

Immigrant Youth and Employment: Lessons Learned from the Analysis of LSIC and 82 Lived Stories

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Abstract Finding a job has become a critical challenge to many youth. Immigrant youth, who have been a key part of the global migrants, are particularly vulnerable when entering the job market of the host country due to various structural barriers. However, in both public policy discourse and research, their labour market experience tends to be overlooked. In this paper, we report the employment experience of recently arrived immigrant youth based on an analysis of the LSIC and findings of in-depth interviews of 82 immigrant youth in four cities in Canada. Our results reveal that recently arrived immigrant youth tend to work in lower-skilled employment, experience significant delays in finding employment, have difficulties with foreign credential recognition, and have fewer means to access to job markets.

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Immigrant Youth and Employment: Exploring the Experiences of Newly Arrived Immigrant Youth in Canada¹

Youth (un)employment, as indicated in the United Nations *Millennium Declaration*, has become an international global concern. In December 2009, when the unemployment rate in Canada hit a 12-year high of 8.4%, the youth unemployment rate was nearly double at 16% (Usalcas 2010). Employment challenges can result from the intersection of many factors including age, education qualifications, class, ethnicity, place of birth, and gender to name just a few. Many youth who recently migrated to Canada find that being an immigrant has an additional, significant and negative effect on their labour market trajectory. Why is it important for us to understand the labour market entrance strategies of young migrants? It is because international migration is overwhelmingly a phenomenon of the young. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2010), 44.5% of migrants arriving in 2009 are under age 24; if we include those aged from 29 to 34, that number increases to 57%, a figure comparable to other international destinations (United Nations Population Fund 2006). When the effects of immigrant status are examined, we find that the unemployment rate of these youth is approximately two times greater than the rate for youth born in Canada (Wilkinson 2008). Unlike the extensive work done with the educational trajectories of newcomer youth, the experience of newcomer youth in the labour market remains understudied and is the focus of this study.

Research on employment among newly arrived immigrants often omits youth (Chui and Tran 2003; Chui and Tran 2005; Schellenberg and Maheux 2007). The rationale for exclusion is that this segment of the population is the least likely to be active in the labour market and is commonly engaged in other activities such as schooling. However, this means that little is known about the younger migrants arriving in Canada and their labour market entrance strategies and long-term occupational trajectories. Our study explores the labour market experiences of this unique, often overlooked group of migrants by examining their labour market trajectories in the first 4 years after their arrival in Canada. The definition of youth in research varies widely. In some studies, youth is defined as the period between age 15 and 24 (see Saunders 2008). While Statistics Canada employs an age range from 15 to 24 to report the youth unemployment rate, almost all of the federally funded youth employment programs set the age range of youth at from 15 to 30. As stated in a United Nations report, “‘youth’ is not so easily circumscribed; it essentially represents the period of transition between childhood and adulthood, the nature and length of which vary from one individual or society to another” (United Nations 2007: xxvi). Similar conclusions can be reached about the population of immigrant youth in Canada, although there are significant differences in labour market trajectories that vary by age within this

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definition of youth, and must *therefore* be taken into consideration. In this study, we decided to arbitrarily define youth as people aged from 15 to 29 years old.

Our aim in this research is to explore the experiences of newly arrived immigrant youth using data from two unique sources. We use the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) master data file and pair this with in-depth interviews of 82 immigrant youth in four Canadian cities. The LSIC data were collected by Statistics Canada with the intent of examining closely the experiences of newly arrived immigrants during the first 4 years after their arrival in Canada. We have narrowed the scope of our research to newly arrived youth, so that our interviews target only the youth from the same group of newly arrived immigrants, allowing further examination of the experiences of these youth in the years immediately after their arrival. Our focus allows an in-depth exploration of this group, rather than a comparison with the experiences of older immigrants or non-immigrant youth.

Our results reveal that recently arrived immigrant youth encounter difficulties finding work due to their limited access to social resources among family and friends and due to discrimination barriers associated with credentials, language and accent and racism.

Literature Review

Much of what we know about the labour market experiences of immigrant youth in Canada is based on a small number of studies. Using results from the Annual Labour Force Survey and the Alberta Refugee Study, Wilkinson (2008) finds that immigrant youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years have a higher unemployment rate than their Canadian-born and refugee youth counterparts. Beaujot and Kerr's (2007) analysis reveals that immigrant youth, along with Aboriginal youth, are likely to have lower incomes despite their level of education and whether or not their education was obtained in Canada. Like their parents, young immigrants are finding it difficult to secure jobs and are taking a longer period of time to reach income parity with their Canadian-born counterparts. This echoes Galabuzi's (2007) findings that newcomers are three times more likely to live in poverty, regardless of their employment status.

