

GREATER TORONTO

Immigration system hurts more than helps, study finds

Many newcomers stuck in jobs that are 'dirty, dangerous and difficult'

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Dumping newcomers in pizza delivery jobs sets them up for a dismal future in Toronto, an innovative new study reveals.

The rags-to-riches immigrant stories Canada has been bred on don't work anymore, say the two professors who led the project that will be released today. In fact, given the increasingly fragile economy, many of the standard methods of dealing with newcomers are making their lives worse.

"The whole argument that, like they did in the '60s and '70s, immigrants will start off in survival jobs and move to stable jobs — that doesn't happen," said Patricia Landolt of the Centre for Urban and Community Studies at the University of Toronto

"Rather than wait around while we create an underclass, we need to deal with this now."

And not just for immigrants, she added. As of 2006, more than 40 per cent of all workers in Ontario worked in low-wage service jobs.

Landolt and Luin Goldring of York University were the lead researchers on the Immigration and Precarious Employment project, which over three years interviewed 300 Latin American and English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in Greater Toronto with a variety of incomes and backgrounds. The study includes a manual in Spanish and English for people who deal with newcomers, available at arts.yorku.ca/research/ine.



ADRIEN VECZAN/TORONTO STAR

Lead researchers Luin Goldring, left, and Patricia Landolt found that even educated newcomers to Toronto aren't able to move on to stable jobs.

Rather than just measure one thing at a time — full-time work or benefit deductions or scheduling or how wages are paid — the project created an index of precarious work that factored all of them in.

"Each indicator of precariousness is not necessarily a problem. It may not even be illegal. But taken together they result in jobs that are dirty, dangerous and difficult," the study said.

Leading immigration academics and community activists are part of a policy group and a community group that will take the research further.

Among the major findings:

- Despite an immigration policy designed to lure "the best and the brightest," education had no impact on whether immigrants ended up in a precarious job. The only thing that made a difference was the ability to speak English.

- Their first job in Canada had a big influence on the rest of their work lives: Those who started with precarious jobs were more likely to stay in them. Bad advice was a prime factor in ending up in precarious work.

Temporary foreign workers "set the floor on how far down you can push everyone else," said Landolt.

- On-the-job training helps improve immigrants' working lives, but government education and training strategies don't have much impact.

- More than 75 per cent worked in non-union jobs and more than 70 per cent worked only part-time. Sixty per cent had weak or vague contracts. More than a third were paid cash.

- 50 per cent reported working with chronic pain.

- 30 per cent reported their work was dangerous.