

Research in Focus

Adapting to the Ontario Labour Market: A Critical Assessment of the Role of Family in the Labour Market Integration of Immigrants.

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ABSTRACT

For more than a decade, academic research has pointed out that economic class immigrants in Canada experience significant levels of underemployment. Studies in Canada, however, have tended to ignore the role of the family in the process of immigrant labour market integration. The purpose of this research is to study the labour trajectory of immigrant families highlighting their experiences with barriers to finding employment, their strategies for overcoming these barriers, and how their family story interacts with this process. Also, this study sheds light on immigrants' experiences with employment services and it includes the perception of service providers about economic class immigrants' integration into the Canadian labour market. A qualitative study of economic class immigrants and their families was utilized employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups in order to examine their experiences with the labour market in the Great Toronto Area.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Lack of Canadian experience was identified as the most significant barrier to integrate into the Canadian labour market
- Volunteering and pursuing further education in Canadian institutions were the main strategies used by participants in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market.
- The participants' strategies for integrating into the labour market rely heavily on their family's support, making the overall process a family affair.
- The vast majority of the research participants were underemployed, but female newcomers experienced greater risks for unemployment as well as underemployment.
- Despite the efforts of service providers to support the integration of economic class immigrants into their professional fields in Canada, this has met with limited success. Those who do gain employment in their related fields are generally not using their full skill sets and are in part-time and/or non permanent jobs.
- Spending the family savings was the main source of anxiety among the research participants. The consequences of spending the family savings before securing sustaining employment includes the threat of return migration and family separation.
- Immigrant families shared a common feeling of downward social mobility and a high level of frustration with the lack of professional employment opportunities in Canada.
- The experience of unemployment and underemployment resulted in periods of depression among some of the participants, some quite serious.
- Lack of affordable daycare was the most significant barrier for women to effectively pursue a professional career in Canada. This has had significant negative impacts on the well-being of all immigrant family members.

FINDINGS (OPTIONAL)

(See highlight above)

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative study using 46 semi-structure interviews and 2 focus groups with economic class immigrants and service providers. Transcripts underwent a descriptive phase of coding, in order to identify the broad themes discussed by participants.

IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of important implications from the research findings of this study including:

First, the high level of underemployment experienced by research participants suggests a significant level of marginalization in the Canadian labour market by immigrants with transferable technical skills. This contradicts assumptions that economic class immigrants in fields such as information technology (IT) and other technical professions currently in demand by Canadian employers offer immigrants with readily accessible opportunities for skill-commensurate employment.

Second, the disconnect between the employment services provided to newcomers and their often weak employment outcomes sheds light on the broader systemic problems regarding the settlement needs of highly educated economic class immigrants. Our research findings highlight the particular value of bridge training programs and professionally-oriented training workshops.

Third, the high levels of underemployment and unemployment experienced by participants, especially women, points to the problem of labour market exclusion. This issue needs to be address with urgency in order to avoid the further marginalization of this vulnerable group. In this regard, practical steps to support immigrants, especially women, such as providing them with subsidies for daycare services should be considered a priority.

Fourth, the problems identified by our participants associated with the spending of family economic resources sheds important light on the fragile family economy of economic class immigrants. Additionally, settlement supports should be in place to reduce the drain on immigrant savings needed to support the protracted process of full labour market integration.

Fifth, the very high levels of stress, frustration, and depression experienced by the research participants highlight the need for providing further mental help support for economic class immigrants and their families going though the process of finding employment.

**Adapting to the Ontario Labour Market: A Critical
Assessment of the Role of Family in the Labour Market
Integration of Immigrants**

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Abstract

For more than a decade, academic research has pointed out that economic class immigrants in Canada experience significant levels of underemployment. Studies in Canada, however, have tended to ignore the role of the family in the process of immigrant labour market integration. The purpose of this research is to study the labour trajectory of immigrant families highlighting their experiences with barriers to finding employment, their strategies for overcoming these barriers, and how their family story interacts with this process. Also, this study sheds light on immigrants' experiences with employment services and it includes the perception of service providers about economic class immigrants' integration into the Canadian labour market. A qualitative study of economic class immigrants and their families was utilized employing semi-structured interviews and focus groups in order to examine their experiences with the labour market in the Great Toronto Area.

Key Words: economic class immigrants, labour market integration, family lens, Canadian experience, employment supports, stress

Note: This research comes out of a larger project entitled *Integration Trajectories of Immigrant Families*. This bigger project has been funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and is led by the Principle Investigator Dr. Harald Bauder, Director of the Masters' Program in Immigration and Settlement at Ryerson University.

Introduction

Immigrants and foreign-born workers now form a substantial part of the labour force in Ontario. In fact, immigrant labour is the only source of labour market stability, and possible expansion, as the Canadian and Ontario labour markets rapidly ages (Canada Press 2014). Consequently, immigrants are critical to Ontario's future not just because of their contribution to labour power and pending skill shortages but also as tax payers who can help sustain the intergenerational social security net (Meier and Werding 2014). The immigrant integration process is closely linked with labour outcomes. Employment is in fact a critical dimension of immigrants' well-being: positive employment experiences can fast-track the settlement and integration process, while unsuccessful participation in the labour market can disrupt that trajectory (Bauder, 2006; Samers, 2010).

The scholarly literature has demonstrated the extent of labour market penalties experienced by immigrants during their integration phase (Bauder, 2006). A growing proportion have had to resort to survival jobs for longer periods, and this is more acute for racialized immigrants (Gottfried et. Al, 2016; Duleep, Orcutt and Dowhan, 2008). To overcome this human capital depreciation, many immigrants try to boost their employability by investing in training and bridging programs, or through additional postsecondary education. But these attempts do not always compensate for the "lack of Canadian experience" (Shields et. al, 2010). This situation raises the question whether credential enhancement attempts indeed result in successful labour market outcomes or whether immigrants continue to experience structural exclusion on the basis of such

factors as race/ethnicity and language differences. The failure to find skills commensurate job matches for immigrants results in billions of dollars of lost income, lost skills and lost financial contributions to the Canadian/Ontario economy each year – it constitutes a massive brain waste (Reitz, Curtis and Elrick, 2014). This is harmful to both immigrant families, and to the Ontario economy at large.

A significant gap in the literature is the place of the family in immigrants' labour market adaptation strategy and trajectories. Indeed, there is a lack of attention given to the family's role, in part due to public discourse that constructs families as economic burdens rather than viewing them as social supports and economic assets in labour market attachment and success (Root et al. 2014; Neborak 2013). The reality is that for the most part immigrants come to Canada not as individuals but as family units. Their integration into Canadian society, including the labour market, takes place within a larger family context. There is a need for a family lens (a family centred approach) regarding the immigrant integration process and the policy and service framework that has been used to address this issue. To address this gap, research must examine how the members of immigrant families access and integrate within the labour market with attention to employment fields, educational credentials, and the influence of gender roles in this process.

This research project builds on qualitative data gathered through a series of 46 in-depth semi-structured interviews, exploring the integration trajectories of 23 economic class immigrant families from 14 countries. These families reside in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and have been in Canada between five to ten years. The interview participants have shared their experience from both a labour outcome and family

integration perspective (see approach and methods to follow). It also employs the use of two focus groups, one made up of 8 economic class newcomers, primarily of professional backgrounds (all who have been in Canada for over a year and most in excess of two years), and a second group composed of non-profit immigrant employment service providers. These experiences speak to the relevance of employment services that are currently offered by settlement organizations in the GTA as well as the strategies they have pursued to improve the economic outcomes of individual immigrant newcomers and their families. The immigrant employment service workers also reflect on the role of the immigrant family in relation to labour market integration.

Using the Family Lens

To emphasize the contribution of the family to the economy is to recognize only half of a complex two-way exchange. The family and the formal economy are part of the same system; neither can exist apart from the other. What happens in one affects what happens in the other (Skolnick, 2005: 4).

Families are commonly symbolically recognized by policymakers, employers and others as vital for society but this is usually cast as a private matter, lying outside the values of competitive market society. Policymakers and service providers are often uninformed about how issues, the labour market and the construction of policies and programs impact families, yet families remain vitally important for individual outcomes related to such issues as immigrant integration and immigrant labour market success. As noted by Bogenschneider, Little and Ooms (2012):

Families create, nurture and sustain society's present and future human and social capital.

...

It is one thing to endorse the importance of families to a strong and vital society. It is quite another to act on the growing evidence on the value of family support and to systematically place families at the centre of policy and practice” (1).

Bogenschneider, Little, Ooms, Benning, Cadigan, & Corbett (2012) argue that it is necessary to “place families at the center of policy and practice” (515). The family impact lens offers a perspective in which family is the priority, recognizing the worth of family for, “study, investment, partnership, and political action” (514).

Bogenschneider et al. (2012) observe that policy and programs are often both developed and analysed from an individualistic lens, excluding the significance of the families that individuals belong to. According to Friese & Bogenschneider (2009) this is problematic because policymakers are then uninformed about the issues affecting families, whereas vulnerable families are often the families most likely to be effected by policymaking.

Significantly, the Family Impact Institute (2012) advocates for both the development and evaluation of programing that considers the needs of service users within their familial context. This includes considering the impact of family and roles within the family even when services are directed towards the individual (Day, Gavazzi, Miller, van Langeveld, 2009). The functioning of the individual is impacted by their role within their familial context; hence individual needs cannot be separated from it (The Family Impact Institute, 2012). For example, while language services are provided to the individual, a woman who is attending a language class may require childcare; consequently, her role as a primary care provider in the family is an important consideration if she is to effectively access this service.

The family impact lens moves away from focusing on the individual to, “relationships between two or more persons tied together by blood, legal bonds, or the joint performance of family function” (Bogenschneider et al., 2012: 517). The definition of family is important from this perspective, and requires flexibility in how the family is conceptualized. The family impact lens takes the position that there is no one single definition of family; rather “the definition will vary depending on the context and purpose” (Bogenschneider et al., 2012: 518). The definition of family is categorized as, a) structural, family membership that is based on biological, or legal ties, or b) functional, organized around the different functions that family members perform, such as childcare and sharing economic resources (Bogenschneider et al., 2012).

In the case of immigrant settlement, outcomes are also traditionally evaluated from an individual perspective, often focusing on individual labour market participation and language acquisition (VanderPlaat, 2007). However, literature is beginning to increasingly demonstrate that family plays a central role in the settlement experience and is therefore worthy of study as a unit of analysis (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; VanderPlaat, 2006). Leigh (2015) argues that for the recognition of the family as a unit of analysis, researchers must, “demystify the dominant ideal of the “autonomous” or unattached economic migrant in Canadian immigration literature and policy by demonstrating the centrality of families” (1067). Settlement decision-making is influenced by the prioritization of needs in the family, for example immigrant women will often prioritize their children’s education before their own career aspirations (Leigh, 2015). In a study of skilled immigrants in Alberta, Canada, Leight (2015) demonstrates that there are multiple reasons that newcomers take certain settlement trajectories, both in work and family re-

structuring, concluding that those things are over-looked using an individual lens of analysis. Placing the family at the center of analysis allows for the opportunity to determine how settlement strategies are developed in the context of the family household and, therefore, how that influences settlement trajectories (Creese, Dych, McLaren, 2008).

