Sri Lankan Tamil Families in Canada:
Problems, Resiliency, and Intergenerational Solidarity

Vappu Tyyskä
Ryerson University

Author Note

ABSTRACT. Family composition and relationships may undergo significant changes upon immigration and settlement. This article approaches teen-parent relationships through the intergenerational solidarity framework, which addresses three areas of conflict and/or consensus related to (a) functional solidarity, (b) consensual solidarity, and (3) normative solidarity. Interviews took place in the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto, Canada with 20 teens who talked about relationships with their parents. The study found that teens describe their intergenerational relations in positive terms, despite reported areas of conflict, which lends support to the resiliency framework. Noteworthy areas of intergenerational negotiation are (a) education, (b) cultural core values, and (c) degrees of freedom. Gender differences with regard to (b) and (c) are of interest, with daughters seen as culture bearers to whom parents allow fewer freedoms than sons receive. Cohort differences also appear because there is a relationship between one's age at immigration and alignment of values and expectations with parents: the older the person immigrating, the more likely he or she is to have common values and expectations with parents.

Keywords: immigrant families, intergenerational solidarity, resiliency

Sri Lankan Tamil Families in Canada:
Problems, Resiliency, and Intergenerational Solidarity

The immigration and settlement experience often alters family life, in some cases quite dramatically. Changes can be based on different expectations, barriers, and norms between the receiving country and the immigrant group in question. Despite resultant stresses of migration, immigrant families manifest resiliency in their settlement experiences.

The focus of this paper is on parent-teen relationships in the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto. The vast majority of Tamils, mostly from the northern Jaffna region of Sri Lanka, arrived in Canada under humanitarian and compassionate grounds in the aftermath of the 1983 Tamil insurgency against the Sinhalese majority. Ethnic conflict has a long history in post-colonial Sri Lanka, after the country (called Ceylon till 1972) gained its independence from Britain in 1948. Internal warfare escalated from 1983 onward, with more refugees arriving in Canada until the early 1990s (Kandasamy, 1995) and through family reunification since then. Tamils are one of the fastest growing South Asian groups in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007). Around 200,000 of the estimated 250,000 Canadian Tamils reside in Toronto (Canadian Tamils' Chamber of Commerce, 2007).

This paper engages with the problem approach to immigrant families and youth and with recent attention to resiliency. The literature review outlines main findings about family and intergenerational lives of immigrants in general and Tamils in particular. I then present results from my study, utilizing the notion of intergenerational solidarity (Rosenthal, 1987) that links the problem and resiliency approaches based on examination of how young people depict and negotiate relationships with parents in the settlement process. The problem approach introduces pressure points in immigrant family lives, while the resiliency approach directs us to consider subjective aspects of coping with those pressures. The combination of the two forms the backdrop for the study of intergenerational relations from the viewpoints of young people.

Immigrant Families: The Problem Approach

The problem approach to immigrant families aims to identify multiple stressors and barriers immigrants face as they make their lives in their new countries (Tyyskä, 2007). Research summarized by Tyyskä (2007; see also Nichols & Tyyskä, 2015) on North American immigrants indicates economic difficulties are common for many years following migration, particularly among racialized immigrants who face barriers to education and employment manifested in (a) poverty; (b) difficulties finding affordable housing or owning a home; and (c) accessing health care, education, and training. In immigrant families, adjustment issues center on shifts in familiar relations including (a) separation and/or reunification of family members, (b) changes in gender relations due to employment patterns and western influences on traditional values, and (c) challenges to intergenerational relations between parents and children due to cross-cultural

adjustments. A generation gap is a relatively common occurrence in immigrant families between "old world" parents and "new world" children: over peer relations, dating and spouse selection, educational and career choices, and retention of culture.

Sri Lankan Tamil Families in Canada

In keeping with results on other racialized immigrant groups, Tamil families' economic situations customarily get worse upon immigration, making Tamils one of the lowest income groups among Canadian immigrants (Ornstein, 2000) with comparatively low home ownership rates (Spencer, 2002). Along with financial challenges, Tamil family structure changes upon migration. Traditional extended family ties often break up upon immigration; later,sponsorship of eligible relatives re-establishes these family ties (Kendall, 1989; Kandasamy, 1995). With fewer extended family members are available, parents often struggle with combined wage work and domestic workloads (Sivarajah, 1998; Kendall, 1989), while reporting stressed spousal and parent-child relationships (Kilbride, Anisef, Baichman-Anisef & Khattar, 2001; Tyyskä, 2008).

Generally, the traditional Tamil family can be described as patriarchal; the family unit functions as a mutual, albeit hierarchical, support system. Tamils consider men breadwinners even if women are engaged in wage work. Women are accountable to men (fathers, brothers, and husbands) through prevailing practices of arranged marriages and female obedience and chastity (Sivarajah, 1998; Kendall, 1989).

