IMMIGRATION STATUS AND MENTAL HEALTH: INVISIBLE LIVES AND HIDDEN REALITIES OF UNDOCUMENTED YOUTH: A PILOT STUDY

by

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Abstract

Individuals with no immigration status are one of the fastest growing migrant populations in Canada, totaling over half a million. Yet, there has been little empirical research on the developmental impacts of living without formal immigration status. In the present study, 47 non-status adolescents were interviewed about their general experiences of growing up in Canada without status, to examine the mental health and developmental impacts particular to this population. Results from the study indicated that lack of immigration status is implicated in significant developmental impairments. Lack of immigration status is associated with difficulties with identity formation and consolidation, compromised self-efficacy, acculturative stress and compromised peer relations, which in turn results in poorer developmental and mental health outcomes. Findings are discussed in terms of both theoretical and practical implications, and directions for future research are outlined.
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INTRODUCTION

Immigration status, or lack thereof, is an important determinant of mental health and social well-being (Khanlou, 2005; Magelhaes et. al., 2009; Oxman-Martinez et al, 2005; Simich, 2006; Sundquist, 1995; Zimmerman, 2003). Undocumented or non-status immigrants\(^1\) – persons living in a host country without any legal immigration status – confront a wide range of mental health issues, but due to increasingly restrictive public policies are rarely accorded the opportunity to access healthcare, education, and a myriad of other vital social services (Khanlou, 2005; Simich et. al., 2006). In the past decade, undocumented or ‘illegal’ migration has replaced traditional forms of movement to become the fastest growing form of global migration, currently accounting for 30-40 million people worldwide (Papademetriou, 2008). Despite the fact that undocumented migration is an internationally relevant phenomenon, this population is remarkably understudied in Canada.

In Canada, conservative estimates hold that there are more than 500,000 undocumented immigrants, over 80,000 of whom reside within the Greater Toronto Area alone (Nyers, 2006). For the purposes of this study, undocumented or nonstatus people are defined as those currently residing in Canada without any legal immigration status, including individuals who have overstayed their visitor’s visa, worker’s permit and/or student visa; failed refugee claimants remaining in the country without authorization; individuals remaining in the country following the issuance of a deportation order; and those pursuing alternate procedures such as Humanitarian & Compassionate applications when judicial

\(^1\) The terms non-status and undocumented are used interchangeably, as they both reference the same population of individuals without legal immigration status.
appeal has been exhausted\(^2\). Due to the sheer size of this population, it is imperative to explore the mental health impacts of living without legal immigration status in an attempt to better formulate public health policies that address the needs of non-status residents. Given that studies on undocumented adolescents have rarely been conducted in Canada, this study aims to help bridge the gaps in existing literature and knowledge and explore the general mental health and developmental impacts of living without status on adolescents. In particular, this study seeks to investigate how living without legal immigration status informs non-status youths’ sense of identity, general mental health, familial and peer relationships, and understandings of social integration and inclusion.

Adolescence has been characterized as a period of time where youth begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in an attempt to discover who they truly are, and how they position themselves or fit in the social world they inhabit (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). It is recognized widely that the development of immigrant children is directly influenced by not only their proximal context (e.g., peer, family, extended family), but also their distal context, which include legislation, policies, and social institutions and structures (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Salehi, 2010). Various studies have documented that this distal context contributes to a myriad of specific developmental challenges for children from immigrant families in general and from nonstatus families in particular (Brabeck & Xu, 2010).

Discriminatory laws and racism have been shown to negatively impact the growth of immigrant and non-status children and adolescents (Fry & Passel, 2009; Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). In particular, the immigration status of a child’s

\(^2\) It should be noted that filing a Humanitarian & Compassionate application does not provide any legal status to an applicant while in process. As such, it is common for many nonstatus immigrants to be in formal correspondence with the Canadian government without having any legal status.
parent(s) is a critical component of the distal context that impacts an adolescent’s development, as policies and laws that delineate who is able to access the benefits of citizenship and effectively exclude others are associated with higher rates of psychological distress, economic difficulties, and lower levels of cognitive ability in children on standardized assessments (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2003; Yoshikawa et al, 2008). Furthermore, irrespective of ethnic backgrounds, non-status children and adolescents are less likely to have any health coverage or insurance or take part in public programs (e.g., the Federal Food Stamps Program and Supplemental Nutrition Plan Program in the United States, recreational programs, etc.) simply on the basis of not having status (Capps & Fortuny, 2006; Caulford et. al., 2006; Magalhaes et. al., 2009). Given that such services and programs are designed to structurally ameliorate some of the negative impacts of poverty on development and the fact that most nonstatus families live well below the poverty line in Canada, nonstatus adolescents are disproportionately and negatively impacted by poverty and various laws and policies that prevent them from accessing services, an important component of the distal context that impacts development (Magalhaes et. al., 2009, Simich et. al., 2006; Salehi, 2010; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Immigration System Overview

Cognizant of the realities of undocumented adolescents and the direct impacts of distal contexts on development for this population, it is critical to examine and understand the immigration system in Canada, particularly in the wake of a changing immigration climate where increasing amounts of families and individuals are denied status (CIC Report, 2009; Magalhaes et. al., 2009; Sharma, 2006; UNHCR Report, 2010). Contrary to popular discourse, which paints undocumented peoples as covertly entering Canada through illicit or
illegal means, almost all non-status peoples enter Canada with some kind of legal status, including work permits and visas (Nyers, 2006). However, they are often unable to live with status after these permits and visas expire, as Canada’s immigration system systematically privileges specific types of immigrants over others, with a strong preference for well-educated, upper-middle class individuals (Sharma, 2006). Consequently, those individuals entering Canada through temporary work programs in service related and labour intensive industries or through travel visas are unable to garner enough points to qualify under Canada’s Immigration Point System (Lowry, 2002). These individuals must apply either as refugees or file a Humanitarian & Compassionate application.

Canada’s refugee system has come under heavy fire in the past few years from all political persuasions, but most prominently for failing to provide transparent guidelines for who constitutes a legitimate refugee and what the criterion for acceptance are (Sharma, 2006). Since 1997, approximately 60% of 250,000 refugee claims were outright rejected with no clear policy outlining why these refugee claims were dismissed (Sharma, 2006; Simich et. al., 2007). Furthermore, according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s 2009 report, the number of refugees who had their asylum claims approved dropped by another 56% in 2008 from 2005 (CIC Report, 2009). This coupled with the fact that refugees even allowed into the country since 2006 has dropped by 25% under the current Conservative government has led many researchers to conclude that refugees fleeing war, persecution, and harm are systematically denied legal status in Canada and the refugee system is becoming increasingly restrictive and arbitrary (Lowry, 2002; Magalhaes et. al., 2009; Sharma, 2006; Walia, 2011).

The only other pathways to gaining status are the Humanitarian & Compassionate route, which have an acceptance rate of 3-5%, or filing a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment
after a failed refugee claim (Walia, 2011). In 2010, there were 8,466 Pre-Removal Risk Assessment applications with only 89 being approved, an acceptance rate of 1.05% (Walia, 2011). Particularly worrisome given the low rates of acceptance for permanent paths to status, is the emerging trend of people coming into Canada through precarious, temporary means. The number of temporary foreign workers has increased 30% over the past four years and, in 2008, for the first time in Canadian history, more people entered Canada on temporary work permits than as permanent residents (Clark, 2009; Montreal Gazette, 2011). Noting the ballooning numbers of temporary workers alongside plummeting numbers of permanent pathways to status have led researchers to note the above trends as ‘the permanence of the temporary’, whereby more and more people on temporary permits will fall out of status, leading to a burgeoning undocumented population (Walia, 2011).

Many individuals, after being denied legal status, make the difficult choice to stay in Canada as an undocumented migrant. Since the focus of this thesis is on adolescents, it is necessary to make salient the fact that although adult immigrants choose to relocate to Canada for a myriad of economic and political reasons, children and youth oftentimes do not have the same choice, as they usually immigrate because their parents have made the decision on their behalf (Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Weintraub, 1980). As such, adolescents do not maintain the same level of autonomy and agency as their adult counterparts in decisions regarding migration.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, there is scant literature exploring the lives of non-status residents in Canada and most Western countries, which have, in recent decades, become home to significant numbers of undocumented migrants (Magalhaes et. al., 2009; Nyers, 2006). This lack of research is largely attributed to the fact that undocumented migrants actively and quite consciously remain hidden from public view so as to avoid detection and deportation (Cornelius, 1982). Although the inability of most researchers to access such populations remains the most pronounced reason why there is only the most exiguous research data, concerns around funding of research on ‘illegal’ or invisible populations and the political controversy surrounding irregular/illega migration has also contributed to the lack of research available (Cornelius, 1982; Sharma, 2008; Villegas, 2006). Given the focus of this thesis is on nonstatus adolescent development, it is noteworthy that even fewer studies have been conducted in the United States and Canada on this particular topic and with this specific population, with almost no studies to date in Canada.