Immigrant youth face several unique challenges. Some studies show that lack of "Canadian" work experience is a critical barrier to employment for many immigrant youth, particularly those who are members of racialized groups. In Canada, two studies find that immigrant youth are less likely to have worked during their secondary and post-secondary education than those youth born in Canada (Kilbride et al. 2004; Kunz 2003). Nearly 60% of Canadian-born youth between the ages of 15 and 19 have work experience prior to leaving high school, compared with only 25% of migrant youth (Statistics Canada 2007b). Perreira et al. (2007) find that in the USA, immigrant youth who arrive after age 6 are less likely to work during their school years. They also argue that work experience during adolescence and young adulthood helps young people accumulate resources such as job references, networks, job skills and work ethics that lead to better economic outcomes as adults (Perreira et al. 2007). Immigrant youth are less likely to accumulate these resources and may find it difficult to compete for career jobs as adults since they are less likely to work during their post-secondary schooling.

Coming from immigrant families is another challenge for the newcomer youth. Newcomer youth coming from families who are struggling economically themselves are just as likely to experience difficulties with transitioning to the labour market as adults (Kilbride et al. 2004). Those youth may also lack the family and friendship networks that are useful for locating employment (Shields et al. 2010). Payne (1987) finds that unemployment may run in families and is linked to long-term socioeconomic challenges. The economic performance of immigrants, particularly in terms of income, is also lower than their counterparts in the general population (Monitor 2004; Zietsma 2007) even among those holding Canadian credentials (Anisef et al. 2003). Therefore, the family's economic background and networks may have a significant influence on the employment of immigrant youth.

Discrimination also plays a role in economic disadvantage among newcomer youth. Discrimination comes in many forms. As Kilbride et al. (2004) reports, the distinctive experience and concerns of immigrant youth, the level of proficiency in both the English language and Canadian pronunciation may have a great influence on the settlement process of immigrant youth, including the search for jobs. The Canadian job market has been notorious for being difficult to enter not only for the foreign born in particular, but also for ethno-racial minorities in general (Pendakur 2005; Pendakur and Pendakur 1998; Tran 2004). Discrimination against ethno-racial minorities is not entirely based on skin colour. Recent studies also find that signs of membership, particularly one's last name, are also important stigmas (Oreopoulos 2009; Silberman et al. 2007). Galabuzi (2007), Kunz (2003), Brekke (2007) and others, all find that the economic disadvantages faced by racialized immigrant youth are substantially higher than those faced by white people. Other research by Shields et al. (2006) outlines the frustrations experienced by racialized newcomer youth in terms of the systemic structural and cultural barriers to finding meaningful employment. These observations confirm those by Nesdale and Pinter (2000).

Networks are shown to be an important source of jobs. As reflected in the youth employment literature, the family is the most important resource for gaining access to the labour market through the social ties of parents, siblings, relatives and their friends (Granovetter 1974; Holzer 1987; Yan 2000). A growing body of research on youth entering the labour market reveals that family networks are a significant source of information about employment opportunities. Leu (2009) reports that nearly 70% of all jobs in the USA are obtained as a result of family and friendship networks. Immigrant youth, however, are less likely to benefit from social network ties for several reasons. Individuals with smaller or less effective networks are much less likely to find employment, a finding supported by a research conducted by Kunz (2003) and Kilbride et al. (2004). Bradley and Taylor (2004) also find that racialized youth are slightly more likely to be unemployed than their white newcomer counterparts. It is also found that when immigrants rely on their friendship networks, because their social ties are small and less robust, they are less likely to find good work (Fang et al. 2010). This difference cannot be accounted for by differences in job search strategies as immigrants use similar strategies to native-born people. Perreira et al. (2007) find that due to their smaller and less powerful networks visible minority youth are less likely to obtain good occupational opportunities than those who are non-visible minorities. Finally, Yan et al. (2008) find that despite the economic boom in British Columbia in the mid-2000s, the benefits of social ties to new generation youth from immigrant families looking for work are few.

Methodology

Our research is divided into two distinct phases designed to coincide with our different data sources. In phase one, using the LSIC (Statistics Canada 2007c), we examine the employment experiences of immigrant youth who were between the ages of 15 and 29 at the time of their arrival in Canada. In total, there were 52,569² (weighted) LSIC respondents who met the age criteria. The LSIC is the only randomly selected national longitudinal sample of newcomers to Canada. It contacted and interviewed respondents who arrived in Canada between October 2000 and September 2001. Two follow-up interviews were conducted at 2 and 4 years after arrival for a total of three interview waves (Statistics Canada 2007d). Participants are representative of the major immigrant-sending countries and major entrance classes except for refugee claimants who were excluded from the sample. Interviews were conducted in 15 different languages. The LSIC provides detailed information about their reasons for migrating, education inside and outside Canada, recognition of foreign credentials, job history, occupation and income. Our results are weighted according to guidelines outlined by Statistics Canada Research Data Centres. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

