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INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE COUPLE FORMATION PATTERNS OF BANGLADESHIS IN QUEBEC: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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Bangladeshi Immigrants in Quebec

After Ontario, Quebec hosts the second-largest Bangladeshi population in Canada. Initially composed mainly of international students and male professionals, this community expanded to include family-sponsored immigrants, business immigrants, and political refugees.[4] The Bangladeshi population in Quebec grew from 7,945 in 2016 to 8,965 in 2021, with **96% in the greater Montreal region** (Figure 1).[5] Many immigrants gradually settled, married, sponsored spouses from Bangladesh, and raised their children within Canada and Quebec's cultural context.

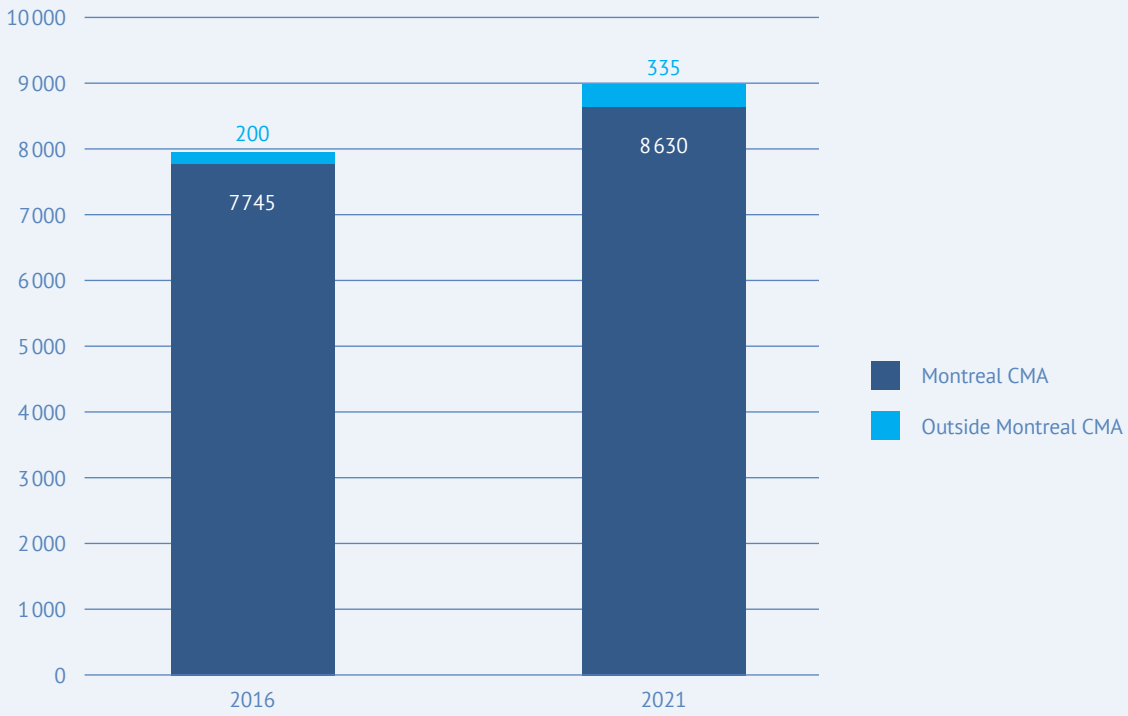
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[4] Abdul Khaleque, "Bangladeshi Families," in *Asian Families in Canada and the United States: Implications for Mental Health and Well-Being*, ed. Susan S. Chuang, Roy Moodley, Uwe P. Gielen, and Saadia Akram-Pall (Springer, 2021), 126; Abu Saleh Mohammad Sowad, "Making Men in Transnational Spaces: Transnational Migration and the Construction of Masculinity among Bangladeshi Men Living in Canada" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2025), 35–39.

