

MIGRATION SHAPES EXPERIENCES OF PREGNANCY, MOTHERHOOD & MARRIAGE

What did we aim to do?

- We aimed to understand how immigration impacts young women's experiences of pregnancy, motherhood, and marriage.

What did we learn?

- Most pregnancies were unplanned and resulted from a lack of information on available reproductive counselling services, abortion care, and contraception, as well as the 3-month wait for health insurance upon arrival in Canada.
- Some women were well-supported by employers who provided health insurance and benefits, while others were discriminated against for being pregnant. These experiences demonstrated the power that employers had over women's rights.
- First-time mothers or those who had no family or friends in Canada often fulfilled caregiving responsibilities alone while partners worked long hours as financial providers. This often led to delayed or sacrificed career and educational goals.
- Isolation made it difficult for married women to adapt to new roles, and several needed sexual health support to navigate new relationships. Isolation also worsened experiences of violence within marriages, which was especially challenging for women whose immigration status or finances were tied to their partner.

Who did we speak to?

34 young immigrant women from May 2019-February 2021. At the time of each interview, participants

- Were between ages 17 and 30.
- Were permanent residents or had experience of precarious immigration status as undocumented residents, asylum seekers, and workers.

What are we calling for?

- Free and accessible childcare for all people in British Columbia regardless of income level
- Maternity benefits for all people regardless of employment contributions
- Full immigration status for all
- Health insurance for all people regardless of immigration status
- Funded community-led discussions to combat isolation and support shared unpaid caregiving work across gender identities and within households

*The term *im/migrant* includes all immigrants and migrants, including those who arrive through permanent and temporary pathways or without official status.



“It was a hard time with a newborn baby. I didn't know how to take care of her, feed her, bathe her. At that time I was just 24 years old, so it was totally new for me and without some elders those things are a little hard for us. The baby is crying a lot, I cannot sleep properly and at the same time I have to cook for her, my daughter, my husband.”

Find the full paper here: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2023.100299>

About the IRIS Project



IRIS is a UBC and SFU research project housed at the Centre for Gender & Sexual Health Equity, in partnership with community-based im/migrant-serving organizations across Metro Vancouver. IRIS is a mixed-methods, community-based study which aims to understand patterns and determinants of access to healthcare for im/migrants in British Columbia, including sexual and reproductive healthcare, as well as COVID-19 related care.