



Reaching families living in underprivileged circumstances

Discover our section about the barriers on families' pathways

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DES COMMUNAUTÉS ENGAGÉES

Individual / Personal barriers



Who is implicated? Individual / Parent

Barriers directly associated with the individual. Among other things, these may stem from his/her perceptions, personal abilities, etc.

Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Perceptions.</p> <p>Example: The fear of being judged by others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Reluctant to make use of available services, for example daycare services or community organizations. → Distrustful attitude towards representatives of institutions. → Social isolation or a poor social network, which may have harmful effects on parents' mental health and children's development.
<p>The individual's personal abilities.</p> <p>Example: Poor reading skills (literacy).</p> <p>Example: Difficulties understanding administrative procedures.</p> <p>Example: Limited French language skills in a primarily francophone environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Difficulties managing many aspects of daily life that call for reading skills, which can often be very stressful. → Loss of access to certain benefits or available programs because of difficulties completing the administrative procedures. → Complications registering their child for kindergarten if the parent does not have certain documents on hand at the time of registration, which can entail additional stress. → Individuals with an immigrant background, as well as First Nations and Inuit face considerable difficulties obtaining necessary public services on account of the language barrier. → Some individuals refuse to make the necessary arrangements to obtain the healthcare services their own or their children's situation requires. → Personal life circumstances can worsen when there are mutual misunderstandings between families and organizations. → A breach of confidentiality occurs when it becomes necessary that an interpreter from the family's ranks communicates on behalf of the family.



"Another communication issue concerns the need for a common and clear language in order to talk about children's development and how to respond to their needs. Parents report an elevated risk of not understanding the written messages they receive, especially when they include institutional or professional jargon. This issue also crops up in the conversations between parents and intervention workers: 'I didn't understand a thing he just told me.'"

*Excerpt from the review report on the
Perspectives croisées et dialogue parents-intervenants
workshops conducted by CEIDF, p. 14*



Nibisha Sioui, Wendat and member of the Anicinape Nation, clinical and community psychologist, discusses language barriers. (In French only)

Social barriers



Who is implicated? Intervention workers

Barriers associated with the stereotypes, perceptions, customs and values conveyed and shared by the members of a society.

Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Guidance attitudes.</p> <p>Example: An intervention worker acts like an expert on child development towards the parent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → The intervention worker decides for him- or herself what the child needs without taking into consideration the needs articulated by the parent. → Following discussions with an intervention worker, the parent feels as if his/her skills are being called into question. → The parent loses his/her confidence in his/her methods and sense of judgment towards his/her child.
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <p><i>"[...] most of the parents point out that the manner in which some intervention workers show off their expertise can easily create the impression that they or their child is being negatively judged. The fear of being judged by an intervention worker appears to be a widely shared emotion among parents. What causes such judgments to give rise to fears is the diminished sense of being effective in their parenting role and the difficulty of imagining a genuine collaboration with the intervention worker concerned"</i></p> </div> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Excerpt from the review report on the Perspectives croisées et dialogue parents-intervenants workshops conducted by CEIDEF, p. 12</i></p>	
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <p><i>"Most of the parents pointed out how important it is in the course of their exchanges that the intervention workers recognize, confirm and even reinforce the primary role the parents play in the lives of their children. Conversely, they mention how 'dispirited' or 'worthless' they can be made to feel when they meet with intervention workers, or how they may even feel as if the intervention workers are 'ganging up' on them, When that happens, the professional knowledge of intervention workers and the plans they have for the child or the family may have a particularly caustic effect on the local knowledge the parents bring to bear on their child and the plans they have for him or her."</i></p> </div> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Excerpt from the review report on the Perspectives croisées et dialogue parents-intervenants workshops conducted by CEIDEF, p. 12</i></p>	
Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Preconceived opinions about certain social groups based on their cultural origins or socioeconomic circumstances.</p> <p>Example: Professionals who refuse to go and work in underprivileged districts.</p> <p>Example: Some intervention workers have a different attitude towards underprivileged families, and their preconceived opinions are reflected in the manner of their interventions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Families and children have difficulties accessing certain professional services or cannot access them at all. → Children with a resolvable developmental delay see their situation get worse. → The tone and approach are more condescending. → There is a lack of trust in the family's capacity to act. → The families refuse to seek help.



“This matter of judgment represents a major stumbling block that intervention workers describe as a considerable source of difficulties when trying to build a relationship of trust with the parents. To them, it is a question of figuring out how they can keep their judgments in check in a context where their institutional or professional mandate depends on their ability to formulate such judgments, seeing how parents have expectations—which may or may not be realistic—concerning their expertise.

