

**THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES:  
A Study of the South Asian Community in Metropolitan Toronto**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Though an underlying sense of unity has helped the South Asian community to emerge as a potent social force within Canadian society, social service agencies need to factor in the wide variety of differences within the community, based on country of origin, language, religion and culture as well as on the varied educational and professional backgrounds and the time of migration to Canada.

An important finding of this study is that the Sikh Punjabi community which has till now been the major South Asian community, is, in terms of numbers, being overtaken by Sri Lankan Tamils. Since the priorities and needs of the two segments are very different in kind, this should receive special attention from service providers.

South Asian migration into Canada has gone through three different phases. In the first phase lasting from 1900 to 1960, South Asians had to fight for their rights to gain entry into Canada and confront an overtly racist immigration policy. The second phase came when the liberalization in the 1960s saw a wave of South Asians entering Canada. From the mother countries came qualified and highly educated immigrants and these were reinforced by South Asians who were predominantly professionals or businesspersons fleeing anti-Asian prejudice in Africa and later those from Europe who wished to escape the recession there. South Asians from the Caribbean in contrast tended to be semi-skilled or domestic labourers. In the third phase centered on the eighties, the immigrants tended to be from the family class or were refugees from places like Sri Lanka, Punjab and Bangladesh.

Mainstream agencies which are funded to provide services to ethnospecific communities, claim they do not keep statistics by ethnospecific origins served. This makes it difficult to evaluate their adequacy or otherwise in delivering services to ethnospecific communities. Our study seems to indicate that ethnospecific agencies are better suited to providing services for new immigrants and refugees and in cases where cultural sensitivity to the clients' predicament is critical.

Our finding is that except for those mandated to provide them with services, mainstream agencies have little contact with new immigrants or refugees. Ethnospecific agencies on the other hand report this to be a routine activity and the frequency of such services exceeded even those of mainstream agencies mandated to provide them.

Ethnospecific agencies feel quite strongly that they provide a better, more cost efficient and less alienating service than mainstream agencies and their integrated service models are less stigmatizing and less psychologically scarring.

One finding is that there is a scarcity of services to help new immigrants with job skills training and job market counselling. Another is that South Asian agencies serve, albeit

inadequately and with a narrower range of services than are needed, Metropolitan Toronto, Brampton and Mississauga. There are no agencies serving York, Markham, Ajax or Pickering.

An overwhelming majority of responding agencies say CASSA's major role ought to be advocacy in general. In the light of this, it is unfortunate that funding agencies do not consider advocacy to be a "direct service" and so make no provisions for funding such activity which consumes an inordinate amount of the time and resources of poorly funded and staffed South Asian agencies. A major portion of the liaison activity they say, involves advocating for cross-cultural sensitivity issues.

The perception that South Asian agencies lack institutional cohesiveness is incorrect. They were found to be on par with mainstream agencies in that regard.

A majority of respondents feel that culturally sensitive and multilingual staff engaged in front line work, as well as suitable representation in the boards and managements of mainstream organizations, is necessary to facilitate access to those agencies by ethnospecific communities. Another important finding is the widespread feeling that culture sensitivity training of mainstream staff at ethnospecific agencies and secondment of ethnospecific staff to mainstream agencies could facilitate this process to a great degree.

Ethnospecific agency respondents say funding guidelines ought to be more flexible, with funds corresponding to the needs and size of the community, after correcting the imbalances caused by funding neglect.

Most respondents feel that services offered by mainstream organizations are often fragmented while there is a need for offering services on a holistic basis.

To conclude, serious service needs that are not being adequately dealt with by mainstream agencies, remain unfulfilled within the South Asian communities. Other gaps identified include lack of recognition and implementation of equity issues, underfunding and lack of security of funding and lack of appropriate strategies for combating direct discrimination.