

**Being Young and Visible:
Labour Market Access among Immigrant
and Visible Minority Youth**

**by
Jean Lock Kunz
May 2003**

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and Visible Minority Youth***

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Applied Research Branch
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Abstract

Youth represent one of the most culturally diverse groups in Canada. It has been shown that labour market participation among immigrant youth, especially those who are members of a visible minority, has been lower than the Canadian-born. Using the 1996 Census, this paper provides an overview of labour market attachment of immigrant and visible minority youth in Canada. Specifically, we examine the patterns of labour force participation among youth aged 15-29. Comparisons are made between youth who are foreign-born and Canadian-born, as well as between visible minority and non-visible minority youth.

In general, immigrant youth are less likely to have work experience than Canadian-born youth. Recent immigrant youth are less likely to participate in the labour market than the Canadian-born as well as immigrant youth who have been in the country longer. Employment outlooks for immigrants who came as children are better than that for those who came as teens or young adults, especially among women. Visible minority immigrant youth are more likely to be unemployed than those who do not belong to a visible minority group. These findings are interpreted in light of the policy implications with respect to youth employment strategies.

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1. Introduction

As new entrants to the labour market, finding a job is generally difficult for young people. For immigrant and visible minority youth, the challenges may even be greater. It has been acknowledged that youth who are Aboriginal, visible minority, recent immigrant, disabled, homeless or from low-income families often face multiple barriers to labour market integration. Compared to youth in general, individuals with any of these characteristics are believed to be at greater risk of being excluded from the Canadian economy and society. The federal government, as attested by the Speech from the Throne, is committed to working with its partners to ease the transition from school to work for youth (Speech from the Throne, 2001; 2002). The federal government offers a number of programs under the auspices of Youth Employment Strategy (YES) to provide access to job opportunities and experience for youth aged 30 or younger. As outlined in the 2002 Speech from the Throne, the federal government plans to keep pace with the changing employment needs of youth and to assist those who face the greatest barriers to labour market.

According to the 1996 census, 14 percent of Canadians aged 15-29 were born outside Canada. Most of them are also visible minority. In spite of the social and cultural diversity among youth, much of the attention on labour market attachment of immigrants or visible minorities tends to be on adults. It has not been until recently that newcomer and visible minority youth have received more attention.

The objective of this study is to present a profile of labour market outcomes among immigrant and visible minority youth. Specifically, we will compare labour market outcomes between Canadian-born and immigrant youth, as well as between youth who are visible minority and those who are not. The study centres on two questions. First, to what extent do immigrant youth participate in the labour market? Second, for those who are in the labour force, do visible minority youth face higher probability of unemployment than do others?

2. Data Source and Definitions

This study uses the 1996 Census public use microdata file which includes 2.8% of the total population. To reflect the age band defined by the Youth Employment Strategy, this study will focus on youth aged 15-29. We will begin with a descriptive analysis of youth with regard to the common indicators on labour market outcomes, i.e., participation rate, employment rate and unemployment. Participation rate refers to the ratio between individuals who are active in the labour market, either employed or actively looking for work, and the whole population. Employment rate refers to those who are working as a proportion of the whole population. Unemployment refers to the proportion of individuals who are actively looking for work among those who are active in the labour market. Comparisons will be made by immigration status and by visible minority status. We will then focus on those who are in the labour force. The descriptive analyses are followed by multivariate analyses to ascertain the effects of immigration and visible minority status on unemployment while taking into consideration the effects of other socio-demographic factors. The purpose is to examine factors that foster or hinder labour market access among immigrant and visible minority youth as compared to others.

Immigrant youth refers to those born outside Canada regardless of age at migration. Visible minority refers to individuals who are non-white, non-Caucasian, and non-Aboriginal. In the 1996 Census, the variable is derived from self-reported ethnicity (VISMINP). Table 1 lists the variables used in the analyses.

