



Strategies for Employment, Income and Health Security: Critical Examination of Policies and Services

Research Bulletin

4

Income Security, Race and Health Project

This bulletin is the last in a four-part Research Bulletin series based on a study conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health working group. The study investigated relationships between employment, income and health insecurities faced by precariously employed racialized groups in the Black Creek area of Toronto.

This bulletin discusses strategies that racialized groups utilize to achieve employment security and health, and critically assesses the effectiveness of existing policies and services. Study findings suggest that in spite of using all available mainstream services and supports, racialized residents of the Black Creek area continue to face barriers

in getting stable jobs they want. Consequently, they experience persistent difficulties in meeting even their everyday basic needs. The most accessible mainstream services (e.g. resume clinics, job readiness training) contribute marginally if at all to achieving stable jobs and income security.

While participants from all focus groups did identify successful programs and services that offer long-term solutions (such as bridging programs, apprenticeships, job mentorship programs and on-the-job training), study results highlight that these programs are not very accessible because of their limited availability, restrictive inclusion criteria and heavier required investment of resources.

Participants were particularly critical of the role of “temp agencies” in reinforcing exploitative and precarious employment conditions. Perspectives on the role of volunteer work in relation to the labour market appear to be mixed and tenuous. These findings suggest that the majority of existing services may not be effective in

overcoming barriers facing racialized groups, particularly barriers rooted in larger systems of inequality and racialized discriminations.

Study results also reveal how service providers are affected by and responding to the growing employment insecurity and poor health experienced by an increasing number of their clients. Community and service provider participants provided insightful recommendations for overcoming employment/income insecurity and poor health that precariously employed racialized people in the Black Creek area face. These recommendations call for changes in approaches to how we plan and deliver services (more interdisciplinary collaboration, more family/community-centred approach), changes to funding/policy structures (more flexible funding and program eligibility systems, cross-sectoral collaboration to avoid policy/funding overlap), as well as recommendations for proactive measures to eliminate discriminatory processes and promote equity. >

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1 Precariously employed racialized people have critical awareness about different employment related services and supports, and make extensive use of short-term and long-term strategies and services, as well as protective strategies, in their efforts to achieve employment/income security and health.

FINDING 2 Many of the main-

stream employment services that are accessible to racialized groups lead to “survival jobs” that may allow families to make ends meet but do not support their efforts to achieve long-term employment and economic security.

FINDING 3 Temporary employment recruitment agencies or “temp agencies” expose people to exploitative and precarious em-

ployment experiences.

FINDING 4 Services/Programs such as internships, bridging programs, mentorship programs, on-the-job training programs, and getting a Canadian post-secondary education are considered to be effective in building long-term employment security but appear to be largely inaccessible due to higher investments in resources, costs

and time required.

FINDING 5 Service providers are experiencing increase in work load and work stress with the growth in precariously employed clients with complex social, economic and health issues. Restrictive policy and funding environments add to the stress and undermine service provider capacity to provide quality services to marginalized clients.

ABOUT THE STUDY METHOD AND FRAMEWORK

In line with community-based research principles, we recruited and trained several residents from the Black Creek area to collaborate with us as research partners (peer researchers) in this project. Peer researchers were actively involved in all phases of the project including developing the research questions, data collection, analysis and writing.

We conducted eight focus groups with different racialized groups living in the Black Creek area (n=105). Focus group participants completed a survey at the beginning of the focus group. The sample size for the survey is 78. All participants self identified as being precariously employed. Focus groups were organized by language and ethno-specific groups and were facilitated by peer researchers from these backgrounds (Vietnamese-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Hindi/Urdu-speaking, Arabic-speaking, Black community, Canadian-born community, an all-male focus group, and one mixed focus group). We also conducted three focus groups with service providers working in the employment, settlement and community services sector in the Black Creek area (two with front line staff and one with management staff). The Black Creek area was selected for the study because it has one of the highest proportions of racialized residents in Toronto, and high levels of poverty, unemployment and sub-standard housing and services. This community was also selected because of the rich history of resident-led social activism in the area.

