

Promoting Post-Secondary Pathways Among Filipino Youth in Ontario

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1. Introduction

Various studies have shown that, in aggregate, the children of immigrants do relatively well in Ontario, and in Canada as a whole (Aydemir et al. 2008; Finnie and Muller, 2010; Reitz et al. 2011). Immigrant children graduate from university at significantly higher rates than their Canadian-born counterparts, and at higher rates than their parents. On face value, it might be assumed that there is an effective system of post-secondary access for new Canadians, and, more broadly, a pathway to upward social mobility for the children of immigrants.

Within that aggregate pattern, however, there are some very wide variations in different immigrant communities and across genders. Studies in the literature on 1.5 and 2nd generation outcomes have therefore emphasized the need to understand group-specific dynamics when analyzing intergenerational social mobility (Abada et al. 2009; Anisef et al, 2010; Finnie and Muller, 2010; Abada and Lin, 2011).

In this report, we examine the case of Filipino youth in Ontario, who represent an unexplained anomaly. Despite having parents with among the highest rates of university degree holdership of all immigrant groups, Filipino youth have among the lowest rates of university graduation. This applies particularly to those who arrive in Canada during childhood. Furthermore, while women have overtaken men in post-secondary educational achievement across all groups, the gender disparity in the Filipino community is especially pronounced. Young Filipino men have among the lowest rates of university graduation of any group.

This report addresses the anomaly in a number of stages. First, we use statistical data to identify the patterns of Filipino youth educational outcomes in Ontario. Second the methods used in this project are explained. Third, we will examine the factors that our data suggests might lie behind the patterns of educational outcomes. In each case, we offer a series of policy and programming recommendations to address the issue.

2. Identifying the Issue of Filipino Educational Outcomes

Table 1 uses the 2011 National Household Survey¹ to summarize the problem. Taking data for the province of Ontario, the table looks specifically at young people who arrived with their families in the 1990s and who were aged 25-29 by 2011. This means that they were aged 5-18 when they landed in Canada and therefore likely spent some or all of their schooling in the Ontario system.

Among the non-immigrant population in this age bracket, 25.4 per cent of women have no post-secondary education, and 37.6 per cent of men. For different visible minority groups², the equivalent figures vary widely. For example, less than 20 per cent of Chinese men failed to gain PSE, while almost half of Southeast Asian³ men failed to do so.

Across all groups, the gender disparity is pronounced, with men far more likely to stop their education at the high school level or below. The Filipino community stands out in this regard because of the sheer size of the gender gap. Filipino men are almost twice as likely to be without post-secondary education as Filipina⁴ women.

Those who have completed some level of post-secondary education follow varied pathways including apprenticeships or trade diplomas, college diplomas and university degrees. Success at the university level varies very widely, both across different groups and by gender. Among Chinese women in this cohort, 68 per cent have university degrees, but only 20.1 per cent of Latin American women. While Filipina women fare more poorly than the non-immigrant average, and significantly worse than some other groups, it is Filipino men whose outcomes are most anomalous. In Ontario, only 13.2 per cent of Filipino men have graduated from university – a rate that is half the number for non-immigrants and less than a quarter of the Chinese community.

¹ The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) (Statistics Canada 2011) is a less reliable source of data than the 2006 census. Although it used a larger sample than the long-form census (one in three households, rather than one in five), the NHS was voluntary and therefore elicited a lower response rate (69.3 percent, compared with 93.5 percent for the 2006 long-form census) (Statistics Canada 2012). It is expected that the survey likely undercounted marginalized groups such as new immigrants, those on low incomes and those with poorer official language skills.

² Visible Minority categories are defined by the federal government. They are useful in understanding the experiences of different racialized groups, but it is important to note that they relate to specific countries of origin in only a few cases (Filipino being one of them). Categories such as 'Black', 'Chinese' or 'South Asian' include individuals who self-identify in this way but they reflect very diverse origins. Chinese immigrants, for example, might originate in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, Indonesia, the United States or anywhere else with a Chinese diaspora community.

³ As a geographical region, Southeast Asia includes the Philippines, but in this case the category refers to Southeast Asians excluding Filipinos. The largest group within this category would be Vietnamese.

⁴ 'Filipina' refers to women in or from the Philippines, or who identify ethnically as Filipina. In this report we use this gender-specific term when referring exclusively to women, and follow the common convention of using 'Filipino' when referring to men or to both men and women.

There is a further anomaly that is not revealed by these data. The parental cohort of first generation immigrants from the Philippines is unusually highly educated. Again using 2011 National Household Survey data, Kelly (2014: 13) shows that approximately 40 per cent of the parental generation has a university degree – double the average for the non-immigrant population in the same age cohort, and significantly higher than other comparable immigrant groups. Given that university graduates are more likely to have children who themselves earn degrees, the outcomes among Filipino youth are unusual.

University education should not, of course, be seen as the *only* pathway to success, and nor does taking this pathway necessarily *lead* to success. Nevertheless, there is no escaping the conclusion that there are many young Filipino-Canadian men and women in Ontario who could benefit from advanced university-based education but who are not getting access to such programs. Our goal in this project is to identify reasons why this might be the case, and ways it can be addressed.

The situation of Filipino youth has been noted in some quantitative studies (e.g. Abada et al. 2009; Abada and Lin, 2011) and qualitative research in Vancouver has explored the role of family separation imposed by the Live-In Caregiver program, which plays a significant role in Filipino migration (Pratt et al. 2008; Farrales and Pratt, 2012). Press reports have also drawn attention to this issue in Toronto (Toronto Star, June 1st, 2013). No study, however, has yet sought to establish a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape educational trajectories and employment outcomes in the Filipino community in Ontario (Kelly, 2014, provides a Canada-wide assessment).