

“Poverty, Family Process, and the Mental Health of Immigrant Children in Canada”

Morton Beiser MD, FRCPC

*Culture, Community and Health Studies Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Department of
Psychiatry, University of Toronto*

Feng Hou, PhD

*Culture, Community and Health Studies Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Department of
Psychiatry, University of Toronto*

Ilene Hyman, PhD

*Culture, Community and Health Studies Program, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Department of
Psychiatry, University of Toronto*

Michael Tousignant, PhD

Laboratoire de recherche en écologie humaine et sociale, Université de Québec à Montréal

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Abstract:

Objectives. This study examined the differential effects of poverty on the mental health of foreignborn children, Canadian-born children of immigrant parents, and children of nonimmigrant parents.

Methods. Secondary analysis of data from a national Canadian study of children between 4 and 11 years of age was conducted.

Results. Compared with their receiving-society counterparts, foreign-born children were more than twice as likely to live in poor families, but they had lower levels of emotional and behavioral problems. The effect of poverty on children's mental health among long-term immigrant and receiving-society families was indirect and primarily mediated by single-parent status, ineffective parenting, parental depression, and family dysfunction. In comparison, the mental health effect of poverty among foreignborn children could not be explained by the disadvantages that poor families often suffer.

Conclusions. Poverty may represent a transient and inevitable part of the resettlement process for new immigrant families. For long-stay immigrant and receiving-society families, however, poverty probably is not part of an unfolding process; instead, it is the nadir of a cycle of disadvantage. (*Am J Public Health.* 2002;92:220–227)