In this report we explore the multiple dimensions of opportunities and challenges that will shed light on how these immigrant families have adapted to the labour market in Ontario and explore their economic outcomes. The research also addresses the structure of family self-help support systems that enable skilled immigrants to adapt to the labour market. Central research questions include: 1) What strategies do immigrant families currently use to overcome barriers and integrate into the labour market? 2) What are the family dynamics used in this process? 3) How do immigrant families experience the struggle to integrate economically; and, 4) How can the delivery of employment programs and services be improved in order to meet the needs of immigrant families?

This analysis will help us to inform policy in terms of issues like labour market access, understand the barriers that currently exist for a family as a unit, as well as the strategies that can be used to overcome these barriers. The study therefore highlights the experiences of immigrants who used employment services, their employment outcomes, their family circumstances and interaction in this process, the consequences of these choices on the family's short and long-term integration, and the family members' evaluation of these journeys. It will also examine the perception and vision of settlement organizations staff who deliver employment programs and services. Finally, the project will yield grounded policy recommendations rooted in the “lived experiences” of

research participants on improving the labour market integration for immigrant families as a unit as well as for individual immigrant newcomers. These recommendations can be used to improve labour market programs, policies, and service delivery.

Although this approach is not aimed at getting research results that are generalizable to the entire population of immigrant families in Canada, it will provide an in-depth understanding of the integration process of immigrant families in the labour market and unveil systemic problems as well as offer potential solutions.

Approach and Methods

Research Design and Recruitment

This empirical qualitative research was conducted under a family-centred framework that considered the whole migrating family as the unit of analysis. Immigrant settlement outcomes—that is how they fare economically and socially at adapting to Canadian society, and as part of the long-term process of integration that involves both the receiving community and the immigrants settling—are usually studied and reported at the individual level. In other words, current policy evaluation metrics tend to look at immigrants through a lens that reduces them to potential individual workers. These, in turn, are expected to integrate into the labour market, thanks to sufficient levels of education and work experience, the transferability of their skills, and their capacity to adapt to a different labour and hiring culture. ‘Desirable immigrants’ are therefore easily construed as individuals that are up and running upon landing; that is, capable of finding a job and earning their own way. Family is often seen in that narrow logic as a necessary weight to ensure the well-being of skilled workers and their retention, for instance, rather than as an active driver facilitating adaptation and integration to society. More than an opportunity in disguise, the Ryerson University-based research project and team¹ considered the family structure as contributing to the whole process of adapting to a new

¹ This project is part of a larger Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded research project led by Dr. Harald Bauder (Principle Investigator), Director of the Masters’ Program in Immigration and Settlement at Ryerson University. The title of this larger project is *Integration Trajectories of Immigrant Families*. It is a research partnership between academic researchers and community partners is spearheaded by the Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement (RCIS). The overarching goal of the partnership is to explore the role families play in the integration trajectories of immigrants.

For further details see: http://www.ryerson.ca/immigrant_families/

cultural, social and economic environment. Starting from the nuclear family structure and expanding to a broader web of relationships, as family ties and traditional roles are being redefined through the settlement process, each member of the family unit—spouses, children, relatives, close friends—have been considered as working closely together to benefit everyone’s integration path. This project draws on this ongoing work.

To guide the research, a broad question inquired whether families helped or hindered immigrant integration, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area, from where all participants were chosen. Data collection was then carried out through semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants asked to speak about their own migration and settlement trajectory, and that of their nuclear family, where it existed. Respondents were offered the chance to participate individually or with the family members of their choice. In total, 28 individuals representing 23 distinct family units were involved in the interview series which unfolded in two meetings. The first was used to gather demographic and socioeconomic information, initiate memory recall with questions about migration, landing, and the settlement process (including labour market integration), and to draw a sociogram of their current family configuration as they seemed fit. The second allowed delving further into the relationships they had outlined including their roles in the settlement process. More questions pointed to the involvement of family members, relatives and friends—either present in the receiving community or living abroad—their reliance on settlement and employment services, other social and economic supports, and the state of their social network, pre- and post-migration. Time was given to expand on their own individual and family challenges, for instance, regarding job search and credential recognition, training strategies, spouse and child relationships, their social

network and support system, and adaptation to Canadian culture, environment, and labour market. Ultimately, they were invited to share advice to future immigrants and to suggest policy alignments that would concur with their vision of a successful settlement.

Immigrant-serving organizations from different sectors of the GTA, as partners of the university-community alliance guiding the project, disseminated flyers throughout their networks, which helped recruit most of the participants. Volunteering participants had to correspond to the three following criteria:

- 1) having acquired permanent residence through one of the five streams of the Economic Class (this was before the Express-Entry program)—Skilled-Workers Program, Canadian Experienced Class, Provincial Nominee Program, Business/Investor Program or self-employed, and Live-in Caregivers Program;
- 2) having initiated the settlement process five to ten years before the interview—to be able to step back and reflect on the process with more emotional distance and a broader lens than recently landed immigrants; and,
- 3) being able to conduct an interview in English—(this requirement was added due to the financial feasibility of the data collection, data process and analysis on our part).

No restrictions were imposed regarding the family configuration of participants, who could be single, have met a partner since landed, or migrated with their family as a whole, or through stages, for example, one parent landing in advance to prepare the way for the others. As an incentive, respondents were offered a \$50 grocery gift card prior to

each interview given, and told they could keep it even if they would not carry forward with the interview and would withdraw their consent.

Sample Characteristics

The total turnout was of 24 adult participants, with ages ranging from 31 to 61 at the time of the interviews, and four adolescents aged 14 to 18—these youths participated with one of their parents in group interviews. Respondents originated from 13 countries located on five continents, of which only two came from Europe. To give an idea of the source regions, five participants originated from East Asia, seven from South Asia, and six from the Middle East. The rest were divided between Africa, South America and the Caribbean. The corresponding family units were well spread out in the GTA, which speaks to the range of community partners involved. Various districts in Toronto Centre were represented, as well as Scarborough and Eastern Toronto, Thornhill, Richmond Hill and North York, and finally Etobicoke, Mississauga, up to Oakville to the west.

This convenience sample was highly racially and ethnically diverse, which approximates the reality of recent immigration waves in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), 60 percent of the immigrant population in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Agglomeration was born elsewhere than in Europe and the United States. Looking at the more recent immigrant

population, that is, those landed between 2006 and 2011, 86 percent² were not born in Western countries.

Women represented 18 of the participants, or 64 percent, including three of the teenagers. That proportion drops to 55 percent if we do not count the youths. Most of the principal applicants in the family units interviewed were admitted through the Skilled-Workers Program, hence 21 out of the 23, or 91 percent. One came with the Live-in Caregivers Program and could apply for permanent residence during the stay. Another arrived initially as an International Student, completed training and signed a work contract. This enabled the applicant to obtain permanent residence through the Canadian Experience Class.

Foreign credentials among sampled participants were overwhelmingly high. At least one of the spouses, usually the principal applicant, had completed a bachelor's degree at a university in their country of origin. Additionally, eleven brought a Masters' degree/diploma, and three had achieved a PhD-level degree, two of which were from schools in Europe and Russia. This high level of education correlates with a middle to middle-high class economic status in their source country. These families were not fleeing a situation of poverty but in many cases their motive to move to Canada was expressed in terms of offering their family a more secure environment, more freedom and an affordable world-class education.

² Drawn from Statistics Canada Tables, NHS Profile, Toronto, CMA, Ontario, 2011. These are the most recent figures currently available regarding the immigrant population. Future data releases from the 2016 census are scheduled for October 2017.

The level of human capital observed did not translate in employment commensurate with education levels or pre-migration positions. Only five participants were able to report on a job in their professional domain, or closely related to it, at the time of interviews. Seven were looking for employment during the period of interviews, and were often involved in additional training, either professionally, so as to repurpose themselves vocationally, or simply to enhance their language skills. The rest, that is, eleven, were engaged in employment that ensured financial stability, but at the cost of downsizing their own professional expectations and lifestyle.

Analysis of Interview Data

All 46 interviews—two per family unit—were recorded, with consent, and then transcribed. In total 32:46 hours of interviews took place; resulting in 769 pages (269,000) words of anonymized interview transcripts. Transcripts underwent a descriptive phase of coding, in order to identify the broad themes discussed by participants. Drawing mainly on the identified segments related to education, language, occupation, and policy, a second phase of coding was performed to refine themes associated with professional training, job search and current employment outcomes. In the work for this project the coding for the themes related to labour market integration were broken down/refined further for more in depth analysis.

The following is the detailed interviews coding scheme breakdown:

Detailed Coding Scheme for Interviews

1. Employment

- A. Full time (professional field/skilled)
 - i. temporary contract
 - ii. permanent
- B. Part time (professional field/skilled)
- C. Entrepreneurship
- D. Labour Trajectory

2. Unemployment

- A. Family Responsibilities
 - i. Children
 - ii. Pregnancy
- B. Studying full time
- C. Depression/Melancholy
- D. Overqualified
- E. Accreditations
- F. Laid off

3. Underemployment

- A. Unskilled
- B. Skilled
- C. Provisional
- D. Deskilled
- E. Multiple Jobs
- F. Social Stigma
- G. Part-time
- D. Labour Trajectory

4. Employment Strategies

- A. Volunteer
 - i. Positive Experience
 - ii. Negative Experience
 - iii. Cost of Volunteering
 - iv. Intergenerational
- B. Education
 - i. College Degree/Certificate
 - ii. University Degree
 - iii. High School
 - iv. English
- C. Professional Accreditations
- D. Employment Companies/ Head Hunters

5. Support

- A. Relatives/Friends

- B. Organizations/Programs
 - i. Positive Experience
 - ii. Negative Experience

6. Family Dynamics

- A. Stress
- B. Family Separation
 - i. Spouse-Return Migration
 - ii. Preparing the way
- C. Children
- D. Financial Insecurity
- E. Downward Social Mobility
- F. Upward Social Mobility
- G. Willing to Move
- H. Spending Family Savings
- I. Socializing
- J. Disagreements/Family Tensions
- K. Family Separation
- L. Supporting Family Back Home
- M. Family Working Together

7. Barriers

- A. Canadian Experience
- B. Language Proficiency
- C. Credentials
- D. Age
- E. Cultural

8. Recommendations

- A. Policy
- B. Practices
- C. Personal

9. Attitude Towards Employment

- A. Realistic Expectations
- B. Low Expectations
- C. Adaptability
- D. Country Comparison

The Focus Groups

In addition to the interview data gathered we conducted two focus groups drawn within the Greater Toronto Area. The focus groups were an opportunity, within a group setting, to explore more deeply the labour market experiences and perspectives of immigrant newcomers and the role that families played in this process. Recruitment was done through outreach and advertisement with non-profit employment agencies in Toronto. A semi-structured interview guide was used to focus the discussions which were recorded on tape. All participants signed consent forms and received \$20 cash or gift card and 2 TTC tokens as appreciation for the willingness to share their time and experiences. This process was approved by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board.

