Guest Editor's Introduction

Demographic Research: Selected papers from the Federation of Canadian Demographers 2015 Conference

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In 2015, the Federation of Canadian Demographers (FCD) held a conference in Ottawa on the theme “Revisiting Demographic Challenges in the 21st Century—Population Dynamics, Demographic Methods, and Public Policy.” The organizers’ intention was to revisit some of the dominant ideas expressed at an earlier FCD conference, “Demographic Challenges of the 21st Century.” Indeed, important social demographic changes evolved over the 10-year span between these two conferences: Canadian society witnessed the continuing urbanization of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples; fertility rates stayed low, at sub-replacement levels; family structures became increasingly more complex; continued ageing of the population led to an increasingly older labour force, as well as changes in health policies; changes in immigration patterns has resulted in the social fabric becoming increasingly diverse along ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic lines; and cancellation of the long-form census in 2011 (recently reinstated for the 2016 Census) prompted researchers to explore new data sources in order to supplement available census data.

It was noted in the call for papers for the FCD 2015 Conference that although some of the challenges raised during the 2005 conference had been addressed, new challenges had since presented themselves, and a substantial number of challenges still remained to be explored. Consequently, the FCD’s Scientific Committee¹ prepared a program that reflected the demographic challenges that we faced in the 2015, and offered an excellent platform to expand demographic research in Canada.

It was agreed early in the planning process for the 2015 FCD conference that a selection of the papers would be published in two journal special issues—*Canadian Studies in Population* for the presentations given in English and *Cahiers québécois de démographie* for the presentations given in French. The six papers presented in this issue of *CSP* offer an excellent cross-section of the research presented at the conference. The themes addressed encompass the retention of immigrants across Canada; the relationship between sociodemographic factors, self-rated health and mortality; immigrant employment and earnings; measures of obesity among Canadian Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, youth, and young adults; non-residential fatherhood; and gender inequality in the family setting.

In the leading paper, Beaujot and colleagues offer an important analysis and discussion of the respective gender roles and responsibilities within a family unit.² They observe that although gender inequalities with respect to paid and unpaid work have diminished, the presence of young children still results in observable inequalities. They recognize the impact of lone parenthood on the children, and suggest that current policy must adapt to help these children to overcome the inherent disadvantages that they face due to the family structure. They propose that discussions on social policy should take into consideration the modernization of families and the concept of co-parenting.

This discussion is taken a step further in Strohschein’s article on non-residential fatherhood in Canada. Strohschein analyzed the 2012 Canadian Longitudinal and International Survey of Adults (LISA) to examine

1. The members of the scientific committee were Rosemary Bender (chair), Lisa Kaida, Thomas LeGrand, Lisa Strohschein, and Hélène Vézina.

2. This article is reprinted, with permission, from the Oxford University Press book *Social Inequality in Canada: Dimensions of Disadvantage*.

the impact of characteristics such as age, marital status, education, income, and region of residence on the likelihood of non-residential fatherhood. *Non-residential fatherhood* is a natural outcome of co-parenting, and it has become a topic of increasing interest to social scientists. Strohschein highlights some of the conceptual challenges that must be addressed when analyzing this important outcome of changing family structures. Her work demonstrates the limitations as to how far analysis can progress with the first cycle of data, and highlights the importance of working with robust longitudinal data on the subject. Importantly, her article provides directions that should be considered in the study of non-residential fatherhood. Chief among these is the need to measure the proportion of time that fathers spend in the same residence as their children.

A great deal of demographic and health research has been conducted on the growing incidence and the health consequences of obesity in the population. Wilk and his colleagues begin their article with an overview of the existing literature on the subject. Obesity has been linked to cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and diabetes, among other ailments. In fact, as proposed by Olshansky et al. (2005) in their article appearing in *New England Journal of Medicine*, rising levels of obesity may possibly lead to a decline in life-expectancy in the United States. Wilk and associates raise the prospect of the possible adverse effects of obesity among Canadian Indigenous children, youth, and young adults. They focus on important methodological issues concerning measurement of the effects of age, birth-cohort, and period on obesity. They examine repeated waves of the Canadian Community Health Survey (from 2001 to 2008) in order to conduct a hierarchical age-period-cohort analysis of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population between the ages of 12 and 40 years. Their findings show that *overweight and obesity* remains an issue that cannot be explained by either period or birth-cohort effects for Indigenous peoples living off-reserve. They conclude that the Indigenous population is at greater risk for obesity-related co-morbidities, and also that nationwide initiatives must be undertaken to promote a healthy lifestyle for these population groups.

