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WHAT ARE IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS IN DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONS?

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KEY POINTS:

- About 40% of immigrants have difficulties in getting their credentials accepted. Immigrants planning to work in unregulated occupations fared only slightly better than those planning to work in regulated occupations.
- Less than a quarter of immigrants had checked whether their credentials would be accepted before coming to Canada
- The two most common reasons for immigrants not checking their credentials are lack of time and the fact that it was not necessary to have their credentials checked, either because they knew that their credentials would be accepted, because they were not looking for work, or because they were planning to work in a different field.
- More than half of immigrants planning to work in the health care sector experienced difficulties in getting their credentials recognized, compared to a third of immigrants planning to work in the natural sciences, in engineering or in architecture.

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 Stella Park, the TIEDI Project Coordinator (tiedi@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

How does an immigrant's intended occupation in Canada affect their experiences with accreditation, in terms of whether or not they have their credentials checked?

BACKGROUND

In Canada, there exists an immigrant earnings disadvantage that is partly attributed to immigrant status and partly to foreign credentials (Li, 2001). Studies have shown that credential recognition is a major hurdle for new immigrants in Canada (Kustec, Thompson and Xue, 2007). Such studies argue that the lack of recognition of immigrants' foreign education and work experience is the main contributing factor to their downward mobility (Guo, 2007).

The fact that immigrants experience difficulties in having their foreign credentials recognized is problematic given that Canada's immigration system privileges those in the skilled worker class who have relevant skills (Khan, 2007). Of the total intake of immigrants admitted to Canada, more than half (58%) were economic migrants, among whom skilled workers and their dependants represent the largest groups. Canada hosts highly qualified immigrant professionals in fields such as engineering (with immigrants constituting 50% of engineers in Canada) information technology (51%), and architecture and building (49%) (Hawthorne, 2008).

Many immigrants intend to work in regulated occupations, which include engineering, health and legal fields, as well as some specialized trades. While 15% of the Canadian workforce as a whole is employed in regulated occupations, more than a third (34%) of immigrants *intend* to work in such occupations, with the other 66% of immigrants to Canada intending to work in non-regulated occupations (Kustec, Thompson and Xue, 2007).

However, employers and regulatory bodies in Canada tend to discount immigrants' credentials for a variety of reasons. In some cases foreign institutions may be viewed as inferior to Canadian schools; or their curriculum context seen to be not as relevant to the Canadian setting; or, employers may simply be unfamiliar with them and therefore unable to judge their merits. Some also suggest that regulatory bodies act to protect the market position of professional certification (Boyd and Thomas, 2001; Girard and Bauder, 2007; Wanner, 2001).

This is further complicated if immigrant professionals do not know how to have their skills recognized. Little information is provided to prospective immigrants with respect to the Canadian equivalency for their credentials. The Canadian government has recently started offering employment orientation through its Canadian Immigration Integration Project. Currently, the project only has offices in India, China and the Philippines.

These obstacles result in foreign trained immigrants facing difficulties integrating into the Canadian labour market. Indeed, in the case of engineers, Boyd and Thomas (2001) found that those who had immigrated at age 28 or later (and who had received their education abroad), were less likely to be employed and were less likely to hold positions in managerial or engineering occupations than

Canadian-born and immigrants with a Canadian education. Moreover, 33% of internationally trained doctors and 35% of internationally trained engineers worked in unrelated occupations in 2001 (Boyd and Schellenberg, 2007). Recent immigrants fared worse, while the situation was slightly better for immigrants who had been in Canada for more than 10 years (Boyd and Thomas, 2001; Boyd and Schellenberg, 2007). It has, however, been estimated that immigrant labour market outcomes have worsened to the point where it may take up to 20 or 30 years for immigrant earnings to match the earnings of Canadian-born employees (Hawthorne, 2008).

It should also be acknowledged that the situation is worse for immigrant women who face greater barriers and are more often forced into low-skilled jobs (Guo, 2007). Many skilled women migrants encounter additional barriers to entry in the occupation of their training, due to:

“...family structures and obligations, gender bias and inability to undertake assessment procedures and training. The most common difference between men and women in the accreditation process is that women frequently delay applying for recognition of their qualifications until their spouse/partner has completed the process. This may mean delaying the learning of the language of the destination in the first instance and remaining at home to attend to the needs of the family as a whole. Second, if the accreditation process is costly women often postpone their application” (Iredale, 2005).

The problems associated with accreditation lead to disappointment on the part of immigrants when they find out that their education is discounted in Canada (Alboim, Finnie and Meng, 2005). Moreover, the non-recognition of credentials limits the adequate delivery of professional services, and entails an underutilization of human resources (Boyd and Thomas 2001).

