

Shift's Immigrant Women Work-Integrated Learning Hub Evaluation Study



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Abstract

The objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Immigrant Women Work-Integrated Learning Hub ("Shift-Immigrant Hub") led by Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. Shift-Immigrant Hub has been providing up to three-month work experience placements for internationally trained immigrant women in the university setting since 2017 with 40+ graduates.

Through semi-structured interviews and demographic survey with 11 graduates of the Shift-Immigrant Hub, the study aimed to understand successes and challenges of the program, how program design and implementation might be improved, and the long-term impact of such placements on employment and wellbeing outcomes.

Results show that the program was successful in supporting participants' integration into the Canadian workplace culture, creating safe space and opportunities to improve employment skills, and providing personalized support while short duration of the placements and remote work were identified as some barriers to successful completion of the program.

Methodology

- Data collection comprised of a brief demographic survey and 1-hour in-depth semi-structured interviews.
- 39 graduates were invited to the study, 11 agreed to participate.
- Survey collected basic demographic information about graduates to better understand the characteristics of those who participated in the work placement.
- Interview guide consisted of 12 questions that explored participants' perceptions about the successes and challenges of the work placement program, as well as potential enhancements and long-term impact.
- Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Analysis is ongoing and preliminary results are shown below.

Results

Theme 1: Unique Qualities of Shift-Immigrant Hub and Positive Outcomes of the Program

Participants identified that Shift-Immigrant Hub was successful in:

- Increasing participants' employment outcomes: All participants gained sustainable employment with their preferred careers within six months.
- Supporting participants' integration into the Canadian work culture:
 - Improved technical and interpersonal skills relevant to the Canadian work force.
 - Provided personalized career mentoring, supervision, and support.
- Increasing participants' overall wellbeing: Some participants reported positive changes in their personal lives.

Theme 2: Challenges and Areas for Improvement

The participants identified the following:

- Remote work and isolation during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Short program duration (current placements are 1-3 months).
- Cultural barrier and loneliness as a newcomer.
- Delays in UCalgary hiring procedures.
- Not having enough tasks to work on.

Theme 3: Directions for Enhancing Program Design and Implementation

Participants recommended the following improvements:

- Provide more opportunities for in-person work experience, connection and engagement with Shift's team, other students, and alumni.
- Provide mentorship opportunities by previous graduates of the program.
- Provide opportunities for job shadowing within and outside of UCalgary.
- Process hire before practicums are started and accelerate the hiring process.
- Provide clear set of activities and assign interns to specific projects throughout their placements.

"The main barrier was, of course, the COVID, and everything was remote. That was one thing [because] it was my first work based in Canada, so understanding things remotely was a bit challenging."
(Participant)

"The only thing that I would say would make this experience a little [better] is something like a networking opportunity. They could arrange something every month. Call everyone for lunch...a monthly get-together or something would help the new students to actually know about how it operates in Canada, or they can even do kind of a mentorship program with the previous graduates." (Participant)

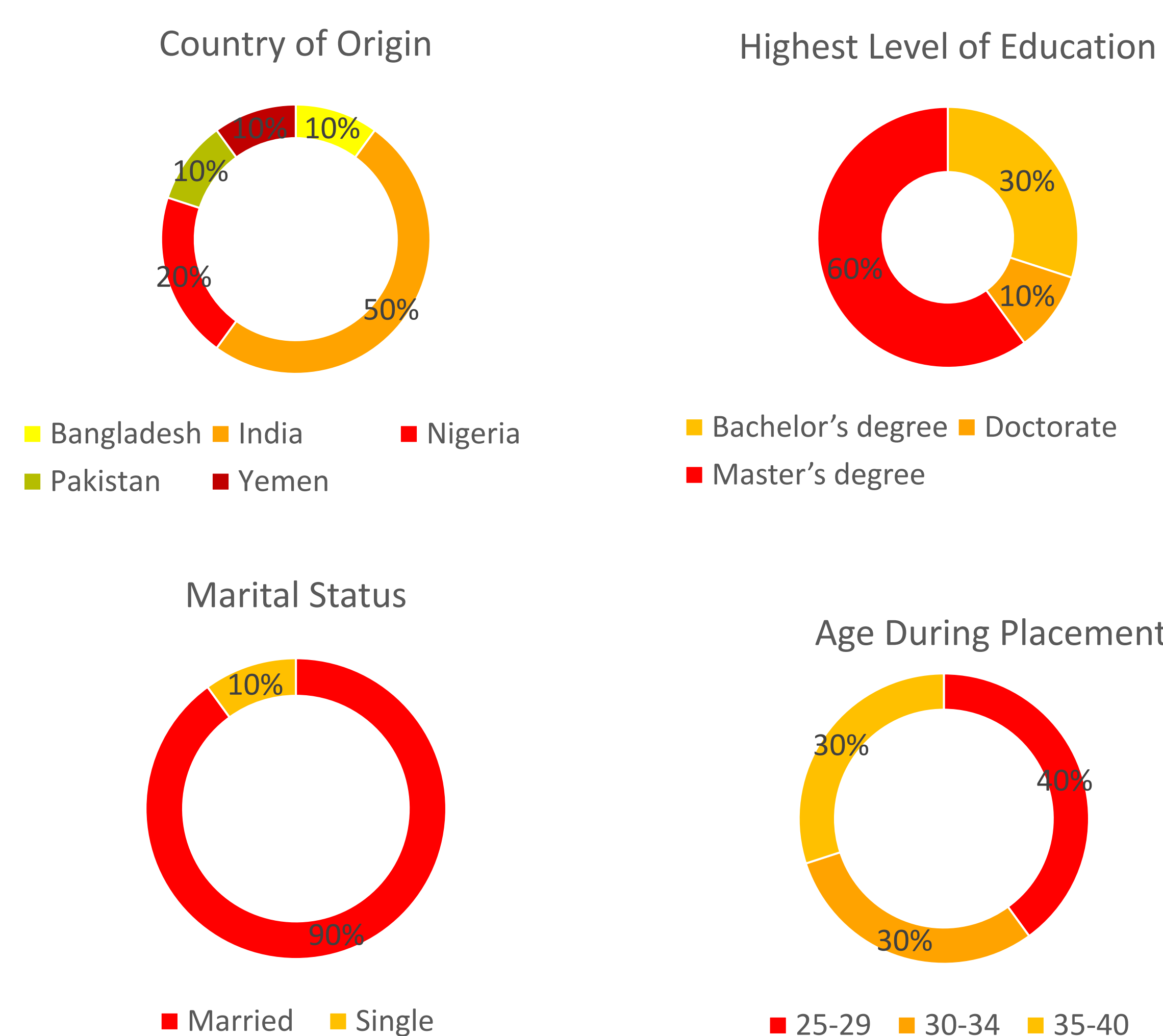
Conclusion

Overall, this study highlights the importance of providing tailored workplace programs for immigrant women to support integration and gain employment. The findings of this research will be used to enhance the design and implementation of the Shift-Immigrant Hub, and to develop a sustainability plan for scaling the program within the University of Calgary.

Acknowledgments

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Participants' Demographic Information



"The most exciting part of my internship is the support and the time that I received from my supervisor beyond her limit she did a lot, for example, improving my business communication...she spent her time. That [was] not part of the internship, but she did it for my career development." (Participant)