WHAT ARE IMMIGRANTS’ EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE?

By

Valerie Preston, Jeanette Chua, Mai Phan, Stella Park, Philip Kelly, Maryse Lemoine

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KEY POINTS:

• Visible minority immigrants are more than twice as likely as white immigrants to perceive discrimination when we control for gender, education and fluency in Canada’s official languages.
• For visible minority immigrants, fluency in English or French increases reports of discrimination in the workplace.
• For white immigrants, fluency in English or French decreases perceived discrimination in the workplace.
• Visible minorities who speak English or French fluently are more likely than white immigrants with comparable language skills to report workplace discrimination.
• Immigrant men are more likely than immigrant women to report discrimination overall and in the workplace.
• Immigrants who report discrimination have less family income and lower job satisfaction than those who do not report discrimination.
• Immigrants with post-secondary education report more workplace discrimination than those with less education.
INTRODUCTION TO TIEDI

The Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) seeks to assist organizations whose mandate includes the better integration of immigrants into Toronto’s labour force. Such partner organizations include immigrant service agencies and advocacy groups, labour organizations, regulatory bodies, professional associations, training organizations, and credential assessment agencies.

The purpose of the project is to provide organizations with free access to statistical data and analysis on various aspects of immigrant labour market integration. The goal is to help organizations access the quantitative data they need in order to: identify priorities, develop programs and services, compose proposals and reports, and carrying out advocacy and public education endeavours.

TIEDI provides a unique service in which community organizations’ data needs are met by a team of academic researchers and student analysts. Our partners define the data that they need - the project is thus driven by their agendas and not by academic research priorities.

TIEDI is based at York University, with a team of academic researchers drawn from York, the University of Toronto, and Ryerson University. Core members of the project team also include representatives of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and World Education Services. The project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under its Knowledge Impact in Society program, and by York University.

The datasets used by the project include a range of large-scale surveys such as the Census, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, the Ethnic Diversity Survey, the Workplace and Employee Survey, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, the Labour Force Survey and the Permanent Residents Data System.

TIEDI Analytical Reports provide tabulations of data, some brief analysis and contextualization, and some necessary caveats about the limitations of the data and analysis. Since the data presented have not been treated to detailed statistical analysis, any conclusions must be seen as preliminary and as starting points for further, more detailed, research.

For further information, contact the TIEDI Principal Investigator, Dr Philip Kelly (pfkelly@yorku.ca), or the TIEDI Project Coordinator, Stella Park (pstella@yorku.ca).

While the research and analysis are based on data from Statistics Canada, the opinions expressed do not represent the views of Statistics Canada.
**Research Question**

Which immigrants are more likely to face discrimination in general and, specifically, in the workplace? How do language skills, levels of education, visible minority status and gender affect perceived discrimination?

**Background**

Discrimination describes unfair behaviour or differential treatment on the basis of a group characteristic that results in negative consequences for that group (Dion 2002). The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) defines discrimination as occurring when people are perceived to be different from others and treated unfairly due to ethnicity, race, skin colour, language, accent or religion (LSIC, Second Wave Q45).

Discrimination is a fluid process that is embedded in everyday interactions (Green, 2003). It is difficult to measure discrimination and as such, we rely on respondents’ perceptions, which may be biased in terms of who is more likely to report and understand behaviours and actions as discriminatory. Dion and Kawakami (1996) recognize the difficulty in assessing whether perceptions of discrimination are representative of actual discriminatory actions. However, the authors demonstrate that whether the perceived discrimination is ‘real’ or not, it is an important psychological reality for immigrants that may affect their social mobility in Canada. Perceived discrimination has strongly and consistently been found to be a psychological stressor for individuals as well as a driving force for collective-based social actions (Dion 2002).

In American research, Hirsh and Lyons (2010) focus on the process by which workers name certain experiences at work as discrimination. They find that lower status groups, specifically African Americans, Hispanics, and women, are more likely to perceive racial discrimination. They also conclude that workers with a sense of entitlement to fair treatment and legal knowledge are more likely to be aware of racial discrimination. Insofar as age and education correlate with knowledge of legal structures, African Americans and women who are more educated and older are more likely to perceive discrimination (Hirsh and Lyons, 2010). In Toronto, Dion and Kawakami (1996) find that Black respondents perceive higher levels of discrimination followed by Chinese and South Asian respondents. In a more recent study using data from the Ethnic Diversity Survey, Ray and Preston (2009) find that 22.3 percent of all residents in Toronto report experiencing discrimination, with higher rates for Blacks and East and South Asian groups at 55 and 35 percent, respectively. Among minority groups in Toronto, racial discrimination is reported to be experienced most often and at higher rates than White charter groups, who are composed of French, British, Canadian, American, Australian and New Zealand respondents. Logistic regressions show that compared to White charter individuals, Blacks are 20.58 times more likely to report racial discrimination while the rate for East and South Asian is 4.48 times more than the White group (Ray and Preston 2009).