Two groups were identified as subjects for the focus groups. First was a group of economic immigrants to Canada who have been enrolled in employment programming in Toronto. There were 8 individuals who took part in this focus group. They all had advanced education, foreign work experience and professional or semi-professional training. All had been in Canada for over a year, with most having greater than two years of residency. This was a diverse group of individuals from a number of countries from the global south. There was an even gender balance in the group. Most joined or arrived with family members. One had no family relations in Canada.

The focus group with non-profit immigrant employment service providers consisted of 7 individuals. They ranged from frontline workers to senior managers. They had experience working for a broad range of immigrant settlement and employment agencies over many years. This group was racially and ethnically diverse and many of them were immigrants themselves. There were 6 females and 1 male in the group. The

demographic background of this group was broadly reflective of the non-profit labour force who work with immigrant populations.

In total for the two the focus groups we recorded over 3 hours of discussion. This resulted in 32 pages of single spaced transcripts of 18,866 words. Each of the transcripts were coded to identify key themes.

See coding schemes below:

Coding Scheme for Economic Class Focus Group

1. Employment

- A. Full time (professional field/skilled)
 - i. temporary contract
 - ii. permanent
- B. Part time (professional field/skilled)
- C. Entrepreneurship
 - i. Positive Experience
 - ii. Negative Experience
- D. Labour Trajectory

2. Unemployment

- A. Family Responsibilities
 - i. Children
 - ii. Pregnancy
- B. Studying full time
- C. Depression/Melancholy
- D. Overqualified
- E. Accreditations
- F. Laid off
- G. Frustration

3. Underemployment

- A. Unskilled
- B. Skilled
- C. Provisional
- D. Deskilled
- E. Multiple Jobs
- F. Social Stigma
- G. Part-time
- D. Labour Trajectory
- H. Frustration

4. Employment Strategies

- A. Volunteer
 - i. Positive Experience
 - ii. Negative Experience
 - iii. Cost of Volunteering
 - iv. Intergenerational
- B. Education
 - i. College Degree/Certificate
 - ii. University Degree/Certificate
 - iii. High School
 - iv. English
- C. Professional Accreditations
- D. Employment Companies/ Head Hunters
- E. Networking

5. Support

- A. Relatives/Friends
- B. Organizations/Programs
 - i. Positive Experience
 - ii. Negative Experience
- C. Lack of Support

6. Family Dynamics

- A. Stress
- B. Family Separation
 - i. Spouse-Return Migration
 - ii. Preparing the way
- C. Children
- D. Financial Insecurity
- E. Downward Social Mobility
- F. Upward Social Mobility
- G. Willing to Move
- H. Spending Family Saving
- I. Socializing

- J. Disagreements/Family Tensions
- K. Family Separation
- L. Supporting Family Back Home
- M. Family Working Together
- N. Divorce

7. Barriers

- A. Canadian Experience
- B. Language Proficiency
- C. Credentials
- D. Age
- E. Cultural
- F. Lack of Networks
- G. Lack of Canadian Citizenship

8. Recommendations

- A. Policy
- B. Practices
- C. Personal
- D. Services

9. Attitude Towards Employment

- A. Realistic Expectations
- B. Low Expectations
- C. Adaptability
- D. Country Comparison
- E. Felling of frustration

10. Professional Background

Coding Scheme for Immigrant Employment Service Providers

1. Immigrant Priorities

- A. Employment
- B. School for Children
- C. Daycare
- D. Housing

2. Immigrant Employment Services

- A. Prior to Arrival

- B. Family Inclusive
- C. Family Exclusive
- D. Female Inclusive
- E. Male Dominated
- F. Employer Focus
- G. Best Practices
 - i. Networking Opportunities
 - ii. Cultural Training
 - iii. Partnerships
 - iv. Flexibility and Adaptability
 - v. Innovation
- H. Not Utilized
- I. Flexibility
- J. Recommendations

3. Barriers

- A. Lack of Funding
- B. Social Intolerance
- C. Regulated Professions
- E. Housing
- F. Daycare
- G. Language Proficiency
- H. Gender

4. Family Dynamics

- A. Stress
- B. Children
- D. Financial Insecurity
- E. Downward Social Mobility
- F. Spending Family Saving
- G. Disagreements/Family Tensions
 - i. Couples
 - ii. Parents and Children
- H. Couples Working Together
- J. Gender Roles
- K. Survival Jobs Due to Family Responsibilities
- I. Family Support

5. Barriers

- A. Accreditations
- B. Cultural
- C. Age
- D. Housing
- E. Daycare
- I. Discrimination in Workplace
 - i. Cultural Intolerance

- J. Regulated Professions
- K. Professions not in Demand

9. Employment Expectations and Readiness

- A. Low Expectations
- B. High Expectations
- C. Adaptability
- D. Willingness to Move

9. Other

- A. Labour Market Opportunities
- B. Social Intolerance
- C. Frustration

The Experience of Immigrant Families Adapting to the Canadian Labour Market

Immigrant families have unique stories of migration and unique experiences integrating into the Canadian labour market. That said the language proficiency and the educational and professional backgrounds of family members are some common factors that influence the process of integration into the Canadian labour market. Also, immigrant families are subject to constant change. Increases in family size, the coming of age of children, and such things as depression affecting spouses due to long periods of unemployment and/or isolation are circumstances that can influence economic migrants' abilities to develop professionally in Canada. While the particularities and changing circumstances of each immigrant family does not allow us to draw representative conclusions, the participants did experience similar systemic barriers in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market, and they used common strategies to overcome these barriers.

The main labour barriers experienced by economic migrants and their families consisted of: 1) their lack of Canadian work experience; 2) the relatively low market value of their professional credentials and international experience; 3) the low English language proficiency of one of the spouses; and 4) their cultural practices for finding employment. Economic migrants develop a pragmatic approach to overcome these barriers, such as pursuing further education in Canadian post-secondary academic institutions, volunteering in local non-for-profit organizations, using employment services, and networking. Also, the majority of economic class immigrants adopted a positive and 'realistic' attitude towards finding professional employment, being open to change careers or work their way up in their professions.

The trajectories of economic migrants adapting to the Canadian labour market were characterized by long periods of unskilled and provisional employment as well as by a significant investment of family savings and family time in both acquiring further education in Canadian institutions and volunteering at local non-for-profit organizations. The lack of well-remunerated employment and the increasing de-capitalization of the family economy often led to growing sense of frustration among principal applicants, periods of depressions within the immigrant family, and a general feeling of downward social mobility among family members.

At the same time, economic class immigrants relied on their family members for support and had access to other mechanism of support beyond the nuclear family. Family relations living in Canada and in their country of origin provided economic migrants and their families with moral and economic support. Also, employment agencies were found to provide economic class immigrants with important guidance and training to access the Canadian labour market and some agencies were able to adapt their services to meet their clients' circumstances, including their family responsibilities. Generally, economic class immigrants had positive experiences receiving specialized employment services but they also had suggestions for improving these services.

The Analysis: Grounded in 'Lived Experiences'

In the following sections of the report we examine various dimensions of this immigrant experience. Employing a grounded approach to our analysis, we let the actual voices of immigrants and non-profit settlement employment workers tell their stories (unveiling their lived experiences, assessments and learnings) about the newcomer employment journey in Canada and the role of, and impact on, the immigrant family in

this process. The analysis flows directly out of these ‘lived lives’. While informed by the academic literature, we used the themes and information which emerged from speaking with immigrant and employment workers to guide and structure the analysis in this report. The voices of our interview and focus group participants uncover a powerful narrative that brings to life the struggles, stresses, strategies, initiatives and the like facing newcomers and their families in their efforts to successfully integrate into the Ontario/Canadian labour market and society.

Barriers and Agents of Support

This section presents the main structural and individual barriers experienced by the research participants and it also highlights the main agents of support available to them. The purpose of this section is to highlight the perspective of economic class immigrants about their struggles to integrate into the Canadian labour market as well as to shed light on the agents of support helping them to deal with these barriers. This section further confirms the prevalence of a lack of Canadian work experience as the main structural barrier experienced by immigrants in Ontario (Shields et.al, 2010) and the persistence of significant labour market disadvantages experienced by newcomers in Canada (Bauder, 2006).

Barriers

- i) *Lack of Canadian Experience*

The research participants identified the lack of Canadian work experience as the most significant barrier for them and their families to access the Canadian labour market. This is despite the fact that most economic class immigrants participating in this research possessed technical skills transferable to Canadian industries such as expertise in Information Technology (IT), engineering, and business management. According to some of the participants specializing in the area of IT, Canadian experience is not necessarily for very technical jobs since, based on their experience, “programming is programming wherever you are and a computer is a computer, wherever it is.” This idea was presented for instance by a participant with a PhD in Information Systems who after being shortlisted for a job as a systems analyst in his field of expertise was informed that his lack of Canadian experience disqualified him for the job.

Lack of Canadian experience pushes economic class immigrants with transferable technical skills to seek employment outside their fields of expertise. For instance, a participant with a Master’s degree in economic management explains: “I did not have so much of what they call Canadian experience [and] a lot of new immigrants, we face this barrier. So I was working for almost a year at a coffee shop first.” Currently, this participant works as a settlement worker in a position in which she does not use her technical skills. Similarly, a data based manager with many years of experience in an American organization in Iraq was able to find a one-year contract as a translator and settlement worker in an Arab community centre but this position was unrelated to her professional expertise and she has not been able to find employment in her profession since her one-year contract expired. Interestingly, our study found that the immigration and settlement fields provide opportunities for economic class immigrants to enter the

Canadian labour market but these are mostly entry-level positions despite the fact that many of them have Masters' degrees and many years of professional experience in their countries of origin.

For some participants in our study, international academic credentials are not perceived as the significant barrier for integrating into the Canadian labour market. Their concern rested with the problem of the lack of Canadian experience. An Iranian professional with M.A in English observed: "They see your Master's degree, they say, okay fine, but they want Canadian experience from us. That's the thing. They don't care what you do, who you are, or what your background is". The perception that lack of Canadian experience is more significant than foreign academic credentials is also echoed by a participant with a graduate degree from Jamaica. She notes: "I have a master's degree and it never came up as an issue, I mean not an obvious one. But certainly the issue of Canadian experience did. I might have had over twenty years of experience in the banking sector at the supervisor and management level that effectively was discounted because there was no Canadian experience. I mean I found that extremely strange but the barrier I found was the Canadian experience, which made absolutely no sense".

Lack of Canadian experience negatively affected economic class immigrants who besides having transferable technical skills also have international careers and university degrees from Canadian and British universities. One of the participants with many years of international experience in the energy sector and a Canadian Masters' degree explains: "I have Masters Degrees and I got a position for a job that is for high school diploma because I had to change my resume because I just don't get interviews. I don't know if it is because I have too much experience, or my work experience is not Canadian and ergo

it has no value. I have worked all over the world so I don't think it is the lack of resume. So that is one very frustrating thing”.

Such a feeling of frustration was common among the research participants, as illustrated by another one of those we interviewed, who besides having sixteen years of international experience in the oil and gas industry and a Masters' degree from a British university, has not been able to find a job in Canada. She explains: “My whole work experience has been overseas outside my home country, under the umbrella of only one company, the leading company in this industry operating in 150 countries, so I have been all over Europe, Africa, and the Middle East assigned to each country for a number of years. I have worked with people from different nationalities, I have reported to them and they have reported to me so I know how to work with colleagues from different cultures and ways of communicating but I haven't been called for a single interview”.

