IMMIGRANT VOICES: 
AN EXPLORATION OF IMMIGRANTS’ EXPERIENCES IN RURAL ONTARIO 

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ABSTRACT

IMMIGRANT VOICES:
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Immigration has been an important characteristic of Canadian society for years as it has often been used as a tool to maintain and grow population. In recent history, most immigrants have chosen to migrate to urban areas, especially the three metropolitan cities: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. However, the current state of rural areas in Canada has created a need for attracting and retaining immigrants. For instance, rural parts of Ontario are experiencing a relative decline in population due to out-migration of youth and an ageing cohort of baby-boomers. Challenges in maintaining population growth and revitalising the economy has reignited the discussion about attracting immigrants to communities outside the urban core. This project started out of interest in finding out about the experiences of skilled migrants who are currently residing in rural Ontario. It presents an exploratory case of a small number of immigrants who have been living in the Bruce-Grey area for less than 10 years. These unique individual stories delve deep into the successes and challenges, the barriers and opportunities faced by an immigrant living in a rural Canadian town.
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Thesis-writing is as much an academic challenge as it is an emotional one, and it cannot be accomplished alone. Although hesitant at the beginning, these past two years have changed me in ways that I never anticipated. Having arrived in Canada by myself at the age of 18, I was forced to rediscover my identity away from my family, my culture and my friends. Undertaking a project where I listened to other immigrants share their migration stories helped me learn a lot about who I am and why I am here. I now appreciate the act of migration and the courage it requires more than before. I celebrate the resiliency that immigrants build more than before. And for the opportunity to undertake a project highlighting immigrant voices in times of rising anti-immigrant sentiment, I thank the participants who took the time out of their say to share some of the most touching stories with a stranger.

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Canada’s rural areas play a vital economic role in the country by contributing as sites for agricultural production, natural resource extraction, energy production and environmental protection (Lauzon, Bollman & Ashton, 2015). Small towns and villages across rural Canada are diverse and so are the challenges facing them today. In 2011, 18.9% of Canada’s population lived in rural areas who are faced with challenging realities of decreasing populations, social and economic restructuring, decline in social safety net etc. (Statistics Canada, 2012; Lauzon et al., 2015).

Firstly, rural communities in Canada have been facing a major decline of jobs in the manufacturing and resource based industries as the Canadian economy becomes increasingly dependent on global markets (Lauzon et al., 2015). Thus, a great number of skilled and unskilled workers have lost jobs making rural communities prone to precarious work conditions (Lauzon et al., 2015). The rural labour force faces additional challenges as the rural communities have lower average education levels and those who seek education often move to urban areas for jobs (Lauzon et al., 2015). There are few youth left behind and not enough resources to invest in them, creating a human capital deficit in rural areas (Lauzon et al., 2015). This deficit of educated and skilled human capital hinders the competitiveness of Canadian rural areas in the global markets as opposed to urban centres that attract talent from all around the country and the world.

Canadian rural areas are simultaneously experiencing a relative decline in population due to low birth rates and high levels of out-migration to urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2009). As the population declines, it results in a reduction of tax bases for municipalities, which further
implies loss of social and economic services such as postal services, schools, healthcare etc. for those who are left behind (Bryant & Joseph, 2001). The low growth rates of population in rural areas has further impacts on the national economy, as migration from rural areas places greater stresses on urban regions and their environments (Caldwell, Khan & Labute, 2015).

As a solution to this challenge, many rural areas are now turning to immigration to grow their population and revitalise the local economy (Statistics Canada, 2009). Attracting immigrants to rural areas has been viewed as a way of filling the labour market shortages in certain areas and increasing the tax base of rural municipalities in others (Caldwell et al., 2015). For instance, in Alberta and Manitoba, local food processing industries have started hiring foreign workers since they were having a hard time recruiting from the local work force (Statistics Canada, 2009). In most cases, these foreign workers have then become permanent residents of the community and brought their families to Canada as well (Gibson, Bucklaschuk, & Annis, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2009).

As of 2011, 97.2% of immigrants arriving in Ontario chose urban residences (Moazzami, 2013). However, there is certainly a political push to attract more immigrants to rural areas (Moazzami, 2013). According to Ambard and Sorenson (2007), immigrants choose to immigrate to Canada to improve their economic status, to re-unite with family members or to pursue education. Displacing and re-integrating in a new culture and a different country is not devoid of challenges. Immigrants face a difficult time getting jobs that match their skills, and are likely to experience a short period of poverty when they arrive (Abu-Ayyash & Brochu, 2006). However, the literature is primarily focused on the experiences of immigrants in urban centres, hence, it is yet to be known how this experience translates for rural immigrants.
Based on previous research, there is evidence to suggest that immigrants living in Oxford County felt a grave sense of isolation after their move (Caldwell et al., 2015). It is also known that employment opportunities, public transportation and lack of cultural amenities remain challenges for immigrants in rural areas (Caldwell et al., 2015). Yet, there is lack of extensive research focused solely on the experiences of immigrants who either arrive in or move to rural areas in search of employment. The proposed study is an effort to begin to fill this gap in the literature. It will aim to gather the experiences of new immigrants who moved to rural areas in Ontario and explore the impacts on their families or self as they undergo the transition.

The literature review of this study will tackle the definitions of ‘rural’ and ‘immigrant’ as these terms may seem ambiguous and their meanings are often contested. The results of this study will identify challenges and impacts faced by immigrants who move to rural areas. Interview questions will be aimed at gaining insights about the reasons people chose that rural area and their experience living there. This will further help in the identification of gaps in services that are needed to mitigate the challenges faced by both immigrants and the communities that they move into. This information is of special interest to regional and municipal level policy makers as they are increasingly and directly involved in the process of attraction and integration of immigrants. It will give the participants an opportunity to share their experiences and become a part of the narrative that has been primarily focused on bringing economic benefits to rural communities. The results and recommendations will also help local immigrant service providers to better understand and serve their stakeholders and beneficiaries.

1.1 Problem Statement

The proposed research project aims to explore the experiences of immigrant families who move to rural areas of Ontario. Rural Ontario is experiencing relative population decline due to a low
natural birth rate and out-migration of youth to urban centres. Hence, there is a strong need for attracting immigrants to rural areas in Canada to maintain or grow the population and revive rural economies. However, there is little known about the challenges that rural immigrants face. This project aims at researching narratives that detail the immigrant experience in rural Ontario. The information gathered will then help in determining the support systems that are needed to develop the long-term capacity of immigrants in order to ensure their long-term well-being. More specifically, this research aims to explore the labour force, social and cultural challenges faced by rural immigrants with the ultimate goal of understanding their transitions to rural Ontario.

