Labour market perceptions and experiences among Ghanaian–Canadian second-generation youths in the Greater Toronto Area

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the perceptions and experiences of second-generation Ghanaian–Canadian immigrant youths in the Greater Toronto Area labour market and highlights some of the challenges they faced. Specifically, the study explores how some of these youths viewed and expressed their feelings in their process of navigating the labour market as well as the connections between their neighbourhood of residence and their performance in the labour market. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to procure empirical data from youths residing in two localities in the Greater Toronto Area. The participants most frequently identified unemployment or underemployment as the main issues that highlighted the differences between the two study localities and that there were differences between male and females in this respect. The findings indicate that the youths' performance in the labour market was influenced by a multitude of factors, including inefficient transportation, discrimination, lack of information, and dress code. In addition, the findings shed light on how neighbourhood characteristics influenced employment outcomes.

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have lower incomes (Galabuzi 2012), and are spatially segregated (Portes et al. 2009).

In 2010, the proportion of immigrants from Africa was increasing and was projected to rise in the next two decades (Statistics Canada 2010). There is growing evidence that, among the second generation, Blacks are the most underprivileged group in Canada (Banerjee 2006; Este et al. 2012; see also endnote 1). The present study focuses on second-generation Ghanaian–Canadians because little is known about their labour market performance, given the economic uncertainties of their immigrant parents in Toronto city (Ornstein 2000; Wong 2006; Mensah 2010).

In the following, I explore the labour market experiences and perceptions of the second-generation Ghanaian–Canadians and describe the process that the study participants underwent when they navigated the labour market in Toronto city. The following research questions are addressed:

1. How do second-generation Ghanaian–Canadian youths view and express their feelings during the process of navigating the labour market in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)?
2. What connections do the second-generation youths draw between either the neighbourhood or community in which they reside and their labour market performance?

**Literature review**

The ‘second generation’ refers to those who were born in Canada, with at least one parent born outside Canada (Kobayashi 2008; Statistics Canada 2011b). The group is heterogeneous, both within and between ethnocultural groups, and their circumstances are influenced by their place of residence (Kobayashi 2008). However, there are differences between the ethnocultural groups with regard to their demographics and their composition in terms of gender, place of residence, educational level, economic status, and social capital (Boyd 2002). A study by Policy Horizon Canada (2013) revealed that experiences of the second generation are changing at national, regional and local levels, and that it is increasingly expected that visible minorities will define the country’s second generation. This changing trend is a result of the shift in the country of origin of immigrants coming from non-European countries since the 1980s. For example, in 2010, Statistics Canada projected that by 2031 the Chinese and South Asians would remain the largest groups, and that the Black and Filipino populations would double in size (Statistics Canada 2010).

Notwithstanding the many research findings showing that recent immigrants and visible minorities in Canada may face uncertainties in many spheres of life, including the labour market (Mensah 2010; Yap et al. 2010; Yap & Everett 2012), relatively little research has been done on the experiences of the ‘new’ second generation (Policy Horizon Canada 2013). In the following sections I review the literature on the educational experiences, neighbourhood characteristics, and labour market outcomes of members of the second generation.

**Second-generation’s educational experiences**

Immigrants and their children have been found to have more years of schooling on average than Canadians whose families have been in the country for several generations (Aydemir et al. 2008). Research has consistently shown the second generation as having a significantly higher educational attainment than their third and higher order generation counterparts in Canada (Aydemir & Sweetman 2007; Statistics Canada 2011b; Picot & Hou 2012). In a study of the school performance of children of immigrants in Canada, Worswick (2001) used data relating to children aged 15 years or under from three cycles of the National Longitudinal Survey of children and youths in order to analyse the determinants of school performance. The children’s performance was measured in terms of their ability in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as their overall aptitude. The study revealed that their first language had a significant effect on their school performance, since the children of immigrants whose first language was either French or English had particularly high performance levels. By contrast, children whose mother’s language was neither of Canada’s two official languages (English and French) had lower performances in reading and writing but were comparable with children of Canadian-born parents in other subjects. It has been reported that in Canada second-generation Asians and Africans have higher educational attainment that other second-generation groups, such as Whites (Aydemir & Sweetman 2007; Abada et al. 2009). Reitz et al. (2011) examined survey and census data from the USA, Canada and Australia and found that in all three countries, regardless of age, second-generation Whites, Afro-Caribbeans, Chinese, South Asians and other Asians had, on average, more education than higher-generation Whites. Specifically, reports for second-generation Afro-Caribbean Blacks in the USA and Canada show that they have, on average, the same amount of education as their mainstream counterparts, but are not as successful in obtaining skilled occupations (Reitz et al. 2011; Picot & Hou 2012).
There are significant differences in educational outcomes between second-generation males and females in Canada, with second-generation females attaining higher academic achievements than their male counterparts (Aydemir & Sweetman 2006; Council of Ontario Universities 2011). A study of the general population in Canada has shown that in the first decade of the new millennium, female students outnumbered male students at all levels of education, from elementary to university, with the exception of science and technology programmes (Statistics Canada 2009a).

