

WHERE ARE THE GOOD JOBS?



Ten case stories of “working rough, living poor”



2013 Full Report



Access Alliance
Multicultural Health and Community Services

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Collaboratively Written by:

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About the Income Security, Race and Health Research Working Group

This report is based on the third phase of a multi-phase research agenda conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) Research Working Group. The ISRH group is an interdisciplinary research group comprising of academics, service providers, and peer researchers interested in examining economic and health inequalities faced by racialized groups in Canada. The group was established in Toronto in 2006 under the leadership of Access Alliance. ISRH team conducted multi-phase qualitative research projects to investigate the systemic causes of growing economic inequalities faced by racialized groups, and to document the damaging health impacts of these inequalities. The team strives to use this evidence to catalyze progressive policy solutions to promote employment and health equity for racialized communities in Canada.

In the first phase of our research, we used an arts-based photovoice method to document the impacts of poverty and racism on racialized residents of Black Creek community. Photo-narratives and results from this study are presented in our report titled 'Exposed: Impacts of Poverty and Racism.' We have incorporated some of these photos in this report. In the second phase (2008-2009), we conducted 8 focus groups with diverse groups of racialized residents from the Black Creek community (n=78) to explore labour market barriers, income insecurity and health impacts facing racialized people living in a marginalized neighborhood. Findings from this second phase led to our report titled 'Working Rough, Living Poor.'

This 'Where are the Good Jobs?' report is based on findings from the third phase research (2010-2011) and closely builds on our previous reports.

Access Alliance has also brought together another interdisciplinary research team to investigate the gendered barriers and de-professionalization that racialized immigrant women face. This fourth phase of our inquiry is one of the six case studies of the Poverty and Precarious Employment in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project funded by Community University Research Alliance (CURA) grant. Results from this study will be released in mid-2013.

All the reports can be downloaded from www.accessalliance.ca

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Acronyms

Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD): Financial assistance offered to families to support children diagnosed with severe disabilities. Once deemed eligible, recipients receive financial assistance monthly, and if required, financial support is offered to cover assistive devices and support supplies for the child/children. Some funding is available to provide respite support to parents and caregivers of the child/children.

Canadian Immigration “Points System”: The point system refers to the calculation tool used by Immigration Canada to determine eligibility for immigrating to Canada under the **Federal Skilled Workers Program**. The point system takes into account several factors when determining eligibility, including educational and employment experience, proficiency in English and/or French, arranged employment, adaptability, criminal background, health issues, age, and proof of funds based on family size. Immigration Canada requires that applicants meet at least 67 points to be eligible for immigrating to Canada.

Employment Insurance/Unemployment Insurance (EI/UD): a government regulated and determined percentage of funds deducted from an employee’s pay cheque. Should an employee require sick leave, parental leave or be unemployed in the future, the funds are used to provide individuals with some temporary financial assistance. These funds are provided for a period of up to 16 weeks, and can be extended to 20 weeks in some cases. The length of time for assistance differs for individuals who are on parental leave.

ESL: English as a Second Language. English language courses offered in schools.

GED: General Education Diploma. The GED is considered to be equivalent to high school education and is achieved through a series of written exams covering major subjects usually offered in high school. GED grades are generally considered for entry to colleges and college level courses. Immigrants who come to Canada without high school diploma can take the GED to enter colleges/universities.

LINC: Language Instruction for Newcomers. English and French language courses offered to newcomers (funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada).

Ontario Works (OW)/Social Assistance: The social welfare assistance program in the province of Ontario. Ontario Works is provided to people who are in financial need with the expectation that they actively seek work, education, or professional training while receiving the benefits. Ontario Works provides dental and medication coverage with some limitations. Ontario Works entitlements are calculated based on family size and cost of living.

ODSP: Ontario Disability Support Program. Provincial social assistance program for people with disability

OHIP: Ontario Health Insurance Program. Health insurance program funded by provincial government.

WSIB: Workers Safety Insurance Board. The WSIB receives and oversees claims made by workplace settings for employees who have been injured while on the job. The WSIB evaluates injured employees’ ability to work, need for medical or rehabilitative services, and compensation while off work.

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About this Research

What is this Research about?

This report contains ten powerful case stories of immigrant families from racialized backgrounds who are struggling to find stable employment in Canada. The stories are based on results from the third phase of a community based research project conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) team in Toronto.

The stories reveal the multiple factors pushing racialized immigrants into precarious work including systemic discrimination, limited professional network, immigration related barriers, temp agencies, policy gaps, ineffective services, and conditions of precarious employment itself.

The ‘case study’ format of the stories means that you get insight into the everyday forces and challenges that people are facing in finding good jobs. This level of detail is not often captured in other research methods.

Who should read this Report?

You should read this report if you are a public service worker, government agency, policy maker, advocate, activist, community worker, service provider, professor/teacher/educator, researcher, student, or simply a citizen concerned about the rise in precarious types of work, and about the wellbeing of immigrant and racialized communities. The report is made for a wide audience, and can be used in a variety of ways.

How can this report be used?

A Blueprint for Action

Everyone has a role to play in enabling working families get good jobs, achieve economic prosperity, and live in good health. The rise of precarious types of jobs negatively affects everyone, but specifically racialized immigrant families. Together we can stop the rise of unstable and unsafe types of jobs in Canada. The everyday level details captured and discussed here can become a basis for real solutions for promoting good jobs for all.

The report includes features to make it easy for you to use. Each family story is free-standing. You can read and share some or all – perfect for a quick read or use in your workshops. The first page of each case story includes a short synopsis. Policy makers can use these case stories to develop better social indicators for measuring the success or gaps in their policies. Government and community agencies that work with immigrant communities and/or with low-income families can use these case stories for professional development training for their service provider staff (e.g., settlement agencies funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Children’s Aid Society, Ontario Works). This report and its case stories will also make excellent course reading material for university and college courses to better prepare future leaders to find solutions to complex real world problems.

We include templates to take notes about key challenges, solutions, and how you will take action. The report also includes recommendations and solutions suggested by the ten families and from the Income Security, Race, and Health team to inform your planning. We encourage solutions geared at system-level change and cross-sector collaboration. The actions you plan might be at the individual practice level, geared at mobilizing broader structural and policy change, or both.

We invite you to tell us how you use this report. Please send your feedback and ideas to: research@accessalliance.ca

Executive Summary



There is growing evidence in Canada that ‘free-market’ oriented policies are fueling the growth of precarious, non-standard forms of employment. These policies are also making workplaces unsafe and exploitative, pushing more and more families towards low wages, and deepening income inequality. There is also equally strong data showing that, compared to other groups, racialized immigrants (and racialized Canadians in general) face the worst levels of poverty, underemployment and over-representation in unstable, unsafe and low-wage jobs. These trends are mutually compounding. This report contains ten powerful case stories of racialized immigrant families stuck in precarious jobs. These working families represent the everyday human faces and voices of people caught in these troubling trends.

The ten families came to Canada with dreams of getting a good job and living a life of prosperity and good health. The families actively participate in the labour market and have extensively used all available employment services and strategies. One participant sent over 1500 job applications. And yet, in spite of exhaustive efforts, all of them are stuck in low-paying, unsafe, precarious jobs that do not reflect their skills. One participant described these as “*horrible jobs*.”

Study findings highlight that being caught in a vicious cycle of “*horrible*” precarious jobs is creating a high level of economic and social instability in the lives of these families, making “*everything feel temporary*” and “*on hold*.” Family communications and relationships are also being directly strained. Moreover, bad jobs are making people very sick. Study participants were suffering from many health concerns including debilitating workplace injuries, chronic pain, gastro-intestinal ailments, severe mental health issues, cardiovascular illnesses and chronic diseases. Participants closely linked the root cause of these health issues to their unstable and unsafe employment conditions.

The main questions all ten families kept asking were: “Where are the Good Jobs?”; “Where is my Canadian Dream?”

The experiences of these ten families provide important qualitative evidence about the everyday forces that push hard working immigrant workers into precarious job pathways. Study results show how racialized immigrants get streamed into precarious job trajectory soon after they come to Canada, and end up getting stuck in the worst forms of precarious employment conditions. Findings point to the presence of deep structural barriers preventing hard working immigrant families from getting good jobs: systemic distrust and discrimination in the labour market; insular and limited professional network, and unnecessary hurdles in getting permanent residency status (for those that come through temporary channels). Further, the case stories reveal that the negative socio-economic conditions created by precarious jobs, in turn, prevent people from finding good employment (across generations). The recent economic downturn appears to have made insecure jobs held by these families even more precarious.

Current employment and settlement services are largely ineffective because most services do not try to overcome structural barriers that immigrant workers face. Instead, they focus on individual behavioral modifications of immigrant workers (e.g. reshuffling their resumes) to make them fit the Canadian labour market – a labour market that is highly discriminatory and increasingly marked by precarious types of employment. Marginalized immigrants families have limited or no access to professional bridging, mentoring and training programs that have proven capacity to lead to stable employment. Failure of current services to link immigrant families to good jobs is the key factor that then streams them in becoming unwittingly dependent on sources that lead to precarious types of jobs such as ‘temp agencies’ or friends who are stuck in precarious jobs themselves.

The experience of these ten aspiring immigrant families caught in precarious employment, near-poverty conditions, and deteriorating health is reflective of a larger problem of *persistent racialized inequalities* in Canada. We need bold reforms in our policies and models of service delivery in order to overcome these deep structural barriers and inequalities.

Recommendations: First, we need major reforms in our labour market policies to create an equitable workforce and to stop the rise of bad jobs. The most important reforms include the following: (i) re-introduce employment equity legislation in Ontario, and in other provinces; (ii) introduce robust workplace anti-discrimination legislation; (iii) effectively enforce Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety regulations (particularly in sectors with rising precarious, non-standard forms of employment) ; (iv) expand pay equity legislation to stop wage gaps facing racialized groups (and other groups); and (v) adopt a *Fair Wage and Benefits* policy. The Fair Wage and Benefits policy is about preventing the ‘race to the bottom’ in wages and benefits. Rather, it involves government taking proactive measures to increase minimum wage in a timely manner, reflective of inflation. It is also about offering proven incentives to encourage employers to provide good benefits to all employees.

Moreover, government should step up and introduce a *Good Jobs Policy* that measures the health of the labour market not simply based on how many new jobs are created but by the quality of the jobs created. We need to adopt *healthy labour market indicators* with attention on how secure, safe, well-paying and fulfilling the jobs being created are, and how dynamic the job growth trend is. These reforms will benefit all Canadian workers, but particularly those at higher risk of being stuck in non-standard forms of employment (immigrants, racialized communities, women, people with limited education and low official language fluency).

Second, reforming labour market policies has to go hand in hand with reforming our immigration policies. We have to stop using immigration as a supply-side labor market strategy and treating immigrants as source of cheap, disposable labour. Instead, we need a *humanist policy vision on immigration*. This involves welcoming and integrating immigrants from diverse backgrounds – and the multiplicity of ideas and innovation they bring – as agents for nation-building, and as an engine for creating a healthy Canadian labour market and Canadian society.

We call on settlement and community agencies to champion system level changes to make

government and employers not just immigrant-friendly but immigrant-driven. In particular, we need to take proactive steps against systemic forms of distrust, discrimination and mistreatment that immigrant workers are facing in the labour market.

Study findings highlight that passive job search services and resume clinics do not work. Instead, we need to substantially expand professional bridging programs, mentorship programs, paid internship programs, and on-the-job learning programs (including on-the-job English learning arrangements). Such programs have shown to be effective in strengthening and diversifying professional networks among immigrant families, and in linking them to secure employment pathways. To do this effectively, we need to forge stronger partnerships between settlement, education sector, and private sector. The important thing to consider is that immigrant families need to have access to such programs from when they arrive so that they can build successful career paths from early on, not decades later.

Third, Canada needs empowering models of social programs, educational programs, healthcare services and social safety nets that can effectively bridge inequality. Study findings show that cut backs to social programs and social safety nets not only compound poverty but can prevent people from getting stable employment. Progressive tax instruments and income supports need to be expanded to create a *guaranteed income supplement program* for working families.

Affordable and accessible education, housing, daycare, and healthcare services are also essential because they directly contribute to good jobs and equity. We call practitioners in healthcare and social services to become champions for good jobs.

These recommendations echo those put forth by Law Commission of Ontario, Workers Action Centre, Office of the Fairness Commissioner, Color of Poverty campaign, 25 in 5 Network, United Way Toronto, and other progressive agencies and researchers.

We need to rebuild Canada as a great nation of opportunities, good jobs and prosperity for all, not just for dominant groups and wealthy immigrants.

Key Findings

Pathways into Precarious Jobs

1. Racialized immigrant families face deep structural barriers to getting good, stable employment (systemic discrimination, non-recognition of credentials, limited/insular professional network, limited economic capital, immigration related barriers,).
2. Current employment and settlement services are largely ineffective because these services focus on modifying individual behaviors of immigrant workers rather than on overcoming structural barriers.
3. Because existing services don't work, immigrants become unwittingly dependent on sources that lead to precarious types of jobs ('temp agencies' or friends stuck in precarious jobs themselves). Tangible services and supports to enable precariously employed workers improve their employment conditions are missing.
4. Even when immigrants use 'high investment job search strategies' (like going back to school), employment outcomes are not much better. Private colleges appear to be taking advantage of immigrants without offering them better employment prospects.
5. Marginalized immigrants with low education and limited English language fluency tend to be 'fast tracked' into precarious manual labour jobs, with little opportunities to improve their career path.
6. Immigrant families who opt for self-employment and small enterprises (because of difficulty finding stable wage employment) also face high levels of precarity.
7. Conditions of precarious employment (irregular hours, low and irregular pay, juggling multiple jobs etc.) lead to more precarious employment; recession makes precarious employment even more precarious.

Negative Impacts of Precarious Jobs

Economic/Income Uncertainty: Precarious jobs lead to very irregular and unpredictable income cycle that makes everyday and long-term economic planning very difficult. During lean months (winter months for people working in manual labour jobs and summer months for those in social services) families can face acute levels of food and livelihood insecurity. Families cannot afford or are forced to make cut backs to important things like furniture, better accommodation, children's extracurricular activities, healthcare needs (e.g., prescription medicine, dental care), and leisure activities. Income irregularity can lead to debt dependence; half of the participants had high levels of debt. Some families had to rely on resources sent by their relatives 'back home' just to survive.

Family Relationship Strain and Social Uncertainty: Although immigrant families develop high levels of family empathy and resilience, precarious employment conditions can severely strain and damage family relationship and communication. Lack of family time, poor communication, crowded housing conditions, and income insecurity make it difficult for families to make and achieve social plans or plans for the future (i.e. "makes everything temporary" and "on hold"). Families were most concerned about lack of time to spend with their children. In turn, children were aware and concerned about the hardships their parents were going through and tried not to bother parents with their own problems. This, however, led to communication gaps between parents and children. Due to economic difficulties, several families had given up their plans to have additional children.

Health Impacts: Precarious employment has damaging impacts on health and prevents healthcare access. Participants linked being stuck in bad jobs as the main cause of many of their physical illnesses (burns, injured hands and legs, hearing loss etc.), musculoskeletal pains, gastrointestinal complications (eg ulcers, stomach aches), mental health issues (depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, low self-esteem), and worsening of chronic health risks/conditions (diabetes, high blood pressures, heart conditions etc).

Policy Solutions for Promoting Good Jobs for all

Build Equitable and Healthy Labour Market: Introduce labour market policy reforms to create more equitable workforce and to stop the rise of bad jobs. Introduce provincial Employment Equity legislation and workplace anti-discrimination legislation, expand pay equity legislation, effectively enforce Employment Standards and Occupational Health and Safety regulations, and adopt Fair Wage and Benefits policy and Good Jobs policy.

Immigration as an Engine for Nation-building: Stop treating immigrants as source of cheap, disposable labour to meet short-term labour market needs. Instead, we need a humanist vision of immigration policy in which immigrants – and diversity of ideas and skills they bring – are inclusively integrated as engine for building a healthy nation and a healthy labour market.

Create Empowering Social Programs: We need accessible, inclusive and empowering educational programs, daycare, healthcare, and social safety nets that can effectively promote equity, while creating opportunities and sustained support for the most marginalized people get good jobs and achieve prosperity.

What Service Providers and Concerned Citizens can do:

1. Report and take proactive action against racism and discrimination in the labour market; promote anti-discrimination and employment equity practices in your workplaces.
2. Report and take action against unsafe and exploitative working conditions. Train and support precariously employed workers to use their rights to improve their employment conditions (e.g. get holiday pay and overtime pay, and negotiate for better working hours, adequate breaks, timely pay raise, promotions, professional development opportunities, benefits). Enable vulnerable workers to use rights and protections offered through Employment Standards Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, and Unions.
3. Enable marginalized newcomer and racialized families build strong professional networks/linkages through programs that help to overcome social isolation and structural barriers to information, knowledge, resources and opportunities. Promote bridging, networking, integration and mentorship programs that create positive relationships across occupations, class, race, social positions, geography and other divides.
4. Build stronger links with the educational sector (universities, colleges and training institutes) and employers (private, government and non-profit) to promote newcomer-friendly academic/professional bridging programs, mentorship programs, paid internship programs, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job learning programs that can lead to stable employment pathways. On-the-job English learning programs are essential to enable people with low education and limited English language proficiency to build better employment/career pathways.
5. Stop offering services that focus on individual behavioral modifications of racialized immigrant workers (e.g. reshuffling their resumes) or those that stream them into low-paying unstable jobs (e.g. child minding, catering) or passive job search services. Replace these with skilled job developers with proven ability to link racialized immigrants to safe, stable, well-paying and discrimination free employment pathways.
6. Since bad jobs lead to damaging health and socio-economic impacts, practitioners working in healthcare and social services need to become champions for promoting stable, secure and safe employment for all.
7. Use your citizen power (voting, advocacy to your local constituency representatives, deputations, petitions) to make government accountable for creating and effectively implementing policies that promote discrimination free labour market, equitable workforce, healthy jobs, empowering social programs and a humanist immigration program in Canada.

Introduction: Where are the Good Jobs?



This report contains ten powerful case stories of immigrant families from racialized background¹ who are struggling to find good jobs in Canada. The case stories are based on results from third phase of a multi-phase community based research project conducted by the Income Security, Race and Health (ISRH) team in Toronto. Findings from this phase build on our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report released in 2011.

The ten families represent a diversity of backgrounds, experiences and aspirations. Participants range widely; a highly skilled male immigrant from India with an engineering degree and an MBA from the UK hoping to get a fulfilling management level job; a female immigrant from Egypt with an Islamic Studies degree aspiring to work as a teacher/educator in Islamic education; a young male immigrant from Argentina wishing to become a male nurse. The study also includes families who came to Canada through temporary immigration streams including through live-in caregiver program and as refugee claimants. Two of the participants in this study are children of families who came to Canada as refugees; the father of one of these participants was deported. There is diversity in terms of family composition from a single mom (whose “ends don’t meet”) to a multi-family household sharing resources just to get by. Study participants include people who have been in Canada less than 5 years and those who came here as children and have lived here over 20 years.

All adult family members who were interviewed actively participate in the labour market and have

strong work ethics. They have exhausted all available employment services and conventionally recommended job search strategies, including job boards, resume clinics, soft-skill trainings, Canadian workplace preparedness trainings, online or in-person resume drop offs, cold-calls, volunteering, networking and as well as randomly asking people they meet on the bus or streets. One participant has sent over 1,500 job applications while another did over one year of volunteer work in four community agencies in hopes of finding a stable job.

Yet, in spite of exhaustive job search efforts, none have been able to find a stable job that reflects their skills or aspirations. Instead, they share the same experience of being stuck in “horrible jobs” (in the words of one participant) that are low-paying (barely above minimum wage) and temporary (“which never become full-time” mentioned another participant) with little security or benefits. These jobs are also often marked by unsafe and exploitative working conditions; many have had debilitating workplace injuries. The only participants with full-time equivalent jobs were working night shifts, odd hours, or split shifts.

The main question all ten families kept asking was “Where are the Good Jobs?”

Rising Precarious Employment and Inequality:

Employment with limited job security, benefits and protections is broadly referred to as precarious work or non-standard employment. There is growing evidence that non-standard types of employment are on the rise in Canada, and that this negatively affects a substantial proportion of Canadians (Cranford et al, 2003). A recently released report *It’s more than Poverty* found 40% of workers in the Greater Toronto Area – Hamilton region are in precarious types of employment (United Way Toronto and McMaster University, 2013). The Law Commission of Ontario report (2012) *Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work* documents how lax employment standards and occupational health and safety regulations are making an increasing number of workers more vulnerable to bad working conditions and exploitation.

¹ Statistics Canada and other mainstream agencies use terms like “visible minorities” or “ethno-racial groups” to refer to people from non-White/non-European backgrounds. These terms relate primarily to number and color. They assume dominant groups are free from race/ethnicity. Such terms also lead to ‘minoritization’ even in contexts where racialized groups are a majority. In line with Canadian Race Relations Foundations, we use “racialized groups.” This term recognizes the dynamic and complex process by which racial categories are socially produced by dominant groups in ways that entrench social inequalities (Galabuzi, 2001).

Studies conducted by grassroots agencies had warned us much earlier about the social costs of the rise in unstable, contingent, ‘temp,’ and unsafe types of jobs. See, for example, *Breaking the Myth of Flexible Work* report published by The Contingent Workers Group (2000) and *Working on the Edge* report produced by Workers Action Centre (2007).

At the same time, analysts from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Conference Board of Canada have drawn attention to the growing income inequality and polarization in Canada during the last three decades. This is in spite of doubling of Canada’s economy since 1981. Unequal sharing of the economic pie is a key reason for the rise in income inequality; Armine Yalnizyan (2011), a policy analyst at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, calculated that the richest 1% took home 32% of all income growth during the last three decades. In contrast, middle and low-income working families either experienced minimal increase in income or faced downward push on wages, income, and wealth during this period of growth (The Conference Board of Canada, 2012; Yalnizyan, 2007). During the last decade, the percentage of people earning minimum wage has more than doubled to one in ten Canadian workers (Yalnizyan, 2013).

Income inequality in Ontario is even worse and has risen faster in spite of the fact that Ontario’s economy grew by 310% between 1981 and 2005. (Yalnizyan, 2007). Half of all minimum wage earners of Canada are in Ontario (Yalnizyan, 2013). Income inequality is experienced in pronounced ways in Canadian metropolitan cities like Vancouver and Toronto resulting in geographically uneven city scape (See *The Three Cities within Toronto* report by Hulchanski et al, 2007; Walks, 2013).

Tax system and government transfers (income supports, tax benefits, tax rebates) do help to lessen inequality. The Canada Board of Canada’s (2012) report *Canadian Income Inequality* highlighted that until mid-1990s, tax system and government transfers played a tangible role in reducing income inequality in Canada. However, since mid-1990s, income supports and transfer programs have not been increased adequately and in some cases been reduced or made restrictive. Consequently the equalizing impact from government tax and transfer systems has diminished since the mid-1990s. For

example, beneficiaries-to-unemployed ratio for Employment Insurance decreased from 82.9% in 1990 to 42.8% in 2009 meaning that a much smaller percentage of unemployed people are actually getting Employment Insurance at present (Canada Board of Canada, 2012). The income support amount that people on social assistance (welfare) receive has been gradually cut back since mid-1990s instead of being increased to account for inflation and cost of living. Based on National Welfare Council data, The Canada Board of Trade (2012) estimated that the average social assistance income for a single parent with one child decreased from \$18,200 in 1994 to just above \$17,000 in 2009.

These problematic changes are fueled by ‘free-market’ policies that institutionalize a ‘race to the bottom’ trend in terms of outsourcing, wages, employment quality, and working conditions in the name of maximizing profits and being globally competitive. All Canadians are negatively affected by these changes in labor market and social policies.

Our research team wanted to find out how Canadian families from racialized backgrounds, immigrants and Canadian-born, are impacted by the rise of precarious types of employment, growing inequality, and weakening social safety nets. More broadly, we wanted to examine how these major changes in labor market and social policies are linked to immigration trends and to the deeper structures of discrimination and inequalities faced by racialized Canadians. In the previous phase of our research, we documented an exhaustive list of systemic barriers and discriminations that racialized workers face in the labor market. Our study also mapped the numerous social and health impacts caused by employment and income insecurity. See our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report.

As a follow up to this report, we conducted two rounds of in-depth interviews with ten precariously employed families from racialized backgrounds.²

² We planned to interview immigrant and Canadian-born families. However, the two Canadian-born families dropped out in the middle of study. Nonetheless, the study includes participants who came to Canada as children; the experiences of these participants closely reflect those of many Canadian-born racialized families.

The team was interested in documenting the everyday pathways that are pushing racialized families into precarious jobs. Further, we wanted to capture how being stuck in precarious jobs affects their day-to-day wellbeing. This granular level of qualitative evidence is missing. In documenting every day level struggles with labor market barriers and precarious employment, the research team hopes to pin point not just what solutions are needed but also when and how to implement them.

Interview data was rigorously analyzed using NVIVO software. In this report, we present the findings in a case story format to provide a seamless picture of everyday experiences of these ten families struggling with precarious employment.

Stories as telling evidence: The case stories of these ten families provide heart-wrenching accounts – and telling evidence – of what it is like to be trapped in a vicious cycle of bad jobs, near-poverty conditions, and deteriorating health.

Take, for example, the Adani family who came to Canada from India. The husband has an Engineering degree and an MBA from the United Kingdom. He assumed that Canada was a country that values people with multiple qualifications. Thus he had high hopes for a management level job in the engineering field in Canada. Instead he has been stuck in one factory job after another (e.g. welding, making boxes, baker). Not surprisingly, but sadly, he has suffered multiple workplace injuries. His wife has a graduate degree in Commerce and over 10 years of experience in accounting. She thought accounting would be a readily transferable skill in Canada (“*accounting is same everywhere*” she noted). However, even after sending 1500 applications, the best she has been able to get is a part-time “office clerk” level job. She keeps a copy of all of the 1500 job application emails for her own record and for her sanity. The office clerk job never becomes full-time no matter how hard she works or how many times she asks to make it full time.

Two other families in this study (the Kumar and Sharma families) seem to have met very similar fate. The male members have taken up night jobs in factories that make you work “*more than human capacity*,” as one put it, while the female members struggle to find decent non-factory type job.

Then there is the story of the Omar family who came from Egypt. The husband is an aspiring graphic design artist. He learnt the hard way that in Canada his degree from Egypt was “*not even worth the paper it is printed on.*” After 5 years of going from one unstable job to another, he got fed up and decided to start a sign-making business of his own even though he had no previous business experience. Though somewhat related to design field, he feels that he is using only bare minimum of what he is really capable of. He lost many of his clients during the recent recession making him realize how risky running a small business can be. His wife has a degree in Islamic studies from Egypt and hoped to be a teacher/educator on Islamic education in Canada. However, there are no prospects within her means to do so in Canada. Instead, like many immigrant women, she is stuck doing home based catering and babysitting.

The story of two sisters from Peru (Pérez family) surviving as single mothers and living together in the same household is very telling as well. Both sisters came to Canada through the live-in caregiver program (one in the early 1980s and the second one a decade later). Both faced immense hardship and exploitation working as live-in caregivers. Both faced acute isolation. Since then, the two sisters have been stuck in part-time shift jobs in the hospitality field for over 10 years. Sadly, the fact that they both work in unionized environment has not helped to improve their employment conditions.

The fate of two Vietnamese families (Nguyen and Tran families) who came to Canada as refugees is very hard hitting. Both families face acute linguistic barriers and are struggling to find effective programs and support to help improve their English language skills. Since coming to Canada, the male members in both families have been stuck in highly precarious jobs as self-employed home renovation construction workers. The recent recession has had a devastating impact on their work and income.

The difficulties that immigrant parents face in getting good jobs have negative intergenerational impacts on the employment outcomes of their children. This is brought to light by challenges faced by two young families in our study (the Bolivar and Suárez families) whose parents came to Canada as refugees and faced excessive difficulties in getting their permanent residency status and in securing

stable employment. Another case story that adds to this evidence is the experience of the Tanya Wilson (see the Wilson family), a single Black mother barely struggling to make ends meet.

We end the report with the case story of the youngest family: the Bolivar family. Like many young families, this family had bold career and life aspirations. However, this family is already being pushed into a precarious employment track. The critical question is whether this young immigrant family will end up in the same difficult conditions and poor health as others in this report.

Deep structural barriers: The ten families live in the Black Creek community – a low-income neighborhood located in the peri-urban region of Toronto (adjacent to York University). The case stories, therefore, capture the struggles of racialized families living in marginalized “priority neighborhoods” in metropolitan cities like Toronto, where poverty and inequalities are geographically concentrated. At the same time, this condition of being stuck in “horrible jobs” is a pervasive trend and reflects the harsh reality for racialized Canadians all over Canada.

Census after census provides national-level data showing that, compared to other groups, immigrants and Canadian-born from racialized backgrounds:

- persistently face 2 to 3 times higher rates of unemployment;
- are up to 4 times more likely to be underemployed;
- have higher representation in non-standard jobs;
- face a wide wage gap (racialized workers earn 84 cents for every dollar that non-racialized workers make); and,
- face low-income rate that is 2 to 20 times higher (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; Ornstein, 2000).

Analysts at Statistics Canada, Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI), and Office of Ontario Fairness Commissioner have produced a wealth of evidence about barriers and inequalities that immigrants face in the labour market.³ A key

barrier is the non-recognition of foreign credentials and experiences by professional licensing bodies and employers. Researchers at Statistics Canada have highlighted that current cohorts of immigrants have much higher levels of education than previous cohorts of immigrants and Canadian-born workers, and yet are experiencing a declining earnings return on their high educational qualifications (Picot et al, 2007; 2009). Evidence shows that immigrant workers face very high rate of under-employment and are over-represented in low-wage and temporary types of jobs; this, in turn results in higher rates of poverty and low-income among immigrant communities (Aydemir and Skuterud, 2004; Chiu, 2003; Galarneau and Morissette, 2004; Picot et al, 2009). A large number of other quantitative and qualitative studies across Canada have highlighted that getting stable employment continues to be the primary concern for most immigrants (Chun and Cheong, 2011; Goldring and Landolt, 2009a; Mennonite New Life Centre, 2009; OCASI, 2012; Oreopoulos, 2009; Sakamoto et al, 2010).

Immigrants from European/White background, on the other hand, have similar levels of unemployment and low-income rate as Canadian-born people. Racialized immigrant men, for example, make 68.7 cents for every dollar that non-racialized immigrant men make (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). Galabuzi (2006), Ornstein (2006) and Block and Galabuzi (2012) remind us that the Canadian labor market is very “colour-coded” and that racialized workers (immigrants and Canadian-born) persistently fare worse compared to their non-racialized counterparts in many socio-economic measure.

These economic inequalities in turn lead to health disparities. For example, compared to other groups, racialized immigrants are more than twice as likely to transition from excellent and good health to fair and poor health (Hyman and Jackson, 2010; Ng et al, 2005). Reports by Public Health Agency of Canada and Toronto Public Health show that immigrants, particularly those from racialized backgrounds, experience rapid deterioration of mental health and several chronic health conditions,

³ See insightful series of reports by analysts at Statistics Canada including Chui, 2003; Picot et al, 2007; Picot and Sweetman,

2005; Galarneau and Morissette, 2004. See analytical reports by TIEDI researchers such Preston and D’Addario, 2008; Preston et al, 2011; Kelly et al, 2001. For the work of Office of Fairness Commissioner, see their 2013 report titled *A Fair Way to Go*.

including cardiovascular illnesses, diabetes, and some cancers.⁴

These ten families represent the human faces of people unfairly caught in this problem of persistent racialized inequalities in Canada. The case stories help to fill important evidence gaps about how and why racialized immigrant families are getting caught in precarious jobs. Economic, social and health impacts are captured in great detail. The stories also reflect feelings, aspirations, responses and voices of people stuck in bad jobs. This level of detail has not been captured by other research projects.

Pathways and Impacts: Private corporations and ‘temp agencies’ are often blamed for the rise in precarious employment and immigrant underemployment. In reality, businesses and ‘temp agencies’ are mediators and beneficiaries of these trends. The root causes go deeper and have more to do with discrimination, structural inequalities, policy and enforcement gaps, information gaps, and ineffective services. The shared experience of these ten families reveals seven crosscutting causes of why and how racialized immigrant families get pushed into precarious job pathways:

(1) Racialized immigrant families face deep structural barriers to getting good jobs: systemic discrimination and distrust in the labour market, limited/insular professional network, limited economic capital, and immigration related barriers. This is why even after sending 1500 applications and using all job search strategies, immigrants are unable to get stable employment that they want. .

(2) Current employment and settlement services do not really work because these services focus on modifying individual behaviors of immigrant workers (reshuffle people’s resumes, offering Canadian workplace preparedness trainings) rather than on overcoming structural labour market barriers that immigrants face.

(3) In absence of effective services, immigrants become unwittingly dependent on sources that lead to precarious types of jobs (‘temp agencies’ or friends stuck in precarious jobs themselves). Study findings show that immigrant families get initially linked up to ‘temp agencies’ through their immediate networks. This underscores the deep structural nature of the problem at hand: high incidence of precarious employment among racialized families streams newcomer racialized families into precarious employment pathways.

(4) After a certain period, some immigrants – particularly those with higher education – begin using what can be called ‘high investment job search strategies.’ This includes strategies such as going back to school, making a career change, and doing unpaid internships and volunteer work. In most cases, only one member of the family can afford to do this. These high cost - high effort strategies offer somewhat better outcomes compared to other strategies. However, the jobs still tend to be part-time, odd hour shifts or well below their skill level.

(5) Marginalized immigrants with low education and limited English language fluency tend to be ‘fast tracked’ into precarious manual labour jobs, with little opportunities to improve their career paths. Immigrants who came through temporary pathways (e.g. as a refugee claimant or through the live-in caregiver program) and faced hurdles in getting permanent residency status are also at risk of being pushed into low-paying manual labour job pathways.

(6) Immigrant families who opt for self-employment (because of difficulty finding stable wage employment) also face high levels of precarity.

(7) The experiences of these ten families highlight that being stuck in low-paying precarious jobs in turn creates negative structural conditions (irregular income, irregular work hours, workplace injuries, jobs-skills mismatch etc.) that further prevent immigrant families from getting stable employment in their field. This finding point to another deep structural nature of the problem: precarious employment conditions leads to more precarious employment. Further, study findings reveal that economic recession makes precarious jobs held by immigrant workers even more precarious.

⁴ See Health Canada’s *Health Policy Research Bulletin* Issue 17 focused on Migration Health. See *The Global City: Newcomer Health in Toronto* report published jointly by Toronto Public Health and Access Alliance.

The economic impacts are severe. Being caught in a vicious cycle of precarious jobs results in high degree of economic insecurity and livelihood deprivation. Although these families are not unemployed, they face similar level of economic difficulties as those who are unemployed and on social assistance. They are living in near-poverty conditions in spite of working very hard.

The social impacts are equally troubling. Study findings show that precarious job conditions (irregular work hours, always looking for jobs or juggling multiple jobs etc.) creates social uncertainty in people's lives (*"makes everything feel temporary"*) and severely strains family relationship and communications.