The data presented in this report, including only immigrants who had been in Canada for 4 years, will highlight the difficulties experienced by recent immigrants and not their long term outcomes.

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 respondents' situations 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 LSIC was conducted from 2001 to 2005. This time period was marked by economic growth, strong employment gains, and earnings growth in Canada (Lin, 2008: 5). Existing economic conditions (see table 1 for basic economic data) and government policies are time-specific and thus even longitudinal data of this kind represents only an historical snapshot. These contextual circumstances may in turn affect the long-term experiences of immigrants arriving during this time period.

Table 1: Economic Performance Indicators, Canada, 2001-2005

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | Overall average |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| Growth in Real GNP | 1.8 % | 2.9 % | 1.9 % | 3.1 % | 3.1 % | 2.6 % |
| Unemployment Rate | 7.2 % | 7.6 % | 7.6 % | 7.2 % | 6.8 % | 7.3 % |

Source: Maslove, 2008: 228

The LSIC sample design was developed using a "funnel-shaped" approach. Thus, 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).

Because of limited sample sizes, the data used in this report are for all of Canada. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents to the LSIC. About 64% of respondents were planning to work in unregulated occupations, compared to 36% for immigrants planning to work in regulated occupations. Men were also slightly more numerous than women respondents, accounting for 55% of the sample versus 45% for women.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents intending to work in regulated and unregulated occupations, Canada

| | REGULATED | | UNREGULATED | |
|---|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | MEN | WOMEN | MEN | WOMEN |
| N | 18,410 | 13,650 | 30,970 | 25,900 |
| % | 20.7 | 15.3 | 34.8 | 29.1 |

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents planning to work in the health care sector or in natural sciences, engineering or architecture, two fields often requiring accreditation.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their intended occupational category, Canada

| | NATURAL SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURE | HEALTH CARE INCLUDING NURSING |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| N | 18,022 | 6,699 |
| % | 72.9 | 27.1 |

The sample includes more immigrants planning to work in the natural sciences, engineering or architecture than those intending to work in the health care sector (respectively 18,022 and 6,699).

DEFINITIONS

Credential: Any pre-migration education above a high school diploma.

Intended occupation: As part of the immigration process, immigrants were asked about their planned occupations in Canada.

Regulated occupations: Intended occupations were divided into regulated and unregulated occupations. Regulated occupations were based on the information available at <http://www.cicic.ca/403/occupational-profiles-for-selected-trades-and-professions.canada?&crit=1>. The full list used in this report is available on request.

RESULTS

Table 4 shows immigrants' experiences with accreditation according to gender and whether they were planning to work in a regulated or unregulated occupation.

A) Intention to work in a regulated or unregulated occupation

Table 4: Credential assessment by type of intended occupation and gender, Canada

| | REGULATED | | UNREGULATED | |
|---|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | MEN | WOMEN | MEN | WOMEN |
| Ever checked if credentials are recognized ¹ | 81.8 % | 74.7 % | 71.6 % | 59.5 % |
| Checked credentials before arriving in Canada | 21.6 % | 23.3 % | 15.3 % | 13.0 % |
| Need license or certification to work in profession/trade in Canada | 65.5 % | 71.4 % | 48.5 % | 49.5 % |
| Experienced difficulties in getting credentials accepted | 37.1 % | 42.4 % | 32.5 % | 36.5 % |

¹ Survey questions asked about checking credentials with any person, organization or employer. Recognition is not limited to credential recognition organizations.

About 40% of immigrants planning to work in regulated occupations had difficulties in getting their credentials accepted (37.1% of men and 42.4% of women). The experiences of immigrants planning

to work in unregulated occupations were only slightly better, as 32.5% of immigrant men and 36.5% of immigrant women still experienced difficulties in having their credentials accepted.

Understandably, the proportion of immigrants needing a license or certification to work was higher among immigrants planning to work in regulated occupations (65.5% of men and 71.4% of women), compared to about half of immigrants planning to work in unregulated occupations (48.5% of men and 49.5% of women).

The majority of immigrants had checked to see whether their credentials would be recognized: 81.8% of immigrant men planning to work in regulated occupations had checked, followed by immigrant women planning to work in a regulated occupation (74.7%), immigrant men planning to work in an unregulated occupation (71.6%) and immigrant women planning to work in an unregulated occupation (59.5%).

