

Some immigrant groups fare badly, new study asserts

Controversial findings indicate new life often no better than the one left behind

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As Canada opens its immigration gates ever wider, a controversial study concludes many new Canadians arrive here to endure an impoverished, ghettoized experience that offers a life no better than the one left behind.

Canada accepts about 200,000 immigrants annually but certain groups of them end up living in poverty at a rate twice the national average, says the new study by a pair of University of Manitoba sociologists.

Visible minorities, especially West Asian, Arab, Latin American, Spanish and Vietnamese immigrants, find living conditions in

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Canada to be little better than their country of origin, says the study, based on 1991 Statistics Canada data, by Shiva Halli and Abdolmohammad Kazempur.

"They are overrepresented among the poor. . . . The poverty they experience in Canada is close to what that have had in their home countries," concludes the research paper entitled *Poverty and Intergenerational Mobility of Immigrants in Canadian Cities*.

Especially startling is the finding that second-generation immigrants often end up being poorer than their parents. "These indices show that for some groups of immigrants the future is even darker, since the younger generation has a weaker record of human capital qualifications compared to the generation of their parents," the paper concludes.

"That's very sad," Mr. Halli said in an interview, adding that the findings seem to disclose that systemic racism is a fact of life in Canada. Something other than language and education surfaces as a barrier to success, he said, since the children of immigrants rarely face the same language and cultural obstacles their parents did.

"Even if they have the same level of education as other Canadians

have, they are bound by a cycle of poverty," Mr. Halli said. "That was very, very shocking. You'd think that the children of immigrants would be able to improve their economic status."

The low-income cutoff for a family headed by one adult is about \$15,000 annually, Mr. Halli said. According to this yardstick, 15.6 per cent of all Canadians live below the so-called poverty line. But certain groups of immigrants are overrepresented among the nation's poor. Nearly 40 per cent of West Asian, Arab, Vietnamese, and Latin and South American immigrants live below the poverty line, the data show.

But other academics dispute the findings. They caution that the 1991 Census figures are out of date and the conclusions drawn by the Manitoba sociologists are counterintuitive.

"Maybe it's possible," said Tom Denton of the International Centre of Winnipeg, which helps new immigrants settle into Canada. "I have a great deal of respect for Shiva's work," he said. "But I think we have to be careful. Maybe all the success stories are just anecdotal. Who's winning all the gold medals in university?"

Don DeVoretz, an economist at Simon Fraser University, said the 1991 Census data are too old to be of much value in 1999. "In another six months they could have used the 1996 data," he said. "That might give another story altogether."

Mr. DeVoretz said the conclusions drawn by the Manitobans are contradicted by another body of academic work that shows wage gaps do exist but that immigrants largely succeed in the Canadian context and that each generation of immigrants generally does better than the previous one. He also noted data relating to Quebec should be tossed out of any national study, since that province handles its own immigration affairs.

Mr. Denton said he does not agree that visible minorities face widespread racism that condemns them to poverty. Canada is more ethnically diverse and tolerant than ever before, he argued. "There's a certain irrelevance to this," he said. "The fact is, Canada needs immigrants." Should Canada's death rate continue to outstrip its birth rate at the present pace, the country will be extinct of people in another 175 years, he noted.