[...] the parent-intervention worker relationship also constitutes a source of confrontation concerning the intervention worker’s practices, knowledge, and values.”

*Excerpt from the review report on the
Perspectives croisées et dialogue parents-intervenants
experiment conducted by CEIDF, p. 16*



“Just because I am on social assistance and I am low-income doesn’t mean that my children are any less intelligent. Try keeping up with my daughter on a computer or on the Internet—she’ll soon leave you behind. She is five years old. When she was little, I made cards with words on them. She has an unbelievable photographic memory. She can read. She is five. I’m telling you, just because I am on welfare doesn’t mean my daughter has to be stupid!”

*René, J. F., Laurin, I., & Dallaire, N. (2009)
Faire émerger le savoir d’expérience de parents pauvres: forces et limites d’une recherche participative
Recherches qualitatives, 28(3), p.52.*




Nibisha Sioui, Wendat and member of the Anicinape Nation, clinical and community psychologist, discusses the systemic racism experienced by Aboriginal persons. This example also implicates organizations. (In French only)

Physical barriers



Who is implicated? Organizations

Barriers associated with the physical organization of the environment in which an individual evolves.

Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Impediments connected to families' mobility</p> <p>Example: Insufficient, poorly adapted or non-existent public transportation made available by the municipality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Difficulties getting around with one or more young children.→ Families' social isolation.→ Loss of employment opportunities.→ Complicated management of daily life (grocery shopping, medical appointments, meetings at daycare centre or school, etc.).→ Difficulties getting to a training session located far away from home on time.→ Difficulties ensuring regular attendance with regard to personal tasks that require several meetings.
<p> Paul Lewis, Full Professor in the School of Urban Planning and Landscape Design, Université de Montréal, and Vice-rector (Alumni Relations, Partnerships and Philanthropy), discusses issues connected to housing and remoteness from major urban centres. (In French only)</p>	

Organizational barriers



Who is implicated? Organizations and institutions

Barriers associated with the culture and management styles of organizations working with families.

Examples	Possible impacts
<p>An organizational culture that provides very little opportunity for team discussions.</p> <p>Example: No designated time for team meetings.</p> <p>Example: Very little or no time allotted for the examination of case studies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Lack of resources for adapting interventions. → Lack of moral support and scope to expose the problems experienced by families. → Sense of helplessness and exhaustion among intervention workers. → Reduced quality of interventions, which may adversely affect or aggravate the initial situation of the families encountered.



“Every Tuesday afternoon we meet as an interdisciplinary team to discuss situations experienced by women and their families. It is very useful to share these stories with a larger group and to tap into several possible approaches to solutions and to the kinds of support we can offer them. In addition to this professional aspect, we have a supportive environment that lets us absorb some of the more difficult stories together.”

Rocio, midwife at Maison Bleue de Saint-Michel

Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Management style that is inconsistent with quality work with families</p> <p>Example: Performance management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Intervention workers are under pressure to see as many families as possible. → Intervention workers have very few opportunities to examine their practices with a view to improving them. → Major difficulties establishing a relationship of trust with families. → Very little leeway to change actions already underway so that they can be more effective. → Intervention workers must necessarily act within the established parameters of a given program, without any flexibility on the part of the management to try out new approaches.



“In terms of the implications, we quickly realized that the knowledge derived from the parents’ experiences carried very little weight against the systems already in place, which are based on data concerning at-risk groups rather than groups of parents firmly rooted in a unique local environment and culture. In fact, the decision-makers did not want to venture down a path that would have reinforced a collective, partnership-based approach, one that would duly consider the local realities of the groups of parents, their perceptions of the more constructive relationships with intervention workers, and the collective needs identified by the families.”

*René, J. F., Laurin, I., & Dallaire, N. (2009).
Faire émerger le savoir d’expérience de parents pauvres:
forces et limites d’une recherche participative
Recherches qualitatives, 28 (3), p.57*



