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## Neighbourhood characteristics and the labour market experience: A qualitative analysis of the second generation Ghanaian-Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

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### *Abstract*

Neighbourhood characteristics pose challenge in labour market participation for immigrants and their children in many immigrants receiving countries, including Canada. The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods on labour market participation amongst the second generation youth. Grounded in focus groups and in-depth interviews, our analysis underscores the importance of understanding neighbourhood characteristics and implication on labour market participation amongst the second generation Ghanaian-Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area, specifically, Jane-Finch and Brampton. Our findings reveal several areas where neighbourhood characteristics impact on labour market participation of the second generation youth: neighbourhood's reputation, inefficient transit system and inadequate jobs in neighbourhoods. Based on our findings, we offer recommendations that may be of interest to decision-makers in government, social services and health agencies in urban centres.

*Keywords:* Second generation, Labour Market, Neighbourhood, Ghanaian-Canadians

### *Résumé*

des Caractéristiques du voisinage présentent des défis liés à la participation au marché du travail pour les immigrants et leurs enfants dans de nombreux immigrants Pays d'accueil, y compris le Canada. Le but de cette étude était d'étudier l'effet de vivant dans les quartiers défavorisés sur la participation au marché du travail parmi les jeunes de deuxième génération. Ancré dans les groupes de discussion et des entrevues en profondeur, notre analyse montre bien l'importance de bien comprendre les caractéristiques du voisinage et l'incidence sur la participation au marché du travail parmi les Ghanaian-Canadians de deuxième génération dans la région du Grand Toronto, plus précisément, Jane-Finch et Brampton. Nos résultats révèlent plusieurs domaines où Neighborhood caractéristiques influenceront sur la participation au marché du travail des jeunes de deuxième génération : la réputation du voisinage, l'inefficacité et l'insuffisance transit system emplois dans un voisinage. Sur la base de nos résultats, nous offrons des recommandations qui peuvent être d'intérêt pour les décideurs du gouvernement, les services sociaux et les organismes de santé dans les centres urbains.

*Mots-clés:* Second generation, Labour Market, Neighbourhood, Ghanaian-Canadians

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## Introduction

Like many developed countries, immigrants represent a significant proportion of the total population (21.9%) in Canada (Statistics Canada 2017). One group that has attracted scholarly attention is the second generation (children of immigrants) (Aydemir and Sweetman 2006; Reitz 2010; Picot and Hou 2012). As the second generation constitutes a significant proportion of the Canadian population, their success in the labour market is an important determinant of whether their parents' decision to move to Canada has been beneficial and fruitful. In 2016, the second generation represented 17.7% of the country's total population with 22.5% of Ontario's population comprising the second generation. Within the Greater Toronto Area, Toronto has the highest number of second generation—around 28.0% in Canada, making it crucial for contributing to economic, social and cultural diversity and development of the city (Statistics Canada 2017).

A number of studies have revealed that the second-generation youths have higher educational attainment compared to the children of Canadian-born parents. However, this does not translate into their labour market performance, particularly amongst the racialized group, including higher rate of underemployment, lower rates of pay, and less access to jobs with opportunity for advancement (Picot and Hou 2012; Galabuzi 2012; Portes et al. 2009). Again, studies have shown that visible minorities and their offspring, particularly the second generation, are denied access to good jobs and are often not given the opportunity to gain necessary skills or utilize their existing skills and education (Yap and Everret 2012; Reitz et al. 2011; Yap et al. 2010). A visible minority is defined by the Government of Canada as 'persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour' (Statistics Canada 2015a).

In 2010, the proportion of immigrants from Africa is increasing and was projected to rise in the next two decades (Statistics Canada 2010). Africa ranks second, ahead of Europe, as a source continent of recent immigrants to Canada, with a share of 13.4% in 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017). There is a growing evidence that, amongst the second-generation, Blacks are the most underprivileged group in Canada (Este et al. 2012; Banerjee 2006).

