

# School-Work Transitions and Employment among Second-Generation Immigrants in Canada



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## ABSTRACT

This study uses in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of young second-generation immigrant adults in the school-work transition, while identifying the challenges they face and the strategies they use to navigate this transition successfully. Preliminary findings highlight the importance of social networks and the complex role of race-ethnicity during the job search process. As the labour market share of young workers with an immigrant background increases, this research will help shed light on the experiences of this population, and shape policy and practice in the Canadian economy.



## INTRODUCTION

### OBJECTIVE

While there is substantial literature on the labour market integration of immigrants, less is known about the experiences of the children of newcomers. This study will explore the social and structural factors that affect the school-work transition among second-generation immigrants.

### BACKGROUND

- More than 5 million Canadians, or 17.4% of the population is composed of second-generation immigrants.<sup>1</sup>
- Existing data suggest that second-generation immigrants generally fair well in the Canadian labour market.<sup>2</sup>
- The educational attainment of this population surpasses those of their peers with Canadian-born parents.<sup>3</sup>
- While second-generation immigrants as a whole appear to be thriving in the school to work transition, those who identify as a visible minority experience more negative outcomes when compared to those who do not identify as such.<sup>4</sup>
- While human capital theory is useful in explaining the importance of educational qualifications and the significance of credentials for access to skilled labour, it is not sufficient in explaining the inequality of labour market outcomes among different groups with the same human capital.
- The economic outcomes of the second-generation are a key determinant of their ability to integrate into other facets of society within the host country.<sup>5</sup>
- Accordingly, the inability of certain groups to make a successful transition into the workplace has serious ramifications for social inequality. As increasingly large numbers of second-generation immigrants make their way into the labour market, it is important to examine the experiences of this group.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Preliminary findings highlight a number of key themes during the school-work transition among second-generation immigrants. Challenges and barriers that hindered this population's ability to integrate into the labour market included: a lack of access to social networks that could help them find work in their field, making the school-work transition in a precarious labour market, and facing discrimination on the basis of their real or perceived race-ethnicity/religion. Some key strategies or tactics that participants found useful include: using their social networks to find work, using familial support to provide them with support and motivation during their job search, and gaining workplace experience through practical learning experiences offered in their post-secondary programs (e.g. co-ops, practicums, internships).

### BARRIERS

#### Lack of Access to Social Networks

*"The only job my mom would be able to get me is at the sari store [...] When I think about my family, like my uncles and my aunts, they're not at a job where I would wanna be. Like, they are either working at a restaurant or working at a factory." –Saramathi*

*"I never used family only because none of my family works in an area that I wanted to work in. It didn't help that my parents were immigrants [...] none of them have been here for years where they have that rapport and then I can use their contacts." –Ivanna*

#### Precarious Labour Market

*"I have 5 part-time jobs. I am actively seeking permanent jobs, it's just that the job market in [my city] isn't very high right now." –Alicia*

*"So right now I have to keep picking jobs just to keep making sure I pay off my debt and not fall into more debt, [...] it makes it harder to like, like it makes the job search harder cause you gotta settle just to make those ends meet." –Lidya*

#### Discrimination

*"The fact that I wear a headscarf I think people definitely have certain perceptions about you if you are a dark skinned girl who wears a headscarf. I do think that during interviews that plays into it. [...] if you look a certain way, or if they have certain perceptions of you that are false, not necessarily negative, but false, I think that plays into them being like, 'You're too different, we don't really hire people like you. No one really works here that is like you.' That kind of thing." –Jameelah*

*"When I went in for the interview the woman said that when she called me she wasn't sure about my name, and was scared that I would be an Indian with an accent and she didn't want to hire anyone with an accent. I just thought wow that's incredibly racist, and incredibly bigoted, but she said she was scared. That's had a pretty big impact with me lately, and I've started to change my name to the American spelling." –Sandor*

### STRATEGIES

#### Access to Social Networks

*"Yes. Definitely. I want to say that 90 percent of the way that I did any form of job searching was through [my network]. It always helps when you have someone on the inside vouching for you [...] it's kind of like they are giving their support and saying this is a candidate you should hire. So absolutely." –Carol*

*"When I was graduating from school, I had a friend who worked in the same department, in a different position. [...] she was leaving for another position so she told me about her position and kind of suggested me for the job. As she was leaving I got an interview for the position. I met with the director, and I ended up getting the position." –Sarah*

*"I got the job through a networking event at university. I just went and talked to some people, and then I applied and I got the call about a week or so later, with a phone interview, and then a few in person interviews, and then yeah I had the job." –Hamid*

#### Familial Support

*"Well like my parents in general are very like, they push like to make sure that I do as much as I possible can. They don't like to see me being lazy, like they don't like to see me not applying for jobs when I obviously should be, so the pressure from that obviously like, it's the good kind of pressure, it's not like bad pressure." –Ivana*

*"[...] that emotional support is there [...] They keep telling me like, 'Oh don't worry about work, you'll find it, you just relax,' and they do all the cooking and cleaning and all this so I think it's great that I live in a very supportive home." –Delia*

#### Practical Learning Experiences

*"There is a co-op class you have to take and through the class you are receiving training in learning how to write resumes, job search techniques, and all of that." –Derek*

*"My practicum I would say was useful for personal goals as well as professional. Professionally because I was able to meet a variety of people [...], and build more skills. It really helped me get my next job." –Misha*

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do second-generation immigrants experience school-work transitions?
2. What challenges do they face during this transition?
3. What strategies and experiences help them navigate this transition successfully?
4. How do visible minority versus non-visible minority individuals experience this transition differently?



## METHODOLOGY

Participants were recruited across Southern Ontario through convenience sampling and passive snowball sampling. A mix of visible and non-visible minority participants were sought in order to examine the role of race-ethnicity in the job search process. In-depth interviews were conducted with 26 participants. Interviews were between 60-90 minutes in length. The sample included:

- 15 visible minority participants
- 11 non-visible minority participants
- 18 females
- 8 males

Participants were asked about their employment history, job search techniques, academic history and the role of schooling, impact of family, barriers and challenges faced in the job search process, and the role of their second-generation immigrant status (including the impact of ethnicity, and if applicable, race).

### Eligibility Requirements for Participants

- Between the ages of 20 and 30.
- Born to immigrant parents in Canada, OR arrived in Canada by or before the age of 8.
- Completed a Canadian post-secondary program within the last 4 years.
- Actively searching for permanent employment, OR currently employed in a permanent position.



## REFERENCES

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