Several explanations have been forwarded for the higher academic achievements of the second-generation immigrants in general and the visible minorities in particular. The impact of the selective nature of Canada’s immigration policy has been highlighted, as in many cases the children of immigrants have benefited indirectly from its points system (Boyd 2002; Feliciano & Ruben 2005; Wayland & Goldberg 2010). The points system was implemented in accordance with the 1967 Canada Immigration Act (Shepard & Mani 2014) and gives priority to immigrants with higher levels of education and skills who would contribute to the development of the country. Borjas (1999) compared immigrants to Canada and the United States and found that immigrants to Canada were better educated and received higher wages once settled, which he attributed to Canada’s points-based immigration system. Further, parents with higher education seem to have the ability to adopt strategies and practices that are more likely to contribute to their children’s educational success and subsequent performance in the labour market (Worswick 2001; Wayland & Goldberg 2010). In addition, higher expectations and aspirations on the part of immigrant parents are contributory factors (Finnie & Mueller 2009). Many immigrant families from many Asian and African countries have high expectations for their children’s educational attainment, which in turn will affect their educational outcomes (Picot & Hou 2012).

**Neighbourhood effects and ethnic capital**

Neighbourhood effects and ‘ethnic capital’ have been identified as factors that contribute to the second generation’s higher academic achievements in Canada (Picot & Hou 2012). Neighbourhood effects can be defined as ‘social interactions that occur in close proximity to an individual’s residence, and that affect social and economic wellbeing’ (Oreopoulos et al. 2008, 238). ‘Ethnic capital’ is defined as the mean level of socio-economic achievement of a given cohort of an ethnic group (Borjas 1992), which is argued to provide a niche for immigrants (Wang & Maani 2014). This definition opens the debate to various arguments concerning how people’s places of residence affect their participation in the labour market. In Canada, the second generation lives mainly in large urban areas where the level of educational attainment is higher (Picot & Hou 2012). When people live in close proximity to their ethnic group there is a tendency for them to benefit from informal networks with more highly educated role models in the group, as well as more economic resources (Abada et al. 2008; Portes et al. 2009; Abada & Lin 2011).

Notwithstanding the educational advantages of living in large urban areas, it has been suggested that immigrants in Toronto city and Montreal are more likely than non-immigrants to live in neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty (Walks & Bourne 2006; Galabuzi 2007). Early studies suggested relatively less segregation among visible minorities such as Blacks in Canada compared to the USA, but there an association has been found between low-income and minority concentrations for Aboriginals, Blacks and Latin Americans in some Canadian cities, including Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Winnipeg (Walks & Bourne 2006). More recent research has confirmed an association between income and neighbourhood segregation in Toronto city (Hulchanski 2010).

**Second-generations’ labour market experiences**

In general, the second generation’s higher educational attainments are reflected in their labour market outcomes. In a comparative study of the offspring of racial minority immigrants in the USA, Canada and Australia, Reitz et al. (2011) observed that in all three countries the second generation from all ethnic immigrant groups secured more managerial and professional jobs than the mainstream population. Their study also found that in all three countries the number of second-generation Chinese and South Asians who worked in managerial and professional occupations was almost double that of the mainstream population of the same age. Picot & Hou (2012) found that in Canada unemployment rates were lower among the second generation than the third and higher order generations. Earlier studies in Canada suggested that the overall earnings of the second generation as a whole were between 9% and 13% higher than among the third and higher order generations (Aydemir & Sweetman 2007; Hum & Simpson 2007).

With regard to gender, Picot & Hou (2010) studied the Canada’s national census for 2006 and found that second-generation males had weekly earnings that were 6% higher than the earnings of males from third and higher order generations. Earlier studies have documented similar findings (Hum & Simpson 2007;
Aydemir & Sweetman (2007). However, Picot & Hou (2010) noted that the positive earnings of the second-generation males were determined entirely by non-visible, minority second generations who had a 9% lead over their third and higher order generation counterparts. They also noted a 5% negative wage gap among visible minority males, regardless of their higher academic achievements, compared with second, third, and higher-generation White Canadians. By contrast, visible minority women were likely to be employed with higher earnings than their male counterparts because the latter did not have the same educational attainment (Keung 2007; Kerr 2010; Picot & Hou 2012).

