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Determinants of Women’s Employment Participation:

Muslim / Non-Muslim Differentials in Australia

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In the Demography & Sociology Program
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Australian National University

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Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated this thesis is my own work.

Yaghoob Foroutan

January 2007
For my wife (Masoumeh) and
my children (Parham and Farnam)
Acknowledgments

I received encouragement, support, comments, and constructive criticism from many people during the completion of my doctoral study at The Demography & Sociology Program of The Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra, Australia. I would like to gratefully acknowledge and express my deepest thanks to everyone who helped me at the all stages of my PhD, particularly those listed below who made major contributions. With having such excellent support, I am very honoured that my research was awarded The W. D. Borrie Essay Prize 2004 for the best PhD paper on a population-related topic.

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Abstract

The employment participation of women, as the major issue of this study, is a phenomenon with a variety of studies that in the social sciences has been described as 'potentially infinite' (Evans 1996: 68). However, the conduct of research in various contexts is essential in order to reveal the varying aspects of this phenomenon. This study has given specific attention to the impact of religion, which 'was once at the forefront of demographic research (McQuillan 2004:25), on women's employment participation. Religion is generally considered to be connected with traditional views and values on gender roles in the household. This is particularly the case in the Islamic context where the level of women's employment participation, as an indicator of gender outcomes, has often been found to be comparatively low. As the empirical observations of this study related to the multicultural and multiethnic setting of Australia, the study is also associated with the factors of migration and ethnicity.

This study has used special tabulations from the full 2001 Population and Housing Census of Australia dealing with almost 5.4 million women in the main working ages (that is, 15-54). The study has used logistic regression analysis as a standardisation process. This has provided the opportunity to examine the relative impact of each determinant of women's employment participation while simultaneously controlling for other determinants included in the analysis. In addition, for two major reasons, the multicultural and multiethnic setting of Australia where this study has been taken place
has provided unusual opportunities for this study. In this study, we have been able to compare employment participation of Muslim and non-Muslim women. Moreover, as these women came from a wide range of countries throughout the world, we have been able to examine the employment differentials between these two groups of women across the regions of origin and to investigate different patterns of employment participation of Muslim women by birthplace. More importantly, this investigation of ethnic variations provides empirical evidence for the theoretical debate as to whether religion per se or other determinants explain the lower level of women’s employment participation in the Islamic settings. This study has been able to separate the effect of religion from that of region of origin reflecting various socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences. It is acknowledged, however, that this study has faced limitations related to the measurement of selectivity due to the migration process, the possibility of disadvantage through discrimination on the part of employers in the destination country, and the matter of religiosity.

The results of this study have revealed a substantially heterogeneous composition of Muslim women across the different regions of origin in terms of characteristics influencing employment participation. Accordingly, considering Muslim women in Australia only as a single group without paying attention to their ethnic differences is insufficient and could be misleading. This pattern also holds for the employment status of women as the influence of Islamic affiliation varies significantly across the regions of origin. Significant ethnic variation was found to apply to the effects of most determinants of the employment status of women, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. The gap between these two groups of women with regard to the effects of most determinants
of employment status and occupational levels varies markedly across the region of origin. However, once employed, we did not find a significant influence of Islamic affiliation on women’s occupational levels even across the regions of origin. The results of this study have also indicated that both family formation characteristics and human capital endowments have greater implications for women’s employment status than religion.
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Chapter 1
Research Design: Questions, Objectives, Background, Methodology

1. Starting Point and Key Questions

The starting point and the key questions in this study relate to the significance of competing factors affecting women’s employment participation in the multicultural context of Australia. More specifically, is Muslim women’s employment participation significantly affected by their religious affiliation once other relevant factors are controlled? How substantial is the influence of religion on women’s employment participation in Australia in comparison with other important determinants such as migration characteristics, family issues, and human capital components? Is Muslim women’s employment participation explained by migration characteristics, family issues, human capital components, or ethnic - as distinct from religious - origins?

The present research focuses on four main aspects: employment participation, gender issues, religious affiliation, and migration characteristics. All these issues will be discussed in the light of a demographic approach in which it is supposed that there are
significant interplays between women’s work status and demographic factors such as marriage patterns, fertility behaviour and migration.\textsuperscript{1,2,3}

2. Rationale of the Research

The increasing trend in female labour force participation is one of the most important characteristics of labour markets throughout the world, particularly, in developed countries such that this increasing trend has been viewed as ‘one of the fundamental facts of gender relations in this century’ (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2001: 430). Davis (1984: 397) explained the substantial changes in gender roles reflected in female labour market behaviour as part of ‘a more important social revolution, a revolution in sex roles’. According to him, ‘in industrial societies, it used to be that a women would be asked what her husband does for a living. Now, increasingly, men are being asked what their wives do’ (Davis 1984: 397).

