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Legal Permanent Residents in the US Labor Market: Occupational Mobility of High-Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigrants

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Larissa Ferreira Coelho, BS, Universidade do Vale do Itajaí, 2015

Director: Gabriela León-Pérez, PhD, Sociology Department

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
05/2020

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Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my family, for their love, support and patience. I would also like to thank the Sociology department for believing I could become a Sociologist despite several challenges, in special, Dr. Gabriela León-Pérez for her help and direction throughout the entire program and with this project.

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Abstract

LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENTS IN THE US LABOR MARKET: OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY OF HIGH-SKILLED AND LOW-SKILLED IMMIGRANTS

By Larissa Ferreira Coelho, BS.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Major Director: Gabriela León-Pérez, PhD, Sociology Department

Despite the vast research concerning immigrants and occupational mobility, little is known if the patterns for high-skilled and low-skilled workers differ. In this project, I analyze the pre-to-post migration occupational mobility of legal permanent residents in the US by using occupation and migration histories from the New Immigrant Survey. I contrast the first occupation in the US to the last occupation abroad using descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, and multinomial logistic regression models. Findings show different patterns of occupational mobility for low-skilled and high-skilled workers. High-skilled immigrants were less likely to experience downward occupational mobility than their low-skilled counterparts. The high-skilled were also more likely to experience lateral mobility than low-skilled workers. I also found that the effects of region of origin on occupational mobility differed by skill-level, and that education was a significant predictor of mobility only for the high-skilled. In terms of the visa admission category, only employment sponsorship was a significant predictor of mobility. As the patterns of migration of low-skilled and high-skilled differ, so does their occupational mobility giving us a better understanding of the dynamics of the US job market for immigrants.

Vita

Larissa Ferreira Coelho was born on July 15, 1991, in Curitiba, Paraná, and is a Brazilian citizen. She graduated from Victor Meirelles High School, Itajaí, Santa Catarina in 2008. She received her Bachelor in Administration from Universidade do Vale do Itajaí, Itajaí, Santa Catarina in 2015.

INTRODUCTION

There is consistent evidence that immigrants tend to experience downward occupational mobility upon relocation to the United States (Akresh 2008; Gans 2009; Sánchez-Soto and Singelmann 2017). Occupational mobility can be defined as "the move to a higher or lower level of income, wealth, education, employment status and standard of living" (Gans 2007: 154). A related concept is social mobility, which refers to "the movement to a higher or lower class or status position" (Gans 2007: 154). Das-Munshi et al. (2012) complement these concepts by adding that occupational penalty is working beneath one's level of skills and qualifications. In the case of immigrants, occupational penalty is evident when they work below their pre-migration socioeconomic situation. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1995) also point out that downward social mobility has equivalent consequences as socioeconomic downward mobility. Individuals who were elites or had leadership positions in their origin countries sometimes turn into ordinary immigrants after migrating.

We know little about whether occupational mobility patterns differ for high-skilled (i.e., college-educated) vs. low-skilled migrants. The patterns of migration and labor market positions vary widely between low-skilled and high-skilled immigrants, and it is possible that the occupational mobility patterns are different as well. Investigating the patterns of occupational mobility among high-skilled and low-skilled workers is essential to understand their adjustment into the American labor market. The investigation requires data on the pre- and post-migration occupation of migrants provided by the New Immigrant Survey.

This thesis focuses specifically on the experiences of legal immigrants in the United States who are legal permanent residents (LPRs) or "green card holders". According to Radford (2019), 27 percent of the US immigrant population is comprised by LPRs. Hence, they are a

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large population of immigrants in the US facing challenges specific to their immigration status. Using occupation and migration histories from the New Immigrant Survey, I examined if the patterns of post-migration occupational mobility among high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants differed. I estimated chi-square tests to compare the first occupation in the U.S. to the last occupation abroad by skill-level, and then I performed multivariate analyses using multinomial logistic regression models to explore the determinants of occupational mobility for the two groups of workers.

