

Title: Immigrant Employment Trajectories and Outcomes in the First Settlement Years: A Sequence-Oriented Approach

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Research Question:

I address two key questions. First, what do new immigrants' month-by-month trajectories in and through the labor market look like? To what extent do we see quick transitions to stable employment versus patterns indicative of more complicated and/or different modes of incorporation? Second, how do differences in the types of trajectories relate to the wages immigrants earn and their chances of working in their pre-immigration occupation (or one of higher status) four years after arrival?

Importance:

Immigration scholars are increasingly attentive to how the host-society context shapes settlement outcomes. This underlines the importance of considering experiences *after* immigration. Yet the existing quantitative literature provides limited insight into the complexity of labor market trajectories after immigration, or the relationship between how employment experiences unfold after settlement and later employment outcomes.

Research Findings:

Using optimal matching and cluster analysis, I identify seven types of immigrant labour market trajectories. These trajectories shape employment outcomes four years after arrival in Canada, although more strongly for wages than for occupational attainment. The pathway most indicative of "successful" labor market incorporation entails rapid entry into full-time continuous employment. "Quick integration" is characterized by the greatest employment stability, the lowest risks of non-employment, and the highest likelihood of full-time employment. All else equal, immigrants who follow this path also typically earn the highest wages four years after immigration, and are less likely to experience occupational degradation. Slightly less than half (47%) of immigrant men and 27% of women follow this type of pathway.

Implications:

For the majority of immigrants, labor market integration does not occur via a single transition to employment. Because multiple moves in and out of different types of employment and non-employment activity are common, focusing on single transitions or outcomes at one point in time can be misleading. In particular, although quick integration into full-time work results in the best outcomes for immigrants who persist in this type of employment, promoting early labor force attachment is not always the best strategy. For a substantial proportion of immigrants, rapid entry into full-time employment does not work out, leading instead to a prolonged period churning through other types of employment and non-employment activities. Such immigrants ultimately earn lower wages than those who delay entry into full-time work (often to pursue schooling), even though the latter tend to spend less time working full-time overall. For immigrants who are not immediately employable in good jobs, providing support for longer job-search and/or educational upgrading would thus appear to result in better outcomes in the long-run than a focus on immediate employment.