1.2 Research Goal

The research goal of this project is to explore the transitory experiences of new immigrants who move to rural areas in Ontario. This will entail researching the impact these experiences create on their lives.

1.3 Objectives

   1. Explore the economic transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario
   2. Explore the social transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario
   3. Explore the cultural transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario

1.4 Research Design

The proposed research will be a phenomenological project that aims to understand the experiences of rural immigrants through their own words. Sovic (2008) highlights that challenging experiences are unique to an individual and can be comprehended only by understanding the relationship between the person and their environment. This is in line with
phenomenologists’ argument that attempts at understanding human behaviour are trivial unless they account for people’s perceptions (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.8). Unlike positivist approaches that look for observables, a phenomenological study gathers information by talking to people, and asking them about their beliefs and perceptions (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.8). Therefore, it is fitting to propose a qualitative research design for the study that views humans as cognitive beings who deserve comprehensive enquiry of their actions (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.8).

A phenomenological study ultimately relies on an inductive approach to understanding human behaviour. Instead of starting with a hypothesis, the researcher should focus on listening closely to the informants. The aim is to identify categories and theoretical dimensions from the informants’ experiences and incorporate these into the analysis of the results (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.10). As a qualitative researcher, theories are not presumed but built on the analysis of the findings. This research will thus be conducted using qualitative tools of data collection and analysis that are detailed below.

1.5 Data Collection

As mentioned above, the aim of the study is to understand the immigrant experience in rural areas. To achieve this goal, the data collection instruments will be qualitative and open-ended. This will give the participants an opportunity to open-up and share their life experiences as seen through their perspective. The first step would be to identify a suitable rural area for study. The selection of the area will be based on deliberations with committee members, their connections, and the accessibility of the place. Further, the researcher will contact 2-3 key informants in the area, for instance, local immigration partnership or the settlement service officials to understand the context of immigration in the locality and connect with immigrants in the area. Then the
researcher will conduct in-depth individual interviews with the immigrants to collect data for the study.

Transitioning into a new culture can be a very challenging and emotionally taxing experience, due to which in-depth interviews are more suitable for capturing individual stories. Based on the initial consultations with key informants, I will select a purposive sample of approximately 15 immigrants in the area for interviewing. The study will attract participants who landed directly in the rural area (primary immigrants) and those who landed in an urban centre and then moved to the rural area (secondary immigrants). The target participants of the study will be immigrants who are between the ages of 18 and 64 and have been living in the rural area for less than 10 years. They can be married or single, as long as they identify as being born outside Canada and have moved to the area within the last 10 years. Ideally, to account for the differences in the transitory experiences of people over time, I suggested that the participants are chosen based on the years they spent in Canada. This meant the first five participants would be those who have been in Canada for the past 1-3 years. The next five participants would have spent 3-6 years in Canada and the last five would have spent more than 6 years. This would allow the researcher to note the differences that have resulted over time. However, this was not feasible due to the low number of immigrants in rural areas and lack of a central network that connects them. Upon deliberations with key informants in the area, it was decided that there be no stratification based on the number of years that participants spent in the rural area. Finally, it is important to remember that the aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of a group of people. Therefore, a random sample is not preferred as the goal is not to make generalisations but to understand the uniqueness of the participant’s experience.
1.6 Significance

There is a need to attract more immigrants to rural parts in Canada in order to salvage the diminishing population levels and fill in the gaps in the labour market. For instance, attracting immigrant entrepreneurs has been stated as a rural policy priority (Caldwell et al., 2015). There are reports on Oxford and Perth County’s experiences with attracting and retaining immigrants, with a focus on the municipality’s role in the process (Caldwell et al., 2015). These report investigate the current best practices for attracting and retaining immigrants in rural communities. They are based primarily on conversations with policy makers and service providers, although some immigrants were also consulted. However, there is a lack of extensive research on the experience of immigrants in the rural areas that they settle or resettle in. Although the number of rural immigrants is low, it is worthwhile to find out what their experiences have been so far, the reasons behind their resettlement, challenges the have faced and their relationship with the community at large.

The information gathered from the interviews will ‘paint a preliminary picture’ of the experience of immigrants in rural areas. Further, the findings from the study will reveal gaps in the literature that can inform future research on this topic. The findings from this study will form the basis for creating a better understanding of the immigrant experience as the province continues to push for a higher number of immigrants in smaller communities. These results can help municipalities and community organisations build their capacities to better serve immigrants in the future.
1.7 Limitations and Assumptions

Like any research project, this study cannot reveal ‘the truth’ about the immigrant experience in rural areas. Firstly, no rural community is the same and no immigrant has exactly the same experience as the other. As mentioned before, rural communities are diverse across the nation and this study can only reveal the characteristics of one community. Therefore, the findings from this project should not be used to generalise the immigrant experience but to learn from one community and create a better understanding of the challenges that immigrants might face when they resettle.

The findings of the study will be derived from the discussions with people and the researcher’s interpretation of the interviews. There is always a chance of researcher bias, and the author will be aware of that in the analysis. I also recognise that time might be a constraint, as the project is on a tight timeline. The success of the project will depend on the availability and engagement of the research participants, so it will be important to start making connections early on.

In short, this research project aims at connecting with immigrants who have been living in the Bruce-Grey area for ten years or less. They will be asked about their economic, social and cultural transitions in a rural town through in-depth interviews. The data collected will be analysed to ‘paint’ a picture of what it means to be an immigrant in a rural area. The findings will then be used to present topics for further research and some recommendations.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Immigration has been an important characteristic of Canadian society for decades. It has often been used as a tool to maintain and grow the population and fulfill economic shortages in the country. Historically, migrants from Western and Eastern Europe came to Canada and usually settled in rural areas, where they were sometimes given free land by the government. However, more recently, most immigrants have chosen to migrate to urban areas instead, especially in three cities: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Recent immigrants tend to choose cities over rural areas in Canada due to a variety of reasons including job opportunities, social networks, cultural amenities etc. (Vatz-Laaroussi & Bezzi, 2010). These urban areas are the largest ports of entry for immigrants to Canada and have been enjoying the benefits of large population numbers and a diverse work force for years (Vatz-Laaroussi & Bezzi, 2010). However, with increasing concentration of immigrants in cities, there has been a growing discussion about balancing the geographic distribution of new immigrants (Di Biase & Bauder, 2004).

