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VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: VISIBLE-MINORITY IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH EXPERIENCES WITH EMPLOYMENT EXCLUSION IN TORONTO

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**Voices from the Margins: Visible Minority Immigrant and Refugee Youth Experiences
with Employment Exclusion in Toronto**

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ABSTRACT

The ability to secure full and meaningful employment is a necessary condition for societal cohesion and inclusion. Effective access to labour market participation has been threatened, however, by the high incidence of unemployment, particularly for youth. The purpose of this research is to examine the “lived labour market” experience of immigrant and refugee youth/young adults who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. A qualitative case study of visibly identifiable African and Asian immigrant/refugee youth was utilized using semi-structured focus groups to probe their experiences of the local job market. The overall guiding questions informing our research were: What roles do race, ethnicity, and immigration status play in affecting employment opportunities and experiences for immigrant and refugee (IR) youth? Do these factors operate to exclude such youth from successful labour market participation? And what other additional barriers exist that contribute to difficulties with immigrant and refugee youth labour-market integration?

This study also makes an important contribution in that it gives voice to visible minority IR youth and immigrant community workers allowing them the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experiences and observations regarding the challenges surrounding labour-market

integration. The voices of those ‘on the ground’ are too often lost in more traditional policy and academic analyses concerned with the integration of IR youth/young adults.

KEY WORDS: visible minority; immigrant/refugee youth; exclusion/inclusion; unemployment; employment barriers; labour market; discrimination; racism; voice.

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INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is the examination of the “lived labour market” experience of *immigrant and refugee* (IR) youth who have been unsuccessful in their attempts to integrate into the Toronto labour market. We used semi-structured focus groups drawn from African and Asian immigrant and refugee youth/young adults in Toronto. The overall guiding questions that have informed this study are: What role do race, ethnicity, and immigration status play in influencing employment opportunities and experiences for IR youth? Do these factors operate to exclude such youth from successful labour market participation? And what other additional barriers exist which contribute to the difficulties experienced by immigrant and refugee youth in their labour market integration?

This study makes a direct contribution to advancing equality by providing us with insight into the “lived labour market” experience of unemployed visible minority IR youth/young adults, allowing us to distinguish conceptually relevant themes, issues, and contexts behind their labour market exclusion. Moreover, it identifies the stresses this places upon the affected individuals and their families as well as on societal cohesion more generally. While this qualitative approach does not allow us to draw representative conclusions, it affords us the opportunity to paint a textured profile through which it is possible to identify emerging and salient variables and tendencies that are important in framing and interpreting IR youth employment/unemployment experiences. This study enables us to begin to understand the racial and ethnic dynamics, the effects of immigration status, and the role of support systems, among other factors, that affect visible minority IR youth in their attempts to integrate into the Canadian job market.

Policy Relevance of the Study

This study was designed to be a public-policy-oriented investigation that could be readily used by stakeholders and the policy communities concerned with employment and economic exclusion among IR youth. Ongoing media and public attention surrounding problems of youth transitions into sustainable employment, the challenges to recent immigrant economic performance in the new economy, and the continuing salience of the current policy discourse around social exclusion/inclusion, integration, and related concepts all make the issues addressed in this study highly relevant for policymakers and the larger community. More particularly, this study gives voice to visible minority IR youth and immigrant community workers, allowing them the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experiences and observations regarding the challenges surrounding labour market integration. The voices of those ‘on the ground’ are too often lost in more traditional policy and academic analyses concerned with the integration of IR youth/young adults.

GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The Study in Context

Over the last few decades, the Canadian economy and labour market have undergone significant transformations and restructuring, most of which have been geared towards increased ‘flexibility.’ In practice, this has meant the expansion of service-based employment and the relative decline of manufacturing jobs, especially employment in better-paid, unionized, full-time work. Also during this period, the so-called ‘informal economy’ has grown. The underground nature of much of this economic activity has created ‘unofficial employment’ but under circumstances that are particularly exploitative of vulnerable populations, such as immigrants and refugees (see: Portes and Haller 2005). These changes have come to challenge traditional ideas and understandings concerning job availability, job stability, and economic security (Burke and Shields 2000; and Shields 1996).¹ More generally, the Canadian labour market, since the early 1990s, has been a particularly difficult one for job seekers – both those displaced from jobs and new entrants to the labour market, such as young people and immigrants. Tight labour markets and the growth in the contingent segment of the labour force in relation to the stable full-time component also have greatly limited the availability of quality employment opportunities (Silver et. al 2005a and 2005b).

The pressures of global economic restructuring, intensified international competition, rapid technological change, a shifting of skill needs, and changing immigration patterns have continued to set the context for Canadian economic and labour market transformations. Demographically, for example, visible minorities represent a growing portion of the labour force. In Ontario, between 1981 and 1991 their share of the labour force increased from 6 per cent to 13 per cent (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training 1996 64). Since the early 1990s, these trends have continued to accelerate.

The 2001 Canadian Census data confirmed that immigration now has become the single most important factor in population growth (Statistics Canada 2002, 2). Moreover, given the ethno-racial background of incoming migrants to Canada, the profile of the country is changing. In fact, by 2016 it is projected that some 20 per cent of the population will be comprised of visible minorities, up significantly from only 9.4 per cent in 1991 (Chard and Renaud 2000, 22-27). The pace of demographic change has been even more pronounced in Canada’s major urban centres. This is because immigration is an intensely urban phenomenon. Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver attract in excess of 70 per cent of all migrants to Canada (Statistics Canada 2004, 1; OECD 2001, 144), with Toronto alone the destination of more than 4 of 10 (43 per cent in 2001) of all newly arriving immigrants (Schellenberg 2004,11).

¹ A recent CIBC study argues that while unemployment levels have improved the quality of employment continues to decline (Tal 2006).

The impact of immigration has affected no Canadian city more than Toronto. Census data from 1996 revealed that 49 per cent of city residents were foreign born, with nearly 30 per cent of them having resided here less than 20 years, and 14 per cent for less than 10 years. Yet, only 6.1 per cent of the population reported that they did not speak English, a significant marker of the adaptability of the immigrant population (Ornstein 2000, iii). The complexion of the city has changed dramatically as a consequence. In 1961, visible minorities made up only 3 per cent of Toronto's population (Carey 2002, B4-5; Doucet 1999, 21-35); by 2001 visible minorities comprised fully 37 per cent of the city's residents. In 2001, the largest groupings of visible minorities in Toronto, by order of population size, were South Asians, Chinese, and Blacks (Statistics Canada 2005a, 2). Projections indicate that, by 2017, Toronto likely will have a demographic structure such that over half of its citizens will be visible minorities, with the area as home to 45 per cent of the country's visible minority population (Statistics Canada 2005d, 2).² Toronto is Canada's most ethnically diverse centre and ranks among the world's leading cities in cosmopolitan status (Doucet 2001).

With regard to the labour market, a number of developments have been noteworthy. Average unemployment levels increased steadily from the 1970s through the 1990s, with the unemployment rate over that three-decade time span averaging over 9 per cent (Bennett 2001, 4). Since 2000, due to sustained economic expansion, unemployment moderated somewhat, but still remained well above 6 per cent, considerably higher than the unemployment levels during the 'near-full-employment' Keynesian period. The poor labour market conditions of this period sparked assessments that this was an economy marked by a "jobless recovery" or, perhaps more accurately, a "job poor" recovery, a term that attempts to capture the contingent nature of much of the employment that did come to be created in this era (Burke and Shields 2000). Finding a job since the 1990s has become far more challenging than in the past for all groups, but it has been especially difficult for young adults and immigrants (Shields 2002; Grant and Thompson 2000; Pendakur 2000; and Shields 1996). It is important to note that supply-side factors fail to offer a satisfactory explanation for high youth unemployment, as those sectors of the labour market with the strongest growth contain the occupations with the largest youth workforces (Blanchflower and Freeman 1998, 5). Young workers, in fact, have experienced twice the rates of unemployment compared to the labour force average. In the Toronto region, youth joblessness stood at above 18 per cent by the latter 1990s (FCM 1998; OAYEC 2000), and it continues to be twice as high as average unemployment rates even with the overall improved performance of the economy.

Many studies have revealed a long established pattern of labour-market disadvantage and exclusion for immigrant/refugee labour (Bauder 2006; Galabuzi 2006; Vosko 2006; Smith and Jackson 2002; Galabuzi 2001; Li 2000; Bolaria and Li 1985). Such research has indicated that visible-minority youth with the same education and training backgrounds have found it more difficult to find full-time work than those of European background (Institute for Social Research 1997). Yet,

² Immigration is the primary factor behind visible-minority population growth. This is indicated by the fact that, in 2001, some 70 per cent of the visible-minority population of Canada had been born outside the country (Statistics Canada 2005d, 2).

we know that young adults from visible minority populations will become an ever more important component of the Canadian, and especially the Toronto, workforce (Statistics Canada 2005c).

While several key trends have been identified, our understanding of the degree to which the structural changes in the labour market are revealed in the lived experiences of unemployed immigrant/refugee youth is quite preliminary. For example, the earning opportunities for immigrant workers have been intensively studied, yet, there has been a dearth of analysis of immigrant unemployment in Canada (McDonald and Worswick 1997, 354). The degrees of income polarization, job insecurity, and detachment from the workplace experienced by immigrant and refugee youth have, however, important economic, political, and social consequences for the nation as a whole.

The Problems of Exclusion and Integration

The failure of so many newcomers and young people to achieve meaningful inclusion in the contemporary Canadian labour market raises the issue of social exclusion. Within Western Europe, the salience of social exclusion as a concept in public-policy circles first became evident in the 1970s. The notion of social exclusion gained a level of prominence because of the appearance and subsequent expansion of segments of the population who were experiencing the threat of being left behind after the end of the long post-World War II economic boom. New economic circumstances within advanced liberal democracies produced growing problems of long-term structural unemployment, large numbers of youth who became shut out of the labour market, serious problems of joblessness among immigrant and guest worker populations and the consequent adjustment difficulties experienced by newcomers, significant levels of homelessness, alarming increases in child poverty, and elevated rates of family breakdown (Byrne 2005; Haan 1998). In Great Britain, New Labour, under Tony Blair, created a Social Exclusion Unit attached to the Cabinet Office in response to the “complex, multi-faceted syndrome of disadvantage.” The responsibility for such problems spanned many government departments. Consequently, the idea of the Social Exclusion Unit was that ‘joined-up problems’ demanded ‘joined-up’ solutions along with “much great co-operation between government departments” (Coles 2003, 298). The British policy response is indicative of the character of social exclusion, that is, the multi-dimensionality of the deficits and barriers that exclude such groups from partaking fully in society and economy.

In North America, concepts related to social exclusion, such as ‘ghettoization,’ ‘marginalization,’ and ‘the underclass,’ often have been used in the identification of such developments (Burchardt, LeGrand and Piachaud 2002, 2). This set of problems developed within a political economy in which a significant segment of society was reaping the benefits associated with the uneven growth pushed forward by neoliberal economic policies, trade liberalization, globalization, and welfare state retrenchment. Manuel Castells, among others, contends that hyper globalization has produced an intensive process of economic development and underdevelopment at home and abroad that has served to expand the scope of social exclusion (Stevenson 2003, 92-93).

Indeed, social exclusion policy discourse emerged in response to a more economically polarized society and segmented population and an emerging public-policy concern over the need to respond to the political and economic issues arising out of a more divided society (Byrne 2005; Ebersold 1998).³ Significantly, the inverse of social exclusion is often thought to be social inclusion and integration into broader society (Byrne 2005, 3; Richmond and Saloojee 2005). The idea of integration and inclusion is particularly important for newcomer populations as it highlights the multiple barriers to employment and social integration that many immigrants and refugees face.

Up until the 1970s, policy discourse was primarily focused upon the poverty question and income inequality. This dialogue very often was centred on identifying the ‘failures’ of people themselves (Iceland 2003, 70). Poverty was commonly attributed to such factors as an unstable family structure, under-achievement in education, a lax work ethic, and other such individual shortcomings. Social exclusion is a more encompassing concept than poverty. It “directs our attention to the social mechanisms that produce or sustain deprivation” (Giddens 2000, 104). Neoliberal discourse on social exclusion harks back to the earlier poverty debates in that it attempts to individualize blame among the poor and contends that older welfare-state structures bear responsibility for creating ‘poverty traps’ and a culture of welfare dependency (Clarke and Piven 2001, 33-34). Neoliberals wish to draw a sharp distinction between the so-called ‘deserving poor’ and the ‘undeserving poor’ (Russell 2000; and Katz 1989). Under this model, structural barriers are denied ultimate significance in the perpetuation of social exclusion. Rather, the problem of social exclusion is given a more individualistic orientation and individuals, sometimes with targeted and limited government assistance, are expected to adjust to the demands of a market society (Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005).

What is lost in such neoliberal accounts is the structural forces that contribute to social exclusion. With regard to the labour market, for example, the fact is that there are not enough good jobs in the new economy. This structural reality is a consequence of a set of policies and economic forces that promote increased labour market flexibility. This situation not only produces higher levels of unemployment but also employment casualization (that is, the increased use of insecure forms of employment such as temporary, contract, part-time, and self-employment) and enhanced income polarization. The demand is for ‘just-in-time workers’ to match the needs of the ‘just-in-time economy.’ Hence, there should be little surprise, with regard to labour market integration, that there is substantial evidence that exclusion, polarization, and marginalization are becoming more pronounced (Burke and Shields 2000).

