Activities and programmes that support the emotional wellness and well-being of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers within settlement agencies: a scoping review protocol

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ABSTRACT

Introduction Obstacles to successful settlement—social isolation, language hardship, issues with employment, housing questions, transportation, barriers to health, education and government service access—all potentially play a role in emerging physical and mental health problems. The objective of this scoping review is to map the services and resources offered to refugees, immigrants and other newcomers by settlement agencies to support emotional wellness and well-being.

Methods and analysis The protocol to be followed for this scoping review is based on the Joanna Briggs Institute to provide a map of the current and emergent literature, and examine the extent, range and nature of this literature. The proposed scoping review will also identify the gaps in research pertaining to the emotional wellness of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers as well as summarise and disseminate research findings and provide direction to stakeholders, including immigrant serving agencies. We propose a scoping review protocol and disseminate research findings and provide direction to stakeholders, including immigrant serving agencies.

INTRODUCTION

Research since the early twentieth century has revealed that immigrants can frequently experience mental health issues to a higher degree than local populations.1 2 Although such individuals might arrive in Canada with a lower average incidence of mental health issues compared with locals, these can increase due to the stress, insecurity and precariousness that often accompanies the settlement process.3 This is precipitated by the loss of long-established and diverse social and emotional ties that existed in newcomers’ home countries but are absent at the settlement destination.4 Rates of mental illness can be especially high among immigrants who are most vulnerable, such as seniors, women and children. There can also be variation in experiences between cultural groups, depending on similarities with the host culture, such as language and religion.4 Obstacles to successful settlement—social isolation, language hardship, issues with employment, housing questions, transportation, barriers to health, education, government service access, and the overall experience of migrating to a new country—all potentially play a role in emerging physical and mental health problems.3 Recent immigrants, for example,
Methods and Analysis
This proposed scoping review will be conducted in the following manner, adhering to the process/guidelines of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) scoping review methodology:

1. Research question identification.
2. Identification of relevant studies.
3. Selection of studies to be included.
4. Extraction of relevant data from included studies.
5. Summary, compilation and reporting of results.
6. Sharing of results with stakeholders.

Review title
Activities and programmes that support the emotional wellness of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers within settlement agencies: A scoping review protocol

Review objective
The aim of this proposed scoping review is to provide a map of the existing literature, and examine the extent, range and nature of the current and emergent literature. This scoping review will also identify the gaps in research pertaining to the emotional wellness and well-being of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers as well as summarise and disseminate research findings. It will also provide the basis for a summary of the most successful practices and initiatives employed to support newcomer emotional wellness available in the literature, as well as the parameters of their success. The discussion of these parameters will also identify barriers as well as facilitators to the success of this programming. While the scoping review will be primarily used to inform knowledge users by identifying gaps in the research knowledge base, clarifying key concepts and reporting on the types of evidence that address and inform the delivery of integration services across a range of disciplinary and sub-disciplinary areas, it may also be used to provide direction for future systematic reviews.

Review question
JBI suggests using the mnemonic ‘population, concept and context’ to inform the research question as well as the inclusion criteria when conducting a scoping review. For our review, the population is refugees, immigrants and other newcomers, the concept is emotional wellness and emotional well-being, and the context is settlement agencies. Therefore, our research question is as follows:

Which practices aimed at addressing the emotional wellness and well-being of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers are, or have been, offered by settlement agencies?

Inclusion criteria
Population
Newcomers, refugees, immigrants who have reached their final destination and who are involved with ‘formal’ settlement agencies’ services will be the focus of the review. Undocumented and illegal immigrants served by more ‘informal’ community associations and organisations will also be included. This review will focus both on practices at ‘formal’ organisations as well as ‘informal’ organisations. ‘Formal’ organisations are typically not-for-profit settlement agencies that employ permanent staff and receive funding from various levels of government and other non-governmental funding agencies. ‘Informal’ organisations are driven primarily by volunteer staff and participants, regardless of their source of funding. While more ‘formal’ organisations typically have a higher degree of consistency and sustainability within their programmes, volunteer-based community organisations can have varied programming due to their precarious funding and resources. This review will look at both types of organisations, which both hold significant value and contributions to newcomer communities, often in different ways. The participant population includes individuals over 18 or families. Children, without

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a family unit or where services are offered within schools only, will be excluded.

