

SALVADOREAN AND GUATEMALAN YOUTH IN EXILE:  
ADAPTING TO LIFE IN CANADA

by

WILLIAM JAMES SMILEY

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Department of Social Work

The University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, Canada

Date July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth adapting to life in Canada. Qualitative methods were used to allow the participants to share their experiences and perceptions in their own words. The data emphasize individuality and common concerns rather than numbers or labels. Focused interviews were done with youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years. Thirteen males and eleven females were interviewed. Their time in Canada ranged from a couple of weeks to five years.

The findings revealed that many were experiencing emotional and psychological wounds due to traumatic pre-migration experiences of war and violence. Symptoms reported included; nightmares, insomnia, intrusive memories, lack of concentration, depression, and anxiety. Our social and mental health services are not prepared to deal with these problems. The highest risk population seemed to be single young men who have come to Canada as refugee claimants. They do not even have the support of family and friends. These young men also face the added stress of waiting to see if they will be deported or allowed to stay in Canada.

The youth described adapting to the cultural differences, their experiences of discrimination and racism, and the

frustrations of learning English. They talked about family problems complicated by conflicting cultural values and changing gender roles. They shared their strengths, ways of coping, and aspirations.

The study revealed a lack of services for refugee youth. Our institutions are not responsive to those who have had their formal education interrupted by war and migration. Although Canada's official policy is one of multiculturalism, our institutions and attitudes seem to expect these newcomers to be "regular Canadians". Their transition from one culture to another at a time of identity formation, further complicated by the scars of trauma, is very difficult. A whole range of services is required, including counselling, support groups, cultural orientation programmes, leisure and recreation programmes, more flexible and responsive educational programmes, and employment training. Canada is a multicultural mosaic and immigrant and refugee youth are a part of our future. The role of social work in addressing these needs is discussed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, Canada has admitted more than one million newcomers, almost 200,000 of whom have been refugees. This is nothing new. Canada, as we know it, was built by immigrants. What is different is that the character of migration is changing. Whereas previously most of the 150,000 people who entered Canada each year came from Europe, now the majority come from Asia, Africa and Latin America (Canada, 1986). These new immigrants hold ideas and values about family, religion, and society vastly different from most Canadians. These differences compound the difficulty and stress of starting life over again in a completely new and unfamiliar environment.

Services to immigrants and refugees have increased substantially in the past ten years. Many non-profit organizations have been established to help with the initial settlement of the newcomers. These agencies provide orientation, information, employment counselling and supportive counselling in the languages of the newcomers. Most of the funding for these services comes from the federal government in the form of grants. Other funds come from the municipal government, churches, and funding agencies like the United Way. The provincial government here in British Columbia provides very little money for such

services.<sup>1</sup> They have been reluctant to see the adaptation of immigrants as a Provincial responsibility (Shearer, 1987). This perspective overlooks the fact that immigrants and refugees become tax paying residents of the province and still experience language and cultural barriers to the use of mainstream services and full participation in British Columbian society.

It is important to make a distinction between immigrants and refugees. Immigrants make a voluntary choice to come to Canada. Their move is often carefully planned, sometimes for years in advance. They often come to improve their economic situations, or to build a "better life" for their children. Refugees are involuntary migrants. They were forced to leave their homeland. They often had to flee for their lives on a moment's notice, leaving behind all they had worked for and all they had known. They must seek asylum outside of their countries. Three quarters of the world's approximately thirteen million refugees are women and children (Siemens, 1988).

Refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala are fleeing brutal military repression and terrorism. Poor landless peasants pressing for land reforms have been labeled communists. Afraid of losing their privileges, the Salvadorean oligarchy and military have waged a bloody war on their own population, forcing the revolutionary movements to organize and fight back. This

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1. The Province of British Columbia spends an average of \$9 per immigrant for settlement and integration services as compared to Manitoba, which spend an average of \$230 per immigrant. British Columbia has the lowest rate in all of Canada (Shearer, 1987).

strife has caused 30,000 deaths and 300,000 refugees since 1979 (Waxler-Morrison, et al. In press).

The youth have been caught in the middle of the struggle. The military conscripts young adolescents, sometimes as young as thirteen years old, by kidnapping them on their way to school, coming out of movies, or wherever they can find them. The youth are also pressured to join the revolutionary groups. If they try to remain neutral they are suspected of being collaborators by both sides. One refugee woman told me that the greatest sin today in El Salvador is to be young.

Growing numbers of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth are living in Vancouver. The settlement services that are available focus mainly on preparing adults for the job market. Immigrant youth as a target group has been largely ignored (Shearer, 1987). Social workers, community organizations, the schools, and the police have become increasingly concerned. Immigrant youth face issues that are common to youth in general but it is important that programmes for youth take into account that some of the group are new to Canada and to the Canadian way of life.

## THE PROBLEM AREA AND LITERATURE REVIEW

I have chosen to study the experiences of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth in Vancouver. Refugee youth have been identified as being "at risk" for developing emotional and mental disorders by the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1986). Adolescence is a time of identity formation, a time of increased vulnerability and heightened potential (Erikson, 1968). Major changes in a cultural context during identity formation tend to have severe consequences for further development (Misri, 1986). Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth have been forced to flee, some with their families and others alone. Departures were often sudden and dangerous; people escaped only with their lives. The continuity of the past with a projection to the future is broken and the individual finds her/himself forced to learn a new language and a different cultural code (Perez, 1984). Just as confidence is growing, the youth finds that what was understood and acceptable behaviour in his\her home country is misunderstood in the Canadian context, causing confusion and disorientation.

Learning a new language could be fun but, when it is a matter of survival, it is not so pleasurable. Not knowing English is a barrier to participation in society. Here in Vancouver, English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) training is provided in high schools and community colleges. Recent newspaper articles have publicized the fact that the schools are

overloaded with E.S.L. students and there is a waiting list to get into classes. Poor English skills confine newcomers to low paying, low status jobs such as cleaning or sweat shop work, not to mention the frustration of not being able to express oneself freely and clearly.

The language, the conversation of the people seemed like a hum. To me they were only "noises" and "sounds"... it is like living under water, semi-isolated and semi deaf...I had never before experienced this feeling of helplessness (Fantino, 1982, p.52).

Many of these young refugees have had very traumatic experiences prior to or during migration. Many have been victims of repression or torture. Most of them have family members who have been tortured and/or killed, sometimes right before their eyes. These experiences may cause a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.) with flashbacks and nightmares along with social withdrawal and a prolonged apathetic and depressive syndrome (Allodi, 1987 and Perez, 1984). The P.T.S.D. is then further complicated by having to deal with it in a foreign culture, removed from a familiar environment and its supports. Perez (1984) calls this the Exile Syndrome and lists the following feelings common to exiles:

1. Guilt and shame to be alive and a wish that they had been killed.
2. Self recrimination for abandoning compatriots and for living in better conditions of survival than those left behind.
3. Loss of esteem with self doubt in the strength of their principles.
4. Hatred towards the aggressor.

5. Reluctance or resistance to incorporate into the new environment and the inability to foresee a meaningful future outside of their own country.

These feelings can prolong the adaptation process of someone who feels that their stay here in Canada is temporary. They may be living with their bags packed, waiting to go home. This contributes to feelings of isolation and marginalization (Fantino, 1982).

Intergenerational conflict is a major problem identified by the literature (Misri, 1986; Sepulveda, 1984; Tesler, 1984; Burke, 1982; Maglione, 1983; Shearer, 1987; Canino and Canino, 1980 and Berdichewsky, 1987). Most of the articles about immigrant families at least referred to this conflict between adolescents and their parents. The individualization process that an adolescent goes through is often a source of conflict in families. This conflict is exacerbated by cultural factors. Latin American families tend to be "normally enmeshed" (Canino and Canino, 1980). The young adult usually lives at home until marriage. Autonomy and independence is discouraged, especially in adolescent girls. The extended family overlaps with the nuclear family. Illness and personal difficulties are seen to be family problems rather than individual problems (Maduro, 1983).

Canadian youth have more liberty than their Latino counterparts. They are encouraged to be more independent and individualistic. The Latino youth moves between two cultures

everyday. Peer pressure at school and the natural questioning of parental values may bring a total rejection of the old values in order to accept the new ones. In other cases the family may reject Canadian culture and influence the youth to do so also (Sepulveda, 1984). Adolescent girls are usually quite restricted and "protected" from bad elements in society. The girls often experience difficulties with parents who become more restrictive in reaction to what they consider to be loose moral values of Canadian society (Burke, 1982).

Another factor contributing to intergenerational conflict has to do with a devaluation of parental authority. The children often learn English before their parents and become translators for the family. The family depends on them for information and communication with the outside world. This puts the child in a "parentified" role which confuses the lines of authority. Traditional disciplinary methods used in Latin America are undermined by Canadian authorities in the defense of child welfare (Canino and Canino, 1980).

The above mentioned problems experienced by immigrant families are not new and have been studied in detail by researchers. Similar problems are experienced by all immigrant populations moving from more traditional cultures to more liberal ones. Studies of Italian-Americans in Boston (Gans, 1962) and Mexican-Americans in Chicago (Horowitz, 1983) revealed that the conflict between the old and new cultures is closely related to

family problems and identity formation in children. Both studies looked at well established, geographically defined communities where the youth were second generation immigrants born in North America. This kind of situation does not exist here in Vancouver where the present study was done. The Salvadoreans and Guatemalans are spread out and do not identify with one particular area of the city. They have immigrated recently. Of those interviewed, the longest anyone had been in Canada was five years, although some had lived previously in the United States. The youth and their parents are both first generation immigrants adapting to a new culture. Family problems arise when family members respond differently to the new culture. Another difference from earlier studies is that these people are refugees and exiles. They have unique and pressing psychological and social problems which require sensitive and immediate attention.

The Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1986) published a literature review which identified certain contingencies which increase the risk of mental disorder in immigrants and refugees. They include:

1. A drop in personal socio-economic status following migration.
2. Inability to speak the language of the host country.
3. Separation from family.
4. Lack of friendly reception by surrounding host population.
5. Isolation from persons of similar cultural background.
6. Traumatic experience or prolonged stress prior to



migration.

7. Adolescent or senior age at time of migration.

Migrant sub-populations characterized by some or all of these variables appear to be at greatest risk for mental disorder sometime between three months and eighteen months of arrival. A second period of elevated risk, which develops years after migration, may be associated with the emergence of family problems (p. ii).

Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth experience many of these contingencies; lack of English, racism, traumatic experiences prior to migration, and of course, adolescent age. They are a high risk population for developing mental disorder. They are also at risk for social problems and getting in trouble with the law. There is a growing concern about youth gangs in the streets and in the schools. Refugee youth who feel isolated and devalued may find belonging to a gang quite attractive (Sepulveda, 1984; Shearer, 1987). Members of a Hispanic gang called Los Diablos have been responsible for house break-ins, auto theft, and petty extortion. Having a criminal record further complicates their future adjustment process and employment possibilities.

In 1987 Renate Shearer conducted the Review of Immigrant and Ethnic Services in Vancouver (Shearer, 1987). It was found that services for youth are sadly lacking. She concluded that:

1. Youth issues are a general area of concern.
2. Immigrant youth are only part of a larger issue.
3. Planning needs to take place for a variety of youth services, from leisure time activities to street work.
4. How immigrant youth are served should be addressed within a larger plan for overall youth programming (p. 72).

Social workers will have more and more contact with immigrant and refugee youth. They will be found in E.S.L. classes, job training programs, income security offices, corrections and, mental health services. It is becoming increasingly important for social workers to develop cross-cultural awareness and skills.

### Rationale for Selection of Issues

The following four factors guided the selection of issues. First of all, immigrant and refugee youth is a new and unpredicted problem area for social workers in our multicultural society. Immigration and settlement policies and programmes have been developed for adults. The children just happened to come along. I suppose it was assumed that the parents would take care of them. But it is often the case that the parents are so busy healing their own wounds and having problems adjusting, that they are somewhat insensitive to problems their children may be having (Allodi, 1980; Paredes, 1984).

Secondly, most of the studies I have seen have focused on the professionals' perspective of what the issues are. Little qualitative research has been done with the youth themselves. This study will help to fill a gap in the research.

Third, planners are presently working on developing programmes for immigrant youth. This knowledge is needed to develop culturally appropriate and effective services.

