

research snapshot

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Understanding the Filipino Experience in the Toronto Job Market

What is this research about?

Since the late 1990s, there have been a growing number of Filipino migrants to Canada. Canada had 9,205 Filipinos arrive in 1999. By 2008, the arrivals had increased to 23,758 Filipinos. The Philippines became Canada's third largest source of immigrants. In Toronto, 41.3 percent of Filipino migrants who are over the age of 25 are well educated. However, a higher education has not helped Filipino immigrants in the Toronto job market. There is a high number of Filipinos in poorly paid, nonprofessional work and they are underrepresented in better paid, more secure jobs. It appears that Filipino migrants are undervalued in the Toronto job market. What are the reasons behind this?

What did the researcher do?

A group was formed with both university and community-based researchers. They sought to find out why Toronto's Filipino immigrants worked in low-pay jobs that did not reflect their educational background. The researchers sent out surveys to immigrants educated in the Philippines. They collected information about their:

1. History of immigration.
2. Educational and professional training.
3. Experiences in the Canadian job market.
4. Barriers they believed prevented them from achieving their full potential.

What you need to know:

For Filipino immigrants, higher education has not helped in terms of looking for work in Toronto. There is a specific set of factors that shape the Filipino experience in the job market.

The researchers also held focus groups with Filipinos in two areas of work. The first group included Filipino licensed professionals. Although some in this group were practicing their professions, most were not. The second group included Filipino immigrants in jobs that did not require a professional license to be promoted in their workplace. This information was used to explain why there is an over concentration of Filipinos in low wage, non-professional jobs.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers found that there are four factors shaping Filipino experience in the Toronto job market. Although these factors are not all distinctly "Filipino", in combination they represent a specifically Filipino experience.

Firstly, many Filipinos arrive in Canada with few financial assets. This affects how they are integrated into the job market. For example, the need to find and accept survival jobs makes it difficult for Filipinos to take time off to find a



better job. Also, this makes studying and upgrading existing credentials more difficult.

Secondly, most Filipinos come to Canada through either the live-in caregiver program or through family reunification. As a result, many have been separated from their immediate families for long periods. Virtually all have had the financial challenge of sending remittances to family back home. Those in the live-in caregiver program usually cannot practice their professions or further their education, so get stuck doing low-paid and precarious work. Those entering Canada through other programs generally find work through friends or family members, and so often end up in similarly precarious and low-wage work. The immigration programs used by Filipinos had effects on both participants and non-participants.

The third factor concerned the way Canada assesses work credentials. Licensed professionals must have their credentials assessed in Canada. However, the accreditation process lacks knowledge about Filipino education systems. The fourth factor concerned how “being Filipino” is understood by society. Societies in which Filipinos reside have assumptions about Filipino culture. This has led to cultural stereotyping as well as discrimination in the workplace.

How can you use this research?

This research may help to establish more effective policies for Filipinos coming to Canada. These may include changes to immigration and employment policy. The research improves our understanding of how each immigrant group faces distinct issues within the job market. It may also inform policy makers about the barriers faced by Filipino immigrants. The research would also benefit organizations that work with immigrants. This includes helping newcomers with the transition process into new environments like the job market.

About the researcher

Philip Kelly is Associate Professor with the Department of Geography at York University and Principal Investigator of the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative, a knowledge mobilization initiative based at York University. Ricky Esguerra is Vice-President for Education, Community Alliance for Social Justice (CASJ). Mila Astorga Garcia is Research Coordinator of the Community Alliance for Social Justice (CASJ); and Managing Editor of The Philippine Reporter. The Community Alliance for Social Justice is an organization of Filipino community groups and individuals dedicated to advancing social justice through advocacy, education, and community action. This Research Snapshot is based on their Ontario Metropolis Centre (CERIS) study, “Filipino Immigrants in the Toronto Labour Market: Towards a Qualitative Understanding of Deprofessionalization”, featured in the forthcoming book Spectres of in/visibility: Filipina/o lives in Canada, edited by R.S. Coloma et al., “Toronto: University Toronto Press.
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