



# **PCERII Funded Research**

## **Progress Report**

### **Immigrant Women Organizing for Change: Integration and Community Development by Immigrant Women in the Maritimes**

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## **1. Research Problem and Key Research Questions:**

Using a qualitative approach, the project examines the integration process of immigrant women in two major urban centres in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. It documents the organizational activities of immigrant women and assesses their significance in the integration process. Key research questions are: (1) What are the diverse issues and forms of immigrant women's organizational participation for community development in the urban structures of the Maritimes? (2) What are the goals from the perspective of immigrant women for their organizing? (3) How are immigrant women integrated in the Maritimes' urban centres and what does "integration" mean from their perspective? (4) Does immigrant women's involvement in organizations in the Maritime urban centres foster integration into the Canadian society? (or, what is the relationship between organizational participation and integration).

## **2. Research Methodology**

Forty immigrant and refugee women were interviewed by two research assistants in Fredericton and Halifax. The interviews were semi-structured, in-depth, conducted in the location of participants' choice. All interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed by using the qualitative software Nud\*ist. A snowball technique was utilized for identifying eligible participants, though efforts were made to include women from as many diverse cultural backgrounds and origins as possible. The criteria utilized for selecting participants were: (1) immigrant or refugee women (2) visible minorities or women who do not speak English well or speak it with an accent other than British, American or Australian (3) living in Canada for at least 5 years.

## **3. Research Progress to Date**

Interviews have been completed and coded. Analysis is at the last stages of completion. Two conference presentations have been made and several manuscripts are in preparation for publication. A final report to PCERII is expected at the end of May 1999.

## **4. Selected Preliminary Findings**

1. Organizational Forms and Issues: Our research participants are involved in the following types of organizations: (a) ethnic-specific organizations, including mixed-gender cultural-social organizations, women's auxiliaries of ethnic-specific organizations, and ethnic-specific organizations with explicit political aims in the country of origin. (b) Religious (mainstream) organizations. (c) Mainstream civic, political, cultural and women's organizations. (d) Multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, and (e) "Panethnic" organizations. Immigrant women have also been involved in organizing for specific issues.
2. The two major categories of organizations where our participants are mostly active are (c) and (d). It is within these two categories where participants have the highest number of activities and where the higher number of participants with multiple activities can be found. The finding indicates that immigrant women are involved in not narrowly defined immigrant and ethnic-specific issues and organizations but in wider social and political issues. In so doing they define their relevant "community" as the wider social milieu of the country where they live.

3. Our research participants are mostly involved in leadership roles and / or exhibit high degrees of commitment in the organizations where they participate. It is rare for the immigrant women of this study not to 'participate' in any organization (despite the investigators' efforts to locate immigrant women who are 'non-participants' in any organization).
4. Reasons for Organizing (from the immigrant women's perspective): Some of the patterns we have discerned include the following reasons for organizing: social (acquire friends, create a social network); religious; "ethnic" (for ethnic identity retention and advocacy); to expand employment opportunities; taking a personal interest and responsibility in issues; choosing to represent the interests of immigrant women in mainstream groups. The few participants who did not want to become involved, did not oppose participation on ideological grounds; they simply could not fit it in the midst of multiple commitments in their lives (especially childcare responsibilities).
5. The major aspects and meanings of integration, from the participants' standpoint, are economic integration, breaking the isolation and making friends, activism to bring about social change, and a sense of gratitude and obligation to give back to Canadian-born citizens.

## **5. Selected Policy Implications**

1. Volunteer involvement and organizations provide immigrant women with a safe opportunity and place to explore, train and get acquainted with Canadian society: Immigrant women acquire much sought-after Canadian work experience and make new friends. Given how important both of these are for immigrant women to feel "at home" in Canada, volunteer involvement and organizations can be considered a vehicle to integration.
2. Immigrant women are important contributors to "community development" in Canada. Their activities extend outside the ethnic community milieu and have important social and possibly economic consequences for Canadian society at large.
3. An important barrier to integration for immigrant women in the Maritimes appears to be lack of employment, despite educational credentials and prior work experience. Non recognition of such qualifications is frustrating and seriously threatening building a commitment to stay in Canada.
4. Work experience acquired in multicultural (and ethnic-specific) organizations is not easily transferrable to jobs outside the "multicultural industry."
5. Social isolation in the new society and/or lack of employment opportunities can have serious mental health consequences. Young mothers, with exclusive childcare responsibilities, are especially at risk.

## **6. Staffing for the Conduct of Research**

Two graduate students (from International Development Studies and Women's Studies respectively) have been trained and employed for the Halifax part of the research. One of them

has taken a directed readings course with the principal investigator in some of the literature engaged in this project. In addition, two recent graduates were also employed as research assistants, in Fredericton and Halifax respectively.

## **7. Dissemination Activities**

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women Organizing for Change: Community Development and Integration by Immigrant Women in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick" Paper presented at the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Meetings in Ottawa, June 1998.

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women and Community Development in the Maritimes." Paper presented at the Atlantic Association of Sociologists and Anthropologists' International conference in Halifax, October 1998.

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women, Activism and Social Change." Paper to be presented at the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Meetings at Bishop's University, Sherbrooke, Quebec, June 1999.

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women Organizing for Change: Community Development and Integration by Immigrant Women in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick" Report in Preparation for the PCERII (expected date: May 1999).

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women and Community Development in the Maritimes." Manuscript in preparation to be submitted for publication.

Baukje Miedema and Evangelia Tastsoglou, "'But Where Are You From, Originally?' Immigrant Women and Integration in the Maritimes", paper under journal review.

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "Immigrant Women, Activism and Social Change", manuscript prepared to be submitted for publication.

Evangelia Tastsoglou and Baukje Miedema, "A Critical Assessment of the Concept of Integration." Manuscript in preparation. In addition: One community session for research-finding dissemination and feedback purposes is being planned to take place in Halifax in mid-April 1999, sponsored by the Canadian Advisory Council for the Status of Women. Plans are under way for a similar session in Fredericton. Summary of final report will be mailed to participants and community organizations.

## **8. Projected Date of Completion: May 30, 1999.**

## **9. Contributions of Outside Sources**

(1) Conference travel expenses provided by Saint Mary's University (Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Meetings, Ottawa, June 1998). (2) Postage, photocopying, computer and logistical support from Saint Mary's University. (3) The Canadian Advisory Council for the Status of

Women will sponsor the community gathering for result dissemination and feedback to take place in Halifax (April 1999).