Studies have shown that immigrants in Canada face discrimination beginning at the job application level (Reitz 2001, Oreopoulos 2009). Reitz (2001) finds significant underutilization of immigrant skills due to the failure of employers and licensing bodies to recognize immigrants’ professional credentials and their tendency to discount foreign experience. Oreopoulos (2009) compares the numbers of interviews elicited by resumes with Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and British sounding last
names. Holding education and experience constant, interview request rates were 40 percent higher for applicants with an English sounding name than for those with Chinese, Indian or Pakistani names. The study also examined the impacts of work experience and country of education to find that English–named applicants with Canadian experience and education were three times more likely to receive an interview call back than applicants with foreign-sounding names and experience. Oreopoulos (2009) concludes that there is considerable discrimination against applicants with ethnic names and foreign credentials that affects immigrant work opportunities. Canadian studies that evaluate discrimination and its effects conclude that visible minority men earn less than their native-born white counterparts but visible minority women do not always earn less than native-born white women (Pendakur and Pendakur, 2002; Yoshida and Smith, 2008). One possible reason for this is the large earnings disparity between men and women in the Canadian labour market, which reduces the labour market disadvantage experienced by visible minority immigrant women.

There are significant differences in earnings between immigrants and native-born Canadians (Frenette and Morissette 2005; Skuterud 2010; Warman and Worswick 2004). Using the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), Palameta (2004) finds that compared to the non-immigrant population, a higher proportion of recent and mid-term immigrants experience low income. Logistic regression models show that immigrant status plays an important role in the effects of education and visible minority status on low income outcomes. Recent immigrants with university degrees are as likely as non-immigrants without a high school diploma to experience low income. Visible minority immigrants are more likely to experience low income than both non-visible minority immigrants and Canadian born groups. Canadian-born visible minorities on the other hand, were no more likely than Canadian born non-visible minorities to experience low income. Regardless of sex, level of education, family type, or province of residence, recent immigrants are two to three times more likely than non-immigrants to experience low income (Palameta 2004).

Picot and Sweetman’s (2005) review shows that the earnings gap between immigrants and Canadian-born has increased over the past two decades. The gap in low-income rates has also widened as the rate of low income has increased among recent immigrants while decreasing among Canadian born. Possible explanations cited for the increasing disparity between immigrants and non-immigrants include changes in the characteristics of immigrants which includes different source regions, rising levels of education, decreasing economic returns to foreign work experience and a general decline in labour market outcomes for new entrants (Picot and Sweetman 2005). A longitudinal study using census data from 1981 to 2006 shows that as a whole, there have been significant declines in immigrant entry earnings (Bonikowska, Hou and Picot 2011). Furthermore, both male and female university-educated immigrants experienced a decline in relative wages despite the increasing proportion of new immigrants who have a university degree.

**THE DATA: LONGITUDINAL SURVEY OF IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA**

This report uses data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), which was a joint undertaking between Statistics Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada under the Policy Research Initiative.

The LSIC is a comprehensive survey designed to study the process by which new immigrants adapt to, or integrate into, Canadian society. As part of adapting to life in Canada, many immigrants face
challenges such as finding suitable accommodation, learning or becoming more fluent in one or both of Canada’s official languages, participating in the labour market or accessing education and training opportunities. The results of this survey provide indicators of how immigrants are meeting these challenges and what resources are most helpful to their settlement in Canada. The survey also examines how the socio-economic characteristics of immigrants influence the process by which they integrate into Canadian society.

The topics covered by the survey include language proficiency, housing, education, foreign credentials recognition, employment, health, values and attitudes, citizenship, the development and use of social networks, income, and impressions about life in Canada. The questions address the respondents’ situation before coming to Canada and since their arrival.

