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The Experiences of Homelessness among First and Second Generation South Asian Youth: Does Culture Matter?

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THE EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG FIRST AND SECOND GENERATION
SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH: DOES CULTURE MATTER?

by

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A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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Master of Arts
Immigration and Settlement Studies
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

The successful settlement of first and second generation youth in Canada is vital to Canada's ethnic dynamism. In spite of this, youth are sometimes wedged between two cultural worlds and two opposing sets of expectations. With the rise of transnational communities, scholars have recently started to research intergenerational conflict between first and second generation youth and their parents. This area of research is just starting to connect with issues of precarious living among newcomer youth. The purpose of this paper is to look at the experiences of homeless South Asian youth to examine whether cultural conflict has facilitated their precarious living situation. Using a qualitative approach, three interviews were conducted with South Asian youth. The youth were residing in shelters at the time of the interviews. The interviews revealed that cultural clash within the family can trigger their precarious life and their use of the shelter system.

Keywords: first-generation, second-generation, acculturation, ethnic identity, family systems

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my parents and to my husband for their constant support and optimism throughout my masters and for always being there for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	4
Theoretical Overview.....	4
Ethnic Identity.....	4
Acculturation.....	6
Family Systems.....	8
Terminology.....	10
Homelessness Today – Canada and other First World Nations.....	11
Migration of Families – An International Perspective.....	12
Immigrant Families and Intergenerational/Cultural Conflict.....	14
First and Second Generation youth, Homelessness in Canada.....	17
South Asian Families and Intergenerational Conflict.....	20
South Asian youth and Homelessness.....	25
CHAPTER 3 - Methodology and Design.....	25
Ethical Considerations.....	25
Participant Selection.....	26
Participant Demographics.....	27
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	27
Family Dysfunction.....	27
Issues with belonging and identity.....	29
Discrimination.....	33
Conflicts between friends and family.....	34
Strategies for Independence.....	36
CHAPTER 5 - FINAL THOUGHTS.....	37
Limitations.....	39
Implications for future practice.....	40
Conclusions.....	42
APPENDIX A: Interview Guide.....	43
APPENDIX B: Recruitment Poster.....	46
REFERENCES	47

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Family migration is hardly a new phenomenon, however their experiences post migration deserve attention even today, especially with regard to familial relationships and conflict. Many of those who migrate by choice do so for the chance at a better life and the promise of a stable future for their loved ones. However, the experiences of those who take the migratory leap are significantly different from one another and can be met with differing degrees of struggle and success.

Many families that choose to migrate to Canada do so because of the country's egalitarian values. For immigrant parents, Canada symbolizes opportunity and a better life for their children or their future children. Unfortunately, this positive outlook can be challenged by a series of struggles encountered by newcomer families and within the wider community. The successful settlement of immigrant youth in Canada is vital to Canada's multicultural dynamism. However, many youth are faced with obstacles that make settlement a difficult and unfamiliar process. With the rise of transnational communities, scholars have recently started to research intergenerational conflict between first and second generation youth, and their parents or guardians. This area of research is just starting to unearth the difficulties inherent to an intercultural upbringing, where cultural conflict and precarious living arrangements impact many of Canada's immigrant youth.

South Asian Focus

This paper will be focusing on the experiences of one of the largest diasporas in Canada – the South Asian diaspora. South Asians are considered to be the second largest visible minority group within Canada, increasing by approximately 37% from 1996 to 2001 (Shariff, 2009).

Countries that are considered to be part of South Asia include Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Afghanistan and Burma (Shariff, 2009). With a wide variance in geographic, cultural, religious and linguistic origins, the South Asian population in Canada is exceptionally diverse.

According to Desai and Subramanian (2000), many South Asian parents come to Canada so that their children will have better educational opportunities, as well as safer and healthier lives (p. 5). Despite this optimistic point of view many South Asian's, including youth, face serious challenges upon arrival. Handa (2003), Rajiva (2006) and Farver, Narang and Bhadha (2002), have all found within their research in both Canadian and American contexts that immigrant families from "traditional Asian backgrounds experience more family dysfunction than other ethnic minority groups" (Farver et al., 2002, p. 340). Frequently, in South Asian families, "parent- child conflict revolves around parents' disapproval of mainstream American attitudes toward dating and adolescents' desire for independence especially with regard to career choice and marriage" (Farver et al., 2002, p. 341). Furthermore, many South Asian youth, both first and second generation, also have the added pressure of learning a new education system or a system that is different than that of their parents. Within this struggle youth face the external challenges of learning a new language, facing possible discrimination or social exclusion (Kirmayer, 2011).

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the realities of cultural conflict as it forces immigrant youth, both first and second generations, into precarious living. Immigrant children play a major role in bridging the gap between the family and the rest of Canadian society. When there is a significant degree of struggle within the family and society, many youth are forced into vulnerable circumstances.

In order to situate this topic within a theoretical framework, there are several factors that have to be considered. The first such factor is ethnic identity. Anisef and Kilbride (2003) refer to the term ethnic identity as the “degree to which a person is oriented or connected to the members and the values of his or her original ethnic or cultural group and to the members of other groups with which they have contact” (as cited in Anisef and Kilbride, 2003, p. 164). This relationship is vital to understand when examining the experiences of South Asian youth who are caught in between two worlds, that of their family’s and that of the Canadian society. The second theoretical framework is acculturation. Acculturation refers to ethnic minorities’ adaptation “to the dominant culture and the associated changes in their beliefs, values, and behavior that result from contact with the new culture and its members” (as cited in Farver et al., 2002, p. 338). For the purpose of this paper, the framework of acculturation can apply both towards immigrant parents and youth. Finally, it is critical to consider family systems theory. Family systems theory factors in the relationships made between primary family members and extended family members including grandparents. This theory also takes into account intergenerational structures that have the ability to either hinder or facilitate the behaviours of immigrant youth (Eldering & Knorth, 1998). Furthermore, this theory explores the relationship between family members prior to migration, upon migration and post arrival which play a significant role in the lives of youth and their acculturation into the new society (Eldering & Knorth, 1998).

Some of the major questions that will I attempt to challenge include: Do cultural or intergenerational differences contribute to states of homelessness among newcomer youth? Are racialized and/or newcomer youth at more risk to homelessness because of their position and status in Canada? What are some of the reasons why South Asian youth are occupying shelters? What are some of the challenges that are unique to the South Asian diaspora?

This paper will be based on a blend of a literature review and personal interviews. The interviews will be done on a one-on-one basis with youth who are, or have lived in shelters or other precarious living conditions such as couch surfing or on the street. The interviews conducted will contribute some of the personal stories of the South Asian youth and their experiences of being homeless. With this qualitative approach, I hope to bridge the research that exists on homelessness and cultural conflict to the lived realities of the individuals being interviewed. This paper, in the end, will aim to investigate the cultural divergences existing between families and society which give rise to states of homelessness for South Asian youth.

In the first section of this paper I will conduct a comprehensive review of the literature where I will take into consideration the theoretical frameworks of ethnic identity, acculturation and family systems. In this section, I plan to also present a synthesis of the literature pertaining to homelessness and South Asian youth. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the methodology used and the findings. Afterward, a final discussion of the results and some of the limitations and implications involved will be considered.

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Theoretical Overview

This paper incorporates three major theoretical frameworks that help situate the topic; ethnic identity, acculturation and family systems. All three frameworks are unique on their own however they feature considerable overlap when considering the experiences of youth and migrating families.

Ethnic Identity

According to many scholars ethnic identity involves one's self identification to an ethnic group. This could encompass one's sense of belonging to the group, attitudes and beliefs toward

the group, degree of group affiliation and whether one is oriented or connected to the members and the values of his or her original ethnic or cultural group (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Farver et al., 2002; Umana-Taylor, 2011).

The concept of ethnic-identity is extremely complex and multifaceted but very important to understand in the Canadian context. Many ethnic groups with ethnic minority group members can experience discrimination and marginalization (Umana-Taylor, 2011, p. 792). Because of this, ethnic group membership is more salient of an issue for those with minority status when compared to their European ethnic majority counterparts (Umana-Taylor, 2011).