Table 1		
Description of Variables		
Census Variables	Definition	Description
IMMPOPP	Immigration status indicator	Whether the person was a landed immigrant
YRIMMIGP	Year of immigration	The year landed immigrant status was obtained
IMMIAGEP	Age at immigration	Derived from year of birth and year of migration
VISMINP	Visible minority indicator	Derived from self-reported ethnicity
AGEP	Age	Regrouped into 15-19, 20-24, 25-29
SEXP	Male/Female	The gender of the respondent
OLNP	Knowledge of official languages	Refers to the ability to conduct a conversation in English, French, in both English or French, or in neither of the official languages of Canada
HLOSP	Highest level of education	Regrouped into no high school, high school, college, and university
TOTSCHP	Total years of schooling	The total sum of the years of schooling at the elementary, secondary, university and other non-university levels
SCHATTP	School attendance	Full-time or part-time attendance at school during the eight months prior to the Census
LFACTP	Labour force activity	Whether the individual was employed, unemployed, or not in the labour force in the week prior to the Census day
INCSTP	Income status	Whether total family income is below or above the low income cut-off

3. Background

Unlike adults, youth usually migrate involuntarily because of decisions made by their parents or other family members. Some came as children while others came as teens or young adults. Most immigrant youth live in large urban centers especially Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Regardless of reasons for migration, newcomer youth generally go through several passages to integration, including learning or improving English/French, adjusting to a new school, finding a job, as well as making new social contacts. Among all of these milestones of integration, finding a job is certainly the most challenging. Many immigrant-serving agencies have seen a growing need to address youth employment issues for newcomers because most of the young people have neither the social network nor the Canadian experience that would be useful in finding a job (Kunz and Hanvey, 2000). Some agencies in Ontario, for example, have identified barriers to employment as one of the key issues for newcomer youth (Kilbride et al, 2001). In spite of their growing presence, newcomer youth seem to have fallen into the 'integration limbo', too young to benefit from programs for adults, but too old for those aimed at children (Anisef and Kilbride, 2000).

How well a person fares in the labour market depends to a great extent on that person's education, work experience, and social network. Studies have demonstrated that while immigrant or visible minority youth have higher level of education than others, they have less work experience. In general, school attendance is higher among visible minority youth than among those who do not belong to a visible minority group. For teens, the difference between immigrants and non-immigrants remain small for those who are not visible minority. Among visible minority teens, however, non-immigrants have a slightly higher rate of full-time school attendance (Kunz, Schetagne and Milan, 2001). Post-secondary school attendance among the 25-29 age group is higher among immigrants than among the Canadian-born. Racial minority immigrants have slightly higher post-secondary enrollment than their non-racial minority counterparts (Anisef et al., 1999).

Young immigrant students are less likely to combine work and school than do the Canadian-born. This is evident especially among youth who have been in Canada for less than ten years. Approximately one in two Canadian-born, part-time or full-time students aged 15-19 are working, compared to one in four immigrant teens who have been in Canada for less than ten years (Kunz and Hanvey, 2000). A study by the Canadian Council on Social Development showed that the proportion of immigrant teens with no job experience was twice that of the Canadian-born (Kunz and Schellenberg, 1998).

Lower labour market attachment of immigrant youth is partly attributable to the higher proportion of visible minorities among them. Participation and employment rates are low especially among visible minority youth. For example, the employment rate for visible minority high school graduates was 49.9% percent, compared to 61.9% among those who are not members of a visible minority (HRDC, 2000). A study of Ontario youth of the same age group found that the unemployment rate was 25 percent for visible minority youth, compared to 18 percent among all youth (OAYEC, 2000). Recent studies have demonstrated the interplay of immigration and visible minority status among older youth.

Of university graduates aged 25-29, Anisef and colleagues (1999) found that the unemployment rate was higher among racial minorities (i.e., those who belong to a visible minority group) than among others. In the same study, the authors also showed that racial minority immigrant university graduates from a number of disciplines were less likely to obtain professional jobs than were non-racial minority graduates¹.

¹ In the study, racial minorities referred to those who belong to a visible minority group.

4. Analysis and Results

Table 2 profiles some socio-demographic characteristics of immigrant youth compared to the Canadian-born. There is little difference in gender distribution between the Canadian-born and the foreign-born. It has also been shown that the intersection of gender and immigration on employment remains relatively small among youth (Bauder, 2001). Gender, according to Bauder (2001), does not have as large an impact on employment for youth as it has for adults.