Finally, an audience exists for the study. Previous to deciding on this topic I met with many people working in the areas of immigrant services and cross-cultural mental health. Almost everyone identified the youth issue as an important one and was enthusiastic in their support of the project. Those interested in the study include: immigrant serving agencies, policy and programme planners of both the municipal and federal governments, schools, and workers in the social service and mental health areas.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth between 16 and 24 years of age who are now living in Vancouver. An exploratory, qualitative research method was chosen whereby the participants were able to tell their stories in open-ended, in-depth, taped, group and individual interviews. I speak Spanish and am familiar with the political situation and the living conditions in El Salvador and Guatemala, having visited there several times. I planned to do six group interviews with five participants each, three groups with females and the other three with males, for a total of thirty participants. It was felt that there would be significant differences between the experiences of the young men and the young women due to their move from a heavily male-dominated traditional society to a relatively more progressive society where women have struggled more successfully for equal status. The decision to have separate groups for each sex was also due to the idea that the young women might express themselves more freely among members of their own sex. The fact that the researcher is a male may have had some effect, but that could not be helped in this study.

An interview guide was developed and tested with three youth before the interviews for the project took place. The topics of

the interview guide were developed from the literature review, in consultation with others who work with Central American youth, and from my personal experience working with refugees. The youth who participated in the pilot interview also provided feedback and helped to modify the guide. The interview guide is reproduced in Appendix "A".

Contact persons from the Latino community recruited youth to be interviewed. The contact persons included a Latino youth worker from Britannia Community Services Centre, a priest from the Hispanic Catholic Mission, and a social worker from the Multilingual Orientation Service for Immigrant Communities (M.O.S.A.I.C.). The participants were chosen purposely as representatives of the different situations these youth find themselves in. Some were quite young when they left their home country and came to Canada with their parents. Others came alone after living in the United States for a number of years. Some were doing quite well in school and at home. Others were having serious problems adjusting. Some were refugee claimants who were waiting for the decision of whether they would be able to stay in Canada or be deported. Some had been in Canada for a very short time while others had been here for up to five years. No interviews were done with youth in trouble with the law or in detention centres due to lack of access. Such interviews would be important for future research.

Focused interviews were done in Spanish. Merton (1956) defines the focused interview as having four characteristics. These are as follows: (a) the persons to be interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular situation; (b) the significant elements, patterns, processes, and total structure of the situation are provisionally analyzed by the researcher prior to the interviews; (c) an interview guide is developed from the situational analysis to outline the major areas of interest to the researcher; (d) the use of the interview guide is informal enough to allow the interviewees the freedom to cover areas that the researcher had not identified in the first analysis and were not included in the guide. This method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to make the best use of the limited time available for each opportunity. All the participants were interviewed only once. The interview guide insured that topics of interest to the researcher were covered while still allowing the participants the freedom to express what they felt was relevant and important.

#### Issues in Implementation

There were some difficulties in organizing the group interviews. The original idea was to have introductory sessions with groups to explain the purpose of the study and to distribute the consent forms. Appointments were to be made for the actual interviews when the participants under 18 years of age would bring the consent forms signed by their parents. That plan did

not work very well. The contact people in the community arranged introductory meetings with groups of youth. The study was explained and, as an incentive, all participants were told they would be eligible for a draw for the prize of a sweatsuit. Appointments for the interviews were made at the introductory meetings but very few participants would show up. My contact people suggested I do away with the introductory sessions and conduct the interviews while I had the participants present, the old "bird in the hand" theory.

So the strategy was changed. The contact people started to explain the study and distribute the consent forms to possible participants. Even then the actual rate of people keeping the appointment was low. Group interviews planned for five participants became individual interviews when only one person showed up. The only interview with five participants took place one Saturday afternoon when the youth worker called me from Britannia saying he had five young men there at the Teen Centre. I went right down and interviewed them. They were all over 18 and signed their own consent forms.

Getting female participants was even more difficult. A social worker from M.O.S.A.I.C. had offered to help recruit young women for the interviews. However, she unexpectedly changed jobs and was no longer available. The male contacts proved ineffectual in finding female participants. It seems that young Latino women do not usually go out the way young men do and

are therefore not that readily accessible. The Britannia Community Centre, where the interviews were being held, seems to have the reputation of a place where tough guys hang out; at least the parents of the young women seem to think that.

It was necessary to recruit more women contacts. It took five women from the Latino community talking to mothers of young women to get access to interview nine female participants. Some of the interviews were held in their homes. All of the participants were very willing to talk and were quite open and articulate once the interview was happening. Many even expressed gratitude for the opportunity to tell their stories. The difficulty in gaining access to female participants seems to reflect the social structure of the Central American community. The young women were more protected by the families and it was important to go through the mother to be able to interview them. In one unique case it was a male member of a street gang who recruited one of the female members to be interviewed. Due to the difficulties in organizing the groups, it took ten interviews instead of the six originally planned to be able to talk with thirteen males and eleven females. Four of the interviews were with individual young women. See Table I for a break-down of the number and gender of the participants in each interview.



\*\*\*\*\*

TABLE I

## Number and Gender of Participants per Interview

Interview #	Males	Females
I	3 males	
II	2 males	2 females
III	5 males	
IV	3 males	
V		1 female
VI		1 female
VII		1 female
VIII		2 females
IX		1 female
X		3 females
SUBTOTAL		13 males
		11 females
TOTAL		24 participants

\*\*\*\*\*

All of the participants were interviewed only once. "The interview guide helps make interviewing across a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting the issues to be discussed in the interview" (Patton, 1980, p. 200). Systematically covering the same topics with different people makes comparisons and data analysis easier. This helped to keep the interviews focused and under control while still allowing the participants the flexibility to talk about things not included in the interview guide. In this way relevant information or ideas not previously imagined by the researcher were generated. Thus the purpose and the format of the focused interview coincided nicely with the objectives of this study.

The individual interviews provided more in-depth information on some of the themes. The participants were free to talk all they wanted without having to think about giving others the opportunity. The group interviews seemed to cover a wider range of topics at a somewhat more superficial level. Participants would keep their statements quite short. In one of the groups however, one person became the spokesperson for the rest who would basically agree with what was being said. The other participants in that particular group had to be asked questions directly. The group format worked quite well as a whole and the comments of one participant would stimulate responses of another. The discussions often became quite dynamic with the participants talking to each other instead of to the researcher. The participants were open and often shared very personal and painful experiences. All of them were very concerned that the information they shared would be kept confidential and that they would not be identified with their comments in any way. The content of the individual interviews was not significantly different from the content of the group interviews.

All the interviews were tape recorded, allowing the interviewer to focus all his attention on the interview process. A field log was also kept to record significant details and experiences in making the contacts, setting up the appointments, and in the interviews themselves. Summaries were written after each interview and detailed notes were taken listening to each tape in Spanish. All ten tapes were then translated and

transcribed. I personally translated four of the tapes, three were translated by M.O.S.A.I.C. Community Translation Service, and the three others were translated by another very competent translator recommended by a Latino contact person.

The translators all spoke English as their first language. It is much easier to translate from a second language into your first language than it is the other way around. One of the tapes was translated by a person whose first language was Spanish, but the English translation was clumsy so I had that tape translated a second time. I checked all the translations for accuracy, not only in the literal sense but also to insure that the more subtle meanings and innuendos were not lost. This was done by reading the translations while listening to the tapes in Spanish. This method worked very well, allowing for in-depth and free flowing interviews unhampered by the use of third party interpreters.

## Characteristics of the Study Population

The study population was made up of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years. This age group was chosen to demonstrate the different issues for youth in transition from adolescence to adulthood while adapting to life in a different culture. Youth from El Salvador and Guatemala come from similar socio-political situations. As one participant expressed, "Guatemala and El Salvador are very similar. The two of us (one from El Salvador and the other from Guatemala) could say we are sisters because our countries are sisters and are experiencing the same things; war and kidnapping." See Table II for the characteristics of the twenty-four youth interviewed.

\*\*\*\*\*

TABLE II

### Characteristics of the Sample

	Males	Females
Range of Age	17-24	16-21
From El Salvador	11	9
From Guatemala	2	2
Living with family	6	11
Living alone (refugee claimants)	7	0
Nuclear family intact	3	7
Nuclear family not intact	10	4
In school (including E.S.L.)	7	11
No classes of any kind	6	0
Employed	0	1
Unemployed	13	10

\*\*\*\*\*

## Data Analysis

The transcripts contained an overwhelming amount of rich data. I went through the transcripts line by line to code the data for different concepts and experiences. The initial codes were written in the margins of the transcripts. This process served to "break the data apart analytically" and open it to inquiry (Strauss, 1988), allowing me to immerse myself in the data and become very familiar with it. During the process of coding I also wrote theoretical memos to organize thoughts and insights generated by the data as well as to remind myself of other areas to explore with the youth.

The next step in the analysis was to code the initial codes. All the codes generated from the interviews were grouped together under second order codes or categories. These categories were generated by both the data from the interviews and the main questions in the interview guide. For example, a question about the youth's perceptions of Canada generated such categories as; cultural differences, discrimination, settlement problems, economic opportunities, and education. Ten categories were identified which were then grouped into four core categories. These four core categories are: War and Trauma, Adaptation, Family Dynamics and, Prospects. These became the main headings in the findings chapter. The coding schedule is reproduced in Appendix "B".

Brief profiles of individual cases were written to illustrate some of the different situations young Salvadoreans and Guatemalans find themselves in. The profiles are found at the beginning of the findings chapter. Quotes are also used throughout the findings chapter to bring the experiences of these young people to life. Their own words tell their stories much better than I could. My purpose in this study was to give them a voice.

### A Qualitative Approach

Service providers and planners have recognized that services are needed for immigrant and refugee youth. In order to develop culturally appropriate and effective services it is important to learn from the youth themselves. Qualitative methods "lend themselves to a description of complex social processes and the subjective perceptions of these processes by people involved in them. Thus, qualitative methods are ideal for conceptual development and hypothesis formulation" (Epstein, 1985, p.273). Qualitative research methods allow the participants to describe their experiences in their own words and "teach" the researcher what it is like for them (Leninger, 1985). The descriptive function in research plays an important role in developing knowledge about client needs, problems, and attitudes toward service (Reid and Smith, 1981).

Quantitative methods with closed-ended questions at this exploratory stage would limit the participants' responses to the issues the researcher was familiar with, not allowing their personal picture to develop. The participants were approached as experts who know better than anyone what it is like to be a refugee youth in a new culture. The researcher was able to identify their major concerns and problems, thereby minimizing his own ideas and interpretations of how these youth viewed their experiences. Qualitative methods recognize the present lack of knowledge in the area and facilitate a description of the complex and multiple aspects of Central American youth adapting to life in Canada.

### Limitations

Qualitative methodology takes a long time. The whole process of data collection was labour intensive and slow. The method produced a large amount of data. It was necessary to choose the most important areas to be examined in depth. It was impossible to use all of the data.

The reliability of the research findings depends on the researcher's holistic understanding of the phenomena and the ability to synthesize and analyze the data. It is not known whether another researcher studying the same population would come up with the same findings. The findings of this study are specific to the twenty-four youth interviewed. One cannot safely

generalize, even to other Salvadorean or Guatemalan youth. Others may have had quite different experiences and perceptions. Some of the problems and issues identified, however, are known to be common to other immigrant and, especially, refugee populations (Beiser, 1986).



## FINDINGS

In this study youth from El Salvador and Guatemala have talked about their experiences, both positive and negative, adapting to their life in exile. I use the word "exile" because these people were forced to leave their home countries. Many did not want to come. Some had personal experiences of brutality and terror and were forced to choose exile. Others wanted to stay in spite of all the problems and danger, but adults decided for them that they would have to move. Adapting to life in a new and foreign culture is a long and complex process. Several categories of concerns and needs emerged from an analysis of the interviews. Experiences of violence and trauma have emotional and psychological implications affecting their adaptation here. Separation and loss of family members and friends was also a common theme. The conflict between the cultural values of their parents and the cultural values learned here often caused problems in family relations. Discrimination from Canadians and surprisingly, from other Latinos, was a common theme for many participants. The existence of Latino youth gangs was also something that has affected and concerns all of the participants that were interviewed.

Following is a summary of the findings. Four short profiles of the participants are included here to illustrate some of the situations the youth find themselves in. Names and other

identifying factors have been changed to insure the confidentiality of the participants.

