

Workplace Safety and Health Training of Asian Workers in Canada: Voices from the Shop Floor

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Abstract

This paper examines safety and health training among Asian immigrant workers in Canadian manufacturing and warehousing workplaces. Based on interviews with 29 newcomers in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, the paper focuses on safety and health training provided by employers and employment agencies to Chinese, Indian and Filipino immigrant workers when they first entered the Canadian labour market. It also explores the gaps and major barriers in training, newcomers' informational and educational needs as well as their self-oriented, informal learning to prevent job risks, body injuries and harms. Some recommendations are suggested for future research and for safety and health training for new immigrant employees whose first language is not English.

Key words: Workplace safety and health training; Asian immigrants; Chinese, Filipino and Indian workers

Introduction

Each year, over a quarter million new immigrants enter Canada as permanent residents (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2010). However, these immigrants are not a homogenous group. Prior to the 1980s, most immigrants to Canada were of European origin. Since the late 1990s, the majority have been skilled immigrants from Asia, especially China, India and the Philippines. Immigrants are important contributors to the economic growth of Canada. As the baby boomers are retiring, Canada relies on internationally-trained skilled immigrants to fill jobs. The 2006 Canadian Census shows that one in five Canadian workers was an immigrant (Chui, Tran and Maheux, 2007), and by 2011, immigrants accounted for 100 per cent of net job growth in Canada (Human Resources and Skill Development Canada, 2002).

Yet, immigrant workers are among Canada's most vulnerable people when it comes to their workplace safety and health. Firstly, the need for financial security often forces newcomers

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to accept a trade-off between the search for high wages and employment in positions lower than those of local workers (Cobb-Clark and Hildebrand, 2006). Secondly, most newcomers are forced to engage in precarious jobs as their employment options are limited by poor English ability and low education levels (Orrenius and Zavodny, 2009).

Many immigrants are not given adequate pre- and on-the-job safety and health training (Kosny and Lifshen, 2012) and they are less likely to raise safety and health issues for fear of losing their jobs. Furthermore, coming from a different culture, these immigrants may have different perceptions or knowledge of job risks from those of Canadian-born employees. This poses a further challenge for newcomers when they first enter the Canadian labour market.

This paper examines safety and health training for Asian immigrant workers in Canadian manufacturing and warehousing workplaces. Based on interviews with 29 Asian newcomers in the Greater Toronto Area in Canada, the focus is on newcomers' perceptions of the safety and health training they received from employers and job placement agencies. It also explores challenges and barriers that newcomers encountered at work, their informational and educational needs, and their strategies to prevent job risks and bodily injuries and harms when they first entered the Canadian labour market. This paper concludes with some recommendations for future research on safety and health training for new immigrant workers whose first language is not English.

Literature Review

Immigrant workers are vital to the Canadian labour market. According to the 2006 Canadian Census, skilled immigrants (i.e. those coming to Canada specifically for the purpose of employment) made up almost 60 per cent of all new permanent residents in Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, many highly skilled immigrants have difficulty finding jobs that are compatible to their education and experience mainly because their foreign credentials are not recognized (Chen, Smith and Mustard, 2010), they have limited Canadian social networks, lack Canadian work experience, and do not have adequate English proficiency (Kosny *et al.*, 2012). As a result, a large proportion of new immigrants take on low-skilled and poorly paid sales and service jobs in order to quickly enter the Canadian labour market. Minority immigrants in particular are at risk, as they are most likely to take jobs with the lowest pay and poorest working conditions. This is particularly the case with young immigrant workers and older workers (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi, 2005).

Initially, new immigrants are more likely to take up occupations which demand more physical strength (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, they are also more exposed to occupational safety and health hazards than non-immigrant workers (Kosny *et al.*, 2012). Data from a large survey in the United States also indicate that immigrants were disproportionately employed in industries and occupations with high injury and fatality rates, largely due to poor English ability and lower average levels of education (Orrenius and Zavodny, 2009). A Canadian study finds