However, within the minority groups, studies have revealed that employment rates are lower and unemployment rates are higher among second-generation Asians, Blacks and other visible minority groups compared with third and higher order generation non-visible minorities (Picot & Hou 2012). The situation for Blacks is particularly unfavourable because they do not experience the same returns for their educational attainment as other visible and non-visible, minority second generations. Picot & Hou (2012) observed a significant variation among visible minority groups in Canada, with Blacks having the largest earning gap (i.e. wage gap). Reitz et al. (2011) found that second-generation Afro-Caribbean Blacks in the USA and Canada had, on average, the same amount of education as the respective mainstream populations, but were not as successful in securing employment in skilled occupations. In an earlier, related study of the second-generation in the USA, Portes et al. (2005) noted that mainstream perception of the children of Black immigrants was negative. Their enduring physical differences from Whites and the persistent strong effects of discrimination based on those differences were barriers to their occupational mobility and social acceptance.

Thus, there are both structural and cultural factors underlining immigrants’ and their children’s labour market performance. Historically, immigrants have been regarded as a secondary labour force or ‘reserve army’ (Hakim 1982), with unemployment and underemployment as a consequence (Gastaldo et al. 2005; Mensah 2010). In turn, unemployment and underemployment have been associated with low incomes among immigrants compared to non-immigrants (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). The reasons for the immigrants’ challenges in the labour market include: their difficulties in obtaining recognition of their educational qualifications; their physical and cultural characteristics; their country of origin; and language barriers (Li 1999; Dean & Wilson 2009; Yap et al. 2010). The literature indicates that second-generation Black youths face greater problems in the Canadian labour market than other groups.

In the following, I explore the labour market experiences of a selected group of Blacks, namely Ghanaian second-generation youths.

**Study localities**

Two localities in the Greater Toronto Area were chosen for the study: the Jane-Finch neighbourhood in City of Toronto, and Brampton city in the Regional Municipality of Peel (Peel Region). These two localities were selected because of the relatively high concentration of Black populations, including the most concentrated Ghanaian communities in the Greater Toronto Area (Owusu 1999; Mensah 2010; Statistics Canada 2011b). Jane-Finch (also known as Jane and Finch) contains one of the highest concentrations of Blacks in Toronto city (City of Toronto 2013). Jane-Finch is an inner-suburb located in the north-west end of the City of Toronto, and was formerly part of the municipality of North York (Rootham 2008). Jane-Finch is both an idea and a physical place (Boudreau et al. 2009). As an idea, Jane-Finch is considered an unattractive and unsafe part of the city, ‘a place of violence, poverty, and foreboding suburban design’ (Cash 2006, 1). It is named after its main intersection: Jane Street and Finch Avenue. Jane-Finch is different from other neighbourhoods in Toronto city in terms of the large scale on which it was conceived, planned, and developed, as well as in terms of its built form, its type of housing, and its resident population (Boudreau et al. 2009). Jane-Finch has a high concentration of Blacks and a significant number of South Asians and Southeast Asians (Lovell 2007). The concentration of visible minority groups in this neighbourhood suggests that racial discrimination is manifested spatially, affecting the lives of the people living in this racialized community (Teelucksingh 2006). Hulchanski (2010) has distinguished between different neighbourhoods in Toronto city based on income: in the neighbourhoods with the highest incomes, the majority of the population are Whites, whereas in the neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes (including Jane-Finch), the majority belong to the visible minorities. Jane-Finch is mainly a residential neighbourhood and local labour market conditions are not favourable for the number of people looking for employment. Research has shown that Blacks are the most underprivileged groups amongst the visible minorities in Canada (Banerjee 2006; Este et al. 2012; see also endnote 1) and experience higher rates of discrimination (Ray & Preston 2009).

The second study locality, Brampton, is the third-largest city in the Greater Toronto Area and the seat of Peel Region (Statistics Canada 2015b). Brampton city is located c.49 km west of Toronto city and c.40 km...
north-west of Lake Ontario. Peel Region was created in 1974 when Brampton became a city. Brampton has the second highest proportion of visible minorities within the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. In total, 57% of the total population are visible minorities. The largest visible minority groups are South Asians (136,000) and Blacks (53,000) (Statistics Canada 2008). In the 1980s and 1990s, large subdivisions were made on former farmland. The city’s major businesses include manufacturing, retailing and wholesale trade. Brampton evolved as an industrial city and continues to offer employment to many people, both within and outside the city. The city has more than 24,000 ha of parkland and offers access to a wide variety of outdoor activities (Statistics Canada 2015c). The city also has a large number of libraries, hospital services, educational facilities, and shopping centres.