A neighbourhood by itself affects the socio-economic opportunities for its residents, often with an ethnic dimension (Friedrichs 1998; Friedrichs et al. 2003; Musterd et al. 2008). However, little is known about area of residence' effects on labour market experiences amongst the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youth, given the economic uncertainties of their parents in Toronto (Ornstein 2000; Wong 2006; Mensah 2010). One of the theories that have been applied to explore the link between neighbourhoods and labour market studies is the opportunity structure theory (Roberts 1968). The theory of opportunity structure will provide geographic perspective on labour market participation amongst the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youth in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

While the theory of opportunity structure has been applied in many areas and scales in recent years (Roberts 2009; Bernard et al. 2007; Macintyre and Ellaway 2000), little attention has been focused on the second generation's labour market participation. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore whether the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian (i.e. Ghanaians in Toronto who are of Ghanaian ethnic origin) youths' places of residence in the GTA provide opportunity structures for labour market participation. That is, the extent to which these neighbourhoods are seen by residents as having opportunities for effective participation in the labour market. By focusing on the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youth living in Jane-Finch and Brampton, Ontario, we believe this study offers an opportunity to deepen the theoretical bases of opportunity structure work and its role in the integration of the second-generation in Canada. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the labour market experiences of second generation Ghanaian youth in deprived neighbourhoods in the Greater Toronto Area?
2. How do distinct neighbourhood characteristics shape opportunity structures with respect to the labour market participation of 2nd generation Ghanaian youth?

## Literature review

### *The second generation*

Canada's demographic composition is undergoing a major transformation. The second generation is a sizable component of the total population—around 17.4% in Canada (Statistics Canada 2017), and thus is critical for the country's socio-cultural development. A disproportionate number of the second generation population of Canada is subject to unequal access to the labour market and inequitable income outcomes. The performance of the second

generation in the labour market also strongly affects how their immigrant parents perceive their life in Canada, since seeking a better opportunity for themselves and their children are often cited as motivation for migration (Statistics Canada 2014). The “second generation” refers to those who were born in Canada with at least one parent born outside Canada (Statistics Canada 2006; Kobayashi 2008). The group is heterogeneous, both within and between ethno-cultural groupings, and their circumstances are also influenced by their place of residence (Kobayashi 2008). This group is varied not only in terms of demographics, but, also in terms of gender, place of residence, educational level, economic status and in relation to the contextual issue of social capital (Boyd 2002). 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 and Hou 2012; Banerjee 2006). 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 (Este et al. 2012; Reitz et al. 2011; Reitz 2010). Picot and Hou (2012) observed a significant variation among visible minority groups in Canada, with Blacks having the largest earning gap (i.e. wage gap). Similarly, Reitz et al. (2011) using a survey and census data from the USA, Canada and Australia 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). Earlier study by Ornstein (2000) also found that among families from Ghana in Toronto, 87% lived in poverty, suggesting that the Ghanaian community is having difficulties integrating into the Canadian economy; therefore exploring the second generation’s integration into the labour market is significant. Studying the specific case of the second generation Ghanaian-Canadians in Jane-Finch and Brampton would help to identify specific challenges these youth (young adults seeking employment between ages nineteen and thirty) face in the labour market. My personal position as an immigrant in Toronto and my interest in labour market issues pertaining to visible minorities in Canada shaped this study.

### *Neighbourhoods as opportunity structures for labour market participation*

Opportunity structure analysis of labour market leverages the important work of scholars who have examined structural mechanisms that stratify people into social categories of hierarchical power, such as income, neighbourhood and education. The opportunity structure theory was first used by Roberts (1968). In a household survey involving young men aged between 14 and 23 in a part of London, Roberts (1968) suggested that the “momentum and direction of school leavers’ careers are derived from the way in which their job opportunities become cumulatively structured and young people are placed in varying degrees of social proximity, with different ease of access to different types of employment” (p.179). The opportunity structure theory argues that sociological factors pre-determined professional choices. That is, the environment dictates to us the opportunities we have. Thus, where we live, the qualifications we have, the state of the economy, our family background, our gender among others come together to in effect remove choices from us (Mensah 2010; Roberts 1995; Roberts 1968). This study extends existing work on opportunity structure through analysis of neighbourhood characteristics on labour market participation. The opportunity structure theory may provide a useful tool for explaining the interconnections between neighbourhoods and labour market outcomes. Situating this theory in the contexts of the “neighbourhood” as having opportunity structures is appropriate for this study because it allows for a multi-level analysis exploring the lived experiences of the second generation and how these experiences can change over time and space.