By “racialized groups” we refer to non-dominant ethno-racial communities who experience race as a key factor in their identity through racialization (Galabuzi, 2001). Racialization is the process whereby racial categories are constructed as different and unequal in ways that lead to regressive social, economic and political impacts (Galabuzi, 2001). While Statistics Canada uses the term “visible minorities”, Access Alliance and many other organizations including the Ontario Human Rights Commission use the term “racialized groups”, as the former term is more static and relates primarily to number and colour while the latter recognizes the dynamic and complex process by which racial categories are socially produced by dominant groups in ways that trench social inequalities.

FINDING

1

TYPES OF STRATEGIES

Precariously employed racialized people have critical awareness about different employment related services and supports, and make extensive use of short-term and long-term strategies and services, as well as protective strategies, in their efforts to achieve employment/income security and health.

Evidence from the study demonstrates that racialized groups living in the Black Creek area have a critical awareness of existing services and supports and utilize a wide array of strategies to achieve employment/income security and health. Table 1 summarizes the different strategies racialized people are using. These strategies can be grouped into four inter-related categories: (i) strategies for finding work; (ii) strategies for making ends meet; (iii) long-term/resource intensive solutions; and (iv) protective responses.

The majority of participants have made exhaustive use of main-

TABLE 1. STRATEGIES UTILIZED TO ACHIEVE EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME SECURITY

Strategies for Finding Work	Traditional job search methods (resumes, internet searchers, job posting boards, etc.); job placements through temporary agencies; obtaining equivalency for foreign credentials; approach potential employers directly; networking; job fairs; adapt to Canadian labour market; government funded employment programs; volunteering (to get Canadian experience)
Strategies for Making Ends Meet	Take on survival jobs, odd jobs; make personal & professional sacrifices; access employment insurance; workfare/welfare; income earning activity outside of the mainstream labour market (working “under-the-table” jobs, criminal activity)
Long-term / Resource Intensive Solutions	Invest in education and training; (LINC, upgrade skills, pursue another college/university degree in Canada, bridging programs, apprenticeships, internship programs); Invest in children’s education; develop prudent financial literacy/strategies
Protective Responses	Keep hope; patience; faith/religion; determination; denial of negative impacts; getting involved in local advocacy campaigns

stream job search tools, job readiness training, resume workshops, and other employment related services offered by government and community agencies. Since these services have not resulted in the stable jobs they want, precariously employed racialized people engage in a variety of strategies to make ends meet, including taking up “survival jobs,” making personal sacrifices and earning money under-the-table. Participants also highlighted the importance of protective strategies and supports in maintaining wellbeing and a sense of hope in spite of all the odds. Protective strategies and supports included faith/religion, community support, getting involved in local advocacy campaigns, and personal reaffirmations to keep hope and be patient. Participants particularly stressed the importance of emotional support from family, friends and faith and talked about strengthened faith and stronger family/community relationships resulting from these experiences. Many participants saw their children as a sense of hope.

These findings provide initial insights about the range and combination of strategies that precariously employed people use to find stable jobs in their field, and to achieve income security and health. More research is required to better understand accessibility and quality of services, how people decide on which strategies and services to use, level of effort that precariously employed people have to invest in their job search process, the costs incurred in the process (financial, social, health costs), and the role of informal supports and strategies.

FINDING

2

LIMITATION IN MAINSTREAM EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Many of the mainstream employment services that are accessible to racialized groups lead to “survival jobs” that may allow families to make ends meet but do not support their efforts to achieve long-term employment and economic security.

Participants mentioned that employment services such as resume/interview workshops, job search services and other job readiness workshops (such as information about adapting to the Canadian workplace environment) are widely available in the Black Creek area and are usually free of cost. However, study findings highlight that participants find these services to be largely ineffective in getting stable jobs in one’s field. In the words of one participant:

“I did take a workshop, a resume workshop so I found out how to update my resume and I am getting lots of interviews. But I think what we need is more skills, like things that improve your skills, like training. More training like practical training.”—Participant from Canadian-born focus group

Service providers provided rich explanations about the limitations of mainstream employment services like resume clinics and job readiness trainings:

“Also like the newcomers when we refer them to the employment agencies and they say the same thing, you know when they come back like they show us the resume and interview skills and really not getting the jobs, you know. And they just kind of get disappointed and because they’re really looking for the job, they want the job, you know. And now in these days because they are so highly educated and they know how to make resumes and they know how to, you know, when they go to the interview you have to talk to the, with the person like with high confidence and they have the courage and they’re even asking, ‘Can you please give me the chance to do the work? I can show you, you know, I can do the work,’ and still they’re not getting the job.”—Front Line Service Provider focus group