that nearly one million Canadian workers experienced nonfatal injuries that led to time off work in 2005 (Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada, 2006). New immigrant workers, especially among males, employed in physically demanding occupations are exposed to more workplace hazards and are at increased risk of work-related injuries than Canadian-born workers (Smith and Mustard, 2010). A recent study that looked at the relationship between education and job mismatch and work injury finds that men recently immigrated to Canada who have higher educational qualifications than are required for their current jobs are three times more likely to report a work-related injury than male immigrants who have been in the country for over a period of time and are not over-educated for their jobs (Premji and Smith, 2013). Several factors may contribute to immigrants' participation in risky jobs: language barriers, financial challenges, discrimination in the labour market, and different perceptions of job risks (Orrenius and Zavodny, 2009; Premji and Smith, 2013). Coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, new immigrant workers may perceive work-related risks differently from the locals or may have less English ability to understand job risks (Faulk *et al.*, 2011).

Despite their increasing importance to the aging Canadian labour force, little is known on what safety training is provided for new immigrants when they enter the labour market (Kosny and Lifshen, 2011). A recent web-based review of safety resources available to newcomers to Canada indicates that there is a lack of systematic and centralized approach to address workplace safety and health issues, even in provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia, which have the largest number of new immigrants to Canada. Furthermore, most of the information directed at newcomers concerning employment standards, occupational safety and health and workers' compensation, is only available in English or French (Kosny and Lifshen, 2012).

This study contributes to the literature on immigrant workers by focusing on their workplace safety and health training and its impact on their daily safety practices. In particular, it examines the challenges and barriers they encountered as well as the efforts and strategies they employed to make their workplace safe and healthy.

Methods

Data used in this paper were collected as part of a large project on Essential Skills through Safety and Health (ESSH). Funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources Development Canada, the project examines safety and health training to new immigrant workers from China, India and the Philippines, the top three source countries of immigrants to Canada. Altogether 29 new migrant workers were interviewed individually or in small groups. The majority of the immigrant workers are male and married, who had been in Canada for less than three years and were employed through temporary employment agencies. At the time of interviews, all of them were working in manufacturing or warehousing workplaces across the Greater Toronto Area in Ontario, Canada. This study aims to examine

safety and health training provided for these workers and its impact on their daily safety practices in the companies, some of which are large and well-known chains and others are small and medium-sized enterprises. The study also highlights the challenges and barriers the newcomers encountered, the gaps in their work-related safety training, the informational and educational needs of the newcomers as well as the learning they undertook to ensure safety and health in the manufacturing workplaces.

Of the 29 newcomers interviewed in this research, 12 were Mandarin-speaking immigrants from mainland China, nine were Tagalog-speaking immigrants from the Philippines and eight were new immigrants from India. All the participants were skilled immigrants who had professional jobs prior to immigration. Only a few of them had previously worked in manufacturing settings but in a professional or management capacity rather than as line staff on the factory floor. Unlike their Chinese and Filipino fellow workers, who came directly from their home countries, the majority of the Indian participants had worked or studied in different countries before landing in Canada. The participants have been living in Canada for less than three years and were chosen mainly because they were still fresh in their jobs and in the process of learning to adapt to the new culture and working environment. Thus, they were able to compare their experiences in their home countries and in Canada.

Participants for this research were recruited through various sources, including employment agencies, immigrant settlement organizations and individual contacts. Each of the interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half. The interviews were taped and transcribed, and interviews conducted in Mandarin or Tagalog were also translated into English.

This research provides the participants an opportunity to tell their stories and to have their voices heard. By making known their complaints, these immigrant workers become more aware of what they have experienced on the shop floor, the adjustments they have made, and the learning they have undertaken to stay safe and healthy in Canadian manufacturing and warehousing workplaces. More importantly, their voices may prod the authority concerned into action to alleviate their plight at the workplaces. It is also hoped that measures will be taken to help new immigrant workers to adapt to and blend quickly into the local culture, and consequently be rewarded fairly for their contribution to the companies they are working for.

