

Unlocking Potential: An Analysis of the Key Predictors of Labour Force Participation Among African Immigrant Women in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the key predictors of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. It addresses a gap in the current literature that often generalizes the experiences of all Black immigrant women, including those from highly developed economies. Using data from the 2021 Census Public Use Microdata File (PUMF) on individuals, this research explores the socio-demographic factors influencing employment outcomes, specifically educational attainment, language proficiency, and marital status. The findings reveal that higher educational qualifications and proficiency in both official Canadian languages significantly enhance the likelihood of labour force participation for African immigrant women. In contrast, marital status presents a complex relationship, with never-married women showing greater participation rates than their married counterparts. This research contributes to our understanding of the unique experiences of African immigrant women. It expands knowledge on the broader discourse on immigration, diversity, and economic integration in Canada.

1. Introduction

Canada has a long history of welcoming immigrants from all over the world. Among these immigrants are thousands of individuals from Africa who have chosen Canada as their new home. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the presence of African immigrant women in Canada, which has sparked considerable interest and attention (Gerba, 2023; Government of Canada, 2023; McGarvey, 2022; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2022). At the same time, the country is challenged with labour shortages and an ageing population (Ferreira, 2023; Stephenson, 2022). As these women navigate the complexities of settling in a new country, including finding employment, it becomes imperative to understand the factors that influence their labour force participation.

While previous studies have examined the labour force participation of immigrant women in general, there is a notable gap in research specifically focusing on African immigrant women

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in Canada. Existing studies across Canada and the United States largely address the broader category of "Black immigrant women" (Djamba & Kimuna, 2012; Solati et al., 2023) and are often driven by concerns of racism or racial discrimination in employment opportunities. This approach groups together individuals from diverse backgrounds, including the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia, with distinct cultural norms and gender-role perceptions. As a result, relying solely on studies that include such mixed groups does not adequately capture the unique predictors of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. This gap calls for focused investigation beyond racial categorizations.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the socio-demographic factors that determine whether an African immigrant woman participates in the Canadian labour force. Specifically, it examines the influence of educational attainment, knowledge of Canadian language, and marital status on the likelihood of labour force participation. By exploring these predictors, it seeks to shed light on the unique experiences of African immigrant women and provide insights into the factors that enable or hinder their engagement in the labour market. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by expanding our understanding of the socio-demographic determinants of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada.

Drawing on data from the 2021 Canadian Census, this study addresses two research questions:

- i. What socio-demographic factors determine whether an African immigrant woman participates in the Canadian labour force?
- ii. How do educational attainment, knowledge of Canadian language, and marital status predict, on average, the likelihood of African immigrant women participating in the labour force, when other factors are held at their mean?

2. Background and Literature Review

In 2021, the number of women and girls in Canadian private households reached about 18.4 million, representing nearly half of the population living in private households. Among them, 23.8% were immigrants, many of whom were highly educated and participating in the labour force (Government of Canada, 2023). The labour force participation among immigrant women has been increasing steadily over the past several decades.

The unique challenges African immigrant women face in adapting to Canada provide strong rationale for exploring the predictors of their labour force participation (Ghadi et al., 2023; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). These women bring with them a rich cultural heritage, experiences, and aspirations, which shape their integration into the Canadian labour market. By identifying the determinants that influence their participation, we gain insights into how to support their economic empowerment and successful integration.

The predictors of labour force participation among African immigrant women are both important and timely for several reasons. First, African immigrant women represent a diverse and dynamic group that contributes to the cultural, social, and economic fabric of Canada. Their integration impacts not only their individual well-being but also has broader implications for Canadian society. Second, their labour force participation intersects with wider discussions on diversity, inclusion, and equity (Government of Canada, 2022). Understanding these predictors can inform policies and interventions designed to foster a more equitable and inclusive society. Third, implementing policies that foster the labour market integration of African immigrant women in Canada will position the nation as one that indeed values and leverages the skills of all. Based on this background, the rest of this section discusses the findings from previous research.

The labour force participation of immigrant women has been the subject of considerable academic inquiry, revealing a complex interplay of different factors. Previous research has shown that higher levels of educational attainment are generally associated with increased labour force participation rates among immigrant women, though the relationship is not always consistent due to factors beyond individual characteristics (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Schieckoff, 2024; Solati et al., 2023). For example, using longitudinal data, Solati et al. (2023) found that immigrant women from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region who migrated to Canada with higher levels of education had significantly higher odds of participating in the labour force. However, their analysis does not exclusively focus on African immigrant women, leaving a gap in understanding how educational attainment impacts their specific demographic. This highlights the need for targeted research that addresses the unique socio-demographic factors influencing African immigrant women's labour force participation in Canada.

Language proficiency is another key factor influencing labour market engagement. Studies indicate that effective communication in the host country's official languages is essential for securing employment and advancing in one's career (Ghadi et al., 2023; Solati et al., 2023). Therefore, it serves as a key driver for immigrant women's integration into the labour market. Yet, immigrant women facing language barriers often encounter significant challenges in finding suitable employment opportunities, which can limit their labour force participation. These women may be relegated to lower-skilled jobs. Understanding the effect of language proficiency for African immigrant women in Canada is essential for promoting their economic empowerment and successful integration into the labour force.

