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Employment Supports for Newcomers in Small and Middle-sized Communities and Rural Areas: Perspectives of Newcomers and Service Providers

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Abstract. *In recent years there has been an increased migration of highly skilled and educated cohort of men and women from their initial port of entry—large urban centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal—to smaller urban/rural communities as a result of regionalization of the Canadian immigration policies. This article examines the employment supports for newcomers in Grand Erie—an urban/rural area in Ontario—which is now a home to an unprecedented number of newcomers. Using a community-based participatory research methodology, data were gathered from 212 newcomers and 237 service providers through quantitative and qualitative responses in the survey questionnaires. Results show that newcomers faced many challenges including non-recognition of foreign credentials, unemployment, language barriers, and discrimination. Collaboration between newcomers, service providers, social workers, and government is vital to foster newcomer integration in this region as well as in other smaller communities.*

Keywords: community-based, employment, immigrants, rural, visible minorities

Canada's rapidly aging workforce and the declining fertility rate of young Canadian women has been a concern of labor analysts for the past few decades (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007; Tolley, 2003). International migration is now a major contributor to Canada's economic prosperity and population growth (Chui et al., 2007; Tolley, 2003). In the 2006 Census the foreign-born population accounted for one in five (19.8%) of Canada's total population, the highest percentage since 1931 (Chui et al., 2007). Although the three largest cities—Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver—continue to be the main points of entry for newcomers, the Canadian government's regionalization policy aimed at supporting a balanced distribution of immigrants/refugees throughout the nation has contributed to their dispersion to smaller urban centres and rural areas (Hyndman, Schuurman, & Fiedler, 2006; Krahn, Derwing, & Abu-Laban, 2005; Walton-Roberts, 2006). Further, Canada's urban-rural communities are also showing interest in attracting and retaining newcomers as a way "to offset population decline, to ensure cultural continuity (linguistic and 'way of life'), and to ease labour market adjustment" (Burstein, 2007, p. 43). However, despite the geographical dispersion of immigrants outside of Canada's three largest metropolitan areas, very little research examines the experiences of newcomers in smaller urban and rural communities. Even less literature explores the perception of service providers and the challenges they face in serving newcomers in these regions.

With a population of about 90,000, Grand Erie (which includes the City of Brantford and Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Counties) is exactly the kind of middle-sized urban/rural region in Ontario, Canada that is now a home to a large number of newcomers. For example, between 2001 and 2006 Brantford-Brant County experienced an annual growth rate of approximately 21.1% in its immigrant population (Halyk, 2009).

This Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) was conducted as part of the first author's Master of Social Work (MSW) thesis (Wilfrid Laurier University) to understand the settlement issues facing newcomers in Grand Erie (Sethi, 2009). The author collaborated with Immigrant, Settlement, Transition, Employment and Partnership (ISTEP), a local community-based newcomer's task-force, which operates under Workplace Planning Board of Grand Erie. Until 2009, Workplace Planning Board of Grand Erie operated under the Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board (GETAB). ISTEP comprises of representatives from Grand Erie community agencies (urban and rural) including social workers, employers, and health practitioners. The key objective of the study was to explore the newcomer settlement and integration issues in Grand Erie in five areas: employment, education, training, health, and social supports. Data were gathered from 212 newcomers and 237 service providers using survey questionnaires (newcomers and service providers). Quantitative and qualitative tools were used to analyze the questionnaire responses.

In this paper the authors draw upon the data from this larger study focusing their discussions on the gaps in *employment* supports for newcomers in Grand Erie. The authors' goal is to add to literature on the *economic* integration of newcomers in Canada's small and mid-sized cities and rural areas with a view to provide culturally relevant knowledge that can improve employment service delivery in these smaller communities. We first present essential elements of the Canadian immigration policy to create a context for the literature review.

Canadian Immigration Policy

The 1960's and 70's witnessed some landmark changes in the Canadian immigration policy. The 1967 regulations replaced the "race" based policy with the points-based system. Potential applicants for permanent residency to Canada were assigned points in accordance to their age, education, language ability (English or French), and occupation (Boyd & Vickers, 2000; Citizenship & Immigration Canada [CIC], 2010). The introduction of humanitarian-based admissions in 1976 facilitated the entry of refugees to Canada (Boyd & Vickers, 2000). On June 28, 2002 the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) replaced the Act of 1976. The new legislation strengthened the human capital criteria of the points-based criterion by allocating maximum allowable points to the applicant's general skills (rather than occupation), education, paid work experience, linguistic ability in French or English, and adaptability (Boucher, 2007; McLaren & Black, 2005). Even though women have been migrating to Canada for economic reasons for centuries—primarily in service professions such as domestic workers or sex workers—the changes to the IRPA permitted women to enter Canada as principal applicants based on their educational level rather than as dependants of their spouses, primarily, under the Family Class Sponsorship Policy (Boucher, 2007; McLaren & Black, 2005).

Historically, family reunification has been the corner stone of the Canadian immigration policy. However, the current skill-based selection policy favours the individual's economic attributes over family relationships. According to McLaren and Black (2005), this is evident in its 60/40 selection rule: selecting 60% economic (skilled workers and business immigrants) and 40% non-economic immigrants (family class and refugee migrants). Economic immigrants

include skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial and territorial nominees, and live-in caregivers. These immigrants are selected based on their skills and ability to contribute economically to Canada. Family class immigrants are permanent residents sponsored by a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident living in Canada. Refugees are newcomers who are landed in Canada based on humanitarian grounds. This category includes government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees, refugees landed in Canada, and dependants of refugees landed in Canada who live abroad (Chui, 2011; CIC, 2010; McLaren & Black, 2005).