This study adds to our previous evidence that precarious jobs cause damaging impacts on health and prevents healthcare access. Participants linked the root cause of many of their health concerns to the unstable and unsafe jobs they are stuck in. Some of the health impacts are immediate and direct such as workplace related injuries (burns, injured hands and legs, hearing loss, etc.) and musculoskeletal pains due to overworking. Chronic and long-term health concerns begin to unfold with prolonged exposure to negative risk factors associated with precarious employment conditions (e.g. not taking scheduled work breaks, not being able to eat well or get adequate sleep, not having time to exercise). Chronic issues include gastro-intestinal complications (e.g. ulcers, ongoing stomach aches), mental health issues (depression, anxiety), and worsening of chronic health risks and conditions (diabetes, high blood pressures, heart conditions). In other words, bad jobs are making people very sick. The growth in precarious types of employment is a major risk to the health of Canadians.

The main photo on this report cover was taken by one of our community researchers (Safy). She titled this photo "The Canadian Dream" and wrote the following narrative: *"The Canadian dream is thought of as being accessible to everybody but in actuality, like the flag in the picture, the Canadian dream is too high to reach."* This report could interchangeably be titled '*Where is my Canadian Dream?*' Like many immigrant families, these ten families came to Canada with earnest aspirations of getting a good job and living a life of prosperity and good health. All of them knew that they would have

to struggle a little bit to resettle in a new country, but did not expect that the challenges would be so severe and never ending. Participants described their lives in Canada as *"always struggling"* and *"too hard."* Their Canadian dream has been shattered (*"ninety percent disappointing"* in the words of one participant). Families who have been in Canada for over 20 years and grew up here did not necessarily fare better. Difficulties that immigrant parents face in terms of getting permanent residency status or good jobs directly undermined the educational and employment outcomes for their children.



Photovoice 1: Where is my Canadian Dream? (Photo by Safy).

Canada cannot become a nation where racialized immigrants are brought just to do the dirty work, treated as *"disposable"* labour, excluded from prosperity and opportunities, and pushed into negative socio-economic and health pathways across future generations. This makes us a very unhealthy nation. The socio-economic loss and healthcare costs to Canada from this is profound.

We argue that the growth in precarious employment and the deepening of racialized inequalities in Canada are closely linked processes. The problems we face are deep and severe and thus Band-Aid solutions that attend to symptoms won't work (such as poverty alleviation). We need bold cross-sectoral action and solutions from all levels of government with strong participation from non-profit/community sector and private sector. All of us have a role to play in rebuilding Canada as a great nation founded on good jobs, progressive immigration policies, equitable and healthy workforce, transformative social programs, and good health for all.

Our Research Goals and Methods



Background:

In 2006, Access Alliance brought together an inter-disciplinary team of academics, community agency partners, and community members (racialized people from marginalized backgrounds) to form the Income Security, Race and Health team (ISRH team). The team led a multi-phase research agenda to investigate the root causes and impacts of employment and income inequalities faced by racialized groups. The initial phases of research were focused in Black Creek area to better understand how place-based discrimination compounds inequalities faced by racialized communities.

Our study design and process was grounded Community-based research

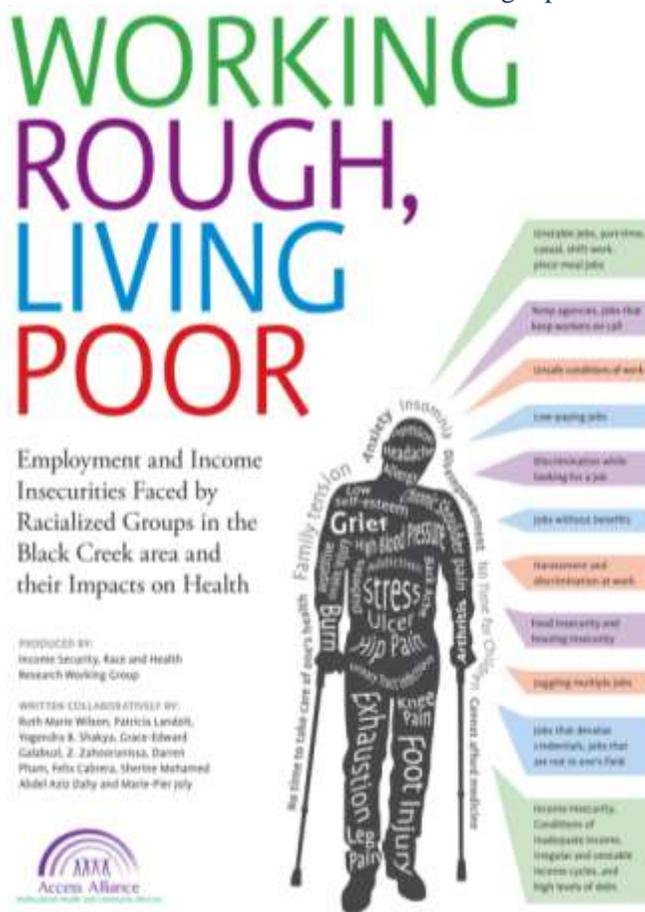
(CBR)/Participatory Action Research (PAR) principles. We drew on the groundwork laid by champions of PAR (including Budd Hall, Deborah Brandt, Orlando Fals Borda, Rajesh Tandon) as well

as practitioners of CBR within the health field (such as Meredith Minkler, Nina Wallerstein, Barbara A Israel). These advocates of CBR/PAR have shown that doing research in inclusive and equitable framework is not just empowering but also leads to more relevant and rigorous evidence (Hall, 2006; Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). CBR/PAR allows research teams to focus on research priorities that are important to marginalized communities, reach people whose voices have not been heard, capture evidence that

marginalized people don't share with conventional researchers, and interpret and understand results in more contextually grounded ways. In other words, CBR/PAR generates rich and deep evidence by encouraging new and inclusive ways of viewing, valuing and validating knowledge (Hall, 2006; Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003).

We define CBR/PAR as a transformative model of knowledge production grounded on principles of collaboration, community empowerment and social change in which members of 'community of interest' are involved in leadership capacity throughout the research process as knowledge producers and agents of change. Our CBR approach is particularly inspired by Brazilian social activist, Paulo Friere, and his ideas of 'popular education.' Friere recommended that in order to overcome inequalities and injustices, we need to involve marginalized communities as empowered agents/collaborators in knowledge production, education and social change process. Failure to do so may result in research and advocacy work reproducing the very structure of inequalities it

is trying to investigate and eliminate. As in previous phases, we trained and engaged precariously employed racialized people in leadership capacity as co-researchers ('peer researchers') and subject matter experts at all phases of the research, starting from research design, data collection, analysis, co-authoring reports, and in knowledge exchange/advocacy work (as Knowledge to Action leaders).



This *Where are the Good Jobs* report is based on results from the third phase of our study. It is a direct follow up to our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report released in 2011. In the *Working Rough, Living Poor* report we shared findings from 8 focus groups conducted with precariously employed racialized people (n=78) from different communities in the Black Creek area (South Asian, Arabic speaking, Black, Spanish speaking, Vietnamese speaking, Canadian-born). We also conducted 3 focus groups with front line and management level service providers (n=20) who work closely with marginalized communities.

The focus group discussions (i) generated an exhaustive list of systemic barriers and discriminations that are preventing racialized people from getting good jobs; (ii) provided valuable details about the precarious, non-standard, and exploitative employment conditions that racialized workers are exposed to; and, (iii) carefully mapped (using a ‘body mapping’ framework) the multiple physical, mental and family health impacts from being trapped in precarious jobs and income insecurity. We also showed that access to good jobs for racialized people living in marginalized neighborhoods, like the Black Creek community, is further undermined by the added layer of place-based discrimination. These place-based discriminations have deep racial tones.

Copies of our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report can be downloaded from our website: www.accessalliance.ca

Our Method: For this follow-up third phase, our community partners and peer researchers recommended that we focus on in-depth interviews in order to map in detail the everyday pathways and processes that push people into bad jobs. They also suggested that we use a ‘family lens’ instead of focusing on individuals only. They highlighted that many of gaps in policies, services and research is due to the exclusive focus on individual oriented interventions, with little or no consideration of the role of family/household.

Based on this feedback, we redesigned our research method to have a strong ‘family lens.’ We conducted in-depth interviews at the family/household level to better understand the everyday strategies that people use as a family to

find stable jobs, achieve household income security, deal with the stresses from economic insecurity, and address/promote health of the family. We conducted two rounds of in-depth family interviews with ten precariously employed racialized families living in the Black Creek area. Two key members of each family/household were jointly interviewed in both rounds (n=19). In other words, instead of interviewing just the husband, we interviewed the husband and wife together and asked relevant details about all other members of the family/household (children grandparents, siblings as well as transnational relationships). In the case of one family, (the Pérez family) we interviewed two sisters who were living with their families in the same household. For the Wilson family, we only interviewed one person since it was a single mother headed household.

A key requirement for participating in the study was that the family had to be actively involved in the labour market but experiencing precarious employment. People dependent on social assistance for lengthy periods were excluded from the study. We recruited families for diversity in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, education level, occupation, family composition, and how long they have been in Canada. We originally wanted to include Canadian-born participants as well; however, the two Canadian-born families we recruited dropped out in the middle.

For each family, the study generated 4 to 7 hours of very rich interview transcripts (a total of 58 hours). For participants with limited English language fluency, the interviews were conducted in their first language. Peer researchers were paired with academic partners or research staff to jointly conduct the interviews. The interviews were translated and transcribed and then coded using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software.

We employed innovative collaborative data analysis process to jointly develop the coding framework and to do rigorous analysis of the coded data summaries. In total, we held 6 full day collaborative analysis meetings and many small group meetings. Peer researchers were encouraged and supported to take leadership role in doing analysis. They provided valuable interpretations that helped to strengthen the rigor of our analysis.

We generated these case stories using what we call ‘social pathway analysis’ framework. Our ‘social pathway analysis’ framework builds on ‘social network analysis’ framework developed by sociologists like Mark Granovetter, Stanley Wasserman, and Katherine Faust (see Granovetter, 2005; Faust & Wasserman &, 1994). The ‘social pathway analysis’ framework recognizes the key role that social networks/structures play in shaping opportunities, outcomes, and pathways but at the same time views networks/structures in dynamic ways as modifiable factors shaped by interplay of dominant macro-economic environment and people’s action/agency. In particular, we looked at:

- Critical nodes: these are key course-changing events such as a workplace injury or birth of a child;
- Catalyzing factors/agents: these can be people or things that help trigger a change (e.g. meeting a good mentor or finding out about ‘temp agencies’);
- Embedded social networks: the types and quality of social relations and networks that people have or develop, and how in turn these networks affect their socio-economic opportunities and mobility; and
- Decision points: these denote when people make firm decisions to take action (e.g. when a participant decides to go back to school)

For each family, we carefully mapped their migration decision and trajectory, career and socio-economic aspirations in Canada, how and why they settled in Black Creek area, their job search strategies over time, their social network/relations over time, deterioration of health due to protracted precarious employment conditions, as well as the everyday strategies they use to make ends meet and stay strong.

Our analytical framework is informed by critical conceptual ideas put forth by French critical scholar, Michel Foucault. In particular, we draw on his suggestion to use what he refers to as genealogical “ascending analysis of power” to capture the “infinitesimal mechanisms” through which dominating and exclusionary power operates in everyday life. The dominating and exclusionary

power that we are most interested in examining is post-colonial relations of race-based discrimination and inequalities that operate in western nations like Canada. For this, we ground our analysis on insights by Canadian post-colonial scholars (including Himani Bannerji, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Roxanna Ng, Kwame McKenzie, Rinaldo Walcott and Vijay Agnew). The writings by these scholars have helped to capture how race and immigrant status (along with gender) are the central basis of inequality in Canada. These scholars have rightly exposed how Canadian immigration and labour market policies continue to be grounded on outdated colonial worldview that reproduces unequal historical/global relations of power, albeit in new forms. They argue that the “national rhetoric of multiculturalism,” while celebrating the diverse food and culture that immigrants bring to Canada, merely serves to mask deep rooted economic and structural inequalities faced by racialized families (particularly racialized immigrants).

We took many steps to achieve rigor in analysis. Interview transcripts and coded data summaries were read multiple times by different team members and compared to ensure consistency and reliability. Contextual information or unclear data was checked, clarified and validated by peer researchers and community partners with contextual expertise.

Pseudonyms have been used for all families to protect their confidentiality. We selected common popular names representing the particular ethnic community with the hope that people in the community can easily identify with the families and their experiences. Small nuances have also been reflected in selecting the names. For example, if the children in the participating family had Anglo names, we substituted with comparable Anglo names for the children.

The research team decided that the first report from this study will be written in an accessible plain language format using a case story framework. Peer researchers took a lead in writing many of the case stories. The fact that this report is written in a plain language format does not mean in any way that the evidence presented in this report is less rigorous. As noted above, the research team utilized very rigorous data collection and qualitative analysis framework to generate the results.

Snapshot of the Families

Family Name	Household Details	Immigration Details	Education Level	Current Employment Status	Current Health Status
Kumar	Family of 3: Akshay, 49, married to Rani, 46, daughter Karishma, 13.	All born in India, came to Canada together in 2004 through Federal Skilled Workers and Professional stream.	Both came with BA degree in Commerce and one additional technical diploma (Rani in Computer Programming; Akshay in IPPM). Rani also got a Social Service Worker diploma in Canada	Akshay: injured at work (and later also had a slip and fall) and currently unemployed; Rani: low-paying, part-time contract job as Program Coordinator at after-school program	Diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid issues, depression.
Suárez	Family of 3: Andreas, 28, married to Martina, 29, son Ricardo, 4.	Andreas born in Argentina, Martina born in Chile. Parents of both came to Canada in the 1990s as refugees. Andreas and Martina first came to Canada in 2001	Andreas and Martina both faced gaps in education. They completed GED diplomas in Canada. Martina is in college working towards getting an accounting diploma.	Andreas is a fulltime Shipper/Receiver, Martina is in college upgrading courses.	Shoulder pain, headaches, sleep issues, exhaustion, stomach aches, neck pain, frequent cold and flu, and partial loss of hearing.
Nguyen	Family of 4: Giang, 50, married to Phuong, 36. Daughters Kim, 17, Lien, 13.	All born in Vietnam. Giang came in 1999 as refugee, Phuong and kids came in 2007 sponsored by Giang.	Giang completed grade ten, Phuong completed grade 12 in Vietnam.	Giang part-time construction (flooring), Phuong is a stay at home mom.	Both Giang and Phuong experience back pain. Giang sustained a serious finger injury at work.
Omar	Family of 5: Sayed, 43 years, married to Hanem, 30 years. Son, Ahmad, 7; daughter, Nuri, 5, and daughter, Mona 14 months	Sayed and Hanem born in Egypt. Sayed came to Canada in 1997 through the Federal Skilled Workers stream. Hanem came to Canada in 2003 sponsored by Sayed.	Sayed holds Bachelor of Fine Arts, Hanem holds BA in Islamic Studies.	Sayed is self-employed: Sign Making, Hanem runs home child care service.	Knee pain, back pain, dizziness, loss of teeth due to no dental care, sleep issues.
Wilson	Family of 3: Tanya, 37, son Jason, 22, son Chris, 12. Jason lives on his own.	Tanya and Jason born in Jamaica, moved to Canada in 1991 with Tanya's parents.	Tanya completed grade ten before moving to Canada. Got PSW certificate in Canada.	Tanya is unemployed, Jason works part time in retail.	Back pain, chest pain, leg pain, sleep issues, weight loss, Chris has asthma.

Snapshot of the Families

Family Name	Household Details	Immigration Details	Education	Current Employment Status	Health Status
Adani	Family of 3: Zamir, 33, married to Hasina, 28, daughter Varshini, 6.	All born in India, moved to Canada together in 2007 through the Federal Skill Worker stream.	Zamir: BA in Mechanical Engineering (India) and MBA from UK, Hasina: Masters of Commerce (India), Accounting diploma (Canada).	Zamir is on-call baker; Hasina is a part time accounting clerk.	Both Hasina and Zamir have high blood pressure. Zamir: burn injury, foot pain. Hasina has eye strain, headaches and exhaustion.
Tran	Family of 3: Vinh, 42, married to Mai, 33, son , Tony, 2.	Both born in Vietnam. Vinh came in 1989 as refugee, and sponsored Mai in 2006	Mai completed high school, Vinh one course short of finishing high school.	Vinh does odd construction work (flooring), Mai works at nail salon (on-call)	Back pain, dizzy spells, frequent colds and flus, sleep issues.
Pérez	Household of 8 (two sisters who are single mothers living together with their family): Carmen, 46, with daughter,6; Elena, 43, with daughter and son and grandson from daughter. Live together with parents.	Elena born in Peru, came to Canada in 1987 through live-in caregiver program. Carmen born in Peru, came to Canada in 1997 through live-in caregiver program.	Carmen has a BA in Education from Peru. Elena completed secretarial and business education courses in Peru.	Carmen is a part time food preparation worker in a hospital. Elena is a part time waitress in a hotel.	Sleep issues, chronic headaches, localized pain, back pain, exhaustion, pre-diabetes (Carmen); mother has multiple illnesses including osteoporosis; father has Parkinson's disease
Sharma	Family of 4: Daruun, 39, married to Nutan, 32; sons Rafat 15, Naadir, 9.	All born in India, came to Canada together in 2006 through Federal Skilled Workers stream.	Daruun holds Master of Science, Nutan holds BA in Economics.	Daruun is a part time factory worker, Nutan is part time factory worker.	Nutan born with one kidney. She has heart and breathing problems. Daruun has high blood pressure (faints frequently) and sleep issues.
Bolivar	Household of 5: Carlos, 24, married to Alicia, 23, son Joshua, 1 year old. Live together with Carlos's brother, Jose, 31, and mother Valencia.	Carlos born in USA (parents from Ecuador), moved to Canada in 1988 with parents; Alicia, born in Ecuador, came in 2009 sponsored by Carlos.	Alicia began accounting degree in Ecuador. Carlos completed high school and one year of college in Canada.	Carlos works part time (split shifts) in a major courier company; Alicia is a stay at home mom; Jose unemployed, Valencia unemployed.	Sleep issues, alcohol use, and depression.



The Kumar Family

*When we come to Canada, we had full hope that we will get some good work as part of our education...and we have a lot of years of experience, twenty-three years of experience for our field, accounting field. So, we just hoped that we would not get any problem to get the job. Yes, it will take some time to get the job, but it will not get that difficult. I don't understand one thing... that accounting is same everywhere. Debit and credit is same everywhere. I don't know why they want so much, so keen on having the Canadian experience. It's not going to become vice versa in here. It's going to remain the same. We are not able to get the job with our degrees and when we go for the jobs that we get our degrees in, everybody required the Canadian experience...**Our degrees are worth zero here**...and how long are we have to suffer because we have to survive our families, and we are forced to start the labour job-Akshay*

Summary: The Kumar⁵ family immigrated to Canada in 2004 through the Skilled Workers and Professionals class. They came for better job prospects and a better future. Akshay, 49 years old, his wife Rani, 46, and their 13 year old daughter Karishma, settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of its central location. Rani has a Bachelor of Commerce and a computer programming diploma from India and many years of work experience in office administration and accounting. After being unable to get a job in her field, she took on survival jobs in bakeries and warehouses to make ends meet. In 2007, however, she made a firm decision not to do any more labour jobs and decided (with encouragement from Akshay) to go back to school. She got a Social Service Worker diploma from a private college only to find out that degrees from private colleges are “useless” in terms of getting jobs. After that, she did volunteer work in four community agencies. The last one led to her getting a job as a program coordinator for an after-school program. However, this is a part-time (20 hours/week) low-paying contract job with no security or benefits. And every summer, Rani worries about whether the contract will be renewed. Akshay has a Bachelor of Commerce, a diploma in Industrial Purchase and Material Management (IPMM) and 23 years of work experience in accounting from India. When he could not find a job in his field, Akshay was “forced” to take on manual labour jobs through temp agencies. After suffering a work place hand injury in 2007, and a slip and fall in 2009, he is now unemployed. He is not able to do labour jobs even if he wants to. In spite of their strong qualifications, this is the story of how the Kumar family has become stuck in precarious jobs and is ‘working rough, living poor.’

⁵ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Kumar Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled “Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor.” Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized ‘visible minority’ immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the ‘Where are the Good Jobs?’ report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

The Kumars came to Canada for a prosperous future for the family. They believed that finding work in their field would not be difficult because of their degrees and over 20 years of rich work experience. They also came to Canada for their daughter Karishma's future. Though they had stable and well-paying jobs back in India, they decided: "let's go there, and let's make [Karishma's] future better." The family used their life savings and borrowed several thousand dollars from relatives to cover the application costs, landing fees and other expenses related to moving to Canada. They settled in the Black Creek area because amenities like groceries, public transit, and schools were readily available.

Initially, both Rani and Akshay tried many strategies and government funded employment services to find stable employment in their field, but none of these proved to be useful. Consequently, to make ends meet, both of them began to rely on temp agencies. Initially, this was for survival purposes. However, they found themselves getting pushed deeper and deeper into a cycle of temporary, precarious, low-paying, manual labour jobs. Rani felt that her good communication skills and her extensive office skills would make it fairly easy to find a stable office job in Canada. Both Rani and Akshay were shocked how employers did not value their accounting experience from India though accounting systems are very similar around the world.

Rani made a decision in 2007 to stop working in manual labour jobs and try out new strategies to get an office level job. With encouragement and support from Akshay, she decided to "study something further." She carefully assessed the labour market conditions and strategically opted to change occupation and study social work/service instead. She had read in a local newspaper that "Canada is going to need a lot of Social Workers" particularly those that can work with immigrants from different backgrounds. Since she felt she had good communication skills and knew Gujarati, Hindi and Marathi, Rani thought "okay, social worker type of job is the best thing."

Rani found out about a one year community service worker diploma program offered by a private college in Toronto that promised good employment prospects. She took \$14,000 in Ontario Student Aid

Program loan (OSAP) and successfully completed this diploma in 2009 with high grades "in the nineties". However, Rani was devastated to find out this "Canadian diploma" was also not really recognized. In fact, an employer once asked her why she didn't go to "Humber" or other reputed college. At the time, Rani had believed that the program she took was a fast track job-gearred program from a reputable college. She did not know that diplomas from private colleges did not carry as much weight in the Canadian job market. It was waste of time and money. She felt lied to by the private college which had boasted high job success rate.

Unable to find employment, Rani started volunteering at multiple community agencies. In total she did volunteer work in four different community agencies for over a year. In 2010, Rani got a part-time After-School Program Coordinator position at an organization where she had volunteered. While Rani is relieved to be working in the social service sector, she is frustrated that this job is not full-time, is temporary, and offers no benefits. Her contract was extended once. Her employer did not inform her until the very last week that her contract would be extended for another year, which Rani recalls as being one of the most stressful experiences. Rani is worried that the same thing will happen again this year.

To make matters worse, Rani has no work hours during the summer vacation period (July and August) which means that each summer she has to find temporary work. Her work hours are irregular (2:30pm to 6:30pm) and she only gets 20 hours of work a week. She gets paid just over minimum wage (\$12.25 per hour) bringing in about \$1,400 a month. She receives no extended health coverage or other benefits. She began receiving holiday pay only from last year after the government introduced mandatory holiday pay legislation for people in temporary positions. She continues to apply everywhere, including through temp agencies, in hopes of getting a more stable job.

Akshay has had it worse. With his 23 years of accounting work experience, Akshay expected that he wouldn't have much difficulty getting a job in his field, particularly because "accounting is same everywhere." In addition, Akshay had technical

expertise doing purchase and management in the industrial sector.

Like Rani, Akshay tried many job search strategies including applying online, word of mouth, networking, and even candidly talking on the bus with other South Asians about how and where to find work. At the end of 2004, after doing many “odd jobs,” (including as line cook at major fast food companies), Akshay finally got a permanent job as a Machine Operator with an ink factory through a temp agency. He found out about this temp agency and this type of job through a friend. This job paid \$19/hour and had excellent benefits, including extended health coverage and pension.

Though this job gave some financial stability to the family bring their household income to about \$4,000/month. However, Akshay wasn't satisfied with this job because it was not in accounting and involved difficult manual labour with lots of heavy lifting. Every day, he had to lift and transport about fifty drums of ink, each weighing 200 kg. Akshay's fears came true when he was badly injured at work in 2007. He wound up in the emergency room due to a severe muscle tear and intense pain on his shoulders. He could barely raise his hands over his head. Akshay had never questioned the unreasonable lifting requirement of his job.

Akshay was relieved to receive Workers Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) compensation to cover for his medical and other expenses, allowing Akshay to focus on getting better in order to return to work. However, in 2008, he was seriously injured again; he slipped and fell on ice, resulting in his ankles needing an operation. Since this second injury happened outside of a work setting, WSIB did not cover it. Akshay feels that it is connected since the previous hand injury made it difficult for Akshay to prevent the fall. He received some long-term disability support through his employer's private insurance program. Akshay mentioned that, unlike WSIB staff, his employer was very helpful in this process. It is then that he fully understood how important it is for workplaces to have good extended benefits and insurance coverage.

With two serious injuries, it has been hard for Akshay to get well enough to go back to work. He hoped to get a better job that is more reflective of his field and not manual labour based. But since this has

been hard to get, Akshay was at least hoping to go back to his previous job as a Machine Operator. However, the factory that Akshay used to work at shut down so he has no job to go back to.

To survive during this difficult time, the Kumar family ended up using most of their savings they brought from India which they had invested in GICs; only \$1,500 remains from their savings now. In 2009, they very reluctantly applied for social assistance since the unstable income from Rani's job was insufficient for them to make ends meet. Rani described this as: “a hard decision because I didn't want to go on [social assistance]. I mean for us it seems like something like begging, you know. And we are not used to that. I really don't like it but what to do? Especially we have to pay the rent. The rent is also so high . . . it is not like as if we were happy to go on social assistance.”

While Akshay found that WSIB medical coverage and compensation for the first injury offered some relief, the Kumar family quickly realized how the WSIB process makes it difficult for injured workers to make ends meet while recovering. Akshay and his lawyer are steadfastly pursuing his WSIB case for the second injury. Even if Akshay does win his case, he won't have much money left after paying the lawyer fees (25% of the total WSIB compensation amount) and ‘back paying’ Ontario Works for the social assistance they received while they were waiting for their WSIB claim. And since Akshay is still not well enough to return to work the Kumar family feels that they will have no choice but to go back on social assistance. The Kumar family is very frustrated to be caught in this vicious cycle of

“Because, as soon as he gets the money from WSIB, we are going to be out of social assistance, right? Whatever the situation may be, maybe if he's having a job or not, or he gets a job immediately or not, or maybe my job because my job is part-time and contract. So maybe my contract is also done at that time. So, like I don't know because my contract will finish in June. So, by the time the decision is made, and we have nothing with us, no job...both of us, and then we at least we can survive on that money [from WSIB]...what we get. If they [Ontario Works] is going to take it back, what's the use? We have to again apply for social assistance.” - Rani

precarious and unsafe jobs, deteriorating health, and low income and fear that they might become dependent on social assistance.

Facing discrimination in the labour market, in addition to bad jobs, has badly scarred the Kumars. Biting back words, Akshay recalled how he was the only Asian in the workplace and about the direct and indirect discrimination he has faced from employers and work colleagues. He felt that, compared to White employees, his employer would always give him the most difficult work. He also noticed how his White colleagues would help each other but would never lend him a hand even when he asked. “Nobody came to help me” Akshay said.

Rani faced discrimination while volunteering at a community centre. A senior staff once told her to go to ESL classes because of her accent. Rani repeatedly heard prejudiced comments like “Asians smell bad” that made her feel unwelcome.

The Kumars question why they are not getting stable employment. Akshay mentioned how they regularly hear in the news about new jobs being created but never hear back when they apply: “last month the Ontario government announced they would create thirty-four thousand jobs. When we are applying on that, nobody is calling us...where are the jobs?” They are also beginning to wonder why they bothered coming to Canada. Often, Rani and Akshay feel like going back to India but console each other to stay here for the sake of their daughter’s future.

Due to the precarious job situations, the Kumar family has been facing severe income insecurity, particularly during the last couple of years. Their household income dropped from over \$4,000 per month during 2004-2005 to \$1,500 per month in 2009. With the bulk of their income going to pay rent for their small one-bedroom apartment (\$950/month), they feel like they are living on the edge. The income supplements, tax benefits and tax credits they receive from the government (e.g. Canada Child Tax Benefit, Working Income Tax Benefit) are not just buffers against poverty but are vital in terms of keeping themselves afloat. They are reluctantly using food banks and are trying to save where ever they can.

Because of a major decline in household income, the Kumars feel that they can’t enjoy family life like before, including enjoying some entertainment or dinners outside. They have given up their plans to have more children. They haven’t been able to afford to go back to India to visit their relatives since coming here. Instead of sending money back home as they had hoped to do, they have to regularly ask their family from India to help them financially.

Their health has been rapidly going downhill since they came to Canada. The painful hand and ankle injuries that Akshay suffered seems to be getting worse and he often wakes up in the middle of night screaming with pain. He has developed diabetes which seems to be deteriorating due to all the stress, and is currently taking insulin.

Rani has been suffering from thyroid problems. Both said that they are experiencing high blood pressure. They both feel that the biggest reason why their health is becoming worse is the constant mental stress caused by their job insecurity and financial worry. While on social assistance, they receive coverage for prescription medicine such as insulin. They are concerned that they are going to lose this coverage once they get out of social assistance and end up back in precarious types of jobs with no extended health insurance coverage.

Rani and Akshay feel that their most important family responsibility is spending more time with their daughter, Karishma. However, their unstable jobs sometimes make this hard. Rani feels particularly bad when her work hours as an after-school program coordinator limits the time she can spend with her daughter after Karishma comes back from school. Also, due to their limited income, Rani and Akshay feel really sad that they cannot afford to send Karishma to extra-curricular activities like singing and dancing classes.

Despite these difficulties, the Kumars make every effort to maintain positive family relationships by eating together, watching TV together and spending quality time with each other whenever they can. Akshay tries to help out by doing housework, “I move to Canada and now I am master in mopping and sweeping... so it’s my

responsibility to clean up everything.” Rani feels fortunate to have a supportive and encouraging husband who shares household responsibilities and inspires her to pursue her career goals.

Rani and Akshay make decisions together and provide emotional support to each other during difficult times. Rani believes that although their finances are stressful, the family will only become stronger after overcoming these challenges.

Based on their experience, Rani and Akshay strongly recommend that other newcomers avoid taking on manual labour jobs if possible since it can be dangerous to their health. While her volunteer work did lead to a job, Rani suggests not to do volunteer work for more than six months to avoid being exploited.

Overall, the family feels that “ninety percent of Canada has been disappointing.” Not being able to find a stable job in spite of their rich skills and experiences has led to broken dreams, a very stressful life, and worsening health. Akshay is still hopeful that they will find good jobs. But Rani seems to be giving up:

We did have the expectation like you know, every person has a dream. So, we had started dreaming about our big house and our child's, and we also had the expectation that I'll have a second child too. But with all the stress... and now, it's not possible. It is not possible at all. I'm mentally tired, stressful, physically tired, [I] go home, make some dinner, and go to bed immediately. The life is totally worse here. Sometimes, I am so full [of pain] and I just burst out like crying. But, [Akshay] is so positive... ↩



The Suárez Family

Money is driving me crazy. I feel like somebody is burning me from the bottom, from below. The 'clouds of rain' is the sense I have bad luck and I can't find something better. I don't have good money so everything is related to my job. If one doesn't have a good job then one can't sleep thinking 'how we are going to make ends meet?' I don't have any chance for a better opportunity in my job; it's a very boring job. It's routinely. You can't have a better opportunity because that is what the job offers. It is routine. . . I am always looking for a better job. – Andreas

Summary: Martina (from Chile; 29 years old) and Andreas (from Argentina; 28 years old) settled in Canada through multiple insecure migration processes.⁶ They both came to Canada in 2001 to reunite with their respective parents who had come to Canada in the 1990s as refugees. Martina's father's refugee application was successful and he sponsored Martina to join him after being apart for 11 years. Andreas's father was deported in 2001 shortly after Andreas arrived in Canada. Andreas and Martina met and married in Canada. With families located in different countries, the young Suárez couple was unsure about the best place for them to settle. In 2004, they went to Chile for a couple of months and then to Spain (Andreas had some relatives there) where they lived for 3 years. In Spain, they were shocked to face "intense racism" and so decided to return to Canada in 2006. Since they had limited financial means, the pair lived for a couple of years with Martina's father, Juan, in his house located in the Black Creek area. Their son, Ricardo, was born in 2007. Martina's career plan is to be an accountant while Andreas hopes to join the armed force or to become a nurse. However, because of having to move so often, they were unable to pursue post-secondary education. After coming back to Canada, financial difficulties forced them to sideline their educational goals and start working instead. Andrea tried to join the Canadian Armed Forces but bureaucratic barriers prevented him from doing so. He then got a forklift operator certificate and managed to find a full-time job through a friend as a Shipper/Receiver in a housing material distribution company. Though the job is full-time with benefits, he is unsatisfied with this job because the work is night shift (4pm to 1am), low paying (\$13.50/hour), and consists of heavy and routine type of work. Whenever he can, Andreas works cash labour jobs to supplement the income. Along with taking care of their son and studying, Martina juggles different part-time jobs including working in a donut factory and cleaning. This is the story of the young Suárez family with big dreams but 'working rough living poor.'

⁶ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Suárez Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled "Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor." Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized 'visible minority' immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the 'Where are the Good Jobs?' report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

The young Suárez family had a difficult time finding a country they could call home. It took several years of living in different countries and being separated from their respective families for lengthy periods, before they settled in Canada. This was partly because Martina and Andreas were from different countries (Chile and Argentina). Moreover, it was because their parents had faced difficulty in migrating to Canada as refugees in the 1990s. This is not uncommon for second generation immigrants from Hispanic communities whose parents faced forced migration, and onerous refugee claimant application processes in Canada.

Martina's father entered Canada as a refugee in the 1990s from Chile to escape from political instability. Martina's mother passed away when she was 2 years old so Martina and her brother were looked after by their grandmother in Chile. Martina's father would send money regularly to Chile. After being separated for 11 years, Martina's father managed to get his refugee application approved and sponsored Martina to join him in Canada in 2001. She was delighted to be finally reunited with her father. Martina was living a comfortable middle-class life back in Chile including studying in a private school with the money her father was sending back home. She assumed that her father was also living prosperously in Canada. However, she was shocked to find that her father was in fact juggling several back breaking jobs just to make ends meet and to send whatever he could back home.

After realizing this, Martina's priorities shifted from studying to helping out financially. At 19 years old, she got a job as a janitor at a local mall cleaning tables. Lack of time to focus on studies combined with a language barrier made it difficult for Martina to do well in school. "I had to start working and the language was difficult because people did not understand me and I didn't do well in school because I worked full time and it took me longer to pass certain levels," recalled Martina, "I didn't have enough time to sleep so I was tired."

Andreas's father left Argentina in the late 1990s to "escape poverty" and had come to Canada on a visitor visa for "a better future." He filed for refugee status but his refugee claim took a long time.

In 2001, Andreas arrived in Canada, also on visitor visa, to join his father. Martina and Andreas met in Canada and fell in love. Sadly, shortly after Andreas arrived in Canada, his father was deported back to Argentina. Andreas chose to stay in Canada with Martina.

