Refugee Single Parents: A Community-Based Assessment

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## Contents

Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 1
The literature ...................................................................................................................... 2
   Methodology.................................................................................................................. 2
   Immigrant/Refugee Single Parents and Integration Outcomes ..................................... 3
      Economic and labour market outcomes .................................................................. 3
      Health outcomes ..................................................................................................... 4
      Housing outcomes .................................................................................................. 5
      Changes in family structure ..................................................................................... 6
      Raising adolescents ............................................................................................... 7
Summary ............................................................................................................................. 9
The Community-Based Assessment Project ..................................................................... 10
   Goal and Objectives .................................................................................................... 10
   Objectives.................................................................................................................... 10
   Methodology................................................................................................................ 10
   Research Methods ....................................................................................................... 11
   Ethical Considerations............................................................................................... 12
   Limitations .................................................................................................................. 13
The Participants ................................................................................................................ 14
Findings from Mothers and Fathers ................................................................................. 16
   Experiences of Heading a Family .............................................................................. 16
   Ability to Manage ....................................................................................................... 17
   Parent-Child Relationship ......................................................................................... 17
   Perception of the Position of Women in Canada ..................................................... 19
   Experiences and Perception of Women’s Status as Single Mothers ......................... 20
   Community Support .................................................................................................. 21
   Relationship with Social Services Systems .............................................................. 22
   Mental and Emotional Wellbeing ............................................................................ 22
   Sexuality Education with Single Parents .................................................................. 23
      Addressing Sexuality with Children ..................................................................... 24
   Youth Perspectives ..................................................................................................... 26
      Relating to their Parents ......................................................................................... 26
      Sexuality Related Issues ......................................................................................... 27
The View from Service Providers and Community Leaders .............................................. 28
Conclusions and Recommendations ............................................................................... 32
Appendices ........................................................................................................................ 37
Introduction

No numbers about the extent of the existence of refugee single-headed households in Winnipeg exist; however, it appears that there are some issues of concern related to this family structure. The Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC) has been working in immigrant and refugee communities for close to 25 years and has been delivering community-based education workshops for immigrant and refugee parents for the past decade. With immigration numbers to Winnipeg increasing yearly and with refugee selection criteria changing to select those who face the most need for refuge, for example, single parents from war-torn countries, there is an increasing need to identify and meet the needs of these parents, to help them and their children integrate successfully into Canadian society.

In our work with refugee communities (e.g. Sudanese, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Afghan) SERC has become aware that there may be specific issues that newcomer refugee single parents face as they integrate into Canadian society. Evaluation reports of our Intergenerational Communication workshops with parents and adults in various ethno-cultural communities show a recurring need to explore the specific concerns single parents or families headed by a single parent encounter (SERC 2008, 2009). In addition to many more “obvious” needs newcomer single parents face such as lack of support, insertion in the labour market, language barriers, isolation, childcare, etc. we are interested in learning about the intergenerational and sexuality-related issues they face while raising their families.

We understand that issues faced by lone parents are relational. They affect parents and children. However, in this instance, we are focusing on parental perspectives. We have identified that there are increasing numbers/proportions of such parents living in Winnipeg or at least that this issue is becoming more apparent. There is an additional burden that “typical” barriers to immigrants such as language barriers, isolation, labour market insertion place on single parents who do not have the support of a spouse. Issues stemming from years of living in war affected areas may also impair the ability to adapt and form a good parent-child relationship. We have also found that newcomer single parents might become “ghettoized”: often, they are raising children in high-poverty, inner-city neighbourhoods, where their children are subject to and often actively recruited into anti-social activities including gangs. We have also found indications that there is a need to address the lack of information on the specific needs of single refugee parents with respect to sexuality.

We are also based the project on certain premises related to familial and social dynamics, that arose from our ongoing work with refugee communities, in particular momentarily from parents:

- Single women raising young male boys and teenagers, in particular, may have their parental authority challenged by boys who may be expecting to quickly acquire power within the family (i.e., become head of household) without the sociocultural context needed in the new country
• For fathers arriving single, raising young girls within a western social cultural context may also present challenges.
• In Canada, many families are faced with different worldviews especially those related to gender role expectations and freedoms, that lead to marriage breakdown.
• Women and men find themselves having to deal with a number of unexpected challenges as singles having to raise children within a foreign social system.

Research on immigrant families has shown that the absence of families has negative impact on the well-being of individuals (Dench, 2006). However, little is known about the experiences of refugee lone parents or one-parent immigrant families.

The literature
The increase in the incidence of divorce and separation during the past three decades has significantly contributed to the growth of single parenthood in Canada (Lindsay & Almay, 2005). To provide the demographic context for the findings in this literature review, the following information, produced by Statistics Canada, is briefly outlined (Lindsay & Almay, 2005).

• Women head majority of single parent families, although the number of male single parents have also grown in the recent decades.
• In 2001, there were over 1 million female-headed single parent families (81 %) and almost a quarter of a million male-headed single parent families.
• Foreign-born women were slightly more likely than their native born counterparts to be single parents.
• Among recent arrivals, women make up even a greater share of single parents.

A study by Statistics Canada showed that overall, foreign-born women were slightly more likely than those born in Canada to be lone parents. The study found that in 2001, 9% of foreign-born women aged 15 and above were lone parents, about one percentage point higher than the figure for their Canadian-born counterparts. That year, for example, 8% of immigrant women aged 15 and over who arrived in Canada between 1991 and 2001 were lone parents. As with their Canadian-born counterparts, foreign-born women are much more likely than their male counterparts to be a lone parent. Among visible minority women, Blacks are by far the most likely to be lone parents. In 2001, 24% of Black women aged 15 and over were lone parents.

Methodology
The literature review was conducted through various search engines. The search for academic articles occurred through Google Scholar, EBSCO Academic Research Premier, Sociological Abstracts/Sage Sociology, Proquest, the Sage Political Science Abstracts and the Metropolis Project website. A keyword search was also conducted of dissertations housed at the National Library. Keywords used for searches were Immigrant Single parents/ lone parents/ separated parents, Refugee single parents/ lone parents, separated parents, Sexuality Immigrants. Majority of the articles used are Canadian. But a few US studies have also been used.
Immigrant/Refugee Single Parents and Integration Outcomes

The documents reviewed raised several integration outcomes for immigrants and refugees. They focused primarily on economic or labour market outcomes, health, and housing. Integration outcomes are heavily influenced by each other and other pre-existing conditions. Tied in with the following discussion on each integration outcome are the inequalities arising out of intersecting disadvantages based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, family composition and immigrant status.

Economic and Labour Market Outcomes

Numerous studies suggest an increased incidence of single parenthood has had more negative impact on the economic well-being of immigrants than their native born counterparts (Lindsay & Almay, 2005; Liu & Kerr, 2003; Picot & Hou, 2003). However, an ongoing decline in the average number of children per household, upward shift in the age distribution of parents, and the tendency of immigrants to co-reside with extended family members were found to have positive impacts (Liu & Kerr, 2003). Low-income rates were particularly widespread among recent immigrants irrespective of age groups, whether immigrants spoke one of the official languages or not, and educational levels (Picot & Hou, 2003). Some major barriers for immigrants and refugees to employment and income are difficulties in having foreign credentials recognized, employers’ demand for Canadian work experience, lack of language skills in English or French, particularly professional, trade or business related language skills, and religious affiliations (for e.g. being Muslim) (Mulvihill, Mailloux, & Atkin, 2001; VanderPlaat, 2007). Despite the relative high level of education among immigrant women in the recent decades, they are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed (VanderPlaat, 2007). Immigrant women’s credentials are less likely to be recognized, their career ladders are more likely to be misunderstood, and the gendered, cultural norms that rule the lives of immigrant women may not necessarily translate into Canadian work experience (VanderPlaat, 2007).

In addition to the barriers that are common to both genders, several researchers argue immigrant women’s labour force participation and economic outcomes should be understood within the context of their care giving roles (VanderPlaat, 2007). Although poverty was extremely high among single parent families who had recently immigrated to Canada, the rise in low income was more pronounced for recent immigrants from Africa, the Asian regions, and Southern Europe (Picot & Hou, 2003). The economic disadvantages of raising children in single parent female-headed households were particularly striking (Liu & Kerr, 2003). However, there is evidence to suggest that the economic well-being of single parent immigrant families also depend on the circumstances of their departure. This evidence warns against the tendency to view single parent immigrant families as a homogenous group. The economic circumstances of wealthy upper-middle class and upper class Taiwanese and Hong Kong women who head “astronaut families” in major Canadian metros while their husbands had returned to their country of origin or abroad in search of better employment prospects (Deng, 2007; Walters, 2002) are very different from that of refugee women coming from war-torn countries. While the former immigrated for the sake of their children and are being supported by cash from abroad, the latter fled their home countries for safety and survival. Economic outcomes influence other integration outcomes. For instance, unemployment or underemployment of foreign qualified professionals was found to have serious implications for their emotional and
Despite the importance of understanding economic outcomes and its relationship with other outcomes such as health, housing, etc, one glaring gap is the lack of research on the link between economic well-being and other integration outcomes, particularly for immigrant single parents. Also, no studies were found on the experiences of male-headed single parent families.

**Health Outcomes**

A number of studies suggest that recent immigrants and refugees are on average healthier than their Canadian born counterparts (Hamilton, 2007; Mulvihill et al., 2001; Smith, Matheson, Moineddin, & Glazier, 2007). Possible explanations for the better health of recent immigrants include the tendency for people with better health to emigrate, health standards required by the Canadian government of immigrants before they emigrate, low prevalence of smoking among immigrant women, and the effect of research tools and methodologies that may not be cross-culturally relevant (Mulvihill et al., 2001). However, there is increasing evidence to indicate that over time the health advantage of recent immigrants declines rather than improves (Hamilton, 2007; Smith et al., 2007). Literature on the well being and health of immigrant women focus on two areas – women’s access to health care, and violence and abuse and their impact on mental health (VanderPlaat, 2007). Access to health care is limited by the lack of fluency in Canada’s official languages, cultural constructions of health, and the lack of familiarity with formal health care services and health promotion channels (Mulvihill et al., 2001; VanderPlaat, 2007). Culturally inappropriate health services coupled with the stress immigrant women experience due to gender role conflicts, racism, sexism and paid work were also found to impact their health, particularly put them at greater risk for cardiovascular diseases (Kumar, 2002, as cited in VanderPlaat, 2007).

