



Visible-Minority Employment Exclusion: The Experience of Young Adults in Toronto

By John Shields, Khan Rahi &
Antonie Scholtz(1)

Issue

Employment
opportunities and
experiences of visible
minority immigrant and
refugee young adults

Introduction

The focus of this study is the examination of the “lived labour market” experience of immigrant and refugee (IR) young adults who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. We used semi-structured focus groups drawn from African and Asian immigrant and refugee young adult population in Toronto as well as a focus group of nonprofit service providers who

work with this population. The overall guiding questions that have informed this study are: What role do race, ethnicity, and immigration status play in influencing employment opportunities and experiences for IR young adults? Do these factors operate to exclude such young people from successful labour market participation? And what other additional barriers exist which contribute to the difficulties experienced by immigrant and refugee young adults in their labour market integration?

This study makes a direct contribution to advancing equality by providing us with insight into the “lived labour market” experience of unemployed visible minority IR young adults, allowing us to distinguish conceptually relevant themes, issues, and contexts behind their labour market exclusion. Moreover, it identifies the stresses this places upon the affected individuals and their families as well as on societal cohesion more generally.

This study enables us to begin to understand the racial and ethnic dynamics, the effects of immigration status, and the role of support systems, among other factors, that affect visible minority IR young people in their attempts to integrate into the Canadian job market.

SUMMARY

The ability to secure full and meaningful employment is a necessary condition for societal cohesion and inclusion. Effective access to labour market participation has been threatened, however, by the high incidence of unemployment, particularly for youth. The purpose of this research is to examine the “lived labour market” experience of immigrant and refugee young adults who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. A qualitative case study of visibly identifiable African and Asian immigrant/refugee young adults was utilized using semi-structured focus groups to probe their experiences of the local job market. The overall guiding questions informing our research were: What roles do race, ethnicity, and immigration status play in affecting employment opportunities and experiences for immigrant and refugee (IR) young adults?

Author Contact:

John Shields

jshields@ryerson.ca

Khan Rahi

ksrahi@sympatico.ca

Antonie Scholtz

ascholtz@oise.utoronto.ca

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Policy Relevance of the Study

Ongoing media and public attention surrounding problems of youth transitions into sustainable employment, the challenges to recent immigrant economic performance in the new economy, and the continuing salience of the current policy discourse around social exclusion/inclusion, integration, and related concepts all make the issues addressed in this study highly relevant for policymakers and the larger community. More particularly, this study gives voice to visible minority IR young adults and immigrant community workers, allowing them the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experiences and observations regarding the challenges surrounding labour market integration.

The Study in Context:

... visible minorities represent a growing portion of the labour force.

Authors

The impact of immigration has affected no Canadian city more than Toronto. In 2001, the largest groupings of visible minorities in Toronto, by order of population size, were South Asians, Chinese, and Blacks (Statistics Canada 2005a, 2). Projections indicate that, by

2017, Toronto likely will have a demographic structure such where over half of its citizens will be visible minorities, with the area as home to 45 per cent of the country's visible minority population (Statistics Canada 2005c 2).

With regard to the labour market, average unemployment levels increased steadily from the 1970s through the 1990s, with the unemployment rate over that three-decade time span averaging over 9 per cent (Bennett 2001, 4). Since 2000, due to sustained economic expansion, unemployment moderated somewhat, but still remained well above 6 per cent.

The poor labour market conditions of this period sparked assessments that this was an economy marked by a "job poor" recovery, a term that attempts to capture the contingent nature of much of the employment that did come to be created in this era (Burke and Shields 2000).

Finding a job since the 1990s has become far more challenging than in the past for all groups, but it has been especially difficult for young adults and immigrants (Shields 2004; Grant and Thompson 2000; Pendakur 2000; and Shields 1996).

Young workers, in fact, have experienced twice the rates of unemployment compared to the

labour force average. In the Toronto region, youth joblessness stood at above 18 per cent by the latter 1990s (FCM 1998; OAYEC 2000), and it continues to be twice as high as average unemployment rates even with the overall improved performance of the economy.

It is important to note that supply-side factors fail to offer a satisfactory explanation for high youth unemployment, as those sectors of the labour market with the strongest growth contain the occupations with the largest youth workforces (Blanchflower and Freeman 1998, 5).