Similar to many other immigrant women, Tamil women are often required to enter the workforce, resulting in major adjustments from both men and women (especially when wives were not employed prior to migration) (Kendall, 1989). Tamil women are not likely to have their job skills recognized in Canada. They often end up in exploitive work situations outside the home while they are also expected to do all housework (Kandasamy, 1995). Meanwhile, Tamil men face downward mobility and barriers to gainful employment even as they maintain their heads of household statuses. Some Tamil men hold more than one job to make a living for their families, reducing their time with family members (Kandasamy, 1995). Accompanying pressures can result in mental health issues among men and women, alcohol abuse among men (Kandasamy, 1995), and family violence (Tyyskä, 2005), which is exacerbated by post-traumatic stress as a legacy of having lived in a conflict zone (Kandasamy, 1995).

Intergenerational Relations

As mentioned above, family separation and reunification processes disrupt extended family life among Tamils. Another change is that Tamil fathers often come to Canada before their wives and/or children do. After years of separation, reunited families experience estrangement of children from fathers, which is exacerbated by fathers being absent because they hold multiple jobs (Kandasamy, 1995).

The generation gap in Tamil families appears in issues such as (a) the caste system, (b)

children's intermarriage, and (c) retention of Tamil dialects (Kandasamy, 1995). Tamil parents also generally worry about ill influence of western materialistic and consumerist values on traditional values of respect for elders and family loyalty (Tyyskä & Colavecchia, 2001).

As is the case among most immigrants (Tyyskä, 2007), Tamil parents highly value education (Kendall, 1989). Parental pressure on Tamil children to excel in school may lead to disagreements, especially if parents compare their children to others, a common practice in Tamil families (Kendall, 1989; Tyyskä & Colavecchia, 2001). This kind of parental pressure may also be frustrating for children who see that high numbers of highly educated Tamils work in unskilled jobs (Kandasamy, 1995).

Customary patterns of parental power in families can be further unsettled if children act as cultural or communication brokers/translators for parents (Tyyskä, 2007). Resource pooling is common in less well-to-do Tamil families in Sri Lanka. This practice may gain a different emphasis upon immigration, as part-time employment of the young may compete with reduced wage earning capacities, particularly for male heads of households (Sivarajah, 1998).

The Tamil patriarchal family pattern manifests in special attention to sons from birth onward (Kendall, 1989) and in a general valuing of men over women. As sons are granted more freedoms, a major parental concern is that they fall in with the wrong crowds or join gangs (Tyyskä & Colavecchia 2001; Balasingham, 2000), while female status is tied more strongly to motherhood and cultural transmission. This is captured in a study of a Tamil father describing his daughter as the "flag bearer of our culture" (Tyyskä & Colavecchia, 2001) who needs to be chaste, to dress appropriately, and to participate in Tamil cultural customs. South Asian immigrant girls and young women generally tend to experience limits on their freedoms, with heightened parental concerns over dating and sexuality (Tyyskä, 2006). Parents often "turn a blind eye on the activities of the male child but impose rigid controls on the female child" (Kendall, 1989).

The sets of restrictions on young people's lives manifest in reported depression among Tamil youth because of conflicts with parents over increased freedoms, opportunities, and choices available in Canadian society (Kandasamy, 1995). Another response to limits is that young South Asian women may hide their actual daily activities from parents in order to uphold their families' reputations and their personal images as good daughters (Handa, 2003). Although many immigrant youth navigate the range of cultural experiences quite well and adopt aspects of their parental culture and of the receiving society (Tyyskä, 2014), many Tamil youth do not feel they fit in either Sri Lankan or Canadian culture, and so they create hybrid cultures, mixtures of the two. The resultant cultural conflict manifests frequently in communication gaps between parents and children (Kandasamy, 1995; Tyyskä & Colavecchia, 2001).

In sum, a review of the literature shows Tamil families to be subject to pressures and shifts similar to other immigrant families – and particularly South Asian families – in Canada. Changes in familial hierarchies accompany financial pressures, as men tend to lose their status as

main or sole breadwinners and heads of household with the increasing labor force participation and exposure to less strict patriarchal influences in Canada. Relationships between parents and children are challenged not only by low economic standing but also by family separation and reunification. This is so because extended family members are not readily available and because separation from one parent (typically the father) may result in parental alienation. Parental expectations from children increase (particularly in the area of education) with resultant stress on children and youth. At the same time, young people have exposure to new influences and they gain new skills that may result in family conflict over retention of culture and ways of life, notably between parents and their daughters.