In ‘Key Issues in Women’s Work’, Hakim (1996: 1) traced the roots of the increasing trend of female labour force participation in a historical approach. First, during World War II, the shortage of men was beneficial for women because of ‘breaking down job barriers and creating new openings’. Second, ‘the contraceptive revolution’ in the 1960s

\textsuperscript{1} For instance, see Ware 1976, 1981a; Davis 1984; Chesnais 1996; Rosenfeld 1996; Riley 1998; McDonald 2000; United Nations 2001.

\textsuperscript{2} By interlinking demographic and gender issues – including women’s participation in labour markets –, United Nations (2001: 49) documented that ‘researchers are increasingly paying attention to gender issues in the collection and analysis of demographic, social and economic data’.

\textsuperscript{3} Ware (1981b: ix) documented that ‘demography is one social science which cannot in general terms be accused of neglecting women’.
provided women with control over their reproductive life and fertility behaviour by enabling them to plan their childbearing to fit in with their work force participation.

Another general and concise explanation for the increasing trend of female participation in the labour market can be found in the concept of the ‘double peak pattern’ termed by the United Nations (2000: 111), which is disappearing in this modern period. The double peak pattern arises when women stop their participation in the labour market when they have their first child and eventually reenter only after a few years outside of the market because of their family and childbearing duties. But, as ‘women are finding ways to combine family responsibilities with market work’ (United Nations 2000: 111), the double peak pattern is no longer as prevalent as in the past.

However, the increasing trend of women’s labour force participation is subject to the context in which this participation takes place so that the conduct of research in different contexts is essential to reveal the varying aspects of this phenomenon.

To this end, research of Australia which, as a multicultural country, contains a remarkable diversity in terms of migration status and ethnicity provides a good opportunity to examine the competing influences of migration characteristics, religious affiliation, family issues, and human capital on female labour market behaviour. More

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4 ‘Women’s participation in the labour force was highest when women were in their early twenties, decline in their early thirties as they left to bear and rear children, and rose to a second but lower peak in their forties’ (United Nations 2000: 111).

5 Giel (1977), for instance, with an emphasis on the strong association between women’s status and demographic processes, pointed out that ‘the precise way’ that this link operates ‘is not well understood’. She, then, added that ‘women’s status varies according to culture and historical circumstance’ (Giel 1977: 27).
importantly, since Muslim women in Australia have come from a large number of different countries, they incorporate diverse socio-cultural and economic background and experience reflected in their region of birth. This provides the opportunity to examine whether their employment participation is more likely to be attributed to their religion or to their region of origin.

3. Objectives of the Research

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

1) To examine the levels of employment participation of Muslim and non-Muslim women in Australia,

2) To review literature and explanations related to women’s status in terms of socio-economic and demographic characteristics in the Islamic settings,

3) To examine bivariate associations between selected socio-demographic characteristics and women’s employment participation by religion,

4) To examine the competing influences of migration characteristics, family issues, and human capital on women’s employment participation in order to reveal the significance of religion using multivariate analyses,

5) To distinguish the contributions of socio-economic background and experience reflected in region of birth, on one hand, and religion, on the other hand, on women’s employment participation.
4. Focus Population & Comparison Groups

The present research covers all women aged 15-54 in Australia at the time of the 2001 Census of Population and Housing. In terms of religious affiliation, these women have been grouped into Muslim and non-Muslim. However, the special focus of this research is on Muslim women in Australia, including Australian-born as well as overseas-born.

As the research concerns employment participation, the age range is limited to women in the main labour force ages (that is, women aged 15-54 years). Therefore, precisely, the focus population of the present research is ‘Muslim women aged 15-54 in Australia at the time of the 2001 Census of Population and Housing’. These women in the present research will be considered in three categories: (a) as a whole (that is, all Muslim women), (b) in terms of their migration status (that is, either Australian-born or overseas-born), and (c) in terms of their ethnic origin (for overseas-born women by country/region of birth).

