



Safe employment integration of recent immigrants and refugees

Agnieszka Kosny¹, Basak Yanar¹, Momtaz Begum³, Stephanie Premji², Dina Al-Khooly¹

1. Institute for Work & Health, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

2. McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

3. Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services Centre, Toronto, Ontario, Canada



Study objectives

We wanted to find out about the work integration of newcomers, including recent immigrants coming via different streams and both government and privately sponsored refugees

- Experience looking for work
- How newcomers prepare to enter the workforce, e.g. programs and resources accessed, where and when this happens
- Specific interest in whether newcomers know about their rights at work as they enter the workforce and whether they have received health and safety information/training

For those with Canadian work experience, we wanted to know about their first jobs, including what sort of employment preparation and training they received from their employer



Methods

Key Informant Interviews:

- In-depth interviews with service providers, program developers, policy makers in the immigration/employment field
- See many newcomers or involved in program/policy development
- Approx 1 hour, audio-recorded (n=22)

Focus Groups:

- Recent immigrants and refugees who are looking for work/working (13 English and 5 Arabic)
- Recruited via settlement agencies, community groups – all involved in employment preparation and/or English language programs
- Approx 1.5 hours, 6-7 participants each (n=110)
- Data were collected in the GTA, Eastern Ontario, Northern Ontario



Methods

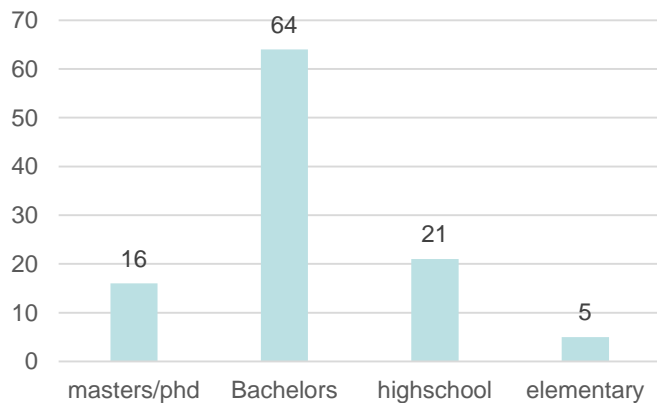
- Interviews and FGs were transcribed and translated
- Transcripts entered into Nvivo (qualitative data analysis software) for data storage and organization
- Transcripts reviewed by researchers and code list developed
- Data coded by two researchers, then organized thematically – inductive approach, but with an aim to address key research questions
- Identified themes, patterns, gaps and contradictions
- Our analysis and interpretation examined core experiences, underlying assumptions, shared and divergent perspectives



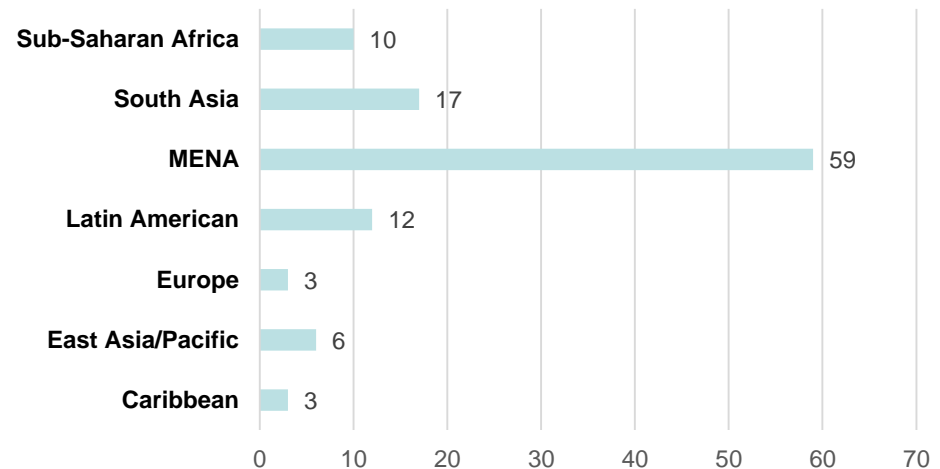
Focus group sample characteristics

- 55% female
- Age: 43% <35, 29% 35-44, 17% 44-56, 9% >56
- Status in Canada: 27 economic (12 spouse), 10 family, 38 humanitarian, 17 temporary
- Time in Canada: 70% less than 3 yrs, 17% 3-5 yrs