Resiliency: Moving Beyond the Problem Approach

Given stresses on family life, one would expect a large-scale problem in many immigrant communities, including those of Sri Lankan Tamils. Despite the challenges, these families are managing to move on. The concept of *resiliency* captures this paradox among stressed groups, particularly among children and youth (Rink & Tricker, 2005; Ryan & Hoover, 2005; Kwak, 2003; Suãrez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). The American-based National Network for Family Resiliency (2009) defines resiliency as "the ability to bounce back from stress and crisis…Individuals, families, and communities demonstrate resiliency when they build caring support systems and solve problems creatively."

The resiliency approach overcomes the problem approach in general social scientific research, which is the tendency to pathologize immigrant families by focusing on "negative fall-out from the migratory experience" (Suãrez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008). The term originates from developmental psychology from the 1980s onward (Rink & Tricker, 2005), and aims at uncovering "assets" and "buffers" that protect children and youth from negative effects of challenging circumstances. As indicated, the term applies to levels of the individual, the family, and the community (Rink & Tricker, 2005; Suãrez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008).

Generally, the idea of resiliency brings attention to the need for developing supports in areas where supports are needed, not where supports are assumed to be (Ryan & Hoover, 2005). The resiliency approach also calls attention to agency of family members instead of seeing familial power as a zero-sum phenomenon.

The Study: Youth-Parent Relations in Sri Lankan Tamil Families

My focus will be on relationships between Sri Lankan Tamil teens and their parents as reported by the youth, which overcomes a general tendency to rely on parental views of children's immigration and settlement experiences. The study combines problem-based and resiliency approaches to immigrant families and intergenerational relationships. My main goal was to explore specific aspects of teenaged Tamil Canadians' relationships with their parents in terms of support and of areas of conflict or perceived lack of support. I asked open-ended questions about (a) family settlement and adjustment to life in Canada, (b) teens' overall

relationship with parents, (c) and differences in teens' relationships with mothers and fathers. All questions explored what the teens think and do themselves and what they see their parents as thinking and doing in their family relationships. I also asked teens if they thought their parents' immigration experiences influenced the way they relate to their children, or the quality and type of relationships between parents and their teen children.

*S*pecifically, the original research builds on the analytical framework that Vern Bengtson developed in the 1970s and beyond (Rosenthal, 1987). My use of the framework captures problems (barriers) and resiliency in the ways in which parents and teens negotiate various elements of family life. Based on the intergenerational solidarity framework, I asked the teens specific questions about patterns of their own and their parents' practices in three main areas defined in this framework (Rosenthal, 1987): functional, consensual, and normative solidarity. *Functional solidarity* refers to ways in which family members coordinate activities related to running the household. In this study, functional solidarity was operationalized in questions about parents' and teens' dealings with money issues, domestic work, giving and getting advice, and about parents' help with teens' schoolwork and activities. *Consensual solidarity* refers to elements that family members value in the way they conduct themselves. In this study, consensual solidarity is operationalized in questions about parents' and teens' values related to educational choices, and as core cultural values. *Normative solidarity* captures the idea that families have internal norms that allow for mutual expectations for conduct. In this study, normative solidarity is operationalized in questions about parents' and teens' expectations regarding support from, and degrees of freedom from, family members.

To note, there is no assumption of the idea of solidarity in this framework; instead, the idea is explored as a possibility (Rosenthal, 1987), given that family relations are subject to negotiation among different members. Thus, conflict or consensus can be outcomes within each category in relation to different areas identified under each operationalized category. My interpretation and usage of the framework forms a link between the problem and resiliency approaches precisely because it leaves the door open to different outcomes rather than presuming there will be either negative or positive results.

Method

Study Design

In its overall design, the project is an example of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is commonly known as "action research," a methodological approach that stresses active involvement of those affected by the issue defined in the research (Gosin, Dustman, Drapeau & Harthun, 2003). The community organization in question is the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre (CanTYD), which aims at providing programs and supports for young Tamils. Young people involved in CanTYD helped with formulation of questions, recruitment, and conducting interviews. Because of the research design, participant recruitment was based on

a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Archer & Berdahl, 2011). The purposive element was achieved through the help of CanTYD, a most useful procedure targeting a specific population (Archer & Berdahl, 2011) and engaged the population in PAR. Participants were then recruited using snowball sampling (Archer & Berdahl, 2011) by youth who worked with CanTYD and who were instructed not to recruit young people that they knew directly. There were four paid CanTYD youth engaged in the project were trained; each conducted five peer interviews, making sure these interviews were matched in terms of gender to encourage open disclosures (Archer & Berdahl, 2011).

Results were analyzed using thematic coding (Boyatzis, 1998; Babbie & Benaquisto, 2010). The objective of thematic analysis is to examine commonalities, differences, and relationships between sets of concepts and ideas (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Specifically, themes were formulated with a combination of a "prior-research driven method" (Boyatzis, 1998; Babbie & Benaquisto 2010; Gibbs, 2007) based on theoretical framework and categories explained above. Thus, themes had their basis in deductive reasoning, in keeping with the model Rosenthal presented (1987).