The following sections are organized as follows. First, I review the literature on socioeconomic and social mobility after migration, patterns of mobility among high-skilled and low-skilled immigrants, and the case of legal permanent residents. Next, I describe the goals of the current study and the data and methods used. Then I present my results and end with a discussion of the findings.

BACKGROUND

Socioeconomic and Social Mobility after Migration

There are ethnic boundaries in the labor market that form an ethnic mixed economy. Upon arrival, first-generation immigrants face barriers in the labor market, usually related to limited human capital, English skills, educational credentials, and work experience. Those limitations prevent them from finding jobs in the mainstream economy (Nee, Sanders, and Sernau 1994).

First-generation immigrants also suffer a disparity in pay compared to their US-born counterparts (Portes and Rumbault 2014). When they first migrate, they face a period of socioeconomic downgrading followed by a possible recovery according to their time in the US

(Akresh 2006). Chiswick et al. (2005) agree that, over time, many immigrants end up acquiring new skills, such as obtaining professional licenses in the receiving country, improving their language skills, and learning how the labor market works. Migrants with more transferable skills and economic migrants have greater occupational adjustment and success than refugees and family-based migrants (Chiswick et al. 2005). The lower the transferability of skills, the larger the decline in occupational status from the last permanent job in the home country to the first job in the destination (Chiswick et al. 2005). This can have consequences beyond socioeconomics given that, as Frank and Hou (2018) argue, a mismatch between immigrant workers' education and occupation may be deleterious to their overall life satisfaction.

Jasso and Rosenzweig (1995) examined whether patterns of occupational mobility differed based on how immigrants gained their legal permanent residence. They found that, on average, employment-based immigrants experienced downgrading, while marital immigrants (i.e., those who acquired their green cards through marriage) experienced occupational upgrading. After six years, employment-based immigrants were usually in different positions than what they were screened and selected originally for, but surprisingly, the direction of occupational mobility was downward. Overall, there was little possibility of upward mobility among this group. On the other hand, marital immigrants experienced upward mobility as they usually worked in less remunerative positions in the early stages of their professional careers in the US and later obtained better paying jobs. Jasso and Rosenzweig (1995) also mention that the jobs offered to employment-based immigrants usually have higher skill requirements, thus providing initial evidence that we may find differences in occupational mobility between high- and low-skilled immigrants.

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Immigrants can achieve social and economic upward mobility as entrepreneurs in their ethnic communities or niches in the mainstream economy. Economic and social mobility can also lead to acculturation or assimilation as successful entrepreneurs adopt class-appropriate non-immigrant lifestyles (Gans 2007). However, Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that adopting the cultural ways and outlooks of the native-born does not represent a step towards mobility; it may lead to the opposite effect as the ethnic communities can also offer a better chance for economic and social mobility.

Gans (2009) investigated middle and upper-class refugees and first-generation immigrants and found consistent patterns of downward social mobility, yet individuals' experiences may vary depending on their backgrounds and the economy upon arrival in the US. For example, social mobility differs across gender, age, and professional groups. Gans (2009) found that the status decline is more pronounced for men than for women, mostly because men's social status tends to derive more from work than women's. Older immigrants tend to lose more status than young ones as young people have more time to pursue upward mobility, while those who are older face barriers such as literacy with technology. Overall, the leading cause of downward social mobility was occupational. Immigrants often cannot restart their previous careers and are forced to take lower-status jobs than in their home country. For example, professors become teachers and doctors turn into technicians. However, even low and middle-class immigrants can face downward mobility, as farmers can become migrant laborers and daughters in their home country become sex workers (Gans 2009).

Patterns of Mobility Among High-Skilled and Low-Skilled Immigrants

Roughly half of all international migrants worldwide are active in the workforce (Benach et al. 2011). Most workers move from low and middle-income countries to high-income countries, looking forward to escape from unemployment, war, and poverty in their home countries and achieve socioeconomic advancement (upward mobility) and family reunification (Alcántara, Chen, and Alegría 2014; Benach et al. 2011; Close et al. 2016). Most immigrants have the necessary skills and experience for jobs in the US that are similar to those they held abroad. However, many end up in different occupations than their last one in their home country. Even though many expect a decline in the occupational hierarchy, many still decide to migrate.