Findings

Perception of Workplace Safety and Health Training

Nearly all the newcomers we interviewed have a post-secondary education and international professional work experience. However, at the time of interviews most of them were doing manual labour on production lines in manufacturing and warehouses. The vast majority of the respondents (90%) said that they received some forms of training on safety and health when they entered the labour market. However, only a small number of the participants (12%) said they had safety training directly from the companies they were working for. Most of the

participants (76%) reported being trained only by the job placement agencies that hired them or by employment agencies before or later on by the companies where they were placed. Still a small number of participants (10%) said they did not receive any safety training before or during their employment. Chinese#2, who has a Ph.D. from China but worked as a temporary employee in a large warehouse, said the training he received from the employer was both substantial and helpful. Chinese#5, who was previously a business manager but a machine operator in a factory after immigration, said that the mentorship he received (e.g. working under the guidance of an experienced co-worker) in the first week of work was quite helpful, as operating three packaging machines simultaneously requires complicated skills. However, the official training was not provided for him until after the initial three months when he became a full-time employee.

In contrast, a few of the respondents, all hired by an employment agency, said that they were not provided with any safety training for their jobs and that they had to learn or figure out by themselves how to do their job safely. Chinese#6, who was a packer in a printing shop, said the only safety training that he received from the employment agent was to watch a video that had little to do with his packing job in the printing shop.

I remember the video I watched at the agency was mainly about explosives and corrosives. There is no content on the safety knowledge I needed in the printing factory. For example, the zone where forklift runs is very dangerous. But nobody told us about it until we found out by ourselves I got small cuts on my fingers several times, about 5 or 6 times, before I figured out how to avoid it. They should have given us training on that. (Chinese#6, male)

Thus, it is not surprising that Chinese#6 did not give a high rating to the training he received. “If the full score is 100, I would give it a 50,” he said. Similarly, Chinese#1, who used to work in a plastic factory before it was closed down for safety issues, shared a similar view on safety training given by an employment agency.

The agency trains you just to get you into the door. That’s no training for what you actually do. When you go in, it’s so different. You learned the labeling of chemicals in general, not the chemicals you work with. (Chinese#1, male)

Chinese#1 recalled having had to work with toxic chemicals without proper protection:

Our work required us to use acids to melt things. When I put the foam in the machine for so long, and when I opened it up, the green smoke popped up. My eyes, the water just came down my chest, and my breath almost stopped. It’s just like burning...(Chinese#1, male)

Many of the Tagalog-speaking Filipino newcomers, who got their jobs through an employment agency, described their safety and health training as follows:

When you apply at an agency, they give you a pamphlet on safety and health. That's it. When you get to your placement, it's up to you on how to apply these. (Filipino#2, female)

[Employment agency] gives an orientation to everyone they've hired but this orientation talks about things like what will happen if you're tardy...on office policy...and then they send you to your area and you don't know anything about it. You just learn as you go along. (Filipino#5, male)

In the workplace, you just do what you're being told. You handle that specific part. But there's nothing...no training... (Filipino#7, female)

Many of the Filipino immigrants found the safety training provided by the employment agency too general to be helpful to them to do the specific job they were assigned.

On our first day, we were so nervous. We don't know what to do...they just give us orders. (Filipino#7)

Others said that they had to use their own judgement to determine whether what they did was safe or not. Many of the Indian interviewees emphasized the importance of practical, but largely missing, on-the-job safety training, as the majority of them got their job through a temporary job placement agency.

When I started working here, they didn't show me anything...if you tell someone that with this thing you will lose a body part, that person will be careful, obviously. But if you don't know how it's going to hurt you, you don't care, right? (Indian#6, male)

You can say to a worker or teach him, that "This is a knife, this is a belt... when you go there, you have to tie up your belt, you have to keep the knife here. When you cut the boxes, your knife should be in this direction." Unless the worker performs himself at the site, he may not be able to remember all these things. (Indian#4, male)

Despite the absence of on-the-job training, the new immigrant workers showed great concern for their safety and health at work. Most of them also admitted that Canadian workplaces are on the whole safer than those in their home countries, as the majority of the Canadian workplaces make safety their top priority.