General Health of Non-Status Immigrants & Youth

Similar to the ways in which non-status immigrants remain hidden from public view, so do the health costs and social implications of housing this population of 500,000 (Nyers, 2006). Congruent with research on other marginalized groups in society, undocumented immigrants have numerous health needs that are not met, especially in regard to mental health services, which are rarely, if ever, offered (Kirby, 2006). Moreover, their needs are frequently ignored by mainstream health professionals, most of whom are not trained to respond to such concerns or are ill-equipped to do so, in terms of financial and institutional barriers (Caulford et. al., 2006; Gushulak et al, 2000; Nyers, 2006). In general, health
security – referring to the concept of personal safety, protection from health risks, and ability to access mental health services and health care in a safe, timely manner – amongst non-status residents tends to be extremely precarious or simply non-existent (Simich, 2006). This is largely the result of public policy prescriptions that serve to effectively excise undocumented people from accessing municipal, provincial or federal resources, as access is directly contingent upon being able to furnish documentation that proves residents are in Canada legally (Khanlou, 2006; Nyers, 2006).

Consequently, non-status residents have higher rates of illness and hospitalization because their lack of health insurance coverage prevents them from receiving care when smaller health concerns arise (Hutton et al, 2003; Frommer et al, 2004). Furthermore, non-status immigrants have significantly higher incidences of being hospitalized for more serious, life-threatening concerns than conventional immigrants with legal status (Frommer et al, 2004). This is largely attributed to the fact that undocumented people fear accessing vital services, such as healthcare, because of fear of detention and deportation (Friere, 1999; Khanlou, 2005; Nyers, 2006). In addition, the cost of healthcare acts as a serious deterrent since non-status migrants are expected to pay out of pocket for costs, and as a result, are at a pecuniary disadvantage (Simich, 2006). Another reason non-status residents are unable to access health services and have higher rates of serious hospitalizations is due to the paucity of health service providers, most notably in community health centres and smaller mental health institutions, who serve such populations (Frommer et al, 2004; Simich, 2006). Often these facilities are inundated with more non-status patients than they can accommodate (Simich, 2006). In addition, many non-status immigrants face linguistic and cultural barriers that further deter them from accessing services (Hyman, 2001).
Undocumented children and youth, in particular, bear the brunt of this lack of health security since they are rarely afforded the opportunity to receive healthcare or treatment for any illness, minor or major. Children born to undocumented parents receive negligible prenatal and postnatal care, suffer from higher incidences of health problems in infancy, and are less likely to receive medical treatment than those born to immigrant parents with legal status (Caulford et al, 2006). Although children of non-status parents born in Canada are Canadian citizens and therefore endowed with all the rights and privileges that come with such a title, they are still less likely to access healthcare because their parents fear that taking their child to a medical facility may expose their own lack of immigration status and result in deportation (Caulford et al, 2006; Simich, 2006). Additionally, youth who reside in Canada without formal legal status, similar to their parents, are unable to receive treatment or annual checkups, which are common for other children their age, and very rarely visit a doctor, even in times of need (Khanlou et al, 2005). Due to the fact that non-status families are encumbered with exorbitant financial costs associated with accessing healthcare coupled with the palpable threat and fear of detention or deportation, non-status youth, similar to non-status adult immigrants, lack meaningful health security in Canada. Given the fact that access to mental health and health services during childhood and adolescence has been implicated in better overall health throughout an individual’s lifespan, promotion of personal self-care and healthy adolescent development, the lack of health security amongst nonstatus youth populations may impact their development trajectory and lead to poorer developmental outcomes (Holmbeck, 2001; Millstein et. al., 1993; Pittman et. al., 2005; Shonkoff et. al., 2000).
General Identity Development

One of the critical developmental tasks of adolescence is to construct a coherent self-identity (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). It is during this period that individuals start to form increasingly abstract characterizations of themselves, and self-concepts become more differentiated and better organized (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Adolescents typically begin to perceive themselves in terms of personal beliefs and standards, and less in terms of social comparisons (Harter, 1998). However, research demonstrates that non-status youth consistently classify themselves based on social comparisons as the designated ‘other’ or ‘illegal’ – someone who is qualitatively different from a typical adolescent (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Villegas, 2006). This perceived difference is based upon social comparisons with peers, but it remains unclear, in the literature available, the extent to which this impacts identity development.

Acculturation & Adolescent Identity Development

Healthy adolescent identity development for minority, immigrant, and nonstatus youth must take into account particular concerns around ethnic identity development and feelings of inclusion (Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Salehi, 2010). Generally, a strong sense of ethnic identity is associated with higher self-esteem and self-efficacy among minority and immigrant youth (Phinney et al, 1997). Adolescents’ personal association(s) with dominant, mainstream culture will ultimately determine the nature of the developmental impact ethnic identity has on an individual. As Steinberg notes, “Adolescents can [either] assimilate into the majority culture by rejecting their own culture, live in the majority culture but feel estranged, reject the majority culture, or maintain ties to both majority and minority cultures (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).” Contemporary findings have consistently shown that
maintaining ties to both cultures, referred to as successful acculturation or biculturalism, is associated with better psychological adjustment and developmental outcomes (DeBerry et al 1996, Phinney & Devich-Navarro 1997; Salehi, 2010; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). The process of acculturation refers to the process whereby minorities, immigrants and non-status individuals negotiate the differences between their native culture and the dominant one in relation to behaviour, values, identity and attitudes (Kim, Atkinson & Umemoto, 2010). Nonstatus youth experience high levels of acculturative stress, referring to the difficulties that arise as a result of the acculturation process, which is associated with numerous negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, increased social conflict, compromised mental health, and the stunting of educational goals and pursuits, all of which lead to poorer developmental outcomes and difficulties constructing a coherent self-identity (Ellis, 2010).

Furthermore, acculturative stressors are associated with adolescent “identity crisis”, which refers to an individual’s inability to make consistent decisions or commit to a set of beliefs and values (Oppedal et. al, 2004). To put it more simply, the very process of acculturation, it is argued, will inevitably cause some youth to vacillate between identifying intensely or not at all with various or all aspects of their host and native culture, without being able to meaningfully reconcile between the two cultures (Oppedal et. al., 2004). This appears to be the case for many non-status youth, as they struggle during adolescence and beyond in negotiating multiple identities and cultures and are unable to commit to either definitely, resulting in identity formation difficulties (Chavez, 2009; Ellis, 2010; Villegas, 2006). In particular, the inability to consider oneself an integral part of a particular host country because of legal exclusion (immigration status) contributes to identity formation problems (Ellis, 2010). Similarly, feelings of belonging and the degree to which individuals
feel connected to friends, neighbours, community, and larger social networks determine how connected an individual feels to the host culture and degree of inclusion (Salehi, 2009). In multicultural societies such as Canada, research has demonstrated that identity formation and a sense of belonging to the larger society are tightly interwoven (Salehi, 2009). Nonstatus youth generally tend to lack a sense of belonging to the larger society, as they perceive larger society to view them in a negative, hostile light as ‘illegals’, people actively excluded from participating in the institutions, activities, and democratic decision-making within a society (Chavez, 2009; Ellis, 2010). Such identity formation issues in undocumented youth populations lead to poorer developmental outcomes in adolescence.

**Employment**

Most of the problems adolescents face tend to be relatively transitory in nature and will be resolved by the end of adolescence or beginning of young adulthood, with little or no long-term repercussions (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Employment difficulties are common in adolescence, as unemployment rates are significantly higher amongst youth populations than their adult counterparts, and for typical adolescents, most will enter the workforce in adulthood and be employed, marking a developmental milestone (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This pattern is not true for undocumented youth, as they will struggle with employment in adolescence and adulthood and not meet this developmental milestone until they have legal status, which could potentially translate to a lifetime of employment related issues impacting development not only in adolescence, but even more acutely during adulthood (Ellis, 2010).

For most individuals in society, financial and economic security is the direct corollary of procuring steady, well-paid employment. This type of security is usually found within primary markets, which employ salaried professionals in either the government or private
sector who engage in non-manual labour (Knights et al, 1991). Although undocumented immigrants participate in the work force at higher rates than both legal immigrants and the general population, they are relegated to working permanently within the informal economy because they are unable to obtain employment in primary markets since they do not have legal work authorization (Passel, 2006). The informal economy, as described by Portes (1995), refers to the sum total of income-earning activities that are unregulated by legal codes in an environment where similar activities are regulated. Informal activities are distinguished from criminal ones in that they encompass goods and services that are legal, but whose production and marketing is unregulated (p.29).

Work within the informal economy is precarious, as there are no labour or environmental laws governing any practices nor are there any benefits for workers, and as a result, exploitation is deeply ensconced within such industries (Chavez, 1992).

Sectors with significant concentrations of non-status workers include construction, agriculture, manufacturing, hotel and service industries, which oftentimes pay below minimum wage (Nyers, 2006). Such ‘under-the-table’ work wages are woefully insufficient for most individuals and families to subsist off, and as a result, most non-status immigrants are part of the working poor, referring to those who maintain steady employment but whose wages in a given year total less than the poverty level of the host nation (Knights et al, 1991; Nyers, 2006).

