



Migrant Mothers Project – University of Toronto
Summary of Caregivers’ Journeys Community Event
Coming Together to Address the Old and New Pathways
Date of Event: February 4, 2018
April 5, 2018

Background

This document summarizes the ideas, concerns, and activities that organizers and attendees participated in and voiced at the Migrant Mothers Project “Caregivers’ Journeys” community event.

On February 4, 2018, the Migrant Mothers Project hosted a community event titled, “Caregivers’ Journeys: Coming Together to Address the Old and New Pathways”, in collaboration with a variety of the project’s community partners. These community partners included: Caregiver Connections Education and Support Organization (CCESO), GABRIELA Ontario, and The Neighborhood Organization (TNO). The event took place at the University of Toronto’s Faculty of Social Work. It featured a community panel and three workshops for participants to engage in dialogue about some of the challenges caregivers currently face; ways of supporting caregivers who are experiencing mental strain and/or employer abuse; and advocacy strategies for systemic change. Over 60 people participated including caregivers, advocates, service providers, faculty, students, and community members.

The timing of our event was deeply impacted by news posted by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) on February 2, 2018 that the Caregiver Program (CP) would expire by November 2019. On November 29, 2019, the Canadian government will stop accepting applications for permanent residents for people working in the CP. We currently do not know what will happen to people who have not yet completed the 24-month work requirement to qualify for permanent residence (PR). At the time of the event, IRCC had not clarified their intent to review the CP, thus this news created a sense of shock and dismay among all attendees.

This summary captures some of the frustration, uncertainty, and unbridled determination among caregivers and caregiver advocates to strategize and encourage one another. Attendees who gathered for the panel and advocacy strategy session spoke to the concerns and possible solutions to the review the expiry of the “new” caregiver program within the broader context of the globalization of transnational care work.

Overview of the Forum Agenda:

1. An overview of the Caregivers’ Journeys research findings
2. A panel discussion with service providers and caregivers, in regards to the restrictions within the CP and the notice posted by IRCC that the CP is currently under review
3. A tribute to Coco Diaz, an esteemed advocate for the caregiver community

4. Workshops on advocacy, signs of abuse and safety planning, and mental health and family reunification

Discussion Themes

Findings from Caregivers Journeys Study

Led by Dr. Rupaleem Bhuyan, Principal Investigator of the Migrant Mothers Project.

The event included an overview of the Caregivers' Journeys research findings and presentations from community leaders, caregivers and advocates.

"Caregivers' Journeys" is a participatory action research project that identifies conditions of abuse and exploitation among migrant domestic workers employed through Canada's Caregiver Program and former Live-in Caregiver Program. Caregivers' journeys used a peer researcher model where migrant caregivers were trained to conduct individual interviews with migrant caregivers who are currently working in one of Canada's Caregiver programs. Peer researchers were also involved in the research advisory committee from the onset, to provide input into the research design and advocacy goals of the project. Overall, 33 participants took part in 21 individual interviews and 2 focus groups in Calgary and Toronto.

Goals of the Caregivers' Journeys Study:

- 1) To hear from Caregivers
- 2) To build capacity for community-based research
- 3) To engage in advocacy with Caregivers
- 4) To develop policy & service recommendations

Study Findings

In our study of 33 caregivers working in Toronto and Calgary, the majority (94%) identified as women; two-thirds had children. Two-thirds had previously worked overseas as a migrant caregiver in Asia, the Middle East, or North Africa. 10% of our sample had arrived to work in Canada within the previous two years, 63% had lived in Canada for two to five years, and 27 had been living in Canada for five to ten years.

Thirteen participants (37%) were working on a closed permit at the time of our study, in either the LIC or Caregiver Program. Fifteen had finished the program and worked on an open permit while waiting for the permanent resident application to be processed. Three participants had recently obtained permanent residence and two had recently lost their immigration status, as a result of the lengthy processing times associated with their permanent resident application.

caregivers, however, fear being stigmatized during periods of insecurity with their immigration status; as a result, they withdraw from peer-support networks when they are most vulnerable.

As of December 2017, an estimated 30,000 caregivers had completed their work requirement and were still waiting for their permanent resident applications to be processed, some of whom have been waiting for eight to ten years. The number of permanent resident admissions for migrant caregivers has also decreased since the introduction of the new caregiver program in 2014. In 2017, only 555 migrant caregivers received permanent residence through the new caregiver program; 1,955 in total since the caregiver program was launched in 2014. The low numbers of applicants are a troubling indication that the education and language requirements are barring access to permanent residence, thus producing longer periods of precarity and increasing risk for loss of status among migrant caregivers.