Concept
Our review will investigate the emotional wellness and well-being of newcomers settling in their final destination country. Studies, programme descriptions or interventions that focus on enhancing well-being, or addressing well-being or barriers/gaps to well-being, will be included. Studies that involve conditions addressed and intervened on by formal health service professionals such as those concerning psychiatric mental disorders will be excluded. Further, studies that focus on interventions for diagnosable conditions, communicable diseases or other diseases and physical illnesses will be excluded. Studies that consider mental state but without Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5 criteria will be included. Studies focused on participants’ thinking around ethnicity, identity, identification and ethnic identification will be excluded in the scoping review.

Context
The review focuses on newcomers in formal settlement agency contexts within their final destination country. As we are looking at the emotional wellness and well-being of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers, we will include studies that deal with families (adults and their children) or adults within the context of formal settlement agencies and services provided by settlement agencies within the destination country. Community-based programmes or research will be included because of the study’s interest in non-governmental assistance within Canadian communities aimed at the successful integration of newcomers. As the study examines service delivery, studies can be about an intervention or formalised programme. School-based programmes for children will be excluded. Services that assist clients in more transitory situations, without consideration for the long-term adjustment and integration of the client, will be excluded. Because of the study’s focus on service providers who aim to settle and integrate clients permanently into the local community, studies that consider participants whose place of settlement are refugee camps will not be included.

Types of studies
All study designs, such as those that are descriptive, qualitative, quantitative, case studies, surveys or using mixed methods, will be included in the review. Further, we will include grey literature, including dissertations, government reports and settlement agency documents or programme descriptions. Systematic reviews and other knowledge synthesis research will be excluded, but the reference lists will be scanned for potentially relevant studies. Studies where participants settle in Europe, North America or Australasia—regions that have comparable forms of governance, degree of economic development and cultural context to Canada—will be included. Studies where participants settle outside of these regions will be excluded. The search strategy will be limited to works published in either French or English. This review will consider studies that are in either English or French because the study is aimed at use in Canada for both English and French settlement services. There will be no date restrictions.

Search strategy
The search strategy for data collection for the scoping review will be purposefully comprehensive and exhaustive. As recommended by JBI, our review follows a three-step search strategy. The first step involved exploring the literature. The team met to discuss and brainstorm potential keywords for the three main concepts: newcomers, wellness and settlement agencies. The team also identified seed articles. An initial search was conducted by an expert health sciences librarian in APA PsycINFO and Google Scholar with the identified keywords. The seed articles were also analysed for keywords and subject headings. Second, the identified keywords and subject headings were then developed into a comprehensive search strategy, with continuous exploring of newly identified keywords through scanning the retrieved results. This was an iterative process, where new keywords and subject headings were added as discovered. This search strategy, in APA PsycINFO, was shared with the team, who provided feedback, and further revisions were undertaken. The APA PsycINFO search was also pilot tested to be sure that it captured the known seed articles. The provisional search strategy is available in table 1. The APA PsycINFO search strategy will be adapted for each database, with keywords remaining constant across databases, and subject headings being responsive to the controlled vocabulary of the database. The final step will involve snowball searching. Specifically, both reference lists and works cited in included studies will be screened. Citations, references and bibliographies of included studies will also be screened. It is the intent of the reviewers to contact the authors of primary studies or reviews for further information as appropriate.

