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Vaccine intentions among Canadian Immigrants in COVID-19: Why does it matter?

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Introduction

Since the start of the pandemic, many changes and disruptions to daily life had taken place. One of the heavily affected groups compared to Canadian born are immigrants, which comprise roughly 22%, over one-fifth of Canada's population⁴. Confronted with language and employment barriers, many newcomers, especially individuals arriving within the last five years² occupy positions in dangerous and essential jobs where social distancing and other preventative measures are difficult to implement. As a result, the risk of COVID-19 spread is higher. The healthcare and the front-line industries employ a disproportionate number of female workers, more than half of whom are newcomers who are more exposed to COVID-19¹.

These conditions contribute to the financial and mental strains on immigrants as their vulnerability to the virus tends to be higher than Canadian born¹. Research shows that immigrants are more likely to be vulnerable to sickness⁸. The inability to work from home as well as crowded living arrangements could lead to potential exposure to the virus at the job site and at home. These risks could contribute to an increase in belief and trust in the government to take the correct measures to keep the population safe. Potentially, immigrants could be more open to the option of receiving a vaccination when it becomes available to the public.

Aim

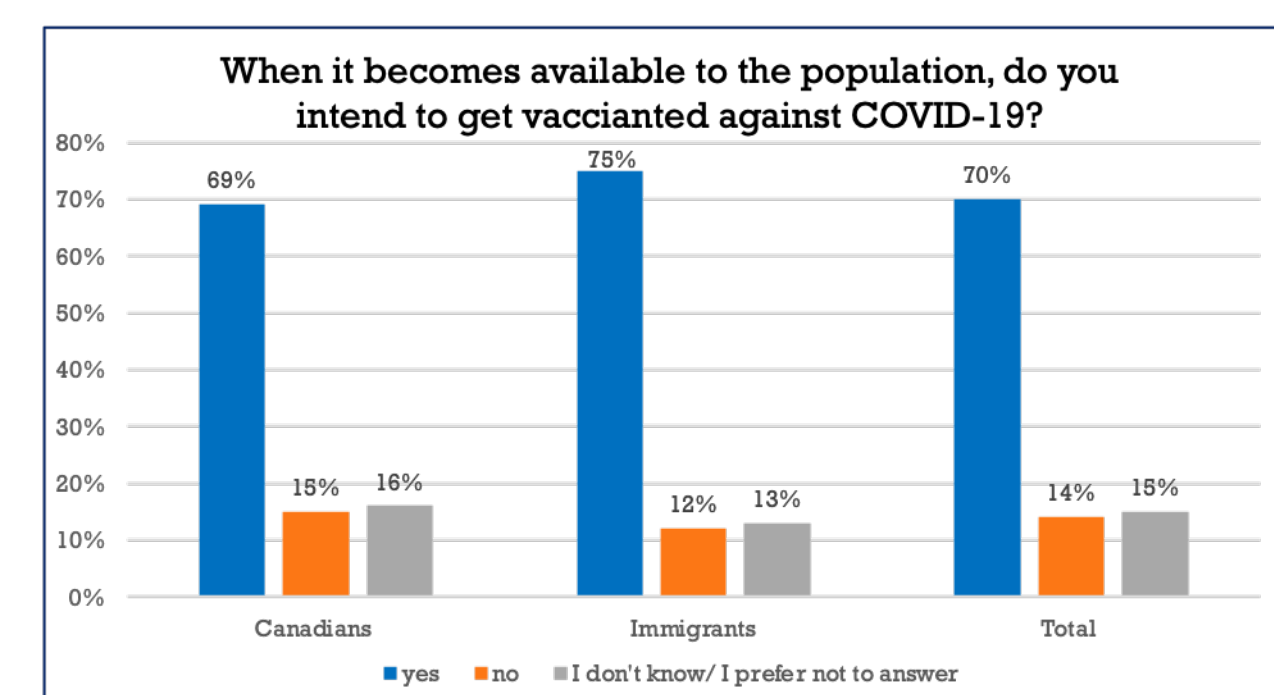
COVID-19 continues to spread rapidly, particularly in crowded areas and among vulnerable populations¹. Newcomers often reside in more populated cities in Canada. Immigrants make up 49% of Toronto and 34% of Montreal³. Housing Market research in Toronto shows that immigrants within the last ten years have difficulty finding housing⁶, and 34.8% struggle to find housing due to low income. Research in Calgary also lists low income (33%) and unemployment (21%) as significant barriers to finding residence⁵. 44% of immigrants reside in households with non-family members, and 23% continuously worry about their housing⁵. According to another study, immigrants also own significantly fewer properties than Canadian born⁷, which could lead to rent in crowded areas and increased stress.

