

## **Paving Their Way and Earning Their Pay: Economic Survival Experiences of Immigrants in East Toronto**

*Keren Gottfried<sup>1</sup>, John Shields<sup>2</sup>, Nasima Akter<sup>3</sup>, Diane Dyson<sup>4</sup>,  
Sevgul Topkara-Sarsu<sup>5</sup>, Haweiya Egeh<sup>6</sup>, Sandra Guerra<sup>7</sup>*

### **ABSTRACT:**

This paper lies at the intersection of precarious labour and immigrant employment experiences. The labour market has evolved over the past few decades such that jobs are increasingly precarious - poorly paid, insecure, and lacking in employee protections. Immigrants are overrepresented among those working precarious jobs and face compounded challenges to achieving socio-economic stability. Immigrants, especially immigrant women, experience heightened exploitation and marginalization in the process of trying to economically and socially integrate into Canadian society. The paper investigates how immigrants living in an east Toronto ethnic enclave navigates the labour market and survive precarious and informal employment realities. It makes use of a unique empirical survey of this community to help shed light on the economic lives of this population.

**KEYWORDS:** Immigrants, Informal Economy, Community Research, Neoliberalism, Precarious Work

The rise of precarious work is a key phenomenon that is a defining feature of the 21st century Canadian job market (Lewchuk, et al. 2015).

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- 1 Keren Gottfried is a public policy and performance measurement professional who has worked at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Ipsos Global Public Affairs.
  - 2 John Shields is a Professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at Ryerson University. He is also the Acting Academic Director of the Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement (RCIS).
  - 3 Nasima Akter is the Executive Director of Bangladesh-Canadian Community Services.
  - 4 Diane Dyson is the Director of Research and Public Policy at WoodGreen Community Services.
  - 5 Sevgul Topkara-Sarsu is the Manager of Settlement Services at WoodGreen Community Services.
  - 6 Haweiya Egeh is a Community Development Officer with the City of Toronto's Toronto Newcomer Office.
  - 7 Sandra Guerra is the Partnership Coordinator for the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership.

Many jobs that once formed the bedrock of middle class employment no longer offer the stability or economic rewards they once provided. Precarious employment can be defined as work that has poor job security, poor benefits and employee protections, and it is often poorly paid. These jobs are commonly part-time, temporary, shift work, or informal jobs, many of which exist outside the formally-recognized employment market. This shift in the job market to more precarious work is taking place not only in Canada but in many developed and developing countries. The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies the absence of ‘decent jobs’ as the new labour market reality (2006), and reflects a ‘decent work deficit’ (Likić-Brborić and Schierup, 2015, 229). The ILO statistics tell us that more than half of the world’s labour force is employed in insecure work today (Wise, 2015, 28).

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) situates precarious work at the intersection of “low levels of pay and high levels of labour insecurity” (Campbell, 1996). Employees generally are pushed into these positions because it is the only work they are able to find in today’s labour market and they quickly discover they have “minimal control over working conditions” (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012, 1). A report by the Wellesley Institute (Akter et al., 2013) notes that precarious employment often reflects substandard conditions that do not meet legislated minimum employment standards like minimum wage, hours of work limitations, health and safety codes, and the like. Precarious jobs can also be defined as what they are not. Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) defines “standard employment relationships” as working at least 30 hours per week, receiving a decent wage and benefits, and expecting to be working at the same employment a year from now (Lewchuk, et al, 2013, 13). Precarious employment deviates from these norms. Some forms of self-employment also fall in the category of precarious work. The Wellesley Institute places unregulated self-employment in the precarious umbrella, particularly unregulated self-employment that might run out of one’s home and operate “under the radar of most regulatory and tax rules” (Akter, et al., 2013, 8). PEPSO contends that people who are self-employed but list no official employees are often working in precarious jobs because they tend to be “a disguised form of employment” that in normal circumstances would be part of the waged/salaried labour force (Lewchuk, 2015, 19).

Many precarious jobs are also called “informal” because they fall outside of the formal employment framework expected in Western economies (Topkara-Sarsu, 2013). Colin Williams (2010) writes these are

jobs not registered for tax, social security, and/or labour law purposes. More broadly, informal work can be thought of as “emigration from the established ways of working” or operating “against the official norms and formal institutions for economic activity” (Schneider and Enste, 2013). Williams (2008) distinguishes three categories of informal work. The first two reference various forms of unpaid work. First, ‘self-provisioning work’ includes unpaid household labour done by household members. Second, ‘unpaid community work’ covers unpaid volunteering and kinship exchange between household members and their extended family, social, or neighbourhood networks. The third refers to ‘paid informal work’ and this encompasses all monetary exchange that is unregistered for tax, social security, and/or labour law but that is largely legal in other respects. Informal jobs are united mostly by their heterogeneity (Topkara-Sarsu, 2013); they can be legal or illegal, monetary or non-monetary, on or off the books, destructive or complementary to the formal economy, for profiteering or survival, and can be a person’s primary or supplementary income source (Schneider and Williams, 2013; Topkara-Sarsu, 2013). The sector includes a range of activity: favours for friends or community members, illicit activity like smuggling or embezzlement, undocumented workers, performing licensed activities without a license like electrical work, and some other forms of self-employment. Questions posed in the east Toronto enclave survey, however, attempted to tap into informal types of work that were engaged in by respondents or members of their household for some form of financial reward.