From a developmental perspective, ethnic identity formation involves the processes of exploration and commitment (Umana-Taylor, 2011). Exploration and commitment/resolution are terms that have been drawn from the work of Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980) which help provide a practical framework for “understanding the psychological meaning of ethnicity” and the “individual’s general sense of self” (as cited in Umana-Taylor, 2011, p. 793). According to Umana-Taylor (2011), exploration incorporates an understanding and exposure to one’s group by doing things like reading about one’s ethnic history and background, conversing with others about one’s ethnic experience, as well as actively searching for more information about one’s ethnic group. Commitment/resolution involves the promise of group membership and the obligation to one’s ethnic identity (Umana-Taylor, 2011).

Another feature of ethnic identity is its impact on the well-being of the individual. Phinney and Kohatsu (1997) argue that positive psychosocial functioning is directly correlated with a secure sense of ethnic identity among ethnic minority group members (as cited in Umana-Taylor, 2011, p. 794). Umana-Taylor’s (2011) findings further support Phinney and Kohatsu’s (1997) argument in that despite the heterogenous nature among ethnic minority groups, “ethnic

identity appears to serve a promotive and/or protective function for individuals' psychosocial functioning" (p. 805).

Phinney (1993) argues that ethnic identity, when viewed as a social developmental process is increasingly important during adolescence but can also become intermittently important throughout the whole lifespan (as cited in Umana-Taylor, 2011, p. 794). This is important to consider especially since this paper will be focusing on the experiences of minority youth who are faced with multiple conflicts and negotiations within their identity practices (John, 2009).

As mentioned previously, all three of the theories that I have selected to explore within my paper overlap. According to Phinney (1990), ethnic identity can be considered as an aspect to the framework of acculturation, "in which the concern is with individuals and the focus is on how they relate to their own group as a subgroup of the larger society" (p. 501). The concept of acculturation deals more broadly with the changes in "cultural attitudes, values, and behaviours that result from contact between two distinct cultures" (Phinney, 1990, p. 501). The difference between the two is that acculturation concerns generally the group rather than the individual, and the focus is on how minority and or immigrant groups relate to the dominant society (Phinney, 1990, p. 501).

Acculturation

Acculturation developed from concern about the effects of European colonization, and then later became directed toward immigrating individuals (Bhaloo, 2011, p. 12). The definition of acculturation has changed and evolved over the years whereby many components of the definition have been added by various researchers in the field (Bhaloo, 2011, p. 13). Graves

(1967) argues that it was only in the 1960s that acculturation had moved from being an anthropological theory to a theory studied in psychology (Bhaloo, 2011, p. 13).

Berry (2003) argues that acculturation is the “process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact” (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006, p. 305). Cultural change includes changes in a group’s customs, and in their economic and political life (Berry et al., 2006, p. 305). Psychological change tends to incorporate “alterations in individuals’ attitudes toward the acculturation process, their cultural identities (Phinney, 2003), and their social behaviors in relation to the groups in contact” (as cited in Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006, p. 305). Berry has also stated that acculturation has group level variables which play a significant role in the acculturation process and model (Bhaloo, 2011). These group variables take into consideration the “characteristics of immigrant and host societies, demographics, reason for immigration, social support, experience of discrimination and individual personality characteristics” (Bhaloo, 2011, p. 13)

There are four acculturation strategies that Berry (2005) proposes that can be highlighted. Before introducing these four strategies it is important to understand that two contexts need to be highlighted when acculturation takes place. In essence, it is the “degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity; and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society” (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). When these two areas of interest are crossed, an acculturation space is created with four sectors within which individuals may express how they are seeking to acculturate: Assimilation, separation, marginalization and integration (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). Assimilation occurs when there is little cultural maintenance combined with a preference for relating to or interacting with the larger/dominant society (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). Separation is a way in which individuals seek out cultural maintenance while avoiding

involvement with others (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). Marginalization exists when neither cultural maintenance nor interaction with others is sought (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). The last sector that Berry (2005) highlights is called integration. Integration is present when both cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger society are pursued (Berry et al., 2006, p. 306). These four strategies are based on the notion that individuals adapt in the ways they can in order to acculturate, only if the larger/dominant society is accepting of their adaptation methods (Bahloo, 2011, p. 16).

For the purposes of this paper, acculturation can be used as a lens to look at the experiences of both first and second generation youth (children of immigrants born in Canada) as well as their parents and everyone involved in the migratory process. According to a study conducted by Abouguendia and Noel (2001) on the acculturation experiences of South Asians in Canada, second generation youth experience unique acculturative feelings compared to first generation youth. This is important to highlight and take into consideration when moving forward with the topic on South Asian youth and homelessness. Not only are the experiences of each individual unique but the way in which they adapt and acculturate can also be unique for a second generation and first generation. In addition, it is important to consider the acculturation process of immigrant parents. According to Farver et al.'s (2002) study, the acculturation process of immigrant parents can either be constructive or create barriers for immigrant children and or children born in Canada to immigrant parents. Farver et al.'s (2002) study reveals that varying degrees of acculturation can either positively or negatively affect the identity construction of youth, as well as affect the way they perceive the dominant society and themselves within this context.

Family Systems

The last theory that is important as a lens for this study is the concept of Family Systems. Family systems theory is similar to the notions of primary socialization in that it explores the relationship of family members within the family system, including children. However, family systems theory delves more into the roles of extended family members, including grandparents.

The family systems perspective takes into account intergenerational structures that have the ability to either hinder or facilitate the behaviours of immigrant youth, their parents and others who make up the family structure (Eldering & Knorth, 1998). Furthermore, this theory considers the ways in which families interact prior to migration, upon migration and post arrival which all have the ability to affect the way the family and the individuals within the family acculturate into the new society (Eldering & Knorth, 1998).

According to Bush, Bohon and Kim (2010) the adaptation among immigrant families is complex. According to these authors, the theory of family systems highlights the “importance of interactions among individuals and family subsystems (e.g., parental, marital, and child) and the resultant meanings and structures that emerge out of these interactions” (Bush et al., 2010, p. 288). Consequently, changes with a family are viewed as being managed by the whole family rather than by one individual family member (Bush et al., 2010, p. 288). The entire family unit will experience stress during the migratory process (pre-, during, post-migration). Bush et al. (2010) argue that the concept of stress in this context is seen as a vehicle for change rather than something that is characteristically negative.

The stress that is experienced by most immigrant families is due to familial change. The strategies that were used in the past such as rules and roles that were established in the country of origin may not be as effective in the social, economic and political climate of North America (Bush et al., 2010). For example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argues that many Mexican

immigrants to the U.S. employ a ‘family stage migration’ whereby one or two members of the family immigrate at one given time (Bush et al., 2010). If the father immigrates first leaving his wife and children in Mexico there is a significant change in family strategies and the rules and roles that were discussed previously now have to change (Bush et al., 2010). As a man on his own, the father must accomplish many tasks that he may have not been familiar with prior to his departure. These tasks may include laundry, cooking and cleaning, tasks that were typically done by his wife (Bush et al., 2010). In turn, his wife has now taken on the head of the family role whereby all the tasks she had once shared or had her husband perform now fall to her to perform. When the wife and children finally immigrate to the U.S. the husband and wife are now at a different stage completely changing the family system entirely. This change involves renegotiating roles so as to accomplish the tasks a family needs to complete in order for it to work in the new country (Bush et al., 2010).

According to Bush et al. (2010), as the family system changes, individuals who make-up the family are changing. Each member will try to interact “in accordance with the new rules” (Bush et al., 2010, p. 288). Often it is the lack of change, or agreement to change to the new rules that causes conflict within the family system. When families are unable to interact and are acculturating differently, states of divergence emerge between generations and among generations. This highlights a conflicting situation that needs to be reflected upon when studying the experiences of immigrant families and the members that make-up the family system.

