



Young Adult Social Networks and Labour Market Attachment

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Social relationships, labour market attachment, labour market inequality, job attainment, social networks, social mobility, social capital, career aspirations

POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Employment & Entrepreneurship;
Strong, Supportive Friends & Families;
Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Academic Article

“Barriers to labour market attachment among young adults can have a greater impact, particularly amongst youth who grow up in low-income areas and who have had a history of precarious attachment to the labour market.”

1. What is the research about?

Many youth face barriers to employment; racialized youth have significantly higher unemployment rates than non-racialized youth in Canada. This study sought to understand the factors that influence racialized youth perspectives toward labour market access, success, and social mobility.

The researchers draw on “social capital theory” for their conceptual framework: this is a theory that there is a relationship between social relationships and individual outcomes. Social mobility is theorized as emerging from “access to, and the ability to mobilise, resources that are embedded within social relationships, resulting in higher status attainment among [some] individual”. However, social capital does not account for all barriers to employment. This research investigates the complex of factors that do.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in a low-income neighborhood in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This study interviewed 36 racialized young adults (aged 17 – 29) who represented a range of employment experiences. 25 were female and 11 were male.

4. How was the research done?

This qualitative study conducted in-depth interviews with participants at one point in time using a semi-structured, open-ended guide.

Researchers asked the participants to respond to the following questions:

- Can you tell me about your experiences of employment?
- Can you tell me about your experiences of employment in your family and your neighbourhood?
- What sort of resources have you used to get a career?
- Can you tell us about an experience with career training, career preparations?

Researchers read the transcripts and found patterns in respondent’s answers related to what factors influenced their current employment situation. Researchers then worked to explain all differences, similarities, and contradictions.

5. What are the key findings?

This study found that social capital, accessed through the following three pathways, is one of the most important factors that helps young adults achieve labour market success:

1. Interactions and experiences with employers
2. Personal life and familial relationships
3. Neighbourhood social dynamics

Participating youth were influenced by both the quality of the interactions with employers, as well as the quality of the relationship with them. Youth who develop positive relationships with employers, perhaps through volunteering, found greater success accessing employment than youth who had no or negative relationships with employers. Negative relationships with employers often resulted in youth leaving their position, affecting their aspirations and belief in upward mobility (i.e. effort is rewarded).

Respondents stated that their families can have both positive and negative impacts on their labour market success.

Parents often serve as a motivating force for young adults but additionally, in the case of the respondents in this study, newcomer parents often don't have a full understanding of employment pathways (for example: how to navigate post-secondary education).

Lastly, negative social dynamics in low-income neighbourhoods, such as high poverty rates and the presence of an illegal job market, can impact young adults' social mobility pathways. However, in this study, the negative factors served to motivate respondents to seek higher education in order to increase their chance of success.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research demonstrates that there are many factors which could either promote or impede the labour market success of racialized youth from low-income communities. Labour market experiences for these youth are not the same as the experiences of non-racialized youth from well-off communities.

Youth who can develop positive relationships with employers have a greater chance of securing employment. Youth programs should work to facilitate access to and development of youth employee-employer relationships. Moreover, youth should be able to access quality employment experiences where they have the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that will expand their labour market opportunities. Within the context of youth employment, youth can be provided access to opportunities to broaden their social networks – to develop positive interactions and relationships with potential employers and gain exposure to additional career opportunities. An additional recommendation is that youth employment programs also engage family networks in order to extend opportunities to them as well.



Graham, J. R., Shier, M. L., & Eisenstat, M. (2015, June 17). **Young Adult Social Networks and Labour Market Attachment: Interpersonal Dynamics that Shape Perspectives on Job Attainment.** *Journal of Social Policy*, 44(4), 769-786.