In phase two, we conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain a more complete picture of the short-term integration experiences of newcomer youth from four study cities: Vancouver, Winnipeg, Hamilton and Toronto.³ Toronto and Vancouver were selected as they and their outlying communities are the top two destination cities of immigrants to Canada. We include Winnipeg and Hamilton for several reasons. Manitoba has the most successful Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). In 2009, nearly 13,000 newcomers came to Manitoba under the PNP (Manitoba Labour and Immigration 2010). Winnipeg is the fifth most popular destination for newcomers to Canada despite the fact that it is Canada's tenth largest city. Hamilton presents similar characteristics. With a population of just over 692,000 (Statistics Canada 2007a), it is similar in size to Winnipeg. Like Winnipeg, Hamilton is a tier-two city that attracts a large number of immigrants. Between 1997 and 2006, 32,252 immigrants arrived in Hamilton (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2007). It is the third most popular city of destination for migrants to Ontario. This makes Winnipeg and Hamilton interesting case studies of migration to mid-sized cities.

Our sampling strategy relied largely on referrals and promotion by individuals, immigrant settlement agencies, Service Canada and ethno-cultural community organizations. We recruited participants who arrived in Canada in or after October 2001, who were between the ages of 15 and 29 years at the time of the interview, and who had participated in both Canadian schooling and work activities for at least 1 year. Table 1 outlines the characteristics of phase two participants by city.

There is variation in the educational credentials held by those who participated in the interview portion of our study. Approximately 39% of the participants in our study have university-level education that they had already obtained in Canada at the time of the

² The number of unweighted cases is just over 2,500, which limited our ability to examine the results of individual countries and characteristics in greater detail.

³ Montreal would be another ideal choice of a large city with an important immigrant population. Our goal with the interview data is not a nationally representative sample. We hope to capture a wide variety of experiences with these interviews, including large and mid-size cities, and different employment sectors.

Table 1 Selected characteristics of participants in semi-structured interviews in Vancouver ($n=20$), Winnipeg ($n=22$), Hamilton ($n=20$) and Toronto ($n=20$)

	Vancouver (%)	Winnipeg (%)	Hamilton (%)	Toronto (%)	Total (%)
Sex					
Female	60	55	55	35	51
Male	40	45	45	65	49
Education in Canada					
Less than high school	0	23	10	25	15
High school diploma only	20	23	15	15	18
Post-secondary in progress	15	0	50	10	18
Trade certificate/diploma	15	0	0	25	10
University	50	55	25	25	39
Employment status					
Employed	95	77	35	65	68
Unemployed	5	23	65	35	32
Area of origin					
Africa	20	32	35	20	27
Asia	60	59	25	45	48
Middle East	5	0	20	10	9
Latin America, Caribbean and Pacific Islands	15	5	10	5	9
Europe and the USA	0	5	10	25	10

Source: demographic data provided by 82 participant interviews

interviews in phase two while one third have a high school diploma or less. Another 10% were enrolled in some type of post-secondary education, either a trade/diploma or a degree program, at the time of the interview. Nearly 70% of the participants were employed at the time of the interview. Participants living in Hamilton pose a slight anomaly given that 65% of our respondents were unemployed at the time of the interview. The actual unemployment rate for youths in the four study cities may differ from the sample averages reported. This might partly reflect the actual local employment conditions and it might be partly due to our strategy of including some unemployed youth in our samples. We felt it important to include the experience of unemployed persons. Our participants came from across the globe⁴ with nearly 30% from Africa, 48% from Asia, 9% from the Middle East, 9% from Latin America, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands, and 10% from Europe and the USA. There are nearly equal numbers of female and male participants. Their average age on arrival was 19.9 years while the average age at the time of interview was 24.1 years.

⁴ Participants from Africa came from Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Those from Asia came from Bangladesh, Burma, China, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Nepal, Philippines and Taiwan. Those from the Middle East came from Afghanistan, Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Those from Latin America, Pacific Islands and the Caribbean came from Fiji, Barbados, Mexico, Peru and Colombia. Those from Europe and USA come from England, Greece, Russia and the USA.

The mean length of each interview was 60 min. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Data from each city were analysed at their respective sites with the assistance of NVivo. A thematic analysis method was employed. To maintain consistency among the four sites, a coding scheme was co-developed and monitored by the researchers through personal and online meetings.

Findings

Employment Experiences

Table 2 describes the work experience of newcomer youth using LSIC data. Our results show that 53.5% of the respondents already had some work experience by the time of their first interview. Although there is some variation by age, there is a convergence in work experience reported during the wave 3 interview by which time 84% of the respondents had obtained at least some work experience in Canada. This figure is slightly higher than what would be expected among Canadian-born youth of a similar age.

