



## SOCIOECONOMIC ATTAINMENT OF VISIBLE MINORITY IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN CANADA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the impact of age at immigration on socioeconomic attainment of visible minority immigrant women in Canada using data from the 2001 Census of Canada. Multivariate regression analysis indicates that among visible minority immigrant women child immigrants have higher educational attainment, and higher occupational prestige and higher income attainment than teen immigrants. The interaction effect shows that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher educational attainment, higher occupational prestige and higher income attainment compared to teen immigrant women of not visible minority. These findings are explained in the context of a theoretical framework that considers, among other factors, the importance of differential parental expectations for their immigrant children with regard to educational attainment.*

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**Keywords:** Immigrant women, Visible minority status, Age at immigration, Canada.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research in Canada and the United States concerning immigrants' assimilation has explored a variety of issues and concerns. Most of them have looked at socioeconomic attainment of immigrants and their descendants (Boyd and Grieco, 1998; Boyd, 2002; Kao, 2004; Feliciano, 2005). Several studies have focused on the impact of age at immigration on the socioeconomic attainment of immigrant women in relation the native born population (Inbar and Adler, 1976; Inbar, 1977; Jones, 1981; Schaafsma and Sweetman, 2001). However, limited attention has been given in examining the impact of age at immigration on the socioeconomic attainment of visible minority immigrant women in Canada. In addition, investigating the interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status has received limited to no focus in earlier research in Canada.

The objective of this study is to examine the effect of age at immigration on socioeconomic attainment of visible minority immigrant women in Canada. The socioeconomic attainment is measured in terms of educational attainment, occupational prestige, and income attainment. In addition, the interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status with respect to socioeconomic attainment immigrant women is also investigated. This study examines these topics using data from the 2001 Census of Canada through the application of multivariate regression analysis.

### 1.1. Age at Immigration and Socioeconomic Attainment

Previous research shows that age at immigration is an important determinant of the socioeconomic attainment of immigrants (Inbar and Adler, 1976; Cahan *et al.*, 2001; Myers *et al.*, 2009). Child immigrant women are more likely to have higher socioeconomic attainment than teen and adult immigrant women. Part of the reason is that child immigrants receive their education in the host society. On the other hand, the qualifications of teen and adult immigrants educated in their own countries are often not recognized as equivalent to the standards of the host country, and this can account for reduced socioeconomic returns for the immigrants. Another important reason is that teen and adult immigrants may be less able to learn the new language and culture of the receiving society as compared to younger immigrants. This in turn may make it difficult to generate earnings appropriate to one's formal educational and occupational training. Finally, immigrant parents have higher educational expectations for their younger children because in many circumstances teen immigrants might be expected to leave school early and seek paid employment to help support the family (Ali and Kilbride, 2004; Tyyskä, 2008). Thus I hypothesize that child immigrant women of visible minority would have higher socioeconomic attainment than teen immigrant women of visible minority. The expectation is consistent with previous research conducted by Trovato and Grindstaff (1986), Inbar and Adler (1976), Inbar (1977), Jones (1981), Cahan *et al.* (2001).

The number of visible minority<sup>1</sup> immigrants in Canada has been increasing significantly since the early 1970s. Subsequent to changes in Canadian immigration policy the majority of newcomers have been from non-European origins, a large proportion being from Asia. Due to their non-European origins visible minority immigrants might face ethnic and racial discrimination, particularly in the labour market (Boyd, 2008). In fact, research on socioeconomic attainment of immigrants in Canada shows that visible minority immigrants are disadvantaged compared to their not visible minority counterparts (Hou and Balakrishnan, 1996; Basavarajappa and Jones, 1999; Chiswick *et al.*, 2005; Heath *et al.*, 2008). However, none of this research has looked at the interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status to examine whether visible minority immigrants who immigrated at younger ages have higher socioeconomic attainment as compared to not visible minority immigrants who immigrated at older ages. This study will void this gap in the literature.

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<sup>1</sup> “The term *visible minority* was developed by the Canadian Federal Government to meet data needs of federal employment equity legislation in the 1980s. Designated groups include Black, South Asian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, South East Asian, Filipini, other Pacific Islanders, West Asian, Arab, and Latin American” (Boyd 2008).

