VARIATIONS IN SOCIOECONOMIC OUTCOMES OF SECOND GENERATION YOUNG ADULTS*

ABSTRACT

Educational and labour market profiles are constructed from the 2001 Census of Canada for the second generation youth aged 20 to 29. In general, second generation youth overachieve compared with the non-visible minority third-plus generation. However, variations exist within the visible minority population, with some groups doing very well and others less well.

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Canada is a popular country of destination for immigrants, and the foreign born now represent 18% of Canada's 2001 population (Boyd and Vickers 2000). Many of these immigrants arrived as adults and have children born in Canada. This latter group is also large. Among people aged 15 and older in 2001, those born in Canada to one or more foreign-born parents (most have two foreign-born parents) make up nearly 17% of the Canadian population. This sizable presence of immigrant offspring redirects the question "How well are immigrants doing in the host society?" into "How well are the children of immigrants faring?"

Both questions focus on the experiences of immigrant origin groups, but they differ in their time horizons. The first question focuses on what happens to immigrants over a given period of time. To date, we know that newly arrived immigrants generally do less well, with respect to economic indicators such as home ownership, employment and earnings, compared with the Canadian born or groups with longer duration in Canada. In contrast, difficulties associated with newcomer status are not expected to occur for their Canadian-born offspring since the latter are educated in Canada, are fluent in English and/or French and are likely to have greater familiarity with workplace practices and customs. Looking at how well children of immigrants do with respect to socioeconomic indicators, then, is useful for two reasons. First, it provides a longer time horizon for assessing how well immigrant origin groups do simply because the emphasis is on outcomes that exist for a subsequent generation, one armed with a greater knowledge about the host society. Second, it usually indicates if the negative experiences of specific immigrant groups persist or disappear for the next generation. The persistence of disadvantages may indicate the existence of barriers based on origins or race that permeate a society and stratify groups; the disappearance of disadvantages across generations suggests the opposite.

Previous research and models of change

How well do immigrant offspring in Canada fare? Until recently in Canada only a limited number of studies on immigrant offspring existed and they focused primarily on educational and occupational achievements. Scarcity of data was the primary reason for the paucity of research. Information on parental birthplace and respondent birthplace is necessary to distinguish among generation groups, minimally consisting of the first generation (the foreign born), the second generation (Canadian born with at least one foreign-born parent) and the third or higher generations, often called "third-plus" (Canadian born with Canadian-born parents).

The 1971 Canadian Census, which was the last one until 2001 to ask birthplace of parents, resulted in a monograph on immigrants and their descendants (Richmond and Kalbach 1980). Surveys conducted by academics in the 1970s also produced information on the achievements of second generation Canadians (for a summary see Boyd and Grieco 1998). From the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s, national surveys did not collect data on Canada's second generation, with the exception of Statistics Canada's 1986 and 1994 General Social Surveys (GSS) and the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics,

starting in 1996. Analysis of the two GSS surveys provided evidence of second generation success, especially for adults with two foreign-born parents. These individuals have higher educational attainments and occupational status, on average, than do the other generation groups, and the magnitude of intergenerational mobility is higher than for the first and third generation Canadians (Boyd and Grieco 1998, Boyd and Norris 1994).

These findings conform to a model of change across generations of immigrant origin groups that is called the "success orientation model" (Boyd and Grieco 1998) or the "immigrant optimism hypothesis" (Kao and Tienda 1995). This model depicts the second generation as overachieving relative to the first and third-plus generations. Such overachievements are frequently attributed to the success orientation of the foreign-born family of origin, where adults communicate high expectations to their offspring and instill high educational and labour market aspirations. An implicit assumption also is that the high success orientation is not sustained by the third and later generations.