The survey involved a longitudinal design, with immigrants being interviewed at three different times: six months, two years, and four years after landing in Canada. The target population for the survey consisted of immigrants who arrived in Canada between October 1, 2000 and September 30, 2001, were age 15 years or older at the time of landing, and landed from abroad (i.e. they must have applied through a Canadian Mission Abroad). Individuals who applied and landed from within Canada are excluded from the survey (Statistics Canada, 2007).

The sample design for LSIC was "funnel-shaped." Only immigrants that responded to the Wave 1 interview (at six months) were traced for the Wave 2 interview (at two years) and only those that responded to the Wave 2 interview were traced for the Wave 3 interview (at four years) (Statistics Canada, 2007).

The LSIC was conducted from 2001 to 2005, a time period marked by economic growth, strong employment gains, and earnings growth in Canada (Lin, 2008). Economic conditions (see table 1 for basic economic data) and government policies may affect immigrants’ economic trajectories so the outcomes for immigrants discussed in this report may not be comparable to immigrants who landed in other time periods. This report examines the relationship between immigrant visible minority status, language skills, gender and educational attainment on the one hand, and perceived discrimination on the other. In this respect, the analysis is partial since not all variables that shape perceptions of discrimination are included. Finally, the data presented in this report refer to immigrants who had been in Canada for only 4 years, and do not capture longer term outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Economic Performance Indicators, Canada, 2001-2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth in Real GNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth in Real GNP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Maslove, 2008: 228

Because of limited sample sizes, the data used in this report are for all of Canada. The final sample consists of respondents between the ages of 15 and 64. In the following tables, the respondents are disaggregated on the basis of education level, language skills, visible minority status and gender.
RESULTS

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by education and language skills, Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS</th>
<th>MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None or poor</td>
<td>Fairly well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (weighted)</td>
<td>6,370</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents’ fluency in English and/or French by education level, distinguishing those who have a high school education or less from those with postsecondary education. The vast majority of immigrants, 105,380, have some postsecondary education compared to 28,330 of immigrants with high school education or less. Reflecting current immigration selection policies, the largest group of people with postsecondary education, 59,040 respondents, consists of immigrants who speak English or French very well or fluently.

Respondents with postsecondary education have better language skills, with 56.0% speaking English or French very well or fluently. Only 36.0% of those with a high school diploma or less are equally proficient in one or both of Canada’s official languages. In addition, of those who are high school graduates or have less education, 22.5% have “no or poor” language skills compared with only 3.2% of those who have postsecondary education.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by visible minority status and language skills, Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>VISIBLE MINORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None or poor</td>
<td>Fairly well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (weighted)</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>2,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents’ language skills by visible minority status. Respondents were categorized as ‘white’ or ‘visible minority.’ The sample size for the visible minority category is larger than for white immigrants, 105,510 and 28,080, respectively.

White immigrants have better language skills overall with 66.6% reporting that they spoke at least one official language very well or fluently in comparison to 47.8% of visible minority immigrants who reported comparable fluency. More visible minority than white immigrants reported having no or poor language skills and speaking an official language ‘fairly well,’ 8.5% and 15.1% vs. 2.6% and 8.3%, respectively. Conversely, almost 90% of white immigrants speak an official language well, very well, and fluently compared with only 76.4% of visible minority immigrants.
a) Perceived discrimination

Table 4 shows the number and percentage of immigrants who perceived discrimination of any type and workplace discrimination within four years of landing in Canada disaggregated by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced Discrimination in General</th>
<th>Discrimination in workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>46.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (weighted)</td>
<td>32,580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men and women report more discrimination overall than workplace discrimination; 46.3% compared to 33.8% for men and 42% compared to 27.6% for women.

Men are more likely than women to report discrimination overall and in the workplace. 46.3% of men perceive discrimination of all types, slightly more than 42% of women who reported discrimination. In the workplace, 33.8% of men and 27.6% of women perceive discrimination.

Table 5 shows immigrants’ perceived workplace and overall discrimination within four years of landing in Canada disaggregated by education level and fluency in Canada’s official languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS</th>
<th>MORE THAN HIGH SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONE OR POOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Experience general discrimination</td>
<td>25.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Experience workplace discrimination</td>
<td>11.6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immigrants with postsecondary education are more likely than less educated immigrants to report workplace discrimination, regardless of their language skills. The percent of immigrants that perceive workplace discrimination is substantially higher in all language categories for those who have postsecondary education than for their counterparts with less education. The same pattern occurs for perceived discrimination overall. The percentages of people reporting discrimination range from a low of 25.4% for those with poor language skills and no more than a high school education to a high of 51.2% for those with postsecondary education who speak an official language well.

