

Human and Social Capital as Determinants of Employment Integration among Skilled Immigrants in Canada



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BACKGROUND

- Canada’s immigration policy emphasizes human capital – education, work experience, and language proficiency – in immigrant selection.
- The system increasingly prioritizes highly skilled immigrants to address specific labour market needs.
- However, racialized skilled immigrants often face systemic labour market barriers, leading to underutilization of skills or “deskilling.”
- Skilled immigrants hold a form of “global driver’s license” – their skills should, in theory, be transferable globally – yet structural barriers limit their potential in Canada’s labour market.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

- Existing research often treats immigrants as a homogeneous group, overlooking diverse experiences.
- The tendency to categorize all skilled immigrants under a single label must be reconsidered.
- Limited research on the experiences of skilled, racialized immigrants admitted to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker Program as principal applicants.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

- This study examines and explores the phenomenon of deskilling among skilled racialized immigrants in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.
- Two primary purposes of the study: (1) to examine the extent and nature of deskilling among skilled racialized immigrants, and (2) to explore their lived experiences of deskilling.

METHODS

- Research Site: Lower Mainland, BC, one of the most ethnically diverse region in the country.
- Research Design: A concurrent parallel mixed-methods design (Survey and Focus groups)
- Participants: Survey ($n = 111$), four focus group discussions ($n = 18$)
- Data Analysis: Descriptive and regression analysis for quantitative and Thematic analysis for qualitative

SURVEY RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics		n = 111
Age in years (mean, SD)		40 (5)
Gender		
	Male	62 (55.9%)
	Female	49 (44.1%)
Marital status		
	Unmarried	20 (18%)
	Married	91 (82%)
Highest level of education		
	Professional degree (MD, LLB, or equivalent)	11 (9.9%)
	Master’s degree	91 (82%)
	Doctoral degree	9 (8.1%)
Employment status		
	Full-time	69 (62.7%)
	Part-time	41 (37.3%)
Ethnic origin		
	South Asian	33 (29.7%)
	East Asian	27 (24.3%)
	African	6 (5.4%)
	Southeast Asian	12 (10.8%)
	Middle East	13 (11.7%)
	Latin, Central and South American	17 (15.3%)
	Caribbean	3 (2.7%)
Residency in BC in years (mean, SD)		8 (3)
Annual income in CA\$		61542 (36456)

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Predictor	B	SE	β	t
(Constant)	16.06	7.77	–	2.07*
Gender (Ref. Male)	-2.01	1.27	-0.08	-1.58
Marital Status (Ref. Unmarried)	-0.62	1.29	-0.02	-0.48
Age	0.15	0.15	0.06	1.03
Educational outside Canada (Ref: Doctoral degree)				
Bachelor's degree	4.32	2.43	0.11	1.78
Master’s degree	4.06	1.94	0.13	2.10*
Length of stay in British Columbia	-0.15	0.19	-0.04	-0.77
Upgrade Edu. in Canada (Ref. No)	-11.30	1.33	-0.44	-8.50***
Bonding social capital	-0.12	0.15	-0.03	-0.82
Bridging social capital	-0.51	0.11	-0.24	-4.57***
Non-recognition of foreign credentials	0.67	0.09	0.35	7.10***

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Results demonstrated that educational upgrading in Canada ($\beta = -0.435, p < .001$) and higher levels of bridging social capital ($\beta = -0.243, p < .001$) were significantly associated with lower levels of deskilling.
- Conversely, non-recognition of foreign credentials ($\beta = 0.354, p < .001$) and holding a master’s degree obtained outside Canada ($\beta = 0.128, p = .039$) were significantly associated with higher levels of deskilling.
- These findings reveal the critical role of social capital, educational upgrading, and credential recognition in shaping immigrant labour market outcomes.

EMERGING THEMES

- **Mirage of meritocracy:** Highlights the gap between Canada’s ideal of equal opportunity and the structural barriers faced by skilled, racialized immigrants, including non-recognition of foreign credentials, pressure to reskill, and the limited value of volunteering.
- **Failures of support systems:** Both formal settlement services and informal networks often fail to facilitate meaningful employment, instead funnelling immigrants into low-skilled jobs and reinforcing deskilling through bonding networks.
- **Gendered pathways to deskilling:** Gender roles and care responsibilities shape women’s labour market outcomes, with domestic and workplace gender divisions creating distinct deskilling trajectories for racialized skilled women.

CONCLUSION

- **Deskilling drivers:** Non-recognition of foreign credentials, limited community support, and gendered labour dynamics hinder skilled, racialized immigrants’ employment integration.
- **Key enablers:** Canadian education upgrades and strong social networks reduce deskilling and promote professional continuity.
- **Policy implications:** Align immigration and labour policies, streamline credential recognition, and integrate mental health and gender-responsive supports into employment programs.

REFERENCES: Available upon request