Newcomer men’s mental health in Brandon, Manitoba: Experiences, perceptions, & recommendations

By Madeleine Kruth, M.Sc., Rachel V. Herron, Ph.D., Candice Waddell, Ph.D. (c.), Kerstin Roger, Ph.D., Jonathan Allan, Ph.D.

What you need to know

Newcomer men in non-metropolitan Manitoba face unique challenges to their mental health. While every individual’s experience is different, this research found that newcomer men thought about mental health in terms of stressors in their lives. Four stressors were identified by newcomer men as being the most significant: (1) finding suitable employment; (2) cultural and linguistic adjustment; (3) obtaining adequate education; and (4) concern for familial safety in their country of origin.

Why this research is important

Brandon is a growing and increasingly diverse community. Located on the traditional homelands of the Dakota, Anishanabek, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, and Métis peoples, it is also home to many people who have arrived from other places, be it over a hundred years in the past or only very recently. Our continued efforts to understand and support newcomers’ experiences are increasingly important in an era of polarization. Our ability as Canadians to help newcomers thrive upon their arrival depends on our understanding of newcomer experiences. This research specifically investigates how newcomer men perceive and experience mental health in Brandon.

How the research was conducted

In partnership with Westman Immigration Services, the researchers conducted focus groups with four groups of men. Participants were divided by language group (Arabic, Somali, Tigrinya, and Ukrainian), and focus groups were conducted with the help of interpreters. The researchers identified recurrent themes across each of the focus group discussions by closely examining written focus group transcripts.
What the researchers found

Newcomer men understood mental health and illness in terms of stressors; these stressors included circumstances in the newcomers’ countries of origin, especially a concern for the safety of family members who remained there; and circumstances in Canada, such as finding gainful employment and cultural/linguistic adjustment.

First and foremost, newcomer men expressed wanting to be able to work. The lack of fulfilling gainful employment was the most consistently mentioned barrier to mental health across all focus groups. Newcomers also expressed that they would much prefer to work for an income rather than receive refugee stipends upon their arrival. They wanted to contribute to Canadian society in any way possible while also staying busy and learning how to support themselves and their families in their new country. While there are benefits to living in a non-metropolitan centre such as Brandon, employment opportunities are often limited, especially for those not fluent in English or whose credentials are not acknowledged by Canadian systems.

Secondly, men from countries embroiled in prolonged conflict were acutely concerned over the safety of their family members, friends, and communities that remained in harm’s way. Some participants expressed feelings of helplessness because they were unable to do anything to protect or support those they cared about. These stressors and others overlap, informing newcomer’s mental health experiences.

How this research can be used

While there may be significant difficulties in addressing some of the stressors identified by newcomer men, others can be mitigated through targeted employment and education programs. This research informs how we might best support newcomer men throughout and following settlement here in Manitoba.

About the researchers

This project is part of the collaborative and interdisciplinary research project, “Changing Rural Masculinities and Mental Wellness: A Prairie Case Study,” led by Dr. Rachel Herron, Canada Research Chair in Rural and Remote Mental Health. HerronR@Brandonu.ca

The Co-Investigators on the project are: Dr. Jonathan A. Allan, Canada Research Chair in Men and Masculinities, Prof. Candice Waddell, Faculty of Health Studies at Brandon University, and Dr. Kerstin Roger, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. The research team benefits from and is thankful for the research assistance of Mairo Ahmadu, Margaret de Jager, and Madeleine Kruth.

Keywords

Mental health and wellness, newcomers, masculinity, rural masculinity, Manitoba, Prairies

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by Joy Escalera, Lois MacDonald, and the interpreters and staff at Westman Immigration Services. It is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada Research Chairs Program.

Research Connection is a periodical publication intended to provide information about the impact of Brandon University’s academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary is supported by the Office of Research Services and by the Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies, Faculty of Education.

Editor: Christiane Ramsey RamseyC@Brandonu.ca
http://www.brandonu.ca/research-connection

Brandon University, founded in 1899, promotes excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship, and educates students so that they can make a meaningful difference as engaged citizens and leaders. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Thank you to ResearchImpact-RéseauImpactRecherche (researchimpact.ca) for their permission to adopt the ResearchSnapshot clear language research summary format.