Compared to the Canadian-born, immigrant youth tend to be older and more likely to be members of a visible minority. Foreign-born youth are more likely to have post-secondary education than are the Canadian-born. In comparison, the Canadian-born are more likely to have work experience. In 1995, nearly one in four immigrant youth had never worked compared to 15 percent among the Canadian-born. Accordingly, 73 percent of the Canadian-born youth worked either full-time or part-time in 1995, but 61 percent of immigrant youth did so.

Further, nearly four in 10 immigrant youth lived in low-income families, compared to two in 10 among the Canadian-born. One in four immigrant youth came as young adults while one in five was less than five years old when they immigrated. Possibly many of these individuals are visible minority. The intersection of immigration and visible minority statuses should be taken into consideration. According to Statistics Canada (2001), in 1995, 36 percent of the visible minority population reported family income below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO).

A majority of immigrant youth can conduct a conversation in either English or French. Of the two languages, they are more likely to be able to speak English than French. This is not surprising given that most immigrants came from countries where English is more likely to be their second language and that a majority of these individuals live in English-speaking regions in Canada. Only three percent of the immigrant youth could not speak either of the official language. That said, it should be noted that this variable measures a person's self-assessed ability to conduct a conversation in either or both of the official languages. Hence, it does not reflect the respondent's competency of the language. Moreover, a person may be able to carry out a conversation in English or French in a social setting but have difficulties in communicating effectively in either language in the context of work.

Table 2
Profiles of Canadian-Born and Foreign-Born Youth Aged 15-29, 1995

	Canadian-Born	Foreign-Born
Sex		
Male	50%	48%
Age		
15-19	35%	25%
20-24	32%	31%
25-29	33%	43%
Visible Minority	5%	67%
Education		
No High School	36%	30%
High School	15%	15%
College	26%	23%
University	23%	32%
Never Worked	15%	23%
Who Worked in 1995	73%	61%
in Low Income Situation*	21%	39%
Age at Immigration		
0-4 years old		18%
5-12		28%
13-19		29%
20+		25%
Official Language Ability		
English	62%	77%
French	13%	4%
Both	25%	16%
Neither		3%

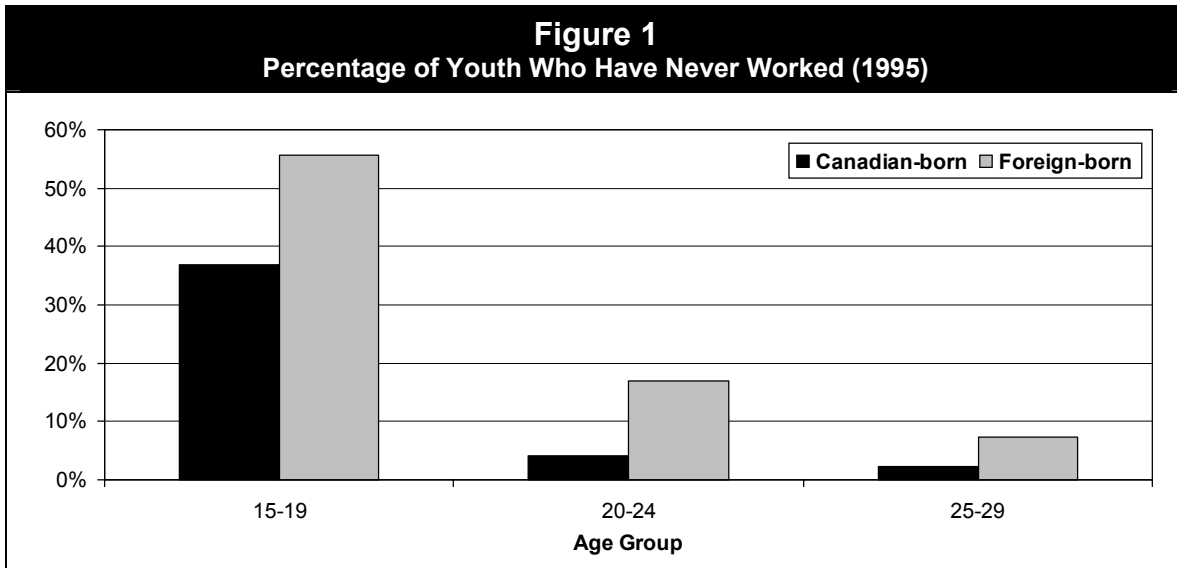
*Those who reported family income below L.I.C.O

Source: Census 1996, Public Use Micro Data File (2.8% Sample).