Education



Region





Sample characteristics: Employment

29% currently employed (of employed, 43% held more than one job, 80% worked less than 35 hours)

Diverse professions in home country: engineering, education, skilled trade, business, medicine & pharma

Job in Canada: customer service , food, trade/construction, work in non-profits



Findings – Looking for work

- Almost every participant reported great difficulty finding work – language barriers, lack of Canadian experience, credentialism, re-education (financial challenges)

“But, even if you have experience in your country ... I have more than 12 years’ experience in work. I worked in [Middle East country] and I also worked in [Country in Western Asia]. Whenever I go and apply for a job, they told me, you should have Canadian experience. How can I obtain it if I am a newcomer?” FG participant

- This was the case for immigrants and refugees arriving via all streams



Looking for work

Consequences:

- Very high participation in “voluntary” work
- Use of community/family connections to find work
- End up in poor quality, survival jobs
- Depression, anxiety and loss of hope (particularly for economic stream immigrants)



Participation in ‘voluntary’ work

- Many newcomers reported doing volunteer work – a double edged sword
- Some viewed this as a valuable pathway to employment – helped get their ‘foot in the door.’ However....
 - volunteering took away from time in language training and looking for paid work
 - extended unpaid labour, long hours that never resulted in paid employment
 - Volunteer labour also has consequences for H&S – many volunteers not covered under OSHA or WSIA



Use of community/family connections to find work

- Many newcomers reported using cultural/ethnic community to find jobs – another double edged sword
- These jobs provided income and *some* experience but...
 - Jobs found via this method were often poor quality
 - Limited experience in immigrant's field
 - Did not help with language learning
 - Jobs in businesses run by other newcomers – sometimes knowledge of rights/responsibility is missing or incomplete
 - When conditions of work were poor - resistance to speaking up (due to this personal connection)



Use of community/family connections to find work

“I think that this [chemical liquid] is not good for me, because all the time I have a runny nose, I cough and I sneeze. I think it’s [chemical liquid], and I need to tell the manager that this one is not good for me. And then she told me if you say that, maybe you’re going to lose your job. Because she said I need you to do the [chemical liquid]...And so it’s very hard for me, because she’s from my country. I know her in my country, we have a tradition. You have to respect somebody if she’s older than you.... So, I have to respect her, but sometimes she abuse(s) (me).” FG participant



Use of community/family connections to find work

- Newcomers also found work through settlement organizations that had ‘links’ to certain employers
 - In most instances manual labour, temporary jobs
 - This ‘connection’ sometimes prevented newcomers from speaking up when job quality was poor or they were being mistreated
 - Also left SPs in an awkward position as they did not want to lose connection with a potential employer



First jobs

- For those who had work experience in Canada, first jobs were almost always characterized by precarity (short contracts, manual labour), poor working conditions, and lack of training
 - This was corroborated by SPs
- Tension between needing to make money and not wanting to be mistreated/injured given that they had left those types of circumstances
- Some newcomers reported working for “cash only” and/or being reprimanded when they were injured



R: Pay cash....Because I am working 10 hours a night.

M: 10 hours?

R: Yeah, but no overtime, sometimes no overtime, if you work more than 8 hours, no overtime

M: So, they just pay you the cash and that's it.

R: Yeah, no pay for overtime.

M: Obviously no vacation, anything like that? Do you get any of that?

R: No.

M: What happens if you're sick?

R: You go home and sleep.

M: But they don't care, they're okay with that?

R: They're okay....You have to leave the job if you're sick, to leave the job.

M: Oh, they want you to leave the job if you're sick.

R: Yeah.