Terms and Clarification

Before proceeding to the literature review, it is important to clarify some terms that are critical to this study (Chui, 2011):

- Immigrants or Foreign-born population is defined as persons with a landed immigrant status in Canada. “A landed immigrant or permanent resident is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities” (Chui, 2011, p. 34).
- Recent Immigrants or Newcomers to Canada refers to permanent residents who came to Canada up to five years prior to a given census year.
- Visible Minority is defined under the Employment Equity Act as “persons, other than Aboriginal persons, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” (Chui, 2011, p. 34).
- For the purpose of the current study Newcomers were defined as recent immigrant, conventional refugee, refugee claimant, and/or other foreign born persons who arrived in Canada within the last five years of the study and were 18 years or older and residing in Grand Erie.
- Employment in the current study refers to newcomers who are (a) currently working in the paid labour force either part-time, full-time, seasonal, or contract work; or (b) are self-employed.

Literature Review

Economic Integration of Recent Immigrants

In recent years, much attention has been directed toward the labour force participation and economic integration of recent immigrants within the context of the “skill-based” Canadian immigration policies. The 2002 and more recent 2008 changes to the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) strengthened the human capital criteria of the points-based system with the purpose to facilitate the migration of skilled newcomers who can respond to Canada’s labour-market needs (CIC, 2010; McLaren & Black, 2005). These upgraded immigrant selection procedures have achieved much success in accelerating the migration of

immigrant men and women with a much higher level of formal education than their earlier counterparts. In 2008, for instance, the number of immigrants entering Canada with a university degree almost doubled as compared to the 1990's cohort (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Women now account for about 51% of immigrants to Canada mainly from Asia and the Middle East (Lindsay & Almey, 2006).

A substantial body of literature suggests that in spite of their high educational skills, recent immigrants, particularly from visible minority groups, face poorer economic outcomes (higher unemployment or underemployment, and lower wages) than previous cohorts relative to the Canadian-born population (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Banerjee, 2009; Bauder, 2003; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Li, 2001; Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2007; Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006; Wald & Fang, 2008). In a recent study Banerjee (2009) analyzed longitudinal data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). Banerjee's analysis suggests that while both European and visible minority immigrants on entry into the Canadian workforce face a wage disadvantage compared to the Canadian-born workers, the European immigrants are able to accelerate their income early on in their career and "catch up" but the "visible minority immigrants do not enjoy such a catch up" (p. 481).

Research aimed at understanding the causes of poor economic outcomes highlights a number of factors such as linguistic proficiency in English or French, non-recognition of foreign credentials and foreign work experience, lack of Canadian experience, employment discrimination, and racial discrimination (Banerjee, 2009; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Picot et al., 2007; Reitz, 2001; Suto, 2009). Walton-Roberts' (2006) study findings are relevant to our study. This author's research focused on Squamish and Kelowna, in British Columbia. Like Brantford, Squamish and Kelowna are urban-rural communities and are not typically considered major immigrant reception zones. Walton-Roberts found that European and non-European immigrant groups faced devaluation of their credentials and skills as well as language difficulties. Aydemir and Skuterud (2005) examined the 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2001 Census data to understand the causes in the decline in entry earnings of successive cohorts. They noted that the shift in immigrant source country from Europe to Asia, Africa, and Latin America accounted for one-third of the overall decline in immigrants' earnings over the last three decades. For many immigrants, especially visible minority groups, the lack of Canadian experience and non-recognition of foreign credentials appear to be two major determinants that affect their prospects in the labour market (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Aydemir and Skuterud (2005) refute the popular notion that foreign education can be attributed to the decline in immigrants' income. Their study, though, reveals that foreign experience has an adverse effect on male and female earnings. Reitz (2001) makes a compelling argument that although it is now well established that Canadian employers place little or no value on foreign work experience, policy makers continue to give work experience substantial weight in the point system. While many researchers have put their efforts into identifying the wage gaps between immigrants and native-born Canadians, Li's (2001) research accessed the net worth of immigrant degree-holders as compared to Canadian degree-holders. Li observed that visible minority immigrant women were most marginalized in the Canadian labour market due to the interaction of the foreign credentials with their minority status and gender. For this group of newcomers their degrees produced most adverse effects on their earnings as compared to male foreign degree-holders, immigrant Canadian degree-holders, and native-born Canadian men or

women degree-holders. Other researchers have noted that immigrant women of minority status face additional economic hardship compared to other groups of immigrants due to neo-liberal ideologies and the interlocking effects of immigration status, gender, race, and culture (Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Lindsay & Almey, 2006; Merali, 2008; Suto, 2009; Walton-Roberts, 2008).

Examining the issue of overeducation that results from discounting or underutilization of immigrant skills, Li, Gervais, and Duval (2006) explain that recent university-educated immigrants were twice as likely to be overeducated or to work in low education jobs and to stay in those jobs longer than their Canadian-born counterparts. Reitz (2001) cautions us not to confuse “immigrant skill underutilization” from “pay inequity” (pp. 352-353). In the first, immigrant skills are not recognized based on their immigrant status or country of origin. In the second, immigrant skills are recognized, however, they are paid less than native-born workers doing the same job requiring similar skills. Reitz (2001) asserts that while skill underutilization results in significant losses to the individual as well as to the Canadian economy due to immigrant “brain waste,” pay inequity benefits economy and penalizes the worker by short-changing him (p. 349). What is important here, Reitz observes, is that “in both types of discrimination—skill underutilization and pay inequity—immigrants end up earning less than they might based on their productive potential” (p. 353).

The above discussions suggest that the skilled-based immigration policy first selects immigrants based on their education and work experience. Once they are here they face disappointments as they are unable to transfer their human capital skills to the Canadian labour market. When the immigrants’ dream of being economically productive and financially independent in Canada does not match their reality—filled with economic hardships, low wages, job dissatisfaction—it makes them vulnerable to mental health issues such as loss of sleep and depression (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Samuel, 2009; Simich et al., 2006). The issue of brain waste, overeducation, or discounting of immigrant skills is a serious concern for the long-term economic welfare and health of immigrants and their families, for employers, policy makers, and for Canada (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006; Reitz, 2001).