It is ominous that the dominant immigration policy debate in the United States has been centred on the notion that ‘newcomer failure’ to integrate into society as well as their wide experience with social exclusion are the consequence of the poor quality of so many of the migrants. The proposed remedy is to demand higher educational and skills qualifications for the selection of

³ In Canada, for an example of how the social exclusion and social inclusion discourse has influenced policy thinking in the area of immigration, see: Government of Canada (2003).

newcomers (Borjas 1999; Duignan and Gann 1998).⁴ The case of Canada points clearly to the flawed logic of this argument. In North America, newcomer difficulties with integration and the problem of social exclusion are tied more deeply to larger “structural forces located in the labour market and shrinking social support systems that exclude a large proportion of immigrant [and refugee] populations, even those with substantive human capital assets” (Shields 2004, 39). As this study demonstrates, newcomer visible-minority youth/young adults confront many barriers that hinder the process of their integration and social inclusion, a process that systematically under-utilizes their education and skill assets, and seriously constricts their ability to find meaningful employment.

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Measure

This CERIS-supported study has focussed on the “lived labour market” in Toronto and the roles that race and ethnicity, both material and perceived, play in influencing employment opportunities of visible-minority IR youth. This project combined the expertise of academic and community-based researchers who were thoroughly integrated in all aspects of the design, implementation, analysis, and write-up of the findings. The study utilized a qualitative approach for gathering our primary data, a method that made full use of our strong community connections. The focus groups were conducted in the year 2000.

Significantly, this kind of in-depth qualitative exploration of our sample population allowed us to gain insight into both how visible-minority IR youth actually negotiate Canadian society and the Toronto labour market, and how they experience unemployment ‘on the ground.’ The focus groups provided an opportunity to understand the “lived” experiences of these youth/young adults, and, while not representative in the quantitative sense, this qualitative study enabled the development of a *rich* and *deep* level of analysis that quantitative surveys are not able to uncover.

The definition of youth is highly dependent upon such factors, for example, as what issue is being studied, or the type of program being considered. For instance, a Quebec Government program geared to aiding young farmers put the upper limit age cap at 40 (McBride and Stoyko 2000, 217). In short, youth is a socially constructed category and, thus, possesses a fluid quality (Tyyskä 2001, 8-9) For this study, we defined youth – or perhaps more accurately, young adults – as 18 to 29 year olds. We decided upon this age range because these are typically the years in contemporary Canadian society when young people are first attempting to establish themselves in their careers and work life.

⁴ Strong elements of this policy direction have become evident in Canada as well (see: Grubel 2005; Collacott 2002; Francis 2002; Stoffman 2002).

Additionally, the understanding of what youth is varies considerably from culture to culture.⁵ Consequently, a study such as this one, that examines visible minority youth from Africa and Asia, is well advised to capture these differences with a more encompassing definition that moves beyond the 24 year old age limit⁶ that many studies employ (see for example: Anisef and Kilbride 2003, 8).

The Sample

Eight focus groups were brought together to discuss issues which had affected the labour-market exclusion and/or the inclusion of visible-minority IR youth in Toronto in their efforts to find paid employment. In total, 61 IR youth from Africa and Asia participated in seven youth-centred focus groups. The youth participants were drawn from a wide range of countries, and included visible-minority immigrants and refugees from such diverse regions as: Vietnam, Somalia, Tibet, Japan, Afghanistan, southeast Asia (including Bangladesh), China, Angola, Rwanda, and various unspecified African countries. A final focus group consisted of individuals drawn from community-based organizations engaged in providing services to IR youth. In total, nine service providers and community-based researchers from organizations in and around Toronto offered insights from their work with, or on, IR youth in the City. All of the focus-group sessions were held in community-based locations.

The youth focus groups consisted of a non-random sample of individuals drawn from immigrant and refugee service agencies, ethno-cultural organizations, and youth and employment centres within the Greater Toronto area. Members of the youth focus-group sample were recruited through the use of posters placed in community-based spaces advertising this project and our need for willing participants who matched our desired profile. Additionally, we worked closely with community-agency staff who were able to identify, and facilitate the recruitment of, appropriate young adults.⁷ The ages of the participants (excluding the service providers) ranged from the late-teens to the late-twenties, with a mean age of 22.7. Focus-group size varied from four participants

⁵ Some definitions of youth are constructed around a social status, in particular “a period of life in which a person is dependent or semi-dependent, usually on his or her family, for material support” (Marquardt 1998, 7). Immigrants from developing nations often have family structures where children remain attached to an extended household in an interdependent set of relationships for considerably longer periods of time beyond what is typical in mainstream North American society. Interestingly, our demographic profile shows that only 24 per cent of our sample were living on their own.

⁶ The United Nations defines youth as encompassing the age grouping of 15 through 24 inclusive. However, national comparisons indicate significant variation regarding youth designations. In Italy, for example, policies for youth are targeted to people between 14 to 29 in the North and 14 to 32 in the South (O’Higgins 2001, 10).

⁷ Youth participants were each given \$25 as acknowledgment for their contribution to the focus group sessions. As a matter of principle we determined that vulnerable members of the immigrant and refugee community in Toronto should receive at least token recognition for their willingness to share their experience with this research project.

to as many as eleven. The focus group sessions lasted up to two hours, but, typically, were closer to one and a half hours in duration. All sessions, with the permission of the participants, were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. Additionally, youth focus groups participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire prior to the group session; all but one participant agreed to fill out the questionnaire. A detailed survey of the demographic profile of the focus group participants is offered below (Appendix 1).

While the interviews were pre-structured and standardized, once the taped sessions began, the participants were given ample room to articulate important concerns and issues which may have fallen outside the original line of questioning (Appendix 2). As well, the interviewer was given the freedom to pursue avenues of inquiry that emerged outside the structured questions posed to focus group participants. These semi-structured dialogues with visible-minority IR youth concentrated on the following topics:

- employment prospects and obstacles;
- how structural features (including racism) and changes in the labour market are revealed in the lived experiences of IR youth;
- the commonalities and disparities between different IR groups, as well as comparisons between the participants of the study and non-immigrant/non-refugee youth;
- identifying clusters of resources, at the institutional, community, and family levels, that empower individuals and allow IR youth to maintain self-esteem, hopefulness, and societal attachment during unemployment; and
- the expectations of IR youth in the short, medium, and long terms regarding their employment prospects.

The transcripts from the focus group sessions were independently coded by two members of the research team in isolation from one another to identify key themes and issues. Then, the coding was cross-referenced for consistency, and a final determination of the salient themes and issues was drawn from this double-blind coding method. This method of cross-referenced, blind coding was used to determine the reliability and relative importance of the themes identified below.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Overview of Demographic Profile from Youth Participant Written Survey

In synthesizing the data from the pre-focus-group written surveys, what manifests itself is that the IR participants, while diverse in geographical origin, education, religion, work experience, expectations, et cetera, had reasonably high levels of education and considerable work experience. In spite of this, they still faced financial hardship and significant difficulties in successfully integrating into the Toronto area labour market. The sample's average age was 22.7 and 59 per cent were male. Some 39 per cent of the youth focus participants were refugees, the remainder being composed of various classes of immigrants. The average time they had spent in Canada since migration was about three-and-one-half years, although there was a considerable range of experiences on this variable.

The vast majority of participants had completed high school, or were on the verge of completing it, and some 40 per cent of respondents had completed some type of post-secondary education – rates of higher education attainment that exceeded those for the general population by a considerable margin. In fact, when non-responses were factored out of the calculation, fully two-thirds of the sample were found to have been educated beyond high school levels. Although less than half had done any extra training or upgrading programs, many IR youth had not had much chance to take advantage of such opportunities, given their age and recent enrollment in formal education. Also, North American society is recognized as one that seriously under-invests in training (McBride 2000b; Dunk, McBride and Nelsen 1996; Shields 1996). Thus, the level of training recorded in our sample appears to be high in this context and can be seen as an indication of the overall positive quality of the sample's work preparedness (that is, high human-capital assets).

Almost three-quarters of the participants lived in the old (pre-amalgamation) City of Toronto, with half the total group still living with parents or relatives and only 24 per cent living on their own at the time of the study. Of those living with parents, many came from traditional homes where their mothers did not, or could not find, work outside the home. A sizeable proportion, 83 per cent, remained single, while just eight of sixty-one participants were married or living common-law. In terms of their family backgrounds, the occupational profile of their parents, and in particular their fathers, indicated that the sample had been, by-and-large, solidly within the middle class in their countries of origin.

A full 78 per cent of those young adults who took part in our focus groups had had a paid job in the past. Many of these jobs were in the service sector, especially in fast food and childcare work; in assorted low-end office work such as reception, telemarketing, and data entry; or as security guards and labourers. All such positions offer notoriously low pay, little job security, and minimal prospects for job mobility. Unfortunately, many of the respondents did not indicate whether their work experience was foreign or domestic, a differentiation which is important in understanding the

sorts of jobs for which IR youth were prepared, and what jobs actually were available to them in Toronto. The focus group sessions themselves suggested, however, that a considerable amount of the work experience that had been accumulated by members of this sample, especially that which was of higher quality, had been attained abroad.

A quarter of the total group reported that they received support from family and friends, and just 16 per cent claimed they had sufficient savings on which to live, figures that should not be surprising given their ages. Some 30 per cent of the participants had been forced to depend upon social assistance to make ends meet, while another 5 per cent had been reliant upon (un)employment insurance at one time or another. Given the number of refugees in the sample, and the fact that all of the participants were experiencing difficulty in finding employment, the use of publically provided financial support was actually quite constrained. Moreover, of the 61 immigrant/refugee youth participants, fully 63 per cent felt they were facing financial hardship (a number of individuals who were receiving social assistance indicated they were *not* facing financial hardship, which may indicate they misunderstood the question or had a different conception of “financial hardship”). As indicated in the focus group discussion below, a goodly number of the participants stated that they were appreciative of the monetary assistance they received from Social Assistance or Employment Insurance (EI), even though the general levels of support that these public supports provide are, by mainstream Canadian living standards, meager.

While it is difficult to draw conclusions from the written surveys alone, the data begin to paint a picture of individuals and ethnic groups struggling against such barriers as language and a lack of Canadian experience in their educational and employment fields. At the same time, many were working to upgrade their training and/or education, but with few resources to support them.

THE ‘VOICES’ OF VISIBLE-MINORITY IR UNEMPLOYED YOUTH: THE THEMES REVEALED

The Focus Groups: An Introduction

The main concern of this study was to examine the nature of the challenges young visible-minority newcomers have experienced in finding paid employment in Canada. In the use of a Toronto-based sample, the strategic nature of our methodology should be evident, since, in recent times, close to one half of all immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada have been destined for the Greater Toronto Area. Pre-existing studies have identified many of the common job barriers confronted by foreign migrants to Canada, such as “lack of Canadian experience” and a failure to recognize educational and skills credentials obtained abroad. These obstacles were found to be primary themes identified by our sample as well. While this study was concerned with clearly identifying the barriers that newcomer visible-minority youth experience in the labour market, perhaps more importantly the study was deliberately designed to allow youth and young adults to speak for themselves. We gave

scope for youth to express their feelings about such barriers, their broader experiences with job searches and other institutions in society, and more generally about their frustrations, hopes, and aspirations in their attempts to negotiate accommodation and integration within Canada. It is extremely important that such voices are recorded because, as explained in the methodology segment of the paper, they articulate the on-the-ground lived experiences and perspectives of this population.

Listening to these voices allowed for the emergence of a deeper meaning and understanding of important themes that raw numbers and distanced analytical categories, by themselves, are unable to achieve. With this goal in mind we provided broad scope for these newcomers to speak in their own voices on the issues as they saw them. There was, of course, no single, common perspective or experience, although there were numerous commonalities in the stories told. Thus, it was the case that these voices often expressed differing understandings of such things as their reception by Canadian society. Here, for example, sentiments ranged from frustration and a general sense of alienation to appreciation and optimism about the future. This diversity of experience and voice was allowed room for expression in this study. In addition to youth voices, we also heard from a sample of community-based service providers and researchers in terms of their assessments of how visible-minority IR youth in Toronto experienced the labour market and various mediating institutions. As well, they were able to provide community-centred perspectives regarding the challenges associated with servicing this population. While we gave considerable scope for the voices of visible-minority IR youth and community-based service workers to be heard, we also were concerned with providing structure and analytical rigor to the content of the focus-group sessions. Consequently, we have grouped this material thematically, and the voices are expressed within the context of the broader literature.

Categories Used in the Analysis of the Focus Group Transcripts

Responses on the following broad categories of information were sought in the semi-structured focus groups and written surveys:

- 1) work experience — Canadian and foreign;
- 2) individual expectations of the employment market and Canada;
- 3) reflections on the kind of work desired, and what is realistic to achieve;
- 4) IR youth appraisal of Canadian employer expectations of employees;
- 5) educational background and needs for upgrading;
- 6) assessment regarding the availability of information regarding employment and settlement;

- 7) perceived and experienced barriers to employment;
- 8) assessment of, and experiences with, government support, financial and other;
- 9) perceptions of Canadian immigration refugee policies;
- 10) experienced social consequences of unemployment and other barriers to integration;
- 11) identified employment strategies;
- 12) service providers – roles and expectations;
- 13) policy recommendations – “remedies” to employment difficulties of IR youth; and
- 14) overall expressions regarding IR youth’s experiences with Canadian society.