The sample

The target study population is youth, a fluid category defined in multiple ways based on different social conventions (Tyyskä, 2014). In this study, the category of "teens" is utilized consciously to capture the range of views in this age group, suited for qualitative exploratory research covering broad themes (Archer & Berdahl, 2011). Similarly, the term "immigrant youth" applies to the first generation (those who immigrated with their parents at age 12 or over), the second generation (those who were born in Canada to first generation parents), and the so-called *1.5 generation* (those who arrived in Canada with their parents at under or around age 12). This wide definition is useful because research continues to find that immigrant youth in different generations tend to share more experiences with one another than with longer-term resident youth, relevant to integration and identity issues (Arthur, Chaves, Este, Frideres & Hrycak, 2008).

This study took place in Toronto, Canada in 2004-2005; it relied on individual interviews with 10 female and 10 male youth aged 13-19 ("teens") in Toronto's Sri Lankan Tamil community. Respondents ranged in age from 13 to 19 with three in the 13-15 age group, 11 in the 16-17 age group, and six in the 18-19 age group. Immigration status of applicants varied: four respondents were born in Canada (second generation), three arrived between 1985 and 1990, seven arrived between 1991 and 2000, and five arrived since 2000 (first generation). Those who arrived in the 1985-1990 and 1991-2000 periods fell either into the first generation or the 1.5 generation, depending on their ages at arrival. One respondent did not specify his date of arrival. The youths arrived between the ages of one and 15. One respondent is Catholic; the rest are Hindu. Given the exploratory nature of this small qualitative study, I must note that there was variation in the sample regarding immigration category and citizenship status (refugee, permanent resident), sequence of arrival of family members, parental education, employment

status, income, residence ownership, and command of English. Notably, all teens lived with both parents, except for one teen whose father had died after immigrating. Most youths in the study were enrolled in high school except for one boy who was not enrolled in school and two boys who were attending university.

Some characteristics of these families differ from those of typical Tamil immigrants, as outlined previously. One notable feature is the high education level of mothers, with 13 mothers having education higher or equal to that of their husbands, and eight mothers with at least some university education. Home ownership among the group was also high, a factor addressed below.

Results

Almost all (eight females, 10 males) Tamil youth said that the relationship with one or both parents was good, and all found their parents supportive in some way. Many youth said that when problems arise, families discuss them together. The majority (six females and eight males) reported that "being able to talk to parents" was the biggest positive factor in their relationship.

In keeping with general findings in the literature discussed above, negative characteristics in relationships tend to be summarized into two categories and to reflect gender patterns: lack of trust (four females, one male) and lack of understanding (five females and two males). Generally, it appears that girls have conflict with their mothers more than with their fathers. Only two girls did not get along with their fathers, whereas four girls conflicted with their mothers. This most likely reflects the fact that mothers typically are more involved with children than fathers are, which provides more opportunities for conflict. The results about lack of trust and understanding, particularly toward daughters, are in keeping with other research suggesting that there are more controls over the girls than over their brothers.

Functional Solidarity

In the area of functional solidarity there was highlighting of financial issues, which is in keeping with the general research. The teens, particularly those who had been in Canada longer than their peers, confirmed their families' financial need despite home ownership, including one respondent who reported money owed to relatives. Notably, the largest area of conflict emerging from financial need was "lack of time for family." This finding was exemplified by a 19-year-old male who complained, "You are working twenty-four-seven. There's no time for family."

This study, in keeping with a general Sri Lankan Tamil pattern, found that boys and girls both participate in families' pooling of resources in order to make ends meet. However, boys tended to gain status inside families from their part-time jobs, while girls helped by saving and handing over their allowances to parents when money was needed. Girls were expected to perform more housework and were less likely than boys to give advice to their parents. The

young men's heightened status was manifest in their reported position to give advice to parents. Of note is that boys and girls were expected to contribute to the household even if their tasks differed, a finding that at may reflect the general focus on family loyalty in Tamil culture.

There are patterns based on immigration cohort in advice giving. Youth in families that have spent a longer time in Canada (either 1.5 or second generation) seem to have higher levels of involvement in advice-giving than do those who arrived at older ages. A possible explanation is that the youth who had been raised mostly in Sri Lanka are more in tune with filial obligation and more likely to submit to parental power.

Parental advice giving also flows from gender expectations, which is in agreement with the literature review. Sons are cautioned against involvement in "bad crowds" while parents are concerned about daughters' reputations regarding interactions with boys. School help was also limited to financial and moral support for their education; while fewer than half actually got help with schoolwork from parents, this was attributed to differences in the Sri Lankan and Canadian education systems.