First jobs

- Workers were typically not sure what to do when they were mistreated, when things got too bad they left
- The optimism gap
 - Those looking for work more optimistic about the future, felt they could speak up if mistreated
 - Those with work experience had a much less optimistic outlook – hesitant to speak up
 - Feelings of depression, anger because could not find good quality jobs and their skills were being under-utilized



“I mean we come here and we are educated people. This [is] rough situation. In any free profession, we would find jobs easily. We are not used for that kind of work. We don’t even know how to do it. We came with education then we would look for work that is appropriate for us and not work in a kitchen or in a restaurant or I don’t know what. We are not used to that kind of work...we find it very hard. My husband is [an engineer]. They would say yes there is work...come carry 15 or 20 kilos of whatever...manual labors!”

FG Participant



Preparation to enter the workforce

- Due to our recruitment strategy, most newcomers had participated in some employment preparation programming – typically resume building, networking, “cultural competency training”
- A minority had attended a program which introduced them to employment standards information; had received a hand out from an employer or completed WHMIS training



Preparation to enter the workforce

- The vast majority of participants
 - had extremely limited knowledge about their rights at work (employment standards)
 - knew nothing about the responsibility of their employer (vis-a-vis training, safety equipment etc.)
 - did not know what to do if asked to do something unsafe or if they were injured



M: So, you said you never received any information about [health and safety]. Did you receive any information about your rights as a worker, like what you're entitled to?

R: No.

R: No.

R: No.

R: No.



Preparation to enter the work force

- SPs and policymakers often had little information about H&S issues or resources and programs offered
- Programs, when offered, tended to be “one offs” and focused on basic human rights and some employment standards information
- Programming was described as being “client driven” = if newcomers did not ask, information was not provided, but...
 - Newcomers focus is on simply finding work
 - Optimism during job search – this type of info not viewed as necessary
 - You don’t know what you don’t know
- Therefore...gaps in health and safety programming



“We have [free information materials] very well-displayed, right in the middle, eye level, in our office, it’s beautifully pegged, Workers’ Rights. But if you come from a culture that does not have it in their vocabulary, you don’t know what to look for. It’s the situation of, I don’t know that I don’t know.”
Service provider



Preparation to enter the work force

- Most SPs only had capacity to provide basic information
 - Organizational resources already stretched – more pressing issues, “putting out fires”
 - Funding structures typically only allow for one off workshops/one year of funding (e.g. Ministry of Labour grants)
 - Lack of knowledge and comfort in the subject area
- Referrals to other websites when newcomers had a problem
 - But newcomers report difficulty navigating such resources
 - “Service Ontario” or “Welcome to Ontario Guide” for H&S information (but it does not contain any!)

You may need financial assistance to start a business. Through the Canada Small Business Financing Program, the federal government makes it easier for small businesses to get loans from financial institutions. For more information, visit www.ic.gc.ca or call 1-866-959-1699.

The municipal government in the city or town where you live is another good source of information and support for starting a business. Visit your city's municipal website and look for the section on business. You can also use the Blue Pages of the telephone book to find a municipal information number you can call or a service centre you can visit.



Employees' rights

In Canada, provincial and federal labour laws are designed to protect employees and employers. These laws set minimum salaries, health and safety standards, hours of work, parental leave and annual paid vacations, and they provide protection for children. There are also laws that prevent employers from treating employees unfairly based on sex, age, race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. You should learn about provincial and federal labour laws before you begin work in Canada. For more information, see Table 8.1.

You have the right to join a labour union in Canada and it is often an involuntary requirement whether you choose it or not. Union fees will be deducted from your salary.

If you feel that your employer or union has treated you unfairly, you may ask for advice or assistance from an officer of the ministry responsible for labour in the province or territory where you work (see Table 8.1 for contact information). You can also visit a Service Canada Centre to talk to a federal government labour affairs officer (see the Blue Pages or www.servicecanada.gc.ca for locations).



Understanding Your Rights in the Workplace

Ontario has legislation called the **Employment Standards Act (ESA)** that sets standards and practices for the workplace in Ontario.