While emigration does not by itself put men or women at greater risk for violence and abuse, the stressors put on immigrant families such as displacement from traditional cultural norms and scripts, isolation from traditional sources of support, and the abuse and isolation experienced from their own peers caused by the need to conform within their communities can put significant strain on marital relationships (VanderPlaat, 2007). Immigrant women in particular are hesitant to seek help because of difficulties with language, fear of social isolation, poverty, threats from the community, fear of violence/deportation, cultural norms, stigma, and the centrality of care giving in the lives of immigrant women (VanderPlaat, 2007). Emphasis on mental health and emotional well being is particularly relevant for refugees from countries marked by political instability and civil war (Mulvihill et al., 2001). Results from a study that used 2000-01 Canadian Community Health Survey data found that depression was high among single parents; and among women the highest rates of depression appeared to be among single parents (Smith et al., 2007). However, several studies have pointed out that immigrants’ social isolation is usually constructed as a psychological problem when in fact they are sociological ones (Mulvihill et al., 2001). This finding underscores the importance of community based assessments that define and understand health within the context of socio-ecological models (Mulvihill et al., 2001). In addition to lack of employment opportunities, non-recognition of foreign credentials, perceived racial and gender discrimination; the nature of housework, the predominance of large shopping centres, the way neighbourhoods are organized, and the Canadian climate have also been identified as social factors that have mental health
implications for immigrants (Mulvihill et al., 2001). In a paper that explored how public policy and practices have operated to increase the marginalization of Somali Canadian women, Spitzer (2006) argued that policies that required Somali women to wait 3 to 5 years to apply for permanent resident status, Eurocentric definitions of the family that delayed family reunification process, and the economic marginalization due to the lack of recognition of foreign credentials had a cumulative adverse impact on the health and well being of Somali women. A couple of studies indicate the need to consider the pre-migratory context of immigrants in order to uncover the impact of violence on their mental health. A 1998 study of Salvadoran immigrant women in Winnipeg emphasize the importance of addressing the social and behavioural consequences of mistrust and violence because decades of civil war in their homeland had left the Salvadoran community divided and distrustful of one another (Bowen, 1998, as cited in Mulvihill et al., 2001). Similarly, a study among Latin American refugee women from Peru and Chile found that exposure to violence in the pre-migratory context, lack of familiarity of their new environment, and social isolation increased these women’s vulnerability to domestic violence, mental distress and single parenthood (Boyd, 1990, as cited in Mulvihill et al., 2001). With respect to the health of immigrant children, since single parent status is frequently accompanied by low income, low education, and a greater risk of physical and mental health problems, children living with single parents were also found to be at a heightened risk of emotional and behavioural problems themselves (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 1998).

Housing Outcomes

Housing is a crucial component of immigrants’ settlement and integration experience. Work by Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA) has found that discrimination and systemic barriers curtail the opportunities of recent immigrants, particularly low-income groups, since many recent immigrants face problems when it comes to meeting the selection requirements of landlords such as credit references, rental history, income and security requirements, first-come first serve basis eligibility rules, and long waiting lists (Mwarigha, 2003). Using the metaphor of an onion, a study that focused on the housing situation of African refugees in Vancouver demonstrated how the multiple layers of identity markers, such as race, gender, socio-economic class, immigrant status, and family composition of immigrants affect their housing status (Francis, 2009). The outer layer represents structural factors that affect newcomers and Canadians in general – low income, lack of information, and lack of affordable housing. The next layers represent disadvantages of being a refugee, particularly the stereotypes of being an African/Black refugee. The middle layers represent institutional barriers – discrimination in the private rental market, obstacles public institutions present such as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) assisted travel loans for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), long processing times for Refugee Claimants (RCs), and barriers to access subsidized housing. Peeling away the layers, at the heart of the onion is a woman who is a single parent with several children, who lacks education, is unable to communicate in English, suffers from trauma or ill health, and is a refugee camp survivor. Findings from several other studies also support how multiple layers of discrimination compound the housing situation for recent immigrants. A study by Hulchanski (2002) found that landlords refused to rent to families with small children, single parents, and people on social assistance. Murdie (1999)
found that Polish immigrants found it considerably easier to secure housing compared to Somali immigrants. It appeared that being immigrant, black, and Muslim invited a triple dose of discrimination because of landlords’ preference for Christians after September 11 (Zine, 2002). Furthermore, a study by Francis (2009) found that the availability and affordability crisis in metro Vancouver forced African refugees to accept substandard housing. Disadvantages occur not only in the rental market but also in the home ownership market. With increasing rents, and the difficulties of finding a suitable rental accommodation, a more desirable and affordable housing option, particularly for low-income households and single mothers, is home ownership (CERA, 2002). However, disadvantaged by systemic biases such as mortgage guarantees, rental housing becomes the predominant choice for single parents and other low-income groups (Mwarigha, 2003). Due to the lack of investment in low and medium income housing, and the tight rental market in most Canadian cities, low income groups such as immigrants and single parent families who have experienced a decline in their income find it particularly challenging to secure affordable, decent housing (Mwarigha, 2003). The disadvantages in the housing market have far reaching social consequences. In major cities, we see over priced, derelict buildings being occupied by the lower income groups, while the more desirable, better quality buildings house higher income, predominantly white, longer term Canadians (Mwarigha, 2003). The public tends to associate the poor quality of the buildings with the residents living habits, further entrenching the negative image of discriminated groups such immigrants and single parents.

Changes in Family Structure

Disruptions in family life due to the death, divorce or separation of parents are believed to have profound implications for the well being of parents and children (Williams, 2001). Although the changes in family structure are complex and difficult to measure, it has been found that children of divorce, or parental separation are far more likely to live in low income families, have emotional, behavioural, social and academic problems, more likely to leave school earlier, more likely to live on income assistance as adults, and have higher chances of marital instability themselves (Williams, 2001). Majority of female single parents in Canada are either divorced or separated from their spouse, and a growing proportion is single, never-married women raising children on their own (Lindsay & Almay, 2005). Families headed by female single parents are more likely to live in poverty (Lindsay & Almay, 2005). It is well established that familial poverty jeopardizes the life outcomes of native Canadian children (Beiser et al., 1998). However, children of recent immigrant families were found to be at least as healthy as native born children, had lower rates of mental health problems, and often outperformed their native born counterparts in school even though immigrant families were typically poorer than native Canadians (Beiser et al., 1998). Beiser and colleagues (1998) concluded that although familial factors such as family dysfunction and single parent family status mediated the effects of poverty on the mental health of native-born children, this was not true for recent immigrant families. While poverty is known to have debilitating effects for native-born Canadians, it means different things for recent immigrant families, and may be considered a short-term, inevitable part of the resettlement experience (Beiser et al., 1998). Similarly, a study conducted in the US that examined familial and extra familial factors associated with adolescent well being in intact, blended and single parent families found that
adolescents in single parent families were just as resilient as their counterparts in intact families (Rodgers & Rose, 2002). It was peer support that moderated the effects of low parental support for adolescents in divorced single parent families.

As an area where socio-cultural change can be readily observed in family relations, the impact of immigration on the family and parent-child relationships has been widely studied (Kwak, 2003). In a study that explored how intergenerational relations are experienced by adolescents and their parents, Kwak (2003) found that when their own culture and their ethnocultural social network supported family interdependence, immigrant families were able to maintain healthy parent-child relationships. Unlike non-immigrant adolescents, immigrant adolescents supported family interdependence by delaying their pursuit of independence. Since their family members encouraged collaboration and participation as well, hardships did not adversely impact intergenerational family relationships. The disagreement between immigrant parents and their adolescent children about the degree to which adolescents should become like their counterparts in the host country, called assimilation, has been found to be a major source of stress in immigrant families (Merali, 2002). Rather than the actual state of affairs within the family, it is perceived disparities that affected intergenerational relationships (Zuckerman, 1999). Merali (2002) found that Hispanic refugee parent and adolescent dyads significantly underestimated or overestimated the actual degree of intergenerational gaps. The findings highlight the need to consider assimilation disparity in parent-child relationships as it is associated with a variety of negative outcomes at the individual and familial level (Merali, 2002). Taking the study of assimilation disparity a step further, Merali and Violato (2002) found that there was no significant difference in the assimilative behaviours of recent immigrant parents and their adolescents among same-sex or opposite sex parent-adolescent dyads. The only variables that influenced parental perceptions of assimilative behaviours that adolescents were likely to display as they became immersed in the Canadian school system were parental education and family size. The greatest potential for parent-adolescent conflict was likely to be among large immigrant families that also had less educated parents. One of the greatest advantages of a higher education was its ability to endow a relativistic perspective whereby parents become more open and receptive to new ideas and concepts. Merali and Violato (2002) suggest in addition to providing formal education, literacy and job training to relatively less educated immigrants, elements of general Canadian culture, and normative adolescent behaviours should also be provided to facilitate successful family adaptation.

**Raising Adolescents**

Due to the potential risks surrounding adolescent sexual activity, such as unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, adolescent sexuality is a serious public health and social concern (Davis & Friel, 2001; Maticka-Tyndale, 2008). Notable changes occurred in the sexual lives of Canadian youth during the 1990’s, but thereafter the patterns of behaviour established have continued into the present decade (Maticka-Tyndale, 2008). Growing up in single parent families has been suggested to have adverse impacts on adolescent sexual behaviour (Davis & Friel, 2001). However, in a US study that analyzed adolescent sexual behaviour, it has been found that with the exception of girls in single parent families, family structure did not significantly influence adolescents’ sexual initiation (Davis & Friel, 2001). Girls in single parent families had earlier ages for sexual initiation compared to their counterparts in
intact and stepparent families. The authors attribute earlier sexual debut of girls in single parent families to the role of parental control because there was only one parent to exert control. However, the results did not support their reasoning for boys in single parent families. It was the family context – mother – adolescent relationship, their level of interaction, and mothers’ attitude toward discussion of sex – that was found to be more relevant for teens sexual debut. When it comes to sexual partnering of boys and girls, neither family structure nor family context had an impact.