Preliminary simple searches, focusing on the main concepts (newcomers/immigrants/refugees, wellness/well-being, settlement) were conducted in numerous databases to identify those which would be most informative. Based on these preliminary searches, the search will be conducted in the following Ovid databases: APA PsycINFO, Medline and Embase. EbscoHost databases to be searched include the following: Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature Plus, Academic Search Complete, Anthropology Plus, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Family Studies Abstracts and SociINDEX. Sociological abstracts will be searched on the ProQuest platform. Scopus will also be searched. Table 1 provides the provisional search strategy for APA PsycINFO.

All search results from the databases will be uploaded into Covidence where it will be automatically deduplicated.

Study selection
The retrieved studies will be screened in two phases, both of which will use Covidence to assist in the screening process.
In the first phase, two content experts (CS and HS) will independently screen these studies by title and abstract, applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria to each record. Prior to commencing screening, the content experts will pilot screen a sample of 100 records, applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria. The content experts will discuss their decisions, and revise or further define inclusion/exclusion criteria if required. Title and abstract screening may commence when an inter-rater agreement of 85% or greater has been established. Discrepancies in screening will be decided through consensus, or a third content expert (SG) will be consulted for discussion. Records that meet the inclusion criteria, or were inconclusive, will move to the second phase of screening, which involves full-text screening. Again, two content experts (KP and SG) will independently apply the inclusion/exclusion criteria to the full-text of each study. Disagreements will be determined through consensus, or discussion with a third content expert (HS or CS). Search results, screening results for both title/abstract and full-text screening will be reported.

| # | Searches                                                                 | Results |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 21 | exp Loneliness/ or exp SOCIAL ISOLATION/                               | 11 153  |
| 22 | exp SOCIAL STRESS/ or exp DISTRESS/                                    | 22 893  |
| 23 | exp Anxiety/ or exp FEAR/ or exp Disadvantaged/ or exp DISAPPOINTMENT/ | 90 620  |
| 24 | (dissatisfaction or dis-satisfaction or sadness),tw.id.                | 21 615  |
| 25 | (social adj3 (exclusion or isolation)).tw.id.                          | 10 760  |
| 26 | (loneliness or lonely),tw.id.                                          | 10 136  |
| 27 | (distress* or stress*),tw.id.                                          | 303 290 |
| 28 | (anxious* or worrying* or fear* or afraid or frightened or nervous*),tw.id. | 171 714 |
| 29 | (unsettled or disillusion* or disappoint*),tw.id.                      | 8995    |

Continued
in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA) flow diagram as demonstrated in figure 1.14

After screening has been completed, reviewers will extract the data from each study using JBI-SUMARI to create a consistent framework. This framework may be further refined at the reviewing stage and modified accordingly. Box 1 outlines the categories in which reviewers will extract data.

The methodology and results of the scoping review will be presented in accordance with the reporting guidelines outlined in the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews checklist.15 Data will be analysed using narrative synthesis, guided by Popay et al's16 approach. These researchers note that narrative synthesis is ‘an approach to the systematic review and synthesis of findings from multiple studies that relies primarily on the use of words and text to summarise and explain the findings of the synthesis’.

Patient and public involvement
This proposed scoping review protocol was written without public involvement. The public was not asked to comment on the design of the scoping review, nor were they invited to contribute to the reading or writing of this document.

Box 1 Data extraction categories

- Author(s).
- Year of publication.
- Origin/Country of Origin (where the study was published or conducted).
- Aims/purpose.
- Study population and sample size (if applicable).
- Methodology/methods.
- Intervention type, comparator and details of these (eg, type of programming or service) (if applicable).
- Duration of the intervention (if applicable).
- Outcomes and details of these (eg, how measures) (if applicable).
- Key findings that relate to the scoping review question(s).

Ethics and dissemination
As this is a proposed scoping review and does not involve human or animal subjects, an ethics board approval was not necessary and thus not obtained. The findings of this proposed scoping review will be disseminated through a future publication as a completed scoping review. Findings will also be communicated to immigrant-serving agencies and those with interest in immigration issues at future conferences. The results of this review will be the first comprehensive recent survey of emotional wellness practices employed by settlement agencies. This scoping review will also be used to directly inform future research on newcomer emotional wellness and well-being.