Other economic class immigrants with similar international professional experiences, academic credentials, and language skills echoed the experience of these two participants. In this regard our study confirms findings from the academic literature that lack of Canadian experience is perceived as the main structural barrier to finding employment among economic class immigrants whether these are economic class immigrants who have technical expertise transferable to the Canadian industries, and/or graduate degrees and managerial experience acquired in their country of origin, and/or successful international careers as well as graduate degrees from Canadian or British universities.

Our study found that service providers in the field of employment are currently engaged in changing the perception of newcomers in regards to Canadian experience as a

structural barrier that determines their employment prospects. A service provider working with newcomers in a bridge training program contends that the idea of Canadian experience as an overwhelming barrier has been prevalent in the past but the attitude of Canadian employers is now changing. As a result, she currently advises her clients that: “Canadian employers really value non-Canadian experience” and that “in the highly globalized world we are living in your experience in the field of technology and IT is really valuable here depending on how you demonstrate that”. Similarly, another service provider explains that in her previous experience working with immigrants in the field of employment it was assumed that lack of Canadian experience placed immigrants at a significant disadvantage. Based on her experience with the bridge training programs however, she has changed her previous assumptions and now tells her clients that “they do not have to start working at several levels lower of where they were before coming to Canada” and explains to them how “many of her clients who have gone through the bridging programs have had such swell jobs”. While the perception of economic class immigrants on how their lack of Canadian experience significantly limits their career prospects seems to differ from the perception of service providers, it is important to point out that the objective of service providers is to help their clients with the necessary tools to overcome labour barriers and change counterproductive practices such as “taking their graduate education and/or exclude their managerial experience from their CVs”, which further reduce their chances to pursue careers in their professions.

Bridge training programs are designed to support newcomers to access work in their professions and based on our discussion with service providers, these programs are an effective way to introduce a counterweight to the lack of Canadian experience. At the

same time, the effectiveness of bridge training programs and other services that aim to integrate skilled newcomers into the Canadian labour market also depends on immigrants' areas of expertise. Based on our discussion with service providers, immigrants in more technical professions are able to integrate more easily to the Canadian labour market than immigrants "who have been working in the arts, culture, or marketing". Service providers agreed that immigrants who have experience in regulated occupations "still have a very limited chance" to practice their professions in Canada. One of the participants explains that newcomers with experience in areas such as IT, engineering, finances, and accounting are able to adapt to the Canadian labour market because "those types of professions have the same principles, math is math, physics is physics, and it does not matter where you did them". Also, this service provider explained that immigrants working in areas related to computer technology are able to integrate into the labour market because they come from "places in the world that are [technologically] more advanced than Canada and North American employers are looking for people coming from those parts of the world because they bring the right [technical] experience." In this regard, country of origin and area of expertise can be factors that influence significantly the ability of immigrants to integrate into the Canadian labour market.

ii) Language Barriers

Based on our study, most economic class immigrants who came as principal applicants were confident in their ability to communicate and work in English. At the same time, the spouses of principal applicants often did not have the same level of

English proficiency, which became a significant barrier for finding employment. For example, a participant who has an M.A in English literature had recently found employment while the job prospects of his wife, also an experienced professional, have been much more limited due to her lower level of English. He explains: “She was working back home. It is difficult for somebody who has worked for 13 or 14 years to basically just sit at home and do nothing. So I told her— you have to improve your English, you have to get your English to a certain level and then you can start sending out resumes and take it from there”. This participant’s support for his wife to study English is an example of how couples worked together to overcome important barriers, but it is also indicative of the difficult position economic class immigrants find themselves in their efforts to integrate into the labour market as a family.

Our study found that the low English proficiency of one of the spouses is a significant barrier for immigrant families to access educational programs and to fully benefit from employment services. Immigrant couples who had difficulties finding employment often decided to pursue further studies in order to improve their employment prospects but the different levels of English proficiency between spouses makes it difficult for both to enroll in their desired academic programs. One of the participants observed: “I wanted to get a doctoral degree but I did not figure out I had that [much] of a problem with my English. My husband studied in Australia, so he can speak English very well but in my case I just studied English in middle school and high school. So I could not speak [that well]”. This participant has a Masters’ degree from her country of origin but her level of English was an obstacle for her to progress academically in Canada. Similarly, another participant with a Masters’ degree found that her low level of English

proficiency did not allow her to benefit from employment services. She explains: “they offered me some facilities, workshops, etc... but because I did not know English well, I could not get them”. According to this participant, the language barrier is the most significant obstacle to employment for immigrants.

In addition to the practical limitations of having low English proficiency there is a challenging personal dimension to the process of learning English as a second language, which can be both frustrating and emotionally tiring for economic class immigrants. For instance, an experienced professional from South Korea has problems with her ability to speak English and she deeply worries about her ability “to find any job”. She shares her frustration with her level of English as well as her experience being an ESL student: “I cannot communicate with a person, so really I had to be living for a long time with my tears. When I went for ESL classes, every day in the morning, I was crying. I want to go back to Korea because there I was a professor. Now I am an ESL student and I do not want to go there. It was a real bad time, it was very hard for me.” Clearly, becoming an ESL student can be a very challenging process for economic class immigrants as many had worked as professionals before coming to Canada. Such personal struggles add a level of complexity for immigrant families already trying to adjust to a new culture and society in Canada.

iii) Cultural Barriers

Our study found a number of cultural practices affecting the ability of economic class immigrants to finding employment. A number of the research participants come from countries in which modesty is an important cultural value so it may be difficult for

them to highlight their professional qualities or to advertise themselves as potentially important assets to employers. The dominance of such cultural norms among many economic class newcomers makes it difficult for them to adopt common Canadian practices for finding employment such as personal branding, or marketing oneself to employers. For instance, one of the research participants explains her difficulties with the idea of marketing herself to employers, stating: “trying to sell yourself to the job market... it is totally different from my culture. To be modest in my country ... is very important. Even someone who is knowledgeable should not say that about himself, should not boast”. Similarly, networking can be a very foreign practice for economic class immigrants coming from countries where ideas of privacy differ from those in Canada. One of the participants explained: “one day someone was giving me a lecture on networking and I was telling this person you don’t know how difficult to understand that concept is to me. If some random person calls me and tells me he wants to have coffee with me I will hang up and then call the police because wherever you may be from that could be incredibly invasive.” In short, there are cultural differences that can negatively impact immigrants’ search for employment.

Service providers who took part in this study were well aware of how some cultural practices can place immigrants at a disadvantage. For example, one pointed out that a significant number of economic class immigrants are not used to making direct eye contact when talking to people, which in Canada can be perceived as a lack of confidence. She comments: “Back in the countries where most of us come from if you are talking to a person doing direct eye contact is considered to be very rude. I never talked to my father and looked at him in the eyes, I would put my head down. But in Canada if

you do not look at people in the eyes they think this person is not paying attention to me, as if I am not interested”. Such a cultural differences can affect the success economic class immigrants have during job interviews. For this reason, service providers also provide immigrants with practical cultural training.

Moreover, our study found that service providers find it challenging to effectively help immigrants to overcome some cultural barriers in order to succeed in job interviews. One of our participants working in a bridging program noted: “just imagine, if a person is 45 years old and all his life he has had all these [cultural] characteristics, but he wants to stay here and find a job [so] he has to change everything. Some of them are very quiet, they have a passive personality but they have great skills and work experience. We tell them when you go to the interview you have to sell yourself, you have to sell your image, and they say I can’t, and I say can you fake it, at least during the interview.” In this regard, the age of economic class immigrants also influences their ability to adapt to Canadian work culture, especially if they come from countries in which being quiet and contained is more socially acceptable than being talkative and outspoken.

Service providers participating in our study come from diverse cultural backgrounds and they use their own experiences dealing with the “cultural shock” of having to adjust to the Canadian labour market to help their clients. For instance, a service provider shares with her clients her own struggle with being a very quiet person when she first came to Canada and through her example she tries to boost their confidence. She elaborates: “I realized gradually that being quiet, keeping my thoughts to myself, was not going to take me anywhere. It took a little while for me to come out of that shell and put myself out there, and walk out of my comfort zone and that is

something I tell my clients.” In this regard, some service providers can act as role models to newcomers in order to boost their confidence and eventually overcome some of their personal and cultural barriers. This is indicative of the empathy and commitment most service providers have with newcomers. It is important that many of these service providers come from similar ethnic/racial backgrounds and share some of the same immigrant journeys as those they serve. This brings an authenticity and a deeper understanding of the clients they work with and the practical struggles they encounter in the labour market.

Agents of Support

i) Employment Agencies

Employment agencies provided important guidance for economic class immigrants to update their skills and learn about the Canadian labour market. Research participants used a number of settlement and employment agencies such as Skills for Change and ACCES Employment in order to develop their abilities in job searching, to improve their English proficiency, and to learn practical employment lessons such as interview techniques. Almost all the research participants utilized pre-employment workshops to help them prepare for interviews and update their resumes. Such practical guidance helped many of the participants to improve their chances for employment. For example, an Iranian professional found a permanent job at a bank as a result of one of the interviews he received following improving his resume. He explains: “I did have a resume but they gave me some pointers in terms of change this, and change that. I did it

and it was something that had a good effect. Immediately after that, I received a call from employers wanting to speak to me”.

Moreover, pre-employment workshops were especially important for immigrants with less familiarity with the Canadian labour market. For example, a participant from Bulgaria explained her learning experience in pre-employment workshops: “I did not have any idea of what is this [type of] resume. We do not use this resume writing, job search, and all this. They offered resume, job search, and information [workshops] and people were so kind, so nice. I went to three or four different workshops”. Also, besides the practical guidance immigrants received from pre-employment workshops, some of research participants found that attending these workshops “motivated them, taught them how to keep positive, and to face challenges rather than ignoring them”. In this regard, employment workshops did not only provide valuable guidance for economic class immigrants to navigate through the Canadian labour market but also helped them to develop a positive attitude towards their search for employment.

Our focus group with economic class immigrants revealed the importance of providing adequate support for immigrants to develop professional contacts and networking opportunities. An IT specialist from India explains how such a specialized employment program helped him to find a paid internship: “I finished my [agency name] program in April 2017 and last week I got an internship offer through a website called CareerNet, I got to know about them through [this non-profit agency]. This organization has provided me with so many opportunities because it connects you with other organizations, big banks, leaders in industries and through this I got to know how the market place works here and what companies are looking for.” Similarly, another

participant from India who also specializes in IT found a job after finishing a program in the same employment agency and spending five months of active job searching and networking. He notes: “I found [the agency] and I went through the leadership program, which showed me [how] to communicate more properly. Through some contacts, the friend of a friend, the contact of some contacts I got a job. I think I had 80 coffees and I don’t drink coffees, which resulted in three interviews of which I received two offers and I took one.” The support they received from non-profit employment agency helped both of these economic class immigrants to find entry-level positions in their fields and they hoped these opportunities would help them to “put a foot in the door” of their profession in Canada.