Terminology

This paper will attempt to capture the experiences of South Asian youth. A South Asian (sometimes referred to as East Indian in Canada and Asian Indian in the United States) may be defined as any person who describes their ethnicity with the southern part of Asia or who self-

identifies as part of the South Asian visible minority group (Allard, Kaddatz & Tran, 2005, p. 21). This definition encompasses people from an immense diversity of ethnic backgrounds, including those with Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Hindu, Ismaili, Kashmiri, Nepali, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sikh, Sinhalese, South Asian, Sri Lankan and Tamil ancestry (Allard et al., 2005, p. 21). For the purpose of this paper and to gain as many participants as possible I will use the widest definition of South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burman, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (UNESCO, 2011).

Furthermore, I will be attempting to use terms such as first and second generation youth or adolescents instead of first or second generation immigrants. The term immigrant applies to those who are of immigrant status. The youth in question have not migrated or had emigrated at a young age and have therefore, for the most part, been fully engulfed in the Canadian way of life (dress, school, peers).

The paper aims to examine the settlement experiences of immigrant families, and to investigate the intergenerational conflicts that force youth onto streets or into shelters. First, however, a discussion of homelessness in Canada and other first world nations is necessary and provides context to the topic.

Homelessness Today – Canada and other first world nations

The face of homelessness has changed significantly in the last few decades. Homelessness is becoming more and more racialized, moving away from the image of the conventional ‘old white man’ to the young and marginalized (Ballay & Bulthius, 2004). According to Davis (1996), “at least 45% of the homeless possess a high school diploma, and at least one half of these people attended college” (p. 177). According to Barr and Evenson (2009), Canada’s true

homeless population, not just those living in emergency shelters, falls anywhere between 200,000 and 300,000 with an estimated 65,000 young people who are homeless or living in homeless shelters throughout the country at some time during the year (p. 14)Based on an American study, current estimates suggest that between 575,000 and 1 million young people run away annually in the United States due to family breakdown (as cited in Thompson, Kost & Pollio, 2003, p. 296). Ethnic groups, such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, have become overrepresented in the homeless population today (Davis, 1996, p. 177). The marginalization of racialized groups forced to live in insecure settings are now the common representation of homelessness today.

According to the literature that pertains to homeless youth, there are three major reasons for homelessness. These three often inter-related reasons are “family problems, economic problems, and residential instability” (Homeless Youth, 2007, p. 1). Disruptive family conditions however are the principal reason that young people leave their homes (Homeless Youth, 2007; Springer, 2006). According to one study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1995) “more than half of the youth interviewed during their shelter stay reported that their parents either told them to leave or knew they were leaving and did not care” (as cited in Homeless Youth, 2007, p. 1). According to a Canadian report, “family conflict, including high levels of abuse, is a clear contributor to youth homelessness for a high percentage of street youth” (Gaetz, Patton & Winland, 2011, p. 20).

Before discussing homelessness as it affects first and second-generation youth, it is important to discuss some of the issues that face immigrant families, in particular the stresses of migration and how that impacts family and children.

Migration of Families – An International Perspective

Migration is seen as a means to a better life and happens all over the world. The impact of migration and the toll it takes on families who choose to migrate can be tremendous no matter where in the world these families decide to go. Many scholars have researched the subject of familial stress upon migration however very few have paid attention to the experiences of first and second generation youth and homelessness. This part of the literature remains scarce. Nonetheless, literature all over the globe confirms that youth prior to, during and upon migration are at high risk of experiencing some form of family turmoil. These issues can be extremely grave and/or create some family disharmony that has the ability to force youth onto streets and or into shelters.

According to Timera (2002), family disharmony amongst Sahelian families in France has been caused by both domains of the public and private life. Migration to other parts of Africa but mostly France became the most viable option for Sahelian males due to the rising population and drought conditions in their native states (Timera, 2002). Upon family reunification, many of the children were forced to discover that their fathers occupied degrading unskilled jobs at the bottom of the professional ladder that they themselves had to inherit (Timera, 2002, p. 152). In the process of being socialized to accept the dominant society's norms and customs, many of these youth because of their economic stature and skin color were relegated to a position of inferiority (Timera, 2002, p. 153). For many of the boys, rebellion toward the wider society was and is the only way in which they can cope with their status in the receiving country and with their new family dynamic (Timera, 2002). Timera (2002) argues that these rebellions can sometimes have negative consequences for girls within Sahelian homes and can at times isolate them even further from the public sphere. French media in some cases "manipulates public sympathy in ethnocentric even racist directions" further marginalizing these families and

individuals from truly becoming French citizens (Timera, 2002, p. 152). Unfortunately, these stories of rebellion and isolation are extremely common for many youth in many countries where racial discrimination and cultural clash are present.

Mediterranean migration into western European countries has been an on-going phenomenon. Family problems that develop upon migration are sometimes overlooked when making the decision to migrate. According to Eldering and Knorth's (1998) study of Mediterranean immigrant youth in the Netherlands, the marginalization and discrimination of racialized families in a 'white centric' country can fracture family systems and force youth into precarious living. Using a quantitative and qualitative approach, Eldering and Knorth (1998) argued that volatile family systems and different approaches to acculturation can increase adolescents' risk of running away.

Suarez-Orozco, C., Suarez-Orzco, M. and Todorova (2008), argue that acculturation attitudes play a significant role in family systems. Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008) claim that children acculturate more quickly than their parents and that this can at times create conflict within the family. Bush et al. (2010) argue that conflict tends to occur when parents are more likely to focus on values and practices from their culture of origin, while children integrate more customs and practices from the mainstream host culture (p. 290). A discussion of some of the conflicts that face youth because of intergenerational conflict is required.

Immigrant Families and Intergenerational/Cultural Conflict

The sense of truly belonging for the average first and second generation youth, tossed in with Canada's 'multicultural' and distinctly colour blind ideology can become problematic. Creating an identity and belonging are two very large themes within the literature that pertains to immigrant youth. Their identity and sense of belonging is highly shaped by their relationship

with their parents and other family members as well as the outside community including school peers.

Parents, for the most part, when migrating to Canada, whether they migrate with children or plan to have children upon migration come to Canada for better opportunities and a better life for their children. Despite these great considerations, many immigrant parents are unaware of some of the challenges they will face including the psychological and cultural changes that take place. However, for many racialized youth, growing up in a white centric setting can be met with strain and difficulty, coupled with enormous identity confusion (Rajiva, 2006). Many youth in both first and second generations are caught in an in-between space. Their attempts to understand and “make sense of who they really are and/or want to be, are governed by familial ties, peer culture and the dominant discourse” (Rajiva, 2006, p. 166). According to one South Asian girl of second generation status:

I know people who were born here and somehow we always feel we are strangers because we're visible minorities, so at first sight, people will always see you as coming from somewhere else. In many cases you still have to prove yourself. (Rajiva, 2005, p. 25)

This passage illustrates that generation and race are key factors that affect a youths' sense of belonging (Rajiva, 2005, p. 25).

Intergenerational conflict is a common experience for many first and second generation youth. To complicate things further, lineage within the family system also plays a significant role. For many families including families that have not migrated, older siblings tend to play a different role than younger siblings, and males at times can assume different functions than females, creating even more intricacies within a family system. Maintaining harmony in

intergenerational relationships with all these intricacies can be a major challenge for any immigrant family (Bush et al., 2010, p. 290).

As mentioned previously, parents and children can acculturate differently and as a result parents often tend to place more importance on cultural values and practices whereas children are adopting the values of the dominant society (Bush et al., 2010). Many children tend to learn cultural norms and practices from their parents, however, the messages that immigrant children receive from their parents may conflict with those they are receiving from their Canadian peers and teachers (Bush et al., 2010, p. 290). According to Bush et al. (2010), second and third generation adolescents are more likely to practice premarital sex, cohabitation, and marry at later ages compared to first-generation adolescents (as cited in Bush et al., 2010, p. 290). These sorts of norms and customs for many families who adhere to certain cultural values can create stress and major conflict within the family system.