[5] Statistics Canada, Immigrant Population by Selected Places of Birth, Admission Category and Period of Immigration, Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Areas Outside of Census Metropolitan Areas, 2016 Census, released October 27, 2017, modified April 3, 2019, accessed September 4, 2026; Statistics Canada, *Immigrant Population by Selected Places of Birth, Admission Category and Period of Immigration, 2021 Census,* Catalogue no. 98-505-X2021005, released October 26, 2022.

Figure 1: Bangladeshi Immigrants in Quebec (Born in Bangladesh), 2016 and 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. *Immigrant Population by Selected Places of Birth, Admission Category and Period of Immigration, Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Areas Outside of Census Metropolitan Areas, 2016 Census*. Released October 27, 2017, modified April 3, 2019, accessed September 4, 2026. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dv-vd/imm/index-eng.cfm; Statistics Canada. *Immigrant Population by Selected Places of Birth, Admission Category and Period of Immigration, 2021 Census*. Catalogue no. 98-505-X2021005. Released October 26, 2022. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/dv-vd/imm/index-en.cfm.

Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada maintain a distinct social identity.[6] In Quebec, they are a small but growing segment of the English-speaking population. While Bengali remains their native language, most arrive with prior exposure to English through their education or work.[7] **Despite relatively high levels of education, many face challenges securing professional jobs because of insufficient French proficiency**.[8] In addition to ethnic and linguistic minority status in Quebec, religion adds an additional layer to their minority group identity. Most Bangladeshis are Muslim[9] and, **for many, their "Muslim" identity supersedes their ethnic identity**.[10] These intersecting identities shape their experiences, including family and community life.

[6] Roksana Nazneen, "The Experience of Adaptation in Canadian Society: A Case Study of Bangladeshi Families" (PhD diss., Concordia University, 2000), 3–5; Sowad, "Making Men in Transnational Spaces," 44–46.

[7] Nazneen, "The Experience of Adaptation," 43.

[8] Nazneen, "The Experience of Adaptation," 30.

[9] Khaleque, "Bangladeshi Families," 129.

[10] Kazi Afzal Ahmed, "Formation of Identities of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Ottawa" (Master's thesis, Carleton University, 2006), 23; Roksana Nazneen, "Bangladeshi Muslims in Montreal: A Case of Divided Loyalty," *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 31, no. 2 (2005): 116.

Bangladeshi immigrant parents typically have a significant influence on their children's identity formation through family socialization, Bangladeshi community connections, and cultural and religious activities.[11] At home, children learn about traditional Bangladeshi culture, often speak Bengali alongside English, and become familiar with Islamic norms and values.[12] In contrast, their school and peer environments encourage them to adopt mainstream Canadian or Québécois culture (speaking French, embracing norms that contradict Bangladeshi parents' traditional beliefs).[13] As a result, **many children develop a dual identity, which can strain relations with their parents**.[14] This dynamic forms the foundation of this study.

Research Overview

While this research brief focuses primarily on Quebec-related findings, it draws on a broader doctoral study examining intergenerational family relationships among Canadian Bangladeshi families in the context of young adults' couple formation. Specifically, it focuses on relationships between young adults and their immigrant parents as they navigate dating, cohabitation, and marriage decisions.

This qualitative study involved interviews with 32 participants (24 young adults from Canadian-Bangladeshi families and eight professional social workers). Young adults were recruited from Quebec (eight from Montreal), Ontario (11 from Toronto), and Alberta (four from Edmonton and one from Calgary).

Western societies, including Quebec, are often marked by their openness to sexual exploration, premarital sexual activity, and diverse sexual orientations.[15] By contrast, Bangladeshi cultural and religious values prioritize marriage over cohabitation and parental involvement in decision-making, and generally disapprove of premarital sex and same-sex relationships.[16]

[11] Rumel Halder, "Immigration and Identity Negotiation within the Bangladeshi Immigrant Community in Toronto, Canada" (PhD diss., University of Manitoba, 2012), 255, 274; Hazem Ibrahim et al., "Heritage Language Maintenance: The Case of Bangladeshi Immigrants in Canada," *Interaction Design and Architecture(s)* 65 (2025): 182.