Simultaneously, the current state of rural areas in Canada has created a need for attracting and retaining immigrants. Rural Ontario, like the rest of the country’s rural areas is experiencing relative decline in population due to out-migration of youth and an ageing baby-boomer population. With continuing low birth rates, rural areas will have to rely on transforming communities to become attractive choice of residence for immigrants. This trend has already started in a few places like Elgin County, where immigrants are settling in search of employment. In the sections below I outline the history of immigration in Canada, along with
some pattern changes observed over the years. I also detail a synopsis of studies that have been done around this topic.

The aim of my research project is to explore the experiences of rural immigrants in Ontario. Hence, there are two major concepts in this research goal that need to be further explained, ‘rural’ and ‘immigration.’ A review of the literature in these fields will help readers understand the meaning and relevance of both these terms. Firstly, this section details the historical trends in immigration and its importance for Canadian society. Further, the next section details the definitions and implications for the term ‘rural’ and how immigration and rural are increasingly thought of as complementary to each other.

2.2 Immigration in Canada

According to Statistics Canada, an immigrant is a person “residing in Canada who was born outside of Canada, excluding temporary foreign workers, Canadian citizens born outside Canada, and those with student or working visas” (Statistics Canada, 2010). Canada has been a land of immigrants for a long time, largely comprised of immigrants and their descendants from various parts of the globe. After Aboriginal peoples settled in Canada hundreds of years ago, it was followed by the French and British migrants in the 1600s, and more recently with migrants from other countries (Edmonston, 2016).
To understand the current state of immigration in the country, it is important to reflect on historical trends of immigration in Canada. The following chart marks the peaks and valleys in the number of immigrants to Canada from 1860 to 2014.

![Canada – Permanent residents, 1860 to 2014](image)

*Figure 1: Number of Permanent Residents in Canada from 1860 to 2014 (Government of Canada [GOC], 2015).*

As evident, the peak years for number of immigrants (termed as ‘permanent residents’) in Canada were 1900s, 1910s and 1950s and the numbers slumped from 1914 to 1918 and in 1940s due to the World Wars. Immigration from Europe was especially high during these periods as Canada provided higher political and economic freedoms (Edmonston, 2016). This trend changed with the passing of new immigration laws in 1967, which abolished national preference policies favouring immigrants from Europe. The new immigration laws now assessed people on their abilities to add to the economic prosperity of the country. After 1967, Canada saw a rise in the number of Asian and Latin American immigrants with the onset of the point system that allowed the government to select people with desirable skills like high education levels, language abilities etc. (Edmonston, 2016). These immigrants were termed as ‘economic immigrants.’
The following chart that characterises immigrants by type, the number of economic immigrants has seen the most increase since 2000, with the number of family class immigrants and refugees remaining constant since late 90s.

![Chart: Number of Permanent Residents in Canada by category from 1986 to 2010. (GOC, 2010).](image)

According to the 2011 census, 20% of Canada’s population is formed by the 6.8 million immigrants who reside in the country (Statistics Canada, 2015). This is the highest proportion of immigrants among all the G8 countries (Statistics Canada, 2015). In addition to these numbers, Retiz (2011) highlights that Canadians tend to have a more positive attitude towards immigration than their American counterparts. Most Canadians believe that immigration is a positive phenomenon due to two major reasons: immigration as a driver for economic prosperity and a pride in the multicultural Canadian society (Reitz, 2011). The high numbers of immigrants and the popular support for immigration both prove that immigration has played an important role in maintaining the Canadian demographics in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

In 2011, of the large numbers of immigrants, 94.8% lived in four provinces: Ontario, British Columbia, Quebec and Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2015). It is interesting to note that over three-fifths of the recent immigrants i.e. those who arrived between 2006 and 2011 settled in
urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2015). More specifically, they chose to settle in the three largest Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA)- Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver (Statistics Canada, 2015). A CMA is defined as an area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. It must have a total population of at least 100,000 with 50,000 of residents living in the urban core (Statistics Canada, 2009). About 97.2% of immigrants who arrived in Ontario chose to live in urban centres in the province (Moazzami, 2013), with almost 68.3% living in Toronto and surrounding areas (El Dakiky & Shields, 2009). These trends demonstrate that certain places tend to attract immigrants and newcomers more than others. According to Ambard and Sorenson (2007), there are three main reasons that attract immigrants to certain regions over others: economic opportunities, family or friends in an area or educational opportunities. Hence, a potential job offer might not be enough to impact one’s decision to move to a new place, especially with a family.

A social network of support services and familiar people can assist in the integration process of immigrants, and bigger urban centres can often provide these services as they are hubs for ethnic minorities and foreign born residents (Statistics Canada, 2015; International Organisation for Migration, 2008). Recently, rural centres have gained traction as first or more often the second choice of residents for immigrants. This growing wave of secondary migration to smaller centres has the potential to create a positive impact on the population of rural communities in Canada. It is thus important to explore the current state of rural areas in Canada and establish the need for immigration as the trends change.

2.3 The current state of rural areas

The notion of ‘rurality’ in Canada can mean a variety of things as there is no agreed upon universal definition of what ‘rural’ means. The term ‘rural’ is often combined with agriculture,
resource extraction, manufacturing or centres of primary industries (Slack, Bourne & Gertler, 2003). Rural places can mean one or all of these terms. According to Statistics Canada (2012), census rural can be defined as an area with a population of 1000 or more and a density of 400 or more people per square kilometre. This definition reflects the density and distance of the geographical area which in turn can have major effects on the socio-economic landscape of the communities (Reimer & Bollman, 2010). One of those challenges faced by rural areas is that although the number of people living in rural areas is increasing, they continue to be relatively lower than the urban growth numbers (Lauzon, Bollman & Ashton, 2015). Therefore, rural population forms a lesser percentage of the total population as compared to the urban population although the rural population is still growing.

Rural areas in Canada have held an important role as sites for agricultural production, natural resource extraction, sources of non-renewable and renewable energy, and flora and fauna protection (Lauzon et al., 2015). It is important to note that rural communities are very diverse and each area faces unique challenges depending on population size, distance from metropolitan centres etc. (Lauzon et al., 2015). According to Statistics Canada, the proportion of Canadians living in rural areas has steadily declined over the last 160 years, falling below the 50% threshold between 1921 and 1931 (Statistics Canada, 2012). This implies that although the number of people in rural areas in Canada is still increasing, the percentage of the total population living in rural areas is decreasing. This trend reflects that more people are choosing to live in urban centres and near metropolitan communities.