4.1 Immigrant youth are less likely to have work experience

Work experience obviously increases with age. That said, the proportion of those who have never worked is much higher among the foreign-born than among the Canadian-born. More than half of the immigrant teens have no work experience, compared to over a third of the Canadian-born. Among those aged 20-24, the proportion of those who have never worked is less than five percent among the Canadian-born, but more than triples to 17 percent among the foreign-born. A similar pattern is observed among the 25-29 year olds (Figure 1). Immigrant youth may be less familiar with the Canadian job market and

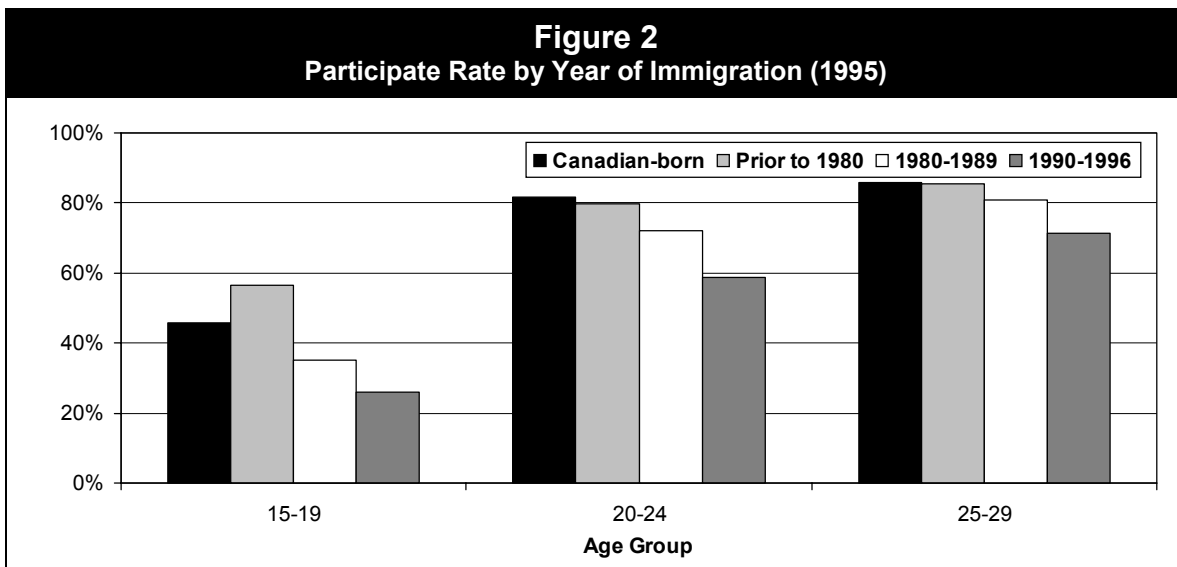
have more difficulties finding work. Some of them may be expected by their families to focus more on school in order to increase their career prospects later. One can expect that immigrants would adapt to the norms of the receiving society the longer they stay.



Source: 1996 Census, PUMF

4.2 Length of residency and age at immigration matter

Employment outlook is positively related to how long a person has been in Canada. As evident in Figure 2, those who have been in the country for less than five years have the lowest participation rate. This is especially true for immigrant teens, only a quarter of them participated in the labour force in 1995. Even if they were available to work, one in four was unemployed.