A considerable body of research has consistently shown that marital status can have an impact on women's labour force participation (Flippen, 2014; Lee et al., 2008; Samper & Kreyenfeld, 2021; Zhang et al., 2008). Specifically, studies indicate that being in a "married" state often reduces the likelihood of women actively participating in the labour force. This finding may hold true, especially for African immigrant women who originate from countries where the institution of marriage is shaped by a broader patriarchal cultural system. In many African communities, cultural expectations around marital roles may influence women's decisions to engage in the labour force. Within a patriarchal framework, women are more likely to face societal pressure to prioritize their roles as wives and mothers with child-rearing responsibilities over pursuing career opportunities (Flippen, 2014). This can result in a lower labour force participation rate among married African immigrant women compared to their unmarried counterparts. Similarly, cultural norms and expectations surrounding marriage and gender roles have been found to potentially create barriers for some immigrant women, influencing their decision to prioritize household responsibilities over employment (Blau et al., 2011; Wang, 2019).

Aside from the aforementioned variables, several other socio-demographic predictors play a significant role in determining the labour force participation of immigrant women. Commonly used control variables in the existing literature, such as age group, immigration admission category, region of residence, spouse/partner's income, and the presence of children, are crucial variables to consider in understanding their employment engagement (Djamba & Kimuna, 2012; Flippen, 2014; Solati et al., 2023). Uncommon additional factors found in a recent study that relied on structured survey data rather than a census dataset in Canada includes having Canadian work experience, possessing Canadian credentials, and having access to a vehicle as predictors of labour force participation for newcomers (Ghadi et al., 2023). For instance, age group is an important determinant of labour force participation among immigrant women.

However, research shows inconsistent patterns in female labour force participation by age. It varies from one country to another. While it is higher for younger women in some geographic locations, it is lower in others (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2024). In some cases, younger women tend to have higher labour force participation rates compared to older cohorts. This can be attributed to factors such as higher education levels, fewer family responsibilities, and greater flexibility in career choices. However, since this result is not consistent across all studies, there is a need to investigate it at national or regional levels. For example, a study of the determinants of labour supply among immigrant Latina women in Durham, North Carolina, showed that older women have a higher likelihood of participating in the labour market than their younger counterparts (Flippen, 2014).

The presence of children in the household is another significant factor that affects the labour force participation of immigrant women. Balancing work and family responsibilities can be particularly challenging for immigrant women, as they may face additional barriers such as limited access to affordable childcare or cultural expectations surrounding maternal roles. As aforementioned, research indicates that the presence of young children often reduces labour force participation rates among immigrant women.

The immigration admission category of immigrant women also influences their labour force participation. Different admission categories, such as skilled worker programs or economic class immigrants, family sponsorship, as well as refugee status, can differently impact their access to employment opportunities and their level of job readiness upon arrival in the host country. Studies have shown that immigrants admitted through the economic class or skilled worker programs tend to have higher labour force participation rates due to their pre-existing qualifications, skills, and high motivations to find employment. For example, a study on the labour force participation of immigrant women in Canada showed that refugee-class immigrants have lower odds of labour force participation compared to those that came through the economic class (Solati et al., 2023).

Based on the literature reviewed, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1: African immigrant women with higher educational qualifications will exhibit higher odds of participating in the Canadian labour force compared to those with lower educational qualifications.

Hypothesis 2: African immigrant women who possess knowledge of both official Canadian languages (English and French) will demonstrate a higher likelihood of participating in the Canadian labour force compared to those who have proficiency in only one language.

Hypothesis 3: Never-married African immigrant women will display a greater probability of participating in the Canadian labour force compared to those who are married or living in a common-law relationship.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Data

This study analyzed the labour force participation of African immigrant women in Canada using data from the 2021 Census of Population of Canada. The Census is conducted every five years and is a reliable source of information on the Canadian population, providing socio-demographic characteristics such as education, immigration status, and language proficiency. Specifically, the study used the 2021 Census Public Use Microdata File (PUMF) on individuals, which represents approximately 2.7% of the Canadian population of 36,328,477

anonymous persons at the time of the enumeration (Statistics Canada, 2023). This allowed for robust statistical analysis.

In terms of sample size, variables, and coverage, the 2021 Census PUMF Individual File contains 980,868 observations and 144 variables that cover individual, household, and dwelling units. Nonetheless, this file excludes individuals living in institutions, Canadian citizens temporarily living abroad, full-time Canadian Forces members stationed in locations outside Canada, and certain other persons living in institutional and non-institutional collective dwellings as stipulated in the documentation and user guide. Nevertheless, these exclusions do not significantly diminish the quality of social and economic data that the file contains. It is worth noting that the response rate was significantly high, at 97.4%.

Although the lack of weight variables in the PUMF dataset is a limitation, it is important to emphasize that unweighted analyses can still yield meaningful insights when the research is focused on relationships between variables rather than producing population-level estimates. As some quantitative researchers note, weighted and unweighted models often produce similar regression coefficients, particularly when the predictors of interest are socio-demographic characteristics (Bollen et al., 2016; Gelman, 2007; Oremus et al., 2022; Solon et al., 2015). In this study, the primary goal is explanatory (understanding determinants of labour force participation) rather than producing descriptive national estimates, which makes the unweighted approach theoretically defensible. Nevertheless, results should be interpreted with caution and not be generalized to the entire Canadian population of African immigrant women without acknowledging this limitation.

3.2. Analytical Sample

The target population of this research was Africans who were landed immigrants or permanent residents (Statistics Canada, 2021) and who identified their gender as “woman+” among the newly introduced official binary categories (Woman+ and Man+) that comprise a confidential distribution of a small number of individuals who identified themselves as non-binary persons (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Additionally, it targeted individuals who were of working age in Canada, that is, 15-64 years, as of the reference day of census data collection—May 11, 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023). Therefore, it was necessary to obtain the analytical sample by applying purposive sampling in excluding the observations outside the predefined criteria for inclusion in this study.