[12] Halder, "Immigration and Identity Negotiation," 261; Ibrahim et al., "Heritage Language Maintenance," 182; Mustahid Husain, *Masculinity and Mental Health of Muslim Men of Colour: Diaspora and Intersectionality of Canadian Youth* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 10.

[13] Husain, *Masculinity and Mental Health*, 2, 28, 72; Ibrahim et al., "Heritage Language Maintenance," 182; Farzana Afroz, "Vulnerabilities and Strengths in Parent-Adolescent Relationships in Bangladeshi Immigrant Families in Alberta" (Master's thesis, University of Lethbridge, 2013), 52–53.

[14] Husain, *Masculinity and Mental Health*, 10, 35, 45; Afroz, "Vulnerabilities and Strengths," 56–61.

[15] Pari-Gole Noorishad, Annick F. N. Tanguay, and Krystelle Shaughnessy, "A Scoping Review of Second-Generation Immigrants' Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours in Western Societies," *Sexuality & Culture* 30, no. 1 (2026): 503.

[16] Nahela Nowshin et al., "'I Was Scared That My Parents Would Find Out': The Dating Practices of 1.5-Generation Bangladeshi Women in Toronto, Ontario," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 57, no. 4 (2026): 589–94; Khaleque, "Bangladeshi Families," 131.

Overall, the study found that **intergenerational relationships ranged from solidarity and emotional closeness to conflict and negotiation surrounding the couple-formation process.** While many young adults shared their parents' values regarding marriage and emphasized parental involvement in partner selection, others concealed dating relationships to avoid conflict arising from differing cultural expectations. Participants also highlighted the importance of open communication, mutual understanding, and culturally responsive services to strengthen family relationships. The following section examines how these themes emerged among participants in Quebec and identifies features that may reflect the province's distinct linguistic and social context.

Findings Specific to Quebec Participants

All eight Quebec young adults (four male and four female) were born in Montreal. They were all 20 to 30 years old. Among them, six were single, one woman was married, and another woman was dating a Bangladeshi man from Montreal. Four had completed CEGEP, two had bachelor's degrees, and two had master's degrees. Most identified as Muslims, while two identified as agnostic.

Key Findings

The findings from Quebec broadly mirror those from other provinces; however, Quebec participants also revealed unique aspects of parent-child relationship patterns in partner selection. Some highlighted the importance of parents and close alignment with parents' preferences in the couple-formation process, while others favoured personal autonomy. Some participants' accounts indicated limited emotional closeness and mutual understanding with their parents regarding partner selection. They attributed this relationship gap to their parents' strong attachment to Bangladeshi cultural norms and religious values, as well as to their parents' limited integration into mainstream society due to limited French language proficiency.

Intergenerational Harmony and Alignment

Many young adults preferred marriage over dating and cohabitation, aligning with their parents' expectations. They viewed premarital romantic relationships, particularly physical intimacy, as contrary to their own values and, for some, as "forbidden" under Islamic teaching. Parent-child alignment was also observed in partner preferences, since many favoured Muslim partners. Besides, some explained that their parents played an intermediary role in conducting screenings and introducing potential marriage partners, while children retained the final decision about marriage. The parents of Amena[17] (a married female participant) sought her consent before arranging her marriage. Similarly, the parents of Dilara (a single female participant) are showing her biodata of prospective marriage partners for her selection.