Similar to rural Canada, rural areas in Ontario are also facing a major challenge of maintaining population growth rates accompanied with economic shifts (Lauzon, Ragetlie, Caldwell & Douglas, 2015a). As rural areas face a decline in manufacturing and other primary
industries, they become less attractive residential areas due to economic reasons (Lauzon et al., 2015a). Declining levels of population can be mainly attributed to three factors: economic shift, out-migration of youth, and national low birth rates. Rural Ontario lost a lot of its manufacturing and primary sector jobs after the 2008 recession (Armstrong, 2015; Lauzon et al., 2015a). This has left rural areas without a lot of the traditional jobs that supported generations, leaving the landscape full of temporary, unregulated and ad-hoc jobs (Lauzon et al., 2015a). The precarious employment conditions are forcing people to migrate closer to city centres with more job opportunities, resulting in human capital challenges in rural areas (Yoshida & Ramos, 2013; Lauzon et al., 2015a). With most youth leaving and lack of investment in those who stay in rural areas, the rural labour force faces challenges as they try to adapt to the demands of a globalising economy (Lauzon et al., 2015a).

Low birth rates and failure to retain young people in rural areas has caused a demographic shift that has resulted in an ageing population. Younger populations leave rural areas for educational opportunities and do not come back, causing the problem of ‘brain drain’ as the most skilled youth are leaving the places that invested in their skill building (Lauzon et al., 2015a). This shift is affecting the dynamics of population growth, the age structure of Canadian society at large and the household composition as rural populations are increasingly comprised of empty nesters (Statistics Canada, 2016). Most importantly, this shift decreases the interest for public and private investments in rural areas (Caldwell et al., 2015).

A smaller and ageing population means a lower tax-base, which makes it harder to administer programs for providing social services like postal services, hospitals, public transportation and schools (Bryant & Joseph, 2001). It also creates challenges for local businesses to remain profitable, ultimately impacting the lives of residents (Bryant & Joseph,
Lastly, with an ageing population and lower education levels, rural areas experience labour shortages jeopardising any attempts to revitalise the human capital in the region (Caldwell et al., 2015). Overall, the demographic shifts in rural Ontario and rural Canada paint a grim picture, thereby establishing the need for creative solutions. One of the strategies that some municipalities are focusing on is immigration, which has been an important characteristic of Canadian society in general (Caldwell et al., 2015).

2.4 Attracting immigrants to rural areas

Attracting immigrants to rural areas is not a completely new phenomenon, nor is it restricted to the North American context. It is being used by governments across the world to reduce depopulation in rural areas. For instance, Spain and other parts of Western Europe experienced loss of high numbers of youth in rural areas (Collantes et al., 2014). Spain provides an interesting case study as it was affected the most by rural depopulation in early 21st century and then went on to become one of the most popular destination for international migration between 2000 and 2008 (Collantes & Pinilla, 2011, p.6). Immigrants came to Spain from Latin America, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and from Asia due to pull factors like temporary jobs in the informal sector, relatively higher wages, family etc. (Collantes et al., 2014). Immigration to rural areas successfully resulted in reducing population loss in the 2000s as compared to the population loss the country suffered in the 1990s (Collantes et al., 2014). Further investigation into ‘immigrant attraction’ has revealed that ports of entry to the country and areas closer to wealthier regions have been the most successful in attracting and retaining immigrants (Collantes et al., 2014). The 2008 recession turned things around and the immigration trends are no longer the same in Spain (Collantes et al., 2014). However, the fact remains that mass immigration to rural areas before
2008, contributed significantly to reducing the rural population loss in Spain (Collantes et al., 2014).

Focussing now on the Canadian context, there are some rural communities in the country who have started using strategies to attract immigrants. For instance, one of the cases of a community showing interest in rural immigration in Southern Ontario has been Elgin County. Elgin County has been attracting foreign workers by using a variety of strategies (Wiginton, 2013). Municipalities have created a program to recruit immigrant workers that is focussed on providing employers with information on ways to hire foreign labour (Wiginton, 2013). New policies and programs have also been developed by the Elgin County officials that attract immigrant entrepreneurs to the area, along with attracting immigrants from near-by urban areas like London (Wiginton, 2013). The cultural community of the area and the manufacturing sector have played a major role in creating a conducive environment for the success of the municipal strategies in place (Wiginton, 2013).

While Ontario has not effectively used its Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) to attract immigrants to smaller centres, Manitoba and Saskatchewan are largely considered success stories (Wiginton, 2013). The case of Brandon in southwest Manitoba is one of a success story where people came together to not just attract immigrants but to also become a ‘welcoming community’ (Gibson et al., 2017). Starting in 2001, a large number of temporary foreign workers were attracted to Brandon because of industrial expansion. Of these workers, 75% of them went on to become permanent residents hence they can be termed as ‘transitional workers’ (Gibson et al., 2017). During the period of 2007 to 2010 the small city of Brandon received 1433 immigrants (Gibson et al., 2017). In four years, Brandon had multiplied the number of immigrants in the city by six times (Gibson et al., 2017). Manitoba has successfully utilised the provisions of the PNP
to address the community development issues of rural areas (Gibson et al., 2017). The program has been used to address declining populations and fast-track highly skilled workers for the local economy (Silvius & Annis, 2007; Carter, Morrish, & Amoyaw, 2008). The community responded to this demographic change by creating local partnerships in order to ensure migrants had a smooth transition.

The examples discussed above highlight that rural immigration has been previously used as a successful strategy to reduce demographic losses and continues to have the potential to do so in the future. There is evidence to show that immigrants have higher labour force participation rates and higher mean incomes when they settle in smaller cities and not the immigrant gateway cities like Toronto or Montreal (Bauder, 2003). However, the challenge is foreign credential licensing systems which are designed to be complex and expensive. This excludes immigrants from realising their full potential and they are left to work in ‘survival jobs.’ These odd jobs tend to be plentiful in urban areas and often there are more established social and ethnic networks in bigger cities. Hence, immigrants prefer to stay in urban areas to do survival jobs if that means they can be closer to family or other immigrants (Bauder, 2003). It is easier to obtain licenses for immigrants in gateway cities which implies that rural areas and small cities lose out on the opportunity to hire international talent (Girard & Bauder, 2005).