In regards to employment services for immigrants, Cukier, Jeffery, Yap, McDonald, and Lejasisaks (2010) assert that immigrant specific services are structured to assist new migrants mainly in the initial phase of settlement. Moreover, “another challenge of contemporary service provision to immigrants is the prevalence of stereotypes and cultural assumptions leading to misinformation among service providers” (p. 162). Cukier et al.’s (2010) findings have important implications for the economic integration of women as their results indicate that more men than women were likely to use employment job search strategies (33% vs. 25%) and more men than women (66.3% vs. 60.7%) were familiar with these services. Other researchers (Frideres, 2006; Sethi, 2009, 2010; Walton-Roberts, 2006, 2008) support these authors’ recommendation for a more targeted approach or services that can adequately meet the needs of the current group of skilled, young, and educated immigrants.

Bauder’s (2003) study provides another perspective in regards to newcomer labour force participation and is important in the context of federal policies regarding the geographical dispersal of immigrants outside of Canada’s larger metropolitan areas to mid-sized communities and rural areas (Krahn et al., 2005; Walton-Roberts, 2006). Bauder reminds us that the

relationship between education and labour market outcome is not so simple. This author's analysis of the 1996 Census data analysis on the province of British Columbia (BC) revealed that immigrants' labour force participation and income was contingent upon the size of the settlement (large, mid-size, or small), size of the local immigrant and ethnic community, and gender.

Recent Immigrants in Smaller Urban and Rural Areas

Krahn et al. (2005) argues that “the federal and provincial governments have not focused the discussion of geographical dispersion in terms of integration, but rather in terms of economic development in the regions, the national decline in population, and resultant labour shortages” (p. 877). Adding to Krahn et al.'s (2005) argument, Walton-Roberts (2006) frames the issue of geographical dispersal of immigrants as a concern of the Canadian government that the three largest cities will not be able to sustain the rapid growth in foreign population.

Some studies on the economic integration of immigrants outside of the metropolitan areas suggest that immigrants settling in these areas are faring better than the rest of Canada (Bernard, 2008; Frideres, 2006). Bernard (2008) reported that the median income gap of recent immigrants narrowed from 67% in very large urban areas, to 32% in small urban centres, to only 20% in small towns and rural areas. However other studies provide a bleak picture of immigrants in smaller communities. For instance, even though immigrant men and women who were residing in the Waterloo region—an area consisting of four rural townships and three urban municipalities—were more educated than the native-born Canadians, the unemployment rate of foreign-born was 13.7% in comparison to 5% for Canadian-born (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006). Further, despite of the labour shortage in the technical industry as well as demand for physicians in this community, qualified immigrants and foreign educated doctors were not considered eligible to fill those positions due to the lack of recognition of their credentials obtained abroad (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006). Some of the barriers specific to immigrant settlement in smaller communities is the lack of proper transport infrastructure and similar amenities as available to those in larger centres (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006; Frideres, 2006; Sethi, 2010; Walton-Roberts, 2006). For instance, the level of English training courses offered in smaller centres may be lower (Level 3 vs. Level 6) than those in larger urban areas (Walton-Roberts, 2006). A one-size-fits-all model is not efficient to foster immigrant integration.

Understanding Social Workers' and Service Providers' Perceptions

Within the needs assessment model, very little work has been undertaken in understanding the perception of social workers and health care practitioners in providing services to newcomers, with significantly even less work around exploring the experience of professionals working in rural and remote communities. The authors concur with Gregory (2005) that such knowledge is crucial to understand how government controls over settlement services, funding cutbacks, and other structural and systemic factors constrain the social worker's ability to provide culturally-appropriate services to immigrants and refugees from around the globe (Cukier et al., 2010; Walton-Roberts, 2006). This is especially relevant as the emerging literature suggests that the economic hardships, high community unemployment, perceived lack of opportunities, and/or unmet expectations of life in Canada is related to

psychological distress, obesity, depression, and other negative physical and/or mental health outcomes among immigrants (Beiser & Hou, 2006; Simich et al., 2006).

Some authors (Reisch, 2008) are concerned that the social work profession is not keeping up with demographic and cultural changes of the last century: “To date, however, even the best histories of social work have focused primarily on the influence of mainstream (i.e., White) organizations and their leaders, ignoring and often objectifying the contributions of minorities” (p. 788). The 2010 fall publication geared to newcomer issues, *Settlement of Newcomers to Canada*, a collaborative venture between CIC and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is a positive step in addressing immigration issues. It suggests that the social work profession is now beginning to take seriously feminists' and other scholars' critique that social workers have failed to address the issues of immigrant populations (Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris, & Hamilton, 2009; Reisch, 2008).

Research Design

The chief objective of this exploratory study was to identify the most important settlement issues for newcomers in Grand Erie. Data were gathered from 212 newcomers and 237 service providers using a variety of sources—quantitative and qualitative responses from a survey questionnaire (service providers and newcomers), discussions with ISTEP members, dialogues with immigrant elders, community meetings, and the researcher's reflexive journal. In this paper the authors present findings from the quantitative and qualitative responses in the survey questionnaires. Most of the questions were on a Likert-type scale. However, space was provided for all participants to mark their responses under an “Other” category in the survey questionnaire if they felt that the choices offered were not applicable to their circumstances. This resulted in some qualitative data. To ensure comparability with other population surveys, both the questionnaires were adapted from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants (LSIC): Wave 2 to meet the criteria for this study (Statistics Canada, 2003) in accordance with the needs of the Grand Erie community. Permission was obtained from Statistics Canada for use of the questionnaire. The reliability of our questionnaire, as measured by Cronbach's alpha was .873. This research was approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Review Ethics Board.

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to recruit newcomers and service providers. Flyers advertising the research project were posted in community agencies, social service organizations, and places frequented by newcomers such as religious spaces, laundromats, and ethnic grocery stores. The research was promoted extensively at multicultural events, community meetings, and through the local media. The consent form and the questionnaire items for the newcomers were translated and back translated between English and the two most spoken languages in this area (Urdu and Mandarin) to ensure satisfactory linguistic equivalence (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). Both newcomers and service providers had the choice of completing the questionnaire using survey monkey or paper survey.