In our study, caregivers changed employers had a minimum eight-month period without work authorization while they waited for both the new LMIA and work permits to be processed. There were a range of factors that contributed to a change in employer including: caregivers who were released by the employer listed on their work permit soon after arriving in Canada; a change in the employer's family status (i.e. a maternity leave; hospitalization of the person in need of care), or caregivers who had to leave an abusive or exploitative employer. With an average eight months of waiting between valid work permits, many caregivers face financial stress and delay in completing the 24-month requirement for the Caregiver Program.

Most of the caregivers in our study reported experiencing different forms of employer abuse or labor exploitation in their caregiving jobs. In most cases, caregivers remained with their employers or delayed changing employers due to the fear of long periods of unemployment while waiting for the new LMIA and work permits to be processed and fear of now completing the 24-month requirement.

The most common forms of abuse and exploitation were related to work caregivers were required to perform outside of their contracts including: caring for extra children and working longer hours without extra pay. Several caregivers also reported psychological abuse, financial abuse (having to pay employers back for the LMIA fee), and sexual harassment. One caregiver in our study reported that she had been sexually assaulted by her employer. She was working with local police to prosecute this assault, but was fearful of returning to care work due to the trauma of this assault, so was unemployed at the time of our study.

The vulnerability that care workers experience is exacerbated by their temporary work permits that are tied to individual employers. The lack of labor protections for domestic workers places caregivers who are tied to their employers at further risk. Issuing permanent residence upon entry for new caregivers and open work permits for migrant caregivers who are already in Canada would directly address the structural roots of migrant caregivers' vulnerability for abuse and exploitation. With permanent residence, caregivers would not be fearful that leaving an employer would jeopardize their immigration status or goal to reunify with their children in Canada.

Areas for Action:

- Community organizations must develop creative approaches to service delivery: evening and weekend hours, itinerant services for caregivers living in remote areas, and various online and phone services.
- Anti-trafficking and family violence programs must respond to the needs of migrant women who must leave an abusive employer, by developing caregiver-specific safety-planning and emergency/transitional housing.
- Policy changes need to address the structural violence in the Caregiver Program, such as forced family separation, stringent requirements governing work permits, eligibility for PR and conditions (such as long processing times) that set up caregivers to lose status (Arat-Koc, 2001; Valiani, 2009).
- Sign the Caregivers and Caregiver Advocates Petition at www.caregiver-action.com

The Caregiver Advocacy & Community Organization Panel

Moderated by Esel Panlaqui (TNO) and featuring Mithi Esguerra (GABRIELA Ontario), Pearlita Juan (Peer Researcher, MMP), Deanna Santos (Santos Law)

1) Responding to IRCC Announcement that Caregiver Program will Expire in Nov. 2019

On November 29, 2019, IRCC will stop accepting PR applications. Caregivers who cannot finish the program and apply for PR before this date will be not eligible for PR. This recent announcement caused frustration and panic among caregivers and advocates because of the lack of information and advanced notice regarding the termination of the CP. It's concerning that IRCC is still continuing to issue work permits even though those caregivers will not have enough time to finish the program before it expires, and there is no information about what will happen to caregivers who cannot finish the program. Further, caregivers currently in the program will face increased vulnerability because of the pressure to finish the program by next November.

This announcement has advocates concerned that "history is repeating itself". Decades of advocacy to reform the structural violence of the Caregiver Program seems to be set back by this announcement. A government that claims to be feminist, is ignoring the voices and human rights of migrant women who come to take care of Canadian families. If migrant women are good enough to work in Canada, they're good enough to stay.

2) The de-professionalization & the stigma attached to domestic work

De-professionalization of migrants is a huge issue. In order to qualify to come to Canada as a caregiver, migrants must attain degrees and diplomas from the Philippines (e.g. most caregivers have a nursing degree) which aren't recognized in Canada. The CP is often talked about as a

“stepping stone” to other career options, however being in the program restricts caregivers from studying in Canada. After the program, caregivers’ face stigma when applying for other jobs because of their experience as a domestic worker. To pursue jobs outside of caregiving, caregivers have to upgrade their educational requirements, which is very difficult while holding a full-time job and because many need to send money back home to their families.

3) Important policies to address and advocacy goals:

- Advocate for PR on arrival
- Continue to prioritize PR as the end goal of the caregiver program
- Work permits should not be tied to a specific-employer, which exacerbates the power employers in their relationship with caregivers
- Raise awareness for and protect caregivers’ rights
- Hold the Philippine Government accountable to the fact that caregivers are still Philippine citizens while caregivers are working toward their PR in Canada; thus, Philippine Government should be responsible to provide proper services to caregivers and other migrant workers.