Neoliberalism, a political ideology and mode of governance that celebrates free markets, limited government, deregulation and encourages the heightened socioeconomic inequality that follows (Burke, Mooers and Shields, 2000), tends to view informal work as an example of individual initiative and a creative alternative to its perception of ‘over-regulation’ in the labour market. Without state regulation of informal activities, Portes and Haller (2005) contend, the flow and transactions of goods and services reflect the true will of market forces (Topkara-Sarsu, 2013). Williams maintains that this view “portray[s] informal workers as heroes casting off the shackles of an over-burdensome state” that is blamed for economic and social problems (2010, 3). On the global scale, alternatively, the context is reversed. Williams notes that informal jobs, in part, can be seen as having grown from an unregulated world economy that encourages “race to the bottom” labour practices. Employers take advantage of opportunities to subcontract work to places where off-the-books workers face “degrading, low-paid and exploitative” conditions (2). The counterweight to these problems, according to the neoliberal viewpoint, is

that through informal work people can achieve some employment rather than no employment. It demonstrates the autonomy and creativity of individuals who take responsibility for their own livelihoods and make their own living rather than relying on welfare services from the public purse (Williams, 2008).

A recent Ontario initiative, the “Changing Workplace Review,” sheds some light on the evolution of these working conditions. Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne’s mandate letter (Wynne, 2014) calls for a review the province’s employment and labour standards processes. The Review identifies five key trends that shape the changing labour market: (1) increased reliance on the service sector, (2) a rise of “non-standard employment relationships,” (3) globalization and trade liberalization (which drives competitiveness and increases pressure to keep costs low – including labour costs), (4) rapid technological change, and (5) increased diversity in the workplace. PEPSO describes the rise of precarious work as “a result of technological change, increased contracting out, and [internationally] extended supply lines” and “financial reorganizations, decisions to relocate, the entry of new competitors, or the inability to keep up with the rapid pace of innovation” (Lewchuk, et al., 2013, 13). Large companies that typically provide middle-income jobs find they now ‘face an uncertain future’ and are significantly reducing their workforces, reorganizing or even dissolving.

Though precarious jobs are rising on aggregate across the breadth of the labour market, immigrants are especially vulnerable to work in precarious jobs. This is not due to a lack of appropriate skills. In fact, immigrant newcomers on average have higher levels of education and human capital than those born in Canada; despite this, they often remain unemployed or underemployed (Shields, et al., 2010). A Wellesley Institute report explains that “immigrants are not only blocked from entering the professions for which they trained but a substantial portion of them are not in any type or form of secure employment. Instead, Canadian newcomers often face substandard, precarious and sometimes dangerous working conditions” (2013, 1). A Law Commission of Ontario report (2012) concludes that this is due to the difficulty encountered by many newcomers in finding financially satisfactory standard employment. Immigrants tend to take what they can get, i.e. survival jobs. The likelihood of immigrants working precarious jobs is also because of their overrepresentation in jobs most affected by the changing labour market. The Worker’s Action Centre (WAC) finds that “outsourcing, indirect hiring, and misclassifying workers takes place in sectors with distinctly local markets: restaurants, business services, construction, retail,

warehousing, trucking, janitorial, home healthcare and manufacture of goods consumed locally.” Moreover, WAC explains that “low-skilled or labour intensive” jobs, where immigrants are disproportionately represented, are increasingly contracted out to third parties. To get one of these jobs, employees no longer look for a waged job but instead sign up with an employment agency as an “independent contractor.” The result is that immigrants face barriers to stable employment and experience very poor economic outcomes. These poor economic outcomes have been a reality facing many newcomers for the last number of decades and have been well documented in the literature (Shields & Türegün, 2014). Moreover, some immigrant groups fare more poorly than others. For example, data from the 2006 Canadian Census show immigrants from racialized groups are more likely to live below the poverty line, as defined by before-tax Low Income Cut-Offs thresholds, than those from non-racialized groups (Shields, et al., 2011).