Project information was sent to the service providers through the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie database of immigrant-serving agencies. Since there are very few immigrant serving agencies in Brantford and the tri-counties, participation of several

individuals within those agencies that serve newcomers was encouraged. All the participants (newcomers and service providers) of the survey were eligible for three \$50 draws as a small token of gratitude for providing their valuable insight and time.

This study was exploratory and designed to collect as much data as possible on the gaps in service for newcomers in Grand Erie. Initially only descriptive statistics are used to describe the characteristics of a sample and analyze the patterns of responses in the completed questionnaires (Rubin & Babbie, 2008). After completion of her MSW studies the first researcher delved deeper into the data and conducted some gender-based analysis as well as analyzed the qualitative data in the “Other” category of the survey questionnaire using themes and quotes.

Results

Both newcomers ($N = 212$) and service providers ($N = 237$) completed the Grand Erie survey on Demographics, Education and Training, Employment, Health, and Social support. This article focuses on the findings in the *Employment* section. The data have been collapsed across the *agreed* and *disagreed* categories to clarify the results. Percentages are based on the number of respondents to a particular question. For some questions respondents could make multiple responses so the percentage total for some questions may exceed 100%.

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Newcomers. Participants originated from 45 different countries with India and the People’s Republic of China as the top two countries of birth. About one-half (48%) were landed immigrants or permanent residents, 34% were Canadian citizens, 5% were refugees, 9% were in Canada on a work permit, and only 1% were in Canada on a visitor visa. Participants spoke 37 different languages. The majority of the participants (69%) could speak in English and/or French and write (71%) in English and/or French *fairly well to well* before coming to Canada.

It is noteworthy that the majority of newcomers (66%) were female. The median age of newcomers was 40 years with most of them (70%) between the ages of 25 to 44 years. About 65% of the participants were married. As expected, over half (60%) had completed at least a Bachelor’s degree before coming to Canada. Most (88%) of the newcomers were living in the City of Brantford at the time of the survey. The median length of residence was 19 months.

Approximately 59% of the newcomers were employed while 41% were unemployed at the time of the survey. A larger proportion of women (60%) than men (56%) were employed. Of those employed the participants reported the following employment status: 54% were employed full-time (58% male, 52% female), 19% were employed part-time (16% male, 21% female), 14% were engaged in contract work (11% male, 15% female), 9% were self-employed (11% male, 8% female), 4% were in Canada on a work-permit (2% male, 3% female), and 2% were engaged in seasonal work (2% male, 1% female). Newcomers reported over 20 different types of occupations with most (30%) of them working in customer service (e.g., call centre, restaurant, and retail sales) followed by factory work (13%) and live-in-caregivers (11%). The median length of time employed in the current occupation was 19 months. Slightly over half (51%) reported either no income or an annual income of less than

\$19,000 and just 1% of the participants earned an annual income of over \$70,000. The median income was \$10,000.

Service providers. The majority (71%) of the study respondents represented a non-profit agency. Service providers reported 21 different categories of the organization such as social services, health care, educational institute, and financial services offering a wide range of services with “employment related services” emerging as the most common. More than half (57%) of the service providers were employed in an agency located in the city of Brantford.

The participants described the characteristics of the *majority* of their newcomer clients in the following ways: 47% were an equal mix of male and female, 30% were primarily young adults between the ages of 25-34 years, and 39% were Canadian citizens. The top two countries of origin of their newcomer clients were China and India.

Responses to the Research Questions

Participants were asked a series of questions to explore the supports that are essential to newcomer employment integration in Grand Erie. Participants' responses to these questions are summarized below.

Newcomer Responses

Barriers that newcomers experienced in seeking employment. The top two barriers reported by newcomers were: “Lack of Canadian experience” (89%) and “Transportation constraints” (77%). An equal number of participants (75%) reported “Not having family or friends in Canada” and “Financial Constraints” as major barriers. Other barriers included “Labour Market Language Training (LMLT)” (72%), “Language Problems” (70%), and “Discrimination” (69%). As compared to other barriers, “Not being able to navigate the internet,” was reported by the lowest proportion of newcomers, yet over half (57%) of them found it a barrier to finding employment.

Training courses that can be useful to newcomers. Over 80% of respondents *agreed* that “Employer Paid Training” (89%), “On-the-Job Training” (89%) and “Off-site Training” (86%), “Language Training Courses” (82%), and “Job Shadowing” (82%) would be useful tools to gain employment. Other important employment training programs that newcomers supported were mentorship programs and personal development courses.

Pearson Chi-square tests of independence revealed the following results for education and employment. When we examined the relationship between newcomers' “Level of education” and “Income” the results were not statistically significant. A significant correlation did emerge between “Level of education” variable and newcomers' responses to “Are you currently employed” with $\chi^2(4) = 11.64, p < 0.001$. As evident from Table 1, the higher the newcomer's level of education the greater his/her chances were of being employed. The majority of respondents (71%) who were employed were those with a university degree (at least a bachelor's degree or higher). The numbers are skewed in regards to the proportion of

newcomers with a university degree and those with a trade certificate. It is worth mentioning that 71% of participants with a trade certificate were unemployed at the time of the survey.

Table 1

Education and Currently Employed Cross Tabulation

Education Level	Currently Employed	
	Yes (<i>n</i> = 123)	No (<i>n</i> = 88)
No Education	33.3	66.7
Elementary or Secondary School	32.6	67.4
Community College	48.3	51.7
University Degree	71.3	28.7
Trade Certificate	28.6	71.4
All Education Levels	58.3	41.7

Note. *N* = 211. The row percentages total to 100%.