The first restriction criterion was chosen to ensure that the analytical sample included only persons who identified themselves as Africans, according to one of the following regions of origin as was stipulated in the original categorical options for the “Place of birth of person” variable: Eastern Africa, Northern Africa, and Other Africa. Instead of the variable for citizenship, this variable was used in applying the first criterion because it helps to include all persons who reported that they were born in geographical boundaries considered to be in Africa at the time of data collection, thereby disregarding their citizenship factor, which could be multiple and is subject to change. For the second criterion, the analytical sample was restricted to observations belonging to the “Immigrants” category using the “Immigration: Immigrant status” variable in the dataset. To satisfy the third criterion, the study restricted the sample to “Women+” using the “Gender of person (binary)” variable, thereby dropping all observations belonging to the “Men+” subcategory. For the fourth and final sampling criterion, the study used the categorical variable labelled “Age” to identify and restrict the analysis to only the respondents between the age groups ranging from 15 to 64 years. These people correspond to the official working-age population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022a, 2022b).

It is worth noting that at each stage of data restriction, all observations belonging to the “Not available” and “Not applicable” subcategories of variables were dropped. The former cases refer to missing data or responses belonging to a few observations that were officially made confidential (not disclosed) by Statistics Canada, while the latter represent data from persons that the variable or question did not practically apply to. The same exclusion decision was made during data preprocessing. The observations with missing data were all less than one percent in the frequency distribution of the subcategories of their corresponding variables in the dataset. Instead of listwise deletion, other techniques for handling missing values would have been considered where practically applicable (see Brick & Kalton, 1996; Buhi et al., 2008), but not in this case.

After applying all restriction criteria and cleaning the data for missing and not applicable values across the variables of interest, the final analytical sample size (N) was 7,802. These represent African immigrant women of working age in Canada as of the time of the 2021 Census data collection.

3.3. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this analysis is labour force status, which is a categorical outcome variable that refers to whether an individual was employed, unemployed, or not in the labour force in Canada during the reference week of May 2 to May 8, 2021. While it was originally a multinomial variable with 14 categorical options that ranged from “Employed—worked in reference week” to “Not in the labour force—never worked,” a binary conversion was applied by recoding it to only two groups: those who were in the labour force (all employed and unemployed merged) and those who were not in the labour force (that is, not seeking employment or not interested in joining the labour force). Thus, dummy coding was implemented, with “0” assigned to “Not in the labour force” and “1” to “In the labour force.”

3.4. Independent Variables

Based on the importance of certain socio-demographic factors that often significantly influence labour force participation of immigrants, as outlined in the literature review, the study includes three focal independent variables: educational attainment, knowledge of any of the official Canadian languages (English and French), and marital status. For educational attainment, the variable for the highest educational qualification obtained, which had 13 subcategories, was used to construct a new variable with four subcategories ranging from “No educational qualification” to “University certificate or higher” and was coded one to four, where the reference category is no educational qualification. For Canadian language knowledge, the variable for knowledge of official languages, which has four categories, was used without recoding, where the reference category is English-only users. For the third focal predictor, the marital status (de facto) variable with six response options was added without recoding, where the reference category is the “Never-married (not living common law)” women.

In addition to the aforementioned three focal independent variables, the study included two control variables. Just like the focal predictors, the selection of control variables was guided by the literature review and the applicable variables in the chosen dataset. The first control variable is age, which had 11 subcategories that were recoded to these 3 subcategories: young adults aged 15-24 years, adults aged 25-44 years (reference group), and older adults aged 45-64 years. The second control variable is immigration admission category, which has three subcategories: economic immigrants (reference category), immigrants sponsored by family and other immigrants, and refugees. This variable indicates the name of the immigration

program under which a permanent resident was first granted the right to live in Canada between January 1, 1980, and May 11, 2021.

Whereas years since immigration, which is also known as length of residence in the foreign country, is often added as a control variable in the literature (Djamba & Kimuna, 2012; Flippen, 2014; Solati et al., 2023), this variable is unavailable in the 2021 Census PUMF. The available closely related alternative in the dataset was age at immigration. However, this variable was excluded for some reasons: first, it is not the same as years since immigration, which can capture the potential impact of the settlement and integration process over time; second, it was highly correlated with the age group variable; third, adding it during the testing of models did not substantially change the odds ratios or significance of the independent variables—there was just a little change in the decimals; fourth, it was not statistically significant for almost all its 13 subcategories, which range from 0-4 years of age to 60 years and over, except for women aged 15 to 19 years at the time of immigration.

Another potential control variable is the presence of children or kids, because this could influence the likelihood of labour force participation by reason of having to manage the family responsibility of spending time caring for children. While this variable was in the Census dataset, it was not controlled for in this study because the research is not focused on women in conjugal relationships. Moreover, a substantial distribution of respondents for this variable in the analytical sample belonged to the “Not applicable” (13.29%) and “Not available” (2.18%) cases. Dropping this missing data was likely to result in dropping many women who were neither married (or living common law) nor living in census families in private households at the reference period (Statistics Canada, 2023). Therefore, excluding this variable from the analysis was a way to ensure that all African immigrant women, irrespective of their marital or family composition, were considered in the analysis.

3.5. Methods

Descriptive and multivariate analyses were performed to achieve the research objective. In the descriptive part, the study presents the percentage distribution of the sample of African immigrant women in the 2021 Census (PUMF, Individuals File) by their labour force status and the selected socio-demographic characteristics. To examine the socio-demographic predictors of the likelihood of an African immigrant woman participating in the Canadian labour force, this study estimated two binary logistic regression models. The first one is a regression of labour force status on the focal socio-demographic independent variables, while the second controls for the effects of two other socio-demographic factors—age and immigration admission category.