Neighbourhoods have long been thought to play fundamental roles in individual and groups’ social life (Suttles 1972; Wilson 1987; Bauder 2002; Hulchanski 2010). It can be defined as “social interactions that occur in close proximity to an individual’s residence, and that affect social and economic wellbeing” (Oreopoulos 2008: 238). Neighbourhood, conceptualized, as the smallest form of social organization outside of the family is a container of local resources that can be harnessed for people’s wellbeing. Another important aspect of understanding how neighbourhoods affect labour market participation is determining what, exactly, a neighbourhood is? In other words, what constitutes the system of labour market event resources, or the opportunity structures? Although this question has been of scholarly interests for decades (Park and Burges 1925; Suttles 1972; Wilson 1987), recent works by Macintyre and Ellaway (2000; 2003) have emphasized our understanding of neighbourhood. They identify five aspects of neighbourhoods as constituting the opportunity structures: physical features that are shared by all residents, such as air quality or the presence of toxic products; the presence of environments that support a healthful lifestyle at home,

work and play; quality services for all segments of the population, and other close proximity services; socio-cultural features reflecting the neighbourhood history and forming its social fabric; and lastly, the area's reputation as displayed through the representations of the residents themselves and of other relevant factors. Thus, spatially patterned labour market inequalities are rooted in the unequal distribution of these opportunity structures (Macintyre and Ellaway 2003; Bernard et al. 2007). Wilson (1987) argued that economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods tend to have fewer resources compared to more privileged neighbourhoods, consequently, constraining the life chances of those from socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. A large body of research has examined the association between neighbourhoods and various social and behavioural outcomes including income, educational attainment, crime, substance use, sexual activity, and labour force participation (Bauder 2002; Power 2007; Simpson et al. 2009; Hulchanski 2010; Block and Galabuzi 2011). Bernard et al. (2007) argue that there are specific resources rooted within neighbourhoods that provide individuals and families the opportunity to earn a living, acquire knowledge, benefit and enjoy social relationships and participate in culture. Consequently, these opportunity structures are socially determinants of individual's performance in the labour market (Roberts 1968).

Besides the direct influence that neighbourhoods have on labour market, including effects on income, education, employment, and social capital, neighbourhoods also indirectly impact labour market through multigenerational disadvantage (Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Sharkey 2008; Wayland 2010; Worswick 2001). Parent's childhood neighbourhood characteristics may affect his or her own experiences in school, employment and income and these aspects of a parent's experience may, in turn, influence the resources available to his or her children (Feliciano and Ruben 2005; Sharkey and Elwert 2011). As a result, children's socioeconomic life chances may vary greatly depending on the human and social capital of their parents (Portes et al. 2005; Feliciano and Ruben 2005; Wayland 2010). For example, examining the effects of neighbourhoods on multigenerational experiences in the United States, Sharkey (2008) and Sharkey and Elwert (2011) observed that more than 70% of African-Americans who live in today's poorest, most racially segregated neighbourhoods are from the same families that lived in the ghettos of the 1970s.

Furthermore, it is hypothesized that neighbourhood inequality is most often found on income and ethnicity lines, and it is a universal feature of all cities in which people have a measure of control over their lives (Cheshire 2007). Despite the evidence on the negative association between disadvantaged neighbourhoods and labour market outcomes, deprived neighbourhoods with high levels of ethnic density have been hypothesized to provide security through the ethnic density effect—as a buffer against racially driven harassment and discrimination (Be'cares et al. 2009; Pickett et al. 2005; Fagg et al. 2006). Other benefits include shared culture, linguistic and religious qualities (Be'cares et al. 2009); and existence of informal connections and employment opportunities (Luttmer 2005). These benefits associated with poor neighbourhoods serve as checks against experiences of interpersonal racism and discrimination, which have been linked with higher levels of stress, anxiety, hypertension, and other health-related outcomes (Nazroo 2002; Janssen et al. 2003; Harris et al. 2006a).