During the past 15 years, critics have cautioned that the second generation success story may no longer hold for all immigrant offspring groups in North America. Their cautions rest on late 20th century changes in the origins of immigrants. As a result of immigration policy changes during the 1960s and 1970s, fewer immigrants to Canada come from Europe and most come from Asia. These changes in origins mean "visible minorities" now predominate in post-1970s immigration flows. The term "visible minority" was developed by the Canadian federal government to meet data needs of federal employment equity legislation in the 1980s. Designated groups include Black, South Asian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, South East Asian, Filipino, other Pacific Islanders, West Asian, Arab and Latin American. The increasing numbers of visible minorities among Canada's immigrants generates concern that immigrants face ethnic and racial discrimination, particularly in the labour market; it also raises the possibility that the visible-minority second generation also will face greater challenges in the labour market compared with the non-visible minority second generation or the third-plus generation. If being a visible minority negatively influences social and labour market outcomes beyond the first generation, then visible-minority second generation groups may have lower levels of educational and occupational attainments. They also may earn less than non-visible minority groups, in which the White population predominates.

The relatively recent arrival of non-European immigrants, and thus of immigrant visible minorities, creates three striking demographic differences between generational groups and between visible and non-visible minority immigrant offspring: the visible minority population in Canada is largely foreign born, far more likely than non-visible minority groups to live in large CMAs and very young.

Visible minority immigrant offspring and their socioeconomic achievements

The 2001 Census of Canada contributes to our knowledge of the socioeconomic outcomes of immigrant offspring in two respects. First, after a 30-year gap, the 2001 Canadian Census of population asked respondents aged 15 and older to provide information on the birthplaces of their parents. Along with questions on respondents' birthplaces and year of arrival for permanent residents, the new questions on parental birthplace allow the creation of generation groups, necessary for investigating the socioeconomic positions of immigrant offspring in Canada. Second, because immigration flows from non-European countries grew during the 1980s and 1990s, the 2001 Census was able to collect a good deal of information about immigrant offspring who are members of visible minorities, something that earlier surveys and the 1971 Census could not do.

At the same time, the relatively recent arrival of non-European immigrants, and thus of immigrant visible minorities, creates three striking demographic differences between generational groups and between visible and non-visible minority immigrant offspring. First, the visible minority population in Canada is largely foreign born, whereas the non-visible minority population is primarily third-plus generation. Of those aged 15 and older and who are not visible minorities, 13% are foreign born, 17% are second generation and 70% are third-plus generation according to the 2001 Census. Conversely, among the visible minority population aged 15 and older, 84% are foreign born, 13% are second generation and 3% are third-plus generation. Second, visible minority groups are far more likely than the non-visible minority groups to live in large Census metropolitan areas such as Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver. Of those aged 15 in 2001, 68% of the non-visible minority second generation live in a Census metropolitan area compared with 93% of the visible-minority second generation. Third, the visible-minority second generation is very young. Of those aged 15 and older in 2001, 78% of the visible-minority second generation are aged 15 to 29 compared with 26% of the non-visible second generation population.

What are the socioeconomic attainments of these second generation visible minority youth in comparison with non-visible minority youth? Specifically, is there continued evidence of the second generation doing better than the third-plus generation and how are visible minority youth faring? To answer these questions, a socioeconomic profile is presented for young adults aged 20 to 29 who are living in Census

metropolitan areas (CMAs), using 2001 Census data on the largest visible minority groups. Many in this age group are still in the transition process from school to work, but their experiences will provide early indications as to whether the economic disadvantages documented by earlier studies for visible minority immigrants continue to hold or dissipate for younger second generation groups born in Canada.

Educational attainments

Higher education is considered desirable for many reasons: it provides knowledge about the world in general, it is associated with better health and it is an important resource for doing well in the labour market since those who are better educated usually earn more than those who are less well educated. Two frequently used indicators of educational attainments are graduating from high school or trade school, and obtaining university or degrees, such as a Master's, a Ph.D. or professional degrees. Whether or not youth are still attending school also shows what percentages of youth are still in the process of acquiring higher education.

For those living in CMAs, the 2001 Census data show that second generation young adults are more likely than third-plus generation youth to graduate from high school. With the exception of the Black and Latin American visible minority youth, they are also more likely to have Bachelor's degrees or other post university degrees (Figures 1 and 2 where the straight line represents the percentages observed for the non-visible minority third-plus generation).

