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Uprooting and Resettlement Experiences of South Asian Immigrant Women

U.K. Choudhry

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to examine and understand the challenges faced by elderly women from India who immigrated to Canada. Ten women were interviewed about their experiences with immigration and resettlement. The analysis of interview data involved iterative process, through which four themes were identified. These themes were isolation and loneliness, family conflict, economic dependence, and settling in and coping. The participants experienced loss because of changes in traditional values and lack of social support. Because the participants could not manage resettlement on their own, personal independence was not very important. Interdependence for the attainment of emotional security and social rewards was more desirable. Health care professionals must take into account the nature of stress and impact of these experiences on health of older immigrant women.

Immigration to a different country and adjustment to a new way of life affect immigrants of all ages and backgrounds. Elderly immigrants find uprooting and resettlement more difficult. This is especially true of South Asian immigrant women in Canada. Resettlement is not simply a matter of adapting to a new culture; it includes the challenge of maintaining lifelong beliefs and practices while at the same time learning new ways to establish a harmonious life in the new country. Resettlement can be a life crisis (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995; Hulewat, 1996; Shin & Shin, 1999).

The immigration experience affects the whole family. The family that acts as a buffer to the demands of immigration has been cited both as a source of stress and a source of support (Aroian, Spitzer, & Bell, 1996; Meleis, 1991). Studies among Indians and Pakistanis living in Britain reveal that the extended family that unilaterally supports its elders is a myth and that these elders expect to return to their homelands (Barker, 1984; Bhalla & Blakemore, 1981; Mays & Donaldson, 1981). Indian and Pakistani elders experience insecurity because of the adoption of what they see as alien values by members of

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their own families. The elders also experience isolation because of language problems, past experiences at work, or with the welfare state. In addition, they experience poverty in the absence of pensions or supplementary benefits and, at worst, rejection by their own families (Boneham, 1989).

South Asian immigrants in Canada experience similar difficulties (Choudhry et al., 1999). Under the Canadian immigration policy of "family reunification," many immigrants sponsor their elderly parents, paying their travel and living expenses. According to custom and for economic reasons, most elderly parents live with their children. This arrangement is not, however, free from problems. Although many elderly continue to live in the extended family, they find that the traditional reverence for parents has diminished. They experience loss of independence and erosion of their traditional power and authority within the family structure (City of Toronto, 1990; Indian Immigrant Aid Services, 1984). As a consequence, they feel disconnected and experience loneliness, hopelessness, desperation, and, in many instances, depression (Bindra, 1994).

Although immigration brings opportunities, there are also numerous risks. Various studies have linked the problems of immigration and acculturation with negative health consequences, both physical and psychological (Aroian & Patsdaughter, 1989; Ng & Ramirez, 1981). There is, however, limited research literature about the effects of immigration on elderly who were sponsored by their children. This study was conceived to address the limited knowledge base regarding the impact of immigration on elderly women who are living with their sons or daughters and their families.

South Asians have a long history of migration to Canada and are among the fastest-growing groups to have immigrated in the last two decades (Statistics Canada, 1996). The South Asian community is very diverse, with a variety of religions and cultural practices. Members come from various socioeconomic levels and educational backgrounds. The first generation of immigrants includes a large number of elderly parents who live with their children. The main problems these elders face are isolation, loneliness, and insufficient emotional support. Women are further isolated owing to their limited facility with the English language, household responsibilities, and inability to get around in the winter (Choudhry, 1998). They also experience intergenerational conflict and disappointment over the influence of North American values on their families and the consequent erosion of traditional values. Many perceive their inability to transmit their culture and traditions to the next generation as a loss and a source of sadness (Choudhry et al., 1999). South Asian women are reluctant to verbalize their problems; hence, they suffer silently and are at risk for physical illness and emotional distress.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

There are significant differences between Canadian and South Asian cultures. Although Indian culture encompasses several spoken languages and various religious traditions, people's behavior reflects the dominant Hindu cultural traditions and values (Ibrahim, Ohnishi, & Sandhu, 1997). The following description of South Asian culture will help the reader understand the participants' experiences in their cultural context.