As Root et al. (2014) explain, the neoliberal mindset has facilitated the development of a particular immigration policy framework in Canada that prioritizes so-called “economic migrants” who are “perceived as self-reliant and embrace practices and expectations around personal responsibility” (5). Over the last decade, the federal Conservative Government has been particularly active in reshaping Canadian immigration policy along neoliberal lines. The focus is on highly-skilled immigrants and less of a priority is placed on allowing immigrants to sponsor family members. Former Minister of Immigration Jason Kenney has been the “prime architect and force” behind these neoliberal reforms and responsible for articulating the “law-and order, family and religious values, small state and self-sufficiency agendas to the immigration portfolio” (Ibid, 9). The driving force behind this policy framework is the assumption that highly-skilled immigrants are perceived to be less of a financial burden on the state, less of a challenge to integrate into society, and more likely to have the English/French language skills to succeed in the labour market. Kymlica writes that this policy framework “affirms - even valorizes - ethic immigrant entrepreneurship, strategic cosmopolitanism, and transnational commercial linkages and remittances but silences debates on economic redistribution, racial inequality, unemployment, economic restructuring, and labor rights” (2013, 112). These policies also privilege recognized high levels of education, Canadian employment experience, and formal credentials that many newcomers, particularly people of colour and women, often lack (Arat-Koc, 1999).

Neoliberalism perpetuates gender stereotypes. The so-called “self-sufficient family” is praised as one that reflects heteronormative, nuclear

family structures (Root, et al., 2014, 7) and rely on women to provide care through family upbringing and voluntary and low-waged work in social services. With the care-taking responsibilities being offloaded from the public sphere to the family, attempts to balance family and employment obligations becomes impossible and particularly burdensome to immigrant women. Neoliberal immigration policy asserts that there is a need to end purported immigrant overreliance on state social supports and ensure that they are making positive contributions to the economy.

The charge that immigrants are a public burden is a myth utilized by neoliberal governments to further their ideological policy agenda. A 2013 report by the OECD, for example, notes that immigrants to Canada use fewer benefits than might be expected and contribute more to the economy in taxes than they withdraw via public services and benefits – a position reinforced by Hiebert (2005). Recent changes in social policy, however, has worked to place greater restrictions on newcomer access to social and health benefits, further depressing their usage of such benefits. At the same time, neoliberal policy casts those who make ‘excessive demands’ on public welfare as undesirable and, in the case of newcomers, the language of ‘good versus bad immigrants’ comes to be employed (Barrass and Shields, 2015). Significantly, the federal Conservative Government’s restrictions on refugee claimants’ access to health services has been ruled by the Supreme Court of Canada as an “outrage [to] Canadian standards of decency” (Root, et al., 2014, 10). The end result is that immigrants have found themselves in an increasingly hostile environment with leaner settlement and social supports and a more hostile and competitive labour market that is marked by few good job opportunities.

Women, especially immigrant women, are particularly vulnerable. Immigrant women are more likely to engage in precarious and informal jobs and are compensated at lower economic levels than men (Akter, et al. 2013; Shields & Türegün, 2014; Shields et al., 2010). Peterson (2012) notes that within the labour market, women have unique experiences because “feminized” workers are assumed to be “less demanding, docile but reliable, available for part-time and temporary work and too [frequently] structurally vulnerable to contest low wages” (16). She also describes the immigrant mother as a person who is likely to be working out of desperation for money and the demands of raising children, all while maintaining normative gender appearances (ibid). During times of economic crisis, the double burden – having to care for social reproduction while making monetary contributions to the family – on women increases and is magnified when social services are cut in the name of government

austerity (Root, et al., 2014). Immigrant women find themselves taking informal jobs that sacrifice workplace standards, protections, and employment stability in exchange for a degree of flexibility that might relieve the family-workplace juggling act.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This work is part of a community-university research project *The Social and Economic Inclusion of Newcomers in Toronto: Navigating the Informal Economy and its Impact on Newcomer Outcomes*, funded by Ryerson University's RBC Immigrant, Diversity, and Inclusion Project. The partners on the project are: the South Toronto Local Immigration Partnership, WoodGreen Community Services, and academic researchers from Ryerson University. The project is based on an analysis of a dataset conceived and developed by the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership and funded through Wellesley Institute. The range of community partners included: Action for Neighbourhood Change, Taylor Massey, Bangladeshi Canadian Community Services, Chinese Canadian National Council - Toronto Chapter, Neighbourhood Link, Riverdale East African Association, and WoodGreen Community Services (Akter, et al., 2013).

The data presented herein reflect a sample of n=453 households in east Toronto from three communities: Bangladeshi (n=199), Chinese (n=214), and Somali (n=40). The sample included n=284 women: n=122 Bangladeshi, n=142 Chinese, and n=20 Somali. Respondents in the survey were selected using interval sampling, were either male or female, and were aged 19 years or older. The stratified sample randomly selected participants in their homes and from street intercepts in east Toronto. The interviews were face-to-face and used a semi-structured questionnaire delivered by multilingual, trained community researchers who conducted the interviews in either English or the interviewee's mother language. Interviews were conducted through October-December, 2011. The survey was primarily fielded in the neighbourhoods identified as ethnic enclaves in the east end of the old City of Toronto: Crescent Town, Broadview Chinatown, and Central Riverdale. Data presented herein were analyzed using SPSS 22.