Another issue that has surfaced in the literature relates to communication problems between immigrant parents and their children. Certain words in certain languages may not come across the way they are intended to. Both child and parent may not be able to fully understand what the other is trying to say. Communication problems like these can lead to arguments and frustration for either party (Bush et al., 2010). Additionally, many children of immigrants serve as cultural brokers within the family system. Cultural broker refers to a person who serves as a guide between two cultures or language groups (e.g. translating notes from schools, bills, or bank statements) (Bush et al., 2010). According to Bush et al. (2010) this can be seen as either an advantage or disadvantage. Some scholars have argued that cultural brokering is a form of “adultification” or “role reversal” which can hinder or impede normal childhood development (Bush et al., 2010, p. 291). Other scholars including Buriel, Perez, De Ment, Chavez, & Moran,

(1998) have argued that children who act as cultural brokers are more ‘bicultural,’ and have higher academic achievement and more self-confidence (as cited in Bush et al., 2010, p. 291). Despite the pros and cons to cultural brokering, children of immigrants play a vital role in Canada. The pressure and the burden that is placed on them increases their chances of conflicting with other family members as well as outside members of the community.

As a result of some of these conflicts and pressures, many youth struggle with what is expected of them. For some South Asian youth, these pressures are compounded with major cultural clash. However, before discussing these clashes, a discussion of first and second generation youth and homelessness is required.

First and Second Generation Youth, Homelessness and Canada

Newcomer homelessness is a relatively a new phenomenon in Canada. Homelessness among immigrant populations are on the rise especially in larger metropolitan cities like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. According to Springer (2006), changes in one’s “social and income support, tenant protection legislation and zero-tolerance policies seem to have combined with discrimination, racism, and economic restructuring to push immigrants and immigrant youth in particular directions, closer to the margins of society” (p. 26). The consequence of this marginal status is often poverty and states of homelessness (Springer, 2006).

Approximately 25,000 to 35,000 new migrant children come to Canada each year (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003). Many who come to Canada or who were born into traditional immigrant families experience cultural clash with their parents’ country of origin and the dominant society. Their adaptation, integration and process of settlement is extremely complex and a multifaceted experience (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003).

According to Berman et al., (2009) uprooting and displacement from the home and communities is very much a lived reality within Canada's borders, particularly amongst the immigrant and aboriginal youth population. This loss of home that Berman et al. (2009) discuss is accompanied by "shattered or culturally eradicated communities" (Berman et al., 2009, p. 419). Cultural conflict, according to Berman et al. (2009) is the inability to successfully be part of a particular group, and tends to be illustrated as one of the main reasons why newcomer youth, including second generation youth, choose to leave their homes (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003).

Springer's (2006) qualitative study is particularly relevant to this study on the South Asian experience. Instead of South Asians, Springer (2006) focuses on the lived realities of homeless Caribbean youth in the Toronto area. His study investigates the experiences of immigrant youth between the ages of 15-25 and provides the reader with some understanding of the ethno-racial dimensions of youth who are homeless within Canada's borders. According to Springer (2006), family violence including physical, emotional and sexual abuse increases the risk of homelessness among immigrant and racialized youth. His qualitative findings revealed several common pathways to homelessness; these included abuse, drug use, family breakdown, poverty, sexual identity/preference, or any combination of these (Springer, 2006). The most common pathway however, was family breakdown. Furthermore, "newcomer youth adjusting to culture, language, education system, blended families, racism, self-image in a new societal context and exclusion or isolation can increase the risk for homelessness" (Springer, 2006, p. 26). For male black youth, the intersection of race and education present a foreboding structural barrier that many are unable to circumvent (Springer, 2006). Similarly, Anisef and Kilbride (2003) argue that structural and ideological barriers for racialized immigrants push youth to the

periphery of a white centric society. Springer (2006) confirms that migration may not be the best indicator for homelessness and that instead a position of multiple structural disadvantages may be a more appropriate explanation for the increase in homelessness amongst racialized immigrant youth (p. 26).

According to Berman et al.,’s (2009) qualitative study, the feeling of displacement is common among racialized newcomers and aboriginal youth. Their immigration status may vary however, their experiences with colonialism coupled with society’s appreciation of whiteness has affected both groups historically in similar ways. Many of the girls interviewed in the study described their accommodations as unstable especially when they were living on the “streets, couch surfing, staying in shelters, or temporarily residing with their mothers and/or boyfriends—or some combination of these”(Berman et al., 2009, p. 423). Most of the girls spoke of troubled childhoods and chaotic homes where interactions with one another were often characterized by physical, sexual, and emotional violence (Berman et al., 2009, p. 423). Surprisingly, some of the homeless girls did not sever the connections they had with family members despite their experiences of being oppressed, abused and controlled while living at home (Berman et al., 2009). Some actually enjoyed the familial contact and the “emotional and physical distance that they considered to be a positive aspect of displacement” (Berman et al., 2009, p. 424). Essentially, choosing to be homeless provided a feeling of control that many were not able to achieve while living at home. As one girl stated:

I’m kind of establishing who I am right now. Now that I’m out on my own, although I still have some current issues to deal with, like family issues, I’m more—I’m able to deal with the past and to start sorting through all of what happened when I was growing up and that. (Berman et al., 2009, p. 426)

For many homeless youth, it was possible to achieve a sense of belonging, and create balance, in an otherwise fragmented life. Being homeless also allowed some youth to re-create their own

sense of history, culture and heritage (Berman et al., 2009). However, despite this sense of freedom, many of the youth did express their fear of being alone and getting hurt while being on the street.

Comprehending the realities of homeless youth and especially of those who are newcomers and of racialized status, a sector that has yet to be fully researched, is vital to understanding the settlement experiences of Canada's migrant groups. A discussion of cultural and intergenerational conflict between youth and parents is imperative and will be tackled next, as this for many is the main reason why first and second generation youth are on the streets and in shelters.

South Asian Families and Intergenerational Conflict

Desai and Subramanian (2002) argue that the South Asian community in Canada is one that is highly unified. South Asians typically place great value on family interaction, preservation of ethnic customs, traditions and heritage languages (Allard et al., 2005, p. 20). In the article "Between Two Worlds", Das and Kemp (1997) provide a list of cultural value variables that apply to some South Asians. Some of these attitudes and values include (Das & Kemp, 1997, p. 27);

- Non-confrontation or silence as a virtue
- Respect for older persons and the elderly
- Moderation in behaviors
- Devaluation of individualism
- Harmony between hierarchical roles
- Filial piety
- Structured family roles and relationships
- Humility; Obedience
- High regard for learning
- Modest about sexuality
- Not demonstrative with heterosexual affection
- Less need for dating
- Strong sense of duty of family
- Protect honor and face of family

- Marrying within versus outside ethnic group

Some of these values remain integral to the South Asian family system in Canada (Das & Kemp, 1997). It is these values and cultural norms that tend to conflict with the receiving society's set of customs and norms, and ultimately between family members that are submersed within the two.

Migration can cause tension between the traditions that a group would like to retain and the dominant culture, resulting in individuals and families redefining and renegotiating their roles and identities within and outside the community (Talbani & Hasanli, 2000, p. 615). South Asian youth tend to experience conflict that arises from cultural expectations assigned to them by their parents as well as what is expected of them by the dominant culture. This genuine lived reality for many youth is almost like a game of tug-of-war. Dasgupta (1998) describes it as a maintenance of 'traditional' Indian values vs. assimilation in 'Western' ones (Dasgupta, 1998, p. 957). According to several scholars, children of immigrants may be affected and or even influenced by some of the cultural expectations and values that are formed by the dominant group, however these values and expectations in many respects can be in direct confrontation to the cultural values of their parents and the South Asian community (Dasgupta, 1998; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Handa, 2003; Samuel, 2010).