Regarding the interaction effect, I hypothesize that child immigrant women of visible minority would have higher education, higher occupation prestige and higher income than teen immigrant women of not visible minority of the same age group. This premise is based on the rationale that immigrant parents' higher expectations for educational attainment of child immigrant women (Kao and Tienda, 1995) and their greater ability to learn English/French (Collier, 1987) would pave the way for higher socioeconomic attainment for child immigrant women of visible minority as compared to their not visible minority counterparts. Moreover, child immigrant women of visible minority become more conscious of the fact that they have to exert more effort, with a view to overcome the barriers related to their visible minority status, to establish themselves in the job market. This postulated relationship is consistent with previous research conducted by Boyd (2002), who found that the 1.5 generation (those who immigrated before age 15) and second generation had higher educational attainment as compared to those of third generation and beyond.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

The data for this study were taken from the Public Use Microdata Files (PUMFs) of the 2001 census of Canada. Only 30-year old immigrant women in 2001 are selected for this study. Age 30 represents an important point in the life course of women. By this age many women have completed their education, have entered the labour force, and are likely to be in a marital or cohabiting relationship and with children. Thus, age 30 represents an important juncture in the lives of immigrant women and an important point at which to assess their socioeconomic situation (Trovato and Grindstaff, 1986).

The data file contains six categories of age at immigration: 0-4, 5-12, 13-19, 20-24, 25-29, and 30-39. For this study, only the first three categories are relevant. I define those who immigrated younger than or at age 12 as being "child immigrants," and those who were between the ages of 13 and 19 when they immigrated as "teen immigrants." This codification is consistent with previous research in this area (Ellis and Goodwin-White, 2006). Therefore, child immigrants are those who immigrated below age 13, and teen immigrants are persons who immigrated between age 13 and 19.

I applied Ordinary Least Squares Regression (OLS) to test our research hypotheses. Age at immigration was entered in the multivariate models as a binary variable, defined as 1 = child immigrants, and 0 = teen immigrants.

Concerning education, the data file contains information on total years of schooling, coded as follows: less than 5 years; 5-8 years; 9 years; 10 years; 11 years; 12 years; 13 years; 14-17 years; and 18 or more years. Midpoints were computed for each of these classes to make this variable continuous: less than 5 = 2.5; 5-8 = 6.5; 9 = 9; 10 = 10; 11 = 11; 12 = 12; 13 = 13; 14 - 17 = 15.5; and 18 or more = 19.5. This recoded variable was used in regression models.

The census file includes 14 categories of occupation. I created an ordinal scale of occupational prestige based on a survey of 10 sociologists. Each person was asked to rank occupations from the highest prestige (=10) to the lowest (=1). Based on this survey, the highest prestige was assigned to professionals followed by senior managers, middle and other managers, semi professionals and technicians, supervisors, administrative and senior clerical personnel, skilled crafts and trade

workers, skilled sales and service personnel, semi-skilled manual workers, and other sales and service personnel.

The 2001 Census measured total individual income as the total money received from various sources such as wages and salaries; net farm income; Canada child tax benefit; benefit from employment insurance; other income from government sources; dividends, interest on bonds, deposits and saving certificates and other investment income during calendar year 2000 by persons 15 years of age and over. For the regression analysis, it was decided to transform the income variable (total individual annual income) into its natural logarithm to make the variable consistent with the assumption of normal distribution.

For marital status, the census file contains information on five categories: legally married and not separated; separated but still legally married; divorced; never legally married (single); and widowed. In order to include this variable into our regressions I computed dummy variables for each category, with “single” as the reference group.

Knowledge of official languages is coded in the census as English only; French only; both English and French; and neither English nor French. An ordinal variable for proficiency of official languages was created, ranging from 0 to 3 (0 = neither English nor French, 1 = French only, 2 = English only, 3 = both English and French). The higher the score on this variable, the higher is the language proficiency.

Parental expectation for higher educational attainment is a crucial factor. Unfortunately, the census file does not contain any direct information on this factor. I created a proxy variable for parent’s educational expectations based on information about the education of respondents’ fathers.<sup>2</sup> This proxy was created by considering education of fathers as being determined by age and place of birth. The cohort of 55-64 was considered as the parent generation for 30-year old women in 2001.

