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Skilled migrants risk depression in low-paid jobs

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(Medical Xpress) -- Skilled migrants who can't find jobs that use their education and qualifications are more likely to suffer mental health problems after three and a half years of arriving in Australia, according to a new study led by a researcher from The University of Western Australia.

"It seems many migrants will take any job when they first arrive - often including cleaning, waiting in restaurants, labouring, working in factories or driving taxis - even if they are university-educated or have other skills," Associate Professor Alison Reid said.

"This is due to the cost of migration and because it takes a while for migrants to get their qualifications recognised. However, skilled migrants can suffer mental health problems such as anxiety disorders if they are still in those first jobs after an extended period of time."

The study - conducted for the UWA-affiliated Western Australian Institute for Medical Research - used a migrant questionnaire at six months, 18 months and three and half years after arrival

Results showed no significant difference in migrant mental health during the first two periods, but well-being declined if skilled migrants could not find work that suited their qualifications by three and a half years.

"Skilled migrants are selected to enter Australia on criteria such as age, language ability, qualifications and work experience because they are

expected to fill gaps in the Australian labour force," Associate Professor Reid said.

"However this study shows there is a large under-use of skills among migrant workers up to three and a half years after they arrive in Australia.

"Australia's immigration program has focused since the mid-1990s on encouraging skilled migration. What is needed now are support programs such as employment training, mentoring and supervision if - after a year - skilled migrants can't get work in their field."

Associate Professor Reid's study, which showed that skilled migrants are more likely than Australian-born workers to work in jobs for which they're over-qualified, has been published in *Australian New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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