

Factors Affecting Equity Deserving Youth Career Decisions



MINING INDUSTRY
HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL



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Table of Contents

Overview	4
Methodologies	6
Findings	8
Indigenous Youth	8
Education and Access to Opportunities	10
Systemic Barriers and Structural Inequities	10
Newcomer Youth	12
Acculturation and Cultural Identity	12
Social Support Networks	13
Education and Skill Development	14
Systemic Barriers and Structural Inequities	14
Youth with Disabilities	16
Support Networks and Mentorship	17
Accommodations and Accessibility	18
Systemic Barriers and Policy Implications	18
Recommendations	19
Conclusion	20
Bibliography	21



Overview

Navigating the path from adolescence to adulthood is a transformative journey marked by a series of pivotal decisions, none perhaps as significant as the many decisions made in relation to one's chosen field, type of work or career. For today's youth, the landscape of career opportunities is vast and dynamic, shaped by technological advancements, globalization and evolving socio-economic trends. Against this backdrop, the process of career decision-making becomes a critical endeavour, influencing not only individual trajectories but also societal progress and economic growth. Understanding the factors that shape the career decision-making process for youth is helpful in terms of guiding youth toward fulfilling and meaningful career pathways. This entails exploring the interplay of personal interests, values, skills, aspirations, as well as the external influences that inform youth choices. Moreover, it involves recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by today's youth. By delving into the intricacies of career decision-making for youth, we gain insights that can inform the development of effective career guidance and information programs, educational interventions whether carried out by public or private organizations, and policy initiatives. Through empirical research, we can identify the factors that facilitate informed decision-making and promote positive outcomes, such as career satisfaction and economic mobility.



Additionally, we can uncover barriers and disparities that hinder equitable access to career opportunities and strive to address them through targeted interventions. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors and timing affecting career decisions among Indigenous and newcomer youth, as well as youth with disabilities. Equity-deserving youth, including those from marginalized or underrepresented communities, often encounter systemic barriers that impede their access to education, employment and advancement opportunities.

In addition, their experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as ways of knowing, immigration, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability and health needs, as well as other elements of identity. This study seeks to advance our understanding of career decision-making for the equity-deserving youth in this study by exploring the intersecting influences of identity, culture, and social context on choices and aspirations.



Methodologies

The purpose of this research is to explore the career decision-making process among Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities, focusing on the factors and timing that influence career choices, decision-making strategies, and outcomes. This study also aims to complement earlier research undertaken by The Mining Industry Human Resources Council that focussed on the factors and timing affecting youth career decision-making generally. By understanding the dynamics of career decision-making among youth belonging to specific equity-deserving groups, this study aims to provide valuable insights into career decision-making processes, while recommending practices aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable career guidance and opportunities.

This study employed a qualitative research approach via a literature review and key informant interviews. A search of electronic databases including PubMed and Google Scholar was conducted using keywords such as “Indigenous youth”, “newcomer youth”, “youth with disabilities,” “career decision-making,” “timing,” “employment outcomes,” and “systemic barriers”. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles and reports published in English within the last 20 years. Studies included in the review focused on youth between the ages of 15 and 30.

Qualitative data was also collected via three semi-structured interviews with key informants belonging to organizations who possess specialized knowledge and expertise relevant to the youth demographic that was the focus of this research.



The purpose of the interviews was to gain further key insights into the career decision-making processes of Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities. The proposed questions explored key informants' experiences and knowledge related to the factors, challenges and timing surrounding the career decision-making process specific to youth belonging to these three groups.

The research adheres to ethical guidelines and principles, ensuring participant confidentiality, voluntary participation and informed consent. All interview transcripts have been anonymized to protect participant privacy. Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to their involvement in the study.