With the exception of those who speak English or French fairly well, reports of workplace discrimination for immigrants in both educational groups generally increase with language proficiency. The smallest percentages of those who report workplace discrimination in both educational categories are those with poor language skills, 11.6% for immigrants who have no more than a high school education and 30.6% for those with postsecondary education. The patterns for
overall discrimination are similar. In each educational group, immigrants with poor language skills have the lowest percentage reporting discrimination overall. Those who have the best language skills report more discrimination than those who are less fluent in an official language. In both educational groups, immigrants who speak English or French fairly well or fluently are more likely to report workplace discrimination than immigrants with weaker language skills.

Table 6 shows immigrants’ perceived discrimination within four years of landing in Canada disaggregated by visible minority status.

Table 6: Immigrants’ perceived discrimination by language skills in English or French and visible minority status, 4 years after landing, Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WHITE</th>
<th>VISIBLE MINORITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NONE OR POOR</td>
<td>FAIRLY WELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Experience general discrimination</td>
<td>41.1 %</td>
<td>35.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Experience workplace discrimination</td>
<td>33.8 %</td>
<td>22.9 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages of respondents who report workplace discrimination are similar for white and visible minority immigrants, ranging from 20.6% to 33.8% and 16.9 to 36.8%, respectively.

For white immigrants, the percentage of people who perceived workplace discrimination decreases as language skills improve: a third (33.8%) of white immigrants who had poor English or French skills reported workplace discrimination, compared to a fifth (20.6%) of white immigrants who spoke English or French fluently. In contrast, the percentage of visible minority immigrants who perceived workplace discrimination increases as language skills improve. Among visible minority immigrants, 36.8% of those who speak English or French fluently report workplace discrimination, while only 16.9% of visible minorities who have poor language skills report workplace discrimination. This may imply that perceived discrimination increases with the ability to articulate experiences and understand rights – both of which are likely to be correlated with fluency in an official language.

Similar patterns exist for perceived discrimination overall though the percentages of immigrants reporting discrimination are higher in every language group. For white immigrants, 41.1% of those who have poor language skills report discrimination while only 32.4% of those who speak an official language fluently report discrimination. 30.5% of visible minorities who have poor language skills report discrimination compared with 49.4% of visible minorities who speak English or French fluently. Again, this may imply that discrimination is under-reported among those with weaker language skills in English or French.

For white and visible minority immigrants, those with poor or no language skills experience workplace discrimination differently than those who speak an official language well or fluently. Visible minority immigrants who have little knowledge of English or French report substantially less workplace discrimination than visible minority immigrants with better language skills. For white immigrants, the relationship is reversed. Workplace discrimination is reported by more of those who speak English or French poorly than by white immigrants who speak an official language fluently.
b) Labour market outcomes and overall perceived discrimination

Table 7 displays the percentages of respondents who reported discrimination from all sources and in the workplace by gender and four economic indicators; the percentage of respondents who are employed full-time, average hourly wage, average family income and average job satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced Discrimination in General</th>
<th>Discrimination in workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Full-time (among those who are employed)</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average hourly wage (2005 dollars)</td>
<td>$17.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average income of economic family (2005 dollars)</td>
<td>$47,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction (1= very dissatisfied; 4 = very satisfied)</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immigrants who perceive discrimination earn lower hourly wages and have lower family incomes than those who do not report discrimination. Immigrant women are the exception to this trend. Immigrant women who report workplace discrimination earned a higher average hourly wage than women who did not report workplace discrimination, $14.78 and $13.84, respectively. In contrast, immigrant men who perceive discrimination in the workplace earn less on average than immigrant men who did not perceive discrimination, $17.62 and $19.10, respectively.

Immigrants who perceive discrimination have lower family incomes. For immigrant women, those who perceive workplace discrimination have an annual family income of $48,700 while those who do not have a higher annual family income of $49,200. Immigrant men who report workplace discrimination also had lower average annual family incomes than men who did not report discrimination, $47,400 and $52,800, respectively. Similar patterns are found for discrimination from all sources; immigrant men and women who report discrimination have lower family incomes than those who do not report discrimination, $47,600 and $53,900 for men and $46,900 and $50,700 for women, respectively.