Figure 1
Percentage graduating from high school, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001

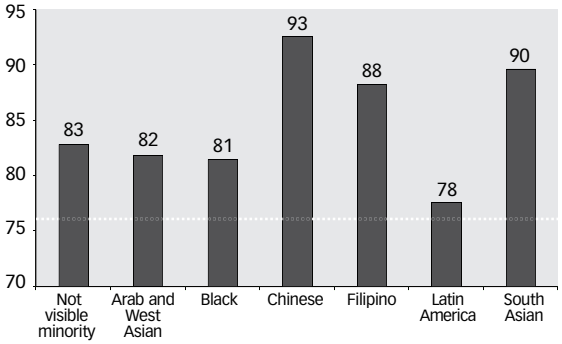
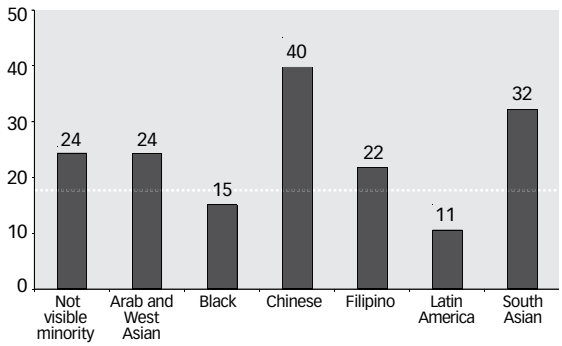
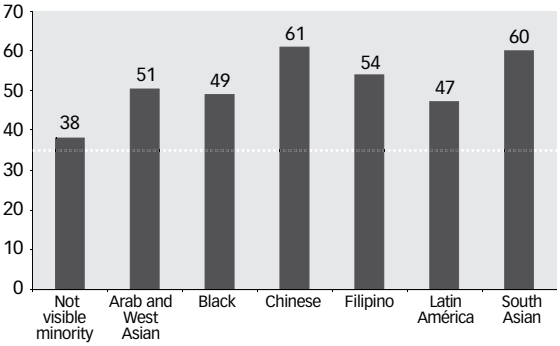


Figure 2
Percentages with Bachelor's degree or higher, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001



As well, the percentages of visible minority youth are either similar to or exceed the percentages of second generation non-visible minority young adults who have high school and Bachelor's degrees. The two exceptions, particularly concerning university degrees, are those youth who are members of the Black and Latin American visible minority groups. Figure 3 shows that second generation youth also are more likely than the third-plus generation to be still attending school, and this is especially true for second generation visible minorities.

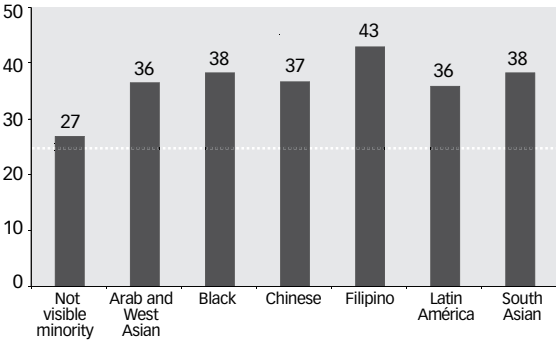
Figure 3
Percentages attending school between September 2000 and May 2001, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001



In transition to the labour force

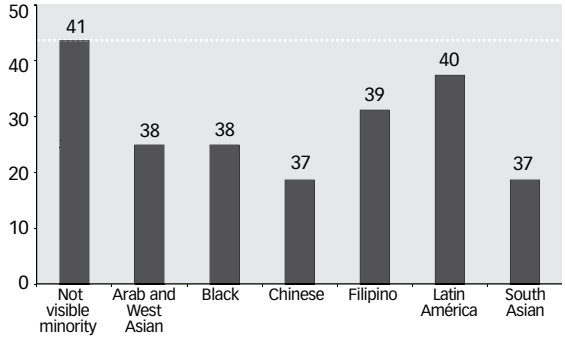
School attendance by many second generation groups suggests that close to half or more are still in transition from school to work. This is supported by economic indicators. Figures 4 and 5 show that compared with the third-plus generation, the second generation – particularly visible minority youth – are more likely to work part time if they are in the labour force, and they worked fewer hours per week on average.