Consensual Solidarity

In general, youth indicated they agreed with their parents on most values. Results confirm that Tamil parents and youth value education for both boys and girls. At the same time, there are signs that some teens may see parental emphasis on education as excessive, males and females alike. Four girls agreed with their parents on education and three disagreed whereas just one male agreed and one male disagreed. Five teens, all in the older age group (18-19), indicated conflict regarding their parents' (and especially their fathers') emphasis on education. This may reflect growing awareness of barriers to employment within the older age group.

Core cultural values seem to be a source of intergenerational conflict, especially with girls and with youth who had been residing in Canada longer than other respondents. There is confirmation of the greater role of mothers than of fathers in instilling core cultural values . The main values with which these teens disagreed with their parents were clothing, freedoms (more about this category in the section on normative solidarity), relationships between young males and females (including chastity) and Western ways that conflict with Tamil culture's core values. All longer-term Canadian residents reported conflict on these values. Of particular note is that all six girls in the category list these as areas of disagreement, which shows a cohort- and gender-related pattern. Along with most male respondents, some of the more recent teen immigrants (first generation) reported less intergenerational conflict with parents over values, lending support to the idea that values are more similar if children have lived longer in their country of origin. One male of the second generation sample expressed the general sense of parental mistrust that can arise when east meets west: "They have a hard time understanding the western way of things so they don't really agree with us. Trusting. The whole western thing. The musics and everything."

The youths reported that more mothers than fathers have conflicts with their children over core values of freedom, style, and opposite sex relationships. These were the source of disagreement between mothers and six girls and three boys. One 17-year-old girl said:

> Especially for my mom it's hard for her to accept that guys and girls have relationships. She went to a girls' school, so she wasn't around guys until she got married. And my dad went to a mixed school so he was around girls and he grew up with three sisters as well, so he's used to it, but he's not as doubtful I guess.

The values of female and male teens suggest important differences, with females putting more stress than boys did on being helpful, working hard, and being religious. The boys did not emphasize these; instead, boys stressed honesty and trust. Eight males mentioned trust and honesty; just one girl held honesty as a value and none of the girls listed honesty as a value of their parents. There are two ways to interpret this finding. First, girls' values reflect traditional qualities of a "good Tamil girl" while the boys stress the good quality of not getting into trouble. In this way, Tamil teens seem to have adopted their parents' values. Second, as indicated earlier, the definition of the issue of trust came from the girls as something their parents lack having in them. This interpretation requires more research based on Handa's (2003) suggestion of how South Asian girls learn to hide some of their activities in order to live in two cultures.

Normative Solidarity

There seems a large degree of consensus among youth and their parents in this area. That said, it is again the girls in the second generation who tend to have the most conflict with their parents over expectations. Again, education and western values are the overriding issues. Girls talked about trust and freedom whereas concerns about gangs and truthfulness were the most talked about issues among males. Gender differences are obvious in parents' expectations for children and in children's expectations of parents. Mostly, the males said they did not disagree with their parents over expectations but rather compromised with them.

In this study, girls were the only respondents who addressed gender differences in parents' expectations. Fathers' expectations of daughters were that they excel in life and education and that they do housework. Mothers' reported expectations from their daughters were that they should uphold religion, do housework, stay home, study, and not spend time around boys.

As noted above, prevalent among girls is the idea of an "ideal" or "typical" Tamil girl. Four girls used this type of language. One stated that her mother expected her "to be the typical Tamil girl. Have some sort of culture, don't go off to the western culture too much." Another 16-year-old girl said that according to her parents, a "Tamil girl should stay home and study."

This message was expressed in a stronger way by one 18-year-old girl who stated that despite her parents' adaptation to Canadian culture, they do not "bend" on "some things that girls can't do," but that she understands and accepts this. She also referred to the importance of upholding "the family name and honour," a sentiment confirmed by four other teen females and one of the males. Children who came to Canada when they were younger may have adapted more to western ways, thus provoking their parents to explain what the "ideal girl" should be like. These girls are also older (between 16 and 18), which may mean they are looking for more freedom from their parents, in keeping with their peers in the Canadian mainstream. These young women's feelings that they were not meeting the expectations of their parents also reflected their search for greater freedoms.

Youths' expectations for parents differed dramatically by gender. Females expect parents to be supportive, trusting, loving, and to give them more freedoms. Girls who were expected to be the "typical Tamil girl" were also the same four girls who listed trust as an expectation from parents. Trust and freedom were expectations of the same girls; the three girls who felt they should be trusted more were also the females who had conflict with parents over relationships with boys. Males expect parents to show respect, to be flexible, and to be like other parents.

Even though there was discussion of a number of conflicts, youth overwhelmingly (seven males, eight females) felt their parents met their expectations. One male, age 19, said he does not "really want to expect anything else more from them because everything they do for me I think [is] perfect." The two young women who felt that parents did not meet their expectations had complaints about restrictions put on them such as curfews and about parents not listening. One of the males who felt his parents did not meet his expectation stated more generally that it was because he was not always "on the same page" with his parents.