## Profiles of Participants

### Profile #1

Pedro is 19 years old and is from El Salvador. His father was kidnapped and murdered. Pedro tried to find out who was responsible by asking the police and military authorities. One afternoon as he was walking home from school he was grabbed by three men, forced into a jeep, and driven into the countryside. Pedro managed to jump out of the moving jeep and run away. The three men chased him but Pedro was younger and faster and he escaped through the brush into the hill side. He knew that he was now on the hit list of the death squads and that he would have to leave his country and go into exile like thousands of other Salvadoreans.

Pedro's journey to Canada was long and dangerous. Traveling without visas or documents he was able to leave El Salvador and make his way through Guatemala, Mexico and the United States. He traveled alone and was always in danger of being caught and deported back to El Salvador. He arrived here in June, 1988 and applied for refugee status. At the time of this writing, five months later, he is still waiting to find out if he will be accepted by Canadian immigration authorities and be allowed to live here.

For now he feels like he is on hold. As a refugee claimant he is eligible for hardship assistance from welfare. He is not allowed to work or to attend E.S.L. but even if he was it would be very difficult for him. He suffers from insomnia. When he does manage to fall asleep he is awakened by nightmares. Subsequently he is tired all the time and unable to concentrate; he feels very alone. His family are all back in El Salvador. He does not speak English, he lives alone in a cheap hotel downtown. He knows he can go to M.O.S.A.I.C or to the Salvation Army for emergency help but he does not know what to do about his insomnia and lack of energy. He went to a evangelical church once to ask them to pray for him. He worries about his family back home and fears that they are in danger. He would like to bring his mother to Canada but does not even know if he will be allowed to stay.

When he fled from El Salvador he was just about to graduate from high school. He planned on attending university. Here in Canada, if he is accepted, he will be too old to enter the public school system. Pedro is aware that he will not have much of a future without a high school diploma. He spends his time in his room or walking around on the streets. Most of the people he knows are other young Latino men in similar situations. He is in a dilemma. He feels grateful to Canada for letting him in and helping him the way that it has. At least he feels safe here for the present time. On the other hand he feels like his life has no meaning here. He is not doing anything worthwhile. He feels

like he is just surviving. He is ashamed of being on welfare and is afraid that Canadians will think he is a worthless parasite that does not want to work. He wants to go back to his family and his country but his life is in danger there. He feels that Canadians do not understand why he is here and that they do not want him to be here.

Like many refugee claimants, Pedro has had traumatic experiences that he will suffer from for a long time. He belongs to a group of people who have the greatest need and the fewest resources and services available to them.

#### Profile #2

Maria is 17 years old. She came to Canada from El Salvador two years ago to live with her mother whom she had not seen for ten years. She never knew her father. Her mother had gone to the United States to work to support her family back in El Salvador. She worked in Los Angeles for eight years and then applied to come to Canada as a landed immigrant.

Maria lived with her grandparents and considered them to be her parents. They were very poor but Maria was happy. She lived in a neighbourhood where she knew everybody and had lots of friends. The war became very intense in the area they were living in and it was decided that it would be better for Maria if she joined her mother in Canada. Maria did not want to come to Canada. She felt like she did not even know her mother. She

begged her grandmother to let her stay but the adults had decided that she would be safer in Canada and have better opportunities to study and make something of herself. Her grandmother told her that they could no longer support her and that she would have to go.

Maria arrived in Vancouver during the winter and the first shock was the change in climate. The world seemed cold and inhospitable. She found Canadian people to be closed and private compared to the open and expressive people in the neighbourhood where she had grown up. She was heart-broken. She spent her first year here locked up in her room crying.

Maria and her mother were strangers to each other. Her mother thought Maria should be grateful to her for having sponsored her and given her the opportunity to come to Canada. Maria felt that her mother had abandoned her when she was a little child and now was responsible for tearing her away from her loved ones and her country. They had a hard time communicating right from the start. When Maria started making friends and wanting to go out with boys, her mother became very over-protective and strict. She was afraid that Maria would be corrupted by the more "liberal" moral values of Canadian society and get involved with street gangs, drugs and sex. Maria felt that her mother was being unreasonable and she rebelled. Their relationship degenerated to the point where they could no longer talk to each other. Fortunately Maria also has an aunt living in

Vancouver. She is now living with her aunt and has decided that she wants to go to university and study education so that she can go back after the "victory of the revolution" and be of greater service to her people. She has become involved with Salvadorean solidarity movements here. She has decided that she will work hard to get an education that will allow her to be of use for the future development of El Salvador. Her decision has helped her to adapt to her situation here and now but she wants to go back home and she is working towards that.

### Profile #3

Carlos is 17 years old. He came to Canada from San Francisco with his mother, father, and younger sister. Carlos's family left Guatemala when he was 10 years old. He thought they were only going on vacation.

The family lived in a Latino neighbourhood in San Francisco. Carlos went to school where he studied both Spanish and English. The Latino community was quite large and he fit right in. He had no major problems adapting.

Two years ago the family came to Vancouver. Carlos speaks English and has done very well in school. His time in California, with the mix of Latino and North American cultures, has helped him to adjust to life here.

He will be graduating from high school this year and will be applying for early admission to the University of British Columbia with a scholarship.

#### Profile #4

Juana is 21 years old. She was born in El Salvador and has lived in Canada for five years. She came alone when she was 16 years old. Her cousin, a soldier, was killed in El Salvador and she wanted to join the army and get revenge. She was very strong willed. Her mother was afraid for her and pleaded with her to leave. She went to Mexico, lived and worked there for awhile, applied to the Canadian Consulate there and came to Canada as a landed immigrant.

She was pregnant when she got here. Her partner arrived nine months after the child's birth. They now have two children.

The couple had big problems at first because the man wanted the woman to do all the house work. Juana said that they were both studying and they should share the work. It looked like they were going to break up. But they got counselling from someone at King Edward Campus, Vancouver Community College. They worked it out and are still together.

Juana lived with a Canadian family when she first got here. That seemed very positive and helped her to adapt smoothly and learn English.

She still feels torn between staying here and returning to El Salvador because her whole family is back there. She thinks about graduating as a pharmacist and going back to live. But then she thinks of her own children who were born here and she does not think they would be happy there. It is a dilemma for her.

### War and Trauma

The four major headings in this section are War and Trauma, Adaptation, Family Dynamics and, Prospects. The numbers after the quotes indicate the interview and the page number the quote was taken from. For example, (VIII-10) indicates the quote came from Interview VIII, page ten.

Both El Salvador and Guatemala are presently embroiled in economic and political struggles that have cost tens of thousands of lives. Most of the victims have been civilians caught in a wave of repression as American-backed government forces try to destroy any base for a popular liberation movement.

For many of the youth interviewed the war had become an everyday occurrence. One young woman, who was ten years old when she left El Salvador, said she could not imagine a country without war. Another explained;



The war got worse in 1980. It was like a ball of fire in the middle of our community. Every night we heard machine guns. The people were very worried at first. They didn't know what to do. But time passed and after awhile they didn't care. They just said, "Well, we're going to shut the doors, it's going to start now. They even knew what time the fighting was going to start! We didn't know who was fighting. We just saw the walls painted (with slogans). Now I know who they are and why they are fighting. We saw blood and dead bodies; friends of ours, neighbours, good friends. The next day we would see them in the streets, flattened. (VIII-10)

Youth is a dangerous age in El Salvador and Guatemala. The armed forces have forced recruitment. It is similar to the draft except that young men are picked up on the streets or taken off buses on the way to school and pressed into military service.

Forced recruitment has become very fashionable. Young people who are not old enough yet go to war, go to fight and later return and are abandoned and don't receive a cent. They come with their legs blown off from the mines. Since they are no longer useful they are just abandoned... The young people are exploited, they are not given schooling; the more ignorant the population, the better for them (the government). (IV-3)

Whereas many young people who are of military age, if their parents are well off and have money, they aren't touched and so there are only the campesinos and poor people. Now that they've finished off the older people, they are starting with the children. (IV-4)

Youth are also pressured to join guerilla movements or are suspected by the military of being sympathetic to the guerillas.

In the capital there were so many students, many kids my age belong to paramilitary groups. There were also a lot of contradictions at the university. There were struggles and sometimes the guerilla groups would go to the streets and burn buses and cars...The military suffers and then they bother the people more. My house was searched. They kill many innocent people in confrontations, they just shoot at

random. People that just happen to be passing nearby show up dead the next day. (I-7)

The police and the military are instruments of repression in El Salvador and Guatemala. They are used to create an atmosphere of fear and terror in the general population so that only a dedicated minority would think of opposing the government. I was interested in how these young people viewed the police and the authorities here in Canada.

Here the police look after the citizens. Of course if somebody does something bad, he has problems, but a good citizen has no problem. You don't expect the police to suddenly say "Hey! Stop! Up against the wall! Put your hands up and spread your legs because I'm going to search you!" This happens frequently there. You go walking down the street and they put you like that, you don't know why, you get nervous and do stupid things which they interpret as if you're hiding something.

At that moment you don't know what's going to happen. For example, a friend of mine was walking with his sister and suddenly they were put into a V.W. and taken away and never heard of again. (IV-14)

Generally the people interviewed felt positively about the police here. They felt that the police and authorities deserve respect. Some young men however, felt that they had experienced some discrimination from police.

I can't say that they all practise discrimination but there is always someone, like that policeman that stopped me. He searched the car as if I were a drug pusher. For a person who has never been mixed up in those things, it shakes you up. (III-1)

Except for those who left El Salvador when they were too young to remember the war, everyone I interviewed had horror stories to tell about kidnappings, killings and torture that had touched themselves personally or had touched family or friends. One young woman reported that her mother had been kidnapped and held for ransom. She was found tied up in the back of a car two days later.

Those two days were really scary and after that we started getting threatening calls and we had to move. Only my cousins, who we are really close with, knew where we were. I couldn't go to school for some days...after school this guy was there who said that my dad had asked him to pick me up, but I said, "No way, I don't even know you". The principal of the school stayed with me until my mom came and picked me up...But it was really scary. Sometimes I remember it all. (V-12)

War is a traumatic experience for everyone. These people lived with a constant threat of violence and death.

The whole population is traumatized. There you are always expecting something to happen. For example, there might be a car bomb, or a bomb planted in a park, maybe you're waiting for a bus and a time bomb explodes. You don't feel safe, from one moment to the next you can be dead. (IV-14)

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Traumatic events often leave emotional and psychological scars. The American Psychiatric Association (1987) gives the following description of traumatic stress:

The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, e.g., serious threat to one's life or physical integrity, serious threat or harm to one's

children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends, sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being, seriously injured or killed as a result of an accident or physical violence. (P.146)

The participants in this study, and refugees in general, are "at risk" for suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.). To be accepted as refugees by Canadian immigration authorities they must demonstrate a "well-founded fear of persecution" (Canada, 1985), and that persecution often leaves scars. Symptoms listed by the young people I interviewed included: crying, depression, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, insomnia and inability to concentrate. Family conflicts, while likely to occur in families who have not had traumatic experiences, are common in families who have had such experiences due to problems with trust, intimacy and lack of communication.

The following account of a young man whose father was killed in Guatemala is an example of post traumatic stress that needs immediate attention.

Of all my problems, the most difficult for me is when I am sleeping, when I am falling asleep, after one hour, always, always I wake up thinking about the problem I had in my country...This is a horrible thing, not to be able to sleep and then the next day get up with no desire to do anything. Sometimes I stay in bed all day. Sincerely I would like to find a solution to this problem. I wish someone would tell me what type of person I can tell about my problem. I was walking and three persons forced me into a jeep and took me away. It is there that I begin to have the nightmare. I ran away and escaped from them. They followed me, running in the mountain, running, running and sometimes I think they really caught me. And I wake up. I left my country. Sometimes I would like to return to make them pay for what they did with my father, because it is

very hard to know who killed your father and not be able to make them pay for what they did. Sometimes I feel like killing them, but I know that isn't the right thing to do. Sometimes I remember the last time he went away, I was sleeping and I said to my brother "why didn't you wake me?" He said our father was going to come back but I had a feeling that I wouldn't see him again. I felt very sad. "Why didn't you wake me?" These are the things I remember. (I-9)

This young man was receiving no professional help for his insomnia and nightmares. When he tried to talk to his Latino friends about his problems they laughed and made fun of him. The "macho" values, so strong in traditional Latino culture, discourage men from expressing pain and weakness. In desperation he had gone to an evangelical mission to ask them to pray for him.