At the same time, not all the participants who went through specialized employment programs had positive outcomes. For example, an engineer from Iran shared with us that even though she had a positive learning experience taking part of a specialized employment program she has been unable to find employment. She observes: “I did [the agency’s] engineering connections in January, which was great because they opened my eyes to PMPs and PMGs and I had lots of individual discussions of things that I could do with my educational and professional background and where I have to target. But despite this and despite all the help I have had so far, I have not been called not even for a single interview and I would consider myself as they say here in [name of the agency] to be job ready”. Other economic class immigrants who are currently participating in specialized employment programs also shared the frustration of this participant in not having found employment.

A participant from Iran who was a senior administrator in the field of IT for more than sixteen years, despite many efforts, “has not been able to find a job, even at the intermediate level or at the entry level or even as a technician”. Likewise, a participant from Iraq with management experience in the field of IT has not been able to find an “entry-level position in that field”. Both of these participants have children and the specialized programs they are currently enrolled are their last hope to find much needed employment necessary to support their families.

ii) Relatives and Friends

Based on our research we found that a significant number of economic class immigrants can rely on relatives already living in Canada for initial guidance and connections. For instance, a clinical psychologist from Bangladesh outlines his experience with his relatives: “When we came here, my wife's side, basically she had a lot of relatives here. This initially helped us a lot. They have given us information about jobs, what jobs we can do, how we can study further. So we got a lot of information but we did not get any specific information for my education level on where I could go, they probably did not know”. Similarly, an economic class immigrant from Sri Lanka received initial guidance from his relatives living in Canada but their advice was not necessarily helpful as they were based on his relatives’ work experience in non-professional jobs. As he observed: “The family, the uncle and aunt, they are not in high professional jobs. And it was a daunting task on them to refer me to places where I could get the job in my own field. And one thing that most people kept telling me was not to expect to get the same job you did, in Canada. Like almost every person in the circle I knew. My family kept

telling me that. They said you have to be able to work like in a coffee shop, and you know, do all those things, which is fine with me. Like if I need to survive, I will do those things”. In this regard, while economic class immigrants can receive initial support and guidance from their relatives living in Canada, their employment guidance tends to be unrelated to their specific professional fields.

Moreover, a small number of research participants was able to benefit from some of their relatives’ contacts. For example, an IT specialist from India was referred by a friend of his relatives to an organization in which he was able to get a job. He observes: “I found a job based on my skills. I got it through a reference from a family friend. I face a couple of interviews, and then they call me up one evening that you are hired, and that from tomorrow morning, you start the job”. Similarly, other participants were able to find employment through friends they made in their communities. For instance, an economic class immigrant from Bulgaria was able to get a survival job through a Bulgarian friend. She notes: “One of my friends, he works in a company. He drives the truck and he goes to this company to take all of the garbage and papers. And he introduced me to the supervisor”. While this participant has a Masters’ degree and professional work experience from her country, getting this survival job through her friend made a significant financial contribution to her household.

Having a place to stay at a time of arrival is another significant economic contribution some of the research participants received from their relatives. For example, an economic class immigrant from Iran has been living with her brothers and sisters since she came to Canada. This has helped her to focus exclusively on finding employment in her field. She explains: “They have been a great support to me because I did not pay any

rent until now so I just been moving from place to place. The good thing is that I did not have to go to any survival job. I have received a big support and if they wouldn't be here I may have ended up doing something else and not doing what I need to do to get where I want to get". Additionally, some economic class immigrants experiencing economic difficulties could potentially get support from their family living in their country of origin. For instance, a research participant currently searching for a job told us he has "received financial support from back home, which has been very helpful, because it is not easy to get a job and you start running out of money". In short, whether it is by receiving initial guidance, contacts, a place to stay, or financial support, some economic class immigrants have been able to get much needed support from their families and relatives in their efforts to get established in Canada.

Economic class immigrants emphasized the importance emotional support from family and friends can have in their search for employment and overall wellbeing. For instance, a Venezuelan engineer talks about the emotional support he has received from his wife, which has helped him to make serious employment decisions. As he outlines: "I recently married and my wife has been very supportive. Also she has been pushing me, she says you are always talking about opening a business why don't you just do it. And she convinced me to delete half of my resume to get something, which was very difficult for me. If I would not have my wife I don't know what would have happened, she is the one thing I needed."

Economic class immigrants who do not have family in Canada communicated frequently with their family back in their countries of origin in search of emotional support. For example, a young Indian IT specialist who came to Canada by himself

elaborates on the importance of emotional support. He explains: “having a family is very important also for emotional support. I call my mother and my sister every day. That emotional support has to be there. And the climate doesn’t help. It is very cold and depressing for six months of the year and that has an effect on you. So family and friends do help”.

The importance of friends and a healthy social life was a recurrent theme in the study. For instance, another IT specialist from India highlighted how crucial it is to develop a network of friends for emotional support. He observes: “Some of my contacts became friends and they would ask me are you ok ...? They have been important, if I have not been successful in the first six months that circle of friends would have been there, and you need acquaintances, people to talk to, people at the gym, without that I would have not survived. Specifically in the emotional level, the collaborative level and you get to value things that you did not value back in your home country like the value of the social support”. In short, emotional support provided by friends and family is a very important factor for the overall well-being of economic class immigrants. Since most of the participants are dealing with significant struggles to integrate into their professions in Canada, their need for their family support and a network of friends with whom to socialize is particularly relevant.

Labour Integration Strategies of Immigrant Families

This section looks at the strategies, identified from our interviews and focus groups, that immigrant families currently use in an effort to overcome barriers and integrate more fully into the Ontario labour market. Academic research has pointed out that immigrants experience significant levels of underemployment resulting from barriers including the lack of Canadian work experience, and the absence of Canadian accreditations (Adamuti-Tache, 2015; Samer and Snider, 2015; Shields, Lucia Lo, Zikic and Atlin, 2011; Bauder, 2006; Shields, 2006). Our research findings concur with these studies and identified lack of Canadian work experience, the challenges of getting foreign work credentials recognized, issues of language proficiency at work, age, and different cultural approaches to work, as some of the main barriers immigrants face in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian/Ontario labour market. Some studies have problematized the concept of immigrant integration (Li, 2003) as form of assimilation into fixed cultural settings, and others have elaborated on the individualistic and collective integration strategies of specific national groups (Moghddam, Taylor and Lalonde, 1987). This section of our study centres on explaining the strategies that immigrant families currently use (based on what we were told in our qualitative interviews and focus groups) to overcome such barriers to labour market integration.

Strategies

Our study has identified two main strategies by which immigrant families try to access the labour market. The first strategy consists in volunteering in community

organizations and professional associations. The second strategy lies in pursuing further education in Canadian academic institutions, which includes the attainment of: a) graduate degrees at universities, b) college certificates; and c) additional English instruction. Also, we have identified two other strategies, consisting of the attainment of professional accreditations, and the utilization of private employment agencies. The purpose of this section is to shed light on the impact and the implications these strategies have on immigrants' labour integration in Ontario. Our research found that pursuing further education was a highly utilized strategy by which immigrant families prepared to enter the labour market. Pursuing further education required significant family support and the spending of family savings. Similarly, the type of volunteering and the level of commitment in volunteering work was largely indicative of the participants' family circumstances and resources. In this regard, while most of the participants had professional aspirations and they were motivated to integrate into the labour market, their ability to further study and volunteer was largely conditional upon their family support.

A) Volunteering

For a significant number of participants, volunteering was their main way “to get letters of reference”, gain “more experience and knowledge” of the Canadian labour market. It was a way to, as interview participants noted, “see how the system works”, “practice their English in a professional setting”, and in some cases to access their “first job” in Canada. This matters since lack of Canadian experience was identified as the main barrier for getting a job. The participants tended to pursue volunteering jobs in their professional field or in a volunteer capacity that would help them develop and advance

their careers through a combination of experience and training. For these reasons, most of the participants volunteered in settlement and community organizations where they could also access different training workshops, such as Skills for Change that provides programs for new comers. Most participants volunteering in settlement and community organizations indicated that their volunteering experience provided initial help in their search for employment. In some cases, the participants were able to access their first jobs in the organizations where they volunteered. Though most of these jobs were temporary and only for a few days a week, they provided a first step into the Canadian labour market.

Volunteering in settlement and community organizations seems in most instances to be mutually advantageous since the participants offer much needed support to community organizations and in exchange they receive some tangible benefits. For instance, volunteering provided the interview subjects local letters of reference that they would not have had access to without their volunteer experience. As pointed out by one of the participants referring to his volunteer experience in a settlement organization: “When you do volunteer work you get a good reference and they also help you find a job”. Arguably, the need for Canadian letters of reference is an indication of the relatively low value given by Canadian employers to immigrants’ letters of references from their country origin.

Volunteering also provides the opportunity for immigrants to practice English in a professional setting. This mattered since lack of language proficiency at the professional level was indicated as a significant barrier for newcomers to integrate into the labour market. For instance, one of the participants looking for a job as a social worker argued

that volunteering with seniors was “the right way to practice [her] English”. Also, other participants improved their language skills by “volunteering in the local library”, and “public schools” among other public institutions. In this regard, volunteering was one of the main strategies to improve language skills in order to access a professional job in Canada.

Moreover, our research suggests that volunteering affects the family as a whole, as the ability of members of immigrant families to volunteer depends largely on their family’s support. For couples with children, volunteering required the support of one of the spouses for childcare during the volunteer hours, which reduced the participants’ ability to participate for “only once a week, and for a few hours”, or in some cases stopped them from volunteering altogether. Thus, our findings suggest that lack of affordable childcare is a significant impediment for immigrants to engage in volunteering activities that could provide them with language proficiency practice, local letters of reference, and work experience in a professional setting. Also, for many of the participants who could afford to participate, their volunteering experience did not translate into a permanent position in their professional field or desired occupation. Rather, volunteering is a strategy that allows immigrants to access their first employment, which our research suggests tends to be a type of employment that falls below their professional qualifications and skills.

While volunteering does not necessarily translate into full employment or skills-commensurate employment, it is an employment strategy that suggests that integration into the labour market is related to an overall effort to integrate and contribute to Canadian society. Some of the participants “felt much happier when volunteering” because they “felt useful” since they could “impact someone else’s life”. Some of the

participants received awards for their volunteer work and had contributed significantly to the field of education and learning. Hence, even though immigrants volunteered primarily as an employment strategy in order to “enhance their resume” in “hope to find a good job”, there was also a philanthropic citizen-oriented dimension to volunteering.

B) Education

Pursuing further education in Canadian institutions was another primary strategy to integrate into the labour market by those in our study. This is significant since the participants already enjoyed a high level of education and work experience from their countries’ of origin. A significant number of the participants opted to pursue practical education through college degrees and certificates. This strategy helped immigrants find entry level positions in their field. However, these were mostly “part time jobs”, “jobs for ten hours a week”, and eventually for some full-time employment. While pursuing further education at a college did not necessarily lead to full employment, many of the participants suggested that “it opened doors” for them. Most of the participants pursuing college degrees also worked in survival jobs such as taxi driving, factory work, and security work. Thus, pursuing college degrees can be understood as a strategy to overcome underemployment, at least in terms of survival jobs.