“I’ve had people come to me and say, you know, they’ve gone through all of the different agencies, and all that happens is that they get their resume rearranged. And it’s not helping them get a job. The jobs are not there. So that’s what the community group is supposed to do. The agency is set up to do resumes, set up to do pre-employment training workshops, work on attitude, character. But it’s not specific job skills that are being taught for that particular job.”—Front Line Service Provider focus group

Study results show that mainstream employment services contribute minimally to building crucial skills that can enable marginalized people to better understand and navigate a Canadian labour market that is increasingly shifting towards precarious, flexible forms of labour and entitlements. These findings raise questions about the quality and effectiveness of these types of employment services that tend to receive significant government funding.

FINDING

3

TEMP AGENCIES AND PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Temporary employment recruitment agencies or “temp agencies” expose people to exploitative and precarious employment experiences.

Participants from both sets of focus groups (community and service provider) perceived temp agencies as ineffective and exploitative. Participants raised concerns about the rapid growth of temp agencies in the Black Creek area. They viewed them as playing an important role in pushing low-income racialized families onto a precarious employment trajectory. Many participants also pointed out that

temp agencies are exploitative “scams” that are most interested in maximizing profits for employers and the agency at the expense of decreased rights and take-home income for clients. Many respondents indicated that they felt they had less control about the type of work and career paths available to them when working through temp agencies and were treated as a disposable source of labour:

“*[Temp] agencies don’t work... They are pimping you, they are taking \$5 or \$6 for every hour that you work. That doesn’t work for me.*” —Participant from Canadian-born focus group

“*I just hope that the agencies and the company will hire us full time not just hiring us for a few weeks then lay us off and then rehire us to avoid the full-time hiring. We need benefits and quality pay through full-time work. Even when we work for six months, we should be entitled for these benefits.*” —Participant from Vietnamese-speaking focus group

“*In terms of making ends meet or achieving income security, like the temp agencies is always, always comes up. I work in the Resource Centre, a lot of [the clients] say, ‘Okay I went through a temp agency.’ They found jobs for one or two days. It’s very sporadic kind of work. It’s very low skilled, low-end kind of employment... and it’s totally not working for the clients at all ‘cause they’re not gaining. If they are foreign trained they are getting some Canadian experience but obviously that Canadian experience is totally outside of their field.*” — Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

“*We hear so many horror stories from our clients from these temp agencies. Clients would tell us, ‘Oh yeah, they called to say there’s a job. Come here at 6:00 a.m.’ They sit in the office with their, say, hard hat and boots and whatever and just sit there until a job actually comes in. So they waste the whole day waiting there, and there’s no job. But every day they have to do that because just in case a job comes in.*” —Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

The above quotes highlight some of the core problems associated with temp agencies: (1) they lead to temporary and irregular/sporadic job opportunities; (2) these job opportunities are often totally outside the individual’s field of experience/study, and tend to be low-skill, low-end positions that contribute to skill reduction and de-professionalization of jobseekers; (3) most jobs through temp agencies are low paying and the agencies take substantial commission leaving clients with little take-home pay; (4) most jobs through temp agencies have no benefits; and (5) in some cases, people may end up spending many hours and days in temp agency offices (or at home) just waiting for potential jobs. Some participants also questioned why temp agencies particularly target marginalized neighbourhoods and people. Study evidence call into question

the proliferation of temp agencies and the role of temp agencies in reinforcing precarious, exploitative and insecure employment conditions for racialized people.

FINDING

4

SERVICES AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Services/Programs such as internships, bridging programs, mentorship programs, on-the-job training programs, and getting a Canadian post-secondary education are considered to be effective in building long-term employment security but appear to be largely inaccessible due to higher investments in resources, costs and time required (for community members, as well as funding and implementing agencies).