Source: 1996 Census, PUMF

Age at immigration also matters. Among adults, for example, those who came as children have better earnings than those who came as teens, who in turn, do better than those who came in their 20s (Schaafsma and Sweetman, 2001). Table 3 demonstrates that youth who immigrated before the age of five are the most likely to be active in the labour market and the least likely to be unemployed. Individuals who came to Canada as children should have an advantage over those who came as young adults. The former would have received all their schooling in Canada at this point in their lives and would be more acculturated into the receiving society. These people are therefore more familiar with the Canadian labour market. Not only would they have fluency in at least one of the official languages, they would also be conversant in the labour market-appropriate language. As mentioned earlier, this data does not allow for analysis of labour market-appropriate language proficiency. For this reason, no further analysis concerning language ability will be carried out in this paper. Nevertheless, if data permitted, the role of labour market-appropriate language proficiency deserves more attention in future research.

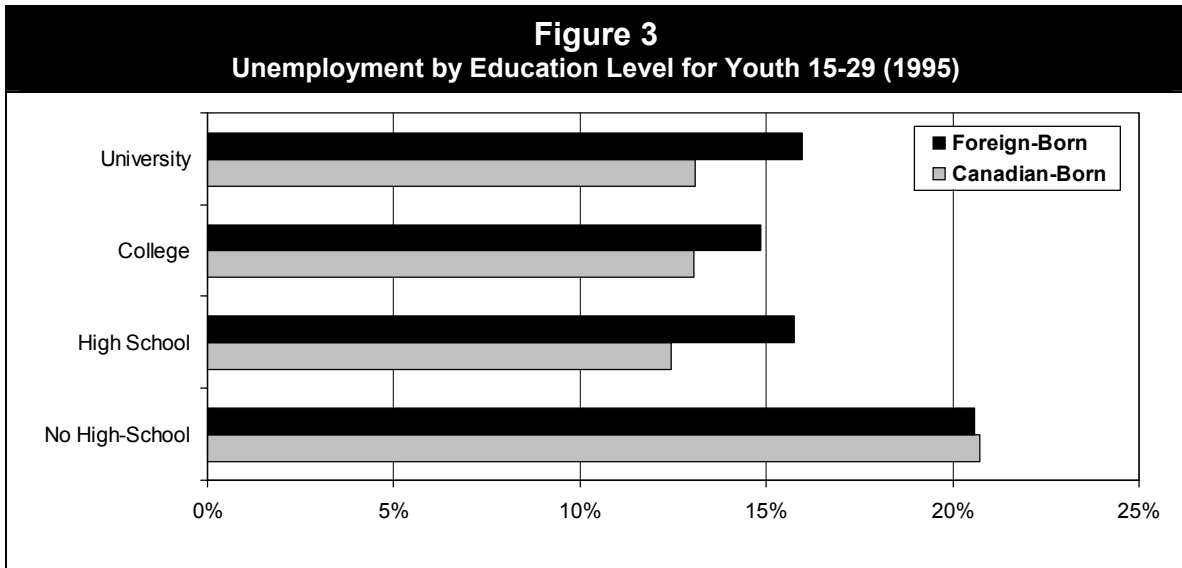
Table 3						
Labour Force Situation of Immigration and Canadian-Born Youth by Age Group and Age at Immigration, 1995						
	Canadian-born	Foreign-born: age at immigration				
		0-4	5-12	13-19	20-24	25-29
Participation Rate						
15-19	46%	41%	29%	29%		
20-24	82%	79%	74%	62%	61%	
25-29	86%	86%	86%	79%	75%	69%
Employment Rate						
15-19	37%	33%	23%	22%	24%	
20-24	68%	66%	61%	49%	48%	55%
25-29	77%	78%	78%	68%	62%	56%
Unemployment Rate						
15-19	19%	20%	23%	25%		
20-24	17%	17%	18%	20%	21%	
25-29	11%	9%	9%	14%	17%	18%

Source: Census 1996, Public Use Micro Data File (2.8% Sample)

Clearly higher education improves labour market prospects (Figure 3). Unemployment is lower among high school graduates and those with post-secondary level education than those with no high school. That said, the unemployment rate is still higher among the foreign-born. The differences in unemployment between the Canadian-born and the foreign-born are more evident among those with high school or post-secondary level education than among those with no high school.