In this research, Muslim women in Australia will be compared with other groups as comparison groups. These comparison groups include the following categories:

1) All other Australian women (that is, non-Muslim women) both as a whole and in terms of their migration status (that is, Australian-born and overseas-born),

2) Non-Muslim women born overseas from the same region of origin as overseas-born Muslim women.

All of these comparison groups are in the same age range as that of the focus population.
5. Literature Review

Besides reviewing literature addressing the role of religion in women’s status and their employment participation, because the large majority of the focus population of this research are overseas-born, here, some major prior findings examining immigrants’ - in particular, female immigrants’- status and success in the labour market are reviewed. Based on these results, not only are there significant disparities between immigrants and natives in terms of employment participation but also considerable dissimilarities can be found among immigrants in terms of their background and experience.

Moreover, it should be noted not only that ‘employment is the most important determinant of a person’s standard of living and lifestyle’ (Collins 1988: 162) but also that success in the labour market has been documented to play a key role in the settlement process for most immigrants (Bouma 1994, VandenHeuvel and Wooden 1996).

5.1 Culture and Religion

There is a growing extensive literature addressing the effects of religion on demographic and economic behaviour (e.g. Lutz 1987; Lehrer 1995, 1996, 1999, 2004; Morgan et al 2002; Dharmalingam and Morgan 2004; McQuillan 2004). However, despite the importance of religion, its influence on women’s employment has received very little attention (Lehrer 1995, 2004) especially when a simultaneous focus is placed on gender
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(women), religion (Muslims), and migration status (migrants), particularly in relation to employment participation. Furthermore, in the case of Islam, prior research is mostly unable to explore the role of religion from a comparative angle because of the absence of non-Muslims as a control group in the research.

According to Lehrer (2004), religion has a substantial impact on women’s labour force activity. This contribution is connected with women’s traditional roles in the household, particularly caring for children as emphasised in religious teaching. So ‘the impact of religion on married women’s labor supply is expected to vary systematically over the life cycle’ (Lehrer 2004: 285). In addition, the impact of religion on labour force participation served ‘to reinforce traditional gender role attitudes...’ (Evans 1996: 79).

In her current research among immigrant Muslim women in Norway, Predelli (2004: 489) came to the conclusion that they ‘use Islam as a flexible resource for interpreting their own constraints and opportunities in paid labor and in the family’. In contrast, Read (2004: 58) in research on immigrant Muslim Arab-American women explored a significant association between religiosity and women’s labour force behaviour so that ‘women with stronger connection to religion usually have lower employment ... than women with weaker religious ties’. Fargues (1989) explored, firstly, the interplay between later marriage, education, and employment of women; and secondly, the inverse relationship between fertility and women’s employment in Muslim Arab countries.
Prior studies also demonstrated the issue of women’s seclusion as a crucial barrier for their market activities in Islamic societies. Anker (1997), for instance, pointed to purdah⁶ - women’s seclusion - in some Muslim countries as an example of cultural obstacles which define the acceptable types of work and may even prohibit women from occupying certain jobs.⁷,⁸,⁹ Bloom and Brender (1993: 8) also by attributing a low level of women’s labour force participation to the influence of cultural attitudes, documented that in the traditional Islamic context, largely in Western Asia and North Africa, ‘women are discouraged or prohibited from leaving the safety and sanctity of their homes to work for others’.

Clark, Ramsbey, and Adler (1991: 59-60) demonstrated that the substantially lower contribution of women’s employment in Islamic countries is related to ‘strong emphasis on separate spheres for men and women’ in Islam so that it has ‘blocked women from acknowledged entry into the paid work force’. Carr and Chen (2004: 133) also documented that the employment participation of Muslim women and Hindu women in

⁶ For instance, ‘in Saudi Arabia, and more recently Afghanistan, total segregation is observed and women are required to cover their entire bodies - including their face - so that they cannot be recognized’ (Saeed 2003: 168).

⁷ Dixon (1978) linked purdah to ‘the culture of suspicion’ and ‘the fear of outsiders’ originated as a Muslim institution, and then adapted by other cultures. However, it is more practiced among Muslims than the followers of other religions – Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and others. She believed that purdah is closely linked to all aspects of life so that even when a Muslim woman ‘is accompanied by her husband or other kinsmen, she will walk a few steps behind’ (Dixon 1978: 116)

⁸ However, the story of purdah was also told and observed from a different angle: ‘Purdah, the seclusion of Muslim women, is often claimed by observers to present an extreme deprivation, while many of the women in purdah regard themselves as being privileged by being able to enjoy the relative cool of their compound while their menfolk have to face the heat of the day’ (Espein 1982: 163). Meriessi (1987: 142) also documented a case in Morocco: ‘the seclusion of women, which to Western eyes is a source of oppression, is seen by many Muslim women as a source of pride... In rural Morocco seclusion is considered the privilege of women married to rich men’.