Although many of the girls conflicted with their mothers, all youth – male and female – felt their mothers met their expectations. One young woman felt her father did not meet her expectations because he does not listen to her and he gets angry rather than discussing differences of opinion. One male felt his father did not meet his expectations when he was drinking. Aside from this male, all respondents who felt their parents partially or wholly did not meet their expectations came to Canada between 1992 and 1994; i.e., they were longer-term immigrants (first generation or generation 1.5). These findings strengthen the suggestion that intergenerational conflicts are more likely when children have longer times to acculturate to the receiving country's values and norms. Some reasons for disagreements were (a) differences of opinion over career paths, (b) the generation gap, and (c) being compared to others. Three respondents (two females, one male) mention being compared to other children; this finding is in keeping with the literature review.

There is a clear gender pattern among respondents regarding explanations of disagreements regarding expectations. Four girls identified the way that their parents were brought up as the cause of disagreements. The two girls born in Canada went further, stating it was their mother,

who was taught different things, who created conflict. One girl, aged 17, blamed the disagreements on her mother's attendance in "a girls' school so she's not comfortable with us being around guy friends".

Only one male respondent stated a reason for disagreement; the reason was that he did not always listen to his parents. Generally, and in contrast to the girls, males did not mention their parents' upbringing as a reason for conflicts. Indeed, most males (six) stated there was no conflict because their family compromised. One male, aged 16, explained it this way:

> We don't really have any agreements disagreements about what we like and what we don't like but we do expect each other to behave a certain way in order fully show that we are a good family. If there is too many fights and too many disputes then we are not really a good family and we are not going by the same values and morals.

In sum, results suggest parents may be more likely to compromise with sons than with daughters, which may further explain why teen girls in this study seem to report more conflict with parents than teen boys do.

Impact of Immigration and Settlement

According to the majority of these teens, immigration had significant impact on their parents and on the nature of the teen-parent relationship, especially among long-term residents. Heightened educational expectations and an emphasis on core values are significant, despite reported parental change and leniency in some areas. One female, age 13, said, "I think he expects more because he changed his lifestyle for us, so he wants it in return."

Immigration changes particularly seem pertinent to the lives of young girls who reported pressure not only to get educated but also to retain their traditionally valued virtues. Teen girls tend to complain about their parents not changing enough; the young men seem more pleased with their lives. Thus, there was a continuum between respondents in reporting on whether or not immigration had or had not changed their parents, with nearly equal numbers supporting views that there were (a) no changes, (b) some changes, or (c) extensive changes.

Specifically, all those who immigrated more recently (first generation) tended to fall into the first category of no changes, with the same values and approaches as in Sri Lanka. This short period of settlement since migration may not be long enough to bring discernible changes. By contrast, several long-term resident teens reported their parents have changed their expectations for them after leaving Sri Lanka. However, four respondents (three females, one male) felt their parents' changes should have been more extensive. The teens in many families acknowledge that some parents changed as a result of immigration, while insisting on holding onto some central values of Tamil culture such as objections to teens' opposite-sex relationships. The theme of heightened conflict between parents and daughters is prominent.

Four youth stated specifically that their parents had made adjustments in their approach to raising their children following migration. For example, a female, aged 16, said: "There is a big difference between here and back home, so our parents tried to adapt to here." One male, aged 17, stated: "Canada is very different from my country so down there it's a different way of living, we can't just be living like how we lived down there. So my mom had to change her ways here." Some teens (one female, three males) recognized that their parents were willing to try to understand what they are going through.

Furthermore, more than half the respondents (seven males, six females) believed their own values (consensual solidarity) were linked to the immigration experience. All respondents born in Canada (second generation) felt immigration had an impact on their family's values. Speaking to the idea of "hybrid" culture, all females born here or who immigrated to Canada before 2000 felt that immigrating to Canada had an impact on their values and those of their parents. One female who came to Canada in 1988 said:

> It's like a balance. I am not going to be pure Canadian or pure Tamil. I want to be a half Tamil and half Canadian. That's how my parents are – they are not going to stick with all Tamil things or they are not going to forget all the roots and go to Canadian. They are easygoing and open.

Thirteen respondents (six females, seven males) thought that immigration to Canada changed expectations (normative solidarity) of their families. Unlike consensual solidarity, responses do not relate to the time of a family's immigration. Although boys and girls reported heightened parental expectations because of immigration, teens' responses reflect gender differences in expectations, as was outlined previously. Results strongly suggest that among Tamil youth, girls need supports in dealing with the stresses of mediating conflicting forces of cultural and parental pressures.

