

Canadian Immigration

Deskilling as a trans-generational social determinant of mental health among Chinese immigrants to Canada

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Background: One in five (~8 million) Canadians is born outside the country. Increased immigration is vital to the growth of Canada's labour force, yet skilled immigrants often face structural barriers that prevent them from attaining jobs in their field of training¹. Deskilling, namely the policies and procedures in host countries that devalue the education and foreign credentials of immigrants, leads to lower earnings and increased poverty among immigrants to Canada and may largely account for the underrepresentation of racialized groups in the upper segments of the Canadian labour market². There is evidence that deskilling in Canada is gendered (e.g., immigrant women from select countries are streamed into low-skill, low-wage positions in the service-sector and manufacturing industry), and may have intergenerational effects, as well as mental health impacts³.

References
 1. McMullen, K. (2009). Earnings differences between immigrants and the Canadian-born: The role of literacy skills. *Education Matters: In sights on Education, Learning and Training in Canada - Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 81-004-X*, 5 (5).
 2. Bauder, H. (2003). "Brain Abuse", or the Devaluation of Immigrant Labour in Canada. *Antipode*, 35, 699-717.
 3. Man, G. (2004). Gender, work and migration: Deskilling Chinese immigrant women in Canada. *Women Studies International Forum*, 27, 135-148.

Study Aims: The proposed qualitative research is a pilot project to explore potential pathways through which deskilling impacts the mental health of immigrants and their children. The focus will be on men and women who immigrated to British Columbia from China, and their adolescent and young adult children. Findings will be used to develop a conceptual model and specific hypotheses to guide my future doctoral research on the intergenerational effects of deskilling on mental health of immigrants.

Methods: The proposed work builds on prior literature review of deskilling and other challenges of immigrant populations in Canada and their potential health impacts (Fang & Goldner, in review). The process of deskilling as a social determinant of mental health of first and second generation immigrants will be explored by designing a semi-structured interview instrument and conducting in-depth interviews on a purposive sample of 10 Chinese immigrants, 5 men and 5 women, half of whom have been deskilled and half who have not. Interviews will be conducted with adolescent and young adult children of these participants. Immigrants will be recruited with assistance of local community-based immigrant support groups including S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and Immigrant Services Society.