Family Structure

Family in India is the center of all social organization. Family and kinship provide the basis of the individual's identity as well as facilitating continuity of culture and religion. In a traditional South Asian family, elders live with their children, preferably with their son(s), in a common (joint) household. To respect, honor, and look after one's parents is considered a moral obligation and an ideal of human life. In a traditional household, the oldest male has material power and remains the head of the family. With the broad social changes wrought by the breakdown of the feudal system and the rise of industrialization and technology, many Indians are compelled to leave the family to seek paid employment (Gulati & Rajan, 1999). This shift has resulted in an increased number of nuclear families and a decline in the number of traditional, joint families. Most elderly continue to live with their children, however.

At the core of the family system are respect for elders and filial piety. Parents are to be honored and revered. Elders are valued for their experience and wisdom; they are consulted for advice, support, and resolution of family conflicts. Respect for tradition, including the hierarchy implicit in social relationships, is the norm. Family solidarity and mutual dependence are encouraged. Indeed, family needs are perceived to supersede those of the individual. Collective identity is valued, and individualism is equated with self-centeredness. Furthermore, the community is seen as an extended family. In addition to familial duties, one also has responsibilities to the welfare of the community (Ibrahim, Ohnishi & Sandhu, 1997).

This value system is kept alive through the socialization of the younger generation. From a very early age, children are made aware of their filial duties and their responsibility for taking care of their parents in their old age. There are higher expectations for sons, who eventually assume family responsibilities and carry the family name, than for daughters, who get married and move away. The traditional family power structure is reinforced

through well-known literary epics. Examples include the dutiful son Rama, who willingly went into exile for 14 years to keep his father's promise, and the devoted son Sravana, who carried his blind parents on his shoulders on a pilgrimage across the continent. Such stories are highly symbolic. The desire to preserve and continue the core values that they exemplify remains very strong among most South Asian immigrants.

Family and societal responsibilities are prescribed in the Vedas (books of knowledge) according to the stages of human life. The Vedic plan divides life into four successive stages (*ashrams*) that provide a framework for living. The training that is provided during these four ashrams helps prepare one for this world as well as one's ultimate destiny, that is, spiritual liberation (Dutt, 1964). In the first stage, *brahmcharya*, one is a celibate student; this is a period of discipline and education. In the second stage, *grahasthya*, one leads the active life of a married householder with worldly responsibilities. This stage is the mainstay of the four stages because it gives unity and cohesion to the entire social structure on which the other stages depend. In the third stage, *vaanprasthya*, one loosens one's bonds to worldly affairs; having fulfilled worldly duties, one spends days in worship and recitation of prayers and holy scripture. In the final and fourth stage, *sannyasa*, one is free from all worldly concerns and wanders in spiritual detachment in the attempt to attain liberation, or *mauksh* (Dutt, 1964; Sen, 1972).

This ideal scheme of life, although not widely observed in modern India, still has many followers (Yogananda, 1974). Although there is no dichotomy between the life stages of men and of women, the Vedic scheme refers to men. Desai (1999) explained that according to *Dharmashastra* (Hindu scriptures), a man may continue to the third stage with his wife or may leave her in the care of his sons, thus indicating woman's dependence on husband and sons. "Dependence on children in old age [is] not considered a problem in the Indian traditional culture, where interdependence was always valued more than independence" (Prakash as cited in Desai, 1999, p. WS-60). In fact, old age gave a high status to elderly women and power over her grown children and the younger women in the family (Desai, 1999, p. WS-60).

The Role of Women

In the Indian subcontinent, the role of women varies with generational, socioeconomic, and educational level. It can be patriarchal or egalitarian. Nevertheless, women are socialized to a prescribed role encompassing dutiful wife, obedient daughter-in-law, and loving mother. On marriage, a girl lives with her husband and his family. Marriage is considered a second birth,

as a rice plant has to be replanted for a successful harvest. Indeed, rice grain is used during some wedding ceremonies to symbolize the girl's replanting of herself into her in-laws' home to thrive and grow. Daughters are counseled to consider the in-laws' home to be their real home. Marriage is for life, and happiness or sorrow is fated. Women are primarily responsible for household duties, with or without the help of a domestic servant, depending on their socioeconomic status. The mother-in-law remains the dominant force within the household structure.

Women's role is that of the nurturing parent. The mother is revered and respected. Indian epics portray women who are tradition-bound, dutiful, self-sacrificing, self-denying, and yet powerful. In mythology, the mother goddess has several divine personae, such as *Parvati*—also known either as *Durga*, the beneficent mother, or as *Kaali*, the dark divine force. These goddesses, worshipped by men and women alike as the embodiment of power, reinforce the love and devotion that are due to a mother. This traditional view makes women feel secure even in a patriarchal household.

