



**Access Alliance**  
Multicultural Health and Community Services

# The Health Impacts of Precarious Work

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Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO)  
Case Study 6: Job-Skills Mismatch Among Racialized Immigrant Women

Literature Review

March 2012



This literature review was developed by Jessica Merolli, PhD Candidate at McMaster University in collaboration with the Access Alliance research project team for the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project, Case Study 6: Job-Skills Mismatch Among Racialized Immigrant Women. This project is funded by the Social Sciences and Research Council (SSRC) as part of their Community University Research Alliances (CURA) program.

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## Labour Markets in the New Global Economy

While much of the focus regarding the global economic crisis beginning in 2007 has centred on the instability in financial markets, the crisis has exposed and in many cases intensified the problematic trends that have emerged as a result of the neoliberal restructure of the labour market during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The post-war era, characterised by Keynesian economics and Fordism, is often celebrated for its dedication to full-time, stable, life-long employment. This period was also marked by an expansive welfare state, which was designed to support workers during periods of unemployment and ensure some level of income security. While this picture of the “golden age” is celebrated, it has become increasingly contested for its inability to account for the experiences of women, racialized minorities and immigrants, who found themselves outside of the white-male industrial worker model upon which the welfare state was premised.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the extent to which the welfare state was developed and the characteristics of benefits varied across states.<sup>2</sup> Despite these critiques, the post-war period remains notable for rapid economic advancement and decreasing levels of economic inequality. Exactly when this period ended is contested; however the stagflation crisis of the 1970s is considered the breaking point for the dominance of Keynesian economics. As governments struggled to manage mounting debts, high unemployment and inflation, neoliberalism became the dominant ideology that underpinned drastic changes to government policy and markets, including the labour market.

The assumption that the market is the most efficient means through which to allocate resources and thus to promote continual economic growth, is at the heart of neoliberal ideology. Peck and Tickell write about two key phases of the neoliberal program. The first phase, beginning in the 1970’s and continuing throughout the 1980s with the rise to power of key right-wing parties and political leaders like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, was characterised by the dismantling the remnants of Keynesianism and Fordism. During this period, the welfare state was substantially changed through the elimination programs, the scaling back of others and in some instances the privatization of services. These changes were not limited to the direct services provided by governments, they also included the protection the state provided to citizens through the regulation of financial and labour markets. It was argued that global competition required flexibility for corporations, both in terms of the flow of finances and goods across borders and the supply of labour. The second phase, which Peck and Tickell coin as the ‘roll-out’ phase, focuses on “the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalised state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations”<sup>3</sup> In this phase, states develop new institutions which are embedded with neoliberal ideology. Labour market policy shifts from one which protects workers from fluctuations in labour demand through unemployment insurance, minimum wages and employment protection, to one which focuses on the mobility and

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, “Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Welfare States”; Herberg, “The Ethno-racial Socioeconomic Hierarchy in Canada - Theory and Analysis of the New Vertical Mosaic.”

<sup>2</sup> Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* /; Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* /.

<sup>3</sup> Peck and Tickell, “Neoliberalizing Space.”

flexibility of employment, through an emphasis on individual skills development and fewer restrictions on employment relationships. Certainly, notorious political figures like Thatcher and Reagan played a key role in the rise of neoliberal ideology. However, its pervasiveness is also linked to the rise of key international organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organizations, which have each worked to development international agreements advancing the neoliberal project.<sup>4</sup> Indeed the IMF structural adjustment programs required governments to drastically reduce welfare state spending and deregulate financial and labour markets in order to receive short and long-term loans. Further, the OECD in particular has been instrumental in the advancement of the case for the deregulation of labour markets.<sup>5</sup>

With its emphasis on the effectiveness of the market over government regulation and provision of services, neoliberalism has had a profound impact on what governments do. Many scholars have argued that neoliberalism has had a homogenizing impact on governments and in particular western industrialised nations.<sup>6</sup> Much of this work has focused on the retrenchment of the welfare state and deregulation of financial markets. If the rise of the welfare state was linked to the relative power of labour vis-a-via business, neoliberalism as policy has weakened labour both through changes to labour market policy, and the elimination of labour's traditional base in manufacturing and the public sector. The elimination of restrictions on the flow of capital and goods throughout the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had two main effects on the labour relations in advanced industrialized nations. On the one hand, these changes increased the rapidity at which the manufacturing sector was being hollowed out, as companies moved operations to countries with cheaper labour costs. On the other, the free movement of capital was associated with a rise of the financial and services sectors.<sup>7</sup> Sassen, for example, argues that such changes has in part lead to the development of global cities, with economies centered around financial services and the services required by those working in financial sector, including everything from shopping centres to dry cleaning.<sup>8</sup> These changes in turn have had a profound impact on the power of labour, not only through the virtual elimination of labour's traditional support base but also through pressure to capitulate to downward pressures on wages, benefits and workplace protection as a means through which to prevent a further erosion of the manufacturing base.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, sectors of the labour market that experience growth, particularly the service sector, have been slow to unionize. Further, the rise of neoliberal ideology has been associated with a shift in the public discourse around employment and the labour market. Whereas the post-war period was dominated by the goal of full-employment, albeit predominately male, and rising standards of living, the rise of service sector employment and the rise of global markets has shifted the goals to those of competition and flexibility.