In addition to adhering to the expectations of the family, many boys and girls of South Asian ancestry are also constantly being reminded of the 'ills' of Western society (Handa, 2003). As mentioned previously, the acculturation processes of parents and children are important to the successful development of a youths' identity. Farver et al., (2002) argues that family conflict based on cultural compliance increases if immigrant parents are unable to acculturate to Canadian society. Farver et al.'s (2002) findings revealed that second generation South Asian

youth who had parents that acculturated well into Canadian society experienced less anxiety and high self-esteem than those whose parents chose separation as a form of settlement (Farver et al., 2002, p. 347). Farver et al.'s (2002) study thus indicates that the acculturation processes of immigrant parents can either be constructive or create barriers for racialized youth.

From early childhood, many children of South Asian background are encouraged to socialize and are expected to marry within the religious-social group, especially girls, in whom the idea of marriage is implanted as an important goal in their lives (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000, p. 618). Dating and mate selection amongst South Asian youth can be, at times, extremely regulated. Many scholars agree that both girls and boys experience different pressures that relate to the topic of dating and mate selection, and that the issue of dating is often considered the most serious between parent and adolescent. According to Dasgupta (1998), sexual chastity is not a major concern for South Asian boys as it is for girls. One can recognize the difficulty that many females have to contend with given this double standard that is imposed on them.

Female Youth

Authors like Handa (2003), Samuel (2010) and Talbani & Hasanali (2000), argue that South Asian girls are the vessels to preserving cultural values and traditions in many migrant families. These cultural expectations can cause great pressure for youth living in a society that condones sexual expression. According to Handa (2003), girls need to portray a proper, 'good girl' image, which means that many are not allowed to date, or do things that would go against their parents cultural values and ideals. Salimah, an eighteen year-old Pakistani girl, felt "weighed down by the expectations this image placed" on her (Handa, 2003, p. 27). Many daughters are faced with the burden of maintaining and preserving the reputation of the family (Samuel, 2010). Hence, the image of the family is reflective of their daughters' reputation within the community.

According to several authors including Handa (2003), Talbani and Hasanali (2000), girls that did date, dated secretly so as not to put shame on the family or jeopardize the family's reputation. However, when it came to selecting a marriage partner, young women were expected to marry within the community (Handa, 2003). Some female youth expressed their desire to bring about change with regards to their ascribed roles and stereotypes (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Many of the youth in Talbani and Hasanali's (2000) study would try to combat the double standard that had been placed on them however, the subject of dating was by far the biggest obstacle and point of contention between the two generations (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000).

According to Farver et al. (2002) young South Asian girls are constantly struggling to balance out "conflicting 'allegiances' and create a discrete self-identity, as well as an ethnic identity that is compatible with both their natal culture" and the Canadian mainstream (p. 338). Due to this binary conflict, young South Asian females may experience greater "family conflict, heightened anxiety, low self-esteem, and poor school performance" (Farver et al., 2002, p. 338). These factors are extremely stressful and can create great hardship for young girls.

Talbani and Hasanali (2000) found that control over socialization was imposed more readily on girls than on boys within the South Asian community. According to several case studies, South Asian girls were portrayed as having less decision making power because of their gender (Talbani et. al., 2000, p. 625; Handa, 2003). Parental attempts to control female sexuality in order to maintain a certain reputation and respect within the family can be enforced not only by parents but also by older siblings, brothers and other family members (Handa, 2003). Even strangers from the South Asian community can cause female youth to switch or 'correct' their 'western ways' so that the script of the good unmarried South Asian girl is maintained (Handa,

2003, p. 13). It is the “changing of masks” that can weigh heavily on the shoulders of youth experiencing a double life in Canada (Handa, 2003).

Male Youth

In most of the literature pertaining to South Asian youth, males for the most part experienced preferential treatment within the family system. Their status within the family embodied a patriarchal norm that can be highly evident in most South Asian families. According to Salam (2010), male respondents felt that they had experienced greater gender privilege in the family while female respondents grappled with a gender double standard, causing more tension and conflict (Salam, 2010, p. 168). Some males felt as though their main responsibility was to achieve and be self-reliant, whereas girls were expected to be responsible and obedient (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000, p. 617). In many of Salam’s (2010) findings, male children were ascribed the traditional gender freedoms associated with South Asian gender norms, and were able to extract more autonomy from their parents than females (Salam, 2010, p. 291). In addition to this, some boys claimed that they had experienced a greater degree of independence, and favored status within the family (Salam, 2010, p. 158). Due to lack of surveillance, male youth for the most part were able to enjoy western norms such as dating, staying out late etc. (Salam, 2010). Despite this, many males did express the pressure to marry within the community (Salam, 2010). According to Samuel (2010), marriage selection for both sexes was a custom that is highly regulated by the parents.

The struggles that face some South Asian youth are extreme and sometimes unbearable. Their family situation as well as their interactions with the wider community can negatively or positively affect their overall well-being. The extent to which these states of conflict contribute to states of homelessness will be explored in the remainder of this paper.

South Asian youth and homelessness

Literature pertaining to South Asian youth accessing shelters is scarce. However, what remains obvious from the literature review conducted above is that South Asian families can and do experience conflict upon migration. Families who come from South Asia bring with them a set of values and customs that may not blend as naturally with Canada's norms and practices.

Experiences of exclusion and cultural conflict for families and for individual members within the family are very much real and relevant problems. The interviews conducted for this paper will help to explore the link between this conflict and shelter use among the South Asian population in Toronto.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Design

The paper uses semi-structured interviews with second generation youth involved with the homelessness system in Toronto in order to explore the issues cited in the previous chapters as well as to provide the reader with a better and richer understanding of the phenomena being studied. The purpose of using this approach is to gain some insight about family life from the perspective of South Asian youth who are experiencing homelessness. The interviews explore several subjects including the youth's family background, their sense of identity, their connection with the community and school, and lastly their experience with the shelter.

The purpose of this research study is to connect the findings with the theoretical frameworks that were addressed earlier including identity, acculturation and family systems. In addition, the paper seeks to add to the literature that revolves around the subject of homelessness among first and second generation youth.

Ethical Considerations

Because the study involves the use of human participants, a research ethics proposal was required. Some of the issues that were raised during the process of completing the proposal were the method of recruiting, potential risks to the participants, and appropriate interview questions. The participants acted as volunteers for the study and were compensated with a ten dollar gift certificate for their time. The only risk that was stated was slight discomfort when talking about family issues and experiences of discrimination. Questions regarding immigration status were not used even though the study revolved around the topic of first and second-generation youth. The reason why this question was avoided, was to protect the participant and his or her family members from associating themselves with a status that would jeopardize their place in Canada.

The interviews conducted were audio recorded. All of the information that was provided was in confidence and all participants were required to sign a consent form approving the recording. Providing a consent form makes it possible for the prospective participants to make an informed decision on whether or not to participate in the study. It also secures the cooperation of those who wish to take part in the study (Bouma, Ling & Wilkinson, 2009, p. 144). Furthermore, in order to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible, the purpose of the study was explained in the consent form and was read aloud to the participant prior to being recorded. Each participant was made aware that if he or she felt uncomfortable at any time that they could remove themselves from the interview.

Participant Selection

Participants were sought in shelters throughout the Toronto area. Posters and announcements on the study were presented as a way to get youth to participate. After an exhaustive recruitment period, only three participants were found.

Participant Demographics

Of the three participants, two were female and one was male. All three participants identified as second-generation and were born to parents who migrated to Canada from South Asia directly. The background of each participant varied from Afghani, Indian and Pakistani. All of the participants had siblings and had at least one parental figure at home. If the parents were not at home, an older siblings would typically step in and act as main caregiver.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Analysis

The interviews that were completed strengthened the review of the literature and proved to be very useful to answering some of the major research questions posed in the introduction.

From the recorded discussions, several themes emerged which will be discussed within this chapter. Some of the themes identified relate strongly to the topics that were dealt with in the review of the literature (Chapter 2). These themes include family dysfunction, issues with belonging and identity formation and experiences of discrimination. In addition, some unforeseen themes also emerged and will be included in this chapter. These include issues between friends and family, and strategies for independence.