This research initiative originally set out to engage focus groups involving Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities with the intention of gaining first-hand insight related to the factors and timing of career-decision making for these youth. Due to a lack of participation, the research method pivoted to include three key informant interviews as a means of data collection. As such, this report does not provide

readers with direct information related to youth experiences nor are the findings generalizable to youth communities or demographics. Rather, the report does provide an initial view into the existing literature and service provider insights when it comes to supporting the career decision-making processes of Indigenous and newcomer youth, as well as youth with disabilities. Furthermore, there remains a noticeable gap in the existing literature regarding the timing of career decision-making specifically for Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities. While previous research has examined the timing of career decision-making for youth in general, there is a lack of comprehensive research focusing specifically on equity-deserving youth. This gap in the literature presents an opportunity for further investigation and scholarly inquiry.

The findings of this study aim to provide a deeper understanding of the unique factors and challenges that can influence career choices, decision-making strategies, and outcomes for youth belonging to equity-deserving groups, informing potential interventions to support youth in their career development.



Findings

Indigenous Youth

Career decision-making for Indigenous youth is influenced by a multitude of interconnected factors rooted in cultural identity, community values, historical trauma and systemic barriers. Indigenous youth often grapple with the legacy of colonization, which has disrupted traditional ways of life, eroded cultural connections, and perpetuated disparities in education, employment, and socio-economic opportunities (D'Antimo, 2021). The complex interplay of cultural values, family expectations and socio-economic realities can influence the career aspirations and choices of Indigenous youth who may navigate a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and embracing opportunities for personal and professional growth in world that is rapidly changing.



Cultural Identity and Values

Cultural identity plays a central role in the career decision-making process for Indigenous youth, shaping aspirations, values and sense of self. Research suggests that a strong connection to cultural heritage and traditional knowledge fosters resilience and self-efficacy among Indigenous youth, providing a foundation for navigating career choices (CHiXapkaid et al., 2011). Indigenous youth may often prioritize careers that align with their cultural values, such as roles that contribute to community well-being, environmental stewardship and cultural preservation (Bruce & Marlin, 2012). Furthermore, Indigenous youth may experience conflict between traditional cultural expectations and mainstream career pathways, leading to a need for culturally relevant career guidance and support (Dokis-Ranney, 2010).

Community Connections and Support Systems

Community connections and support systems are critical resources for Indigenous youth as they navigate their career paths. Research indicates that strong social networks and mentorship from Indigenous role models can enhance career self-efficacy and resilience among Indigenous youth (D'Antimo, 2015).

According to a key informant interviewed for this study, relating to and interacting with one's community is important for Indigenous youth to feel supported and empowered when beginning to consider their future endeavours. For example, community-based programs and initiatives that provide culturally relevant career guidance, skill development and networking opportunities have been shown to positively impact the career decision-making process for Indigenous youth (Pidgeon et al., 2019). Moreover, involvement in cultural ceremonies, land-based learning and community activities can strengthen senses of belonging and cultural identity among Indigenous youth, which in turn can influence career aspirations and choices (Crooks et al., 2015).

Education and Access to Opportunities

Access to quality education and opportunities for skill development are crucial factors in empowering Indigenous youth to pursue their career goals. However, Indigenous youth often face systemic barriers such as inadequate funding for Indigenous education, lack of culturally relevant curriculum and limited access to post-secondary education and training programs (Krahn, 2014). Additionally, as stated by our key informant, there is often little to no expectations of Indigenous youth within educational and workplace settings, and nascent self-advocacy skills can make it difficult for Indigenous youth to navigate these settings, thus impacting confidence to pursue their career aspirations. Therefore, research highlights the importance of culturally responsive education initiatives that incorporate Indigenous perspectives, languages and ways of knowing to support academic success and career readiness among Indigenous youth. Moreover, partnerships between Indigenous communities, educational institutions and employers can create pathways for Indigenous youth to access meaningful employment opportunities and provide the confidence to build successful careers (Caron et al., 2020).

