The City of Guelph is located in southwestern Ontario, Canada. It has a population of 121,688 and is located approximately 100 km west of Toronto. Because of its low crime rates, clean environment, and generally high standard of living, Guelph is consistently rated as one of Canada’s best places to live. Through the Home Tune-Up program, eMERGE Guelph helps people save money while reducing their impact on the environment.

Research Findings

**FACILITATORS**

- Acting sustainably brings a feeling of importance
- Money saving on hydro bills
- Hawthorne effect – when compared to neighbours
- Desire to help the City of Guelph
- Lack of time
- Desire for comfort and convenience
- Reluctance to retrofit due to potential move from home
- Perception that environmental concerns are unimportant

**BARRIERS**

- Previous and current exposure to a culture of conservation
- The overarching consumer culture that promotes a life of convenience
- Comparing one’s hydro bill to the average household in the city, a service provided by eMERGE Guelph
- The sense that the City of Guelph prides itself on being socially and economically green in order to maintain a healthy community and the local economy

**COMMUNITY-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING HOUSEHOLD SUSTAINABILITY**

- Continued study to understand the complexity of household sustainability
- Building a suite of initiatives that support and encourage household sustainability at multiple scales
- Promotion of attitudes that simultaneously connects individuals to multiple community and global concerns
- Compiling a list of sustainability resources for residents, in a pamphlet or online list, covering the areas of water, energy, transportation, food, and waste
- Facilitating integration of current sustainability resources within the City of Guelph

**INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL FACTORS INFLUENCING HOUSEHOLD SUSTAINABILITY**

- Desire for comfort and convenience
- Perceived pressure to save money
- Lack of time
- Perceived inconvenience of maintaining sustainability
- Reluctance to retrofit due to potential move from home
- Perceived insignificance of the issue

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Continued study to understand the complexity of household sustainability
- Building a suite of initiatives that support and encourage household sustainability at multiple scales
- Promotion of attitudes that simultaneously connects individuals to multiple community and global concerns
- Compiling a list of sustainability resources for residents, in a pamphlet or online list, covering the areas of water, energy, transportation, food, and waste
- Facilitating integration of current sustainability resources within the City of Guelph

**INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH GOAL**

This study sought to explore the awareness and practice of household sustainability by persons residing in the City of Guelph.

**THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION:**

- What are the range of residents’ awareness of the impact of their practices related to water, energy, transportation, food, and waste on the environment?

**BACKGROUND**

This study was a collaborative effort between eMERGE Guelph, an environmental consultancy with a focus on maximizing resource efficiency, and Jeji Varghese, associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Guelph. It is a follow-up from a 2014 qualitative assessment of the awareness and behaviours of Guelph residents with regards to environmentally sustainable practices.

As in the 2014 study, the current study focuses on five household sustainability pillars: water, energy, waste, food, and transportation.

**METHODS**

A total of 89 participants were recruited for this qualitative study. 55 of these participants had previously taken part in the Home Tune-Up study facilitated by eMERGE Guelph. The remaining 34 participants were recruited from the Pine Ridge/Westminster, St. Georges/ St. Patricks, and Grange Road communities within the city. Participants were all 18 years and older, with 66% identifying as female and 44% identifying as male, and were mostly homeowners (72%). Students enrolled in a third year Qualitative and Observational Methods course at the University of Guelph (SOAN*3070), conducted 85 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with the participants, and conducted thematic analysis on the information shared.

**LIMITATIONS**

Given that data collection was conducted by multiple student researchers, there is likely variation in how the interviews were conducted, particularly in terms of the depth to which probing questions were used.