Focus group discussions suggest that the most successful programs are those programs that involved collaborations between government, not-for-profit employment programs and employers or trade unions leading to practical, on-the-job, paid work experience. Many participants identified apprenticeship, mentorship and bridging programs as the most successful strategies to finding long-term decent work in one’s field. Although many participants had not been able to access these programs, they knew of friends who had benefited from such programs. According to one participant:

“*There are opportunities for immigrants for non-paid training and volunteering. For instance, Corporate Training Readiness Program... give non-paid work for six weeks. They look at your skills and government pays for it. Many people are absorbed by organizations but these programs are limited. In keeping with the professional qualifications of immigrants, more of such programs should be implemented to give them intensive training program. Alongside they should be able to attain experience at organizations and if the organization is happy with their work then upon graduation they can be offered jobs.*” —Participant from Hindi/Urdu-speaking focus group

Service providers confirmed community participants’ positive appraisal of programs like apprenticeships, internships and educational pathways and provided concrete examples of the success of such programs:

“*What is working? Like there’s a few programs, like if a foreign-trained, they need more programs where they are able to*

get the Canadian experience. Now one program that I know of that works pretty well is there's an Adult Learning Centre ... They are downtown and they have a co-op program. It is called the Can Ex Program, the Canadian Experience, and they will actually help the person to find a placement within a company that specifically will give the foreign-trained professional experience on the job. So they don't have to necessarily go out on their own to try to get it, they will have support from the school, from the co-op program, that will go out there and help them find a company."—Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

These narratives reveal that programs that work are those that (1) create direct and meaningful work experiences in people's field and/or in stable occupations and trades; (2) build capacity and skills that strengthen employability (not just rearranging resume); (3) involve collaboration between employers, trade unions, government and community agencies to create meaningful job opportunities/experiences that build longterm employment security. Participants also highlighted the need for programs that strengthen local economy and create jobs, particularly for marginalized people. Participants shared many examples of successful programs including this one:

"Another thing I was going to say that I think is hopefully going to have good results is a [youth focused program] that the City has been working on in partnership with local trade unions. The City has invested \$13 million in the priority neighbourhoods for capital projects, and the goal was that through those capital projects there would be a [youth focused program] so local youth would be hired and trained in the trades to actually do the construction of those projects. And the Painter's Union and the Carpenter's Union have been really amazing partners in that, so that youth can get the certification and connections to actual apprenticeship opportunities beyond the program. So that's been good, and the other good thing about that is a lot of the youth we work with are youth that have criminal records and the unions will work with people who have criminal records and that's a good opportunity"—Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

Although participants agreed on the success of these programs, they stressed that there were only a few of these programs available and that there were many barriers to gaining access. For example, many of these apprenticeships and internships are geared at particular trades or specific groups (e.g. recent immigrants who have been in Canada less than three years). Because of limited spaces, even people who do meet the eligibility criteria may not be able to access them. Similarly, several participants noted that pursuing a university or college degree in Canada can be very costly and require several months and years of commitment. One participant, for example, mentioned how he had to use up all his savings from back home

DEBATE ON THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEER WORK

Participant views on the role of volunteer work were mixed and thus there was a very interesting debate on this topic in each focus group. Participants, specifically immigrants, noted that while volunteering was a helpful way to build social networks and get entry-level positions or sporadic contract work, this strategy did not necessarily lead to long-term, stable employment. A few community participants mentioned that they felt misled into believing that volunteer work was a successful way to include Canadian experience on their resumes, only to discover that many employers will not consider volunteer positions as legitimate work experience. Other participants shared positive experiences about their volunteer work and indicated that volunteering has multiple benefits irrespective of whether it leads to jobs. Such varied views were echoed in the service provider focus groups as well. Several participants from our service provider focus groups were very critical of volunteerism (describing volunteer work as exploitative and free labour) while others perceived volunteer work as a community building tool and a potential "stepping stone" to career linkages and other opportunities. Overall, participants stressed the need to make sure that volunteer opportunities are not used to exploit people and that whenever possible agencies should build stronger links between volunteer work and employment.

"Volunteerism... it is a big, big issue in my personal opinion. It is like an industry by itself. And I think some of the clients also mentioned during your focus groups previously that it's a cheap free labour and I totally 100% agree; because why can somebody be employed or taken in as a volunteer and not taken in as a paid worker?"—Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

"I would like to speak on behalf of volunteerism, not that my agency is 100% volunteers – we're not – but some businesses, some agencies do not have a large budget so it's for them to get some of their services that they need done in their offices. They need volunteers to come and assist because they do not have the money to pay employees. What does the person coming in get in exchange? They get experience in the environments, they get familiar with what it's like to go into an office every day, what it's like to do, run a photocopier or answer phones. Yeah it may not be, if it's not their, like, where they want to work, then don't volunteer there. I'm not going to volunteer at McDonald's if I want to work at City Hall. I want to volunteer at City Hall, right? So you have to try to volunteer in a place that's going to help you find a job, or give you connections to find a job. So that let's say I'm volunteering at City Hall, I want to work at City Hall, a job comes up, they're more likely to hire me as a volunteer than to outsource."—Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

