

FAMILY TIES OF OLDER CARIBBEAN MIGRANTS: PATTERNS OF AGENCY AND OBLIGATION

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INTRODUCTION

- Family relationships are seen as a key component in ensuring a good old age.
- In a country of migrants, we know relatively little about the family ties of those who grow older in a new country.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- How do older migrants navigate family connections across distance and time?

METHODS

- A qualitative descriptive design
- 10 people aged 65+ who had immigrated to Canada from the Caribbean (an average of 41 years ago)
- Semi-structured interviews over Zoom
- Analytical process followed Braun and Clark's (2021) thematic analysis

RESULTS

- Immigration prompted thinking about family relationships: Which ones were **salient**? Which were **obligatory**? Which could be **left behind**?
- Family relationships, structure, and saliency were actively shaped over the life course of older migrants, underpinned by relationship obligations, agency and quality.

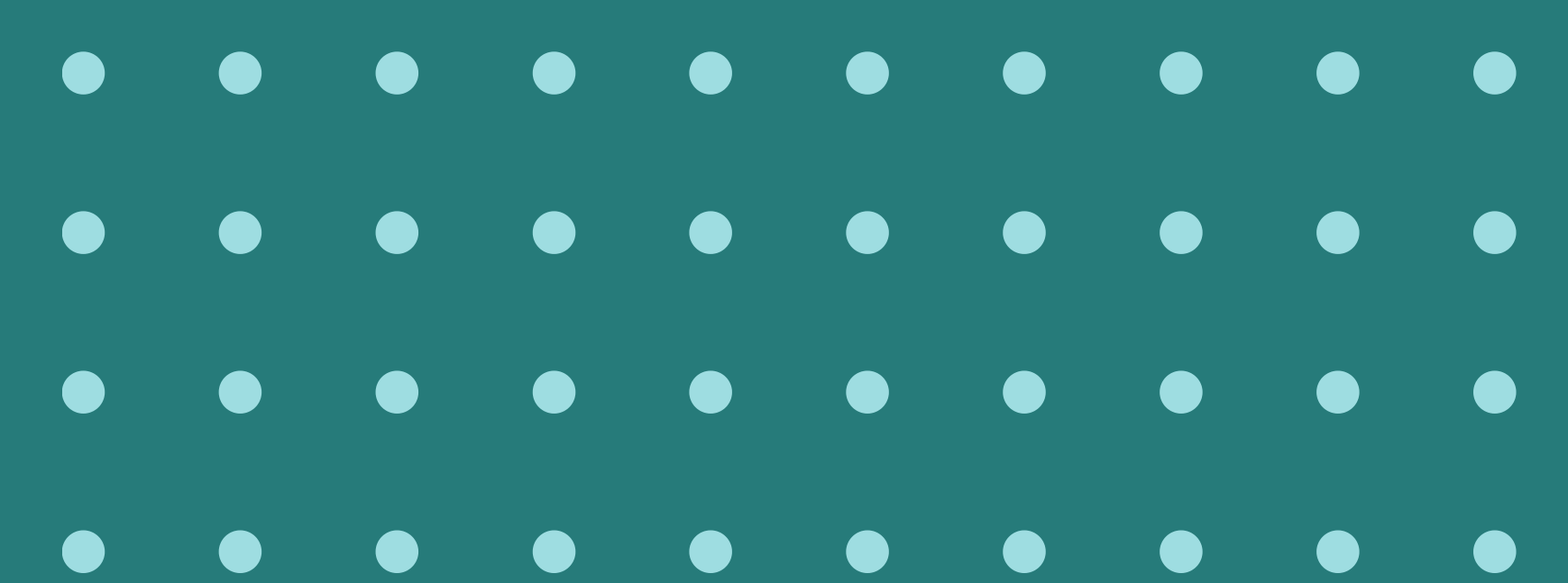
DISCUSSION

- Migration gave participants the mental, emotional, and physical space to come to terms with their various relationships post-migration and determine who would belong to their family moving forward, focusing on mutually beneficial relationships.
- Family relationships are dynamic and not bounded by households or nations. Over time, there was the (re)negotiation of and reshaping of family relationships.
- Participants' willingness to engage in network (re)building reflects a level of resilience and the importance of having a unit that one can identify and connect with that provides protection and support across time.
- Further research across the diversity of Canada's migrants is required to understand the differences in family pathways into later life.

Migrants actively engaged in (re)creating family connections

Obligations to remain connected to close kin in the home country

“You try to stay in touch with people, especially now in the dwindling years of your life, you know. So, I would talk to cousins often or when I can, but I call my siblings on a more regular basis, you know...Technology has allowed us to improve on our communication.” (John)



“My mother died last month, and I had to go and bury her. I only just came back. My siblings were there but I knew I had to go and make sure everything was right. This was my responsibility, one final thing... [pausing to reflect].” (Terrence)

Agency to incorporate people who became ‘like family’ and leave difficult kin relationships

“Family does not mean blood for me. Family means love, family means caring...I can't choose my siblings because they came, and they're there, but I can choose my friends, and when I choose my friends, I choose the friends who are supportive, and we support each other, and I call them my tribe, you know, because these are the people I want to be with.” (Alice)



“I am the oldest of seven children. My mom and I didn't get along, she always ahm... put me down and things like that. Even when I came to Canada, she would write me dirty letters...So, I didn't bother with her or them [siblings].” (Angela)

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