The Census file divides information on visible minority indicators into five categories: Chinese; South Asian; Black; other visible minority; and not a visible minority. Visible minority was entered in the multivariate models as a binary variable, defined as 1 = visible minority that includes Chinese, South Asian, Black, other visible minority; and 0 = not visible minority. In addition, I create four dummy variables to examine the interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status: child immigrant visible minority; child immigrant not visible minority; teen immigrant visible minority; and teen immigrant not visible minority. “Teen immigrant not visible minority” was used as the reference category for the interaction model of regression analysis.

Multivariate regressions take the following form:

$$Y_i = a + b_1(AIM) + \sum b_j X_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

Where,  $Y_i$  represents a dependent variable (i.e., years of education, occupational prestige, or the natural logarithm of income) for individual  $i$ ;  $a$  is the intercept term (the expected average on the

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<sup>2</sup> I initially computed two proxies for parental expectations, one based on the father’s education, and one based on the mothers’ education. However, only the father’s education proved to be statistically significant in the regression analysis.

Therefore mother’s education was dropped from the analysis.

dependent variable when all predictors in the equation are set to 0);  $\mathbf{b}_1$  is the slope coefficient denoting the effect of unit change in age at immigration (AIM) on the dependent variable;  $\sum \mathbf{b}_j X_{ij}$  represents all other slope and predictor variables in the model (i.e., marital status, fathers' education and language proficiency);  $e_{ij}$  is an error term (unexplained variance in the dependent variable).

## 2.2. Sample Characteristics

In this study, 30-year old immigrant women in 2001 have been selected for the analysis. The final sample size for this study is 36,038. Majority of them are visible minority immigrants (67.2%). A vast majority of the respondents mentioned their knowledge of official language as "English only" (78.4%) followed by "both English and French" (14.1%), "French only" (4.2%), and "Neither English nor French (3.3%). Regarding marital status, most of the respondents are married (67.7%) followed by single (28.2%), and divorced/widowed (4.1%). Out of the total sample size, 23.18 per cent is comprised of child and teen immigrant women (n=8,357).

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. Socioeconomic Attainment of Immigrant Women by Visible Minority Status

Model 1 (Table 1) presents OLS regression estimates of educational attainment of visible minority immigrant women based on their age at immigration. The model also includes control variables of marital status, father's education, and language proficiency. Consistent with the expectation I find that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher educational attainment than teen immigrant women of visible minority even after controlling for the sociodemographic characteristics. Model 1 also shows that married women are more likely to have higher educational attainment than single women. It is evident from Model 1 that father's education has strong positive impact on the educational outcome of visible minority immigrant women. Another important determinant of educational attainment of visible minority immigrant women is language proficiency. Higher proficiency in official languages is positively associated with educational outcome of visible minority immigrant women (Model 1 in Table 1).

The OLS regression estimates of occupational status of visible minority immigrant women based on their age at immigration is presented in Model 2 (Table 1). The model also includes control variables of marital status, language proficiency, and education of visible minority immigrant women in Canada. Model 2 clearly shows that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher occupational prestige than teen immigrant women adjusted for marital status, language proficiency and education. Married immigrant women of visible minority have lower occupational status than single women. This is also true for divorce/widowed women of visible minority in relation to single women. Both language proficiency and education are positively associated with occupational status of visible minority immigrant women (Model 2).

**Table-1.** OLS regression estimates of socioeconomic attainment visible minority immigrant women

Variables	Model 1 (Education)	Model 2 (Occupation)	Model 3 (Income)
Immigrant status			
<i>Child immigrants</i>	1.445***	0.136***	0.131***
<i>Teen immigrants (R)</i>			
Marital Status			
<i>Married</i>	0.469***	-0.442***	0.009
<i>Divorced</i>	0.242	-2.169***	0.122**
<i>Single (R)</i>			
Fathers' education	0.382***		
Language proficiency	1.976***	0.543***	
Education		0.639***	0.124***
Occupation Prestige			0.143***
Constant	14.738***	5.773***	9.654***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.124	0.239	0.274
F (df)	276.106*** (5 & 8,352)	525.559*** (5 & 8,352)	58.965*** (5 & 8,352)
N	8,357	8,357	8,357

\*\*p <0.05, \*\*\*p <0.01

Findings regarding income attainment of visible minority immigrant women based on age at immigration are presented in Model 3 (Table 1). The model also contains sociodemographic covariates of marital status, education, and occupational prestige. Model 1 demonstrates that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher income attainment than teen immigrant women of visible minority net of the sociodemographic covariates. I also find that there is no significant difference in income attainment between divorced immigrant women and single immigrant women. Surprisingly, there is no significant difference in income attainment between married immigrant women and single immigrant women. Consistent with earlier research, visible minority immigrant women with higher educational attainment and higher occupational prestige are more likely to have income attainment as compared to visible minority immigrant women with lower educational attainment and lower occupational prestige (Model 3 in Table 1).