P.T.S.D. is considered to be acute when the symptoms occur within six months of the traumatic event. Early treatment has a good prognosis for remission measured as a reduction in such symptoms as insomnia and anxiety. If, through denial or shame, the symptoms are repressed and do not emerge until years later after another stressful event, the condition is considered to be chronic and is often more difficult to treat. Furthermore, it can be inferred that there is little hope or tendency for spontaneous recovery (Somnier and Genefke, 1986). Memories of killings and violence do not just go away. They can be repressed for a time but they must be dealt with in a therapeutic relationship. Early treatment can avoid years of suffering.

When I first got here I had lots of nightmares, violent dreams of massacres and bombings. I was never in one but I always dreamt about them, that I killed lots of people or someone wanted to kill people dear to me. That's another reason why I went to the doctor and he gave me some drugs to sleep. And we also talked of doing relaxation before going to sleep. (X-14)

This impedes me, whether I want it to or not, from having a normal life. It's really hard. One could party all the time and go to dances but it's always there in the mind, thinking. (VII)

Intrusive memories and flashbacks cause difficulties in school and in life in general due to problems concentrating.

I guess the worst part is that I still remember things and that makes it worse for me here. I know I will never forget them but maybe at least they will fade away some day. It's really difficult. After coming from Guatemala I was really depressed. The whole month of January and the first three days of February I was really depressed about everything. I used to remember the things that happened. I didn't want to remember them and I used to cry a lot. There were days I didn't want to go to school, I didn't want to talk to anybody. But then I went to my counsellor and she helped me out a lot. I'm not like I used to be. My parents and I are really close so they help me out a lot. I'm starting to believe in God again but it's still pretty hard. I know the memories won't go away. Sometimes I still get really nervous and start crying and can't concentrate or anything. (V-12)

Counselling helped this young woman. She was fortunate to be in school and have access to a counsellor. She was also fortunate to have come with her family who could give her support. Considering the tragedy and trauma they have experienced, many of the youth are coping quite well.

Sometimes when you remember that some of your friends have been killed, or your family, you feel like crying. But you have to get over these things even if it hurts. (VI-9)

Coping methods include, sending money to family members back home, trying to educate Canadians about what is happening in their countries and why they are here, solidarity work for liberation groups back there, talking with other Latinos, listening to music, going for walks. Being able to do something like study or work also helps although intrusive memories and emotions are often very distracting. Helping others who are having difficulties is another way of coping.

I would try to take my friends out to let them see the beautiful things in this country. We would go for walks or whatever so they could distract themselves and have something to do. Because just thinking and thinking you just get old. And you don't do anything. You've got to see things positively. There are a lot of groups that send money to their countries and one can help. Why not start there? That is how I tried to help my friends. (VIII-4)

### Refugee Claimants

The young man who told of his insomnia is a refugee claimant. He does not have any family here and lives alone in a downtown hotel. All of the refugee claimants interviewed, young men between the ages of 18 and 24, had come alone. They had made their way through Mexico and the United States to seek asylum in Canada. They had applied for refugee status within Canada or at the border and were anxiously awaiting a decision. These young men felt isolated and alone. As refugee claimants they were eligible for provincial hardship assistance which provides for food and shelter. They are not allowed to work nor are they eligible for other social services. They all reported symptoms

of anxiety and stress but none were receiving any counselling or treatment.

I'm in Canada, alone in my room. I think about my family; that something has happened to them. It's like a nightmare...You've left your mother, your brother, your uncle, the family is there. You're always thinking about the people there because you're afraid something will happen to them. It preoccupies you. It affects how you act. You even walk around with a defiant attitude in the street because you are affected by what you were dreaming about...It bothers you a lot. (III-11)

An 18 year old refugee claimant told about his frustration with the immigration bureaucracy.

I applied at the border but haven't received an answer. I had an immigration hearing scheduled but it was cancelled; that is, now I don't know. I'm fearful for my status...I fall under the new law that the government imposed on people who were non-residents which has caused several deportations back to countries of origin. I'm here legally because I applied, but I have no status to rely on...you think about how things will turn out and you don't know. They say they will send you a letter telling you when your appointment is but they don't say when. (IV-8)

Under the new refugee determination legislation which came into effect January 1st, 1989, the status of such individuals is to be determined within two months of their application. However there is presently a backlog of 80,000 refugee claimants waiting to be processed by Ottawa. It could take up to two or three years for those applicants to find out whether they can stay or will have to go. Their situation is very uncertain and stressful. The stress can result in negative coping methods like fighting or drug and alcohol abuse.



Well you know sometimes it isn't that we like to fight, but because of the problems you have on your mind. You are hanging on a thread, you feel very vulnerable to forces that are controlling your life, you are easily excitable. And in those circumstances you get into more fights...It's not that we're bad, it's because of the tension. (I-2)

The refugee claimants feel that they are on hold, "wasting time", "just surviving". They feel powerless and insecure. Many have experienced traumatic and difficult journeys to reach safety in Canada. They are alone and often isolated. They might spend all day alone in their rooms or going for long walks. They feel they have too much time to think. They meet mostly other Latinos who are in the same situation. If they are accepted as refugees and allowed to stay in Canada they will not receive the financial assistance and language training that government sponsored refugees receive. They did not have the "courtesy" to apply from abroad so once they are here they are treated officially as "regular Canadians". The message that they get is that they are not wanted.

Here you feel as if you were a piece of garbage, just because you are here. Sometimes I feel as if the only thing that Immigration wants is for me to go... I know some people, families, they have gone to Immigration and been given papers to study English just over here at King Edward. On the other hand, I go and they don't give me a thing. I can only observe, and that is only because I came through the border. If I don't like it the only thing I can do is leave. (III-1)

This high risk group has the least services. They do have hope however. They hope that they will be granted immigrant

status and be able to build a new life here so they can later bring some of their family members. Some lose hope.

I've talked to friends and they have told me, "look, I'm going to stand it for as long as I can". "And what are you going to do afterwards," I ask. "Afterwards I will have to sell drugs. Some Canadians tell me to sell drugs to make money." If the alternative is to steal, they put you in jail anyway. And sometimes selling drugs is a form of entertainment. You're on the street. You're earning money. (III-10)

If they feel blocked and are unable to gain access to the goods and services in our society, crime may be seen as an alternative. Ignoring the needs of these young men could have serious consequences for their mental health as well as for our society.

#### Discussion of War and Trauma

People who have experienced catastrophic stress, whether natural disasters like earthquakes or floods or man-made disasters such as harassment, threats, warfare, rape or torture - bear wounds which require special compassion and understanding (Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues affecting Immigrants and Refugees, 1988, p.85).

El Salvador and Guatemala are both war torn countries where a large portion of the population lives under threat and fear. The youth who participated in this study are all victims of the violence there. The findings show that they do bear wounds. Some of them are suffering greatly. The effects of the trauma range from being distracted in their studies, to depression and

to anti-social behaviour like fighting and drug abuse. Adapting to life here in Canada is complicated by these unhealed wounds.

The violence has not ended, loved ones are still living in danger in Central America. Nightmares are often about some tragedy befalling a mother or other family members. Thinking about those left behind makes it almost impossible to live "a normal life". Many are caught in the dilemma of wanting to go back and wanting to stay here.

Naturally enough, many reported that talking with Latino friends helped to ease some of the pain. Friends who speak the same language and have shared the same experiences provide understanding and support. Young women, especially, reported that talking with friends helped them and they were more likely to help others. The young men reported that sometimes other Latino friends would make fun of them when they told of their nightmares or problems. This could be due to the macho value of not showing pain or weakness. One young man said, "If I get talking to people who have the same problems as me and they tell me about worse problems, I might just feel worse". Repressing or hiding symptoms could then result, making treatment more difficult.

Some of the young women received support from counsellors and teachers at school. One young woman received medication to help her sleep. None of the young men reported getting any help

except for one who asked evangelists to pray for him. Supportive counselling, prayer and the encouragement to "hang in there, everything will be alright" is important but insufficient in many cases. Symptoms of the P.T.S.D. are often reduced by reliving the trauma, understanding it in a political and social context, and integrating it into one's personal history. This requires a safe therapeutic environment (Somnier and Genefke, 1986). No one reported getting that kind of help.

The refugee claimants who are here alone without the supportive network of family and friends are the "highest risk" group. Their uncertain status and the lack of services make it very difficult for them. Immigration policy treats these people as "gate crashers" and gives them a double message - "you can come in but you are not welcome". If they are finally accepted as immigrants they do not even get the same material support and language training that government chosen refugees receive. They are treated as "regular" Canadians and basically left to fend for themselves. They usually have little or no English, are unemployed, and have had traumatic pre-migration experiences. This sub-population seems to be the most "at risk" and has the fewest resources and services available to them.

## Adaptation

The youth from Latin America have to try to fit into a new environment here. Not only do they have to learn a new language, which is difficult enough, they have to try to understand a new culture. How will the new and the old fit together? How will they resolve the conflicts?

I have been here almost three years. It is different. And I still have not gotten accustomed. Every day I discover differences and I ask "why", "what's this", "why do they do that" and I don't understand. I think that my parents will explain it to me but they can't. It's the same for them. They only say "Well my child, that's the way it is here, the only thing you can do is choose between what is good and what is bad". (VIII-4)

## Cultural Differences

Latinos are generally expressive and warm. Canadian society seems cold and private to them. They feel like outsiders.

Here people are more private you could say. Life is lived more privately. Happiness is not passed from one to another like it is there...if you go to El Salvador, how should I say it, anyone would give you love and friendship, they are warm. Here that also exists but not as much. You also see a little racism on the part of Canadians, some of them. There are always exceptions. (II-7)

Neighbourhoods or barrios in El Salvador and Guatemala are strong support networks where everyone knows everyone else and people help one another.

Our people are sweet, they give, they are affectionate and friendly. They will give you their own food. If they have a little piece of meat for the whole family, they'll give you a piece too...Canadians are strange this way.

They'll arrive and knock at the door. Neighbours don't interact much or invite each other in. At night in El Salvador people would sit outside and visit, have coffee. It's a beautiful community. But here, in the building where I live, all the doors are closed. All the Canadians are closed. They don't even know each other...That's a big change here. The whole neighbourhood there knows everyone else, it's like a big family. (VIII-19)

Although Canadian society seems closed, at the same time they see it as being very liberal, even libertine. Canadian youth are seen to be more free and undisciplined. Many of those interviewed expressed both appreciation for the increased freedom as well as concern about the negative influences of the more liberal morality here.

Here there is more freedom for young people. There your parents have you subjected to very strict rules, whereas here the young person has more freedom. Maybe for this reason (Latino) youth here stray from the right path, because they see so much freedom. (IV-4)

Personal respect and dignity are strong cultural values for Latinos (Maduro, 1983 and Horowitz, 1983). Canadian youth seem very disrespectful to them.

Here I am amazed at the way the students talk back to the teachers. Even in regular classes the teacher asks the student to work and they insult the teacher and say bad words. I just sit there with my mouth open! We were taught to respect the adults and our teachers, so I feel shocked...We were taught to respect if we wanted to be respected. We wouldn't even dream of answering like that to a teacher! Sometimes I talk back to my parents but not the way they talk back to the teachers here (V-5).

Drugs are perceived to be part of the Canadian youth culture.

That is one thing that surprised me here. I had never heard of marijuana or so many drugs. And here I just arrived at school and it is all around....It seems like everybody is taking drugs here. It's o.k. for Canadians, it's their culture, but not for us. In El Salvador you'll never see a gang, maybe groups of kids talking, nobody would be smoking. They are not accustomed to that. But here they come and get influenced by Canadians. It's o.k., it's their country, but not for us. (VIII-22)

### Discrimination

Discrimination was another thing that the youth had to adapt to. Some reported more discrimination from other Latino youth than from Canadians. This was a surprise for them because they expected that the Latinos would be understanding and supportive, having had the same experiences.

We moved to Sixth Avenue and that was difficult because most of the people were from Latin America and they made us sad. That was the hardest thing...when you don't know the language everybody thinks that you are inferior even if they had the same problems when they came. I didn't understand why, if they had the same problems, they had to treat everybody else like that...they just try to make you feel inferior. (V-2)

There are some who don't want to associate with us. And why? They are Latinos, we are all the same. I don't know why they look down on us. They criticize. (II-11)

They wished there was more unity among Latinos and suggested that groups be organized to help orient newcomers. Many tried to help newcomers on their own. Experiences of discrimination from Canadians were also common. They were getting it from all sides.