Although most newcomer youth find work and many enter the labour market quickly, this does not imply that those experiences are uniform or seamless transitions. Table 3 provides a snapshot of the employment experience for those respondents participating in employment at wave 3. On average, newcomer youth changed jobs one or two times during the 4-year span, and over 90% of these youth experienced at least one jobless spell of 7 days or longer, a figure comparable to Canadian-born youth. While many youth had secured full-time employment within 4 years after arrival, particularly among older youth, over 30% of those respondents report either being dissatisfied with their job or actively looking for a new job at the time of the interview.

Working Low-end Jobs

Like Canadian-born youth, most newcomer youth find their first *work* in low-skilled, low paying jobs in the service and retail sectors. For them, these types of jobs are temporary, useful for ‘getting by’, to gain job experience, to meet people and to provide income for their households and/or pay for further education. A 24-year-old male from the Philippines who lives in Vancouver tells us in his interview that his job is temporary. *I’m just doing part-time for my work at Future Shop and then part-*

Table 2 Employment rates prior to and post-arrival in Canada by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Before arrival (%)	6 months after arrival (%)	2 years after arrival (%)	4 years after arrival (%)
15–19	15.8	29.5	67.8	83.1
20–24	42.6	56.5	80.0	82.2
25–29	85.6	64.0	81.2	85.2
Total	57.7	53.5	77.5	84.0

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

Table 3 Employment experiences 4 years after arrival by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Number of jobs held	Jobless spells (%)	Employed full-time (%)	Dissatisfied or looking for work (%)
15–19	2.37	98.1	36.2	31.9
20–24	2.50	94.5	67.5	31.3
25–29	2.38	91.2	75.1	31.0
Total	2.40	93.7	63.6	31.3

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

time as a promoter at the club. So I still pursue my photography but haven't enough to sustain my living and pay for my bills and my living expenses.

Many feel pressure from their parents to pursue employment while still in school. Working during the pursuit of school is a fairly common occurrence among Canadian-born youth with 41% of females and 52% of males working at the same time as attending post-secondary education (Baisley 2011). Two things distinguish the newcomer experience from Canadian-born youth. First of all, many are forced to work 'underground' while their immigration applications are being processed. As a participant in Toronto tells us, *I did some underground work while I was waiting for my work permit, which was ok for me; I need to survive so I did the underground work. I didn't have the work permit then, so I couldn't apply for other jobs.*

The second thing is that lower end jobs are promoted as a way of getting 'Canadian' work experience. Youth are told that this will open doors to jobs in which they were trained and may have worked in their countries of origin. A 22-year-old female who lives in Hamilton and is originally from Zimbabwe tells us:

Well I was pushed to it because from what I have been hearing, it's hard to get a job after school if you don't have work experience. After all, that's the reason why my parents had a tough time because they don't have Canadian experience. So my parents were pushing me, my dad especially, to get as much experience as you can while I'm in school so that it's easier after school.

Many gain this experience at low-end jobs such as McDonalds. For some, this type of work is meaningful and does provide them with experience, particularly in improving their English and communication skills. It also helps them learn more about our culture and society. We have the following comment from a 23-year-old female from the Philippines working at a service job, *I think that I'm matured a lot as a person and most of the stuff I learned at work didn't really learned at home or either school*, so for her, the experience was necessary and worthwhile.

For others, however, the low-end jobs are long term and an example of significant downward trajectories in their careers. A female participant from Winnipeg tells us *my husband put a lot of pressure on me and tells me not to be spoiled and that I won't get a job in what I used to do, so I started looking in other places like coffee places, fast food restaurants and malls.* After 18 months of searching and despite having Master's degrees from both Canada and Bangladesh, she remains unemployed.

Finding Work: The Market Value of Family and Friends

The value of social ties, including family, friends and acquaintances, are often considered resources for people in search of work. It is also commonly recommended that job seekers draw on *these* ties when searching for work. We find immigrant youth take advantage of social ties in the job search, but limitations in the resources contained in their networks lead them to rely on friends rather than family. ‘Canadian’ friends rather than other co-ethnic friends also appear to be important in our interviews. We expand on this below.

Using the LSIC provides a picture of the job search process of newcomer youth and we have supplemented this with details from our phase two in-depth interviews. In this analysis, we focus on the first job a respondent held after arriving to Canada. Table 4 below directly compares the use of family and friends in securing that first job.

The table shows that family and friends are important for securing work among newcomer youth with just over 45% of new jobs secured through the ties of family and friends. Family ties appear to be most important among 20 to 24 year olds while friends are most important to the youngest newcomers from 15 to 19 years old. Another interesting finding from the table above is the ratio of importance of friends versus family. Overall, newcomer youth are 1.5 times more likely to use friends to secure a job than family. This ratio reverses in the period from age 20 to 24 when family become slightly more important than friends, but is still very strong among the other age groups examined.