Since undocumented families frequently live in conditions of destitution, most undocumented youth enter the work force to help their families and pay for their education (Mattingly, 1997; Villegas, 2006). These youth, like their parents, are permanently relegated
to low wage jobs within the informal economy (Passel, 2006). The inherent nature of working within the informal economy subject adults and adolescents alike to greater health and safety risks because of the types of employment opportunities available coupled with the unregulated nature of these settings (Lowry, 2002; Nyers, 2006; Villegas, 2006). Consequently, compromised physical health status and mental stress due to job-related risks are highly prevalent in non-status populations (Lowry, 2002; Nyers, 2006). Although living without legal immigration status is itself implicated with significantly higher levels of stress in both youth and adults, constant financial insecurity has been found to negatively impact non-status youths’ morale, sense of wellness, beliefs about the future, and sense of hope (Oxman-Martinez, 2005; Passel, 2006; Simich, 2006; Villegas, 2006). Youth and adolescents express a sense of general malaise when confronted with the grim reality that their only option for obtaining employment is in the informal economy and that this may remain their reality indefinitely, or at least until they manage to procure legal status (Suarez-Orozco, 2005). Undergoing development in conditions where professional growth and related identity is severely constrained because of lack of documentation creates conditions conducive to hopelessness, depression, powerlessness, anxiety, and higher levels of stress (Dozier, 1993; Suarez-Orozco, 2005; Villegas, 2006). In other words, when employment and financial factors impel undocumented youth and adolescents to work in precarious jobs, and they feel no upward mobility exists because of a lack of status, developmental milestones of securing full-time, professional jobs will go unmet, resulting in poor developmental outcomes.

Depression

During adolescence, the prevalence of depression increases significantly compared to childhood and adulthood, and gender differences have been found, with girls more likely to
experience depression than boys (Avenevoli et. al, 2000). There are large range of factors associated with adolescent depression, including hopelessness about the future, anxiety, loneliness, maladaptive styles of coping, dysfunctional attribution styles for success and failure, negative self perceptions and poor peer relationships, among many others (Cole, 1991; Compas et al 1993; Garber et. al., 1993; Kaslow 1994; Morris & Steinberg, 2001).

Undocumented youth often express a profound sense of loneliness, which stems from their belief that other youth simply do not understand what it means to contend with lack of immigration status and therefore, feel that many of their relationships are characterized by lack of sufficient level of understanding and empathy (Dozier, 1993). Consequently, many non-status youth feel they are struggling alone and feel a keen sense of loneliness (Villegas, 2006). Such sentiments are further exacerbated by feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, which are related to the lack of opportunity and understanding that they do not possess the agency required to alter their status (Ellis, 2010; Villegas, 2006). Such beliefs, thoughts, and emotions give rise to depression in non-status youth populations (Dozier, 1993; Simich, 2006; Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Villegas, 2006).

Furthermore, it is commonplace for undocumented youth to yearn for privileges denied them because of their lack of status (Villegas, 2006). Most research in the field has chronicled how youth constantly desire driver licenses, student visas, and work authorization (Ellis, 2010; Dozier, 1993; Magalhaes et. al., 2009). When such aspirations go unrealized, many youth become depressed that they are unable to engage in age-appropriate activities and feel left out (Villegas, 2006; Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Due to the precarious nature of living without status, many undocumented youth also experience extended periods of anxiety and feel apprehensive about their unstable future.
(Villegas, 2006). Incapable of predicting with even a modicum of certainty where they will be residing in a year (because of the threat of deportation), youth experience high levels of anxiety, especially when planning their educational pursuits and employment (Ellis, 2010; Dozier, 1993; Villegas, 2006). In particular, non-status youth experience a particular variant of ‘persecutory anxiety’, which results in an emotional state “whereby the host environment…is experienced as hostile and persecutory” because of the constant threat and fear of imminent or distant deportation (Grinberg in Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Such anxiety is endemic to non-status youth because they must contend daily with deportation-related distress. Thus, loneliness, lack of control, hopelessness, and anxiety, when considered together, lead to increased rates of depression amongst undocumented adolescents, although it remains unclear if such rates are higher than that of typical adolescents (Ellis, 2010).

**Peer Relations**

During adolescence, individuals spend increasing amounts of time socializing with friends and friendships mature into more intimate, supportive and communicative relationships (Buhrmester 1990, Levitt et al 1993). However, such trends are not as pronounced in undocumented youth populations. Undocumented youth, because of their lack of immigration status, often consciously avoid intimate interactions with peers and initiating close friendships or relationships out of fear that others may find out and disclose their status (Dozier, 1993). Such avoidance and lack of self-disclosure in friendships and romantic relationships are not rooted in simple puerile insecurity or pathological complexes, but reflective of youths’ understanding of their social surroundings and the belief that disclosure of status would negatively impinge upon both their life and the lives of family members (Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Villegas, 2006). Thus, lack of trust in relationships is more closely
related to not having status and concomitant fears. This is of concern given the fact that the ability to form and maintain stable friendships and forge romantic partnerships are typically witnessed in normally developing adolescents, and lack of trust – despite being unrelated to pathological complexes – may impede normal developmental processes in undocumented adolescents since there are palpable disincentives to revealing personal information about oneself and forming close ties with peers or romantic partners (Ellis, 2010; Steinberg & Morris, 2001; Villegas, 2006).

*Family Relations*

Adolescence is marked by an increase in bickering and fighting between parents and youth, a decrease in time spent together as a family, and a decline in reported closeness, (Larson & Richards, 1991; Steinberg et. al, 2001). However, the opposite patterns are reflective of the experiences of nonstatus adolescents, as various studies have documented increased amount of time spent with parents and high levels of reported closeness, as many youth perceive the family unit as their sole source of support, a place where they can engage in honest conversations about their life and how lack of status is impacting them (Ellis, 2010, Villegas, 2006). It is important, however, to note that conflicts are still a central theme in undocumented adolescents’ relationships with their parents. Many non-status youths’ patterns of conflict with their family members are borne out of a sense of exasperation, discontentment, and futility in changing their status (Chavez, 1993; Dozier, 1993; Hodes, 2002; Bramley et al, 2000; Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Although adolescence is normally a period where parent-child relationships witness more intense confrontations and increased conflict, such strife is typically a function of the adolescent’s growing cognitive and social abilities whereby their desire and need for greater freedoms causes friction with parents,
undocumented youths’ conflict with their parents and family members are oftentimes associated with their lack of status and the ways in which immigration status itself restricts their personal freedom to obtain a driver’s license, gain legal employment, participate in extra-curricular activities, or frequent public spaces such as malls and movie theatres where security personnel and police are present without fear or threat of detention and deportation (Steinberg et. al., 2001). Such parent-child tensions may oftentimes remain unresolved, as parents are unable to grant such freedoms on an individual level to their children, leaving such tensions and conflicts unresolved and an environment where frustration and futility may emerge (Ellis, 2010).

The Present Study

Almost all of the studies examining perceived impacts of lack of immigration status on youth development and identity have been conducted in the United States where the immigration system and migration experiences are vastly different, as the vast majority of undocumented people are Latino and initially enter the country through unconventional or ‘illegal’ means. As such, the objective of this research is to examine such developmental impacts in the Canadian context, where the majority of undocumented people are not Latino and enter the country through legal, conventional means. In particular, this study seeks to investigate how living without legal immigration status informs non-status youths’ sense of identity, general mental health, familial and peer relationships, and understandings of social integration and inclusion from a developmental perspective.

METHOD

Qualitative designs are appropriate to research exploring the realities of populations from their own distinct perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and particularly preferable for
research pursuits involving topics in exploratory phases of academic research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As little research has been conducted in Canada on the mental health and wellbeing of non-status youth, this study functions as a preliminary exploration of how living without legal immigration status informs non-status youths’ sense of identity, general mental health, familial and peer relationships, and understandings of social integration and inclusion. As such, a qualitative approach was adopted to accurately gauge what factors impacted adolescents from a developmental perspective.

Sample

As discussed earlier and expressed by Cornelius, (1982) "most field researchers have found that the most difficult part of fieldwork among [the undocumented] population is locating and gaining access to the interviewees on terms that will permit valid and reliable information to be gathered” (p. 385). To gain access to this population, community partnerships were forged between the researcher and three organizations in downtown Toronto that work closely with undocumented youth: South Asian Women’s Rights Organization (SAWRO), Grassroots Youth Collaborative (GYC), and No One Is Illegal (NOII). SAWRO has more than 5 years experience administering social and health services and approximately 70% of clients are undocumented youth (Nyers, 2006); GYC consists of 11 youth-led organizations, many of which have a considerable base of non-status youth within their programs, although formal statistics are not kept; and NOII is a social justice group that works directly with undocumented youth and all their case work is with non-status youth. Due to the fact that a strict randomized sample was not possible, a convenience sample was obtained through these three organizations. A sample of 47 undocumented youth was ultimately selected who resided in Canada or the United States without status at some
point between the ages of 13-22, and were currently within the (same) age bracket of 13-22. Youth participating in the study varied in terms of the length of time they were undocumented, ranging from 11 months to 14 years. In an attempt to establish gender parity and explore whether there were any differences based on sex, 24 males and 23 females were selected (see Table 1 for a summary of the sample’s demographic characteristics). A sample size of 47 was ultimately selected because sample sizes of 30-50 are recommended for qualitative designs that seek to draw more robust conclusions and lay the starting foundation for future research in a particular subject or area (Mason, 2010).

With regard to this particular population on nonstatus adolescents, it is critical to recognize that the youths who are the focus of this study represent an extremely vulnerable population whose protection is necessary not simply for the conventional ethical practice in the academy, but also as recognition of the danger of detention or deportation they may face should their identities be revealed (Villegas, 2006).

