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Degrees don't ensure jobs for female immigrants

Women from Asia or Africa have toughest time finding work, StatsCan labour survey shows

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Women with university degrees who immigrated to Canada recently from Asia or Africa are having the toughest time finding jobs, a new analysis finds.

Statistics Canada, in its labour survey released yesterday, found almost half of all the university-educated immigrants who have come in the last five years were women. But they were much less likely to have jobs or be looking for jobs than male immigrants with university degrees.

For women from Asia and Africa, the gap is the widest. Only 62.7 per cent of the 86,000 university-educated recent immigrants from Asia and 38 per cent of the 9,700 from Africa were working or looking for jobs.

"This is proof of what we've been saying," said Neethan Shan, executive director of the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. "This is not just a credentials issue. The significant reason is discrimination by race or country of origin and women face even more barriers to employment."

Credentials clearly aren't always the issue, agreed Jason Gilmore, the lead researcher of this immigrant labour force analysis series that examines 2007. Yesterday's findings are Part 4 of the series.

Overall, he found to his surprise that even recent immigrants who got their degrees here had a harder time finding work.

More than 90 per cent of university grads born in Canada had jobs compared with 75 per cent of very recent immigrants who also got their degrees here. The gap may be because of age, he said, since the immigrants are generally five years younger than the Canadians.

Another sign that credentials aren't the only factor keeping immigrants unemployed, Gilmore said, was the discovery that although newcomers with degrees from the United States or Europe did better, they still didn't do as well finding jobs as Canadians. Only a third of the immigrants with U.S. degrees were born in the U.S.

Newcomers to Ontario with Canadian university degrees had a better track record of finding jobs: 86 per cent, compared with 75 per cent across the country. But newcomers with degrees from elsewhere did just as badly in Ontario as the rest of the country: a 66 per cent employment rate for people with Asian university degrees, 75 per cent for European degree holders (most of them from eastern Europe) and 55 per cent for Africans.

Gilmore also gave the *Star* numbers for Chinese university graduates in Ontario, which show a slightly different trend.

For the 61,000 Ontario immigrants with degrees from Chinese universities who arrived in the last 10 years, the employment rate is 74.8 per cent, he said. For Asian immigrants generally, the highest employment is consistently among Filipinos whose education is in English and Tagalog and whose system is similar to Canada's.