Immigrants arrive in the US with different levels of education; however, they tend to be overrepresented in the highest and lowest ends of the educational and skills range. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2012) found that immigrants encompass 25 percent of all US physicians, 24 percent of science and engineering workers with a bachelor's degree, and 47 percent of scientists with a Ph.D. On the other hand, some adult immigrants have levels of educational attainment far below the average US citizen. Many sectors of the US economy rely on low-skilled immigrants, such as agriculture, service, and construction. For example, approximately 75 percent of farmworkers are immigrants (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2012). There is evidence that most recent immigrants are better educated than previous generations. The educational level of new male immigrants has been rising, yet not as fast as that of native-born US citizens (Clark and Bolton 2000).

Some immigrant professionals are more impacted in terms of occupational mobility than others, especially those with licensed occupations. For example, lawyers, doctors, and dentists are barred from their jobs unless they acquire US licenses to practice and often have to find

lower status work. Others are too old or poor to re-learn their occupation in the US. Engineers and computer experts often have more flexibility to stay in their fields (Chiswick et al. 2005). In some cases, blue-collar jobs in the US may offer a path to a better life than the white-collar jobs left behind in home countries, leading to a better future for their children (Chiswick et al. 2005).

Boyd and Tian (2018) studied the Canadian labor market and found that immigrants are penalized for having foreign degrees. More specifically, in STEM fields, migrants are likely to be disadvantaged in terms of their work and earnings. People who acquired their degrees in Canada, the USA, the UK, and France are more likely to be employed in STEM or other high-skilled occupations compared to immigrants educated elsewhere. Immigrants with a STEM bachelor's degree usually work in positions that do not require a degree. Banerjee and Phan (2014) found that immigrant workers in Canada that were in regulated occupations in their home countries face a steeper drop in occupational status upon arrival in Canada when compared with those who worked in unregulated occupations prior migration. However, when those professionals found a regulated job in Canada there was little change in occupational status when contrasted with their status in the country of origin. Hence, more time in the receiving country helped them achieve lateral mobility. Similarly, Chiswick et al. (2005) found evidence that in Australia, high-skilled immigrants have their degrees discounted or are not allowed to perform their original occupations because their licenses are not transferable or need additional certifications.

The Case of Legal Permanent Residents

Currently, immigrants account for 13.6 percent of the total US population. Among the immigrant population, approximately 27 percent is comprised of LPRs (Radford 2019).

Individuals can become LPRs in the US through family, employment, asylum, refugee status, being victims of crimes and abuse, and other categories. Currently, the US immigration system is designed to give preference to family reunification (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1995; Waters and Pineau 2015). Hence, the majority of LPR petitions are based on family sponsorship (65 percent), followed by employment sponsorship (13 percent), refugee status and asylum (16 percent), diversity programs (5 percent), and others (2 percent) (Waters and Pineau 2015). The literature defines the immigration system as a structure of stratification (Menjívar 2014; Söhn 2013), with LPRs having the largest array of rights, only behind naturalized citizens. LPRs have a clear pathway towards naturalization (Waters and Pineau 2015). Investigating their labor market outcomes is crucial as they are potential American citizens. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2012) explains that LPRs come from a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds and the ones who arrive with less education or experience unemployment and poverty face greater challenges to overall well-being. Kreisberg (2019) found evidence that starting points (previous statuses) also matter in the job market even after immigrants acquire their legal permanent residency.

The LPR status is less static than previously assumed given that it may not be associated with equal labor market integration across immigrants. Five years after gaining LPR status, immigrants previously admitted based on employment maintained more prestigious occupations, family reunification and diversity admissions stayed in the middle of the socioeconomic ladder, whereas LPRs who were refugees and undocumented still held less prestigious occupations even after they acquired LPR status (Kreisberg 2019).

In sum, previous studies have accounted for gender and previous immigration statuses to examine mobility differences among legal permanent residents. However, I did not find research stratifying immigrants by skill level. In addition, the inequalities within LPRs are understudied in

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the migration scholarship. The present research contributes to this body of scholarship by addressing these gaps in the literature.