These observations from the LSIC are echoed by our phase two interview participants who indicate that networks are useful in searching for work in Canada, but the quality and usefulness of family and friendship networks varies. Most participants in phase two indicate that family networks were only marginally helpful in the job search process, providing indirect help such as settlement support and information. One reason respondents give for not using family ties in the job search process was the lack of knowledge their parents and relatives have about the labour market in Canada. Being newcomers themselves, many adult family members do not have the specific knowledge that can help young people secure jobs. For similar reasons, family members also lack viable employment networks themselves. The information and support of family members was only effective if the family member was already well established in Canadian society. A Ghanaian participant, living in Vancouver, reports, *yes my dad sometimes go to um mechanic shops, drops off my*

Table 4 Job-finding assistance from friends and family by age on arrival

Age at arrival (year)	Family (%)	Friends (%)	Ratio of using friends vs family to find work
15–19	21.5	36.5	1.70
20–24	29.0	25.4	0.88
25–29	12.0	24.1	2.00
Total	18.3	27.5	1.50

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

resume, talks to them about what a good boy I am. He goes to friends to drop my resume to give anybody they know but still uh some of them call me for interview.

Few participants reported job search assistance from more distant relatives. A couple had found work in the public sector from aunts and uncles or brothers and sisters. This reflects a predicament that many immigrant families face. A lack of close familial networks and a truncated social network due to migration negatively affects their values in the job search.

Friendship networks are overwhelmingly perceived to be more valuable than family networks by study participants. A 29-year-old Korean male in Vancouver reports that friends are *the fastest way because through other job search routes, it takes long time since you have to go through all the stages*. The study participants rated the assistance of friends much higher than that of family members, but a number of them preferred job market information from ‘Canadian’ friends. One participant from Winnipeg reports *I asked my friend for help. She is Canadian. I know my English is poor, I need practice and I also feel nervous when talking with another person. It is good to talk to another person who is good in English*. ‘Canadian’ can often be interpreted as a codeword for white and native-born. A female from Zimbabwe expressed this well when she said, *well the people I did ask for, my white friends, that I did ask for job opportunities, they had high places in the job place*.

Although our phase two respondents express this preference for help from ‘Canadians’, the LSIC data suggests that, in line with the findings from Ooka and Wellman (2006) for Canadian-born youth, these types of ties are used less often than co-ethnic ties for initially finding work. In fact, as Table 5 shows, LSIC respondents were more than three times as likely to use co-ethnic friends as non co-ethnic friends to secure a first job in Canada. This may reflect the types of network ties respondents hold after arrival, particularly when first entering the labour market. Drawing on non co-ethnic help might be preferred, but those resources may not be available to newcomers who are entering the labour market for the first time. Our phase two respondents did describe seeking help from co-ethnic friends, particularly those who had been in the country for longer periods of time. A 29-year-old Saudi Arabian woman in Hamilton reports *‘I wouldn’t’ say ‘newcomers’ they have been here for more than ten years. (Q: so they are still immigrants?) Yes. So they know how to help newcomers and what’s the challenges you face*. Several Chinese participants from different cities indicated that their longer-term friends who are also Chinese assisted them with resume and cover letter writing.

Nesdale and Pinter (2000) find that friendship networks have an indirect effect on finding work. In their study, those whose cultural background most mirrored the host society were more likely to be used in the job search. Ooka and Wellman’s (2006)

Table 5 Job-finding assistance from co-ethnic friends by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Co-ethnic (%) friends assistance in finding work
15–19	75.4
20–24	82.5
25–29	80.4
Total	79.2

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

study of Canadian youth finds that those with friendship networks that are ethnically homogeneous are more likely to use friends to help them find jobs. Conversely, those with ethnically heterogeneous friendship networks are less likely to use friends to find employment. McPherson et al. (2001) find that ethnic background is the greatest determinant of homophily, the propensity for individuals with similar social, economic and demographic characteristics to ‘hangout’ together (Lauer and Yan 2010). Peer groups, particularly among young people, have a significant influence on educational and occupational attainment according to these and other researchers (see Ibarra 1995).

Seeking Formal Help: Experience with Service Agencies

Participants in our phase two interviews were asked about their experiences with community and government organizations in the process of school-to-work transition. Looking again at the LSIC data provides some context for these interviews. Table 6 compares the use of employment agencies, including the Canada Employment Centre with the use of informal job search strategies through family and friends. From the table, it is clear that newcomer youth are securing their first jobs far more often through informal sources rather than employment agencies. Employment agencies are somewhat more useful to the older youth, but still the value of friends and family far outweigh that of the assistance of the agencies. Perhaps the fact that employment agencies and other organizations were not popular places for newcomer youth to locate work should not be surprising. Ng (2006) finds that employment agencies rank the lowest in terms of importance in finding work among native-born youth.