"So it's always good idea to have a counsellor to guide you, that's the most important thing. Why do you want to volunteer, where do you want to be after? You need some sort of planning. And what happens is, you know as you say some companies they don't have money to train. Yes. But you, you get your money later on if you get the position anyway. Let's say I finish, you know, you know a degree from York University and now I'm a volunteer in an organization in three months and I get the position. Technically you're better off. Because if you don't volunteer maybe like after two years still you don't get a position. That's what I would argue for volunteerism."—Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group

in order to pay for educational expenses in Canada. Many of the courses are offered during times when people have to work. The degrees and diplomas that tend to be less costly and can be obtained in shorter periods are often offered by smaller colleges or private institutes. Participants who had obtained such degrees and diplomas pointed out that these can carry limited weight in finding stable jobs. Moreover, many immigrant participants rightly questioned why immigrants with high education have to go back to school in Canada to get additional degrees.

Accreditation and re-certification for regulated professions can be very stringent, costly and time consuming. Several participants with medical, engineering and teaching backgrounds pointed out that they were not able to pursue accreditation and re-certification because of these factors. Other studies have also documented that stringent accreditation and re-certification requirements are making many foreign-trained professionals abort their professional line of work and find jobs in other areas. Bridging programs (for foreign trained social workers, dieticians, nurses, etc.) that involve a speedy re-training process with paid internship opportunities have proven to be more popular and were seen as very effective. Service provider participants did point out that programs such as apprenticeships, internships, professional mentorships and bridging programs do require more investments in terms of funds, effort and time from the government, employers and community agencies; however they stressed that the benefits from these programs are many and far outweigh the costs.

FINDING

5

IMPACT ON SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service providers are experiencing increase in work load and work stress with the growth in precariously employed clients with complex social, economic and health issues. Restrictive policy and funding environments add to the stress and undermine service provider capacity to provide quality services to marginalized clients.

Study findings indicate that service providers working closely with precariously employed racialized communities are also being negatively impacted, professionally and personally, due to the worsening economic security and health of their client groups. Many service provider participants spoke about the emotional toll they experience (using terms such as “vicarious trauma”, “compassion fatigue” and “vortex of hopelessness”) from seeing the economic and health conditions of their clients get worse. These feelings were also attributed to perceptions that systemic change is slow moving and the impact of

discrimination, particularly systemic racism, is overwhelming. The following quotes capture these sentiments:

“There’s a technical name for it: vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, you know, is something that we in the service industry sometimes we have to be cautious of. Especially, you know, when you get into the double-digit [unemployment] years and it is somewhat daunting, two steps forward three back kind of mentality.” —Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

“We get drawn into the vortex of hopelessness that a lot of the community experiences... that we are part of it now and we get pulled into that. Somehow I feel I shouldn’t talk about youths but that’s all I do are the youths. They speak of the hopelessness that they feel and I think as workers we feel. I feel sometimes some of that hopelessness.” —Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

Service provider participants pointed out that as more clients are coming to them with multiple issues (including mental health issues) it is putting additional work and emotional burden on service providers to the extent that agencies are having to re-orient their service model and staff training:

“So before, when we used to be focusing say 80% on employment assistance and maybe 20% on everything else, right? Now it’s like, we’ve got much more need now to help them with all of their other barriers before we can even get to the employment piece, right? So now we’re sitting down with them more just to find out what sort of mental problems they have, try to figure out where they can get their next meal, right? So we’re referring so many more people to food banks and other yeah. I mean it’s incredible, everything that my staff is having to learn and having to be more resourceful and that, right? So the impact to the staff is they’re feeling much more stress because they weren’t thinking about coming into this position to have people cry on them, to have people talk about being suicidal because they don’t know how to respond to all that. So the impact now is obviously affecting the staff in that I don’t want them to be over stressed in which case they can’t help the clients that come in either, right?” —Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

While more clients are coming with a complexity of issues, service providers pointed out that funding and policy environments have become more restrictive in ways that preclude them from offering integrated, high-quality services to their clients. Service providers offered cogent critiques about the negative implications of the recent shift towards a restrictive funding structure, restrictive program eligibility requirements, number/quota-driven accountability re-

quirements, and targeted, individual-oriented programs (compared to family/community-centred programs):