Recruitment

Recruitment for the project was conducted by each of the three organizations internally, as they were privy to immigration information about their respective clients and had provided ethical clearance for the study. Based on the participant requirements set by the researcher whereby all individuals had to be 13-22 years of age and living without immigration status, each organization designated one of their staff to select participants that match these criteria. Each organization selected 15-16 individuals and provided the researcher with their contact information when the individual agreed to be part of the research and consented to being contacted by the researcher. Afterwards, the researcher contacted the participant individually and set up a time and location to conduct the interview.
Interview Questions

Following a multidisciplinary review of the available academic literature on undocumented immigrants in general in Canada and the US, and undocumented youth in particular, a semi-structured interview questions list was generated. Questions were developed temporally as well as according to topic (e.g., personal identity, acculturation, peer relations, etc.). Once a comprehensive initial list was developed, "lead" questions were identified and "follow-up" questions were categorized accordingly. For example, questions related to identity development in light of immigration status began with the lead question, "How would you describe yourself?" and was followed with the question, "What do you identify yourself as? How did you identify yourself before you moved to Canada and how would you identify yourself today?" Ultimately, the final set of questions was developed to understand participants' current reflections of how their immigration status impacted their identity development, familial and peer relationships, understandings of social integration and inclusion, and general mental health.

After the final set of questions were developed and categorized together, it was distributed to three academic researchers in Toronto whose area of study focuses on undocumented immigrants in order to ensure that interview questions addressed issues relevant to the identity development and general mental health of undocumented adolescents. Two of these individuals were social science researchers, and one individual was a medical doctor specializing in primary care of nonstatus immigrants. Feedback from these individuals included confirmation that the domains addressed through the interview questions were relevant to the goals of the research project, as well as recommendations for changes to the protocol. Recommendations included changes in semantics (e.g., changing "legal status" to
"immigration status" because, according to one source, "undocumented immigrants do not have legal status") as well as suggested omissions.

In addition to interview questions, a demographic questionnaire was developed to include age, gender, country of origin, time spent in Canada without status, employment status, family income, education and English proficiency. Such data was collected to document and gauge the diversity of the sample and allow for future comparisons between subgroups of undocumented youth.

Procedure

In depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted by asking nine open-ended questions followed by questions that provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on their responses (see Table 3 for the list of interview questions). For example, follow up questions were asked when the interviewer felt the participant had not answered a question fully or when issues were raised by the participant that seemed relevant to the study. In order to maximize comfort and ensure that all participants were feeling relaxed during the interview process, interviews were conducted in each of the youth’s setting of choice and according to their time availability. Most interviews occurred at the home of the participant, except for seven, which were held in the researcher’s office. Such settings were conducive to personal contact and minimal interruptions. All interviews took place in individual sessions that ranged from one and a half to two hours in length. All interviews included completion of a consent form and a demographic questionnaire. Before the interview phase, the researcher emphasized that confidentiality and anonymity would be protected and was paramount to the study, and further stated that all names and personal identifiers would not be disclosed and would be replaced by numerical identifiers. At the end of each interview, there was a
debriefing session where participants were encouraged to give their thoughts, feelings, comments and general feedback about the interview process. Also, if the participant showed visible distress or discomfort about certain mental health issues, the interviewer provided referrals for community health and mental health service clinics and community centres that welcome undocumented youth. Overall, most participants were very forthcoming about their experiences and lived realities. Some cried at particularly difficult moments, at which time the interviewer stopped the interview, comforted the individual and afterwards asked if they would like to continue (all did). Some participants remained stoic, and others maintained their normal demeanour.

All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed onto the computer, along with extensive field notes from each interview. Responses to the interview questions were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Through a method of constant comparison, recurring topics, key words, and phrases within and across the interviews, coding categories and relationships among the data sources were mapped out through repeated sifting of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subsequent stages of focused coding involved the renaming and condensing of codes and the use of “family” or umbrella categories that brought together the underlying codes they represent. The codes and themes that emerged from the participants' narratives were analyzed by examining the participants' social locations on the contextual variables of race, class and immigration status and how these locations informed their experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although various themes emerged from the data, this section will focus on themes that were mentioned by all or almost all participants and will be divided into three
developmental processes that were the focus of this research project: General Identity Development, Peer Relations, and Family Relations. Each component will delineate particular themes that emerged within these three areas and outline their mental health impacts on undocumented adolescents.

**General Identity Development**

One of the critical markers or developmental tasks of adolescence is to construct a coherent self-identity (Steinberg & Morris, 2001), a process whereby adolescents typically begin to perceive themselves in terms of personal beliefs and standards, and less in terms of social comparisons (Harter, 1998). However, this process appears to be quite different for undocumented adolescents: Nonstatus youth both see themselves in terms of personal beliefs insofar as they reject and feel appellations such as ‘illegal’, ‘undocumented’, ‘criminal’, or ‘nonstatus’ do not fit with their personal understandings of themselves as being ‘good’ or ‘law abiding’ residents, but also simultaneously classify themselves based on social comparisons as the designated ‘other’, ‘nonstatus’, ‘undocumented’ or ‘invisible’ population – a unique duality of self-identity that simultaneously seeks to reject social comparisons and construct self-identify based on personal beliefs while reconstructing an identity and very much steeped in social comparisons. This phenomenon is evident when Participant 42, an 18-year-old female, states:

“[They] think we’re [nonstatus people] a bunch of crazies and criminals running around taking their jobs and not contributing anything to society. I’m none of those things, I’ve never stolen anything, robbed, scammed or hurt people like that, I’m no criminal. I volunteer at a youth centre, a retirement home, and an animal shelter. I babysit my neighbour’s kids. I graduated high school as valedictorian of my
class, and I know I’m smart, I’m resourceful, I help people as best as I can and I would do more if I could legally work or go to university, I really would. I know a lot of people have perceptions of us that are messed up and negative, but that’s not the truth. We’re good, honest people and we’re only trying to make a living and it’s so unfair…but at the same time, I know I don’t have status and that means no one really notices or, I don’t know actually, maybe it’s more that my story doesn’t really exist. I don’t know, it’s confusing and hard to explain. Even if I’m doing all the good in the world, I’m still kind of invisible…not having it [status] makes you really different, like a lot different. I have to deal with everything differently from my classmates, like, I mean, everything. They have it so easy and don’t know it. But you know what, going through all of this makes you different from everyone else and it, like, just, it changes you. I know I’m not like normal people. I have no papers, but I’m a hard-working and intelligent individual, I know I have a lot to offer.”

From this vignette, it is salient that this participant’s personal beliefs lead her to view herself as a hard working, intelligent individual and she rejects the perceived societal view of nonstatus people as criminals, and yet, there is an ongoing and consistent comparison to others and emphasis is placed on social comparisons that highlight the ways in which not having status makes you different from ‘normal’ people, the designated ‘other.’ This duality of self-identity was also mentioned by 46 of 47 participants in some form. As Participant 13, a 17 year old male further elucidates:

“I don’t care what they [society] say about us, if they don’t think we’re good enough or whatever, I know I’m a good person. I do things right…or I mean, I do the right thing, you know, mostly. I go to school, get good grades, I don’t get into no trouble. I work
when I can find a job, I treat people good, I do all that and more. I ain’t no criminal, I
don’t do anything illegal or nothing like that, not at all, you know. My friends
sometimes joke with me about why I gotta always be so legit and everything with
everything so I know I’m doing this…I’m going about all this the right way. But, you
know what, none of that counts because when you ain’t got status, if people know that,
they look at you different, you know, like, everything’s still me but now I’m this illegal
kid or whatever and we [family] gotta be deported because people think we’re
criminals or something, like we’re these people everyone just wants to get rid of or
something. I don’t know man, it’s frustrating and shit...I know I’m not like other kids
because we don’t have no status or anything so yeah, I don’t know, I know I’m
different because of it…’cuz like, everything’s different for me ’cuz I ain’t got it
[status] and everybody else just takes it all for granted and things are so different for us
[nonstatus people].”

This duality of self-identity, mentioned by almost all participants, has implications for
identity development, as nonstatus youth are in a unique position whereby they are able to
develop more abstract, personalized characterizations of themselves, which is part of typical
identity development, but simultaneously view themselves as different from ‘normal’
adolescents, consistently comparing themselves to their peers and people with status and
default positioning themselves as the distinct ‘other.’ This is particularly salient when
Participant 27, a 17 year old, female states:

“I do really well in school, I’m intelligent and focused. Last term, all my marks were
above 92…I’m kind, caring, compassionate and pretty motivated most of the time. I
know I’m a good person at the end of the day and it doesn’t really matter if people
think my family and me are illegals and scammers…or criminals or whatever else they [society] think…but I don’t know, it’s a really messed up situation because it matters, you know, it [status] really matters sometimes because I’m not like everyone else, I can’t be like them and do what they do because I don’t have status. It’s made me a different person because like, I live in a different world…no, I mean, like, my reality’s different than their reality and I’m always different from them [peers], like, separate, you know.”

As such, the trend amongst nonstatus youth seems to be that, unlike typical adolescents who begin to view themselves less in terms of social comparisons and more in terms of personal beliefs and standards, they simultaneously view themselves both more in terms of personal beliefs and standards (such as ‘good’, ‘hard working’, ‘intelligent’, etc.) and social comparisons where they see themselves as different from ‘normal’ peers and relegate or recognize themselves as the ‘other’, who is separate and distinct from the ‘normal’ adolescent.