CURRENT STUDY

This study seeks to examine the patterns of occupational mobility among high-skilled and low-skilled LPRs in the US. Prior studies have analyzed the patterns of occupational mobility of immigrants, yet there is still little knowledge regarding whether the patterns between high-skilled and low-skilled migrants differ. This study is guided by the following research question: How does occupational mobility differ between high-skilled and low-skilled LPRs? To answer the question, I use data from the New Immigrant Survey to (1) explore patterns of post-migration occupational mobility among new legal immigrants, and (2) examine if those patterns of mobility differ between high-skilled and low-skilled workers. I expect that the patterns of occupational mobility between the two groups will differ and downward occupational mobility will be more prevalent among high-skilled migrants than their low-skilled counterparts.

In this study, the sample is divided into two groups, high-skilled and low-skilled LPRs. Different approaches have been used to define high-skilled immigrants, such as educational attainment, area of specialization, occupation, and experience in the workforce. For the purpose of this investigation and following prior research, high-skilled immigrants are defined as individuals ages 25 or older with 16 years of education or more (Docquier, Lowell, and Marfouk 2009; Gandini and Lozano-Ascencio 2016). Thus, the high-skilled sample includes individuals with college, graduate, or professional degrees who are part of the workforce. Low-skilled migrants are defined as individuals ages 25 or older with less than 16 years of education.

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METHODS

Data source

Data come from the first wave of the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) collected in 2003. The NIS sampling frame was based on nationally representative samples of new legal permanent residents who acquired their LPR status between July and August 1996. The sample was drawn from administrative records of the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and consists of immigrants who acquired their LPR abroad or adjusted their status in the US between May and November 2003. The latter consists of individuals who were already in the US with different visas and statuses (including individuals who were previously undocumented) then obtained their green cards. Importantly, the survey gathered information about individuals' pre and post-immigration experiences, including their occupations (NIS 2019). The adult sample includes immigrants who were 18 years of age or older at admission. A total of 8,573 interviews were conducted in the language of the respondent's preference between June 2003 and June 2004 (NIS 2019). For this analysis, the sample was restricted to 1,562 adults 25 years or older who provided information on their pre and post-migration occupations.

Dependent Measures

The dependent variable is occupational mobility which was constructed with the Socio-Economic Index (SEI). The SEI is a standardized measure widely used as an indicator of occupational ranking and it is based on education and income data (Stevens and Featherman 1981). The SEI scores used in this investigation were estimated using both male and female respondents (Frederick 2010). The dependent variable was constructed as follows. In the survey's pre-migration experiences section, respondents were asked: "What kind of work did you

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do on your last job abroad?"[1]. In the section of post-migration employment, respondents were asked, and "What is your current job occupation?"[2]. The NIS coded respondents' pre- and post-migration occupation according to the Census 2002 codes. Using this information, I matched responses with the SEI codes in order to obtain the occupational ranking of respondents' last job abroad and current job in the US. Then, I compared respondents' pre- and post-migration SEI scores in order to identify patterns of occupational mobility. Based on this, I created three dummy variables capturing upward mobility (wherein the current job in the US had a higher occupational ranking than the last job abroad), downward mobility (wherein the current job in the US had a lower occupational ranking than the last job abroad), and lateral mobility (wherein the current job in the US and the last job abroad had the same occupational ranking).

Independent Measures

The independent variable was skill level. Respondents were classified as high-skilled or low-skilled based on their age and educational attainment. High-skilled immigrants were defined as individuals ages 25 or older with college, graduate, or professional degrees, which represents 16 years of education or more (Docquier et al. 2009; Gandini and Lozano-Ascencio 2016). Low-skilled migrants includes individuals who were 25 years or older with 15 years or less of formal education, comprising individuals without complete college education.