The choice of binary logistic regression as the method for this study is appropriate given the dichotomous nature of the outcome variable (Pituch & Stevens, 2015), which is whether or not an African immigrant woman is participating in the Canadian labour force. This method allows for the examination of the socio-demographic predictors of participation, including factors such as education, language proficiency, and marital status. Moreover, binary logistic regression is a commonly used method in social sciences to examine the relationship between categorical outcomes and a set of predictor variables (Agresti, 2017). The use of logistic regression models also allows for the estimation of the probability of participation in the labour force for different subgroups of the population, such as women from different African countries. Furthermore, logistic regression models can be used to assess the marginal effects of each predictor variable on the outcome variable, which can provide valuable insights into the relative importance of different factors in determining labour force participation among African immigrant women.

For research question two, post-estimation analysis was conducted. In other words, the second logistic regression model was used to obtain predicted probabilities as regards the average marginal effects of each of the focal independent variables, namely educational attainment, knowledge of official Canadian languages, and marital status, on the odds of labour force participation for African immigrant women. The other covariates were held at their means.

When using the logistic regression method, results can be presented as coefficients, also referred to as log odds, or as odds ratios (also known as exponentiated coefficients) (Norton & Dowd, 2018; Peng et al., 2002). An odds ratio greater than 1 indicates that there is a positive association between the independent variable and the outcome variable. It suggests that as the independent variable increases, the odds of the outcome occurring also increase. In other words, there is a higher likelihood of the event or outcome happening when the independent variable is present or has a higher value. On the other hand, an odds ratio less than 1 signifies a negative association between the independent variable and the outcome variable. It indicates that as the independent variable increases, the odds of the outcome occurring decrease. Put differently, the presence or higher value of the independent variable with an odds ratio below 1 is associated with a lower likelihood of the event or outcome happening. This suggests an inverse relationship between the independent variable and the probability of the outcome. In this research, the results of the regression analyses are presented in odds ratios.

4. Findings

4.1. Sample Distribution

Table 1 presents descriptive results for the dependent and independent variables in the analysis. Concerning labour force status, the majority (71.34%) were in the labour force, while 28.66% were not in the labour force. In terms of educational attainment, a significant proportion (45.85%) had a university certificate or higher qualification, indicating a highly educated sample. Additionally, 23.81% had some college or trade qualification, and 17.05% had a high school qualification. However, 13.29% did not have any educational qualification. When it came to knowledge of Canadian official languages, nearly half (47.81%) of the respondents had knowledge of English only, while 30.94% had knowledge of both English and French. Around one-fifth (19.76%) had knowledge of French only, and a small percentage (1.49%) did not know either English or French. The marital status of the respondents revealed that the majority (58.49%) were married, while 25.04% had never been married. Smaller proportions were separated (4.56%), divorced (6.52%), living in a common-law relationship (3.70%), or widowed (1.68%). Regarding age distribution, over half (53.55%) of the respondents were adults aged 25-44 years, indicating a significant representation of working-age individuals. Around one-third (34%) were older adults aged 45-64 years, and a smaller proportion (12.45%) were young adults aged 15-24 years. Finally, in terms of immigration admission category, nearly half (46.30%) of the respondents were economic immigrants, while 25.97% were refugees. The remaining 27.74% were immigrants sponsored by family and other immigrants.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of African immigrant women by labour force status and the selected socio-demographic variables (N = 7,802)

Characteristics	Percent
Labour force status (dependent variable)	
Not in the labour force	28.66
In the labour force	71.34
Educational attainment	
No educational qualification	13.29
High school qualification	17.05

Characteristics	Percent
Some college or trade qualification	23.81
University certificate or higher	45.85
Knowledge of official Canadian languages	
English only	47.81
French only	19.76
English and French	30.94
Neither English nor French	1.49
Marital status	
Never married	25.04
Married	58.49
Living common law	3.70
Separated	4.56
Divorced	6.52
Widowed	1.68
Age	
Young adults (aged 15-24 years)	12.45
Adults (aged 25-44 years)	53.55
Older adults (aged 45-64 years)	34
Immigration admission category	
Economic immigrants	46.30
Immigrants sponsored by family and other immigrants	27.74
Refugees	25.97

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census (Public Use Micro Data File, Individuals)

4.2. Multivariate Regression Results

4.2.1. Socio-demographic Determinants of Labour Force Participation

Turning to the socio-demographic factors determining whether an African immigrant woman participates in the Canadian labour force or not, Table 2 presents the analytical findings. It shows the odds ratios from the two logistic regression analyses conducted to investigate the direction and magnitude of relationships between the outcome variable (labour force participation status) and the selected independent variables (Peng et al., 2002). A major difference between the two models is that the second (Model 2) includes the control variables.