For immigrants coming from other parts of the globe where sexuality is rooted in different cultural and gender norms, adjusting to Canadian concepts of sexuality is particularly challenging (Maticka-Tyndale, 2008). A study that explored the concept of sexuality among immigrant Iranians in Canada, also took gender relations into consideration (Shahidian, 1999). Migration profoundly influenced gender relations between men and women and one fundamental change in gender relations and sexuality the researcher noted is how the emphasis on individuality built deep divides between real and ideal behaviour even among upper-middle class Iranians. However, since neither the host community nor the ethnic community is all constitutive or all restrictive, immigrant Iranians selectively mixed and matched traditional norms and values with Canadian ones and thereby creatively constructed and contested gender and sexuality. It is this newly created versions of traditional gender and sexuality norms and values that served as a guide for parenting in Canada. Another study that explored how immigrant Iranians interpret and understand Canadian sexuality found that individualism, access and use of divorce, cross-gender social and public interactions, and the kind of permission given to adolescents in Canada were experienced as potential risks to the preservation of Iranian family life and values (Shirpak et al., 2007). Among the East Indian diaspora where family obligations and gender segregation were paramount, a study among East Indian Sikhs found that while mothers held on dearly to their traditions and values, their daughters who grew up in Canada were struggling to find a middle ground between maintaining respectful relationships with their parents’ culture and the Canadian way of life (Mann, 1998). Similarly, adolescent females belonging to various South Asian immigrant groups (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) living in Montreal reported that their parents and communities had the strictest rules for female socialization than any other immigrant community in Canada (Talbani & Hasanali, 2000). Because of the high social cost involved with protest, many adolescents expected to change the situation gradually, and in the process underwent stress resulting in behavioural problems. Among Chinese university students in Toronto, the values endorsed by young Chinese women were more at odds with that of their parents than were the values of Chinese young men and their parents (Tang & Dion, 1999). This finding suggested greater conflict between Chinese women and their parents in regards to traditional gender roles and cultural values. To sum up, since differences of opinion and conflicts are bound to arise in intergenerational relationships, the ability to mix and match cultural norms and values related to gender relations and sexuality from the traditional as well as the Canadian culture and transmit them to the next generation, will be a valuable skill for immigrant parents raising adolescents.
Summary
There is a profound lack of research on the experiences of refugee lone parents. Our literature review was able to uncover some general issues for single parents of many different backgrounds, and not necessarily of any group similar to the group we engaged in this research. Further, many findings from the studies cannot be generalized to the whole population of immigrants nor to those of same ethnic origin in other locations. However, the findings can help us to shed light on overall related issues for newcomers. These are some important highlights from the review to keep in mind:

• Disruptions in family life due to the death, divorce or separation of parents are believed to have profound implications for the well-being of parents and children.

• When immigrant’s own culture and their ethno-cultural social network supported family interdependence, immigrant families were able to maintain healthy parent-child relationships. Unlike non-immigrant adolescents, immigrant adolescents supported family interdependence by delaying their pursuit of independence.

• For immigrants coming from other parts of the globe where sexuality is rooted in different cultural and gender norms, adjusting to Canadian concepts of sexuality is particularly challenging.

• Since differences of opinion and conflicts are bound to arise in intergenerational relationships, the ability to mix and match cultural norms and values related to gender relations and sexuality from the traditional as well as the Canadian culture and transmit them to the next generation, will be a valuable skill for immigrant parents raising adolescents.
The Community-Based Assessment Project

Goal and Objectives
The purpose of the “Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment” Project was to work closely with refugee communities to identify the specific needs, issues and capacities of newcomer refugee single parents, as they related to intergenerational communication including sexuality-related issues, through a community-based research process. The project also aimed to build capacity among refugee community members, with a focus on refugee single parents, and to provide information to Winnipeg service providers that will enhance their ability to serve refugee single parents. The project ran for 10 months.

Objectives
The objectives of this exploratory community-based assessment were to:
- Develop an understanding of the particular issues newcomer refugee single parents face while raising children in a new culture;
- Identify those factors that are barriers to a positive relationship with children, and those factors that support resiliency and strengthen relationships with children;
- Identify and prioritize specific areas of education and promotion across services and systems regarding refugee single parents’ needs, with a particular focus on sexuality related issues;
- Determine the best approaches to deliver community-based and appropriate education for refugee single parents; and,
- Engage refugee communities in a meaningful process, providing opportunities for input, direction and direct participation in the project.

Methodology
We used a community-based research approach by partnering with refugee-serving community agencies as well as by engaging refugee communities directly. Community-based research implies the involvement of community members and other partners, the development of research that is relevant to the community (in this case refugee single parents), ensuring that the process is rigorous and ethically sound, and that the results will be used for program direction.

A project advisory team was established early in the development of the project. This advisory group was composed of representatives of key community agencies such as the Manitoba Interfaith Immigrant Council (a.k.a. Welcome Place), Mount Carmel Clinic’s Multicultural Wellness Program, Healthy Start for Mom and Me and the Immigrant Refugee Community of Manitoba (IRCOM), and two community members advocating for the situation of refugee single parents. This advisory team provided guidance to the project at different key stages of the project. Individual community members and other community organizations were consulted, as we engaged in community outreach. This group was involved in key aspects of the project such as question guide review, recruitment strategies, interpretation of preliminary data and dissemination.
Community members were hired in different capacities to support the project and participate in different stages of the research process. They were oriented to the project and received basic training on research approaches and methods or regarding specific task they were assigned to. They assisted with promotion of the project and recruitment of participants, data collection (facilitation or co-facilitation of focus groups, interpretation, note-taking and transcription), data analysis, and dissemination.

**Research Methods**

We conducted this assessment through focus groups and consultations with assistance from the many community partners (i.e. agencies and ethno-cultural groups) we have developed throughout the years and for this specific project. A literature review, which includes a search for publications from the academic and community realms, was conducted.

We reached out to and engaged members of recently established and rapidly growing refugee communities. The selection of these communities was based on SERC’s experience of increasing interest from these communities in access to sexuality education, as well as current data on arrivals published by Manitoba Labour and Immigration (2008). We pursued to reach out mostly to the Congolese, Burundi, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, and Somali communities.

We conducted nine gender-specific focus groups with single parents of many newcomer communities to Winnipeg (see section on profile of the participants on page 13 and 14). Six focus groups involved single mothers and three with single fathers. We had a total of 38 women and 17 men attending the focus groups. We sought to access parents who have already arrived in the country as single as well as those who have become single in this country as result of separation or divorce or other circumstances. Although participants were invited to focus groups based on such characteristics (i.e., arriving single vs. becoming single), not all participants to each designated group followed under such categories. Yet, we were able to engage people in both categories.

In addition to the focus groups, we conducted four interviews with community members (2 with single mothers and 2 with single fathers). Other individual interviews were conducted with community members in leadership positions, one leading an ethno-specific organization and a religious leader. A consultation meeting was held earlier in the project with staff at the largest agency serving refugees in Winnipeg, Welcome Place.

All the interviews with parents were conducted through interpretation. To minimize the impact of the use of interpretation in the process of data collection, we designed the groups to accommodate two to three main languages (including English). We involved one or two interpreters in each focus group to make this possible. One of the facilitators led the session and another member of the research team took notes of the discussions. We tape-recorded the groups only with the purpose of using the recordings to check on information that was not clear in the notes.
Upon direction of the Project Advisory Group, we expanded the study to consult with a number of children of single parents. The purpose of this expansion was to gather the views and experiences from the perspectives of youth, as the main topic of the research focused on the experiences as parents, and in particular addressing sexuality related issues with their children. A focus group with 7 youth was conducted in the Fall 2010. The group included 2 young males and 5 young females. Youth ages ranged from 13 to 18, and with the exception of one youth, the rest have been in Canada between 1 to 3 years. The youth were from Eritrea, Congo and Iran.

**Feedback Sessions with Community Members.** Two additional group sessions or Community Meetings were conducted to verify, validate and expand on the findings of the initial focus groups. These two sessions were designed to gather feedback from the men and women who participated in the focus groups. We conducted the sessions in the Fall 2010 with a total of 7 women and 8 men attending the meetings.

These two gender-specific sessions were meant to be able to gain insight from mothers and fathers’ perspectives independently and prevent family and personal issues that could have stemmed by bringing representatives of both groups in only one occasion. We learned over the life of the project that some of the participants were related in some way (e.g., were going through separation or divorce, knew their family, etc.) or that because of the nature of some of the findings would prevent participants from expanding or even affirming the information. Using a participatory process, with interpretation, SERC presented the main findings of the study and obtained confirmation on these, as well as further information on related topics. We also asked participants who else should know of the findings from this assessment (Session Process and Outline attached).

Relevant data from the sessions and written feedback were also considered for analysis and included in this report.

**Researchers’ Observations and Debrief.** Interviewers kept some additional notes of their meetings with individuals and groups. These notes reflected any relevant issues, anticipated and unanticipated outcomes from the meetings, areas for further exploration, and their own views on the experience of learning from the community. Sometimes these notes were taken during debrief meetings with the rest of the project team.

**Ethical Considerations**

In order to carry out this project we pursued a partnership with Professor Tuula Heinonen, Faculty of Social Work University of Manitoba. Prof. Heinonen facilitated the access to an ethics review through the Sociology/Psychology Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. Approval from the REB was obtained in January 2010.

Participants were asked to consent to their participation in the research. In most cases, an interpreter was utilized to read the original consent form into the required language on a one on one basis with the participant. A member of the research team was present to answer any
questions and ensure that the participant fully understood the purpose of the project, the benefits and any potential risks associated with being a participant.

An amendment of the ethics protocol was submitted in the summer 2010 to accommodate the inclusion of a focus group with children of single parents. Approval for this was granted to proceed with an extension of the project. Copies of the consent forms are appended.