The young couple married soon after. However, with families in different countries, they had a tough time deciding where to settle. Initially, they went to Chile but quickly realized that this was not an ideal setting for them. The couple then moved to Spain where Andreas had some relatives. They stayed there for 3 years doing various small jobs to survive. The couple found Spain to be very "racist" and was deeply saddened by how Martina was discriminated against because of her darker complexion.

Martina became pregnant in 2006 and both Andreas and Martina decided to move back to Canada because they believed it would be a good place to raise their child. Martina, who had Canadian permanent residency status by this time, came first and then applied for Andreas to get permanent residency status through the spousal sponsorship program. Their son, Ricardo, was born in 2007 while Andreas was still in Spain and Martina was living with her father in Black Creek. After the sponsorship application was approved, Andreas joined Martina and their newborn son in Canada. After a couple of years, the Suárez couple moved to their own apartment also in Black Creek.

Education was a priority for both Martina and Andreas. While they were moving from one country to another, however, Martina and Andreas were unable to pursue post-secondary studies. After they came back to Canada in 2006, it was difficult for them to go back to school after the long break. Also, with their newborn son, they were pressed to start working to earn money rather than pursue studies. Andreas wanted to join the Canadian Armed Forces but was refused entry because he could not get his Argentinian high school transcripts on time and was not yet a Canadian citizen. The other ambition Andreas has is to work in the healthcare sector as a nurse. However, mounting barriers have systematically kept Andreas and Martina in low paying manual labour types of jobs.

Andreas and Martina used many different job search strategies including applying online, in-person and through friends and networks. Andreas went to two temp agencies. After negative experiences with them, he decided to “never” use them again. Andreas specifically goes directly to potential employers to demonstrate his skills in person: “well, I sometimes have found jobs by going into a place and speaking to the owner and saying ‘look, watch how I work.’” However, these have not led to anything better paid or more stable.

Since joining the armed forces was not an option, Andreas needed to find potential good alternative. He completed a Forklift Operator certificate in 2009, after several short contract jobs, he managed to get a full-time job as a Receiver/Shipper at a large housing material distribution company. His friend was working at this company and helped Andreas get this job. The position involved routine work of loading and unloading trucks.

Andreas was on probation for one year before the company made his position permanent. He is still concerned that he does not have a written job offer contract that states that the position is permanent. Andreas is glad that this company offers extended dental and health benefits, vacation and overtime pay, and sick leave provisions, but he is very unsatisfied with this job for many reasons. The job only pays him \$13.50 per hour which means that he is only able to earn about \$2,100 per month working full-time, 6 days a week. He did some research and found that other companies pay \$16 per hour or more for this type of job. He has asked for a salary increase; “the [employer] says that because the company is new that is why they pay low.” Knowing how much the company makes compared to how much he is getting paid makes him very frustrated. During the 2 years that he has worked at the company, he has only received \$0.75 raise in salary.

In addition to working 6 days a week, Andreas takes on other cash jobs, particularly doing cleaning, whenever he can in order to supplement his income. Another reason why Andreas does not like this job is because it is an odd hour shift job (4pm to 1am) that takes away from spending quality time with his wife and young son. The routine nature of the work involved – loading and unloading trucks – makes the

job unsatisfying and uninspiring. This is not what Andreas wants to be doing for the rest of his life. The company offers little professional development opportunities for workers at his level. Andreas one day went and asked the employer “if they help with tuition fees for college and they said ‘no’.”

Andreas has noticed two things about the company that concerns him. The first is that the company prefers to hire recent immigrants, particularly those with low English language fluency so the company can pay them low wages. Second, he feels that the training and enforcement of safety protocols is below the required standards. Sometimes he wonders if these two practices are connected. He worries about the negative financial and health impacts this could have on immigrant workers: “there is nobody there to enforce [safety protocols]...there are the safety issues, because if somebody falls down and gets hurt they can say ‘well, he didn’t speak English’ and they wash their hands... the owners of companies, of businesses they hire people that just arrived because it is cheaper.”

Andreas wants to raise these issues and take action but doesn’t know where to start. Andreas recalls how some people at the company tried to unionize but were met with harsh consequences. “A local union came to the company,” shared Andreas, “and now the company has security guards so they don’t come close.” The employer also made it clear if workers try to unionize again, he will just sell the company resulting in major lay-offs for current employees. This put Andreas and many other workers in a dilemma. Andreas is aware of the benefits of having a union but mentions that he now “prefers not to be unionized because if the union comes to the company then the owner will sell it.” For now, he feels stuck in this job. He still hopes that one day he can study to become a nurse. However, with the long gap from school, he does not know how to make this happen.

Martina also has used a host of strategies and services to find jobs. But these only lead to low paying manual labour types of jobs. Though her English language fluency is good enough for everyday use, she doesn’t think that it is strong enough when looking for jobs. She gets nervous about her English when called for job interviews.

Friends, particularly from Hispanic communities in Toronto, are her key source of connection to jobs. However, since most of her friends are stuck in low paying manual labour jobs, Martina only gets similar types of jobs through friends. Martina has also tried government-funded employment programs for youth, but the jobs available were low paying and temporary – no better than jobs available through temp agencies. Since daycare costs are very expensive, Martina decided to stay home to look after Ricardo. This limits the jobs she can pursue.



Photo-narrative: 1"Searching" by Celena: This picture depicts one of the many promising ads placed around Black Creek; like this van claiming there are jobs, while many Black Creek residents still struggle to obtain well paying, stable employment.

In the summer of 2009, Martina got a ‘temp’ job for six weeks at a donut factory. She got paid \$10.50 per hour but the temp agency took \$1.50 on this so her take home pay rate was only \$9.00 per hour. Through a friend, Martina then did a cleaning job for six months; the work hours were 9pm to 12pm, which meant leaving for work after putting her son to bed. She also briefly worked at a factory folding sheets for one month. The machines were so loud that she had a hard time hearing what anybody was saying.

Instead of doing these short low paying jobs, Martina has now decided to focus her energy on her studies. She is currently doing college preparation courses to make up for the long gap in her education. She hopes to get a degree in accounting. She is glad that the public college she is studying at provides

free daycare services for her son while she is studying. A government program also helps with covering transportation costs to and from the college. She views these supports as crucial in enabling low-income mothers like her to pursue education.

In terms of discrimination, the Suárez family are relieved that they don’t face blatant racism in Canada like they experienced in Spain. However, Andreas is very aware of systemic discrimination and prejudice that exists in Canada. At one company, he recalls how a few incidents of theft by people from Spanish-speaking backgrounds led the company to “automatically catalogue every Spanish-speaking as being the same.” At the sheets factory, Martina was surprised to hear comments from colleagues from racialized backgrounds about her “broken English”, thinking Martina was hard of hearing. She had to explain that she was having a hard time communicating because of the loud noise of the machines.

“Always struggling,” is how the Suárez family characterizes their lives. Since getting their own apartment, their \$2,500 per month household income barely covers their living expenses. Almost half it goes to cover rent for their one bedroom apartment. The monthly payments and insurance for their car eats away another chunk. In spite of this high cost of owning a car, Andreas feels that it is vital for them to have a car both for the long travel to work and to be available to do the other cash jobs: “If I don’t have a car I can’t work. And I can’t make money.” The utility bills then take most of the other income leaving very little for food and other basic expenses. They find that they have to regularly ask Martina’s father for money; they currently owe \$1,500 to her father. Their credit card debt has also been steadily increasing.

They are “very often” worried that food would run out. They frequently use food banks. To save food costs they buy “whatever is on sale” and regularly go to Martina’s father’s place to eat. “Well I cook for 2 days and we go for lunch at my dad’s,” says Martina, “and we buy whatever is on sale and we put together whatever the food bank gives us and that is how we manage.” Martina managed to join a program for single mothers by convincing the program coordinator that she faces very similar

challenges that single mothers do. She receives food and clothing support through this program. Though the food she gets from food banks and food donations are helpful, Martina finds that “half of them are expired aside from crackers and soups.”

The Suárez family has had to cut many corners. In particular, they are very sad that they have had to stop putting money into their son’s RESP account. As Ricardo is growing, they wish that they could put him in martial arts classes and other extracurricular activities. However, they cannot because of financial constraints. When they were living in Martina’s father’s house, their son had his own room. Now he has to sleep in a bunk bed in the same room as his parents. They have noticed that Ricardo does not sleep as well because of this. They have not been able to buy lamps, night tables, and comfortable mattresses for their place.

Their only vacation was a day trip to Niagara Falls two years ago.

The Suárez family wants to move out of Black Creek because they are concerned about safety and security. Their apartment was nearly broken into recently. The increasing violence in the neighborhood makes them worried about their family’s safety. They are aware that the root causes of these problems are unemployment, unstable jobs and poverty. “Well I feel that a parent here has to have two jobs and so he or she doesn’t have a presence or a lot of influence in their child’s life,” asserts Andreas, “so they grow up learning more outside than from us... they don’t get the good from you.” They don’t want to be in this situation.

The Suárez family is experiencing “lots of headaches,” stomach aches, neck pains, lack of sleep, and constant stress due to their current jobs and financial insecurity. Due to stress from work and constant worry about money, both Andreas and Martina often have sleepless nights. Because of this, Martina is worried that Andreas might “fall asleep at the wheels” while driving.

The stress is compounded with a sense of frustration and anger. Andreas used to go to the gym regularly to keep up with his boxing hobby. Due to “mental stress,” he once punched the punching bag so hard that he broke his arm. Even with a broken arm, he

“Because of the financial situation we are going through, what I have in my mind all the time is money. And that makes me stressed and in a bad mood, lots of headaches and neck pain. Stomach aches because everything I eat doesn’t agree with me because I am so stressed, because I eat when I am stressed. And I take pills to be able to sleep because I am a sleeping very little.” - Martina

continued to go to work. Martina has noticed that she has reduced hearing because of the impact of the loud machinery at the factory job.

They have both noticed that the stress weakens their immune system. In the words of Andreas, “what it is, is that I get sicker more frequently like I get a cold.” Both Martina and Andreas are concerned that they are experiencing frequent health problems at such a young age. They are acutely aware of the more serious chronic health problems that these can lead to. “I don’t want to have heart problems,” Andreas says emphatically.

In spite of many difficulties, the Suárez family keeps strong and has developed many tactics to “manage.” Their key strength comes from their positive family relationships: “we have each other and my father.” Whenever, they are having a tough time, “they talk” with each other. They feel fortunate to have Martina’s father there to support them. The Suárez family makes sure that they spend quality time with each other and their son whenever they can. In fact, they mentioned that going for walks in the park with their son helps relieve their stress. They watch comedy movies, play video games together with their son, and they bake a cake for Ricardo every weekend to share some family fun time. They try their best not to let Ricardo be impacted by their troubles.

The work division remains along traditional gender lines. Martina is responsible for all household responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, budgeting and caring for their son. As Andreas put it unquestioningly, “she cleans, cooks, she budgets and I work.” In reality, Martina also works whenever she can in addition to taking care of all household responsibilities. They actively access local community programs for low-income families. Martina, in particular, keeps herself informed about local programs and services and strategically

negotiates access to these programs. They are glad that at least dental and other health costs are covered through the extended health insurance program offered from Andreas's job.

Martina really hopes that she can complete her studies and get a job in accounting. Andreas is always actively "looking for a better job," with better pay so he does not have to juggle two jobs. Andreas is looking into joining the police force and has passed all of his tests. Another option for him is to go into nursing. "The idea is to go to college, the idea is not to stay and be a factory worker all of our lives", he says.

In the future, they would like to start a Tim Horton's franchise. Based on his negative experiences with working for other people, Andreas argues that "it is better to work for oneself than for somebody else." They have observed how Canadians love "food and coffee" and believe that opening a "Timmy's" will be a sound economic option for the future. However, they are aware that due to high investment costs, this dream may be very hard to achieve.

Their key priority now is to make sure that their son is able to get a good education. They have seen a positive shift in how their community prioritizes education. "Because in the Spanish community is very well seen that you work so the idea is to kill yourself working," recalls Martina. "Now they are changing, my father tells me: yes you have to study, you can't kill yourself working as I did, you have to go and study." The Suárez family really hopes that their son can study and become a "professional" so he does not have to face the same "problems" they are facing:

That [our son] studies and that he becomes a professional. Even our budget is so tight we are saving so that he goes to study. That at least he has good money to go to study for the first 2 years [of college/university]. Then he can find a scholarship or something. That he has a house, that he has his own car and that he doesn't have the problems we are having right now.





The Nguyen Family

We wanted to come to Canada to have a better life and be more prosperous here. I hoped I could find good job here in Canada, but it is not easy when I have my daughter who is not in very good health condition. I have to stay at home to take care of my [disabled] daughter. It is very very difficult, for example, if I want to work at the factory I have to wake up very early and leave the house at 6am. I have to feed her and pick up my daughter and not sure I would have enough time... – Phuong

Summary: The Nguyen⁷ family came to Canada hoping for a better life, better health care and support for their daughters; particularly their eldest who has a severe disability. Giang, 50 years old, came to Canada in 1999 as a refugee, leaving behind his wife Phuong, and daughters Kim, 6, and Lien, 2. Giang got permanent residency status for Canada in 2005; for the first couple of years he had “no papers” and the remaining years were spent waiting for his refugee claim to come through. During this period, Giang went from one “cash job” to another in order to support himself and send money back home. Once he got his refugee claim approved in 2005, Giang sponsored his wife Phuong, now 36, and daughters, now 17 and 13. They joined him in 2007 after being apart for 8 long years. The Nguyens settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of its large Vietnamese population, making it easier to keep in touch with community members about available jobs and other supports. Giang worked in a factory in Vietnam and was hoping to get a better job in Canada. Until he received his permanent residency status, Giang was forced to work in jobs where they pay cash or don’t ask for “papers”. The only jobs he could get were in small factories and construction companies. Also, because he lacked legal status, Giang did not have access to English language classes or other formal skill training programs. Whatever skills he learnt, he did so through his Vietnamese friends. Currently, he works as an on-call contract worker for a small hardwood flooring company run by another Vietnamese family. The company has been hit hard by the recent recession and the number of contracts Giang gets has significantly decreased since 2009. His limited English language fluency restricts the types of jobs he can get. Phuong had hoped that she would be able to work in Canada. Without social supports, however, she has to dedicate all of her time to taking care of her disabled daughter. After six years of living with insecure immigration status, facing acute language barriers, and being stuck in a very precarious type of job, this is the story of the Nguyen family’s experience with ‘working rough, living poor.’

⁷ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Nguyen Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled “Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor.” Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized ‘visible minority’ immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the ‘Where are the Good Jobs?’ report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

The Nguyen family had heard from a friend that it was fairly easy for people to immigrate to Canada and that life would be better here than in Vietnam. Giang had completed grade 10 in Vietnam, the highest level of high school at that time, and was working in a factory. Phuong had completed grade 12 in Vietnam in the later developed curriculum. Their economic situation in Vietnam was very poor. They decided to take the risk of coming to Canada “to have a better life and be more prosperous here.” In 1999, Giang borrowed money from a friend and managed to travel to Canada leaving his wife and two young daughters behind in Vietnam.

After arriving in Canada, Giang did not know much about the immigration or refugee application process and so continued to live here without legal status. Through a friend, Giang was able to get a job at a small factory where they did not ask for “papers.” With this job, Giang was able to regularly send money back home to his wife and daughters. After working there for three years, his boss asked everyone for residency papers and Giang was fired. He then applied for refugee claimant status. During this time, Giang learned how to lay hardwood floors from a friend, and started doing mostly “cash jobs” in home renovation type of work or whatever labour work he could find.

Giang received his permanent residency status in 2005. Shortly after, he got a job at a small hardwood floor company through one of his friends. He has worked there ever since. Similarly to other people working in small construction and renovation companies, Giang’s job is very unstable. It is mostly on an on-call basis. Giang might be called for two flooring jobs one week, and not be called at all the next week. The company has been badly affected by the recent economic downturn. Before 2009, he says, “the summer was busier and a better time but now both summer and winter are not.” Also, there are too many workers for the amount of contract work available in this field. Occasionally, Giang’s friends will call him to help them on other construction and repair types of jobs. But even these have started to be less frequent.

Like for many people working in small construction companies, Giang does not get any benefits like

extended health coverage nor is he entitled to holiday pay or sick leave. One day, he injured his finger so badly on the job that he could only work with one hand for a period of time. His employer did not encourage him to apply for worker’s compensation, did not cover Giang’s time off or the cost of the medical care he needed, and took no measures to increase safety on the job. Giang did not know anything about compensation and support that injured workers can receive through the WSIB. Though, he is able to use both hands now, Giang still feels pain in that finger to this day.

Phuong is a full time caregiver to their older daughter (Kim) who has a severe disability. She had hoped that she would be able to work in Canada to support the family. She thought there would be enough social support here for Kim that it would free up some time for Phuong to work. While she is satisfied with the healthcare services that Kim receives, Phuong dedicates all of her time to take care of her daughter at home.

She is at home most of the time and rarely goes out even for social events. Since Phuong cannot work, she is on social assistance.

“I hoped I could find good job here in Canada, but actually it is not easy when I have my daughter who is in not in very good health conditions. I have to take care of her and I cannot look after her if I have to go to work. Any type of job would have been good. But it is very very difficult. For example, if I want to work at the factory I have to wake up very early and leave the house at 6am. I have to feed her and pick up my other daughter and not sure I would have enough time.” - Phuong

Language is the main barrier for the Nguyens: “the principal barrier is the language. It is very hard to find good job because we don’t speak the language.” Thus, Giang finds work only through his connections with the Vietnamese community. If people who they work for “talk too much English, we don’t understand.” Language barriers combined with “being born outside of Canada” creates a double disadvantage of “not having much information on even where to go to get information.”

Language barrier also makes them more at risk of being mistreated and discriminated at work. The discrimination they face makes the family feel sad and “uncomfortable” but they are unsure of their rights around reporting workplace discrimination. In turn, because of language barriers, they feel that they “cannot communicate about what happened.”

Both would like to take English language courses but there are many barriers. Phuong hasn’t been able to find time because of the full time care she gives to her older daughter. Giang did join English language courses but recently stopped attending. An irregular job schedule, the long gap in education and challenges in concentrating in class makes it difficult to complete his classes.

“Sometimes he cannot express well about what he want to say because of the language barrier so when people treat sometimes my husband not very well he cannot respond to them because of the language.” - Phuong

The unstable work conditions in Giang’s hardwood flooring job creates a lot of financial insecurity and irregularity in the lives of the Nguyen family. They don’t have a stable flow of income. Winter months are particularly hard. Also, the employer sometimes delays in paying Giang. Since the social assistance amount that Phuong receives is calculated based on Giang’s bi-weekly pay stub amount, the delays in getting paid also delays when they receive their social assistance money.

The Nguyens are barely surviving on the little income that Giang brings in, supplemented by what they receive from social assistance, other government funded income supplements and tax rebates for low-income families. The financial support they receive from Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities program (about \$410 per month) is crucial in covering some of the Kim’s additional medical expenses (e.g. frequent travel costs to hospitals, assistive medical devices).

The Nguyens are not able to invest in retirement savings plans, education savings plans for their children, or other savings engines. Giang has never worked in a job where an employer contributed to retirement savings plans. At the time of the

interview, they did not know what these savings or retirement plans were.



Photo-narrative: 2 “Untitled.” Photography by Moses: The busy intersection of Jane Street and Finch Ave, where carpools regularly pick up eager workers for temporary labour jobs.

The family tries their best to save to prepare for periods when Giang is not called in to work. They save money by not spending on recreation and rarely going out for fun activities or social gatherings. Consequently, Phuong mentioned that they hardly have any friends and feel very isolated.

Their health is becoming directly and indirectly affected by all these factors. Both Phuong and Giang are experiencing chronic back pain. For Giang, his back pain, largely due to his job is making it increasingly difficult to do heavy work or work for long hours, “We are not very healthy and we are not young enough so we cannot do heavy job.” At the same time, however, he takes any job that is available even if they are heavy jobs: “any kind of jobs... if somebody asks him to do a job he’ll take it.” Phuong is starting to have a lot of back pain due to all the lifting she has to do while taking care of Kim. All the mental stress from not having stable jobs and secure income is taking a heavy toll

During Kim’s medical visits to the doctor or hospital, both parents usually have to go. Since the medical visits for Kim are quite frequent, it limits the hours that Giang can work as well as the type of job he can do.

Whenever the family needs help, they turn to their local Vietnamese community agency for guidance. Although the agency has not been able to help them find stable jobs, they help by translating documents and providing information about various community resources. Apart from this, friends within the Vietnamese community are their sole source of emotional support.

The mounting barriers have left Giang and his family in a cycle of despair. They have no time or equitable support to further develop their English language abilities and no real opportunities to develop other professional skills in order to

improve their employment outcomes. They are limited to their single income, have no extended medical benefits to overcome deteriorating health, and have little choice but to keep working in the precarious job that is making them sick. Phuong says, “if we don’t go to work, we get hungry.” They wonder if their family situation will ever improve:

There have been 3 or 4 months [Giang] had had no job. We’ve got [no work] since several months. I just want the Canadian economy to go up so that they have enough jobs for my husband. If he has a stable and a good job, we accept it. We would find another solution.





The Omar Family

I didn't think it would take so much time to take a job, although I can assure you that I spend all the time looking for job, everything. Like I [sent] hundred and hundred and hundred of resumes out there. Sometime, most of the times I don't hear back from them, and few times some nice guys send me a letter and say 'thank you,' that's it. Maybe a hundred or 150 resumes just to get one or 2 interviews... and it seems like from the people around me it seems like... forcing me to the labour job, to make a living, you know what I mean -- Sayed

Summary: Sayed Omar⁸, currently 44 years old, came to Toronto, Canada from Egypt in 1997 through the Federal Skilled Workers and Professionals program. He has a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from Egypt and was expecting "a better future, financially and career wise" in Canada. However, everything was the opposite of what he expected. In spite of trying all strategies, he was not able to get a good stable job. The initial years were the most difficult and the \$10,000 in savings that he brought from back home got used up very quickly just to survive. He got his first job in 1999 in an orthotics factory. Though the job asked for someone with artistic skills, Sayed felt it did not make good use of his capacity. Shortly after, he got an offer for a full-time job as a graphic designer for a local newspaper in a small town in Nova Scotia. Though he did not want to move to a small town, he accepted this job because it was in his field. He worked in this company for one and half years but got laid off as part of "downsizing." He then came back to Toronto but still could not get a stable job. In 2001, he returned to Egypt to marry Hanem, currently 30 years old, and then sponsored her to immigrate to Canada. Hanem has a BA in Islamic Studies. They currently have three children, ages 7 years, 5 years, and 14 months. The Omars settled in Black Creek because of its central location. Sayed got fed up of juggling precarious jobs. A friend who was operating a self-employed sign-making business encouraged them to do the same. Sayed started his own sign making business in 2005. This business did fairly well for the first two years. However the recession hit in 2008 and Sayed watched his client base, particularly other small business owners, dwindle rapidly. While raising three children, Hanem tries to also contribute financially by running a small baby-sitting service in her home and doing odd catering jobs. However, these jobs have been hard to get lately. Hanem helps with office work for their family business. Their income has been decreasing while expenses have been increasing substantially with three children. The sign-making work has led to many injuries for Sayed and is a constant source of stress. This is the story of the Omar family 'working rough, living poor.'

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Sayed was hopeful that he would get a job in his field as a graphic designer in Canada. He was “hugely surprised” to find that his Fine Arts degree and many years of work experience in large companies in Egypt and Kuwait was not “worth anything” in Canada. It was “almost impossible” to get a stable job here as an immigrant.

“Before I come here, I thought if I’m accepted by the government to come as an immigrant, my certificate or my degrees should be recognized, but I was hugely surprised to see that my degree doesn’t worth anything. It doesn’t worth even the paper [that the degree is printed on].” – Sayed.

Sayed tried all possible employment services and job search strategies including “send[ing] hundreds and hundreds of resumes,” going to job search agencies, and upgrading his skills. Sayed was “ready to accept any salary.” A good stable job in his field was nowhere in sight. To survive in the first year, he used up all of the savings he brought with him to Canada: “I got about 10 grand with me from Kuwait and spent it all within about a year; and I was so so upset... because I got this money through hard time.”

In 1999, Sayed took on a job in an orthotics company to make ends meet. He got this job through a job search program run by a community agency, the same agency where he was taking a multi-media course to upgrade his skills. The orthotics company wanted someone with “artistic skills” but Sayed found that he was not able to use his skills that much in this job. Nonetheless, he was thankful to the employment counselor at this community agency who took time to call potential employers on his behalf rather than just give him a list of job postings like other employment counselors he had worked with. Sayed repeated throughout the interview the need for more services that actually linked people to employers and good jobs.

The job at the orthotics company was full-time and with fairly good pay and benefits. Sayed kept looking for a job that was more directly related to his field though. He started applying outside of Toronto as well. Shortly after, he got a job offer as a graphic designer from a local newspaper in “very small town” in Nova Scotia. The boss of the newspaper company even suggested to Sayed to come and first

see the town before deciding to take the job offer. Though the town was “so boring... with nothing there” he decided to take this job because he thought it was more fitting to his career path: “I said I am going to build my career, if you know what I mean.” The job was full-time with benefits but the pay was low. He worked for this newspaper company for one and half years. He got laid off when the company lost a big contract and had to downsize. Sayed stayed in Nova Scotia for another 6 months hoping to find another job there. Since he could not get a job there, he moved back to Toronto in 2001. Between 2001 and 2005 he had three different contract jobs, each one lasting about a year and half.

In 2001, he went for a visit to Egypt. While there he met Hanem and they decided to get married. Soon after, he sponsored her to immigrate to Canada. Hanem was pregnant with their first child when she landed in Canada.

Sayed got fed up with precarious jobs and determinedly said “enough is enough, I have to do something.” Also, having a family pushed him to look for other alternatives that could potentially provide higher and more stable income. “Before it doesn’t matter for me, work for one year, stay home for one year, no problem.” recalls Sayed. “But now you have a family, you have to have a backup for yourself, you know what I mean, I can’t stay up and down up and down like that.” A friend who had a sign-making business in London, Ontario, encouraged Sayed to start a similar business and offered to teach him about it. Sayed had never run a business but decided to try it anyway. It was somewhat related to his graphic design field. While on Employment Insurance, Sayed took a 6 month course on how to start a self-employed small business; he was glad that the “whole program” cost was covered through Ontario’s Second Career program. He registered his sign-making business in 2005.

The business did fairly well in the first two years. He recalled how he used to work 50 to 60 hours weekly to meet demand. He had to learn how to do everything from making signs to invoicing, accounting and delivery. He noticed that many of his clients were immigrants themselves who decided to start their own small business because they could not find a stable job in their field. It was sad but

comforting to share stories about similar experiences with them. From 2008 onwards, things went downhill mainly due to the recession. This was made worse by high taxes and a new city by-law that prohibited signs from being displayed on sidewalks, therefore eliminating a large percentage of Sayed's client base.

"From 2 years now, I would say I lost about 25% to 35% of my customers," he recalls "because they shut down their businesses." He noticed that mostly it was other small businesses like him that shut down or were negatively affected. "So many of my customers now they close down because too much taxation and too many by-laws over there hitting businesses of small guys," Sayed mentions. "I'm not talking about Canadian Tire or Wal-Mart. No I'm talking about small guy who has a dollar store or pizza, not Pizza Pizza, but small pizza guy or a restaurant." Increasingly, some of his clients get sign work done from him on credit and would not pay for many months. With the decline in his clientele, Sayed now spends about 2 days a week looking for clients by putting ads on the internet, posting flyers, and sending faxes. With decreased revenue, he cannot hire other people to help him with heavy tasks like lifting and putting up signs. Though "business is not steady," Sayed feels that it is still better than being stuck in bad jobs working for others.

Hanem decided to become a stay-at-home mom because they could not afford daycare expenses for their three young children. Also, because of her husband's bad experiences, she is scared to work for others and instead prefers to do things on her own. Hanem has tried different ways to bring in some extra income for the family. A friend was running a small home-based babysitting and encouraged her to do the same. Hanem decided to take this up since she thought that it would not be difficult to look after a few more children. She completed a home daycare training course offered by a community agency and started a home daycare service in 2007. Hanem's business barely lasted a year because of the recession. Her main clients got laid off during the recession and decided to look after their children by themselves. She continued to place ads on the internet and tried to offer cheaper rates; as low as \$2.50 an hour. Despite the low fees,

Hanem recalled how people would still "come and haggle," trying to negotiate lower prices.

Hanem also did some home-based catering services. However, she realized that there is very little business these days for either service. Instead, Hanem now helps her husband with office work such as invoicing, faxing and filling orders. But looking after her three children is all consuming. She has to wait until the children fall asleep before she can take care of her responsibilities of filling orders and invoicing. Sometimes she waits "till she [the baby] sleeps at night and spend all the night preparing the order; I remember for 48 hours I haven't slept mostly, during day take care of the kids, at night preparing the order."

In line with her Islamic Studies degree from Egypt, Hanem eventually hopes to find a job teaching at an Islamic school or teaching about Islam. She does not know when or how this can happen.

Multiple barriers are preventing immigrant families like the Omar family from achieving employment and income security in spite of their qualifications and all their efforts. Sayed feels that being Canadian-born would make things "a lot easier in terms of connections, in terms of language, Canadian degree with Canadian experience." "It's who you know not what you know" reflected Sayed. "Sometimes even if you don't know the job, they can still give you training and just do it, just because they know you."

Sayed learnt the hard way that graphic design jobs in Canada can be very unstable. It was "impossible" for him to get jobs with large companies. Instead, he was only able to get jobs with small companies that made him vulnerable to low pay and frequent lay-offs. His decision to start his own self-employed small business in sign-making was a bold but risky move, since he had no previous business experience. However, he quickly realized that self-employed small businesses are precarious and unstable in their own ways. The recession greatly affected small businesses. Sayed is struggling to keep his business afloat while witnessing most of his small business customers, many of them run by immigrant families, go out of business.

Sayed has not experienced direct forms of discrimination. But he is left wondering whether his Muslim background may have negatively affected his job search process. He shared a story about a friend who changed his name from Mohamed to MO. Sayed admitted that “sometimes I think that way too, like many times I think that way, maybe because of my name...but I have no evidence.” In contrast, Hanem, who wears a hijab, regularly faces discrimination from people including statements about her or her cultural practices not being welcome in Canada:

Hanem has learnt to ignore such comments. But she can't help but feel sad and emotionally scarred by insensitive and hateful remarks. The Omar family was disheartened to read “an excellent article” in the newspaper about the difficulties that a Muslim woman wearing a hijab faced in getting a job. They realized then that discrimination is not uncommon in Canada.

“Sometimes I was walking with my friends from the same culture and someone would say ‘ok, what brings you to this country, what are you doing in this country? As long as you’re accepted and you come here...you have to live like us, the way we live.’ - Hanem

Their health is directly affected due to the difficult work conditions and growing income insecurity. When the sign-making business was doing well, Sayed could afford to hire people to help him with some of the difficult tasks like carrying signs and putting them up. But now with business getting tight, he has to do them by himself. He has developed severe pain in his hands and back. Extended amounts of time kneeling down to paint the signs have taken a hard toll on his knees. He had to wait for one year to get an MRI scan of his knees.

Once while working, he accidentally dropped a large cement block on his foot causing a lot of bleeding. He rushed to the hospital. The wait time at the hospital was so long that he got tired and decided to go home. The next day he went to a walk-in clinic and was very surprised that the doctor hardly did anything not even clean it to prevent it from being infected. It has healed but his broken nail has still not grown back. Most of his experiences with the

Canadian healthcare system have been very disappointing.

Sayed mentioned that he is constantly stressed and often cannot sleep. But he thinks that this is common with anyone who runs a business. He also mentioned that he has developed a “heart condition” and is taking medication.

Hanem has difficulty sleeping as well because of the tight finances, the exhaustion and the stress she experiences “on a daily basis.” She finds that she often gets “dizzy, tired and in a lot of pain.” She has developed back pain and leg pain from having to stand a lot while working at home and on the business. Hanem’s experience with the healthcare system has been more positive compared to Sayed. She was pregnant when she arrived in Canada and did not have her OHIP card for the first three months. She is very grateful that a community health centre located in Black Creek provided her with good care and were “very helpful” in spite of not having government health insurance coverage.

The Omar family does not have dental care coverage. When they have dental problems they usually get their teeth pulled since they cannot afford the medication and regular dental maintenance expenses. Sayed shared, “I almost have all my teeth pulled out, because I can’t afford.”

Both Hanem and Sayed admit that the biggest impact from the economic insecurity has been on their family relationship and wellbeing. “If you have money, you can find a good shelter, a good school, good food and most of the time, you can have a happy family,” Sayed mentioned. “When you have no money, then see how we fight? [Referring to the many disagreements they had during the interview process itself].”

The stress is starting to pit husband and wife against each other resulting in deteriorating marital relationship. Without mincing words, Sayed blames Hanem for adding to his stress by asking for money “all the time” and not letting him rest when he is tired; “she comes after me and then she wakes me up and doesn’t leave me alone”. Hanem expressed deep frustrations that Sayed sees her as a nuisance and a source of his stress when she is trying to better manage the household needs and wellbeing. It makes her sad to see that Sayed prioritizes “his customers”

over family and spends very little time with the family and children even during important time.

Holding back tears, Hanem recalled Sayed's absence when their baby was born: "I remember when I was having my baby in the hospital, he was at work all day; when he came at the end of the day to pick us up, one of his customers called...he gave us a lift home and then went out again." She continued, "this had a great psychological impact on me, feeling that when you need your husband the most at this critical time, you cannot find him beside you because of work...this is a really terrible feeling." She admits that this "eventually has its impact on the relationship between me and my husband."

Sayed is concerned that due to work pressures he has "no time with the kids" and wishes otherwise saying, "I would love to have more time". He is sad to see that sometimes when he comes home in a bad mood due to work stress, his children "stay away" from him. To correct this, he has tried to work from home sometimes but whenever he gets calls from customers he has to tell his children to go away or keep quiet so he can attend to his business. Due to being stressed and exhausted, Hanem sometimes does not feel like taking the children outside when they ask. Hanem said how the children constantly ask for "Band-Aids" just to get attention even though they don't have any wounds.

In the face of these difficulties, the Omar family utilizes many tactics to make ends meet that represent strong resolve but also vulnerability. They applied for subsidized housing and recently got accepted after waiting for about 5 and half years. They hope that this will take some financial pressure off. Sayed also sends "letters to politicians to tell them how hard time a small business has so they have to change this by-law." If this does not work, Sayed is also considering moving the family to a different city that does not have the "business-killer by-laws" like in Toronto.