Along with general links the young people made to parents' immigration-related changes, they referred to specific shifts in family structure. One Canadian-born Tamil female, age 17, is very much aware of the role extended family plays in Sri Lanka. She had this observation:

> I think the supportiveness has increased here because we're away from our family members and we need to help each other out more and we can't ask our neighbours and our cousins don't live across the street. Say back home when you were small, you could've easily gone to my next door neighbour's house or my aunt's house while my parents had to go out, but now it's not like that because we don't have relatives across the street or next door. We have to do everything ourselves.

Two of the youth (one male, one female) also noted higher levels of safety in Canada compared to war-torn Sri Lanka. Many of the young people expressed awareness of struggles

their parents had upon immigration and settlement. The young people also mentioned that immigration and settlement compelled their parents to change, even if these changes were not as extensive as some of the youth hoped they would be.

Discussion

The main finding is that interviews with Tamil teens reveal a high degree of family resiliency in the process of immigration and settlement while also identifying multiple pressure points. Many youth are keenly aware their families have undergone many stresses and adjustments through the immigration and settlement process. These youth value the ways in which family members work together to make things run smoothly. This study particularly manifests resiliency in that despite reported differences of opinion and conflict in intergenerational relations, the teens almost universally reported generally good relationships with their parents.

A large degree of *functional solidarity* is evident in pooling of financial resources and participation in household work. That said, the majority of Tamil families uphold traditional gender patterns in that young men are likely to contribute to finances while young women perform more domestic work than males. This finding is also manifest in parents being more receptive to advice from sons than from daughters.

An area of concern in the area of *functional solidarity* is reported lack of involvement by parents in their children's school work. This does not reflect lack of parental interest but is more likely the result of a combination of factors. First, parents may lack English language skills or knowledge about the Canadian school system. Considering the high levels of parental education in this group of families, this factor is of particular concern for other Tamil families who may not be in the position to afford the costs of extra school help for their children. A second significant pressure arises from parental workloads; which some teens saw as restricting the time parents spend with families in general.

In the area of *consensual solidarity*, results suggest that education is a focal point of parental concerns for sons and daughters alike. In addition, the expectation is that a "good Tamil girl" (unlike her brothers) should also be domestic and uphold core Tamil cultural values, which amounts to upholding the family's reputation by not going out with boys and by focusing on school work and domestic tasks. This is a reported area of conflict because girls seem to rebel, potentially hiding their activities from parents. A major area of concern for the teen males surrounds parents' fears about trouble they may get into in the streets.

Interestingly, in the area of *normative solidarity*, male respondents in the study rated trust and honesty highly. It is possible that sons in Tamil families can report their activities to parents more openly than girls can without fear of reprisal, because boys have comparatively higher status and more freedoms than girls do. Interestingly, boys value honesty but girls do not identify

honesty as a central value, instead focusing on trust and freedoms. This difference may reflect coping mechanisms of Tamil girls who feel they must meet parents' expectations while carving out freedoms for themselves. Therefore, Tamil girls may develop double lives while maintaining good relationships with parents.

In conclusion, this small-scale qualitative study suggests that although there are areas of intergenerational stress and conflict in Sri Lankan Tamil families in diaspora, specifically for teenagers, the teenagers' reflections are indicative of high degrees of resiliency. Youth seem well aware of pressures their parents face and of what others expect of them. Teenagers also show a combination of accommodation and resistance to parents' wishes and expectations, with the noted gender patterns. Notable cohort-related patterns emerge; specifically those youths who immigrated at older ages seem to have higher degrees of consensus with parents because the youths lived longer in their countries of origin. These findings call for ongoing attention in empirical work and in theorizing (with regard to resiliency and intergenerational solidarity) to gender, age, and cohort at migration in this and other immigrant groups, to further understand complexities of intergenerational relations in immigrant families.

Policy and Practice Implications

This study opens up numerous policy and practice areas. Major policy recommendations confirm the need for removal of barriers to education and employment of immigrants, to allow for a solid financial basis for family life, and to allow for more family time that is free of work pressures such as holding multiple jobs. The study also calls attention to improvements required in family reunification to allow for continuation of mutually supportive extended families. Areas for attention from school and community practitioners working with immigrants include identifying and addressing needs of immigrant children and youth and paying attention to family dynamics, which may adversely affect young people. Counseling and family services provide avenues to healthy family functioning, while afterschool activities and homework clubs would help young people who cannot rely on help from parents. Though family issues are sensitive terrain for practitioners to address, culturally sensitive models of practice (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith & Bellamy, 2002) provide scripts for addressing multiple needs of diverse families.

Limitations and Future Research Implications

As stated above, this small-scale qualitative study has the standard limitation of lack of generalizability to the population in question (Archer & Berdahl 2011). Purposive sampling also resulted in a skewed demographic profile among participants, notably in an elevated presence of home owners and higher than normal levels of education, particularly among women. Acknowledging these limitations, the study points to future areas for exploration of this rarely studied immigrant group in North America.