They don't know how much it hurts when they look down on you. They don't know how you have come here, how you have struggled to get here, only so that they can discriminate against you. (III-8)

School seemed to be a place where there was a lot of tension.

In school many students look down on you. You are in E.S.L. classes and come from another country so they look down on you. That is what bothers me the most. I am also having problems with two teachers. I think they don't like me because I am Latino. I ask for help and they ignore me...It is not all the Canadians, but a lot of them discriminate against me. I feel bad, in our country it's not like that. (X-6)

On the positive side many expressed gratitude for the help and support they did receive, both from other Latinos and Canadians.

I have some Canadian friends and they helped me a lot. They did a lot for us. (V-3)

### English as a Second Language

Learning English was a big barrier. It is very stressful not being able to understand or be understood. You feel stupid. You think you will never learn it.

In Spanish I can explain a lot of things but when I try to do it in English I feel stupid...(X-6)

When you can't speak English you think you'll never learn. That's when you want to leave and go back with people who can speak your language, where you can work. (IX-5)

Many reported that the first year is the most difficult time. Home sickness, loneliness and depression are common. Many



feel powerless and trapped. They want to go home and they can not. Some did not want to come in the first place.

My mother told me, "If after three months you don't like it, you can return." But even though I didn't like it, I couldn't go back...she tricked me. (VI-14)

After they start to learn English and see the opportunities they have to study and build a future they start to feel better.

The first months, the first two years, you feel kind of trapped, sometimes people don't understand you, so you ask yourself what you are doing here. You want to go back but you can't. So this helps you to reason: "If I go back I might lose and here I can gain other things, live better, I don't have to worry that if I go out something might happen to me," things like that. (V-13)

Many of them are experiencing the dilemma of wanting to go back and wanting to stay. Some of them have resolved this by planning to work hard to get an education or some training to be able to help their country develop in the future. Others wanted to send money home or sponsor relatives to come to Canada.

The first year, my mind was set, I wanted to go back to Guatemala and stay there, because of my relatives mainly. But just in December I went back and I was really happy seeing everybody but, seeing the way the country was, I don't want to live there. I guess I needed to go back to see if I was going to find happiness here or down there. I want to go to visit, for a month or so, but not to live. (V-10)

One young woman who is doing well in school and plans to go on to university expressed her dilemma.

Maybe I'll stay here forever but I'll never forget, neither the people I left behind, nor my culture, nor my language. I consider myself a Latino living in Canada, because the truth is, I wasn't so small when I came. I was fifteen. I brought the culture that I had lived with for fifteen years and all the things that I had become used to for fifteen years. You can never forget this because it's already inside you. (VI-16)

Adapting to life here is a complex process and it takes longer for some than for others.

When you see the differences here and you don't like them, you want to go back. If you like it more here, you want to forget about how things were there and just live here. It's something which you have to decide and which you might not know until you have more experience and have lived through more things. (V-13)

Those who become involved in their community and keep themselves busy seem to have an easier time. This young man has been here three years.

I have a friend...He has a bicycle that he goes to school on. "Let's go together". Great! We have a nice time. On Saturday I go to a youth group at church. I have a pretty nice time there. I deliver newspapers. I have a lot of things to do to keep me from getting sad. I have to study quite a lot too. It makes me feel better to write to my friends. I feel more or less okay...In other words, I am adapting. (II-7)

### Gender Roles

Another major cultural difference that both young women and men had to adapt to was the changing gender roles. Latin American culture is traditionally patriarchal. The women here have discovered they have more freedom.

It's much better here. I have adult friends who are married and the husband does the shopping or takes care of

the kids while the wife works or something, whereas down there the man thinks the wife is for the house and the man is for work...They think they are really superior...They can be with another girl if they want. They can drink and smoke but if they see their wives doing that they raise hell, right! (V-7)

Male participants saw the changes in the women as being negative.

Both the young girls and the older women change a lot when they come here. In Latin America they are more reserved, here they become more free, extremely so. Not so good really. They take a look at how things are here and they fly away. If they didn't change their way of thinking when they arrive here maybe they wouldn't have a problem, but that is not the case; here they go a little crazy (I-7)

The males lose some of their privileges.

Sometimes I have problems with my brothers. As males they think that because you are a woman you have to do more things in the home. This is one of the big cultural differences because here the women are equal to the men and the work is divided up 50/50. (VI-7)

If you get married here you tell your man, "No, you have to help me, I'm not going to do everything for you." Sometimes it's difficult for the woman but she has to do it. She sees the example of the Canadian woman who is not going to be anybody's servant. (IX-10)

A 21 year old woman recently married told me of some problems she was having with her husband.

He wanted someone to say he was right, that if he wanted the food on the table, I had to put it there. That's what his friends told him. They had recently come from El Salvador and didn't know what the situation was here. Maybe they came with their wives who had become accustomed to how they did it there and they kept on with the same routine. And when they talked about me they said, "No, it's because the women here are too liberal and they want to order the man around, they want to dominate the man, they think they

are stronger than men." We went to see a counsellor together but the second time he didn't want to go because he thought the counsellor was on my side. (IX-14)

### Gangs

Belonging to a street gang is also a way of adapting to the new environment. If youth feel alienated and discriminated against in the schools and in society they can find status and peer support in a gang. Being a gang member serves to protect one's honour and dignity. In the macho code of honour, fighting is necessary to respond to perceived insults or lack of deserved respect (Horowitz, 1983).

It's only logical, if you feel sad and deserted you seek support in your own community. If you don't have work to go to or something to study, these gangs are your family...when they see racism is not uncommon among the youth here, they form groups and then say "No! We don't have to put up with this. Why should we?" So the arguments start. They get carried away a lot of times. (III-8)

The existence of the gangs was a concern for all those interviewed. Youth gangs are unknown in Latin America but they are quite common in most major North American cities. They seem to be a response to the social conditions here. Many youths experienced being insulted and hassled before becoming members of gangs.

Maybe a young guy doesn't have any friends and is frustrated by how people treat him and he feels everyone is like that. Instead of getting to know people who can help him, he gets involved with people he thinks can understand him. But they are the ones in the gangs. If there were programs or counsellors to help him get together with other youth to do other things, that could help him

I have a friend in Los Diablos. He came alone. He was living with roommates but they didn't get along. So he went

to live with an Evangelical family. He did well there but they wanted to convert him. They told him if he didn't convert he couldn't stay. They pressured him. So he left and now he hangs out with people he thinks understand him, the gang. (IX-18)

The street gangs have received much media attention lately and the participants expressed concern about negative stereotyping.

And now it's a problem, no? People get assaulted on the corner by a group that speaks Spanish, and they hear about this group Los Diablos, so they think everyone who speaks Spanish is mixed up in that gang...A lady said to me, "you should go back to your country because you have only come here to organize gangs." I said "Tell it to the ones who are hanging around on the streets, but not to me. Why me?". (II-8)

Whenever there is news about the gangs we have more trouble in the schools. In some schools we are under surveillance. They think we are involved in something. We are not all like that...The gangs do something wrong and it puts our whole culture down. (X-16)

### Discussion of Adaptation

Latino culture is very different from the one found here in Canada. The youth often find it hard to understand. On the one hand it seems closed and cold while on the other hand it seems very open and liberal with many opportunities to do both good and bad. They seem to see Canadian youth culture as being liberal and undisciplined. Drug and alcohol abuse is seen to be almost normal behaviour for Canadian youth. Many expressed concerns about friends being led astray, influenced by loose Canadian morals. It seems that the first impression many Latino youth get of Canadian society is somewhat negative. This could be due to

the fact that, upon arrival, they are usually housed in poor inner city neighbourhoods where they are exposed to the street life here.

Not only is the culture new, but the youth often feel they are being discriminated against. They feel Canadians look down on them because they are from another country and cannot speak English very well. Experiences of discrimination were reported in the schools from both students and teachers. Some suggested that programmes be developed to help students understand people from diverse cultures and the circumstances of their migration. They felt that they needed more opportunity to interact with students from the mainstream culture. The youth were also surprised by discrimination from other Latinos. Instead of helping or providing support, Latino youth who have been here longer often look down on newcomers and make fun of them. Some denied speaking Spanish even though their accent and imperfect English belied them. The discrimination that they experienced on arrival may have had the effect of making them ashamed of being Latino. Adolescence is a time of identity formation and the experience of being discriminated against and put down at this time could cause a rejection of the previous cultural identity with the hope that they will then be accepted by the larger society. It may be that the newcomers remind those that came before of the pain and embarrassment they experienced at first so they do not want to associate with them. Powerless people often do not want to identify with those who are less powerful.

The discrimination could also result in a defiant attitude towards society as manifested by the gang members who join together to reinforce their identity and support one another in what they perceive as a hostile, closed society. Access to power, status, and money are gained through gang membership and activity. The gang also protects the honour of its members. For some it is an alternative to being on welfare.

The gangs' activities affect the whole community because of the media attention they receive. There is a great deal concern about negative stereotyping and further discrimination because of the activities of a small group.

The first months to the first year seemed to be the most difficult time. Some reported a short-term feeling of being on vacation but it soon ended. Not speaking English is very frustrating, making even the simplest tasks seem almost impossible. Many reported being depressed, homesick and unable to concentrate or study. Once the youth started to feel more comfortable with English and began to appreciate their opportunities for study and career, they began to feel better. The parents, on the other hand, while optimistic at first, are often frustrated later by underemployment and loss of status. When the parents are up, the youth are down. Then, when the parents are down, the youth are becoming more optimistic. This dynamic could have important implications for counselling.

The youth often did not choose to come and in some cases were not even consulted about the decision to migrate. Parents, more aware of and affected by the violence in their countries, often made the travel plans themselves and brought the youth along. This made their feelings of loss even greater. Conflicts with parents often resulted.

Changing gender roles here in Canada also required some adaptation. The young women discovered they had more economic and personal freedom here. The young men seemed to think that the women changed too much. The women have more to gain and the men perceived that to be a loss for them. These changes often caused misunderstandings and stress in relationships.

### Family Dynamics

#### Separation

It has been said that there are no intact refugee families. Forced migration always separates families. This is especially true considering that the Latino concept of family is that of the extended family (Canino and Canino, 1980). Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are considered to be family and often live very close to each other in Central America. If people are fortunate enough to come with the nuclear family, parents and children, they often still feel isolated, cut off from an important source of emotional and material support.



When you have children back there, your mother, nephew, aunt, the whole family takes care of them. But here everything is more individual. If I have an appointment I have to pay someone to look after them. People from here don't have their families close by...There we always live surrounded by family. (IX-10)

In many cases the war forces a man to flee alone, hoping to later reunite with his family.

My father was in the army and when he died my mother told me it would be best for me to leave. (III-6)

My family told me that they preferred to see me far away and not there. I would rather be there. And I know my family would rather have me there too, but with what is happening there, what can you do? I have to stay here. Although I don't like this country, I have to stay. (III-7)

The youth are often sent to live with relatives here because they are at an age when they are in danger of being victims of the conflict there.

My father was here. I was living with my mother there and he asked me if I wanted to come. They separated a long time ago. I wanted to stay with my mother, but she saw what the situation was there and realized it was dangerous. "Something can happen to you," she said. They can kill you, they can confuse you with someone else and you'd never know what happened. You can't safely walk down the streets. You can be kidnapped into the army...There are no human rights for people there. So many problems. So I called my dad and he asked if I wanted to come and I said yes. It hurt me to have to leave my mother because I always lived with her...to be so far away from her. (III-6)

When family members are finally reunited after long separations it is not always easy to live together. They often feel like strangers to each other. The young woman quoted below

resented being sent to Canada and had serious problems relating to her mother. She finally moved out to live with an aunt.

I hadn't seen my mother for eleven years. She left El Salvador when I was five...I lived with my grandmother...I didn't even think of my mother. I didn't feel anything for her. My love was for my grandmother and my aunt...I didn't want to come here. They only told me it was time to be with my mother...I felt like I was torn away from that home to come here to be with someone I didn't know. (VIII-14)

So for some of these youth, adapting to a new culture is complicated by having to adapt to a new family as well.