Using these rather open and malleable categories, a number of distinct, repeated, and interrelated themes emerged from the transcribed interviews. As well, there were other issues which were only briefly touched upon by the interviewees that could potentially be re-examined or provide fuel for later studies. The key themes are explored below.

Exploring the Themes: Uncovering IR Visible-Minority Youth Experiences with Labour Market ‘Integration’

Employer Expectations Regarding Desirable Qualities in an Employee – The Need for a Chance

We probed our participants for their sense of the kinds of **expectations** that they believed that Canadian employers wished to see in the persons that they employed. In total, our focus group sample identified twelve key traits, although they did not establish a ranking order from most important to least among these identified characteristics. They believed that employers wanted employees who would: 1) be qualified for the job, in terms of education, training, and ‘relevant work experience;’ 2) embody trustworthiness; 3) be willing to accept relatively low wages; 4) be responsible; 5) be punctual; 6) be dependable; 7) be flexible; 8) possess personal skills, including speaking skills; 9) be computer literate; 10) have good appearance, 11) possess good values; and 12) be hardworking. In short, our youth sample seemed to be keenly aware of many of the key attributes that Canadian employers value highly in employees.

It is equally clear, moreover, that a large majority of IR youth in our sample were confident that they possessed the kinds of human-capital assets employers said they desired. Yet, they felt the Canadian employers they had encountered had been mainly unprepared to suitably employ their

talents in the labour market. The sub-theme that emerged in response to this situation was one of the **need for a chance** for IR youth to demonstrate their abilities and potential, and the opportunity for IR youth to gain valuable Canadian experience. A sample of such sentiments can be found in the case of two Asian youth who voiced their sentiments in these ways:

... most of the time ... they [employers] always ask you for the experience. [They] ... ask you for three or five years minimum. [They] didn't give people a chance to work, like to gain experience, where [are they] going to get the experience? That's the whole problem.

And the other Asian youth argued: "But if they [IR youth] have the chance, I think they can show our ability, our potential."

Frustration

Among those participating in our study, a constant sentiment appears to be one of **frustration**. This emotion is common not only among those IR youth from poorer, sometimes war-torn, countries but also among the more affluent, better-educated immigrants. Also, as might be expected, those working as service providers to youth expressed a high level of frustration with both the systemic structural and cultural barriers facing recent immigrants and the lack of adequate resources to help deal with these problems. Among the IR groups, this frustration often was accompanied by feelings of both embarrassment and disillusionment with the yet unfulfilled "promise" they had expected Canada to provide. This sense of frustration has been raised in other studies as well. Gopikrishna, for example, identified the lack of concrete action by all levels of government in Canada to address long-understood barriers to immigrant employment as the source of much immigrant disillusionment. According to Gopikrishna, the "sum total" of the immigrant's experience in Toronto is frustration, and more frustration (Gopikrishna 2001, 17). Peera, moreover, contended that built-up frustration by newcomer youth can even result, over time, in the complete abandonment of their search for work. Indeed, a sense of hopelessness and 'giving up' can set in if barriers to meaningful integration become embedded (Peera 2003).

Interestingly, the most negative forms of frustration in our study were found among highly educated young immigrants who felt that their skills and abilities were unappreciated and good jobs too difficult to secure. Their frustration has led many immigrant youth/young adults to seriously consider leaving Canada for perceived better employment prospects elsewhere.⁸ A Vietnamese youth expressed the feeling this way: "Eventually, I think I will see myself in [the United] States because

⁸ While the "threat of leaving" may seem like a hollow expression of frustration, a recent study suggests that there may well be more substance to this sentiment than commonly thought. The Statistics Canada study revealed that 1 in 6 male immigrants leave the country in their first year, largely because of difficulties in finding suitable employment in Canada. Not surprisingly, those most likely to leave are immigrants with the highest levels of skills and education (Aydemir and Robinson 2006; and Keung 2006, A1, A20).

that's where the good jobs are, the whole brain drain situation. But that's probably what I would do." Likewise, a Chinese participant noted: "One thing I want to tell you. Most of my friends they have a plan. After three or four years, they will just leave Canada. Maybe go somewhere, America or Europe. But I think it's a big problem for Canada..." On the other hand, other focus group participants, while clearly frustrated with many of their experiences with the barriers to finding work in Canada, still expressed positive attributes about the future. A refugee youth from Africa, for example, stated their optimistic outlook in the following terms:

In five years ... I think things will be much better. I see myself getting closer to my goals. I'll be almost an engineer, I hope — I know if all goes well and ah, yeah, I think everything will be much better because now it's difficult and because I don't have the right ... papers, I don't have [a] work permit ... I have to live on social assistance and in five years from now all that will have changed. I'll have a lot of Canadian experience and I think I'll be just used to everything and it will be better.

Hence, our sample uncovered a duality. Along with a general expression of frustration about the barriers to meaningful employment, some saw their inadequate employment being favourably resolved over time, while another segment of our youth population was growing increasingly embittered about a possible future of continued employment marginalization in Canada.

The Canadian Immigration Process: The Case of Refugees

Among the numerous reasons for the frustration of visible-minority IR youth in Toronto, is a perception of the **Canadian immigration process** as a major barrier to employment. Many of those IR youth interviewed felt discriminated against by a process that prevented them from working and which could hold their fate in limbo for up to a reported seven years in the case of refugees. According to one service provider:

with newcomer youth they're very ready to work. They're very motivated and that's never the issue. The issue is dealing with immigration. So these two youth have to wait for their work permits before I can really help them.

This situation has compelled many refugee youth to seek 'illegal employment' under conditions that most often are extremely exploitative. The number of 'less-than-full-status immigrants' working in the Greater Toronto area is unknown, but estimates range from a low of 30,000 to a high of 200,000, with the actual number likely falling somewhere in between these estimates (Bustos 2005, B1).

Our focus groups uncovered numerous instances of employers who paid hourly wages considerably under the legal minimum wage, as in the case of a Chinese youth who was paid only \$10 a day to do garment work at home. Also revealed were several reports of training scams, where employers refused to pay youth for work done because they were only being 'trained,' and, as such,

were not entitled to pay for this period. As one Asian youth reported: "... he [the employer] didn't pay nothing. He said only that five days is training, so there's no pay for five days, and I only worked two days then I quit." According to some, after the 'training period,' the employer often would dismiss the youth employee and search for another vulnerable youth to 'train.' Such situations have led the President of the Canadian Hispanic Congress, Vilma Filici, to conclude that the unprincipled are empowered to take advantage of society's most vulnerable with impunity. In her words: "It is a big problem. There is an incredible abuse of people who are undocumented" (as quoted in Bustos 2005, B2).

With regard to refugees who lack proper documentation, another service provider had this to say:

the youth they have no skills, then they need to go to universities, colleges, then they don't have the documentation because government have a policy of waiting for seven years. A child or a teenager sixteen years old waits seven years to get documentation to go to college. And that we view is a systematic discrimination.

Such obstacles to upgrading skills have serious negative consequences for the human-capital development of refugee youth.

An African refugee youth expressed his frustration in this way:

the way they do it is like they are segregating everybody, dividing, like, landed immigrant, citizen, refugee. [It] is like: 'Oh, you are refugee?' ... [W]hen you go to a place of work, 'Oh! We can't give you a job.' ... So sometimes it just is like when you come from your country you are starting from the scratch.

Later in the same focus group, another African refugee respondent put the problem this way:

you are willing to do something, you can't really do it because the landed immigrant has already removed you from the category (employable) Sometimes it takes up to three years, four years. People are telling [you]: 'Oh, they are processing the case.' Meanwhile you are wasting your time.

Across the different groups, respondents expressed the feeling that they were constantly running, yet remaining at a stand still. Another refugee youth from the Asian group stated:

You know, right now like till we get landed status, I mean there are so many things we would like to do but there is always that obstacle, you know. So we cannot do that before we get status.

Since being labeled a refugee comes with many of its own systematic barriers, many newcomer youth have learned to adopt strategies that avoid such identification (Anisef et. al. 2000,

48), especially when seeking (il)legal work. The importance of employment to successful integration and transition into full adulthood can not be underestimated. According to Anisef and his colleagues:

Acquiring a job allows youth to learn about the Canadian economic system, to develop mechanisms for coping with people of different backgrounds, and to gain Canadian experience, which is often a prerequisite for better employment (Anisef et. al. 2000, 60).

Often IR youth, especially in the kinds of labour markets in which refugees frequently are compelled to participate, do not know if they are being discriminated against or if they lack the necessary skills to obtain better employment. Over time, this can lead to a loss of confidence in their abilities, which can have long-term, detrimental effects on both their successful integration into society and their ability to secure meaningful permanent employment. Restrictive government policies around refugee access to legal employment, and other institutional barriers, such as those found in the case of gaining access to higher education, have not been helpful in this regard.

Government Support

It is abundantly clear from our IR youth sample population that a consensus exists that these youth are eager to work, whatever their level of education, but many end up locked into a vicious cycle of unemployment/underemployment, poverty, and/or dependence on the welfare system. Numerous studies have documented poverty rates and economic dislocation among immigrant groups in Canada. For example, Volunteer Canada has identified the following labour market and economic challenges commonly faced by newcomers:

- New arrivals (immigrants and refugees in Canada for less than five years) are significantly over-represented in occupational sectors that are characterized by low skill requirements, low rates of pay, few benefits, few opportunities for advancement, and the prevalence of part-time work;
- Newcomers have unemployment rates that often are double the rates of established immigrants and non-immigrants, and a poverty rate almost five times that of Canadian-born families;
- Under-employment is pervasive among new immigrants and refugees, at least half of whom have a secondary or post-secondary education; and
- In communities with a higher proportion of family class immigrants, women have significantly more difficulty in obtaining employment, as they tend to have lower educational, skills and language levels (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13).

For Toronto, Michael Ornstein has comprehensively documented the extent of low income and poverty among various ethnic groups in the city. The 1996 census data he utilized demonstrated that for non-European groups the family poverty rate was twice (34.3 per cent) that of European groups and “Canadians” in general. While non-European families made up only 36.9 per cent of all families in Toronto in 1996, they accounted for 58.9 per cent of poor families. The most severely disadvantaged groups were from Africa and Afghanistan, with other visible minority groupings also displaying “high levels of poverty, accompanied by high levels of unemployment, over-representation in low-skill jobs, low education and high school drop out rates” (Ornstein 2001, 18).⁹ Moreover, the economic position of youth of working age has deteriorated, with average earnings falling by more than 20 per cent over the decade ending in the late 1990s (McBride 2000a, 3). Additionally, McBride has argued that, in Canada, youth increasingly have been left to fend for themselves in a market system encouraged by government policy which has expanded the demand for low-end employment, especially in the service sector, and is accepting of the growth of inequality in society (McBride 2000a, 11).¹⁰ In recent decades, Canadian youth-unemployment rates have been about double the average overall unemployment levels. In 2000, for example, average unemployment had declined from the double digit figures of the 1990s to 5.7 per cent (by 2005 it rested at 5.9 per cent), the best showing in decades. Youth unemployment in 2000, however, was still double the average levels and double digit at 11.3 per cent; and, by 2005, these rates had deteriorated further, with Canadian youth

⁹ With respect to the disadvantage that newcomers have in the contemporary Canadian labour market, it is important to observe that over the last number of decades a serious earnings gap has emerged between immigrant earnings and those of their Canadian-born counterparts. While in the past the earning profiles of these two groupings moved towards convergence over time, and in fact average immigrant earnings after about ten years tended to surpass those of the Canadian-born, today a permanent immigrant earnings deficit appears to have been solidified (Hum and Simpson 2004).

¹⁰ McBride convincingly argues that the youth labour market has deteriorated in recent years, even though the overall labour market has improved. Youth labour market conditions have been compromised due to three main factors, namely, that: 1) youth have been scape-goated as lazy, unskilled, and unmotivated. Even though youth are becoming more and more educated, many entry-level jobs youth take are now becoming permanent or lead to chronic unemployment or underutilization of youth human capital assets; 2) youth numbers, as a percentage of the total Canadian population, have been shrinking concurrently with their shrinking representation in the labour market as the demographic profile of Canada continues to age. When viewed in light of studies which indicate that youth really do want to work (a position reinforced by evidence in this study), McBride believes that a shortage of jobs, rather than an excess of young people, is to blame for their higher unemployment rate (McBride 2000a, 13). However, in the case of Ontario generally, and Toronto specifically, it must be noted that these economies have benefited from a significant migration of skilled and educated youth to its economic hub creating a “brain drain” from other parts of the world and from other Canadian provinces. Excess demand for work over the supply of suitable jobs can be produced by this circumstance (McBride and Stoyko 2000, 240); and, more controversially, 3) youth have become a “highly flexible reserve army of labour” within the neoliberal, globalized economy. Youth are both “guinea pigs” and the “control valve” of an economic system which is currently restructuring to satisfy the interests of private business market needs (McBride 2000a, 14). McBride and Stoyko contend that this labour market situation was promoted by Canada’s support of the neoliberal-inspired OECD Jobs Strategy. Public policies in Canada have in fact followed the Job Strategy’s recommendations including an increased emphasis on getting youth “job ready,” encouraging self-employment, welfare-to-work programs, reductions in minimum wage (nominal or real), and making the educational system ‘more responsive to the needs of a competitive economy’ (McBride and Stoyko 2000, 211).

unemployment then standing at 13.1 per cent (Canadian Labour Congress 2005, 4). Our IR youth shared many of these low-income traits, although clearly their levels of educational attainment were generally quite high,¹¹ and they clearly were struggling to find their place in an increasingly harsh labour market. It was, therefore, within this context that the theme of IR youth's relationships toward **government support** emerged.