Examples	Possible impacts
 <p><i>“The intervention workers and the teams that work with families should earmark some time to step back and critically examine their practices together with their colleagues; and also take the time to develop the so-called ‘therapeutic alliance’ with the parents, without any organizational pressure, or quotas or numbers to fill so that they can have an opportunity to demonstrate a little more humanity.”</i></p>	<p style="text-align: right;">T</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Testimonial excerpted from the thematic day Créer une relation de confiance parents-intervenant, la clé pour soutenir les familles en contexte de défavorisation JASP 2018</i></p>
Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Inability to work together with other organizations in the community</p> <p>Example: Some organizations’ corporate reflex: “We are keeping our families here.”</p> <p>Example: Inadequate communications between the services and organizations.</p> <p>Example: Organizations’ lack of awareness of the other available services in the same territory.</p> <p>Example: A lack of recognition between different service networks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Families’ power to act to improve their life trajectory is affected due to a certain degree of competition between different organizations. → Absence of a genuine partnership with other organizations in the community. → Low mobilization levels focused on a shared vision in support of families. → Families do not get the appropriate service at the appropriate time because of a lack of collaboration between organizations. → Lack of coherence among the services available to families. → Duplication of services. → Certain services are made available by organizations that don’t have the appropriate mission or the necessary expertise. → Non-recognition of the expertise of certain networks or types of organizations. → Impossibility to put to good use the different types of expertise and experience. → Missing opportunities for sharing, which would help ensure a better reading of families’ situations.

Systemic barriers



Who is implicated? The government

Barriers connected to the organization of the different social systems and public and private services, as well as the policies, laws and framework arrangements in effect in the society in which the individual evolves.


Examples	Possible impacts
<p>The choice of social programs proposed and the conditions for participating in them.</p> <p>Example: Restrictive eligibility criteria for specific programs.</p> <p>Example: A predetermined issue to be targeted by the program, participant quotas, and funding tied to the number of participants.</p> <p>Example: Stigmatizing eligibility criteria (low-income, low educational attainment, single parents, young mothers, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Impossibility for young mothers to access education support programs in cases where the mother would like to work or keep her job. → Obligation to become an income support recipient in order to qualify for a program, which is often difficult in terms of self-esteem and can entail the fear of being judged by others. → Impossibility for intervention workers to devote the necessary time to families because the internal management system focuses on results-based performance (meet with as many persons as possible). → The target issue a program seeks to address does not correspond to families' needs. → Organizations emphasize numbers of participants rather than the quality of the guidance service due to the accountability standards demanded by their funding agencies. → Parents are unwilling to embrace programs that may be very useful for them because they feel they are being judged right from the get-go. → Loss of parents' trust because the criteria strike them as overly negative and demeaning.
<p>A lack of professionals and specialists in the healthcare system.</p> <p>Example: Long waiting lists for services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Children with the most serious difficulties don't get to see anyone until kindergarten. → Waiting lists are reset to zero when children start school, meaning any interventions for children with difficulties are pushed back as well. → Impossibility to intervene early in a child's development, which often exacerbates the problem (Example: language development, defiant behaviours, etc.). → Distressed parents are unable to access appropriate, free services to deal with their personal problems, which ends up affecting their family life.



"But it was the issue of sexual abuse that cropped up at the beginning of the group process. During the second meeting, a mother asked the facilitators if she could talk to the group about the sexual abuse her daughter had apparently suffered a few days earlier. Her words resonated with another parent who had had a similar experience. The second parent was capable of articulating the powerlessness that one feels when one asks for help but doesn't get any: 'when something like that happens, you feel really helpless. When an abusive situation occurs, it becomes a free-for-all in the parent's mind.' This prompted the group to discuss and criticize the lack of resources available for parents who have to deal with this kind of situation."

*René, J. F., Laurin, I., & Dallaire, N. (2009).
Faire émerger le savoir d'expérience de parents pauvres:
forces et limites d'une recherche participative.
Recherches qualitatives, 28 (3), p.49*



Examples	Possible impacts
<p>Administrative procedures, web platforms, and government information systems that are poorly adapted to the different citizen profiles.</p> <p>Example: Complex official requirements (birth certificate or other documentation).</p> <p>Example: Difficult-to-understand web architecture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Impossibility to place an online order without a credit card, higher costs if the procedure is carried out by letter mail. → A website that requires advanced literacy skills, leading to comprehension problems. → Less than straightforward navigation, making it difficult to find required information.
<p>Political disagreements between different levels of government</p> <p>Example: First Nations children do not receive the required healthcare, social services, or education because the federal and provincial governments fail to agree who is responsible for paying the associated costs (jurisdictional dispute).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Services take longer to become available or aren't made available at all due to administrative reasons. → Parents' energy is consumed in the pursuit of solutions. → First Nations children's welfare and development may become seriously jeopardized. These were the circumstances in which a Cree child with a disability ended up caught in a jurisdictional dispute. The child did not get the recommended residential care and had to remain in hospital until it died at the age of five. Following this incident, the Jordan Principle was adopted in order to establish a legal principle that set out that the interests of children must take priority in the provision of necessary public services.
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <p>Nibisha Sioui, Wendat and member of the Anicinape Nation, clinical and community psychologist, talks about the Jordan Principle. (In French only)</p> </div>	

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