Country of education and employment status of newcomers. Pearson chi-square tests of significance for “Country where newcomers were educated” and “Are you currently employed” were statistically significant with $\chi^2(6) = 25.03$, $p < 0.001$. Most newcomers who were employed were educated in Europe and Australia (71%). Of the newcomers educated in Asian countries (mostly from India, China, Pakistan, and the Philippines) 66% fared slightly better than those educated in North America (64%; Canadian educated). Although there were very few newcomer men and women from the Middle East, they largely were unemployed (67%).

Employment and type of barriers. Overall, Pearson chi-square tests of significance between the question “Are you currently employed?” and the “Type of barriers to Seeking Employment” were not statistically significant for any of the aforementioned barriers: “Lack of Canadian experience,” “Transportation constraints,” “Not having family or friends in Canada,” “Financial Constraints,” “Language Problems,” “Not being able to navigate the internet,” and “Discrimination.” Some correlation emerged between “Are you currently employed” and “LMLT” as a barrier to seeking employment with $\chi^2(2) = 6.12$, $p = 0.05$. A larger proportion of newcomers who were unemployed (79.5%) as compared to those who were employed (65.3%) reported LMLT as a barrier to finding employment (see Table 2).

Gender analysis of newcomer responses. Pearson chi-square tests of significance were performed to assess gender-related differences with respect to the following questions: (a) are you currently employed, (b) what is your employment status, and (c) what are the type of

barriers to seeking employment. Results were not statistically significant. However, more men (70%) than women (48%) *agreed* that they were employed in their field of expertise.

Table 2

Percentages of Currently Employed and LMLT as a Barrier to Finding Employment

Currently Employed	LMLT as Barrier to Employment		
	Agree (<i>n</i> = 151)	Do Not Agree or Disagree (<i>n</i> = 24)	Disagree (<i>n</i> = 37)
Yes	65.3	12.1	22.6
No	79.5	10.2	10.2
Total	71.2	11.3	17.5

Note. *N* = 212. The row percentages total to 100%.

Service Provider Responses

Barriers that newcomers experienced in seeking employment. Service providers ranked the top barriers as: “Communication problems” (work place terminology) (85%), “Not Employed in their Field of Expertise” (83%), “Education Accreditation” (83%), “Language Barrier” (82%), “Cultural Barriers” (73%), and “Transportation Barriers” (e.g., do not have a driver’s licence; 73%). Similar to newcomer responses, service providers suggested “Not Being Able to Navigate the Internet” as the least common obstacle yet it was reported by more than half (59%) of the service providers.

Barriers that newcomers experienced in being promoted. The majority (77%) of service providers reported “Education Accreditation” as the most common barrier that newcomers experienced to being promoted. Almost three-quarters (74%) of the study respondents agreed that “Not Employed in Their Field of Expertise” posed difficulties to newcomers. It was followed by “Language Barriers—Verbal” (70%), “Language Barriers—Written” (69%), and “Communication Problems” (69%).

Reasons that service providers reported for newcomers’ dissatisfaction with employment. The top five reasons were: “Job Was Not a Desired Profession” (82%), “Position Was Not in the Area of Specialization” (81%), “Poor Pay” (80%), “Problems with Work Load / Responsibilities” (80%), and “Overqualified for This Type of Work” (77%).

Satisfaction with current employment. Approximately 43% of the respondents reported that newcomers were *satisfied* with their current employment, 35% of respondents reported that newcomers were *unsatisfied*, 20% of the respondents said that they *did not know*, and barely 2% marked their responses under the *other* category.

Comparison of Newcomer and Agency Data

Fluency in verbal language skills. Figure 1 represents newcomers' and service providers' responses to newcomers' "current" language skills. A high proportion of both the newcomers and service providers agreed that newcomers currently spoke English and/or French *fairly well*. However a larger percentage of the newcomer participants (93%) reported that they spoke the language *fairly well* as compared to the service providers (73%).

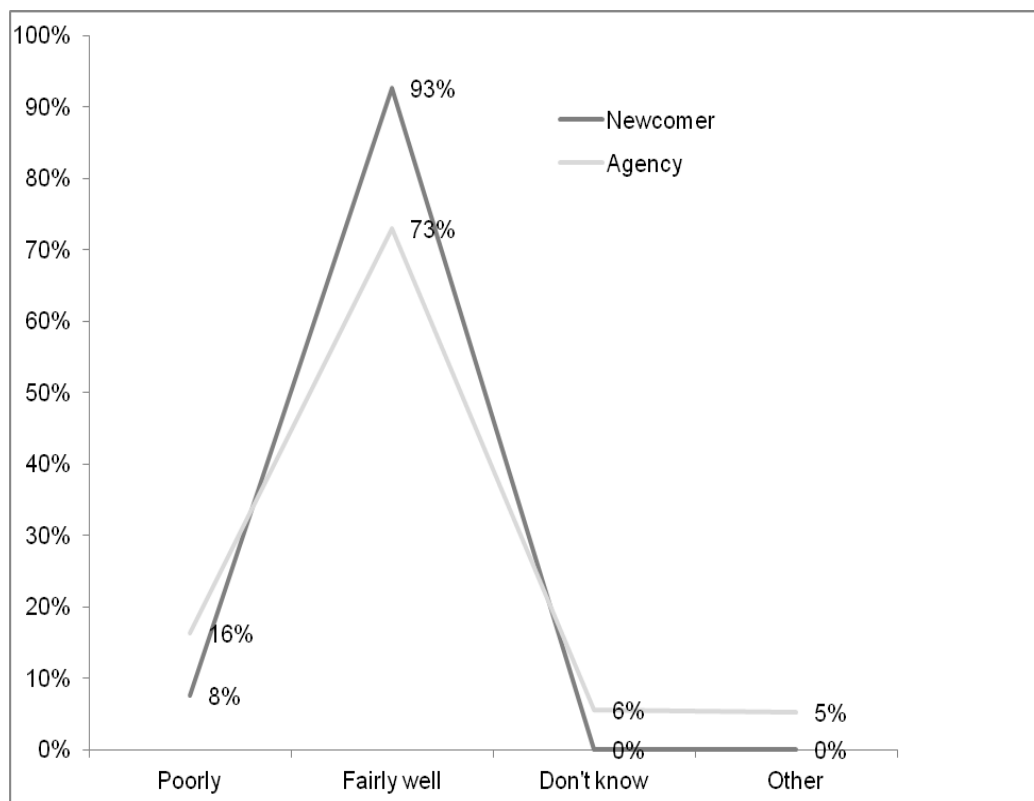


Figure 1. Newcomers' current verbal language skills: Comparison of newcomer and service providers' responses.