⁹ Some other part of the story of purdah was revealed in a study among Muslim women in Bangladesh where constraints caused by purdah on women’s work were found ‘more symbolic than real’ so that, for instance, ‘poorer women who are in need of outside work cannot afford to remain indoors, and make token concessions to the practice by putting a veil or covering their heads when going out’ (Adnan 1993: 288).
many of the higher castes in India is affected by the seclusion system and ‘traditional barriers still prevent women from going out of their home to work’.

In a broader scope, some researchers pointed out that women’s low labour force participation in Muslim societies is related to a set of barriers which make it difficult or even impossible to achieve the rational prerequisites of labour force participation. For instance, education, as will be discussed later, plays a substantial role in both females’ and males’ labour market success but women’s education is restricted in some Muslim societies. Bilmen (1976), for example, found that primary education was enough for girls according to their [Muslim] Turkish parents (cited in Young, Petty, and Faulkner 1980:66). Inglis, Elley, and Manderson (1992) also observed more restrictions in social activities for Muslim Turkish immigrant girls, as compared with boys, in Australia. In addition, high incidences of early marriage and high fertility, which are normally predominant in Islamic contexts, have been viewed as crucial restrictions for females’ employment outside the home (Mahmoudian 1998). Such obstacles which negatively affect women’s employment participation have also been addressed by Batrouney (1995) and Humphrey (1988). Carr and Chen (2004: 133) pointed out that in India particularly, Muslim women’s participation in work outside the home is still limited by traditional barriers such as these.

The literature also reveals that immigrant Muslim women are likely to suffer in the host country’s labour market because of their beliefs and customs reflected in their dress codes. Omar and Allen (1996: 38), for instance, demonstrated that apart from unsuitable workplaces in terms of their religious beliefs and family structure, relatively low labour
force participation of Muslim women in Australia might be explained by ‘the experience of discrimination against those who observe certain codes of dress such as wearing the head scarf’. This issue was also explored in a survey at Monash University in which ‘the wearing of the headscarf - *hijab* - by women and dress codes in general, ... and clashes between religious and work obligations’ were observed as difficulties (Adhikari 2001:601). Collins (1988: 185) pointed out the issue of ‘culture clash’ in Muslim families of non-English speaking background immigrants in Australia, in particular, among girls and young women in relation to their subordinate position.

According to Kabir and Evans (2002: 74, 76), the Australian census data from 1986 to 1996 illustrates that ‘although the Muslims’ skill level was almost equivalent to the mainstream labour force, their unemployment rate was three times higher than the dominant group and remained virtually consistent’\(^{10}\) over this period of time. Moreover, as Muslims experienced a greater unemployment rate than the United Kingdom and Irish-born\(^ {11}\), and even unemployment rate of Bangladeshi and Lebanese-born Muslims was higher than their Christian counterparts\(^ {12}\), they concluded that ‘the Australian labour market continues to give preference to ‘its own kind’ ... [while,] Islamic culture in a predominantly Christian society remains unacceptable’.

\(^{10}\) In 1996 the unemployment rate of Muslims was 25 per cent, compared to eight per cent for the United Kingdom and Irish-born, and nine per cent for the Australian-born, in spite of the fact that the Muslims’ skill level were almost equivalent to the Australian-born and the national total’ (Kabir and Evans 2002: 73-74).

\(^{11}\) Unemployment rate for ‘the United Kingdom and Irish-born (eight per cent), ... [and for] Muslims (28 per cent in 1986 and 25 per cent in 1996)’ (Kabir and Evans 2002: 76).

\(^{12}\) ‘The unemployment rate of Bangladeshi-born Muslims in 1996 was 22 per cent compared to 13 per cent for Christians; and [for] Lebanese-born Muslims was 31 per cent compared to 17 per cent for Christians in 1996’ (Kabir and Evans 2002: 87).
Kabir and Evans (2002: 82) pointed out that although ‘there is no documentary evidence of discrimination towards unemployed Muslims in the 1980s and 1990s’, some of their interviews revealed that ‘religion was a cause of discrimination for Muslims’ resulting from such religious identities as Muslim names\textsuperscript{13} and Islamic dress code. While acknowledging the ethnically diverse composition of Australian Muslim population, Kabir and Evans (2002: 93) also explained the different employment pattern of the Australian Muslims partly by the role of Islamic culture which is not as accepting of social change as the Western culture is.