Government support, or the lack thereof, stood as a structural barrier for many of the IR youth in our sample. In the case of social/welfare assistance, some 30 per cent of our sample accessed this form of government assistance. With a monthly social assistance stipend which barely avoided extreme poverty, they were unable to afford adequate housing, appropriate "Canadian" clothing, or necessary transportation, thus forcing them to accept jobs which paid little, challenged them less, and which were completely unrelated to either their foreign work experience or education. One African youth explained the practical implications of such meagre support:

If you are on social service, you can't buy nothing. Even the food is not enough [for] the money. So that's why is like important to have a job in Canada."

According to another African youth, the money from social assistance was only able to offer the most basic support: "They helping me just to survive."

Another perceptive African youth complained that the amount of support did not allow him to even look for a good job, seeming to imply that a greater initial infusion of money would be a more useful investment to get them off support sooner:

The money that Social Services give you it will be not enough [to buy a Metropass]. [How are you going to] buy ticket or you gonna buy food or you gonna pay rent? So if really people who are (unclear) looking for a job, the person, the government could help, should help them at least to give them something. Even (unclear) so they can buy a ticket so they can go to the agencies so they can look for a job or so they can use that money to go for interview.

On the same topic, a female Asian youth commented that:

I am under social assistance right now, and I also am a stay-home mother, so ... it's kind of hard to find a job because of the child. I'm not comfortable with life with social assistance. It's like they told us ... it's not enough.

While the level of state welfare support is minimal, and there was a general feeling among the IR youth that this hindered the process of finding appropriate employment, there also were sentiments of appreciation for the assistance and a strong desire to find work that would end the need for such

¹¹ Additionally, the demographic profile of our IR youth sample indicates that a large proportion of our population came from "middle class" backgrounds in their home countries.

government “help.” One Tibetan youth noted: “Yeah, it’s very difficult, you know, without a job because we don’t have any income, and ah, but we are fortunate that we are getting help from Social Assistance.” Another Tibetan youth observed:

We are very thankful that we receive social assistance from the Canadian Government and without that support, I mean, it would be very difficult to survive in Canada. And our priority – I think my priority would be to get a job as soon as possible and to stop living on social assistance. That’s the big priority.

On this point, an Asian youth argued:

... also my friends they are not comfortable to live on Welfare assistance, you know. They want to live on their own, to support themselves financially. So you have that (unclear) in your mind but when you go out there it’s all [a] new ball game.

Another Asian youth commented:

I’m very grateful to the Canadian Government, not only for social assistance but also showing me different avenues, you know, showing me the way, like the Connections programme to upgrade my skills, to get settled down in this country.

The dominant sentiment among those who were utilizing social assistance was that it was a short-term situation that they would exit as soon as an alternative in the form of paid work became available. In this spirit, one African refugee youth commented:

Social Services is helping me now; without them I ... would have to live in a shelter or something I think they help for some time, for a short time I’d say. If I get the right papers and a work permit I don’t think I have to depend on them any more.

One highly qualified Afghan youth expressed an unwillingness to be reliant on social assistance and a preference to work at a low-end job, far below her/his qualifications, and questioned why other IR youth would not take such work as an alternative to welfare:

It’s a transition period. Yeah, it’s hard for me because if I’m working there as a doctor it’s very hard for me to work in McDonald’s. We have that pride, I know. But once you have to do it, instead of depending on government, ... I respect your brother because he’s not depending on social assistance, right? How many people are working—like how many people can work here and they depend on social assistance? There’s something wrong. Because there are tons of people who need that money from social assistance, but they can work but they don’t, you know what I mean?

The notion, however, that there was available work – even if only low-end work – as a realistic alternative to dependence on government welfare support was something that a large majority of our sample did not believe to be true. As an Asian youth noted:

Yeah, I'm trying to find a job but it's difficult to find a job here. Even I have my experience. So that's why [I'm on social assistance]. What I get from the Social Assistance, it's really very difficult to survive. Very hard to survive.

Other government forms of support also were broadly touched upon by those interviewed in our survey. Their thoughts in this regard hinted at issues related to problems with the complex, inter-jurisdictional nature of programming for youth and newcomers, and the strength of government commitment both to overcoming bureaucratic obstacles and to providing access to training. One African refugee youth commented on the lack of government support in relation to the immigration process in the following way:

All we need [is] more support to reach our goals by hastening the [citizenship] paper, [getting] into school, and by providing more rooms for employment, you know. And this discrimination of a landed immigrant refugee claimant, this [is] supposed to stop.

One of the agency workers in our sample echoed these sentiments, saying:

So there's a lot of issues around support; they have to deal with immigration, they have to deal with housing, and it's hard to be really actively looking for a job when you have all these issues.

Speaking of the lack of a cohesive, comprehensive plan to deal with IR youth by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the Government of Ontario, one service provider felt that there was a lack of understanding which led to chronic under-funding: “they [government] don't understand, they're just putting a band-aid out there instead of really looking at the issues.” Put another way, another provider observed:

We have some very good recommendations in each of these reports done by each level of government and have they really been implemented, you know? I don't think so. And if they have been implemented, rather than – they'd have been implemented in a very superficial way to expedite political mileage rather than actually to really intrinsically address the issues that people have talked about.

These sentiments were echoed by another service provider:

I don't think there's enough, well certainly funds, but enough recognition invested in what are 'youth learning needs' and how will you fund that? How will they be engaged and how will they want to contribute in a positive way?

With regard to IR youth having to jump through the hoops of government bureaucracy and programs, a provider had this to say:

the frustration is having to battle the bureaucracy; having to advocate time and time again with HRDC, you know, they can't get services there, to get any training dollars they have to go through this ridiculous, you know, these ridiculous workshops, and then they can be turned down.

Unfortunately, many training programs can only be accessed through employment insurance (EI) funds, but, paradoxically, access to these is denied to those not eligible for EI, often those most in need of the training (Kran et al. 2000, 80). In our sample, only 5 out of the 61 IR youth would have been potentially eligible for such training because of these restrictions, while clearly the demand and need for such support was considerably broader within our population.

There are many boundary problems with respect to policies relating to youth and labour-market issues, and these go beyond the usual complications associated with federal-provincial power divisions. Young people in Canada are most often subdivided into four categories: 1) disadvantaged or marginalized youth; 2) 'at risk' or vulnerable youth; 3) 'young achievers;' and 4) 'young offenders.' Youth policies, specifically those that target only youth, fall into three broad categories: 1) (re)employment services to match individuals with existing jobs; 2) direct employment schemes; and 3) short-term work experience programs (McBride and Stoyko 2000, 219). Both federal and provincial governments maintain involvement in youth policy because it has a certain political currency, but, more recently, the state has increasingly adopted a hands-off "navigator" role rather than engaging in the more hands-on and involved "stewardship" role popular in many European countries that have been far less influenced by neoliberal policy trends. Moreover, contemporary public policy in Canada involving youth and employment has been more focused on better Canadian-educated youth over those youth deemed to be at risk (McBride and Stoyko 2000, 221, 235). Few programs have been targeted at IR youth and/or visible-minority youth, even though these are youth groupings at considerable risk. There was a strong feeling among IR youth and among service providers in our study that more targeted, integrated, and engaged employment-support policies from all levels of government would be helpful in overcoming the barriers being faced by IR youth in their labour-market integration.

Education

The categorical theme of **education**, under which we might group educational credentials and skill acquisition, and to which we can also tie the theme of **Canadian experience**, was widely addressed by our sample. The youth, whether possessing higher or lower levels of formal education, faced such barriers as a devaluing of their foreign educational achievements, an inability to finance further studies, and, even when qualified, refusals by professional organizations to recognize their credentials.

Many of the IR youth spoke of the frustration surrounding their lack of 'Canadian experience,' and their contrasting views of the place of education as a bridging institution. As one Asian youth observed:

So then like it's – like I say, it's like everyone here needs just a chance, just one chance and then show what they have. Because without a chance ... what's the point? What's the point in you learning, right?

Reflecting more positively on the role of education a Chinese youth noted: "Now we give up find[ing] a job. It's a waste time That's why I'm going to study."

While some immigrants express vocal disillusionment with the Canadian immigration and employment market systems, others simply turn inwards and make their unemployment an issue of their being under-skilled. Noted one of the Asian youth: "I want to work, but the thing is I cannot get a job with my present qualifications. I need to upgrade my skill and learn new skills so that I can compete in the market." What is not clear from this statement is the level of job the individual is seeking. This respondent's English seems more than adequate, and she/he may very well be talking about competing at a higher end of the labour market.

One African youth noted that, among his ethnic community, there was a cynical, self-policing mentality with regards to foreign education, and whether their education in Canada would be useful or not: "When I came to Canada everybody [was] saying you need training. No matter what you have been trained for from where you come from, you still need new training here." A Chinese youth expressed concern that even after getting Canadian-based higher education the prospects of getting decent employment were not that good:

But the problem is because to think about you go[ing] to college is one thing, then you just get a job eight dollars or less than that, no way. Because why you spent all the tuition fee to go to college, just graduate from high school to get a job! No. Sometimes those students like they graduate from high school, they even get more than ten dollars. What's the point go to college, you know?

Another Chinese youth was more optimistic about the value of getting higher in Canada:

I know the situation, I know the difficulty, I don't get despondent. But I just want to make sure after my graduation, after I have the Master's degree in three-and-a-half year[s] ... I can get a professional job.

On the other side of the coin, some of the more highly educated youths felt that, in many ways, they were over-educated but under-valued. One Asian IR youth even told of lying, saying she had far less education than she actually did just so she would be hired:

I don't think this way is good to Canadian society. And I think this way is not very good to those who immigrate to Canada. But if only this way can find a job and we all need money, I think maybe everyone, well, must do this way to find a job.

Likewise a Chinese youth complained that:

It's like they wasted all their time studying and then like getting a general labour job, and it's just a waste of time. And they wasted like what, five, six years in school for nothing then, right? Like what's the point of getting a Master's degree if you don't get — the only opportunity is just general labour (laughter). It's true, it's a waste of time, right? Like what's the point of getting a Master's if you know you can't get anything else, right? So you just need, like, chances.

A service provider connected the refusal of businesses to recognize foreign education and work experience to structural and systemic racism. That service provider described how such racism affected IR youth, saying it:

discourages them and then mainly they come and then they say okay, I don't have Canadian experiences, what should I do? And it's very difficult then to say to them, 'Okay, go back to school.' Then that would take time, some of them are having families and raising them, and it's very difficult, [it] discourages them.

This **devaluing of foreign education** is a divisive barrier faced by a large number of immigrants, even if not directly stated as such. The following Asian respondent, for example, despite possessing a Master's degree from India, neither perceived any discrimination nor questioned the lack of recognition of foreign schooling. The Master's was of

not much relevancy in this country because what my friends and people at the social services advised me is to convert my degrees here into Canadian equivalency. You get the equivalency and go for courses, professional courses to the university so that, you know, I can get a Canadian education.

On this same point, a Chinese focus-group participant observed that:

in China I am a structural engineer. But when I come here I find it so difficult to find a job as an engineer because they asking me to give them a licence, or maybe some experience. So I went to some agency to find if I can get licence. They told me 'Oh, you should have education in Canada.' So it's so difficult for me. Yeah, no way, I think. And as you know, I came from not a long time ago so my English not so good. So two reason [it is hard] for me to find job

One service provider felt that the stringent, ‘Canada-centric,’ and potentially racist, requirements of Canadian institutions and professional associations could drive recent immigrants out of Canada. That individual argued:

the Canadian institutions or professional organizations are closing their doors, and that might be a problem. Because Canada says we want to attract the best, the brightest professionals, and now when they come there are simply closed doors and opportunities, and the only opportunity they have is perhaps [to] go back.

In responding to the interviewer, an Afghan youth made it clear that structural barriers are neither invisible nor unquestioned:

I think there are regulations and red tape in Canadian law that make it hard ... for people who come with this kind of stuff [foreign credentials] from abroad. Because I think the main concern is to protect people who graduated from Canadian universities and they have professional degrees. That is understandable but ... I think there has to be a kind of a mechanism that provides for people who have ... a professional degree from a different country to be able to work at lower level jobs, you know, till they get the experience and go higher up.

What this IR youth seemed to be alluding to is an organized system in which foreign professionals could be eased into their field of expertise and given time and support to prove their competency, not left to grope blindly among so-called “open” market forces.

These expressions by IR youth and service workers reveal many of the challenges associated with education, credentials and training received outside of Canada. Some authors have compellingly described the failure of educational institutions, accreditation bodies and employers to give due recognition to foreign-held qualifications as the “institutionalization of downward mobility” for many newcomers (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80). It has been standard practice for such bodies to systematically assume that foreign credentials are inferior to Canadian-held ones. This has contributed significantly to blocking access to occupations for which highly educated/professional immigrants and refugees have been trained in their native countries (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80).