Family Dysfunction

Family discontent was by far the most predominant theme that stood out from all the interviews. Prior to using a shelter, all three participants had expressed periods of conflict and disruption with other family members. This finding is consistent with Springer's (2005) findings where he argues that family and relationship breakdown are one of the major leading causes of homelessness among the Caribbean youth in Ontario.

Interestingly, all three participants had related their family problems to culturally divisive issues when asked how their relationship was to other family members:

Raina¹: My dad is really a, he's an Afghan guy, like completely. So you can't really open up to him or talk to him. It's really hard to get emotional, so..he's pure Afghan. Where as my mom she is Afghan but she has her Canadian side, meaning she's a little bit more understanding. She will try to be flexible and try to understand the Canadian world and try to balance us but somehow we still have issues with that because we obviously get into a lot of fights.

My sister, me and her don't get along so...cause she is kind of like a rules girl. She likes the rules, the priorities, she likes to be the cultural (Afghani) girl. Where as my brother is a little like me. He's got this Iranian Afghan thing going on and this whiteness going on.

Nahla: Siblings is great like I love them and everything but parents is horrible, really bad. Like umm I don't talk to my parents at all and they make sure that I don't keep in contact with my siblings either... My parents are so strict and weird because of our background. I like the (Indian) values and everything I just don't like the way...like the way my parents enforce the values.

According to the youth, culturally contentious issues existed within the family home ultimately causing the youth to leave their family, either by choice or by being forced out. One particular participant however, had regarded his behavior with the family as disrespectful and that he had deserved to be kicked out:

Hammed: I don't have a problem with them (older brothers) but they have a problem with me because of the old me that I was, ya know? But hopefully if they see me now and if they interact with me I'm pretty sure they are gonna be back to normal.

It's nobody else's mistake other than me (for being kicked out)... It's my duty to respect my older siblings, no matter if they beat me up for stupid reasons or what not. They are older and they know more than me. I'm not the typical modern half Pakistani half Canadian kid ya know?

¹ In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants a pseudonym was assigned to each individual

It was interesting to find that the youth, all of whom were of second generation status, had linked their problems at home in a culturally specific way before being asked culturally specific questions.

According to Ensign's (1998) study on health issues among homeless youth in America, "first-generation immigrant youth can experience 'cultural gaps' when they assimilate more quickly than their parents do into American culture, causing family conflict" (p. 164). Though Ensign (1998) chooses to examine the experiences of first generation youth, it is obvious to see from the findings above that even second-generation youth also experience family conflict stemming from cultural gaps.

Upon further reflection, the theory of acculturation and family systems helps to situate some of the issues that are present among some immigrant families. Varying degrees of acculturation between children and their parents can lead to intergenerational conflict and communication problems (Bush, Bohon & Kim, 2010, p. 290). As an immigrant family, the family dynamic is in constant flux. The youth's parents and siblings not born in Canada will acculturate in accordance to the new rules and the new way of life in their receiving community (Bush, Bohon & Kim, 2010, p. 288). However, the ways in which these members of the family choose to acculturate can conflict with how the youth perceive the norms and values of Canadian life. When looking through the lens of family systems, the way in which family members acculturate will affect everyone living within the home in either a positive or negative way.

Issues with belonging and identity formation

An issue with belonging and identity formation was an anticipated theme. The review of the literature proved that many first and second-generation youth who are of South Asian

background, experience issues with their identity and belonging. What was not expected was how complex this particular theme can be when it is applied to racialized youth where home does not, at that moment exist. Predictably, the experiences of homeless youth are very different than youth who are residing with families. However, there is not a great deal of literature that can explain some of the issues that are faced by South Asian homeless youth but what was extracted from the interviews was an overall opinion of a broken sense of belonging:

Raina: I've never felt like I belong or know something or whatever cause I've always been confused by that. I have never felt satisfied feeling for anything. So at the moment, I would say I 'm just trying to figure what I believe in and what I want to do. Which is really hard because of my past life, my family would have so many judgmental things to say and has screwed with my head like.

The way my mom and dad taught me about life it like helps a lot but again they screwed me up because of the whole mixture of Muslim and western, its just, its two morals clashing into one and I don't know what I'm supposed to do at the moment.

Nahla: I would love to live with my parents. I would love to get along with them. I definitely belong more like their (Indian) lifestyle and everything but they are just too controlling and strict. So for now, I guess I belong with myself. I don't give friends too much importance ya know?

Interestingly, Raina and Nahla link their sense of belonging, or lack there of, to their family's cultural set of expectations. Lalonde and Giguere (2008), describe this situation as an interpersonal conflict. According to these authors, interpersonal conflict is experienced within the individual and is captured by the 'feeling of being torn between two cultures' (Lalonde & Giguere, 2008, p. 58). To further add, a battle "between two sets of cultural norms" (western and non-western) is more likely to occur "when two of the cultural identities are salient to the individual" (Lalonde & Giguere, 2008, p. 58). Desai and Subramanian (2002) as well as Bush, Bohon and Kim (2010), describe this conflict as a common issue among second-generation

youth. Furthermore, some parents who arrive as immigrants from South Asia, bring with them a set of cultural norms that can conflict with western cultures (Das & Kemp, 1997; Dasgupta, 1998). According to Lalonde and Giguere (2008), Western cultures have a strong sense of autonomy and independence where as Eastern cultures tend to have strong norms of family connectedness and interdependence (p. 61). It is because of these differences where children of immigrants are trying to gain their own autonomy that can give rise to interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts (Lalonde & Giguere, 2008, p. 61).

Another part of this theme that should be emphasized here was the way in which the youth identified themselves. Although the youth had identified themselves differently by using race, religion and nationality, all of them felt indifferent to the Canadian identity:

Raina: In all honesty I can relate to a lot of groups. I could say I relate to Indian people, I can relate to Afghan people and I can relate to white, western people. But I don't think I would ever feel like I belong....If I'd say I was Afghan my mom would look at me and say you're not even close to Afghan. If I'd say I was western they would be like what the heck, why are you western. I'm kind of in the middle. I really don't know where I really am.

From the way Raina spoke of herself, she seemed to express a bi-cultural identity, which according to Sundar (2008) can work out positively or negatively for youth. A bi-cultural identity emerges when youth maintain ties to a culture of origin, while simultaneously adhering to the norms of the majority culture (Sundar, 2008, para 8). A strong bi-cultural identity can be “characterized as ‘bi-cultural competence,’ where youth are able to successfully integrate aspects of both mainstream society and the culture of origin” (as cited in Sundar, 2008, para 8). However, a weak bi-cultural identity has been linked to “adjustment and mental health problems arising from feeling “neither here nor there,” or “in-between” cultures” (as cited in Sundar, 2008, para

8). It was obvious from the discussion with Raina that she was struggling with her identity, an issue that is common for many first and second generation South Asians (Rajiva, 2005).

Going back to the main research question “*do cultural or intergenerational differences contribute to states of homelessness for second-generation youth?*” It is important to indicate that these issues do contribute to states of instability for youth, however, it is the intrapersonal conflicts that can increase family conflict that lead youth into states of homelessness. Although having a bicultural identity can lead to a positive bridging process and can create “new possibilities for self-definition,” it can also make youth like Raina feel excluded from both cultures (Brooks, 2008, p. 76). As a result, second generation youth of color can experience difficulties negotiating their identity and their cultural membership, a struggle that is very different from any experienced by their immigrant parents (Brooks, 2008, p. 76).

Two of the participants did not even choose to consider Canadian as a part of their identity despite the fact that both ascribed to Canadian values and norms:

Nahla: (Canada) doesn't have any culture or anything, its whatever... I don't consider myself Canadian, even though I was born and raised here I don't know. For some reason, like, because like my parents used to go to the states a lot, we have a lot of family in the states. For some weird reason but I have always seen myself more American than even Canadian. Indian first, American second, and then Canadian doesn't make the list.

Hammed: I'm just a Punjabi, Bhutan, Muslim, Pakistani kid.