However, cultural and normative determinants affecting the issue of priority for either work or family responsibilities are associated with not only immigrant women’s labour market behaviour but also that of Australian-born women. The Australian women’s labour force participation in the middle 1990s, for instance, was found to be normatively supported: ‘Australian’s ideal for full-time homemaking while there are pre-school children in the home ... and for part-time employment while there are school age children’ (Evans 1996: 78). On the basis of a cross-national study, Brusentsev (2002) also explored different impacts of the family life cycle on female labour force participation caused by different perspectives towards work and family in Australia, Canada, and the USA. According to her, women in Australia are more likely to leave the labour market because of their family responsibilities such as marriage, childbearing, and child-rearing while in Canada and the USA women still like to remain in the labour market even during these years of family responsibilities. She believed that this cross-national variation, besides labour market incentives, could be attributed to social

\textsuperscript{13} Like Ayesha, Fatima, Rahima (for women), and Mohammad, Abdullah, and Ahmed (for men).
attitudes towards employment; meaning that because of stronger traditional ideology of the family, Australian women more than both Canadian and American women, prefer family lives to work outside the home.

5.2 Educational Attainment

In contrast to religion, the literature linking education and immigrants’ employment participation in the destination country is abundant. According to Wooden (1994), the role of education in migrants’ labour market success is so essential that it has been considered in most immigration-related studies. Hook and Balistreri (2002: 640) also pointed out the role of education in migrants’ lives in the host country ‘as a vehicle for socioeconomic mobility’. Read (2004: 55) documented education ‘historically ... [as] a significant predictor of women’s employment’.

McDonald (2000) addressed education as an institution that deals with people as individuals (in countries with a very low fertility) and in which the level of gender equity is high. Education plays a key role in the ‘equal pay for equal work’ system and in eliminating discrimination against women in employment. This high level of gender equity lies in high educational aspirations so that ‘parents very actively encourage their daughters to pursue education and paid employment’ (McDonald 2000: 4).

The strong impact of education on women’s employment participation in Australia has been documented by Richmond (1974), Evans (1984, 1988), Brooks and Volker (1985),
and Santow (1990). Sorensen (1993) demonstrated that educational background puts immigrant women on an equal footing as native women in labour market status and success. She also considered education to be the strongest defining achieved human capital characteristic, which ‘explains part of the occupational stratification of immigrant women’ (Sorensen 1993: 4). Gregory (2002) attributed higher pay and higher rates of immigrants’ labour force participation to higher levels of education. Read (2004: 71) also found ‘further evidence of the positive effects of human capital [firstly, education] on immigrant women’s labor force activity’.

However, based on the results of prior research, there are other considerations that show more clearly how migrants’ labour force participation can be affected by their educational backgrounds. One of these considerations refers to the place where the qualification has been received. For instance, Chapman and Iredale (1993: 359) found that in Australia ‘around 39 per cent of skilled immigrants chose to subject their overseas qualifications to local assessment and, of these, 42 per cent were recognized as being equivalent to their Australian counterpart’. More specifically, it is believed that many qualifications obtained abroad are undervalued or unrecognised so the impact of education on labour market success amongst immigrants from non-English speaking countries is lower than it is for both immigrants from English speaking countries and the native-born population. For example, Evans and Kelley (1986), Iredale (1988), Castles, Morrissey, and Pinkstone (1989), Hugo (1992, 1995), and Chapman and Iredale (1993) argued that because of the lack of recognition of qualifications and skills obtained abroad, non-English speaking background immigrants find it difficult to gain employment.
Moreover, it was found that ‘adult immigrants educated abroad are at the greatest disadvantage in the labour market’ (Wooden 1994: 266). VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996) documented that the influence of education is weaker for non-English speaking background female immigrants than for other women. Jones and McAllister (1991), and Wooden and Robertson (1989) showed that the probability of unemployment for women whose qualifications are gained abroad rather than in Australia is higher. McAllister (1995) pointed out that one of the disruptive consequences of the migration process per se on the Australian immigrants’ occupational status and success is that migrants usually find their qualifications gained abroad to be less valued in Australia.