Control Variables

Multivariate models adjusted for the following individual characteristics: age, gender, marital status, household size, years of education completed, years of education in the US,

[1] The question was rephrased for clarity
[2] The question was rephrased for clarity

English proficiency, region of origin, and visa admission categories. Age was a continuous variable ranging from 25 to 81. Gender was a dichotomous variable where female=1 and male=0. Marital status was dichotomized indicating whether 1=the respondent was in a marital or cohabiting union at the time of the survey or 0=else. Household size was a continuous variable ranging from 1 to 13 individuals living in the household. Years of education completed and years of education in the US were both continuous variables. English proficiency was a dichotomous variable indicating if respondents were proficient or not at the time of the survey. Region of origin and visa admission category accounted for where they came from and their previous immigration status before they acquired their legal permanent residency. The regions of origin were categorized into five variables according to the NIS categories, geographical region, and number of cases: Latin America (reference category), Europe and Central Asia, East and Southeast Asia, Middle East and North Africa, and Others. The visa admission categories indicate respondent's immigration status before they obtained their green cards and is operationalized into five categories: family preference (reference category which includes spouses and relatives of American citizens); employment (individuals that were sponsored by an employer); refugees, asylees and parolees; and other (includes individuals who were legalized, those who obtained diversity visas, and other admission categories.)

Analytic Strategy

First, I estimated descriptive statistics for all study variables by skill level. Next, I compared the last job abroad to the first job in the U.S. I present two-way tables to compare the last occupation abroad and the first occupation in the U.S. for the high-skilled and low-skilled samples. These tables provide a visualization of pre- and post-migration census occupation

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categories and illustrate the percentage of workers who moved from one field to another, and the ones who stayed in their field upon migration to the US.

To assess patterns of occupational mobility, I recoded the pre- and post-migration occupation variables according to the SEI codes. Then, I estimated the proportion of individuals who experienced upward, downward, or lateral mobility. To determine if there were differences in occupational mobility between skill level I performed chi-square tests that highlighted the percentage of low-skilled and high-skilled and the occupational mobility experienced upon migration to the US. To further examine the patterns of occupational mobility between the two groups, I estimated multinomial logistic regressions to examine the determinants of occupational mobility by skill level. Models predicted the likelihood of experiencing upward vs. lateral mobility and downward vs. lateral mobility while adjusting for the control variables listed above. Separate models were computed for the low-skilled and high-skilled samples.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics by skill level. The two samples were relatively similar in some variables but substantially different in others. The mean age was roughly 39 years for both low-skilled and high-skilled respondents. In the low-skilled sample, around 64 percent were male and 36 percent were female. The gender distribution in the high-skilled level was slightly different, 69 percent were male and 31 percent female. The mean size of the household for the low-skilled and high-skilled samples was roughly 4 and 3, respectively. The two groups differed in terms of schooling: low-skilled respondents had an average of 12 years of education and 0.2 years of education in the US; high skilled respondents had a mean of 18 of

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years of education and approximately 1 to 2 years of education in the US. The high-skilled group also reported better levels of English proficiency: the majority reported English proficiency (78.8 percent), while more than half of low-skilled respondents reported lack of proficiency (55.7 percent). The marital status of both groups was fairly consistent as roughly 80 percent were married or living with a partner. The majority of the low-skilled sample was from Latin America, followed by East and Southeast Asia, and Europe and Central Asia. The high-skilled sample was mostly from other countries, Europe and Central Asia, and East and South East Asia. High-skilled respondents had a higher percentage (51.6 percent) of employment-based admissions, while low-skilled were scattered but slightly more concentrated in admission based on other (36 percent), followed by family preference (33.4 percent).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Sample (N=1,562)

	Low-Skilled	High-Skilled
Age, mean (S.D.)	39.9 (9.7)	38.5 (9.1)
Gender (%)		
Male	63.7	69.0
Female	36.3	31.0
Household Size, mean (S.D.)	3.9 (1.8)	3.4 (1.5)
Years of School Completed, mean (S.D)	11.6 (3.2)	18.0 (2.6)
Years of School in US, mean (S.D.)	0.2 (0.9)	0.7 (1.7)
English Proficiency (%)		
Proficient	44.3	78.8
Not Proficient	55.7	21.2
Marital Status (%)		
Married or living with a partner	79.2	79.8
Not Married	20.8	20.2
Region of Origin (%)		
Latin America	36.9	17.8
Europe and Central Asia	18.8	20.4
Asia	22.8	20.6
Middle East and Africa	9.5	13.3
Others	11.9	28.0
Admission Type (%)		
Family Preference	33.4	18.9
Employment	21.1	51.6
Refugee/Asylee/Parolee	9.5	4.6
Other	36.0	24.9
N	823	739

