PRELIMINARY UNDERSTANDING OF CHALLENGES IN ENTERING THE JOB MARKET

Experience of New Generation Youth from Visible Minority Immigrant Families

MIU CHUNG YAN
Assistant professor, School of Social Work, University of British Columbia

SEAN LAUER
Assistant professor, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia

SURITA JHANGIANI
Project Coordinator, IMUEM Project, School of Social Work, University of British Columbia

ABSTRACT

We report here preliminary findings of two exploratory studies on new generation youth from visible minority immigrant families. We tentatively conclude that coming from an immigrant family with limited social capital, a major resource for finding employment, may impose unique challenge to their job search process.

Research on the difficulties and experiences of second generation immigrant youth from non-European backgrounds in the Canadian labour market continues to grow. Youth unemployment and underemployment in this group is always significantly higher than in the general population (Yan 2000). As the result of a change in immigration policy, Canada has recruited a large number of immigrants from non-European countries since the 1970s. These immigrants have established their own communities and raised their children in Canada, creating a growing number of non-European new generation youth. The new generation refers to youth born in Canada to immigrant parents or youth that have immigrated themselves at a very young age and been brought up primarily in Canada. Recent research indicates that the new generation youth have done better than their parents who are first generation immigrants (Aydemir, Chen and Corak 2005, Hum and Simpson 2004). Using the 2001 Census data, however, most studies are confined to the older cohort of new generation youth from immigrant families that came from Europe before the 1970s. Research on this growing group of new generation youth from non-European immigrant communities is still catching up to take into account current demographic trends.

The notion that family and other personal contacts are well-known resources in the search for a job (Granovetter 1974) has recently been corroborated by Canadian research on finding employment (e.g., Canadian Youth Foundation 1995, Yan 2000). This finding draws attention to the number and type of resources found within families and contacts and how this may affect the opportunities of youth searching for employment. Payne (1987), for instance, found that unemployment may run in families, perhaps resulting from limited family resources providing access to employment opportunities. This may pose problems for immigrant families in particular. Recent research from Statistics Canada (2004, Zietsma 2007) on immigrants in Canadian urban centres finds higher unemployment rates within the immigrant population compared with Canadian-born individuals and that the economic performance of immigrants, particularly in terms of income, is also lower than their counterparts in the general population (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2004). This is true even among those holding Canadian credentials (Anisef, Sweet and Frempong 2003).

New generation youth from these immigrant families and communities may face greater challenges in entering the job market and securing a stable and well-paying job as a result. This may be particularly true for youth from visible minority immigrant families. Some studies indicate that these youth (who were born in Canada or came to Canada when they were very young and have gone through the education process in Canada) tend to have lower income and less desirable jobs compared with the general youth population (Cheung 2005, Palameta 2007). Similar findings are also found in Australia (Nesdale and Pinter 2000).

Taking these conditions into consideration raises a number of important questions. In our research we aim to explore the actual job-seeking experiences of new generation immigrant youth. Given that family is a primary source of job referrals and job-seeking resources, we consider the advantages and disadvantages of their family and its network in their job-seeking process. We are also interested in the impact of educational achievements and aspirations on searching for and finding employment. The research is based on three related data sources. The first draws on qualitative data collected through focus group interviews with new generation youth without university degrees. A total of five focus group interviews were conducted with youth from South Asian, Chinese and Filipino/Filipina backgrounds.

The second data source was collected through survey research conducted with 140 youth graduating from university in 2007. The sample includes new generation youth from non-European backgrounds, new generation youth from European backgrounds and European youth whose parents were born in Canada.[1] The third data source draws on qualitative interviews conducted with 20 new generation youth from various ethnic backgrounds who participated in the survey and who had university degrees.

Research findings

Below we briefly summarize our current findings from this exploratory research. Using our qualitative data sources, we first look at new generation youth who are non-university graduates and then at university graduates. We follow this with a look at the general job search picture of new generation university graduates from European and non-European backgrounds and third generation youth from European backgrounds whose parents were born in Canada. The findings indicate that job search strategies differ among these graduates in terms of their ethnic background. Drawing from the two sets of qualitative data, we highlight some major barriers for youth from visible minority immigrant families.

Job search strategies among youth without university degrees[2]

We found in our interviews that youth without university degrees were likely to move regularly from job to job. These moves were often lateral, rather than to better or more stable jobs. Many of the youth have worked or are currently working in entry-level positions in the service sector in labour intensive jobs. Often these youth have few sunk costs in these jobs, making them easy to leave, and in British Columbia's current tight labour market it is not too hard for them to find their next entry-level job. In the market today, it is often possible for these youth to find work through walk-ins and cold calls on employers. While the goal of job change is sometimes to find better, more rewarding work, many job changes seem to be made in order to facilitate some aspects of personal life.

Despite these youths being able to find work with co-ethnic employers, poor past experiences leave many of these youths evading such opportunities and searching for work outside their ethnic enclaves. Co-ethnic employers often expect too much, according to our respondents, and do not fairly compensate their employees. Interviewees expressed having to work long hours completing arduous work for co-ethnic employers and are asked to accept reduced pay, delayed pay or not receive overtime. Thus, these youth wish to avoid relationships where they feel their shared ethnicity further compromises their right to fair and equitable treatment.