**Limitations**

We found that many community members were interested in the project and registered to attend a focus group; however, closer to the time of the actual focus group some indicated not being able to attend due to changes in work schedule (many working casual work), having to attend children’s activities, and other last minute commitments. In addition, an important number of registrants changed their mind about attending a focus group alleging not wanting to relive some of their experiences as single parents or the circumstances that had put them in such situation. This was particularly the case for men.
**The Participants**

A diverse group of participants was reached and engaged in the project. The following chart includes information on all categories for most participants. In order to provide a more accurate profile of the participants we used a short demographic questionnaire that participants had to answer before the focus groups. Similar data was also gathered in one-on-one interviews, but using the questionnaire as a guide. The questionnaire was anonymous and voluntary. Only a few (n=2) did not respond to the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>ranging from 26 to 53 average of 37.9 years of age</td>
<td>ranging from 34 to 67 average of 46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Sudan (8), Ethiopia (6), Burundi (5), Eritrea (5), Somalia (4), Congo (3), Afghanistan (2), Kenya (1), Burma (1), Colombia (1), Iraq (1), Argentina (1)</td>
<td>Congo (6), Burundi (4), Ethiopia (3), Eritrea (1), Cameroon (1), Rwanda (1), Tanzania (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Canada</td>
<td>Average of 4 years (about 74% 1 to 5 years; ~18% 5 to 10, ~2.5% over 10 years, and 2 NA)</td>
<td>Average of 4.4 years (though about 94% in Canada for 5 or less years – only one much longer than any of the other participants).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>all but 2 declared following a religion - 34% adheres to some form of Christianity; 18% Islamism; 2.5% Judaism, 42% did not specify</td>
<td>all but 1 declared following/belonging to a religion – 56% Christianity, 12.5% Islam, 25% did not specify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as lone parents/single head of household</td>
<td>ranged from 1 month to 23 years / average of 7.5 years (about 64% under 10 years), indicating that some had kids while single/after separation, some separated when pregnant of their last child.</td>
<td>ranged from 1 month to 16 years, average of 3.7 ( 87.5% under 5 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>13% university education/undergrad, 10.5% some postsecondary; 10.5% no formal education; 23.5% grade 1 to 5; 31.5% grade 6 to 1; 2.6% secondary education completed</td>
<td>12.5% University, 18.7% College, 12.5% some postsecondary, 25% Secondary complete, 18.7% Grade 8 to 10 and 12.5% grade 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Number of children ranged from 1 to 7, 3.5 children in average. Over 44% had 4 or more children.</td>
<td>Number of children ranged from 1 to 7, 2.4 children in average. 78.5% 1 to 3 children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrived or become</td>
<td>36.8% becoming single in Canada; 50.5% arriving single in Canada</td>
<td>56.2% becoming single in Canada; 43.7% arriving single in Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently in an intimate relationships</td>
<td>3 indicated currently being in an intimate relationship</td>
<td>3 indicated currently being in an intimate relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>58 not working, 39.5% working / one third in cleaning work; one third in community related work; others in low-entry position/factory related; retail or technical work (technician – most qualified/better positioned). Only 4 women on full-time positions (10.5%)/ one woman declared to work 65 hours/wk; others 4 to 30 hours a week.</td>
<td>62.5% working, 33.3% not working – 2 cleaning, 1 health care field/entry level / 3 labour/entry level / 1 office work / 1 truck driver / 1 soc work related. Half of the respondents with a job had full time work, others part-time job from 7.5 to 20 hour/week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings from Mothers and Fathers

Experiences of Heading a Family

In order to open up the conversation on participants’ experiences as single parents in Canada, we asked them to describe in a few word how that was like for them. The most common expressions to describe their current experience were less hopeful. They quickly mentioned their life as, “difficult”, “stressful”, “isolated”, “lonely” and “powerless”. Some felt “frustration” or at “lost” with the only purpose of “just [able to] focus on kids and nothing else”. A few women indicated some differing and more positive aspects of heading a family or household. One of them felt that it was an “interesting” experience by having to figure out how to make things work for themselves and their children. Another mother felt that she has been able to get closer to her children as result of having to rely on their emotional and instrumental support as much as her children had to rely on her.

Other women felt that in spite the fact that life was difficult as a single parent, they felt relieved of not having to continue to experience abuse on the part of their husbands or partners. For those who left an abusive relationship, being single represented a “peace of mind”. This expression was common among those in such situation. One of the participants further explained: “especially if you are out of an abusive relationship, don’t have to worry about if your husband is going to beat you up, worry about what he is going to do, what he is thinking if you do this or that...less stress...” (Female participant). Another participant was grateful about the resources available for women in such situations. She said: “something positive? Well... to leave and get the support from the government, because my husband used to always beat me up. Thank you, Canada!” (Female participant).

Men focused on the difficulties presented in having to deal with daily household chores. Unlike women, who would also look after such aspect of a family daily life, men did articulate this as a main concern as single parents. They talked about difficulties with food preparation, looking after children’s need such as taking to and picking them up at school as main issues. They believed that these responsibilities prevented them from gaining access to further education and employment. Mothers and fathers with many children under their care were preoccupied by lack to time to dedicate to their children. As one father illustrated to us, “my kids become angry because there is no time to help with their school tasks” (Male participant).

While access to employment was a major issue for men, a few women longed for better employment opportunities or access to work. One of the participants said: “I’ve always been a hardworking person. Here [in Canada], I’m worried. I’d like to work, and working in the cleaning business is a big change for me. It affects my temperament, and it affects my children. [When that happens], I run into my bedroom, and ask myself ‘Oh, my god, what am I doing? What can I do?’ As I’ve always been alone [making decision], I have to think that through all by myself. It is not easy [here]” (Female participant).
**Yearning for human contact** appeared to put some single men in what they believed to be a somewhat vulnerable position. One of the participants mentioned about trying to have an intimate relationship after separation: “we are human beings, first of all in this new situation ... be in the first phase, being alone without your wife and then, it is difficult to live alone. Sometimes the person you meet is a prostitute and you don't know what can happen [you can get an STD, HIV.]” (male participant). Another male participant felt that he couldn’t get into another intimate relationship due to the hardships of having to deal with previous separation and not able to prevent the interference of his former spouse in his intimate life. Only one of the female participants was concerned about reestablishing an intimate relationship with a man. Most others did not raise this as an issue of concern.

**Ability to Manage**

To our questionnaire on background information on participants’ profile we included one question regarding the ability to manage at home as a single parent. We asked participants to rate their ability to manage by telling us “yes”, “no”, “not sure”. In this regard, we found that a similar proportion of women indicated being able to manage, not being able to manage and not being sure. As per men, half believed that they were not able to manage, one third was able to do, and a minority was not sure. Overall, these results are not surprising as women were more likely to obtain increased resources from the government as their children’s main caregivers.

We found that about half of those **arriving single** (mostly women) indicated that they did **not** have **adequate resources** to manage their household (45 percent), in addition another important proportion did say that were not sure (40 percent), only 4 participants (15 percent) in this category felt having enough resources to manage. Among women, we found that over half were not sure (52 percent) if they had any sufficient resources and another important number (43 percent) did not have enough resources. Only 2 women felt secured. We found a similar proportion among men, although the numbers were much smaller (only 7 men in this category).

As per people **becoming single** in Canada, **half indicated having enough resources** to manage their household, with only 8 indicating not having enough resources and 4 not being sure about this. Yet, it is worth noting that half of the men believed not having enough resources. Only one male participant indicated having enough resources. Among the women, 65 percent were able to manage. Among the rest, 14 percent were not and 21 percent were not sure.

**Parent-Child Relationship**

Parent-child **communication** was of major concern for parents, in particular with their teenage children. Although not in all cases, both, mothers and fathers found it **more challenging to develop open communication with children of the opposite gender/sex**. Many men believed that communicating with children in general was easier for mothers. A father explained the situation as “hard (...). It could be simple for a single mother but not a single father. It is natural for children to open up to their mother. Fathers are more reserved. Females are not able to effectively communicate with their fathers” (Male participant). Communicating about sexuality related issues presented a major challenge to both mothers and fathers.
A main area of concern was “disciplining” children as single parents. Participants believed that this should be a shared responsibility, where mothers and fathers contribute to setting “rules” for their children. Some parents were concerned about the fact that their children were “acting out” as result of their parent’s separation. For instance, fathers believed that they were blamed for the situation and expecting to understand children’s unruly behaviours or problems as the parent’s own fault.

Some of the mothers were more reticent in showing their parental authority over their children. They were also blamed. As such, they were fearful of losing their children or be confronted by them. One of them told us: “without a partner, as a mother, I’m afraid to discipline my children and risk losing them, be blamed for leaving their father.”

Many shared stories by illustrating how their children were slipping away from their sight. They explained that many of their children were leaving home sooner than expected and under distressful circumstances. Some were concerned about children as they would not share with their parents about their daily whereabouts. Many others were fearful that that would happen to them as well. They believed that these were very common experiences in their communities. It was common to hear that their children would threat both their mothers and fathers. Parents believed that some of these outcomes were attributed to the increased “freedom” their children found in Canada. Parents attributed this to the fact that youth were in increased contact with mainstream or “Canadian” society, were more able to learn and speak English, and did not feel their parents have any authority as they started to grow up.

By now experiencing and trying to understand the new cultural environment, parents faced many challenges. The lack of social and community support, lack of understanding and access to “cultural brokerage” left them with little resources to “manage” their children within the only parental knowledge and resources at hand. The following two stories provide some insight on how parent and children relate to each other in the new environment.

One of the mothers explained about her expectation for her son to take over the role of male head of household. In her struggle to pass along this expectation, she delegated some key tasks of what she believed would bring about authority to her child. In the process she found out that her son felt proud within his newfound role. It appeared that this outcome (being proud) was not only the result of the mechanic act involved in the request to fulfill certain role; but the conversations this mother had with her son about what she believed a good grown up son would do for the family. While this story appeared to have a positive outcome for both mother and son (and their family), the process was mired with the challenges that teenage life in this new country introduced. New social and cultural challenges (e.g., media, peers, school, etc.) had to be navigated by both parties.

Another mother felt that all the work she had put towards teaching her child to take responsibility on her own, build self-confidence and become resourceful was challenged as they settled in Canada. Back home her child had taken on many responsibilities, now she felt that
the child protection laws presented some obstacles to her child development and the very survival of the family. She found very difficult having to make a leaving and being able to find childcare as she could not leave her child alone before the age of 12. This had a major implication for her as a single mother to find or secure.

Mothers were clearly concerned about their lack of knowledge of their children's daily life, including what they learn in school, and how life in school is. They also felt pressured by demands from their children to acquire material goods (“stuff” such as clothing or electronics). All this was believed to cause stress and strain their relationship.

In addition, for some parent-child communication has been mediated by long distance contact. Family reunification presented additional challenges for some of the participants. One of them explained,

[When I came here] I left small kids in [name of the country]. After 10 years [of being apart], we are now [re]united. Because we have been apart for a long time, my kids regard me as a stranger. I face a lot of opposition from them. When I show concern over their welfare, they do not like it. But, they are gradually coming around. Presently I do not have concerns about my children though they are spoiled. They are serious about going to school. I cook for them, they do not put away groceries. It is hard to monitor their movement as I work 2 jobs. If my wife were alive, I think my children will not be as spoiled as they are now. (Male participant)

Perception of the Position of Women in Canada

Freedom is given to children and to the females, nothing to say to children and the wife (Male participant)

Canada is for women, men are garbage (Male participant)

There was a pervasive and highly prevalent understanding among the male participants that “Canada favors women”. This strong belief was rooted in the understanding and experience of how the law and government systems operate in Canada. Much of the discussion about this topic was illustrated by the way the Child Tax Benefit is set up to be received by the mothers. Other areas that men felt women were favored correspond to child custody procedures and the justice system when dealing with domestic violence (i.e., family law).