In another area, immigration and its role in the growth and development of Canadian society has been the subject of numerous books and articles (Beaujot 2005; Boyd and Vickers 2000; Ley and Hiebert 2001). Other studies examine the link between immigration and economic growth (Morley 2006). Ci and Hou focus more narrowly on the economic opportunities of immigrants, once they have arrived in Canada. They employ data from four administrative sources that have been linked together to form the Canadian Employer-Employee Dynamics Database, study the factors associated with initial employment of immigrants, and examine the earnings growth trajectories for these immigrants. The firms are classified into three categories: low-paying, low- to medium-paying, and high-paying. A great deal of work to develop administrative data sources for analytical purposes has been undertaken by national statistical agencies, and this article demonstrates the analytical power of these data to study demographic phenomena. The authors demonstrate that the initial employment for immigrants is a strong indicator of their longer-term earnings trajectories. Furthermore, the returns to education were significantly higher for those employed in high-paying firms.

Continuing with the theme of immigration, Haan and colleagues examine the factors that contribute to the retention of immigrants across Canada. This project is another example of the value of administrative data in analyzing demographic phenomena in Canada. The authors use the Longitudinal Immigration Database and harmonized Census data files to examine the differences between official language minority communities in Quebec and outside Quebec with respect to retention of immigrants. Language is an important demographic feature of a society, and it is a defining feature of Canadian society (Goldmann and Lachapelle 2011; Goldmann et al. 2011; Trovato 2015). Haan and colleagues combine the demographic and political importance of language by focusing their analysis on the role of official language minority communities in the retention of immigrants, using Cox proportional hazard models to analyze the risk factors associated with migration out of a province. They consider the type of community (with respect to official language designation) as one of the explanatory variables, and they distinguish between English- and French-speaking immigrants. They observe that the risk of immigrants migrating out of the province of landing diminishes with age, and that it is influenced by the immigration class under which they were admitted. They also observe that the patterns differ based on the language classification of the immigrants and on the province of settlement. Significant differences in risks of migration exist among immigrants landing in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. This work clearly demonstrates the importance of considering language in analyzing migratory flows in Canada, and also the power of administrative data in demographic analysis.

The final article in this Special Issue addresses an important methodological question in social epidemiology—the predictive power of self-rated health on mortality. Falconer and Quesnel-Vallée test the moderating effect of demographic and human capital characteristics on self-rated health to predict mortality. They examine longitudinal data from the National Population Health Survey over 9 cycles from 1994 to 2010 to complete their analysis. As mentioned by the authors, this study adds a Canadian context to the existing literature on the topic. Self-rated health is often reported on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from poor to excellent. This scale is often either dichotomized (“poor” versus the remaining 4 categories) or simplified into three categories in demographic and epidemiological studies. Falconer and Quesnel-Vallée effectively dichotomize the scale by focusing primarily on self-reported “poor” health. They hypothesize that the predictive power of self-rated health will increase with proximity to death. This thesis is supported by their empirical analysis. They also show that there is a positive correlation between self-rated health and the SES of the respondent. Their research reinforces the power of longitudinal data in demographic analyses, and situates Canada firmly in the social epidemiological literature on the impact and value of self-reported health in demographic analyses.

The papers published in this issue of *Canadian Studies in Population* (and in the upcoming volume of *Cahiers québécois de démographie*) provide strong evidence that the goals of the FCD 2015 Conference were achieved. The papers address the demographic implications of changing family structures and changing gender roles. They also address some of the economic challenges faced by immigrants, and the impact of language on internal geographic mobility. A number of the papers demonstrate innovative uses of existing and new data sources. Questions of the health of various population groups, most notably the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, and the use of health indicators in demographic methods are addressed. Although much more research is clearly needed concerning Canadian population dynamics, demographic methods, and public policy, this special issue of *Canadian Studies in Population* presents substantial progress in addressing certain important aspects of the broader theme.

As most readers of this Special Issue of the *CSP* journal will appreciate, its content is the result of significant contributions by many people and organizations. First, the success of the conference is due to important contribution made by the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ottawa, Statistics Canada and the Program and Organising Committees. The publication of this collection of selected papers on demographic research was made possible, in part, by the generous support of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. I would also like to acknowledge the collaboration of Laurent Martel, my co-chair on the FCD 2015 Conference Organizing Committee. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the overwhelmingly excellent contribution of Frank Trovato and his staff in producing this outstanding Special Issue of *Canadian Studies in Population*.

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