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The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic

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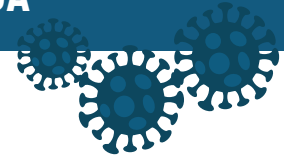
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The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic

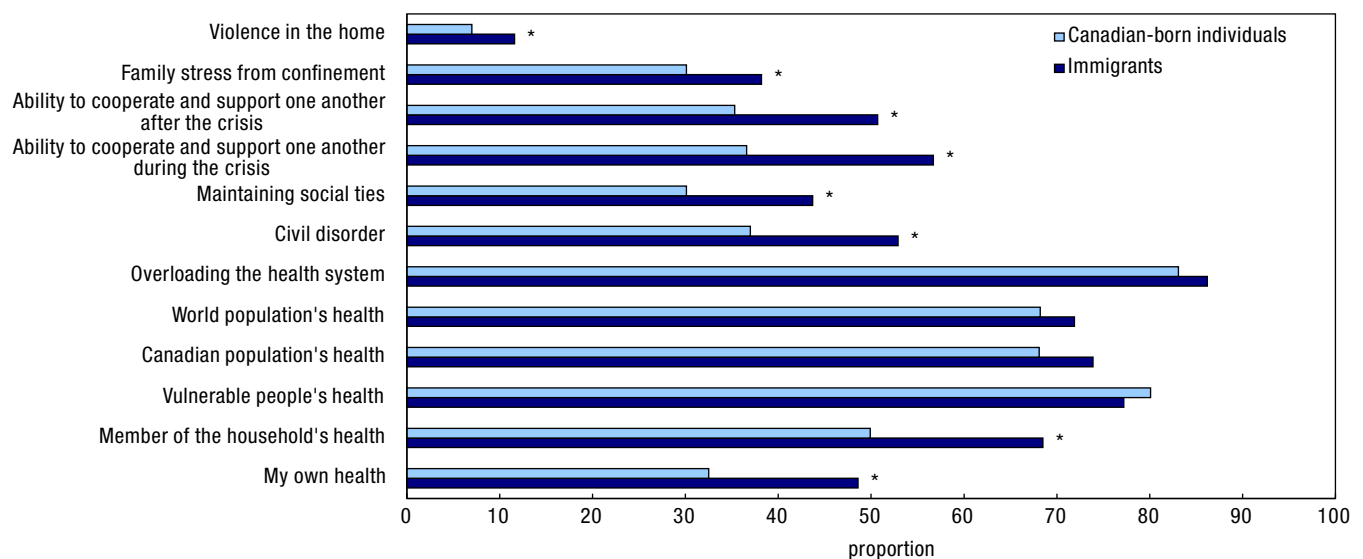
by Sébastien LaRoche-Côté and Sharanjit Uppal

In 2016, at the time of the most recent census, immigrants represented 21.9% of the overall Canadian population. Because people born outside Canada have different life experiences than those who are born in Canada, their social and economic concerns may be different from those of Canadian-born individuals. This release examines the social and economic experiences of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic, using a new web panel survey that was conducted two weeks after the pandemic began.

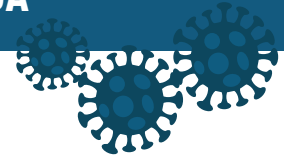
Immigrants report higher levels of concern about their own health than Canadian-born individuals

With respect to health-related concerns, immigrants were more likely than Canadian-born individuals to report that they were “very” or “extremely” concerned about their own health (49% vs. 33%) (Chart 1). Similarly, they were also more likely than Canadian-born individuals to be concerned about the health of other household members (69% vs. 50%). Immigrants were as likely as Canadian-born individuals to be worried about other health concerns, such as overloading the health system. Similar results were found for both men and women.

Chart 1
Proportion of immigrants and Canadian-born individuals aged 15 and older who reported that they were “very” or “extremely” concerned about selected social issues



* significantly different from Canadian-born individuals (p<0.05)
 Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.



Immigrants are more likely to be concerned about civil disorder, social ties and the ability to cooperate

Previous research has shown that, although immigrants have different social networks than Canadian-born individuals (Turcotte 2015), some immigrant categories (e.g., refugees) may be more sensitive to certain social risks, such as civil disorder or the ability to support each other. This raises the possibility that immigrants will have different social concerns than Canadian-born individuals in the context of the pandemic.