Interviews with the newcomers also revealed that safety regulations are better enforced in some large companies than in small enterprises. This is probably because large companies usually have more financial resources and manpower for safety and health training for their new employees. However, many respondents, especially those who worked in large companies, also reported that efficiency is equally, if not more, emphasized than safety at work. According to some newcomers, they value safety but they also found some of the safety regulations go against efficiency (e.g. carrying only one item at a time) or are impractical (e.g. having another person to help move heavy objects while working on an assembly line). Yet efficiency is usually the only criterion that determines whether they can keep their job or not. Here is a quote from Chinese#2, whose job was to sort out items on an assembly line at a large warehouse:

We are required that boxes over 20 kilograms have to be lifted with two people or more...it is impossible for anyone to find a person to help you right away. Possibly, the other person close to you is busy with his own task and is unable to help you out, as the assembly line runs really fast.... If I can't find a person within a limited time, I'll have to lift it by myself. (Chinese#2, male)

Overall, the newcomers we interviewed were very much aware of the extensive safety rules and regulations and were able to observe those safety rules. However, many newcomers also pointed out that if they follow every single safety rule, they may not be able to get the job done within the required time, as many tasks have a time limit. While they appreciate the great emphasis that Canadian manufacturers put on their workers' safety and health, the immigrant workers said that the inconsistency between safety norms and efficiency prevented them from being as productive as they would like to be because productivity was the only indicator on which they were evaluated for their performances. As a consequence, they sometimes had to compromise their safety and health concerns for efficiency and productivity in order to keep their jobs.

Challenges and Barriers in Workplace Safety Training and Practices

In this study, nearly all newcomers reported a downward mobility after immigration, moving from professional jobs in office environments in their home countries to becoming low-skilled labourers in Canada. As it was the first time for most of them to work in manufacturing settings, they had to adjust to not only new types of jobs but also new working environment, new workplace norms and culture.

In India, we know everything. If something happens, we know where to go and what to do. Here everything is new for us. It will take some time before we have proper ideas about Canadian safety. (Indian#1, male)

Many of the Chinese newcomers talked about the differences between Canadian and Chinese workplace cultures.

In Chinese culture, we value hard work. But here you must obey the rules.
(Chinese#11, female)

When we first came to this company, they asked us what comes first. We said efficiency comes first. They said no, safety comes first. (Chinese#10, male)

Coming from a country where hard work and efficiency are highly valued and innovation to increase efficiency is greatly encouraged, many of the Chinese immigrants found that some of their efforts to increase productivity, such as taking on extra workload and helping their co-workers with their work, are not appreciated and sometimes even discouraged.

Once a Chinese co-worker carried a pile of books, our manager told her to just carry three each time. She felt so wronged when she was told “if you do it again, you will be sent home.” (Chinese#11, female)

I think Chinese people care more about efficiency. They believe the best way to contribute to their work is working faster. Sometimes they don't pay that much attention to safety. (Chinese#9, male)

Chinese newcomers also noticed that Chinese values on hard work and efficiency were not always shared by other non-Chinese co-workers. Others found that their attempts to increase productivity were disliked by their co-workers. As a result, one of the adjustments that many of the Chinese newcomers made was to follow the Canadian workplace culture by not “working too fast”.

When I first started to work in this company as a work associate at a large warehouse, I found they (the other employees) are not happy if you work too fast. (Chinese#2, male)

Sometimes, the full-time employees do not understand why we help other Chinese newcomers, as they are earning money for what they do. Sometimes, we also help the full-time employees, if we see they are overwhelmed. However, they are not very happy with our help. They don't like us to work too fast.
(Chinese#7, male)

Another frequently mentioned challenge for new immigrant workers is language barriers. This is especially the case with the Mandarin-speaking Chinese immigrants.

Some of our new hires have very poor English, but the safety training was all given in English, so if they can't understand the content, it'll be dangerous for their work. (Chinese#8, male)

Although none of them reported English as a barrier for them to understand safety and health instructions at work, most of the Chinese interviewees said that they have difficulty communicating effectively with their non-Chinese co-workers and supervisors. Over a third of the Chinese participants said that lack of proficiency in the English language is the main reason why they ended up doing manual labour in the factories. They also believed that lack of English greatly limited their opportunities for promotion and restrained, their ability to defend themselves when conflicts arose or to negotiate for better work hours and job opportunities.

If you speak good English, you have more chances to get a lighter job in other departments. (Chinese#9, male)

Even though our factory is bilingual, most of the workers use English to communicate....Since we can't speak English, sometimes they even don't want to communicate with you. So some of the skills or training they don't want to share with you. (Chinese#10, male)

While all the Tagalog-speaking Filipino workers are fluent in English, they also reported challenges understanding “Canadian slang” and Canadian intonations and pronunciations.