Systemic Barriers and Structural Inequities

Despite progress in addressing systemic barriers, Indigenous youth continue to face structural inequities that impede career advancement. Persistent issues such as discrimination, poverty, geographic isolation and intergenerational trauma contribute to disparities in employment outcomes and can hinder Indigenous youths' ability to realize their full potential (D'Antimo, 2015). Addressing these systemic barriers requires a comprehensive approach that involves policy reform, community empowerment and reconciliation efforts aimed at dismantling colonial legacies and fostering equitable opportunities for Indigenous youth (D'Antimo, 2015).



Recommendations

Overall, the timing of career decision-making for Indigenous youth is influenced by an interplay of cultural, educational, personal and external factors. The below recommendations are set out to recognize and support Indigenous youth in navigating career pathways in a way that honours cultural heritage, values and aspirations.

- **Cultural Awareness:** Recognize and respect Indigenous cultures, traditions and worldviews. Provide culturally sensitive career counselling and resources that honour Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve Indigenous communities, elders and leaders in career support initiatives. Collaborate with Indigenous organizations and agencies to develop programs and resources that meet the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs that connect Indigenous youth with Indigenous and non-Indigenous professionals and role models in various fields. Mentors can provide guidance, support and cultural knowledge relevant to career decision-making.
- **Cultural Identity:** Help Indigenous youth explore how to integrate their identity, values and aspirations into their career considerations and decisions. Highlight Indigenous role models and success stories in different career fields to inspire youth.
- **Cultural Safety:** Create safe and culturally inclusive spaces where Indigenous youth feel respected, valued and supported in their career exploration journey. Address systemic barriers and discrimination that may exist within educational institutions, workplaces, and society.
- **Empowerment and Advocacy:** Empower Indigenous youth to advocate for themselves and their communities in pursuing career goals. Provide training and support in leadership development, advocacy skills and community organizing to help effect positive change.



Newcomer Youth

Career decision-making for newcomer youth presents unique challenges and opportunities shaped by migration experiences, acculturation processes and socio-economic contexts. Understanding the factors that influence career choices among newcomer youth is essential for developing culturally responsive interventions and support systems that facilitate successful integration and economic empowerment.

Acculturation and Cultural Identity

Acculturation plays a significant role in the career decision-making process for newcomer youth as they navigate between their heritage culture and the new country's norms and expectations. Research suggests that newcomer youth may experience acculturative stress and identity conflicts, which can impact their career aspirations and choices (Berry et al., 2006). According to a key informant interviewed for this study, newcomer youth often need time to adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the new country's education systems and workplace, and the timing of career-decision making can vary based on factors such as individual circumstances, language proficiency, educational background, legal and immigration status and cultural adaptation.



While some newcomer youth may prioritize careers that align with their cultural backgrounds and family expectations, others may seek to assimilate into mainstream career pathways to enhance social and economic integration (Calience Research and Consulting, 2023). As newcomer youth become better adjusted to the new country's culture and norms, they may feel more confident exploring and making career decisions. Thus, understanding the nuanced relationship between acculturation and career decision-making is essential for providing tailored support to newcomer youth.

Social Support Networks

Social support networks play a crucial role in facilitating newcomer youth's career exploration and decision-making processes. Research indicates that strong social support from family, peers, mentors and community organizations can enhance newcomer youth's career self-efficacy, resilience and adaptation to the new country (Deckers & Zinga, 2012). Moreover, access to culturally sensitive career guidance, mentorship programs and networking opportunities can empower newcomer youth to navigate unfamiliar career landscapes and overcome barriers to employment. Building and sustaining supportive relationships within the new community are vital for successful integration and career advancement. As our key informant stated, integration into the local community and participation in community activities can contribute to a sense of belonging for newcomer youth and thus support career development.



Education and Skill Development

For newcomer youth, access to quality education and opportunities for skill development are critical factors that can shape one's career trajectory. Research suggests that newcomer youth often face various challenges in accessing education and training programs, including language barriers, credential recognition and limited financial resources (Deckers & Zinga, 2012). For example, as discussed by a key informant, language skills can impact the ability to communicate effectively, access education and secure employment. As well, the recognition of qualifications acquired in the home country by the new country's institutions and employers can affect career choices. Therefore, culturally responsive educational initiatives that provide language support, career counselling and pathways to further education and employment are essential for supporting academic success and career readiness (Deckers, 2011).