Therefore, child immigrant women of visible minority have higher educational attainment, higher occupation prestige, and higher income attainment at age 30 compared to teen immigrant women of visible minority. The higher socioeconomic attainment of child immigrant women of visible minority can be attributed to higher parental expectation and higher language proficiency of child immigrant women of visible minority as compared to teen immigrant women of visible minority.

### 3.2. Socioeconomic Attainment: Interaction of Age at Immigration with Visible Minority Status

The interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status on socioeconomic attainment of immigrant women is presented in Table 2. The findings in Table 2 are different from those of Table 1 from two perspectives. First, Table 2 examines socioeconomic attainment of both visible minority immigrant women and not visible minority immigrant women. It also contains the

interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status on the socioeconomic attainment of immigrant women in Canada.

**Table-2.** OLS regression estimates of the interaction effect of age at immigration and visible minority status

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 4 (Education)</b>	<b>Model 5 (Occupation)</b>	<b>Model 6 (Income)</b>
Visible minority status			
<i>Visible minority</i>	-0.895***	-1.538***	-0.223***
<i>Not visible minority (R)</i>			
Marital status			
<i>Married</i>	-0.071**	-0.110***	-0.095***
<i>Divorced</i>	-0.674***	-0.713***	0.246***
<i>Single (R)</i>			
Fathers' education	0.124**		
Language proficiency	1.333***	0.196***	
Education		0.534***	0.241***
Occupation prestige			0.136***
Interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status			
<i>Child immigrant visible minority</i>	0.857***	1.195***	1.006***
<i>Teen immigrant visible minority</i>	-0.497***	0.866***	0.870***
<i>Child immigrant not visible minority</i>	-0.717***	0.496***	0.732***
<i>Teen immigrant not visible minority (R)</i>			
Constant	12.345***	7.027***	9.104***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.176	0.238	0.254
F (degrees of freedom)	478.749***	1407.319***	292.615***
	(8 & 36,060)	(8 & 36,060)	(8 & 36,060)
N	36,068	36,068	36,068

\*\*p < 0.05, \*\*\*p < 0.01

Model 4 (Table 2) demonstrates educational attainment of 30-year old immigrant women in Canada in 2001 based on their visible minority status. The model also includes control variables of marital status, father's education, language proficiency and interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status. In the interaction term, teen immigrant women of not visible minority have been used as the reference category. I find that visible minority immigrant women have lower educational attainment than immigrant women of not visible minority after controlling for marital status, father's education, language proficiency, and interaction effects between age at immigration and visible minority status. Model 4 also shows that married immigrant women and divorced immigrant women have lower educational attainment than single immigrant women. Father's education has consistently positive impact on educational attainment of immigrant women. Similarly, those who have higher proficiency in official languages are more likely to have higher educational attainment than those who have lower proficiency in official languages (Model 4).

However, the interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status shows that child immigrant women of visible minority are likely to have higher educational attainment at age 30 compared to teen immigrant women of not visible minority after controlling for marital status, father's education, language proficiency, and visible minority status (Model 4). In contrast, teen immigrant women of visible minority have lower educational attainment than their not visible

minority counterparts. In addition, child immigrant women of not visible minority also have lower educational attainment than teen immigrant women of not visible minority (Model 4). These results suggest that although age at immigrant is an important determinant of educational attainment among immigrant women, there are substantial variations in educational attainment based on their visible minority status.

The OLS regression estimates of occupational prestige among immigrant women based on their visible minority status is presented in Model 5. The model also takes sociodemographic characteristics such as marital status, language proficiency, education, and interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status into account. It is evident from Model 5 that visible minority immigrant women have lower occupational prestige than not visible minority immigrant women net of the sociodemographic characteristics. Consistent with educational attainment, married immigrant women and divorced immigrant women have lower occupational prestige than single immigrant women. Model 5 also shows that immigrant women with higher language proficiency are likely to have higher occupational prestige than those who have lower proficiency in official languages. In consonance with previous research, education is positively associated with occupational prestige (Model 5).