Source: The New Immigrant Survey, 2003

Occupational Mobility Patterns of Low-Skilled and High-Skilled Respondents

Table 2 shows results from cross-tabulations of low-skilled workers' major occupations in their last job abroad and their first job in the US according to the NIS-2002 Census Codes[3]. The diagonals in gray represent the proportions of individuals who remained in the same major

[3] For the full list of occupations and categories please refer to the Census Website

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occupation group. The percentages that are not in the diagonal line represent individuals that changed the area of occupation upon their first job in the US. To illustrate, 17.5 percent of management business and financial workers remained in the same field; however, the majority moved to other occupations such as service, production/transportation/material moving, sales/office, and construction/extraction/maintenance/repair, in this order. In comparison, 47.4 percent of professional and related workers remained in their field. The last row in Table 2 highlights the sectors of the US labor market in which low-skilled respondents were concentrated. Overall, over a third of the low-skilled sample working in their first job in the US were concentrated in service, followed by production/transportation/material moving (20.7 percent), and sales/office (14.9 percent).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of the Last Occupation in Home Country and First Occupation in the U.S. for Low-Skilled Workers

	First Occupation in the US								
Last Occupation Abroad	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**Total**	**N**
1. Management, Business, Financial	17.5	10.0	23.3	18.3	0.8	10.0	20.0	100	120
2. Professional and Related	8.1	47.4	21.5	10.4	0.0	3.0	9.6	100	135
3. Service	2.5	5.0	56.2	9.9	0.8	6.6	19.0	100	121
4. Sales and Office	4.7	4.2	37.5	26.6	0.5	5.2	21.4	100	192
5. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.0	0.0	46.7	6.7	13.3	13.3	20.0	100	15
6. Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, Repair	4.8	3.6	23.8	10.7	0.0	46.4	10.7	100	84
7. Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	3.8	3.2	27.6	9.0	1.3	18.6	36.5	100	156
Total	6.6	11.9	32.4	14.9	0.9	12.6	20.7	100	823

Source: The New Immigrant Survey, 2003

Table 3 presents the percentage of high-skilled workers who moved from one field to another, and the ones who stayed in their field upon migration to the US according to the NIS-2002 Census Codes4. Forty-one percent of management/business/financial workers remained in

4 For the full list of occupations and categories please refer to the Census Website

the same field; a much higher percentage when compared to the low skilled. However, a high percentage moved to other occupations such as professional and related, service, sales/office, construction/extraction/maintenance/repair, and production/transportation/material moving, in this order. Roughly 70 percent of the professional and related category remained in the same area of occupation. This category encompasses medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other licensed occupations. Over a third of workers in sales and office occupations remained in their field. However, 15.4 percent moved to management/business/financial, 19.2 percent moved to professional and related, and 15.4 percent went to the service sector. The last row in Table 3 highlights the sectors of the US labor market in which high-skilled respondents were concentrated. Overall, 43.8 percent of the high-skilled sample working in their first job in the US was concentrated in professional and related, 16.8 percent was in management/business/financial, and 15.8 percent in sales/office. Overall, when compared with the low-skilled sample, the high-skilled sample included a higher percentage of professionals who remained in their fields of occupation.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of the Last Occupation in Home Country and First Occupation in the U.S. for High-Skilled Workers

Last Occupation Abroad	First Occupation in the US							Total	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1. Management, Business, Financial	41.3	10.7	14.7	20.7	0.0	3.3	9.3	100	150
2. Professional and Related	9.6	69.9	7.5	8.1	0.0	2.3	2.6	100	385
3. Service	7.7	34.6	34.6	7.7	0.0	7.7	7.7	100	26
4. Sales and Office	15.4	19.2	15.4	37.7	0.0	3.8	8.5	100	130
5. Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0.0	0.0	66.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	100	3
6. Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, Repair	8.7	8.7	21.7	0.0	0.0	39.1	21.7	100	23
7. Production, Transportation, and Material Moving	4.5	13.6	18.2	18.2	0.0	13.6	31.8	100	22
Total	16.8	43.8	12.3	15.8	0.0	4.5	6.8	100	739