As a South Asian interviewer, how my identity was perceived by the young people may have influenced the way in which Nahla and Hammed discussed their identity. According to Sundar (2008), youth can choose to ‘brown it up’ or ‘bring down the brown’ in specific situations. When

a youth decides to 'brown it up' he or she may emphasize South Asian characteristics and behaviours, whereas when youth choose to 'bring down the brown' they focus on attributes considered to be more Canadian (Sundar, 2008, para 40). It is a popular strategy, which can be used to reach a particular objective (Sundar, 2008, p. 2008). In this case, the objective is unclear, however, one needs to recognize the impacts of interviewer effects and the potential that has on influencing data.

Discrimination

It came as no surprise that most of the youth interviewed had experienced some sort of discrimination and bullying growing up. The ways in which they had experienced it however, was expressed differently from one another:

Raina: I've always been kind of bullied...usually a lot of people joke ya know terrorist and my brother is Osama Bin Laden. I get that it's a joke and I laugh but just because it's used so much but like I'm just like you. I could say some shit to you. I really don't. It's embarrassing at points because when I was little I didn't say where I was from.

Hammed: (Experiencing racism) I do remember sometimes by certain people. Residents sometimes, the police officers...I would feel like it just happened in front of my face and they are saying it verbally. But honestly, I never really like cared about that, I just let it go. I forgive them.

Interestingly, both participants had experienced forms of racism but handled the experiences differently. Raina did not reveal to people her background as a strategy to escape from the prejudice that she had faced as a child. Hammed on the other hand chose to forgive and expressed that he did not spend too much time caring about it. Which makes one question, if these experiences of discrimination that are faced by youth like Hammed, are a regular occurrence?

From the review of the literature on this issue, many racialized youth experience discrimination (Fenton, Fisher & Wallace, 2000; Bohon, Bush & Kim, 2010). According to Fenton, Fisher and Wallace's (2000) study on discrimination, reports of racial discrimination by peers was highest for youth of East and South Asian descent (p. 687). Youth had expressed that they had been called racially insulting names and were excluded from activities because of their race (Fenton, Fisher & Wallace, 2000, p. 687). The interviews were designed to take into consideration the experiences of discrimination, however, details as to the specificities of these types of experiences were not asked due to risk of discomfort on the part of the participant.

Conflict between Friends and Family

In the literature reviewed here, issues between immigrant families and their children were not considered. Many youth regardless of their background and their situation can experience this type of conflict. Most of the youth who participated however, expressed this issue as one that caused them to leave the home or be kicked out from the home:

Hammed: Sometimes I would come home late and the next thing you would know like my sisters or brothers are like spazing at me and bringing up my friends like I'm this because of my friends, I'm doing this because of my friends...(my friends are) the reason why I went through some bad times in my life... and the reason why I got myself kicked out of the house.

From each of the discussions, it was obvious that this conflict was a huge problem for the youth.

Some of the youth had described their parents' problem with their friends as irrational:

Raina: My mom and dad are very superstitious, like they will look at you for one minute and if they feel you'll do something wrong to their daughter they were like. So yeah, I had issues having friends still to this day.

Nahla: (My parents) have never liked my friends, ever. I wish I knew. Like they never liked any one of my friends. My circle of friends, they have this excuse that they oh smoke, they drink, ya know. Even really good, like even Indian girls, they never like them. (They) used to hate them and I never brought them over...they're weird.

It is clear that the youth's parents, and where applicable siblings such as Hammed's older siblings would worry about the influences friends had on the youth. Handa (2003) argues that friends are a common problem area for South Asian youth and their parents because parents become worried that friends can influence their children, negatively affecting the child's reputation as well as that of the family (Samuel, 2010). Many first and second generation South Asian youth are expected to follow customs that preserve the heritage culture (Handa, 2003). In addition, many children of this background are reminded of the evils of 'Western' society (Handa, 2003). According to Handa (2003), the public sphere, especially when it is associated with white, Western society, can become a dangerous space for South Asian youth, especially women (p. 118). From the review of the literature, several authors had argued that South Asian girls experience more pressure and surveillance by family members in order to maintain traditional customs than do boys. However, the discussion with Hammed showed the contrary (Dasgupta, 1998; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Handa, 2003; Samuel, 2010);

Hammed: I was the first person to be in class like around 9 o'clock and at lunch I would have no friends... I would be so strict because my mom would tell me, you better be home by 12 for lunch you better not stay at school. I would run home for lunch, eat lunch at home and play Playstation. School would end at 3:10 I would have to be home at 3:20. One minute late, OMG, ya know? My mom would never let me go to the plaza...or anything. She would be like no, sit in the car and I will take you and we will get whatever you want and come back.

The situation that Hammed had experienced in his home is unique to some of the arguments that Samuel (2010) had made. It is important to highlight that South Asian boys too can experience a great degree of burden and control by parents and other family members. Because of the extreme parental and sibling control that Hammed had experienced, he became rebellious and broke the rules his siblings and parents had enforced and was eventually kicked out from the home. Hammed and the other youth had all expressed a degree of surveillance making life at home very stressful. Living in shelters proves to be a space that allows youth to escape the structural limitations that are placed on them by other family members.

Strategies for Independence

The last theme that stood out from the discussions with the youth was their level of comfort with the shelter system and their desire to eventually become independent. All three of the participants seemed content with the shelter setting and had regularly used the service in the past:

Nahla: My favourite is (shelter)...it's near, like a five minute ride away from here. It's like an adult shelter, like this is a youth shelter, but (other shelter) is for everyone and they don't say no to anybody. So it's a little weird but I don't know I always go to that shelter...it's really familiar to me, all the staff and everyone knows me over there.

Raina: I always try to come here (current shelter) because (the community) is kind of like my home and it's a youth shelter and I prefer this one.

Although all the youth, prior to turning eighteen years old, had tried to live independently, they were unsuccessful up to this point. Some of the reasons included trouble with the law, bad experiences with roommates, and lack of financial support. Despite their desire to gain independence, the youth seemed content with their situation at the shelter and were ready to move forward. Berman et al. (2009) argue that this feeling of contentment is caused by gaining a

sense of balance in an otherwise unbalanced life and also because it empowers youth to re-create their own history and culture. In addition, choosing to live at a shelter may provide youth with some control that they were not able to gain with their family (Berman et al., 2009).

The subsequent chapter will offer some final thoughts of the findings presented here and in closing, present some of the limitations that were faced when writing this paper. In addition, policy implications will briefly be considered.

Chapter 5 - Final Thoughts

From the discussions presented earlier in chapter four, it was evident that each participant had a unique story to tell. Despite the uniqueness of each interview, similarities surfaced. Each of the participants had described comparable states of intergenerational conflict and identity issues, both of which were linked to cultural tensions found within the home. These findings suggest that parents' and at times older siblings' adherence to the heritage culture combined with the rejection of the dominant culture can restrict youth from fully participating in Canadian society. In many cases, parents and older siblings tend to act as the main disciplinarians to younger children within the family system. With this particular study, the findings suggest that the discipline provided by parents and older siblings was in the form of social control. Furthermore, the control that was described by the participants reflects culturally specific ways. From the youth's perspective, parents and siblings who acted as the main disciplinarian clashed with mainstream Canadian customs, especially when it revolved around the youth's friends, staying out late, sleep overs, dress etc.. The way in which parents and older siblings perceived Canadian values conflicted with their heritage values creating enormous conflict between the children and their parents.

According to scholars like Handa (2003) and Singh (2009), the main reason why immigrant parents and their children fight is because of the clash between Eastern values versus Western values. One way in which to describe these dichotomies is exploring values based on Collectivism, which for the most part tends to be found in Eastern cultures, and Individualism, which tends to be found in Western cultures (Singh, 2009). Collectivist values emphasize “modesty, filial piety, harmony, moderation, role based obligations and fulfillment of group needs” (Singh, 2009, p. 8). Individualist values emphasize “independence, self-reliance, self-fulfillment, frankness and hedonism” (Singh, 2008). Canada, despite its claim to multiculturalism, is a Western country that harvests individualistic values. According to this study and its findings, the youth in question face incredible barriers that are derived from parents’ dismissal of Western customs and norms. This in many ways can negatively affect the way in which youth identify with others including their relationship with their heritage culture. It also explains why some of the youth were unable to fully describe whom they identified with and why.