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<sup>4</sup> Stone, *Controlling Institutions*.

<sup>5</sup> Mahon and McBride, *OECD and Transnational Governance*.

<sup>6</sup> Pierson, *Dismantling the Welfare State?*.

<sup>7</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights*.

<sup>8</sup> Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.

<sup>9</sup> Munck, *Globalisation and Labour*.

The labour market by its nature is diverse, with a variety of jobs which are associated with corresponding working conditions and levels of remuneration. Traditional understandings of the labour market posit that in an open market, individuals are rewarded based on their skills, level of education and experience. Together, with individual decisions on the working conditions and compensation trade-offs, these characteristics determine an individual's position in the labour market. However, segmented labour market scholars argue that in fact, there are two segments to the labour market, the primary segment, where jobs are well remunerated and stable with good working conditions and the secondary segment, where salaries are low, working hours long, labour conditions poor and job security minimal. More importantly, transition between the two markets, especially from the secondary to primary is difficult. Empirical research from the past four decades suggest that allocation into the primary or secondary segment is influenced strongly by race and gender, with women and ethnic minorities over-represented in secondary sector jobs.<sup>10</sup>

The 'new' economy in western developed nations has become dominated by the financial and service sectors. As the economy shifted, jobs lost in manufacturing were replaced by 'high-skilled' and 'low-skilled' jobs in the service sector. Not surprisingly then, over this same period, the gap between the highest income earned and the lowest have steadily increased.<sup>11</sup> The impact of these changes on women has been uneven and shaped by race and immigration status. While women have generally made improvements in terms of pay gap and employment participation rates, racialized immigrant women have not shared in these gains at the same rate. What's more is that employment rates can obscure the fact that women remain over-represented in part-time employment and continue to be responsible for much of the unpaid home work.<sup>12</sup> The gains made in terms of fair pay are in part a consequence of pay equity and affirmative action programs. However, as the political climate and labour market demands have shifted, so too have governments' commitment to such policies.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, governments have been under pressure to reduced spending, primarily through the elimination and/or reduction of social services. Again, this has had a disproportionate effect on women, who have tended to work in the areas of education, health and social welfare and in particular skilled immigrant women have historically found work in the public sector in health and education.<sup>14</sup> Cuts to social programs has a further impact on women as care work is shifted from the public sector back to the home, where much of the care work remains the responsibility of women.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hudson, "The New Labor Market Segmentation"; Kaufman, *Race and Labor Market Segmentation*; Boston, "Segmented Labor Markets."

<sup>11</sup> Burton and Phipps, "Families, Time, and Well-Being in Canada."

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey: Time Use*.

<sup>13</sup> Singh and Peng, "Canada's Bold Experiment with Pay Equity."

Robert L Kaufman, *Race and Labor Market Segmentation*, ed. Berg *et al.* (Plenum Studies in Work and Industry. Boston; Dordrecht and Moscow: Kluwer Academic/Plenum, 2001); Thomas D Boston, "Segmented Labor Markets: New Evidence from a Study of Four Race-Gender Groups," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 44, no. 1 (October 1990): 99–115; Walter Stafford, *Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Employment Segmentation in New York City Agencies*, ed. Melendez *et al.* (Environment, Development, and Public Policy series New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Kofman and Raghuram, *Skilled Female Labour Migration*.

<sup>15</sup> Brush, "Gender, Work, Who Cares?"

Moreover, governments have been slow to regulate new types of employment relationships that have emerged with the rise of the service economy. Indeed the term ‘non-standard’ working relationship used to describe the use of temporary, contract, part-time and seasonal workers and work for temporary agencies reflects the fact that these jobs are not regulated under the same conditions of ‘standard’ employment. Hudson explains, “Nonstandard work is integrally related to the organizational changes that have characterized the new economy. At the heart of these changes is a fundamental restructuring of the employer–employee relationship in which many jobs, and the workers who fill them, have become increasingly contingent.”<sup>16</sup> The reluctance to regulate new non-standard employment relations fits within the larger discourses around ensuring labour is flexible and adaptable to the demands of capital, rather than ensuring work is fair and secure. Further complicating this process is the reality that women, with a weaker attachment to the work force, have continued to be overrepresented in both the service sector and part-time precarious work. In the Canadian context, Vosko has traced the relationship between women and precarious labour in two edited volumes, *Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of a Precarious Employment Relationship* and *Precarious employment: Understanding labour market insecurity in Canada*.

## **Racialized Immigrant Women in the New Economy**

It is within the general context of deteriorating conditions that this study considers the labour market experiences of racialized immigrant women in Toronto. While there are relatively few studies which consider this specific population’s experiences, we can draw on the findings of other research projects with similar goals. Generally, research suggests that women continue to not do as well as men, even within precarious employment. Fuller and Vosko, using Statistics Canada’s Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) data from 2002-2004 found that not only were women over 2.5 times more likely than men to be in part-time employment, they were also more likely to earn less than \$10 per hour. That gap worsened in part-time temporary employment, where there were 4 times as many women in such jobs and again they were more likely to make less than \$10 per hour than their male counterparts. Further, women were less likely to have union coverage. Almost 5 times as many women as men in part-time permanent jobs and almost 3 times as many women as men in part-time temporary jobs lacked union coverage.<sup>17</sup> Lack of union coverage is of particular concern as it can expose workers to additional job risks. For example, a recent study of 520 low-wage precarious workers by Workers Action Centre, shows that precarious, temporary workers are likely to experience employment violations. Of the respondents, 22% were paid less than the legal minimum wage and 33% reported being owed wages. While 60% of respondents reported working overtime, 71% of those workers either did not receive overtime pay at all or only received it sometimes. In terms

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<sup>16</sup> Hudson, “The New Labor Market Segmentation.”