While vaccines are not available at this time, several are in the process of being developed. This research aims to learn the opinions of Canadian born residents compared to recent immigrants regarding their willingness to be vaccinated². The focus of the research entails the level of trust in the federal government and the stress recent immigrants to Canada experience compared with Canadian born. It will aid in observing how individuals in Canada might respond to the vaccine when one is available.

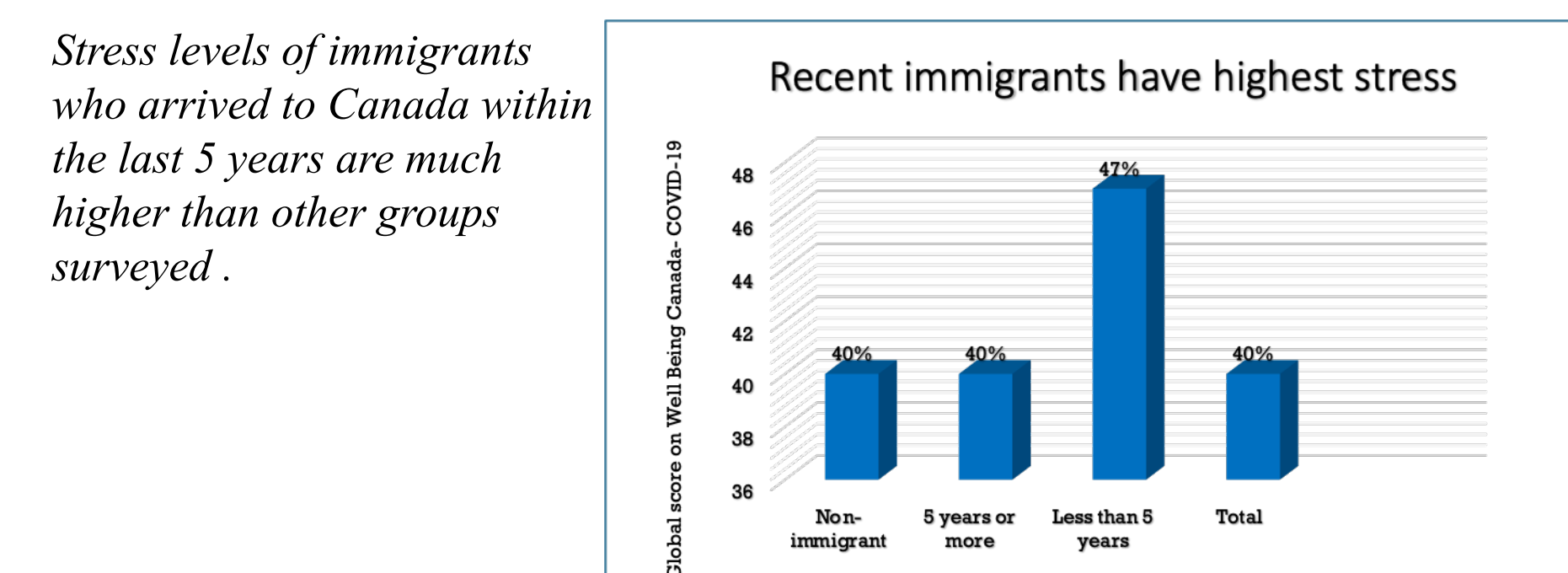
Methodology

- Web surveys using computer-assisted Web interviewing (CAWI) technology.
- No margin of error can be associated with non-probability sample (web-panel in this case).
- Weekly data collection starting March 9th 2020.
- Weekly: 1,510 Canadians and 1500 Americans, 18 years or older, random recruitment.
- Majority of the data presented is from the most recent data collection, August 31, 2020.