Source: The New Immigrant Survey, 2003

Table 4 presents the occupational mobility patterns of low- and high-skilled respondents upon migration to the US. Overall, there was a general decline in the occupational status the low-skilled sample given that 60.1 percent experienced downward mobility, 23.1 percent upward mobility, and 16.8 percent lateral mobility.

As highlighted by Chiswick et al. (2005) and Gans (2009), licensed professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, judges, and legal support often must obtain additional licensing in the US, thus increasing the barriers to join the US labor force. Consequently, I expected to find a steeper downward mobility for high-skilled workers compared to their low-skilled counterparts. However, I did not find support for my hypothesis. As shown in Table 4, 23.1 percent of the low-skilled sample and 26.1 percent of the high skilled sample experienced upward mobility. The percentages were fairly similar and the difference was not statistically significant. However, the low-skilled sample had a significantly higher percentage of workers who faced downward mobility (60.1 percent), compared to 48.7 percent of the high-skilled sample. In addition, 25.2 percent of the high-skilled group had lateral mobility compared to only 16.8 percent of the low-skilled workers. The difference was also statistically significant.

Table 4: Relationship Between Occupational Mobility and Skill Level (N=1,562)

	Low-Skilled	**High-Skilled**	**Chi-Square (p-value) and Association**
Upward Mobility	23.1%	26.1%	χ_2= 1.932 p-value=0.165 ν = .035
Downward Mobility	60.1%	48.7%	χ_2= 20.537 p-value=.000 ν = .115
Lateral Mobility	16.8%	25.2%	χ_2= 16.716 p-value=.000 ν = .103
Total	100	100	

Source: The New Immigrant Survey, 2003

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Determinants of Occupational Mobility

To further examine the patterns of occupational mobility, I estimated multinomial logistic regressions to investigate the determinants of occupational mobility among high-skilled and low-skilled workers. Table 5 presents results of the multinomial logistic regression. Results show important skill-level differences in the effects of the variables on downward and upward mobility.

Age, gender, household size, marital status, and English proficiency were not significant predictors of mobility. Education was only a significant predictor for the high-skilled sample. Having more years of education completed decreased the odds of downward mobility vs. lateral mobility, while having more years of school in the US increased the probability of upward mobility. The effects of region of origin on occupational mobility differed by skill-level. In the low-skilled sample, being from Asia (compared to Latin America) increased the likelihood of upward mobility and of downward mobility versus lateral mobility; it had no effects in the high-skilled sample. Instead, being from other regions and Europe and Central Asia (compared to Latin America) increased the probability of downward mobility of the high-skilled. In terms of the admissions category, only employment sponsorship was a significant predictor. Obtaining a green card through employment (versus through family) was related to an increased probability of upward and downward mobility for the low-skilled workers and increased probability of downward mobility for high skilled workers.

Table 5: Multinomial Logistic Regression to Estimate Direction of Mobility between Last Occupation Abroad and First Occupation in the US