DISCUSSION
A wide scope of practices is employed by settlement agencies to address the emotional wellness of newly arrived immigrants and refugees. This proposed scoping review will generate findings that will aid in identifying settlement agencies’ activities and programmes that support agencies who undertake work with the emotional wellness of refugees, immigrants and other newcomers as described in academic and grey literature.

While the area of mental health within this population has received a significant amount of research, little research attention has been paid to emotional wellness. This proposed scoping review, therefore, focuses on ‘emotional wellness’ practices as opposed to those aimed at newcomer ‘mental health’. The reason for this is that often settlement agency staff do not have the professional resources to address clinical mental health issues that can often be present in their client population, particularly in those clients who come from conflict zones or have been forced to migrate to their new country. There is much established research, however, that suggests the value of preventative measures in mental health,17 18 including when addressing social isolation and cultural anxiety. It is often within this area that settlement agencies act, an examination of which can provide valuable insight into the integration process of many new immigrants.

The results of this scoping review will offer comprehensive analysis of emotional wellness practices employed by settlement agencies. The findings generated will also be useful to policymakers, academics, researchers and programme implementers who work with refugees, immigrants and other newcomers within resettlement organisations or in other similar capacities. These can provide a picture of which approaches used by agencies are more common and sustainable in particular contexts. It will also reveal which contexts agencies who operate emotional wellness supports in are more common. The ways in which funder reporting impacts service delivery and programme design, for example, can reveal sector-wide patterns and practices that might be similar. These mirrored structures, in turn, can lead to specific outcomes in clients. Evidence generated through this review will offer a critical foundation from which primary prevention strategies, which directly

Figure 1 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols flow diagram demonstrating the planned screening-to-extraction activities of the scoping review.
impact the social and ecological determinants of health and emotional wellness, may be built.

For policymakers, practitioners, agencies and other stakeholders, this proposed scoping review can also help identify gaps in practices where needs remain inadequately addressed or examined. A comprehensive overview of practices examined in depth in the literature can serve as a point of reference for agencies who may only have their local experiences and contexts to draw from in determining interventions on emotional wellness and well-being issues. Agencies may also refer to studies in the review to find future effects and impacts on interventions they may be considering in order to make more informed choices in terms of approach. It is acknowledged by the authors that this audience does not typically access academic literature. As such study results will be disseminated in briefings and presentations at industry-oriented (as opposed to primarily academic) conferences. The involvement of the two authors of this review whose affiliation lies with a settlement agency facilitates access to this audience of stakeholders.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Results from this scoping review can identify and assess the wide scope of practices employed by settlement agencies to address the emotional wellness of new immigrants and refugees. These practices and programming may, however, not be documented completely and extensively in published academic literature, but rather are available in grey literature that includes government reports and project results summaries held at the agency, funder or community level. As access to these documents may be challenging, the researchers acknowledge that this may be a limitation to the study.

A synthesis and analysis of these practices and approaches by the authors will also provide a comprehensive summary of the most successful of these practices as they are found in the established academic literature. However, this study will only include articles and reports published in English and French, and therefore works in other languages will not be reviewed. Additional strengths and limitations will be identified during the conduct of the scoping review itself.

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Contributors

SG conceptualised the review and was involved in drafting and editing the protocol paper, guided the development and refinement of the research question, revised the title, guided the development of inclusion/exclusion criteria, the establishment of the review objectives, final preparation of protocol for submission. KAH provided methodological guidance throughout the development of the protocol, wrote the data collection component and developed the search strategy. HS was involved in drafting and editing the protocol paper, the development of inclusion/exclusion criteria, strengths and limitations, PRISMA chart, final edits and reference clean-ups and proofreading. CS and KP were involved in drafting and editing the protocol, reviewing of the background literature and giving contextualisation to the study within the third sector, and involved in the development of inclusion and exclusion criteria.

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