A significant number of participants opted to pursue Masters’ degrees at Canadian universities in order to improve their chances of getting a professional job. Most of these degrees were Masters’ in Business Administration (MBAs), Masters’ in Education (MEd), and Masters’ in Social Work (MSW). While some of the participants were able to combine working full time and studying for a Masters’ degree, most of them relied

heavily on their family savings in order to cover their living expenses and the cost of their studies. Spending the family saving was pointed out as a significant source of stress for immigrant families participating in our research. In this regard, pursuing Masters' degrees is a strategy to integrate in the Canadian labour market that requires a significant level of family investment and it is also a potential source of considerable family stress.

Such a level of investment can be the source of family conflict, as family members do not always agree on which steps to take next after completion of a Masters' program. For instance, one of the participants who recently graduated explained her differences of opinion with her husband: "Although, I have the M.Ed [from a Canadian university] I always apply for the entry level, because I think I am new, brand new! But my husband does not agree with this". Therefore, the family investment necessary for pursuing graduate education can result in different expectations on how to best access the labour market.

Some research participants also study English as an important strategy to integrate into the Canadian labour market. This included research participants studying ESL full time at colleges, and those who register in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). Interestingly, there seems to be a gender difference in investing in English instruction as some of the participants mentioned their wives focused on improving their language skills registering in LINC but very few male participants took lessons at LINC. Also, some of the participants pointed out their wives improved their employment opportunities by joining bridging programs, something that was seldom used by male participants in our sample. In this regard, there seems to be a gender dimension in immigrant families' investment in pursuing further education and training.

For a significant number of the research participants, pursuing further education in a Canadian institution is necessary in order to integrate into the Canadian labour market as professionals. This view is clearly presented by one of the research participants who explains his motivation for continuing to invest in his education in Canada: “I have a diploma, a certificate, and now I am doing this second certificate from a good college. Without this I would not have any chance to get a job. Now we have a little bit of hope that hopefully I will get something at an entry level at my field, social worker field. It is the biggest—that is what I want to do. That is my profession”. For some of the research participants, their investment in further pursuing their education in Canadian institutions is viewed as their best chance to work in their professions and fulfill their own vocations.

C) Private Employment Agencies and Professional Accreditations

A small number of the participants used employment agencies and pursued professional accreditations such project management, mutual fund license, and other accreditations in the financial field. Our research participants did not have positive experiences with private employment agencies. Hence, this was not viewed as a viable path to sustainable employment. Pursuing professional accreditations relate to the standardization of specific jobs in the business/financial sector, which could potentially help immigrants working in the financial sector to work in their fields.

In conclusion, there are a number of lessons which can be drawn from the strategies immigrants in our sample used to integrate into the labour market. First, the family works as a primary support system for immigrants attempting to integrate into the labour market. Newcomers rely on family savings to study and on family support in order to volunteer. In this regard, the family is at the center of labour market integration of

immigrants. Second, the significant investment required to pursue further education in Canada can impact the family savings, contributing great stress to immigrant families. Third, volunteering and studying are not only indicative of the desire of economic migrants to integrate into the Canadian labour market but also of immigrants' willingness to contribute to Canadian society as well as to pursue their professional vocations. Thus, there are significant personal and social implications attached to the efforts of economic migrants to integrate into the Canadian/Ontario labour market.

Investing in post-secondary Canadian education and spending time volunteering can be a double-edged sword for immigrant families. On the one hand, they invest time and resources in volunteering and acquiring further education in Canadian colleges and universities in order to access professional jobs. On the other hand, these activities often do not translate into tangible economic gains for immigrant families, at least, in the short to medium term. This can also lead to a reduction in the family's savings and in their ability to acquire additional capital. Thus, the path to integration into the Canadian labour market places immigrant families can be risky. In order to support immigrant families in their strategies to integrate to the Canadian labour market, steps should be taken to support immigrant families' efforts in volunteering by providing better access to affordable daycare, and by facilitating study in post-secondary institutions by providing more affordable tuition rates, or other financial supports, to attend school for newcomers. The family shares the consequences of the lack of integration to the labour market and the loss of their financial resources can negatively impact the prospect of immigrant families from eventually fulfilling their professional potential in Canada.

Unemployment and Underemployment

This section looks at the participants' experience with unemployment highlighting their personal struggles and financial difficulties. Also, this section identifies participants' wide experience with unskilled and precarious employment such as temporary contracts. The research findings presented in this section further support the academic literature (Gottfried et.al, 2016; Lewchuk, et.al, 2015; Shields, Rahi and Scholtz, 2006) showing that a growing proportion of economic class immigrants resort to survival jobs and that this phenomenon is especially prevalent among members of racialized immigrant communities (Ogbuagu, 2012; Duleep, Orcutt and Dowhan, 2008).

Unemployment

Despite their efforts at volunteering and pursuing further education in Canada, our study found that the overwhelming majority of economic class immigrants participating in our study were underemployed and also experienced extended periods of unemployment. As a Chinese participant who just finished a degree explains: "The placement was pretty interesting but I am in the same situation, after graduation, I am still looking for jobs, you know. It is just a little now, I volunteer, I do not know what is my next step." Feelings of uncertainty about the future were common among participants who were unemployed and some of these participants also started to reconsider their decision to stay in Canada. For example, an IT specialist from India talked about his doubts and frustration with his search of employment: "I think this period of job search is very difficult and makes it even more difficult for us to integrate into the Canadian

society because we come here with so many expectations, when they are not fulfilled we can get into depression and it is very hard. At times I check every day how much is the flight to India because I don't want to stay here. If I invested all this money and effort and I see no returns then I just want to go back”.

The potential for depression and other mental health issues was another recurrent theme among participants looking for employment. Experiencing a more sedentary life associated with the lack of employment proved to be especially challenging for economic class immigrant who for the most part have been accustomed to having very active professional lives. As a participant from Iran, currently unemployed, explains: “I used to work fourteen hours a day. So you can imagine how this period is affecting me. Many times I have felt down and I go to the fundamentals, what am I doing here? Many times I ask myself that question. At one point I thought I was going into depression and I got really worried. And this affects even people around you [the family]. I try to overcome this because I am sure this period is not going to last very long, it has been already eight months”. A similar experience with depression was shared by another participant also having serious difficulties dealing with unemployment. She notes: “For me most of the time when my kids are in the school I am just at home crying because I cannot wait until I find something, I am not a housekeeper, I am sorry to say that but I want to work. I use to go to my office from nine in the morning to five or six in the afternoon so this is a disaster for me. I am in a bad mood and this reduces your self-confidence. My self-esteem is so low because of that. You know a person just at home crying sometimes, and I am sorry for saying that, I feel like suicide I reach that level for this kind of pressure.” In this

regard, based on our study, unemployment can have a serious emotional toll on economic class immigrants, negatively affecting their self-esteem and their overall mental health.

In addition, there are significant financial difficulties resulting from unemployment. A participant from South Korea explained her deep worries when she was unemployed: “That time was very hard for me. Especially, I could not buy a cup of coffee. It is just one dollar but my mind is uncomfortable to buy something. It feels like a—I will go into bankruptcy [sic] or homeless, like that, because the monthly payment is every time—I have to pay for land, some grocery, or something but my husband and I did not have a job at that time”. As explained by this participant, couples that were both unemployed faced especially challenging financial difficulties. However, unemployed couples managed to rely on each other for support. For example, a participant from India currently looking for employment relies on her husband who is also unemployed. She explains, “I am not working. I am looking for a job. My husband is not working also at the moment. He got laid off. No, he is getting E.I. [unemployment insurance], and we are surviving on that. I am looking for a part-time job now.” And, as the above transcripts show, despite serious economic and emotional difficulties research participants looking for employment exhibited resilience and determination.

Underemployment

Our study found that most economic class immigrants are currently engaged in unskilled labour or jobs significantly below their professional qualifications and experience. Some of the most common survival jobs were taxi drivers, restaurant staff, and factory workers. The relatively poor conditions and low wages of these jobs make

them accessible for economic migrants. As explained by a participant with a Masters' in Social Work currently working in a factory: "The factory, they accept everyone because I think not everyone wants to work—cleaning up all day for minimum wage". Also, research participants were able to ask members of their communities for low skilled employment. For instance, an Iranian economic class immigrant with a Masters' degree told us: "I looked for an Iranian restaurant and decided to call the owner, and then I had a meeting with him, and then I started to work". Such survival jobs tend to be physically demanding, have difficult schedules, and are poorly remunerated, our study found.

Most research participants took survival jobs as short-term solutions to cover their families' basic necessities. For instance, a Bangladeshi scientist explains the case of him and his wife: "No, we did not go for long term [jobs]. The problem was that we had to survive. She was also in the so-called odd jobs. I am also in so-called odd jobs because we had to earn [money] for our family. That was it". Also, a participant from India told us that she and her husband, both experienced professionals with Masters' degrees, had to find survival jobs for similar reasons. She observes: "Both of us started with the labour job to maintain the family. We do want to get back to our professions". While survival jobs were initially perceived as a short-term solution to cover immediate family needs, because most research participants found it exceptionally challenging to find work in their professional fields they over time developed 'more realistic' employment expectations. This is well explained by a Jamaican participant with a Masters' degree who told us: "It is hard to get into the job market here at the position that you would have been at home. So it is a mental thing, you have to acknowledge and accept that you may have to start over".

Starting over meant for many research participants working not only outside their professional fields but also taking jobs that offered few if any benefits or employment security. A significant number of research participants work from contract to contract and such employment instability was a significant source of stress. For example, a medical doctor working in survival contract jobs explains: “Instability, that sort of cuts all the time. That contract, yearly contract, every March, it is like, you know, there is no tomorrow. Like I do not want to live that anymore. And I am at an age where I really want to feel stable. I am willing to work. I am willing to work hard. Just give me the opportunity. And I need to know that we can sustain the family”. This highly qualified economic class immigrant has not been able to find a permanent job and he is currently in the process of opening his own business. Similarly, a Chinese participant looking for a permanent position has only found short-term contract jobs. She states: “I just finished one-month contract. [Then] two months [contract] with my job. And before it was with it was working with homeless. So the two [contracts] are finished but I am looking for new jobs”. In this regard, the lack of job security meant underemployed economic class immigrants had to constantly search for employment.

i) Overqualified

Lack of employment security also affected the few economic class immigrants who were able to find employment in their professions. A Bangladeshi participant with a PhD had a well-remunerated contract position but since his contract expired he has not been able to find another job. He commented: “I worked for two years [two one year contract] with a very good salary, after the project closed and moved. Then I started

looking for a job in different places and since I have a PhD, they were saying, ‘you are overqualified’. Then I started not to write PhD and I started writing only MBA.” The question of being overqualified was also a recurrent theme in our study. For example, a Chinese participant does not apply for positions that he is qualified for because he feels his foreign credentials and experience are not going to be taken seriously but at the same time he find himself to be overqualified for more junior positions. He observes: “I do not think they will give me a chance if I apply for a government job like policy analysis or project manager. I went for an interview for an entry-level position. I think college is enough for that job but I like to start from beginning [positions], I think it is better for me to get a more solid experience. Maybe they think I am over-qualified. You know, they can hire a college student to do that job, but I have a Masters’ in Education”. In this regard, the question of being overqualified was a constant source of concerns newcomers. Their high human capital opened the doors to Canada for them but once here it was often an impediment to gaining employment; something like a Catch-22 for the participants.

ii) Underemployment as a Systemic Problem

Our study found that our interview and focus group subjects understood unemployment in Canada as a general problem that negatively impacts immigrants and places them and members of their communities at risk. For example, a research participant pointed out how underemployment places members of their communities at a significant disadvantage. For instance, a participant originally from Bangladesh told us about the challenging labour trajectory of other economic class immigrants from his community. He observes: “Some of them are educated and they have professional skills

and everything but they did not get a job they should get. They are the so-called odd jobs, I do not find that any job is odd but not up to their level. Some of them are doing jobs in [Coffee shop name] or I know some of my friends, he is an agriculturist but he works as a taxi driver”. Similarly, an Iranian participant with a Masters’ degree talked about the experience of his community members with unemployment. He elaborates: “I know a few people who have returned but having said that I know some people that have stayed and basically that are struggling and I see them struggling. They tend to do jobs here and there. Just jobs that are not related to their background or work experience, but they are still [in these jobs], in order to get the food on the table, for the lack of better terms”.