Another advantage associated with poor neighbourhoods is the suggestion that people's welfare does not only depend on the level of their own income, but on the level of their income relative to others living near them and those they socialize (Luttmer 2005). Thus, income inequality at the population level may intensify relativities, which may have a negative health impact at the individual level (Wagstaff and van Doorslaer 2000). However, living with people with similar socioeconomic status may offset some of the stress associated with income relativities. This suggestion corroborates with earlier assertion by Wilkinson (1997) who observed that an individual's relative rather than absolute income affects his or her wellbeing.

Other factors deserve mention. Race/ethnicity is a contributing factor, as these youth are visible minorities, often having difficulties obtaining jobs that match their educational credentials. Most importantly, visible minorities in Canada are more likely to experience discrimination in the labour market than non-visible minorities. According to the 2003 Statistics Canada Ethnic Diversity Survey, Black employees perceive labour market discrimination the most (35%), followed by South Asian employees at 25%, and Chinese employees at 20% (Banerjee 2006). In addition, Hiebert (2015) found that majority of visible minorities reporting some form of discrimination identify race as its cause. Historically, visible minority immigrants and their children have been regarded as a secondary labour force or 'reserve army' (Hakim 1982). They are more likely to be deskilled or unemployed (Dossa 2004; Ng 2006; Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues 1988). Evidence suggests that most discriminatory encounters in the labour market are biases relating to immigrants' country of origin, skin colour and appearance, health status and an undervaluing of foreign education and works credentials (Beiser and Hou 2001; Akhvan et al. 2004). In work places where people from diverse ethno-racial groups are called upon to work together, their interactions are influenced by hierar-



chical social relations among employees that characterize most workplaces and that may reduce the mutual benefit of contacts (Ray and Preston 2015). Studies focusing on youth reiterate how prejudicial and discriminatory treatment within the media, school, neighbourhood and other public places inhibit their sense of belonging (Caxaj and Berman 2010; Khanlou et al. 2008) which is vital to positive self-esteem (Beiser and Hou 2006) and subsequent labour market integration. There is a strong association between discrimination, racial minority status and ethno-cultural group identification (Ray and Preston 2013). Given the importance of adolescent years for identity and behavioural development, it is imperative that the impacts of discrimination, available support and differences in neighbourhood characteristics be explored. Research from the US supports these research needs of children of immigrants. It further suggests the need for in-depth understanding of how available resources and supports in family, schools and neighbourhood settings influence youth resilience and/or vulnerability to impacts of discrimination (Medvedeva 2010; Potochnick and Perreira 2010; Benner and Kim 2009).

In terms of education, children's educational attainment has been linked to their parents' education where the second generation benefits from this "cultural capital". As Aydemir et al. (2008) noted, immigrants and their children have been found to have more years of schooling on average than do Canadians who have been in the country for several generations. In addition, there have been forms of disparities in the labour market between males and females (Statistics Canada 2011). With respect to the second generation, women are likely to be employed with higher earnings than their male counterparts because the latter do not share the same educational attainment (Keung 2007). These factors are important, given the fact that the second generation youth have multiple identities, which may come together to influence their labour market outcomes.

### Study areas

Two study areas within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were chosen for this study: the Jane-Finch neighbourhood in the City of Toronto, and Brampton in the Regional Municipality of Peel (Peel Region). These two areas were selected because of the relatively high concentration of Black populations, including the most concentrated Ghanaian communities in the Greater Toronto Area (Statistics Canada 2011b; Mensah 2010; Owusu 1999). Jane-Finch is one of the highest concentrations of Blacks in Toronto (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 West. Jane-Finch is different from other neighbourhoods in Toronto 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 based on income: in the neighbourhoods with the highest incomes, the majority of the population is Whites, whereas in the neighbourhoods with the lowest incomes (including Jane-Finch) the majority belongs 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.