METHOD

This qualitative study used a descriptive exploratory approach. This design was considered appropriate as there is little reported research on the topic under study. The focus of the present study was to explore the impact of immigration and resettlement on older women; questions specific to living in Canada were raised with the participants. The study's purpose was twofold: (a) it was intended to examine participants' beliefs, values, and culture as mediators of stress in the experience of immigration and resettlement, and (b) to provide baseline information to help guide future work in the area of stress, coping, and health among older immigrants.

Participants

The network sampling technique was used to reach the participants. The inclusion criteria specified that participants must be immigrant women who were sponsored by their sons or daughters and were currently living with, or had initially lived with, their children in a joint household. After the project received ethical approval, the research assistant contacted potential participants through her social network and invited them to take part in the study. Many women were reluctant; in the South Asian culture, one does not dis-

close personal and family matters to outsiders as this action might dishonor and shame the family. The women were assured that confidentiality would be maintained at all times and that at no time would their names appear either in a report or in a presentation. In all, 10 women participated in the study.

The participants were between the ages of 59 and 78 years. A total of 8 were Hindus, and 2 belonged to the Radhaswami/Sikh community. Nine women were sponsored by their sons and 1 by a daughter. Four had migrated to Canada during the past 4 years, 5 had lived in Canada between 10 and 16 years, and 1 had been in Canada for 26 years. Six of the 10 participants were widows; 6 were Punjabi/Hindi speaking, 3 Gujarati, and 1 Marathi. All were fluent in Hindi.

None of the participants had more than a high-school education. Six rated their English comprehension as poor, 3 as fair, and 1 as very good. Six were widows, and 4 had living husbands. All had been primarily homemakers and had never engaged in paid employment. Six had no income of their own, and 4 had an old-age pension. Eight were living with their sons and sons' families. One had lived with her son, but now was living separately with her husband. One, who was a widow who had lived with her son, was now living alone.

The sample was diverse in language, subculture, family composition, and living arrangements. It ensured the uncovering of multiple realities and fitted the requirement of qualitative research. The data provided thus elicited a good understanding of a population that is diverse within the same culture (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Procedure

A research assistant, who was a middle-aged woman from the same culture and spoke the language of the participants, was hired and trained to conduct the interviews. This assistant had demonstrable sensitivity about the topic under investigation. Given the nature of the inquiry and cultural constraints, gaining the participants' trust was very important. Because the research assistant knew the participants through her social network, she had their confidence. Free and informed consent was obtained prior to the interview. The participants were assured that the data would be shared only with the investigator and that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained at all times.

Data were collected by face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions that were culturally appropriate. These included "What is good about

living in Canada?” and “What is not so good about living in Canada?” Interviews were conducted in participants’ homes and were of 1.5 to 2 hours in duration. The participants chose a time when no one else was at home. Only in one situation were family members present, and the woman seemed inhibited. All except one interview were audiotaped. Hindi, Punjabi, or both languages were used, depending on the participant’s preference. At the end of the interview, the research assistant felt that she had spent sufficient time to learn about the participant’s experiences in depth. She also clarified and confirmed her observations, thereby establishing credibility. After the 10th interview, no new information was forthcoming, and it was felt that data saturation was achieved.

The interviews were transcribed and translated into English, taking into consideration the context and nuances of the language and the choice of words used to express certain thoughts and feelings. In order to ensure the accuracy and cultural appropriateness of the translated version, both the research assistant and the investigator reviewed the transcripts, first independently and then jointly. Participants were asked for a second interview to examine the transcript and add to or change what had been transcribed. This request was denied; the women felt a return visit might arouse suspicions among family members and might deepen the interviewee’s own sense of loss and regret.

To ensure that the findings of the study would have meaning to others in similar situations, a community meeting was planned at a seniors club frequented by immigrants from India. Approximately 50 men and women attended the meeting. After an explanation had been given regarding the purpose of the meeting, the men were given the choice of joining the discussion or continuing with their club activities. The men stayed and took an active part in the discussion.