The way the Child Tax Benefit works was believed to be a major catalyst for family conflict and separation. As one of the male participants indicated, “women are given more favors [here in Canada], like the Child Tax Benefit. Then, they think that if they separate, they will be self-supported. They don’t need us [husbands]. That is what we see. I have 5 friends in the same situation.” As per the women, they appreciated that the “government was looking after the children.”
Among those who were able to articulate how this would bring about conflict they say that would instigate women to separate. Men believed that having the woman receiving the cheque would infringe on traditional ways of family financial management. This was viewed as not acceptable among men. In addition, some participants, and in this case not only men, felt that children are also putting pressure on the family by claiming that such financial support should be directed to themselves or asking parents to become more accountable to them on this matter.

There was some recognition that male gender expectations may collide with Canada’s laws, while some thought that it was the laws that exacerbated or contributed to the gender clashes in the families. Yet, there is some evidence that women or families have separated quite recently after arrival. This leaves little room to the argument that indicates that knowledge and understanding of women’s protection in Canadian society would largely benefit them. Some cases of early separation suggest that family conflicts were already present before arrival into Canada. A puzzled male participant reflected this when he said “somebody come having been together for 10 years and within a few months how do explain a separation?”

**Experiences and Perception of Women’s Status as Single Mothers**

People think you are bad (Female participant)

There is stigma, for a woman is very strong, for a man it is okay [to be separated]  
(Female participant)

Women are always blamed. If the woman leaves the house, if the man leaves the house, it is always the woman who is blamed (Female Participant)

Overall, women felt that according to their experience and from what they observed, single mothers were highly stigmatized in their own ethno-cultural communities. This was more prominent among those who were divorced or separated. Women explained that this stigmatization was coming from women and men. They explained that other (married) women would perceive single mothers as “loose” or as trying to seduce or “get” their husbands. These lone women were something to avoid.

As per with men, they issue was that they may not want their wives to associate with single mothers/women to prevent them from “getting ideas” that would affect their marriage and potentially lead to separation. This reality left many women and their families isolated from their own communities. Yet, many of these single mothers appeared to rely on other single mothers. This finding explains in part why about 45 percent of the women indicated not receiving or finding any support in their communities. To this lack of support women said that they “feel “deserted” by the community” and “other people leave you. First you are single, they think you don’t know how to keep your family together, you didn’t keep your partner…”
**Community Support**

Men and women experienced a high degree of isolation from their own communities and from mainstream society. The experiences were somewhat different for those separated/divorced in Canada, than those coming to Canada as single. This was mostly related in terms of family and community supports. Communities appeared to be more supportive of women coming as single mothers.

A second closed ended question on this topic was added to our short questionnaire. In this regard, we found that about 40 percent of women indicated having support from their community, about 45 percent, not having support, and 13 percent, not sure. Among the men, half indicated not having support from their community, and about one third receiving support. The rest were unsure or didn’t answer the question.

Among women arriving single, 56 percent (n=17) said that they did not receive any support from their own community, one third (n=10) indicated receiving support, 1 respondent was not sure and 2 more did not answer the question. Among women arriving single, over 56 percent (n=13) of them declared not having support from their communities, 39 percent (n=9) received support and 2 were not sure. The same was found among men where over 57 percent (n=4) did not receive support, 1 did receive support and 2 did not respond to the question.

![Community Support Among Participants Arriving Single](image)

Among those becoming single parents in Canada, 37.5 percent (n=9) indicated receiving support, for another similar proportion of participants the opposite was true and 25 percent were not sure. About 43 percent of the women (n=6) indicated receiving support, 28.5 percent (n=4) did not receive support and another 28.5 percent (n=4) were not sure. Among the men, half (n=5) did not receive support, 30 percent (n=3) did receive support and 20 percent (n=2) were not sure.
Community Support among Participants Becoming Single

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It appears that most single mothers arriving single compared to those separating or becoming single in Canada did not receive any supports from the community. About a same proportion in both groups did receive support. Among men, those becoming single in Canada appeared to receive less support than those arriving single. It also appeared that length of stay in Canada was no relevant in this case.

The issue of lack of internal community supports to dealing with family conflicts, and eventually prevent family separation was also brought up. Some of the participants, mainly among the men, felt some nostalgia about the lack of community structures that would help them to deal with family problems. As this participant explained, “sometimes, first of all misunderstanding ...family in Africa, Africa easy thing to get a solution, families, communities discuss and get to a solution, here's different (...) this is a big problem,” they longed for alternative ways or supports.

**Relationship with Social Services Systems**

One of the main concerns women had was in relation to the “welfare” system. Most of them were receiving government income assistance. They felt they were not able to gain full or meaningful employment due to the many demands of being a mother, dealing with childcare and school schedules. For those whose children were growing up, they felt harassed by welfare workers. These workers would insist that their children were old enough to find employment to support the family. This directive was perceived as “Canada pushing children to abandon their families”. Conversely, they feared that once their children gained employment they would leave home, something unacceptable in cultures where that is something you do when you get married.

**Mental and Emotional Wellbeing**

Sometimes, stress [is an issue] you can sit in your house lonely, don’t have a wife and you don’t have your children, things become difficult. (Male participant)
Many participants, including many men, mentioned or referred to emotional or mental health related issues resulting from their situation as single parents. It is worth mentioning that many who were interested in the project and who believed looking into this issue was important, decided no to participate in order to prevent further mental and emotional distress. They anticipated that the topic of the research would bring about many memories and experiences they did not want to relive. This was mostly the case for men.

Participan ts indicated that being a single mother or father brought about much additional “stress” to their lives. This meant that parents would be concerned about raising their children while trying to settle in Canada by learning from basic day-to-day activities to different education and social and health services systems. The lack of family support, in particular from a husband or wife, was believed to be a major contributor to such stress.

Overall, men expressed their frustration and anxieties more openly than the women.

About all participants raised emotional health concerns such as stress and grief. Among those who were separated in Canada, were still waiting to be reunified with their spouses who were in their home country or in transit, or had lost their partners in situations of violence or conflict. However, it was among those who separated in Canada that demonstrated some additional concerns. They articulated stress resulting from having to deal with their family separation and, in some cases, the social services and justice systems. One of the men expressed his worries when he said:

    Our parents, male parents, want to protect children from starvation, [he] has done his best for 5 - 10 years...now here in what is a safe situation, in Canada, things get worst, more mental disturbance... (male participant).

Evidently, changes in men’s role have a big impact on the self and the family dynamics.

*Sexuality Education with Single Parents*

Groups were diverse with women with only younger children to those with older children (late teens). Although this provided an idea on women’s lives, their needs were quite different with regards to sexuality (e.g., moms with younger kids were not worry (yet) about what’s to come, and women with older children were more concerned about being lonely, not having an intimate relationship).

Women who had teenagers provided desired insights into the issues they face raising teenagers. We need to talk to parents in this situation.

Before turning to specific sexuality related areas concerning children, we would like to highlight another area of education participants felt strongly about. This is about the “Child Tax Benefit” (CTB). Participants raising this issue felt that this was at the centre of much family conflict and even family separation. CTB highlights gender conflicts, and as such it relates to the broader
understanding of sexuality. In sum, participants requested education on CTB. Some were more specific and directive.

How they can manage the Child Tax Benefit, why and how it would be good that this be taught back in Africa, in refugee camps, before coming here...nothing on this issue...they just talk to you about the weather, winter time, how nice is Canada! (Male participant)

This quote reflects the need for information way before arriving in to Canada. Further it also speaks about the type of information that seem more relevant to people. This was also echoed by another participant in another group

To prevent this situation I think those refugees should before getting a workshop on this as soon as possible. they get some, insufficient, not enough, too quick, people are in the honey moon stage then, even those who are even together in that period every time on the 20th of each month there is tension, even in intact families.” (Male participant)

It is noticeable that women did not bring about the CTB as a problem. However, it was very significant for men.

**Addressing Sexuality with Children**

Women with children in their teen years provided much insight into the issues they face raising teenagers in Canada. However, for those with younger children did not relate to the issues in the same way. Mothers of teens were concerned about how to address sexuality related issues with boys, mostly. They did not know much about the issues boys were going through in their life, including developmentally and were not ready to talk to them. They referred to the difficulties that being a mother/a woman presented in broaching the issues with boys. As one concerned mother put it “how do I talk to my boy?”

For fathers was also more difficult to speak with their daughters. A male participant while he felt that he was able to talk to his children, felt that speaking to one of his daughter (who is living here) was more difficult than to his son, and older daughter who is back home. In his words:

As it regards support and guidance on the issue of sexuality, my older son knows quite a bit. I am only able to speak to my younger son and not even my daughter because she is above my control. I am closer to my older daughter, but she is not yet in Canada. She discusses a lot with me over the phone. I do not mind discussing sex with my children. I do not see it as a taboo.

Parents felt that there were a number of issues that affect their communication with their children and affect talking about sexuality. For instance, some of the women were concerned about the whereabouts and actions of their young teenage children during at night. While some understood that this was a common part of youth life in Canada, they were puzzled about how to deal with some of the problems that come along with it. On the other hand, a mother spoke
about accommodating different cultural messages and realities and trying to be “in peace” with the outcomes so not to feel “guilty” when things do not go her way when she said:

I understand that we have to manage two cultures here. My children need to learn our culture and the culture here. I believe that the education they got [back home] has helped me. I always tell my children that it is easy to have children; but that raising them is difficult. I try to accommodate them to the system. I try as much as possible, now, if they choose a different path, it is not my fault. I have passed them my values. I have to say, I haven’t been a “saint”, but I haven’t been a “slut” either.

Participants from a specific cultural group indicated that parents do not address sexuality related issues directly with their children. There are specific relatives (e.g., paternal uncle, maternal aunt) who would communicate sexuality-related knowledge to the youngest generation. For immigrants from this group, they felt a complete lack of readiness to talk with their own children about sexuality (regardless of being single or not).