Brampton, is the third-largest city in the Greater Toronto Area and the seat of Peel Region (Statistics Canada 2015b). Brampton is located c.49 km west of Toronto and c.40 km north-west of Lake Ontario. Brampton has the second largest proportion of visible minorities within the Greater Toronto Area. In total, 57% of the total population are visible minorities. The largest visible minority groups are South Asians (261,705) and Blacks (82,175) (Statistics Canada 2017). In the 1980s and 1990s, large subdivisions were made on former farmlands. 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 67.70%, 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 was employed; the unemployment rate was 13%, which was twice of that of Brampton, while 23.4% were in the low-in-

come 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 percentage 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

A qualitative methodological approach was chosen since it favours an understanding of the workings of neighbourhood structures, especially in groups which there is little information (Patton 2002). For this study, I used both focus groups 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. The focus group discussions informed the in-depth interviews by generating questions that were subsequently explored and addressed in the in-depth interviews. Groups were accessed through direct forms of contact. Perceptions of the neighbourhood dimension of labour market were explored. The focus groups identified a variety of neighbourhood effects on labour market, and provided information on various ways in which these were understood and experienced. Participants discussed the circumstances under which this takes place and the ways in which neighbourhood effects are represented in the 'informants' discourse. I tested the interview guide with two second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youths and incorporated their suggestions. Open-ended interview questions were developed to reflect the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youths' experiences in the labour market.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youths who lived in Jane-Finch neighbourhood and in Brampton. I placed advertisements for participants in several Ghanaian churches and temples in Jane-Finch and Brampton as well as recruitment posters and verbal announcements in local restaurants. In total, 27 youth in the age range 19–30 years participated in the in-depth interviews and the two focus groups conducted between July 2011 and 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 eight males and seven females from the Jane-Finch neighbourhood and six males and six females from Brampton. Prior to the in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion was held in Jane-Finch and one in Brampton. The youth participated in group semi-structured, and individual open-ended interviews in English. Audio recordings were made of both the focus group discussions and 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, five 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, five were between 19 and 22 years of age, 17 participants between 23 and 27 years, and five participants between 28 and 30 years. All participants were Canadian citizens, and of these four stated that they had educational qualification up to high school level, nine had college certificates, and the remaining 14 had university degrees. A total of six were employed full time, 13 were employed part-time, and eight were unemployed, 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 seven 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.

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 sub-headings. The second level involved analyzing the coded data and rereading the transcripts to identify any patterns in them. This level revealed the process reflected in the

second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youths' descriptions of their everyday experiences in the labour market in the GTA.

## Findings

Taken together, this study's findings reveal that participants' labour market experiences drew on a complex mix of lack of jobs, mismatched skills, transportation issues/spatial mismatch, and discrimination (on the basis of race and neighbourhood reputation). Most strikingly, all participants expressed the difficulties in finding jobs in the GTA. However, the study found that Brampton participants were the most likely to perceive their neighbourhood as "good" in terms of access to jobs compared to their counterparts from Jane-Finch neighbourhood. In the discussions that follow, we do not distinguish between participants from Jane-Finch and Brampton. As we explore these barriers in great detail below, it is important to note that participants consistently stressed that individuals from Jane-Finch neighbourhood faced more and greater barriers than those from Brampton. As one participant stated:

It is about two years now since I had my College diploma and I have been looking for job all along. I've applied to many jobs, but not even one of them has called me for an interview. It was just a couple of months ago that I got this part-time work in the mall. I need a full time job as a man in order to meet my needs but it has been difficult getting job. I don't know what they want from me to give me the job (Jane-Finch participant).

Although not unique to this group, unemployment and underemployment are consistently noted in the literature as key systemic barriers to integration and belonging amongst visible minorities in Canada (e.g., Block and Galabuzi 2011; Mensah 2010; Reitz 2010). Inadequacy of community resources such as employment centres and better schools were cited as constraints militating against the Jane-Finch neighbourhood. Many participants here lamented about the poor nature of the place, undermining the job prospects of the youth. As noted in the words of a youth from Jane-Finch:

Everyone who grew up in Jane and 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. But I managed to grab a job at Scarborough I go to work at Scarborough every day.

Jane-Finch was purposely created as a residential area for immigrants (Boudreau et al. 2009). It has been labeled as one of the problem areas in Toronto. It is also one of the most densely populated areas in Toronto with the highest percentage of single-parent families in the city (40–45%) (Carey 2001). As noted by Murdie (2002), appropriate housing establishes conditions for access to other formal and informal supports and networks and thus speeds up the integration of immigrants and their children into the host countries.