(My grandmother) and I lived together for fifteen years and we only separated when I came here. So this was one of the greatest conflicts that I had. Because I wasn't used to living with my mother or my brothers...In the beginning my mother and I had a lot of fights. I wanted to go back, I didn't want to stay here. My mother wanted me to stay here because I was the only girl that she had. I got used to being with her and now we are more united. (VI-14)

The grandmother emerged as a common theme in all the interviews. She seemed to be a symbol of all the family and everything that had been left behind. They talk of going back to El Salvador or Guatemala to see their grandmother.

I love my grandmother like my mother. I always visited her and she always advised me and gave me love. Here it is different. I have never heard any Canadian friend talking about their grandmother like that. (VIII-1)

### Intergenerational Conflict

Intergenerational conflict is a major factor affecting family dynamics. Adolescence is a stage of identity formation when youth are examining and challenging the values and

assumptions they have been brought up with (Erikson, 1968). Coming to Canada they are exposed to the example of youth here. The more liberal values of Canadian society are often in conflict with the traditional values of the Latino culture. This often creates conflict between parents and youth.

Here, sometimes when some of us want to adopt the customs from here - the customs of our country are so different. So some kids stand up to their parents saying "No! I am right." They want to go down their own road only because they are in this country. There it isn't like that. The parents see that there is more liberation here, a more liberal country. So they react by being more strict with their children. But they shouldn't be so strict because when you are too strict with someone, sometimes it has the opposite effect. (II-9)

The parenting style is more democratic here. Both the youth and their parents are not quite sure how to respond. The youth live in two worlds and cultures, that of their parents and that of their peers.

The parents are used to having their children a certain way; what they say is law. There in El Salvador they are entitled to punish their children, whenever, however and however many times they want to and nobody would tell them, "Don't hit him like that"...Whereas the way I see things here is that the son and the father are not the father and son but rather are two men talking and coming to an agreement between them...So you encounter a sudden change when you come here because there you are under the pressure from your parents and then you find yourself here with younger people who are freer and can go out at any time they like and make their own decisions.(IV-11)

Sometimes the parents react by becoming more strict and not allowing their children to do things that they would have been able to do back in El Salvador or Guatemala.

They aren't too sure of the situation here yet and they are afraid of too much liberty. So they don't give their children the freedom, and then the kids become, not rebellious, but if they strictly follow the rules of the parents they become bored and then the problems start. Many times they will leave home. (IV-12)

The young women experienced parental restrictions more than the males.

Their parents are overprotective I guess...I have a friend who is 15 or so and her dad says, "No, you can't go out with a guy until you are 18," which is so old-fashioned...There are some parents who hit their daughters, they want to protect them and everything. My dad used to say that, if I wanted to go out with a guy, my brother would have to go out with me, supposedly to take care of me. But my brother was younger than me so I would have to take care of him! But when he came here he changed his mind about it. At least now I can go out without my brother! But so many girls say that their parents are overprotective and they treat them like babies, even when they are 18 or 19...I guess that's why they ran away. They hit them, they always want to have them in the home. (V-8)

Some rebel against the restrictions.

Some girls from Central America don't care what time they get home, don't phone their parents, and the parents really worry. Sometimes parents even call my mom to ask if she knows where their daughter is. (V-8)

Many girls lead a double life. They are one kind of person at home and another at school. They often learn to lie to keep the peace at home.

I know some girls who are with gangs or smoking marijuana or taking cocaine and at home they're like little girls, it's like they are hypocrites. (V-8)

The parents are concerned about the drugs and the gangs. They are afraid that they will lose their children. The Latino family seems threatened by Canadian society. Parental authority is seen to be undermined by our child protection laws.

Our parents here feel restricted because they cannot abuse their authority in Canada. They can no longer punish you because there are laws protecting minors. So this is how parents find themselves up against a wall, because they feel powerless to do anything and that's when they get very depressed. (IV-12)

The youth feel that they have more freedom and power here. The state backs them up with their decisions. In the following case a young woman, known to hang out with a street gang, told me she could get income assistance to live by herself.

I started to go out when I was 17. She (my mother) didn't like it, and she started to fight with me. I told her if she would go on like that I was going to live by myself. Now I don't live with my mom...They are going to pay me for my rent. My social worker agrees with me that I am going to live by myself. (VII-4)

Forced migration, trauma, loss, separation and cultural conflict all put a great deal of stress and strain on family relations. For some it unites them.

Here in Canada there are only four of us, my brothers, my mom and myself. So we have to be more united and support each other when one of us is trying to do something worthwhile. (VI-7)

#### Discussion of Family Dynamics

Loss was a common theme with all the participants. Forced migration disrupts families. Youth often were sent here to live with aunts and uncles or parents they had not seen for years. The stress of having to adapt to a new family while having to adapt to an entirely new culture and environment often caused serious conflict. Nuclear families migrating to Canada lost the support of their extended families and friends. The grandmother seemed to represent all that was lost and left behind. She was mentioned again and again in the interviews.

The differences between Latino and Canadian culture often cause conflicts in the families. Unmarried children, especially women, tend to live with their families in El Salvador and Guatemala. Here youth tend to move out at a younger age and the parents see that as a threat to their family. Parents tend to hold onto the values of their own culture and try to protect their children from what they perceive to be the dangers of the looser morality here. They may tend to be over-protective and restrictive. The youth see that their Canadian peers enjoy more liberties and may challenge their parents, considering them to be old-fashioned. Canadian child protection laws also seem to undermine the parents' traditional autocratic authority. In El Salvador and Guatemala parents are allowed to discipline their children as they see fit, without any interference from the state. The youth seem to appreciate the more democratic style of parenting practiced here and would like to see their parents give them more freedom and responsibility. The restrictiveness often

caused rebelliousness and, sometimes, family break up. There was also some confusion about what is normal for Canadian youth. Some saw "doing whatever you want", including drug and alcohol abuse, as a normal part of Canadian youth culture.

### Prospects

In spite of all the difficulties adapting to the new culture the young people interviewed felt grateful for the security and opportunities Canada offers.

Well, I think sincerely that this country is great. I'm going to take advantage of it because, as he said before, it is a bit difficult sometimes. It's not all easy but, if one works and waits, things will work out. (II-1)

Here you feel safer, away from the problems of war. You don't find a dead body on your doorstep. That doesn't happen here. Here everything is quieter. (II-10)

The standard of living of course is higher.

I like the fact that you are never in need here, in comparison to there. The poor man here is a rich man there. He who has the least here, would be considered to have everything there. Why is that? No one will die of hunger here. As far as this is concerned, it's not a problem, but sometimes I'd still prefer to be there. (I-5)

### Education and Employment

Education was a strong theme for all the participants, which is natural considering their ages. They felt they could have greater opportunity to study here. Those who were doing well in

school felt very optimistic and planned on going on to advanced studies.

I took the five month E.S.L. course in King Edward and later you can apply for a grant and they keep helping you. I got my grade twelve that way and am now taking a course in pharmacy. It has been good but it is limited. Only certain people can take advantage; if you do well in classes. But others can't make it, they stay behind and aren't eligible. (IX-3)

But for those who are having difficulty in school the future does not seem so bright.

Many of our youth, because of trouble adapting, lose their study habits and leave school, maybe get into gangs. They lose the opportunity they have to get ahead. (X-10)

E.S.L. classes are frustrating for most. Students have to study in E.S.L. classes before they can move into regular classes.

If you are in E.S.L. you can't take any regular classes like math. For math you don't need much English. They don't want to take students from E.S.L. even if they are good students. I am learning math in E.S.L. classes that I already know. In E.S.L. they have everyone together. Some know more than others. So they teach the ones who don't know and the ones who know have to learn it again. It's a waste of time. (X-6)

Youth who are over 18 when they arrive will have a very difficult time graduating from high school, thus limiting their career opportunities.

Teachers tend to keep you in E.S.L. for a long, long time and then you can't even graduate. Sometimes in E.S.L. my counsellor would say I was good enough to be in advanced



class but the E.S.L. teachers wouldn't transfer me. But when they received a lot of Spanish and Chinese people that needed the space they just took everybody in E.S.L. out but they didn't know enough English to be in regular classes...I think that when you turn 19 you have to leave if you are not in regular classes. There are kids who won't be able to graduate because of their age. They have a program to help you find jobs and everything but still, what can you do without a grade twelve diploma? (V-15)

Those who are 19 when they arrive are not allowed to attend high school. Many have had their education interrupted by the war and forced migration and have not been able to finish high school. For some it was very frustrating.

Well my main plan in Guatemala was to go to university, and that is what I would like to do here. But I don't know if I will be able to. They don't even let me go to school to finish high school...It seems like everyone else is going to school, and me, I'm stuck in a room. And I want so much to go to school and I can't. Me, who always loved to go to school, now I can't. And I won't be able to. (I-4)

Although many of the young people did not want to come to Canada in the first place, they have a vision of life here, a dream to build a better future and to do something worthwhile.

The opportunities. At least the opportunities to have a better future. Here you can study and go to different institutions and, if you have the desire and the will, you can get ahead...of course, in appreciation of those opportunities you have the obligation to try to be someone, to be useful. (IV-3)

Those who can not study often have difficulty finding work as well. The "land of opportunity" becomes a frustrating illusion.

One of the factors that affect the young people is that they want to work. They come to work and end up doing nothing, understand? This affects all of their other activities. So there they are with the desire to work and they need permission, no? And then, no, you needed this and this and that...People have problems finding work because they don't know the language...This affects you. They go on welfare, they don't do anything. They lose their vision, the focus they brought to do something. They lose themselves when they find themselves up against these obstacles. (II-1)

Those who left their home countries when they were quite young, say under ten years of age, usually identify more with Canada and want to stay here in the future. Those who came when they were older often face a big dilemma of whether they want to stay or go back.

I want to study. I don't have plans about where I will live. I am here but I was born there and my whole family is there. I am the only one here. I don't know where I will be in the future, whether here or there. Right now I am learning here, I am studying. But I don't know. If my family was here I would make my plans for my future here. (IX-6)

Some, of course, want to do both.

If I got a university education and could help with the development of my country I would like to do that. That doesn't mean that I am only going to take advantage of Canada. If I could contribute to Canada I would like to do that too. I would like to be a Canadian citizen and be responsible to Canada. Canada will be a part of me and it will also need us. But I also have responsibilities to my country. My roots are there. (X-11)

### Discussion of Prospects

Canada has better opportunities for education and career development for youth than El Salvador or Guatemala. Here they

are also safe from the dangers of war and repression. Many expressed gratitude for these things and are taking advantage of them. The good opportunities are only for those who do well however. The best students are encouraged to go on and are offered grants and loans. Those who are having difficulty with their studies, perhaps due to the stress of adaptation or previous trauma, are often left behind and drop out, destined for low paying jobs or unemployment.

The standard of living is higher here, even for the unemployed. The state provides income assistance, health care, and other services unknown in their home countries. But work provides a sense of identity and self worth.

It's the first time I've lived off something like welfare and I can't stand it. I want to work, but I don't have a work permit. Until it comes from Ottawa, and it never comes...Instead of taking money from the taxpayers. What can the people of Canada think of this? This guy doesn't like to work. (III-3)

Prospects are not good for youth who are older than 19 when they arrive. Many of them have had their education interrupted by war and forced migration. They come to Canada with the hope of being able to graduate from high school and continue on with their education. But high schools here do not accept anyone over 18 years of age. These people are expected to go to Adult Education classes if they want to finish high school. They have to pay for their own education, including E.S.L. They are caught in the dilemma of not being able to study English unless they get

a job and not being able to get a job because they can not speak English. Student loans are available but they are often not aware of them. Their dreams of a better future seem frustrated by the barriers they face. Our school system is not responsive to their special circumstances and needs.

Refugee claimants, once again, are the most disadvantaged. Even if they are accepted as immigrants they will not be eligible for sponsored language training. They too are expected to work and pay for their own English classes. Present policies seem to punish these victims of repression. They are officially eligible for all the services and benefits due to any Canadian resident but this ignores their special needs and the barriers that exist to their access to mainstream social services. They often end up as menials and servants in our society, taking jobs that Canadians reject.

Many also experience the dilemma of wanting to return to their home country and wanting to stay in Canada. Naturally, the younger they were when they came, the more they identify with Canada as their home. For the older ones, waiting to go back may become an excuse for not applying themselves to their studies or opportunities here. Some have resolved their dilemma for the present by deciding to work hard and take advantage of the opportunities they have to be able to offer their knowledge and skills for the development of their home country in the future.