Statistics for 2012 show that Brampton had an employment rate of 67.7%, which was higher than that of the province of Ontario as a whole (62.8%) (Statistics Canada 2015c). In the same year the city had an unemployment rate of 6.6%, with 13.9% in the low-income category. By comparison, 49% of the population in Jane-Finch were employed; the unemployment rate was 13%, which was twice that of Brampton, while 23.4% were in the low-income category (Statistics Canada 2015c). With regard to education, in 2009, 34% of the residents in Jane-Finch had post-secondary education, 31% had a high school certificate, and 35% did not have a certificate (Statistics Canada 2009b). In 2011, 48.3% of Brampton’s residents had completed post-secondary education, 29.6% had a high school certificate, and 22.1% did not have a certificate (Statistics Canada 2015c). According to Statistics Canada (2009b), Jane-Finch is densely populated and has a higher percentage of residents living in multi-unit dwellings. It also has a high rate of crime. In addition it has the highest percentages of children under the age of 15 years, renters, and single-parent families of all neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area. The residents are also less likely to have a university degree, more likely to earn a lower wage, and more likely to live in low-income households (Statistics Canada 2009a).

Methods

For my study, I used focus groups interviews and in-depth interviews. The focus groups informed the in-depth interviews by generating questions that were subsequently explored and addressed in the in-depth interviews. Findings from the focus groups were triangulated (Denzin 1970) with those from the in-depth interviews. I tested the interview guide with two second-generation Ghanaian youths and incorporated their suggestions.

Open-ended interview questions were developed to reflect the second-generation Ghanaian youths’ experiences in the labour market.

Participant recruitment and data collection

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit second-generation Ghanaian–Canadian youths who lived in Jane-Finch neighbourhood and in Brampton city. After obtaining approval from the Office of Research Ethics at York University (Toronto), I placed advertisements for participants in several Ghanaian churches and temples in Toronto city as well as recruitment posters and verbal announcements in local restaurants. In addition, some participants were drawn from across the Greater Toronto Area using snowball sampling.

In total, 27 youths in the age range 19–30 years participated in the in-depth interviews and the two focus groups conducted between July 2011 and April 2012. I selected participants who had received different levels of education and who were willing to share information on the process of navigating the labour market. The participants comprised 8 males and 7 females from the Jane-Finch neighbourhood and 6 males and 6 females from Brampton city. Prior to the in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion was held in Jane-Finch and one in Brampton. After individual consent was obtained, the youths participated in group semi-structured and individual open-ended interviews in English. Audio recordings were made of both the focus group interviews and the in-depth interviews. The Brampton focus group discussion lasted 60 minutes and the Jane-Finch one lasted 90 minutes. The 27 in-depth interviews (one with each participant) each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. In total, 10 participants took part in the focus group discussions, 5 from each group. The Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at locations preferred by the participants, including coffee shops, church premises and homes.

Of the 27 participants, 5 were between 19 and 22 years of age, 17 participants between 23 and 27 years, and 5 participants between 28 and 30 years. All participants were Canadian citizens, and of these 4 stated that they had educational qualifications up to high school level, 9 had college certificates, and the remaining 14 had university degrees. A total of 6 were employed full time, 13 were employed part-time, and 8 were unemployed; however, 7 described themselves as underemployed, while 12 described their annual income as inadequate to meet their needs. There was an important distinction between the two groups of participants, who differed in their immigration status: 20 were second-generation Ghanaian–Canadians and 7 were ‘1.5 generation’ who were aged 12 years or below when they immigrated to Canada. The age of 12 years was chosen for the study.
because those immigrants had completed their basic education in Canada and shared similar worldviews with the second generation.

**Data analysis**

The recordings of the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. Codes were developed after several readings of the transcripts, and the selections of categories followed. The first stage of the analysis was coding the data and categorizing it into subheadings. The second level involved analysing the coded data and rereading the transcripts to identify any patterns in them. This level revealed the process reflected in the second-generation Ghanaian youths’ descriptions of their everyday encounters in the labour market.

**Findings**

There were a number of similarities and differences with regards to the labour market experiences of the two groups. In addition, participants from both groups identified the lack of appropriate dress code, effective transportation, strong networks, and information about jobs as among the challenges to their participation in the labour market. Verbatim quotes from the interviews are presented below to illustrate the experiences and perceptions of the participants as they navigated the Greater Toronto Area labour market. The selected quotes capture what many participants expressed regarding how their experiences were shaped by their participation in the market.