Barriers to employment in the 'Discrimination' category. Figure 2 represents the comparison of newcomer and service provider responses in regards to "Discrimination" as a barrier to newcomer employment. Although some differences emerged between newcomers' and service providers' responses, over half of the newcomers (69%) and service providers (60%) *agreed* that discrimination was a barrier.

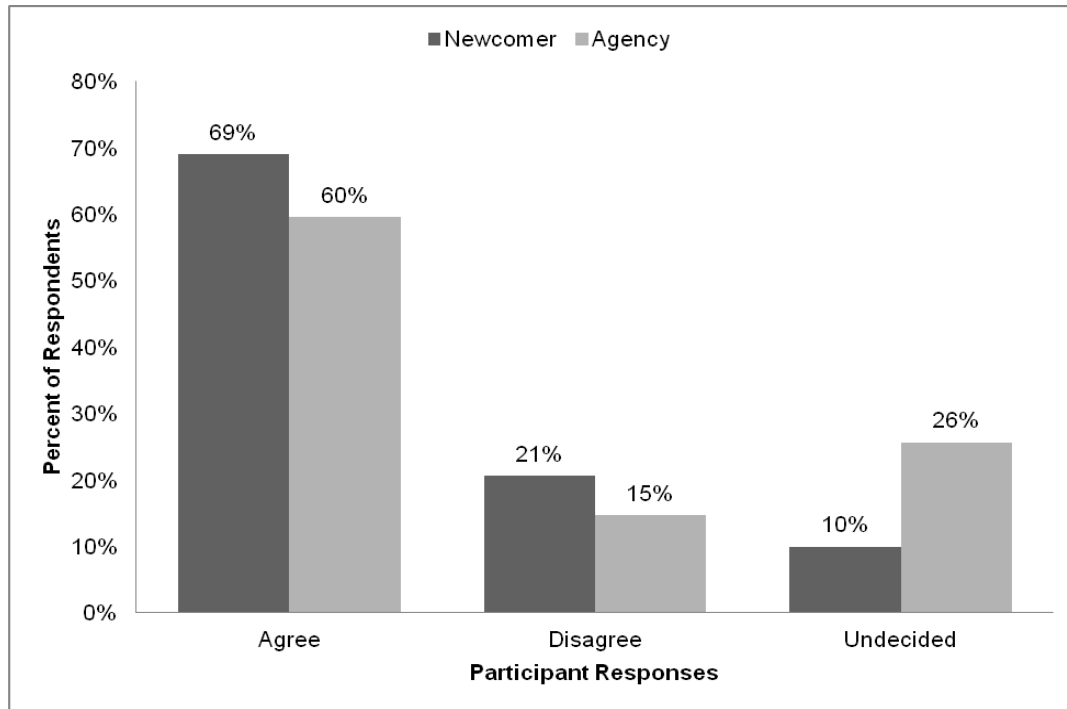


Figure 2. Barriers to employment in the "Discrimination" category: Comparison of newcomer and service providers' responses.

Other Important and Relevant Findings to Grand Erie

Decision to relocate. Despite the low income experienced by newcomers, it was encouraging to learn that over half (53%) were not planning to move out of Brantford or the tri-counties. The top two factors that would contribute to newcomer location as suggested by both newcomers and service providers would be: (1) to find better training or employment prospects and; (2) to be closer to family, friends, and/or ethnic organizations.

Ways to assist with newcomer integration. Both newcomers and service providers suggested that "Recognizing foreign credentials" and "Creating more jobs" was critical in fostering newcomer integration. It is noteworthy that "Having specialized programs for women migrants" as a way to facilitate newcomer integration emerged as an area that met with almost 100% agreement between the service providers and the newcomers.

Qualitative Findings

Common themes that emerged between service providers and newcomers in the "Other" category of the survey questionnaire are briefly summarized below:

- Deskillling of newcomers

- Newcomers' and service providers' statements suggest that newcomers experienced unemployment and/or underemployment in Canada.

Newcomer quote: Unemployment is the major source of stress.

Service provider quotes: It would seem that when you have a professional Engineer or physician driving a cab . . . we have a problem.

Employment is not in their field, their credentials are not being recognized—they have to take unrelated work at minimum wage.

- Newcomer participants highlighted “overqualification” as a barrier to finding employment:

Newcomer quote: No matter what are the qualifications, somehow we only qualify for restaurant and minimum wage jobs. I was even told that can't get a job because I am overqualified for it. But I am never qualified for other minimum wage ones.

“Non-recognition of Foreign Degrees” and “Lack of Canadian Experience” emerged as significant barriers to the newcomer’s economic integration in both the newcomer's and service provider’s questionnaire. Newcomers seemed puzzled and unsure how they could get Canadian experience when the employers would not give them an opportunity to work: “Nobody seems to give me a chance to show them my experience.” Another participant corroborated: “How you get experience if no one hires you?”