Workshop A: Advocacy Strategy Session

Moderated by Dr. Rupaleem Bhuyan and facilitated by Mithi Esguerra (GABRIELA) and Esel Panlaqui (TNO).

The following topics were discussed.

Priorities for Advocacy/ Action

- Clear the backlog of PR applications
- Reform medical inadmissibility
- Open work permits
- Orientation for LCP from OWWA
- Regularization for former caregivers
- Intimate partner violence & Trafficking
- Integrate domestic work into labour standards
- Enforce regulation of hiring agencies
- Establish occupational health & safety standards
- Set-up a hotline for migrant caregivers to get support

Community Strengths

- Strong network of churches and faith-based organizations
- Strong presence on social media
- Direct contact with migrant workers
- Some funding for organizing work: Migrante Ontario; FCJ Refugee Centre, welcome centre for migrant workers.

Challenges/Needs

- Ensuring caregiver’s voices are heard
- Need funds to sustain grassroots work
- Education on TFWP
- Itinerant and flexible service delivery

Recent & Ongoing Actions

- New Changes to Bill 148
- Repealing medical inadmissibility, National Day of Action
- Press spot or Rally on March 12, 2018 at IRCC office in Toronto at 10 am
- New Migrant Workers settlement program by FCJ Refugee Centre
- Ongoing advocacy for nonstatus people
- Having access to settlement and legal aid and labour services
- Action to end PR backlog

Short & Long Term Goals

- Licensing system for recruiters
- Pathway to PR for all TFWs
- Request clarification for November 2019 deadline for the Caregiver Program
- Access to open work permits
- List of bad employers
- Interim federal health coverage for caregivers

Future advocacy campaigns

- Using a “frontline workers approach”
- Gathering people to support the petitions for caregiver’s rights
- Collectively testifying to the parliament

Workshop B: Signs of Abuse and Safety Planning

Facilitated by Martha Ocampo (CCESO), Lorraine Valmadrid (MMP Research Assistant) and Alex Timoteo and Natasha Hoyte (The Redwood Shelter).

The signs of abuse and safety planning workshop provided a definition for abuse and identified common types of abuse experienced by caregivers in the Caregivers’ Journeys study. This includes being “put down” or insulted; long, unpaid work hours; doing tasks outside of ‘light housekeeping’; sexual harassment or assault; being forced to pay for items children broke when with the caregiver; not being allowed to leave the house; being denied privacy, etc. The workshop provided a space for participants to discuss these types of abuse in relation to their

experience working as and with caregivers. Other forms of abuse identified in the discussion was: abuse from recruiters and online abuse (caregivers turn to online networks/online dating to curb feelings of loneliness and isolation; this becomes another source of vulnerability). Overall, the session emphasized the importance of awareness about caregivers' rights and proposed that employers also be educated about forms of abuse/exploitation caregivers' face.

The workshop also highlighted the role anti-trafficking and violence against women (VAW) organizations have in responding to migrant women's needs. One way of doing so would be for VAW organizations to develop safety-planning tools and strategies specific to caregivers. To see resources and tips regarding safety planning shared by the Redwood Shelter, please visit: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18JLb4463EDW9_Ase4wrL5qyBTRHABNA7WzXOQk623Y/edit?usp=sharing.

Workshop C: Mental Health and Family Reunification

Facilitated by Lani Aguinaldo (Psychologist) and Fernanda Villanueva (Social Worker)

The mental health and family reunification workshop addressed stresses experienced by caregivers prior to and after the arrival of their families. While caregivers are happy to have reunited with their spouse and children, the long period of family separation and stresses of migration can cause strain on family relationships. Caregivers spoke about getting to know their children, who they left as babies, and now are almost adults; guilt from their children growing up without them; financial burdens of supporting their families in Canada; and how coming to Canada as a caregiver was the "ultimate sacrifice".

Caregivers also spoke about feelings of depression, anxiety, and worry. They talked about the importance of open communication with their children in order to foster understanding about their separation and support each other in their transition to living as a family in Canada.

A Tribute to Columbia "Coco" Tarape Diaz

Led by Bong Castro, Martha Ocampo and Genie.

As it is important to create a space to recognize the ongoing struggles of migrant workers, and those who fight endlessly for caregivers' rights, the tribute to Columbia "Coco" Tarape Diaz was a time to applaud the significant advocacy work she contributed within the caregiver community.

On March 23, 2018, Coco Diaz passed away, surrounded by her family and friends.

Conclusion



The Migrant Mothers Project is grateful to those who attended our community event and engaged in such important dialogue regarding the precarious status of caregivers in Canada. Please visit www.migrantmothersproject.com for project updates and more information or follow us on Facebook at @MigrantMothersProject and Twitter at @Migrantmothersp.