Many studies have revealed a long established pattern of labour-market disadvantage and exclusion for immigrant/refugee labour (Bauder 2006; Galabuzi 2006; Vosko 2006; Smith and Jackson 2002; Galabuzi 2001; Li 2000; Bolaria and Li 1985). Such research has indicated that visible-minority young people with the same education and training backgrounds have found it more difficult to find full-time work than those of European background (Institute for Social Research 1997).

Yet, we know that young adults from visible minority populations will become an ever more important component of the Canadian, and especially the Toronto, workforce (Statistics Canada 2005b).

... newcomer difficulties with integration and the problem of social exclusion are tied more deeply to larger “structural forces located in the labour market and shrinking social support systems that exclude a large proportion of immigrant [and refugee] populations, even those with substantive human capital assets”. (Shields 2004, 39)

While several key trends have been identified, our understanding of the degree to which the structural changes in the labour market are revealed in the lived experiences of unemployed immigrant/refugee young adults is quite preliminary. For example, the earning opportunities for immigrant workers have been intensively studied, yet, there has been a dearth of analysis of immigrant unemployment in Canada (McDonald and Worswick 1997, 354).

The degrees of income polarization, job insecurity, and detachment from the workplace experienced by immigrant and refugee young people have, however, important economic, political, and social consequences for the nation as a whole.

METHODOLOGY:
A Qualitative Measure

The study utilized a qualitative approach for gathering primary

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data, a method that made full use of strong community connections. The focus groups were conducted in the year 2000.

Significantly, this kind of in-depth qualitative exploration of the sample population allowed us to gain insight into both how visible-minority IR young people actually negotiate Canadian society and the Toronto labour market, and how they experience unemployment ‘on the ground.’ The focus groups provided an opportunity to understand the “lived” experiences of these young adults, and, while not representative in the quantitative sense, this qualitative study enabled the development of a rich and deep level of analysis that quantitative surveys are not able to uncover.(2)

The ‘Voices’ of Visible Minority Unemployed IR Young Adults

The main concern of this study was to examine the nature of the challenges young visible-minority newcomers have experienced in finding paid employment in Canada.

We probed our participants for their sense of the kinds of expectations that they believed that Canadian employers wished to see in the persons that they employed. In total, our focus group sample identified

twelve key traits, although they did not establish a ranking order from most important to least among these identified characteristics. They believed that employers wanted employees who would demonstrate:

- 1) Qualifications for the job, in terms of education, training, and ‘relevant work experience’;
- 2) Trustworthiness;
- 3) Willingness to accept relatively low wages;
- 4) Responsibility;
- 5) Punctuality;
- 6) Dependability;
- 7) Flexibility;
- 8) Personal skills, including speaking skills;
- 9) Computer literacy;
- 10) Good appearance;
- 11) Good values;
- and the 12) Ethic of hard work

In short, our young adults sample seemed to be keenly aware of many of the key attributes that Canadian employers value highly in employees. It is equally clear, moreover, that a large majority of IR young adults in our sample were confident that they possessed the kinds of human-capital assets employers say they desire.

“They [employers] always ask you for the experience. [They] ... ask you for three or five years minimum. [They] didn’t give people a chance to work, like to gain experience, where [are they] going to get the experience? That’s the whole problem.”
Asian IR Young Adult Respondent

Yet, they felt the Canadian employers they had encountered had been mainly unprepared to suitably employ their talents in the labour market.

The sub-theme that emerged in response to this situation was one of *'the need for a chance'* for IR young adults to demonstrate their abilities and potential, and the opportunity for them to gain valuable Canadian experience.

Among those participating in our study, a constant sentiment appears to be one of frustration. This emotion is common not only among those IR young adults from poorer, sometimes war-torn, countries but also among the more affluent, better-educated migrants. Also, as might be expected, those working as service providers to youth expressed a high level of frustration with both the systemic, structural and cultural barriers facing recent immigrants and the lack of adequate resources to help deal with these problems.

This built-up frustration by newcomer youth can even result, over time, in the complete abandonment of their search for work. Indeed, a sense of hopelessness and 'giving up' can set in if barriers to meaningful integration become embedded (Peera 2003).

Among the IR groups, this frustration often was accompanied by feelings of both embarrassment and disillusionment with the yet unfulfilled "promise" they had expected Canada to provide. Interestingly, the most negative forms of frustration in our study were found among highly educated young immigrants who felt that their skills and abilities were unappreciated and good jobs too difficult to secure.

