

# Immigrant Labor Rights and Intersectionality: Unpacking Barriers and Pathways to Equity

Dr. Rita Dhungel<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Karun K. Karki<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Social Work and Human Services, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC, Canada

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Faculty of Arts, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

## ABSTRACT

In an era marked by increasing uncertainty and systemic inequities in immigration, critical social work is called upon to reaffirm its commitment to social justice, decolonization, and anti-oppressive practice. This study investigates how Canada's immigration system—shaped by enduring colonial legacies and neoliberal policy frameworks—contributes to the deskilling and marginalization of highly educated, racialized immigrants. Such processes not only devalue the knowledge, skills, and experiences of immigrants but also reproduce systemic hierarchies that privilege whiteness and Western credentials. Drawing on intersectionality theory and primary data from three focus group discussions with immigrant women, the analysis highlights how race, immigration status, and gender intersect to generate compounded barriers. Racialized immigrant women, in particular, experience both horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market, encountering a persistent glass ceiling that restricts access to equitable employment opportunities and professional mobility. These structural exclusions reflect deeply embedded colonial, racialized, and gendered power relations that continue to shape Canada's socio-economic landscape. The findings underscore the urgent need for social workers to resist institutional forms of oppression by centering marginalized voices, engaging in advocacy, and advancing transformative, anti-oppressive practices that contribute to the broader struggle for equity and social justice.

**Keywords:** Anti-oppression; decolonial; racialized immigrants; intersectionality