They have become good at buying food and clothes on sale. They are thinking of getting rid of their landline phone to cut costs. Hanem regularly uses the free children's programs and women's fitness programs offered by local community agencies to keep active. She has also been attending LINC classes to improve her English. Hanem regards these programs as being very helpful. When asked about employment services, however, the Omar family is quite pessimistic and thinks that such program are "missing something." As Sayed put it:

I don't think...those places for helping to find jobs like...like resumes, sending faxes, this stuff...I think they missing something... I know they spend a lot of money on them...but, I don't know. I tried them so many times. I didn't get no jobs from them. ↩



The Wilson Family

Many times my ends don't meet. And I don't think my ends will ever meet because I don't really have a steady job. I have a job that is on and off and that's not really paying me much. You can't even buy the basics all the time because you don't have the money to buy it. You would want to have at least a decent couch or something to sit on and you can't afford it because you don't have the money to buy it. A lady needs certain things for the month, you can't be buying it all the time; you have to ask people for it. And for me that is a bit degrading, you feel less than a woman.-Tanya

Summary: Tanya Wilson⁹, currently 37 years old, came to Canada in 1991 from Jamaica at the age of 16, with her one year old son Jason, now 22 years old. Tanya was sponsored to immigrate to Canada by her parents. Arriving as a “kid,” she did not have specific expectations about Canada when she arrived here. Her dream was to become a nurse. However, as an immigrant and a single mom in her teens, she quickly realized that all the odds were against her. She was working during the day to support her family and doing night school to finish high school. Tanya found it almost impossible to juggle work, school and taking care of her baby. She stopped high school in grade 11. She did a series of unstable, low-paying jobs including as a woodworker, baby sitter, and caterer. She had her second son, Chris, in 1999. She started focusing exclusively on working to support her family and gave up on her dream to become a nurse. The Wilson family settled in Black Creek after receiving subsidized housing in the area. As a long-time resident of Black Creek (over 20 years), Tanya has endearing views about her neighborhood and is concerned that the negative stereotypes about Black Creek is hindering her and other residents from getting good jobs. Since none of the previous job search strategies (applying online, dropping off resumes etc.) led to a stable job, Tanya realized that she needed to go back to school. Since nursing was not an option for her anymore, Tanya decided to become a Personal Support Worker (PSW). She successfully completed the PSW program from a private college only to find out that the certificate was not widely recognized and did not help her get a job. She had no choice but to go on social assistance (Ontario Works). In 2010, through the job development program within Ontario Works, Tanya got her current part-time job as a receptionist at a community agency that pays minimum wage, barely enough to survive. This job is a one-year contract. Tanya is afraid that she won't be able to find another job after this and will probably end up back on social assistance again. This is the story of a single Black mother living in a low-income neighborhood who is ‘working rough, living poor.’

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Tanya and her one year old son

were sponsored by her parents to come to Canada in 1991. Tanya had little time to prepare for her move to Canada. “I didn’t have a choice, my parents wanted me to come here.” She remembers abruptly moving to Canada at the request of her parents. As a teenager, Tanya had no particular expectations apart from being excited: “I was just a kid excited to come to a new place and I guess when I came here it’s not all fun and joy.” As a teenager, single mom and newcomer to Canada with little idea of where to go for help, Tanya’s difficulties started from early on and continue to this day.

When she joined school, Tanya developed high ambitions to study hard and become a nurse. She wanted to be in high school full-time like her peers. However, to support herself and her infant son, Tanya had to start working while going to night school. Her first job in 1991 was as a woodworker in a factory. When time permitted, Tanya would also take babysitting and cooking jobs to generate extra cash. “I thought I was going to be in school full-time but I wasn’t because I had a child and I had to take care of a child,” recalled Tanya. “So I had to find a source of income, any kind of job to support my child and I had to do night school, go to work in the day time and take care of [my son].”

After being in Canada a year, Tanya had to make a tough decision to drop out of high school in grade 11. To this day, Tanya has strong regrets about having to quit high school when she was so close to finishing it. And yet, she remembers how she had little choice but to give up on her educational goals in order to meet more immediate financial needs. Not having completed high school, Tanya was only able to get low-paying manual labour jobs, barely enough to survive.

Her second son Chris was born in 1999. With this her household expenses increased. However, her search for a good stable job was still nowhere in sight in spite of using all job search strategies like dropping off resumes in person, applying online, going to employment agencies, and networking. She noticed that the only full-time types of jobs that were available were night shift jobs. Being a single mother with two young children, night shift jobs were not an option. Tanya recalls, “I do get calls,

but for night for midnight and I can’t leave my kid for a midnight job.”

Disappointed but unscathed, Tanya gathered her strength and made a bold decision to go back to school after 20 years of struggling to survive in Canada. Nursing was no longer feasible at that time. Since she still wanted to work within healthcare, she decided to study to become a Personal Support Worker (PSW). She noticed that private colleges offered flexible fast-track (one year) job-gear training. Thus, she decided to complete her PSW certificate through a private college in Toronto. She was very happy and proud to have successfully completed the PSW certificate in spite of her long gap from school. However, this was short lived since there was no job in sight even after getting this diploma. She noticed that many of her classmates from the PSW program did manage to get a job. So Tanya is left with many questions about why she has not been able to get a job too.

“I find that a lot of times when I look for PSW jobs I present everything. When I go there to drop the resume they say they are not hiring. And you still give the resume and they keep it for file for six months. You call them back they’re not hiring. You send somebody else, and they took the resume and they got the job. So I am thinking, because, I am looking at it as... a quite a few of us went to school, and I keep talking to most of my friends who are in school and they live in different areas in Toronto. They got jobs in the same place that they sent me with the same school, the same certificate and I am still here and I can’t get a job. So I am not sure if it’s my luck or their luck, I don’t know what it is.” - Tanya

“Discrimination,” Tanya feels is a key factor that is preventing her from getting a good job. As a black woman living in a low-income neighborhood, she has experienced many racializing experiences in the labour market and in other settings. She is acutely aware about how race and the colour of her skin expose her to unequal and discriminatory treatments.

“I think I do go through racism in the job,” affirmed Tanya. “I think it does exist because I go out sometimes and I do volunteer work or I go and look

for other part-time jobs and before I could finish saying what I'm saying they'll say no we're not hiring." She is even conscious by how her older son Jason, who is lighter skinned than her, gets treated better than her when he is looking for jobs: "because [my son] has a lighter complexion, nicer hair so when he goes out there he will find things, better than a darker complexion person so I don't want sometimes to sound racial but that's how it is." She is happy to see her son getting more opportunities but deeply troubled by how her own employment prospects are undermined by race-based discrimination.

Tanya feels that living in a low-income neighborhood like Black Creek further undermines access to good jobs. She is extremely critical of the negative stereotypes about her neighborhood and about employers who assume that people who live in low-income neighborhoods are less capable.

"Living in Black Creek I know it does affect the people from getting the jobs that they like. People in Black Creek are working but I am sure it's not the jobs that they would really want. They're just doing something to survive. . . I think the stigma that the area has it kind of holds down a lot of people where they want to be.

Tanya was surprised that even businesses located in Black Creek prefer to hire people who live outside of Black Creek. She noticed this when she was rejected for a position in the local mall. Based on this experience she stated: "I live at Jane Finch and the store is at Jane Finch so if you have a store and the people from Jane and Finch cannot work there what's the sense of you have a store there because you put a store to create jobs in the neighborhood, I am not saying that you cannot have one or two from outside what's the point of having the store at Jane Finch?" Tanya has sometimes considered changing the address information on her resumés to a different address in order to avoid being discriminated for being a Black Creek resident. She feels caught between a rock and a hard place with the idea of changing her address though: "I sometimes want to change it but if I change it, it's like I am not proud of where I live, I am not proud of my community. So I want to keep my address."

Things turned around somewhat

for the positive in 2010. Unable to find a decent stable job, Tanya had been on social assistance (Ontario Works) for some time. She then decided to do some volunteer work to keep herself engaged: "I just wanted to come out of apartment [and do volunteer work], because it was driving me nuts." She arranged a volunteer opportunity to help with office work at a local community agency. Though it was office work (filing, photocopying etc.), Tanya enjoyed volunteering at this agency. She got to meet and interact with a lot of people and was treated and included in the agency activities. She increased her volunteer hours from two hours a day to 3 days a week.

Then, Tanya learnt about a special job link program funded by Ontario Works that helps people on social assistance to find jobs. She managed to arrange a one year contract job doing general office work through this program at the community agency where she was volunteering. This job paid minimum wage (\$10.80/hr) and was part-time (30 hours) so Tanya's monthly income was only about \$1,300. The job was not in her field of study and it provided no benefits. At the time of the interview, Tanya had one and a half weeks remaining in her one-year contract for this job. She doubts that the contract will be extended. Also, she is very worried that she won't be able to find another job and will be "back to welfare."

Tanya has not given up yet. If the right opportunities and support become available, she hopes to go back to school again and get a social work degree. Or she plans to do the PSW training again but this time from a public college. Financially, however, at the moment this doesn't seem feasible. She cannot take another OSAP loan to study because she is still struggling to pay off the OSAP debt that she took to cover Jason's studies at York University. Also as a single mother, it seems logistically impossible to go back to school for a lengthy period. "I was thinking about my children and I'm thinking about if I sit down and go back to school it is going to take me two, three years but in that two, three years what are my children going to be doing," Tanya questioned, "how am I going to have money to take care of them." So she has put her plans on hold for now.

Her sons are her source of hope.

In spite of years of acute poverty and many barriers, Jason has overcome the odds and is currently studying sociology and media studies at York University. He wants to either become a social worker or go into media arts and is keeping both of his options open. Tanya prays that Jason will not face difficulties in getting a good job after he graduates. He recently moved out to live on his own. Her younger son, Chris, 12, however, is not doing well in school. Tanya gets calls from his principal frequently because Chris is getting into trouble at school. She is aware that the reason for Chris's problems at school is linked to the difficulties they face at home.

Tanya is very worried that the never ending poverty and economic difficulties are taking a toll on her sons and sometimes questions her ability as a parent: "I think my kids feel the energy from me; it makes you feel like you failed as a parent." She is sad that she is increasingly unable to connect and communicate openly with her sons. Jason, in particular, rarely talks about his studies or problems with her even when she asks him: "sometimes I'll say to [Jason], 'you know talk' and he will say 'mommy you don't understand'. And I say, 'yeah but I want to know what's going on'. But I don't think he wants to probably make me cry knowing how I do cry so he will probably talk with his grandmother or will probably talk to his aunt so I think it is sometimes better for him to talk to them than to talk to me."

The income insecurity that the Wilson family faces is harsh and affects many other aspects of their life, including food security. Tanya mentioned that she often does not have enough money to buy basics and frequently skips meals. She relies heavily on food banks for her food supply. She can't afford a decent set of furniture for her apartment. In fact, she has had to sell off her furniture just to buy food and pay the bills. She constantly finds herself struggling and juggling to pay her bills.

Since her income is barely enough, Tanya has no other choice but to borrow money or use credit cards to cover her expenses. She has over \$20,000 in debt and a poor credit rating. Tanya has had to use her parent's credit card to cover expenses,

negatively affecting their credit rating when she was unable to make the payments. Since Tanya has never had a stable job with benefits, she has not been able to put aside any money into saving vehicles or education plans for her sons.

"I can't make all the ends meet. I can't cover everything but some time what I have to do is, don't pay something and pay another just to catch up on certain things but if I try to catch up on the phone bill, the cable I don't pay. For grocery, if I can't buy grocery I have to wait for the food bank. So there is different things to do. I can't manage all of my bills." - Tanya

She has received 2 eviction notices that she managed to eventually reconcile. She wishes she could get out of social housing if she had the means, since her building is infested with pests (mice and roaches), molds (in her bathroom), and is in a state of dilapidation (e.g. broken pipes, leakages).



Photovoice 2: "Second Chance" by Stanley: A snapshot of some of the dilapidated housing conditions in Black Creek.

Tanya's health is adversely impacted by all of this. Not having a stable job, not being able to "make ends meet," rising debt, and difficulties faced by her son at school all cumulate to produce intense and ongoing stress for Tanya to the point that she has trouble sleeping. She is up most nights worrying about how to get by the next day. She frequently has headaches, chest pain and back pain. She avoids taking medication since

she does not like the idea of becoming dependent on drugs. She is glad that dental visits for Chris are covered through his school. However, Tanya has to cover the expense of his asthma medication.

Tanya feels that she has “failed as a parent.” This feeling causes her the most worry and sadness. She knows that that the “trouble at home” is seriously affecting her children and yet she feels unable to do anything about it. She tries to keep the family together by having open and regular talks whenever she can. “We are a family that likes to sit down and have a talk,” stated Tanya, “so we usually talk about stuff and if the older one doesn’t want to talk then me and the small one usually sit down and have a discussion on certain things and sometimes the older one will jump in and say what he has to say and we will talk about things.”

She feels that she gets upset easily, rooted in feelings of inadequacy as a parent. This further strains her communication with her sons. “I’m easily upset. The least little thing gets me angry because I can’t do what I am supposed to be doing for my children. I come home but it feels like it’s not a home because I can’t do what I am supposed to be doing.”

As a long-time resident of Black Creek, she affirms that it is a “good neighborhood” with a strong sense

of community. She feels that “[Black Creek residents] really need jobs and if we don’t have jobs, like when they bring in new projects, like the subway that they are bringing in, I think they could have trained people from our neighbourhood to work on that project.” She added that “when bringing them in, [the residents] might not know as much, but they can learn as they go along.”

Tanya says, “I don’t think my ends will ever meet.” In spite of this, Tanya tries to maintain a positive outlook on life. She keeps her inner strength by praying, going to church and by taking walks. She still hopes that someday she will be able to go back to school again and get a PSW certificate from a recognized public college. She is still waiting for a good job:

We have positive times to keep the positive-ness and even when there is nothing, we try to keep it positive. I am a person that doesn’t really give up that easily. Most of the time when I go on social assistance, I don’t want to go on it but I’ve reached to the point when I can’t do more, so I have to go on it and me while I’m on it, I’m still out there looking for something. I still try my best to go out there – Tanya.





The Adani Family

Efforts? I have more than 1,500 emails I have done. I can show you my Inbox. I took a diploma course [in Canada] and I completed my graduation in the year 2008. And went back home to drop my daughter there [in India] because it was hard with her...like we cannot afford babysitting and it was hard with her to ...I cannot go out for work. I drop her back with my mother, when I came here and I started looking for job I have done more than fifteen hundred of emails. Fax and even I went to agencies. So still I have that email, that was for my, you know I want to keep in mind all the time. - Hasina

Summary: The Adani¹⁰ family came to Canada in 2007 with high expectations that their strong qualifications would lead them to good jobs and prosperous life. Hasina Adani, 28, her husband Zamir, 33, and their daughter Varshini, 6, settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of the area's affordability and its central location. Hasina has a Master's degree in Commerce from India. Zamir has a Master's degree in Business Administration from the UK and a Bachelor degree in Mechanical Engineering from India. Both had many years of work experience. They had been told by friends that they would be able to get really good jobs in Canada with these high qualifications. They immigrated to Canada through the Federal Skilled Workers and Professionals class with high points in the "points system" assessment. However, the Adani family was shocked to find out that their degrees and years of experience carried little value in Canada. Hasina was hoping for a full-time permanent job in accounting but has been unsuccessful even after sending over 1,500 job applications. She currently has a part-time job (less than 20 hours/week) as an office clerk at a marketing company. Getting this part-time job was challenging: she went back to school in 2008 to get a Canadian diploma in accounting. She did an "unpaid co-op" placement, and was laid off from 2 jobs before ending up in her current job. Her current employer refuses to expand her hours and keeps giving her "silly tasks" that are well below her skill level. Zamir was expecting that his engineering degree combined with his MBA would be highly valued in Canada and would lead to a management level position. Sadly, in spite of pursuing all avenues, he has been unable to get a job in engineering or management. Instead, he has been stuck in a series of low-skill manual labour jobs, making boxes, welding and working in a bakery. The jobs have led to de-skilling and resulted in multiple injuries. Zamir is now pursuing a Chartered General Accounting (CGA) degree while juggling on-call labour jobs. In spite of trying out numerous job search strategies, the Adani family is still struggling to find stable employment. This is their story of 'working rough, living poor.'

¹⁰ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Adani Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled "Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor." Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized 'visible minority' immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the 'Where are the Good Jobs?' report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

The Adani family had a good life in India and always had stable employment in their field. They had very high ambitions. This is why Zamir went to the UK and successfully completed a MBA degree there. Zamir's father was happy to use his "province fund", a government supported retirement savings fund in India, to help Zamir cover his costs of doing a MBA. The Adani family wanted more out of life and became interested in immigrating to Canada for better job opportunities, economic prosperity, and better future for their daughter. As Hasina recalled: "people say in India, whatever you make in whole one year, you can make here [in Canada] in one month. And if you're educated it's easy for you to get job here and that's what we thought and we are here today."

So both of them quit their permanent jobs in India, sold their property, and immigrated to Canada. They took a loan to cover the application and moving expenses. They expected that their high qualifications and experiences would lead to good employment and were looking forward to contributing productively to the Canadian economy. In Hasina's words: "I was expecting that yes they should recognize my degree and, they should give me a chance to prove myself [...] they should not ask me for Canadian education because the basic of accounting is the same, wherever you go in the world is same."

Hasina's search for full-time employment in Canada in accounting remains unmet in spite of her graduate degree, years of work experience, and exhaustive use of all job search strategies. She was somewhat happy to get a part-time job as an office clerk at an accounting firm just a couple of months after coming to Canada. She thought that this could be a stepping stone to getting the job that she wanted. Instead, this proved to be an early start for her into a long vicious cycle of precarious types of jobs. The owner of the accounting firm did see Hasina's potential and promoted her to an accounting clerk. However, the accounting manager at the company was hesitant to give her accounting responsibilities and instead kept giving her menial administrative tasks like putting labels on boxes and filing papers. She then got laid off four months later.

Hasina again started actively applying for jobs in her field making exhaustive use of all available services and strategies (attending resumé clinics and 'soft-skill' trainings, online and door-to-door applications, networking etc.): "we have done all possible steps...we have taken all possible steps." She mentioned that she has applied for over 1,500 jobs. Hasina has saved all of the emails for her own records. However, none of them led to a stable job. After some time, she realized that her degree and work experience from India were almost worthless in Canada.

This disregard for her degree from India

was blatant in some cases. For example, upon suggestion from a friend, Hasina had approached a "famous" private job placement company that claims to treat career seekers as clients and not "commodity to be sold." This company's website stated that their programs are "specifically designed to serve as a total employment resource to you no matter where you are in your career." Hasina recalled how this agency was "ready to register me in the labour job work but they said they are not going to take my interview and register you in the field job . . . even not in an admin job." Even after multiple requests the company's response was: "No, we cannot take you because the company who will take your interview they want the people, they want their client who has Canadian degree and who's English should be good and this and that . . . She was even not ready to register me. I requested her actually to take my, at least you take my interview, you register me, but she said no we cannot give that opportunity to you."

Hasina does get invited for job interviews occasionally but employers rarely follow up after that. Hasina also realized that potential employers never give satisfactory explanations for why she was not selected for the job except for the generic note that there was someone more qualified than her. Sadly, she has come to the conclusion that "Indian degree is not valid here [in Canada]."

Initially, Hasina did do some survival jobs (e.g. at a dollar store) to make ends meet. However, particularly after her husband suffered a bad work place injury at his factory job, Hasina made a firm decision not to do manual labour jobs anymore but to keep pursuing a job that matched her

qualifications: “Really, I do not want to do labour job now, because as far as I am concerned I am a good educated person.” To increase her chance of getting a job in her field, she decided to go back to school and get a Canadian diploma in accounting. Her husband, Zamir, encouraged her to do this and continued to work at the factory to support the family during this time.

Hasina successfully completed her accounting diploma from a private Canadian college in 2008 only to find out that this did not really help much. The next hurdle she still had to overcome was getting “Canadian experience” in her field. Like for most immigrants, Hasina found this roadblock even more difficult since the Canadian labour market does not allow newcomers to get this Canadian experience.

“The people, when you go out, they say that ‘okay, we really need, we are looking somebody who, who is having Canadian degree.’ Then after I got the degree, then they said, ‘okay we need somebody who really had Canadian experience.’” - Hasina

Still unfazed, Hasina decided to take matters in her own hands to get Canadian experience. She approached a friend who worked in an accounting firm and asked her friend to convince her boss to create an “unpaid co-op position” for Hasina at the firm. Two months into her co-op, Hasina found a full time accounting job with a construction company in 2009 only to be laid off again 6 months later. In mid-2010, Hasina got a permanent part-time job with a marketing company, where she still is today. She got this job by applying online. While she is relieved to get a permanent job, Hasina finds the current job to be a source of stress with minimal economic benefits.

She is not allowed to exceed 20 hours a week in this firm and is paid just \$11/hour. She is also given very basic invoicing and administrative tasks that are well below her skill level. While the workload is high, her employer specifically doesn’t allow her to do more than 20 hours: “they don’t want to give me more hours but I will have to finish my work within that much hours; so it is like mentally tension, I am,

even you cannot take one hour or fifteen minute break.” If Hasina does accumulate more than 20 hours, her employer asks her to take time off rather than pay her for the extra hours. Or if she finishes the assigned work early, Hasina is sent home earlier. She does not get any extended benefits nor are there any opportunities for professional development. Hasina continues to search endlessly for a stable fulltime job that matches her strong skill set but is getting worn out:

“This job is not much satisfying. Because the pay is too less plus it is part time. Like even he’s not sometimes he is not giving me sixteen hours, seventeen hours, like after fifteen hours, he will say okay your fifteen hours is complete, you don’t come . . . Because I know I can do more in this field. But I’m here, I’m stuck here because at least I have part time job so, I’m still looking for that but you know, now, I’m literally tired of looking for job.” -Hasina

Zamir also has had it tough in Canada. He was hoping for a management level position like his job in India. However, he was not getting response for any positions he was applying. He spent six months getting his certification as an Engineer in Training (EIT) through the Professional Engineers of Ontario. As part of this recertification process, Zamir had to do an apprenticeship under another professional engineer. However, in spite of many requests and willingness to work for free, Zamir could not get an apprenticeship opportunity and thus was unable to further pursue a career in this field.

To make ends meet, Zamir reluctantly applied for “general labour jobs” and took some on-call jobs through temp agencies. He recalled how he and his wife would go from factory to factory and drop off resumés. They would also just sit and wait to get calls from temp agencies. Though the temp agency on-call jobs were highly unpredictable, Zamir still depended on them since it would help to at least “cover food.” In 2008, Zamir got offered a full-time job as a welder in a heating and air conditioning company. He found out about this job through a friend. Seeing no other options, he reluctantly took this job. He felt “ashamed” to be doing general

labour job as a welder when he had graduate degrees and many years of experience in engineering and management. Since welding was not his field and also due to poor safety protocols at the company, Zamir was injured twice with bad burns to his arm and finger. At that time, he did not know about worker's compensation for workers who get injured at work. Also, the company did not do anything to increase safety.

“Back home [in India] this like having technical degree and financial both, leads to me very good, nice position in any kind of company right? And it leads me in future to general manager or deputy general manager you know. And that's a good job over there. But here, in Canada its totally different stuff . . . when I came in Canada, all the stuff like wash up, like 10 years [of education and work experience] was wash up, completely wash up. Now I am struggling and I have to start all the stuff again” - Zamir

Zamir had no choice but to continue with the welding job. The welding job included extended health insurance coverage and other benefits. This was one of the reasons why Zamir decided to stay with this job even with the occupational health risks associated with it, and despite the fact that it did not match his skills. Hasina made a choice not to do high risk manual labour jobs and was constantly worried about Zamir.

Zamir got laid off from the welding job in 2009 after working there for one and a half years; the company said that his lay off was “because recession came”. He was relieved to at least get coverage from Employment Insurance (EI).

While on EI, he made a bold decision to change his career from engineering to accounting. He carefully reviewed current job prospects and trends in the Canadian labour market and decided to go back to school to get a CGA degree. He had heard about a new grant program called Second Career, a program where laid off employees on EI can receive funding to pursue training in a new field. Zamir applied for this grant to pursue a CGA degree. As if the timing could not be worse, Zamir's EI eligibility period ran

out by the time he found out that his Second Career grant was approved. Thus he was not able to get the grant and had to self-pay the tuition cost to study CGA. Since they did not have enough money, Zamir had to ask his father in India again for money to cover tuition costs. Currently, Zamir is doing the CGA course on a part-time basis while taking on-call jobs when they are available, at bakeries and other factories. With great sadness, he mentioned how his annual income for the previous year was only \$6,500.

The discrimination that Hasina and Zamir have faced in Canada is what shocks them most. When applying for jobs and in workplace settings, Hasina has on several occasions been criticized for her “Indian accent.” One of her supervisors made belittling comments about Hasina's “Indian degree” to her. The supervisor also never offered opportunities for professional development.

The Adani family put up with discrimination on the job because they knew how hard it would be to find another job. These discriminatory experiences, including subtle forms of exclusion, caused deep emotional scarring. With tears rolling down her cheeks, Hasina recalls about a demeaning job interview experience: “I went to Scarborough for interview, and that was only one month contract, but still I went there for the post of admin. When you take interview you honor the whatever, whoever candidate is coming. But that lady the moment she saw me, she was like, I felt like she was not interested in taking interview at all. She asked me silly question from here to there. I don't know what were the reasons but I was feeling so bad, why I went there for interview. I was really feeling so bad, I feel like crying there (*voice breaking*).”

In another job interview, the interviewer specifically told Hasina that he was “very impressed” with her skills and her previous work experience from India at a major mobile phone company but that he could not offer her the position because of her “language problem.” She did not clearly understand what he was referring to as the “language problem” and was very disappointed to have been so close to getting a good job but refused for a superficial reason. Zamir is still questioning why no engineers or engineering firm wanted to accept him as an apprentice, even to

work unpaid. He remains disheartened that he was unable to get a good job despite being highly educated.

Hasina and Zamir settled in the Black Creek area of Toronto because of the area's affordability and central location. The family found it easy to access amenities in the area and also found it convenient to commute to jobs from Black Creek due to 24 hour bus routes. However, the family worries about the area's negative reputation and have occasionally faced place-based discrimination while looking for jobs. Hasina was once told "you are coming from too far that is why we cannot hire you" when this job was actually closer to her home than the current job she had. The Adani family is also concerned about poor safety and security issues in their neighborhood, particularly in their daughter's school. They want to move further West in Toronto to Etobicoke to be closer to their place of worship. However, the high rental costs there prevent them from doing so.

Financially, the Adani family is living hand to mouth these days. Since 2010, after Zamir lost his full time job as a welder, they have seen a major drop in their household income and are struggling to meet their everyday expenses. Their total household income for the previous year was less than \$20,000. The income supplements and child tax benefits that they receive from the government are keeping them afloat. They had plans to send money back home to support their family or at least to be able to repay Zamir's father's providence funds. Instead, they have to regularly ask for financial support from their family in India to survive here in Canada. Relying on their parents for financial support is a source of guilt because of the cultural expectations that at their age, they should be supporting their parents instead of the other way around.

They have developed prudent strategies to meet their everyday needs making major cut backs to their lifestyles. They avoid eating out, going for entertainment and buy "marked down vegetables." They are particularly saddened when they are not able to afford extracurricular activities for their daughter. Reluctantly but increasingly, they have begun accepting second hand items from friends in Canada and are now regularly getting clothes, food, medicine and spices sent from their parents in India.

Hasina has also made arrangements with some neighbours and friends where, for example, she cooks for them in exchange for things that she needs for her home.

Their health has rapidly deteriorated since coming to Canada. The burns that Zamir got in his arm and finger still affect him. During his time as a welder, Zamir experienced frequent foot pain due to the heavy work boots that he had to wear; a pain that has persisted. Being overworked and underpaid, facing poor treatment and discrimination, being undervalued, having limited job satisfaction, compounded by high employment uncertainty have caused high levels of mental stress for the Adanis.

Both Hasina and Zamir have developed high blood pressure which they specifically attribute to the stress of bad jobs and constant financial worries. Hasina is also worried about the eyestrain and headaches from her current job.

"Yes, I told you like maybe I, like mentally problem or maybe, in the job also as I told you, they are not paying more but they want you to do everything, so that is like, you get mentally disturbed. They will give you time limit, finish everything, but they don't want to pay, but even we need money so we will do everything. If we are going to lose our job, its going to effect us, so we will do everything even that is going to have, even mentally" - Hasina

The social and wellbeing impacts of precarious employment go beyond their individual health. At one point, Hasina and Zamir decided to send their daughter back to India for about six months when they were having a hard time finding jobs; a decision they still regret. They know of other families who did the same including a family who had to send their one year old baby back to India. They hope that no parents should have to take such a difficult step. The insecurity in terms of jobs and income is the key reason why the Adani family have decided to delay having a second child: "we cannot like for my daughter one daughter its hard, we have to manage everything for her, so we are not stable so how can we plan on bringing another baby." With Hasina's age fast approaching 30, they fear that they might have to give up on the idea of having a second child.

Their plans to sponsor their parents to Canada also seem hard to achieve. They are fully aware of the tremendous social and financial benefit of having their parents come to live with them here in Canada. Mainly, they like the idea of their daughter spending time with and being cared for by her grandparents. But their current financial situation makes it almost impossible to meet the requirements for sponsoring their parents to come to Canada. No matter how difficult the finances get, they don't want to go on social assistance because they are afraid that this will negatively impact their goal to sponsor their parents to Canada.

Their healthy relationship is the key source of strength

and everyday solutions for Hasina and Zamir. In spite of the multiple and never ending hurdles, Hasina and Zamir make sure to spend quality family time together. No matter how busy, tired or stressed they are, they consciously make an effort to spend time with their daughter (e.g. read her stories). They take extra steps to shelter their daughter from being affected by their stress. In Zamir's words, "because we are trying to keep her [daughter] completely happy all the time (laughs), she is small, it will you know affect on her mind and bad; so we just never try to disclose the stuff." Varshini's education and future is the main thing that is keeping them from going back to India. Even when they have very little income, they put money into Varshini's RESP account. They have also purchased private extended health insurance for her. They have intimate knowledge about staying healthy and make sure that the whole family eats healthy and takes care of each other.

Hasina feels very fortunate to have such a supportive and encouraging husband like Zamir. He

not only inspires her to continue pursuing a job in her field but actively helps her with job applications. Zamir has full confidence in Hasina that she will and should get a stable and well paying job in her field. Zamir also readily shares household and childcare responsibilities.

The Canadian labour market, however, seems unaccommodating to Hasina and Zamir. Their experience demonstrates how incredibly difficult it is for racialized newcomers with strong professional backgrounds to get good, stable employment and income security in Canada. They feel like they are getting penalized for having strong professional qualifications. There are so many barriers working against them and yet none of the government funded employment services have been useful. Even after being in Canada for over 3 years, they are still waiting for a secure job and they feel very unsettled:

Me and my husband, we don't have any kind of secure job, still its [been] 3 years. We are doing jobs here and there part time, we are trying to manage our family but we don't have any secure job. Full time job, still we are looking for a job. If we have good job we can have better hope, even we want to buy a house, but we cannot manage. We cannot expect for anything right now – Hasina

How long it takes to get settle down one year two year three year, how long, this is fourth consecutive year going on but still we haven't seen any end of the settlement – Zamir





The Tran Family

I'm self-employed. I work for myself, for the past several years. When I first worked in Canada the thing I liked most is I made a lot of money compared to Vietnam. Huge money. And luckily that I worked at a place they don't require lot of English. So they teach me how to do things and I learn from that and just do the routine work. Because the economy isn't good now and the tax goes up, I lost all my jobs

Summary: Vinh Tran¹¹, 42 years old, came to Canada from Vietnam in 1989 as a government assisted refugee. He risked his life and fled Vietnam and lived in a “prison-like” refugee camp in Indonesia for 13 months before coming to Canada as a sponsored refugee. When he left Vietnam, he had finished grade 9. Vinh imagined that it would be “like heaven” in Canada. But things were far from it. He tried to complete his high school diploma in Canada. However, due to his limited English fluency and other issues, things got “very difficult” and he quit when he was one course short of getting his diploma. From when he was young, Vinh had always wanted to do construction. So he learnt a range of skills including installing drywall, flooring and plumbing from other Vietnamese friends involved in this sector (“learnt everything, but no certificate”). Initially, Vinh worked as a general worker. Later, he started specializing in flooring jobs and eventually opened his own flooring business. In mid-2000, during his visit to Vietnam, Vinh met Mai and they got married. He then sponsored Mai to immigrate to Canada and she arrived in 2006. Mai had finished grade 6 in Vietnam. Her dream was to be an elementary school teacher as she loved teaching little children. Like Vinh, she tried to finish her high school and take English classes in Canada but stopped because it was more difficult than she thought. She started working part-time in a factory and occasionally in a nail salon run by a Vietnamese family. In 2009, their son, Tony, was born. Since they could not afford daycare, Mai quit her job at the factory in order to take care of Tony. At one time, Vinh’s business was thriving. However, since the recession of 2009, there was a major drop in contracts. His limited English language fluency makes it particularly difficult to get contracts when competition is high. Instead, now Vinh mostly works on-call for his Vietnamese friends who are more successful at getting contracts. Job availability is very limited and irregular. Sometimes there is work for 2 to 3 days per week while at other times there is 1 day of work in three weeks. Consequently, things have become “very difficult.” Physical health concerns are rising (back pain, dizziness) and mental health is rapidly deteriorating. This is the story of the Tran family “working rough, living poor.”

¹¹ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Tran Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled “Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor.” Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized ‘visible minority’ immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the ‘Where are the Good Jobs?’ report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

Vinh left Vietnam due to major threats to his rights and freedoms. “[Vietnamese government officials] get a very tight control” he recalled. “The police can come to your house anytime to check on you and harass you many ways. And about your way of expressing things, everything is controlled.” He refers to himself as one of the “boat people.” He lived in a refugee camp in Indonesia for 13 months, where conditions were “prison-like”, before finally coming to Canada as a government assisted refugee in 1989. “I learnt from friends that Canada is best country and I should go. Yeah. So, that’s why I chose to [immigrate to Canada]. He had heard Canada was very peaceful and that you can “make a lot of money if you work hard.”

“I didn’t have any direction for my future because I don’t have English and I don’t have a degree or diploma. So I come to Canada, the first thing in my mind is to improve my English. And then after a while apply for job, any kind of job.” -- Vinh

The first thing Vinh tried to do after arriving in Canada was to learn English since he realized that without good English language fluency it would be hard for him to succeed here.

He took English classes and also tried to complete his high school diploma. However, like many refugees with limited schooling and gaps in education, he found it very difficult to learn. So he eventually gave up and started looking for jobs without completing his diploma and English language courses. He was one course short of getting his high school diploma in Canada. “So I finished grade 9 in Vietnam and I come to Canada go to school again,” recalled Vinh. “I almost finished high school. Almost, almost, let me see, one more course left ... my English is not very well, I had a hard time.”

Construction work is what Vinh had always wanted to do. So he navigated his way into this occupation through his Vietnamese friends working in this field: “Okay, so I really like job in construction field. So when I came to Canada I looking for friends in that field. And I move with them to learn from them.” He learnt many construction-related skills including laying floors,

installing drywall, and plumbing. Though he is very good at these, Vinh does not have any “certificate” to formally credit his skills since he learnt them through friends. In the beginning he worked on every kind of construction job that became available to him through his Vietnamese friends.

Vinh mentioned that in Vietnam he would earn only about \$100 per month. Compared to this, the \$1,200 per month he started making in Canada seemed like a “huge amount.” However, he quickly realized that due to the higher cost of living in Canada, \$1,200 per month was hardly enough to get by. “Even though I make \$1,200 a month, it’s like, I spend all the money” Vinh compared. “But in Vietnam, with \$100 a month, I can save some money.”