Gopikrishna has argued that Canadian institutions and evaluation bodies (as well as employers) have generally adopted a condescending attitude toward foreign education. This is an attitude that fails to take into account the “fierce competition for admission into colleges in the developing countries.” Moreover, many of the job skills gained in third-world countries are “more efficient than deficient, if compared to skills acquired in Canada.” Evidence of this is provided by the explosion of the software market in India, where technological and infrastructure constraints force programmers “to learn how to write code that will satisfy multiple constraints simultaneously.” Gopikrishna contends that despite sustained campaigns to raise awareness of these issues “there

continues to be a pronounced apathy towards the issue at all levels of government” (Gopikrishna 2001,17).

Without question, problems regarding foreign-based education, credentials, and training constitute a major and continuing barrier to many IR youth in their attempts to secure meaningful employment in Canada. Also, as noted above, many IR youth have difficulty gaining entrance into higher education in Canada because of factors such as language ability, refugee status, and the costs associated with such schooling. Canada, in general terms, under-invests in training, and many of the training programs that do exist operate through EI programs for which many newcomers remain ineligible (McBride 2000b; Dunk, McBride and Nelson 1996; Shields 1996). This situation presents a significant problem as “continuous investment in human resources through job-related training is essential for ensuring long-term economic growth in today’s global economy” and for improved individual success in a highly competitive labour market (Sussman 2002, 5).

Language Proficiency

The issue of **language proficiency** is obviously a central one with respect to the successful labour-market integration of IR youth. All but one of the IR youth in our surveyed population could speak English, and, in addition, a number of the African youth were able to speak French as well. A majority of our sample, however, while competent in the English language, were arguably not “fully fluent,” which has become increasingly important in a service- and information-based economy.¹² A Chinese youth expressed an assessment of the situation in this way:

I think my most difficulties in Canada is my communication skills. I found many jobs they need fluent English speaking, but I’m a newcomer, I can’t speak fluent. I think this is my most difficulty to find a job.

Deficiencies in the quality of language skills constitute an ongoing barrier to IR youth/young adults in the new labour market, often limiting their access to even the lower end of the employment market.

A number of the IR youth in our focus groups also made mention of the problem of their accents. They noted that often employers had difficulty in understanding them because of their “foreign accents” or else they suspected that employers were hesitant to employ individuals with accents because it was seen to be ‘bad for business.’ Interestingly, no one in our sample observed the fact that their foreign-language skills might be an asset in a city as multiculturally diverse as Toronto.

¹² According to Volunteer Canada: “Approximately half of newcomers are believed to arrive in Canada with sufficient language skills to work independently, but more frequently lack fluency in the “language” of a specific sector or occupation” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13).

Without question, throughout the developed world there has been a significant decline in the amount of available unskilled and semi-skilled, but relatively highly paid, industrial work, where language skills traditionally were less important to obtaining 'good' employment. At the same time, we have witnessed the rise of a new economy that is more service-oriented, and in which English- (and, in some parts of Canada, French-) language skills have become an essential ingredient to employment success. Ironically, today more newcomers to Canada than in recent history speak English and/or French upon arrival (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13). The demands for 'higher quality language (English/French) abilities,' however, are greater than ever. This means that language continues to be significant barrier for immigrants/refugees seeking employment and broader integration into Canadian society. Unfortunately, at the public-policy level, disinvestment in language training and ESL programs in Ontario over the last decade or so (Anisef and Kilbride 2003), the general lack of access to English language training programs for newcomers (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, and Wilkinson 2000, 80), and the long delay in reaching a partnership agreement between the Province of Ontario and the Federal Government on immigrant settlement services, has compromised the economic integration of IR youth.

Related to language proficiency, educational achievement, and professional credentials, it is telling to examine the national profiles of employer-nominated groupings of immigrants in comparison to state-selected 'economic immigrants.' Employer-nominated immigrants predominantly have been drawn from English-speaking, developed countries where working-language proficiency is rarely an issue, and where credential acceptance by the host county is high. The racial background of this group of nominees is primarily Caucasian. By contrast, state-selected economic immigrants largely have been from the developing world. Most of these migrants are visible minorities, their English-language skills generally are 'less refined,' and their formal credentials less likely to be given due recognition by the necessary Canadian professional bodies and employers. Of course, immigrants from employer-nominated groups have very high rates of employment, and hold jobs in Canada within fields for which they were trained. In comparison, state-selected economic migrants have far poorer employment outcomes and, when employed, tend to have jobs outside the areas for which they were trained, often in positions considerably below their levels of foreign-attained education, training, and experience (Hawthorne 2005).¹³

Canadian Employment Experience

A common theme voiced by Canadian youth is that employers are resistant to employing them because they lack work experience. Many of the IR youth in our sample, however, possessed work experience, but this experience had been largely attained outside of Canada. IR youth, consequently,

¹³ It is interesting to note that, among the prime work ages (25 to 44), most immigrants in 2003 after two years in Canada had not found work in their designated occupations. Of the 80 per cent of such immigrants who did find work within two years, only 4 in 10 held a job in their own occupational area (Statistics Canada 2005b, 5). Even among those who do find employment in their areas of training and education, it is common for immigrants to be employed in inferior jobs to ones they held or were qualified for in their home countries.

often confront an additional obstacle over native-born youth in the Canadian employment market in that work experience obtained abroad (especially from the non-Western World) is most often deemed irrelevant or invisible by employers. It appears that in this labour market, only Canadian-based work experience, or its equivalent,¹⁴ is valued. In fact, Pico and Sweetman, in a recent study, concluded that more recent “immigrants from non-traditional countries receive close to zero economic benefits from pre-Canadian potential labour market experience” (Pico and Sweetman 2005, 19). This approach to hiring results, among other things, in skill under-utilization – a sign of wasted human capital, newcomer labour-market exclusion, and the blockage of many visible minorities, whether deliberately constructed or not, from securing employment for which they are qualified.¹⁵

This ‘deficiency’ in **Canadian experience** is perceived as a critical factor in the lack of employment success by many ethnic groups. Not only do employers not always value foreign experience but often newcomers themselves also engage in self-policing, and perhaps self-defeating, behaviour. Some migrants, after a number of initial negative experiences, will automatically set their standards low, and stop attempting to find jobs in their field. As one service provider observed:

I was gonna say that also there is a perception that skills are not important if they are gained outside of Canada. And while ... it’s definitely true that there is a lot of employer bias about having Canadian experience, I think a lot of youth that I work with believe that because they have no skills in Canada or experience in Canada that they can’t get a job.

An Asian youth echoed this perspective:

The moment I came to Canada, my friends, they told me those people who came here earlier, they also joined some courses like technical – develop some technical skills — and they told me, I mean if you don’t have the skills or you don’t have the Canadian experience, it’s very difficult to get a job in Canada.

Another Asian youth expressed disillusionment with the situation in this way:

I guess most of the people who come from the Third World countries they have this desire to do well here, and they have this dream, but it’s shattered as soon as they realize that without the experience, without the skills they cannot get a job.

¹⁴ Canadian employers have historically been more willing to accept work experience obtained in countries like Britain and the United States of America.

¹⁵ A 2003 longitudinal survey of prime-working-age immigrants (25 to 44) over two years after arrival in Canada revealed that the most difficult problem in finding employment “was their lack of experience in the Canadian workforce,” and this factor was identified as the most important challenge at all time points in their residency in the country (Statistics Canada 2005b, 5).

The discriminatory racial/ethnic impact of the employer demand for Canadian experience was often viewed as racial/ethnic discrimination as those most negatively affected by this were minority newcomers. This underlying sentiment of discrimination was felt by many of the IR youth in our survey.

On the other hand, many other youth expressed their belief that there was no deliberate intent on the part of employers to discriminate in this way. One refugee youth from Africa, for example, reflecting on the importance of experience in finding employment, was equally convinced that this was not a product of racism:

Experience is all — doesn't matter if you're Black, White, Brown, Chinese whatever, just if you know, if you're smart, you know you speak the language very good, you get experience, then you get good job. If you don't, doesn't matter how you look like. It doesn't matter where you come from.

This perspective was also expressed by a Vietnamese youth: "I think most of the jobs most of the time we get refused for the job because we don't have experience."

For those without Canadian experience, the attempt to gain access to employment can be a very frustrating process. As one African focus-group member suggested:

when I first came, what people that was helping me out, they told me, they said before I can get a nice job I have to go back to school. So any time I tried to apply for a job, when I get there I see a lot of resumes filled up with different experiences which I don't have.

Further to this point, an Asian youth noted:

because the problem is like, ah, a lot of the problem, you know, they don't give us the chance, you know, to show them what we have, you know. Then how we going to get experience to get a job?

A Somali youth declared: "I just feel like quitting, not looking any more because every time I go they just tell me that I have no experience...." An Afghani youth added:

... the first question they ask is, even I was coming from Pakistan they knew that I am like here for – I'm just a kind of new-born Canadian here for – a week, they were asking me, 'Do you have any Canadian experience? We can't give you a job without Canadian experience.'

And a Chinese youth observed:

I think the problem is that many companies require the local experience, and some Chinese they have very good professional career in, maybe, China or the other countries, and it's quite difficult to transfer to North America, I mean Canada.

How to secure meaningful experience, consequently, has become a central concern, and the potential of volunteer work has been viewed as one avenue to resolving the experience deficit.

Volunteer Work

Volunteering, and charitable work more generally, have increasingly come to be identified as an important form of social engagement that is critical for both promoting social inclusion and integration and in the building of social capital (Policy Research Initiative 2005).¹⁶ The issue of **volunteer work**, however, can also be an acrimonious one, a catch-22 situation, which has the potential to be used by neoliberal ideology in a manner that can work against the interests of recently arrived immigrants or refugees (Evans and Shields 2005). There seems to have developed a general feeling among policymakers and governments that volunteering opens up an important avenue to labour-market access for newcomers and youth more generally. This is one of the reasons that the neoliberal Mike Harris Government in Ontario introduced 'mandatory volunteering' during the late 1990s as a requirement for successful high school graduation (Jones 2000). The attitude of these authorities appears to be: "If you need experience, volunteer." What they failed to take into account was the fact that for many migrants, living on little money and often with little community or familial support, volunteering often was not a feasible option. Consequently, the 'failure' of IR youth to 'take advantage of volunteering opportunities' has the potential to be used as a reason why these youth are not achieving more success in the labour market. Thus, some of the structural barriers in the labour market may be explained away by perceived individual short falls within the IR youth population itself. Neoliberal policy discourse tends to individualize blame for unemployment, thus ignoring the broader structural problems and barriers to employment that would require that the state take on more responsibility for resolving the problem (Shields 2004; McBride 2000b; Shields 1996).

Given the demands and stresses faced by the majority of IR youth on a daily basis – including navigating the immigration system, finding housing, facing language barriers, lacking adequate financial support, and the like – the ability to simultaneously devote the time and resources necessary to becoming a volunteer has not always been a realistic option for this population. In fact, not surprisingly, newcomer volunteer rates are lower than those for the general population (NSGVP 2000, 2). Some of the obstacles to volunteering were identified by our IR youth. As one Asian youth told us: "My kids don't give me chance to do any voluntary work." Another Asian youth felt that there were many opportunities, but that it was not realistic to work at low or minimum wage and also find

¹⁶ Overall in Canada, there have been few studies that have examined recent immigrants in relation to charitable activities. For exceptions see: Wolfe 2006 and Mata and McRae 2000.

time to volunteer: “Many opportunities, and many volunteers. Just that I suggest something to cover our cost.”

There was one example from our focus group sessions on the use of volunteering as a strategy to aid IR youth in the search for employment. One ‘creative’ service provider noted that they used the agency they worked at as a vehicle to provide IR youth with volunteer work experience. These youth may only do a few hours work, but they can put it on a resume. Since the experience and credentials from their country-of-origin were largely ignored in Canada, the service provider felt she had to do something, anything, to give her clients a leg up. The service provider suggested that this volunteer experience was described as more significant than it actually was, and that she taught IR youth to be inventive about identifying what other experiences and skills ‘they have’ that Canadian employers might value. As this service provider noted: “So sometimes as an employment counsellor who makes resumes, I lie in a very modern manner. (Chuckles) I lie. And I train them to lie, I think.”

The general overall sentiment from our surveyed IR youth and service-provider population, however, appeared to be that volunteering as a strategy to secure employment was of quite limited utility. There may be some altruistic value, in and of itself, in the volunteer experience, but for IR youth this was not perceived to be a particularly effective route for them as newcomers to get meaningful work experience that employers would value, nor was it particularly helpful in making the kinds of connections that ‘paid off’ in terms of successful job searches.

Access to Information/Information Deficits

The problem of **information deficits** is a contributing factor to many newcomers’ difficulties in finding suitable employment and in successfully integrating into Canadian society. While largely ignored in the literature on social exclusion, lack of access to information is a major problem with regards to immigrant integration (Caidi and Allard 2005, 2). The problems with access to information usually begins before migrants leave their home countries, since most “immigrants arrive in Canada without an adequate understanding or appreciation of the challenges they will face” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13). In fact, many migrants are under the assumption that there is abundant work in Canada, and that their skills are in high demand. For example, the “Canadian independent immigrant selection system (point system) that tends to accept immigrants having a ‘skill in demand’ leads immigrants to believe that finding employment in their field of work should not be difficult, and that their skills and experience will be recognized” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 13). Canadian immigration officials overseas do little to provide information that would correct such misinformed views.