The literature on typically-developing youth reveals that viewing the self in terms of social comparisons more than usual during this period is associated with higher levels of depression, lower self-esteem, and less independence and autonomy, which leads to compromised identity development and poorer developmental outcomes (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Similarly, the current interviews suggest that viewing the self both in terms of increased social comparisons and personal beliefs impacts non-status youth in a myriad of ways, leading to increased stress, anxiety, hopelessness, depression and difficulties with identity consolidation. As Participant 8, an 18-year-old male frankly voiced:
“It’s one of those Catch 22’s, you know. Like, yeah, I think I’m a pretty good kid. I do all the things I’m supposed to: I do all the things I’m supposed to: I help my mom out around the house, I take care of my sister, I don’t get into any sticky situations or anything like that, I try to get good marks and stuff…I’m a good person, I know that…[but] we don’t get any respect…I get treated differently only because of this one thing [status] and it’s really annoying, you know, because it doesn’t matter that you’re doing everything right…it just feels hopeless sometimes, like, who cares, you know? It doesn’t matter how I am or, I mean, who I am, like, it just matters if you have papers and it weighs you down a lot because you’re always worried all the time and not sure about things, like, even scared sometimes because you don’t ever know what’s going to happen next or when things are going to go right or really wrong or that kind of thing. I don’t know, everything’s just confusing…you think you know yourself and things are all good because you know you’re a good person and all that but then, I don’t know, you go through some things and it’s hard to explain to you. Like, so what I’m good, you know? It doesn’t fix these problems, I’m still the only one having to go through it and it makes you low and doubt yourself and everything you’re doing and if you’re really doing anything right and stuff. Like, sometimes you feel like, is this me, this my life, like, seriously? I don’t even know what I’m doing anymore sometimes, like I’m looking at myself from outside, you know, and it’s like, who is this guy?”

Given that 46 out of 47 youth in the study expressed similar sentiments, this may be a common phenomenon among non-status youth. Respondents’ reflections on the connection between their sense of dual identity and negative emotions also suggests that this duality may be causally related to youths’ increased stress, anxiety, depression and hopelessness.
Compromised Self-Efficacy

Adolescents evaluate themselves both along several specific dimensions (e.g., athletics, academics) and more globally, with a direct correlation between these dimensions of the self and personal understandings of self-worth, mastery, and control (Harter et. al., 1998). Typically, as personal feelings of competence and achievement in a particular dimension develop, personal self-worth, mastery and control increase both within that domain and more globally (Harter et. al., 1998). Amongst nonstatus youth, data only supports positive relationship between self-worth, mastery and personal feelings of competence in a particular domain. For example, examining the domain of academics, 39 out 47 youth expressed feelings of increased self-worth and mastery as a function of high academic performance. However, all 39 mentioned that higher levels of academic achievement were not associated with increased feelings of control either in academics or more globally, a finding that is in stark contrast to trends in typical adolescent development. As Participant 1, a 15-year-old, female reports:

“I guess I’d also describe myself as someone who’s intelligent and works hard. I get good grades and my teachers feel I should be in a gifted program, but my mom doesn’t want me to do all the tests and stuff because she knows that when I do well on their tests and have to transfer to a special school, questions [about status] might come up, you know. But yeah, like, my lowest mark right now is a 98 in chemistry so I feel I’m smart with school [laughs]…but I have this feeling like it doesn’t, all this, it doesn’t matter because if you don’t have papers, you can’t do anything with all of it [grades]. I mean, sometimes, it’s like, what’s the point, right? Like, I don’t know what’s going to happen to me, I don’t know if I’ll even be able to go to a university or how I’m
supposed to enroll in one because of it all [status]. I don’t know and I don’t know anyone else that does and I don’t even know if I’ll still be here [Canada] or where I’ll even be. There’s too much, you know, that I can’t really, I can’t, you know, I can’t do anything about all of that stuff. It’s not like I can just fix it by doing well. I don’t know, it puts a lot of pressure on me and my parents, there’s so much tension about it…you never know what’s going to happen and sometimes I even feel like, there’s nothing we can, or I can do…or anyone can really do to change it and it doesn’t matter how good my marks are. Who knows if things will change and when, maybe never.”

From this vignette, it is clear that higher levels of academic achievement were related to increased feelings of self-worth and mastery in academics and more globally, but is not associated with feelings of control in that domain or more globally. Rather stress, anxiety and varying levels of hopelessness were reported, irrespective of levels of academic competence. As such, the trend amongst nonstatus youth that diverges from typical adolescent developmental patterns is that feelings of self-worth in specific domains such as academics are not positively associated with increased feelings of control within that domain or more globally in their lives. This lack of control leads to increased stress, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness, which negatively impinges on nonstatus adolescents’ mental health.

Another domain where this relationship of self-efficacy not being associated with increased feelings of control is employment. Nonstatus youth feel they are proficient, have sufficient skills to enter the labour market and are confident in their personal ability to manage a job but such feelings of competence and self-worth are not associated with increased feelings of control, but rather stress, uncertainty and varying levels of hopelessness. As Participant 16, a 17-year-old female explains:
“I’ve watched my parents go from job to job and struggle all their life. Trust me, it’s crazy trying to get a job and I don’t even know if it’s possible to keep one for long. They just go from one place to the next because it’s the only work they can get. I know the same thing’s going to happen to me because that’s already what’s been happening…This year I’ve been going from different places to clean offices and people’s houses, but it’s not stable because when they need you, they call you, but then you can go for weeks without hearing anything from them. Like, there’s some weeks where I work everyday after school and some weeks where I don’t hear a peep from them. My mom tells me to be patient, but I don’t know, I’m not like most people that work there, you know. I graduated from high school here with mostly A pluses and some A’s, I speak perfect English…I’m good with people and I know my stuff, you know. Like, if you need me to do something, I can figure it out, I can look it up, I can do whatever the job needs. It’s just depressing and you can’t really do anything about it and I don’t know, like, I just don’t know anymore if it’ll ever be better…so yeah, I get really worked up at times and my heart starts racing and everything and then I feel worse after and you know, like, the stress of it all, that just never, it’s like, it doesn’t leave.”

All 47 participants expressed such sentiments across age, sex, and ethnicity. The only difference in terms of mental health impacts of self-efficacy not being associated with increased control was that the degree of hopelessness expressed with regard to employment was more pronounced amongst participants in their last year of high school and those already graduated than amongst youth in younger grades. Given that one of the developmental milestones of late adolescence and early adulthood is procuring employment or pursuing
higher education, such trends are not surprising. Compromised self-efficacy in both academic and employment domains is associated with feelings of lack of control along with concomitant feelings of increased stress, anxiety, depression and varying levels of hopelessness amongst nonstatus youths, which may ultimately lead to poorer developmental outcomes.

**Acculturation**

The process of acculturation, as delineated in the Literature Review section, has profound implications for identity development during adolescence. Though research consistently suggests that maintaining ties to both majority and minority cultures, or biculturalism, is associated with better psychological adjustment (Debarry et. al., 1996; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) and developmental outcomes (Steinberg & Morris, 2001), biculturalism is a largely absent phenomenon in the present study sample. Most, 42 out of 47 youth, identified based on ethnicity/nationality, oscillating exclusively between either Canadian or their country of origin (uniculturalism). Irrespective of whether youths identified as Canadian or from their country of origin, all youth in the study expressed feelings of exclusion and marginalization. This is concerning because research on acculturation consistently demonstrates that uniculturalism within multicultural societies, referring to visible minorities who identify mainly with one culture, is associated with increased feelings of exclusion, stress, and problems with identity consolidation, a major development task of adolescence (Oppedal et. al., 2004; Shahsiah, 2006; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Specifically, identity consolidation issues amongst non-status youth in this study are related to stressors associated with “identity crisis”, which refers to an individual’s inability to make consistent decisions or commit to a set of beliefs and values (Oppedal et. al, 2004).
Almost all, 46 out of 47, nonstatus youth participants experienced a variant of identity crisis whereby they went back and forth between identifying strongly or not at all with some or all aspects of their host or Canadian culture and their native culture, without being able to meaningfully reconcile the two. This is evident in the narrative of Participant 6, a 15-year-old female:

“It’s hard to know where I fit in. I’m not really Canadian because I’m not a citizen and stuff. I’m the exact opposite of a Canadian citizen, but I grew up here since I was 6 so it’s kind of my home, but kind of not. I guess I’m Mexican but I barely speak Spanish so I don’t know about that either, but I guess that’s what I’d be seen as, you know. It’s hard to really know because I love hockey, winter, nature, all that stuff [that’s Canadian], but I love Mexican food, having my quincenera [traditional coming of age birthday event], watching football and not having to call it soccer, which makes no sense, by the way, why would someone name it soccer [laughs]? So yeah, I don’t know, I guess Mexican because I’m not a citizen but I don’t know, I’m really Canadian in some ways, it’s hard to explain ‘cuz it’s confusing, you know.”

Similarly, Participant 11, a 15-year-old male, states:

“I try not to think about all that because I don’t identify as anything…people like me [without papers] can’t really say we’re from somewhere, really. I don’t know how to be Canadian enough to be accepted as Canadian citizen. Most of the things I enjoy are things that other Canadian friends enjoy so I guess that’s kind of Canadian, I don’t know. I don’t feel they want me here…or my family either. But it’s where I grew up so I don’t really remember much about Nicaragua, it’s all kind of blank…but I speak Spanish fluently and all that so I’m Latino, I guess…but I don’t live there for a long
time so it’s not really that big a part of who I am or anything. I don’t know it’s not, I don’t know, how to say it. That’s the best I can explain…like, you need a Canadian passport to be considered Canadian, I guess but I’m not like a regular dude from Nicaragua either, you know.”

