

Immigrant and Refugee Youth Unemployment: A Qualitative Exploration of Labour Market Exclusion

Final Summary Report, 2002

By

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Research Statement

The ability to secure full and meaningful employment is a necessary condition for societal cohesion. Effective access to labour market participation has been threatened, however, by the high incidence of unemployment, particularly regarding youth. The purpose of this research is to examine the "lived labour market" experience of immigrant and refugee youth who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. A qualitative case study of visibly identifiable African and Asian immigrant/refugee youth using semi-structured focus groups to probe their experiences of the local job market was utilized. The overall guiding question informing our research was: What role do race and ethnicity play in affecting employment opportunities and experiences for immigrant and refugee youth, thus excluding them from successful labour market participation?

Research Objectives

The ability to secure full and meaningful employment is a necessary condition for the realization of values such as freedom, economic well-being, justice, social participation and integration within market society. Effective access to labour market participation has been threatened by the higher incidence of unemployment, particularly on the part of youth. The central place of the labour contract as a core component of societal cohesion, consequently, is experiencing significant erosion (Offe 1997: 82).

The purpose of this research is the examination of the Alived labour market@ experience of immigrant and refugee youth who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. We used semi-structured focus groups drawn from African and Asian immigrant and refugee youth in Toronto. The overall guiding question that has informed our research project is: What role do race and ethnicity play in affecting employment opportunities and experiences for immigrant and refugee youth, thus excluding them from successful labour market participation?

This research will make a direct contribution to advancing equality by providing us with insight into the Alived labour market@ experience of unemployed immigrant/refugee youth, allowing us to identify conceptually relevant themes, issues and contexts behind their labour

market exclusion and the stresses on societal cohesion. While this qualitative approach does not allow us to draw representative conclusions, it affords us the opportunity to paint a textured profile and identify emerging and salient variables that are important in framing and interpreting the immigrant/refugee youth unemployment experience. This study enables us to begin to understand the racial and ethnic dynamics, among other factors, affecting Canadian youth in their attempts to integrate into the job market.

Context

There is ample evidence to suggest that a number of fundamental changes have occurred in the Canadian labour market within the last two decades challenging traditional notions of job availability, job stability and economic security (Shields 1996; and Burke and Shields 2000). The pressures of global economic restructuring, intensified international competition, rapid technological change, a shifting of skill needs and changing immigration patterns have set the context for Canadian economic and labour market transformations. Demographically, for example, visible minorities represent a growing portion of the labour force. In Ontario, between 1981 and 1991 their share of the labour force increased from 6% to 13% (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training 1996: 64).

Data from the 2001 Census indicates that immigration has now become Canada's most important source of population growth (Statistics Canada 2002: 2). Also, given the ethno-racial profile of incoming migrants to Canada, by 2016 some 20% of the population will be comprised of visible minorities up from 9.4% in 1991 (Chard and Renaud 2000: 22-27). The impact of demographic change facilitated by immigration is even more dramatic in major urban centres, a reflection of the fact that the immigration experience in Canada is a decidedly urban affair. Over 70% of immigrants settle in the three largest Canadian cities, Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal (OECD 2001: 144). In 2000, 47.5% of all arriving immigrants came to the Greater Toronto area. The impact of immigration has affected no Canadian, or for that matter North American, city more than Toronto. Census data from 1996 reveals that 49% of city residents were foreign born, with nearly 30% having resided here less than 20 years and 14% less than 10 years. Yet only 6.1% of the population reported that they did not speak English (Ornstein 2000: iii). The colour of the city has changed dramatically as a consequence. In 1961, visible minorities made up only 3% of Toronto's population, by 2001 visible minorities composed the majority at an estimated 53%. In terms of the racial profile of Toronto's visible minority population, 25% is Chinese, 25% South Asian, and 20% black (Carey 2002: B4-5). Toronto has become not only Canada's most ethnically diverse centre but ranks among the world's leading cities in cosmopolitan status.

Average unemployment levels have increased steadily since the 1970s, with an average level over the past three decades at over 9%, and more recently still sitting at 7.5% level. Poor employment performance during the post-1993 economic recovery fueled discussion of a "jobless recovery" or a "job poor" recovery. Having lost a job in the 1990s, it is much more difficult to find a new one across all groups, but especially for young workers and immigrants (Shields 1996; and Pendakur 2000). Supply-side factors fail to offer a satisfactory explanation for high youth unemployment as those sectors of the labour market with the strongest performance contain the occupations with the heaviest youth workforces (Blanchflower and Freeman 1998: 5). Young workers are experiencing twice the rates of unemployment compared to the labour force average. In the Toronto region youth joblessness stood at some 18% by the latter 1990s (FCM 1998).