Regarding occupational prestige, we find that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher occupational prestige at age 30 compared to teen immigrant women of not visible minority after controlling for marital status, language proficiency, education, and visible minority status (Model 5). Teen immigrant women of visible minority and child immigrant women of not visible minority also have higher occupational prestige than teen immigrant women of not visible minority. These findings demonstrate that teen immigrant women of not visible minority are the most disadvantaged in terms of occupational prestige in Canada and reinforce the importance of age at immigration in occupational success in the labour market of the host society.

Model 6 (Table 2) presents the impact of visible minority status on income attainment of immigrant women in Canada. The model includes control variables of marital status, education, occupational prestige, and interaction between age at immigration and visible minority status. I notice that visible minority immigrant women have lower income attainment than not visible minority immigrant women adjusted for the sociodemographic characteristics. In addition, married immigrant women have lower income attainment than single immigrant women. On the other hand, divorced immigrant women have higher income attainment than single immigrant women. In consistent with earlier research, I also observed that higher education and higher occupational prestige are positively associated with income attainment of immigrant women in Canada (Model 6).

Net of marital status, education, occupational prestige, and visible minority status, child immigrant women of visible minority have higher income attainment at age 30 compared to teen immigrant women of visible minority (Model 6 in Table 2). Moreover, teen immigrant women of visible minority and child immigrant women of not visible minority also have higher income attainment than teen immigrant women of not visible minority. These results suggest that despite being visible minority child immigrants have higher income attainment as compared to not visible minority immigrants. Therefore, age at immigrant is a pivotal determinant of income attainment among immigrant women in Canada.



#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study examines the impact of age at immigration on the socioeconomic attainment of visible minority immigrant women in Canada using data from the 2001 census of Canada. In addition, the differential effect of visible minority status on the socioeconomic attainment of immigrant women is also assessed. I find that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher education attainment, higher occupational prestige, and higher income attainment as compared to teen immigrant women of visible minority. This can be explained by immigrant parents' higher expectation for educational attainment to child immigrants than teen immigrants. Higher parental expectation leads to higher educational attainment for child immigrant women and higher educational attainment eventually leads to higher occupational prestige compared to teen immigrant women. Moreover, child immigrant women have higher capability to learn English and French, which in turn leads to higher educational attainment compared to teen immigrant women. Also, higher educational attainment leads to higher occupational prestige for child immigrant women compared to teen immigrant women. This is consistent with previous research conducted by Halli and Vedanand (2007), Trovato and Grindstaff (1986), and Jones (1981); Jones (1987) who found that age at immigration had a strong negative impact on educational attainment and occupational status.

Regression analysis regarding the socioeconomic attainment of immigrant women of visible minority shows that these women have lower educational attainment, lower occupation prestige, and lower income at age 30 compared to immigrant women of not visible minority. However, when the interaction of age at immigration and visible minority status was taken into account, we find that child immigrant women of visible minority have higher educational attainment, higher occupational prestige and higher income attainment at age 30 compared to teen immigrant women of not visible minority. This suggests that age at immigration is a strong determinant of socioeconomic attainment for immigrant women in general, and visible minority immigrant women in particular. One reason for higher socioeconomic attainment of child immigrant women of visible minority might be that they are quite aware of the lower socioeconomic standing of visible minorities in Canada, which motivates them to engage greater efforts for socioeconomic success.

An important limitation of this study is that year of immigration is not taken into account as a control variable in the multivariate analysis. With year of immigration into the multivariate model I could control for the possibility that difference in duration of residence in Canada since the time of immigration might explain away variation in socioeconomic attainment between child and teen immigrants at age 30. However, when year of immigration was entered into regression models, this resulted in a collinearity problem with age at immigration. I therefore had to exclude this variable from regression models. Another limitation of this study is that I did not look at the socioeconomic attainment of immigrant men. A comparative analysis of the socioeconomic attainment of both immigrant men and immigrant women would permit additional insight regarding the effect of age at immigration. Moreover, I have only looked at the socioeconomic attainment of visible minority women in general but a separate analysis based on generational status (i.e., first generation visible minority, second generation visible minority and third generation visible minority) would provide further insight into the analysis of the determinants of socioeconomic success of visible minority immigrant women in Canada.

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