

How do Syrian refugee women find work? A feminist grounded analysis of work integration experiences in Canada*

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Summary High immigration rates and changing immigration policy of neighbouring countries suggests that Canada's labour force will become saturated with newcomers, half of whom are women. Understanding how they navigate through the labour market and identifying additional challenges they may face then is important to narrowing the gap in gendered resettlement experiences.

1. Relevance

Work is an integral part of our lives, providing us with the income necessary for housing, food, transportation, as well as social networks to help integrate into the community. For refugees, however, labour market barriers including non-recognition of foreign credentials, lack of language proficiency, and racial/ethnic discrimination, impedes work resulting in low-skilled, low-waged, precarious employment positions. Refugee women are particularly vulnerable to these positions when having to manage their *double day* responsibilities.

2. Aims & Objectives

The purpose of this study is to understand how Syrian refugee women seek and find employment as newly arrived refugees. There are 3 main objectives:

- a) Map current policies in place to assist refugees
- b) Explore work integration process as experienced by Syrian refugees and key informants with focus on i) how government programs and policies shape women's employment experiences; ii) how women encounter the Canadian labour market and iii) challenges women face in securing employment and how they navigate through them.
- c) Explore ways in which gender plays a role in women's ability to enter the Canadian labour force

3. Methods

A qualitative research design guided by feminist grounded theory will be employed. This approach focuses on women's subjective experiences and interpretations as a source of knowledge while examining micro- and macro-level influences, allowing us to explore gender, work, and health in a systematic way. Syrian refugees and key informants will be recruited through our community partnerships with not-for-profit organizations in the Kitchener-Waterloo region that provide settlement services to refugees. We will conduct one-time, in-depth interviews either in-person or over the phone. Interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and entered into NVivo qualitative data software. Through constant comparison and deviant case analysis, data will be distilled into codes and codes linked and compared within and across data to develop key themes.

4. Conclusions

This research is the first of its kind, to the best of our knowledge, that utilizes a qualitative design guided by feminist grounded theory to explore interactions of work with power relations, familial role, host-related policies, services, and norms, culture-related practices and norms, and labour force conditions. The findings have numerous implications relevant to the Canadian labour market – it will address challenges to employment integration, gender inequity in labour force participation, and highlight recommendations for improving resettlement experiences of *all* incoming refugee women.

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