Their frustration has led many immigrant young adults to seriously consider leaving Canada for perceived better employment prospects elsewhere.

On the other hand, other focus group participants, while clearly frustrated with many of their experiences with the barriers to finding work in Canada, still expressed positive attributes about the future. A refugee young person from Africa, for example, stated their optimistic outlook in the following terms:

"In five years ... I think things will be much better. I see myself getting closer to my goals. I'll be almost an engineer, I hope ... I think everything will be much better because now it's difficult and because I don't have the right ... papers, I don't have [a] work permit ... I have to live on social assistance and in five years from now all that will have changed. I'll have a lot of

Canadian experience and I think I'll be just used to everything and it will be better."

"One thing I want to tell you. Most of my friends they have a plan. After three or four years, they will just leave Canada. Maybe go somewhere, America or Europe. But I think it's a big problem for Canada..."
Chinese Young Adult Participant

Hence, our sample uncovered a duality. Along with a general expression of frustration about the barriers to meaningful employment, some saw their inadequate employment being favourably resolved over time, while another segment of our young adult population was growing increasingly embittered about a possible future of continued employment marginalization in Canada.

The Canadian Immigration Process: The Case of Refugees

Among the numerous reasons for the frustration of visible-minority IR young people in Toronto, is a perception of the **Canadian immigration process** as a major barrier to employment. Many of those interviewed felt discriminated against by a process that prevented them from working and which could hold their fate in limbo for up to a reported seven years in the case of refugees.

The number of 'less-than-full-status immigrants' working in the Greater Toronto area is unknown, but estimates range from a low of 30,000 to a high of 200,000, with the actual number likely falling somewhere in between these estimates (Bustos 2005, B1).

"[W]ith newcomer youth they're very ready to work. They're very motivated and that's never the issue. The issue is dealing with immigration. So these two youth have to wait for their work permits before I can really help them. This situation has compelled many refugee youth to seek 'illegal employment' under conditions that most often are extremely exploitative."
IR Service Provider

Our focus groups uncovered numerous instances of employers who paid hourly wages considerably under the legal minimum wage, as in the case of a Chinese young woman who was paid only \$10 a day to do garment work at home. Also revealed were several reports of training scams, where employers refused to pay for work done because they were only being 'trained,' and, as such, were not entitled to pay for this period.

Across the different groups, respondents expressed the feeling that they were constantly running, yet remaining at a stand still.

Another refugee young person from the Asian group stated: "You know, right now like till we get landed status, I mean there are so many things we would like to do but there is always that obstacle, you know. So we cannot do that before we get status."

Since being labeled a refugee comes with many of its own systematic barriers, many newcomer youth have learned to adopt strategies that avoid such identification (Anisef et. al. 2000, 48), especially when seeking (il)legal work.

The importance of employment to successful integration and transition into full adulthood can not be underestimated.

Often IR young adults, especially in the kinds of labour markets in which refugees frequently are compelled to participate, do not know if they are being discriminated against or if they lack the necessary skills to obtain better employment. Over time, this can lead to a loss of confidence in their abilities, which can have long-term, detrimental effects on both their successful integration into society and

"It is a big problem. There is an incredible abuse of people who are undocumented".
President of the Canadian Hispanic Congress, Vilma Filici, (as quoted in Bustos 2005)

their ability to secure meaningful permanent employment. Restrictive government policies around refugee access to legal employment, and other institutional barriers, such as those found in the case of gaining access to higher education, have not been helpful in this regard.

Acquiring a job allows youth to learn about the Canadian economic system, to develop mechanisms for coping with people of different backgrounds, and to gain Canadian experience, which is often a prerequisite for better employment.
(Anisef et. al. 2000, 60).

Government Support

It is abundantly clear from our sample population that a consensus exists that these young people are eager to work, whatever their level of education, but many end up locked into a vicious cycle of un/underemployment, poverty, and/or dependence on the welfare system.