The data support that view. Immigrants were more likely than Canadian-born individuals to report that they were “very” or “extremely” concerned about the possibility of civil disorder (53% vs. 37%). They were also more likely than Canadian-born individuals to have higher levels of concern about the maintenance of social ties (44% vs. 30%) and about the ability to support one another during or after the pandemic. Furthermore, immigrants were almost twice as likely as Canadian-born individuals to be concerned about the possibility of violence in the home (12% vs. 7%). Again, differences between immigrants and Canadian-born individuals were similar for both men and women.

Immigrant men are more likely to report that the crisis would have an impact on their finances

Recent research has shown that the labour market outcomes of immigrants have improved in recent years (Yssaad and Fields 2018; Statistics Canada 2019). Are immigrants more likely to report higher levels of concern about their personal economic situation in the context of the pandemic?

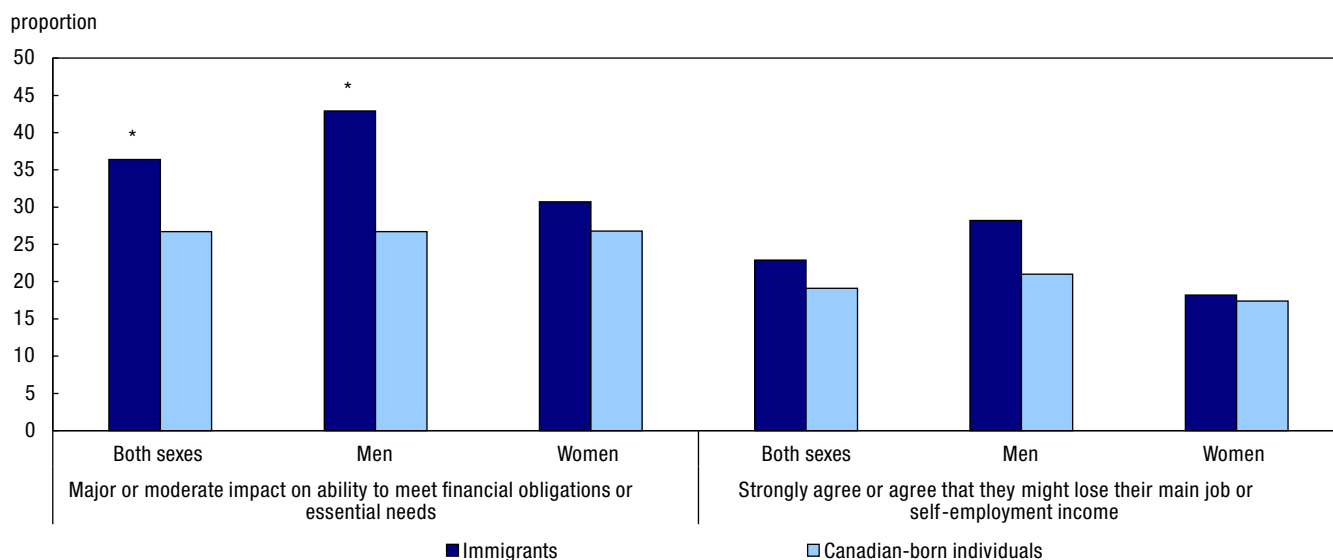
The results suggest that immigrants were not necessarily more likely than Canadian-born individuals to believe that they would lose their job as a result of the pandemic (Chart 2). However, immigrants were significantly more likely than Canadian-born individuals to report that the crisis would have a “major” or “moderate” impact on their finances. In particular, immigrant men were more likely than Canadian-born men to report that the crisis would have an impact on their ability to meet financial obligations (43% vs. 27%).¹

1. This difference remains significant after controlling for other factors, including age, education, marital status, region of residence, presence of children and household size. Household debt, which tends to be higher among immigrants (Uppal 2019), could also be a factor.



Chart 2

Proportion of immigrants and Canadian-born individuals aged 15 and older who reported that their job or family finances would be impacted by the crisis, by gender



* significantly different from Canadian-born individuals ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series, March and April 2020.

Methodology

To gather timely information about how Canadians are coping with COVID-19, Statistics Canada developed a new web panel survey, the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS). Between March 29 and April 3, 2020, more than 4,600 respondents in the 10 provinces participated in the CPSS. Because the CPSS is a subsample of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), immigration status was obtained from the LFS. CPSS respondents included 357 immigrant men and 366 immigrant women. All differences discussed in this release between immigrants and Canadian-born individuals are significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). Bootstrap weights were used for significance testing.

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