

Social mobility among Canadians: A comparative study of intergenerational social mobility factors by parents’ Canadian status

Amina Ayesha Quraishi

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University

Introduction

Unique to Canada, numbers of children born to either 2 foreign-born parents or only one foreign-born parent have been on the rise. This trend will continue with a forecast of almost half of all children born in 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Previous studies on measuring the successful integration of these second generation Canadians has shown differences between them and their parents (Kasempipur & Halli, 2001; Goitom, 2012; Weldeyesus, 2009; Gebre, 2004; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001).

- Limitations of these studies:
- Up to 17 years ago (not current)
 - Contradictory results (parents are more socially mobile than their children and vice versa)
 - Location of study not in Canada

Objective

To explore second generation Canadian’s social mobility factors in relation to their parents. Factors include: Standard of Living, Educational & Employment Opportunities, Opportunities to acquire assets (houses, cars, etc.) & for leisure, and 5-year outlook on Life Opportunities.

- Research Questions:
1. Are there any intergenerational differences in social mobility factors such as life opportunities among Canadians with one or 2 foreign-born parents, and with no foreign-born parent?

2. How do parental birth place, visible minority status, age, perceived social class and income affect social mobility among second generation Canadians?

Method

Using the General Social Survey, Cycle 30, 2016, raw data (PUMF) was extracted and analyzed via cross-tabulation and logistic regression models. This survey’s theme was to provide a better understanding about the lifestyle behavior of Canadians that impact their health and well-being in the workplace and at home.

Results

| Table 1. Descriptive statistics of major study variables: General Social Survey, Cycle 30, 2016 (N= 19,609) | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Variables | N | % | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Female | 10824 | 55.2 | | | |
| Age (groups of 10) | | | | | |
| 15 to 24 | 1443 | 7.4 | | | |
| 25 to 34 | 2425 | 12.4 | | | |
| 35 to 44 | 2928 | 14.9 | | | |
| 45 to 54 | 3139 | 16.0 | | | |
| 55 to 64 | 4050 | 20.7 | | | |
| 65 to 74 | 3431 | 17.5 | | | |
| 75 years and over | 2193 | 11.2 | | | |
| Visible minority | 2430 | 12.6 | | | |
| Place of birth of parents | | | | | |
| Both Canadian | | 65.7 | | | |
| Mix (One Canadian, one immigrant) | | 8.9 | | | |
| Both immigrants | | 25.4 | | | |
| Same or worse standard of living vs. parents | 10623 | 57.7 | | | |
| Better educational opportunities vs. parents | 15221 | 78.4 | | | |
| Better employment opportunities vs. parents | 11409 | 59.5 | | | |
| Same or worse opportunities to acquire assets vs. parents | 9797 | 51.0 | | | |
| Better opportunities for leisure and recreation vs. parents | 12906 | 66.6 | | | |
| Same or worse life opportunities in the next 5 years vs. parents | 11479 | 59.8 | | | |
| Perception of social class | | | | | |
| Low | 3372 | 17.6 | | | |
| Medium | 12225 | 63.8 | | | |
| High | 3545 | 18.5 | | | |
| | M | SD | Med | Min | Max |
| Income (from tax files for respondents 15+) | \$50,769 | \$29,831 | \$37,500 | \$25,000 | \$125,000 |

Although most respondents were born without any foreign-born parent (65.7%) and were not visible minorities, a notable proportion of the sample can be considered second generation, with either 1 or both parents born outside Canada (34.3%) and were visible minorities (12.6%).

Respondents perceived their standard of living, opportunities to acquire assets like houses and cars, and general outlook on future life opportunities in the next 5 years as the same or worse than their parents (57.7%, 51%, 59.8%).

They reported perceptions of an improvement in their educational, employment and leisure opportunities from that which their parents had. (78.4%, 59.5%, 66.6%)

Their median income was reported at \$37,500, which coincides with their medium perceived social class (63.8% of respondents).

Table 2. Perceptions of social mobility factors, age, and visible minority status among Canadians by Parents' Canadian Status, GSS 2016 (N=19,609).

| Variables | Parents' Canadian Status | | | Test | |
|---|--------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------------|--------|
| | Both Canadians (%) | Mix (%) | Both Immigrants (%) | χ^2 (df) | p |
| Standard of living vs parents | | | | 74.81 (2) | <0.001 |
| Same or Worse | 55.8 | 55.8 | 63 | | |
| Better | 44.2 | 44.2 | 37 | | |
| Education opportunities vs parents | | | | 7.19 (2) | 0.027 |
| Same or Worse | 21.8 | 22.9 | 20.2 | | |
| Better | 78.2 | 77.1 | 79.8 | | |
| Employment opportunities vs parents | | | | 179.232 (2) | <0.001 |
| Same or Worse | 43 | 44.3 | 32.2 | | |
| Better | 57 | 55.7 | 67.8 | | |
| Opportunities to acquire assets vs parents | | | | 251.595 (2) | <0.001 |
| Same or Worse | 54.2 | 54.9 | 41.1 | | |
| Better | 45.8 | 45.1 | 58.9 | | |
| Opportunities for leisure and recreation vs parents | | | | 95.422 (2) | <0.001 |
| Same or Worse | 35 | 37.8 | 27.9 | | |
| Better | 65 | 62.2 | 72.1 | | |
| Life opportunities in the next 5 years | | | | 261.819 (2) | <0.001 |
| Same or Worse | 63.1 | 64.2 | 49.9 | | |
| Better | 36.9 | 35.8 | 50.1 | | |
| Perceived social class | | | | 4.147 (4) | 0.387 |
| Low | 17.5 | 17.1 | 17.4 | | |
| Medium | 63.8 | 62.8 | 64.6 | | |
| High | 18.7 | 20.1 | 17.9 | | |
| Age (groups of 10) | | | | 315.729 (12) | <0.001 |
| 15 to 24 | 7.6 | 6.4 | 7 | | |
| 25 to 34 | 12 | 10.6 | 13.8 | | |
| 35 to 44 | 14.1 | 14 | 17.6 | | |
| 45 to 54 | 16 | 13.9 | 16.9 | | |
| 55 to 64 | 22.8 | 17.8 | 16.2 | | |
| 65 to 74 | 18.4 | 20.9 | 14.2 | | |
| 75 years and over | 9.2 | 16.4 | 14.3 | | |
| Visible minority Status | | | | 6579.78 (2) | <0.001 |
| Visible minority | 0.9 | 5.1 | 46.5 | | |
| Not a visible minority | 99.1 | 94.9 | 53.5 | | |