After a general discussion regarding the problems and challenges they had faced, club members were asked to share specifically what they knew about the experiences of other elderly immigrant women. Talking about other women and not about themselves allowed members some distance from their own stories, yet allowed expression of feelings and sharing of experiences that were similar to theirs. This approach opened the floodgates: What was initially intended as a short meeting became a long and emotional one. Although club members avoided personal details, they generally validated the findings of the study and confirmed the themes that were identified in the data. The following example given by one man (and endorsed by most) confirms the feelings of loss experienced by these immigrants. The man recalled that, in the story about the dutiful son Sravana who took his

parents on a pilgrimage, at one point the son reached “black earth” (*kali dharti*) and, as soon as he stepped on it, forgot all his filial duties and neglected his parents and those duties were forgotten. The men at the meeting equated Canada with the “black earth” where traditional values weaken. Such examples increased the transferability of the findings.

Data Analysis

Sources of data included transcription notes from the interviews and the field notes made subsequent to each interview. The investigator reviewed transcripts simultaneously as the data were being collected. This was done to see if additional information was needed to interpret the findings. Regular meetings between the investigator and the research assistant facilitated this process. Data analysis began by reading the transcripts in their entirety over and over again to attain a general understanding of the content. The iterative process was then repeated until redundancy was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the iterative process, themes and subthemes were identified within the participants’ sociocultural context. These themes and subthemes were reviewed and validated by an experienced independent researcher. The transcripts were then read again to see if the themes really fit the interview material. Themes and subthemes were refined and are shown in Table 1.

FINDINGS

The dominant themes that emerged from the analysis of data were isolation and loneliness, family conflict, economic dependence, and settling in and coping.

Isolation and Loneliness

Relocation to a new country late in life has had an impact on the participants’ sense of personal continuity. Although most of them had anticipated the prospect of spending their old age in their son’s home, they had not foreseen the extent of dislocation and uprootedness they have experienced. As one participant said, “[I wish] we would not have to leave our country to be with our only son.” Another felt, “I have no home now. Although my son is good and his home is my home, I feel that I am lost.”

TABLE 1: Themes and Subthemes of Resettlement Experiences of South Asian Immigrant Women in Canada

<i>Isolation and Loneliness</i>	<i>Family Conflict</i>	<i>Economic Dependence</i>	<i>Settling in and Coping</i>
Lack of informal support Fast pace of children's life; no time for the elderly Language barrier with neighbors, with grandchildren, with ability to use public transportation	Weakening of traditional family values Lack of filial piety Liberation of daughter-in-law Westernization of grandchildren	No personal source of income Eligibility criteria for old-age pension Widowhood	Reconciliation to life in Canada; karma/destiny Religious and spiritual activities Attempt to build personal social network

The sudden change in environment, and the transition from a traditional society to a modern one, is a cultural shock for many. The informal daily social interactions that help lessen the burden of day-to-day stresses are lacking in their lives. They miss the company of extended family and friends. The unfriendliness of neighbors adds to their loneliness and is a source of stress. As one woman said, "Back home, our neighbors were like a big family." Not having a diverse support network created a void, as another said, "I feel lonely all the time and I fly to India on the smallest pretext." Another said, "I feel I am alone in this whole world, [with] nobody to listen to and nobody to talk to."

The participants' lives in India were embedded in family affairs, but they find that life in Canada does not allow this. One source of stress is the hectic lifestyle of their children. Their extremely busy work schedules, household responsibilities, and the extracurricular activities of grandchildren contribute to the women's feeling of being on the sidelines. According to one, "My son is so busy most of the times that [he] does not get time to sit with me and talk; sometimes he sits for a short time . . . sometimes I think, 'Is there any choice? Even if I go and stay with somebody else, things would be the same.' At least he is my own son."

Back at home, the women relied on family members for their social needs. Here, family members are busy focusing on their own resettlement process and are not always available to respond. As one participant said, "My son has to take time off work to take me to see the doctor; this makes it difficult for everybody." Another said,

I feel dependent, I feel isolated and I get depressed sometimes. I can only go to the temple when I get a ride. If my son or daughter-in-law or grandson is willing to take me to temple on Sunday, I go. Otherwise, I just stay at home and brood.

The language barrier adds to the participants' loneliness and isolation. Not being surrounded by people who speak the same language is very stressful for most of them. As one recounted,

I felt I was in hell and wanted to go back to India every moment of my life; I was very much home-bound and had no friends, no acquaintances, didn't know the language, had nobody to talk to. We [she and her husband] felt we were trapped. I could not go anywhere and I still cannot because I don't know any English and I feel I will get lost if I move out of this house.