<sup>17</sup> Fuller and Vosko, “Temporary Employment and Social Inequality in Canada: Exploring Intersections of Gender, Race, and Migration.”



of additional benefits, only 18% had sick leave, 29% additional health benefits and 13% pensions or RRSP in lieu.<sup>18</sup>

While Vosko and Fuller focus on gendered dimensions, other research suggests that race and immigration status can compound the negative experiences for racialized immigrant women. Teelucksingh and Galabuzi's research considered the impact of race on labour market outcomes using 1996-2001 Canadian Census, SLID and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada data for the same years. They found, that despite growing as a share of the labour force, racialized groups continued to sustain a double digit income gap and higher rates of unemployment. Interestingly, they found that the gap between racialized and non-racialized Canadians persists even among university-educated workers, suggesting that dynamics other than individual human capital variations are at play with the income gap. While the income gap disappears when family income is considered, the authors suggest this is because racialized groups are more likely to have multiple income earners per family as a means through which to mitigate low wages. Finally, they show that racialized people are over-represented in precarious and low skilled work and under-represented in senior management and professional positions, with one exception. Racialized persons fared better in IT sector jobs such as software engineers, computer engineers, and computer programmers.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a Statistics Canada study by Hou and Colombe using the same data sets found that the income gap between 'visible minority' and white people varied between private and public sector jobs. Whereas there was no significant difference in income across gendered or racialized lines in the public sector, in the private sector visible minorities earned less than their white counterparts in similar jobs. Interestingly, the study found that visible minority men and black Canadians were the most disadvantaged in the private sector. The study suggests that affirmative action programs and unionization in the public sector help to ensure more fair outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

Tastoglou and Preston's work considers the immigrant and gendered dimensions of identity and their impact on labour market participation. They found that of Canadian-born women aged 25-44, 82.5% were in the labour force compared with only 75% of all immigrant women in the same age group. Interestingly, immigrant women were more likely to have a bachelor's or professional degree than Canadian-born women (20.9% versus 17.3%), with recent immigrant women (arriving between 1996-2001) far more likely to have such a degree at 27.7%. The gap in education attainment persisted with higher level certificates with 15.4% of recent immigrant women holding such a degree (9.0% of all immigrant women) while only 5.2% of Canadian-born women held credentials above the bachelor's level. Despite this, labour force participation rates of Canadian-born women are higher than those of immigrant women. For Canadian-born women with a post-secondary degree, the labour market participation rate was 82.8% versus only 68.3% for recent immigrant women with the same level of education. The authors argues that these findings suggest educated immigrant women are withdrawing

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<sup>18</sup> Gellatly, *Unpaid Wages, Unprotected Workers: A Survey of Employment Standards Violations*.

<sup>19</sup> Galabuzi and Teelucksingh, "Working Precariously: The Impact of Race and Immigration Status on Employment Opportunities and Outcomes in Canad."

<sup>20</sup> Hou and Coulombe, "Earnings Gaps for Canadian Born Visible Minorities in the Public and Private Sectors."



from the workforce, either due to sufficient single-person income or because the jobs available to them are insufficient to draw them away from social reproductive work.<sup>21</sup>

Looking specifically at Ontario, Block's most recent report for the Centre for Canadian Policy Alternatives finds similar patterns. The unemployment rate for racialized women in 2005 was 9.8%, versus 5.8% for non-racialized women, and 7.8% for racialized men versus only 5.6% for non-racialized men. This is despite slightly higher labour market participation rates among racialized Canadians. The report found persistent income inequality between racialized and non-racialized Canadians, even when education levels were accounted for. While the income gap between immigrants (first generation) racialized and non-racialized Canadians was the largest, strikingly, Block found that even among third generation or more, the income gap between groups remained. For third generation racialized men with university degrees, the average income was \$73,351 versus \$81,993. Although the gap between women was less, they also earned substantially less than their male counterparts at an average for \$47,005 and \$49,389 per year respectively.<sup>22</sup>

Much of the data on labour market outcomes across gendered, racialized and immigration status dimensions focuses on unemployment rates and income/wages, there are relatively few studies which consider the employment conditions faced by workers. One study by Statistics Canada provides insight into these factors. The report found that in terms of non-wage benefits, while immigrants and Canadian-born had similar levels of access to extended health and dental benefits, the share of immigrants with access to pension plans was 28.4% versus 37.0% (a gap of 8.6 percentage points), and they had slightly fewer paid holidays. In terms of the precarity of their employment, immigrants were more likely to be working part-time involuntarily and while immigrants and Canadian-born worked multiple jobs at similar rates, among those doing so, immigrants worked more hours per week. Further, immigrants were more likely to be employed in temporary jobs and less likely to be unionized.<sup>23</sup>

### **Explaining the Labour Market Position of Racialized Immigrant Women**

Given the above studies the fact that racialized immigrant women are struggling to find stable, gainful employment is clear. However, what is leading to these outcomes is less clear. Gilmore's report for Statistics Canada states low language level was a critical factor in explaining the lack of access to well-paying stable employment for newcomers. Beyond simply finding employment, another study on language learning and immigrant women found that language was an important tool for resisting exploitation at work.<sup>24</sup> In a report on the labour market integration of immigrants, Wiener considers the most widely accepted barriers to decent work, including language skill, accreditation of foreign credentials and Canadian experience. Bringing together data from Statistics Canada Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada and a survey by Lockhead (2003) of public

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<sup>21</sup> Tastsoglou and Preston, "Gender, Immigration and Labour Market Integration."