As suggested in Table 3, the country where a degree was attained is equally important. The unemployment rate for immigrants aged 25-29 who came prior to age five resembled that of their Canadian-born equivalent. In comparison, those who came at age thirteen or older had a higher unemployment rate than their Canadian-born counterparts. Those who came in their mid-twenties, for example, would have completed most of their education prior to emigration. Canadian employers may be less willing to hire foreign-trained

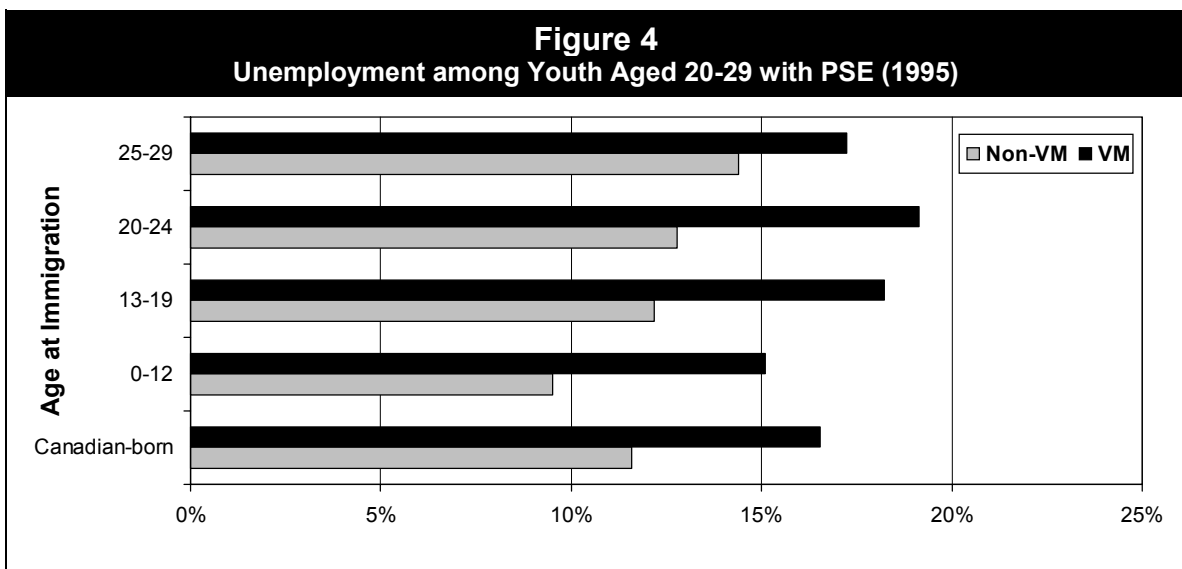
immigrants because they are less familiar with credential and degrees granted outside North America. Further, youth who came in their 20s may not be as familiar with the local job market as those who grew up in the country.



Source: 1996 Census, PUMF

4.3 Unemployment is higher among visible minority immigrants

As shown in Table 2, two-thirds of immigrants are visible minorities, compared to five percent among the Canadian-born. Could this difference contribute to the labour market outcomes of immigrant and Canadian-born youth? The answer seems to be affirmative. Once taking into account the effects of education and age, it is evident that visible minority youth do not fare as well in the labour market (Figure 4).



Source: 1996 Census, PUMF

While post-secondary education increases the likelihood of finding a job, visible minority status appears to have a negative effect on labour market access. Among youth with post-secondary education, regardless of immigration status, the unemployment rate is higher among visible minorities than among those who are not. Even with post-secondary education, there are five percentage point differences between visible minorities and those who are not members of a visible minority. This suggests that individual attributes play a critical role in labour market outcomes (Li, 2001).

There is a good deal of research on the adult population that shows an earnings deficit among visible minority immigrants relative to Canadian-born residents and immigrants who are not members of a visible minority (Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001). Further, labour market outcomes are influenced by a number of factors which often interact with each other, such as age, education, immigration status, and family income status. To ascertain the effect of visible minority and immigration status on employment above and beyond other factors, we employed logistic regression techniques. The analyses centre on those who are in the labour force, hence, excluding those who are not available for work.