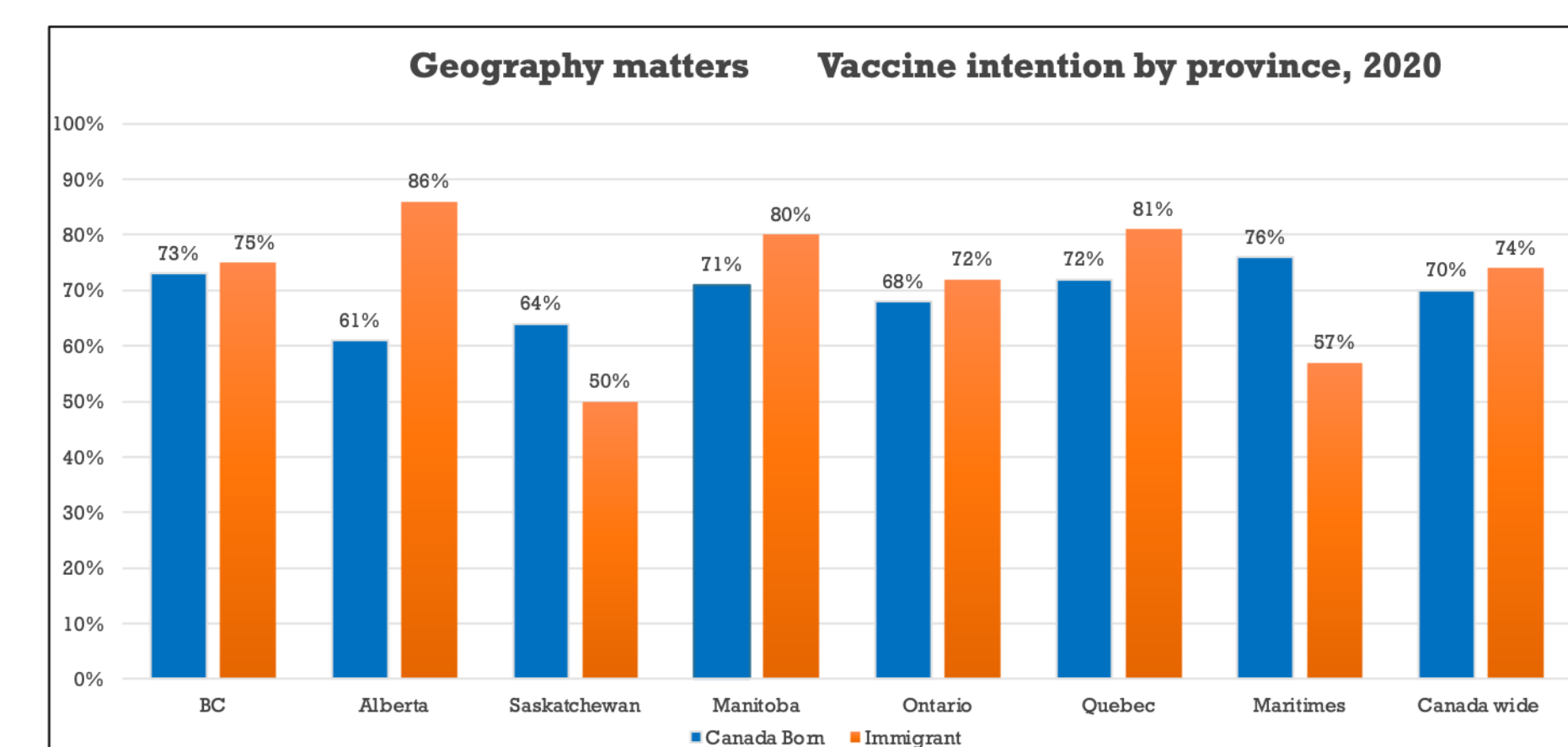
Results



Immigrants are more likely than Canadian born to be vaccinated. Need about 85% of population to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity².



Stress levels of immigrants who arrived to Canada within the last 5 years are much higher than other groups surveyed.



Vaccine intentions of immigrants compared to Canadian born by province and Canada wide, 2020.