In summary these youth have to face many challenges in their adaptation to life in Canada. These newcomers, which are a part of our multicultural society and our future, need attention from our policy makers and service providers. Following are the conclusions of this study and some implications for social work.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Before focusing on the situations of Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth in Canada I would like to review some of the reasons for the violence and repression in their home countries. Industrialized countries exploit the natural resources and cheap labour of the poor Third World countries, thus insuring their continuing underdevelopment. Central America is an area of economic and technological dependency controlled by imperialist monopolies. Although it is a rich and fertile region, its agricultural production (mostly coffee and bananas) and its mineral resources are syphoned off by international corporations. The International Monetary Fund has "lent" large sums of money to underdeveloped countries to develop agriculture and resource extraction but the profits and the products always leave the area. In reality what has been happening is that the multinational corporations have financed the development of their own operations and have gotten the poor countries to pay for it. The only Central Americans that benefit from this kind of "development" are the privileged class of large landowners and businessmen who act as the representatives and partners of the foreign interests. Huge foreign debts are incurred in the name of the people but for the exploited class of peasants and workers there are no benefits or development, only deepening poverty and misery.

Latin America has been pillaged and exploited for the five centuries since the European conquest; first by the Spanish, next by the English and now by multinational corporations controlled mainly by the United States (Galeano, 1973). The people have tried many times to throw off the yoke of their oppression. In the first three decades of this century the United States sent troops to Central America and the Caribbean twenty-eight times to protect its economic interests (Golden and McConnell, 1986). General Smedley D. Butler spent thirty-three years in the Marine Corps:

During that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street, and for the bankers. In short I was a racketeer for capitalism... Thus I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank to collect revenues... I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1901-1902. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903 (Pearce, 1981, p.20).

The present day conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala are a continuation of a history of repression and violence. The United States is spending millions of dollars every year to maintain military regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala to protect American interests. Canada, less powerful than the United States and therefore less repressive, also has economic interests in the region. The Canadian government officially supports American foreign policy and recognizes, supports, and does business with the puppet governments dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Canadian businesses, especially banks, have considerable stakes in Latin America (Whitaker, 1987).

One of the contributions of Salvadorean and Guatemalan refugees has been to make Canadians more aware of the situation in their countries and in the rest of the Third World. The social work Code of Ethics states that social workers have a commitment to develop resources to meet individual, group, national and international needs and aspirations; and to work for the achievement of social justice for all (British Columbia Association of Social Workers, 1988). The implication is that social workers have a responsibility, not only to the refugees that make it to Canada, but to all the oppressed people in Central America and the rest of the Third World. The same exploitative capitalist system that puts profit before the well-being of people and creates poverty here, also creates poor underdeveloped countries. Social workers have the responsibility to work to change foreign and domestic policies that will improve social conditions and promote social justice both here and abroad. We can no longer live in our own insulated and comfortable world while hungry and landless peasants break their backs to support our consumer lifestyle and put luxuries like sugar and coffee on our tables.

Social workers also have the responsibility to respond to the needs of the immigrants and refugees who are here. Canadian society is changing and dynamic. Forty-eight percent of Vancouver's students speak English as a second language (Cleanthro and Levens, 1989). Every new immigrant changes



Canadian society a little more. The immigrant must adapt to a new life in Canada and Canada must also adapt to its changing population. It must be a mutual process. Social workers, as advocates for the disadvantaged, must work to develop policies and programmes to provide equal access to services and resources for those blocked by language and cultural barriers to full participation in our society.

In order to provide effective and relevant services, social workers need to develop cross-cultural sensitivity and skills. Cross-cultural education should be an integral part of a social worker's professional training and development and as such should be included in the curricula of the Schools of Social Work.

The next sections follow the same main headings as in the findings chapter. The conclusions and implications are discussed under the headings of trauma, adaptation, family dynamics and, prospects.

### Trauma

Migration in itself entails experiences of loss and grief. The loss and grief experienced by the youth in this study was amplified by the traumatic experiences of war and state terrorism. Witnessing violence was a common experience and many had friends and relatives kidnapped, tortured and/or killed. Psychological and emotional scars, in the form of symptoms such

as insomnia, depression, anxiety, nightmares, flashbacks, and inability to concentrate, were reported. Other studies done with refugee populations have found similar experiences (Allodi, 1980; Beiser, 1988; Cohen, 1980; Coleman, 1987). The literature has identified these symptoms as those of the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.).

Symptoms of P.T.S.D. along with the loss of a person's support system due to forced migration may result in the Exile Syndrome, which lists as one of its symptoms: the reluctance or resistance to incorporate in the new environment and the ability to foresee a meaningful future outside of their own country (Perez, 1984). The youth in this study, perhaps due to their age, have dreams of a meaningful future. Perez's study was done with Chilean adults who had been politically active before the Chilean military and the C.I.A. overthrew the popularly elected Allende government in 1974. The defeat of democracy in Chile was a personal defeat for them. The Salvadorean and Guatemalan youth were not so involved in politics and did not seem to identify as much with either side in the war. Their dilemma of wanting to stay in Canada and wanting to go back had more to do with missing family and friends. Their symptoms of P.T.S.D. also made their adaptation here more difficult. Many were suffering greatly. The implications for social work are that whenever working with refugee clients social workers must be sensitive to the fact that most of them have had very traumatic experiences. Symptoms like depression and anxiety may be misdiagnosed as mental illness when

in fact they are natural and normal psychological reactions to extreme trauma. While spontaneous recovery is not likely, therapy has shown to be quite effective in reducing symptoms (Allodi, 1980; Somnier and Genefke, 1986). Social work needs to develop skills in the assessment and treatment of victims of repression and torture.

### Adaptation

The Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1988) suggested that adolescent age is a bad time to migrate. Both Misri (1986) and Perez (1984) wrote that major changes in a cultural context during identity formation tend to have severe consequences for further development. This seems to be supported by the present study. Discrimination and ethnic insults experienced by youth, especially in the schools, also seemed to affect their identity formation. Some youth rejected the culture of their parents because they saw that it was devalued by Canadian society. In an effort to be accepted they would even pretend that they did not speak Spanish and sometimes would ridicule and insult other Latino youth who had recently arrived in Canada and could not yet speak English. This was hard for the newcomers to understand because they thought the other Latinos would help them. Other youth reacted to the discrimination they experienced by joining gangs. "The gang provides a place where they belong and that is exactly what we have not given them. The real issue is racism and our ability to aid in assimilation of immigrants" (Came,

1989, p. 37). The youth who had adapted most successfully were those who had the support of family and friends and could talk openly about their experiences and problems. A few reported getting help from counsellors at school. The refugee claimants, usually single young men here alone, reported having the most difficulty.

Orientation is needed for the youth as soon as possible after they arrive here. Social workers could help to organize and facilitate support groups for youth to discuss the cultural differences, difficulties and methods of coping. The groups would provide a welcome and a sense of belonging. Leadership skills and awareness of their special gifts as bicultural, bilingual people would help to empower them and build a stronger sense of pride and community.

### Family Dynamics

The Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (1988) identified separation from family as a contingency of migration that increases the risk of developing mental health problems. Separation and loss were common themes for all the participants. Reunification after extended periods of separation meant further loss for youth as they had to leave surrogate parents (usually grandparents or aunts and uncles) to join parents they had not seen for years.

The literature indicated that changing gender roles and intergenerational conflict created major problems for many immigrant families (Misri, 1986; Sepulveda, 1984; Tesler, 1984; Burke, 1982; Maglione, 1983; Canino and Canino, 1980; and Berdichewski, 1987). I also found this to be true. Serious conflicts were reported with both the parents and the youth confused about what was expected of them. Family breakup sometimes resulted with the youth moving out of the family home. This is a tragedy for the family because the family is first in Latino culture. One father said that he had brought his family here to save them from danger in El Salvador and then lost them in Canada.

There is a lack of services for Latino families. The immigrant settlement agencies do not have the mandate or the expertise to provide family therapy. Language and cultural barriers block these families from using the mainstream agencies. Parenting groups are needed to help parents adjust to the different parenting style found here. They are often confused about child protection laws and what they perceive as the loose moral value of Canadian society. Social work has the responsibility to provide services for these families. Schools of Social Work need to recruit more students from the ethnic communities to work with people of their own culture. Affirmative action programmes are needed in the universities to encourage these students to apply. Special supports and tutoring may also be necessary due to language and cultural difficulties.

Social workers, once again, need to develop cross-cultural awareness and skills such as working through an interpreter. Social workers also need to advocate for policies and programmes in the mainstream agencies to respond to the needs of these families.

### Prospects

These youth, like all refugees, came to Canada to escape from war and violence with the hope of building a better future. The inability to speak English is their first barrier and has been identified as a contingency of migration that increases the risk of developing mental health problems. The studies of Fantino (1982) and Montero (1977) both describe the frustrations of not being able to communicate, making the simplest of tasks seem almost impossible and making one feel powerless and stupid. The youth in this present study reported similar feelings. They also expressed frustration with the E.S.L. classes that try to teach Latinos, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Polish, and any other immigrant all in the same class. Many felt it was a waste of time.

Education was a concern for all and those that did well in school were optimistic about their opportunities and their future. However, the war and forced migration had disrupted the education of many and they were too old to enter the regular school system when they arrived here and so they were unable to

graduate. They were not excited about their prospects of unskilled labour or unemployment.

Refugee claimants are especially disadvantaged. They are not allowed to study or to work while their claim for refugee status is being processed. This could take four to six months during which time they receive hardship assistance, remain idle and are ineligible for any other social services. If they are allowed to stay in Canada they do not receive any special assistance as refugees. This policy appears to be an attempt to discourage refugees from coming to our borders to seek asylum. The Department of Immigration wants to choose their refugees from their overseas offices. This policy ignores the human needs of the refugee claimants once they are here. A more humanitarian response is needed.

Social workers are needed to advocate for the refugee claimants who have no power of their own. They are in double jeopardy; that is, a high risk group whose chances for getting help are low. E.S.L. classes should be provided to all, regardless of their status. E.S.L. for Latinos should be taught by teachers who speak Spanish. Free adult education should be provided for those who had their education disrupted so they can graduate from high school if they want to. Job training is needed to prepare the youth for the Canadian job market. Of course, jobs are also needed.

Youth has long been ignored as a target population (Shearer, 1987). A full range of services, from leisure activities to street work, are needed. Youth gangs are a growing phenomenon and are getting a great deal of media attention. A recent Macleans magazine dedicated a cover story to "gang terror" in Canadian cities (Came, 1989). While these gangs involve just a small percentage of youth, they are a visible and disturbing symptom of a much larger problem that needs immediate attention. Following are some recommendations to help respond to the needs and concerns of immigrant youth.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

I have been impressed by the courage and energy of the young people I had the privilege of talking to. They are definitely an asset for Canada. Many are adapting quite well despite their past tragedies and present difficulties. Whatever Canadian society can do to facilitate their process will be to the collective benefit of us all. Our society and its institutions also has the responsibility of adapting to our newcomers.

This study has revealed a gap in services to these refugee youth. Their own, often poetic, words have described the difficulties they experience adapting to life here while dealing with the painful wounds of trauma and loss. The following recommendations are grouped under the headings of services, education, further research and, resources. They are:

### A. Services

1. That support groups for youth be facilitated to give them the opportunity to talk about their experiences and problems.

Many of the youth interviewed reported that talking with friends helped them cope with their problems and some expressed the desire to help other newcomers. Such groups could serve as orientation programmes and help with the initial adjustment period as well as teach problem solving skills. Youth who have been in Canada for a longer period of time and have had similar

experiences could help facilitate the groups. These groups could be organized through community centres such as Britannia or by the multicultural workers and E.S.L. teachers in the school system. Due to the social organization of the Latino community, groups for young women would need to be developed with the consent and, hopefully, the participation of the parents, perhaps through church organizations.

2. That individual and group therapy for those having adaptation or psychological problems be provided in the E.S.L. context.

E.S.L. teachers are often the first professionals who have contact with the newcomers. The teachers often recognize the needs of their students for psychological help but have no resources to refer them to. Counsellors in the school system need to receive cross-cultural training with an emphasis on understanding the symptoms and treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. All refugees are "at risk" by definition. The schools are a natural environment to provide services because that is where many of the youth spend most of their time.

3. That the mental health system place cross-culturally trained mental health workers in the immigrant settlement agencies.