In the following analysis, we employ descriptive statistics to present a labour market profile of this immigrant enclave sample. We contrast this east Toronto population with other groups along a number of dimensions and internally compare differences within the sample using factors such as gender and ethnicity. When employing ethnicity in the analysis of our sample, we are only able to contrast those of Bangladeshi and Chinese

background given that the Somali sample size was too small to provide statistically meaningful results. Furthermore, multivariate statistics are employed to deepen our analysis regarding the independent role of variables like ethnicity, gender, and English language ability on labour market outcomes.

## DATA FINDINGS

*Demographic Profile.* About half (48%) of our sample population immigrated to Canada under the immigration class of “Family/Sponsorship,” while one in three (34%) were “Economic Class,” 12% were “Refugee Claimants,” 5% were here on temporary visitor, student, or work permits, and less than 1% said “other.” More Bangladeshi respondents moved here under the economic class (42%) than Chinese respondents (30%). Chinese respondents were more likely to be refugee claimants (13%) than Bangladeshi respondents (3%). About half of the men in the survey were here under economic status (49%) while only one quarter (25%) of women were. Considerably more women (62%) than men (26%) fell under family class designation. The majority of respondents (71%) were married, while two in ten (19%) were unmarried and 7% were divorced. The rest were separated (2%) or widowed (2%). A plurality (38%) moved to Canada five or less years prior to survey participation, three in ten (28%) moved five to ten years ago, and three in ten (31%) had been in Canada for more than ten years. These figures begin to demonstrate how demographic variables link together to compound their impact on labour market experiences.

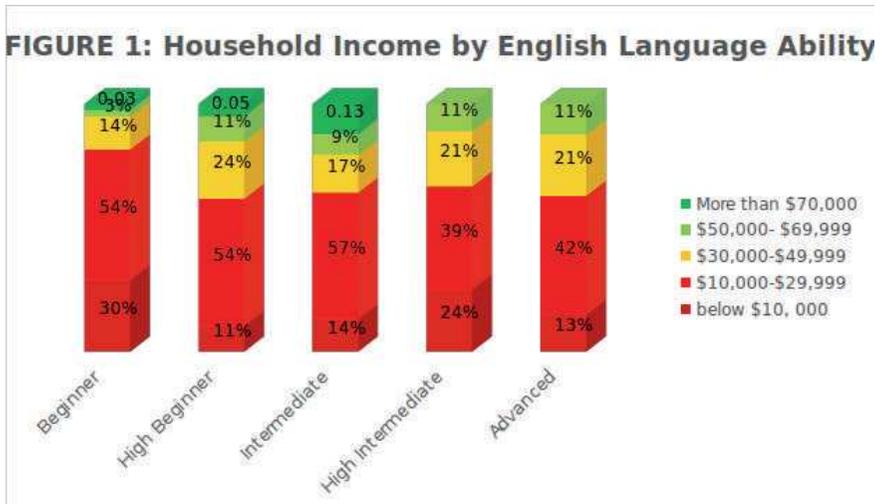
More specifically, six in ten (63%) of respondents had an English proficiency level<sup>8</sup> of High Intermediate or Advanced: more men (73%) than women (58%) did so, however. Approximately half (46%) reported using English at home sometimes or all the time (52% men, 43% women) and 87% reported using English at work sometimes or all the time (90%

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<sup>8</sup> Respondents self-identified their English proficiency levels based on the following definitions: *Beginner* (ESL Levels 1-2, LINC levels 1-2)- communicates only through a few words. May recognize and write letters and numbers and read and understand common sight words. *High Beginner* (ESL Level 3, LINC level 3) – communicates using basic learned phrases and sentences. Reads and writes letters and numbers and a limited number of basic sight words and simple phrases. *Intermediate* (ESL Levels 4-5, LINC Level 4) – can follow oral directions. Has limited ability to understand on the telephone. Can read simplified material on familiar subjects. *High Intermediate* (ESL Level 6, LINC Levels 5-6) – ability to understand and communicate on the telephone. Can participate in conversations on a variety of topics. *Advanced* (ESL Levels 7-8, LINC Level 7) – can participate fully in social and familiar work situations; can understand and participate in conversations and in technical discussions in own field.

men, 83% women). Seven in ten (70%) said they use English in the community sometimes or all the time, while more men (75%) than women (68%) said so. Hence, overall, a large proportion of all respondents did have good English language skills although there was also a clear gender differentiation. The weaker English language ability among women put them at a distinct labour market disadvantage.