Barriers Specific to Immigrant Women

Participants (newcomers and service providers) identified, “Lack of quality and affordable child care” as a major barrier that hindered immigrant women’s economic integration: “Hard for women to go out to work because of small children.” Service providers echoed newcomers’ sentiments identifying “Lack of quality and affordable child care” in Grand Erie as a significant barrier for immigrant women’s economic integration. For women living in the rural areas of Haldimand and Norfolk, their resettlement difficulties were further compounded as they found it difficult to travel to the City of Brantford with small children. A newcomer specified: “There are not many courses available here . . . in Brantford it is difficult to attend them because I have small children and it is quite challenging to find a right babysitter.” Another rural participant highlighted the lack of transportation infrastructure as a barrier to attending ESL classes that was integral for the integration of newcomers: “. . . live in the outskirts, transportation is very very difficult to attend courses like ESL. If there is some transportation services that are arranged, will make lives easier and accessible for the courses.” The following newcomer quote further adds to the issue of transportation challenges for rural residents: “Lack of transportation/biggest—no license/no public transportation.”

Newcomers and service provider's data clearly highlighted that immigrant women put aside their needs in regards to their economic integration so that their spouses could get first settled in the host society. One newcomer wrote: "First my husband needs to find job—and due to lack of culturally relevant and affordable child care as I have a small child—it is difficult for me to go to work." A service provider asserted, "It seems that immigrant women wait for husband to get driving license, and settled and put their needs last." Furthermore, the following statements from newcomers and service providers suggest a clear division of gender-roles within newcomer families.

Newcomer quote: Immigrant women look after family and cannot get out . . .

Service provider quote: Women have additional burden of home responsibilities.

Newcomers and service providers expressed an urgent need for programs that addressed the needs of immigrant/refugee women in Grand Erie.

Discrimination

Several newcomers in the study commented that they experienced discrimination based on their educational credentials, dress, and/or culture. One newcomer remarked, "Discriminated because of non-Canadian degrees: yes . . ." Some participants feared the safety of their children: "More security and safety for children in school, from being bullied to discrimination." A female newcomer reported discrimination based on her dress. "I am discriminated because of my dress—hijab/burka." Service providers statements such as, "Employment is not in their field, their credentials are not being recognized—they have to take unrelated work at minimum wage" provide evidence of non-recognition of foreign degrees. Service providers corroborated on the issue of discrimination: "Some have experienced discrimination more obviously and blatantly than others."

Discussions

The newcomers in this study were mostly university educated, yet, 51% either had no income or were earning less than \$19,999. As noted in the literature review, several studies conducted in larger cities also point to low labour force participation, unemployment, underemployment, and deteriorating wages of educated immigrants (Banerjee, 2009; Chui et al., 2007; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Li, 2001; Lindsay & Almey, 2006; Picot et al., 2007; Reitz, 2001). The newcomer's quote, "No matter what the qualifications, somehow we only qualify for restaurant and minimum wage job. I was even told that I can't get job because I am overqualified for it. But I am never overqualified for other minimum wage job" expresses the sentiments of other newcomers in Canada. Wald and Fang's (2008) analysis of the 1999 Workplace and Employee survey, for instance, highlighted that recent immigrants are over educated, are working in jobs that do not match their education and skills, and experience greater wage penalty for their surplus education than Canadian-born workers.

It is possible that education-to-job or skills-to-job mismatch may account for skilled newcomers' low-paid job status in the Grand Erie community. From the standpoint of service

provision and policy immigrants' labour force participation must be examined in the context of the changes occurring within the employment sector in a particular community as well as the business cycle across the province. For example, in Grand Erie the two core industries—agricultural and manufacturing—are experiencing significant job losses. Most of the gaps are in the business, finance, sales, and service occupations (Halyk, 2009). As there is over representation in this region in trades (Halyk, 2009), it may provide an explanation why 71% of newcomers with a trade certificate were unemployed.

On the other hand our analysis suggests that being university educated improves the chances of finding employment in this region. This may be due to the shortage of university educated men and women in this community. The number of people with a university degree in Brantford is almost half the provincial rate (Halyk, 2009). It is possible that some employers favour immigrants with a university degree even if it was obtained abroad. It is important to recognize that most of the newcomers who were employed in our study were educated in Europe or Australia. Surprisingly, newcomers educated in Asian countries did better than those educated in the United States. For instance, Houle and Yssaad (2010) found that degree holders from European countries and the United States had better labour market outcomes than those from Asia. Although the findings in relation to the impact of foreign education on labour force participation on different racial groups are mixed, there seems to be a general consensus amongst researchers that recent immigrants, most strongly from non-European regions, face a wage disadvantage due to the lack of Canadian experience as their foreign work experience is devalued in Canada (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Banerjee, 2009; Reitz, 2001).

In our study, the quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis from both service providers and newcomers highlighted “Lack of Canadian Experience” as a significant barrier for newcomers in finding employment. A newcomer quote, “Nobody seems to give me a chance to show them my experience” reflects the paradoxical nature of the requirement of Canadian experience. How can newcomers gain work experience if they do not get an opportunity to work? The judgement of immigrant educational credentials and work experiences as “less than” or “inferior to” those of Canadians is smeared with racism and discrimination (Reitz, 2001). Employers' ignorance of the market worth of newcomers' educational credentials from different countries or their lack of knowledge on how to access the quality of newcomer education is another possible explanation of their resistance to hire them (Reitz, 2001).

It is indeed disturbing that newcomers and service providers in our study (quantitative and qualitative) identified discrimination as a barrier to newcomer economic integration. Studies also point to the newcomer's accent as a reason of employment discrimination. In exploring the social construction of language and accent, Creese and Kambere (2003) proclaim that “Accents signify more than ‘local’/Canadian and extra-local/’immigrant;’ accents embodied by racialized subjects also shape perceptions of language competency. Thus, accents may provide a rationale for (dis)entitlement in employment or full participation in civil society without troubling liberal discourses of equality” (p. 566). Employers' biased perception that members of visible minority groups have lower linguistic ability than European immigrants is likely to result in the employers favouring the European immigrants over visible minority applicants (Li, 2001).