[17] As part of the study, all participants were assigned Bengali pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Moreover, some young adults described their parents as more liberal than other Bangladeshi parents in the diaspora. Keya (a female participant) did not feel the need to hide her dating relationships from her parents, whereas she believes most children in the Bangladeshi community do. Dilara (a female participant) also observed that her parents had become more accepting of her premarital dating aimed at marriage over time. Hasib (a male participant) expressed openness to interethnic and interfaith dating and cohabitation before marriage, assuming his parents would accept these choices once he became financially independent. Another male participant, Abir, observed that his parents had grown more accepting of interethnic and interfaith marriage partners for him, despite earlier favouring only Bangladeshi Muslims. **Some parents are gradually adapting to their Canadian-born children's preferences, though this shift is not widespread.**

Potential for Family Conflict

All young adults noticed that their **Bangladeshi parents deliberately maintain a distance** from them, particularly when discussing romantic relationships. Some young adults viewed their parents as trapped in traditional Bangladeshi culture, unable to emotionally bond with their children. Some noted that, **in Quebec, parents' French language barriers have limited their ability to form connections outside the Bangladeshi community and to understand or accept the Canadian couple-formation process.** Sheuli (a female participant) observed that language barriers prevent her Bangladeshi parents from watching Canadian dramas or movies that could help them to understand the mainstream norms of partner choice. **Participants also emphasized limitations in service delivery for Bangladeshi people** (such as underrepresentation of service providers from people of colour, limited cultural competence among service providers, and services only in English and/or French).

Salim (a male participant) referred to his relationships with his parents, particularly his father, as "toxic." He noted that many parents in the Bangladeshi community show little interest in understanding their children's preferences. Besides, because of many Bangladeshi parents' conservative mindset, some children do not feel comfortable sharing their romantic relationships with their parents. Abir and Hasib had dated earlier, but never shared their relationship with their parents.

Although no one reported direct conflict with their parents over partner choices, some shared preferences that might lead to intergenerational conflict. Hasib (a male participant) expressed disinterest in selecting Bangladeshi ethnic partners and anticipated that his parents might initially oppose his relationships. Also, Abir, Sheuli, and Salim showed reluctance to get married, which their parents might not accept in the future. Some shared stories from the Bangladeshi diaspora in Quebec, where parents cut off relationships with their sons because they married someone from a different ethnicity and a different religious faith.

Conclusion

Intergenerational gaps in immigrant families extend beyond the Bangladeshi community. Professionals noted that **many children of immigrant families from other South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries also experience disagreements with their parents.** Parents from these ethnic minorities are often confined to their ethnic communities and fail to understand their children's cultural assimilation through local schools and peers. **This is particularly true of English-speaking immigrant groups in Quebec, where integration into French-language schools and peer networks creates an added barrier.** Consequently, value differences between immigrant parents and their Canadian-born children often weaken intergenerational bonds and generate conflicts across major family aspects, such as partner choice and Western lifestyles.

The study findings carry significant implications for policymakers and service providers in Quebec, and in Canada more broadly. They highlight the **need for immigrant-focused services that recognize diverse identities and unique minority experiences.** They show that family relationships are influenced not only by family members' interactions and cultural norms, but also by the structural realities of living as English speakers in Quebec.

Participants and professionals identified several approaches that could help strengthen intergenerational relationships. First, **culturally appropriate orientation programs** could help immigrant parents better understand social norms and couple-formation practices in Quebec while fostering discussion about the experiences of Quebec-raised children. Community organizations and public institutions could play an important role in delivering such initiatives.

Participants also emphasized the importance of **more accessible and culturally responsive support services.** Both young adults and professionals identified barriers to accessing public services, including language limitations and the underrepresentation of service providers from communities of colour. Addressing these barriers could improve immigrant families' ability to seek support when intergenerational tensions arise.

Finally, participants highlighted the importance of **greater cultural sensitivity among service providers.** They suggested that professionals develop a better understanding of the cultural contexts shaping immigrant families' experiences and tailor support to each family's needs rather than relying on a uniform approach. Together, these measures may help strengthen intergenerational relationships while improving access to appropriate services for immigrant families in Quebec.

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