Figure 4
Percent working part time in 2000, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001



This pattern is consistent with being in school. At the same time, other labour market indicators are consistent with the various levels of educational attainment achieved by the second generation. With the exception of second generation Black and Latin American groups, higher percentages of second

Figure 5
Average weeks worked in 2000, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001



generation young adults work in occupations that are defined as high skill, meaning that a university degree is necessary for the job (Figure 6). Further, even though many are working part time, average weekly wages for second generation young men exceed those earned by third-plus generation young men who live in Canada's cities (Figure 7).

Figure 6
Percentages with high skill occupations, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001

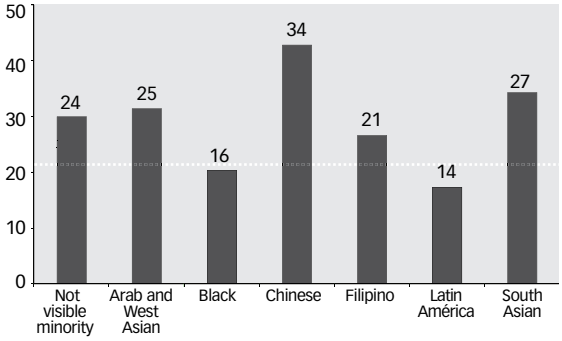
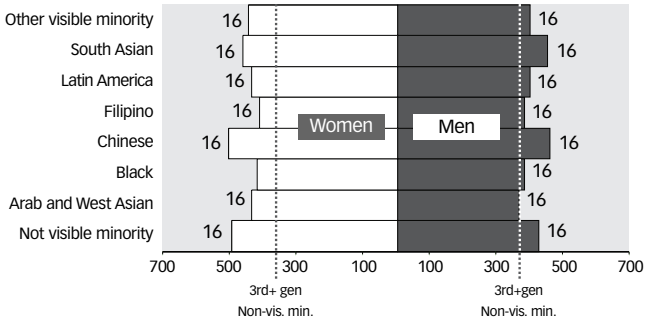


FIgure 7
Average weekly wage earnings for women and men, second generation by visible minority status, age 20-29, living in CMAs, 2001



Consistent with general studies on the Canadian gender gap in earnings, second generation young women earn less than their male counterparts, and, with the exception of South Asian and Chinese second generations, their weekly earnings are similar to the earnings of the third-plus non-visible minority generation of women.

The second generation mosaic

In general, comparisons of the educational and labour market characteristics of second generation young adults with those of the third-plus generation still support the "success" model in which the second generation is overachieving relative to the third-plus generation. However, two cautions exist. First, the focus here is on young adults in their twenties, many of whom are still in the school-to-work transition phase or in the early stages of their carriers. Future research is needed to determine if the relative advantages for the second generation persist or decline with age. Second, within the second generation, wide variations exist with respect to socioeconomic achievements. Second generation young adults who are Chinese and South Asian are the most likely of all groups to be attending school, to have university degrees or higher, to be working the fewest weeks, to be employed in high skill occupations and to earn the highest weekly wages. In terms of educational indicators, second generation young adults who are Black or Latin American do less well than many other groups and are less likely to be employed in high skill occupations. These variations in outcomes clearly demonstrate that the second generation visible minority experience is not a homogenous one – some groups do well, other do less well. The variations also generate at least two questions for the future. First, what produces these differences between visible minority youth? Sociologists and economists know that the socioeconomic outcomes of offspring often reflect parental characteristics and resources; but recent research suggests that educational differences within the second generation population still remain after parental resources are taken into account (Boyd 2006, Park and Boyd 2008). Second, given that visible minority groups themselves are heterogeneous in origins, what are the socioeconomic outcomes for specific groups subsumed under homogenizing labels such as "South Asian" or "Black"? Research on the socioeconomic outcomes of second generation youth is still in its infancy. There still remains much to learn.

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Notes

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Our Diverse Cities: Challenges and Opportunities

Special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*

This issue of the *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* (Vol. 15, No. 2, 2006) was guest edited by Tom Carter and Marc Vachon of the University of Winnipeg; John Biles and Erin Tolley of the Metropolis Project Team; and Jim Zamprelli of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It contains selected articles on politics, religion, housing, youth gang activity, sports and recreational services. These articles explore the challenges posed by the increasing concentration of religious, linguistic, ethnic and racial groups in Canadian cities, and suggest ways of facilitating the integration process.

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