Also, participants perceived that highly skilled immigrants are being underemployed as a result a failure in the Canadian labour market. For example, a research participant with a PhD in Information Technology shares his impressions about foreign academics being underemployed in Canada as a result of systemic practices that push educated highly educated professionals into mainly survival jobs. He explains: “All of them are graduates of chemistry or related areas and they are doing some survival job. They were here in Canada as to present at a conference. They came here and loved the country and when they get the opportunity to come back, they came and they stayed here. But when they finished all these paperwork they did not get any professional job at all. If you see the majority of immigrants in here regardless of the [immigration] class, they are not doing what they should do. That is a waste [of] resource[s] for the Canadian economy”. Likewise, a participant from Bolivia with a Masters’ in Education shares how she has had firsthand experience working with immigrants who have been left behind by the system. She notes: “I worked as a settlement worker in the schools and you see so

many [immigrant] families that are suffering so much. So many of them are here like I don't know, five, six, seven years, and they are still struggling to get a job, to have somebody to give them an opportunity. And it is just heartbreaking, it is very bad".

Clearly, research participants have a profound understating of how the systemic exclusion of immigrants from the Canadian labour market affects individual immigrants, their families, and their communities.

In summary, most economic class immigrants participating in this research are currently underemployed and they have also experienced long periods of unemployment. The significant number of highly educated professionals taking survival jobs suggests economic class immigrants face significant levels of marginality in the Canadian labour market. This idea is reinforced by the participants' levels of frustration in searching for employment in their professional fields as well as through their knowledge of the high level of underemployment experienced by members of their communities. There is little evidence to suggest that the participants currently underemployed are on their way to find employment matching their level of education and professional experience. All of this has been very difficult for the families of these immigrants. It is important to remember that those family members which we interviewed had been in Canada from between 5 and 10 years and yet they are still struggling with finding skills-commensurate, stable employment.

Family Dynamics

Our study has shed light on how the family serves as an important agent of support for individual immigrants. Economic class immigrants participating in this research relied on their family members in order to pursue further education and in order to volunteer. Also, they relied on their family and relatives for emotional support, as well as for contacts, and guidance during the settlement process. This section looks at how family dynamics, such as the need to support the family, expending of family savings, stress at home related to lack of job security, and family separation affects the integration of immigrants in the labour market. Especially, we highlight the experience of financial stress and downward social mobility of immigrant families as they attempt to integrate into the Canadian labour market and society.

Stressing about the Family Finances

Our study shows that the experience of unemployment and underemployment affected the family dynamics of the research participants, in particular the family economy. As explained by a research participant from China: “Financial security is the problem. I feel so tight! Stressed! Because you know, the money is going to run out! So what should we do [then]?” A participant originally from Ethiopia echoed such feelings of stress: “I think it is a burden on the family not having a good job. I do not think the family will get a good support with that. It is very difficult. You are in a different country and a different culture, and you are not making money. You are not sustaining your family. That is really problematic.”

The family economy and quality of life was a source of preoccupation for economic class immigrants and even participants who had found permanent employment perceived their family economy had declined as a result of their labour trajectory in Canada. A participant from South Korea observed: “[First] I was volunteering, after they offered me a part time job. The first time I just worked two days, 14 hours a week, but after that they offered me a full time job. So after [finding a job], I have keep my position until now but comparing South Korea and Canada, the social and economic status is better in South Korea”. Thus, the experience of significant periods of unemployment and underemployment has led to the overall downward social mobility for most of the research participants and their families.

Our study found that spending the family savings was a significant source of stress for the research participants. A participant from Jamaica stated that spending their savings impacted them: “It was the challenge, just wanting to find a job and wanting to be able to take care of the family. Granted, you were required to take with us to Canada, migrate with settlement funds. But then there was a constant concern, how long will it take to get a job before these settlement funds run out. And of course that was a concern and that I found provided the most stress for me”. Similarly, a participant from Bolivia echoed her deep concerns with spending the family savings. She expressed it this way: “That was and is still a big thing. I will not say that I did like. The thing is I came here with my children and I came with, I do not know, thirty thousand dollars, which is nothing. I thought I had to support myself for at least a year and not depend on the government.... and to not spend all of the savings. I had to find a job soon. So the first month that I landed here I knew that I was not going to be able to find a good job. Like

something according to my expectations.”

Spending the family savings had significant consequences for immigrant families, including the return migration of some of the family members. An Iranian participant observed: “My husband, because of the financial situation, because we had no job in here, we should spend our saving, then it is impossible. Actually impossible. He went back to Iran and I stay here for my immigration papers”. In order to avoid spending the family savings some of the participants came to Canada ahead of their families. A participant from Pakistan explains his experience in this regard: “We had the idea when we converted rupee into dollars. So I planned initially, start focusing on how to get little bit of money so that my children can come over here.” The separation of family members is a difficult decision that affects the family structure. In this regard, the decision of immigrant families to temporarily separate in order to prevent further financial instability is indicative of the many costs incurred by immigrant families.

Clearly preoccupations about family wealth played a determining role in the employment decisions taken by the research participants, which often led to underemployment. Also, research participants experienced significant levels of stress because of the weakening of the family economy. Lastly, while the research participants immigrated to Canada with settlement funds, such funds are not able to outlast significant periods of unemployment and underemployment as well as investments they believe they need to make in areas like further education.

Gender and Race

More than 90 percent of the participants from our study came from non-European countries and 67 percent of the participants were women. Thus, the experiences of the research participants provide important insights about the gender and racial dimensions of immigrants' labour trajectories in Toronto. In terms of gender, our study shows that both female and male participants experienced very high levels of underemployment but almost all female participants experienced greater levels of unemployment. There was only one male participant who was unemployed at the time of the interviews and unlike most female participants he had been employed in a full time job but his contract had expired. In this regard, our study furthers supports academic literature suggesting racialized immigrant women face special disadvantages in the labour market (Arat-Koç, 1999). This section explores the gender and racial dimensions of our research findings, highlighting the experience of racialized immigrant women trying to integrate into the labour market.

Based on our study we found that the lack of affordable childcare was a determining factor affecting the lack of employment of female participants. A research participant from South Korea noted how the lack of childcare has affected her ability for finding employment: "That is the biggest thing. For me, I planned to look for a job, I think I can find a job, my language is okay, but I have no one to take care of my kids. My daughter, who can take care of my daughter? You know?" This participant's frustration about the lack of affordable childcare is also echoed by a research participant whose wife is expecting a baby. He explains: "My wife is a professional, she studied in Europe that is

where she did her undergraduate and her Master's but she is going to have baby now and since daycare is crazy expensive she won't be able to apply for a job because what are we going to do with the baby. There are countries in which daycare is subsidized by the government. I come from the developing world and we have free daycare for some professions". Toronto has the most expensive daycare in Canada and as suggested by these participants it limits the ability of immigrant women to find employment.

Also, our study found that lack of affordable childcare complicates the ability of immigrant families to benefit from employment services. A service provider from our focus group explained how the lack of affordable childcare affects immigrant couples: "We provide a lot of networking opportunities for our clients. So this couple they are very good, one is in sales and marketing and the other is in consulting but they have a three-year old daughter and the networking event happened the same day, and they cannot find daycare for the daughter so one of them has to say no to the event."

While lack of affordable daycare is a family concern, it is a problem that especially affects women. Another focus group participant provides an example of this: "Last year I had a couple and we have some network opportunities and they had two kids and as usual there is no support system in Canada and because it was more tailored to the wife it was good for her to attend but she came to me and told me I can't come because he will get upset, and we will have problems at home, so she stayed at home like a mom looking after the kid and instead came the husband". Based on our focus group discussions with service providers such scenarios where the wife is expected to take care of the kids and prioritize their husbands' employment opportunities is common among their clients.

Service providers who took part of our focus group were well aware of the complex gender dynamics between immigrant couples looking for employment as well as their clients' childcare needs. For this reason, they try to accommodate their services to the family needs' of their clients providing "workshops online in their general programs as [they] encounter clients that need to be helped with childcare and that type of support". Having said that, providing child friendly services to immigrant families can be a double edged sword in some employment programs. One of the service providers stated: "A lot of the times they could not afford childcare and they don't have any relatives here or friends they have to bring their kids in and when they are discussing their situation with us you know helping us understand their situation and providing them with the best support, the kid starts crying, the kid is looking for their attention, and they cannot concentrate and have to take care of the kid." In this regard, even when service providers accommodate their clients' family needs by allowing them to bring their children, the presence of children in employment sessions can be very disruptive not allowing them to effectively benefit from these services.

Similarly, another service provider shared her experience working at an agency that provided both daycare and employment services. She notes: "I used to work with a centre that provides services to newcomers, the concept of that organization is to provide all the services together under one roof, which means that centre includes settlement, childcare, language, and employment services. But when you enter that centre the feeling you get is that you become more relax, more comfortable, and I feel that the job searching is not that effective. So here we create a very professional mentality for the people to come and say ok this is a work place, we have to look for a job, we have to

work as professionals. So I agree that we need to help newcomers with their family needs but somehow employment is employment.” Based on our discussion with service providers it was clear that employment services worked best when immigrant parents can attend workshops and sessions without their children, which lamentably they agreed also tends to place immigrant women at a disadvantage for finding employment.