For Toronto, Michael Ornstein has comprehensively documented the extent of low income and poverty among various ethno-racial groups in the city. The 2001 census data he utilized demonstrated that for non-European groups the

poverty rate was considerably higher than that of European groups. While some 10% of those from European ancestry fell below the poverty line, 20% of South Asian, East Asian, Caribbean and South and Central American; 30% of Arab and West Asian groups; and 40% of African groups faced poverty. Over time the ethno-racial differences have not been decreasing. Ornstein concludes that: "Extreme economic disadvantage is highly racialized. All twenty of the poorest ethno-racial groups in the Toronto CMA are non-European" (2006, vi). Education levels also varied considerably by ethno-racial background with some non-European groups demonstrating elevated levels of high school non-completion rates (Ornstein 2006, iv).

Moreover, the economic position of young people of working age has deteriorated, with average earnings falling by more than 20% over the decade ending in the late 1990s (McBride 2000, 3).

"In 1971 members of non-European ethno-European ethno-racial groups accounted for five percent of the [Toronto] CMA population of about 2.6 million, compared to nearly forty percent of the 2001 population of 4.6 million".
(Ornstein 2006, iii)

"If you are on social service, you can't buy nothing. Even the food is not enough [for] the money. So that's why is like important to have a job in Canada."
African Young Adult Participant

Our sample of visible minority young adults shared many of these low-income traits, although clearly their levels of educational attainment were generally quite high, and they clearly were struggling to find their place in an increasingly harsh labour market. It was, therefore, within this context that the theme of IR young people's relationships toward government support emerged.

Government support, or the lack thereof, stood as a structural barrier for many of the individuals in our sample. In the case of social/welfare assistance, some 30 per cent of our sample accessed this form of government assistance. With a monthly stipend which barely avoided extreme poverty, these individuals were unable to afford adequate housing, appropriate "Canadian" clothing, or necessary transportation. They were often forced to accept jobs which paid little, challenged them less, and which were completely unrelated to either their foreign work experience or education.

The dominant sentiment among those who were utilizing social

assistance was that it was a short-term situation that they would exit as soon as an alternative in the form of paid work became available.

There was a strong feeling among IR young adults and service providers in our study that more targeted, integrated, and engaged employment-support policies from all levels of government would be helpful in overcoming the barriers being faced by IR young people in their labour-market integration.

Education

"When I came to Canada everybody [was] saying you need training. No matter what you have been trained for from where you come from, you still need new training here."
African Young Adult Participant

The categorical theme of education, under which we might group educational credentials and skill acquisition, and to which we can also tie the theme of Canadian experience, was widely addressed by our sample. The young adults, whether possessing higher or lower levels of formal education, faced such barriers as a devaluing of their foreign educational achievements, an inability to finance further studies, and, even when qualified, refusals by

professional organizations to recognize their credentials.

On the other side of the coin, some of the more highly educated young people felt that, in many ways, they were over-educated but under-valued. One Asian participant even told of lying, saying she had far less education that she actually did just so she would be hired.

“The Canadian institutions or professional organizations are closing their doors, and that might be a problem. Because Canada says we want to attract the best, the brightest professionals, and now when they come there are simply closed doors and opportunities, and the only opportunity they have is perhaps [to] go back.”
IR Youth Service Provider

These expressions by IR young adults and service workers reveal many of the challenges associated with education, credentials and training received outside of Canada. Some authors have compellingly described the failure of educational institutions, accreditation bodies and employers to give due recognition to foreign-held qualifications as the “institutionalization of downward mobility” for many newcomers (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80).

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It has been standard practice for such bodies to systematically assume that foreign credentials are inferior to Canadian-held ones. This has contributed significantly to blocking access to occupations for which highly educated/professional immigrants and refugees have been trained in their native countries (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80).

Language Proficiency

The issue of language proficiency is obviously a central one with respect to the successful labour-market integration of newcomers. All but one of the IR young adults in our surveyed population could speak English, and, in addition, a number of the African youth were able to speak French as well.

A majority of our sample, however, while competent in the English language, were arguably not “fully fluent,” which has become increasingly important in a service- and information-based economy.

Deficiencies in the quality of language skills constitute an ongoing barrier to IR young adults in the new labour market, often limiting their access to even the lower end of the employment market.

A number of the IR young people in our focus groups also

noted that often employers had difficulty in understanding them because of their “foreign accents” or else they suspected that employers were hesitant to employ individuals with accents because it was seen to be ‘bad for business.’