Despite the conclusions from the table above, many participants across the country who participated in our phase two interview did report using the resources of a non-government or government agency in their search for employment and re-training upon their arrival in Canada. Twenty-two (27%) participants reported their use of formal services in conjunction with networks of family and friends, a percentage which is higher than the results in the LSIC data and higher than for Canadian-born youth. Their experiences with formal services are mixed. Many feel that these services are useful for helping them start the job search. A South Asian female participant from Winnipeg told us a success story *I also joined [Agency X], it's free and paid training for immigrants and that program was really good for me because I came to know about lots of information about employment and I get lots of knowledge about the free programs here and free language classes here. So that's why I get enrolled in that program and then I got my job.* However, while the service programs were helpful, they were good

Table 6 Assistance from employment agencies in the job search by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Friends/family (%)	Employment agencies (%)	Ratio of friends and family to employment agencies (%)
15–19	58.0	2.9	20.00
20–24	54.4	5.0	10.88
25–29	36.1	9.9	3.65
Total	45.8	7.0	6.54

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

only for entry level, low-paid employment and were far less useful for making connections with jobs that would provide careers.

Negative feedback was also received. One participant made the observation that *there are many advisors in the agencies and (they are) very friendly and try to help you, but the working opportunity they can provide is limited to the lower paid or entry level ones*. This was a theme that was echoed throughout the interviews conducted across the four cities. Some participants observed that the service organizations were very busy and they felt badly about asking for assistance. One Filipino youth in Vancouver reported his experience of seeking help from an employment agency, *they said, hey, why don't you apply to McDonald's? Now, she was like, she just wanted... Her goal was just to get us a job as soon as possible and it doesn't matter how, what kind of job, you know, she doesn't care*. A female participant from Mexico now living in Hamilton observed that the guidance offered by different agencies seems contradictory. *That is a different thing from McMaster career counsellor and they were telling me all positive things. Here (at the immigrant centre) it was like, okay. Try to move all your Canadian things into the first line; all the things that you have done in Canada and (on) the second page, all the things you have done in Mexico*. A participant from Vancouver reports that the programs offered at her school *couldn't help me understand the culture and the background, uh especially how to communicate with your employer and their expectations*. The fact that only 27% of our survey participants, most of whom were referred to us by community organizations, have sought help from formal services may reflect that there is still much room for the organizations that provide formal services to this youth group to improve their services.

Volunteering: The Positive and Negative

In our phase two interviews, we learned that many newcomers are given the advice to take a volunteer job, especially if they are having difficulty transitioning to the labour market. Volunteer work is supposed to assist newcomers to develop that all important 'Canadian' experience in order to help them attain employment in their field. It is also purported to assist newcomers who need to gain more confidence in speaking the official languages by giving them opportunities to use them in an employment setting. It may also increase their social and friendship networks, helpful in getting the 'word out' that they are looking for work.

Table 7 provides a snapshot of the volunteer activities of newcomer youth from the LSIC. It is clear that volunteer work is a common pursuit of newcomer youth. Column 1 describes the percent of participants who accepted a volunteer job at least one time during their first 4 years in Canada. Fifteen- to 19-year olds in particular were very likely to volunteer their time. Following the suggestion that volunteer work is pursued in order to gain important skills and experience for employment, the table also examines the amount of instrumental volunteering in which these young newcomers participated. The instrumental volunteering column includes youth that volunteered in order to achieve a goal beyond the volunteering itself; this includes volunteering to get Canadian experience, to be able to work in their field of expertise, or in order to develop various skills including such as language skills. Column 2 shows that, of those who volunteered at least some of their time, volunteering with instrumental motivation was very common. Over 40% of the newcomer youth hoped to gain some external value from

Table 7 Volunteering for work experience by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Ever volunteered (%)	Instrumental volunteering (%)	Volunteering leads to job (%)
15–19	57.0	44.5	26.1
20–24	33.2	45.6	18.8
25–29	39.5	42.5	20.0
Total	42.4	43.8	21.8

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

their volunteer work. For some, this paid off. Over 20% of those who volunteered some of their time found work directly from the volunteer experience. Of course, this means that many newcomer youth that volunteered for instrumental reasons did not find work as a result of this experience. Schugurensky et al. (2005) report that adult immigrants are twice as likely to volunteer to gain work experience than those born in Canada. They also felt the experience was very rewarding and very few (9%) felt it was a negative experience.

Our phase two interviews reflect the mixed value of volunteering in order to secure work. While some participants had positive experiences that led to full-time, permanent employment, others did not. A primary motivation for many newcomers to volunteer is the hope that the experience will lead to a paid job offer from the organization. Like many Canadian-born youth, a few participants reported that the volunteer experience was helpful in determining whether or not their chosen field of study would suit their career trajectory. A young woman from Hamilton reports *volunteer will help you network and gain experiences and know what you like and what you don't like. And it's easier to get a volunteer job, see what your strengths are and what your weaknesses are.*

Unlike Canadian-born youth, some of our participants found their volunteer experience did assist them with learning how to speak English more fluently. One participant in Winnipeg found the volunteer experience helped her to articulate her skills on her resume which led to several interviews and eventually a full-time job as a settlement worker. Volunteering is not always done with the expectation of obtaining employment. A few of our participants indicated that they felt they needed to give back to their community and to assist other newcomers in their settlement process. A young woman from the Congo used her volunteer experience with African communities in Winnipeg to better her English. Later, she assisted other newcomers from Congo, Uganda and Rwanda as she could work in the four languages of that area.