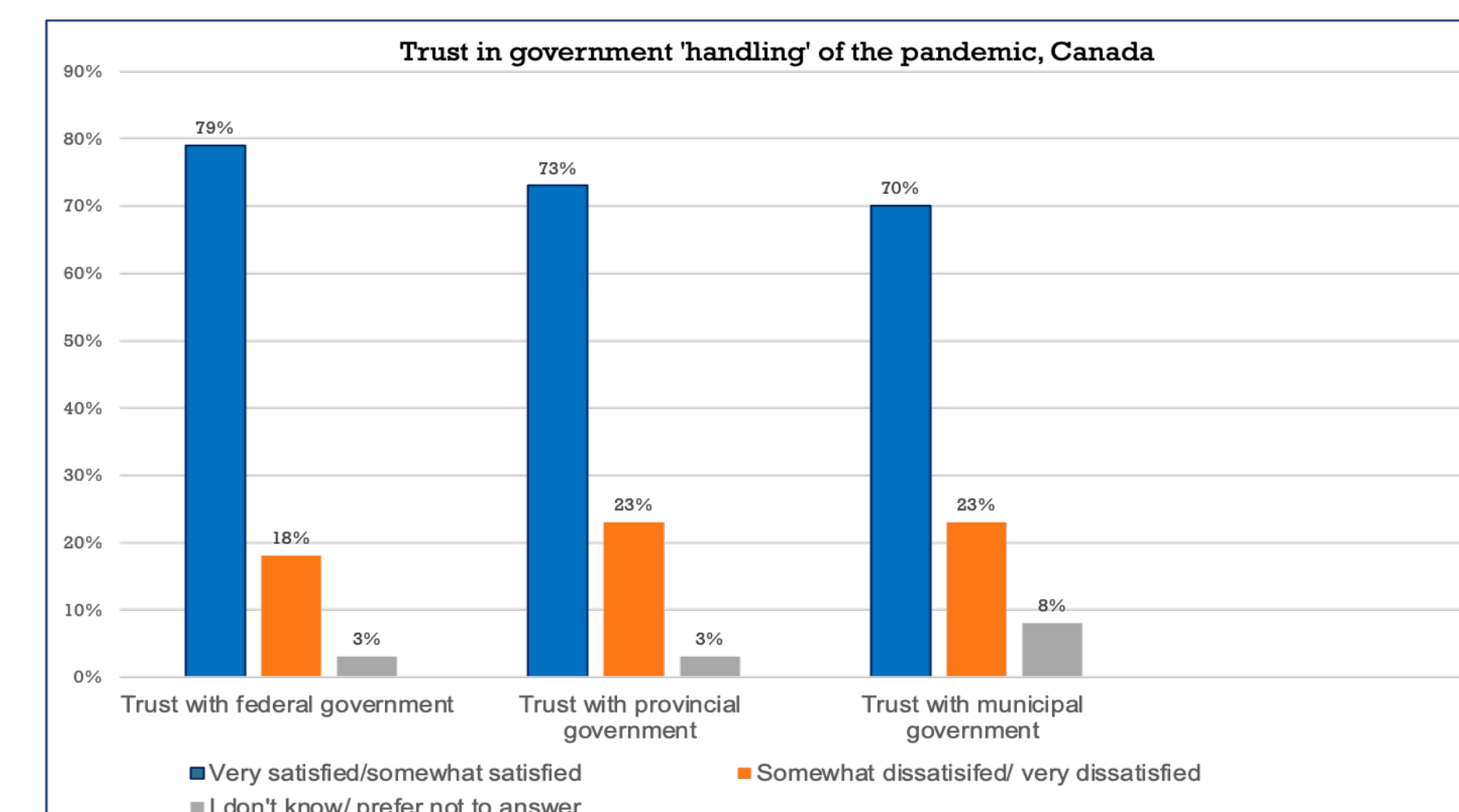
Discussion

The results of this research show significant differences between Canadian born and immigrants in their vaccine intentions:

- Higher trust in government leads to more assurance in governmental decisions and willingness to follow protection measures such as receiving a vaccine².
- Due to higher stress and socioeconomic status, immigrants are more likely to suffer from mental health strain.

Since vaccine intentions are highly dependent on socioeconomic determinants, stress, and other life circumstances, it is important to note the context in which immigrants are more accepting of a potential vaccine. The health risks that newcomers are exposed to at their job sites¹ and their living arrangements often contribute to their susceptibility to the virus. Overcrowding conditions and financial instability⁵ lead to dependency on governmental actions. To be able to immigrate into Canada, newcomers are often required to have certain vaccinations upon entry. Depending on conditions in their country of origin they might be more susceptible to diseases and encouraged to be vaccinated in Canada⁸.

Because there are many immigrants residing in highly populated Canadian cities, it is important for them to trust their government's decisions regarding vaccinations. This could be achieved by translating educational materials about vaccines for immigrants to understand. Although the majority of surveyed participants have intentions to be vaccinated to achieve immunity, 13% of immigrants remain undecided, and 12% are against a vaccine². Research shows that one of the most common reasons for vaccine hesitancy is the lack of knowledge regarding the vaccines⁹. Since immigrants are more likely to rely on the federal government, it could resonate better with this population to hear information regarding the potential vaccine and its effectiveness directly from the prime minister. A more personal address could potentially increase their trust in governmental decisions and the likelihood to have positive opinions regarding the potential vaccine.



Immigrants trust in various levels of government regarding their approach to the pandemic.

Conclusion

From the collected data, recent immigrants are shown to be more likely to comply with governmental protection including vaccination requirements. The stress and mental health levels of immigrants are higher compared to Canadian born. In addition to language barriers and often lower income³, immigrants coming to Canada could be more susceptible to the virus at job sites¹ and crowded living spaces⁵ due to a large number of recent immigrants often working in health care or frontline services¹. These circumstances could be major determinants of vaccine intentions. Currently about 70% of the population are showing intentions of receiving the vaccine. 85% of the population must be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity². Since there is a significant number of immigrants in more densely populated areas³, it is important for newcomers to have intentions to receive the vaccine and for the government to provide resources for their understanding on the importance of the vaccine. Further research will continue to explore the factors that are tied to the decision to be vaccinated and the intentions of immigrants compared to Canadian born.

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