

# **OPTIMISING INTERACTION BETWEEN NEWLY IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND HEALTH SERVICES : CONTRIBUTION TO CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING**

## **AN INTRODUCTION**

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### **Summary**

**Key-Words** : Health Recently Immigration Children Refugee Families

#### **1. Context**

The contribution of the Liege team to the UNISOL project from Houtman Funds (Belgium) is based on three basic interrogations:

- Which are the resources and difficulties of the recently-migrant families ?
- Which are the needs and resources of the professionals who deal with them?
- How universities and research structures can help to develop the competences of the health workers ?

#### **2. Research objectives are:**

- Identifying the problems faced by newly-arrived families, their resources and constraints
- Analysing the migration route and the families' plans for the future
- Pointing out intrinsic resilience factors in children and their families

- Encouraging their expression as regards health requirements and their possibility of access to existing structures
- Creating intra- and inter-university solidarity networks
- Encouraging creation of networks with and between local family care structures
- Supporting health professionals in charge of this population

### **3. Main outcomes**

The Liege team works in an area with a large immigrant population and a refugee centre. Collaboration has been set up with health services in order to assess the difficulties faced by local workers when taking charge of target populations. The team also meets with immigrant families and their children in order to approach their experience of integration and analyse the problems they have to cope with. The information thus obtained gives a better understanding of what may happen to these families and throws light on their potentialities for insertion. Later on, meetings are held between professionals and researchers in order to determine a plan of action considered by all to be of use. An ad hoc programme for diffusing results and approaching decision-makers is in view.

### **4. Methods**

Mobilization of networks of professionals and active observation near recently-migrant families.

#### **4.1. Professionals**

A meeting with 25 health professionals working in close collaboration with the target population: interviews, meetings and visits to health services.

#### **4.2. Families**

Meetings with 24 immigrant families: interviews, children's drawings.

12 families having stayed in Belgium for less than 5 years with children under 16.

12 families having stayed in Belgium for about 10 years and with children who were under 16 at the time of migration (in contrast to the former).

### **5. Results**

#### **5.1. Professionals**

Organisation of themed meetings based on three main issues identified by all the participants (workers and researchers).

- Practical and administrative organisation of the health care offer for the newly immigrant families or refugees
- Accommodation and its health effects on population
- Effects of reception policy on families' mental health

## 5.2. Families

Analysis of migration routes followed by the 24 families interviewed shows that 12 important factors contribute to stabilisation, well-being and integration of families in Belgium.

- Administrative situation: residence permit
- Families' psychological condition
- Relationship with the medical system and medical care
- Presence of a personal connection in Belgium before arrival
- Social and leisure network
- Acquisition of independent accommodation
- Languages
- Religion
- Children's schooling and leisure activities
- General spirit of sacrifice for the children
- Work
- Homesickness

## 6. Research conclusions

Present results support the feeling that the treatment of the asylum issue in Belgium is in itself a cause of health problems. These people arriving in Belgium with the desire for a better life find themselves confronted by a system that confines them to a between-world, without permanent residence, which makes it impossible to plan any action leading to integration in the country. The situation of children born or growing up in such families is thus worrying insofar as the conditions necessary for the healthy psychological development are compromised.