We will explore the place of English language and employment patterns more fully in later section of the paper but Figure 1 provides an outline of the core nature of the relationship; more advanced English language ability results in improved economic outcomes. Those with high intermediate or advanced English ability (62%) were more likely than those with lower levels (52%) to be employed at all – full-time, part-time or casual – though they are just as likely to have full-time work (35% vs. 33% respectively). Critically, however, those with stronger levels of English (42%) were considerably more likely than those with weaker English skills (27%) to be living with household income levels above \$30,000.



n=453 (all respondents)

*Employment Rates, Types, and Participation in the Labour Market.*

Figure 2 gives us a snapshot comparison of general employment outcomes between our surveyed enclave population and the overall Canadian workforce in 2011. What particularly stands out is the much lower rates of full-time employment from our surveyed immigrant population and their much higher rates of unemployment. One in three (34%) from our immigrant enclave report were working full time, defined as 30 hours per week or more, while data from the Labour Force Survey by Statistics Canada report the Canadian employment rate among those over the age of 15 in 2011 was 50% (Statistics Canada, 2015). The difference in unemployment levels between these two groups was 15% versus 7%, a rate that was twice the level for the enclave. The enclave sample also had somewhat higher levels of part-time and casual work.

**FIGURE 2: Proportion of Respondents Who Are Employed Compared to Statistics Canada Data**



n=453 (all respondents)

Bangladeshi respondents in the survey (36%) were more likely than Chinese respondents (32%) to have full-time work, while men and women both held, on aggregate, similar levels of full-time employment (34%). One in ten (10%) responded to having a current employment level that was “casual,” defined as “whenever you can get the work, but it is not very predictable.” Chinese (11%) respondents were more likely than Bangladeshi (8%) respondents, while men (15%) were more likely than women (7%), to hold casual work. Our sample overall reflects 15% currently not employed and looking for work, compared with 7% of the overall Canadian labour force, as reported by the Labour Force Survey (*ibid*). While there is no apparent difference between the ethnicities surveyed, women (17%) were more likely than men (13%) to be unemployed but looking for work. Hence, overall our sample experienced significantly greater rates of unemployment and nonstandard employment than the overall labour force.

Levels of household income reveal the grim employment and financial prospects facing respondents living in these ethnic enclaves. A majority of households (68%), where the respondent said they were working more than 30 hours per week, reported earning less than \$30,000, versus only 25% at the City of Toronto level (*ibid*). This is an earnings deficit figure that approaches three times the low incomes levels found in City of Toronto households. Looking at individual income, eight in ten (80%) overall reported earning less than \$30,000 and 40% earned below \$10,000. Among the lowest income bracket, women (53%) were more than twice as likely as men (25%) to report income levels below \$10,000. Hence, low income levels displayed a distinct gender dimension with women being greatly disadvantaged.

Only one in three (37%) households reported being able to fully cover their household expenses on income earned through formal employment while a majority (67%) said they relied on other income sources. Six in ten (62%) reported difficulty in meeting their monthly household expenses and one in seven (14%) reported great difficulty in doing so. A similar proportion (60%) of employed respondents (full-time, part-time or casual) said they were having difficulties making ends meet, indicating that this difficult situation reflects poor work prospects among those living in these communities. Consequently, the problem for many of these immigrant households was not simple unemployment but employment that did not provide a living wage (i.e. a wage that provided them enough to meet the basic necessities of daily life).

One in three (34%) of all respondents reported doing at least some self-employment work and three in ten (32%) reported that someone in

the household was doing cash work. Self-employed workers were most likely to say they pursued this route because of unemployment (37%), convenience (25%) or start-up costs (14%). These figures reveal that self-employment activity within this immigrant enclave has become extremely important for providing a source of income – the survey provides important evidence revealing the turn to work outside the standard labour market for survival work. Of those engaged in self-employed work, childcare or babysitting (20%) led the list, followed by self-employment work in food services (12%), building/renovating (10%), caregiving (8%), tutoring (8%), and taxi driving (8%). There were, however, distinct types of self-employment activity utilized by the different ethnic communities and by men versus women. Bangladeshi respondents were more likely to say tutoring (16%) or taxi driving (16%) while Chinese respondents were more likely to report working in food service (20%), providing room and board (13%), and sewing (8%). Men reported building/renovations (20%) or taxi driving (17%) considerably more than women did (1% each) while women reported babysitting (27%) and caregiving (15%) more than men did (11% and 1% respectively).

Among those working for direct cash payments, factory work (35%), working in a store (29%) and restaurant (14%) work were the most popular forms of employment. Bangladeshi respondents were more likely than Chinese respondents to say they were doing restaurant work for cash (19% vs. 11%) or tutoring (13% vs. 1%) while Chinese respondents were more likely to say factory work (35% vs. 19%). Men were considerably more likely to say they were doing factory work for cash (45%) than women (28%). The amount of work carried out in the shadow economy by those in the ethnic enclaves is considerable and speaks to the reach and importance of ‘informalized work’ within the immigrant community (Castles, 2015, 57-58).