All variables are statistically significant except Perceived Social Class.

Most respondents with both parents born outside Canada perceived their social mobility differently than the other 2 groups: Standard of Living worse than their parents (63% vs 55.8% in other groups), whereas all other factors were perceived as better than their parents.

Respondents with either one or both parents born in Canada reported same or worse perceptions for opportunities to acquire assets and in their general 5 year life opportunity outlook.

Conclusions

The surprising result of lower expectations of improving one’s Standard of Living among all respondents, and especially among those with immigrant parents may reflect Canada’s modern economic reality. The result does seem to correlate with Kasempipur & Halli, despite 17 year-old data.

Another striking conclusion is that descendants of 2-immigrant parents exhibit more optimism than even their one-immigrant parent counterparts (expectations of improvements in most social mobility factors). This agrees with Goitom’s research, where certain cultural traits are retained through transmission by both immigrant parents.

Lastly, the negative expectation among respondents with one or 2 Canadian-born parents to be unable to acquire assets like houses and cars also may indicate a shift in our modern economic milieu.

Literature cited

Berry, J. W., & Sabatier, C. (2010). Acculturation, Discrimination, And Adaptation Among Second Generation Immigrant Youth In Montreal And Paris. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34, 191-207. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.11.007

Goitom, M. (2012). *Becoming habesha: The Journey Of Second-Generation Ethiopian And Eritrean Youth In Canada* (Order No. NR91110). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1252883321). Retrieved from <https://0-search-proquest-com.mercury.concordia.ca/docview/1252883321?accountid=10246>

Kazempipur, A., & Halli, S. S. (2001). Immigrants And ‘New Poverty’: The Case Of Canada. *International Migration Review*, 35(4), 1129-1156. Retrieved from <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.mercury.concordia.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=snh&AN=6319050&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Statistics Canada *Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage* <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016016/98-200-x2016016-eng.cfm>, Accessed November 1, 2018, 6:55 a.m.

Statistics Canada, *Children with an immigrant background: Bridging cultures* <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016015/98-200-x2016015-eng.cfm>, Accessed November 1, 2018, 7:11 a.m

Skuterud, M. (2010). The Visible Minority Earnings Gap Across Generations Of Canadians. *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 43(3), 860-881. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5982.2010.01598.x

Zuccotti, C. V. (2015). Do Parents Matter? Revisiting Ethnic Penalties In Occupation Among Second Generation Ethnig Minorities In England And Wales. *Sociology-the Journal of the British Sociological Association*, 49(2), 229-251. doi:10.1177/0038038514540373

Table 3. Logistic regression model for social mobility factors

| | Regression Model | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------|---------------------------|-------|--------------------------|------|---------------------------------|------|---------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|------|
| | Standard of Living | | Educational Opportunities | | Employment Opportunities | | Opportunities to Acquire Assets | | Opportunities for Leisure | | Life Opportunities over next 5 years | |
| Variables | OR | p | OR | p | OR | p | OR | p | OR | p | OR | p |
| Constant | 1.98 | 0.01 | 2.15 | 0.01 | -0.624 | 0.01 | 0.289 | 0.01 | 0.984 | 0.925 | 35.06 | 0.01 |
| Parents' Canadian Status | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Both Canadian (reference) | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Second Generation | 0.757 | 0.01 | 1.083 | 0.295 | 1.584 | 0.01 | 1.696 | 0.01 | 1.449 | 0.01 | 1.23 | 0.01 |
| Perceived Social Class | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Low (reference) | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Middle | 0.653 | 0.01 | 1.403 | 0.01 | 1.612 | 0.01 | 1.661 | 0.01 | 1.436 | 0.01 | 1.423 | 0.01 |
| High | 0.542 | 0.01 | 1.365 | 0.01 | 1.596 | 0.01 | 2.046 | 0.01 | 1.641 | 0.01 | 1.698 | 0.01 |
| Visible Minority Status | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Not a visible minority (reference) | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Visible minority | 1.424 | 0.01 | 0.766 | 0.01 | 0.707 | 0.01 | 0.641 | 0.01 | 0.663 | 0.01 | 0.497 | 0.01 |
| Age Group | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 15 to 24 (reference) | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 25 and older | 0.78 | 0.01 | 1.126 | 0.01 | 1.216 | 0.01 | 1.37 | 0.01 | 1.258 | 0.01 | 0.545 | 0.01 |

* Note: Income was removed, as it was used as a control variable.

Second Generation respondents are roughly one and a half times more likely to perceive that their social mobility will improve more than their parents' except in Standard of Living, where they are 1.25 times more likely to perceive that their parents experienced better.

As social class increases, expectations for more opportunities to acquire assets, for leisure, and overall 5 year outlook also increases by approximately 1.5 times; however, the opposite direction holds true for Standard of Living.