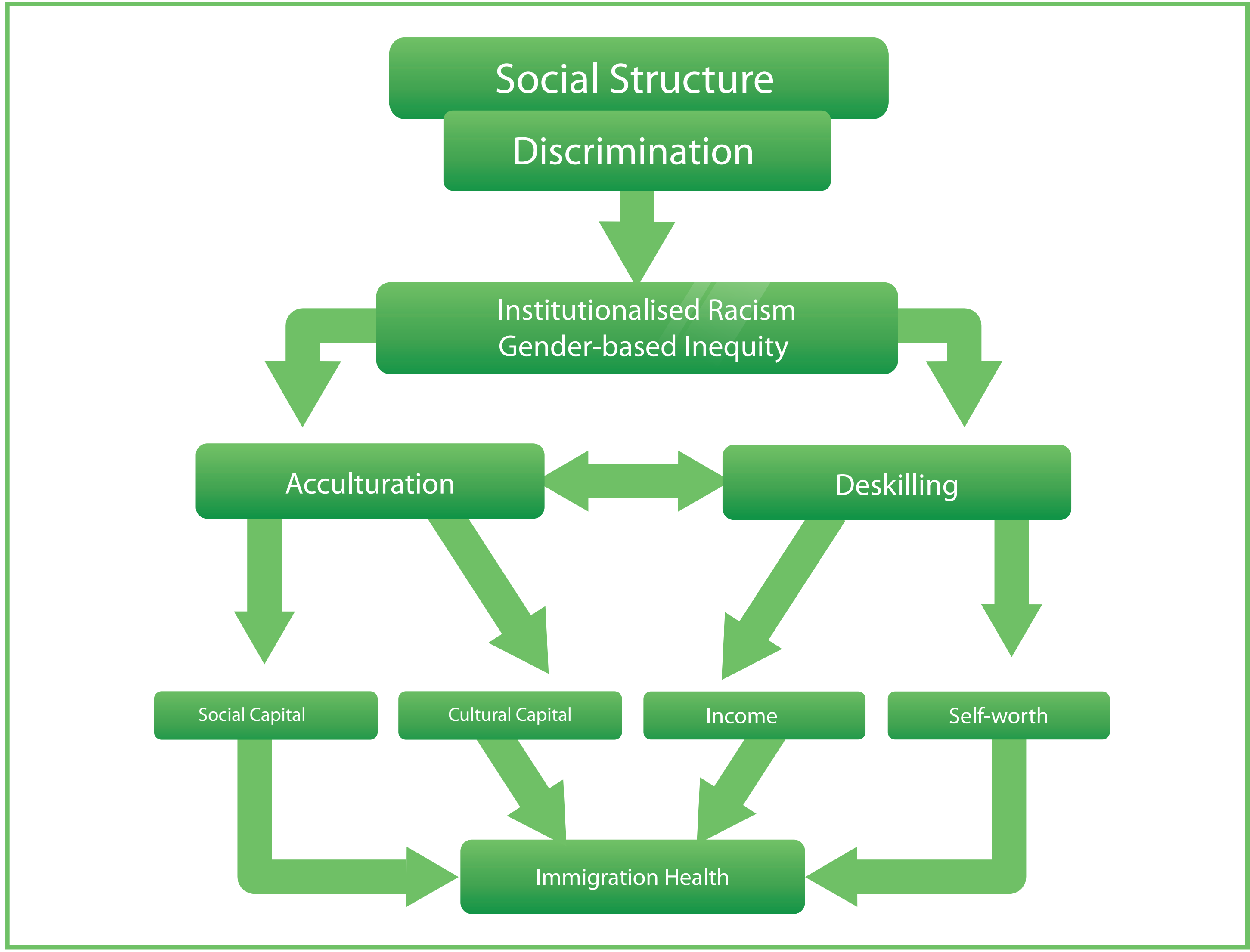


Figure 1. Concept map delineating pathways that affect immigrant health.

Table 1: Mean earnings of women workers by education and origin in Canada, 1980 – 2000. Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2003.