Along with the tight labour market, regular job movement is facilitated by using personal contacts to find work. Personal contacts provide information about job openings or a personal reference to an employer. Using personal contacts can also often shorten the job search. Youth without degrees take advantage of this assistance as they move from job to job. Interestingly, they do not ask for personal contact assistance from family members and are more likely to use contacts from friends. For some of the youth, their parents' ties do not offer them the kinds of opportunities they are looking for. Parents often provide support but are unable to provide contacts for the type of employment being sought. Our respondents also express a strong desire to make it on their own merits. For the youth this often means doing so without the assistance of their parents. Very few youth reported seeking help from employment service agencies, something of which many of the youth were not even aware.

Despite not having a university degree, the youth we spoke with still valued the importance of education. It is an integral part of their values and aspirations, which, as many of them reported, are inherited from their parents who have constantly encouraged or even pressured them to pursue a proper post-secondary education. For many of the youth, a degree or diploma also means holding credentials that provide access to better jobs. Many youth described a continuous approach to their education goals. They regularly take courses in order to "upgrade" their skills and credentials. While some youth express an interest in completing coursework for a degree, there is no sense of urgency to complete a degree, and, in some cases, a specific degree is not the stated goal of taking courses.

> New generation youth…may face greater challenges in entering the job market and securing a stable and well-paying job as a result. This may be particularly true for youth from visible minority immigrant families.

Job search strategies among youth with university degrees[3]

Like their counterparts who have no university degree, the new generation youth with a university degree see value in the credentials they obtained, which open doors to employment opportunities. These youth question, however, the usefulness of the material learned while obtaining their degree. They also desired more support from the university or their academic department in their job search, such as resume writing and interviewing practice. Particularly for those seeking professional jobs, such as teaching, youth desired more practical advice on how to navigate the complicated job application process of their profession.

With a university degree in hand, this group finds "upgrades" through professional experience rather than course work. We found in our interviews that youth with university degrees were planning for the start of a career; they therefore tend to be looking for long-term professional work. This goal leads them to spend more time and effort on the job search, which some describe as "pulling hair" – frustrating and stressful. Despite this frustration, approximately 80% of respondents found work within a two-month period. A majority of them found a job in their professional field, except those with liberal arts degrees. Working for co-ethnics is not common for this group, compared with their non-university counterparts, nor is avoiding the co-ethnic enclave

an important part of the job search experience for youth with university degrees.

Table 1 shows the job search strategies for a sample of 140 students approximately one year after graduating university. Personal contacts include family, friends and acquaintances. Impersonal strategies include cold calls, help wanted advertisements and other approaches not relying on a previous relationship. The recent graduates were asked exactly how they found their current job. In general, university degree youth do not rely on family to find work. Youth in this group, youth with professional aspirations, do not consider their parents to be a valuable resource for obtaining job referrals or information. Parents and family are, however, a valuable resource for emotional support throughout the process of finding work. When personal contacts are used, it is more likely to be through friends and acquaintances that possess some professional experience in the youth's chosen field. Only a few of the graduates were aware that formal employment services existed.

Table 1
How exactly did you find your current job? (N=140)

	Through personal contacts	Through impersonal strategies
New generation non-European youth	35.7%	64.3%
New generation European youth	61.3%	38.7%
Third-plus generation European youth	46.2%	53.8%

Table 1 compares the job-search strategies of university graduates by ethnic/racial background and shows that new generation youth from non-European backgrounds are less likely to use personal contacts for finding work. Only 35.7% of these youth used personal ties to find their current job. This complements the findings of our interviews discussed previously and suggests that the resources found within the personal networks of these youth may not be particularly rich when looking for professional positions. The same is not true for those from European backgrounds. Just over 46% of youth from the third-plus generation group found their current job through personal contacts, and over 60% of new generation youth with European backgrounds found their current job through personal contacts.

Coming from a visible minority immigrant family

The findings presented here require further examination. The findings are suggestive of the difficulties for new generation youth from non-European backgrounds that may follow from having limited personal network resources. Many visible minority youth from both studies reported that their parents – first generation immigrants – are not helpful in the job search process because they do not have a professional job, they work in the ethnic enclave or they lack a wider cross-ethnic social network. Many of their parents do not know how to navigate the job search process in their children's chosen field. When asked about the ethnic background of friends that are instrumental in their job search process, new generation youth from visible minority immigrant families reported in both studies that these friends are largely from their same ethnic group.

Conclusions

If social capital is an important resource for young people searching for work (Granovetter 1974), then this exploratory research suggests that new generation youth face a unique challenge when entering the job market. With the increase in the number of job seekers from these new generations in the immigrant community in Canada (Statistiques Canada 2005), more research is needed on these new generation youth and their job search experiences (Portes 1995).

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Notes

[1] The sample comes form the second wave of a longitudinal design. The sample is not strictly random due to an over sampling of non-European youth in a non-random fashion in order to increase representation.

[2] This study is funded by Research on Immigration and Integration on Metropolis (recently renamed "Metropolis British Columbia").

[3] This study is funded by Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.