Upon arrival in Canada, immigrants and refugees face further challenges related to **access to information**. To begin with, “Canada does not have a comprehensive system of assessment of immigrants and refugees to help them determine their ... readiness for successful labour market integration” (Volunteer Canada n.d., 6). Moreover, newcomers are in need of information related to a whole host of issues, beyond direct labour-market services, that are also necessary to function

successfully in Canadian society. These issues range from how to find adequate housing and access the health care system to language training and access to programs that increase awareness regarding Canadian society and culture. There is no system in place that provides newcomers with, if you will, 'one-stop shopping' access, and in language-friendly formats, for this kind of information. The information that does exist often is incomplete, in locations that are not easily accessible to the IR population. Moreover, many service centres often are under-staffed and under-resourced, and, importantly, the coordination between different service providers most often is incomplete or nonexistent (Richmond and Shields 2005; Lim, Lo, Siemiatycki, and Doucet 2005; Sadiq 2004; Richmond and Shields 2004a and 2004b). Lack of timely access to information often means that newcomers spend considerable time, emotional energy, and resources trying to navigate the multiplicity of Canadian institutions, markets, and society, efforts that detract from the job search and employment networking.

One of the support agency workers from our focus groups described the situation faced by IR youth like this:

I found that any newcomer to Canada they do not know, like they don't know, where to go. This is like a big issue. They don't know where to go, job searching is really different usually than where they come from, and they're just not aware. They're not aware of like the laws in terms of how many hours you can work and what is the minimum wage ... they'll get under-paid, often less than minimum wage. There's not even an awareness when somebody comes to Canada there's no representative, any agency to say this is the information you need, these are some numbers you should call, this is where you go to get your SIN card ... [and] it often takes several months, at least, for them to figure [this] out.

This assessment was given concrete expression by an Afghan youth, who reported that:

most of the immigrants, when they come, it's very hard for them to know about everything [provided by] the system ... because every country is different. They have a different experience. Like myself, ah, I didn't know till lately that there are some employment centres [that] can [help] find [a] job for you.

Many of the IR youth talked about using newspapers and the internet in their attempts to locate employment, yet they also appeared naive about the resources and community support, however imperfect, that was available to them. This problem was also raised by a service provider, who criticized the lack of government commitment in this way:

in terms of employment ... HRDC gives a lot of lip service to newcomers or youth or whatever. But they, for example, their employment resources centres, nobody knows where they are. (Chuckles) I'm serious!

Likewise, an African Youth respondent exhibited the perceptions of many immigrant youths, on whether employment services were readily available or not:

I don't really think [social services] help in term of looking for a job and it's very impersonal. It's just about paying your rent until you can pay it for yourself. They don't help you to look for a job or anything like that.

Hence, the themes of *information deficits* and the inability of newcomers to gain *access to information* are ones identified by our sample as important contributing factors to the problem of labour-market integration for IR youth/young adults in Toronto.

Anisef and Kilbride have forcefully argued that Citizenship Immigration Canada should help relieve some of these problems by putting together a more comprehensive information package for newcomers, a package that would be available in a wide variety of languages. This information package could play the role of a knowledge directory of service organizations in the government and nonprofit sectors, as well as offering basic information itself. This package should be given to each newcomer upon arrival in Canada, and also be accessible through such avenues as the internet (Anisef and Kilbride 2000, 22). Moreover, according to the authors, CIC should offer readily accessible courses, or orientation sessions, to newcomers regarding their rights (including labour standards and employment law), and information regarding affordable housing, health, education, and recreation. These sessions should be offered in an accessible and safe environment. Since newcomers need greater assistance in obtaining "meaningful employment," government should work closely with schools to help provide assistance, and offer more by way of training workshops, especially since supports offered through the EI system are inaccessible to much of the newcomer population (Anisef and Kilbride 2000, 22-23).

Government policy makers apparently regard the use of greater numbers of volunteers in the nonprofit sector, who work with labour-market-bound newcomers, as a way to resolve the information gap. One concern about this approach that has been articulated by Volunteer Canada is that volunteers lack sufficient "materials, tools, and programs needed to successfully help newcomers assess their fit for careers in Canada's workplace" (Volunteer Canada n.d., 6). It is true that resources for volunteers are inadequate; however, it is also clear that voluntary responses to the depth of the employment crisis for IR youth alone is inadequate to address the multiplicity of barriers confronting this population (Evans and Shields 2005; Richmond and Shields 2004b). As much as overcoming some of the information gaps is important in addressing IR youth labour-market exclusion, more substantive state policies will be required if we are to move beyond 'band-aid' solutions.

Racism and Discrimination

Notwithstanding the commitment by the Canadian state to promote and build a nonracist and a multicultural society in Canada,¹⁷ the problem of **racism and discrimination** remains as a major issue and reality for many IR visible-minority youth.¹⁸ Visible-minority IR youth face discrimination and racial exclusion in many forms, from the lack of knowledge of cultural differences on the part of much of the Canadian population, to stereotyping, to a refusal on the part of employers to accommodate religious clothing at work. Some of the ‘evidence’ of racism and discrimination was obvious and blunt, some of it was suspected and subtle, but, either way, many of the respondents were negatively affected by their experiences with the Canadian labour market. Indeed, it is clear from their responses that many of the expectations and dreams of the IR youth in our sample have been undermined or compromised by the impact, real and perceived, of racism and discrimination.

The existence, extent, and impact of racial discrimination in the Canadian labour market has been difficult to determine with any precision, but there is a general consensus both that it exists and that racism is an important negative determinant with respect to employment outcome for identifiable minorities (Jackson 2005, Chpt. 6; Li 2003; Pendakur 2000). As stated, racial minorities, on average, face higher levels of unemployment, earn lower wages and salaries, and their quality of employment tends to be less favourable compared to other segments of the Canadian population.¹⁹

¹⁷ It is significant that in a recent opinion poll Canadians in an open-ended question identified what they believed was the most important thing that makes Canada unique as the characteristic of diversity and multiculturalism, by a wide margin (23 per cent of all respondents identified diversity or multiculturalism, followed next by ‘freedom’ by 12 per cent of respondents) (Evans 2005, A22). It is clear that large numbers of Canadians see the diversity of the peoples that make up the country as important to our identity, a viewpoint that rejects the American notion of a ‘melting pot’ (for an example of American hostility to multiculturalism see: Huntington 2004), and perhaps indicates a more accepting and tolerant approach to ethnic and racial difference within society compared to most other ‘immigrant-welcoming’ countries.

There is, however, evidence in other countries and also in Canada of growing strains regarding the challenges of living and working in a multicultural society (Gregg 2006). Nonetheless, there remains considerable public and governmental support for multiculturalism as an integration strategy (Duncan 2005). For a critical analysis of Canadian multicultural policy see: James (2005) and Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002).

¹⁸ Judge Rosalie Abella, in her 1984 report on the Royal Commission on Equity, noted that: “discrimination ... means practices or attitudes that have, whether by design or impact, the effect of limiting an individual or group’s right to the opportunities generally available because of attributable rather than actual characteristics. What is impeding the full development of potential is not the individual’s capacity but an external barrier.” (As quoted in Jackson 2005, 102).

¹⁹ There have been a variety of calls in the Canadian business community for employers to recognize the value of an increasingly diverse workforce. RBC Financial Group has asserted, for example, the so-called ‘diversity advantage’: “Smart employers recognize the benefits of diversity in gender, race, and national origin, building a skilled workforce with a variety of cultural backgrounds, and that this will become even more important in years ahead” (RBC Financial Group 2005, 3). Nonetheless, as this study suggests the problem of employer discrimination remains a significant one in Canadian society.

In a comparative context, minority groups tend not to fare as well as dominant ethnic groups in terms of economic integration. In the United States of America, for example, the unemployment rates for those defined as “black” are nearly twice the rate of so-called “white” youth. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, ethnic minorities’ incidence of unemployment is well over twice that of whites, even though their participation rates in education were higher (O’Higgins 2001, 29). In Canada, similar disparities are evident. For example, between 1996 and 2001 racialized and new immigrant groups experienced an after-tax income gap of over 13 per cent; however, some groups, like visible-minority male youth, suffered more than a 42 per cent deficit in earnings in relation to comparable groups (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi 2005, 6).

Many of the IR youth from our study talked about their experiences with racism and discrimination. An African refugee commented that:

I think that they should teach people ... I don’t know how they’d do that but I really wish people could know more about, ah, new immigrants, people from Africa and I think it would make it much easier for us ... if people were not so ignorant about Africa in general, it would be much easier for us, really.

A Chinese youth also made the point that “Canada should understand the Chinese culture” as a way to overcome some of the difficulties experienced by migrants from that part of the world. The lack of knowledge of cultural and national differences on the part of the Canadian population was commonly identified by our sample as a contributing factor to a lack of understanding and sensitivity regarding newcomer integration/adjustment issues.

An Afghan female youth described the trouble she encountered because of the religious scarf which she had previously worn at all times:

over here the hardest thing I find for a job was again the cultural thing. I used to wear a scarf, and wherever you used to go, okay, they were satisfied with my English, with my qualification, computer and everything, but the only problem was, ‘Well, will you wear your scarf to the office?’ ‘Yes, of course I will wear it.’ And well: ‘Okay, I’ll call you back in two days or three days,’ and they never used to call [me] back. Because all those people say that Canada is a kind of county that doesn’t discriminate, but still there is a discrimination.

Significantly, she stopped wearing the scarf for job interviews. An Asian Youth, who experienced a similar scarf-related problem with a major Canadian department store, exposed the pessimism and resignation of many immigrants in the face of overt and structural discrimination in the following manner:

I complained to the (unclear) and they said I can sue the company. I said there’s no point. There are, like, thousands of people happen the same thing every day, right, so how many companies are you going to sue?

One African youth described the effect of racist preconceptions:

many people have stereotypes about people from Africa, they think you don't have much to offer, they think your education is low, they just have these things in their minds that you can't seem to change, so it puts you down because many of us have a lot to offer.

The pain of racist stereotypes is also apparent among members of the Afghan group. One youth stated that many Afghans do not seek to 'use' Canada for negative purposes, and that they were driven to Canada *by* violence, not because they *are* violent. This individual forcefully observed: "that hurts when some people discriminate ... when they hear the name Afghanistan they think these people ... [are] dangerous."

Another Afghani recounted a revealing conversation with a Canadian citizen. The conversation unfolded in the following way after the Afghani youth was asked the question: "Are you Canadian?:"

No I'm not. I'm from Afghanistan'. 'Oh well, okay' [and the questioner moved back when he heard the name of the country Afghanistan]. 'So you belong to a dangerous country'. 'Excuse me?' (Laughter). And it's like 'Excuse me?' 'Yeah, you belong to a dangerous country, you are dangerous'. ... I said to him: 'No, I am not. I'm coming from Afghanistan, that doesn't mean I'm a terrorist. And not all Afghans are terrorists.'

The experiences that these Afghani youth encountered reveal a significant discrimination problem that newcomers from Muslim and Arab backgrounds have had to face because of political turmoil and violence in places like the Middle East and Afghanistan.²⁰

A Bangladesh youth related his experiences of perceived racism as he tried to find employment:

There were lots of times they had the thing hanging that they are hiring, and each time they did, I applied. I never got the job. [This occurred over the] last two years and I know why? Because in these places there is racism. And the [store name] there, all people working are white. So I think that's really bad and really hurts me, because I know I'm qualified for that job.

Perceptions of racism were not, it must be said, monolithic. In the section above on "Canadian experience," we cited an African youth who denied that there was racial discrimination in the labour market. For him it did not matter what colour or ethnic origin you were, your success in the labour

²⁰ It is worthy of note that this conversation occurred prior to the events of 9/11 after which the issue of terrorism became greatly elevated.

market was based on your determination, skills, and abilities. This general perspective was one also expressed by others in our sample. An Afghani youth further observed that from her/his perspective:

Toronto is really, really good when it comes to racism; like, compared to many ... places around the world.... Not all of Canada because there's a lot of racism ... But Toronto is very good.

An African Youth expressed some of the qualified sentiments that many immigrants and refugees feel towards Canada. In this case the youth was reflecting on the label of 'Canada as the best place to live.' He observed:

However good Canada is, we still have problems, and that's what we are talking about. We don't have – no, we don't have to compare ourselves with Europe and say 'Oh, Europe is so bad so Canada is perfect.' Because Canada is not perfect.

The overall pattern that emerged from our sample appeared to be that discrimination did exist within the employment market, and within Canadian society more generally, although the extent to which IR youth experienced this was unevenly felt and expressed. Moreover, while there was a generally expressed feeling that Canada and Toronto were 'good places to live,' they were still far from ideal because exclusionary practices still persist. For the majority of those in our focus groups, **racism and discrimination** was a 'lived' reality that carried many negative consequences for their employment prospects.

Meaningful Employment

The members of our sample of youth/young adults were asked explicitly about their perspectives regarding the kind of employment that they would like to find in Canada. Their responses were revealing with regard to issues like their attitude toward a **work ethic**, perspectives on what a **good job** is, and their sense of the **intrinsic value of working**.