If this tension in establishing a coherent, consistent cultural identity remains unresolved, the literature suggests that it will result in compromised identity consolidation, which is in turn associated with both poorer developmental and mental health outcomes.

An interesting trend in adolescent acculturation literature involves examining the gender-specific aspects of acculturative identity development. There is research indicating that adolescent females are more sensitive to the cues they receive from dominant Canadian society about “belonging” and anglicize their names to mask or minimize their difference (Khanlou et. al., 2006). Nonstatus youth in the current study, irrespective of gender, employed various strategies, ranging from perfecting their accents to mimic that of a ‘native Canadian’ speaker to anglicizing their names. As Participant 7, a 15-year-old female, explains:

“I practice my English a lot because there’s some words that you have to pronounce differently than they look. Also, written and spoken English are really different so I work on how I sound when I talk. Not having an accent helps if you get called by a policeman or security guard or whatever.”

Another participant, an 18 year old male discusses another coping strategy for masking difference, anglicizing one’s name:

“It’s better to have a Canadian sounding name so people don’t ask too many questions so ended up changing my name to ----- [name] so it’s more Canadian now, you know.”
Such narratives are consistent with findings in adolescent acculturative literature that outline how immigrant and minority youth employ coping strategies (such as anglicizing names, perfecting accents, etc.) to minimize their difference “both in the face, and fear, of prejudice and discrimination directed towards them” (Khanlou et. al., 2006, p. 55). The only difference between previous findings in acculturative adolescent literature and the present study with nonstatus youth is that in the current study there were no gender differences in terms of sensitization to cues from dominant Canadian culture and coping mechanisms employed to ameliorate perceived difference. For example, 13 youth in the study, 7 females and 6 males, mentioned they have tried to anglicize their names to sound less ‘foreign’ or ‘not Canadian.’ Further, 24 participants, 13 females and 11 males, mentioned practicing ‘Canadian accents’ to appear more Canadian.

Issues around uniculturalism, cultural identity formation, and actively employing strategies to mask cultural difference may lead to increased stress and anxiety, decreased self-worth, and lack of cultural identity consolidation by the end of late adolescence amongst non-status youth. This last finding is of particular importance since one of the key developmental tasks of adolescence is identity consolidation by the end of adolescence and beginning of young adulthood.

Peer Relations

Adolescents choose friends with similar experiences and identities (Akers et. al., 1998, Hogue & Steinberg, 1995), but a majority of the youth in this study, 32 out of 47, indicated that they did not have friends who were nonstatus and were uncomfortable with sharing immigration related information with individuals outside the family unit. Youth reported that it was difficult for them to relate to their peers and friends because they did not
share the same hardships related to identity and, as a result, sometimes felt they couldn’t connect with peers intimately. Participant 4, a 16-year-old female explains:

“She [friend] had no idea what was happening inside me and I realized that we live very differently. For her, crushes and boyfriends are a big deal and she took my panic to mean that, and for me, I’m trying to make my immigration problems disappear. It’s not their [friends] fault; we live in different worlds almost so she would never understand. You can’t be 100% sure that people won’t talk if they find out [status info] so I don’t tell anyone. They wouldn’t understand and I can’t risk trying, it could end badly for us [family].”

Similarly, Participant 33, a 17-year-old female, states:

“I try to just be my own best friend sometimes because you can’t share your immigration things with friends…you don’t know what that might mean later on, what if you’re not still friends and they tell or what if they accidentally blurt it out or don’t think about what they’re saying, a lot of things can go wrong quickly. I never talk to people about it because it’s complicated; it’s not something I can explain that well. Like, I don’t think normal people can ever understand what it’s like to be this way and worry every single time you leave your house. Sometimes you’re scared in your house because what if Immigration comes to it. These aren’t normal problems my friends have [laughs]. You can’t, they won’t ever get it, it’s not their life, this isn’t their reality…sometimes when they talk about how the world’s going to stop because they broke up with their boyfriend of 2 weeks, I don’t get it, it’s so stupid that they worry about it. It’s like, ‘Don’t you have better things to worry about? Really, you’re going to think this is a serious problem?’ I don’t get that.”
From these narratives, it is salient that nonstatus youth perceive their realities as distinct from their peers with status. Due to the realities that constrain them from sharing immigration-related information with friends and peers, coupled with the fact that their friends do not experience the same hardships and issues they confront, nonstatus youth report a lack of intimacy in these relationships. Given that adolescence is a period where friendships typically develop into more intimate, supportive and communicative relationships (Buhrmester, 1990; Levitt et. al., 1993), this finding shows a divergent developmental trend amongst nonstatus youth.

It is not simply that most participants mentioned a lack of intimacy in their friendships, but also a lack of support. Although youth reported that they did feel supported by their friends on many matters, including homework, issues with romantic or peer relationships and various other matters, 30 out of 47 youth reported not receiving social support from their friends on any immigration-related problems, which were described as a significant and large part of their life, one which they required the most support with. As Participant 26, a 20-year-old female, states:

“In terms of peers, I didn’t really tell any of my friends because in our family we said that this was a family matter…I think it did end up affecting my relationships with them [friends] because it was always a thing I couldn’t ever talk about and it was the biggest thing in my life so sometimes I felt I didn’t know how to relate to some of the things my friends were going through and I don’t think they knew how to relate to me sometimes because they didn’t understand my exact situation and what was happening all the time inside me. I remember once, my friend, --------, and I were going shopping for prom dresses and I wasn’t all there and she kept saying how prom was
going to be one the biggest events of our lives and I didn’t get it, how is a party the biggest event in a person’s life? And I remember kind of resenting that because their lives seemed so nice, you know, so simple and fun and without these huge things looming over their shoulders. It must be nice to live in a world where you can worry about these things and not be thinking about how you can’t enroll at Berkeley even though you’re graduating at the top of your class, and it must be nice to get loans and scholarships and think a stupid party is the main event…it’s just hard. Like, when you’re in really tough situations, you need to be comforted and reassured or have friends on your side who help you through those times and you can’t, you don’t have that luxury. That’s not really an option you have with friends so it’s hard…because you can’t get that strength through your friends, you have to deal with it inside the best you can.”

This lack of support leads to increased feelings of isolation and compounds pre-existing stress and depression as Participant 13, a 17-year-old male, explains:

“It’s a trip sometimes because even though they my friends and all that, they don’t know a whole lot of things about my life that make me me, you dig. Like, it gets real stressful sometimes dealing with everything ‘cuz you can’t even get your homeys to try and help solve ‘em [problems]. Like, normal peeps get pissed off or sad or anything and they go and tell their friends and you kinda figure shit out together, you know ‘cuz my friends do that with me. They be coming to me for advice on so much random shit [laughs], you don’t even know!...But yeah, like, I can’t do that and it gets me cheesed on some days because you can’t let that stress out and talk it over with your homeys or nothing, you know. So yeah, you just sit alone and feel like shit, all down and
everything and…sometimes you get even more down ‘cuz you feel you just gotta go at
everything alone and can’t get no help from the homeys or nothing.”

Such sentiments are representative of the 30 youth who reported lack of social support and
from such narratives it is evident that this contributes to feelings of loneliness and isolation
and further exacerbates pre-existing stress and depression.

Typically developing adolescents begin to value loyalty and intimacy more,
becoming more trusting and self-disclosing (Buhrmester, 1996). However, results show all
47 participants consistently view self-disclosure as a threat to safety. Consequently, intimate
relationships with friends and, in particular, romantic partners, are negatively impacted by
lack of self-disclosure and inability to trust. Participant 21, an 18-year-old female, explains:

“You can’t really talk about this stuff [immigration status] to friends or your boyfriend
or whatever. One, they won’t understand, they don’t know what it’s like and if they
pretend, it’ll just annoy me more because they don’t understand. Two, you don’t know
what someone will say to someone else and from that person it might catch someone
else’s ear and this type of information can spread quickly without you even knowing
about it until it’s too late…I dated this guy for almost a year and a half and he never
knew, I never had the urge to tell him because what’s the point? He won’t understand
anyway and he might tell people…and yeah, I guess it kind of made our relationship
weird or whatever because I couldn’t really talk about important stuff in my life so like,
what’s the point of keeping guys around if you can’t [talk about these things], you
know?...so yeah, I just ended it because it [relationship] seemed kind of a bit
superficial.”

Another participant, an 18-year-old male, states:
“It doesn’t feel right to be sharing that type of information with my girlfriend…we’ve been dating on and off for 2 years, but I don’t know if I’ll end up telling her, there’s too many risks that come up with that type of thing. I’m just playing it safe for now and play it by ear and see what happens in the future. It’s better she not know, it’s not safe for her either, it’ll just stress her out and what if she gets in trouble ‘cuz she knew but didn’t tell nobody. It’s not the right thing, ain’t no need for it…I guess it [not self-disclosing anything about status or related matters] does affect me or us or like, yeah, our relationship because you have so much going on inside your head and ---- [girlfriend’s name] can tell when I’m really stressed out or upset or whatever and she’ll bug me about it because she wants to know and stuff. And, I know she wants to help but like, I don’t really say anything and sometimes she gets mad because she knows something’s wrong but I don’t talk about it so she gets upset with me and…we might get into a fight or something.”