There are definite language barriers. Sometimes, especially if you're a newcomer, there are intonations and pronunciations that you can't understand. It's hard to understand if you're new especially if you are not used to the surrounding community and the people you are with. (Filipino#3, female)

And then when white people talk to me, they slur, they mumble their words and it makes it harder on my part to understand what they're talking about and their instructions are so vague. (Filipino#5, male)

Some of the Tagalog-speaking Filipino participants talked about English as a barrier to communication with other non-English speaking co-workers.

In the Philippines, we have what we call “Carabao” English...I can understand it, but others here may not. Different nationalities have specific types of English spoken there. If you cross-communicate this with different nationalities, there are different connotations even if you are both speaking English! (Filipino#1, male)

But our co-workers, they are not fluent in English so it's hard to understand what they mean. (Filipino#3, female)

Some Filipino participants also reported clashes with other ethnic co-workers due to language barriers:

Sometimes people give different meaning to what you are saying because of the limitations on the vocabulary they have or different meanings of words used in their countries. They may find a word offensive when it wasn't meant to be. (Filipino#1, male)

Many newcomers view English as their biggest barrier to get back to their previous profession or to move ahead in their new job. Some said that lack of English proficiency puts them at a disadvantaged position when competing for jobs dominated by native speakers. For example, Chinese#3 blamed English as his major obstacle to get back to his trained profession of supply chain, despite his Canadian education and his previous work experience in this field. Frustrated after searching in vain for a job in his trained area, he said, "All I hope now is just to get a stable job."

Vulnerability of Working for an Employment Agency

Studies show that workers' sense of belonging, their feeling of being safe and secure in the workplace, and their ability and desire to contribute to a safe and healthy workplace are crucial to the success of a company (Faulk, 2012). However, these characteristics were clearly missing from the immigrant workers we interviewed due to the nature of their employment. The majority of these workers in this study were hired and paid by employment agencies. This makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitation, as employment agencies provide jobs only based on market needs, which fluctuate with the seasons and the economic situation. Whenever there are fewer orders, the temporary immigrant workers are the first to let go.

It's the mentality of the management because they decided to get the temporary workers, which means they have no responsibility, they are hands off. They won't have to care about them. If they're injured, they'll be laid off and replaced by somebody else. (Filipino#5, male)

Many newcomers talked about the disadvantages of working for an employment agency. For example, the lack of job security prevented them from speaking up about their safety and health concerns for fear of losing their jobs.

When you have trouble or complaints, they won't call you. (Chinese#1, male)

Look, if you complain, you'll be seen as a whiner and you get removed.
(Filipino#5, male)

If the supervisor is not happy with your work, your speed, he will let you go home. He (the agent) may call you on any day to ask you not to come back for work. As part-time, we are disposable when there are fewer orders.
(Chinese#7, male)

Apart from the lack of job security, the newcomers said that they were excluded from the many benefits enjoyed by full-time employees, including company-sponsored training programmes, over-time pay, and medical insurance.

We learned everything by ourselves. But for the full-time members, they hold regular meetings on safety issues. But not for us, there is nothing, as we are temporary workers. (Chinese#11, female)

Medical insurance is covered only for those full-time employees. We don't have those benefits because we work part-time. (Chinese#2, male)

Full-time employees have benefits and overtime, getting 1.5 times if they work more than 44 hours a week. For us part-time employees from the agency, there is no benefit and overtime. We are paid by hour. (Chinese#7, male)

In our company, they provide free language training, but only for full-time workers. They said it has nothing to do with part-time workers. We do the same thing as the full-time workers, but we don't have any benefits. And our wage is only half of that of the full-time employees. If you count the benefits in, we have less than half. (Chinese#10, male)

Many respondents claimed that their temporary status made them feel like outsiders who were not treated with respect by the management.

I found that my company is kind of cold. Our supervisors never communicate with us. They only sit there and watch us. They only call us Chinese. They only say this Chinese and that Chinese. I don't think they respect us at all. They don't even bother to learn our names. They don't want to know anything about us. They only know that we work for them and we are Chinese.
(Chinese#11, female)

The disrespectful treatment not only hurts newcomers' self-respect but also their sense of belonging and, more importantly, their motivation to contribute, which are crucial to the success of a company.