<sup>22</sup> Block, *Ontario's Growing Gap: The Role of Race and Gender*.

<sup>23</sup> Gilmore, *The 2008 Canadian Immigrant Labour Market: Analysis of Quality of Employment*.

<sup>24</sup> Kilbride and Ali, "Striving for Voice."

and private sector managers, Weiner contrasts the perceptions of each group. According to the LSIC, 21% of immigrants identify credential recognition as an issue, while 26% identified Canadian experience but only 13% identified language skill as a barrier. In contrast, Lockhead's study found that 65% of managers believe that language skill was a barrier, followed by credential recognition at 52% and Canadian experience at 46%.<sup>25</sup> Man's study of Chinese immigrant women in Toronto affirms the importance of language skill. In his qualitative study of Cantonese and Mandarin women, Man found that this sub-group found jobs largely within the retail and services sectors, with many relying on ethnic enclaves for employment. Man argued that this left workers at higher risk of exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

While language skill is an important obstacle to consider, so is the recognition of foreign credentials, both in terms of education and work experience. Suto's study considers the employment experiences for 14 highly skilled immigrants in Vancouver and found that accreditation and language skills were significant barriers to employment within their field.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Shan found interesting patterns among skilled immigrants in regards to their re-training. Based on 21 interviews with Chinese immigrants admitted to Canada under the skilled migrant program, Shan found that 16 of the women were participating in retraining, while all the others expressed interest in doing so once their family and financial situations allowed them to. Her findings are interesting as they suggest a partial explanation as to how precarious, low paying work might 'lock' newcomers into a vicious cycle of precarious work by limiting the opportunities for retraining. Further, Shan found for those pursuing education, most were retraining for entirely new fields and that often they had chosen traditionally 'female' occupations such as community workers, accounting clerks, day care assistants, teachers and librarians. Again, Shan's findings point to the crucial role that gender norms play in shaping the job opportunities available to newcomers, and suggests that women might be opting for traditionally 'female' occupations for ease of access, even though they might expect to receive lower compensation.

Accreditation of foreign credentials has received a fair amount of attention and governments have responded by developing agencies to convert foreign training and experience into Canadian equivalents. However, in her piece Shan is critical of accreditation programs. She argues that by attributing different values to credentials produced in different places, "It makes it only 'natural' and 'rational' to devalue training and credentials from developing countries."<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Girard's paper which looks specifically at the role of accreditation bodies argues that these bodies tend to reify radicalized hierarchies by systematically devaluing skills and education from abroad and together with professional associations, act as a source of further exclusion for immigrants,

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<sup>25</sup> Weiner, "Breaking Down Barriers to Labour Market Integration of Newcomers in Toronto."

<sup>26</sup> Man, "Gender, Work and Migration; Deskillling Chinese Immigrant Women in Canada."

<sup>27</sup> Suto, "Compromised Careers."

<sup>28</sup> Shan, "Shaping the Re-Training and Re-Education Experiences of Immigrant Women: The Credential and Certificate Regime in Canada."

particularly in terms of work in their fields of expertise.<sup>29</sup> Thus, these authors seem to suggest that the accreditation process itself has become a barrier to decent work.

The aforementioned studies suggest that within the context of increasingly levels of precarious employment, racialized immigrant women are among the most disadvantaged. While language skill and accreditations may be barriers to decent work, they do not fully account for their inferior labour market positions. In fact, changes to the Canadian immigration system in the 1970s has meant that recent immigrants are among the most highly educated people in Canada. However, Wayland reports that finding stable and decent work remains the number one priority for immigrants, with the unemployment rate gap between some immigrants and Canadian-born in the double digits.<sup>30</sup> This makes the position in the labour market more troubling. At issue is not only the immediate material deprivation, but also how poor labour market positioning effects access to decent work in the future.<sup>31</sup>

The inability to find decent work, especially within one's field has long term implications. One such risk is deskilling, a process which occurs when workers find employment either outside of their field or in a position within their field but below their credentials. Overtime, skills are 'lost' through lack of practice, lack of investment in developing new skills or by employers refusing to acknowledge skills that have not be used recently. Kofman and Raghuram considered Canada and other OECD countries and found that immigrant women experience deskilling at higher rates than men. Further, they found that the deskilling was more common for migrants from non-OECD countries. They posit that there are individual and societal factors which explain why immigrant women are more likely to find themselves in deskilled work. At the societal level, they argue that the inability to get foreign credentials recognised and discrimination guised as the need for "domestic experience" creates obstacles to decent work within one's field. Equally, they argue that individual dynamics, including working survival jobs to support spouses as they seek a skills-matched job and social reproductive responsibilities may be reason why immigrant women choose not to pursue jobs in their fields. However, overtime through the process of deskilling, they become 'stuck' in those 'survival jobs.'<sup>32</sup> Reitz found that 25% of recent immigrants with a university degree were employed in jobs that required no more than high-school education and furthermore, they were paid substantially less than Canadian-born workers in the same jobs. As a result, the income gap between Canadian-born and immigrants is growing. In 1980, immigrant men who had arrived in the five previous years, earned 79.5% of the earning of Canadian-born men, but that number dropped to 60% by 1996. For women in the same time period the gap grew from 73.1% to 62.4%.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Girard, "Assimilation and Exclusion of Foreign Trained Engineers in Canada: Inside a Professional Regulatory Organization."