Table 2. Odds ratios of logistic regression of labour force participation of African immigrant women in Canada on selected socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Model 1	Model 2
(Dependent variable: Labour force status)		
Educational attainment (Ref.: No educational qualification)		
High school qualification	2.250*** (0.194)	2.192*** (0.191)
Some college or trade qualification	4.515*** (0.389)	3.929*** (0.347)
University certificate or higher	6.265*** (0.507)	5.143*** (0.448)
Knowledge of Canadian languages (Ref.: English only)		
French only	1.044 (0.0742)	1.054 (0.0763)
English and French	1.271*** (0.0811)	1.324*** (0.0871)
Neither English nor French	0.312*** (0.0728)	0.304*** (0.0710)
Marital status (Ref.: Never married)		
Married	0.931	0.643***

Characteristics	Model 1	Model 2
	(0.0609)	(0.0562)
Living common law	1.466*	1.088
	(0.232)	(0.180)
Separated	0.977	0.668**
	(0.129)	(0.0965)
Divorced	1.442**	0.968
	(0.179)	(0.135)
Widowed	0.742	0.477***
	(0.152)	(0.102)
Age Group (Ref.: Adults aged 25-44 years)		
Young adults aged 15-24 years		0.475***
		(0.0505)
Older adults aged 45-64 years		1.136*
		(0.0706)
Immigration admission category (Ref.: Economic immigrants)		
Immigrants sponsored by family and other immigrants		0.797***
		(0.0534)
Refugees		0.844*
		(0.0607)
Maximum log likelihood	-4262.511	-4227.36
N (Number of observations)	7802	7802
Exponentiated coefficients (odds ratios); standard errors in parentheses		
Statistical significance levels: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001		

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census (Public Use Micro Data File, Individuals)

The interpretation focuses only on statistically significant results, which is in line with the conventional approach. Both models consistently showed that higher educational attainment was a strong positive predictor of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. In Model 1, compared to those with no educational qualification, women with a high school qualification were 2.25 times (125% higher odds) more likely, those with some college/trade qualifications were 4.52 times (352% higher odds) more likely, and those with a university certificate or higher were 6.27 times (527% higher odds) more likely to participate in the labour force. While the odds ratios generally diminished in Model 2 after accounting for age and admission immigration factors, the pattern persisted—those with a university certificate or higher were still 5.14 times (414% higher odds) more likely to participate in the labour force than the group without educational qualification. This result is generally consistent with hypothesis 1, where it was expected that having higher educational qualifications increases the likelihood of labour force participation for African immigrant women.

Knowledge of official Canadian languages also mattered, with Model 1 indicating that those proficient in both English and French had 27% higher odds (1.27 times) of labour force participation compared to English-only speakers. The magnitude of this association increased to 32% higher odds (1.32 times) in Model 2. Conversely, not knowing either English or French was associated with significantly lower odds in both models (68.8% lower odds or 3.21 times less likelihood in Model 1 and 69.6% lower odds or 3.29 times less likelihood in Model 2). Based on this result, hypothesis 2 is supported, as African immigrant women with language proficiency in English and French demonstrate higher likelihoods of labour force participation than other groups.

Interestingly, marital status effects on labour force participation differed across models. In Model 1, being in a common-law relationship predicted 47% higher odds (1.47 times) of participation, and being divorced predicted 44% higher odds (1.44 times), when compared to being never married. However, once age and immigration were controlled for in Model 2, the

situation changed. Then, compared to never-married women, lower labour force participation likelihoods were predicted for all groups of African immigrant women as follows: being married (35.7% lower odds or 1.55 times less likely), separated (33.2% lower odds or 1.49 times less likely), and widowed (52.3% lower odds or 2.09 times less likely). Therefore, accounting for the effects of age and immigration admission category, this finding supports the third hypothesis that never-married women would have a greater probability of participating in the labour force compared to those who are married or living in a common-law relationship. But this is surprisingly not consistent in the analysis.

Regarding the control variables in Model 2, compared to the 25-44 age group, younger adults aged 15-24 had 52.5% lower odds (2.11 times less likely) of participation, while older adults aged 45-64 had 13.6% higher odds (1.14 times more likely). Immigration class also mattered, with family/other immigrants being 1.25 times (20.3%) less likely and refugees 1.18 times (15.6%) less likely to participate versus economic immigrants.

4.2.2. Post-estimation Analysis Results: Adjusted Predictions for the Focal Independent Variables

For research question two, the average marginal effects of each of the three focal independent variables on the outcome variable (labour force participation) were estimated using the logistic regression results of Model 2. The study performed the post-estimation analysis for educational attainment, language knowledge, and marital status with all other covariates held at their means, and the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) indicated.