Although low in number, immigrants are moving to small towns and rural areas. I am interested in finding out what happens once they get there. A group of researchers conducted a survey to find out about immigrants’ perceptions of life in second and third-tier Canadian cities. They surveyed residents in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; Hamilton, Ontario; and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in response to a call for further research in immigrant experience outside the big cites (Williams et al., 2015). The results of the study highlight that immigrants
perceive a low quality of life when they move to second and third-tier Canadian cities (Williams et al., 2015). However, they also note that their perceptions, although low, are not lower than immigrants in first-tier cities (Williams et al., 2015). This concluded that immigrants generally perceive their quality of life to be lower than that of others (Williams et al., 2015). Participants of the study expressed that their perceptions are formed due to concerns about income, language barriers, and the quality of education for their children (Williams et al., 2015). Therefore, researchers concluded that some challenges are faced by the immigration population at large, despite their choice of residence (Williams et al., 2015).

Another research project by Safdar, Fuller and Lewis (2007) provides more context to the challenges faced by rural immigrants. They highlight that rural immigrants are not worse off than their urban counterparts in terms of their psychological well-being, psycho-physical well-being and ethnic identity i.e. their sense of belonging to their cultural group (Safdar et al., 2007). This means that the socio-cultural adaptation of rural immigrants in the study was comparable to that of the urban immigrants in the study (Safdar et al., 2007). There was however a difference in the social support that they received. The rural immigrants in the study reported receiving less social support from both family and others (Safdar et al., 2007). They had less social interactions with ‘in group members’ i.e. members of their own cultural group and ‘out group members’ i.e. members of the society at large (Safdar et al., 2007).

There is existing research to highlight some of the kinds of challenges faced by immigrants when they arrive in rural communities. These are inadequate public transportation systems, unsuitable employment for spouses, a lack of cultural amenities, and inappropriate housing among others (Beattie, 2009; Wiginton, 2013). These challenges can be worsened if the community displays a negative attitude towards receiving immigrants. Therefore, creating
‘welcoming communities’ in rural areas has been presented as one of the ways to tackle the challenges that immigrants face. This term came to light with the formation of the Welcoming Communities Initiative (WCI) by the Government of Canada (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). At its inception, the three pillars of the WCI are: connecting newcomers and non-immigrants; creating welcoming communities that aim to eliminate discrimination; and educating people against racism (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). These three pillars have however, over time, evolved into settlement programs in schools, focusing on youth and the development of anti-racism programs (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010). The concept of ‘welcoming communities’ also remains a core feature of the WCI. As the name suggests, the process of becoming a welcoming community involves providing services that fulfill the unique needs of immigrants (Beattie, 2009). It also goes beyond that to encourage long term residents of the community to accept and appreciate newcomers (Beattie, 2009). While this is great framework to work within, it does not necessarily mitigate the challenges faced by immigrants. Some research sheds light on the common problems that newcomers can expect to face. Some of these challenges can be solved with cooperation. Beattie (2009) suggests the creation of partnerships at the municipal level to bring service providers together can help in creating a comprehensive strategy to tackle issues faced by immigrants.

Some other suggestions that have come out of research are: greater education of the public around immigration, understanding cultural needs of immigrants and creating appropriate services; using plain language for communication; and continuing dialogue and solution seeking (Beattie, 2009). These are some challenges and solutions that were developed in a workshop for service providers and government officials for the community of Brandon, Manitoba. I believe that these are broad general ideas of challenges that immigrants might face, missing a personal
narrative of a newcomer’s story. The research so far has not delved deeper into the post-arrival issues faced by immigrants once they get to the communities. What do the immigrants have to say about their journey of living in rural areas? How do they perceive their personal experiences?

The proposed study is an attempt to begin to fill this gap in the literature. The aim of the research project is to explore the experiences of immigrants who move to rural areas by researching narratives that detail their experience in rural Ontario. More specifically, this research aims to explore the labour force, social and cultural challenges faced by rural immigrants with the ultimate goal of understanding their transition to the rural area. The information gathered will also help in determining the supports that are needed to develop long-term capacity of immigrants in order to build sustainable livelihoods. I am not looking for a service provider’s perspective on challenges of immigration, but to listen to the journeys of the individuals who are facing these challenges. This project is to give voice to immigrants so that they can tell their own stories. The results of the project will help humanise immigrants as unique individuals and not a homogenous group.

2.5 Conclusion

Similar to other western countries, rural spaces in Canada are experiencing an alarming outmigration of the younger population. Youth leave for urban areas mostly in search of better education and employment opportunities, increased choice in services, entertainment etc. Nationally, lower birth rates have also contributed to this issue, as Canada will be unable to grow its population size to meet labour market needs without immigration. People who choose to then stay in rural areas tend to be older or with lower average education levels. Municipalities in rural areas are starting to recognise these challenges and explore the option of attracting and retaining immigrants in rural spaces. This can pose many challenges as rural areas often do not have
adequate and culturally appropriate services to offer to the immigrants, and there might be a lack of a social network.

However, the narrative needs to be further explored from the immigrants’ perspectives. Why does one choose to move to a small town in a new and unfamiliar country? What are the challenges and opportunities they come across when they move to a county that they may have never heard about before? These are some of the questions that this study aims to answer by presenting ethnographic accounts of the transitions that rural immigrants go through when they move to parts of rural Ontario. These questions are extremely important if rural municipalities want to retain immigrants who move there. Long term success of immigrants is dependent on if their social, cultural and economic needs are met in the rural areas. Therefore, it is important to find out what attracts them to rural areas and what might help in keep them there for a long term.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study uses tenants of phenomenology as its epistemological basis. The project aims to understand the experiences of rural immigrants through their own words. When a person moves their life across oceans, the experiences they undergo are quite personal and unique. Such challenging experiences cannot be understood without delving into the relationship between the person and their environment (Sovic, 2008). This requires, what Husserl calls, ‘a certain way of seeing’ things that appear in the conscious experience, which is not always the same as what might be experienced in ‘reality’ (Gallagher, 2012, p.8). Thus, truly understanding the essence of someone’s experience needs accounting for their perceptions of it and to understand that essence is the focus of this project (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.8). Before outlining the data acquisition and analytical methods used in this study, I would like to present a brief synopsis of phenomenology below.

3.2 Research Methodology

As briefly mentioned before, this is a phenomenological study that is the tenants of a philosophical movement started by Edmund Husserl in the early years of the 20th century. Phenomenology can serve as both a method and a philosophy that is not used just by philosophers but also in naturalistic and qualitative research projects (Gallagher, 2012, p.4). Husserl’s ideas about phenomenology focused on the consciousness and the structures that characterise our conscious self as we experience the world (Gallagher, 2012, p.7). Phenomenology is studied in the first person point of view which means that the researcher
"studies his or her own experience from the point of view of living through that experience” (Gallagher, 2012, p.7). Our view on reality is not removed from our consciousness as everything that a person is seeing through the eyes, is registered as knowledge in the conscious mind (Gallagher, 2012, p.8). The way one perceives things is considered more important than what the ‘real situation’ is as truth is interpreted differently by each individual (Gallagher, 2012, p.9).