Settlement agencies such, as M.O.S.A.I.C. and Immigrant Services Society, are the services that most immigrant families are most familiar with. They do not presently have the mandate,

training or resources to provide counselling to those suffering from mental health disorders or adaptation problems. The Greater Vancouver Mental Health Services could place workers in those settings to make them more accessible and less stigmatizing to immigrant clients.

4. That parenting skills, along with other life skills, be taught in the content of the E.S.L. classes.

Parents often need orientation to the culture as well as help dealing with the intergenerational conflict frequently experienced by immigrant families. They are often confused by our child protection laws and about what they perceive to be the "loose" moral values of Canadian society. Providing parenting skills training in the content of E.S.L. classes helps to solve the problem of lack of time which is a common complaint for immigrant families.

5. That special programmes be developed for refugee claimants.

Refugee claimants are a "high risk" population. They are often isolated, idle, and under high stress while waiting to find out if they will be deported or be allowed to stay in Canada. Such programmes should combine E.S.L. instruction with supportive group therapy to help end their isolation and loneliness. Settlement agencies and community centres would be good settings for such programmes.

6. That more recreational and job training programmes be developed to give youth an opportunity to develop healthy relationships and interests as an alternative to street life and gang membership.

Youth need to feel that they belong. They need opportunities to develop their talents and skills. Programmes like the Work Orientation Program (W.O.W.) which provides a summer of paid job training and experience should be expanded to include more immigrant youth. Existing sports programmes also need to be expanded.

#### B. Education

1. That cross-cultural training be required for students of education, medicine, nursing, psychiatry, psychology and social work.

Mainstream agencies are often inaccessible and unresponsive to immigrant clients due to language and cultural barriers. They will continue to be so until the professionals are more cross-culturally aware. Such education should be a required part of their training at the university level.

2. That affirmative action programmes with bursaries and incentives be developed to encourage minority students to study in the helping professions.

Relaxed academic admission requirements and tutoring may be necessary for students with English as a second language. Such students would have the benefit of being bicultural and bilingual

and be better able to understand people of their own ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

3. That cross-cultural education be included in the curriculum of our school system.

Children growing up in a multicultural society need understanding and skills to be able to communicate with and appreciate people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Primary and secondary schools would be excellent places to combat discrimination and racist attitudes, teaching children to be proud of their ethnic and cultural heritage.

4. That the educational system give special consideration to youth whose studies have been disrupted by forced migration.

Those who are over 19 years of age are often not allowed to attend high school and feel blocked and frustrated. They should be given more time and help to graduate. An alternative they have is to get a student loan and try to graduate from Adult Education which means they would be graduating from grade twelve with the burden of a debt.

#### C. Research

1. That further research be done to delineate the psychological consequences of torture and exile and to develop effective treatment modalities for survivors of trauma.

Refugees coming from war-torn countries are mostly likely to have experienced severe trauma yet our present mental health

system and immigrant adaptation services are not prepared to help these people heal from their wounds. More knowledge is needed in this area.

2. That further research be done with immigrant youth and their families. This study has taken a preliminary look at a small population. A larger study could include interviews with parents, police, teachers, social workers, health professionals, mental health workers and, all others who are involved with immigrant youth.

#### D. Resources

1. That the Government of British Columbia accept greater responsibility for the well-being of its new residents.

All of the above recommendations require money and resources. Employment training, for example, is useless if there are no jobs. British Columbia is one of the most multicultural provinces; forty-eight percent of Vancouver's school children have English as a second language (Cleanthro and Levens, 1989). Yet the Province of British Columbia spends the least of all the provinces on immigrant services (Shearer, 1987). Spending money to help newcomers adapt and integrate into our society is an investment and a preventative measure to avoid costly social problems in the future.

Immigrant youth are a big part of Canada's future. Considering the difficulties of their past and present situations

they cannot be expected to adapt smoothly to life here in Canada without some assistance. If we neglect their development today our society will pay the price tomorrow.

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## APPENDIX "A"

## Interview Guide

1. Perceptions and experiences of Canada  
Encourage youth to talk about their experiences in Canada.  
Probe for:
  - their perceptions of the cultural differences
  - differences between them and other youth
  - experiences of discrimination and racism
  - likes and dislikes
  - aspirations and expectations
  - barriers and frustrations
  - future plans, whether to go back or stay
  - networks
  - differences for young men and women
2. Family Relationships  
Get their perspectives on what is going on in the family.  
Probe for:
  - how migration has affected family relationships
  - typical parent/youth relationship in home land
  - intergenerational/cultural conflicts
  - differences for young men and women
3. Effects of Violence and Repression  
Many people who have had traumatic experiences often have nightmares and other problems. Others do not have such experiences.  
Probe for:
  - symptoms of P.T.S.D.
  - coping methods
  - suggestions for help
  - attitudes toward violence
  - attitudes toward authority
4. Suggestions  
Explore what the youth think about services and resources available to them now and what they would like to see be made available or developed.  
Probe for:
  - School and E.S.L.
  - Immigrant services
  - Recreation and social activities
  - Police
  - Social workers

APPENDIX "B"  
Coding Schedule

Initial codes	Categories	Core Categories
Latinos more expressive\emotional, materialism, bad influences, machismo, human rights, more liberal, welfare state, respect, drugs, street kids, Canadians more casual, Canadians more private.	Cultural Differences	Adaptation
racism, racism at school, put downs from Latinos, ashamed of accent, can't be myself, police discrimination, go home, how it hurts, good reception, help from Canadians.	Discrimination	
so difficult at first, didn't want to come, pillow full of tears, mixed emotions, fights due to tension, crime as coping, resistance, just surviving, coping.	Settlement Problems	
gang as support system, reaction to discrimination, negative stereotypes, gang members from Los Angeles, police too lax, Latinos under surveillance, community reaction.	Gangs	

here it's easy, better  
conditions, nobody starves,  
myth of easy money,  
grateful, can send money  
home, work and wait, work  
and welfare, give something  
back

Economic  
Opportunities

learn English, can't go to  
school, can't graduate, put  
in lower grade, E.S.L. waste  
of time, different standards  
for E.S.L., study and get  
ahead, discrimination from  
teachers, some don't take  
advantage, university

Education

Prospects

help my people, help  
newcomers, go back after  
the war, dilemma-go or stay,  
I'll never forget, be somebody,  
buy things, solidarity,  
develop skills for there, stay  
here for good.

Future  
Plans

accustomed to war, threats,  
nightmares, intrusive  
memories, repression from  
authorities, forced  
recruitment, killings,  
kidnappings, post traumatic  
stress, insomnia, loss of  
faith, war was exciting,  
wish someone would help,  
fear, lack of concentration

War and Trauma

War and Trauma

insecurity, ambiguity,  
feel like garbage, no  
status, ashamed of welfare,  
double message.

comments of  
Refugee  
Claimants

separation, torn away,  
here alone, grandmother,  
inter-generational conflict,  
new family, reunited, parents  
over-react, parenting more  
democratic, parents frustrated,  
women change, machismo, can't  
go out, no communication, got  
to stick together.

Family  
Dynamics



## APPENDIX "C"

## Example of Interview Data

Taken from Interview IX

J. I went by myself to Mexico. My visa expired after 6 months so I applied to come to Canada. I couldn't go back to El Salvador, so after 6 months the Canadian Consulate answered me and I came here. The shock of the change between El Salvador and Mexico wasn't so strong, even though I missed my home, but they spoke the same language, food and everything. But when I came here it was raining, in August. I spent the first month shut in, I didn't want to go out, I wanted to go back to El Salvador. I couldn't communicate with anyone, not even to ask for the key to my room at the hotel. Such a simple thing but I couldn't speak English and that depressed me more. I got sick that week and was sick with fever and a cold for a month, and another thing, I wasn't used to hot and cold water. I opened the tap and was hit with really hot water. I went to buy shampoo and bought dish washing liquid. Things like this happen to a lot of people. I wish there had been more people to orient me, people who had been here longer. But there wasn't anyone. I made friends with some people who were coming from the U.S. They could speak a little English but they were new here too. They helped translate for me. I came in 1983, maybe it wasn't very organized then.

Later I went to live with a Canadian woman. She was a director of an agency that serves immigrants. She started to help the newcomers. Another thing was the English classes. I have always studied in King Edward, I took the 5 months E.S.L. course there and later you can apply for a grant and they keep helping you. I got my grade 12 that way and am now taking a course in pharmacy. It has been good, but it's limited. Only certain people can take advantage. If you do well in the classes. But others can't make it and they stay behind and aren't eligible. The younger you are the easier it is to adapt. The environment is very important. Many young people have joined gangs and gotten into drugs. I think there is a lack of places for Latin youth. La quena (coffee house) is for adults. There should be more recreation for youth like camping and gym. So instead of wasting their time they can do better things. Being alone didn't affect me very much because when I came from Mexico I was pregnant. I met a guy there, but I had the responsibility of my daughter. Maybe if I had come without any commitments who knows what I would have done. But with the responsibility for her I had to be careful.

I. What do you like about Canada?

J. I like the opportunity to study and express yourself as you like. It doesn't matter what social class you come from. If you make an effort you can do it. In El Salvador I would never have been able to have 2 children and study and have my own self-

worth. Maybe I would have wanted to do more but I wouldn't have been able to due to my social class. There is no economic aid there. The first thing that affected me was the climate, but I had an opportunity to live with a Canadian woman and had a very good impression of the people here.

I. What don't you like about Canada and the culture?

J. One thing I don't like is that some people don't respect elders - there's a certain class of people. In El Salvador there is respect for elders. But there isn't much I don't like, I haven't had bad experiences here.

I. Was it difficult to learn English?

J. At first I got frustrated and I thought I would never learn it. After five months I was at a low level. The people who had come with me were doing much better. But when I was living with that family I practised more and improved a lot. I think that's a good thing for young people. Give them the opportunity to relate with the dictionary, looking up words, but after 1 year we could understand each other.

I. What other difficulties?

J. I didn't have many problems except for when I got sick at first, whether it was the shock of the climate or depression.

And the language, when you can't speak English, you can't communicate what you want to, and you think you'll never learn. That is when you want to leave and go back with people who can speak my language, where I can work.

I. When did that stage pass?

J. It took a year. I wanted to go back that whole year. That's a problem, not to accept that you are here and you have to adapt. If I had kept that negative attitude, that I wasn't going to learn, I wouldn't have even wanted to go to school. But I was here, I was going to have my baby here. I needed to learn English and study, I had to be responsible for her.

I. What are your future plans?

J. I want to study. I don't have plans about where I will live. I am here but I was born there and my whole family is there. I am the only one here. I don't know where I will be in the future, whether here or there. Right now I am learning here, I am studying. I want to study some medicine or pharmacy. I am in a class in pharmacy now. But don't know if my family was here I would make plans for my future here. But since they're there, maybe I'll go there but then I think of my children who were born here and don't have the same fantasies as I have about these. If they go there, they'll be thinking about here.

I. You are living with your partner here?

J. Yes, her father came when she was 9 months old. He had been in Mexico since 1979. Sometimes I get confused in my head - should I go there? But it would be more difficult for them. And the situation there. But then in the case that it got better there.

I. It seems that you didn't have such big problems in changing cultures, maybe because you lived with that Canadian family?

J. In El Salvador I left school at 12 years and went to work on a hacienda. I didn't have responsibilities of looking after the house. I didn't have to do that and then when I came here we shared all the household duties, cooking and everything. And that helped me when her father came. At first it was difficult for him, he expected that I would serve him. That he would come home and sit down and expect me to do everything.

I. But you had learned a different way?

J. Right now we are adapting but for him it was very difficult. We are both going to school. You don't work, I don't work. We spend the same amount of time in school. We have two children. We have to work together to make it easier for each other. But he said no, that the woman should be at home, should

do everything - wash clothes, cook, serve him at the table and take care of him.

I. It's a change in the women's role here?

J. I always thought it was the same because in El Salvador we all worked. My grandmother, my brother, my step father and myself all went to work at the hacienda. I didn't cook. I would do housework and wash clothes at the river on Saturday. But I never had the attitude that the woman should stay at home. I left school when I was 12. My mother told me I had to learn to read and to write my name because I was going to get married and none of those studies would be of any use to me.

I. Do you have much contact with your family?

J. We always write. My brother always writes that they are doing well or about his work. But I wish they would tell me about the situation there. But he doesn't tell me that.