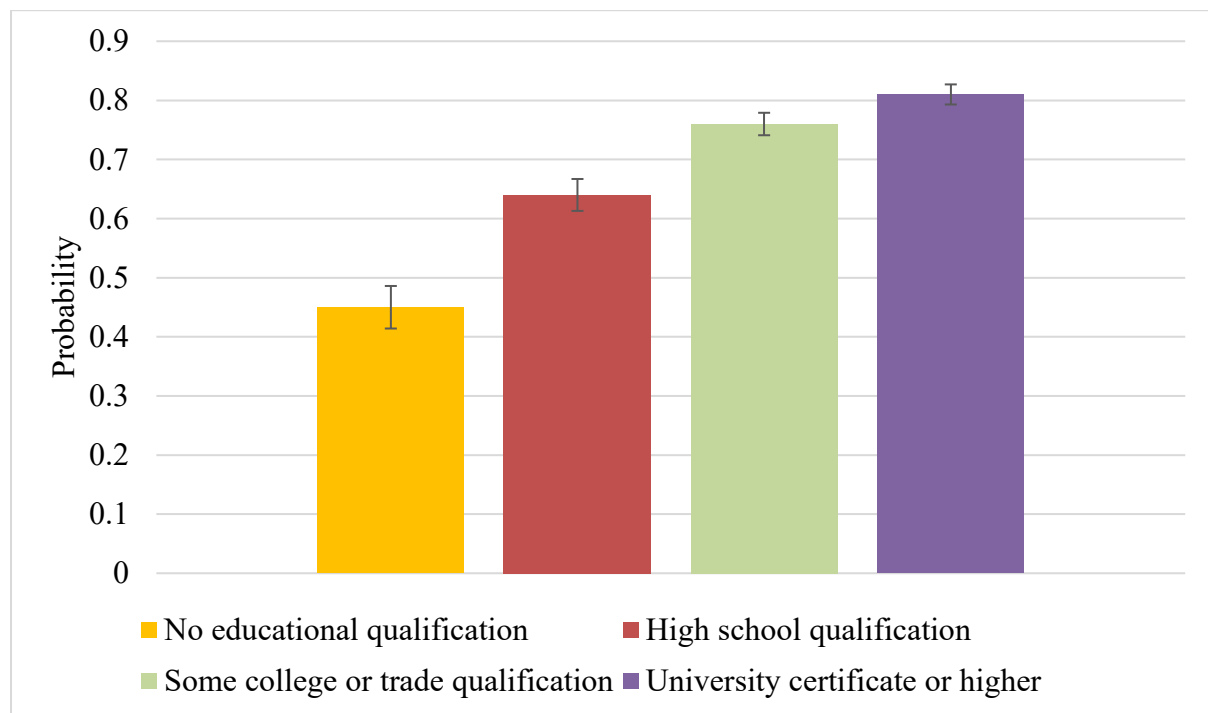


Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of labour force participation by educational attainment (95% CIs)
 Source: Author's prediction using Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data (Public Use Micro Data File, Individuals)

Figure 1 presents the predicted probabilities of labour force participation by educational attainment, along with their corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs). The results indicate that African immigrant women with no educational qualification have a predicted probability of labour force participation of 0.45 (95% CI: 0.41, 0.48). Those with a high school

qualification have a higher predicted probability of 0.64 (95% CI: 0.61, 0.67). The predicted probability further increases for those with some college or trade qualification, reaching 0.76 (95% CI: 0.74, 0.78). Finally, African immigrant women with a university certificate or higher have the highest predicted probability of labour force participation at 0.81 (95% CI: 0.79, 0.82). These findings suggest a positive association between educational attainment and the likelihood of labour force participation for African immigrant women, with higher levels of education being associated with a greater probability of participation. These marginal predictions are consistent with the odds ratios reported from the logistic regression analysis and do support the first hypothesis.

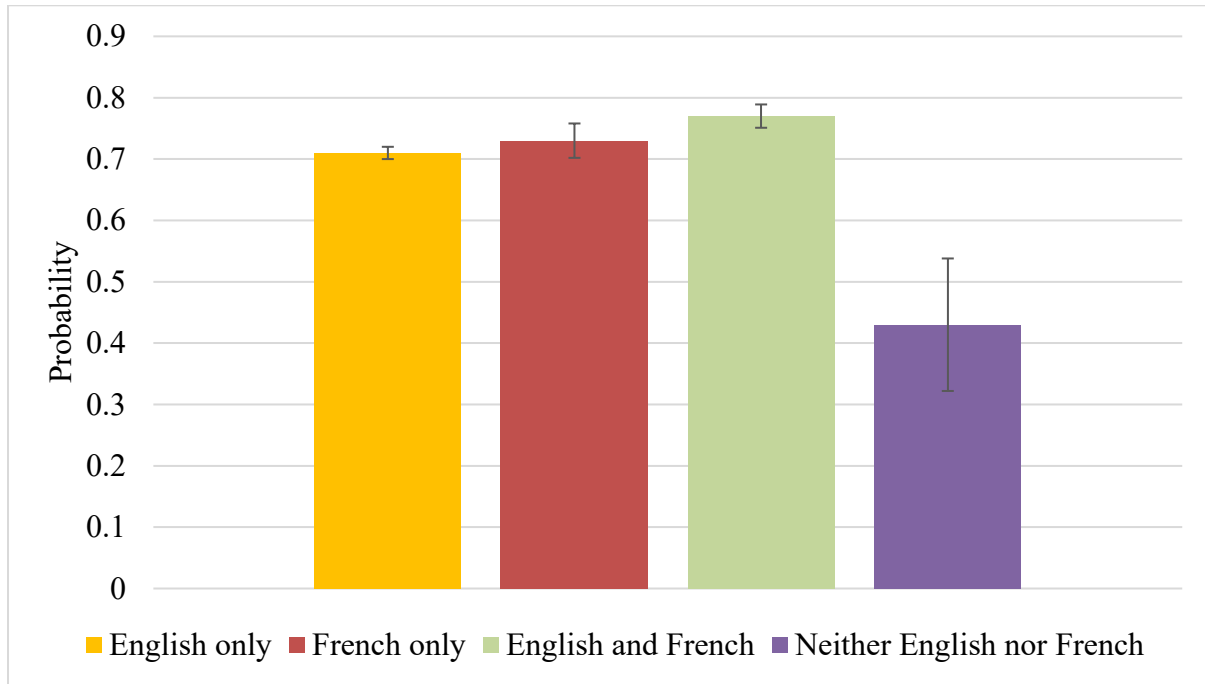


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of labour force participation by knowledge of Canadian languages (95% CIs)

Source: Author's prediction using Statistics Canada's 2021 Census data (Public Use Micro Data File, Individuals)

Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities of labour force participation based on knowledge of Canadian languages. The results reveal that African immigrant women who only speak English have a predicted probability of labour force participation of 0.71 (95% CI: 0.70, 0.73). Similarly, individuals who only speak French also have a relatively high predicted probability of 0.73 (95% CI: 0.70, 0.75). Those who are proficient in both English and French have the highest predicted probability at 0.77 (95% CI: 0.75, 0.79). In contrast, individuals who do not speak either English or French have a substantially lower predicted probability of labour force participation at 0.43 (95% CI: 0.32, 0.54). These predictions suggest that proficiency in English and/or French languages positively influences the likelihood of labour force participation among African immigrant women. Again, these predictions support the second hypothesis and are consistent with the odds ratios reported in Models 1 and 2 from the logistic regression analysis.