Less than a quarter of immigrants planning to work in a regulated occupation had checked whether their credentials would be accepted *before* coming to Canada (21.6% for men and 23.3% for women), compared to about 15% of respondent planning to work in an unregulated occupation (15.3% of men and 13.0% of women).

Table 5 explores immigrants' reasons for not having their credentials checked by gender and whether they were planning to work in a regulated or unregulated occupation.

*Table 5: Reason for not checking credentials** by type of intended occupation and gender, Canada*

| | REGULATED | | UNREGULATED | |
|--|-----------|--------|-------------|--------|
| | MEN | WOMEN | MEN | WOMEN |
| Don't know how to | 19.7 % | 17.9 % | 16.6 % | 18.6 % |
| No time | 38.3 % | 30.0 % | 34.1 % | 42.2 % |
| Know assessment will not be recognized by employers | 11.0 % | 9.4 % | 7.1 % | 6.0 % |
| Told would not be accepted (by word of mouth) | 19.9 % | 25.2 % | 19.1 % | 15.5 % |
| Not necessary (credentials are good) / not needed (not looking for work) | 34.7 % | 35.9 % | 45.4 % | 40.3 % |
| Returning to school | 9.9 % | 10.8 % | 8.1 % | 10.8 % |
| Cannot afford it | 7.5 % | 6.9 % | 6.0 % | 7.5 % |
| Know credentials will be accepted | 17.1 % | 12.3 % | 18.2 % | 12.7 % |
| Not main priority | 8.6 % | 15.1 % | 8.3 % | 12.3 % |
| Other reasons** | 15.3 % | 13.0 % | 19.3 % | 15.4 % |

**Categories are not mutually exclusive

Across all groups, the two most common reasons for not checking credentials was lack of time and the fact that it was not necessary to have their credentials checked, either because they knew that their credentials were good, or because they were not looking for work. Lack of time is the most important reason for immigrant men planning to work in a regulated occupation (38.3%) and immigrant women planning to work in an unregulated occupation (42.2%). Immigrant men planning to work in an unregulated occupation and immigrant women planning to work in a regulated occupation were more likely to say that it was not necessary or not needed to check their credentials (45.4% and 35.9%, respectively).

Across all groups, a substantial number did not know how to have their credentials checked (ranging from 16.6% to 19.7%) and about 7% could not afford to seek accreditation (ranging from 6.0% to 7.5%). Having credentials assessed is one of the most important steps for the integration of immigrants. Research has found that immigrants who delay getting their credentials recognized are less likely to ever get their credentials recognized, as working outside their educational and occupational background for long periods leads to deskilling (McKay, 2002).

B) Selected intended occupation

Table 6 looks at the experiences of immigrants with accreditation by selected field of intended occupation.

Table 6: Credential assessment by selected intended occupation, Canada

| | NATURAL SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURE | HEALTH CARE INCLUDING NURSING |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Ever checked if credentials are recognized ¹ | 77.9 % | 85.1 % |
| Checked credentials before arriving in Canada | 23.2 % | 22.4 % |
| Need license or certification to work in profession/trade in Canada | 61.9 % | 85.3 % |
| Experienced difficulties in getting credentials accepted | 35.3 % | 54.3 % |

¹ Survey questions asked about checking credentials with any person, organization or employer. Recognition is not limited to credential recognition organizations.

More than half (54.3%) of immigrants planning to work in the health care sector experienced difficulties in getting their credentials recognized, compared to a third (35.3%) of immigrants planning to work in the natural sciences, in engineering or in architecture.

The majority (85.3%) of immigrants planning to work in the health care sector were planning to work in regulated occupations needing a license or certification to work in Canada, compared to 61.9% of immigrants planning to work in natural sciences, engineering or architecture.

The majority of immigrants planning to work in health care and in natural sciences, engineering or architecture occupations had checked to see if their credentials would be accepted in Canada (85.1% and 77.9%, respectively). However, less than a quarter of immigrants had their credentials checked before landing in Canada.

Table 7 shows immigrants' reasons for not checking their credentials according to the field of their intended occupation.