The lack of self-disclosure and inability to trust intimate partners and friends negatively impacts the quality of friendships and romantic relationships and is a marked difference from typical adolescent developmental patterns whereby adolescents increasingly share more sensitive and private information about themselves.

Amongst non-status youth, lack of intimacy, social support and self-disclosure with peers leads to increased feelings of loneliness, isolation, stress, and depression. Given the fact that developing social competencies is an integral part of adolescence – whereby friendships are expected to evolve into more intimate, self-disclosing, and supportive relationships – the negative mental health outcomes experienced by non-status youth as a result of not being able to solidify such competencies are not surprising. In fact, such
findings are consistent with developmental literature of other adolescent populations whom have difficulties solidifying such social competencies.

**Family Relations**

Typical adolescent developmental patterns indicate that adolescents spend increasing amounts of time alone and with friends, and there is a dramatic drop in time adolescents spend with their parents (Larson & Richards 1991). However, the majority of nonstatus adolescents in the study, 43 out of 47, report opposite trends as they spend the bulk of their time at home with family and have limited interactions with peers outside the home because of parental constraints/fears and personal fears about safety and security outside the home.

Participant 3, a 16-year-old female, reports:

“I don’t really go out that much with my friends outside of school because it’s kind of dangerous. A couple months ago, police were asking my friends for ID when they pulled us over in [friend’s name] car. These things can happen anytime so I feel more comfortable at home because I can control things here more, you know…and the more time you’re outside with people, the more things that can go wrong. And it makes my parents really worried so I just stay at home most of the time. It’s not bad, I prefer it.”

Similarly, another participant, a 16-year-old male, states:

“Like, my mom doesn’t like me going out too much or hanging with my friends at the mall. When I was there with my friends last year, a security guard came up to us and said we were loitering and could be charged, but he let us go so I know my mom’s right about wanting us to stay home more because something can happen to us…most of the
time I’m at home with my family and playing video games, I go out with my friends sometime once a month or sometimes I just don’t.”

Another interesting trend amongst non-status youth is that, unlike typical adolescents who report a marked increase in bickering and squabbling and decrease in reported closeness between parents and teenagers, reported closeness with parents is remarkably high, with 38 out of 47 youth reporting very close ties to a parental figure. Interestingly, the 38 participants explicitly identified lack of immigration status as a factor in both the development and maintenance of close parent-adolescent ties. Participant 4, a 16-year-old female, explains:

“My support is my family, my parents and my sister. They are my…they’re everything. Our family has always been very close even when we lived in Bangladesh and we’re even more close now. No matter what the problems may be, my parents figure out what to do and we get by because of their strength. I watch my mom and dad and how they try, even if they are tired, haven’t slept, anything, they still go to work everyday and it’s for us, for me and my sister. I don’t think you can watch that and not feel a responsibility. I feel a lot of responsibility, so does my sister, we both do well in school, we keep the house clean, we don’t make too much noise when my parents come home, we try to help cook – that’s always a bad idea because I’m terrible inside a kitchen, but we try. We feel we need to do this to take some of the burden off them because they do everything for us. I am very lucky to have my family. I know they provide me with unconditional support, it goes without saying…and moving here [Canada] made us closer because not having immigration made us count on each other only and it made us so much closer. We always go to one another when we need to talk
about our frustrations, vent, don’t know what to do, need a hug [laughs]. They’re the only ones I can go to for this kind of stuff.”

Another participant, a 17 year old male, similarly states:

“Family is everything…especially when you ain’t got nothing. My moms, man, definitely my moms. I mean, my dad also but mostly my mom. She’s always there for me, looking out for me, there’s nothing that woman wouldn’t do for me, nothing. She works, she cleans, she tries to help me with school, she cooks us these crazy good meals, she gives me money, she does everything. She talks to me when she knows I’m down or scared or frustrated or whatever the situation is, she talks to me and tries to figure things out. We’re like this team, me and her, she always knows how to get me out of a bad place, you know? And I try really hard to do good so she’s happy and she’s not worried about me, on top of everything else…My dad also tries his best for us and he’s always working. Right now, he’s got 4 jobs and that’s for us, you know, he does it for us. So even he ain’t around all the time, he’s got our back and I gotta respect that so…[inaudible] at the end of the day, he makes me wanna be a better man. He’s good to my moms and all of us and he’s there for us, in his own way so I know I always count on him. I think our whole family, we’re just all there for each other. That’s how we’ve gotten by, that’s how we ain’t go crazy yet. We always there for each other and we push each other’s buttons a lot but we also push each other in good ways, you know, to do better, to stay positive and keep trying our best. I mean that’s all we can do, just try our best in these situations…I think that’s the positive tip
about this [not having status] is made us closer, we the only ones we can look
to for things and talk it over with.”

From these vignettes it is apparent that the developmental process of disequilibration, whereby youth distance themselves from parents, is largely absent, as youth form closer ties to parents. Consequently, the family unit becomes the main and oftentimes exclusive support system given that youth are unable to discuss immigration related issues with friends and individuals external to their immediate family. Having stronger family ties has positive mental health outcomes for nonstatus youth as they report reduced stress, anxiety and hopelessness when they are discussing immigration-related barriers and issues with family members. Participant 26, a 20-year-old female, elucidates:

“Growing up, I think there was a lot of family support just because my mom was always very supportive and always very forthcoming. She did want us to succeed in life and that we could choose what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it. I think in some way not having papers brought our family closer because we didn’t really sweat the small stuff so there weren’t crazy fights all the time because we had something that united us, you know, something we could only share and discuss with one another. And the fact that my brother and I are close in age, we were able to sort of help each other through our work in school and stuff. Also, because we didn’t share our status with anyone, it was something we talked about amongst ourselves and so that was kind of like our only source of support for all our lives. It brings you closer together because you go through some of the darkest times and only your family really gets it because they had to go through the same things and
they calm you down when you’re tensed all the time and anxious. They inspire you and lift your spirit when you feel you can’t take it anymore; they make you feel like it can be better, that it will get better and they stick around…well, I guess they kind of have to, they are your family [laughs].”

The positive mental health outcomes of reduced stress, anxiety and hopelessness is attributed to the close family ties that provide nonstatus youth an outlet to voice their concerns amongst people dealing with the same issues and collectively strategize possible solutions. As such, though closer family ties in nonstatus adolescents are in stark contrast to typical developmental patterns, this trend has a beneficial impact on adolescent development with positive mental health outcomes.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study suggest that there are important associations between lack of immigration status and youths’ mental well being that are related to the developmental concerns, specifically: lack of a unified, coherent sense of identity; the perceived disconnect between competencies and opportunities and outcomes (educational, vocational); and compromised peer relationships (e.g., lack of intimacy and support). Although it is important to note that identity development is a dynamic process that evolves over time and that such a process is an ongoing negotiation for nonstatus youth and typically developing adolescents alike, the former confront a myriad of challenges that are endemic to their immigration status and result in unique developmental challenges. More specifically, nonstatus youths’ unique duality of self-identity that simultaneously seeks to reject social comparisons and construct self-identify based on personal beliefs while reconstructing an identity very much steeped in
social comparisons, coupled with feelings of compromised self-efficacy in the domains of employment and education, and ongoing acculturative stressors related to issues around uniculturalism, cultural identity formation, and seeking to mask cultural difference, all conflate to create conditions conducive to greater risk of developing mental health problems. Results suggest that being non-status or undocumented should be viewed as a psychosocial condition characterized by increased anxiety, stress, depression, hopelessness and difficulties related to identity development and consolidation. However, future studies are needed to corroborate the findings, particularly due to the fact that this is one of the first studies in Canada to explore the developmental correlates of being undocumented, as well as to address the limitations of the current study.

Theoretical Implications

Results from this study provide data for an emerging theory on nonstatus adolescent development. Developmental concerns centred on a lack of coherent self-identity, compromised self-efficacy and peer relationships, coupled with acculturative stressors lead to increased depression, anxiety, and poorer mental health outcomes in undocumented adolescents. Given that typical developmental trajectories outline the pernicious effects of failing to consolidate a coherent self-identity by emerging adulthood, the implications for this population need to be examined closely. First, long term implications of problems with identity are already well-established and associated with greater psychopathology, poorer mental health outcomes, as well as difficulties in relationships and career (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Cognizant of such realities, it is important to understand the duality of identity non-status adolescents experience and explore whether the very process of identity development that is contrasted with the perceived “non-other” itself leads to the development
of anxiety, depression, and stress. Such findings would have far reaching implications not just for nonstatus adolescents, but a myriad of other marginalized youth populations that may also contend with similar dual identity developmental processes, such as immigrant and refugee youth who view themselves as separate, distinct and different from the norm, racialized youth, or LGBT youth, to name but a few.

Although developmental literature shows that it is sometimes possible for adolescents and emerging adults who struggle with developing a coherent self-identity to not develop psychopathologies, have compromised relationships, career issues, and poorer mental health outcomes, the main mediating variable in ameliorating the negative impacts of incoherent self-identity is feelings of personal agency – the higher the level of personal agency, the less likelihood that the individual will experience the negative impacts of incoherent identity (Schwartz et. al, 2005). However, results from this study reveal that nonstatus adolescents report low levels of agency across academic, personal, and career domains, as they feel immigration status, not personal will, strength and competence, dictate successful outcomes. Consequently, this has implications for both research and clinical practice, as the need to cultivate a sense of personal agency needs to be examined to establish ways to counteract the negative impacts of a consolidated and unified sense of self-identity.