Logistic regression assesses one's probability of being in one of two categories. This probability is expressed in terms of an odds ratio. The dependent variable is dichotomized into zero and one. The analyses were conducted for men and women separately. Four models are fitted to the data, two for all the youth population and two for immigrants. The objective of this exercise is to examine factors associated with labour market access among immigrant and visible minority youth. Hence, earnings differences will not be explored here.

Among men, as is evident from the second column in Table 4, Canadian-born visible minority youth are more likely to be looking for work than Canadian-born youth who are not members of a visible minority. Immigrant youth who are not visible minority seem to be less likely to be unemployed compared to their Canadian-born counterpart. The findings for women are somewhat different. No statistically significant difference (.05 level or below) is found among female Canadian-born youth but visible minority immigrant youth are more likely to be looking for work than are others. These differences between men and women require more examination in the future.

While taken into consideration other social and demographic factors, among immigrant youth, being a visible minority increases one's likelihood of being unemployed by over 20 percent. Age at immigration is a significant factor for females but not for males. Females who came in their adolescence are more likely to be unemployed compared to those who came as children or teens.

As evident in both Tables 4 and 5, several other factors increase the likelihood of being unemployed. Full-time students are more likely to be looking for work than those who go to school part-time or non-students. This may reflect the reference period used in the Census. The unemployed refers to those who had been looking for work during the week prior to the Census. Given that the Census takes place in May, most full-time students would be searching for summer jobs. Older youth and those who have more years of schooling, as expected, are less likely to be unemployed compared to those who are younger and have fewer years of schooling. Youth from low-income families appear to

have more difficulties in finding employment. Perhaps these individuals face greater barriers to labour market than others.

Table 4				
Factors Associated with Being Unemployed among Youth Aged 15-29, 1995				
	Men		Women	
	Odds Ratio	B (S.E)	Odds Ratio	B (S.E)
Immigration Status				
Canadian-born (Non-VM)*				
Canadian-born (VM)	1.4	.32 (.05)	1.1	.06 (.05) (NS)
Foreign-born (Non-VM)	.74	-.31 (.05)	.85	-.16 (.05)
Foreign-born (VM)	1.0	.03 (.04) (NS)	1.3	.29 (.04)
Age	.98	-.02 (.004)	.98	-.01 (.004)
Total years of schooling	.86	-.15 (.001)	.84	-.17 (.008)
School Status (1995)				
Did not attend school*	1.3	.29 (.02)	1.5	.42 (.02)
Attended school full-time	.92	-.08 (.03)	.81	-.21 (.03)
Attended school part-time				
Family Income Status				
Above LICO*				
Below LICO	1.5	.40 (.01)	1.5	.41 (.01)
Sample Size	55763		51850	
-2 Log Likelihood	45496.9		40116.3	
*reference group				
S.E: Standard Error				
NS: statistically not significant at <.05.				
All other coefficients are statistically significant at <.01.				

Table 5
Factors Associated with Being Unemployed among Immigrant Youth Aged 15-29, 1995

	Men		Women	
	Odds Ratio	B (S.E)	Odds Ratio	B (S.E)
Age at Immigration				
0-4*				
5-12	.89	-.12 (.07) (NS)	.81	-.2 (.07)
13-19	.87	-.14 (.07) (NS)	.97	-.03 (.06) (NS)
20-24	1.0	.01 (.08) (NS)	1.3	.27 (.07)
25-29	1.1	.14 (.11) (NS)	1.3	.27 (.10)
Visible Minority Status				
Yes	1.2	.19 (.04)	1.2	.2 (.04)
No*				
Age	.95	-.05 (.01)	.96	-.04 (.01)
Total years of schooling	.98	-.02 (.02) (NS)	.91	-.10 (.02)
School Status (1995)				
Did not attend school*				
Attended school full-time	1.6	.46 (.06)	1.4	.35 (.06)
Attended school part-time	.77	-.26 (.08)	.77	-.26 (.07)
Family Income Status				
Above LICO*				
Below LICO	1.5	.41 (.04)	1.5	.41 (.03)
Sample Size	6757		6504	
-2 Log Likelihood	5277.4		5766.98	

*=reference group

S.E: Standard Error

NS: statistically not significant at <.05.