Language proficiency continues to be significant barrier for immigrants/refugees seeking employment and broader integration into Canadian society. Unfortunately, at the public-policy level, disinvestment in language training and ESL programs in Ontario over the last decade or so (Anisef and Kilbride 2003), the general lack of access to English language training programs for newcomers (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80), and the long delay in reaching a partnership agreement between Ontario and the Federal Government on immigrant settlement services, has compromised the economic integration of IR young adults.

“Approximately half of newcomers are believed to arrive in Canada with sufficient language skills to work independently, but more frequently lack fluency in a language of a specific sector or occupation .”
(Volunteer Canada n.d., 13)

Canadian Employment Experience

A common theme voiced by Canadian youth is that employers are resistant to employing them because they lack work experience. Many of the individuals in our sample, however, possessed work experience, but this experience had been largely attained outside of Canada. IR young people, consequently, often confront an additional obstacle over native-born youth in the Canadian employment market in that work experience obtained abroad is most often deemed irrelevant or invisible by employers.

This approach to hiring [the demand for Canadian experience] results, among other things, in skill under-utilization – a sign of wasted human capital, newcomer labour-market exclusion, and the blockage of many visible minorities, whether deliberately constructed or not, from securing employment for which they are qualified.

Authors

This ‘deficiency’ in Canadian experience is perceived as a critical factor in the lack of employment success by many ethnic groups.

Not only do employers not always value foreign experience but often newcomers themselves also engage in self-

policing, and perhaps self-defeating, behaviour. Some migrants, after a number of initial negative experiences, will automatically set their standards low, and stop attempting to find jobs in their field.

The discriminatory racial/ethnic impact of the employer demand for Canadian experience was often viewed as racial/ethnic discrimination as those most negatively affected by this were minority newcomers. This underlying sentiment of discrimination was felt by many of the members of our survey.

On the other hand, many other young adults expressed their belief that there was no deliberate intent on the part of employers to discriminate in this way. One refugee young person from Africa, for example, reflecting on the importance of experience in finding employment, was equally convinced that this was not a product of racism:

“Experience is all — doesn’t matter if you’re Black, White, Brown, Chinese whatever, just if you know, if you’re smart, you know you speak the language very good, you get experience, then you get good job.”

For those without Canadian experience, the attempt to gain access to employment can be a very frustrating process. A Somali declared: “I just feel

like quitting, not looking any more because every time I go they just tell me that I have no experience...”

“I think a lot of youth that I work with believe that because they have no skills in Canada or experience in Canada that they can’t get a job.”

IR Youth Service Provider

How to secure meaningful experience, consequently, has become a central concern, and the potential of volunteer work has been viewed as one avenue to resolving the experience deficit.

Volunteer Work

Volunteering, and charitable work more generally, have increasingly come to be identified as an important form of social engagement that is critical for both promoting social inclusion and integration and in the building of social capital (Policy Research Initiative 2005). The issue of volunteer work, however, can also be an acrimonious one, a catch-22 situation, which has the potential to be used by neoliberal ideology in a manner that can work against the interests of recently arrived immigrants or refugees (Evans and Shields 2005).

There seems to have developed a general feeling among

The “Canadian independent immigrant selection system (point system) that tends to accept immigrants having a ‘skill in demand’ leads immigrants to believe that finding employment in their field of work should not be difficult, and that their skills and experience will be recognized” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13).

policymakers and governments that volunteering opens up an important avenue to labour-market access for newcomers and youth more generally.

This is one of the reasons that the neoliberal Harris Government in Ontario introduced ‘mandatory-volunteering’ as a requirement for successful high school graduation (Jones 2000).

What they failed to take into account was the fact that for many migrants, living on little money and often with little community or familial support, volunteering often was not a very feasible option.

Consequently, the ‘failure’ of IR young adults to ‘take advantage of volunteering opportunities’ has the potential to be used as a reason why these young people are not achieving more success in the labour market. Thus, some of the structural barriers in the labour market may be explained away

by perceived individual short falls within the IR young adult population.

Information & Information Deficits

The problem of information deficits is a contributing factor to many newcomers’ difficulties in finding suitable employment and in successfully integrating into Canadian society.

The problems with access to information usually begins before migrants leave their home countries, since most “immigrants arrive in Canada without an adequate understanding or appreciation of the challenges they will face” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13).

In fact, many migrants are under the assumption that there is abundant work in Canada, and that their skills are in high demand.