Newcomers in our study identified “Employer Paid Training” courses and “On-the-Job Training” as avenues to help them improve their labour market participation. “Labour Market Language Training (LMLT)” was reported as a significant barrier to the economic integration of newcomers. Familiarity with Canadian “workplace terminology” is integral to newcomers' success in their respective occupations. Further, access to English language services is essential for newcomer integration in urban-rural communities. However, as the study findings revealed, for women living in rural areas of Grand Erie, transportation difficulties and lack of affordable childcare compounds their resettlement difficulties. Culture interacts with their settlement issues in complex ways to further marginalize them. For instance the qualitative data revealed that women delay upgrading their credentials or get their driving license until their spouse is employed. Without a car it is very difficult for rural populations of Grand Erie to travel to the city of Brantford where most of the jobs and services (employment and language training) are located. Zehtab-Martin and Beesley's (2007) work with immigrant populations in the rural regions of Manitoba and Walton-Roberts' (2008) results parallel our findings that day care challenges particularly hinder economic integration of immigrant women. Zehtab-Martin and Beesley (2007) note, “The issue immigrants face with daycare, or lack thereof, is that it is expensive. This situation makes it difficult for immigrant parents, and women especially, to attend to English language training services, and significantly places women particularly at a disadvantage” (p. 77). One way to meet this challenge is to incorporate day care expenses within the funding budget for settlement services (Zehtab-Martin & Beesley, 2007).

The gender analysis of our study uncovers that even though more women were employed than men, these female participants were largely working in part-time jobs or doing contract work. These results mirror the experiences of women migrants in Suto's (2009) study. The author uses the theme “compromised careers” to show how women's gendered responsibilities adversely impacted their work trajectories. Well-educated professional women participants in her study experienced downward mobility in their careers post-migration and were working below their capacity in Canada (p. 417). In Teo's (2007) study, female participants who held competitive jobs in their country of origin became housewives after immigrating to Canada. Hence it cannot be assumed that immigrants always migrate from an oppressed environment to a non-oppressive environment, from a rural to an urban area, or to escape poverty in their country of origin. In light of the difficulties experienced by educated female migrants, it is not surprising that in this study there was 100% consensus between service providers and newcomers that there is an urgent need to develop “Specialized Programs for Women Migrants” in this community.

Our findings suggest that without improved transportation facilities to enhance mobility between Brantford, Haldimand, and Norfolk counties, it will be very difficult to retain newcomers especially women in rural regions. For sure, federal government funding cuts to settlement agencies in Ontario haven't helped the situation of rural residents. Further, similar amenities (such as affordable child care) as those available in larger urban areas must be provided if immigrant dispersal is to succeed. Walton-Roberts (2006) persuasively argues,

There is a contradiction between the aspirations of the federal government to disperse immigrants to smaller communities and the current provincial actions

which are cutting back on services in regions outside of the main urban centres in health, education, legal, and other areas. (p. 161)

The finding that over half of the newcomers in our study were planning to stay in this area despite the difficulties is an important finding in regards to the geographical dispersion of immigrants outside of Canada's major cities. It demonstrates that if government and host communities join their efforts to foster newcomer integration and create a welcoming environment, it is likely that newcomers may not leave these areas and move to bigger cities. Several factors may account for newcomer retention in this region. According to the Trend, Opportunities and Priorities (TOP) report, Brantford has been recently identified as a "Places to Grow" community due to the positive net-migration numbers in all age groups suggesting that despite the downturn in the economy the area's quality of living, cost-of-living, and availability of jobs is improving. Lower housing prices are a major attraction to new residents. The expansion of Laurier Brantford has been a positive influence to revitalize the downtown area, increase in-migration and create jobs in the construction sector (Halyk, 2009).

Currently in Grand Erie there is a great desire for labour force renewal, an upward demand on individuals with post-secondary qualifications, significant changes (loss or gain) in core industry sectors, expansion of the business community, population growth, and under-representation of immigrants, youth and persons with disabilities in certain professions (Halyk, 2009). To our knowledge, this is the first academic study related to immigrants in this community. This study has initiated several community projects. The first author, in collaboration with Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie, published *Tapping into Global Talent*, an employer resource guide. In addition, Brantford received funding from CIC for the Professional Mentorship Program for New Canadians and the most recent Grand Erie Local Immigration Partnership to ease the transition of newcomers into the labour force. A full report of these projects can be found at <http://www.workforceplanningboard.org>. Further investigation into the employment experiences of immigrant women and refugees to understand its implications on their health through a qualitative inquiry would be beneficial. It would foster women's settlement into this growing community and to assist community practitioners design culturally appropriate services for this population.

Moreover, more studies are needed to understand the perception of service providers including social workers in exploring the settlement needs of newcomers working in rural and remote communities. As Gregory (2005) points out, such knowledge is crucial in understanding the challenges of living in a rural community. It opens discussion among employers, communities, and funding bodies about the elements of rural life and improves access to service for rural residents. A successful newcomer settlement and integration cannot be considered in isolation but requires collaboration and partnerships of community agencies so that both the newcomers and the host society can benefit from immigration.

Moving Forward

As Canada's slower growth regions continue to seek out young immigrants to boost its population, it is important that communities create strategies to retain these newcomers otherwise there is a risk that they will move to bigger cities. It will impact the productivity and economics of Brantford and other similar towns. Recognizing the strength of diverse

experiences, culture, ethnicity, and language that newcomers bring to Canada, United States of America, and other nations can enrich the host community's life and contribute to the overall economic health of these countries.

Greater collaboration between government bodies, policy makers, service providers, and researchers is vital for dispersal to small and middle-sized urban centres and rural areas. The social work profession as an agent of social change is perfectly positioned to:

facilitate mechanisms and processes aimed at building better relations between policy makers and the persons targeted by the policies that are instituted and promoting the use of collaboration and consensus building rather than top-down sanctioned approaches to policy implementations. (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 90).

The invisible and unspoken cry that echoed throughout the research process resonates with the following statement: "I want freedom for the full expression of my personality" (Mahatma Gandhi, Indian political and spiritual leader, 1869-1948).

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