Later on Vinh specialized on flooring and eventually started his own registered flooring business. Due to his limited English language fluency, Vinh’s source for job contracts was mainly through Vietnamese friends/network and Vietnamese newspapers, “not the English newspapers”. In spite of this, Vinh’s self-employed business was doing fairly well in the beginning years. Through his Vietnamese network, he would get subcontracts for flooring in large buildings and the contract would last almost a year. He was able to accumulate savings during these years. However, things started to get more competitive and the business began experiencing sharp decline particularly since the 2009 recession. “Because the economy isn’t good now and the taxes go up, so I lost all my jobs” he mentioned sadly. He did not realize then that small construction enterprises are very vulnerable.

Currently, he works on an on-call basis for his Vietnamese friends with larger business and better English fluency who are still able to get construction contracts. The job availability is very limited and highly irregular. Sometimes he gets one or two days of work per week and other times he gets only one day of work for two weeks. He has a “list of friends” he calls periodically for jobs. But these days there is very little available.

Mai’s family in Vietnam operated a store and Mai regularly worked in the store. She met Vinh in mid-2000 during one of his trips to Vietnam. They fell in love and got married. Vinh

sponsored Mai to immigrate to Canada through the spousal sponsorship program. At that time, Mai had completed grade 6 in Vietnam. Her dream “since she was very young” was to become an elementary school teacher.

Once Mai came to Canada in 2006 everything changed drastically for her. She thought she was a “very easily adaptive person” and could settle into Canada quite well. However, it was a big “surprise” to her that not having good English fluency would be such an enormous barrier to everything. Like Vinh, she tried to take classes but faced many difficulties in making progress. And so, she quit the classes as well. Right after she moved to Canada, her husband’s construction business started to wane and then the recession hit. So Mai was pressed into entering the labour market to bring in extra income for the family. She found a part-time job in a factory. She also started working occasionally at a nail salon. A Vietnamese friend who worked at the nail salon convinced Mai to join since the job did not technically “require English.” Mai mentioned that Vietnamese friends are the only source through which she finds out about jobs: “all the time I got job through friends.”

In 2009, their son, Tony, was born. Since daycare is very expensive, Mai quit the factory job to take care of Tony. “At the time I came to Canada the economy is not as good,” Mai recalled, “So I try to help my husband but then we have a child, a baby. So it is very difficult in terms of finances.” She continues to work occasionally in the nail salon (a few hours a week). She wants to get a certificate as a nail technician so she can get more steady hours. She also wants to go back to school to improve her English. However, since Tony was born, she cannot find the time required.

“The first difficulty is communication. Because if I don’t have English how can I understand and talk to people? And how can I get interview for job and get a job? . . . I think everybody is equal. I don’t think because I’m an immigrant I have less chance. Just that I don’t got a chance to learn English. And other people are more lucky that they got to learn English, they got the job easy.” – Mai

Moving to Black Creek was a strategic decision for the Tran family. They used to live in the Chinatown area of downtown Toronto. They moved to Black Creek because of the large Vietnamese community that live there.

“Before we lived in the East Chinatown, Gerard and Broadview area. The population in that area, mostly Chinese. And we don’t speak Chinese so we don’t get job from Chinese. That’s the reason. And when we moved here [Black Creek area] lots of Vietnamese people. So when we go to the coffee shop we can hear who needs this and who needs that, easier to get job. -- Vinh

With limited English language fluency, it was crucial for them to be in an area where there is a large Vietnamese community for job and other supports. As Vinh noted, coffee shops in Black Creek are common places where Vietnamese people hang out to network and find out about potential jobs. Mai added that being closer to the Vietnamese community in Black Creek was important for social reasons as well. “When I go out of the house I usually see another Vietnamese so that make me happy” said Mai.

Language barrier is the main cause of all their hardships, according to Vinh and Mai. The Tran family does not perceive that they are treated unequally because they are immigrants. However, their low English language fluency makes them feel isolated, helpless and sad.

“Yes I feel sad about lacking of English and also sometimes frustrated” said Vinh. Mai also added “I also do feel sad and sometimes angry with myself because I don’t know English.” Both of them feel strongly that they need to improve their English language skills. However, they face many structural as well as motivational barriers. Mai can’t find any time to learn English since their son Tony was born: “right now, I have no choice. I have to look after my baby. I don’t have time to invest for myself for learning English. So it’s very difficult and makes me angry and frustrated.” Both Vinh and Mai did take English language classes but quit soon after because they found the classes difficult. Their experience reveals some gaps in current English language instructions program for newcomers.

Marginalized immigrants like Vinh and Mai with low educational background, long gaps in education, and limited social networks require a more accessible curriculum and community linked mentoring and motivational supports. Providing childcare services and other economic and structural supports will also be necessary for people like Mai to be able to attend classes.

Health wise, the Tran family mentioned that they did not really have any major health issues so far. Vinh and Mai were very appreciative of the affordable and high quality of healthcare in Canada. “When we have health problem we go to the hospital for free,” said Mai with a sense of relief. “And in Vietnam you spend so much for hospital cost. So, health care is the best [in Canada]. Because I go to the hospital to deliver my baby, there was no cost. In Vietnam we would spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars.”

After probing further, Vinh and Mai did mention some emerging health concerns. Mai said that the strong smell of the chemicals used in the nail salon is affecting her health. Though the employer provides safety masks, Mai mentioned that she and most staff don’t wear the masks. Vinh said his key health concern was lower back pain and lack of sleep. Vinh recalled how he feels very weak and dizzy sometimes at work (once or twice a month) and that he has had to leave in the middle of the day because of this. He feels that there might be

something more serious happening to him but he is not sure.

Both of them shared that their emotional health is suffering due to the “very difficult” economic situation they are facing. They don’t want to go on social assistance and become dependent on the government. Until now, they have been living off of their savings, which are almost depleted. Consequently, they are experiencing a lot of anxiety about how they are going to manage in terms of jobs and finances after their savings are gone. Both of them still have strong professional aspirations. Vinh wants to be able to run a construction business and Mai hopes to teach someday. However, they don’t know how to achieve these aspirations. Their limited English language fluency is not just a barrier to stable employment but also a constant source of stress and sadness. They are waiting for a way out without knowing where to start:

Right now I don’t have any job to work, just to help friends [in their contract jobs] sometime when they need me. . . Sometimes 3 weeks I get one day work. Sometimes every week I get 2 days job. . . Because right now we still live on our savings. We don’t really need the support from the government. But when we need we will definitely go and apply for it. Our savings kind of close to the end. Right now we hope that we’ll get a job soon. So our life will be better. - Vinh





The Pérez Family

The child minding job from the community agencies, they call you in for a couple hours when they need you. The hospital is the same. So at times, they give you two shifts or three shifts. So if anyone gets sick, or a full-time doesn't go, there you are. So many years have passed. How I would have liked, because I was a teacher in Peru and I had ten years of service, and a person starts to develop a level of calmness but here no, they just call you and you have to run, with such little time, and they tell you 'no' over here and the next day they don't call you because you left on bad terms. A person can't be so disposable. – Carmen

Summary: Sisters Carmen and Elena Pérez¹² came to Canada from Peru for a better future. Elena, 43, was the first one in the family to come to Canada in 1987 when she was 20 years old. She left her work at a travel agency in Peru and entered Canada through the live-in caregiver program. However, there were many complications with her employers and she was not able to fulfill the 2 year work requirement for live-in caregivers to apply for permanent residency status. Luckily, she managed to get permanent residency status by applying through humanitarian and compassionate grounds. A couple of years after Elena came to Canada, their parents also entered Canada as visitors and later succeeded in getting permanent residency status. Older sister, Carmen, 46, has a Bachelor of Education degree from Peru and was working as a teacher there. She also decided to come and join her family in Canada. She also aspired for a better economic future since she was only making \$100/month as a teacher in Peru. However, she was refused a visa to Canada repeatedly. With other options running out, she applied through the live-in caregiver program and was accepted to come to Canada in 1997. While working as a live-in caregiver, Carmen faced similar difficulties and exploitation like her younger sister Elena. Carmen managed to get her permanent residency paper after 7 long stressful years. For the Pérez sisters, the delays and difficulties in getting permanent residency status had long-term negative impacts on their employment pathways. Among, other things, it “super-isolated” them, as Elena put it, in ways that prevented them from improving their English language skills and developing other skills. The career pathway for both sisters and their parents has been very precarious. As Carmen put it, they are stuck in “horrible jobs.” Currently, Carmen works as a part-time food services staff at a hospital while Elena works as a part-time banquet staff at a hotel. Since both of these jobs offer limited hours, the Pérez sisters juggle several other casual jobs (on-call banquet staff for functions, on-call child-minding, house cleaning etc.) to make ends meet. Both sisters are divorced and are raising children as single mothers. The Pérez sisters managed to pool their savings with their parents and purchase a house together in the Black Creek area. They all live together along with their children: Elena's 23 year old daughter, Gabriel (also a single mother with a 1 year old son), and 15 year old son, Rueben, and Carmen's 8 year old daughter, Monica. They share costs, household responsibilities, and provide emotional and other support to each other. However, the acute difficulties caused by their jobs that “never become full-time” are taking a severe toll on everyone. This is the story of the Pérez sisters “working rough, living poor.”

¹² Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Pérez Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled “Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor.” Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized ‘visible minority’ immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the ‘Where are the Good Jobs?’ report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

The Pérez sisters (Elena and Carmen) came to Canada by different paths and at different times. But both of them have disturbingly similar experience of being trapped in a precarious employment pathway.

Elena completed a one-year secretarial course and a six-month business administration course in Peru after finishing high school. She was working in a travel agency there. During one of their visits to Peru, her Canadian “godparents” strongly encouraged her to join them in Canada and told her about good economic and educational prospects in Canada. They helped to arrange her visa through the live-in caregiver program and even paid for her flight to Canada. Once her visa came through, Elena “booked her own flight” at the travel agency she worked at, and came to Canada without much time to prepare. She only knew that she was going to work in a job that involved “taking care of children” and that she wanted to “improve her English.”

The live-in caregiver work was much more difficult than Elena expected. Like other live-in caregivers in Canada, she found the work environment very exploitative. Employers would take advantage of her just because she did not have “papers” and her English was weak. They would make her work more than forty hours a week, sometimes seven days a week, without compensating her overtime. They expected her to do housework and cleaning in addition to taking care of children. In the case of one family, she had to sleep in the same bedroom as the child and thus was responsible for getting up at the middle of the night to change diapers. Elena was shocked at how little time the parents spent with their children. The children would call Elena their “mommy.” She found the work environment to be “like a prison” but tolerated it for the sake of the children she was looking after.

“Yeah, the abuse as well, because in my case, I had to work so many hours, they had me in something like a prison. It was my own prison because I didn’t have any papers, I had to work seven days, and they could tell me ‘oh no’ so they can dismiss me - Elena

Elena’s key goal was to study English. But the work situation and demands from employers prevented her from doing so. The only time she had to study was in the weekends, but often the employers would add weekend responsibilities for her, sometimes without pay. Her godparents offered to help her with studying English on the weekends. However, her godparents lived in Brampton and her work was in Mississauga making it difficult for Elena to study regularly at their place. Once when her employer did give her a ride to her godparents place, her employer made her feel “very bad” for “using up so much gas.” The distance and the minimal interactions she had with other people made her feel “super-isolated.”

Elena had many complications with her employers. Like many other live-in caregivers in Canada, Elena was unable to meet the 24 months of work requirement for live-in caregivers to be eligible to apply for permanent residency status. Elena’s first employer dismissed her due to personal health problems. Her second employer let Elena go after their original caregiver returned from a leave of absence. Elena sought professional help from a community legal clinic to apply for permanent residency status. After several years, the government accepted her permanent residency application based on humanitarian grounds.

Elena met her, now ex, husband soon after she had arrived in Canada. Elena’s daughter, Gabriela, was born in 1988 and her son, Rueben, was born in 1995. Elena described her ex-husband as a “*machista*.” He was abusive, which led to a difficult divorce. This left Elena homeless. She lived with her daughter in a shelter for three months. To add to her difficulties, her daughter Gabriela was diagnosed with a serious “cancer-like illness” that was all consuming for many years. Only recently, Gabriela seems to have recovered and is maintaining good health and a positive spirit. Not having “papers” for a long time, a strained marital relationship, and her daughter’s serious illness, made it very difficult for Elena to study English. “I hardly had time to think about myself” recalled Elena. Unable to find stable work, she took whatever jobs that came her way.

A couple of years after Elena arrived in Canada, her parents came to Canada as well on a visitor visa. After a long wait, they managed to become

permanent residents. Her parents also faced similar difficulties in getting stable employment. Elena was relieved to have her parents join her in Canada.

Elena's older sister, Carmen, was working as a teacher in Peru after finishing her Bachelor of Education degree. Though she enjoyed her teaching job, the \$100/month salary was limiting. All her family was now in Canada and she wanted to join them.

She applied for a visitor visa to Canada several times but her application was always refused. "Every time that I presented myself at the embassy," recalled Carmen, "I was rejected because I was a teacher and was not making enough." Her father then encouraged her to go England and apply from there. They had a family friend in England who helped with accommodation and also helped Elena find a job in a nursing home in London. She hoped that applying from England and working in a nursing home setting would enable her to get a visa to Canada. However, her visa application was denied again. After consulting with an immigration consultant agency, she was told about the live-in caregiver program as her only potential channel of getting to Canada. Although she had heard about the difficulties that Elena faced working as a live-in caregiver, Carmen felt she had no other option. She managed to find a family in Canada looking for a Spanish speaking live-in caregiver to sponsor her. Her application was approved. After many years of being separated from her family, Carmen finally arrived in Canada in 1997.

But her troubles had just begun. Although a decade had passed, Carmen faced similar difficulties and exploitation as a live in caregiver as her younger sister, Elena. "They abuse you because they know that you don't have any papers or you don't speak any English," claimed Carmen. Elena was appalled that her sister had to go through similar mistreatment as she did 10 years earlier. Like Elena, Carmen recalled that she worked many unpaid hours and was required to do excessive cleaning tasks in addition to taking care of children. In one case, she had to work seven days a week, all day long only earning about six hundred dollars a week.

Once she went to file a complaint and the agency responsible told her "if you want the job, you have

to do what they tell you to do." For the sake of the "blessed [immigration] papers" she felt that she had to tolerate the ill treatment. Carmen had thought that "two years will pass and then I'll have my papers." But instead it took 7 long years before she managed to get her permanent residency status. "Throughout the whole period of those seven years, I couldn't do anything" said Carmen referring to how insecurity in terms of immigration status can lead to severe isolation. This can prevent people from building good base in terms of employment, education or social networks.

As soon as she got her permanent residency status, Carmen tried quickly to make up for the lost time. She got her degree from Peru evaluated for Canadian equivalency and took any free or affordable training that became available. She wanted to get back either into teaching or working with seniors. She took English courses and completed training to work as a daycare assistant and to work with seniors. Although her sister Elena was going through a very difficult time in her personal life, Carmen managed to convince Elena to come along with her. They were determined to get their careers and lives back on track. Elena also wanted to work in a job that involved looking after children, like in a daycare setting. However, since her comfort in English wasn't as strong as Carmen's, Elena was hesitant to attend the trainings or apply for jobs. But Carmen was great at motivating Elena. Carmen would first scope out a potential training or job and then would convince Elena to come along as well.

Together they went to many government and community agencies that offer employment services. This is where they found out about the different trainings that are available. One of the community agencies recommended that along with applying for caregiving roles, that they prepare themselves for jobs in the food services industry. So they prepared two types of resumés and took food handling training. Although, Carmen and Elena found the community agency staff "very helpful" and had good intentions, the Pérez sisters were unaware of the barriers that immigrant women face in these two sectors. They were systemically becoming primed to fill unstable, part-time and on-call work.

In other words, they were becoming what critical feminist scholar Roxana Ng calls a “captive labour force:” like other marginalized women in the caregiving and food services sector, they would be “essential” for the sectors to function but at the same time would be treated as “dispensable.” In turn, the unstable and precarious nature of their jobs would make them “captive” and unable to find more stable employment.

Thinking back, the Pérez sisters questioned why the community agency advised them to apply for food service jobs. They were unaware of the level of insecurity that jobs in this sector can be. They felt unequipped to be able to negotiate decent stable jobs within this sector.

Both Carmen and Elena feel like disposable workers juggling precarious jobs in Canada. They have become stuck in an extended precarious employment cycle just like many racialized immigrant women. Through a friend, they heard about job openings for banquet servers in a hotel. Carmen applied and got this banquet server job first and then convinced Elena to join since “you could do it without having strong English;” later, their mother would end up doing this job as well. They were initially hired on an on-call basis and later promoted to part-time employees.

Elena continued with this banquet server job and has been working there for twelve years now. The pay scale is minimum wage but they usually get “good tips” which can bring the pay rate to \$20/hour. The work environment is unionized. However, part-time employees have limited benefits and protection. “Well, the full-time get all the benefits and the part-timers only have medicine at eighty-percent and dental once every six months,” said Elena. “But that is only for the worker and not for the family. And, they wash our uniform shirt of the hotel (laughs). And that’s it.”

Although she has gained some seniority over time as per union guidelines, Elena’s job has remained part-time until now. She has been waiting eagerly for the job to become full-time but there seems to be very little prospects of this happening. In fact, the job feels like an on-call casual job. Her work hours vary every week. She finds about her shifts every

Friday, usually getting about one or two shifts. She sometimes picks up a few more if someone is sick or cannot do a shift. But the number of shifts as well as the hours varies a lot. January and February are lean months when she hardly works at all.

“And then I went to the union and I asked them why is it they don’t respect seniority? And they say ‘well, it is because you are not available for every day.’ But at the times I have to work, they give me two or three shifts. I can’t live off that!” – Carmen.

One of the main reasons that Elena has not quit this part-time unstable job is because the unionized environment offers good sick day and time off provision. Due to her daughter’s serious illness, Elena has had to take many sick days and time off without losing seniority or the job itself. “I stayed,” Elena said. “And for *las cosas de la vida* [things that happen in life] I didn’t leave because I had too many problems during the course of that period. My daughter became sick, a very bad sickness, and I had the chance to leave at whatever time. I could ask for one month, two months, three months of vacation time, all the way up to two years. You continued with your seniority. That’s why I stayed at the hotel job.” Elena feels that this provision in unionized work setting is a blessing and that all work settings should have this.

Carmen was more prepared to take risks. She found out through another friend about a job in food services in a local hospital. She kept herself in the casual worker roster at the hotel and applied to the hospital. She was hoping that she could eventually transition from food services into a caregiving job in the hospital. Or at least she hoped that she could get a stable well-paying food services position in the hospital. She has been working as a part-time food services staff at the hospital for five years now. Sadly, she feels that things are worse for her in the hospital compared to the banquet staff job at the hotel. The food services employees at the hospital do belong to a union. But, unlike the banquet servers at the hotel, part-time employees at hospital “doesn’t get any benefits” said Carmen. “You don’t get nothing. Zero.”

Similar to Elena’s job at the hotel, Carmen’s shifts are unpredictable and changes every two weeks.

She usually gets assigned two shifts per week and then has to “fight” for additional shifts. Her work responsibilities also vary every week.

“They give us our schedules, they call us every Friday. The Friday, they can give us one day, they don’t give us one, or they can give us three, the most they can give us is four days. And every day, you are never guaranteed the eight hours. It could be four hour shift, it could be five . . . They respect the seniority and I am around the middle. But, the problem is that it is a rather large list. For example, in January, February, there is nothing. Or, they’ll give you one day a month, especially those who don’t have seniority. - Elena

In 2009, the hospital decided to outsource food preparation to an external private company. Due to this, many employees were laid off, mostly full-time employees. Carmen was relieved that she was not let go but she got demoted from part-time to casual worker status. “Last year they surprised us when they fired ten top people, and everyone was put back on ‘casual’ so now I’m casual again” said Carmen.

Elena often noticed people who are “whiter” and like to flirt with the male supervisor got more shifts than her, even though Elena had higher seniority. She often wondered if her background had anything to do with this. The staff members at the union office or the human resources office were of little help. She has stopped filing complaints since she fears that she will be given even fewer or worse shifts.

“I see that at the hospital my supervisors don’t respect seniority. If anyone gets further it’s because they are whiter, or something. So I went to complain to Human Resources and all that but that doesn’t work, whether it’s because I’m Spanish or because I live in Black Creek, or because they live in another part of the city. At times, I feel bad because if I go and complain, the deeper I dig myself into more problems because, because now they won’t call me. - Carmen

Elena confirmed that she is also afraid of filing complaints for the same reason as Carmen. “You can’t say anything because if you do they put you in the worst jobs or don’t call you” said Elena.

To make ends meet both Carmen and Elena have to constantly seek and juggle several other casual jobs. Carmen, for example, works on-call basis as banquet staff at the hotel where Elena works. Both of them take on any casual banquet work for private functions, cleaning work, and occasional child minding work that become available. They currently have developed a network of friends/colleagues through whom they can find out about different casual work. They have linked up with a couple of families who call them for cleaning work occasionally. The child minding work is usually through community agencies during events. This work is very occasional and is just enough to “covers transportation expenses” as Carmen put it.

However, juggling and managing multiple jobs is an extremely stressful and complicated process. Their main part-time jobs (Carmen at the hospital and Elena at the hotel) require them to be super flexible and available at all times. “They want you to be available from Monday to Sunday, morning, afternoon and evening,” said Carmen. This makes it difficult for them to line up their other casual jobs. If they block out certain times of the day or week at the hotel/hospital job, they run the risk of appearing not flexible or as available as other employees and thus may not get additional shifts. What is really troubling is that the union representatives at their respective jobs try to demand employees to be flexible rather than advocating with the employer for better security and stability for employees.

Both Carmen and Elena feel very stuck in these “horrible” job conditions that have little prospects of becoming permanent.

Health consequences from these precarious jobs are severe and impact the whole family. The biggest stressor for both sisters comes from having to mentally and physically juggle many low-paying, irregular jobs. “I always feel headaches and pain as a result of my job” Elena said sadly. “Not having enough money since I have so many different jobs and each of them paying me very little, very little. It gives me a headache because I don’t have a stable schedule. It makes it very difficult to plan anything out. Sometimes I’m busy from Monday to Sunday and I don’t even have one day to rest. The tiredness, sometimes there are

weeks that I'm exhausted from the tension, because all of us have to coordinate ourselves, from the exact moment on the exact day."

Wayne Lewchuk, a researcher from McMaster University focusing on labour market issues, refers to the energy required to find, maintain and juggle job(s) as 'employment effort.' For people juggling multiple low-paying irregular jobs just to make ends meet, the everyday 'employment effort' can be enormous in ways that it can be incredibly stressful. As captured in Elena's words, this stress of juggling irregular "horrible" jobs can make one's whole life irregular causing severe headaches, pain, and exhaustion.

The Pérez sisters mentioned that they feel like their lives are on hold. They have to coordinate and be on-call every second of their lives. Sometimes they may end up with too many shifts and be completely exhausted because they have no day off for several weeks. At other times, they may have no calls for work, but rather are left "on hold" in anticipation that something might come up; this waiting is equally exhausting and stressful.

Having sleepless nights, either from the financial stress or work exhaustion, has become so common for both the sisters that they have come to regard it as normal part of their life. Both of them suffer from chronic back pain, leg pain, and neck pain.

Carmen got a major wake-up call when her doctor diagnosed her with "pre-diabetes." "I received the surprise being diagnosed with pre-diabetes," mentioned Elena. She questioned her doctor about this and rightly came to the conclusion the root cause of this was the tension and "horrible state of stress" from her employment precarity.

Carmen has become a little more cautious after this diagnosis and tries to take it easy and take rest whenever she can. However, her irregular employment situation makes it impossible to do this. Once, due to being weak and exhausted, Elena strained her back while pushing a heavy cart loaded with food trays. She had to go to the emergency room. She was relieved to learn that part-time employees at least get health costs covered if there is a workplace accident. She was also eligible for sick time pay but they only paid her for the remaining hours on that day and not for the days she

"And I ask 'how if no one in my family has ever had pre-diabetes?' The doctors say that 'it could be due to stress and because one is Hispanic'" recalled Elena. "No, I wanted to know 'why?' And I think the ultimate answer is all the tension. When I was facing the problem with two shifts, three shifts, and that's when it started. Because, because I told the guy 'How, how do you expect me to act if I can't be available all day,' if not, I don't get hours. So for that, at the end, one lives with this horrible stressful state, the same with tumours or cancer, it comes from stress, unfortunately." - Carmen

had to stay home to recover. She filed a workplace injury report but nothing came out of that. She still has to return to her regular duties of transporting heavy food carts.

Elena's job at the hotel does provide more health coverage and other benefits than Carmen's job at the hospital. Elena, for example, is eligible for sick leave. As mentioned earlier, this is one of the main reasons that Elena has stayed with this job since the sick leave provision enabled her to take care of her daughter when her daughter was seriously ill. Elena has not had a direct workplace injury at the hotel job but is constantly worried that she might since "there is nothing safe." The employees have been fighting with the union to improve safety but there has not been any concrete action in spite of many injuries. "No, in the hotel, we're always fighting with the union since there is nothing safe" said Elena. "Accidents have already happened. People have slipped and fallen. They don't take care about you. For example, they don't have those shoes so that you don't slip because people can slip. It has happened a lot."

Their mother, who has also been working as a banquet server at the hotel while also juggling other jobs, suffered serious back pain and is currently on extended sick leave. She has osteoporosis. Their father has high blood pressures and arthritis. He suffers from severe leg pain and back pain, and has recently been diagnosed as having Parkinson's disease. The stress of multiple illnesses, and side effects of the many medications he has to take, makes him very depressed. Sometimes, he does not want to get out of his room. While Elena and Carmen somehow manage to pull themselves up and go to work even when they are not feeling well,

they are afraid that in the near future they will be too weak to continue and very soon end up in the same state as their parents.

Social impacts are equally serious. Both Elena and Carmen are particularly worried at not being able to spend quality time with their children. And yet, they often feel that they can't do anything about it. "For me, there can be two days, three days that pass and I don't see my daughter because she left at the exact moment when I had to be at work," says Carmen. "I leave at seven o'clock [in the morning] until six at night, so it is a lot. When I'm here [at home], I pick [my daughter] up earlier from daycare. But these are the problems for them, having to spend the entire day in another place."

"My daughter, she doesn't tell me any of her problems anymore because she says it will just give me another additional headache. My son doesn't even tell me anything. They see you tired, or they see you sick, they no longer want to tell you, or make you have an additional thing to worry about."
- Elena.

With much guilt Elena shared how she had to tell a series of lies to her son for not being able to make it to his sixteenth birthday party.

Elena and Carmen feel truly blessed to have very understanding children. Their children realize how hard Elena and Carmen work and the multiple challenges they face. The children try not to add additional burden on their parents.

While they genuinely appreciate this empathy and sensitivity from their children, both Elena and Carmen are aware that extended gaps in communication between parents and children can lead to serious problems. Or, it will prevent them from addressing problems in time. This was brought home when Elena's daughter became pregnant with Joshua when she was just 19 years old. Carmen feels that she could have educated her daughter more about relationships and pregnancy had she been able to spend more time with her daughter. Initially, Carmen was very opposed to her daughter going ahead with the pregnancy. But now of course little Joshua is the "joy" of the whole family.

In spite of all the stress, Elena's son, Rueben, keeps doing quite well in school; his grades are always in the eighties. She is very relieved each time about this. However, Elena is very concerned that her son complains about having headaches very frequently, but he does not want to go to the doctor. She has observed a steady drop in his motivation level. Recently, for example, he stopped going to soccer games. But Rueben consoles her very caringly that she does not have to worry about him. He often tells Elena: "Don't worry mom. I'm going to study. I don't want you to work anymore. Stop working. Go to sleep." Elena added that it is her son who is more worried about her. Rueben is "always very worried about me even though he is little, he gets bothered at times. 'Where did you go? Why didn't you get home at this time?'"



Figure 2. Family. Original Artwork by Ambreen Akbar

Carmen's eight year old daughter, Monica, is also deeply affected. According to Carmen, the little girl starts asking: "my mom said she would be here by eight...it's nine o'clock! Why hasn't my mom come home yet? Why?" And she starts feeling anguish and starts thinking that her mom won't come home or something happened to her." Carmen knows that this level of fear and anxiety in an eight year old can have adverse psychosocial impacts. "At times I see that [my daughter] lacks a little concentration" said Carmen. "And she goes off into her own little world. Yeah, she does absorb a lot of the problems." But like Elena, she feels she is stuck in unstable jobs that prevent her from taking care of her daughter.

The Pérez sisters and their family are not necessarily “poor” since the whole family shares everyday costs. But they live minimally and cut costs whenever they can. Elena for example really needs good orthopaedic shoes as her feet are “killing her” from standing all day. And yet to save costs she buys nice shoes for her children but for herself she buys shoes at “Payless.” When hard pressed they use the food banks, about “once a month” according to Elena. “Well in the food bank, they have a lot. They have beans, tomatoes, but on other days they give you bread, butter, or lettuce, which is always a huge surprise when they give you something like that. Sometimes soap.”

Family is their main source of strength

and happiness. Although all of them had to go through very lengthy stressful process to get permanent residency status in Canada, the Pérez family is happy that they are all together here. Everybody chips in to cover household expense. And they take care of each other. “We have always been united” said Carmen. Elena and Carmen are able to work late because they have family members to look after their children. They have a good network of friends, mainly from the Hispanic community, who also provide emotional and other support to each other. This social network within their Hispanic community is also their source of information for casual jobs.

Both Carmen and Elena take turns accompanying their parents to medical appointments. They come all the way downtown to a community health centre that provides professional interpretation in Spanish. They feel that having this service assures that they get the best healthcare and therefore don’t mind traveling the distance for the medical visits.

The Pérez sisters, particularly Carmen, keep informed about community programs. They try to take as many free training that is offered. Although Carmen mentioned that they often “fall asleep” during these trainings because of lack of sleep. Both the sisters really want to study in order to secure a better paying job. They are also very keen on improving their English fluency. But their job precarity and financial insecurity is the primary factor that prevents them from doing so. Carmen mentioned “as [Elena] said, our plans are that we would like to take on a career for a couple years and stop doing the jobs that we are currently doing, because these jobs like being waitresses are ruining our backs.” “So, if we could study, we would feel happy with ourselves since we’re currently doing jobs that we are not happy in right now.”

But there are no tangible solutions and supports in sight. Thus, for now, they are stuck in their precarious jobs that employers intentionally don’t want to make full-time (largely to save costs by not offering benefits). Carmen summed up the problem of this situation in this way:

Everyone fights to become full time, but that is really difficult. How long have I been here? Fifteen years, and you can never become ‘full-time’. It’s the same thing in the hospital. They don’t want to give it to you because of the benefits. Which is why I ask ‘after living in Canada for so many years...’ one starts to feel bad because you can never become full-time. Now, I’m coming close to retirement age (laughs) . . . That’s the problem that we face when we come into this country. I think that in our home country, we ask for less. Well, we have no money but we were able to relax [back home]. But over here, we’re always stressed.





The Sharma Family

Not having enough money, not being able to afford healthy food and so it does affect me and causes weakness overall in the body . . . and because of financial insecurity from job and the income is not enough so that stresses me and that stress again affects my behavior towards my children and causes conflict and argument with my wife. . . because of the jobs, just in between us, husband and wife, we have tension and that gets transferred to children and they also express their tensions in terms of anger ... so it is affecting them, our anger is affecting them mentally -- Daruun

Summary: The Sharma¹³ family came to Canada in 2006 “thinking of family and children’s future.” Daruun Sharma, currently 39 years old, his wife Nutan, 32 years old, live together in the Black Creek area with their two sons, Rafat, 15 years old, and Naadir, 9 years old. Their relatives living in the US encouraged them to apply to immigrate to Canada through the “points system” (Federal Skilled Worker and Professional class) and ensured them that “there are good job opportunities, good money” here. Nutan was born with one kidney and one lung and was excited that she will receive good healthcare for this in Canada. Daruun has a Master’s degree in Chemistry from India and 15 years of work experience in big steel companies. Nutan has a Bachelor’s degree in Economics from India. In addition to taking care of their sons, Nutan was tutoring and doing beautician work on a part-time basis. They were not rich but were “living comfortably” in India. They wanted more for themselves and especially for their two sons. They pooled in all their savings and took loans from family and friends to cover for their move to Canada. Once they got here, their high hopes quickly disappeared. Daruun was particularly saddened that his 15 years of professional work experience did not mean anything in Canada. After doing a variety of survival jobs, he finally got a full time job in 2007 as a machine operator in a chemical factory. The main reason he got this job was he was willing to take the night shift (11:30pm to 7:30am). The job is far below his skill level but he was at least glad to have a full time stable job. However, from 2010, his hours have been much reduced (2 days per week) and his work schedule is constantly changing. For Nutan, her health conditions make it difficult to do manual labour jobs. However, manual labour factory jobs are the only types of jobs she has been able to get. Currently, she works in a bakery doing packaging. Both Daruun and Nutan feel that discrimination and language barrier are the key reasons why they are unable to get good jobs. A year ago, Nutan’s brother and his family also immigrated to Canada against Nutan’s advice. Nutan’s brother has a nursing degree from India but is stuck in doing labour jobs while he goes through the long process of getting his degree accredited. They are currently living with the Sharma family in the small apartment. The Sharma family finds their life in Canada to be “too hard.” This is their story of “working rough living poor.”

¹³ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Sharma Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled “Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor.” Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized ‘visible minority’ immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the ‘Where are the Good Jobs?’ report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

Daruun and Nutan were living a comfortable and happy life in India. They were not wealthy but always had a decent job and were financially secure. But they wanted more out of life, especially for their two growing sons. They heard from their friends and relatives how “nice and peaceful” Canada was. They also heard that Canadian government was looking for skilled people to immigrate to Canada to fill the many jobs there. They were also told that Canada had good healthcare services. Nutan was particularly keen to come to Canada so she could get good care for her health condition. They found information about the Canada Federal Skilled Worker immigration program through their relatives in the US and applied right away. They were thrilled that their immigration application was approved. This approval made them feel like their rich skills and experiences were validated and that Canada wanted them. To prepare for their move to Canada, Daruun and Nutan sold their assets and also took loans from family and friends. They even worked with an immigration consultant in India to better prepare themselves for Canada.

They made big plans including the possibility of opening a small business in Canada. However, their high hopes and positive image of Canada was short lived. They found Canada to be a hard and unfriendly place to live in. They were also sad to see that “health care is not so very good” here.

When they first came, the Sharma family lived in a small basement apartment in Etobicoke area of Toronto. They eagerly started applying for work through all job search strategies including applying online for “hundreds of jobs,” applying with the help of employment agencies, applying in person etc. However, they rarely heard back. Initially, Daruun would highlight his 15 years of work experience. Then he began to wonder if having “too much experience” is why he was not getting jobs. Soon, he found himself in the ironical situation of underplaying his work experience.

They had brought \$18,000 in funds when coming to Canada; some of this was their own savings and the rest was loans from family. Much of this fund became depleted very fast within the first year to cover rent, food and other costs. Then the Sharma family started going to temp agencies for jobs. The

only jobs they could get were low paying temporary manual labour factory jobs far away from Etobicoke. Nutan, for example, got a job in an electrical factory located in the Black Creek area and was commuting from Etobicoke.