Concern about high rates of unemployment among young people has often been neglected in public-policy discussions which tend to be overshadowed by unemployment issues for older segments of the population. This relative neglect of youth joblessness has been labeled by the Canadian Youth Foundation as the "hidden deficits" (Canadian Youth Foundation 1995). Experiencing involuntary unemployment early in one's working life, however, can have serious and lasting negative consequences. The problem of the so-called "scarring effect" of early unemployment has come to be widely acknowledged. Scarring from unemployment happens when "the initial negative experiences become self-fulfilling, sowing seeds that can lead to longer-run unemployment or even complete withdrawal from the labour force" (Gunderson, Sharpe, and Wald 2000, S86).

This effect is further reinforced by the prevailing neoliberal ideology which suggests that youth unemployment is largely self-inflicted. Unemployment, according to this line of reasoning, is a product of young people pricing themselves out of the labour market due to excessive wage expectations. Neoliberalism further implies that this youth exclusion from the labour market is also promoted “through [young people’s] negative attitudes towards employers and the employment they offer..., their refusal to accept arbitrary authority and discipline, and their supposed preference for an easy life on benefit/[public welfare]” (Novak 1997, 23). This ideologically coloured approach to youth unemployment was pervasive in policy circles through much of the 1980s and 1990s in Canada. It was an approach that ignored the mismatch between the supply of and the actual demand for labour by employers, and it encouraged public policy that was increasingly punitive and restrictive of support for the unemployed, especially unemployed youth (Sliver, Shields, and Wilson 2005; Silver, Shields, Wilson, and Scholtz 2005; Tyyskä 2001).

Despite all the barriers impeding employment success, and a prevailing environment that has often ‘blamed’ young people themselves for this lack of employment success, few, if any, of the IR youth in our sample had so far lost their strong desire to work. Neoliberal assertions about the erosion of the work ethic among the young are not sustained by the findings of our study.

A healthy work ethic, was, for example, clearly manifest in the philosophy of one Somali youth: “like say you want to become a basketball player or whatever, like work on it, don’t just dream.” Another confident and practical Asian respondent said:

I’m quite optimistic that though it might take some time to prove your credibility, but if you really work hard and you work sincerely, honestly, and you feel very comfortable with your work, I believe any employer ... can hire you permanently.

This desire to work on the part of newcomers does not negate the equally important desire for **meaningful employment**, a so-called **good job**. In fact, another source of disillusionment with integration into Canadian society may come from an immigrant’s experience with chronic underemployment – the underutilization of the skills and talents/human capital of workers (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi 2005; Krahn et. al. 2000; Livingstone 1999). Many of the respondents described lives in which, due to any number of the barriers identified in this paper, they were unable to find satisfying employment and were experiencing the frustrations articulated earlier.

A lack of adequate job opportunities was strongly expressed by one Somali Youth who said:

I mostly have problems in finding something I wanna do, you know what I mean like? And sticking to it like. I see a lot of jobs I can get, right, but it’s not...it’s not something I would like to do, you know what I mean? That’s why I have problems finding [a job].

One of the stronger statements of an unwillingness to accept substandard employment was echoed by a youth from Afghanistan: “they feel insulted washing somebody’s dishes. I’m Afghan, I’m not gonna do that.”

A number of respondents also identified the problem of their marked drop in status because of their lack of good employment opportunities in Canada. Noted one Afghani participant:

Most Afghans come like from wealthy families back home, and their reputation is very respected. So once they come here and they have to clean up like, you know, do stuff like that, they don’t feel good about that.

In the same vein, a Bangladeshi youth stated:

Like after coming here, the first two years it was very hard for my parents to go and look for a perfect job for themselves. Because they are highly qualified. And even now, like what my mother was back home, she doesn’t have the same status here. Even though she’s working for government right now, but back home she was a scientist, like a big scientific officer, she did this research stuff. But now she’s working totally different from what she studied in her entire life. Same thing happened with my Dad. The first two years was very bad, very poor. Like same thing. We never ever expected that would happen to us.

Another Asian youth identified an initial resistance by immigrants to take jobs that were clearly below their levels of qualifications:

... the kind of work they were offering me, I got some pride from back home that no, I don’t have to do this work because see, like here. So I didn’t work for eight months, sometimes because of myself because I didn’t want to do that work and sometimes because of the opportunities they don’t have there.

One Bangladeshi woman explained how she was compelled to enter the labour market in order to support her family because of her highly trained husband’s inability to secure a good job in Canada. Speaking through an interpreter she noted:

What she’s saying is back home her husband is an engineer. He had a very good job, and they well lived there, okay. She even never thought of working, she was a housewife, all she does is take care of the baby, go out shopping. But now she’s finding it very hard in here. Her husband is not getting a good job. ... [W]hat she told me right now is that they have great expectations, people coming in here, and after they came here, frustrations.

The neoliberal perspective commonly argues that youth and newcomers should be happy with any job, but this is a position that is arguably discriminatory and obstructive to the promotion of a socially cohesive society.

A number of our youth commented quite eloquently and philosophically on the question of **quality employment** and the **intrinsic value of work**. One Somali respondent put his/her position on meaningful employment axiomatically: “a wise man once told me, find a job you love and you never have to work a day.” According to an Asian respondent:

Money is not the only consideration as far as I’m concerned. I like to work for a place where the job satisfaction is very good for me, and I feel good that my work and dedication is appreciated. This is very important to me.

In stark contrast to oft-repeated stereotypes of “greedy” immigrants who abuse the social safety net, the goals of the youth in our sample appeared little different from those of most individuals born in Canada. One Asian youth expressed his employment needs in this way:

the most important thing for me is to be able to support myself when I’m single, and support my family or my kids when I’m married, and to work and have a very healthy adequate environment to live in. To be able to give them all the basic necessities.

Others identified their commitment to find the kind of employment in Canada that would allow them to be of assistance to their families in their counties of origin. As a Tibetan youth asserted:

I believe I want to support our families back home and to be able to do that ... I think you need to make like eleven, twelve dollars per hour, that is the minimum I think.

In a similar vein, another Asian respondent contended:

Money is not the only consideration as far as I’m concerned. I like to work for a place where the job satisfaction is very good for me, and I feel good that my work and dedication is appreciated. This is very important for me. If I have a choice to do my job which pays me a little better, but another job where the job satisfaction [is high], I would definitely go for the one with job satisfaction.

The voices of the youth expressed here indicate a group of people who have a strong work ethic. They are a group that is eager to work hard and secure meaningful employment and contribute to their new society. Yet the lack of quality employment opportunities available to them is contributing to wasted human capital.

The Social, Psychological, and Societal Consequences of IR Youth Labour-Market Exclusion

There are **societal consequences** to some of the problems associated with unemployment and under-employment and the frustration visible minority “newcomer” youth feel regarding their attempts to ‘integrate’ into Canadian society more generally. Problems connected to **mental health** (Rummens 2004; Beiser 2002 and 1999) and **social exclusion** and **alienation** (Richmond and Saloojee 2005) were among the issues raised in our focus group discussions. While not directly commented on by our sample population, newcomers from refugee backgrounds faced additional burdens and stresses given their uncertain longer-term status and the traumas many of them had experienced because of repression and conflict in their homelands. Difficulties associated with labour-market integration often work to magnify **psychological problems** and other **negative societal consequences** (Simich, et al. 2006).

Addressing the theme of alienation and exclusion, one African youth noted that it:

Is bad thing not to be employed, you know? Somebody will feel like nothing. You are not able to do many things for yourself, and even with this support [social assistance] is not enough.

Speaking of the effects of unemployment, another IR youth from Africa identified how various sources of stress combined to produce health (including mental health) strains. As he observed: “financially, medically, mentally, you know, it affects people, and affect the situation of the family too.” In a different group, an Asian IR youth protested that: “I think those jobs I found I can do them well. But they cannot give us opportunity. So it’s embarrassing here.”

One of the Afghani youth in our sample addressed the personal effects of government support and the motivation to get a job. As this individual noted:

You just don’t want to sit and look at people, ‘Okay, he’s coming from work,’ and you feel bad because I don’t have a job. It’s nothing that you might need money, it’s not [that] people are materialistic. Everybody wants to do something, right? If you don’t have a job, if you don’t have studies, what are you gonna do ...?

A Vietnamese youth spoke about the **social pressure and condemnation** within his ethnic community for taking jobs which were far below that which he might have held in Vietnam: “just how does it look like as a job because other people, other Vietnamese families, they will kind of look down upon you. It’s not a real professional job.” Many of the IR youth felt the familial and/or community pressure to succeed, even as they were struggling in their efforts to adjust to life in a new country. As one Vietnamese youth observed: “I find that’s a bit too much pressure. So I’m studying as first year [student] like if I’m studying for my PhD even though I’m not too sure what it is.” Likewise, an Afghani youth observed that:

... many people over there were highly educated. I have seen doctors, like my brother is a doctor, now he's working in a shop like as a cashier, so just imagine someone working there, it's hard in the beginning.

The isolation that many of the youth had experienced, and the struggles and disappointments associated with trying to find employment in a tight labour market, had combined to create enormous stress and psychological pressure for many of our participants. A sampling of such expressions is illustrated by the following comments. For example, an African youth suggested:

Even in my country there is no support from the government, but the little moral support anybody you meet give you, will give you desire and happiness that at least I know I have some people with me. But here ... they may help you financially, but they will [add] more to your psychological problem.

On the same point, a Chinese youth observed:

I think no job, no experience, no experience no job. ... And I think the other thing is the people, the newcomer also should just adjust to the psychology values, their perception; I think that's very important. I know a lot of people that have a lot of good experience and I think some association[s], they should just provide some training or some, you know, some help for the newcomer [to], you know, adjust their mental [outlook]. They're thinking that's more help – useful, you know.

An African youth neatly summed up the situation in the following concise statement: “the pressure is too much!”

The difficulties and barriers that so many newcomer youth experience in their efforts to integrate into a less-than-inviting labour market has created significant pressures. This situation promotes psychological stress, social exclusion, and youth alienation.

Effectiveness of IR Service Provision and Service Providers

Our focus groups included one session composed solely of settlement-service providers and researchers. We felt it important to include the insights from front-line community-based workers regarding their perceptions of the issues surrounding the labour-market integration of visible-minority newcomer youth. While not the explicit focus of our research, the settlement workers identified a number of insights regarding problems in service provision from an provider perspective. Since this set of concerns was not the centre of our analysis, the thoughts included here do not provide a complete overview of the situation but their input gives expression to some of the problems of the settlement-service system as it relates to immigrant/refugee youth – a system under increasing stress

– and it has allowed community workers to articulate, in general terms, how services might be improved.

The literature informs us that the settlement-service system in English Canada, and in Ontario more particularly, has been under-resourced and operating under a funding system that does not encourage effective service integration which often results in seriously over-extended community organizations (Evans, Richmond and Shields 2005; Richmond and Shields 2004a and 2004b; Sadiq 2004). Within this context, community workers discussed issues related to the effectiveness of service provision.

A question raised concerned the **effectiveness of service provision/providers** in helping IR youth find meaningful employment. One Asian youth commented on short term employment schemes offered through community-based programs, noting that:

Most of these jobs are just like for the summer time or just like little bit money to pay whatever bills or whatever, sort of thing. So like these organizations do help, but then it doesn't really fulfill what you want really.

Settlement workers generally agreed with this assessment, recognizing that while such employment did offer the ability for youth to earn a bit of income and gain some 'Canadian experience,' that, generally, these organizations did not provide the kind of training and experiences that would lead to quality employment opportunities. A service provider elaborated: "youth have a completely unique set of needs: the high motivation, the high energy, the creativity, the innovative mind." Such qualities, however, were rarely tapped by the employment programming usually available.

Also, many programs run by agencies have come to address a variety of different users with specific needs. For example, a number of organizations were established with the goal of providing programming for street youth. However, because of large influxes of immigrants and refugees into Toronto and the overall lack of sufficient settlement programs for such young people, many newcomer youth, especially refugees, have been utilizing the services of agencies for street youth. Obviously, the needs of each of these populations is different and, in order to accommodate refugee youth, programs have had to be adjusted. Often times, these modifications have not led to the efficient servicing of either group. The choice with which agencies often have been faced, therefore, has been to deliver a less-effective, blended program, or to refuse service to one of the groups altogether. The latter rarely has been seen as an acceptable alternative because of the consequences for a highly vulnerable group. Some of the dimensions of this situation are captured in the following observations of a service provider:

As far as the effectiveness of my job, because this particular programme was designed for homeless youth there's a lot of like resume writing and assertiveness training and a really heavy life skills focus. And we're having to adapt that a little bit because of the different needs of most ... refugees coming in, again with no family support as has already been said, and some education and very, very stable and work ready, except

for the basic needs. So it's difficult for them to take time to attend a programme when they have to, you know, deal with the housing issues and all that sort of thing that comes along. And we are having to sort of redesign our programme so that it's not – how do I say it – a lot of these refugees coming in don't need anger management, for example, or (chuckles) you know, this stuff but [for] the street youth in Toronto it's a good idea. So we're having to adjust accordingly and it's just sort of an odd need; but there's nothing else for them as has already been said. There's no training programmes designed to give you computer skills which is what they come to our programme for. We've had lots of youth who've had some university in Uganda or somewhere doing work that they could do here and it's back to the issue of no recognition of school experience and other experience in the country they're coming from. But it's just it seems so striking these very, very skilled people in our programme ... but in a sense they don't belong in our training programme at [name of agency]. We're glad we have them, mind you, they're great, but there's nothing else for them. There's very little for that sort of ... trained professionals, they probably have pretty good English, but where's the middle ground? There is no middle ground. There's nothing.