Alongside the issue of lack of jobs for the second generation are mismatched skills. Participants from Brampton talked about not the issue of lack of jobs, but the availability of jobs that match their educational attainment. Many participants identified underemployment as a serious problem. They described not 'fitting' into their jobs.

Getting job is not the problem. It is finding job that matches your qualifications and skills. It is difficult to find a good job in Brampton. What one can get easily is factory job. So whether you have higher qualification or not you still work in a factory with the uneducated ones and earn the same minimum wage (Brampton participant).

While many expressed disappointment living in Jane-Finch, as a result of lack of jobs, many participants from Brampton were somehow comfortable. This distinction comes as a result of how these two neighbourhoods were created. As mentioned earlier, Jane-Finch was created purposely as a residential area for immigrants while Brampton has different land uses, and is relatively well developed as an industrial city. According to Power (2007:21), "neighbourhood reputation is often closely tied to its location, its history, its housing structure and economic rationale."

Thus, “intrinsic problems, linked to where places are, how they are built and their core function in the city shape neighbourhoods.”(Power 2007: 21).

Negative perceptions and stereotypes were not limited to the Jane-Finch neighbourhood but were expressed by participants from Brampton as well about the way Black youths are discriminated in Toronto. When asked about barriers to employment in the GTA, participants identified factors that related to both discrimination and neighbourhood reputation. Several participants said that being Black youths appeared to constitute a significant barrier in their job search. 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. 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 use you as subhuman. This is a serious problem. (Brampton participant)

To experience discrimination as a consequence of race or skin colour is strongly negative no matter who or where it might occur. However, the frequencies with which people report discrimination, as well as the factors that are influential in understanding who reports unfair treatment vary in important ways across gender in the GTA, according to this study. Females from both study areas were concerned about the way the Black males are discriminated in the GTA in relation to the appropriateness of their male counterparts' dress code:

I heard many Blacks are treated differently in the job places in Toronto; but I haven't seen any of this, neither have I been treated badly at my workplace. Thought 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 appear 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)

As we found, social characteristics play a major role in explaining who reports experiences of discrimination. Some participants' comments on dress code revealed 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 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.

Directly related to the above experiences is neighbourhoods' reputation. A handful of participants attributed the high unemployment level among the youth of Jane-Finch neighbourhood, in particular, to the high incidence of youth crime and bad criminal records, particularly amongst the male youth. Jane-Finch has been described as an unattractive and unsafe part of the city, “a place of violence, poverty, and foreboding suburb design” (Cash 2006; Bourdeau et al. 2009). It is commonly perceived that unemployment causes criminal behaviour. For example, Tanner et al. (1999) and Hagan et al. (1996) have documented that youth involvement with crime tends to affect their future employment prospects. With this idea of neighbourhood quality, many participants believe that Brampton has better opportunities and less crime rate relative to Jane-Finch that in effect gives some advantage to the youth in Brampton. Due to the stigma attached to the 'bad' places, employers regard residents from Jane-Finch as 'bad' people:

I know employers look down on us. If you are from Jane-Finch then you're considered different from other people. Employers think you're 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)



Conversely, not all participants believe that a neighbourhood's reputation impinges on labour market performance of potential employees. In the words of a female participant from Jane-Finch:

A lot depends on one's attitude, and believed that at certain times employers do not look at where you come from but who you are: life is what you make of it. Those who come to Jane and Finch for the first time admire the area yet residents still believe they have no future. (Participant from Jane-Finch)

Significantly, the experiences of some participants in Jane-Finch neighbourhood did provide some opportunities for the youths to challenge the negative attitudes held by others with respect to neighbourhood reputation. While we are cautious about overstating the positive views of Jane-Finch neighbourhood, particularly given its 'bad labeling' in the Canadian context (Boudreau et al 2009), most participants felt that Jane-Finch was viewed more positively in 'Canadian' culture as compared with other neighbourhoods in North America. In particular, females talked about the ways in which the youth were understood to be more active participants in society. The broader message of participation, along with the youths' practical experiences, could be used to challenge others' views.

I believe because Jane-Finch is one of the prioritized communities in Toronto, if you have a good qualification and you live in Jane-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 resume (Jane-Finch participant).