*Table 7: Reason for not checking credentials** by selected intended occupation, Canada*

| | NATURAL SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, ARCHITECTURE | HEALTH CARE INCLUDING NURSING |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| No time | 36.9 % | 25.1 % |
| Don't know how to | 20.8 % | 20.4 % |
| Cannot afford it | 7.2 % | n/a |
| Not necessary (credentials are good) / not needed (not looking for work) | 33.9 % | 37.5 % |
| Not main priority | 9.6 % | 14.6 % |
| Know credentials will be accepted | 17.2 % | 8.5 % |
| Know assessment will not be recognized by employers | 12.4 % | 8.1 % |
| Told would not be accepted (by word of mouth) | 21.3 % | 24.4 % |
| Returning to school | 9.2 % | 10.3 % |
| Other reasons** | 16.4 % | 9.1 % |

**Categories are not mutually exclusive

n/a: Data suppressed due to reliability and/or confidentiality issues

Among immigrants planning to work in the health care sector, the main reason (37.5%) for not checking credentials was that accreditation was not necessary, either because credentials were accepted, respondents were not looking for work or were planning to work in another field. One quarter (25.1%) of respondents planning to work in health care had no time to check their credentials, and a similar proportion (24.4%) were told by word of mouth that their credentials would not be accepted.

With regards to immigrants planning to work in the natural sciences, engineering or architecture, lack of time was the most common reason for not having their credentials checked (36.9%). A third (33.9%) of immigrants planning to work in natural sciences, engineering or architecture did not have their credentials checked as it was not necessary or not needed (their credentials were good or they were not planning to work).

CONCLUSIONS

Clearly only tentative conclusions can be reached from the data compiled in this report. In part this is because the questions asked in collecting the LSIC data are not specific concerning *with whom* credentials were being checked. It is also worth bearing in mind that the data presented here represent only a very specific cohort of immigrants – arriving in a narrow window of time and within a particular set of macro-economic circumstances. Other factors besides accreditation, such as difficulties with integrating and adapting to the local labour market, or changing career interests and circumstances, may also influence immigrants' trajectories following immigration.

In terms of the process of credential recognition examined, the following conclusions emerge:

- About 40% of immigrants have difficulties in getting their credentials accepted. Immigrants planning to work in unregulated occupations fared only slightly better than those planning to work in regulated occupations.

- More than half of immigrants planning to work in the health care sector experienced difficulties in getting their credentials recognized, compared to a third of immigrants planning to work in the natural sciences, in engineering or in architecture.
- The majority of immigrants checked to see whether their credentials would be recognized in Canada. However, less than a quarter of immigrants had checked whether their credentials would be accepted before coming to Canada.
- The two most common reasons for immigrants not checking their credentials are lack of time and the fact that it was not necessary to have their credentials checked, either because they knew that their credentials were good, or because they were not looking for work.
- While the proportion of immigrants needing a license or certification to work was higher among immigrants planning to work in regulated occupations, about half of immigrants planning to work in unregulated occupations still needed licensing or certification.

To understand how other factors, such as [levels of savings](#) brought to Canada or [immigrant class](#) influence labour market influence of immigrants, visit our website to have free access to our TIEDI publications <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/pubreports.html>.

APPENDIX

RELEVANT QUESTIONS FROM LSIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE:

- 1) Gender – from CIC immigration records
- 2) Trade or occupation that respondent practiced or intended to practice when applied for immigration to Canada – from CIC immigration records
- 3) When you decided to come to Canada, did you plan to work here? (wave 1)
- 4) Did you have an idea of what kind of job you wanted? (wave 1)
- 5) What kind of job did you want when you came to Canada? (wave 1)
- 6) Do you or did you plan to have your credentials assessed or checked? (wave 1)
- 7) Did you check with any person, organization or employer to see if your credentials would be accepted as equal to one received in Canada? (wave 1)
- 8) Why have you not had your Credentials assessed or checked: (waves 1-3)
 - a) Don't know where/how to get my credentials assessed
 - b) Haven't had time/been too busy
 - c) Assessments are not recognized by employers even if an assessment was done
 - d) I know my credentials would not be accepted (friend told me, common knowledge, etc.)
 - e) More interested in having my highest degree assessed - not necessary
 - f) My credentials are good - not necessary
 - g) Not looking for a job - not necessary
 - h) Planning to return to school
 - i) Cannot afford to have them assessed
 - j) I knew my credentials would be accepted
 - k) No need/want to work in another field
 - l) Not my main priority (need to learn or improve language skills in English and/or French first)
 - m) Other
- 9) Do you need to obtain a license or certification to work in this profession or trade or to use the professional or trade title in your province? (wave 3)
- 10) Did you have any problems or difficulties trying to get this credential accepted? (wave 3)

Questionnaire (wave 1): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V1-eng.pdf

Questionnaire (wave 2): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V2-eng.pdf

Questionnaire (wave 3): http://www.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/instrument/4422_Q1_V3-eng.pdf

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FURTHER READING

For data on foreign credentials and credentials recognition, see
<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-614-x/2005001/findings-resultats/4079120-eng.htm>