



PCERII Funded Research

Progress Report

The Triple Ghetto: The Concentration of Poverty Among Immigrants

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1. Statement of the Problem

The magnitude of poverty in Canada is quite striking: nearly one out of every seven Canadians was poor in 1991 - one out of every three Canadians will be poor sometime during their working lives; the overall number of Canadians living in poverty has increased from 3,624,000 in 1980 to 4,227,000 in 1991 and 4.9 million in 1993; between 1981 and 1991, the number of working poor households increased by 30 percent for families and 57 percent for unattached individuals (Chekki 1995:250). But not all segments of Canadian population are equally affected by the rising poverty levels. The 1991 census data, for example, revealed that the poverty rate for immigrants was 19.1% (3.5% above the national poverty rate), while that of non-immigrants was 14.1% (1.5% below the national rate). In spite of this, there is no research undertaken in Canada to address this issue. The purpose of the present research is to fill this gap and provide a basis for poverty alleviation public policy. The study is intending to discuss different dimensions of poverty among immigrants with a special reference to their 'spatial concentration of poverty'(SCOP), which has never been addressed before. The specific questions to be addressed in the study are: what is happening to the spatial concentration of poverty in Canada? Are there any ethnic differentials in spatial concentration of poverty in Canada? What are the underlying factors that are responsible for different levels of SCOP for different ethnic groups? Is the intergenerational socioeconomic mobility of the ethnic groups with a higher deposition to SCOP any less significant than that of the others? And finally, how an interaction of ethnic segregation and low class status can explain the phenomenon of SCOP?

2. Research Methodology

Research on the American cities has consistently shown differential levels of SCOP for cities located in the South, Mid-West, and North-East, which have to do with different historical backgrounds, economic performance, and migratory statuses. Similarly, regional differences of SCOP level are expected to be observed in Canada as well. In order to understand these differences, the conceptual model was developed and presented in Figure 1. The rectangulars at the periphery of the causal diagram specify the indicators which are going to be used to measure the concepts and constructs introduced in the model. The SCOP is measured by the proportion of each immigrant group in the neighbourhoods with a poverty level of 40 percent and higher. The segregation level is measured by the Dissimilarity Index. The job market status is measured by the proportion of each immigrant group represented in different sectors of economy. The intergenerational mobility is operationalized as the extent of mobility, in terms of education and employment, across two generations.

3. Project Status

Most of the data analysis is completed. Many interesting results are found. The findings of the project have been presented at various regional, national, and international meetings. One paper has been published and three others are under publication consideration in national and international journals. A book contract is signed with the Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc.

4. Research Finding and Expected Application

The study shows that poverty varies by region, ethnic group, and immigration status. The 1991 Census data reveals that Winnipeg and Montreal experience extreme poverty in Canada. Also, certain immigrant groups end up living in poverty at a rate twice the national average. Visible minorities, especially West Asian, Arab, Latin American, Spanish, and Vietnamese immigrants

are among those severely hit by poverty. The conspicuous finding is that some second-generation immigrants often end up being poorer than their parents. It seems for some groups of immigrants the future is even darker, since the younger generation has a weaker record of educational qualifications, compared to the generation of their parents. The implications of these findings are frightening. It can be argued that the interaction of ethnic segregation and high poverty might result in the formation of a particular type of neighbourhoods. The poverty areas may promote a particular lifestyle, flourish a unique sub-culture, and limit the life chances of dwellers. Subsequently, the ethnic groups that are over-represented in such areas may develop an identity and a culture, distinct from that of the general population. Because of their sub-culture, these groups may not have shown as much success over the generations as compared to other groups. In the long run, this phenomenon can lead to more segregation, rather than integration of different ethnic groups.

5. Policy Implications

The results revealed that there are regional variations in poverty levels and some CMAs experience higher levels of poverty, compared to others. Some ethnic groups are more disadvantaged and especially, some immigrants experience more than double the national poverty level. In other words, what some ethnic and immigrant groups in some CMAs experience is a unique poverty. This demands a unique set of public policies to deal with it.

6. Research Staff

The total budget for the project is \$ 23,000. More than \$2 1,000 of this is allocated for research assistants. The financial support provided by the project has helped the graduate student who was hired for this project, to gain experience in large scale data analysis using sophisticated methodology but also to work on the project as a part of his Ph.D. thesis.

7. Dissemination Activities

BOOK: The New Poverty in Canada: Ethnic Groups and Ghetto Neighbourhoods, Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc. 1999 (forthcoming) (jointly with A. Kazemipur, the research assistant)