<sup>30</sup> Wayland, *Unsettled: Legal and Policy Barriers for Newcomers to Canada*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Reitz, "Closing the Gaps Between Skilled Immigration and Canadian Labour Markets: Emerging Policy Issues and Priorities."

A more recent experimental study by Oreopoulos provides interesting insight into why immigrants are unable to secure jobs in their fields. Oreopoulos' research investigates the impact of race on access to employment by sending out 1000 resumes across Toronto, with varying information on degrees earned (local and abroad), work experience history (local and abroad), fluency in languages, and different types of names (ethnically diverse names) and documented the number of call backs. Oreopoulos found that the interview requests rates for English-named applicants with Canadian education and experience was more than three times higher compared to resumes with Chinese, Indian or Pakistani names with foreign education and experience (16% vs 5%), but were no different when compared to foreign applicants from Britain. Most tellingly, Canadian applicants that differed only by name had substantively different call-back rates: those with English sounding names received interview requests 40% more often than applicants with Chinese, Indian, or Pakistani names (16% vs 11%). Overall, the results suggested considerable employer discrimination against applicants with ethnic names or with experience from foreign firms.<sup>34</sup> Yap and Everett's study on the labour market experiences of 3 visible minority groups, namely Blacks, Koreans and Latin Americans in Toronto, suggested experiences are varied across groups and so too are strategies for finding employment. All three groups, in total 28 participants, reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace and being held to a different standard. While the Korean and Latin American respondents, saw the value in investing in 'soft' skills like improving language and communication skills, all three reported that the lack of access to informal professional networks within their fields prevented them from accessing jobs and the groups felt that organizations needed to be more transparent in their hiring process.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, Kaddouri's research on the experiences of professional Moroccan women in the Canadian labour market found that prejudices, particularly religious-based discrimination was a key obstacle to employment within one's field. Kaddouri's findings were based on 12 in depth interviews with Moroccan professional women in Montreal.<sup>36</sup> Participants cited visible discomfort on the part of employers during interviews, which they suggested was in reaction to their decision to wear a headscarf. Shields, Rahi and Scholts paper on the experiences of visible minority youth in Toronto, yielded similar results. Drawn from semi-structured interviews, the report found a general sense of frustration with employment prospects and cited the "need for a chance" to gain Canadian experience. Interestingly, while de-valuation of education was identified as a barrier, some reported that over-education limited job prospects as well. While language skill was an issue, many participants were unable to secure jobs within their field, despite having the range of skills employers were looking for. Again, participants pointed to discrimination by employers as one of the key obstacles to their employment, and as a source of disillusionment and embarrassment.<sup>37</sup> Relatedly, Wayland also found that when immigrants experience discrimination on the job, they often are unaware of the avenues

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<sup>34</sup> Oreopoulos, *Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market?*.

<sup>35</sup> Yap and Everett, "Similarities and Differences in Labour Market Experiences of Minorities of Black, Korean and Latin American Heritage."

<sup>36</sup> Kaddouri, "The Experiences of Professional Moroccan Women in the Canadian Job Market."

<sup>37</sup> Shields, Rahi, and Scholtz.

available to them for recourse or when they do, do not have the financial resources to pursue a claim against the employer. Further, they are often also unaware of other employment protections while on the job and thus are at higher risk of exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

While Canadian experience appears to be one obstacle to decent work, some of the strategies immigrants employ to gather such experience, might have a long term negative impact on their search for decent work. One of the arguments for accepting precarious work, particularly for newcomers, is that it provides a ‘foot in the door’ and can provide an opportunity to gain the elusive ‘Canadian experience.’ Temporary employment, often through temporary work agencies provides such an opportunity. However, a study by Fang and MacPhail (2008) found that the longer a person remains in temporary employment, the less likely he or she is to find permanent employment. Using 1999-2004 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics data, Fang and MacPhail found that between 46 and 54 percent of workers transition from temporary work to permanent jobs in the first and second year of that work. However, by the third year the rate drops to 37.5%. Moreover, they found that women are less likely to transition to permanent work.<sup>39</sup> Fuller’s more recent research found that temporary workers are more likely to become unemployed, leave the workforce or move to more temporary work, than they are to find a permanent position within 2 months of their job ending. Further, they transition to these states at a higher rate than workers leaving permanent jobs.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that the ‘foot in the door’ hypothesis does not bear out in reality for many workers.