Lack of proficiency in English reduces the women's ability to use public transportation. One said,

I have not gone anywhere and I don't know what there is to see in Canada. I have never gone alone and I don't know how to go alone. In my country I went alone everywhere. . . I feel I must learn some language to be able to communicate with people outside.

Lack of proficiency in the English language also leads to a developing distance between the participants and their grandchildren. This causes additional strain. For women with limited formal education, learning English at this late age is not easy. As one said,

I attend ESL [English as a Second Language] classes but when I go home, nobody encourages me to learn more, even if I ask my grandson or granddaughter to tell me the spelling of any word they laugh and avoid me. I feel very unhappy and depressed then.

Family Conflict

Conflict with the daughter-in-law is the most frequent source of strain and stress for the participants. Participants described how in their youth they were dutiful daughters-in-law to their husbands' parents, served them respectfully, and gave without demanding anything in return. When their turn came, instead of being the matriarch in their sons' home, they are forced to become passive and undemanding in their daughters-in-law's house. As one participant said, "My daughter-in-law dominates the house and my son is so scared of her, he said, 'Mom! Two women cannot live in the same house.' I was very hurt; I am very attached to my younger son" [with whom she is living]. Another said, "Nowadays, the daughter-in-law has become the mother-in-law to be feared, and the mother-in-law has to fear and obey the daughter-in-law."

Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are traditionally expected to compete for the attention of the son/husband, a phenomenon that reinforces patriarchy. The study participants, who expect their sons to be dutiful toward them, are disappointed in their sons for not supporting them and are unable to stand up to the wives. One woman was shattered when her son, during a family altercation, suggested that she find a place to live by herself. Another said,

I once told my son that when you buy a bigger house just build one room off the kitchen for me, and he said, "But the entrance must be separate, otherwise your daughter-in-law will break [down] the door [of the house]." My son clearly said, "Mother, if we don't separate, something [disagreeable] will happen in this house."

The participants feel they have become a nuisance for all and are in the way of their daughters-in-law's enjoyment of independence. One sadly said,

When my friend asked [my daughter-in-law] why she was doing this [mistreating me] . . . she said she wanted her freedom . . . I moved out. The first few months I could not sleep and could not eat. Now, I am used to the solitude. It has been several years since I went to my son's home. When somebody asks my son why is your mother living alone, he replies, "I have to put up with my wife for the rest of my life; my mother does not have to."

In a traditional household, the arrival of a daughter-in-law is seen as a reprieve, as she will share household responsibilities with the mother-in-law. In Canada, with women's liberation and the effects of consumerism, many daughters-in-law are seeking work outside the home. Thus, elderly mothers are expected to continue with the household duties. In one woman's words,

I do everything in the house. My daughter-in-law feels that she doesn't have to do anything in the house since she is working for money outside the home. Once, [when] my husband said that she needn't go to work, she can cook and do housework, [my daughter-in-law] said, "Am I your maid?"

Another woman said, "I cook the whole day for the family; my son cleans, shops, and does every possible thing in the house. Although [my daughter-in-law] leaves her work at 3 p.m., she is never home before 6:30 p.m."

In Indian families, social roles dictate deference and obedience to acknowledge the status of elders. Appropriate behavior, such as polite language, showing respect, serving elders, seeking their advice, and keeping them informed of happenings are some of the unspoken expectations placed on the younger generation. According to the participants, however, things are different in Canada. As one said, "The new generation thinks in their own way, and we think in our own. We want them to listen to us (laughs) . . . Our lives were different, and what a time it was! (sighs)."

Participants play an active role in the care of grandchildren and the continuation of culture and religion. They are disappointed that, as the grandchildren get older, they become "Westernized." As one woman said,

[My granddaughters] are entering their teens now; they don't seem to be close to me any more. They answer me back, make gestures of rudeness with their body language. Their mannerisms and body language put me off; probably this is the price we pay, and they don't [even] like Indian food anymore.

Another woman said,

I feel helpless and isolated . . . although language is not a problem, my grandchildren, all of them, speak English with me; although they are affectionate, there seems to be a big gap between us. I wish my daughter-in-law could treat me with some respect.