For example:

Minimum Wage

There is a set general minimum wage per hour. Some workers, such as liquor servers, home workers, hunting and fishing guides, or students, have a different wage standard. There are limits on the number of hours an employee can work in one week. Employees must be paid on a regular payday. They will receive a statement showing their wages and deductions (for taxes, benefits, pension and possibly union) for that pay period.

Vacation Time and Public Holidays

Most employees earn at least 2 weeks of vacation time after every 12 months of work. Employees are entitled to at least 4 percent of their total wages earned as vacation pay. Ontario has 8 public holidays every year. Most employees are allowed to take public holidays. This is true regardless of how long they have been working and whether they are full-time, part-time, permanent, or a limited contract, or a student.

Termination Notice and Pay

An employer must give an employee advance written notice, or termination pay instead of notice, or a combination of both, if the employee has been working continuously for 3 months or more and his or her job is terminated. The amount of notice or pay depends on how long the employee has been working for the Employer and the number of employees being terminated.



Employees cannot be punished for claiming their rights

Employers cannot intimidate, fire, suspend, or otherwise punish an employee, or threaten any of these actions, because the employee asks for or asks about their rights. If this happens, contact the Ministry of Labour.

The Ministry of Labour can help

If an employee thinks that an employer is not following the law, he or she can contact the Ministry of Labour for help. Employment Standards Officers can inspect workplaces and look into possible violations of the ESA.

Employers can be ordered to:

- pay the wages owing to employees
- give back an employee's job
- follow the rules of the ESA
- compensate an employee

The Ministry of Labour can also charge or ticket an employer with an offence. If convicted, employers may be fined or sent to jail.

Learn More: www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/es/brochures/br_rights.html or

Employment Standards Information Centre at **(416) 326-7160**
or toll-free at: **1-800-531-5551**





Preparation to enter the workforce

- Diffusion of responsibility = Assumption that information and resources were being offered by someone else (employer, Ministry of Labour, settlement agency)
 - SPs told us that some employers assumed if a worker was recruited via a settlement agency they had received training from the agency
 - Some policy makers assumed employers, job readiness programs provided training
- Little long-term follow up = do newcomers end up getting the resources needed, do they find good quality jobs, do they stay in them, what happens when they have problems?



Implications, recommendations, future areas of research

So how can we prepare newcomers to safely integrate into the labour market? – no easy answers

“It has to be done at many different times, in many different ways”

- It has to start early
 - Start at lower LINC levels
- It can't involve (only) sending people to websites
- It can't (only) depend on the employer doing his/her part
- It can't (only) be newcomer driven



Implications, recommendations, future areas of research

- It has to be (much more) systematic
- It must involve a champion (in an organization and/or more broadly, e.g. the MoL)
- Settlement organization described as an important and trusted resources by most – can raise issues/questions without worrying about job security
- BUT if the settlement sector is to be involved, it must include an infusion of (sustained, not one-off) funding and expertise



What else? What next?

- OHS research often does not include recent immigrants or linguist minorities – this is a problem
- Consider the invisible “other” (not principal applicants, spouses of students, etc.)
- Consider the implications of volunteer work
- We do not know (much) about the experiences of employers who hire recent immigrants – what are their needs? What challenges do they face? What are best practices?
- Educate employers, provide incentives for safe practices and training, give fines
 - Target workplaces that employ newcomers, use a carrot/stick approach



What else? What next?

- Track long term outcomes - this has to be requested by policy makers and requires financial and human resources for organizations
- We need to think about how to reach newcomers who do not access settlement services for employment preparation
- Update existing employment resources for newcomers to include health and safety and employment rights information, what to do if injured – many first jobs may not be good jobs
- Give newcomers a realistic representation of the employment they are likely to encounter...while at the same time work on getting foreign credentials, experience and training recognized in a timely manner



Time: 9:00 AM – 1:30 PM EDT

Location: Toronto City Hall, Committee Room 2

Register at: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/research-policy-forum-on-immigration-work-health-tickets-36073721472>



akosny@iwh.on.ca

byanar@iwh.on.ca



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