**Barriers to the labour market**

The most frequently mentioned labour market issues were unemployment, underemployment, inefficient transportation, and discrimination, all of which were perceived by the immigrants as resulting from difficulties in finding secure employment in Toronto city that matched their qualifications. The participants from Jane-Finch were especially concerned about the lack of jobs or long commuting times to work, while those from Brampton were more concerned about finding appropriate jobs that matched their qualifications. Although both groups expressed their worries about finding jobs that match their qualifications, the situation was worse for most participants from Jane-Finch, who lamented the difficulties in accessing menial jobs in their neighbourhood, as exemplified by the following statement from one participant:

- It is difficult to find a job in Jane-Finch because all the jobs are located in the new areas such as Scarborough, Mississauga, and Brampton. To get work in these places you need to move to live there, which is very expensive as a beginner. Rent is so high in those areas that all your money will go into rent. To work in those areas, then you have to commute every day to and from work that is very difficult since you would spend all your time in the bus. (Unemployed male, Jane-Finch)

A handful of participants felt the frustration of being unemployed in a poor neighbourhood. One youth captured the feelings shared by many of the participants with respect to how the lack of job impacts his life as a youth from Jane-Finch:

- Everyone who grew up in Jane-Finch knows that there are no jobs for the youth after school. Jane and Finch is just a residential area for the poor and not for work. You just live with your family and when God willing you grab some work somewhere then you leave this area. I don’t think it is a good place for youth. There is nothing here for the youth to focus in life. The most painful aspect is that no employer would like to employ a guy from this place. But I managed to grab a job at Scarborough without showing my identity as a Jane-Finch guy. I go to work at Scarborough every day. (Employed male, Jane-Finch)

However, lack of a job did not concern all of the second-generation youths, as some who were employed were much concerned about the issue of underemployment. They perceived themselves as employed in jobs that were below the level of their qualifications. Thus, higher educational attainment was not useful to these participants as it seemed irrelevant for securing higher status jobs:

- Finding a job is not the issue but getting the right job that matches your qualification. I know there are certain jobs that are not for minorities. It does not matter whether you have the highest qualification and experience. I have attended several interviews, which I think I qualified for. I had all the qualities that they were looking for, yet I was not hired. A lot of people in my neighbourhood also experience a similar situation. They keep on complaining, but what can you do my brother? Only God knows how we survive in this system. (Underemployed female, Brampton)

Directly related to the above experiences was the lack of efficient transportation, which had been experienced as a barrier to accessing the labour market. Many participants, particularly those from Jane-Finch who commuted to other parts of Toronto city for work, talked about their difficulties in accessing public transport to and from their workplaces:

- I live in Jane and Finch but I worked with a company at Vaughan [a suburb north of the City of Toronto]. I have
to wake up as early as possible throughout the week except Sundays to get to work on time. The problem is that I take two buses with different fares to and from work. Vaughan operates its public transit differently from Toronto. Even that, when I get down from the bus at the nearest bus stop to my workplace, it takes me between 20 and 30 minutes’ walk to the workplace. And, the stressful aspect is that, after work when you’re tired you have to walk again to the bus stop for bus. This situation is serious so I’m still looking for other opportunities elsewhere. (Underemployed female, Jane-Finch)

In addition to unemployment or underemployment and inefficient transportation, the participants considered that discrimination affected their participation in the labour market. For example, they worried about the way Blacks were discriminated in Toronto city. This was explained by one unemployed participant, who was unhappy, frustrated and anxious about his situation:

I think most Blacks don’t get the best jobs in Toronto [city]. It is like there are no jobs for Blacks in Toronto. Blacks only get jobs that nobody wants, no matter your qualification and skills. In most cases these jobs are the poor ones advertised through the placement agencies. These jobs have only few hours of work and pay minimum wage. They treat you badly and see you as subhuman. This is a serious problem. (Unemployed male, Jane-Finch)

One youth expressed her motivation for not relenting in her search for a job despite her perception of discrimination in the labour market:

Many people complain about discrimination in the job places so they have stopped looking for jobs. But who cares, who loses, is it the employer or you? I know that whether you have a good certificate or not you must work in order to live, so if I’m not getting the job that matches my educational qualification should I stop working and stay home? I know it is painful with higher education without a good job, but who do we blame? I believe with time, our hard work in schools will surely pay us. (Underemployed female, Brampton)

**Gender and the labour market**

With regard to gender differences, females from both groups of participants expressed some level of satisfaction with their jobs in contrast to males in the same groups. Although 8 of the 13 females said that they were working below their qualifications, they seemed to be more satisfied than their male counterparts. Their satisfaction might have been attributed to their self-motivation and their determination to achieve the best possible for themselves. Based on participants’ responses, the females appeared to persevere in their job searches more than the males:

Many youths in my community are not working. I think the problem is more serious for boys than girls. The boys just roam about without any job. I know many boys in my area who aren’t working. When you ask them why they are not working, they tell you they are still looking for jobs but don’t get the jobs. Some have even made up their minds to stop looking for jobs because they think they are not going to get them anyway. (Employed female, Brampton)

In addition, females from both groups were concerned about the appropriateness of their male counterparts’ dress codes:

I heard many Blacks are treated differently in the job places in Toronto [city], but I haven’t seen any of this, neither have I been treated badly at my workplace. Though racism is real in Toronto as many complained, I believe this has to do with the way most Blacks dress, particularly the boys. They dress in a way that scares even their own people from approaching them. I believe every employer wants people who are friendly and focus to work in their companies. There are certain kinds of dressing that employer wouldn’t like if you appear before them for interviews. (Employed female, Jane-Finch)

Some participants’ comments on dress code indicated that many Black male youths did not know what type of clothing they were expected to wear when attending interviews. They did not know when to wear casual or formal clothes, despite the fact that professional jobs require some kind of dress code, which interviewees should be aware of beforehand. Females were more careful about their clothing when attending interviews and that enhanced their chances of securing good jobs compared to their male counterparts. When the participants were asked to explain further the rationale behind their style of dressing, the majority of the males did not recognize it as a relevant requirement for most employers.

While many male participants in both groups found their jobs through placement agencies or direct encounters with employers, females from both groups thought that gaining information from family and friends as well as voluntary associations would be useful in job searches. They held the view that staying connected to and expanding their networks was important for success in education and careers:

Before when I was in school, I would go to placement agencies for temporary jobs. Now I cannot do those jobs. I would rely on friends and others for information about quality jobs. (Underemployed female, Brampton)

**Social ties and family socio-economic status**

Closely related to gender differences outlined above, my analysis revealed that females were more likely to have
good contacts that might aid their job search compared to males. For instance, when asked about how they found their jobs, many females replied that it was though family and friends, while the majority of the males had found their jobs through placement agencies. This difference might have been due to the fact that many females were closer to their families and participated more in social and community organizations than their male counterparts:

I have confident in my parents. My father is my role model and has helped me to reach where I am today. I came to Canada at age 8. I didn’t know the importance of education, because I was young and my older siblings were not interested in schooling, but my father inspired me and said to me that I can make it to the university. He took some of his time teaching me English [spellings] and through that I developed interest in education. I can say that, even at this level [University] he helps me with my assignments and other school activities. (Employed female, Brampton)

The participants said that personal relationships maintained for non-economic reasons might help to provide them with useful contacts and information that would help them with their educational attainment and job searches:

My parents are very supportive, but they are not well educated. They couldn’t help me with my assignments so it was difficult for me. I had to rely on some of my older friends for my assignments. Fortunately for me, my family moved out to a new place where one of the tenants was a Ghanaian international student studying in one of the universities in Toronto [city]. We became friends and he was helping me with my studies, particularly, in mathematics. He has become my role model. I just completed my college education and I’m looking forward to going to the university next year. (Employed female, Jane-Finch)

I got my job through my church elder. The church secretary announced on my behalf that I was looking for a job during the church’s announcement session. After a few weeks the church elder called me and asked me to bring my résumé. He took my résumé and helped me in the application through which I got the job. (’Employed female, Brampton’)

**Spatial and neighbourhood effect**

While many of the participants expressed disappointment about living in Jane-Finch because of lack of jobs and the neighbourhood’s bad reputation, many participants from Brampton felt more comfortable in this respect. This distinction appear to be due to how the two localities were created, since whereas Jane-Finch was purpose-built as a residential neighbourhood for immigrants, Brampton has had varied land uses and is currently a relatively well-developed industrial city.

Another concern that Jane-Finch participants expressed was that employers looked down on them primarily due to the nature of the place. Due to the stigma attached to the place, employers regarded residents from Jane-Finch as ‘bad’ people:

I know employers look down on us. If you are from Jane and Finch then you’re considered different from other people. Employers think you are not polite, have no morals, and that you are not fit to work in their companies. It does not matter whether you have a good qualification or not. They think you are inferior because of where you live. (Employed male, Jane-Finch)

When asked how he found his current job, he said:

I used to live with my uncle in Vaughan, so I still use that address for all my applications; and whenever I go for interviews I don’t disclose anything about Jane-Finch. I think it is not a good place to live when you’re young. I think it is only good for the poor older people who have nothing to lose.

Conversely, other participants said that they had secured their jobs because they had indicated in their applications that they were from Jane-Finch. This was explained by one participant who thought she had been offered her job because of her attachment to the Jane-Finch neighbourhood:

I believe because Jane and Finch is one of the prioritized communities in Toronto [city], if you have a good qualification and you live in Jane and Finch, employers see you as a serious person. My work focuses on reintegration services and because I work with ‘at risk groups’ they were interested in someone who comes from a poor neighbourhood and I used that to my advantage, and it looks good on the résumé. (Employed female, Jane-Finch)

According to the same female, much depended on a person’s attitude and she was of the opinion that at certain times employers did not consider where their potential employees came from but what type of person they were: ‘Life is what you make of it. Those who come to Jane and Finch for the first time admire the neighbourhood yet residents still believe they have no future.’