I don't feel like I am a part of that company. I don't feel proud of my company either. I don't even feel that I belong there. ... I feel they (supervisors) treat us as materials rather than human beings The only motivation for me to go to work is money. (Chinese#11, female)

Furthermore, nearly all the interviewees said that there is no channel for them to voice their safety concerns and they do not know what their right is when they are injured at work.

We don't have such a system (for workers to raise safety issues). One day a worker who didn't wear sleeves at work was punished for it. It turned out that she was allergic to the sleeve material, but there was no way for her to report. (Chinese#9, male)

New immigrant workers voice their concerns repeatedly over the fact that, in the manufacturing workplaces, their temporary status does not make them feel as an equal and valued member of the community. As a result, many do not feel secure to speak up on their safety and health issues, even though hearing workers' safety concerns is an important step to reduce and prevent work-related injuries and compensations.

Challenges in Accessing Compensation after a Work-Related Injury

In her study on immigrant workers in the United States, Brown (2003) found that immigrant workers were reluctant to speak up about dangerous safety and health conditions or report injuries because they did not have the skills (e.g. language and education) to take action or because of workers' fear of reprisal and job loss. In this study, many newcomers reported facing similar situations when they suffer minor injuries due to lack of adequate knowledge and protection equipment. Furthermore, language barriers and insufficient knowledge of their rights prevented or delayed them from filling injury claims to employers and to the workers' compensation board. In many cases, they chose not to report the incidents for fear that it might affect their job. Sometimes, even when they reported, they did not receive any compensation because of their temporary worker status. Chinese#7, who worked in a meat-packing factory, said that there was no one he could turn to for compensation when he was hit by a box and broke his glasses at work, as neither the factory nor the employment agent claimed responsibilities for it.

I talked to the supervisor about the incident and asked if I can get reimbursed for a new pair of glasses. The supervisor said he can't do anything about it. When I turned to the agent, he said he cannot help either. So I was really angry about it. I was only asking for compensation for my glasses, what if my eyes were hurt? Will they do the same to me? (Chinese#7, male)

To make things worse, Chinese#7 found that after his complaint, the agent reduced his weekly hours of work from 40 hours to 20 hours. “If you complain too much,” he said, “they think you are a trouble maker and will reduce your work hours or even stop giving you any work.” Chinese#1 had an accident and hurt his back when he was working in a plastic factory, due to an absence of safety training and protection equipment. The factory did not report his accident nor did they give him a break. When he lodged a complaint to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), he was moved to a different job. Later, when his injury got worse, he was sent home for a whole week without any pay. What hurt him most was that there was a lack of solidarity among his co-workers.

A lot of people don't support one another. When I got injured at work, the person who worked with me was asked questions about me, but he said he saw nothing.
(Chinese#1, male)

It was only after the closure of the factory that the workers realized that they needed to support each other. “We realized that we must all work together. We must stand up for our rights,” revealed Chinese#1, who is working at a Workers’ Service Centre, providing support for other workers in need of help. Similarly, Chinese#7 also realized after his accident that temporary workers needed stronger support from the government when voicing their safety issues and defending their right for compensation.

If workers have a place to have their complaints heard anonymously, and if the government can get some of the employers' improper behaviours penalized, this will improve the workers' situation and protect their interests.
(Chinese#7, male)

For the newcomers, the employment agency-manufacturer relationship complicated their situation and exacerbated their vulnerability in case of accidents and physical injuries. Therefore, they hope that there is a stronger workers’ rights organization that can provide legal assistance and act on workers’ behalf.

New Environment, New Learning

Despite the many challenges and barriers they encountered at work, many newcomers we interviewed revealed what and how they learned to adjust to their new working environment. One of the things that many newcomers spoke about is learning about the new Canadian workplace safety culture.