Systemic Barriers and Structural Inequities

Newcomer youth often face systemic barriers and structural inequities that hinder access to employment and career advancement opportunities. Racism, limited work experience and lack of social capital are among the challenges that newcomer youth encounter in the labour market (Yan et al., 2008). Moreover, policies and practices that perpetuate inequalities in education, housing and social services can further marginalize newcomer youth and restrict their opportunities for economic mobility (Kilbride & Anisef, 2001). As discussed by a key informant, factors such as discrimination, financial constraints associated with living in a new country, and unfamiliarity with the new country's workplace culture and differences can impact career opportunities and choices.

Recommendations

For newcomer youth, the stage of life upon immigrating is particularly important in the career decision-making process because it directly influences their priorities, needs and opportunities. It is important to note that the recommendations provided below are general and may not be relevant for newcomer youth who immigrated to a new country at an early age versus newcomer youth who immigrated in their teenage or young adult years.

- **Language Support:** Provide language support services to help newcomer youth overcome language barriers in career exploration and development. Use clear, accessible language in job advertisements, postings and career guidance materials enabling newcomer youth to learn the specific terms related to careers and employment opportunities.
- **Financial Supports:** Provide information about scholarships, training, business development/ start-up and employment supports to help offset the many costs associated with transitioning into the Canadian workforce and/ or accessing learning/continuing education.
- **Employment Orientation:** Offer orientation programs to help newcomer youth decode the approaches to identifying career and employment opportunities in Canada, including, for example, the 'hidden job market' and networking, workplace norms and career opportunities in the new country.
- **Employment Services:** Encourage employers to collaborate with Immigrant Employment Councils to access newcomer talent and effectively attract, recruit and retain newcomer youth.
- **Skills Recognition:** Help newcomer youth identify and transfer their skills and qualifications gained from their home country to the local context. Provide support with credential evaluation, recognition and re-certification processes as needed.
- **Hands-on Experience:** Facilitate opportunities for newcomer youth to gain practical experience through apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing and/or volunteer work. Hands-on experience can help youth explore different career paths and build valuable skills in the new country.
- **Networking Opportunities:** When arriving to a new country, newcomers may have limited networks. Communities and organizations can support newcomer youth by facilitating opportunities to build valuable relationships and networks relevant to their career objectives, gain insights into the local job market and enhance career prospects in their new country.

Youth with Disabilities

The career decision-making process for youth with disabilities can be shaped by a multitude of factors, including individual abilities, societal attitudes, support systems and access to resources. Understanding the unique challenges and opportunities faced by youth with disabilities in navigating their career paths is essential for developing inclusive policies, programs and interventions that facilitate successful transition to adulthood and employment.

Self-Determination and Empowerment

Self-determination plays a crucial role in the career decision-making process for youth with disabilities, empowering them to assert control over their lives, set goals and pursue meaningful employment opportunities (Meshcheryakova & Rogotneva, 2022). According to a key informant interviewed for this study, self-confidence and career readiness among youth with disabilities can be adversely impacted by negative life experiences and unsupportive familial and educational environments. For example, Kerka (2002) suggests that restricted early opportunities, dependence on family and experiences of academic failure may lead to low self-esteem and limited self-knowledge that can produce feelings of helplessness and a perceived lack of control over the future, which ultimately deters from career exploration. Thus, it is important for parents, educators and mentors to focus on and encourage individual strengths, especially in early childhood, to positively contribute to the confidence of youth with disabilities to pursue their career aspirations. Moreover, promoting self-awareness and self-efficacy enables youth with disabilities to identify their strengths, interests and career aspirations, laying the foundation for informed decision-making and successful career development (Brown & Lent, 2021).