Tension in the family and the influence of the children's mothers (the participants' daughters-in-law) creates a distance between them and their grandchildren and undermines the older women's status and authority. As one woman stated,

In our lives, we never even thought of alienating our kids from our mother-in-law. My granddaughter used to fondly call me Grandma, and I used to love it. But now she never calls me Grandma in front of her mother.

Economic Dependence

In addition to emotional stress, the participants experience financial hardship. Although the women have their financial needs, their children are interested in establishing themselves and their own children, causing strained family relations. In the absence of any independent source of income, most participants feel they have become a burden. As one said,

While living here [in Canada], one needs money for things like medicines, [which] are costly. It is difficult for my son to spare that kind of money. Once, when I asked for only \$20 per week to spend on transportation or to go to the temple, they made such a fuss. After that, I don't take anything from them, even if my son asks me.

When their husbands were alive, the participants had places of their own to live, as well as financial security and social and psychological protection. They experience a change in their status after the death of their husbands. Their widowhood has lessened their power and control. As one said,

My husband died and left no money. I cannot work because of my age [72 years]. When I ask for money, my son shouts and says that he is the one who is keeping me. . . . To make a little money, I go and visit some sick people and stay with them to make \$10 or \$15 a day [once in a while].

Having spent most of their productive years doing the unpaid work of mother, wife, and homemaker, many feel that the present society values materialism instead of human values. As one said, "The relationship only depends on money, whether it is with the relatives, or the daughter, or the son. This is the truth. I am not lying (laughs)."

As a condition of sponsorship and because of the required 10-year residency period, many participants are not eligible for government financial assistance or the old-age pension. Many look forward to the day they would qualify. As one said, "I am dependent on them for money and transportation. I am happy that my old-age pension might be due in another few months." Another participant, during critical financial difficulty, recounted, "Once we thought of applying for social assistance, but my son argued that once we start getting social assistance, no one will be able to sponsor anybody from India again, so we did not [apply]."

Settling in and Coping

Regardless of the length of time spent in Canada, the participants reminisce about the good old days in India. To overcome nostalgia and persistent feelings of loneliness, the women often entertain the idea of returning to their homeland. But after visiting India, many agreed that there is no going back. They cannot live with their married daughters because of societal norms. Leaving a son's home and living alone will bring dishonor and shame (*muh kala*, "blacken the face"). On becoming a widow, a woman experienced societal pressure not to live alone. One said,

We had a huge *kothi* [house] in India and had lots of servants and maids, but all my kids were abroad and everybody who came to see me asked me what I was doing in India, [and would say] go live with your sons.

Living with relatives has practical difficulties. One woman said,

[For the] first few days and weeks, everybody is hospitable and happy to see you. But you can only stay so long with your relatives. Welcome wears off with time. You need your independence, we do not realize how much we have changed since coming to Canada.

Many participants have become accustomed to life in Canada. As one woman said, "After 7½ years, I feel I am OK here in Canada, except for the winters. Otherwise, medical care and other facilities, which we enjoy here, are hard to find in India." With increasing age and, possibly, decreased health and vitality, participants feel that they would eventually be dependent on their children and do not want to make the move; hence, they make adjustments to accommodate the family. Others cope with the stresses of daily living by contemplating financial independence once they qualify for a pension (or social assistance). As one said,

We feel lucky to be here in Canada. Though we do not have any financial income of our own, my son gives us sometimes to spend on food outside [when we go] to temple. We are looking forward to one regular pension [her husband's] after another 2½ years.

The participants believe in the primacy of spiritual and religious teaching as a coping resource. Praying and listening to recitation of hymns provided them with transient comfort. As one woman said,

I do believe in *pooja*, which I do daily, but I feel that God has not rewarded us for our faith in him. I do not know what we did in our past lives to deserve this [meaning strained family relations].

Although they were very fatalistic in their views (owing to their belief in karma), they were not dissuaded from their faith in prayer. As one woman explained, "I feel I am a religious person and I do *pooja* [prayers] every day, especially when I am depressed. I keep healthy. . . . I do *pooja*."

In addition to going to places of worship and the seniors club, many participants have developed a social network and create occasions that brings them together with others. According to one, "I do *Ramayan Paath* [recitation of the holy book] at home once a year and invite other people. . . . I go to seniors club most Saturdays and go to temple whenever my son takes me." Such a social network helped them with their ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and cultural continuity, and strengthen them in their adjustment and adaptation to life in Canada.