*Employment Standards Violations.* One aspect of nonstandard employment forms and low wage based work is the notion that these workers are more exposed to employer abuse (Rodgers, 1989; Rubery, 1989). Respondents were asked if they, or anyone in their household, had worked for cash and if certain employment conditions applied to that work. The survey data reveal that immigrants living in the East Toronto Bangladeshi, Chinese and Somali communities do in fact face poor employment standards. Regarding the household member who was working for cash, about one third (36%) indicated at least one employment standard was not met at this job; 17% reported two violations, 11% reported three violations, and 7% reported four violations. These numbers vary considerably by ethnicity. Fully half (50%) of those from

Chinese communities reported experiencing 1 violation while 23% of those from Bangladeshi communities reported so. Specifically, 16% received less than \$10.25 an hour (the minimum wage in 2011) – 23% of Chinese and 11% of Bangladeshi respondents were below this level. Overall, one in ten reported the household member working for cash experienced the following workplace violations: no paid holiday (11%), no vacation pay (11%), and cash payment without deductions (10%). Figure 3 reports the frequency and percentage by type of employment standard violation for those who had experienced such victimization. The high incidents of violations of basic employment standard norms speaks to the deficits of employment quality experienced by so many racialized immigrants in urban centres.

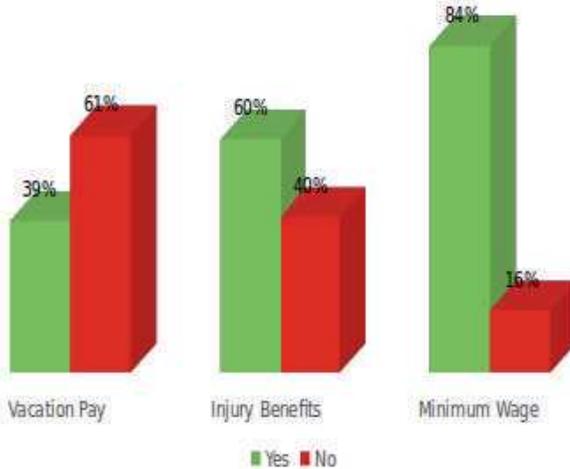
**FIGURE 3: Respondents With Members in Household Working for Cash, Experiencing Workplace Violations**



n=453 (all respondents)

An immigrant group that has faced particular challenges with integrating into the labour market has been the most recently arrived newcomers. Figure 4 examines those who had come to Canada within the last five years at the time of the survey. They are a group that are particularly vulnerable to Employment Standards violations and the survey shows that a high percentage of them were not aware of many of their employment rights. Interestingly, however, very large majority were aware of what the minimum wage rate was, yet, as indicated previously, this was the most common form of Employment Standards abuse by employers. Clearly, many newcomers do not feel that they are in a position to stand up for their rights against employer abuses.

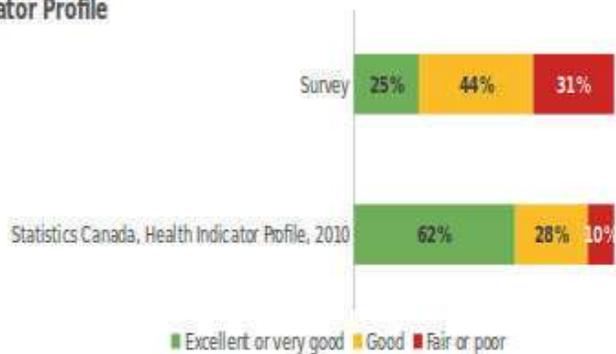
**FIGURE 4: Percentage of Newcomer Respondents (arrived 2007-2011) Aware of Employment Rights**



n=171 (respondents arrived in Canada between 2007-2011)

*Health and Social Outcomes.* The labour market is closely connected to other parts of society. For instance, poor employment can negatively affect health and social outcomes. This relationship is outlined in the social determinants of health perspective that is widely used in policy circles (Graham, 2007). Figure 5 compares health outcomes for our sample with the general population. It indicates that there are large differences between these populations with our sample population fairing far more poorly. Three in ten (31%) from our sample rated their health as poor (3%) or fair (28%) while the rest (69%) rated their health as good (44%), very good (19%) or excellent (6%). By contrast, only 10% of the Canada-wide sample rates their health as poor, 62% as excellent or very good and 28% as good. From our immigrant enclave sample, more men (34%) than women (20%) rated their health as excellent or very good while more Chinese (82%) than Bangladeshi (70%) respondents said so. Three in ten (30%) experienced stress, two in ten (19%) experienced difficulty sleeping, and 12% experienced depression more than twice per week over the past month. Clearly, the health outcomes from the east Toronto immigrant sample compared negatively along a variety of dimensions to the general Canadian population. Social determinant of health perspectives relate these kinds of differences directly to poor working and economic conditions of vulnerable populations living in immigrant enclaves (Graham, 2007).

**FIGURE 5: Self-Reported Health Quality of Respondents Compared with Statistics Canada Health Indicator Profile**



n=453 (all respondents)

Problems associated with social inclusion were also revealed in the survey. We use one measure here related to feelings of social inclusion – the respondent’s sense of strong attachment to community. The rather weak sense of attachment/inclusion is telling. Less than one third (27%) said they strongly felt they are a part of their community. Interestingly, more women (29%) than men (22%) and more Bangladeshi (37%) than Chinese (13%) respondents felt these strong attachments to their communities. As revealed in our findings, there is clearly an inter-relationship at play between such variables as gender, ethnicity/race, immigration status and class. More work is required of researchers to untangle the nature of some of these differences within such ethnic enclave populations but what is clear in the results overall is that there exists a measurable deficit in feelings of social inclusion among this immigrant population.

