

More education, experience but money still tight for some

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Canadian workers are better educated and more experienced today than they were in the early 1980s, but their chances of being stuck in low-paying jobs remain virtually unchanged, a new study suggested Monday.

The report, prepared by Statistics Canada, said the proportion of adult employees who had a university education rose to 24 per cent from 14 per cent between 1981 and 2004.

At the same time, as the Canadian work force aged, employees were also bringing more experience to the job, according to the agency.

But those two traits did not necessarily add up to bigger bucks.

Last year, about 16 per cent of the adult work force laboured in low-paying jobs – those paying less than \$10 an hour (in 2001 dollars) – compared with 17 per cent in 1981.

“The share of adult workers employed in low-paid jobs did not drop overall in spite of the fact that the percentage of adult employees with a university degree increased during that period,” the government agency said.

“This means that some workers with a given level of education ended up having lower wages in the late 1990s than their counterparts had in the early 1980s.”

For example, Statscan said, young, Canadian-born men between the ages of 25 and 34 with a high school education or less saw their real wages drop substantially over the past two decades.

“Likewise, older recent immigrant men of all education levels also suffered a decline in wages over the last two decades,” the agency said.

The report, meanwhile, also found that the majority of workers in low-paying jobs were not living in low-income families.

In both 1980 and 2000, the percentage of people with full-time jobs living above the low-income level remained at 70 per cent.

That said, the report also found that recent immigrants and people with low education levels were increasingly “economically vulnerable.”

As an example, the agency said 6 per cent of recent immigrants between the ages of 35 and 54 who worked full time were labouring in low-paying jobs and living in low-income families.

By 2000, that percentage had doubled to 12 per cent.

“Four groups were very likely to be in this position: individuals with no high school diploma, recent immigrants, unattached individuals – living alone or with cohabitants – and female lone-parents,” Statscan said.

People in those groups represented 37 per cent of all full-time workers but accounted for 71 per cent of full-time employees who were in both low-wage jobs and low-income families in 2000, the agency said.

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