## **Health Impacts of Precarious Work**

Based on the above literature, it is clear that racialized, immigrant women face substantial obstacles to finding decent work within their field. Despite high levels of education compared to the Canadian born population, they continue to be at a higher risk of finding employment in precarious, part-time, temporary and deskilling jobs. The impact of this is multifaceted however clearly such employment has a direct impact on their material well-being and that of their families. Based on data from the Longitudinal Administrative Database (LAD) and the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB), Picot *et al* found that about 65% of entering immigrants enter low-income jobs at some time during the first ten years in Canada, and of these, two-thirds do so during the first year. However, the report found if entering immigrants escaped low-income jobs in the first full year in Canada, their chances of remaining out of low-income jobs are quite high, suggesting that decent work soon after settlement is essential. Despite this, of the immigrants entering between 1992 and 2000, 19% found themselves at chronic-low income levels (at least four out of five years in Canada).<sup>41</sup> This was about 2.5 times higher

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<sup>38</sup> Wayland, *Unsettled: Legal and Policy Barriers for Newcomers to Canada*.

<sup>39</sup> Fang and MacPhail, “Transitions from Temporary to Permanent Work in Canada.”

<sup>40</sup> Fuller, “Up and on or down and Out? Gender, Immigration and the Consequences of Temporary Employment in Canada.”

<sup>41</sup> Picot, Hou, and Coulombe, *Chronic Low Income and Low-Income Dynamics Among Recent Immigrants*.



than that observed among the Canadian-born. Even at the 10 year margin, chronic low income was persistent. Looking specifically at racialized groups, Ornstein found that all of the 20 of the poorest ethno-racial groups in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) are non-European. Further, he found that between 1980 and 2000, while poverty rate for the non-racialized population fell by 28%, the poverty among racialized families rose by 361%.<sup>42</sup> More recent data reported by Galabuzi and Block (2011) places racialized families at 3 times more likely to fall below the poverty line than non-racialized families. In Toronto, racialized families make up 27% of all families but accounted for 59% of poor families.<sup>43</sup>

However, the impact of precarious work goes beyond the immediate impact on material well-being. Several studies point to the link between chronic-low income and health effects. While Canada's immigration system results in an initial cohort of immigrants with better health than their Canadian-born counterparts, new research suggests that over time the 'healthy immigrant effect' disappears. Especially for those immigrants stuck in a cycle of precarious employment, the elusiveness of decent work might explain declining health outcomes over time. In general studies which consider the impact of precarious employment on health use self-defined health status or stress and mental health as measures for the impact of work on health.<sup>44</sup> There are relatively few studies that consider more specific pathways but we know from other literature that mental health issues, including job-related stress and depression have further health-related impacts including increased risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and stroke.<sup>45</sup>

However, there is also rich literature on the relationship between employment conditions or work itself and health. More traditional approaches have considered how the type of work people do impacts their health, with substantial attention to workplace injury. Several studies show a relationship between manufacturing jobs and repetitive stress injuries and some of this work considers how women are affected differently. For example, because most manufacturing equipment assumes a standard male body, it exposes women to different types of risks in terms of workplace health and safety. While there are few macro-level studies which look at workplace health and safety among racialized, immigrant women, there is research to suggest that newcomers and racial minorities are more likely to find employment in workplaces that have poor work safety conditions and therefore are more likely to be injured.<sup>46</sup> Further, studies of particular workplaces help to provide more

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<sup>42</sup> Ornstein, *Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile*.

<sup>43</sup> Block and Galabuzi, *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers*.

<sup>44</sup> Clougherty, Souza, and Cullen, "Work and Its Role in Shaping the Social Gradient in Health."

<sup>45</sup> Rukavina et al., "Association of the Psychological Distress and Cardiovascular Risk Behaviors, Conditions and Diseases"; Holmgren et al., "The Prevalence of Work-related Stress, and Its Association with Self-perceived Health and Sick-leave, in a Population of Employed Swedish Women"; von Känel, "Psychosocial Stress and Cardiovascular Risk"; Tsutsumi, Kayaba, and Ishikawa, "Impact of Occupational Stress on Stroke Across Occupational Classes and Genders"; Kamble and Phalke, "Study of Occupational Stress as a Risk Factor for Various Morbidities Among Policemen"; O'Donovan et al., "Lifetime Exposure to Traumatic Psychological Stress Is Associated with Elevated Inflammation in the Heart and Soul Study"; Andel et al., "Work-related Stress May Increase the Risk of Vascular Dementia"; Clark et al., "The Contribution of Work and Non-work Stressors to Common Mental Disorders in the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey."

<sup>46</sup> Premji et al., "Are Immigrants, Ethnic and Linguistic Minorities Over-represented in Jobs with a High Level of Compensated Risk? Results from a Montreal, Canada Study Using Census and Workers' Compensation

insight. One notable piece by Premji *et al* focuses on the working conditions in a Montreal garment factory with a predominately immigrant, female and racialized work-force. The work considers how piecemeal work affects the health of workers. Premji *et al* found that the fast pace production process created a stressful work environment and led workers to choose strategies with negative health impacts to keep up with the pace, including skipping breaks, not drinking water and avoiding bathroom breaks.<sup>47</sup>

