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Understanding Intergenerational Social Mobility: Filipino Youth in Canada

Canadian research on intergenerational social mobility in immigrant communities has noted that there are some clear exceptions to the overall pattern of upward mobility among the children of immigrants. This study takes up the case of one such group - the children of immigrants from the Philippines. In aggregate, Filipino youth present a double anomaly, as they are less likely to hold a degree than either their parents or their peers in other racialized groups. Using qualitative evidence to supplement the more common reliance on statistical data, the study argues that three sets of factors shape youth educational and employment trajectories in the Filipino community. The first set of factors relates to family resources of money and time. Immigrant parents' educational and professional qualifications tend not to yield commensurate rewards in the labour market (a circumstance that is exacerbated by the precarious status created by the Live-In Caregiver Program). Financial hardship then shapes family life, as parents work extra jobs and extra hours, or in sectors that require irregular and shift work, resulting in little time for parental oversight and assistance for their children. Daily separations such as these may also be the conclusion to long periods of family separation resulting from the conditions attached to the caregiver program.

The second set of factors concerns the networks and information flows through which youth navigate the labour market. Social networks are key in shaping educational choices and employment trajectories. They affect decisions and choices - from the intimate advice given, or examples set, within families, to the wider network of mentors that might exist within the community. The result is a tendency for labour market marginality to be reproduced from one generation to the next.

The third set of factors relates to the ways in which constructions of 'Filipino-ness' shape the self-esteem and aspirations of young people. Faced with the deprofessionalization of their parents, some Filipino youth may be motivated to ensure that they aim higher, but many resign themselves to lower positions in the labour market. Beyond parental exemplars, the lack of role models in the

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larger community, especially for young boys, is seen as a problem. But the issue is not internal to the Filipino community. Representations and racializations of Filipino identity in wider Canadian society, and the absence of reflective school curricula, are also factors.

The study concludes with policy implications that point to the need to: a) continue addressing the issues of immigrant access to professions and credential recognition; b) recognize the importance of extended families in the success of the next generation; c) address the separations and precarity created by the Live-In Caregiver program; d) find ways of reflecting the needs of specific groups in school curricula; e) support role-modelling and mentoring in specific communities; f) ensure the financial accessibility of post-secondary education; and g) develop data-gathering tools that will accurately track the inter-generational outcomes of youth in immigrant families.

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