Support Networks and Mentorship

Support networks and mentorship play a vital role in facilitating the career decision-making process for youth with disabilities, providing guidance, encouragement and practical assistance in navigating educational and employment pathways. Research indicates that access to supportive relationships with family members, educators, peers and disability mentors can have a positive influence on the career aspirations and outcomes of youth with disabilities (Mentor Canada, 2022). Moreover, mentorship programs that pair youth with disabilities with successful professionals who share similar experiences can provide valuable role modeling, networking opportunities and career guidance, thus enhancing their confidence and competence in pursuing their career goals (Mentor Canada, 2022).

As a key informant acknowledged, mentors can play a pivotal role in providing tailored career advice that help youth with disabilities explore different career paths best suited to their individual strengths and make informed decisions about their educational and professional pursuits. This guidance can be especially valuable when navigating workplaces that may have specific considerations related to disabilities.

Accommodations and Accessibility

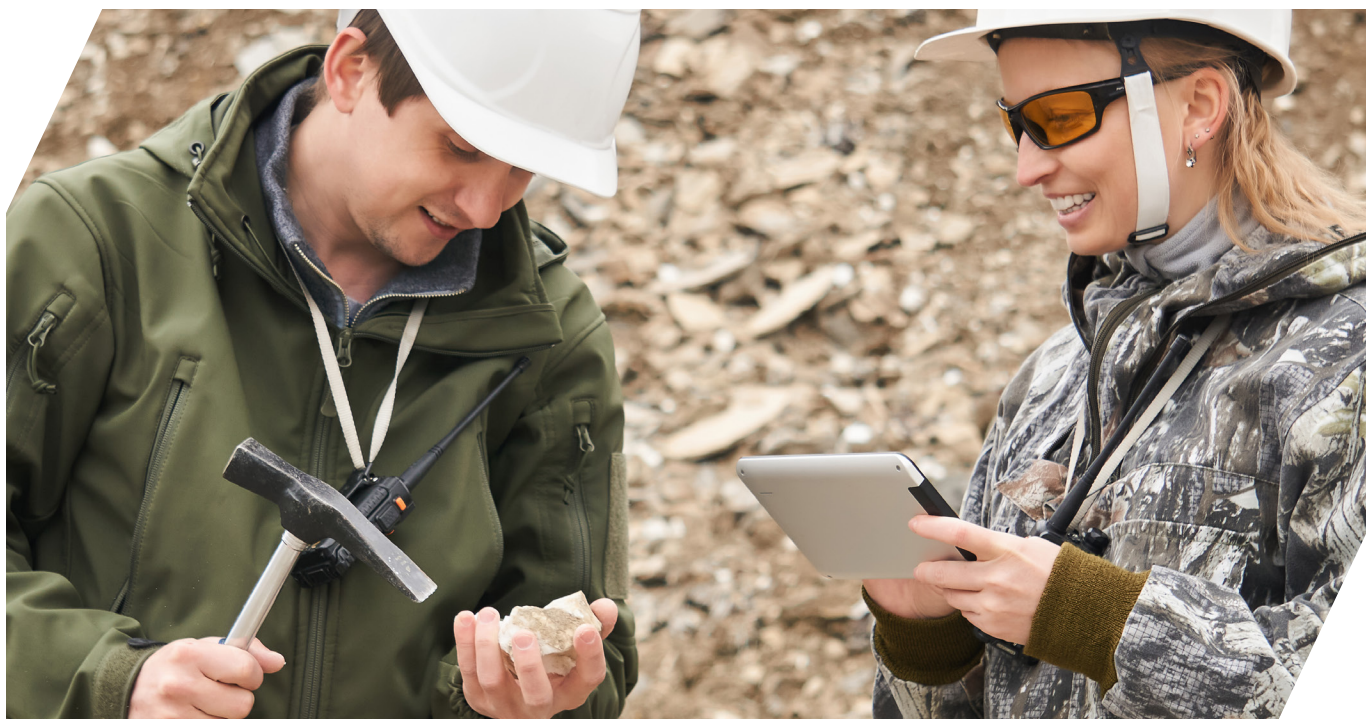
Access to accommodations and accessibility features is critical for ensuring equitable opportunities for youth with disabilities in the career decision-making process.