## PRECARIOUS WORK

Precarious forms of work encompasses those in our sample who are employed but are not well paid, who work in informal jobs like self-employment or cash work but who cannot get by, those employed only part-time or casually but desire more hours, those working jobs where employment standards are not met, and those with poor job security. While there are various ways in which precarious work has come to be operationalized (see Lewchuk, et al., 2013) we considered the following variables from our survey to help capture and measure elements of precarity in our sample:

a. *Insufficient employment*: those who work full-time (30 hours per week or more) but earn less than \$30,000 at the household level;

b. *Precarious informal work*: those who work informal jobs (self-employment or cash work) and report they ‘cannot make ends meet’ each month; and,

c. *Workplace violations*: those who work full-time but where at least one employment standard was not being met.<sup>9</sup>

The survey of this East Toronto enclave uncovered evidence that a large proportion of this population was struggling to make ends meet and working in precarious, insecure work. Of those employed full-time (34%), 65% had household earnings of less than \$30,000 at the household level and 32% experienced at least one employment standard that was not met.

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<sup>9</sup> The following employment standards were measured in the survey: minimum wage, irregular hours, cash payment without deductions, irregular pay schedule, working more than 13 hours per day, no vacation pay, no paid holidays, or poor physical working conditions.

Of those working informal jobs – either self-employed or earning cash without formal documentation – 26% said they could not earn enough to make ends meet. Overall, one third (33%) of those surveyed fell into one of these three categories. The literature would suggest that gender, ethnicity and English proficiency are related to involvement in precarious work. Taking a look first at some basic relationship testing<sup>10</sup>, a chi-square analysis suggests ethnicity and English proficiency may play a role though gender may not be a significant factor in determining whether one holds a precarious job, though the type of precarious work done is impacted by gender (see Table 1; also refer to the appendix). In fact, a recent PEPSO study on precarity in the Toronto-Hamilton region reported broadly similar levels of precarious employment between men and women (Lewchuk, 2015, 29-30).

An ethnic breakdown of our sample found that eight in ten (78%) Bangladeshi respondents who work full-time were also living in households earning less than \$30,000, while this was the case for only half (51%) of the Chinese respondents surveyed. However, full-time employed Chinese respondents appear more likely to be exploited at work; half (47%) reported at least one employment standard as not being met while this was the case for only 21% of Bangladeshi respondents. Each ethnic group was about as likely to report engaging in any informal work, however; 37% of Chinese and 13% of Bangladeshi respondents working informal jobs also reported having a hard time making ends meet. Those with an advanced level of English language proficiency were considerably less likely overall to do informal work, to have a hard time making ends meet (15% vs. 49%), and to experience at least one workplace violation at their full-time job (15% vs. 43%) among those who were employed on a full-time basis. There does not appear to be a statistical difference by gender, however.

A logistic regression sheds more light on these relationships when each independent variable is controlled for<sup>11</sup>. Again, ethnicity and English proficiency level appear to be driving the dependent variable of insufficient employment and involvement in precarious informal work, though only English language level appears to be driving the existence of workplace violations for those with full-time jobs. These models, however, once again do not uncover a significant independent role for gender regarding these relationships. This multivariate analysis may be masking

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10 Results presented herein are statistically significant to the .05 level according to chi-square independence tests.

11 These findings are also significant at the .05 level according to the multinomial logistic regression.

an important role played by gender in that it is the very intersectionality (the interconnectedness) of variables working together like ethnicity, gender and English language ability that suggests that gender not be dismissed here.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Models: Sig. Values  
(Full results in Appendix)

	<b>Model 1</b> Dependent variable = <b>insufficient</b> <b>employment</b> (works full-time but HH earns < \$30k/yr)	<b>Model 2</b> dependent variable = <b>workplace violations</b> (work full-time, at least one workplace standard not met)	<b>Model 3</b> dependent variable = <b>precarious informal</b> <b>work</b> (works informal job but cannot make ends meet)
<b>Men</b>	<b>0.241</b>	<b>0.352</b>	<b>0.253</b>
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>0.014</b>	<b>0.064</b>	<b>0.003</b>
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>0.006</b>	<b>0.072</b>	<b>0.001</b>
<b>Somali</b>	<b>0.124</b>	<b>0.274</b>	<b>0.625</b>
<b>English advanced</b>	<b>0.821</b>	<b>0.066</b>	<b>0.041</b>
<b>Constant</b>	<b>0.004</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