Still, it could be argued that not all employers discriminate based on where one lives, but most depends on the type of job being sought. It also seems that Black men are stigmatized by where they live more than women. Despite the divergent views participants shared about a neighbourhood's reputation and its effect on labour market, it is believed that poorer areas, such as Jane-Finch often attract people with serious social problems that affect their chances of getting employment and the subsequent effects on community development.

Beyond lack of job is 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 for work, talked about their difficulties in accessing public transport to and from their workplaces. This assertion in some ways corroborate with the spatial mismatch hypothesis (Kain 1968). Several Canadian scholars have used the general idea of spatial mismatch and expanded it to explain the effects of housing segregation on the urban poor in all spheres of life. For example, Galabuzi (2007) argued that young immigrants living in low income areas often find it difficult to integrate themselves in their own communities and the broader society. Concerning transportation problems, this is what a male youth from Jane-Finch had to say:

I live in Jane-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 work place, it takes me between 20 and 30 minutes' walk to the work place. 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 (Jane-Finch participant).

It was observed that those in Jane-Finch commute longer distances to and from work because of lack of jobs in their community, while others commute from other areas to Jane-Finch to take up jobs in the service sector. Arguably, this situation among the youth supports the spatial mismatch hypothesis.

One important asset of a good neighbourhood is its social capital, reflecting the value residents attach to links with other residents, to the support offered by family and friends, to the familiarity, sense of security and mutual help that comes with frequent social contact (Power 2007). In consonance with Power's point, participants were of the opinion that resources and support derived from their networks of social ties and relationships in and outside their communities contributed immensely to their labour market success. 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 through 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:

My parents were not well educated so couldn't help me with my assignments. 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. 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 (Jane-Finch participants).

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 (Brampton participant).

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. For all participants, neighbourhood structures had significant impact on their labour market participation in the GTA. The participants identified multiple factors that influenced their labour market participation, including lack of jobs, mismatched skills, discrimination (based on race, gender, dress code, and reputation), inefficient transportation and/or spatial mismatch, and social ties.

## Discussion and conclusion

Geographically, the research presents findings from uneven spatial distribution of jobs between two study areas, with different historical backgrounds. While Jane-Finch was created as a residential neighbourhood for immigrants, Brampton, on the other hand, emerged as an industrial city. This study presents an approach in exploring the labour market experiences of the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), using the opportunity structure theory and analyzing them qualitatively. By applying this theory, we believe to have demonstrated its advantages in understanding neighbourhood structures in two differing localities. In particular, this study has attempted to identify the ways in which neighbourhood structures (characteristics) impact and intersect to shape the labour market experiences of the second generation (Picot and Hou 2012). We are aware that this exploratory study faces a number of limitations. Chief among these is the differing history of the two study localities, with Jane-Finch created as a residential neighbourhood for immigrants and Brampton as an industrial city. Another limitation is the small sample size, which was primarily a function of recruitment difficulties. Given the small sample and the differing history of the two localities, comparison was difficult. Notwithstanding these limitations, the preceding analysis offer some insights into the neighbourhood structures of the second generations' labour market in the GTA.

In the analysis, we found evidence of lack of good jobs that matched the participants' educational qualifications. This 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. This finding corroborated with participants' assertion about the difficulties of accessing high-paid jobs in relation to high-level qualifications. Jane-Finch has been identified as one of 13 priority neighbourhoods in Toronto (City of Toronto 2015) and therefore the lack of jobs that matched the youths' qualifications, particularly the male youths, is not unexpected.

The lack of efficient transportation was directly related to the commuting times, and represented a barrier to some of the youths' participations in the labour market. Many participants, particularly those from Jane-Finch who commuted to other parts of Toronto 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.

At the same time, we found evidence of discrimination in variety of situations where forms of oppression are overlaid to impact participants' labour market participation. Reitz and Somerville (2004) and Reitz and 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 group. 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. This study also notices differences in dress code, as 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. Therefore, it can be inferred that dress code was a factor that most employers took into consideration during interviews.

Other neighbourhood structures including 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. 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 and Lin 2011).