The goal of a phenomenological study is to present a transcendental analysis in order to avoid biases or distortions (Gallagher, 2012, p.9). Phenomenology is different than psychology in the sense that it tries to describe the experience of a meaning rather than the meaning itself (Gallagher, 2012, p.22). A transcendental analysis goes beyond searching for empirical evidence to find out the conditions that create the possibility of knowledge in the first place (Gallagher, 2012, p.23). Husserl calls his approach ‘transcendental’ because according to him, discovery is made through reflecting on the subjective actions in relation to the objective (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl also emphasizes a focus on information that is available to the conscious mind i.e. how things appear to the subject. Thus, a phenomenological analysis must take into account the experiences of the person and the connection that takes places between the person and the material world around them (Moustakas, 1994). In simpler terms, transcendental implies that the mind is structured a certain way, independent of the experience (Gallagher, 2012, p.23).

Immanuel Kant, who expanded on the meaning of transcendental analysis, refers to this as the ‘priori structure’ of the mind, i.e. the mind is a certain way before the experience occurs (Gallagher, 2012, p.23). Kant believes that causality is a universal feature of a rational mind but the transcendental question is what makes it possible for the rational mind to understand causality (Gallagher, 2012, p.24). Husserl answers this question by taking a slightly different stance. Unlike Kant, he doesn’t believe in the transcendental deduction but that we are capable of
taking on a transcendental attitude that allows us to find out how our mind experiences the world (Gallagher, 2012, p.24). According to him, this is the concept of ‘intuition’. Here intuition doesn’t refer to a hunch but to the ability of stepping back and noticing the ways in which our consciousness works (Gallagher, 2012, p.24).

Now that I have outlined the philosophical basis of phenomenology, it is important to understand, the procedures involved in conducting a phenomenological study. The most important thing in a phenomenological project is for the researcher to abstain from making presuppositions about the subjects or expect certain findings (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl calls this abandoning the natural attitude i.e. the beliefs that we take for granted (Gallagher, 2012, p.43). An example of such a judgement or opinion would be the supposition that we live in a real world (Gallagher, 2012, p.43). This does not mean that we stop believing in everything around us but that we suspend our judgements about what is real and what is not (Gallagher, 2012, p.43).

Husserl calls this first step the ‘epoché,’ a Greek word for suspension (Gallagher, 2012, p.43). This is in line with features that can be expected from a good qualitative researcher i.e. avoiding researcher bias. A phenomenological researcher must then approach the topic naively, construct guiding questions and use the findings as basis for further reflection and exploration (Moustakas, 1994). According to Husserl, there always remains a distinctive relationship between the external perception (objective reality) and the international perception (subjective reality) of things (Moustakas, 1994). In Gallagher’s words, (2012, p.45) even when all beliefs are suspended, “I would still have all of my experiences that are experiences of the world within which I am situated. This puts us in a position to do phenomenology, since phenomenology begins with the description of the world as experienced” (Gallagher, 2012, p.45).
The second step of Phenomenology is referred to as ‘reduction’, which means that we now move from the metaphysical state of suspension of beliefs to a state where we take our experiences for the way they are (Gallagher, 2012, p.47). The phenomenological reduction (PR) state allows the researcher to pay attention to the way phenomenon appear to us or to take the experiences for what they seem (Gallagher, 2012, p.47). This involves not describing an experience but the lived experience, relying on interpretation through the consciousness (Gallagher, 2012, p.47). Husserl takes this a step further and encourages researchers to attain ‘eidetic reduction’ derived from ‘edios’, the Greek word for essence (Gallagher, 2012, p.49). The idea behind this concept is that a phenomenologist can grasp the essence of a phenomenon as his or her mind rests with the “transcendentally reduced sphere of consciousness” (Gallagher, 2012, p.49). The essence of a phenomenon can be discovered by focussing on the core invariables that remain constant through the variable descriptions of lived experiences (Gallagher, 2012, p.49). Therefore, eidetic variation is a method of performing conceptual analysis that allows the researcher to bring attention to the conceptual truths within the realms of one’s experiences (Gallagher, 2012, p.50).

Phenomenological studies are thus conducted in first person which means that the researcher examines their own experiences making the studies highly subjective (Gallagher, 2012, p.56). Some consider the subjectivity of these studies as an argument against phenomenology (Gallagher, 2012, p.56). In response, phenomenology embraces the subjectivity with the following two arguments. Firstly, the issue with first person approach usually arises when it is compared to the third person approach, which studies consciousness indirectly from the outside (Gallagher, 2012, p.57). Third person approaches, associated with the natural sciences, are not free of biases because science usually stems from ideas of common sense that
are not controlled (Gallagher, 2012, p.57). Therefore, the third person approach is not free from biases; scientists rely on their own worldviews to create research questions and find their solutions.

Secondly, phenomenology differentiates between understanding objectivity as a) without bias or b) studying something as an object i.e. from the outside (Gallagher, 2012, p.57). As epoché strives to eliminate bias that the researcher carries, phenomenology claims to be objective in the first sense and not the second (Gallagher, 2012, p.57). Phenomenology does not deal with understanding objects, but subjects that have unique lived experiences (Gallagher, 2012, p.58). Thus, subjectivity is not only justified but desirable.

Phenomenology is not just about subjective experiences as a bunch of feelings but it involves intentionality (Gallagher, 2012, p.58). To describe intentionality as Husserl did, Gallagher (2012, p.67) quotes that the formula for intentionality is “all consciousness is consciousness of something as something”. There is the act of consciousness and then the way we experience it i.e. what you see and how you see it (Gallagher, 2012, p.69). Both the what and the how make up the intentionality in phenomenology. Thus, it is an appropriate methodology for a research project that aims to understand the variety of experiences that immigrants from diverse backgrounds have in rural settings. Phenomenology is focussed on the consciousness and the way things are perceived, therefore, it is also important that I outline my positionality as a researcher. In the following section, I detail some aspects of my personal worldview.

### 3.3 Researcher’s Positionality

A researcher’s positionality is his or her perceptions of the world around and the lens they choose in relation to their research project (Foote & Bartell, 2011). This includes their
ontological, epistemological assumptions and their views on human nature (Sikes & Opie, 2004). A researcher, like any other human being, is tied to their value system and beliefs about issues such as politics, religion, sex, gender, geographical location, ethnicity, race, social class etc. (Sikes & Opie, 2004). The positionality of a researcher can be identified by placing them in relation to the subject of the study, the participants and the research process (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, p.71). All researchers carry these beliefs with them when they are living their personal lives, but also when they are researching.