	Low-Skilled				High-Skilled			
	Upward Mobility		Downward Mobility		Upward Mobility		Downward Mobility	
	vs. Lateral Mobility				vs. Lateral Mobility			
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Age	0.005	0.015	0.025	0.013	0.006	0.016	0.007	0.014
Female (ref=Male)	-0.307	0.288	-0.259	0.256	-0.022	0.279	-0.025	0.253
Household Size	0.032	0.083	0.062	0.073	-0.035	0.097	-0.012	0.080
Not married (ref=Married)	-0.047	0.396	-0.413	0.347	0.141	0.447	0.740	0.376
Years of School Completed	-0.031	0.054	0.038	0.049	-0.071	0.051	-0.132**	0.049
Years of School in US	0.283	0.255	0.210	0.22	0.152*	0.076	-0.015	0.078
Not proficient in English (ref=Proficient)	0.400	0.314	-0.096	0.278	-0.186	0.398	-0.349	0.333
Region of Origin (ref=Latin America)								
Europe and Central Asia	0.644	0.410	0.427	0.375	0.411	0.46	0.870*	0.405
East and Southeast Asia	1.517***	0.384	0.633*	0.322	0.28	0.438	0.566	0.389
Middle East and Africa	-0.341	0.658	-0.715	0.619	0.886	0.538	0.682	0.438
Other	0.938	0.486	0.588	0.434	0.238	0.427	1.188**	0.390
Admission Type (ref=Family Preference)								
Employment	1.063**	0.356	1.928***	0.311	0.399	0.371	1.134**	0.331
Refugee/Asylee/Parolee	-0.225	0.383	0.105	0.480	-1.977	1.115	-1.412	1.082
Other	-0.255	0.535	-0.199	0.342	0.621	0.495	-0.397	0.396
Constant	-2.059	1.820	-1.760	1.641	1.322	1.965	1.660	1.796
-2LL	1205.24				1088.29			
N	718				607			

Source: The New Immigrant Survey, 2003
Notes: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. Model excludes 105 low-skilled and 132 high-skilled observations due to missing data.

DISCUSSION

In this thesis, I analyzed the occupational mobility of legal permanent residents in the US using data from the New Immigrant Survey. Migrants' occupational attainment depends on their own individual characteristics, but the circumstances of their migration are also crucial. I sought to find out how does occupational mobility differ between high-skilled and low-skilled LPRs. My findings from the New Immigrant Survey showed different patterns of occupational mobility

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for low-skilled and high-skilled LPRs. Chi-square tests of independence showed that high-skilled respondents experienced significantly less downward and more lateral mobility than the low-skilled. The high-skilled also showed a slightly higher percentage of upward mobility than the low-skilled. Hence, and contrary to my initial expectations, low-skilled LPRs are more likely to experience a decline in occupational status than their high-skilled counterparts. Results from multinomial logistic regressions revealed that years of education, region of origin, and admission type were important predictors of mobility for both low-skilled and high-skilled professionals.

My findings, however, were slightly inconsistent with previous literature. Even though high-skilled immigrants may face barriers in the job market upon arrival in the US, they still presented a greater ability for upward and lateral mobility than low-skilled immigrants. This finding may be explained by the fact that the majority of the high-skilled individuals in the sample obtained their green cards through employment-based sponsorship. Another possible reason for this finding is that I did not take into consideration that a lateral or even downward occupational move may still entail increased wages for immigrants in the US. Considering differences in both wages and standard of living between the two countries, migrants could earn a much higher real salary even when facing lateral or downward occupational mobility after migration to the US.

Taken together, these findings contribute to our understanding of how individual characteristics and the mode of entry to the US shape immigrants' outcomes before they even attempt to enter the job market. The US labor market has a rigid occupational structure for immigrants where placement in job market depends heavily on their migration background. This research on LPRs occupational mobility also contributes to the study of inequalities by shedding light on the existence of stratification structures within larger stratification systems. The

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immigration system already is a structure of stratification in US society. My findings highlight a system of stratification within the LPR category which is based on individuals' prior migration histories. In sum, migrants are subject to many structures of stratification due to their condition as immigrants.

My analysis had a few limitations. The NIS lost a significant number of respondents in the second wave performed in 2007. For this reason, this investigation was limited to the first wave. Consequently, it was not possible to verify whether a recovery on occupational mobility was experienced over time.

Studying the patterns of occupational mobility between high-skilled and low-skilled immigrant workers in the US is crucial to understand the dynamics of the US job market. Previous studies suggest that high-skilled migrants in Canada working in low-skilled positions have poor mental and physical health. Their poor health status was associated with lack of job satisfaction, financial limitations, loss of social identity, and wasted skills (Subedi and Rosenberg 2017). Hence, for future studies I suggest verifying the relationship of occupation mobility and the impacts on migrants' physical and mental health, stratifying samples not only by gender, but also by skill level.

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