One day, the Sharmas came home after a long day of work to find their apartment broken into and ransacked. The thieves took all their jewelries and electronics. The thieves even took Nutan’s “mangal sutra” which is a symbolically valuable necklace that married women from India wear. They were even more shocked to see that the police came only 28 hours after they reported the robbery and did not do very much to help them recover their stolen property. They lost most of their valuable assets due to this robbery. Since they were new in Canada, they did not know about home insurance and thus did not get any compensation for these lost goods.

They decided to move out of Etobicoke after this incidence. Since Nutan’s job was in the Black Creek area, they decided to move to this area to be closer to her work. More affordable rent, central location and good public transit system were other reasons why the Sharma family decided to settle in Black Creek area. They also noticed that there were many temp agencies in this area and ready availability of manual labour jobs. Nutan mentioned, “at least you can find labour job in Black Creek.”

Nutan got laid off from the job in the electrical factory shortly after moving to the Black Creek area. She then went from one precarious job to another: “first in a furniture company putting glue, then worked on circuit board, and then in a bakery, worked in a plastic company, worked at many different places.” She got most of these jobs through temp agencies. All of the jobs were low-paying and low-skill jobs that not just paid barely above minimum wage but also did not contribute in building any meaningful professional skills for Nutan. They were all short contract jobs. A few were just couple of days. She felt like a disposable labourer.

Hard work and job stress has caused adverse impacts on her breathing since she has only one lung. She can’t stand and work for too long. However, the only jobs available to her till now are labour jobs that require hard work and standing for

long hours. She currently works at a bakery doing packing. If the packaging machine is broken, she has to do it by hand. She has been working at this bakery for the last two years. She finds the work very routine, dull and unsatisfying. Even after two years, the job remains “on-call basis” and is highly unpredictable. If she is lucky she has 25 hours of work some weeks. At other weeks, she does not get called at all. Being a casual on-call employee, Nutan often gets weekend shifts since permanent employees at the bakery don’t want to work weekends. She gets paid at minimum wage of \$10.50 per hour. However, since the temp agency takes \$1.50 commission, her take home wage ends up being less than minimum wage.

The company gives holiday pay but does not have sick leave provision nor does it give extended health insurance and other benefits. She worries about her safety on the job because she was shown how to work the machines only once, and she has witnessed a few workplace accidents. She also realized that management only addresses workplace safety concerns after someone becomes injured. Two years later, she is still considered a temp worker, and has not been offered any form of permanency or benefits at the job.

Daruun started applying for jobs in his field (Masters in Chemistry; 15 years of work experience in big steel companies) as soon as he got to Canada. However, he did not hear back from any. Daruun was advised by a settlement agency to get his graduate degree accredited by a Canadian university for equivalency. However, he found the process for getting equivalency quite cumbersome. Also, the \$150 fee was another deterrent at a time when he did not have a job. His friends who had been in Canada longer told him that getting Canadian equivalency for foreign degrees was a waste of money because it did not really increase their chance of getting a good job. So Daruun did not pursue getting Canadian equivalency for his degree and continued to apply through the usual channels (online, in-person, through job search agencies, through friends and networks etc.).

Since these avenues were not leading to stable employment in his field, he also started to go to temp agencies like Nutan was doing. As always, temp agencies only offered low-paying casual

labour jobs. Daruun would tell them about his rich work experience but the staff at the agency would indicate that they only had manual labour type jobs. “Ya, we ask [the staff at the temp agency] that we expect he give good job and I say my experience is in steel field” recounts Daruun. However, the temp agency staff would respond, “I don’t have steel jobs, I only have machine operator.” With little choice, Daruun was pressed to take on the low paying machine operator level job: “because I need money so I say ok I go there.” People at the temp agency told him this machine operator job was still related to his field just because it was work in a factory. Daruun, on the other hand, felt it was nowhere close to the high skilled work that he used to do.

“I have worked 15 years in steel making industry in India and I’m looking for a job in that line, but it’s difficult to get one. So even though my education is a master of science with chemistry, I’m working as an operator. – Daruun

The first machine operator job he held in 2007 paid only \$9 per hour. He was laid off from this job in three months. He again started applying for jobs. He got called for several job interviews in his field of work. However, none of them led to a job offer. During the interviews, Daruun noticed that most of the people interviewing and working at the office were “White.”

Since a job related to his field and skill level was not forthcoming, Daruun decided to accept another machine operator job in a paint factory in late 2007. It was full time and had a little better pay than the first company he worked at. But it was night shift job from 11:30pm to 7:35 am. Daruun was in a big dilemma. He and Nutan knew that taking this night shift manual labour job would have negative impacts not just on Daruun’s health but also on their family wellbeing. Daruun was particularly concerned that working night shift would make him too tired during the day to spend quality time with his wife and children. However, since no other decent job was available, the Sharma family decided that it would be best for Daruun to take this night shift job. He tried to ask his employer for day shift but he was told that only employees who have been in the company for a long time get day shifts.

With great burden on himself and his family, Daruun has been working a night shift job since 2007. During the day, while juggling childcare responsibilities, he is lucky if he gets about 4 hours of sleep.

The Sharma family is glad that there is extended health insurance coverage through Daruun's employment. However, employees are required to contribute to the plan; \$80 gets deducted from each paycheck from Daruun's salary for this insurance premium. Daruun's company has sick leave provision and holiday pay. He does not get paid vacation leave and instead gets 4% vacation pay.

The recession in 2009 led to cutbacks and had direct immediate consequences on Daruun's job. Daruun's hours got cut from full time to 16 to 20 hours per week. His employer justified this by saying that the work orders weren't coming in as much. The heavy work load, however, has not necessarily decreased. In fact with less number of hours, the work load feels heavier and beyond "human capacity." "You have to finish so much within one hour" mentions Daruun, "what is asked to do is more than our capacity, more than human capacity."

To make things worse, Daruun's work schedule has become irregular and unpredictable. "It changes every week," mentions Daruun, "sometimes they say you come Mondays sometimes Tuesday, you get a call today or at night...so come tonight....and then supervisor says ok today last tomorrow not come." He always feels on hold and is constantly hoping for more hours. This makes it difficult for Daruun to plan anything including applying for other jobs. He feels stuck in this precarious irregular job that hardly covers their household expenses. Working low-skill manual labour jobs had led to deskilling and Daruun is unsure whether he will be able to get a job in his field anymore.

Facing discrimination in the labour market is the last thing that Sharma family had expected about Canada. They were shocked and feel "tortured" by the direct and indirect forms of race-based discrimination they experience while looking for jobs as well as in the workplace settings. Having low English language fluency makes them more likely to be discriminated, looked down upon and excluded. In tears Nutan shared how her employers

and co-workers look down on her and make prejudicial comments about her background: "in my company sometimes they say 'I don't like Indian people...team leaders do.'" She feels that she is constantly told that she is not doing a good job. In the beginning she thought there was something wrong with herself. Later, she realized that she was doing as good a job as anyone and so felt that this was a way for her supervisors to intimidate her. Based on her experience, she has come to the conclusion that "they [employers] consider color as well, white people find the jobs and they don't like Indian people."

Nutan says that co-workers also rarely ask her to join for lunch. All this discrimination and exclusion make her feel "very heavy and disturbed." She often cries at work and at home because of this. Over time, she has gathered strength to fight back. "After some time I also say 'I don't like you' back" asserts Nutan.

Daruun has not faced direct discrimination and intimidation like Nutan. However, he is always questioning why he only sees "white" people in good jobs. He also wonders if their "pronunciation" (i.e. accent) is a factor in not getting a good job.

Their household income level is adversely affected by their precarious employment situations. With low wage, they feel like no matter how many hours they work or how hard they work, they cannot make enough to become economically secure. As Nutan bluntly put it, "we work hard but we don't earn enough despite working hard; so it's always there in your mind and your family also gets disturbed." They don't have to go hungry or have not missed rent payments (have missed telephone bill payments), but are living on a month to month basis with no savings at all. With a household of four, they wish they could move to a two bedroom unit. But in Nutan's words "[one bedroom unit] is all we could afford; the bigger apartment costs twelve hundred dollars or so." They feel very crowded. They wish their sons could have a quiet room to study and a desk. Instead the sons do their homework on the floor of the living room.

They also wish they could live in a cleaner building without pest infestation. Nutan shared how her younger son was traumatized when he saw a rat in

the apartment, “my younger son, although he had seen rats in Bombay, but not inside the home, and he saw a rat inside and he was very scared and he was feverish at night.”

Their financial insecurity pushes them to make tough money savings steps in their everyday lives. Even public transportation fares appear unaffordable when faced with low-income conditions. The Sharma family often has to decide to walk rather than take the bus since \$10 each way bus fare cost for the whole family seems a lot when you don’t have much money in hand. So much so, Nutan has actually begun washing clothes by hands to save \$2 for the laundry. “Two years ago, the situation was better,” Daruun sadly shared, “we used to, for example for laundry, we used to be able to go for laundry outside.” “But now we have to think that it costs \$2 for each load, so [Nutan] does it at home.” They rarely eat out. Even when they do they “just buy pizza” as this is the cheapest. Nutan and Daruun reminisced their days in India when they would go out to eat in restaurants periodically or go to movies and it would be a memorable family time. They wish they could afford to do the same sometimes.

What makes them really sad is not being able to afford educational and extracurricular activities for their children. With great sense of regret, both Nutan and Daruun recounted the many extracurricular activities (swimming, piano, French language tutorial, summer activities) that their sons wanted to join but could not afford to do so.

“For example my child is good in mathematic but French he is not so good in French. He wanted extra tutorial help for French and we could not afford and because of that his grade dropped in French and because of that his total average has come down” – Nutan

“[Our sons] want to learn swimming and piano, but the fees are so high, we cannot afford. . . summer activities are so expensive, for example soccer is \$200. Even though they want to go, we are not able, we cannot afford it.” - Daruun

Nutan and Daruun are aware about the free extracurricular activities for children that local

libraries and community centers offer. However, the precarious work hours and conditions of their jobs make it difficult for them to benefit from these free children’s activities. “There are some free activities available, especially the activities that are in the library, but we are not able to take them because of our jobs,” shares Daruun, “we are so tired and we don’t have time sometimes.”

Due to lack of affordable childcare

programs in Ontario, coordinating childcare responsibilities ends up being very stressful. It is also one of the biggest barriers to getting good employment for low-income and precariously employed families with school aged children like the Sharma family. They don’t have the well-paying and secure employment conditions to be able to afford suitable childcare arrangements nor do they have the negotiated flexibility in their jobs to be able to attend to childcare responsibilities like picking up their sons from school (at 3:30pm) and dropping them off in their after-school activities. The only option they have is for Daruun to stick with the night shift job so that he can take care of childcare responsibilities during the day. In Daruun’s words, “we both have to go to work here and we cannot afford childcare, both of us cannot afford to go to work at the same time so we decided to go to work at different times.” They know many families in which the husband has had to take a night shift job because of this.

In the two months when school is in summer break (July and August), Nutan and Daruun are able to take “extra work” since they don’t have to worry about picking and dropping off their sons from school or about after care. The older son is able to look after the younger one while Nutan and Daruun are at work. They try and “get as much work as possible” (from different temp jobs) so they can save for the leaner months. Winter months tend to be the worst since usually there is less work and less hours available in these months.

Their health has been the biggest casualty from their precarious employment and income conditions. Doctors have recommended Nutan against doing long strenuous work because of her preexisting health condition (one lung and one kidney). However, all the jobs she has been able to

get involve standing for long hours doing difficult manual labour jobs. She gets tired fast due to her pre-existing health condition but she has to continue working.

Nutan shared the many direct health impacts from her current job at the bakery: “because sometimes I have headaches because of the noise of the machine and because of the speed, I have shoulder pain . . . and if I talked too loudly it affects my lung . . . and knee is hurt for continual standing.” She is very aware and concerned about how the constant stress she feels from job and financial insecurity are big risk factors to more serious chronic conditions, particularly related to heart disease. “I used to feel heart pain sometimes and if I stress too much, I do have heart pains,” However, even if she does not feel well, Nutan has to go to work since her current job does not have sick leave provision. “Even though I’m sick now, I have to go to work, because if we don’t go to work we have no sick leaves and we don’t get paid” stressed Nutan. “I had a cough and I was vomiting and yeah I had vomiting at the job and I still continued to work.”

The same is true for Daruun. He added, “last week for example, I did not have strength to stand but I still had to go to work.” Getting only about 4 hours of sleep every day is making Daruun very weak. They are stuck in bad jobs that are making them sick frequently but then don’t have access to provisions (sick leave, relaxed time to rest, 8 hours of sleep, stress free environment) that can help them fully recover and maintain good health. “So, if we have to go work even if we are sick so the recovery period is extended,” as Daruun aptly put it, “so for example, others may recover 2-3 days after, but it actually takes us 8 to 9 days to recover.”

Daruun also listed the many health impacts from his current job: “so for the work involves standing most of the time and I have to lift boxes which are 25 kilos heavy and because of that the problem of back pain, knee pain and pain in the feet because of wearing safety shoes that causes constant burning sensation in the feet.” Like Nutan, Daruun is concerned about telltale signs (high blood pressure, fainting) of more serious chronic health impacts to come: “because of the job pressure, I faint so much it is affecting my blood pressure.”

Nutan has to access healthcare on a regular basis. This affects both Nutan as well as Daruun’s work. In November 2008, for example, Nutan had to have a surgery and was in the hospital for 22 days. Since her job did not have sick leave provision, she had to leave the job because of this. Daruun also was not able to go to work during these days since he had to take care of Nutan and their two sons. Their total income during that month was only \$300. They had to borrow from relatives and use up their savings to make ends meet during this month.

Their family relationship and wellbeing is very much strained due precarious employment conditions. Nutan and Daruun mentioned that they hardly get to see each other and talk to each other. The following conversation captures how little time Nutan and Daruun have to spend with each other. “So I come back at 4pm and he goes back to sleep at that time there is really not much interaction” Nutan mentioned, “I’ll wake him up for dinner and hmm and it’s time for to sleep and for him to go to work.” Daruun added, “In the morning, our interaction is over the phone between each other passing information about home.” He sadly shared that “for the last four and a half year and I feel like we are not really living together.” To which Nutan responded, “it’s not good, this life is not good.”

They have noticed how their precarious job conditions are directly leading to increased tension and anger within the family. Their children are most affected by this. Daruun in particular is aware of how the stress of his night shift job compounded by exhaustion and lack of sleep makes him much easily agitated. “If the stress goes up then high level of stress causes headaches and my blood pressure increases,” Daruun admits, “and because of that I get angry and it affects my interaction with children, and also because of that I cannot help my children in their activities because I’m so stressed.” He wishes so much that he was able to spend quality time with his wife and children in more relaxed environment.

Sadly, their employment conditions, their financial situation, their individual health, and their family health all appear to keep getting worse every day.

In spite of these difficulties, Nutan and Daruun find ways to stay strong and keep going. Though their relationship is getting strained, Nutan and Daruun try to support each other whenever they can. Daruun has readily taken on many of the childcare responsibilities. He also tries to give as little stress to Nutan. “Because I am at home during the day and I have to take care of most of those things and because of [Nutan’s] health conditions I try not to give her any additional stress” shared Daruun. Nutan tries to do the same for Daruun knowing that he is operating on 4 hours of sleep. Whenever the whole family is together, they try and make the best out of it. Any time they get, they prioritize it for their children. Nutan and Daruun go out of their way to find affordable extracurricular activities for their two sons so their children can keep learning. They feel glad that their children are very understanding of the difficulties that the family is facing and try to help out in every small way they can. The empathy from each other is what keeps them going.

The key source of support that keeps Nutan and Daruun afloat is their family back home in India. Their parents regularly send them clothes, food items, spices, medicine and when needed, money. They feel guilty that they have to rely so heavily on their family back home. Like many immigrant families, they were hoping to send money back home to India. Instead the reverse is the case and it appears like it is not going to change anytime soon.

Due to several negative experiences, Nutan has lost trust in the healthcare system here and regularly consults her aunt in India, who is a doctor, for health recommendations. She finds that doctors here take her more seriously when she tells them that her physician aunt recommended certain treatment.

In 2010, Nutan’s brother Sanjay expressed interest to immigrate to Canada. Sanjay holds a nursing

degree from India and had been working in a government hospital. Nutan strongly recommended Sanjay not to immigrate to Canada. Nutan mentioned that she told Sanjay “you have a government job, you are alone and you are fine there so you stay there, don’t come here.” But Sanjay did not want to listen to Nutan and instead asked her “you have come here and why are you stopping me?” He came to Canada under the Federal Skilled Workers and Professional class. He has applied for accreditation of his nursing degree but since it takes a long time, Sanjay is stuck doing labour jobs. Seeing Sanjay’s situation, Nutan stressed, “so [Sanjay] also came here and is doing a labour job now; so that’s why I say that somebody who has a good job [back home] should not come here.” Their Canadian dream is completely shattered to the point that they are actively recommending people not to immigrate to Canada.

Nutan and Daruun’s main and only source of hope is their children. They are committed to creating the right environment and supports for their sons to have successful education, career and as Nutan put it “not be in our situation.” They are hopeful that their children’s success is what will eventually “improve” their situation:

We are keeping our future in mind. We are hopeful. We know that our situation is not going to [be] forever. My son for example if he gets a good education and in the future things will improve. We sit down and discuss our situation with our son, planning for the future so that teaching him also how to manage and cut down on extra unnecessary expenses, and also manage with what you have... And also concentrate on education so that he can improve his life and get a better education and not be in our situation.





The Bolivar Family

In [my] job, there is no security... I have seen through the experiences of a lot of workers where they have done their jobs, but they are asked to do more than what the job requires. There have been many people who they have [been] fired, or terminated ... A lot of stress because we're always thinking 'Okay, this week I'm here, you know?' I made it until the end of the week. Now it is like a war is going to start in order to hold on to this job, in order to survive, in order to make it to the next week. And this turns into a vicious cycle. Everything feels temporary because at any given time, it can end whether it is your fault or not. – Carlos

Summary: Carlos Bolivar's¹⁴ parents migrated to Canada from Ecuador in 1987 when Carlos was just one year old. Now he is 24 years old. Carlos thought that growing up in Canada would make things smoother for him to find a decent career job. However, Carlos's experience has been anything but smooth. Fresh out of high school, Carlos had dreamt of serving with the Canadian Armed Forces. In spite of completing the necessary training and working there part-time for three years, he could not get the promotions to get a stable full-time posting. He quit this dream and completed a Police Foundations diploma in 2007. Sadly, the only job he could get was working as security guard in buildings. During a visit to Ecuador, Carlos met Alicia, currently 23 years old, and the two decided to get married. He then sponsored Alicia to immigrate to Canada through the spousal sponsorship program, and she joined him in Canada in 2008. Alicia was pursuing an accounting degree in Ecuador which she hoped to continue in Canada. In 2009, they had a baby boy, Jose. Due to unaffordable childcare costs, Alicia decided to be a stay-at-home mother to take care of Jose. To help out with looking after Jose and share costs, Carlos's mother invited the young couple to stay with her in her apartment. In 2008, Carlos got a job in a major courier company. At first, the job seemed good. It offered good wage rate (currently at \$19/hr) and hours (40 hours per week), enough to make a decent living; plus, it offered "tons of benefits." However, the recession hit and hours were steadily cut back to 25 hours per week. Worse, the company expects him to do "split-shifts." Carlos feels like he is making equivalent of minimum wage because of the limited hours and split shifts. The good benefits plan is the only reason why he still wants to keep this job. Though they really want to get their own place, Alicia and Carlos are pressed to continue living with Carlos's mother. Recently, Carlos's brother lost his call centre job and also started living there. Carlos's mother who works as a janitor got injured at work and is currently on sick leave. Though sharing housing and other costs eases things financially, five people living in a two bedroom apartment makes it extremely crowded and is leading to family tensions. This is the everyday experience of the young Bolivar family 'working rough living poor.'

¹⁴ Pseudo-names used to protect confidentiality of participants. This case story of the Bolivar Family is part of a ten case story compilation from the report titled "Where are the Good Jobs?: Ten stories of working rough, living poor." Evidence for this report is based on research conducted in 2011 in Toronto by the Income Security, Race and Health team spearheaded by Access Alliance. This research generated rich evidence about the everyday pathways and factors that are preventing racialized 'visible minority' immigrant families from getting good jobs in their field. Damaging economic and health impacts from being stuck in unstable, precarious types of jobs have also been documented. This case story can be read independently or together with the other case stories of the report. Full version of the 'Where are the Good Jobs?' report is available for download at www.accessalliance.ca

Carlos had high hopes and big dreams about career and financial security. Since he came to Canada when he was one year old, he always felt like he was Canadian-born. He and his parents assumed that like other Canadian-born children of immigrant families, Carlos would not face the same difficulties that his parents had to face to find stable job. He had Canadian education and spoke English fluently without any accent. His main dream from when he was in high school was to join the Canadian Armed Forces. He saw that some of his friends joined the armed forces as a way to get themselves through university. However, Carlos was certain that he wanted to “make a career out of it.” He enlisted with the armed forces soon after high school graduation and worked there part-time for three years. However, he was disappointed to find that it was very difficult to get promotion to the ranks he wanted (“sergeant or higher”) even if he had “all the prerequisites.”

In 2007, he left the Army and decided to try the police forces instead. He completed the Police Foundations course at Seneca College. He took \$14,000 loan from the government run Ontario Student Aid Program (OSAP) to cover tuition and other educational costs. However, he could not secure a job in the police forces in spite of this course. The only job he could get was with security companies that provide security guard service in condominium buildings. The pay rate was low and the job was “very unsatisfying.” However, he had no other choice but to take the security guard job to make ends meet and pay off his student loan. “I did it more out of necessity for money,” recalls Carlos, “because at that point OSAP was starting to bother me since [government] was saying that they wanted their money.” He wished his parents had invested in Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) so he would not have had to be burdened with such a large student loan.

In the meantime, he started applying for other jobs. Like other young people, he was adept at using technology and internet for job search. “This is the twenty-first century so we use the internet to search for jobs,” affirmed Carlos, “starting with the most obvious places like Monster.ca, Workopolis, Jobbank, and those recruiting centres.” He also went to “the community centres where they help you

make your resumes.” Sadly, none of these strategies led to a well-paying meaningful job. Once he tried out a salesperson job at a major electronics company. Although he was making good sales, the company decided to fire him during his probationary period. So he was back to doing security job. When asked whether networking through friends and people he knew had helped with finding a good job, Carlos quickly responded that this was useless in low-income neighborhood settings since most of the people he knew did not have jobs. “Because, you have to know people in a place where they are hiring people,” he stated, “and if fifty-percent don’t even have jobs, how are you going to find work though those people?”

Carlos was aware of his extrovert personality and good communication skills and used this whenever he can in his job search process. He would talk to everyone and anyone he met about their job and ask about job vacancies. This strategy turned out to be effective. While working as a security guard in a condominium building, Carlos started having regular conversation with one of the courier delivery staff that delivered packages to the building. This person gave Carlos detailed information about working as a courier delivery person in a major courier company and encouraged him to apply. Carlos thought he would give it a try and dropped his application and even had an interview. However, he did not hear back so he gave up on this idea.

To his surprise, after almost a year (in 2008), he got a call out of the blue from the company with a job offer. The wage rate was good and although the position was part-time he could regularly get 40 hours per week or more. Thus he did not think twice about accepting the offer. After the probation period, he became eligible for extended health and other benefits from the company. He was really pleased with the “tons of benefits” that the company gave including coverage for dental visits, prescription drugs coverage, disability and life insurance coverage, sick days provision, paid vacation leave (3 weeks per year), contribution to employee pension plan as well as discounts on partner company products including for telecommunications services and airline tickets (for example, Carlos can get a flight tickets for less than half the cost).

With an average annual income of \$40,000 a year, Carlos thought he had found a financially stable career path although this was not necessarily the profession he wanted to be in. At that time, he did not realize that the job was not very secure and that he should be “savings some oil for May” like his mother used to advise him. Nor did it strike him then that he and many others were treated as “permanent part-time employees” though they were doing more than full time hours.

The recession hit in 2009 and things started to go downhill for Carlos. The company went through major downsizing and “cut a lot of people.” Carlos was very worried that he would be among the first to be laid off since he was a part-time employee. But to his surprise, the company kept him and other part-timers while he noticed many full-time long-term staff being given the boot. However, things were far from rosy and smooth for Carlos. In fact, he steadily saw the “house of cards falling down.” His work hours were cut back. “I was working thirty-five, forty, no, fifty hours a week,” he recalled, “then they dropped it down to forty, and then thirty, and then to twenty.” Though the company did increase hourly pay rate annually (“merit based increases”) to the current rate of \$19/hour, Carlos saw his annual income level drop down to half of what he was making (from almost \$40,000 a year in 2008 to approximately \$20,000 by 2010). The workload did not decrease correspondingly so Carlos found himself working harder for lower number of hours while earning less over time. “They want us to fill the vehicles with more stuff, or more documents, with less people,” shared Carlos. “So, the same amount of work with less people, where is the rationale in that?” He estimates that the company now wants ten staff to do what fifteen staff used to do before.

Worse, the company expected staff to start working “split-shifts.” Carlos would start at 8am and work till 12pm and then he would have to wait till 3:30pm for his next shift and work till late evening (7pm or 8pm). It felt like working for 12 hours per day but only getting paid for 8 hours. In Carlos’s words, this was like “working on minimum wage” even though the wage rate was \$19/hr.

The excellent benefits plan that the company offers to employees is the main reason that Carlos is staying with this job . . . for now.

“My job is part-time’... so, my schedule is from eight in the morning until noon. That is the schedule which is, as they say is ‘guaranteed.’ But depending on the day, we could finish early or we can finish late. They would give us ‘split-shifts.’ So, from eight to twelve, and then there was nothing else to do except wait until three-thirty, quarter to four. So just imagine having to wait two, three, four hours until your next shift... doing another two, three hours of work... and then leaving at seven, seven-thirty, or eight at night. So we work, we spend twelve hours there, but they only pay us for seven or eight of them.” -- Carlos

Job satisfaction level at the courier company job is very low for Carlos. He finds his job dull and repetitive. With the cut in work hours without corresponding decrease in workload, and the split-shift arrangement that make for long work days with less paid hours per day, Carlos is finding that he gets physically exhausted more easily than before. He mentioned that the company has “paramilitary” approach in terms of meticulously managing work order flows “everything from the kilometers on the vehicle up until the exact minute when we clock in and punch-out at work, up until the exact minute when inspecting our vehicles... it is very controlled.”

Unlike some of his other colleagues, he feels lucky that he had only one minor workplace related physical injury. He strained his leg muscles once when jumping off the delivery van. To be eligible for ODSP compensation for this injury, he was asked to accept “modified duties.”

The emotional burden of this high stress work environment is very taxing. The constant rush to make deliveries within short time frame creates a lot of high pressure. The highly mechanized and computerized surveillance of work order flow make work “very exhausting process because you don’t have much time, and the supervisor is there, not

watching you, but there are the cameras and we all know that we have to work really quickly.”

The company offers limited professional development and skill building opportunities. Carlos shared that the only training that the company offers is to become a supervisor at the company. While the pay is a little higher for supervisors, Carlos has noticed how incredibly stressed supervisors at the company are. “Yeah you get a bigger salary, but you have to sacrifice your life, your family life, your life with your wife, your kids, life in general,” observed Carlos. “Because of this the majority of those supervisors, unfortunately, they always look stressed and are not happy in the positions that they are in.” Carlos does not want to pursue career advancement to the supervisor level since the employer expects supervisors to “draw blood” for the company. In other words, for Carlos, the current job is a dead-end job in terms of career advancement.

Some company employees have tried several times to unionize. Since the company offers good benefits, many employees at the company appear divided about whether to unionize or not. “Because some love their jobs and others do not, its fifty-fifty percent who want to and who don’t want to [unionize]” Carlos noted.

Carlos is constantly worried about the security of his job. He has seen many colleagues laid off for no particular reason and hopes he won’t be the next. Even after working there for 4 years, the company has not shown any signs of making his job permanent. He is holding on to the job without knowing if he will still be at this job next week. Carlos compared this “vicious cycle” of job insecurity and emotional turmoil that he goes through every week “like a war is going to start in order to hold on to this job, in order to survive, in order to make it to the next week.” Alicia is equally affected and adds “and all this just to survive.”

Alicia was pursuing a degree in accounting in Ecuador when she met Carlos in 2007. Carlos was visiting relatives in Ecuador. They fell in love and decided to get married. Alicia joined Carlos in Canada in 2008 once Carlos’s spousal sponsorship application was approved. Alicia was keen to continue her accounting degree in Canada. She had

made concrete next steps. She knew that she had to master fluency in English so had started taking intensive English language courses. Alicia had assessed that the accounting field offered a promising career prospect in Canada and was keen to finish her studies and enter the labour market to support the family. The arrival of their baby boy, Jose, in 2008 changed priorities for the young Bolivar family. Alicia decided to put her studies and career plan on hold to dedicate herself to looking after Jose. The high cost of childcare in Canada was a key reason that pressured her to do this. Another reason was that Alicia had some health complications after birth and so had to rest and recover.

For housing, Alicia and Carlos were glad when Carlos’s mother agreed to let them stay with her in her apartment. This way Carlos’s mother was able to help with looking after both Jose and Alicia. Alicia was feeling “very lonely” since she did not have any of her immediate family here in Canada. So it was nice for Alicia at first to be living together with Carlos’s mother. Also, sharing housing and living expenses served to ease the financial burden for everyone. The Bolivar couple, especially Alicia, always thought this was a temporary arrangement until they became more financially stable. Their dream was to get a place of their own with a separate room for Jose. Once Carlos’s hours at the courier company started being cut, the prospects of getting a place of their own diminished. Carlos’s mother’s two-bedroom apartment started appearing more and more crowded with time.

When Carlos’s brother lost his job (at a call centre) and decided to come and live with Carlos’s mother, things became even more difficult. Carlos’s brother has had it worse in terms of going from one precarious job another. Due to the five individuals living in an apartment with only two rooms, there isn’t much privacy. Carlos, Alicia and their son all sleep in one room. His mother sleeps in the other room, and his brother sleeps in the living room. As with any crowded arrangement, cordial family relations slowly gave way to tensions and conflict. With everyone facing difficulties in terms of job and income, the tensions became compounded and everyone is lately starting to “butt heads” with each other. “There can’t be any quiet,”

remarked Carlos, “each one has their own problem, but each one’s problems affect everyone.” Alicia added, “and they stress everyone in the house.”

Carlos sometimes feels like he “doesn’t even want to be home.” “I prefer to be out on the street or locked in my room because I don’t want to hear anything, because it comes in through here and it stays here.” Alicia really wants to move out and find their own place as soon as they can, “some place where we could be alone and have a complete home.” However, the young Bolivar couple is reluctant to do this right now because Carlos’s job at the courier company and their income situation seems very unstable.

To add to the vicious negative cycle, Carlos’s mother had a workplace injury in 2010 and is currently on social assistance. With both his brother and mother on social assistance, Carlos is currently the main breadwinner for the whole household.

Living in social housing is not an option that Carlos wants to revisit. He and his mother had lived in social housing when Carlos was a teenager. He recalled growing up in this environment as being extremely unpleasant. Recalling the pervasive violence and negative crackdown by the police, Carlos likened it as “cops versus the neighbours in the summer, and that was almost, not daily but weekly, biweekly, it was frequent.” He stated with raised voice: “I never liked it and I never wanted to go back. I don’t care what I have to do but I’ll never go back . . . just because it is subsidized [housing]? No.”

About living in Black Creek area, the young Bolivar couple has mixed feelings. On the one hand, they have endearing views about the close community spirit here and are quick to counter the negative stereotypes about Black Creek residents. At the same time, if opportunity comes along, they “would leave to another city or town” for better future.

Carlos is critical of “why an owner of a business or a recruiter or an interviewer or manager looks at your address and your postal code and they are already thinking this person is from Black Creek



Photo-narrative: 3 Jane and Finch our Community (Photo by Safy)

area or from Jane and Finch and I won’t even consider them.” He questioned how many employers wrongly assume that a Black Creek resident is “*bago*’, or lazy [in Spanish], or maybe this is a person who is lying right through their teeth, he is going to steal our property . . . because this guy doesn’t come from a prestigious area, he won’t be the same ‘quality worker’ like someone who comes from Leaside, for example, or High Park, Etobicoke.” Although Carlos has not experienced this place-based discrimination directly, he is critical of the lack of good jobs in the Black Creek area in general. He rightly questioned, “there is the Ministry of Transportation, the Downsview Armory or the Canadian Forces, the bus stations, or train stations, the Ministry of Health in the Dufferin and Finch area, and there are the Courts; so I see so many businesses, so many enterprises, so many companies, and I ask myself ‘how can there not be any work around here?’” He wishes he could get a job in the community so he does not “have to make a half-an-hour, or an hour long commute to Mississauga.”

Carlos himself has not experienced direct discrimination in the labour market. But he is aware that there is a lot of discrimination in the labour market, especially against immigrants, including his parents. He feels he is sheltered from discrimination because he is fluent in English and has confident communication skills. And though his first language

is Spanish, he mentioned that he is able to on-demand speak English without any Spanish accent. “Maybe it is because when I talk with the interviewer or the recruiter, I can speak almost identical like them without an accent,” he reflects, “maybe that’s why they look at me, but they hear me sound like one of them, and I don’t sound like I come from another country.”

Carlos has learnt the hard way that being fluent in English, not having an accent, and growing up in Canada does not mean that you can get a job that is stable, non-exploitative and pays enough to achieve income security. The Bolivar family has never had to go hungry, use food banks, or cut down on food and basic necessities to make ends meet. However, they are constantly on edge about their financial situation and feel they are living on a week to week basis.

They are especially worried about their growing debt level. Carlos and Alicia mentioned that their student loan, car loan and credit card debt total over \$50,000. They keep racking up their credit card debt since they use it regularly to cover everyday expenses. And the growing debt in turn becomes a major source of worry for them. After finding a place of their own, their next top goal is to get rid of their debt. However, with the current situation, Alicia mentions that they “can’t do that.”

Self-employment is the solution that the Bolivar family wants to explore. Carlos has given up on the idea of getting better wage employment than what he has right now. Both Alicia and Carlos strongly feel that the only way to financial stability is through self-employment. This is also the way they hope will free them from being stuck exploitative jobs with little control and satisfaction. “In my knowledgeable opinion, the best way to get ahead is self-employment” Carlos asserted. “The reason why I say this is because, as I said earlier, you are in control and you are the one who decides how you go about doing business, with who you do business with, how many business transactions you do.” Alicia is also “analyzing different strategies” so she can “work from home and so that don’t have to leave because of the baby.” Carlos has attended information session from a mortgage broker company on how to become a self-employed mortgage-broker. And the Bolivar couple has

already taken some key steps including registering their self-employed business (in Alicia’s name). However, here again, financial barrier is preventing them from pursuing the self-employment.

Also, they are not aware that self-employment path has its own difficulties and can be very unstable.

Their health is already starting get bad

even though they are still in their early twenties. Job and income insecurity causes a lot of stress and as Alicia put it “the stress affects the whole body” In fact, the acute levels of stress they face has become a hard lesson for them about stress being a critical determinant of health. “Now we know that stress affects everything” stated Alicia. Constant worry and anxiety that comes from high stress job (with low pay) and not having job security leads to lack of sleep and constantly being on edge and increased tension between family members. Alicia mentioned whenever she asks Carlos to spend time with family he always says “I have no time, I have no time.” This is because of the split-shift work hours that Carlos has and also because he is always on the lookout for more hours and other ways to bring additional income.