Another growing body of research looks at the health effects of cleaning work, a service sector dominated by immigration, racialized women. In a small sample study of immigrant women working the hotel industry in Toronto, Liladare found that all the women's self-rated health fell dramatically after joining the industry. Not only did the women report that the work itself had impact on their health, including chronic back and leg pain, it also had an effect on their personal relationships and that their unpredictable schedules were a source of stress and conflict within their households. Furthermore, the women reported experiencing discrimination at work and limited job-advancement opportunities.<sup>48</sup> Experiences of discrimination are important as they have an effect on mental health outcomes. For example, Becares *et al.* consider the impact of racism on the long-term health of respondents. Drawing from 2005 Citizenship Survey data in the United Kingdom, they found that fear of religious or racial attacks and employment discrimination increased the likelihood of limiting long-term illness.<sup>49</sup>

While the workplace conditions, including adherence of workers health and safety regulations are important in explaining the health outcomes of employment, a growing body of research considers how precarious employment relationships affect health. In their book on new working arrangements and health Schnall *et al* write,

Work can negatively affect our health, an impact that goes well beyond the usual counts of injuries, accidents, and illnesses from exposure to toxic chemicals. The *ways in which work is organized*—particularly its pace, intensity and the space it allows or *does not allow* for control over one's work process and for realizing a sense of self-efficacy, justice, and employment security—can be as toxic or benign to the health of workers over time as the chemicals they breathe in the workplace air. Certain ways in which work is organized have been found to be detrimental to mental and physical health and overall well-being, causing depression and burnout, as well as contributing to a range of serious and chronic physical health conditions, such as musculoskeletal disorders, hypertension, chronic back pain, heart disease, stroke, Type II diabetes, and even death.<sup>50</sup>

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Data"; Premji and Krause, "Disparities by Ethnicity, Language, and Immigrant Status in Occupational Health Experiences Among Las Vegas Hotel Room Cleaners."

<sup>47</sup> Premji, Lippel, and Messing, "'We Work by the Second!' Piecework Remuneration and Occupational Health and Safety from an Ethnicity- and Gender-sensitive Perspective."

<sup>48</sup> Liladrie, "'Do Not Disturb/please Clean Room': Hotel Housekeepers in Greater Toronto."

<sup>49</sup> Becares, Stafford, and Nazroo, "Fear of Racism, Employment and Expected Organizational Racism: Their Association with Health."

Tea Vukusić Rukavina et al., "Association of the Psychological Distress and Cardiovascular Risk Behaviors, Conditions and Diseases: The CroHort Study," *Collegium Antropologicum* 36 Suppl 1 (January 2012): 157–164; Roland von Känel, "Psychosocial Stress and Cardiovascular Risk : Current Opinion," *Swiss Medical Weekly*



Building off the concept of job strain, which focuses on how perceptions of control over one's work can lead to mental health issues, Lewchuck *et al* have developed the concept of employment strain. Employment strain focuses on how the uncertainty associated with precarious employment affects mental and physical health. The model developed by Lewchuck *et al* considers three inter-related aspects of precarious employment:

- (1) Employment Relationship Uncertainty which includes duration of employment, terms and conditions of employment, work schedule and uncertainty over future employment;
- (2) Employment Relationship Effort which includes both finding employment and the conditions of worksites, and;
- (3) Employment Relationship Supports which include support from unions, coworkers, friends and family.

An important element of Lewchuck *et al*'s study is that it considers the individual's perception of their status in precarious work and their ability to meet their needs. As such, it considers three groups; those who are able to meet their needs and find the employment relationship acceptable; those who cannot meet their needs but see the current working conditions as a necessary step to more stable employment, and finally; those unable to meet their needs and are also discouraged from finding better employment conditions. Lewchuck *et al* found that self-rated health was worst among those who were discouraged and unable to meet their needs.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, there is a growing body of research which considers how various elements of precarious work, including temporary work, part-time hours, non-standard work hours and low pay each have an impact on health outcomes. Drawing on Canadian Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) from 1999–2004, Scott-Marshall and Tompa argue that precarious employment has an impact on health through 3 interconnected pathways; increased physical exposure to risks, material deprivation and stress. While they did not find a relationship between non-standard work (part-time or contract work) with adverse health outcomes, they did find that exposure to key aspects of precarious work were related to health outcomes. In particular, low earnings, substantial unpaid overtime, limited benefits and manual work were all related to poorer health outcomes<sup>52</sup>. Again looking at Canadian workers, Jamal (2004) found that employees working non-regular work hours, including weekends and non-standard shift work (i.e.

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142 (2012): 0; Ross Andel et al., "Work-related Stress May Increase the Risk of Vascular Dementia," *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 60, no. 1 (January 2012): 60–67; C Clark et al., "The Contribution of Work and Non-work Stressors to Common Mental Disorders in the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey," *Psychological Medicine* (September 6, 2011): 1–14.

<sup>50</sup> Schnall, Dobson, and Roskam, *Unhealthy Work*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Lewchuk, Clarke, and Wolff, "Working Without Commitments: Precarious Employment and Health."; Wolf, Lewchuk, and Clarke, "Precarious Work and Health: The Ill Effects of Working Without Secure Employment."