All other coefficients are statistically significant at <.01

5. Discussions and Conclusion

Our analyses show that immigrant and visible minority youth are less attached to the labour market than the Canadian-born or those who are not members of a visible minority. A substantial number of immigrant and visible minority youth have never worked. For those who are active in the labour market, however, immigrant visible minority youth are more likely to be unemployed than are others. For women, even though higher education generally improves job opportunities, this is more the case for the Canadian-born or immigrants who came to Canada as children than for those who migrated in young adulthood.

Findings in this study suggest that immigrant youth, especially if they are members of a visible minority, face multiple barriers to employment. One must first identify these barriers in order to effectively address labour market issues of these young people. Clearly a lack of Canadian experience and familiarity with the Canadian work culture could hinder immigrant youth in their job search. Language proficiency could be another contributing factor. Especially for those who came in their late teens or early 20s, immigrant youth may not have the language skills appropriate for the workplace. More research is required to examine the relationship between labour market literacy and employment outcomes among youth.

Individual attributes such as language and knowledge of the labour market should be examined in the broader social and economic context. Immigrants who came in the midst of a recession would surely have a harder time finding a job than those who came during the recovery. The double-negative of being foreign and visible may reflect employers' acceptance towards visible minorities as well as immigrants. Focus group findings have revealed that, when it comes to employment, recent immigrant and refugee youth who are members of a visible minority often feel that they are penalized by their accent, their country of origin and for some, their religious beliefs (Kunz and Hanvey, 2000; Shield and Rahi, 2002). Yet, there have not been quantitative studies that could explore the link between employer practices and labour market access among both youth and adults.

In addition to access to jobs, research on employment among immigrant youth should pay attention to job quality. Finding meaningful employment that would lead to a career later on is more important for one's economic well-being than just having a job. The role of career counselors and employment agencies should also be examined. In addition to the Census, other data sources such as the Youth In Transition Survey allows for further analysis of the factors that facilitate or hinder labour market integration of immigrant youth.

Labour market conditions usually vary across communities and regions. Immigrants in large urban centres may have better job opportunities and support than those who live in small or medium-size communities. Employment outcomes of youth should be examined using the full Census data that allow for comparisons at more detailed geographic levels.

Several implications for policies and programs for newcomer and visible minority youth can be drawn from the findings. First, programs should target newcomer youth who come as teens or young adults. Compared to the Canadian-born or those who have been here since childhood, newcomer youth are more likely to need government programs when they seek employment. For individuals who did not receive their education in Canada, higher education does not often improve their job prospects nearly as much as for their Canadian-educated counterparts. Other than education, Canadian job experience is essential to improve employment outlook for these people. Most newcomer youth, however, lack the social network that helps them to get work experience or land a job. Moreover, even though the majority of the newcomer and visible minority youth are able to conduct a conversation either in English or French, their official language skills may not be proficient to conduct formal or informal job interviews.

Second, youth employment policies should take into consideration the interplay between immigration and visible minority status. A substantial number of immigrants are members of a visible minority. This study suggests that it is harder for visible minority immigrant youth to find employment. Newcomer visible minority youth are likely to face multiple barriers in the labour market. These barriers could be hard to identify due to the unavailability of data. For example, it is not clear whether the existing youth employment resources are relevant to the needs of immigrant or visible minority youth. Nor has there been much discussion on the effective practices for employment assistance for these young people.

Third, employment prospects for youth is related to the economic well-being of their families. Compared to the Canadian-born, immigrant youth are more likely to be from lower income families. Many immigrant youth are keenly aware that their parents are struggling to make ends meet or to find jobs matching their qualifications (Kunz and Hanvey, 2000). Consequently, youth with these family backgrounds may have fewer contacts and resources that can lead to employment.

In conclusion, labour market access for immigrant and visible minority youth is a complex issue that requires further exploration. At present, there is a lack of resources to ease the labour market entry and effective participation for these young people. This report points to the need to identify barriers to labour market participation among immigrants, especially visible minority youth.

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