The findings of this study suggest that looking at acculturation as a lens to explain the experiences of second-generation youth may not be as useful to this study as predicted earlier. Instead, the process of acculturation might usefully be applied to parents of second-generation youth. According to Salam (2002) and Farver et al. (2002) first generation parents’ relation to their “natal, as well as to the host culture has direct effects on adolescents’ ethnic identity achievement and their psychological functioning” (Farver et al., 2002, p. 338). It was evident from the findings that the participants were at a tumultuous time in their lives and were struggling with their identity as well as their relationship with the family. This study

demonstrates that the acculturation process of immigrant parents negatively affected the youth, especially with how they had perceived themselves and their relationship with their family.

This study did not take into consideration the parents' perspectives. Therefore, further studies focusing on their perspective may prove to be useful to those working with homeless youth. Unlike the family dynamics in South Asia, time spent with family members and roles tend to change once families immigrate. For many immigrants, and especially for those who have children, working long days for less pay is a common occurrence (Kilbride, 2000). Parents sometimes may not have the time or ability to support their children and or their needs and desires (Kilbride, 2000). Their insight into the family system and the way in which they perceive intergenerational conflict cannot go unnoticed and bears attention.

Limitations

Despite the importance of this subject matter, some limitations need to be presented. The review of the literature proved that not many studies have considered the prevalence of homelessness among youth as a result of intergenerational conflict. Further research on this area would be beneficial to policy making and to services provided in shelters. In addition, research on the experiences of South Asian boys was also lacking. Though the findings presented in chapter 4 revealed one boy's experiences of homelessness, further investigations on their particular perspective within the South Asian family system is required.

The second limitation relates to the low number of participants in the interviews. Unfortunately, only three interviews were conducted for the project. This may be attributable to the transient nature of the population being studied and or perhaps that not many South Asian youth choose to use shelters as a means of escape and perhaps may be living alone, or with friends. In spite of this, having a larger group of participants would have expanded the variety of

data that was collected. In addition, it would have provided a better and enhanced picture of the population being studied. Furthermore, all of the participants in the study were of second-generation status. The experiences of first-generation youth may have provided different results that could have strengthened or weakened the arguments made within this paper.

Implications for future practice

The situation that arises between immigrant parents and their Canadian-born children is a difficult and a contentious matter. What should be noted is that not all South Asian families experience these difficulties. The findings however show that some families do experience these problems and because of this a couple of implications have surfaced for future practice.

The participants had identified some intergenerational conflicts that had occurred between themselves and their parents, including their older siblings. In order to reduce or prevent these conflicts from happening it would be meaningful to develop policy that can mitigate these issues at the time of immigration. Government bodies that prepare policy around family, immigration and integration need to be able to respond to the cultural and psychological changes of newcomers. As mentioned earlier, the acculturation process of newcomers can positively or negatively affect their imminent relationship with their Canadian-born children. Working with these types of issues beforehand may mitigate some of the intergenerational conflicts that are found in South Asian families.

Some frontline options to dealing with this issue may involve the use of social support networks for both parents and children (Samuel, 2009). It may be essential to provide specific programs of support in communities that are highly diverse and are the main recipients of newcomers. Providing social programming through schools and settlement agencies can serve as a way for families to contend with intergenerational differences.

Another area that needs further reflection and exploration are the everyday struggles that face South Asian youth who are of first and second-generation status. Participants had acknowledged a sense of fractured identity and loss of cultural connectedness with the family. One way of mitigating these issues is to re-visit Canada's policy of Multiculturalism. According to CIC (2008), Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities and can take pride in their ancestry as well as have a sense of belonging (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008). Unfortunately however, the discussions presented in chapter 4 reveal the contrary. The way in which Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) perceives Multiculturalism needs to be re-examined. Creating an alliance between CIC and Service Canada: Services for Families and Children, may enable policy makers to create strategies and programs that reduce the challenges that face South Asian youth and their family. When creating policy around this issue, analysts have to acknowledge and be inclusive to the cultural nuances that are present within these families. Similar to the framework of family systems, Tyyskä (2008) argues that policies which revolve around newcomer families need to be looked at holistically and in addition, need to take into account all family members and not just the individual.

According to the findings, cultural conflict within some South Asian families can force youth into shelters. Shelters, which are for the most part funded by donations and by government subsidies, need to be able to provide services that can bridge the differences between youth and their family members, especially where the issue faced by the youth is resolvable by means of proper counseling, guidance and support. Counselors and case workers alike need to be made aware of some of the customs and practices of South Asian families, as well as some of the

issues that can arise between generations. Providing support and safety related to family reunification could prove to be very useful for these youth.

Conclusion

The intention of this paper was to fill a gap in the literature but to also strengthen some of the arguments that were made by other scholars. When returning to the main question proposed at the beginning of the investigation, it is possible to assert that intergenerational conflict does have the ability to push South Asian youth into precarious states of living. The findings of this research as well as the review of literature, revealed some of these conflicts and proved that more needs to be done with regard to social programming and community support.

Appendix A – Interview Guide

Background Sheet (hand-out, complete prior to interview)

1. In what year were you born? _____
2. What is your gender? _____
3. If you have lived in a shelter, group home or hostel
of episodes _____ 1st episode _____
Length of period _____
4. Including yourself, how many people live in your household? _____
5. What is their relation to you? _____
6. Are you presently married? _____
7. Do you have any children? If yes, how many? _____
8. Were you born in Canada? _____
- 9 a. If no, in what country were you born? _____
b. In what year did you move to Canada? _____
10. a. Were your parents born in Canada? _____
b. If no, in what country were your parents born? _____
11. What language is or was usually spoken in your house? _____
12. Do you think of yourself as Canadian (y/n)? _____

Interview Questions

Family Background

1. Were you born in Canada, if not, in what country were you born in?

2. Were your parents or legal guardians born in Canada or were they born somewhere else?
If so, where else?
3. Do you have any siblings? What are their ages?
4. Were your siblings born in Canada?
5. How would you describe your relationship with your family (parents, siblings, grandparents)?
6. Are there any cultural or religious practices that your family follows? Do they expect you to follow them as well? How does this make you feel?
7. Have there been times where your family and your friends have come into conflict?
8. Where do you feel like you belong the most (friends, family)? Why?

Identity

1. In addition to Canada, some people often describe themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group. To which ethnic or cultural group do you see yourself belonging (e.g. Pakistani, Nepali, Sri Lankan, and East Indian)? Explain?
2. What do you think of Canada?

The Community and School

1. Do you go to school? If so, how do you feel about school?
2. Have you ever been teased or harassed because of your race or ethnicity (other classmates, friends, teachers)?
3. Have you ever felt like you didn't belong because of your race or ethnicity? If yes, could explain?

4. Are there any other problems that you face because of your race and ethnicity that affect you?

Shelters

1. How many times have you used a shelter? Which ones do you usually go to? Explain your reasons as to why you go to certain shelters?
2. How long do you usually stay in the shelter?
3. What led you to this most recent episode?
4. Where did you go between shelters? Please explain your situation after you left the shelter?

Appendix B – Recruitment Poster

Research Study on South Asian Youth and Homelessness

I am a graduate student at Ryerson University and I am looking for participants for my study on
South Asian Youth and Homelessness

As a volunteer, your information will remain confidential. The interview process will last approximately 60 minutes where you will be asked about the experiences you have had with family culture and the community. The interview will be recorded, if you agree, however your identity will remain private. A \$10 dollar gift certificate will be given as an honorarium for your time and participation.

For more information or to participate in this study, please contact:

Saveena Saran

at

saveena.saran@ryerson.ca

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