Furthermore, there is a gender consideration in the literature referring to the weak influence of education on labour market success of non-English speaking background immigrants. VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996), for instance, argued that this problem is more severe for migrant women than for migrant men. To explain this gender disparity, Wooden and Robertson (1989) found that women are more likely than men to come to Australia as the secondary applicants so women in this situation often accept some lower level of employment until their qualifications received overseas are recognised.

This literature review also reveals the existence of links between education and some other factors affecting female labour force participation. For instance, Evans (1984) demonstrated this linkage with period of residence in Australia and English competence. Also, the place where the qualification was gained has been related to other achieved characteristics such as English language proficiency that affect labour market success. Wooden (1994: 266), for
instance, highlighted that ‘immigrants educated in Australia nearly always have perfect language skills’.

5.3 English Language Proficiency

There is a wide range of early research referring to a significant association between English language proficiency and labour force participation of immigrants: the higher the former, the more the latter. For instance, Brooks and Volker (1985), Inglis and Stromback (1986), Wooden and Robertson (1989), Young (1990), Hugo (1992, 1995), and Wooden (1994) found a substantial association between poor English proficiency and lower rates of participation in the labour market amongst immigrants. More specifically, Brooks and Volker (1985), Inglis and Stromback (1986), and Wooden and Roberson (1989) recognised a negative association between English skills and unemployment for immigrant women. Prior research in Australia revealed that not only is finding a job for those immigrants who are unable to speak English well harder than those whose English ability is better but also their earnings are lower (e.g. Ware 1974, Martin 1975, Evans 1984).

It is interesting to note that the importance of English abilities on immigrants’ life and work in the receiving country is so crucial that they are often classified in a wide number of studies into two main groups: English speaking background (ESB) and non-English speaking background (NESB) immigrants. VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996), for instance, argued that immigrants from English speaking countries are more successful and proficient in the Australian labour market than those who came from non-English speaking countries.
Wooden (1994) also stressed that immigrants from English speaking countries participate in the labour market more than both immigrants from non-English speaking countries and the Australian-born; this pattern is applicable for both males and females. By examining factors affecting employment participation such as different levels of English speaking abilities, having or lacking officially recognised qualifications, and the length of residence in Australia, they also argued that there is a great deal of evidence supporting the claim that ‘unemployment rates are higher amongst overseas born compared with the Australian born and within immigrant groups are highest amongst those from NESB\textsuperscript{14}’ (Wooden 1994: 232). They argued that the lack of proficiency in English language skills is one of the main reasons for differences between the Australian-born workers and immigrants from non-English speaking countries in the Australian labour market.

Also, according to VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1996: 21), the importance of English skill is so substantial for immigrant women from non-English speaking countries that it accounts for one of the two key reasons for their disadvantaged circumstance in the Australian labour market so that they found ‘women with poor English skills were twice as likely as those women who only spoke English (the comparison category) to be unemployed rather than employed’. Shamsuddin’s (1998) findings also confirmed that non-English speaking background immigrant women are less likely to be employed than English speaking background immigrant women in Australia.

Based on data from three waves of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs’ Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants in Australia (LSIA1), Khoo and McDonald

\textsuperscript{14} Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)
(2001) found that English language proficiency is an important prerequisite for settlement success, and is associated with measures of economic participation, economic well-being and physical well-being. According to them, the strong positive impact of English skills on immigrants’ life and work in Australia does not seem surprising because ‘English is the language of commerce, instruction, political and judicial institutions, social interchange and the mainstream media’ (Khoo and McDonald 2001: 84).

5.4 Duration of Residence in the Destination Country

Another determinant of immigrants’ status and success in the labour market of the country of destination that has been emphasised by a wide range of studies is duration of residence in the host society as a leading facilitator in the process of socio-cultural assimilation for (female) immigrants’ labour market behaviour (e.g. Hirschman 1994, Yamanaka and McClelland 1994, Read 2004). Evans (1984) documented that all immigrants’ occupational success increases with their length of residence in Australia. She attributed this effect to the disruptive function of the immigration process per se on the migrants’ life and work in the host country. According to Wooden (1994), after controlling for English language proficiency, the most important factor to distinguish immigrants’ employment status is length of residence in Australia.

Khoo and McDonald (2001) found a positive association between labour force participation rates and duration of residence in Australia for both female and male immigrants. In their research about the settlement process, they came to the conclusion that immigrants’ success