Studies reveal a long established pattern of labour market disadvantage and exclusion for immigrant/refugee labour (Bolaria and Li 1985). Research indicates that visible minority youth with the same education and training backgrounds have found it more difficult to find full-time work than those of European background. While some 58% of university graduates from European and 54% from South Asian background found employment quickly, only 40% of Black and 35% of Chinese graduates were equally successful (Institute for Social Research 1997).

While several key trends have been identified, our understanding of the degree to which the structural changes in the labour market are revealed in the lived experiences of unemployed immigrant/refugee youth is quite preliminary. While the immigrant earning opportunities for immigrant workers have been intensively studied, there has been a dearth of analysis of immigrant unemployment in Canada (McDonald and Worswick 1997: 354). The degrees of income polarization, job insecurity and detachment from the workplace experienced by immigrant and refugee youth have, however, important economic, political and social consequence for the nation as a whole.

Conducting the Field Research and Summary of Initial Findings

Initiated in September 1998^{1[1]} this CERIS-supported study has focused on the Alived labour market@ in Toronto and the role that race and ethnicity, both material and perceived, play in affecting employment opportunities of immigrant and refugee youth. Professor John Shields of Ryerson University is the lead researcher on this project, working in partnership with the community co-investigator Kahn Rahi from the Access Action Council of Toronto (AAC).

With the funding support from CERIS, the City of Toronto Access and Equity Grants Program, and Ryerson University, nine focus groups were brought together to discuss issues which affect labour market exclusion and/or inclusion. In total 61 immigrant refugee youth from Africa and Asia participated in the focus groups. The youth participants were drawn from a wide range of countries. They included recent visible-minority immigrants and refugees from such diverse regions as: Vietnam, Somalia, Tibet, Japan, Afghanistan, southeast Asia, China, Angola, Rwanda, and various unspecified African countries. As well, eight service providers from in and around Toronto offered insights from their work with immigrant / refugee youth in the City.

The non-random sample of individuals was drawn from immigrant/refugee service agencies, ethno-cultural organizations, and youth / employment centres within the Greater Toronto area. Ages of the participants (excluding the service providers) ranged from late-teens to mid-twenties with a mean age of 22.8. The size of the groups varied from four participants to as many as eleven. Appendix C provides a detailed survey of the demographic profile of the focus group participants.

While the interviews were pre-structured and standardized, once the taped sessions began the participants were given ample room to articulate (important) concerns and issues which may have fallen outside the original line of questioning. These semi-structured dialogues with participants concentrated on the following topics:

- employment prospects and obstacles;
- how structural features (including racism) and changes in the labour market are revealed in the lived experiences of immigrant/refugee youth;
- the commonalities and disparities between different immigrant/refugee groups as well as comparisons between the participants of the study and non-immigrant/non-refugee youth;
- what cluster of resources, at the institutional, community and family levels, empowers individuals and allows immigrant/refugee youth to maintain self-esteem, hopefulness, and societal attachment during unemployment; and
- the expectations of immigrant/refugee youth in the short, medium and long term regarding their employment prospects.

Emerging from the interviews and voluntary written pre-surveys are a number of discernible themes related to labour market exclusion. For the frustrated youth and service providers, one of the major barriers often talked of was the lethargic and prohibitive nature of the Canadian immigration process. Eager to work, many of the participants, especially those arriving

^{1[1]} The funding period granted through CERIS stretched from September 1998 to June 2000, additional funding from Ryerson University allowed for funded work on this project to extend to March 2001. CERIS funding for the project totalled \$14,510.00.

without proper documentation, felt the immigration process was far too slow and forced them into a holding pattern of financial hardship and dependence upon government support.

"You know, right now like till we get landed status, I mean there are so many things we would like to do but there is always that obstacle" (Asian youth)

The government support, while appreciated by the vast majority of those dependent immigrant/refugee youth, was felt to be too meager. With a monthly stipend which barely keeps them out of extreme poverty, they are unable to afford adequate housing, appropriate Canadian clothing, or necessary transportation thus forcing them to settle for jobs which pay little, challenge them less, and are completely unrelated to their foreign work experience or education.