“Funding that’s out now, I think a lot of the funding that’s out right now current, requires us to be a certain way... So it would be nice if they (funders) went back to the other way where they’re funding infrastructure and were funding creative programs. Like I would like to see that as opposed to we’re not going to fund you dollars for admin, or we’re not going to fund you dollars for things to help us set up, because some of the times, especially for other smaller organizations so that they can be included, that helps them, right.”—Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

“Number-driven programs – so when a government has to program, whether it be Job Connect or whatever, they’re so focused on get the number, get the number, get the number... how can you get the number when I still have this person who still requires my help who is coming to the end of the year. Like I find that the programs try to constantly fit the oblong or the star into the square peg and it just doesn’t work.”—Participant from Management Service Provider focus group

“I think I am limited because of the time limitation that has been given to us as service providers during our one-on-one counselling meeting... It’s because of funder requirement; you are not supposed to go beyond a certain time limit for counselling with any one client. I usually go beyond. [giggle] I always go beyond actually, not usually, always go beyond the time limit. But I feel that I’m breaking the rule but for the sake of better service I always do go beyond the time. So that is one of my barriers that I feel hampered with.”—Participant from Front Line Service Provider focus group ■

CONCLUSION

Study findings indicate that the majority of mainstream and widely available employment-related services (in particular, resume/interview workshops, job search services and job readiness programs) are largely ineffective in enabling people to get stable jobs in their field. This is because these programs contribute minimally to building relevant skills and work experiences, or overcoming systemic barriers that racialized people face in the labour market. Programs that are perceived as effective in building employment security are ones that are geared towards building skills, creating employment opportunities and bridges, and those that foster collaboration between employers, unions, governments and community agencies. Some of these programs, such as apprenticeships and internships, are few and also have strict eligibility requirements and thus are not very accessible. Stringent accreditation and re-certification requirements also preclude foreign-trained people from entering their professional field, pushing them onto a precarious employment trajectory. While participant views on the role of volunteer work was mixed, many participants highlighted the need to make sure that volunteer opportunities are not used for exploiting unemployed and underemployed people.

Study evidence also reveal on how the increase in economic insecurity and poor health among racialized people affects the service provider agencies accessed by these people. Service providers shared their professional and emotional stress (vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, as some put it) resulting from this. Employment agency staff discussed how they have to try to address many other barriers that their clients face before they can address employment issues. Service providers also criticized the shift towards more restrictive funding and accountability structures from government and funders, and pointed out how these prevent them from offering high quality, integrated services that are crucial to overcoming the multiple, complex issues faced by their clients.

Recommendations from community members and service providers call for changes in approaches to how we plan and deliver services, such as more interdisciplinary collaboration, more family/community centred approach, changes to funding/policy structures (more flexible funding and program eligibility systems, cross-sectoral collaboration to avoid policy/funding overlap), as well as recommendations for proactive measures to eliminate discriminatory processes and promote equity.

ABOUT THE INCOME SECURITY, RACE AND HEALTH PROJECT

The Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) Working Group is a multi-stakeholder collaborative research group comprising academic, community agency, and peer researchers established in 2006 in Toronto under the leadership of Access Alliance. Using community-based research (CBR) principles, the key goal of the working group is to investigate the systemic causes of growing racialized inequities in employment and income, and to document the health impact. The ISRH working group intends to use evidence from this study to mobilize progressive policy changes to overcome the systemic income and health inequalities that racialized groups in Toronto face.

In 2007, we used photovoice methodology to document the impact of poverty on racialized residents of Black Creek. For the second phase (2008-2009), we conducted eight focus groups with different racialized groups in Black Creek. Focus group participants also completed a survey about employment and health status. We also conducted three focus groups with service providers (management and frontline). In line with CBR principles, we trained and engaged low-income racialized community members as research collaborators (peer researchers) at all phases of the project.

This study has generated rich evidence about the types of systemic barriers and challenges that racialized groups experience in the labour market and the multiple, compounding negative effects these have on their health (at individual, family and community levels). Study findings about labour market barriers are discussed in this research bulletin. The remaining three research bulletins and other reports from this study can be obtained from: <http://accessalliance.ca/research/activities/isrh>

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