With regard to the types of jobs sought, the results of the analysis indicated that Black males were more stigmatized due to where they lived than Black females. Despite the benefits derived from living in a poorer neighbourhood, the participants revealed that poorer neighbourhoods such as Jane-Finch often attract people with serious social problems that affect their chances of finding employment, which has subsequent effects on local development. In addition, the participants attributed the particularly high unemployment level among youths in Jane-Finch...
neighbourhood to the high incidence of youth crime and youths with bad criminal records, especially among the male youths. Given their perceptions of neighbourhood quality, many participants claimed that Brampton had better opportunities and lower crime rates than Jane-Finch, which meant that youths in Brampton had more advantages: ‘At least we have something here to hook up to if you want it [factory job] compared to other areas in the Greater Toronto Area’ (Underemployed male, Brampton).

In summary, the participants identified multiple factors that influenced their labour market participation, including lack of suitable jobs, inefficient transportation, racial discrimination, inappropriate dress codes, family and friends’ social networks, and neighbourhood reputation. In addition, the majority of the participants perceived their lives as negatively influenced by their employment circumstances. Underemployment and unemployment were the biggest concern for participants from both Jean-Finch and Brampton.

Discussion

From a geographical perspective, I researched the uneven spatial distribution of jobs between the two study localities, which resulted from their differing history, with one created as a residential neighbourhood for immigrants and one as an industrial city. A neighbourhood’s reputation is often closely related to its location, history, housing structure, and economic rationale. According to Power (2007, 21), ‘intrinsic problems, linked to where places are, how they are built and their core function in the city shape neighbourhoods’. Both male and female second-generation youths from Jane-Finch expressed difficulties in accessing jobs nearby, while most of the participants from Brampton had found their jobs either within or close the city. The youths from Jane-Finch had to look for jobs elsewhere, which required longer commutes to work (30–50 km each way). The lack of efficient transportation was directly related to the commuting times, and represented a barrier to some of the youths’ participation in the labour market. Many participants, particularly those from Jane-Finch who commuted to other parts of Toronto city for work, talked about the difficulties they experienced in accessing public transport to and from their work places. To some extent, the labour market barrier corroborates the spatial mismatch hypothesis used by Kain (1968) to explain the effects of housing segregation on the urban poor in all spheres of life. For example, Galabuzi (2007) argues that young immigrants living in low-income areas often find it difficult to integrate themselves into their own communities and wider society.

The lack of good jobs that matched the participants’ educational qualifications was not only limited to the study participants but also occurs widely among members of the Black communities in the two study localities. For example, Ornstein (2006) found that more than one-third of Ghanaian and Somali males worked in manual occupations that required low skills. His finding is supported by many of my study participants’ comments about the difficulties of accessing high-status jobs despite having high-level qualifications. Jane-Finch has been identified as one of 13 priority neighbourhoods in Toronto city (City of Toronto 2015) and therefore the high unemployment rate among the youths, particularly the male youths, is not unexpected. The 13 priority neighbourhoods have few employment services and high levels of unemployment. Moreover, they have few immigrant settlement services, yet high numbers of immigrants, and they fall below the neighbourhood equity score and thus require special attention. The equity score was constructed as a ratio of neighbourhood median income compared to the Toronto city median income (City of Toronto 2015). The designation of the 13 priority neighbourhoods was a comprehensive, innovative initiative by the City of Toronto to build stronger, safer, healthier neighbourhoods in under-serviced communities (City of Toronto 2015).

Reitz & Somerville (2004) and Reitz & Banerjee (2007) found that some of the second-generation in Canada felt that they experienced more racism than their parents. This feeling arises because of their ability to speak English as well as other Canadians, their high educational attainments, and high expectations of the rights that come with citizenship, since these factors are likely to cause them to be viewed as a challenge to the dominant groups. In a related study conducted in the USA, Portes et al. (2005) observed that children of Black immigrants could not escape their ethnicity and race, as defined by the mainstream, since their physical differences from Whites and the equally persistent strong effects of discrimination based on those differences created a barrier to their occupational mobility and social acceptance.

Appropriate clothing appears to be a major issue for many Black youths. From the focus group discussions, it was apparent that females tended to dress more formally for job interviews compared to males. Thus, it can be inferred that dress code was a factor that most employers took into consideration for during interviews.

Resources and other forms of support from family members, social networks and contacts were identified as contributing to the youths’ success in the labour
market, since being connected to the right people had helped them to find their jobs. Several types of support received from family and social networks were crucial for the educational attainment of the children of immigrants and their later success in the labour market. This finding supports other researchers’ findings that parents with higher education and who have the ability to adopt strategies and gather resources are more likely to shape their children’s educational success and subsequent labour market performance (Worswick 2001; Feliciano & Ruben 2005; Wayland & Goldberg 2010). Other studies have revealed the importance of social networks within ethnic communities. For example, a social network within a prosperous community is likely to pave the way for children to be competitive in the labour market (Borjas 1992; Portes et al. 2009), whereas in a community characterized by weak ethnic ties the immigrants and their children are likely to experience difficulties when seeking to translate their human capital into a corresponding occupation (Abada & Lin 2011).