In addition, immigrant women often take survival jobs in order for their husbands to pursue a professional career. One of the service providers explained how this situation tends to happen in her program: “When couples come and the two are professionals and they are in the bridging programs, they are going to invest in one and the other is going to look for a survival job. Because and I have been attached to the bridging program so I have witnessed that there and it is fascinating to me that a lot of our bridging programs are male dominated and I look now in my classroom in Brampton and there are not too many women there”. In this regard, it is not uncommon that immigrant women sacrifice their careers in order to support’s their husbands’ professional development. Such practices however may also be informed by the reality of the Canadian labour market in which women’s salaries tend to be lower than men’s. A service provider explains: “The fact is men do make more money and how our system is set up just feeds right into this. If you get two people who are equally educated, which they may not be, practically speaking the man is probably getting a higher paying job. It is not just their perceptions, it is their reality, it is an unfortunate reality. When you are a couple and you have to make that tough decision, if one is going to have higher chances, it almost makes sense, it fits just into it, it is a vicious cycle and that is how I would describe it”. Thus, based on our discussion with service providers, immigrant women are at a significant disadvantage for

finding employment whether it is by cultural practices that push them to sacrifice their careers to support their husbands or by the lower salaries women tend to make in the Canadian labour market.

Racial and cultural prejudices also prevent immigrant women from fully integrating into the Canadian labour market. A service provider gave us an example of how her clients who wear hijabs have a difficult time in getting employment and how some have felt unwelcome in their workplace. She observes: “Talking about [Muslim] women’s challenges, I have a few clients that have challenges. They pass their interviews, you know first round, second round, and they didn’t get the job. One actually started working but after three months she had to leave the job. I cannot really tolerate the way they look at me, she says. In Canada we always say free country, we welcome all religions, but this is reality and some places are still stuck with that type of mentality and that is not pleasant”.

While this example is specific to Muslim women, questions of exclusion were brought up by the participants as an element that affects immigrants overall. For example, a research participant elaborates on his perspective about immigrants’ difficulties in the labour market: “So we can have solid experience, solid knowledge but you know, we are immigrants. I think immigrants, I should not say discrimination, maybe because we immigrants have relatively low proficiency in the culture, so sometimes for immigrants is hard”. Research participants often perceived their high level of underemployment as indicative of a systemic differential treatment immigrants receive in the Canadian labour market. In short, questions of differential treatment in the labour market based on gender

and racial elements are thus perceived as part of the challenges economic class immigrants have to face in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market.

Policy Recommendations: Avoiding the De-capitalization of Immigrant Families and Improving Labour Market Outcomes

The following five policy recommendations are informed by suggestions made by the research participants and derived from our analysis of the findings. In this way, this report attempts to integrate immigrants' voices (individuals and families) and their experiences in the process of policy development. Our study found that the prospect of spending the family savings is one of the greatest sources of stress for immigrant families, which can have profound consequences for economic class immigrants, including family separation and return migration. We suggest that actively helping to maintain immigrants' family savings needs to be a policy priority. This would be in line with innovative economic research that highlights the increasing importance of family capital for the economic development of individuals and their families (Piketty, 2014). As such, the policy recommendations of this report focuses on reducing the spending of the family savings by adopting measures that would help reduce some of the immigrant families' core expenses encountered in job readiness activities. Additionally, we support the expansion of bridge training programs and enhancement of professionally-centred employment workshops as tools which have shown their worth in improved employment outcomes for newcomers. Measures that help improve the speed and quality of labour market attachment also enhances the immigrant families' financial stability, such as the

recognition of foreign work experience. Improving access to realistic information about Ontario/Canadian labour market for the immigrant family will empower them to be able to make better informed decisions about migration and be more prepared for the labour market opportunities and challenges that await them. Our final recommendation concerns the provision of more resources to address stress and mental health issues that are commonly found in immigrant families due to labour market and other settlement challenges. Policy measures that would help improve the position of immigrant family finances would decrease the level of anxiety experienced by economic class immigrant families due to financial instability as this the main motivation for economic class immigrants to engage in survival jobs.

i) Subsidized childcare for newcomers

Both economic class immigrants and service providers identified the cost of childcare as one of the greatest expenses endured by immigrant families as well as one of the greatest obstacles to the integration of immigrant women into the Canadian labour market. As a result, the first policy recommendation of this report is to provide improved access to subsidized childcare for newcomers. Currently, the Ontario Child Benefit provides a maximum \$1,356 annual subsidy per child, which low-income families are able to access. Such a subsidy is not reflective of the cost of childcare in Toronto or elsewhere in the province. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Toronto is Canada's most expensive city for childcare "in which the average cost for one preschool spot and one toddler spot is \$28,300 a year" (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). Thus, a significantly higher childcare subsidy would be needed for newcomers in order to

effectively reduce their financial stress and facilitate their integration into the Canadian labour market.

We realize, of course, the problem of affordable childcare is not just an issue for immigrant families but an issue for all families in Ontario. Hence, at the broader level, addressing childcare supports would need to be applied equitably among all in-need populations in Ontario.

At a more immediate and smaller scale, however, more limited childcare supports could be provided for newcomers accessing programs like employment workshops, bridge programs and language classes. Women in particular are hindered from taking advantage of these programs because of the lack of childcare supports. Providing childcare for families to allow them to take such programming would make these types of supports more accessible and effective.

ii) Validating immigrants' work experience

Our study indicates that lack of Canadian experience still remains the most significant barrier to employment for newcomers. In this way, our study further confirms the need to address the issue of lack of Canadian experience long identified in the academic literature. Volunteering and pursuing further education in Canada as ways to help address this gap requires a significant financial investment by economic class immigrants. Based on our focus group discussion with economic class immigrants an alternative suggestion to reducing the problem of Canadian experience would be to provide immigrants' foreign work experience with an equivalent to Canadian work experience, which can be assessed by professional associations. The participants suggested following a similar model to the Australian New Zealand Standard

Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) in which professional associations also evaluate the work experience of prospective immigrants before their arrival to Australia (see: Hancock, 2004). This assessment helps immigrants in Australia and New Zealand to become accredited members of professional associations in their countries even before arrival. Since the development and implementation of this policy would require the active collaboration of independent professional associations, it is suggested that the first step would be to open a round of consultations with professional associations that provide certifications currently in high demand by economic class immigrants such as Charter Financial Analyst (CFA) and Project Management Professional (PMP) certifications.

iii) Expanding Ontario Bridge Training Programs and Professional Employment

Workshops

Based on our study there is a high demand for Ontario Bridge Training programs among economic class immigrants. At the same time, the limited number of spots available reduces the ability of service providers to support their clients in this way. This is further complicated by the very limited budget for transport support to access these supports, even though clients commute long distances and often have very limited financial resources to take part in these intensive programs. Expanding the bridging programs and providing funding for public transit can help economic class immigrants who are currently unemployed/underemployed access this kind of programming. These programs have proven to be among the most successful in terms of employment outcomes.

Our study suggests employment workshops with a focus on professionals make a significant difference among economic class immigrants. Economic class immigrants benefit from specific information about the Canadian workplace culture, training in networking, and interview preparation. Expanding these services can be a significant contribution to support the integration of economic class immigrants. Such Services should be enhanced.

iv) Addressing the labour market information gap

There is a need for more realistic information about the job market in Ontario/Canada so that economic class immigrants are able to make more informed decisions about immigrating to Canada, and are better prepared in understanding the labour market once they arrive. Currently there is a gap in a realistic understanding about the nature of the Canadian labour market and employment practices among economic immigrant recruits. Many seem to assume that their high human capital will translate seamlessly into skills-commensurate employment in Canada. Improving the knowledge of economic class immigrants and their families about the state of local labour markets and professional job opportunities (remember all labour markets are local) is important for immigrants and their families to enable them to develop realistic strategies about their labour market prospects and goals.

To address this gap additional pre-arrival immigration services focused on realistic and practical labour market information should be offered to potential immigrants. An internet accessible and regularly updated labour market information

(with a local and professionally-centred emphasis) and other employment resources site should to be developed, advertised and maintained for domestic and international use.

v) Creating supports to address immigrant mental health

Economic class immigrants and their families, especially in their initial years after landing, experience significant levels of stress and mental health problems because of the difficulties encountered in their attempts to integrate into their new society (particularly with regard to labour market integration). This places strains not only on the individual immigrant but on the whole family. This is a significant problem for economic class immigrant families, negatively affecting their abilities to integrate successfully. Clearly additional supports to address stress and mental health are called for. These could range from 'dealing with stress workshops' to actual medical health supports to families in need.

Conclusion

The experience and insights provided by the research participants shows that economic class immigrants faced significant barriers in trying to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Our research identifies that lack of Canadian experience was perceived by the participants as the most significant barrier to integrate into the Canadian labour market, irrespective of having transferable technical skills, Canadian or British graduate education, and international professional experience in multinational corporations. Not surprisingly, most participants think Canadian employers undervalue their international professional experience, which places them at a disadvantage for finding employment in their profession. Since the vast majority of the research participants were underemployed and a significant number of the female participants also experienced long periods of unemployment they should be consider marginalized in terms of employment.

Based on the experiences and reflections of the research participants, employment services provide valuable support and training to learn Canadian work culture and get acquainted with the Canadian labour market in their professional fields. At the same time, our research found that despite the efforts of service providers to support the integration of economic class immigrants into their professional fields in Canada, almost all the research participants have experienced limited employment opportunities such as non-skilled jobs or entry-level positions outside their professions. As such, the study identifies a disconnection between the work employment services provides to newcomers and the employment outcomes experienced by the research participants.

Our research found that volunteering and pursuing further education in Canadian institutions were the main strategies used by the participants to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Such strategies rely heavily on family support. Thus, our study shows that the overall process of integrating into the market economy was in practice a family affair. Also, this study found most participants rely on their families for emotional support and those with relatives in Canada were able to stay with their relatives for significant periods of time, which allowed them to save money and concentrate on finding employment. In this regard, family members in their country of origin and relatives living in Canada served as a valuable support system for the research participants.

At the same time, our study also found that only a small number of the participants was able to rely on their family members living in their home countries for economic support and that the participants' relatives living in Canada were not able to provide them with practical support in their search for employment. Hence, the support provided by the participants' family members in their home countries and their relatives in Canada could not be considered an effective counterweight to the systemic barriers they experienced in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market.

Our research found that spending the family savings was the main source of anxiety among the research participants and the consequences of spending the family savings could lead to return migration and family separation. Also, our research found that research participants shared a common feeling of downward social mobility, and a high level of frustration with the lack of professional employment opportunities in Canada. As a result of long periods of unemployment and underemployment some of the research participants went through periods of depression, which led them to feel isolated,

and even suicidal. In this light, the emotional support provided by family members was critical for the research participants to endure the challenging process of integrating into the Canadian labour market.

This study found that female participants were particularly disadvantaged in their efforts to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Lack of affordable daycare was the most significant barrier for women in our research to effectively pursue a professional career in Canada. Also, we found that it was common for immigrant women to sacrifice their own careers in order to support their husband's professional development. In this regard, our research found that female participants were especially disadvantaged in their prospects to integrate into the Canadian labour market as professionals.

Overall, our study sheds light on the experience and perspective of economic class immigrants trying to integrate into the Canadian labour market as a family unit. While the findings of this study are not necessarily representative of the experience of economic class immigrants and their families in general, they present a picture of immigrant families going through significant hardships as part of their efforts in finding employment. Their experience of marginalization in the Canadian labour market are a powerful example of the perseverance of immigrants trying to succeed as professionals in Canada and they serve as an important reminder of the need for improvement to facilitate the integration process of economic class immigrants in the Canadian labour market.

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