



Settlement Services for Immigrant Youth: A Focus on Employment



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Introduction

- Based on a critical literature review and experiences working in the field with immigration issues
- Preliminary field work interviews and focus groups with key informants, immigrant youth, and settlement workers.
- Who are immigrant youth? (15-24 but definitions vary)
- Literature quite uneven on topics researched; little work on actual impact of settlement programming – a prime focus of current work
- Age at time of arrival very important for youth outcomes (young people arriving at older ages tend to have greater language and settlement issues)

Focus on Labour Market / Employment

Key issue but relatively few current academic studies

- Immigrant youth have high levels of unemployment and precarious employment rates, and low levels of labour market attachment compared to Canadian-born youth
- Place-based job discrimination; example Jane-Finch
- There are significant race and country of origin outcome differences (especially notable for those of African, Jamaican, and Latin American backgrounds)

Labour Market / Employment

- Gender also important (males do better with respect to wages, job security, and labour market participation)
- Too many employers lack an understanding newcomer youth and are failing to provide accessible workplaces

“What is not working is our workforce. Our employers are not providing accessible workplaces for youth, especially for youth dealing with settlement issues” (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).

- Youth overall face barriers, unemployment rates double that of adults (11% in October 2018, immigrant youth’s stands at about 3% higher – overall unemployment rate 5.8%)

Labour Market / Employment

- Common challenges faced by immigrant youth (transportation – especially suburban areas, smaller communities; ethnic and racial barriers; workplace interview clothing; mental health – settlement stress; challenge of balancing responsibilities)
- Job search strategies (heavy use of friendship networks; want ads; cold calls; volunteering; employment agencies). How effective?
- Effectiveness of paid co-ops and placements and to a lesser extent volunteering (Canadian work experience, letters of reference)

“I am doing co-op and it is amazing because you work for free for a couple of months and then if the manager sees that you are organized and you always come on time you are going to get hire[d]” (An Immigrant Youth, Ottawa).

Labour Market / Employment

- Immigrant youth find it difficult to build their own employment networks that bridge into the larger community
 - “... from an specific employment lens, with the lack of community and the lack of sense of belonging, I found that newcomer youth find it hard to build their own network here, especially in regards to employment networks, minimizing the opportunities they are able to seek in the community and not knowing where to go, along with facing difficulties in accessing services in areas such as mental help, facing some of the anxieties about coming to a new country on your own” (An Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).
- We know very little about how immigrant youth manage their labour market marginalization and exclusion

Immigrant Youth and Adult Responsibilities

- Adult responsibilities placed on youth include: income earning; providing care for family members including younger siblings; family language translation roles; etc.
- This is an aspect of unpaid labour within the family environment (hidden / invisible labour)
- Also specific gender expectations attached to this work
- Reinforces that we must view youth within a larger family context

Immigrant Youth and Adult Responsibilities

- The extent of such responsibilities can create barriers to quality employment in the future as well as negative impacts educational and personal development
- “... I have a youth and ... he is working at McDonalds for minimum wage and he is also in school full time. His thing is that he needs to support his family, and financially he does not get any money from his parents for his own expenses and then he also needs to finish school so he takes overload of courses because as soon as he finish his university he can get a job so he can support his parents full time. So what do you tell a youth for that because he is making minimum wage, he is stretching himself too thin because school is a lot, and there is also community service and then his job. So how do you help a youth manage all of that with employment and school” (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).

The Education Jobs Challenge

- The value of education over survival jobs:

“You need people here to just focus [on] study because if we get a good education we will help this country. If we do not study we do little jobs just to survive and that is not good because I came here to make my dreams true” (An Immigrant Youth, Ottawa).

Some Policies and Programming Considerations for Immigrant Youth Settlement

- 1) Involve immigrant youth in the development of policies and programs (the importance of immigrant youth voice and listening)
- 2) Develop more culturally appropriate services
- 3) Adopt family-centered approach to immigrant youth programming
- 4) Broaden settlement service eligibility (too many barriers based on things such as age and status); few services for non-regularized youth
- 5) Need for some targeted services to most vulnerable immigrant youth

Some Policies and Programming Considerations for Immigrant Youth Settlement

- 6) Importance of social media as outreach tool
- 7) Pre-arrival service advantage (lack of knowledge of services significant)

“... if you can find a way to connect these pre-arrival services and post-arrival services together is very helpful because we already give them resources or services that exist like the awareness that we talked before so it would be very helpful if they are coming here and they already know which resources and which organization they can connect with” (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).

Some Policies and Programming Considerations for Immigrant Youth Settlement

- 8) The value of mentorship, youth peer leaders, youth leadership skills – building empowerment key to youth resilience
- 8) Settlement services help to take the stress off of being alone – it breaks isolation
- 9) Value of community-centred and holistic services

“For a more employment stand point – having employment programs that are focus on collaboration with community services and having programs that are engaging with providing multitude of services, not just employment focus but also life skills, financial, health and safety within the work place and the community. So that is working ... (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).

Some Policies and Programming Considerations for Immigrant Youth Settlement

10) The power of stories

“I believe in the power of sharing stories, so if an immigrant youth shares her story with other immigrant youth I think that connection is important to make because if I know you went through something that I am going through then I will find comfort in knowing that you have succeed it in facing those challenges and you came [out] successful. I believe that sharing their stories is important and that we should have platforms where they could do so” (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).

Some Policies and Programming Considerations for Immigrant Youth Settlement

11) Youth as unacknowledged settlement agents

“... I think youth are the unofficial settlement agents in their communities. Within ethnic communities word of mouth is the number one source of information and with youth they always ... pick up the language faster and may get oriented faster than mom and dad. So if they are able to share settlement information with their parents, parents are in turn able to provide that information to family, friends, and neighbours. So, if we are strengthening youth capacity in the settlement, we are actually strengthening whole communities” (A Youth Settlement Service Provider, Toronto).