DISCUSSION

As in other immigrant groups, the South Asian women in this study identified many stresses that they have experienced since immigration to Canada. Being uprooted from their homeland and the changes in family relations were central to their feelings of isolation, loneliness, loss of status, and economic hardship. Many of the findings of this study are consistent with the findings of studies on Iranian immigrants (Lipson, 1992), Jordanian immigrant women (Hattar-Pollara & Meleis, 1995), and Korean immigrant women (Shin & Shin, 1999). The findings of the present study suggest that immigration at a later age, and as one's children's dependent, causes additional stresses. The participants came to Canada with the prospect of being the matriarch in their son's home and to enjoy the material comforts of an

affluent society. Instead, they face a future full of uncertainty. The prospect of spending their old age in Canada is distressing to them.

There is confusion and contradiction in the participants' voices. Although they have encouraged their children and have played a role in their economic and social advancement, they wish that their sons and particularly their daughters-in-law would follow some of the traditional social practices unquestioningly. The models provided to the participants by their own mothers and grandmothers were no longer apparent in their sons' homes. A traditional Indian family has a lot of flexibility within it. In the name of progress (a usual preoccupation of many immigrants), the elderly accept and even encourage adoption of modern ways. Nontraditional practices are accepted as long as the family values remain intact. They feel their children and grandchildren have become too liberated from the constraints of the traditional social system. The participants' experience distance between the generations, deprivation of ethnic continuity, and inability to pass on their traditional cultural values.

Although the participants want to remain connected to their traditional values, the younger generation is taking advantage of the opportunities of liberal Canadian society to break away from traditional trappings. Easy access to information, education, and the labor market contributed to the daughters-in-law's economic and social independence, thus shifting the balance of power within the family. The unequal power that is so deeply embedded in the Indian social structure is not evident to the participants. They never questioned the centuries-old practices.

The participants willingly take an active role in child care and housework. With increasing age, however, some participants can no longer cope with these demands and complain about the burden of housekeeping in their sons' homes. They allude to the need to disengage from worldly affairs, which in keeping with cultural norms is appropriate at their stage of life. Had they remained in India, such disengagement would have been a matter of natural, gradual progression. In the West, there are no societal reminders to follow the Vedic passages of life.

The participants face daily challenges in working around the constraints of living in their sons' homes. They experience remorse and regret for having to leave their home country. Most of their family conflicts center on the loss of the traditional reverence for elders and the abandonment of long-held values. The older women's economic dependency further strained relationships.

The participants believe in karma (the word encompasses destiny, fate, and actions). They believe that certain challenges are preordained and are

the result of past deeds. They also believe that one can influence one's destiny by good actions. On one hand, this belief makes them feel powerless to change things; on the other, it helps them to accept what they could not change. Because the women could neither go back to India nor live alone, they used the theory of karma as a coping mechanism. They were accustomed to daily social interaction and an extensive social network that acted as a buffer against day-to-day problems. In the absence of daily social interaction, they feel vulnerable to emotional distress. Some participants make attempts to find solutions to their problems but face cultural constraints affecting their decisions. To become an independent agent, seeking one's own happiness and comfort, is contrary to their value of being the all-loving, self-sacrificing, and beneficent mother. Dependence on children in old age is not considered a problem. Independence is not very important to them, as they value interdependence and considered it necessary for the attainment of emotional and social rewards (Prakash as cited in Desai, 1999). Those participants who are widowed (with the exception of 1) do not prefer the solution of separate accommodation or independent living. They fear that living alone would further isolate them from their family and the community as well as engender feelings of guilt and regret.

With increasing life expectancy, the participants are likely to continue cohabit with or be dependent on their children until the latter are in their 50s and 60s, thus creating economic hardship on the younger generation as well as a physical and emotional burden (Gulati & Rajan, 1999). Longevity, combined with discontent over their present situation, increases the participants' vulnerability to illness, abuse, and neglect. To counter this prospect, the immigrant family needs to be strengthened through social support and governmental policy (for example, extending financial assistance to these dependent women). Older women should feel that they are a resource and not a liability and have the rights of health, financial security, and self-fulfillment. Health care professionals being knowledgeable about the sources of stress, of conflict about appropriate gender roles, of dissenting values, and of cultural constraints faced by immigrant women can help promote and maintain family health, as well as help individuals and families cope with stresses and strain, which are health risks.

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