**Addressing the Issues**

Parents felt that as much as they needed to find ways on how to deal with sexuality with their children, their children needs “orientation” as well. In fact some would put a lot of emphasis to the need to “learn” how to deal with the issues they face with their children. As this participant others felt that “lack of information” was a key contributor to the problem:

Due to lack of information, workshops, there are lots of problems. Many immigrant youth from these families end up in jail, get into drugs, gangs...whatever is here is not enough...this is all the result of family separation. Mom with children, they won't respect her...they go on the street...it is hard to raise children here, in such situation. The children don't like to go to school, They don't feel they fit...

And a male participant reinforced the need for youth to receive information as well.

There is a need for orientation [for youth] concerning the laws, culture, the family, sexuality, how to live in a different environment before children become brainwashed. This could be done in form of workshop, seminars and through the schools.
Youth Perspectives

We expanded our study to include the perspectives of a group of youth living in a single-headed household. As indicated, this idea resulted from discussions with the Project Advisory Group to obtain the perspective of youth as members of such family structure.

Youth Overall Experiences

All participants were living with their mothers and siblings with little other family support in Canada. A few relied on other community members. With youth, we began to explore their overall experiences as youth in the new country. The first thoughts that came to mind for the participants reflected their positive experiences and perceptions. The most salient comments related to the fact that they were in a “free and safe country”. All showed gratitude to be in Canada, having the prospect of increased opportunities in life. Above all, they were happy to be attending school, safely and at no cost. One of the youth said, “it is great not [being] worried about going to school.” Once they have commented on the upside of being in Canada, the quickly focused on some of their worries in the new country. The older ones were concerned about their ability to find employment. For all other issues of concerns were their ability and capacity to “make the right choices” based on their knowledge, the cultural changes experienced, and the what is right or wrong in the new social environment. One of the male participants provided a clear example on this overall topic. He was concerned about what to do to “stay away from gangs”. Some participants were worried about their families. A few of them acknowledged that their parents were struggling as they had all the responsibilities (as single parents) to deal with the family. They were also concerned about what that meant for them as children of single parents.

Youth found support mostly through “getting an education”. Education and the school environment was important in that it provided “a lot of fun” and “help [them]focus”. Other key aspects of life were recreational and sport activities and having the support of friends.

In all youth were very hopeful of their future and put lots of hope into their education. The main forces behind a bright future were the encouragement of parents and friends. Some of the youth indicated that when things got difficult for them, it was the “don’t give up” messages from their close support people that help them through.

Relating to their Parents

Older youth believed that the communication and relationship with their parents got better as they grew older. However, all had issues confiding in their parents. They would prefer talking to their friends or even some close family friends, even adults, than their own parents. They felt that among the barriers to communication were the perception and belief that their parents were too strict. One of the youngest female youth was puzzled by the meaning of her mother’s actions. She said, “Parents can be bossy, not sure what that is...love?” Other youth interpreted such actions not as an act of meanness, but “out of love”. They also believed that their parents were concerned about their future and expected their children to do better than themselves,
for some this was the main reason for strict rules around the house. However, all youth believed that parents should listen to their children rather than just set rules.

**Sexuality Related Issues**
Youth felt that life in Canada was more lax. The new environment has changed the way they related to their parents. They appealed to the word or notion of “freedom” to explain that it is easier in Canada compared to their home countries or places they have lived before to experiment with their sexuality and sexual interests. One of the young males said: “if you want to experience things, it is easier here.” However, they were still very much influenced by their culture and, above all religion in relation to some issues such as same sex relationships (e.g., “this is against my religion.”). It was also clear that gender expectations were still strong in the new country, for instance, boys are able to date, and experience new relationships while girls are not expected to do so.

With respect to parent-children communication about sexuality related issues, all participants felt that it is easier to speak with their mothers. However, in the same breath youth said that they are not able to speak about relationships. Youth believed that at parents’ expectations was “to stick to our “own” when it comes to marriage.” Such clear message prevented youth from confiding on some other potential relationships. They felt that bringing up these issues would raise unwarranted concerns by their parents. One of the participants said: “if we ask or say something, they think we already did it.”

**Sexuality Education**
All youth agreed that they would like to see some sort of assistance for their parents to understand changes in Canada. The youth emphasized the need for spaces for dialogue or training on what youth as newcomers may go through. They also advocated the inclusion of information on sexuality.

Most of the youth acknowledged receiving information on sexuality or sexual health at school. Some got information at a weekly-run youth group at IRCOM. All described sexual health information as important to them, and suggested that more information was needed.
The View from Service Providers and Community Leaders

Exchanges with key service providers working with newcomers, mostly with refugees, raised interesting observations. First, we found out that many of individual workers in this area serve a large number of single headed households (some estimated serving between 60 to over 90 percent of clients in such type of family structure). It became apparent that because of this type of family structure becomes such common part of their work that serving to single headed households has become normalized within the refugee-serving context. It was also evident that much of their work involved families that were waiting to be reunified with other family members, including partners.

We also learned that among some groups it was believed that in order to expedite the paperwork that would allow them to leave refugee camps, women would indicate that they were single while in fact they were married. It was clear that, once in Canada, such declaration has meant a longer road to family reunification with many waiting for years to see their husbands arriving to Canada. These situations presented a great challenge to service providers.

Second, we learned of the likelihood that some specific narratives about the situation of single parents/headed families were circulated not only in Winnipeg but in other countries where refugees came from or lived in. For instance, we heard that an alleged narrative refers to coming to Winnipeg as coming to a “place of single-parents.” This was believed to be place where not only it was somewhat common place to be single or become easily separated, but where it is possible to live as single without the same social repercussions that single parents would face back home.

Third, service providers had gained some insight on the fact that people’s understanding of the benefits of becoming single or separating from a situation of domestic violence or family conflict may be present at the very arrival to Canada resulting in about immediate family separation.

Fourth, there were differences between refugees coming from different regions or countries. For instance, newcomers from Bhutan or those of Karen background more often compose families arriving as nuclear families, than many arriving from African countries. Fifth, indigenous understanding of human reproduction or mechanisms to save face in the community affects communication around birth control and protection among single women getting pregnant in Canada.

Among community members in formal or informal leadership roles, some of the above mentioned issues by service providers and by participants resonated with them. They found themselves lending an ear at many single parents in their community and assisting with some of their needs.
They have observed a growing number of fathers struggling with the effects of long term separation. They are now dealing with family reunification that presents problems with their wives and children as they have lived in Canada for years. These fathers appear to be concerned with children’s “lack of respect” to their authority as fathers. This also brings about important conflicts with their partners with regards to differing expectations on children’s disciplinary actions. Another compounding factor is that some of these men may have engaged in relationships “back home” and also have children in that country.

Some believed that there were more single mothers than single fathers in their communities. This was believed to be the case as many women have migrated with their children only. As per those who separate in Canada, they believed that women end up looking after the children. One of the participants felt that as children’s custody would mostly go to the women, many men do not feel a need to cooperate with the responsibilities of looking after the children. They felt that this has a great impact on the mothers as they have to juggle many responsibilities when families are large. This is particularly more difficult for mothers when they have come with little formal education, and have little to no options for employment.

Further, these women see their children adapt more easily to the new society, and pull apart from them. One of the participants compounded this to the isolation and lack of social resources, when he said: “Single mother don’t know how to deal with their children here, parenting is a big deal here. Back home you also have others, other looking after your children, now it’s all by yourself.” In this environment, the participants felt that “You’re alone raising children, single mothers, parenting, disciplining children ...these skills are lacking.” While the lack of supports that are required for families to raise their children, including the lack of extended families and other social supports, it appears that “parenting” skills is a new idea for these families, something that is required for them to succeed in Canada.

One of the participants observed that the problems lie in that “some kids, change lots, for instance, they don’t want to wear the hijab, the way the dress is different, parents don’t understand kids’ activities. [Then] They use religion as a way to protecting their children. There is lots of friction, boyfriends are not allowed, most issues won’t be discussed, they are taboo, for instance, mothers may discuss menstruation with their daughters, but other than that, sex is taboo among most cultures.”

As most the issues facing youth and parents were seen by this participant as related to the broad topic of sexuality he indicated that: “Parenting has to be combined with sexuality, both have to go together. Proper training for families is necessary, share their culture, learn the culture of how people live in this country, trying to balance things out, original culture and this culture. Then, there will be a possibility to go and talk to their children.” In this regard, participants felt that “orientation” to these issues would be best at early stages of settlement (within six month of arrival into Winnipeg, was the suggestion) for everyone, government and privately sponsored refugees. As one of the participants felt that “once they got corrupted by rumors in the community, then things go out of track,” while referring to what he felt were misunderstood information or beliefs.
As many of families end up led by one parent as result of family violence, some of the participants believed that both women and men should “be taught” about these issues at the same time, with people from both genders in the same room. One of the participants strongly felt that the same should be done with regards to the role of the police in family disputes, and also with Child and Family Services. This person acknowledged that women may not openly share her views in a gender-mixed group as they come from places where male are the one expected to be the one talking or expressing their views. However, this person felt that both groups should receive the same message. For instance, people have different views on how the Child Tax Benefit (CTB) works as on the one side a way to undermine men’s authority (as the cheque would likely go to the women) or as a way of ensuring their children would be provided for (as the mother would more likely provide for their children’s needs). In all the issue of CTB was believed to be at the core of many family disputes as the woman now has concrete and immediate access to money. On the other hand, one of the participants mentioned that in many cases the money end up in a shared bank account that at the end of the day is only accessed by the husband. In these cases, some venture the women may feel that although the funds are there for their children, they do not have control over it.

To add to the gender dynamics, one of the participants felt that as long as men continue to believe that they need to be in control and have power over women, these problems will persist. Paradoxically, one of the participants believed that it was because “Males think that [because they] have some education, [think] they know everything.” That would give them more authority at home.

One of the participants believed that some of the frictions at home had to do with sexual intimacy. He raised the issue that in his community female circumcision was common and that women would not engage in sexual relationships for their own pleasure but for men’s satisfaction or felt that women would only please the men through sex. He felt that men “own women, so anytime he wants [something/sex] she has to obey”. Further, he said that he felt that men “are not knowledgeable about sex, they think that the woman is satisfied [and move on].”

Further conflict may ensue as result of messages that the women receive or engage with from community leaders or service providers. One participant explained that “Community leaders, or service providers they the women stand up for their rights...then, men would tell women ‘I’m the one that brought you here’ [you do as I say]...”

Some participants identified agencies that could “intervene” or assist parents with these matters, like Family Centres, Child and Family Services, the Aurora Centre, Welcome Place, and the School Guidance clinic.