I learned that you have to follow safety procedures step by step and can't skip any of them. I also find that in China we care more about the results, but here they pay more attention to the procedures. I think the procedures are equally important. (Chinese#3, male)

In India everyone is relaxed about everything. If there is an accident, they won't be bothered about it. Here, there is maximum safety. The police and other people will come within 5 or 10 minutes and will try to save the lives. (Indian#1, male)

It (Safety training) was useful for me because I never learned this kind of thing, never seen this kind of thing. In India, we never used to do this, we just go to work. (Indian#5, male)

All new immigrant employees showed great appreciation for the safety culture in Canadian workplaces. Several among them said their workplace training made them more safety conscious and more likely to follow safety rules and regulations at work. Here is a quote from Chinese#11, the only Chinese woman in this research.

I used to take a pile of books when I packed. Now I took one book at a time. I find that here the Canadian culture is more respectful for the rules. In China, we always want to contribute more, but here, no, we are required to work safely. (Chinese#11, female)

Filipino immigrant workers talked about learning new strategies to protect themselves from being bullied by other employees when they first started.

I've learned to feel people out to figure out what they're like; I've learned how to get along and be cooperative. One can say that I learned to play with them.... because if you don't learn, if you don't understand what the dynamic is, they'll oppress you.... In [name of company], if they find out that you're a newcomer, they just boss you around, they'll bully you. (Filipino#8, female)

However, several newcomers said they learned not to speak up about their safety concern or make any complaint about safety hazard in their work for fear of losing their job. "If you complain too much, they will view you as a trouble maker and will reduce your hours of work or send you home," said Chinese#7, who had a minor accident at work but did not receive any compensation for it. Several newcomers said that they learned to accept inequality and job discrimination by changing their own attitude and way of thinking.

If you don't like it, you can go to a different agent. But many times, we just comfort ourselves by accepting the unfair treatment because we think such work is only temporary, once we get a better job, we will quit this job. (Chinese#7, male)

"You just have to adapt to what is in your environment. That's right." We tell ourselves, "Ok, you are in Canada, you know from the start that it's going to be like this ..." (Filipino#5, male)

Look, for us, we have to go through mental conditioning.... There will be a paradigm shift for us...we have to shift our paradigm...to manage our expectations... so it's more mental...(Filipino#7, female)

It is clear that not all learning is positive. In the process of adapting to their working environment and workplace dynamics, newcomers learned to accept their new realities, including learning to manage their expectations and behaviours instead of voicing their unfair treatment by their employers.

Plans for the Future

For many of the temporary workers, lack of job security, unequal treatment in pay and benefits deprived them of a sense of belonging, and more importantly, reduced their motivation to work to their full capacities and their long-term interest to work for the company and in their employers' success.

If they make sure that their workers are proud to work at [name of company] permanently, with benefits, I'll work harder. And I know that the company cares for me. But here, there's nothing...there's no care. As I'm temporary, so I don't have to care. (Filipino#5, male)

The majority of the new immigrants are thinking of changing their jobs. At the time of interviews, several respondents were already taking courses at colleges with the hope of getting a better-paid job in the future. For example, Chinese#4, previously a surgeon but a machine operator in Canada, had already started a two-year diploma programme in nursing at a community college two weeks before the interview.

I am considering changing to a job closer to my major (medicine). I am thinking about finding a RPN (Registered Practical Nurse) job after two years (of study). I also plan to take the exams for physicians in five years. Now I have only taken one. (Chinese#4, male)

Chinese#6, who used to be a manager but worked as a labourer after immigration, was actively seeking new job opportunities after doing a number of manual labour. As soon as he became qualified for employment insurance (EI), he left his job and registered to attend a government-funded training programme for unemployed workers. He hoped to become a social worker after completing his programme, helping other new immigrants with issues on settlement, community services and workers' rights. Chinese#9, an engineer prior to immigration, was brushing up his English at an adult high school as part of his preparation for returning to college. Two other participants, who had advanced degrees and work experience from other

countries before immigration, said they were actively looking for professional jobs in their trained areas.

I want to apply for a governmental food inspector position in the future. The job I am working now gives me a lot of pressure. As a quality controller, I am at the front line. If there is an accident, it will be my responsibility. I don't want to do it for long term. (Chinese#8, male)

One newcomer said that he wanted to start his own business after completing a diploma at a college, but sought in vain for a job in his trained area. Still a few respondents said they do not know what to do yet mainly because their English was not good enough for them to find a professional job.