Similarly, service providers also expressed concerns about the narrow mandates often dictated by the restrictive terms of government funding agreements which often limited the kinds of programs that these agencies could offer, leaving newcomer youth needs unmet. This can become very frustrating for community workers because there are often no alternative programs at other agencies to which they can refer clients. As one service worker noted:

So I think it's the frustration of having, as front-line workers, the constant battle; having clients not fall through the cracks because agencies, you know, funding is restricted, you're only mandated to do this, you can't – where do you refer them? Okay, what's the waiting list when you refer them somewhere else? So it's just this constant frustration, you know. You spend more time being frustrated with the system and then I think that ... it can take away from the effectiveness of having to deal with clients. And then they get frustrated and they come back to you.

To address the perceived ineffectiveness of the system, to make sure Canada remains an attractive place where immigrants will want to live and work in an inclusive society, and can do so, a number of remedies were suggested. These **remedies**, from both the youth respondents and the service providers themselves, covered everything from the structure of the agencies, to funding policy, to problems with the traditional immigrant-refugee distinction.

Stressed a number of times was the need for, and difficulty with, a holistic approach to IR youth unemployment. One service provider expressed this sentiment in the following way: “so I think as everybody says, we cannot tackle only the small piece of the pie. It's a big issue of the whole system....” Similar but more cynical, another said: “given the political climate and the will of the politicians it's very difficult to see a holistic approach to dealing with the issues.”

A call for greater communication, though not greater centralization, was made as well. Noted one of our service-provider participants:

the policy recommendation that comes out [is] ... to look at some better level of coordination in the service delivery networks. I mean, not only should the employment services be talking to each other but also ... with the housing [,etc.].

Another noted that:

I think that what needs to happen is rather than creating another level of government, is to sit at the table with the existing levels right now, the federal, the provincial, and the municipal. And I think they need to have an honest, frank discussion among themselves, and rather than keep dividing the already small restrictive pie and creating more and more layers, is to start looking at how can we reduce some of this red tape ... – rather than becoming more obstructionists, they should become facilitators and a point of access for what we're going to do.

According to community-based workers, these suggested reforms must always take into account the problem of defining immigrants and refugees. Among the conflicting views, one community worker observed that:

a youth coming from a context of civil war comes in, ... I don't mean to stereotype but, as people working with them, as researchers, as people working to influence policy, what you're looking at is their needs are very different from say, immigrant youth. Because I'm making a distinction between refugee and immigrant. ... The nuances are very different, the experiences are different, the needs are very different.

While acknowledging differences, another provider problematized the effort to draw clear-cut definitions, illuminating the dangers of labelling and potentially stereotyping:

there is also another problem which people say it's not a problem because if you say immigrants [are] smarter because they bring to this country skills and money, and say that refugees are simply poor and, therefore, they're irrelevant, then I think you're making a mistake. The government is making also a troubling mistake because I say it is interchangeable. ... Immigrants can be also refugees, and refugees can be also immigrants.

While these observations from our focus groups represent less than a comprehensive assessment of the problems with immigrant settlement services, their delivery, and potential ways forward, they do point to important support deficiencies that hinder the successful integration process. A new settlement agreement signed between the Federal Government and the Province of Ontario in 2005 should put more resources in the hands of community-based organizations supporting

newcomers.²¹ More thoroughgoing reform of the ‘Canadian model’ of settlement support, however, will be necessary before fundamental improvements are to be realized (Richmond and Shields 2005).

CONCLUSION

The experiences and reflections of the visible-minority immigrant and refugee youth/young adults surveyed in this study reveal patterns of barriers that obstruct the social and labour-market integration of newcomers to Toronto and Canada. Many of the youth in our sample had experienced significant hardship and, thus, should be regarded as socially excluded. Refugees, in comparison to immigrants, often have to face significant additional obstacles because of their uncertain status but, generally, the “lived experience” of refugees and immigrants in our sample reflected more commonalities than differences. While there was some variability, overall, the sample population was composed of newcomers who possessed considerable educational skill assets, and many also were equipped with meaningful work experience. Most also came from families with solidly middle-class backgrounds in their countries of origin. Yet, despite these ‘advantages,’ these youth were not successfully integrating into the labour market. This speaks to the many blockages that newcomers and youth face in the new labour market.

First and foremost, this study was concerned with giving voice to visible-minority newcomers, although this voice is placed in the context of the existing scholarly and community-based literature. By paying closer attention to the actual ‘lived experience’ of newcomer youth/young adults, we have been able to both gain a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and more fully comprehend the negatively reinforcing character, as well as the various dimensions, of the barriers faced by newcomers.

As a qualitative study, the findings are not meant to be representative in the statistical sense. Rather, our results highlight relevant themes and provide additional insight regarding the experiences and barriers faced by visible-minority youth as they attempt to navigate the Toronto labour market. Not surprisingly, the focus groups revealed, as have other studies, that the lack of Canadian employment experience; the difficulties in getting recognition for education, training, professional qualifications obtained abroad; as well as English language proficiency, top the list of the barriers that visible-minority IR youth and community-service workers identified as forestalling successful labour-market integration. However, there were other barriers that were singled out as posing important obstacles to the employment market. These included: 1) blockages caused by refugee and immigration processes; 2) resource deficiencies in settlement services and coordination difficulties between settlement and employment services; 3) government programs, like social assistance and EI, that do not provide adequate access or support for individuals and families and which are not supporting

²¹ The agreement commits \$28 million dollars to Ontario settlement in the first year of its implementation and a total of \$920 million over the following five years (OCASA 2005).

meaningful employment outcomes; 4) serious information deficits for newcomer youth that make it difficult to negotiate Canadian society and the job market; and 5) the questionable nature of volunteering as a way to gain Canadian experience and to provide a network to achieve employment success. This study also pointed out that racism and discrimination remain a major problem. In this regard, the main concern was with the more 'passive forms' rather than more 'aggressive and overt forms' of discrimination, although there were instances of the latter encountered by some members of our sample. Nonetheless, real and perceived discrimination was considered to be a significant barrier in gaining employment by most of our sample.

The study also underscored the fact that our young people were highly motivated in their desire to find meaningful work but increasingly frustrated by the barriers they encountered. It was clear from their responses that they valued work and wanted to achieve meaningful employment. They also were keenly aware of the expectations that Canadian employers have of potential hires and felt that, objectively, they were generally well qualified for many such positions. Over time, lack of success in the labour market tended to result in increased frustration and anxiety that often resulted in social and psychological difficulties and produced a general pattern of social exclusion.

The voices emerging from the focus groups spoke compellingly about the hopes, dreams, frustrations, and realities of the immigration and refugee experiences of visible-minority young adults in Toronto. These expressions send a powerful message that gives us a deeper understanding of the process of social exclusion experienced by these young people; at the same time, they also provided glimpses into the possibilities for their meaningful integration.

APPENDIX 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF VISIBLE-MINORITY IR YOUTH SAMPLE**Group Surveys: All Participants Combined (61 total)****General Information**

Age:	Mean:	22.7	
	Mode(s):	19, 20	
	Median:	24	
Gender:	Male	36	(59%)
	Female	25	(41%)
Immigration Status:	Immigrant Class	37	(60.7%)
	Refugee Class	24	(39.3%)
Marital status:	Married/Common Law:	8	(13%)
	Divorced/Separated:	1	(2%)
	Single:	50	(83%)
	n/a:	1	(2%)
Time lived in Canada:	Mean:	3.44 years	
	Mode:	8 months	
	Median:	4 years	
Range of time spent in Canada:		2 weeks – 20 years	
Area of Greater Toronto lived in:	Toronto:	44	(73%)
	York:	1	(2%)
	North York:	8	(13%)
	East York:	1	(2%)
	Scarborough:	5	(8%)
	Etobicoke:	1	(2%)
Principle Residence:	Own:	14	(24%)
	With parents or relatives:	30	(50%)
	With friends:	9	(15%)
	Other:	6	(10%)
	n/a:	1	(2%)

Educational Background

Highest Grade Completed (primary and secondary only):

Mean: 11.8 *this number is suspect, as many participants may have finished high school in their respective countries where graduation occurs following grade 12.
 Mode: 13
 Median: 13
 Range: grade 4 – grade 13

Highest degree, certificate or diploma obtained:

			% controlling for n/a responses
High School:	11	(21%)	(33.3%)
Bachelor:	13	(25%)	(39.4%)
Master’s:	4	(8%)	(12.1%)
College:	5	(10%)	(15.2%)
n/a:	19	(37%)	—

Training or upgrading programs:

Yes: 24 (40%)
 No: 33 (55%)
 n/a: 3 (5%)

Description if “Yes”:

Trade Institute:	1
Life guarding:	1
First Aid / CPR:	6
Computer workshop:	2
St. Stephen’s Employment and Training Centre “Connections” Workshop:	6
Computer training, Business English, and job searching workshop:	4
Workshop (unspecified)	1
n/a:	3

Family Background

Parents principle occupation/job

Father:	Dentist:	1
	Doctor:	1
	Labourer:	1
	Teacher:	2
	Principal:	1
	Engineer:	7
	Public admin:	1
	Civil servant:	1
	Business:	10
	Entrepreneur:	2
	Professor:	2
	Service:	1
	Computer	
	Programmer:	1
	Trade:	3
	Military:	1
	Social work:	1
	Accountant:	1
	n/a:	23

(some respondents were orphans, or their parents were unemployed, or they may have been from single-parent homes)

Mother:	Teacher:	5
	“Housewife”	14
	Scientist:	1
	Labourer:	5
	Doctor:	2
	Professor:	1
	Trade:	5
	Accountant:	1
	Professional:	1
	Pharmacist:	1
	Retail:	1
	Service:	1
	Business:	1
	n/a:	21

Employment Experiences

Have you ever had a paid job:

Yes:	47	(78%)
No:	11	(18%)
n/a:	2	(3%)

Type(s) of job(s) held:

Computer programming:	3
General labour:	4
Life guard:	2
Teaching assistant / tutor:	1
Dental assistant:	1
Camp counselor/supervisor:	1
Research lab assistant:	1
Translator:	1
Cook:	1
Security guard:	2
Service:	13
Librarian:	2
Office (reception, telemarketing, date entry):	14

Foreign (where indicated or apparent due to short time participant had been in Canada):

Sales:	1
Manager:	3
Engineer:	3
Computer programmer:	1
Biochemist:	1

Reasons for job loss:

Returned to school:	9	(15%)
Contract ended:	5	(8%)
Emigrated:	16	(27%)
Language barrier:	1	(2%)
Inexperienced:	3	(5%)
Religious clothing:	1	(2%)
Unsafe working conditions:	1	(2%)
Personal:	2	(3%)
n/a:	23	(38%)

Sources of Financial Support

Currently facing financial hardship:

Yes:	38	(63%)
No:	17	(28%)
n/a:	5	(8%)

Current source(s) of financial support:

Savings:	11	(16%)
Employment Insurance:	3	(5%)
Social Assistance:	20	(30%)
Support from family and friends:	18	(27%)
Other:	11	(16%)
n/a:	4	(6%)

APPENDIX 2: YOUTH FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below are the broad questions that were posed in the focus groups with IR Youth. The questions were open ended and the interviewer was free to pursue issues and other lines of questioning as they presented themselves in the focus group sessions.

1) Labour Market Experience

- What types of jobs have you held? How long have you held them for?
- Have you found it difficult to obtain suitable employment in Canada?

2) Experiences of Unemployment

- Why did you lose your last job? What type of job was it?
- How has unemployment affected you personally?
- Describe the changes you (and your family) have had to make because of unemployment.
- What changes have been the most difficult?

3) Barriers to Labour Market Access

- What do you feel are the reasons for your current unemployment?
- Have you experienced discrimination (including difficulty with employers and co-workers) in your employment or job search experiences? Can you explain the form which this discrimination took?

4) Strategies for Securing Employment

- How long have you been searching for employment?
- Describe your job search strategies: types of jobs considered, use of newspaper ads, personal visits to employers, use of peer groups and friends, use of EI resources, training/upgrading programs, networking, etc.
- Have you done or are you currently doing any volunteer work; are you doing this because you feel it may lead to a paying job?
- Can you expand on your experiences related to job searching?

- Can you describe any obstacles/difficulties you have faced in relation to getting employment?

5) *Employment Expectations*

- How long do you think it will take you to find employment?
- What type of employment do you expected to get?: full or part-time, self-employment, contract work, wage level, responsibilities, skill levels, etc.
- What do you think an employer looks for in a worker? Employer expectations.
- Do you consider yourself a reliable worker and qualified for the type of work you are searching for?

6) *Future Security*

- Where do you see yourself, in relation to employment, in one year, five years?
- What is a good job in your view?
- How would you define economic security for you and/or family?

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CERIS

The Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement - Toronto (CERIS) is one of five Canadian Metropolis centres dedicated to ensuring that scientific expertise contributes to the improvement of migration and diversity policy.

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