Clearly, immigrant background/ethnicity (Chinese versus Bangladeshi<sup>12</sup>) plays a role in mediating employment type held and employment well-being. Further targeted, in-depth research is required to uncover the dynamics behind ethnically-distinct employment outcomes; this should be the focus of future studies. The results point to the fact that ethnicity and/or racialization are experienced differently and unevenly by various segments of society. The role of English proficiency, by contrast, is easier to make sense of. Clearly, poorer English skills translates into greater employment precarity and a high incidence of employment standards abuses, like employer wage theft (Milkman, 2015, 165). Some employers exploit the lack of English language strength of immigrant populations to break workplace rules, confident that workers are either unaware of their rights or too afraid to report employers to authorities (Kerwin & McCabe, 2011). Indeed, our data reveal that six in

12 The Somali sample for the survey was not large enough to derive a statistically significant reading.

ten (59%) of respondents believed it is likely that their future employment would be negatively affected if they were to raise employment rights or health and safety issues concerns with their current employer. Problems communicating in the working language of English also push immigrant workers out of the formal labour market into the shadow economy where they are in greater danger of exploitation (Akter, et al., 2013). Immigrant men and women are both vulnerable but our sample points to women as having overall weaker English language skills than men, heightening their risk. The need for stronger employment standards legislation, accompanied by strong enforcement, is among the public policy implications of these findings, as is the need for more investment in immigrant language training with targeted programs for women.

## CONCLUSION

This paper provided an analytical perspective on the economic experiences of ethnically/racially identifiable immigrants in urban Canadian cities with two approaches. The first approach provided a critical evaluation of the relevant literature that illustrated the nature of the informalize economy generally, the role of immigrants within that spectrum, and the relationship between informal economic activity and the increasing precarity found in jobs in Canada today and around the world. The second approach leveraged empirical findings from a unique survey conducted in three ethnic enclaves in East Toronto – Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Somali. It has found that the drastic increase in precarious work – poorly paid, insecure, and lacking in employee protections – correlates with the rise of dependence on informal work by immigrants, a scenario reinforced by prevailing neoliberal ideologies.

The literature pointed to a relationship between gender and economic outcomes, finding that women are particularly burdened by an increasingly precarious job market. The data presented from the East Toronto immigrant survey, however, also demonstrate a strong correlation between economic outcomes and the variables of ethnicity and English language level. Bangladeshi immigrants are faring better than their Chinese counterparts. Strong English speakers fare better than those with poorer English language skills. These two variables are linked; many more Bangladeshi immigrants arrived in Toronto with stronger English skills than the Chinese immigrants surveyed. Similarly, though the data did not show this driver, gender is strongly linked with ethnicity and language skills. These variables intersect; men were much more likely in the survey to indicate they had advanced or high intermediate English skills, for example. Indeed, given the political economy of immigrant

selection, and the structure of the family, women are at a distinct disadvantage that is connected to the intersection of gender, language, and ethnicity. The study also demonstrates that women are experiencing job precarity differently from men, largely because they are employed in different types of work. They also report higher levels of experience of discrimination in the workplace and report worse health outcomes. Given these results, further in-depth study is needed to more clearly see the full picture of the vulnerability of women in the labour market. The intersectionality of these variables is difficult to tease out but the literature and data point to a troublesome experience for immigrant women that merits targeted public policy attention.

**APPENDIX: REGRESSION TABLES**

**TABLE 1**

Logistic Regression: dependent variable = **insufficient employment**  
 (works full-time but HH earns < \$30k/yr)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1a	Men	-0.282	0.241	1.376	1	0.241	0.754	0.47	1.209
	Bangladeshi			8.586	2	0.014			
	Chinese	-0.697	0.252	7.659	1	0.006	0.498	0.304	0.816
	Somali	-0.731	0.475	2.37	1	0.124	0.482	0.19	1.221
	English advanced	-0.057	0.252	0.051	1	0.821	0.945	0.577	1.547
	Constant	-0.74	0.258	8.258	1	0.004	0.477		

**TABLE 2**

Logistic Regression: dependent variable = **workplace violations**  
 (work full-time, at least one workplace standard not met)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1a	Men	-0.3	0.323	0.867	1	0.352	0.741	0.394	1.393
	Bangladeshi			5.512	2	0.064			
	Chinese	0.614	0.341	3.248	1	0.072	1.848	0.948	3.604
	Somali	1.152	1.053	1.197	1	0.274	0.316	0.04	2.49
	English advanced	-0.713	0.388	3.379	1	0.066	0.49	0.229	1.048
	Constant	-2.024	0.371	29.794	1	0	0.132		

**TABLE 3**

Logistic Regression: dependent variable = **precarious informal work** (works informal job but cannot make ends meet)

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1a	Men	-0.352	0.308	1.306	1	0.253	0.703	0.384	1.286
	Bangladeshi			11.738	2	0.003			
	Chinese	1.209	0.365	10.955	1	0.001	3.349	1.637	6.852
	Somali	0.334	0.684	0.239	1	0.625	1.397	0.365	5.343
	English advanced	-0.776	0.381	4.159	1	0.041	0.46	0.218	0.97
	Constant	-2.305	0.391	34.833	1	0	0.1		

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