As a key informant discussed, the adoption of adaptive technologies and additional training may be necessary to enhance the employability for youth with disabilities, and the timing of incorporating these into the career decision process varies based on individual needs. Providing reasonable accommodations, such as accessible facilities, adaptive technologies and specialized support services, enables youth with disabilities to fully engage in career exploration, skill development and workplace activities, thus enhancing their chances of success. Moreover, fostering inclusive attitudes and awareness among educators, employers, and community members is essential for creating environments that value diversity and promote equal opportunities for all youth.

Systemic Barriers and Policy Implications

Despite societal progress in disability rights and inclusion efforts, youth with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers and structural inequities that hinder career advancement.

Research indicates that factors such as stigma, discrimination, lack of access to education and vocational training, and limited employment opportunities contribute to higher rates of unemployment and underemployment among youth with disabilities (Jorgensen Smith et.al, 2014). As a key informant stated, negative attitudes about disabilities within society create barriers to certain career paths for youth with disabilities, as well as the fact that some careers are more accessible and accommodating than others depending on an individual's disability or disabilities and the complexity of their unique needs. Addressing these systemic barriers requires comprehensive approaches that involve policy reforms, advocacy efforts and community collaboration targeted at promoting accessibility, reasonable accommodations and inclusive practices in education, employment and other areas of society (Mentor Canada, 2022). As one key informant reiterated, policies and legislation related to disability rights and inclusion can impact opportunities available to youth with disabilities and therefore supportive policies are needed to enhance the overall landscape for career development.



Recommendations

Overall, the timing of career decision-making for youth with disabilities is highly individualized and may vary based on factors related to an individual's needs, abilities, support systems and personal aspirations. The below are recommendations to help support youth with disabilities pursue meaningful employment opportunities that align with their interests and goals.

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that career support services, resources and facilities are accessible to youth with disabilities. Remove barriers (physical, communication, etc.) to ensure equal participation and engagement.
- **Disability Awareness:** Increase awareness and understanding of disabilities among career counsellors, educators, employers and peers. Provide training to build capacity regarding individualized accommodations and inclusive practices to create supportive and knowledgeable career guidance environments.
- **Individualized Support:** Offer individualized career counselling and support services tailored to the unique strengths, abilities and goals of youth with disabilities. Provide assistance with resume writing, interview preparation and job search strategies, taking into account career/job requirements and any accommodation needs.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Promote work-based learning opportunities such as internships, job shadowing and apprenticeships for youth with disabilities. Advocate for safe, inclusive workplace practices and accommodations to support the participation and success of youth with disabilities in the workforce.
- **Promote the potential of integrating persons with disabilities in the workplace** by positively depicting people who have a variety of disabilities in communications materials.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs for youth with disabilities. Connecting with peers who have similar experiences can provide valuable support, encouragement and guidance in navigating career pathways.



Conclusion

The journey of career decision-making for equity-deserving youth can be a complex and multifaceted one, shaped by intersecting factors of identity, culture and systemic inequities. This literature review and report has delved into some of the challenges and opportunities faced specifically by Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities as they navigate career paths.

This study has aimed to underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing the structural barriers that hinder the career aspirations of equity-deserving youth. From systemic discrimination and limited access to resources to stereotypes and lack of representation, these barriers create challenging obstacles that impede one's ability to pursue passions and fulfill their potential. This study has also provided recommendations that can help support the career decision-making process for Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities. Ultimately this support requires a tailored approach that acknowledges diverse backgrounds, experiences and challenges. Fostering self-determination, building support networks, ensuring access to support services and accommodations, and addressing systemic barriers are essential for empowering Indigenous youth, newcomer youth and youth with disabilities to pursue their career aspirations, achieve meaningful employment outcomes and help recognize their full potential.

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