<sup>52</sup> Scott-Marshall and Tompa, "The Health Consequences of Precarious Employment Experiences."

other than fixed 9-5) were more likely to experience job stress, emotional exhaustion and psychosomatic health problems.<sup>53</sup>

Using a Swedish cohort employment study, beginning in 1981 during the last year of secondary school for respondents, Waenerlund *et al* traced the impact of temporary employment on health outcomes over time. Using the data from the 2007 survey, the report found that women were more likely to be in temporary employment and that temporary employment was associated with poor self-rated health and psychological distress. Moreover, these differences remained even once socioeconomic status and previous health status was accounted for.<sup>54</sup> The authors argue their findings are significant, given that Sweden has a high level of social support. Quesnel-Vallée *et al's* research considered the impact on temporary work on mental health in the United States. Using the US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth from 1979-2010, the report found that individuals who had experienced temporary employment in the last 2 years were 50% more likely to show depressive symptoms. However, they authors did not find evidence of temporary employment having a 'scarring' effect, with those who had worked in temporary employment showing no stronger propensity to depressive symptoms 4 and 6 years following the employment experiences.<sup>55</sup> While this provides some relief if temporary employment is a transient situation, for individuals who remain 'stuck' in such employment, the findings of the report are significant.

However, there are very few studies which considered the gendered dimensions of precarious work and its impact on women's health. Menendez *et al* argue that part of the problem is there is a systematic lack of research on the relationship between precarious work and women's health. They argue this is because the types of job hazards that are more likely to affect women, (ergonomic, psychological or chemical) have not garnered the same level of attention as physical risks more closely associated with physical labour or factory work, both of which are dominated by men.<sup>56</sup> There are some exceptions. In 2004 the WHO commissioned a report on the social determinants of health and one of the results of this was the development of a research network on the relationship between precarious employment and health, to develop a framework through which to study this relationship, with a particular focus on how gender affects the relationship. The report found that the effect of gender was not always clear. In many cases, the health outcomes for men and women are the same. However, the report suggested that the pathways might be very different. For example, men are more likely to work in full time employment and as a result are more likely to work over-time and in high-stress jobs, both of which affect mental health. Whereas, women are more likely to work in part-time employment which is related to sources of stress, like balancing multiple jobs, schedules and home life, which impacts

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<sup>53</sup> Jamal, "Burnout, Stress and Health of Employees on Non-standard Work Schedules: A Study of Canadian Workers."

<sup>54</sup> Waenerlund, Virtanen, and Hammarström, "Is Temporary Employment Related to Health Status? Analysis of the Northern Swedish Cohort."

<sup>55</sup> Quesnel-Vallee, DeHaney, and Ciampi, "Temporary Work and Depressive Symptoms: A Propensity Score Analysis."

<sup>56</sup> Menendez, Benach, and Muntaner, "Is Precarious Employment More Damaging to Women's Health Than Men's?".

their mental health. Similarly, a Swedish study on perceptions of employment, domestic work and leisure time and its effect on health found gendered variations in the impact of work on health. The report argued that low stress, both at the workplace and home, were strong predictors of women's health. In contrast, the ability to manage workplace stress was the strongest predictor of men's health. The authors suggest this may reflect gendered divisions in domestic work, where women's responsibilities, in particular caring work, are associated with high degrees of mental stress.

Another body of research considers the impact of job satisfaction on health outcomes. In particular, it considers how a jobs-skill mismatch might lead to deteriorating health outcomes. Drawing on LSIC data from 2001-2006 Chen, Smith and Mustard (2010) found that over-qualification was a factor in the health outcomes of immigrants. The authors measured over-qualification based on education level, expectations prior to immigration and work experience, and found a relationship with a decline in mental health. Further, they found that this relationship was stronger for women and refugees. They argue that over-qualification's effect on mental health may have an additive impact on these two groups, who, based on other research, are more likely to have issues with mental health during settlement in Canada.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, a research project based in New Zealand, looked at the impact on employment experiences on health outcomes for highly skilled immigrants. The paper was based on interviews with 107 skilled immigrants to New Zealand from the People's Republic of China, India and South Africa conducted over the first 3.5 years of settlement. Pernice *et al* found that generally respondents struggled with mental stress but that over time, for those whose employment conditions improved, so did their mental health status. However, even among those employment, their self-rated mental health was worse than the New Zealand population, this in part reflected the fact that many respondents were under-employed or working outside their field.<sup>58</sup>

The literature described above points to several important pathways through which precarious employment might negatively impact the health of racialized immigrant women. First, the work itself, especially in manufacturing and certain service industries such as cleaning, restaurant work and care work, can expose workers to a high risk of workplace injury. Second, the stress associated with poor wages and low income may impact health and as Lewchuck *et al*'s model suggest, the uncertainty of precarious work itself, compounds this effect. Thirdly, given the unique characteristics of immigrants in Canada, who are often highly skilled, precarious jobs exposes them to additional health risks through the stress and depression related the processes of deskilling. Fourthly, household and gendered responsibilities add to the various chores which must be completed with the context uncertain work schedules and job stability, again adding to the risk of stress and depression. Finally, immigrant racialized women are exposed to the health risks associated with discrimination, all within the context of highly deregulated jobs, with low union

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<sup>57</sup> Chen, Smith, and Mustard, "The Prevalence of Over-qualification and Its Association with Health Status Among Occupationally Active New Immigrants to Canada."

<sup>58</sup> Pernice *et al.*, "Employment Status, Duration of Residence and Mental Health Among Skilled Migrants to New Zealand: Results of a Longitudinal Study."

representation and few avenues for recourse. All of these factors intersect and result in high levels of stress, which ultimately has long term impact on health outcomes.

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