It is naïve to think that research is value-free. However, recognising one’s positionality allows one to be aware of bias and articulate how that might affect the research that they undertake. This concept has been named reflexivity- which allows researchers to reveal their own selves in the research to understand their role better which informs their positionality in the research (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011, p.225). This process requires a high degree of self-awareness, and continuous self-assessment about how their beliefs might affect the design, execution and the implementation of the project (Greenbank, 2003). It allows for sensitivity around the belief system that is dear to the researcher, which may be ever-changing (Greenbank, 2003).

According to the Savin-Baden and Major (2013, p. 75), a good positionality statement includes a detailed description of the personal beliefs related to the research process, the potential influences on the topic, and their chosen position in relation to the participants. This should also include the kinds of influences researcher had on the process throughout (Savin-Baden & Major 2013, p. 75). Following these guidelines, I present my own positionality statement below.
3.3.1 Positionality statement

I am a trained social scientist, who doesn’t believe in the positivist views on research i.e. that research can be value-free and ‘objective.’ Humans are social beings that are a product of their nature and nurture, therefore the kinds of situations one is exposed to has an effect on our belief systems. We have socially constructed ideas of what qualifies as objective and what does not. I believe that there are some facts that are ‘true,’ no matter what. For instance, the existence of this planet Earth, climate change, and gravity. Now, we surely could have called Earth by another name but the fact of the matter is that it would remain a planet. However, when it comes to concepts like class, race and language, I believe that these are social constructs and are interpreted differently by different people. I would like to classify myself more towards the post-positivist and constructivist side of the spectrum. My epistemological beliefs have surely impacted this research project from inception to execution.

Immigration in rural areas has been studied before by other researchers; it is not a completely new topic. However, I noticed that most studies didn’t create a rich dialogue with immigrants, the subjects of the issue. Some focussed on a survey comparing urban to rural counterparts and others focused on ways to attract more newcomers to rural towns. All these studies present very useful insights and findings, but my interests lie elsewhere. I wanted to hear directly from the immigrants who are living in rural areas. I wanted to know what they thought about their communities and about this renewed interest in attracting immigrants to rural areas. Discussion around immigration is not the same as it was 50 years ago. I recognise that for many years immigrants from all around Europe have moved to rural areas to set up a new life, but I wanted to focus on the ‘not-so-subtle-outsiders.’ I am interested in the stories of people who moved there more recently from countries across Asia, South America and Africa. Most immigrants from these countries are not white and this adds a layer of racial tension to the
integration process. If there is discrimination, it is no longer just anti-immigrant but may be racist as well.

My interests and beliefs on this topic arise directly from my lived experiences. I was born and brought up in India and moved to Guelph, Canada in 2011 to pursue post-secondary education. I moved as an international student and still carry that title around after six years of living here. When I moved here, Guelph was a predominantly white town; it still is, although there are a lot more students from diverse racial backgrounds from nearby areas. I was very aware of being a minority in a university that is rooted in rural and agricultural studies. When I started my masters, I was a research assistant for a project that aimed at identifying best practices for attracting, retaining and integrating newcomers in small towns. This experience intrigued my interests in this topic, which were solidified when I attended the R2R conference in Blyth, Ontario.

During the conference, I had the opportunity of spending three days in the heart of south-western rural Ontario, talking about a range of topics from rural fashion designers to immigration. Experiencing a town spread over a few blocks and talking about immigration in a room full of older white folks gave me a sneak peak into the what an immigrant might experience if they lived there with a family. Some of the things that I heard in that room encouraged me to take the discussion further and I decided that we needed to hear more from immigrants who are living in small towns.

I introduced myself as an international student in all the participant interviews, hence I presented myself as an insider. I believe that an immigrant’s experience is a very unique story of displacement and rebuilding, the essence of which is hard to present to a non-immigrant person. Also, if people are already feeling like an outsider, they might not want to reveal their challenges.
and vulnerabilities to someone who does not even remotely understand the challenges of migration. When I revealed my background to the interview participants, I noticed that most of them became more comfortable as it gave us a connection to build on. In some instances participants preferred to speak in our shared native language, mixed with English phrases. I appreciated this because the motive behind this project was to get to the truth of these participants’ stories, and to understand their perceptions about living in small towns.

As I mentioned before, my beliefs and ideologies impacted the execution and the design of this study. Befitting the essence of phenomenology, I have designed this project to rely on an inductive approach to understanding human behaviour. Instead of starting with a hypothesis, the focus was placed on listening closely to the informants describe their lived experiences. Then I identify categories and theoretical dimensions from the informants’ experiences and incorporate these into the analysis of the results (Palys & Atchison, 2008, p.10). I did not include a conceptual framework in my analysis to preserve the inductive nature of this exploratory research and to presumptions about the results. As a qualitative researcher, theories are not presumed but built on the analysis of the findings. This research will thus be conducted using qualitative tools of data collection and analysis that are detailed below. Before delving into details about data collection and analysis, I would like to talk about the selected location for this project, Bruce-Grey.
3.4 Choice of site

As illustrated in Figure 3, the Bruce-Grey area lies in south-western Ontario by Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. Simcoe and Dufferin counties border the area on the east, and Huron and Wellington counties border it on the south and the west.

Bruce and Grey were picked as the site for the research study for a variety of reasons, one of which was the location. Both counties are removed from the urban core and are highly touristic places. Based in Guelph, I wanted to pick an area that was far enough from the city centres like Kitchener, Waterloo, London etc. but not as far up as the northern areas. I believe northern parts of Ontario like Thunderbay, Sudbury, Chapleau etc. have a different context and would serve better as case studies for projects focussing specifically on northern issues, possibly intersecting with important dialogues about First Nations and Aboriginal rights in the North. I believe those issues deserve special attention as a different case study, hence I picked two places not too far
from the urban areas but far enough to have a rural context. Here I will present some community background about these two counties.