On the other hand, these participants also raised other ways that would work in their communities. For instance, in one community the best approach would be to organize meetings led by an elder, and use storytelling (e.g., “word travel fast, word of mouth, no written
materials”). Another participant indicated that in his community elders are well organized making this a very “active community” to the extent that he saw that there was “too much going on.” Elders, again, could be a good conduit to engage the community on these matters. For another community, the participant felt that meetings could be organized for adults around religious activities, while for youth there can be something organized through their youth groups.
Conclusions and Recommendations

While for the most part participants felt that being a single parent was difficult, a few found some positive aspects, including getting closer to their children. In spite of the challenges of raising children on their own, for those becoming single as result of domestic violence, life was described as much better upon separation. Not having access to employment, and therefore income was an issue for most, even many who were receiving financial assistance from the government. It was evident that for most, access to sufficient resources to manage their day-to-day life was a problem. This was more evident for women and men who had already arrived as single to Canada.

Maintaining good relationships to their children was a major concern for parents. Open communication with children of the opposite sex/gender was more challenging. In addition, “disciplining” children was a problem for both men, and women. Lack of understanding of the new cultural environment, and in particular about their children’s life outside the home was a major problem.

Among other major issues that male participants shared were the perception of women’s higher status in Canada, which translated in major benefits to women. This was extensively illustrated by access to the Child Tax Benefit.

It was interesting to find out that while most single women felt stigmatized in the community, particularly those becoming single in Canada; compared to those arriving single the one becoming single indicated receiving larger community support than those arriving single. This may be attributed to the fact that those arriving as single head of household are more isolated.

As the project focused on sexuality related issues concerning children, we found that the perceived needs were quite different between those having younger children to those with older children (children in their teens). However, in all they felt in need of information. They also welcomed information for their children.

As per youth, they felt that when it comes to sexuality, life in Canada presented more opportunities to learn and engage in intimate relationships. When it came to communicating with their parents about sexuality, they were more likely to talk to their mothers; however, most would not raise some sensitive topics like dating someone from another ethnic or racial group, with their parents.

In the next sections we address the implications of the findings for sexuality education with single parents.
Implications for Sexuality Education

Delivery of Education

In the area of communication about sexuality with children, there is no need to develop sessions for single parents separately from parents in general. Parents believed that the issues they face, as parents, are similar to those faced by those in any other type of families (i.e., where both mother and father are present). However, this project also points out to some specific issues for consideration when doing sexuality education with parents/parental guardians.

Specific Topics to Consider

Parents articulated only a few specific issues they struggle with as single. A major issue regards talking or addressing some sexuality or relationship issues with children of opposite sex; particularly teenagers. Another matter of specific concern related to educating their children with respect to relationships vis-à-vis their own apparent failed intimate relationship (in the case of those separated or divorced).

A major issue with regards to sexuality for many of these parents relates to gender and power relationships, something rooted in the reasons for the current status of many single parents or, more accurately, separated or divorced. Education should explore cultural dimensions of gender such as expectations around male and female roles and identity – this should be done from a historical perspective, and take into account the social, economic and political context in which relationships unfold.

It appears that among many communities with significant refugee population, the presence of single-headed households (particularly by women) is also significant. In order to address some of the issues discussed by single parents (e.g., how to talk to teenage children of opposite sex about sexuality or delving into deeper understanding of gender dynamics and sexuality for couples and families) SERC should assess the presence of single parents within the participants to our groups in order to make space for key issues faced by single parents be addressed in any given group. This would no only facilitate some key tools or approaches for parents to deal with their own situations at home, but create empathy among participants on these situations something that indirectly may assist in enhancing the social/human capital and reduce stigma associate with single motherhood.

Among other topics to consider are: the legislation on age of sexual consent in Canada, family benefits offered by the state such as the Child Tax Benefit and the role of child protection agencies. All these issues have a big impact on many newcomer families. Some are even catalysts for misunderstanding and family conflict. Plain language materials with clear explanations on these specific topics are required. This information should be provided early on in families’ settlement process. Service providers and educators should consider providing this
education with the whole family in order to ensure all members receive the same information. The translation of such materials is also warranted.

**Approaches to Education**

Refugee communities are an important sector of the newcomer community to Winnipeg. This project documented important issues faced by newcomers from many refugee communities. It showed that literacy is a major concern. This work calls to paying attention to the role of oral traditions in education. Incorporation of oral traditions and emphasis on participatory education would be of benefit for newcomer parents with low literacy and English proficiency. The use of traditional sayings or refrains and metaphors should be explored while conducting education in the area of sexuality when working across cultures.

**Implications Beyond Sexuality Education**

In order to contextualize gaps related to sexuality education we needed to broadly understand, to some extent, the experience of being a lone parent in Canada. The findings from this project point out to the complexities of people’s lives trying to make Canada their place with very little supports.

There is a particular need to pay attention to the stigmatization that single mothers face in their communities. Those working closely with individuals and communities should engage in a dialogue to mobilize change to redress and prevent further stigmatization. Stigma isolates people, and reduces social supports.

Although there is a role in SERC’s education sessions to address gender conflicts resulting from what is considered to be by some an “unfair” or “inappropriate” practice such as the Child and Tax Benefit (as the money is paid to the women); this also requires others such as community and religious leaders, counselors, settlement workers and government workers working with newcomers to engage in a dialogue on the meaning of the CTB, and the implications for families.

It was evident that as most participants were in touch with government social services, namely Employment and Income Assistance, they raised important concerns regarding their limitations accessing employment because of many issues, including being a single parent. However, another important pressing issue was their felt pressure by the system for their children to find employment to support themselves and the family.
References


Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation. (2002). Women and housing in Canada: Barriers to equality. Toronto: CERA.


### Refugee Single Parents: A Community-Based Assessment: Feedback Session with Participants Attending Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5:30 – 5:45</td>
<td>Arrival</td>
<td>Welcome&lt;br&gt;Quick? Go around just names?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:45</td>
<td>Alero</td>
<td>Overview and Agenda&lt;br&gt;Reminder of informed consent&lt;br&gt;Overview of what meeting is about, what we will be doing:&lt;br&gt;• We spoke with 38 single mothers and 19 single fathers.&lt;br&gt;• We are writing a report with all the ideas you shared&lt;br&gt;• This meeting is a chance for us to share with you what we have learned&lt;br&gt;• This is also your chance to tell us if we are getting the right idea, or if we are missing some information&lt;br&gt;• We have put the main ideas that we learned from you onto this flipchart.&lt;br&gt;• Then, we will ask you the following questions about each topic:&lt;br&gt;  - Is this information clear?&lt;br&gt;  - Does this information reflect what your views and experiences are?&lt;br&gt;  - Is there anything that we need to ensure is included in the report?&lt;br&gt;• We are also going to share some information men and youth shared with us. Then, we will ask you about any comments you have on this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:50 – 6:00</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Alternate on topics – read and expand on the main findings and ask the questions, as above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00 – 7:15</td>
<td>Alero - Paula</td>
<td>Next Steps&lt;br&gt;• Who else should know about this information?&lt;br&gt;• What is happening now with project&lt;br&gt;• Any more questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:15 - 7:20</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Thank you&lt;br&gt;Honorarium&lt;br&gt;Sign up if want copy of report</td>
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Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment
Consent Form for Parent/Guardian of Participating Youth (15 to 17 years old)

NOTE: the following consent form will be read (and interpreted, if needed) to the parent or guardian of the participating youth.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?
Your son/daughter/child under your care was invited to participate in an extension of the study called the Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment. The purpose of the extended study is to learn about the experiences of children of refugee single parents in Canada.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE RUNNING THIS PROJECT? HOW CAN I CALL THEM?
Tuula Heinonen (Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba), Paula Migliardi (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, SERC) are the main researchers. You can call Tuula at 474-9543, Paula at 982-7813 or Alero Adeleye-OLusae (Project Coordinator) at [number here]. The Winnipeg Foundation sponsored this project.

WHAT WILL YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER BE ASKED TO DO?
Your son/daughter, and other youth like her/him, will be invited to participate of an individual or group interview, where a researcher will ask questions about his or her experiences living in a one-parent family or with a single parent in Winnipeg. Some of the topics that they may be asked about are cultural identity, family life and growing up in Canada, talking with mother/father/caregiver about relationships, dating, sexual health, etc. and youth access to health information.

If your son/daughter decides to participate, they will be asked to sign an Assent Form to make sure that they understand the purpose of the project, what they will be asked to do, and that they can stop participating in the project at any time he/her wishes. (Please note: You, as a parent or legal guardian must sign and return a copy of this Parental Consent Form in order for your daughter/son to participate in this project).

We will meet at SERC’s office - 200-226 Osborne St. N. or any other convenient and private location (e.g., community centre) at a time that is suitable for the youth and the researchers. The interviews will be recorded. If your son/daughter feels like not having all or any specific parts of the interview recorded, she/he will be advised to tell the researcher to say so. The researcher will obey the request. The group interviews will be conducted by two researchers – one will ask the question and the other will take notes. These interviews will be conducted in English.

WHAT WILL YOUR DAUGHTER OR SON GET OUT OF BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
A benefit of participating in this research study is that the your daughter/son will have the opportunity to share their experiences that may inform others, but as well as provide an opportunity to create actions that will help them and their families in their integration to a new society.

Your son/daughter will receive bus tickets. He/she will receive a copy of the final report. Also, he/she will be invited to a meeting with all other youth participants to learn about the findings of the research and to provide comments. He/she will also receive a $20 honorarium for his/her participation in the project.

WHAT WILL YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER RISK BY BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
Taking part in the project should not put her/she at risk for physical harm. If after their participation in the interview he/she needs to talk to a counselor to discuss any personal issues, they will be free to contact the service referred in their Assent form.

**WILL PEOPLE KNOW THAT YOUR SON/DAUGHTER TOOK PART IN THE PROJECT?**

To make sure what you say is confidential, we will not use your real name or other identifiable information anywhere in the transcripts (or notes) of the tape recordings or any other reports. All information will be kept in a locked file drawer in SERC’s office at 226 Osborne St. N. and electronic files will be password protected. Only the researchers (i.e., Prof. Heinonen and Ms. Migliardi) will have access to the information. By December 15, 2011, the consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

Also, what other people say during the meeting is confidential, so we ask you not to share anything you hear or see in the group with people outside the group.

Canada has laws that protect children. If, during the interview someone talks about abuse of a child, or someone who needs special care, that is happening right now, or is being planned, the researchers must report the incident to the appropriate authorities. Abuse means things like physical harm, or severe emotional harm or neglect.