Of the 11 new Chinese immigrants interviewed, only three of them said they would stay in their current job mainly because their wives were already studying at a Canadian college or university and they needed to work to support their families. The only exception was Chinese#12, an engineer who found a technician position in an auto parts factory shortly before the interview.

My current job matches my profession perfectly. My short term plan is to keep this job for a couple of years, and then I will try to get some professional certificates, such as P. Eng. (professional Engineer). With it, I will have more job opportunities, and they will no longer question my qualifications/abilities for similar jobs. (Chinese#12, male)

Chinese#11, the only Chinese woman in this study, said she will return to China after her only daughter goes to university two years later. Filipino#1, who had worked as a nurse in several countries, was taking courses in the Personal Support Worker programme at a college. Meanwhile she also worked as a temporary worker to support her family and to pay for her tuition. Overall, many new immigrants saw re-schooling as an opportunity for them to upgrade their skills and to get out of the labour-intensive manufacturing jobs, which are high in job risks and lack job security.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Literature on workplace safety suggests that effective safety training is beneficial to both employers and employees, as it helps to reduce claims and costs of workplace injuries (Faulk, 2012). In this study the majority of the Asian immigrant workers from China, India and the Philippines have received some forms of training on safety and health when they first entered Canadian manufacturing and warehousing workplaces. While some newcomers found

their training helpful in their assigned work, many, especially those trained by employment agencies, reported a mismatch of their training and the jobs they were assigned to do. In a few cases, inadequate training and a lack of supply of proper personal protective equipment put them at risk, resulting in minor injuries and cuts while performing their work.

Consistent with the literature on immigrant workers (Brown, 2003; Kosny *et al.*, 2012; Orrenius and Zavodny, 2009; Premji and Smith, 2013), Asian immigrant workers in this study experienced a number of challenges when they entered the Canadian labour market. Language barriers, financial problems, and labour market discrimination have channelled many new immigrants, who were highly educated professionals in their home countries, into low-paid, high-risk manual labour in manufacturing workplaces in Canada. Although they were prepared and keen to adapt to new work environments and appreciate the prioritized safety culture in Canadian workplaces, the newcomers felt they were discriminated in terms of pay, benefits and employer-sponsored training programmes that are available only to full-time employees. As temporary employees hired by employment agencies, many newcomers felt they do not have the job security and a sense of belonging to voice their concerns over safety and health and to work to their full capacities.

To promote safer and healthier workplaces, employment agencies need to collaborate with manufacturers in providing customized safety and health training to meet the specific needs of the workers for their specific positions. The forms of training should also be diversified, ranging from videos and written tests to on-site demonstrations, hands-on practices, and mentorship (i.e. working with a mentor). It is also important that all employees are provided with adequate personal protective equipment.

To foster a sense of community and belonging and a strong safety and health culture, temporary employees should be treated equally as their full-time, permanent co-workers. These should include equal pay, equal job opportunities/security/stability, equal level of training on safety and health, as well as equal benefits, such as medical insurance for dental care, vacations with pay, and equal on-the-job English training.

Further research is required to explore effective ways to promote safety practices among new immigrant workers. Participants in this research have proposed some ways which may be helpful in promoting workplace safety and cultural diversity. These include putting up signs and posters in ethnic languages in workplaces where newcomers concentrate. Training materials and important documents on employment standards, occupational safety and health and workers' compensation should also be made available in major ethnic languages. To increase newcomers' awareness of work-related risks and to promote communication and a sense of community, the newcomers proposed creating a newspaper by the workers for the workers, inviting employers and employees to contribute their personal stories about safety and health, to share their knowledge and experiences as well as their interest on work-related topics. Meanwhile it is important to have a mechanism or venue that allows or encourages workers to express

openly their concerns on safety and health-related issues without the fear of having their jobs compromised.

Given that almost all manufacturing new hires will be immigrants in the next decade, workplace safety and health trainers need to be innovative when designing and developing safety and health training programmes in order to meet the needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse new employees. Effective safety and health training will not only make the Canadian workplace safer and healthier, it will also promote a sense of belonging for its new employees whose first language is not English.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. The author wishes to thank Johanna Faulk and the research team for their support in conducting the research. The author also gives special thanks to the newcomer workers who participated and shared their experiences in the research.

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