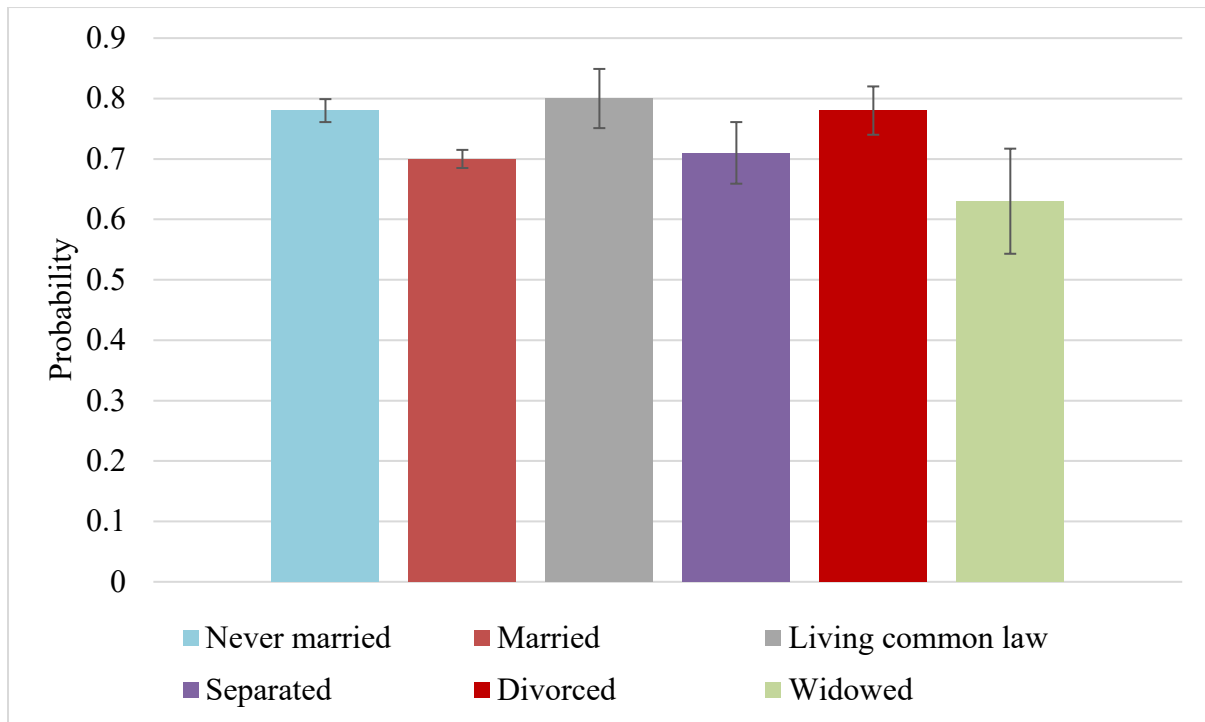


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of labour force participation by marital status (95% CIs)
 Source: Author’s prediction using Statistics Canada’s 2021 Census data (Public Use Micro Data File, Individuals)

Figure 3 provides the predicted probabilities of labour force participation by marital status, showing an alternating pattern of high and low likelihoods. Surprisingly, the results indicate that African immigrant women who are living in common-law relationships have the highest predicted probability of labour force participation at 0.80 (95% CI: 0.75, 0.85). This is followed by women who have never been married, with a predicted probability of 0.78 (95% CI: 0.76, 0.81). Those who are divorced also have a relatively high predicted probability of 0.78 (95% CI: 0.74, 0.82). The predicted probability for African immigrant women who are married is slightly lower at 0.70 (95% CI: 0.68, 0.72). Individuals who are separated have a predicted probability of 0.71 (95% CI: 0.66, 0.76). Lastly, widowed individuals have the lowest predicted probability of labour force participation at 0.63 (95% CI: 0.54, 0.72). This prediction does not support the third hypothesis. Instead of never-married women, the highest adjusted prediction is in favour of those living in common-law relationships. It is somewhat similar to the odds ratios in Model 1.

5. Discussion

The objective of this study was to investigate the predictors of the labour force participation of African immigrant women in Canada. This research is particularly timely, given Canada’s current labour shortages and an ageing population, which necessitate contributions to the broader discourse on immigration, diversity, and social inclusion. Using data from the 2021 Census of Population of Canada, specifically the Public Use Microdata File for Individuals, this study examines the socio-demographic factors influencing the likelihood of African immigrant women participating in the Canadian labour force.

Unlike previous studies that often cluster African immigrant women within the broader category of Black immigrant women—who hail from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia—this research specifically focuses on African immigrant women. Many existing studies emphasize issues of racism and racial discrimination,

which may obscure the unique socio-cultural dynamics affecting African women. This distinction is crucial, as mixed-group analyses often yield inconsistent results that do not adequately represent the experiences of African immigrant women in Canada. By concentrating on this specific demographic, the study aims to inform policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity and address the unique needs of African immigrant women in the Canadian labour market.