Generally, females were found to have better social contacts that aided their employment prospects than males. Also, they persevered in their job searches longer than their male counterparts. The females’ perseverance might have been attributed to their high educational attainment. It is important to note that the participants’ status as Black males might have contributed to their gender differences in employment opportunities, as found by Galabuzi (2009) and Khenti (2003), both of whom conducted studies in Toronto city. According to some of the participants, employers and employees in many workplaces were more hostile to Black males than to females. This unfair treatment could be due to the media images of Black male criminality in Toronto city (Galabuzi 2009; Khenti 2013; Toronto Star 2015).

An additional explanation pertains to the relatively unequal earnings, with females more likely to be employed with higher earnings than their male counterparts because the latter do not share the same educational attainment (Aydemir & Sweetman 2006; Keung 2007; Council of Ontario Universities 2011).

Accessing information about available jobs and job search strategies were evidently a problem for some of the study participants, and participants in both groups wanted to see improvements in information on labour markets in order to help them make better decisions in the face of competing employment opportunities. The participants considered that job information, including descriptions of available jobs, requirements, and salaries and wages would guide their preferences. According to the participants, unemployment and underemployment were likely to occur when youths were not exposed to occupational information to direct them towards appropriate occupations. These findings corroborate Galabuzi’s (2012) assertion that, due to their ethnic backgrounds, racialized individuals and groups are more likely to be excluded, either implicitly or explicitly, from job opportunities, key information networks, human resource investments, professional development opportunities, team membership, and decision-making roles. The participants in my study wanted the government to do more to enhance job searches, since many youths have recently graduated from colleges and universities and access to occupational information would improve in their searches.

My findings give important insights into the ongoing debate about the nature of the relationship between neighbourhood and employment. Some scholars have noted that the literature is divergent with respect to the direction of the relationship between neighbourhoods and employment and argue that social and spatial processes and patterns feed into each other, either exacerbating or alleviating the socio-spatial exclusion in diverse situations and locations (Soja 1980; Mensah & Ironside 1994; Galabuzi 2006). Consequently, the extent to which visible minority groups are spatially excluded in a neighbourhood feeds into their social exclusion and vice versa. For example, a person can be socially excluded from employment because they are spatially secluded from where the jobs are located, as experienced by some participants from Jane-Finch).

Conclusions

Building upon the important geographical research on the labour market experiences of the children of immigrants, this article has explored how second-generation Ghanaian–Canadian youths viewed and expressed their feelings in the process of navigating the labour market in the Greater Toronto Area. Specifically, the article has investigated the connections that the participating second-generation youths drew between their places of residence and their performance in the labour market, and attention has been focused on the issues of employment and underemployment, discrimination, gender, and social support networks. From a geographical perspective, I have found that the uneven spatial distribution of jobs in the Greater Toronto Area results in varying degrees of geographical accessibility to the labour market for second-generation youths in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood and Brampton city.

The interviews revealed that the participants, regardless of where they lived and their gender, were particularly concerned about the issue of underemployment. However, participants from Jane-Finch were more concerned about unemployment issues than the participants
from Brampton, which confirms the results of other studies that have examined the characteristics of the Jane-Finch neighbourhood (Rootham 2008; Boudreau et al. 2009; Statistics Canada 2009b). In particular, the relevance of gender to unemployment and underemployment was evident from the interviews, which revealed that females were more likely to be in employment and less likely to report underemployment compared to their male counterparts. Further studies that examine the gendered experiences of the second-generation females and males in the labour market are necessary in order to give a better understanding of the impact of unemployment and underemployment.

As second-generation African youths continue to make up an increasing proportion of the Canadian population, it is important to understand not only the extent to which spatial and social conditions challenge the labour market outcomes but also the factors that contribute to successful labour market participation. Of equal importance is the need to take into consideration the sociocultural factors that shape the full integration of immigrants and their children into Canadian society. This study has demonstrated the importance of key factors, including lack of information and appropriate dress code, which are often overlooked in labour market analyses.

Notes
1. Information obtained from a lecture titled ‘Economic and social integration of the immigrant second generation in Canada’, given by J.G. Reitz, at the Centre for Refugee Studies (CERIS), York University, Toronto, on 3 November 2010.
2. The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) comprises the City of Toronto (Toronto city) and the surrounding four regional municipalities: Durham, Halton, Peel, and York Regions.
3. For census purposes, the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area excludes some municipalities in the GTA with a certain population size, which differs from year to year (OECD 2009).

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