In terms of research, the relationship between dual identity processes and personal agency has to be explored further within this population, as adolescent developmental literature does not look at the particular challenges in dual identity that nonstatus adolescents routinely encounter. Further, research on how to support non-status youth in developing a coherent, non-dual self-identity requires a functioning theoretical model that is able to parsimoniously explain the process of identity development while accounting for how
perceptions of the “non-other” self duality itself leads to the development of anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health issues. Ultimately, this theory also has implications for therapy since the need to provide a space for undocumented youth to develop a unified self-identity would be a critical focus of any therapy with nonstatus adolescents.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There were several limitations of the current study that need to be addressed. First, with regard to the demographic and personal characteristics of the current sample, there is a selection/sampling bias insofar as all participants were recruited from various social service and advocacy organizations, and were therefore receiving or had access to various services and information. This is a particularly important sampling bias to note, as the vast majority of nonstatus youth do not have access to services (Nyers, 2006) and may consequently be at even greater risk than the current sample. Consequently, future studies need to account for and creatively recruit nonstatus youth from non-service sector sites to gauge what the mental health and developmental outcomes are for this population where the majority of people will never access social services.

Another limitation of the present study is that one of the major themes of adolescence, autonomy – the ability to simultaneously maintain social connections while becoming increasingly self-regulating and independent (Collins, Laursen, Mortensen, Luebker, & Ferreira, 1997) -- was not explored. Given that autonomy is a central theme in the developmental literature and a significant developmental milestone, future studies seeking to investigate developmental and mental health outcomes of living without status on youth need to understand the trajectory of developing autonomy, particularly given findings within the current study that nonstatus youth tend to form and maintain closer familial ties
during adolescence than their peers. This may have implications for autonomy, as most typically developing youth seek increasing independence from their parents and family. Particularly, given that the current study’s findings provided support only for the positive benefits of closer familial ties, future studies need to scrutinize how such ties may actually compromise and disrupt processes of individuation and autonomy development that are necessary in developing a coherent self-identity.

Research on the developmental and mental health impacts of living without status on youth is in its infancy in Canada; therefore much remains to be done to examine the state of this vulnerable population. Although findings demonstrate that undocumented youth exhibit symptoms of anxiety and depression, it is unclear whether they would meet diagnostic criteria for these disorders. Further, future studies should compare rates of anxiety, stress and depression amongst undocumented youth to other similar populations such as refugees, immigrants, or even the youth population at large to establish whether undocumented youth suffer from higher levels of anxiety, depression, stress and other mental health issues. This would require quantitative studies in this area, measuring differing rates of mental health issues on numerical scales. Another area future studies should explore is whether there is a relationship between the amount of time an adolescent lives without status and worsening mental health outcomes, particularly anxiety, depression, stress, and hopelessness, which were consistently mentioned by most of the participants in the current study. Furthermore, future studies should also examine and consider the developmental differences between youth who spent the entirety of their adolescence being undocumented and those who became undocumented during late adolescence to gauge for adjustment and mental health outcomes between these two subsets of this population. Finally, cognizant of the fact that this
is an exploratory study, more research needs to be conducted to replicate or repudiate this study’s findings before any generalizations are made and policies drafted.

**Implications for Policy and Clinical Practice**

In terms of policy and recommendations that would ensure better developmental and mental health outcomes for undocumented youth, there are several implications of this study. First, exclusion and marginalization of non-status peoples occurs within a social and political context that privileges certain individuals’ human rights and well-being over others. This type of framework creates a false dichotomy of ‘us’ against ‘them’ where the ‘other’ is separated by those rights and privileges that are systematically denied them. In so doing, those with the misfortune of being labeled ‘other’ are forced into undesirable conditions that compromise their mental health and well being. To ensure that mental well-being and health take precedence, undocumented youth and their families should not be forced to live in the shadows of fear, insecurity and discrimination and need to be included within and viewed as integral members of the community and feel included within larger society. A possible way to further inclusion on a policy level is to develop health policies that ensure immigration status not be a prerequisite for receiving help and access to essential services. Given the pervasive nature of the stress experienced by non-status individuals, a Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) policy could be adopted and implemented, which is already in effect in over 40 cities across the United States (Nyers, 2006). This policy would prohibit health and essential service providers from inquiring into individuals’ immigration status in order to provide them with a vital service, such as healthcare, mental health assistance, and police services among others: the Don’t Ask component. Also, in the event that service providers inadvertently become aware of an individual’s immigration status, they would be barred from disclosing
this information to immigration enforcement authorities: the Don’t Tell component. The DADT policy would reduce the risk and fear of disclosure of immigration status undocumented youth and their families associate with accessing support outside their family unit. By allaying such apprehension and fear, services would be provided based upon need and undocumented youth would not be excluded from care should they require it, which would allow nonstatus youth to feel they had support and increase feelings of inclusion since they are able to access resources and support like everyone else.

Furthermore, developmental considerations should be taken into account when providing services to undocumented youth, as this population has different mental health needs than their adult counterparts. Given that typically developing adolescents choose friends based on shared experiences and identities and the fact that non-status youth within this study overwhelmingly stated that they had no nonstatus friends to share their experiences with, possible peer support circles that facilitate undocumented youth meeting one and supporting one another would be an important step in breaking the isolation many such youth experience. Also, providing legal support to this population so that they are able to better understand the immigration system and get legal advice for not just their personal or family case, but also advice on whether they are eligible to obtain a driver’s license or enquire into possible student status in Canada, would be an important step in reducing some of the anxiety youth experience because of a lack of information and support. Similarly, providing psycho-educational information and sharing practical knowledge about educational opportunities, including the university application process and obtaining financial assistance to nonstatus students who may be unaware of their rights and opportunities, unsure of how larger bureaucratic systems operate, or afraid to seek out such information themselves, would go a
long way in alleviating much of the distress experienced from the lack of information available. Finally, increases in funding for neighborhood centres and health facilities that serve this vulnerable population would facilitate expansion of the mental and physical health services offered.

A review of the literature and an examination of the results from this study indicate that this population is at risk for a variety of negative developmental outcomes related to identity development and consolidation and peer relations. Such findings echo the potential for pervasive stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, decreased self-worth, and stigmatization among undocumented adolescents. Given that the primary purpose of this pilot study was to begin to identify various developmental challenges undocumented adolescents face, this study underscores the significance of compromised developmental processes leading to poorer mental health outcomes with a population that is largely understudied. Future studies in this field may corroborate these results or shed new insight into the unique stressors and developmental challenges this population is encumbered by, but current research in the field is consistent with findings in this study. Progress in examining and understanding the repercussions of immigration status on the development of adolescents has the potential to inform not only basic knowledge in developmental psychology but also larger immigration and service policy.
REFERENCES


Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

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Table 2. Prevalence of Coded Factors

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

I am conducting a research study on the mental well-being of non-status or undocumented youth. I am requesting your cooperation as a voluntary participant in this study.

My research aims to generate a more comprehensive understanding of how non-status youth in Canada respond to stressful situations related to their immigration status or lack thereof. In particular, I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of non-status youth and how the threat of detention and deportation informs their identity and well-being.

I am therefore inviting you to assist me by agreeing to participate in the study, which will take approximately two hours devoted to a one-on-one interview.

All data generated during this study will remain confidential. The only limitations to confidentiality are in situations where abuse or intention to harm others or self is reported, as I am required to legally report these situations. Your name and all other personal identifiers will never be used in the final paper or any drafts. Any information collected will be labeled with a coded alphabet, not a name, so as to ensure complete confidentiality. Only the researcher, myself, will know the names and other personal identifiers of the participants.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to participate in the interview. You may refuse to participate and terminate your participation in the study at any time without any consequences or prejudice and without penalty. If you have any questions, or would like further information about the research, please feel free to contact me anytime at faria.kam@gmail.com or 647.236.4212.

Thank you for your consideration. I greatly appreciate your time and contribution.

_________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature                                                   Date

_________________________________                  ______________________________
Researcher Signature                                                   Date
APPENDIX B

Personal Information Questionnaire

Age: ________________________

Sex: _____ Male     _____ Female

Are you currently in school?    _____ Yes     _____ No

Are you currently working?     _____ Yes     _____ No

If yes, how much do earn weekly:  __________________

Are your parents currently working? ______ Yes     ______ No

If yes, how much they earn weekly:  __________________

When did you move to Canada: _____________________ (Month/Year)

How would you rate your current level of English fluency?
Good ___   Fair ___   Poor ___

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire. All information given is strictly confidential.
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe yourself?

2. What do you identify yourself as? How did you identify yourself before you moved to Canada and how would you identify yourself today?

3. Does your immigration status – or lack thereof – affect you? Your family? Your community?

4. What are your sources of motivation and support? (Examine familial, peer and institutional levels)

5. What are the biggest stressors in your life? How do they make you feel?

6. What could be done to alleviate the stress you feel?

7. What do you immediately associate with the words ‘detention’ and ‘deportation’?

8. On a day-to-day basis, do you think about detention or deportation? If so, how do you deal with the possibility of being detained or deported?

9. What do you see as the biggest hurdle to gaining full immigration status? How do you tackle this issue?