Vappu Tyyskä is a Professor of Sociology and Program Director of the M. A. Program in Immigration and Settlement Studies at Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada.

References

Archer, K. & Berdahl, L. (2011). *Explorations: Conducting empirical research in Canadian political science.* Don Mills, Canada: Oxford University Press.

Arthur, N., Chaves, A., Este, D., Frideres, J. & Hrycak, N. (2008). Perceived discrimination by children of immigrant parents: Responses and resiliency. *Canadian Diversity, 6*(2), 69-74.

Babbie, E., and Benaquisto, L. (2010). *Fundamentals of social research* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Nelson Education.

Balasingham, S. (2000). *Toronto Tamil youth: The realities*. Toronto: Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre. Retrieved from: http://www.CanTYD.org.

Boyatzis, R.E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Canadian Tamils' Chamber of Commerce. (2007). *Emergence of the Tamil community in the GTA. Facts and figures.* Toronto: Canadian Tamils' Chamber of Commerce.

Gibbs, G. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Gibson, W., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with qualitative data.* London: Sage.

Gosin, M., Dustman, P., Drapeau, A., & Harthun, M. (2003). Participatory action research: creating an effective prevention curriculum for adolescents in the Southwestern US. *Health Education Research, 18,* 363-379.

Handa, A. (2003). *Of silk saris and mini skirts: South Asian girls walk the tightrope of culture.* Toronto: Women's Press.

Kandasamy, B. (1995). *Findings on the Tamil community*. City of York: York Community Services.

Kendall, P. R. W. (1989). *The Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto*. City of Toronto: Department of Health Promotion and Advocacy Section.

Kilbride, K. M., Anisef, P., Baichman-Anisef, E., & Khattar, R. (2001). *Between two worlds: the experiences and concerns of immigrant youth in Ontario.* Toronto: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS).

Kumpfer, K. L., Alvarado, R., Smith, P., & Bellamy, N. (2002). Cultural sensitivity and adaptation in family-based prevention interventions. *Prevention Science, 3*(3): 241-246.

Kwak, K. (2003). Adolescents and their parents: A review of intergenerational family relations for immigrant and non-immigrant families. *Human Development, 46*: 115-136.

National Network for Family Resiliency (2009). *Family resiliency: Building strengths to meet life's challenges.* Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Extension. Retrieved from: www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/EDC53.pdf

Nichols, L. and Tyyskä, V. (2015). Immigrant women in Canada and the United States. In H. Bauder and J. Shields (Eds.), *Immigrant experiences in North America: Understanding settlement and integration* (pp. 248-272). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Ornstein, M. (2000). *Ethno-racial inequality in the City of Toronto: An analysis of the 1996 Census.* City of Toronto.

Rink, E. and Tricker, R. (2005). Promoting healthy behaviors among adolescents: A review of the resiliency literature. *American Journal of Health Studies, 20*(1): 39-46.

Rosenthal, C. J. (1987). Aging and intergenerational relations in Canada. In V. Marshall (Ed.) *Aging in Canada* (2nd ed.) (pp. 311-341). Markham, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside.

Ryan, C. A., & Hoover, J. H. (2005). Resiliency: What we have learned. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 14*(2): 117-118.

Sivarajah, R. (1998). From family to state: six Tamil women receiving social assistance. Master's thesis, York University, Toronto: Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Spencer, J. F. (2002). Sinhalese immigrants in Toronto and their trajectories into home ownership. Master's thesis, York University, Toronto: Graduate Programme in Geography. Retrieved from: www.ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/ York University at housing_neighbourhoods/spencer_thesis/chapter2.html

Statistics Canada (2007). *2006 Census: Immigration, citizenship, language, mobility, and migration.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/rt-td/immcit-eng.cfm

Suãrez-Orozco, C., & Carhill, A. (2008). Afterword: New directions in research with immigrant families and their children. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 121*: 87-104.

Tyyskä, V. (2005). Immigrant adjustment and parenting of teens: A study of newcomer groups in

Toronto, Canada. In V. Puuronen, J. Soilevuo-Grønnerød, & J. Herranen (Eds.), *Youth – similarities, differences, Inequalities*, Joensuu, Finland: Joensuu University, Reports of the Karelian Institute, No. 1/2005.

—— (2006). *Teen perspectives on family relations in the Toronto Tamil community*. Toronto: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS). CERIS Working Paper Series No. 45.

—— (2008). Parents and teens in immigrant families: Cultural influences and material pressures. *Canadian Diversity/Diversité Canadienne*, *6*(2): 79-83.

—— (2014). *Youth and society. The long and winding road* (3rd ed.). Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Tyyskä, V., & Colavecchia, S. (2001). Report of individual parent interviews in Toronto. Study of parenting issues of newcomer families in Ontario. Kitchener-Waterloo: Centre for Research in Education and Human Services (CREHS), and Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS).