



## Project Background

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-sponsored (SSHRC) **Maternal Health and Diversity Project** aims to document and understand the various preferences that women have concerning medical services or other types of care during pregnancy and childbirth. In different places around the globe, and even within Guelph, some women prefer “natural” births while others want access to medical services to the greatest extent possible. Some women want to give birth at home, whereas others prefer hospital deliveries. Why is there such variation? What can we learn by comparing international experiences? By mapping experiences and preferences, this project aims to contribute to better international and domestic public policy.

## Methods

Eight Guelph-based immigrant women were recruited and trained to conduct interviews for this project from January to March, 2010. Six were recruited through the project’s partnership with Immigrant Settlement Services in Guelph, while two were recruited through the University of Guelph.

Community research partners consisted of women with experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, such as mothers, physicians, or other care providers such as midwives, nurses, traditional birth attendants, or even family supporters. Along with being interviewed themselves, each participant received training from Dr. Candace Johnson regarding how to conduct interviews, along with a letter of acknowledgment indicating their training in this capacity. Researchers were also made aware that their work would ultimately contribute to a publication that will showcase the breadth of opinions and experiences concerning pregnancy and childbirth in the Guelph region. Community-based researchers then delved into their own networks and between them, conducted 119 interviews. Analysis of these interviews is currently underway by Dr. Johnson and her team.

1

## Emerging Themes

While still early in the data analysis, researchers have already identified a number of emerging themes and common threads arising from the interviews.

### Language Barriers

For many women, pregnancy and childbirth can be a very exciting, stressful, and sometimes frightening experience, even at the best of times. For some of the immigrant women interviewed in and around Guelph, the challenges of pregnancy and childbirth can be exacerbated by the challenges of trying to navigate a health system, rife with specialized medical terminology, in a language that is not their own.

*“When you don't know what the doctors are saying it can be very overwhelming” -research participant*

Language barriers can affect women’s ability, or willingness, to ask questions, seek information, and be able to adequately articulate their preferences.

### Lack of Support Networks

Pregnancy and childbirth often bring families and friends together to celebrate the birth, and to support the new parents (the new mother in particular). However, some immigrant women

interviewed for this project point to the isolation and difficulty of being pregnant and giving birth far from one’s community of origin, and often, far from family and friends.

*“Women need a lot of support during this time, and for the immigrant women that come here, they are separated from their community, from their family... from everyone that they know in a very unfamiliar place and setting.”  
- research participant*

### Understanding the Options

For many immigrant women, researching and understanding the array of options surrounding pregnancy and childbirth preferences can be daunting. Understandings of midwives, for example, can vary from place to place, carrying different social and economic connotations in different contexts. For some, home births can be associated with poverty, or rural village life, where people cannot afford to pay for hospital births and specialists. Still, for others, opting for birth by caesarean section may be indicative of a higher social status. For some immigrant women, options in their country of origin are intricately linked to economic status.

*“...if you have the money to pay, of course you have choices... but if you don't have the money then you don't have a choice.”  
-research participant*

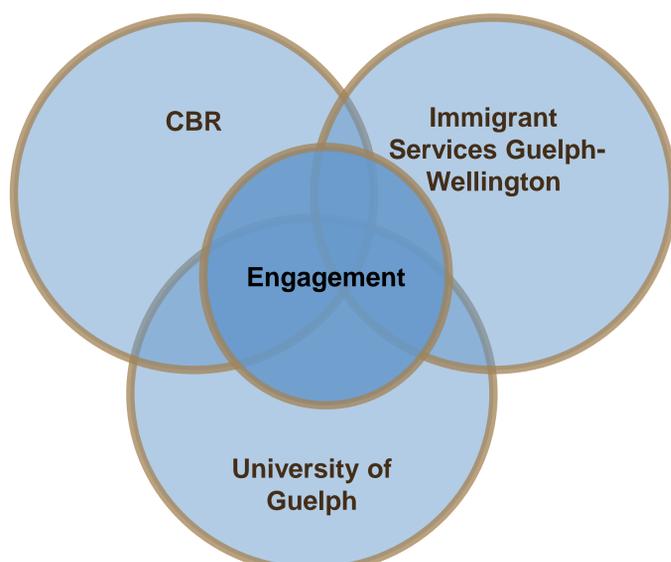
2

## Why Engage Community-Based Researchers (CBR)?

### Working with Community-Based Researchers can:

- Enhance complementary Campus-Community research relationships
- Engage respondents from a diversity of languages, regions, and cultural backgrounds
- Draw on the existing skills, training, and experience of immigrant women in Guelph
- Draw on personal and professional networks within the community
- Build inclusive research techniques
- Tap into the experience of women from around the world, who have resettled in Guelph.

### Maternal Health and Diversity Project



3

4

## Sample Research Questions:

### Some sample research questions include:

- Tell me about your own experience with medical services or other types of care during pregnancy and childbirth. OR, Tell me about medical services or other types of care that are available for women during pregnancy and childbirth in general (i.e. you can refer to either your own personal experiences or your general understanding/ perception of options and experiences). This can apply to experiences in Canada or elsewhere.
- What was/ is your own ideal visions of the experience of pregnancy and childbirth? OR, What are the ideal preferences for women (in general) during pregnancy and childbirth?
- How do women (in the context or country in which you have experience) make sure that they will have the sort of experiences with pregnancy and childbirth that they hope for?

## What Next for the Maternal Health and Diversity Project?

- This project is part of a larger ongoing international SSHRC-supported research project that looks at questions of maternal preferences and diversity in Canada, the United States, Cuba and Honduras. In Honduras, this research is being undertaken in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross.
- This work hopes to identify some of the concurrent strengths and vulnerabilities of pregnant and new-mother immigrant women in the community, and to share this pivotal information with relevant decision-makers, policy-makers and service-providers.
- In Guelph, working with community partners, it is hoped that this data will assist in the integration of maternal health needs and knowledge with existing settlement services in the community.