Canadian immigration officials overseas do little to provide information that would correct such misinformed views. Upon arrival in Canada, immigrants and refugees face further challenges related to access to information.

Moreover, newcomers are in need of information related to a whole host of issues, beyond direct labour-market services, that are also necessary to function successfully in

Canadian society. These issues range from how to find adequate housing and access the health care system to language training and access to programs that increase awareness regarding Canadian society and culture.

Lack of timely access to information often means that newcomers spend considerable time, emotional energy, and resources trying to navigate the multiplicity of Canadian institutions, markets, and society, efforts that detract from the job search and employment networking.

Many of the IR young adults talked about using newspapers and the internet in their attempts to locate employment, yet they also appeared naive about the resources and community support, however imperfect, that was available to them.

Hence, the themes of information deficits and the inability of newcomers to gain access to information are ones identified by our sample as important contributing factors to the problem of labour-market integration.

“Canada does not have a comprehensive system of assessment of immigrants and refugees to help them determine their ... readiness for successful labour market integration” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 6).

“I don’t really think [social services] help in term of looking for a job and it’s very impersonal. It’s just about paying your rent until you can pay it for yourself. They don’t help you to look for a job or anything like that.”
African Young Adult Participant

Racism and Discrimination

Notwithstanding the commitment by the Canadian state to promote and build a nonracist and a multicultural society in Canada, the problem of racism and discrimination remains as a major issue and reality for many IR visible-minority young adults. They face discrimination and racial exclusion in many forms, from the lack of knowledge of cultural differences on the part of much of the Canadian population, to stereotyping, to a refusal on the part of employers to accommodate religious clothing at work.

Some of the ‘evidence’ of racism and discrimination was obvious and blunt, some of it was suspected and subtle, but, either way, many of the respondents were negatively affected by their experiences with the Canadian labour market.

Many of the IR young adults from our study talked about their experiences with racism

and discrimination. The lack of knowledge of cultural and national differences on the part of the Canadian population was commonly identified by our sample as a contributing factor to a lack of understanding and sensitivity regarding newcomer integration/adjustment issues.

Indeed, it is clear from their responses that many of the expectations and dreams of the IR young adults in our sample have been undermined or compromised by the impact, real and perceived, of racism and discrimination
Authors

The overall pattern that emerged from our sample appeared to be that discrimination did exist within the employment market, and within Canadian society more generally, although the extent to which IR young adults experienced this was unevenly felt and expressed.

“I think that they should teach people ... I don’t know how they’d do that but I really wish people could know more about, ah, new immigrants, people from Africa and I think it would make it much easier for us ... if people were not so ignorant about Africa in general, it would be much easier for us, really.”
African Refugee Participant

For the majority of those in our focus groups, racism and discrimination was a ‘lived’ reality that carried many negative consequences for their employment prospects.
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Meaningful Employment

Despite all the barriers impeding employment success, and a prevailing environment that has often ‘blamed’ young people themselves for this lack of employment success, few, if any, of the IR young adults in our sample had so far lost their strong desire to work.

A confident and practical Asian respondent said:

“I’m quite optimistic that though it might take some time to prove your credibility, but if you really work hard and you work sincerely, honestly, and you feel very comfortable with your work, I believe any employer ... can hire you permanently.”

Neoliberal assertions about the erosion of the work ethic among the young are not sustained by the findings of our study.

This desire to work on the part of newcomers does not negate the equally important desire for meaningful employment, a so-called good job. In fact, another

source of disillusionment with integration into Canadian society comes from immigrants' experiences with chronic underemployment – the underutilization of the skills and talents/human capital of workers (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi 2005; Krahn et. al. 2000; Livingstone 1999).

A lack of adequate job opportunities was strongly expressed by one Somali young person who said:

“I mostly have problems in finding something I wanna do, you know what I mean like? ...I see a lot of jobs I can get, right, but it's not...it's not something I would like to do, you know what I mean? That's why I have problems finding [a job].”

The voices of the young adults expressed here indicate a group of people who have a strong work ethic. They are a group that is eager to work hard and secure meaningful employment and contribute to their new society. Yet the lack of quality employment opportunities available to them is contributing to wasted human capital.