Job satisfaction is measured on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 being very dissatisfied and 4 being very satisfied. Job satisfaction is higher for those who do not perceive discrimination for people of both genders and for both forms of discrimination. Mean satisfaction scores range from 2.91 to 2.95 for those who report workplace discrimination, which is lower than the average job satisfaction scores of 3.18 to 3.19 for those who do not perceive discrimination at work. Job satisfaction scores are also lower for immigrant men and women who report discrimination from any source. Though there is an association between job satisfaction and perceived discrimination, the causal direction is unclear as perceived discrimination can result in lower job satisfaction or it can be the result of dissatisfaction.

The percentage of immigrants who are employed full time does not vary considerably between people who report discrimination in the workplace. 91.4% of men and 77.5% of women who perceive discrimination in the workplace are employed full time, which is not significantly different
from the 91.1% and 73.3% of full time men and women, respectively, who did not report discrimination.

The LSIC data indicate that visible minority immigrants are approximately two (2.35) times more likely to perceive discrimination than white immigrants when all other variables are held constant. Immigrants with postsecondary education are about one and a half (1.52) times more likely to perceive discrimination than their counterparts who have no more than a high school education. There is no significant difference between men and women in perceived discrimination when all other variables are held constant.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Only tentative conclusions can be reached from the analysis. Language ability, gender, visible minority status, and educational attainment are only some of the many factors that affect perceived discrimination. Language skills as described in this analysis are based on the perceptions of survey respondents themselves. Respondents were asked to determine whether they spoke English or French poorly, fairly well, well or very well, but the categories were not specified. In addition, immigrants’ language abilities are dynamic and they can improve or worsen over time. Finally, the data represent a very specific cohort of immigrants who arrived during a narrow window of time when particular macro-economic circumstances prevailed.

In terms of the specific perceived discrimination that we examined, the following conclusions emerge:

- Immigrants who have postsecondary education perceive more workplace discrimination than those who have less education. When all other variables are held constant, those with postsecondary education are 1.52 times more likely to perceive discrimination than those who have no more than a high school education.
- Visible minorities with better knowledge of English or French are more likely to perceive workplace discrimination than visible minorities who have limited fluency in an official language. This may imply substantial under-reporting of discrimination among those with weaker language skills.
- Compared to white immigrants, more visible minority immigrants who speak English or French fluently perceive workplace discrimination.
- Unlike visible minority immigrants, white immigrants who have limited fluency in English or French are more likely to perceive discrimination in the workplace than white immigrants who can speak an official language fluently.
- Immigrant men are slightly more likely than immigrant women to perceive discrimination of all types and in the workplace.
- Immigrant men who report discrimination earn a lower hourly wage and have lower family incomes than immigrant men who do not report discrimination.
- Immigrant women who report discrimination earn a higher hourly wage but have a lower family income than immigrant women who do not report discrimination.
- When all other variables are held constant, visible minority immigrants are more than twice as likely to perceive discrimination as white immigrants.
### APPENDIX A

**RELEVANT QUESTIONS FROM LSIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE:**

1. Gender – from CIC immigration records

2. In what month and year did you arrive in Canada as a landed immigrant, a refugee or other type of immigrant? (wave 1)

3. Are you...White, Chinese, South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.), Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.), Arab, West Asian (e.g., Afghan, Iranian, etc.), Japanese, Korean, Other – Specify

4. What was the highest level of formal education you attained outside Canada? (wave 1)

5. Including all courses or training you have taken, what is the highest level of formal education you attained in Canada? (wave3)

6. How many hours per week do you usually work? (waves 1-3)

7. Since you came to Canada, how much income in total, have “you and your family” received from all sources? (Both inside and outside Canada if applicable.) (wave 1)

8. Could you give me an estimate of the total income that “you/you and your family” received before taxes and deductions from all sources inside and outside Canada in the last 12 months? (waves 2-3)

9. How well can you speak English? (waves 1-3)

10. How well can you speak French? (waves 1-3)

11. Since your arrival in Canada, have you experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly by others because of your ethnicity, culture, race or skin colour, language or accent, or religion?

12. Since your arrival in Canada, in which places or situations do you feel you have experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly? Would you say: At work or when applying for a job or promotion?

13. How satisfied are you with your current job?


**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