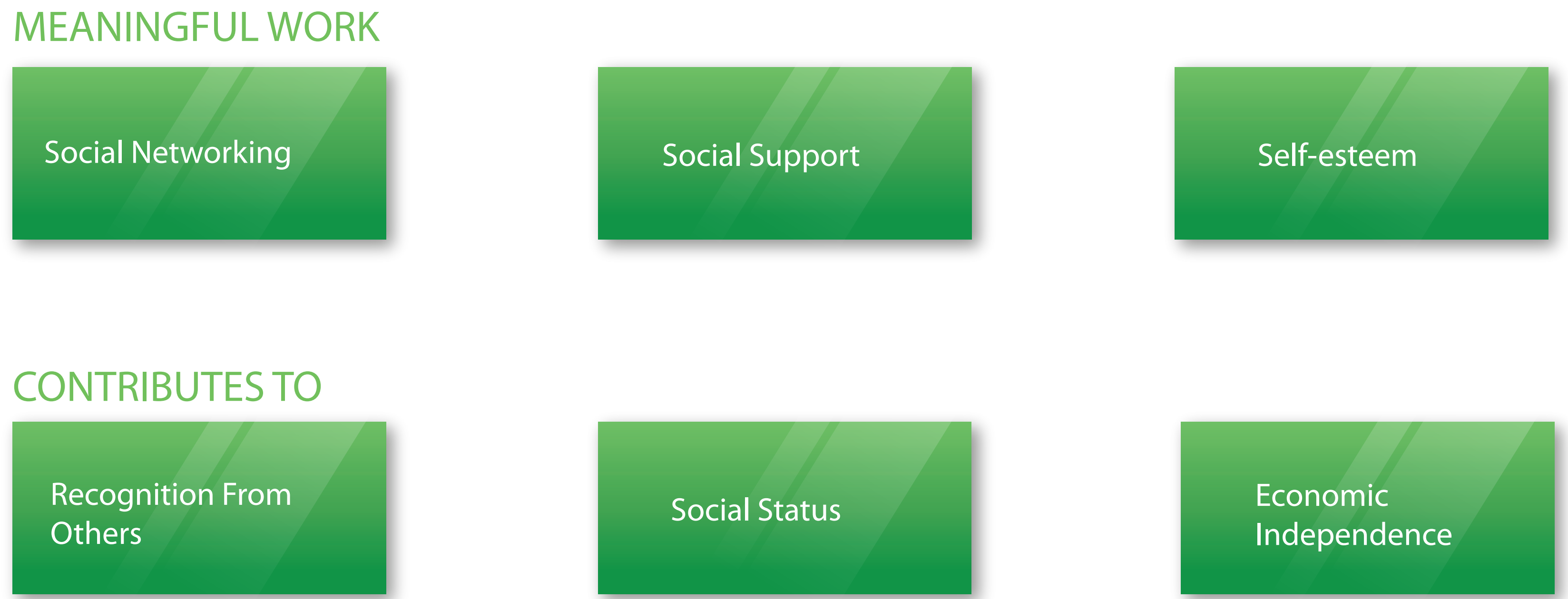
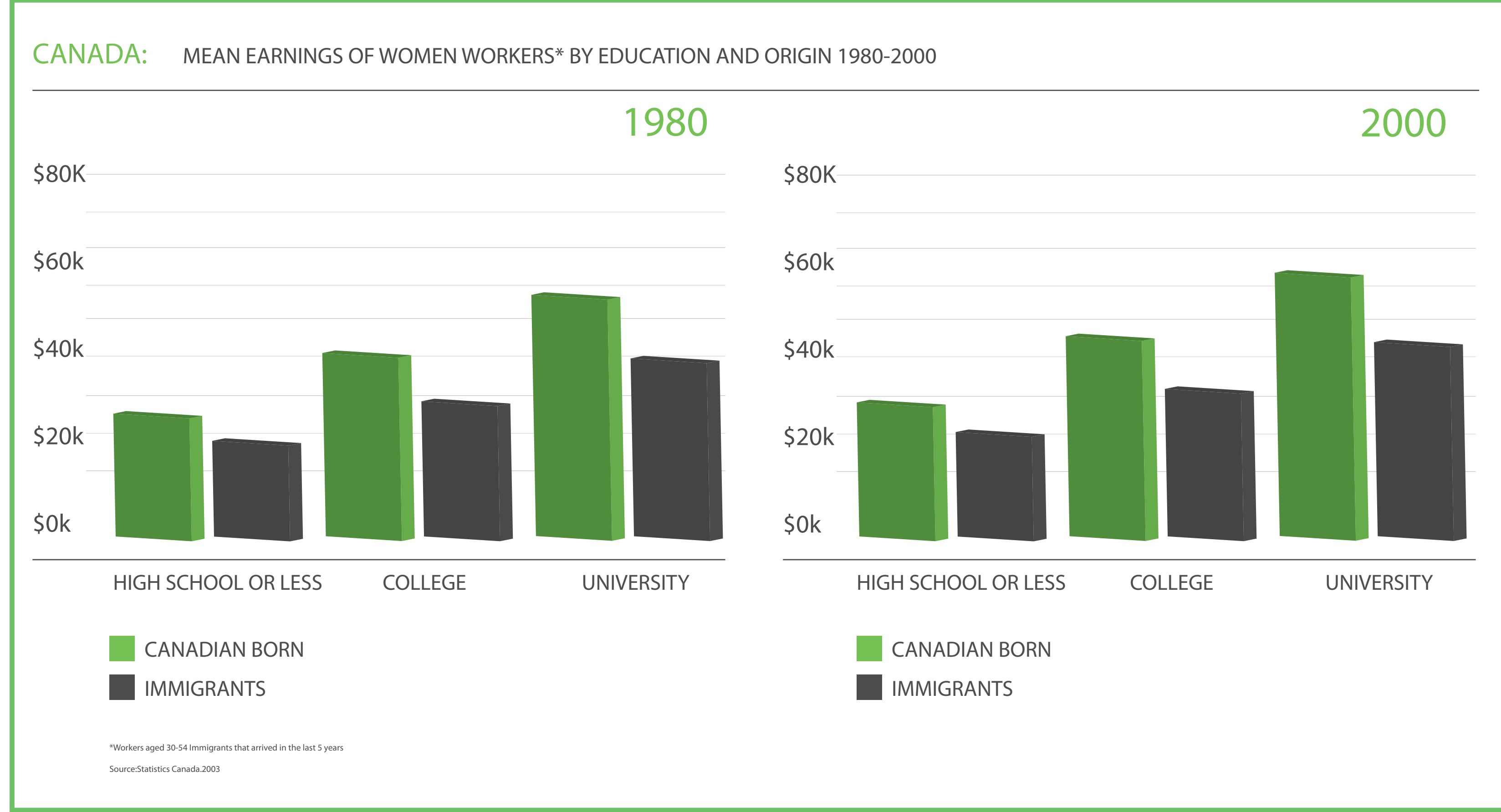


Figure 3. Demonstrates employment as a social determinant of mental health – based on a study by Pottie et al. (2008).

Implications of the research: The proposed research will contribute new knowledge on the linkages among deskilling and mental health among first and second-generation Chinese immigrants to Canada. The resulting conceptual model will delineate pathways through which immigration results in health inequalities between immigrant and Canadian-born populations. Research findings will aid public health and other policymakers in considering macro-, meso- and micro-level interventions to help immigrant groups achieve equity in employment and health.