**DOES YOUR SON/DAUGHTER HAVE TO PARTICIPATE? DO THEY HAVE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION? CAN THEY QUIT THE PROJECT WHENEVER THEY WANT?**

Your daughter/son participation in the interviews is voluntary. They don’t need to answer all the questions if they don’t want to. They are free to stop the interview at any time, for any reason, without any loss of your child’s rights as a participant. If your son or daughter wants to stop the interview, they will be asked to let the interviewer know. Then, the interview will stop.

**HAS THIS STUDY BEEN APPROVED BY A GROUP THAT MAKES SURE THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND PROTECTED FROM HARM?**

Yes. The Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba has approved this project. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or are not satisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact Margaret Bowman by phone at 474-7122 or by email at Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. You do not need to give your name.

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Do you agree to let your son or daughter participate of an interview? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Would you like to receive a copy of the final report? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Would you like to come to a community presentation of the final results? (childcare will be provided) [ ] Yes [ ] No

Please include your contact information to send you the report and/or invite you to the presentation (address, email and/or phone number)

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If you would like your son/daughter/child under your care to participate in this project, please sign and date this form and return it to the researcher. You may keep a copy of the form for yourself in case you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

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PARTICIPANT’S AGREEMENT STATEMENT:

By signing this form, I consent to let my son/daughter/child under my care participate in this study. Both you and the researcher will sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

Sign your name here ____________________ Date ____________
Print your name here __________________________
Name of Participant (your son/daughter/child under your care) ____________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ___________________ Date ____________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent ____________________________________________
Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment
Assent Form for Youth (15 to 17 age)

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?
You have been invited to participate in a study called the Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment. The purpose of this extended study is to learn about the experiences of children of refugee single parents in Canada.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE RUNNING THIS PROJECT? HOW CAN I CALL THEM?
The researchers for this project are Tuula Heinonen (Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba), Paula Migliardi (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, SERC), Alero Adeleye-Olusae (Project Coordinator, SERC). You can reach Paula at 982-7813, or Alero at [number here].

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
You and youth like you are asked to participate of an individual and/or group interviews. The interviews will last about 1-2 hours each. Some of the topics that they may be asked about are your experiences living with a single parent (mother or father), family life and growing up in Canada, talking to your parent(s) about relationships and dating, sexual health and access to information and services. (Please note: you and your parent or legal guardian must sign and return a copy of this Assent Form and a Parental Consent Form for you to participate in this interview).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE INTERVIEW?
The interviews will be conducted at a safe place and time that are convenient for you and the researcher. With your permission the interviews will be audio-taped. If you feel that you don’t want all or any specific parts of the interview taped, you can say so to the researcher, and he/she will immediately comply with your request. Your rights as participant will not be affected if you choose not to have the interview taped. The individual interviews will be done at SERC, at 200-226 Osborne Ave. North or a public place, such as the university campus or a coffee shop. The group interviews will be conducted by SERC’s Research and Evaluation Coordinator and the Project Coordinator. One will ask the question and the other will take notes.

WHAT WILL YOU GET OUT OF BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
A benefit of participating in this research study is that you will be given the opportunity to share your experiences of growing up in Canada that may inform others. Also, you will play a part in developing actions that will help you, your family and the community in the integration to a new society.

You will receive an honorarium of $20, bus tickets and a copy of the final report. Refreshments and snacks will be offered during the group interview. Also, you will be invited to a feedback session with all other youth participants to learn about the preliminary findings of the research and to provide comments.

WHAT WILL YOU RISK BY BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
Taking part in the project should not put you at risk for physical harm. If after your interview you feel upset and want to talk to a counsellor (someone who helps people through talking and giving information) to discuss any personal issue that the interview may have raised, please feel free to contact Mr. Jaime Carrasco, Multicultural Wellness Program Manager, Mount Carmel Clinic at 589-9420.

If in the course of the interview, any actual or threatened abuse against children or persons in care is disclosed it is responsibility of the researchers to report the incident to the appropriate authorities.
WILL PEOPLE KNOW THAT I TOOK PART IN THE PROJECT?
To make sure what you say is confidential, we will not use your real name or other identifiable information anywhere in the transcripts (or notes) of the tape recordings or any other reports or the findings. All information will be kept in a locked file drawer in SERC’s office at 226 Osborne St. N. and electronic files will be password protected. Only the researchers (i.e., Prof. Heinonen and Ms. Migliardi) will have access to the information. By December 15, 2011, the consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed.
Also, what other people say during the meeting is confidential, so we ask you not to share anything you hear or see in the group with people outside the group.

DO YOU HAVE TO PARTICIPATE? DO YOU HAVE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION? CAN YOU QUIT THE PROJECT WHenever YOU WANT?
Your participation is voluntary. You also do not have to answer any of the questions asked during the meeting. You are free to stop the interview at any time, for any reason. You have the right to quit the project at any time. If you choose not to answer any questions or stop the interview there will be no negative effects on any services you may be receiving now or may receive in the future. If you wish to stop the interview, please let the researcher know, and she/he will immediately stop. You are also free to ask any questions regarding this consent form.

HAS THIS STUDY BEEN APPROVED BY A GROUP THAT MAKES SURE THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND PROTECTED FROM HARM?
Yes. The Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba has approved this project. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or are not satisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact Margaret Bowman by phone at 474-7122 or by email at Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. You do not need to give your name.

Would you like to receive a copy of the final report? [ ] Yes [ ] No
Would you like to come to a community presentation of the final results? (bus tickets will be covered) [ ] Yes [ ] No

Please include your contact information to send you the report and/or invite you to the presentation (address, email and/or phone number)

If you are interested in participating in this project, please sign and date this form and return it to the principal investigator. You may keep a copy of the form for yourself in case you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

PARTICIPANT’S AGREEMENT STATEMENT:
By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. Both you and the researcher will sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

Sign your name here if you want to participate __________________ Date __________
Print your name here if you want to participate __________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent __________________ Date __________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent ___________________________
Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment
Consent Form for Youth (18 years of age and older)

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?
You have been invited to participate in a study called the Engaging Refugee Single Parents: a Community-Based Assessment. The purpose of the extended study is to learn about the experiences of children of refugee single parents in Canada.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE RUNNING THIS PROJECT? HOW CAN I CALL THEM?
The researchers for this project are Tuula Heinonen (Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba), Paula Migliardi (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, SERC), Alero Adeleye-Olusae (Project Coordinator, SERC). You can reach Paula at 982-7813, or Alero at [number here].

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?
You and youth like you are asked to participate of an individual and/or group interviews. The interviews will last about 1-2 hours each. Some of the topics that they may be asked about are your experiences living with a single parent (mother or father), family life and growing up in Canada, talking to your parent(s) about relationships and dating, sexual health and access to information and services.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE INTERVIEW?
The interviews will be conducted at a safe place and time that are convenient for you and the researcher. With your permission the interviews will be audio-taped. If you feel like not having all or any specific parts of the interview taped, you will just have to say so to the researcher, and he/she will immediately comply with your request. Your rights as participant will not be affected if you choose not to have the interview taped. The individual interviews will be done at SERC, at 200-226 Osborne Ave. North or a public, but private place, such as the university campus or a coffee shop. The group interviews will be conducted by SERC’s Research and Evaluation Coordinator and the Project Coordinator – one will ask the question and the other will take notes.

WHAT WILL YOU GET OUT OF BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
A benefit of participating in this research study is that you will be given the opportunity to share your experiences in growing up in Canada that may inform others, but as well provide an opportunity to develop actions that will help you, your family and the community in the integration to a new society. You will receive an honorarium of $20, bus tickets and a copy of the final report. Refreshments and snacks will be offered during the group interview. Also, you will be invited to a feedback session with all other youth participants to learn about the preliminary findings of the research and to provide comments.

WHAT WILL YOU RISK BY BEING IN THIS PROJECT?
Taking part in the project should not put you at risk for physical harm. If after your interview you feel upset and need to talk to a counsellor (someone who helps people through talking and giving information) to discuss any personal issue that the interview may have raised, please feel free to contact Mr. Jaime Carrasco, Multicultural Wellness Program Manager, Mount Carmel Clinic at 589-9420.

If in the course of the interview actual or threatened abuse against children or persons in care is disclosed it is responsibility of the researchers to report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

WILL PEOPLE KNOW THAT I TOOK PART IN THE PROJECT?
To make sure what you say is confidential, we will not use your real name or other identifiable information anywhere in the transcripts (or notes) of the tape recordings or any other reports. All information will be kept in a locked file drawer in SERC’s office at 226 Osborne St. N. and electronic files will be password protected. Only the researchers (i.e., Prof. Heinonen and Ms. Migliardi) will have access to the information. By December 15, 2011, the consent forms, audiotapes and transcripts will be destroyed.

Also, what other people say during the meeting is confidential, so we ask you not to share anything you hear or see in the group with people outside the group.

DO YOU HAVE TO PARTICIPATE? DO YOU HAVE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION? CAN YOU QUIT THE PROJECT WHENEVER YOU WANT?
Your participation is voluntary. You also do not have to answer any of the questions asked during the meeting. You are free to stop the interview at any time, for any reason. You have the right to quit the project at any time. If you choose not to answer any questions or stop the interview there will be no negative effects on any services you may be receiving now or may receive in the future. If you wish to stop the interview, please let the researcher know, and she will immediately stop. You are also free to ask any questions regarding this consent form.

HAS THIS STUDY BEEN APPROVED BY A GROUP THAT MAKES SURE THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS ARE TREATED FAIRLY AND PROTECTED FROM HARM?
Yes. The Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba has approved this project. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or are not satisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact Margaret Bowman by phone at 474-7122 or by email at Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca. You do not need to give your name.

Do you agree to participate in an interview? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Would you like to receive a copy of the final report? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Would you like to come to a community presentation of the final results? (bus tickets will be covered) [ ] Yes [ ] No

Please include your contact information to send you the report and/or invite you to the presentation (address, email and/or phone number)

If you are interested in participating in this project, please sign and date this form and return it to the principal investigator. You may keep a copy of the form for yourself in case you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

PARTICIPANT’S AGREEMENT STATEMENT:
By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. Both you and the researcher will sign and keep a copy of the consent form.

Sign your name here if you want to participate ____________________ Date __________
Print your name here if you want to participate ____________________ Date __________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent ____________________ Date __________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent ____________________