“The only thing stopping us is money. That we don’t have enough money. For example, the cheapest [mortgage broker] course – if it was free I already would’ve done it – but it costs five hundred dollars. I don’t have five hundred dollars for me to just pay it and do the course because five hundred dollars is rent for the house, the month’s food, two month’s food. The barrier is that we have needs first before we can have goals or luxuries.” -- Carlos

With sense of hopelessness, Carlos shared that the cycle of disempowerment also impacts health: “because I don’t have money, I don’t have time. Because I’ve got goals and not being able to achieve those goals due to a lack of money it affects my health. So when my health gets affected I try to think of ideas. And when those ideas don’t help me reach those goals, I feel like the storm continues.”

Carlos mentioned that his coping strategy is to “suck it up” and not to bother other people about it.

But Alicia has noticed that the stress is affecting Carlos's eating habit: "from the actual stress I see that Carlos has got this anxiety so he eats and eats and eats and that doesn't stop." When asked about her way of coping, Alicia stated, "I cry. . . that's my only relief is to cry."

Both Carlos and Alicia are worried about Carlos's brother. He has started to smoke and drink more often and more readily goes into violent outbursts because of all the stress from being laid off and income insecurity. They wish that Carlos's brother could get some counseling help to enable him to deal with his emotions better as it is affecting the whole household.

They are most concerned about Carlos's mother's health. Many years of working in low-paying jobs (currently as a janitor) has taken heavy toll on her health. She has chronic hip and back pain and feels pain "in almost her entire body." Because of constant and compounding stress ("one thing hits her and then another"), she suffers from depression. "She gets desperate and she suffers from this desperation that also affects others and she starts to talk and talk" mentioned Alicia, "she also feels lonely, in bed, she thinks she is alone." Carlos's mother "stresses a lot" not just because of her own job, income situation, and poor health but also because she is unable to send money back to Ecuador to her ill mother. Everything works as a vicious cycle and pushes things from bad to worse everyday. Carlos added that her mother feels completely lost: "the ideas of how to get ahead have started to run out so the light bulb has gone out and she's run out of ideas and just got a question mark up there; she is lost." The young Bolivar couple hopes that they won't end up in the same situation like Carlos's mother. However, they also feel they are getting sucked up into the same vicious cycle.

They appreciate the value of the extended healthcare coverage benefits from Carlos's job and also from government/community health services. "It is good to get these benefits from the government," affirms Carlos, "because, if not, where would our lives have been?" They particularly appreciate how the local community health centre took care of Alicia during her

pregnancy even though she did not have OHIP coverage at that time.

They recommend that the education system and employment services needs to prepare people better to tackle the difficulties of real life. Moreover, they need to be empowering. "Our educational system doesn't prepare us for real life because real life is tough" emphasized Carlos. "It does not help you survive or get ahead and not be stuck in a system...a world with such high levels of competition." Alicia and Carlos feel that having a "life coach" to guide and mentor through this highly competitive world and labour market would be very beneficial for young people like them: "Like a life coach so to speak, like in high school when we had the guidance counselors. Someone who could help you, not just find work but work out what to do afterwards. What to do when you have a family, or money, all those things. Someone to help you with those kinds of things and the steps to planning."

At least, Carlos added, employers and people who help with job search should ask people about their "goals and expectations" and try to understand "what motivates them." Like other young people, Carlos and Alicia have high ambitions of "contributing to this world" so that as Carlos put it "after I'm gone, people will still talk about me." They are already planning ahead for better future for their son. Alicia mentioned that they want to make sure their son does not "fall into the same debt that Carlos fell into in order to be able to study." When asked about what they plan to teach their son to better prepare him, Carlos passionately stated that they want to inspire him to have high ambitions not be satisfied just with surviving and to "never accept mediocrity":

What I plan to teach [my son] is that we have one shot at life. Just one. There's no do-over's. I don't believe we'll return to see if we can do it better the next time. You're here once. Make it count. Don't just be satisfied with surviving. Always push to be something bigger. To be great.



Discussion: Everyday Reproduction of Bad Jobs

*Efforts? I have more than 1500 email I have done. I can show you my Inbox. I took a diploma course [in Canada] and I completed my graduation in the year 2008. And went back home to drop my daughter there [in India] because it was hard with her...like we cannot afford babysitting and it was hard with her to ...I cannot go out for work. I drop her back with my mother, when I came here and I started looking for job **I have done more than fifteen hundred of emails**. Fax and even I went to agencies. So still I have that email, that was for my, you know I want to keep in mind all the time – Hasina (Adani family).*

*Everyone fights to become full time, but that is really difficult. How long have I been here? **Fifteen years, and you can never become ‘full-time’**. It’s the same thing in the hospital. They don’t want to give it to you because of the benefits. Which is why I ask ‘after living in Canada for so many years’ one starts to feel bad because you can never become full-time. Now, I’m coming close to retirement age (laughs) . . . here we’re always stressed. –Carmen (Pérez Family)*

*A lot of stress because we’re always thinking ‘Okay, this week I’m here, you know?’ I made it until the end of the week. **Now it is like a war is going to start in order to hold on to this job, in order to survive, in order to make it to the next week**. And this turns into a vicious cycle. **Everything feels temporary** because at any given time, it can end whether it is your fault or not. – Carlos (Bolívar Family)*



These ten case stories reflect the shattered dreams and expectations of hard working immigrant families and their very painful reality in Canada of being viciously stuck in precarious employment pathways, near-poverty conditions, and deteriorating health. As captured in the above representative quotes, the only thing that seems permanent in their lives is being trapped in non-permanent, stressful and “horrible jobs” in which even just trying to hold on to a job and surviving feels “like war.” The first thing most immigrant families say when we share with them these case stories is that this is very much their story as well. Canada cannot be a nation where immigrant families are brought to do “horrible jobs,” battle everyday just to survive, and become very, very sick. It makes us an unhealthy nation.

In order to reverse this unhealthy trend, we need to fully understand the deep structural forces that produce these types of precarious jobs. Further, we need to grasp how and why hard working immigrant families from racialized backgrounds are getting pushed and stuck in these types of jobs. The

evidence captured in these case stories provide the much needed rich granular level details about the everyday pathways, experiences, and impacts of precarious employment conditions for racialized immigrant families. In doing so, we can begin to pin point with precision not just what kinds of solutions are needed but also when and how to implement these solutions.

Michel Foucault¹⁵ suggests that it is important to understand how dominating and exclusionary power operates within everyday life. He recommends using what he calls an “ascending analysis of power” to capture “infinitesimal mechanisms” through which power manifests in daily life. We use

¹⁵ Michel Foucault is a well-known critical scholar and philosopher from France. His writings about how power operates in everyday life are very insightful. His ideas can be used to identify and overcome everyday structures of discrimination and exclusion. For an example of Foucault’s writing see Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: the birth of a prison*. London, Penguin.

this framework to map the everyday level forces and barriers that prevent deserving immigrant workers from getting stable employment that they want. This framework allows us to identify multiple stakeholders (including well-intentioned ones) who are directly or indirectly implicated in pushing racialized immigrant families into precarious employment pathways. At the same time, by tracing root sources of exclusionary power, it allows us to capture the deep structures of discrimination and disadvantages working against immigrant families. Crucially, it brings into sharp focus the role of regressive policies in institutionalizing these structures of discrimination and disadvantages.

We begin by discussing the dimensions and severity of precarious employment that these ten families face. Then we map the everyday pathways and forces that push immigrant workers into precarious employment trajectory. Within this, we focus on how immigrant workers respond to precarious employment conditions, how they shift their job search strategies over time, and examine the factors that help or worsen precarity, including the impact from the recent economic downturn. The economic, social and health impacts of precarious employment are discussed next. We end with analysis of how the experiences of these ten families are symptomatic of deeper structural inequalities facing racialized groups in Canada.

1. Dimensions of Precarious Employment

Canadian researchers like Leah Vosko, Cynthia Cranford, Nancy Zukwicz, Wayne Lewchuck, Marlea Clarke, Alice de Wolff, Luin Goldring, and Patricia Landolt have taken a lead in research on precarious employment. They have developed useful conceptual categories to better understand different levels and dimensions of employment precarity based on indicators like job security (permanent or not), job status (full-time or part-time), low wage and earnings uncertainty, work hours uncertainty, number of jobs people are juggling, job satisfaction, presence or absence of unionized environment, relationship with employers

and colleagues, control over work hours/load, types of employee benefits and so forth.¹⁶ In most of these measures, and cumulatively, study findings show that these ten racialized immigrant families face very severe levels of precarious employment conditions.

When examining precarious employment among racialized immigrants, it is important to take into account some more indicators including (i) link between immigration status and precarious employment pathways (see research by Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt for insights on this linkage); (ii) job-skill mismatch and underemployment (since racialized immigrants face job-skill mismatch and underemployment in very pronounced ways); (iii) length of precarity (racialized immigrants may be stuck in precarious employment for much longer periods, extending inter-generationally); and (iv) access to opportunities to get out of precarious employment (racialized immigrants may have limited opportunities to get out of precarious employment). Moreover, we need to consider how being pushed into precarious employment pathways for racialized immigrants is interrelated with systemic discrimination and exclusion, and with the process of racialization.

Severity of Precarious Employment:

Out of the total nineteen participants in the study, only one had permanent full time job (this job had other kinds of precarity including the job being a night shift). One other participant had full-time equivalent hours at his job but was doing split shift. Most participants were in part-time jobs, with four in permanent part-time positions and six in temporary part-time positions.

What was particularly troubling was that several participants were stuck in part-time positions for

¹⁶ See Goldring, L., & Landolt, P. (2009a). *Research Brief 2 Immigrants and Precarious Work*. Toronto: Cities Centre, CERIS, York University; Cranford, C., Vosko, L.F. and N. Zukewicz (2003). —Precarious employment in the Canadian labour market: a statistical; Lewchuk et al. . (2008). Working Without Commitments: Precarious Employment and Health. *Work, Employment and Society* 22, no. 3, 387-406.

very lengthy periods in spite of their strong desire to be full-time (i.e. being part-time was involuntary). The Pérez sisters had been part-time for over 15 years in their respective hospitality jobs (in hospital and hotel) in spite of working in unionized setting. As Carmen (from the Pérez family) put it, these are jobs that “*never become full-time*” even if you are working in unionized environment, and no matter how long you have been in that job or how many times you ask to make it full time.

Several families were precariously self-employed. One participant (Sayed from the Omar family) was self-employed on a full time basis running his formal small business and working over 50 hours a week; plus, his wife (Hanem) put in lots of hours (technically unpaid) to take care of administrative tasks for the business. Two other participants were self-employed but working based on availability of contracts (the Nguyen family and the Tran family). Five other participants ran informal self-employment activities on casual on-call basis.

All women participants were in permanent part-time or temporary part-time positions or doing home-based casual informal self-employment work (mainly home-based childcare and catering). It is well documented that women are more likely than men to be represented in non-standard types of employment, including in self-employment (Townsend, 2003; Cranford et al., 2003).

Most participants were making barely above minimum wage. Some participants who got jobs through temp agencies were making less than minimum wage since temp agencies took a commission on the minimum wage. Those doing informal self-employment work were at risk of earning well below minimum wage. Hanem (from the Omar family), for example, mentioned that she was at one time offering to do childcare at \$2/hr. Those in contract and on-call work had unpredictable pay schedule including lean months where they have little or no income. One family mentioned that during some of the lean months, the total income for the family was less than \$200/month.

Since their main job was not enough to make ends meet, at least half of the participants were juggling two or more jobs, including casual on-call jobs. For those juggling multiple jobs, some had to work over

50 hours per week during certain high demand times. However, in spite of working hard for many hours, many participants stated that they could hardly cover their expenses. As Daruun (from the Sharma family) sadly put it “*we work hard but we don't earn enough despite working hard.*” This low benefit (in terms of wage, improvements in job security, appreciation and other rewards) in spite of hard effort is referred to as ‘effort-reward imbalance.’

Except for the one participant running his own formal full-time self-employment business, all participants mentioned that they had little or no control over their work responsibilities, work load, work hours and working conditions. Participants working in manual labour jobs said they felt like they were being made to work “*more than human capacity.*” Several had to lift very heavy loads that resulted in frequent muscle tears and severe pain. In spite of this, most were not able to file complaints about the heavy work responsibilities/load. Three participants specifically mentioned that they felt they were given the worst and heaviest types of work because they were newcomers and from non-White background. One participant shared how none of his work colleagues ever offered to help like they did to others.

Participants who had least control over work availability and work hours were those in shift work jobs. Since shifts varied every week, it made it hard for these participants to plan anything in their everyday life. Worse, even when they got only one or two shifts per week, they felt strong pressure to be available all the time and come to work at short notice. If they get a call and are not able to come to work, they risk not getting more shifts in the next round or put into the worst shifts. This was the case even in unionized environment for the Pérez sisters. As Carmen (from the Pérez family) described: “*and then I went to the union and I asked them why is it they don't respect seniority? And they say 'well, it is because you are not available for every day.'*” But at the times I have to work, they give me two or three shifts. I can't live off that!” Her sister, Elena added: “*You can't say anything because if you do they put you in the worst jobs or don't call you.*”

Only two participants worked in unionized setting. Several participants mentioned how the companies

they worked at had aggressively prevented workers from forming unions.

Only four participants had some kind of extended health coverage and other employee benefits through their work. All of these four participants were doing heavy manual labour types of jobs. All four stated that the only reason why they were holding on to their current manual labour job (unrelated to their education or aspiration) was because of the extended benefits.

These difficulties represent very severe conditions of precarious employment. All jobs are marked by very high demand, low control, hazardous working conditions, low job satisfaction, and high effort-reward imbalance. Several studies have highlighted that racialized immigrant workers face very high levels of labour market vulnerability and precarious employment (Block & Galabuzi, 2012; de Wolff, 2000; Goldring & Landolt, 2009; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012). The recently released report by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) titled *Making Ontario Home* found that of the 2,530 immigrant they surveyed, almost two third listed employment as the main challenge they face in Canada.

Job-skills mismatch and under-employment: Study evidence on job-skill mismatch and underemployment for these hard working immigrant families is very troubling. If we compare people's aspirations with the precarious job pathway they are stuck in, the mismatch is even more disheartening. After four years in Canada, the participant with an engineering degree and an MBA (Zamir from Adani family) is stuck working as an on-call baker in a factory; he has already had several workplace injuries. His wife (Hasina) who has over 10 years of experience in accounting has barely managed to get a part-time "office clerk" level job even after sending over "1500 job applications" and doing unpaid internship work (see case of story of the Adani Family). Zamir questioned when or whether they will ever get a good job and feel "settled" in Canada:

"How long it takes to get settle down one year two year three year, how long, this is fourth consecutive year going on but still we haven't seen any end of the settlement."

After 8 years in Canada, the female immigrant from Egypt (Hanem) who wanted to be an educator on Islamic issues is instead doing home based on-call daycare and catering work, and helping her husband with administrative tasks for his self-employment sign-making business. Her husband with a graphic design degree realized that his degree from back home was not "worth even the paper [that the degree is printed on]" in Canada. Fed up with juggling short-term contract jobs, he decided to start his own sign-making small business, only to realize how high risk such business is (see case story of the Omar Family). The young male immigrant from Argentina (see case story of the Suárez Family) who wanted to be a nurse is stuck in a high intensity job as a receiver/shipper at a large housing material distribution company working odd hour shift (4pm to 1am) six days a week for barely above minimum wage (\$13.50/hr).

The experiences of these ten families show that this job-skill mismatch and underemployment occurs not just in healthcare and education occupations but also in occupations that are readily transferable such as accounting and industrial professions. There is now a wealth of Canadian literature documenting the high levels of job-skill mismatch and underemployment that immigrant workers face. In particular, see analytical reports produced by Statistics Canada (e.g., Abdurrahman & Skuterud, 2004; Chiu & Zeitsma, 2003; Galarneau & Morissette, 2004 and 2008; Picot et al, 2007; Sweetman, 2004) and by researchers at Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) (e.g., Preston et al. , 2011; Kelly, Park & Leper, 2011). The Office of Ontario Fairness Commissioner has compiled extensive evidence on the barriers and discriminations that skilled immigrant workers face in getting their qualifications recognized by licensing bodies and employers (see www.fairnesscommissioner.ca).

Things don't get better with time: Contrary to other bodies of evidence (and popular belief), the case studies in this report suggest that employment status of low-income racialized immigrant families may not necessarily improve the longer they are in Canada, or the longer they stay at a job. Even if some indicators show improvement over time – say increase in wage or increase in seniority in unionized environment – the long-term

economic impact of low-wage precarious employment has lasting negative economic impacts on families. Crucially, it has adverse impacts on educational outcomes of children. As noted earlier, both the Pérez sisters have been stuck in the same part-time, non-permanent hospitality sector jobs for over 10 years. The fact that they work in a unionized environment – and have gained seniority over time – has not necessarily helped to make their job more secure.

For Tanya Wilson (from the Wilson Family), a single Black mother who came to Canada over 20 years ago, the job prospect keeps getting worse every year. Her dream of studying nursing was quickly undercut by economic difficulties faced by her immigrant parents. She thought she could at least work as a Personal Support Worker as it still fit her interest to work in health/caregiving field. However, her Personal Support Worker diploma from a private college has not led to any stable job. Consequently, she is barely scraping by juggling unrelated secretarial types of jobs at minimum wage and unwittingly having to go on social assistance from time to time. Tanya does not see opportunities and support to overcome this predicament: *“many times my ends don’t meet. And I don’t think my ends will ever meet because I don’t really have a steady job. I have a job that is on and off and that’s not really paying me much.”*

Self-employment is not necessarily a better option: Unable to find a good stable job, a few families have resorted to starting their own self-employed small business or informal employment. However, these families have found the hard way that running a small self-employment enterprise is very risky and not necessarily less precarious. The experiences of the Omar family, Nguyen family and Tran family serve as case in point.

Sayed Omar has a fine arts degree and many years of graphic design experiences from Egypt. He thought that graphic design was readily transferable skill and was hoping to get a good job in a newspaper or graphic design company. He did manage to get jobs in small newspapers but suffered frequent lay offs. After being laid off from 5 jobs, Sayed got frustrated and decided to start his own sign-making business. He learnt about how to run a

sign-making business from a friend who also operates a sign-making business in other city. Initially, Sayed’s business was doing quite well. However, with the recent economic downturn he saw substantial drop in the number of clients, many of whom are immigrants running their own small business. He wished someone had told him how risky small business can be.

Moreover, like other people who run own account self-employment, the Sayed family does not have extended health coverage plans and are not covered by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board for workplace related injuries. Sayed has incurred multiple hand and leg injuries but is still pressed to continue working without having recovered fully. The Nguyen family and Tran family are in a similar situation with their own account self-employment doing home renovation contract work. Since the recent economic downturn, they barely have work contracts and are again starting to work on-call for larger home renovation companies.

Several female participants were running small home-based informal catering and childcare enterprises. For Hanem Omar (from the Omar family), this is the only job she is able to do. She mentioned that many of her clients lost their job during the recent recession and so decided to look after their children by themselves instead of paying Hanem. She saw a marked decline in clientele due to the recession. The Pérez sisters are juggling childcare and catering work on the side to make extra money since their income from their main work is not enough to make ends meet. All the women mentioned that they received training from community agencies on how to start and run home-based catering and childcare activities. Looking back, they wished the community agencies warned them about the risks of running small enterprises.

Several other families are thinking of starting a small business. This is in direct response to difficulties they are facing to find stable wage employment. For example, Carlos and Alicia Bolivar want to become self-employed mortgage-brokers and have already registered a business. The Suárez family has dreams of starting a Tim Horton’s franchise one day.

While self-employment has been growing rapidly in Canada since the 1990s, studies have shown that

self-employment can be as precarious as other job types (Townson, 2003; Hou and Wang, 2011; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012).

2. Mapping Pathways into Precarious Employment

We draw on the experiences of these ten families to map the everyday pathways and forces that not just push hard working immigrant workers in precarious jobs but also prevent them from getting better jobs. Closer analysis of study evidence points to the presence of deep structural barriers. Specifically, the ten case stories show that the key factors that push immigrant families into precarious job pathways are: systemic discrimination in the labour market; insular/limited professional network among racialized immigrant families; and, barriers related to getting permanent residency status (for those that come through temporary channels). Moreover, study findings highlight how the negative socio-economic conditions created by precarious jobs, in turn, lead people to deeper levels of precarious employment. During recession, precarious jobs held by immigrants become even more precarious and ‘casualized.’ Economic and immigration difficulties faced by one generation can result in precarious employment for their children.

Shifts in job search strategies: The shared experience of being stuck in precarious job pathway for these ten immigrant families points to some crosscutting patterns in job search strategies among precariously employment immigrant workers. Specifically, the job search strategies for immigrant families are marked by four phases: (i) low investment job search strategies; (ii) ‘survival job’ phase; (iii) high investment job search strategies; and (iv) resignation phase.

Immigrant families come to Canada with confidence that their skills will be valued and with high hopes of getting a good job. Thus, during the initial periods, immigrant families use ‘low investment job search strategies.’ These are employment and settlement services that are available for free or for low costs such as job search and resume clinics services, free or low-fee skills trainings, Canadian equivalency certification of their degree from back home, and free government funded English language classes. They also widely

use low cost, low-effort job search strategies such as online job applications and attending job fairs. All participants equivocally said that these types of job search services and strategies “*don’t work.*” Many said that they hardly get called for job interviews even after applying for hundreds and hundreds of jobs. The only jobs available are night shift jobs or manual labour types of jobs that are well below their skill level.

The assessment by Sayed (from the Omar family) of conventional job search services resonates with that offered by all participants: “*I don’t think...those places for helping to find jobs like...like resumes, sending faxes, this stuff...I think they missing something... I know they spend a lot of money on them...but, I don’t know. I tried them so many times. I didn’t get no jobs from them.*” A growing number of both quantitative and qualitative studies in Canada have now documented that while immigrants make extensive use of employment services, the satisfaction level and outcomes from these services are very limited (Fang et al. , 2010; Cukier, 2011; Mennonite New Life Centre, 2009; OCASI, 2012; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Sakamoto, 2010)

Cumulatively, prolonged use of low investment job search strategies can end up being very costly and high effort. Study results reveal that the savings and assets that recent immigrant families bring with them to Canada get rapidly depleted within the first few years just to make ends meet. In other words, most of initial savings and assets that immigrants bring to Canada go merely to “servicing” the high costs of the labour market barriers rather than in building long-term prudent financial foundations for these families. Sayed (from the Omar family) was very upset to see the \$10,000 savings he had brought to Canada used up within the first year because he could not find a stable job. Other families also shared with heavy heart about the rapid depletion of their savings and assets.

Frustrated with this situation, immigrant families then go into *survival mode*. This is when they increasingly rely on either their immediate friends/network or on ‘temp agencies’ for labour market needs.

Sadly, most of their immediate friends/network are immigrants and racialized people who themselves

are stuck in precarious jobs. Consequently, this systematically streams them into an insular labour chain pathway towards highly precarious jobs. The jobs that they get through their immediate friends/network often tend to be manual labour factory work or low-paying front-line work. As exemplified from the case stories, immigrant families learn about and get linked up with ‘temp agencies’ through their immediate friends/networks. Researchers at TIEDI have provided strong macro level evidence showing that immigrants rely heavily on their immediate friends and families for jobs (Sheilds et al. , 2011) and these jobs tend to be low-paying part-time precarious types of jobs (Fang et al. , 2010).

Immigrant families view these precarious ‘temp jobs’ as ‘survival jobs’ or ‘odd jobs’ to get by until they find a stable job in their field. However, that good stable job in their field never comes.

After a period of struggling with survival, temp jobs, some of the immigrants with high education and strong professional experience make proactive decision to use ‘high investment job search strategies.’ This includes strategies that are not necessarily cheap and/or require very high effort. Going back to college or university for skills upgrade or to make a career change, investing in recertification, doing unpaid internship, volunteering, and seeking out new networks are some examples. Often, only one member of the family can afford to do this at any given time. In the case of two families (the Adani family and the Sharma family), it was the husband who encouraged the wife to go back to school while the husband continued doing manual labour factory job.

These high investment job search strategies do lead to somewhat better jobs (a little less precarious) compared to previous strategies. However, most immigrant families can still only get part-time, front-line and low-paying jobs. For example, one participant (Hasina from the Adani family) with 10 years accounting experience created her own unofficial unpaid internship in an accounting firm and worked for free for six months. After this, the firm offered her a part-time clerical position that involves doing “silly” tasks well below her skill level. Her repeated requests for higher level accounting responsibilities continue to go ignored.

Another participant (Rani from the Kumar family) went back to college and did over a year of volunteer work only to get a part-time odd-hour contract job as an after-school program coordinator.

After trying all available services and strategies available to them for several years, most immigrant families go into the ‘*resignation phase*.’ Immigrant families in this phase have usually given up their hopes and efforts. They accept as inevitable the fate of being stuck in “horrible jobs,” near-poverty conditions and deteriorating health status. The only hope that most families have at this phase is that their hard work will at least enable their children to have a better future in Canada. Sadly, all ten families are currently in this resignation phase.

Fast-tracked to precarious work:

Study results show that families with low-education and low English language fluency – particularly those families who came as refugees – go straight into manual labour jobs after coming to Canada. Most often they find these jobs through their immediate friends/network. These families face acute linguistic, service access, and social network barriers to improve their career pathways. They get pushed into the worst types of manual labour jobs with very weak employment standards and occupational health and safety standards. Mainstream employment and settlement services offer no tangible services to these families to diversify or strengthen their employment pathways.

The trajectories of the two Vietnamese families (the Tran family and the Nguyen family who came to Canada as refugees), Nutan (from the Sharma family), and the Pérez sisters characterize this fast-tracking to precarious work. Nutan mapped her vicious cycle from one precarious manual labour job into another in the following way: “*first in a furniture company putting glue, then worked on circuit board, and then in a bakery, worked in a plastic company, worked at many different places.*”

Many studies have raised concern about how immigrants with limited education and low English language fluency are fast tracked into high risk manual labour factory types of jobs with no opportunities for improving their career path (Kelly et al., 2011; Lamba, 2003; Premji et al. , 2010; Preston et al. , 2011).

Recession deepens precarity and ‘casualization’:

These ten case stories indicate that the recent economic downturn (starting in 2009) resulted in unexpected adverse impacts on precariously employed immigrant families. Participants mentioned that many employees in higher up stable positions were laid off during the recession and that they were expecting to be met with the same fate. To their surprise, the participants recalled how they did not get laid off but rather their jobs were made even more precarious and ‘casualized.’ People with full-time positions were made part-time or split shift (see for example, the Sharma Family and the Bolivar Family). Those with part-time jobs were changed to positions that looked very much like on-call casual type positions (see the Pérez Family).

This practice suggests that employers may prefer to keep rather than lay off marginalized immigrant employees during recession. The key motive behind this seems to be that employers can make marginalized immigrant employees work in even more ‘flexible’ and ‘causal’ ways without potential negative recourse. While families were relieved not to lose their jobs during recession, they saw significant decrease in their income. Some began earning half or even only one-third of what they used to earn. Immigrant families running small business or self-employment, including home-based daycare, also experienced a marked decline in clients and income flow due to recession; this is when many realized how risky it can be to run a small business or self-employment enterprise.

There is growing evidence that recession leads to increase in part-time types of jobs and makes precarious jobs and small self-employment businesses even more vulnerable (see Kelly et al. , 2011; Law Commission of Ontario, 2012).

Place Matters: Study findings give powerful evidence that place and geography also play a salient role in reproducing precarious employment conditions for racialized immigrant families. All ten families live in the Black Creek community – a composite of four neighborhoods around the intersection of Jane Street and Finch Avenue in northwest Toronto. In 2006, 63% of Jane-Finch residents were born outside of Canada

and 12.4% had immigrated within the previous 5 years. 70.6% of residents were racialized. The largest racialized groups are Black (20.2%) and South Asian (18.2%) (City of Toronto, 2008). Like other other priority areas of the city, this community has high rates of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment (City of Toronto, 2005; United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004). It is also one of many Toronto neighbourhoods that have become considerably poorer over the last 30 years (Hulchanski, 2007). In 2005, almost one third of households in the Jane-Finch area were low income (31.9%) compared to 24.4% for the City of Toronto (Statistics Canada, 2010). The poverty and inequality in the area is racialized. In 2005, 37.9% of racialized households in the community were low income compared with 16.9% of non-racialized households (Statistics Canada, 2010).

The ten families mentioned that they moved to Black Creek community because of more affordable housing, its central location in the city, good public transportation, and to be closer to their family or their ethnic community.

Several participants explicitly said that they felt disadvantaged during job application process and job interviews because they indicated that they lived in the Black Creek area. They were concerned by disparaging comments and views about Black Creek residents as being “lazy,” uneducated, not trust worthy. Worse, some felt that they got assigned the worst jobs because they were from Black Creek area. In our *‘Working Rough, Living Poor’* report (2011), we presented evidence of how place-based stigma against Black Creek area (Jane and Finch) negatively affects the job search process and outcomes for its racialized residents. Several participants mentioned that they give an address other than Black Creek to avoid this.

Carlos (from the Bolivar family) who grew up in the neighborhood asked why it is so hard for residents to find good jobs within the neighborhood in spite of so many government offices and private businesses located in the area. He observed: *“there is the Ministry of Transportation, the Downsview Armory or the Canadian Forces, the bus stations, or train stations, the Ministry of Health in the Dufferin and Finch area, and there are the Courts; so I see so many businesses, so many enterprises, so many*

companies, and I ask myself ‘how can there not be any work around here?’” He wishes he could a get job in the community so he does not “have to make a half-an-hour, or an hour long commute to Mississauga.”

Most families found their precarious jobs through friends/network living in Black Creek community who themselves were precarious employed. Nutan (from Sharma family) initially took solace in the fact that “*at least you can find labour job in Black Creek.*” However, after going from one bad job to another, she has started to consider moving out from Black Creek. The families also rightly questioned why there are so many ‘temp agencies’ in this neighborhood but so few stable jobs.

Some participants were strategically aware that they should not rely on local friends/network for jobs due to high rates of unemployment and precarious employment in the Black Creek community. For example, Carlos (from the Bolivar family) stated: “*you have to know people in a place where they are hiring people and if fifty-percent don’t even have jobs, how are you going to find work though those people?*” The Bolivar family is considering moving out of the Black Creek community the first opportunity they get.

Four other families were also considering moving out of the Black Creek community.

In spite of immense difficulties a few participants, like Tanya Wilson (a long time resident of Black Creek community) had endearing views about Black Creek community as being a strong vibrant community.

Inter-generational precarity: The acute immigration and economic difficulties that immigrant parents face can have negative intergenerational implications on the educational and employment outcomes of immigrant children. The experiences of Andreas and Martina Suárez, Carlos Bolivar, and Tanya Wilson exemplify this.

Take the case of Martina from the Suárez Family. Due to lengthy refugee claimant application process for her parents, Martina was separated from her family for 11 long years. After she reunited with her family in Canada, she was shocked to find that her father was juggling several back-breaking jobs just

to support the family. In response, Martina shifted her priorities from school – she was a top student studying in a private school back in Chile – to helping out her family financially by working as a janitor. She had to work so hard that she felt she “*didn’t have enough time to sleep,*” let alone study. This is in direct contrast with youth from dominant backgrounds who do part-time jobs to make some extra pocket money.

With her educational dreams cut short, the only jobs Martina has been able get (through ‘temp agencies’ or friends) are short-term low paying temp jobs like working in a donut factory, cleaning jobs, and folding sheets in a factory. Her husband, Andreas, had it worse since his father got deported back to Argentina. Since their respective families became dispersed due to immigration challenges, the young Suárez family struggled to decide which country they should settle in. Their precarious migration process was directly responsible for delays and disruptions in finishing their education. Andreas wanted to either become a nurse or go into armed forces. Instead, he is stuck in a back breaking job that he desperately wants to get out of, but cannot.

For all ten families, their children are their only source of hope. Everyone specifically mentioned that they don’t want their children to be in the same situation as they are currently in. However, they are very worried about the toll that precarious employment conditions are having on their children.

3. Impacts of Precarious Employment

The ten case stories capture the numerous damaging impacts from being stuck in precarious jobs. We discuss below some of the economic, social and health impacts.

Chronic economic insecurity: Study findings reveal how conditions/relations of precarious employment (job insecurity, irregular work hours, irregular wage, irregular pay schedule, no extended benefits, high costs of job search effort) directly results in pronounced levels of household income irregularity and uncertainty. Many of these families are not necessarily ‘poor’ by absolute

measure. However, their income flow was so irregular and unpredictable that their economic situation was as bad as for people in poverty.

Many did not have regular and predictable salary and pay cycle (e.g. pay was based on piece work rather than regular bi-weekly/monthly paycheck) or predictable income flow (e.g., differing amount even when they have regular bi-weekly/monthly paycheck). Several families faced lean months due to the contractual or seasonal nature of their jobs: winter months were particularly difficult for people in construction jobs; for those in school or service sector, summer months were the lean months.

Half of the families had developed prudent budgeting system to make do with their limited and irregular income cycles. However, other half had already incurred high levels of debt. Three of the families had over \$20,000 in debt. For most families, their debt was with their family and relatives. One participant (Tanya from the Wilson family) mentioned that because she was borrowing heavily from her mother and could not pay back, she was dragging her mother into debt as well.

The economic insecurity for some of these working families is severe. Tanya (from the Wilson family) mentioned that she did not have enough money to even buy a “*decent couch*” and other basic necessities. This level of income insecurity was “*degrading*.” In Tanya words: “*a lady needs certain things for the month, you can’t be buying it all the time; you have to ask people for it. And for me that is a bit degrading. You feel less than a woman.*”

Several other families mentioned that they also had not been able to buy basic furniture like lamps, comfortable mattresses and tables. Majority of families (all with children) were living in one bedroom apartments and thus were experiencing crowdedness; the children were sleeping in the same room as their parents even in cases where the children were school going age. Due to their insecure income and the unaffordable housing market in Toronto, they were not able to afford housing with more adequate space for the family.

Half of participants stated that they have to rely on food banks regularly or from time to time to make ends meet. Some families like the Suárez family and

the Wilson family indicated that they are “*often worried*” that they won’t have enough to eat. Though the food that they get from food banks is helpful, Martina (from the Suárez family) complained that “*half of them are expired aside from crackers and soups.*”

The level of income insecurity and material deprivation was so heavy that some families would do anything even to save a few dollars. For example, the Sharma family mentioned that Nutan would laboriously wash clothes by hands just to save the few dollars of laundry money. Daruun traced the reasoning in the following way: “*two years ago, the situation was better. We used to, for example for laundry, we used to be able to go for laundry outside. But now we have to think that it costs \$2 for each load, so [Nutan] does it at home.*”

Many immigrant families who came from middle class background were sad that they could not afford to eat out or go to movies as they used to ‘back home.’ Many families had hoped to send money back home to their relatives. Instead, they have to periodically ask for money and resources from relatives back home just to survive in Canada.

All of them knew that they would have to struggle a little bit to resettle in a new country, but did not expect that the challenges would be so severe and never ending. Participants described their lives in Canada as “*always struggling*” and “*too hard.*”

Limited and irregular income prevented families from making long-term economic investments. None of them had savings plan; only three families were contributing to education savings plan for their children.