The findings from this study shed light on the socio-demographic determinants of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. Consistent with prior research, the results reveal a strong positive correlation between higher educational qualifications and labour force participation rates. This aligns with earlier studies that have established educational attainment as a critical factor in enhancing employment opportunities (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Schieckoff, 2024; Solati et al., 2023). It supports our first hypothesis. Specifically, African immigrant women with a university certificate or higher demonstrate the highest likelihood of participating in the labour force, reinforcing the need to promote educational access for them.

Language proficiency in official Canadian languages—English and French—also emerges as a significant determinant of labour force participation, echoing findings from previous research that highlights the importance of language skills in labour market integration (Ghadi et al., 2023; Solati et al., 2023). The odds ratios and predicted probabilities reveal that African immigrant women proficient in both languages have the highest likelihood of participating in the labour force. This supports the second hypothesis and underscores the relevance of language skills in accessing employment opportunities and engaging with the Canadian workforce. Indeed, English/French language is the medium of self-expression, workplace communication, and even learning about available employment opportunities and taking advantage of them in Canada. Policymakers must therefore prioritize resources to facilitate language acquisition among African immigrant women, as this can greatly enhance their economic empowerment.

Interestingly, the impact of marital status on labour force participation varies across models. The relationship between these variables presents a more nuanced picture. In Model 1, being in a common-law relationship or divorced is associated with higher odds of participation compared to never-married women, which aligns with some literature suggesting that marital commitments can influence employment decisions. However, Model 2, which accounts for age and immigration factors, reveals a contrasting pattern: never-married women demonstrate a greater probability of participating in the labour force compared to those who are married, separated, or widowed. This finding, in view of the third hypothesis, suggests that marital status alone may not be the sole determinant of labour force participation among African immigrant women. Instead, factors such as age, immigration category, and possibly cultural considerations may interact with marital status to influence their engagement in the labour force. Because time use and conjugal commitments vary across different marital statuses, women in common-law relationships may face fewer spousal commitments, allowing a higher likelihood of labour force participation compared to their married counterparts.

Control variables introduced in Model 2 yield additional insights. The results suggest that younger adults aged 15-24 exhibit lower odds of labour force participation, while older adults aged 45-64 show higher likelihoods. This age-related trend reflects findings from previous studies that suggest varying opportunities and barriers for different age cohorts (Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2024). This suggests potential age-related barriers and opportunities within the Canadian labour market for African immigrant women. Furthermore, the immigration category variable reveals that family/other immigrants and refugees have lower odds of participating in the

labour force compared to economic immigrants. It aligns with existing literature that highlights the integration challenges faced by certain immigrant groups compared to others in Canada (Bonikowska & Hou, 2017; Solati et al., 2023) and calls for targeted support and policies to address their unique needs.

Despite these contributions, the study acknowledges limitations. Primarily, it focuses solely on socio-demographic determinants, omitting other potentially influential factors such as cultural influences, discrimination, recognition of foreign credentials, and access to social support systems. Future research should explore these dimensions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by African immigrant women in the Canadian labour market. Additionally, the absence of weight variables in the dataset limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of African immigrant women in Canada. While unweighted models serve an explanatory purpose, this limitation must be considered when interpreting the results.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the socio-demographic determinants of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. It stresses the importance of educational attainment, language proficiency, and marital status, while highlighting the need for targeted policies and interventions to empower and promote the economic integration of this population. Addressing the limitations identified and building upon these findings, future research can further contribute to the knowledge base and inform evidence-based practices that foster the inclusion and empowerment of African immigrant women in the Canadian labour force.

6. Conclusion

This study significantly enhances our understanding of the socio-demographic determinants of labour force participation among African immigrant women in Canada. The findings highlight the positive effects of higher educational attainment and proficiency in official Canadian languages on the likelihood of these women participating in the labour force. Furthermore, the research reveals the complex interplay between marital status and labour force participation, which is influenced by age and immigration factors. These insights carry important implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners committed to fostering the economic integration and empowerment of African immigrant women.

Based on these findings, policymakers can take actionable steps to address the barriers faced by this population. A key policy recommendation is to expand access to educational opportunities and skill development programs specifically for African immigrant women. By investing in initiatives such as language training and credential recognition, policymakers can enhance the employability and labour market integration of these women, thereby empowering them and contributing to Canada's overall economic growth.

Additionally, the findings suggest a need for targeted strategies that cater to the unique circumstances of African immigrant women. For example, providing tailored support for younger African immigrant women aged 15-24, who encounter specific barriers to labour force participation, could be beneficial. Similarly, addressing the challenges faced by family/other immigrants and refugees—who exhibit lower odds of participating in the labour force compared to economic immigrants—will be essential. By recognizing and addressing these specific dynamics, policymakers can foster a more inclusive and equitable labour market for African immigrant women.

Educators also have a critical role to play in facilitating the economic integration of African immigrant women. They can contribute by developing and implementing programs that

promote language acquisition and skill development tailored to this population's needs. Educators can help bridge the gap between education and employment by equipping African immigrant women with the tools necessary for success in the Canadian labour market.

Finally, practitioners working in employment and settlement services can leverage these findings to inform their interventions. By creating targeted support programs that address barriers related to education, language, and marital status, practitioners can assist African immigrant women in overcoming these challenges and accessing meaningful employment opportunities.

In conclusion, this study not only illuminates the determinants of labour force participation among African immigrant women but also offers practical implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners. By harnessing the potential of education, language proficiency, and targeted support, we can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable labour market for African immigrant women in Canada. This will not only benefit them individually but also contribute to the overall prosperity and diversity of the nation.

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