Volunteering is not always a rewarding experience. For some youth, the experience has led to frustration and exploitation. Many youth are told that if they volunteer, they can gain the 'Canadian' work experience needed for entry level jobs in their professions. Unfortunately, employers do not often see it this way. An Iranian participant living in Vancouver agrees, *But anywhere else you put under your volunteer, people just, they either skip it or they don't really look at it, take it seriously.* A participant from Toronto agrees, *without volunteering, you don't have any Canadian reference at all. But even if you go and volunteer there, chances are they don't give you good reference; they are very picky and very serious; it's very difficult.*

The Challenges of Finding Work: Linguistic Barriers, Racism and Being an Immigrant

Barriers to finding jobs are also reflected in the LSIC data. Table 8 shows that a significant number of respondents (45%) have had some difficulties finding work at some point in their first 4 years in Canada. This is particularly true for older youth who move into the labour market more quickly.

Any amount of discrimination is troubling, but direct discrimination is less commonly expressed in the LSIC data than language difficulties. In our phase two interviews, we find that the problems of discrimination and language can often be subtly linked as accent and skin colour combine to play a role in the perception of newcomers.

Double Jeopardy: Coloured Accent

Of this group having problems, language problems comprise the largest proportion of the difficulties they encounter (35%). This matches the findings from our phase two interviews. A Zimbabwean male working for an investment firm reports his experience with his accent and interaction with his clients. *Now my accent, you may not be able to detect it but if I am talking to a client and I have this heavy 'new Canadian' accent and I am not a normal Canadian that they expect. They would not trust me to handle their money, basically.* A Ghanaian living in Vancouver tells us his perception of racism in the hiring process. *I have spoken on the phone with about 25 to 30 different companies on the phone and I know they did not call me back because of my accent and I have been to about 14 interviews and I know because of my skin colour and the way I sound. Then I have faxed a lot of resumes. Maybe it's my last name or where I come from.*

Discrimination is not only faced by racialized youth. A Russian male living in Toronto tells us about the barriers he faced in looking for a job. He reported: *I don't have any data to support this of course but sometimes I feel the employers here they exercise some sort of anti-Slavic discrimination because my last name, because my name is hard to pronounced... It's just the feelings that I get sometimes. Russians are minority and Russians have this stereotyped of not speaking English well and when they see this name.* The barriers to employment caused by accent and not by language fluency are very important to note. Language fluency issues affect one's eligibility for employment. Those not fluent in the official language will experience difficulty in the interview process and are unlikely to get hired. Those with accented English face a

Table 8 Problems finding work by age on arrival

Age on arrival (year)	Any problems finding work (%)	Language problems (%)	Discrimination problems (%)
15–19	53.4	32.0	7.5
20–24	60.4	38.0	10.0
25–29	71.9	34.7	11.4
Total	64.5	34.9	10.3

Source: (Statistics Canada 2007c) LSIC masterdata file

different set of barriers. As these examples from our research show, there is very little tolerance in the Canadian labour market for those with accented English.

Several participants in all the cities report they felt they encountered discrimination in their job search or at work. Although they could not point to a direct incident, they have the perception that racism occurs, especially when they see their Canadian-born white friends finding work faster. A female from Zimbabwe reports, *(o)nce I applied for a position in a store and it is primarily a white store. And it was my friend and I and my friend is white and obviously I am black. We both applied and I had a bit more experience because I volunteered before as a cashier, so I know a little bit about the position, but she got hired and she had no job experience.* Whether or not race really played a role in the selection of this candidate is certainly an issue, but the perception that skin colour limits one's chances in life has a powerful effect on some immigrants' occupational outlook and how they regard their future in Canada. However, many participants reported they had experienced an incident of racism since arriving in Canada, although most often it was limited to an isolated event. One participant in Winnipeg tells us, *like not very strong. But sometimes I do feel biasness from some people, but mostly it is okay. It's not a bad place to live as an immigrant.* Another participant from Vancouver tells us, *when I am going to interview, I (wish) I could change the colour of my skin to become like a white person and then go and get the job and then change back. But it's not flexible. Once I'm Black, I will always be black and I don't think people like black people working for them for a fact, what I have seen.*

The perception that racism might have played a role in an interview is a powerful force that can negatively influence a person's feeling of belonging in Canadian society. A participant from Afghanistan relates her observations. *Actually, I have never experienced anything about this but this is what I think. You know what I mean. I'm not trying to be racist or something, but if a white guy is trying to find a job, they can get a job in a week. You know my friends, they quickly got a job. And I told them that you can find a job because you guys are white.*