“A wise man once told me, find a job you love and you never have to work a day.”
Somali Young Adult Respondent

The Social, Psychological, and Societal Consequences of IR Young Adult Labour-Market Exclusion

“Is bad thing not to be employed, you know? Somebody will feel like nothing. You are not able to do many things for yourself, and even with this support [social assistance] is not enough.”
African Young Adult Respondent

There are societal consequences to some of the problems associated with unemployment and under-employment and the frustration visible minority “newcomer” young adults feel regarding their attempts to ‘integrate’ into Canadian society more generally. Problems connected to mental health (Rummens 2004; Beiser 1999) and social exclusion and alienation (Richmond and Saloojee 2005) were among the issues raised in our focus group discussions.

While not directly commented on by our sample population, newcomers from refugee backgrounds faced additional burdens and stresses given their uncertain longer-term status and the traumas many of them had experienced because of repression and conflict in their homelands. Difficulties associated with labour market integration often work to magnify psychological problems and other negative societal consequences (Simich,

et al. 2006).

The difficulties and barriers that so many newcomer young people experience in their efforts to integrate into a less-than-inviting labour market have created significant pressures. This situation promotes psychological stress, social exclusion, and youth alienation.

Conclusions

The experiences and reflections of the visible-minority immigrant and refugee young adults surveyed in this study reveal patterns of barriers that obstruct the social and labour-market integration of newcomers to Toronto and Canada

“Given the political climate and the will of the politicians it's very difficult to see a holistic approach to dealing with the issues.”
IR Youth Service Provider

By paying closer attention to the actual ‘lived experience’ of newcomer young adults, we have been able to both gain a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and more fully comprehend the negatively reinforcing character, as well as the various dimensions, of the barriers faced by newcomers.

The voices emerging from the focus groups spoke

compellingly about the hopes, dreams, frustrations, and realities of the immigration and refugee experiences of visible-minority young adults in Toronto. These expressions send a powerful message that gives us a deeper understanding of the process of social exclusion experienced by these young people; at the same time, they also provided glimpses into the possibilities for their meaningful integration.

The study ... underscored the fact that our young people were motivated in their desire to find meaningful work but increasingly frustrated by the barriers they encountered. ... Overtime, lack of success in the labour market tended to result in increased frustration and anxiety that often resulted in social and psychological difficulties and produced a general pattern of social exclusion
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ENDNOTES:

1. For an extended version of this paper see: John Shields, Khan Rahi and Antonie Scholtz, "Voices from the Margins: Visible-Minority Immigrant and Refugee Youth Experiences with Employment Exclusion in Toronto", *CERIS Working Paper*, No. 47, May.

http://www.ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/WKPP%20List/WKPP2006/CWP47_Shields_et_al_final.pdf

2. Seven focus groups were conducted in 2000 involving sixty-one immigrant and refugee visible minority young adults drawn from the African and Asian communities in Toronto. In addition, there was one focus group of nine community-based service providers who work with immigrant and refugee young people in Toronto.

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Launched in 1996, the **Metropolis Project** aims to improve policies for managing migration and diversity by focusing scholarly attention on critical issues. It involves policymakers, researchers, and NGOs in all project initiatives.

Metropolis' goals are to:

- Enhance academic research capacity;
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- Develop ways to facilitate the use of research in decision-making.

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For Further Information on POLICY MATTERS Please Contact:

John Shields, CERIS Director, Ryerson University and Academic Lead on the **POLICY MATTERS** Initiative
jshields@ryerson.ca

Editor

Simon Enoch, Doctoral Candidate, Communication & Culture, Ryerson University

Editorial Committee

Michael Doucet, Ryerson University
Bryan Evans, Ryerson University
Ted Richmond, Laidlaw Foundation
John Shields, Associate Director, CERIS

For More Information

The Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement – Toronto (CERIS)
246 Bloor Street West, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON Canada
M5S 1V4

Tel: 416-946-3110

Fax: 416-971-3094

<http://ceris.metropolis.net>

Authors

John Shields is a full professor in the Department of Politics & Public Administration at Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario and a Director, Ryerson University of CERIS.

jshields@ryerson.ca

Khan Rahi is a Community Based Researcher and Management Consultant with the Canadian Community-Based Research Network (CCRN).

ksrahi@sympatico.ca

Antonie Scholtz is a PhD Candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto.

ascholtz@oise.utoronto.ca

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