Research Snapshot

Effectively Communicating Legal Information to Newcomers in Saskatchewan

CREATE Justice Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Action Towards Equal Justice
Access to Legal Services - Dispute Resolution - Systemic Justice

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What is this about?

The Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR) was contracted by CREATE Justice, the College of Law and the Government of Saskatchewan Ministry of Justice to examine what formats of legal information are most effective for newcomers to Saskatchewan.

What did the researchers do?

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

CHASR initially connected with seven service providers who worked with newcomers to Saskatchewan to identify some of the key barriers faced by newcomers in terms of legal information. Given the different English abilities and legal needs of newcomers, a 1.5-hour virtual focus group was held. Based on focus group findings, as well as data from the Saskatchewan Legal Needs Assessment and Saskatchewan findings of the Canadian Legal Problems Survey, the project team determined it would focus on testing various forms of legal information resources on the topic of renting rights and responsibilities.

Phase 2: Development of Online Legal Resources

A graphic designer developed the materials, which were presented in three ways: a picture (i.e., infographic), a video, and a plain language summary.

Phase 3: Process and Outcome Evaluation

An experimental survey was launched to evaluate the effectiveness of the legal information resources. The survey consisted of 104 respondents, who were randomly assigned one format of the legal resource (31 picture, 37 video, 36 plain language summary).

What do you need to know?

Participants ranged from 18-56 years and were on average 33 years old. Slightly over half of the overall sample were Black (53.0%). Others were South Asian (26.0%), White (7.0%), Southeast Asian (6.0%), Latin American (3.0%), East Asian (2.0%), Middle Eastern (2.0%), or another ethnicity (1.0%). In the overall sample, Nigeria was the most common country of origin reported (44.0%). This was followed by India (12.0%), Bangladesh (12.0%), Pakistan (5.0%) and Philippines (5.0%). Most participants in the overall sample reported living in Canada for less than 5 years (90.0%). Others lived in Canada for 5 – 10 years (8.0%) or ten years or longer (2.0%). Almost all participants who provided the first three digits of their postal code lived in urban areas of Saskatchewan (91.0%). Just over half of respondents in the overall sample relayed that English was not their first language (53.9%); however, the majority of participants self-reported having advanced English reading skills (83.5%) and writing skills (79.2%). Approximately 1 in 5 respondents who reported their highest level of education in the overall sample had at least some university education (80.4%).

What did the researchers find?

The analysis found:

1. The more that respondents reported understanding what the resource was saying, the more they reported learning.
2. The more participants believed the information was true/accurate, the more they reported learning.
3. The more respondents viewed the resource as helpful, the more they reported learning.
4. The more respondents liked the resource, the more they reported learning.

Additionally, after reviewing the resources:

- There was a significant increase in pre-resource to post-resource test scores, which demonstrated an increased understanding of the material.
- There was significant improvement in self-reported understanding of renting rights and responsibilities in which the median score changed from "mostly understand" to "clearly understand".
- 75% of respondents reported an improved understanding of the following topics: a) overall rights and responsibilities of tenants, b) the application process, c) security deposits, d) the moving process, e) property maintenance responsibilities, f) property access, g) the moving out process, and h) where to go with questions about renting rights and responsibilities.
- Almost all participants in each group felt they could explain all or most of the information in the resource to others (Picture Group – 90.4%; Video Group – 97.2%; and Summary Group – 94.4%).
- Over half of the participants would be willing to seek more information about renting properties (Picture Group – 58.1%; Video Group – 63.9%; and Summary Group – 52.8%).

There were no significant group differences in knowledge gain or self-reported gains in understanding about renting rights and responsibilities. Together these findings suggest that the content of the resources mattered more than the format in which the content was communicated.

How can you use this?

This information is helpful in considering how to convey legal information to Canadian newcomers and highlights the importance of the content, rather than the tools utilized to convey that information.

About the researcher:

CREATE Justice is a centre for research, evaluation and action on the topic of access to justice in the areas of access to legal services, dispute resolution, and systemic justice. CREATE Justice was established at the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan in 2016.

The Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR) is a unique university-based research support and consulting service. With a broad range of experience, expertise, and tools, CHASR supports a diverse array of applied and social research. CHASR supports all phases of research, including data collection, data processing, data analysis, and reporting. Our in-house supports and tools enable us to lend unique and innovative approaches to all CHASR-supported research.

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