"The money that Social Services give you it will be not enough to buy a Metropass]. To buy a ticket you going to buy ticket or you going to buy food or you going to pay rent." (African youth)

Often, it becomes clear in the study, foreign work experience and/or education is devalued in the Canadian labour market. So pervasive is the feeling that all experience and education must be Canadian that many individuals and ethnic communities internalize this barrier, not even bothering to enter the job market before they have at least some new, "Canadian" training.

"I want to work, but the thing is I cannot get a job with my present qualifications. I need to upgrade my skill and learn new skills so that I can compete in the market." (Asian youth)

"When I came to Canada everybody have been saying you need training. No matter what you have been trained for from where you come from, you still need new training here." (African youth)

A number of other obstacles, in addition to the major structural barriers, include access to information, difficulties with (the English) language, hostility to religious clothing, and culture shock. While overt experiences of racism were not that common, and perception of racism is highly subjective, the racism inherent in many of the structural barriers must be analyzed and addressed. Appendix D offers a detailed summary of the themes and expressed views of the immigrant/refugee youth surveyed in this study along with the insights of community-based immigrant service staff.

Dissemination

To date the findings of this study have been disseminated in a number of settings including an academic conference, presentations made to community-based forums and policy-makers. A paper for publication to an journal article is also in the process of being finalized. Below is a detailed listing of dissemination to date:

Academic/Conference Papers Presented:

Khan Rahi and John Shields, Almmigrant and Refugee Youth Labour Market Exclusion: A Qualitative Toronto Case Study@, **Fifth International Metropolis Conference**, Vancouver, Canada, November 14, 2000.

Public Forums, Workshops and Talks

Invited Key Informant, *PREPARING CANADA=S YOUTH FOR THE FUTURE: An HRDC Project with Canadian Leaders* (interviews conducted by SPR Associates Inc. for Human Resources Development Canada), Toronto, June 30, 2001 (material from this project was presented).

Presentation, "The Canadian Labour Market and the Immigrant Experience: Economic Well-Being, Settlement and Adjustment" for a ***Tour of French Journalists organized by the Canadian Embassy in Paris France***, September 27, 2000, Toronto, Canada (material from this project was presented).

Khan Rahi and John Shields, **Workshop Facilitators**, "Unemployment and Ethno-Racial Youth", ***Bridging the Future: Settlement, Youth, Technology***, Ontario ISAP Conference, Toronto, March 24, 1999.

Article in Preparation for Academic Publication

Khan Rahi and John Shields, "Left Out of the Labour Market: Visible Minority Immigrant Youth Experiences with Employment Exclusion in Toronto". To be submitted to the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

Employment Opportunities

In total three graduate students and one community researcher were employed from the resources of this project. They received training in the areas of literature search and review, focus group and community meeting facilitation, transcript preparation and qualitative analysis, and report writing.

Budget/Expenses

Graduate Student Researchers C Literature Reviews C	30 hours x \$20 = \$	600.00
Graduate Student Focus Group Facilitators C Training Time and Facilitation	65 hours x 20 =	1,300.00
Focus Group Expenses: refreshments =		540.00
Transcriptions:	125 hours x \$20 =	2,500.00
Day-long Community Youth Participation Consultation:		
Refreshments: 40 x \$6 =		240.00
Lunch: 40 x \$15 =		600.00
Student/Community Facilitators and Note Takers: 8 hours x 3 x \$20 =		480.00
Transportation: TTC tickets =		360.00
Student Transportation (TTC) (focus group sessions ad community forum) =		40.00
Graduate Student Research Assistants (coding data and assistance in research analysis) C 350 hours x \$20 =		7,000.00
Communication Costs (mailings, poster reproductions, phone calls, etc.) =		500.00
Purchase of Reports, Books and Electronic Equipment for Focus Group Recording =		350.00
Total Expenses =		\$14,510.00

Other Sources of Funding:

Ryerson University contributed an addition \$4,200.00 in which we were able to hire another graduate student to assist in the coding of transcripts and other related research activities on this project.

Access Action Council through the **City of Toronto Access and Equity Grants Program** provided an additional \$6,000 in funding in support of this project (this support the payment of community researchers, stipends for focus group participants, and related costs).

List of Additional Appended Documents

Appendix A: Ryerson University Ethic Review Report	Pg. 3
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form	Pg. 2
Appendix C: Summary of Immigrant/Refugee Youth Participant Survey	Pg. 6
Appendix D: Thematic Survey of Focus Group Responses	Pg. 15

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