Government income support and tax rebates for low-income families (e.g. CCTB, UCCB, HST rebate) were the only stable and regular source of income for these families. Study evidence underscores that any further claw backs to currently available income support provisions will have devastating impacts on such families.

Social strain and uncertainty: The ten case stories capture how precarious employment and income irregularity and uncertainty in turn lead to relationship strain in the household, high degree of social uncertainty (difficulty making every day

and long-term decisions and plans), and reduced socio-political mobility. One participant aptly put it that precarious jobs “*makes everything feel temporary;*” most referred to feeling like their life was “*on-hold.*”

Reduced family time was a big concern for all participants. Several participants mentioned that they hardly see their spouse because of different work shifts. For several families, the wife was working during the day and the husband was doing a night shift job. One participant (Nutan from the Sharma family) said that she feels the family is “*not really living together.*” She mentioned that she and her husband mostly communicate through cell phones and hardly have face-to-face time to make everyday decisions and long-term plan. Alicia (from the Bolivar family) mentioned that whenever she asks her husband, Carlos, to spend time with family he always says “*I have no time, I have no time.*” This is because of the split-shift work hours that Carlos has and also because he is always on the lookout for more work to make ends meet.

While most participants indicated that their family was still their main source of emotional and other support, the growing gaps in communication and face-to-face family time were starting to create tensions and strains in their relationship. Several admitted that they get more easily irritated and upset with family members because of their bad job conditions and economic stress.

For example, both Hanem and Sayed (from the Omar family) admitted that the biggest impact from precarious employment and economic insecurity has been on their family relationship and wellbeing. “*If you have money, you can find a good shelter, a good school, good food and most of the time, you can have a happy family,*” Sayed stated frankly. “*When you have no money, then see how we fight? [referring to the many disagreements they had during the interview process itself].*”

In the case of Omar family, the wife’s attempt to keep the family together and healthy was often seen by the husband as nuisance and hindrance to work. Sayed blames Hanem for adding to his stress by asking for money “*all the time*” and not letting him rest when he is tired (“*she comes after me and then she wakes me up and doesn’t leave me alone*”). Hanem was sad to see that Sayed views her as a

source of his stress when all she is trying to do is better manage the household needs. This gendered impact was present in other families as well.

The biggest worry for all families was not being able to spend enough time with their children, plan activities for them, and cover their fees for extracurricular activities. Elena (from the Pérez family) has big regrets to this day about the fact that she could not be at her son’s sixteenth birthday party although her son really wanted her to be there. This was mainly because of her unpredictable shift work schedule. Carmen (from the Pérez family) mentioned that her shift work schedule and having to juggle multiple jobs means that sometimes she does not see her eight year old daughter “*for two or three days.*”

Interestingly, and sadly, it was the children who sometimes kept the physical and communication distance from their parents. They did so more from an empathy point of view. They did not want to put additional burden on their parents who were already drowning in work and financial related stress. Take for example, Elena’s children. Elena mentioned that: “*my daughter, she doesn’t tell me any of her problems anymore because she says it will just give me another additional headache. My son doesn’t even tell me anything. They see you tired, or they see you sick, they no longer want to tell you, or make you have an additional thing to worry about.*”

While this is a response from children to shelter their parents from additional worry, it can lead to communication and relationship break down if it happens over a long time. The deteriorating relationship between Tanya (from the Wilson family) and her two sons serves as a case in point. Tanya had put in place a good communication system with her sons. This is what kept the family together through thick and thin. However, years of disrupted communication due to work and financial related stress has broken down this effective communication system in the Wilson family. Tanya wants to know about and support her sons through their difficulties. However, her sons are distancing themselves from her. This was Tanya biggest fear and now she feels like a “*failed parent*”

Three families shared that their precarious employment and insecure economic condition was the key reason why they had given up on the idea of

having another child as previously planned. The negative consequences of precarious employment on household relationships, communication and planning have also been documented by other researchers including Chun & Cheong (2011), Lewchuk et al. (2003; 2008; 2013),

Bad jobs are making working immigrant families very sick:

Precarious jobs and the socio-economic impacts from these jobs are making these hard working immigrant families very, very sick. Participants linked being stuck in bad jobs as the main cause of many of their physical injuries/illnesses (burns, injured hands and legs, eye pain, hearing loss etc.), severe musculoskeletal tears and pains, gastrointestinal complications (e.g. ulcers, stomach aches, digestive problems), mental health issues (depression, anxiety, sleep disorder, low self-esteem, sense of disempowerment), and worsening of chronic health risks/conditions (pre-diabetes/diabetes, high blood pressures, heart conditions etc.). Younger families see the deteriorated health conditions of their immigrant parents and fear that they will end up in the same situation.

All families mentioned that their health status has been rapidly going downhill since they came to Canada. Take the Kumar family, for example. Akshay incurred painful hand and ankle injuries from working in an unsafe factory job; the pain seems to be getting worse and he often wakes up in the middle of night screaming with pain. He has not only developed diabetes after coming to Canada but the condition is deteriorating due to all the stress. He has to take insulin but cannot really afford to buy insulin (except when they are on social assistance sometimes). Rani has been suffering from thyroid problems. Both said that they are experiencing high blood pressure. They both feel that the biggest reason why their health is becoming worse is the constant mental stress caused by their job insecurity and financial worry.

Several other participants were concerned that they were starting to experience cardio-vascular risks and ailments from such early age. Both members of the Sharma family said that they were also suffering

from high blood pressure. Sayed (from Omar family) also noted having a “*heart condition.*”

Early onset of diabetes was also a concern. Carmen (from Pérez family) was shocked when she was diagnosed with “*pre-diabetes.*” Though her doctor explained that Hispanic people are high risk group for diabetes, Carmen attributes the root cause to the “*horrible stressful state*” caused by precarious employment conditions. She reasons this because no one in her family has ever had diabetes. According to Carmen: “*I think the ultimate answer is all the tension. When I was facing the problem with two shifts, three shifts, and that’s when it started. . . . one lives with this horrible stressful state, the same with tumors or cancer, it comes from stress, unfortunately.*”

Importantly, families expressed concerns that some of the minor but frequent health symptoms they are experiencing may be telltale indicators of more serious health issues to come. One participant (Nutan from the Sharma family), for example, noted that “*because of the job pressure, she faints so much that it is affecting [her] blood pressure.*” Andreas was concerned that he was getting “*sicker more frequently.*” He emphatically stated that he “*does not want to have a heart problem,*” and yet is worried that this may be inevitable given his precarious job and income situation.

In our *Working Rough, Living Poor* report, we introduced the term “health strain” to highlight the salience of these everyday “minor” health issues and strains (e.g. getting sick more frequently, frequent complaints of dizziness, frequent headaches, stomach aches, ulcers, exhaustion, chest pain). We argued that healthcare providers working with marginalized communities need to consider these everyday “minor” health issues as telltale risk factors of more serious chronic health illnesses, and take timely preventative actions.

Take, for example, Elena’s narrative: “*I always feel headaches and pain as a result of my job. Not having enough money since I have so many different jobs and each of them paying me very little, very little. It gives me a headache because I don’t have a stable schedule. It makes it very difficult to plan anything out. Sometimes I’m busy from Monday to Sunday and I don’t even have one day to rest. The tiredness, sometimes there are weeks that I’m*

exhausted from the tension.” While Elena’s sister, Carmen, has been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, Elena may very well be at risk for similar serious chronic illness. The numerous health issues she mentioned (like frequent headaches and pain, extreme tiredness and exhaustion) need to be considered as telling signs of this.

All participants were very aware of how the different health issues they faced from unstable jobs and income insecurity compounded to result in overall poor health status and deterioration of health over time. Martina (from the Suárez family), for example, mapped the cumulative impact of the different health issues she is facing in the following way (stress, bad mood, head ache, neck ache, stomach ache, eating disorder, sleeping disorder): *“Because of the financial situation we are going through, what I have in my mind all the time is money. And that makes me stressed and in a bad mood, lots of headaches and neck pain. Stomach aches because everything I eat doesn’t agree with me because I am so stressed, because I eat when I am stressed. And I take pills to be able to sleep because I am a sleeping very little.”*

Almost all the participants shared that they and their family were experiencing very high levels of mental stress. Some expressed these through heavy metaphors like (*“burning from within”* and *“like a storm brewing”*). Others openly stated that they or some members of their family were suffering from depression. There is strong evidence that discrimination, social exclusion, employment insecurity and poverty are associated with damaging mental health impacts including high rates of depression (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002a; Nazroo, 2003; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Wu, Noh, Kaspar & Schimmele, 2003).

These families are stuck in “horrible jobs” that are making them sick frequently. However, they don’t have access to provisions that can help them fully recover and maintain good health such as sick leave, relaxed time to rest and spend with family, getting 8 hours of sleep, stress free environment, time and motivation to exercise, money to buy medicine or healthy options. Several participants mentioned how they went to work even though they were sick because their work did not have sick leave provision. Daruun (from the Sharma family) wisely assessed that *“recovery period is extended”* because

of having to go to work even when you are sick. *“So for example,”* Daruun stated, *“others may recover 2-3 days after, but it actually takes us 8 to 9 days to recover.”* Elena shared that although her foot pain is *“killing her,”* she has not been able to afford buying orthopedic shoes as recommended by her doctor. To save costs she buys nice shoes for her children but for herself she still buys shoes at *“Payless.”*

Most families do not have extended health and dental coverage from their work. Consequently, participants talked about how they often forgo seeking care for health issues not covered by OHIP, such as dental health, physiotherapy, and prescription medicine. One participant (Sayed from the Omar family) indicated that when they have dental problems they usually have their teeth pulled out by themselves since they *“can’t afford”* dental care costs. Several participants shared that they get their prescription medication sent from back home.

All of these health issues and risk factors could have been prevented if these families had secure well-paying employment. Employment and income are now recognized as core determinants that have multiple health impacts along with influencing many other determinants including food security, education, access to services and social inclusion (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004; Lewchuk et al., 2008 Raphael, 2004; Lynch et al., 2000; Ruetter, 1995; Lightman et al., 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003; World Health Organization, 1999).

Canadian evidence on links between income and health is particularly strong. A pan-Canadian study of 15 major urban areas conducted by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (2008) found that people with low socioeconomic status had higher rates of hospitalization for 21 health indicators (see the CIHI report titled *Reducing Gaps in Health*). Another report called *Poverty is Making us Sick: A Comprehensive Survey of Income and Health in Canada* (Lightman et al., 2008) revealed that low-income people have significantly higher rates of diabetes, bronchitis, arthritis, rheumatism, ulcer and a host of other chronic illnesses compared to wealthier people. Toronto Public Health (2008) released a report titled *The Unequal City: Income and Health Inequalities in Toronto* that found a “clear gradient” linked to income level for several

health indicators for Toronto residents, including life expectancy at birth, all-cause premature mortality rates, singleton low birth weight rates, self-reported health, teen pregnancies, lung cancer rates, cardiovascular disease, premature mortality rates and dental visits.

However, there is only a thin body of Canadian evidence on how employment conditions, particularly precarious forms of work, impacts health. Clarke et al (2007), Lewchuck et al, (2008), and Smith and Mustard (2010) have done some initial work on health impacts of precarious employment in Canadian context. Dean and Wilson (2009) examined the health impacts of unemployment and underemployment on recent Canadian immigrants with post-secondary education. Premji et al, (2010) have documented negative health impacts faced by racialized Canadian workers with limited English language fluency that are stuck in high risk jobs.

At the global level, the evidence on employment conditions and health is growing. Researchers from the Employment Conditions Knowledge Network (EMCONET) – established under the auspices of the World Health Organization – have been closely examining data from many countries on relationship between employment conditions and health. See EMCONET’s report to the World Health Organization titled ‘*Employment Conditions and Health Inequalities*’ (Benach et al., 2010) for a thorough analysis of the link between health and different employment types and work conditions. See also Sirgist et al (2010) and Quinlan (2003) for systematic literature review from around the world on this relationship.

These researchers have compiled very convincing bodies of evidence showing how workers in precarious employment and vulnerable working conditions are more likely to experience a host of cardio-vascular, musculoskeletal, respiratory, mental health and other illnesses. Their analysis on the link between conditions of precarious employment (high demand, low control, high effort-reward imbalance, irregular hours/shifts, hazardous working conditions, low job satisfaction etc.) and poor health outcomes is very insightful. The following are some of the examples of evidence that EMCONET researchers have compiled: (i) working more than 11 hours a day is associated with a

threefold risk of myocardial infarction and a fourfold rise in risk of type 2 diabetes; (ii) compared to those working in regular daytime work hours, shift workers have a 40 percent higher risk of cardiovascular diseases; and (iii) people working night shifts are particularly at high risk of having work accidents and developing cardiovascular and gastro-intestinal problems, as well as cancer.

The ten case stories in this report provide powerful qualitative evidence of how precarious jobs lead to poor health. The health risks and issues identified by these ten families (heart disease, diabetes, musculoskeletal illnesses, gastro-intestinal ailments, and mental health issues) are in line with macro level global evidence on adverse health impacts of precarious employment conditions.

It is important for healthcare providers to take social determinants of health approach in order to effectively tackle the negative impacts of health from being stuck in precarious jobs. This approach begins by asking client about their employment status and explaining how precarious employment conditions are negatively impacting their health. This can enable clients to take health into account when making hard decisions about their employment status, working conditions, work-life balance, and working hours. Further, it may facilitate healthcare provider and clients to jointly find ways to improve client’s employment conditions or at least decrease the negative health impacts from precarious jobs. Healthcare providers can encourage precariously employed clients to practice health promoting habits such as taking the full scheduled work breaks, eating healthy and on time at work, and taking time to do exercise (e.g., stretches and daily walks). Moreover, healthcare practitioners need to work seamlessly across disciplines (e.g. with settlement agencies) to help their clients find stable employment and be advocates against the rise of precarious jobs and hazardous working conditions.

4. Precarious employment and the dark side of Canada

The experiences of these ten racialized families stuck in “*horrible jobs*,” near-poverty conditions,

and deteriorating health symbolically reflect a deeper problem in Canada. Canadian post-colonial scholars like Himani Bannerji, Roxana Ng, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Vijay Agnew, Kwame McKenzie and Rinaldo Walcott have been steadfastly calling attention to how race and immigrant status (along with gender) are the key basis of inequality in Canada. Their writings help to capture how Canadian immigration policies and labour market still operate within outdated colonial worldview and serve to reproduce historical global inequalities based on race, ethnicity, and immigrant status. They also argue that the national rhetoric of multiculturalism in Canada serves as a “powerful integration myth” (Galabuzi, 2009: 38) to mask these deep inequalities.¹⁷

There is now strong national level evidence in Canada that people from racialized backgrounds face disproportionately high levels of poverty and multiple forms of inequalities. While rising income inequality and downward push on wages negatively affects all Canadians (Yalnizan, 2007), successive Census data reveal that the economic impact on racialized families are severe. Compared to the national average, racialized families (immigrants and Canadian-born) are three times more likely to be low-income; experience a larger decline in household income over time; face up to three times higher rates of unemployment and underemployment; and rapidly increase rate of child poverty (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; ‘Campaign 2000’, 2011; Galabuzi, 2006; Ornstein, 2000; Picot, 2008; Picot et al, 2009).¹⁸ Even among immigrants to Canada, racialized immigrants face 2 to 3 times higher rates of unemployment, wage gap, and poverty compared to immigrants from European/White background.

¹⁷ See a series of incisive critique of multiculturalism in Fall 2009 volume of Canada Watch.

¹⁸ There are of course variations within racialized groups. For example, while most racialized groups experience double digit low-income rate, Japanese and Filipino Canadians have single digit low-income rate (but still 25% higher than for non-racialized groups) (Block and Galabuzi, 2011). However, on an overall basis, Canadians from non-European/non-white background face wide and increasing inequality on most socio-economic measures.

Grace-Edward Galabuzi (2006) and Michael Ornstein (2000) had raised concern early in 2000 about the growing ‘racialization of poverty’ in Canada. Himani Bannerji characterized the growing inequalities in Canada based on race and immigrant status as the “*dark side of the nation.*” Building on this, we argue that there is problem of *persistent racialized inequalities* in Canada. These ten working families represent the human faces and lives of people unfairly caught in these disturbing statistics of the dark side of Canada.

National health data indicate that negative health impacts on racialized immigrants (and racialized Canadians in general) are immediate and far-reaching (Health Canada, 2010). Of particular concern is the increased risk for chronic illnesses (like diabetes and heart disease) and mental health issues among racialized immigrant families. Many studies in Canada and internationally have documented how immigrants are healthier than native-born residents when they first arrive but lose their “health advantage” over time, often very quickly (Benancourts & Roberts, 2010; Ng 2011; Hyman and Jackson, 2010; Simich & Jackson, 2010; Toronto Public Health, 2011). Immigrants, particularly racialized immigrants, lose their health advantage in terms of mortality, self-rated health status (physical and mental health), and a number of critical chronic health issues including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity and several cancers. (Hyman & Jackson, 2010).

For example, while recent immigrants are 30% less likely than Canadian-born to report high blood pressure, analysts at Public Health Agency of Canada found that this advantage was not observed for immigrants who had lived in Canada for more than five years (Betancourts & Roberts, 2010). In terms of diabetes and other chronic illnesses, there is growing evidence showing earlier on-set of these diseases among immigrants after coming to Canada (see Creatore et al., 2010 for evidence on this for diabetes among immigrants to Canada).

Thus, the dark side of Canada is also the unhealthy side of Canada. It is leading to racialized disparities in health.

The experiences of these ten families highlight that the Canadian immigration system and the labour market operate as *dominating spaces of*

racialization and alienation where people of non-European background (immigrants and Canadian-born) become ‘color-coded,’ ‘othered,’ and ‘alienated’ and excluded as incompetent and less-deserving citizens, and treated as sources of cheap, disposable labour. To paraphrase Edward Said’s reference to Orientalism, racialized immigrants are “rarely seen or looked at; they are seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved or confined – and taken over.”

The systemic distrust, discrimination and alienation that racialized immigrants face in the labour market are austere and deeply rooted. As documented in these case stories, credentials of racialized immigrant professionals get treated like they are “not even worth the paper they are printed on.” Worse, even after applying for 1500 jobs, racialized immigrants cannot get a job. Even after spending thousands of dollars to go back to college and investing many hours in unpaid internships and volunteer work, immigrant families are able to get only part-time and temporary jobs that are well below their skill level. For many immigrants, this is the first time in their life they experience race-based discrimination and become racialized as less capable or less deserving. Real or perceived, these experiences can scar them for the rest of their lives. These are the conditions of discrimination and disadvantage that push hard working racialized immigrant families into precarious job pathways.

Canada is becoming a nation where immigrant families from non-European backgrounds come just to do “horrible jobs” and become poor and sick. Immigrants come to Canada with high dreams of escaping poverty and inequality. Sadly, they end up facing conditions in Canada that in some cases are worse off than what they were hoping to escape. Some immigrant families are pressed to rely on money and resources from relatives from ‘back home’ just to survive in Canada; when in fact their dream was to send money ‘back home.’ This situation of ‘reverse remittance’ is ironic and tragic.

We argue that rise in precarious, non-standard types of employment and the deepening of racialized

inequalities in Canada are closely tied processes that compound each other. Racialized discrimination leads to high rates and severity of precarious employment among racialized groups. In turn, studies have shown that people in non-standard types of jobs are more likely to face discrimination and exploitation.

Critical scholars have raised attention to racialized dimensions of labour market segmentation and the growing racialization of certain type of low-wage precarious work/occupations such as janitorial, hospitality, live in caregiver, security worker, taxi driver occupations (Galabuzi, 2006; Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Creese and Wiebe, 2009; Preston & D’Addario, 2008). Researchers have also shown that discrimination and inequality faced by racialized communities, in turn, undermine their integration and social cohesion (Reitz and Bannerji, 2007; Smith and Wortley, 2010). It is thus vital to pay close attention to the racialized (and gendered) dimensions within the rise of precarious employment in Canada.

To quote Grace Edward Galabuzi (2005:9) : “coupled with the persistence of historically racial and gender discriminatory practices in the labour market, what emerges is a deepening of the process of social inequality, manifested through the segmentation of the labour market along racial line, intensification of income inequality and along with it the racialization of poverty, the racialization and segregation of low income neighbourhoods with higher health risks, disproportionate contact with the criminal justice system and the overall intensification of processes of group marginalization and social exclusion.”

We need bold actions to overcome these deeply entrenched structures of alienation, discrimination and social exclusion that working Canadian families from racialized background face.

Recommendations: Pathways to Good Jobs for all



Results from our study indicate that racialized immigrants get pushed into precarious job trajectory soon after they come to Canada, and end up getting stuck in the worst forms of precarious employment conditions. Canada cannot become a nation where immigrant families come just to do “dirty work” and become poor and sick. This literally makes Canada an unhealthy nation. Each aspiring immigrant family streamed into a precarious employment pathway is one too many. There is an urgent need to reverse this trend. We need to rebuild Canada as a great nation of opportunities, good jobs and prosperity for all, not just for dominant groups and wealthy immigrants.

As discussed in the report findings, there are deep structural barriers preventing immigrant families from getting good jobs. However, all of the socio-economic factors that lead to precarious jobs and poor health are modifiable. To overcome these deep structural barriers and inequalities, we need bold actions and solutions geared at catalyzing system level change. Crucially, we need to mobilize important reforms in our policies related to labour market, immigration and social programs.

1. Building an equitable labour market

First, we need a number of urgent reforms related to labour market policies in order to make it more equitable, to stop the rise of precarious jobs, and promote safer and better workplace conditions. This will benefit all Canadian workers, but particularly immigrant workers. In line with recommendations put forth by Law Commission of Ontario, Workers Action Centre and Color of Poverty, we call for the following policy solutions/actions:

i. Re-introduce the employment equity legislation in Ontario (and in other provinces). Reinstating employment equity legislation at the provincial levels will be the single most important step in promoting good jobs for racialized Canadians and in

- overcoming persistent racialized inequalities in Canada.
- ii. Introduce comprehensive workplace anti-discrimination legislation that ensures that all workplaces have accessible and proactive anti-discrimination policies (in terms of hiring, promotions, pay and treatment of employees). Anti-discrimination legislation needs to be applied to accreditation and recertification bodies as well to stop these agencies from creating unnecessary barriers for qualified immigrant professionals.
 - iii. Ensure more effective enforcement of Employment Standards regulations and Occupational Health and Safety regulations to promote safe exploitation-free work environments; extend these protections specifically for those in non-standard, non-unionized precarious work environment (see Law Commission Ontario’s report on Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work for very concrete set of recommendations on this)
 - iv. Expand Canada’s pay equity legislation to stop the widening pay inequities faced by racialized groups.
 - v. Increase minimum wage rate periodically to account for inflation and introduce a Fair Wage and Benefits Policy to prevent ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of employee wage and benefits.
 - vi. Introduce a Good Jobs Policy with concrete incentives and regulations to promote ‘race to top’ in creating good, stable types of jobs, even in times of recession and global competition.

Progressive businesses and community agencies can take leadership in implementing employment equity, pay equity, and anti-discrimination policies within their workplaces even when progressive government legislations are lacking.

2. Immigration as an engine for nation building

Our immigration and settlement policies continue to be fundamentally based on outdated colonial rationality that instrumentally views immigrants as source for cheap, disposable labour to meet short-term labour market demands; a labour market that is highly discriminatory and increasingly marked by precarious types of employment. This is the heart of the problem. Using immigration purely as supply side labour market strategy is not just problematic in an ethical sense, it also does not work. Labour market trends and needs are marked by high degree of imperfect information that market-driven immigration policies cannot overcome. The current government is making things worse by making immigration even more restrictive for those who want to settle here and by expanding the influx of temporary foreign workers.

Instead, we need to shift to a *humanist policy vision* on immigration which sees immigrants as an *engine for nation-building, and for promoting global equity*. Immigration/immigrants should become agents and catalysts for the nation we want to create, not just for meeting labour market needs. To quote Kwame McKenzie “workers can build an industry, but people build a country.” We need to start treating immigrants as people and nation builders.

Immigration needs to become inclusive and empowering in ways that welcome aspiring immigrants with diverse knowledge and skills, including those from marginalized backgrounds. We then need to develop a battery of services and supports that can effectively recognize and utilize the diverse knowledge and skills to make our labour market, economy and our society more innovative and dynamic.

Settlement services should not just be about helping immigrants access and navigate services. Rather, settlement sector needs to take a leadership role in reshaping services and Canadian society to better respond to the needs and potentials of diverse immigrants. This involves taking proactive role to orient/train other sectors to become not just immigrant-friendly but immigrant-driven. It involves taking bold actions to overcome the deep

structures of discrimination and disadvantages facing immigrants from racialized backgrounds.

Settlement sector needs to build stronger links with the educational sector (universities, colleges and training institutes) to ensure that effective educational and training programs are accessible to marginalized newcomers. We need to promote collaboration between education, labor market, settlement and community sector to create innovative newcomer-friendly professional bridging programs, mentorship programs, paid internship programs, apprenticeship programs, and on-the-job learning programs that can lead to stable employment pathways. On-the-job English learning programs are essential to enable people with low education and limited English language proficiency to build better employment/career pathways.

We need to shift from employment/settlement services focused on making individual behavioral modifications of immigrant workers (e.g. reshuffling their resumes or Canadian workplace preparedness trainings) towards those that help to catalyze system level changes. For example, instead of simply giving immigrants a list of job vacancies, we need more job developers that can assess the quality and fit of jobs vacancies, and proactively link immigrants to good employers. Instead of accepting precarious jobs as a given reality for immigrant families, service providers need to work together with these families and their employers to negotiate for more job security, benefits and protections. We need employment and settlement counselors to proactively take action against discriminations and exploitations that their immigrant clients are facing in the labour market.

Importantly, immigrant families need to be trained and supported to use their rights to achieve and negotiate good jobs free of discrimination and exploitation.

We need to substantially expand professional mentorship and bridging programs in order to break the vicious cycle of limited/insular professional network among racialized families. Further, the key focus of employment and settlement programs should be to enable immigrant families to build strong and diverse professional and social networks and help them overcome social isolation and structural barriers to information, knowledge,

resources and opportunities. Promote bridging, networking, integration and mentorship programs that create positive relationships across occupations, class, race, social positions, geography and other divides. Doing so will link immigrants to successful people in their field, create longer term employment security (and not just one off opportunity for a decent job), and prevent insular labour chain supply into precarious jobs or racialized occupations.

We need to establish Canada as a great nation where even the most marginalized immigrants can get good jobs, achieve prosperity and contribute actively to nation building. Canada needs to meaningfully draw on the diverse knowledge and aspirations of immigrants to build healthier labor market, and become a global leader in driving innovation and in promoting global equity.

Take, for example, the immigrant woman from Egypt (Hanem from the Omar family) with a degree in Islamic studies who is currently stuck doing occasional babysitting and catering work out of her home. Imagine if we can proactively create professional work opportunity for her to achieve her aspiration to teach about Muslim faith and culture to our children and to be a community educator against Islamophobia. That will definitely make us a better, healthier nation.

5. Empowering Social Programs

Social programs (education, housing, childcare etc.), healthcare services and social safety nets (Employment Insurance, Ontario Works, tax system, and other government transfers) should not just be about alleviating the negative impacts of a highly unequal labour market. Instead, they need to be catalysts for promoting equity in ways that transform labour market and economic spheres towards more progressive directions. These services need to become drivers for breaking viscous cycles of poverty and precarious employment, for overcoming deep inequalities, and for empowering the most marginalized people to achieve prosperity. As noted in this report, poverty, income insecurity and income inequality are key factors that stream

people into precarious jobs, over generations. Specifically, it allows companies/employers to create and sustain non-standard, low-paying bad jobs since they see that there are always going to be marginalized people ready to take these precarious jobs. Leaders within social services sector need to take bold action to break this vicious cycle.

Affordable and accessible education, housing and daycare are essential in promoting good jobs and economic prosperity for all

Employment insurance and social assistance programs need to be expanded and made more empowering with strong supports and linkages to stable employment/career pathways. Excessive restrictions and unfair claw backs should be removed from these programs to avoid forcing people into hastily taking up bad jobs. Expanding progressive tax instruments (tax breaks and rebates for low-income families) and introducing guaranteed income supplement for working families are vital in bridging income inequalities and in promoting economic prosperity of hard working low income families.

Healthcare practitioners need to proactively identify and talk about the damaging health impacts from precarious jobs and work with clients to find immediate and long-term solutions. Moreover, healthcare practitioners need to become champions for good jobs and economic wellbeing for all.

We need to establish Canada as a great nation founded on good jobs, progressive immigration policies, equitable and healthy workforce, transformative social programs, and good health for all. Doing this requires strong policy environment and incentives to promote a 'race to the top' in terms of workforce diversity, working conditions, wages, and employee benefits, health and equity. The problems we face are deep and severe. However, citizen advocacy to make government accountable and seamless inter-disciplinary collaboration between settlement, education, health, community agencies, and private sector can catalyze bold and workable solutions.

Solutions Mapping Tool

For each family, list the key barriers they face in getting a good job that match their career goals and aspirations. Then identify concrete solutions that can enable them to overcome these barriers and get stable employment.

Family Name and their Goals	Barriers they face to good jobs	Solutions for Individual Family	Crosscutting solutions

Solutions Mapping Tool

Family Name and their Goals	Barriers they face to good jobs	Solutions for Individual Family	Crosscutting solutions

List below three actions you or your agency plan to take, and the timeline for taking action.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Readings and Resources for Action

Here is a list of recommended reports, website links, and tools produced by progressive agencies (community and governmental agencies) working to build pathways to good jobs, eliminate discrimination and inequality, and promote immigrant wellbeing. You can use these to increase knowledge, build collaboration, and identify concrete actions/solutions to make things better.

- ☑ **Color of Poverty- Color of Change Network:** This network is led by a group of committed activists in Canada. This group is at the fore front in terms of building action against racialized discrimination and inequalities in Canada. The group is calling for bold actions including introducing robust employment equity and anti-discrimination legislation. <https://www.facebook.com/colourofpoverty.colourofchange>
- ☑ **Employment Conditions Knowledge Network (EMCONET):** <http://www.emconet.org/> . This network is comprised of researchers and advocates from around the world working to build international evidence on adverse health impacts of employment conditions (including precarious employment) and to mobilize solutions. The network was formed to inform the work of World Health Organization’s Commission on Social Determinants of Health. See report to WHO from EMCONET: http://www.who.int/social_determinants/resources/articles/emconet_who_report.pdf
- ☑ **Law Commission of Ontario (LCO):** is an independent organization that researches issues and recommends law reform measures to the government to” make the law accessible to all Ontario communities. One of the key issues it is working on is to protect vulnerable/precarious workers through better enforcement of Employment Standards and other legal reforms. See recently released report titled ‘Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work’ for a list of sound and feasible legal reforms/enforcements that can help to promote better labour market and working conditions. <http://www.lco-cdo.org/en/vulnerable-workers-final-report>
- ☑ **Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI).** This council represents settlement and community agencies serving immigrants and is a leader in research and advocacy work on immigrant wellbeing in Ontario. See recently release research report titled ‘Making Ontario Home. A study of settlement and integration services for immigrants and refugees.’ <http://www.ocasi.org/MOH>
- ☑ **Office of the Fairness Commissioner** is an independent agency of the government of Ontario working to “make sure that people are treated fairly when they apply to become licensed professionals in one of Ontario's regulated professions, no matter where they were trained.” It reports on barriers and progress made in licensing and accreditation process and recommends concrete actions on how to better recognize and integrate skilled immigrants into our workforce. See, for example, report titled ‘A Fair Way to Go: Access to Ontario’s Regulated Professions and the Need to Embrace Newcomers in the Global Economy. ’ http://www.fairnesscommissioner.ca/index_en.php?page=home
- ☑ **Ontario Human Rights Commission** is an independent agency of the government whose mandate is “preventing discrimination and promoting and advancing human rights in Ontario.” It has the “power to monitor and report on anything related to the state of human rights in the Province of Ontario” It works to develop public policies on human rights, works proactively to prevent discrimination, and takes action against discrimination and violation of human rights. Community agencies, advocacy groups, and Ontario residents can access the services of this commission to promote discrimination free Ontario.
- ☑ **Public Health Agency of Canada** is a government agency with a mission to “promote and protect the health of Canadians through leadership, partnership, innovation and action in public health.” It is one of the most progressive government agencies. It takes a leadership role in promoting a social determinants of health

framework (SDOH) and in proactively taking action against discrimination and inequalities faced by immigrants and racialized groups. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>. See, for example, report published by PHAC titled ‘The social determinants of health: Employment security as a determinant of health’ and another report titled ‘Migration Health’ published in collaboration with Health Canada. <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/sr-sr/pubs/hpr-rpms/bull/2010-health-sante-migr/index-eng.php>

- ☑ **Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI)** “seeks to assist organizations whose mandate includes the better integration of immigrants into Toronto’s labour force.” It does so by providing “free access to statistical data and analysis on various aspects of immigrant labour market integration.” TIEDI researchers have produced a wealth of evidence and reports that help to better understand labour market experiences and outcomes of immigrants; this body of evidence can be used to develop concrete solutions for improve employment outcomes for immigrants. <http://www.yorku.ca/tiedi/index.html>
- ☑ **Toronto Public Health (TPH)** is a local government agency committed to “protecting and promoting the health of Toronto residents.” It strives to reduce health inequities and improve the health of the whole population.” Like PHAC, Toronto Public Health works through a social determinants of health (SDOH) approach and takes leadership role proactively tackling socio-economic factors that lead to poor health, including discrimination, poverty and inequalities. It also takes a leadership role in promoting immigrant health. <http://www.toronto.ca/health/aboutus/index.htm> See recently released report by TPH (in collaboration with Access Alliance) titled ‘The Global City: Newcomer health in Toronto.’ http://accessalliance.ca/research/activities/Global_City
- ☑ **Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)** is a “multi-stakeholder council that brings leadership together to create and champion solutions to better integrate skilled immigrants in the Toronto Region labour market.” It works with employers, regulatory bodies, professional associations, educators, labour, community groups, government and immigrants to develop innovative and promising solutions. It has resources for companies/employers to improve process for recruiting and retaining qualified immigrants. It helps immigrants build “professional connections through mentoring and professional immigrant networks.” <http://triec.ca/about-us/>
- ☑ **Workers’ Action Centre (WAC)** is a “worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable employment” It is the most active agency that is working to promote good working conditions, workers safety, and access to fair wage and benefits. <http://www.workersactioncentre.org/> . See also its report titled ‘Working on the Edge’: www.workersactioncentre.org/.../pb_WorkingOnTheEdge_eng.pdf
- ☑ **25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction** is a “multi-sectoral network comprised of more than 100 provincial and Toronto-based organizations and individuals working on eliminating poverty.” It is focused on promoting a “Poverty Reduction Plan with a goal to reduce poverty in Ontario by 25% in 5 years and 50% in 10 years.” <http://25in5.ca/> . See its latest report titled ‘Building a Resilient Ontario: From Poverty Reduction to Economic Opportunity’ <http://25in5.ca/poverty-reduction-key-to-economic-recovery/>
- ☑ See writings by the following post-colonial scholars on systemic racism/racialization in Canada and how to overcome this: Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Himani Bannerji, Roxanna Ng, Kwame McKenzie, Rinaldo Walcott, Vijay Agnew, Sunera Thobani.

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