2011-2012 Annual Report
Research for Change
Precarious Employment Among Racialized Immigrant Women project

As a follow-up to last year’s “Working Rough, Living Poor” report, we have been conducting research on the labour market barriers faced by racialized immigrant women. Canadian census data shows that racialized women from racialized backgrounds face the highest levels of unemployment, precarious employment and poverty rates.

Working with a multidisciplinary team that includes academic partners from the School of Labour Studies at McMaster University and several community agencies in Toronto, our research goal has been to produce evidence about the specific gendered barriers and discriminations facing immigrant women. In line with our community-based research principles, we trained six of our peer outreach workers, themselves racialized immigrant women. We collaborated with them to design and conduct the study, which involved one-on-one interviews with 30 immigrant and refugee women from other minority linguistic and ethnic groups, with varied education and skill levels.

Data analysis is still underway, but early findings show that women immigrant to Canada for social and health reasons, not just for economic opportunities, face additional barriers from racialized backgrounds.

Social and health factors are also key considerations regarding when to enter the labour market, what jobs to apply for, and when to quit jobs. Our data shows that barriers to getting well-paying, stable jobs in one’s field are highly gendered, especially in engineering and IT. This results in ‘gendered occupational streaming’—the pursuit of work in low-paying sectors that lack job stability and government regulation, such as caregiving, acousticaladministration, sanitary, and fast food chains. Even in well-paying, regulated fields such as health care, racialized immigrant women find themselves in front-line jobs with few opportunities for advancement or job security.

Our data suggests that racialized immigrant women are more likely to be facing long periods of unemployment between jobs; (ii) actively volunteering for employment and/or for better services to enable immigrant women to get good, stable jobs in their field.

The project is part of a larger study called Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO), co-led by McMaster University and the United Way Toronto, and funded by the Social Sciences and Research Council (SSRC) as part of its Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) program.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:
- Most employment counselling services are not responsive to the professional needs of newcomer women.
- Better partnerships between employment services and employers is needed for better labour market outcomes for newcomers and racialized groups.
- Barriers to decent work, including those to professional accreditation, add individual and system-level costs, keeping qualified internationally trained people out of their fields.
- Employment services can do better services to enable immigrant women to get good, stable jobs in their field.

The Health of Newly Arrived Immigrants and Refugees

Access Alliance has four priority research areas, and recently released a report in November 2011 entitled “The Global City: Newcomer Health in Toronto.”

Half a million immigrants and refugees settled in Toronto between 2000 and 2009 and more than half of the city’s residents are born outside of Canada. Good health is one of many assets that newcomers bring to Canada, however “The Global City” reveals that the longer immigrants live in Canada, the worse their health gets. Some particular areas of concern include mental health status, some chronic diseases (including diabetes, heart disease and stroke), certain cancers (including prostate, colon and breast), and some maternal and infant health outcomes. The research also showed that newcomers are less likely than other Toronto residents to access many kinds of health services, including preventive care (e.g., cervical cancer screening), mental health services, or perinatal care, sexual health services, and dental care. Newcomers’ access to health services is affected by cost, eligibility requirements, and cultural and linguistic barriers, among other factors discussed in the report.

The report also identifies key social and economic factors such as inadequate income, unstable employment, discrimination, social isolation, housing insecurity, and linguistic barriers that contribute to the decline in health among newcomers.

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The report also identifies key social and economic factors such as inadequate income, unstable employment, discrimination, social isolation, housing insecurity, and linguistic barriers that contribute to the decline in health among newcomers. The “Global City” highlights the impact of making efforts to improve access to health services and working across sectors to address the social and structural exclusion that negatively affects newcomers’ health. The report also recommends that service providers and policy makers employ a health equity lens that prioritizes the most vulnerable newcomer sub-populations. Access Alliance plans to continue to work closely with Toronto Public Health to disseminate these important findings and to identify concrete strategies to meet the health needs of newcomers.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:
- Newcomers arrive with a wealth of education, skills, experience, and good health; however, their health advantage is often lost over time. Preventing this decline and improving the health of all residents is key to ensuring a prosperous and healthy city.
- The diversity of newcomers who settle in Toronto leads to a complex picture of the health of this population.
- Social and economic factors, such as low incomes and employment challenges, contribute to the decline in health among newcomers.
- Newcomers experience multiple barriers to accessing health services and are less likely than other Toronto residents to access certain kinds of health services.
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:
- Youth who come to Canada as refugees have unique settlement paths, challenges and support needs.
- Post-secondary financial aid is currently not accessible to refugee youth.
- Refugee youth entering post-secondary education require additional supports to overcome barriers to success.

In 2011-12, we:
- released two book chapters that were accepted for publication in an academic book about refugee mental health, and;
- started to develop a comprehensive report on promoting educational success for refugee youth.

All of our publications can be found on our website at www.researchforchange.ca or you can reach us at research@accessalliance.ca.

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