This exploratory study employing the opportunity structure theory contributes needed empirical evidence for understanding neighbourhood structures and labour market participation. The findings also highlight the significance of discrimination for labour market outcomes. Our analysis underscores the effect of discrimination on labour market. The findings consistently point to markedly lower levels of participation among the second generations Black youth. To the degree that the second-generation Ghanaian-Canadian youths find themselves working in low status jobs, their integration into the Canadian labour market through acquisition of jobs that match their qualifications and develop a sense of belonging may well be substantially weaker. Frustrations expressed by participants about lack of job among the Black youth because they belong to the visible minority population may be misplaced. Poor labour market participation, if it is indeed a problem, may be much more a function of other neighbourhood structure than ethno-cultural composition of neighbourhoods. Likewise, the mismatch skills of the youth deserve attention, especially given higher educational attainment by the second generation.

### *Policy implications*

The findings offer answers to the research questions posed above, provide theoretical insight into the labour market participation of the second generation youth, and broaden the basis for further research. If Roberts' principle of opportunity structure and labour market integration should be the proper aim of government, then what action can be taken to promote labour market participation, and to ensure that policy interventions solidify links between neighbourhood environment and labour market or enhance their potential for full labour market integration? This paper suggests that variation in employment experiences between Brampton and Jane-Finch participants are evident from the analyses. It is important to understand the perceptions so that steps may be taken to address the issues. By addressing the factors that affect employee's perception of discrimination, employers and policy makers may be able to better design and implement development training programs and broader public policy instruments, such as training, bridging and job creation (see Galabuzi 2012). More specifically, how socio-economic status, ethnicity and neighbourhood conditions intersect to shape the labour market outcomes (Ray and Preston 2015; Kobayashi and Preston 2014). A disproportionate number of the second generation youth with postsecondary education are more likely to perceive labour market discrimination than their less educated counterpart (Agyekum 2016). Educated second generation likely compare their situation to similarly educated mainstream Canadians and have relative high expectations. Organisations need to create spaces where individuals feel safe to comment or report racism and other forms of discrimination that systematically impact racialised groups. Additionally, support for second generation youth who are from minority ethnic groups is required. Most often, these individuals are isolated, marginalized and devalued in the labour market and have little support.

Overall, this paper calls for an approach in which the existing and potential neighbourhood opportunities of communities are more widely recognized, nurtured, and built upon labour market integration. Interventions in the

form of strategies, practices and policies to ensure that the second generation Black youth are not isolated and have access to full economic integration. The concept of 'priority neighbourhoods' introduced by the City of Toronto (City of Toronto 2015), could be a useful starting point for developing the labour market policy. It enables councils to take action that will contribute to socio-economic integration in the GTA. While this paper is not suggesting that the influence of neighbourhood characteristics on labour market can be privileged over that of wider structural factors, or that improvement in neighbourhood conditions alone can be a panacea for full labour market participation, neighbourhood opportunities are significant resources for both individuals and communities, and policy makers must take into account all neighbourhood opportunities to achieve labour market integration.

The findings of this study suggest that neighbourhood characteristics reflect labour market, such as access to jobs, housing and efficient transportation (Mensah and Williams 2013). Since neighbourhood characteristics carry serious consequences, it is imperative for urban planners and researchers to understand these perceptions and experiences so that steps may be taken to address the issues. By understanding neighbourhood opportunity structures that affect employees, employers and policymakers may be able to better design and implement programs and interventions to address the barriers they face to labour market integration in their communities. Proper planning and design could improve and change the behaviour of the residents and their feeling towards the residential environment. A menu of policy responses includes transportation responses, such as frequency of services, better suburban connection, and more direct route to employment areas. As a consequence, the labour market experiences of specific neighbourhoods remain an avenue for future investigation. Further research should examine the ways informal neighbourhood ties influence labour market participation and their role as adaptive mechanisms to expand the often-limited resources of residents in poor urban neighbourhoods.

Finally, this study has demonstrated the importance of key factors, including inefficient transportation system, lack of information, gender differences, informal ties, and appropriate dress code, which are often overlooked in labour market analyses. Additional studies will be required to further refine the identification of opportunity structure theory as a methodology for examining neighbourhood characteristics, as are studies about discrimination and belonging (Kobayashi and Preston 2014), and to anticipate the effects of neighbourhood resources on labour market outcomes, particularly for the second generation at a number of spatial scale in major Canadian cities.

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