For some, however, the experience of finding a job and working in Canada did not present a significant barrier. For them, their immigrant status and prior experience did not prevent them from finding suitable employment in Canada. For instance, some perceive that language and accent issues are largely unfounded. A Chinese participant living in Hamilton reports, *I think for immigrants who want to get a job, it's not really the English and the accent, it's the courage. Many immigrants don't apply for a lot of jobs because they feel that their English is not good enough and they are not confident in themselves. So I would just say keep trying and don't give up easily and youth need some courage and do some preparation before you had the interview.*

How do our results compare with other studies regarding discrimination and acquisition of employment among youth? Recent research in the USA indicates that there is a marked decline in the influence of race, ethnicity and racism on employment and other indicators since the 1960s (Pager 2007). Yet when average income and occupational attainment are considered, visible minority and immigrant youth still lag behind the attainments of white, native-born youth in Canada and elsewhere (Pager 2007). A study of African-American and Caribbean-American youth in the USA indicates that nearly 90% have experienced at least one or more

acts of racism in a single year, with males and later adolescents experiencing the greatest number of incidents (Seaton et al. 2008). Bauder (2001) finds that ethnicity is a significant factor predicting the odds of being employed, particularly among immigrants; those from Europe are more likely to be employed than those born in Canada, while all other racialized groups have a significantly lower probability of being employed. For the youth from African, Caribbean, Chinese and Latin American countries, the odds of being employed are twice as low as for Canadian-born youth. In short, our more recent quantitative and qualitative data confirm this trend in ethnic discrimination faced by migrant newcomers in the labour force.

Implications and Conclusions

During the 4-year period in which data were collected for the LSIC, many youth respondents had, at one time or another, tried to access the Canadian job market. Most of them found low-skill jobs by mobilizing their social resources among family and friends. The stories of the 82 interviewees substantiated the findings of the LSIC analysis and also provided an experiential understanding of both the value and limitations of formal and informal resources among immigrant youth. Lack of work experience, particularly Canadian experience, along with language and accent discrimination is what emerges from these interviews.

Some considerations for public policy and social programming follow from the findings presented here. First, immigrant youth may require specific information that many Canadian-born youth do not require. Coming from immigrant families, their parents have limited knowledge of how to navigate the labour market information system in Canada. They also need basic, culturally appropriate training from resume writing to job interview skills. Second, the stories of the 82 youth and the LISC analysis concur with the results of existing studies that show that the lack of resourceful social networks hampers them from obtaining job information and connections to employers. Meanwhile, having network work resources is different from knowing how to mobilize them. It is important to develop social programs that can help immigrant youth to build and also to mobilize diverse social resources. Mentorship programs, co-opt education and paid internships are all possible options.

Third, linguistic and racial discrimination are difficult to prove empirically. Although not all our participants have directly experienced these kinds of discrimination, the perception that one has not obtained a job because of the colour of one's skin, the way one speaks or the origin of one's education is a powerful one. While it may be the case that these kinds of discrimination are less common than we think they are, what needs to be remembered is the power of perception. The perception that one has been discriminated against because of ascribed characteristics plays a significant role in one's outlook on life. Meanwhile, the recent field study on resumes further reveals possible discrimination against new immigrants who bear a non-Anglicized name (Oreopoulos 2009). Ensuring equitable and fair hiring will have a direct impact on the long-term integration of immigrant youth.

Fourth, despite their limitations, the parents of these youth are still an important source of support. Therefore, it is critical to assist parents with helping their children find work in a socioeconomic context where temporary, unstable employment has

become the norm. A young professionally trained woman we spoke to indicated that her parents constantly 'hounded' her about getting a 'real job' or going back to university to obtain a professional degree as they felt her work as a settlement counsellor was unstable, low paying and unsuitable for someone with her educational background. The reality, particularly in the current labour market, is that all labour market entrants need to be flexible in terms of their short-term employment goals. While an entry job may be unpleasant, it can provide experience necessary for future labour market success. What is needed is a greater understanding from parents that employment trajectories in the current labour market are sometimes bumpy and circular. The idea that a university education is the best pathway to good employment is no longer true, but immigrant parents may not always understand this. Therefore, there is a great need to educate many newcomer parents who lack basic information about the education system and the labour force. Information workshops can be provided for parents, either by immigrant-serving organizations or by schools that would help them to better understand the different educational, vocational and training opportunities available to their children.

To conclude, the data from the LSIC and the interviews reported in this paper only shed some light on the complexity of the employment situation faced by immigrant youth. Further research with a focus on immigrant youth will be needed. In view of the many challenges that immigrant youth face when entering the Canadian job market, the government may need to develop an immigrant youth employment policy and program that can support these youths and their parents who have never been properly prepared for these new structural challenges. This is particularly important for newcomer families when their adult members themselves are struggling with their own settlement.

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