**3.4.1 Overview**

Bruce county is situated in south-western Ontario, along Lake Huron and Georgian Bay, spreading over 4,079 square kilometres of land (Statistics Canada, 2013). It is about two hours away from major urban centres like Mississauga and Brampton. It has 23 communities including the popular Sauble Beach area. Bruce can be described uniquely based on three geographical features i.e. natural beauty, the lakeshore and the importance of agriculture for the county (County of Bruce, 2016). The Bruce Peninsula is a breathtakingly beautiful part of the Niagara Escarpment with plenty of cliffs, hiking trails and rock formations (County of Bruce, 2016). The lakeshore provides the residents access to almost a hundred kilometres of fresh water beaches (County of Bruce, 2016). Finally, the interior part of the county is known as the bread basket as it has a long history of agricultural activity (County of Bruce, 2016). Bruce makes for an interesting case study as it is home to a major employer, Bruce Power. Bruce Power is Canada’s first private nuclear power generator, producing 30% of Ontario’s electricity (Bruce Power, 2015). They also provide 4,000 full-time employment opportunities to highly skilled employees directly, and generate thousands of other indirect employment opportunities (Bruce Power, 2015). Along with being the single largest employer in the area, they deliver a few community programs namely, Indigenous Relations, Emergency Preparedness, and Physician Recruitment (Bruce Power, 2015). The significance of Bruce Power in attracting immigrants to the area is discussed later in the thesis.

The second county I picked was Grey, also located along the shores of the Georgian Bay is spread over 4,508 square kilometres (Statistics Canada, 2013a). It is located 160 kilometres
north of Toronto and is home to the diverse economy of Owen Sound. The county has nine lower-tier municipalities across 57 settlement areas with diverse demographic, economic and geographic characteristics (Hemson Consulting Ltd., 2015). Grey county is full of natural beauty and recreational opportunities as it is home to the Blue Mountain Resort, Scenic Caves, Niagara Escarpment and Georgian Bay (McSweeney & Associates, n.d.). Grey county has a strong agricultural sector with a variety of food processing operations in the county (McSweeney & Associates, n.d.). It is not only a leading producer of apples, but also has various breweries, wineries, bakeries, a water bottling plant and an ice-cream factory (McSweeney & Associates, n.d.). Grey county has the only medium-sized city in this region, Owen Sound, which also allows for interesting characterisation in terms of pull factors for immigrants although that is not depicted in the findings.

### 3.4.2 Demographics

In 2011, Bruce county had a population of 66,102 which was an increase of 1.2% from the population in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012a). The population density of the county is 16.2 persons per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2012a). The highest number of Bruce county residents are aged between 50 to 64 years, with 47 years as the median age (Statistics Canada, 2012a). A high majority of the residents report English as their first and only language of use (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Of all residents living in Bruce around 52% hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree (Statistics Canada, 2013). The county has an average income of $43,399 with the largest number of people in the $20,000-$29,999 bracket (Statistics Canada, 2013). Utilities, Retail and Tourism are considered the three most important sectors providing employment in the area (County of Bruce, 2016).
Compared to Bruce, Grey county had a slightly higher population of 92,568 people in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012b). This was a marginal increase of 0.2% from the population numbers in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2012b). The population density of the county is slightly higher than Bruce at 20.5 persons per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2012b). The highest number of Grey county residents are also aged between 50 to 64 years, with 47.3 years as the median age (Statistics Canada, 2012b). Much like Bruce, a high majority of Grey county residents also report English as their first and only language of use (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Of all residents living in Grey county around 48% hold a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree (Statistics Canada, 2013a). The average income of individuals in the county is $36,649 with most people in the $20,000-$29,999 income bracket (Statistics Canada, 2013). The top three key industries in the county are healthcare, manufacturing and retail trade (McSweeney & Associates, n.d.). Both counties are quite comparable in characteristics with Bruce having a slightly higher average income, which might be due to Bruce Power.

3.4.3 Migration trends

Between 2009 and 2014, Bruce county received 13,139 people (in-migration) and 12,913 people left the county (out-migration), which resulted in a modest net increase of 226 people (Knafelc, 2016a). Similar to Grey, most people who moved out of the county fall in the 25 to 44 years and most of migrated into the area fall into the 45 to 64 age cohort (Knafelc, 2016a). Bruce county attracted the most people from intra-provincial migration (within the province), and experienced a net loss of people due to inter-provincial (between provinces) and international migration (Knafelc, 2016a). As of 2011, Bruce county has about 5,000 immigrants, of which 340 arrived after 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Of these 340, only 100 migrants in Bruce county were from non-European descent (Statistics Canada, 2013a).
In comparison with Bruce, the migration numbers for Grey are higher. Grey county attracted 20,161 people to the county (in-migration) and 18,652 people left the county (out-migration), which led to a net increase of 1,509 people in the period from 2009-2014 (Knafelc, 2016). Just in the year 2013-2014, Grey county had a meagre net gain of 85 people (Knafelc, 2016). Of the migrants who arrived in the county between 2009 to 2014, the majority of people fell into the 45 to 64 age cohort (Knafelc, 2016). On the other hand, the greatest number of outmigrants fell in the 18 to 24 age cohort (Knafelc, 2016). Amongst the youth population, 58% males and 66% females currently in high school plan to leave the community in search of job opportunities elsewhere (McSweeney & Associates, n.d.). Most people migrating in and out of Grey county are from Ontario, so there is not much movement from outside the province or the country. However, Grey experienced a small net gain of 71 people due to international migration (Knafelc, 2016). Specifically, Grey county has 6,660 immigrants of which 205 arrived after 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2013). According to the available data, a total of 70 people arrived from non-European countries in Grey county more recently i.e. after 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2013).

This information is presented to give the readers a sense of scale. As compared to the national and provincial migration trends, the net migration rates for Bruce and Grey are quite modest. Both counties are in the same region, with similar landscapes, similar socio-economic characteristics which make for comparable cases. Both these areas also have very limited number of immigrants, which is why I was interested in finding out the experiences of people who chose to live there.

3.5 Data Collection

As mentioned in the sections above, this study relied on qualitative data collection tools. All primary data was collected over a period of two months, details of which are presented below.
As part of the project, I conducted 15 in-depth interviews with residents of Grey and Bruce counties who fit my sampling criteria. In order to be part of the study, residents were required to be within the age limits of 18-64 years, i.e. the average working age. This was included in the criteria because one of the objectives of the study is to gather information about economic transitions of immigrants when they move to a small county. Further, they should have been living in the county for less than 10 years. In quite initial stages I found out that it was not feasible to conduct a study with participants segregated by the number of years they had spent in Bruce-Grey area. There were not enough connections with the community to make that sort of distinction between immigrants who had lived there for 1-3, 3-6 and more than 6 years. Therefore, I modified the sample to consist of immigrants who had been residing in Bruce-Grey area for the last 10 or fewer years to capture people who were new to the area.

As I will further discuss in the findings section, most of the immigrants in the counties were secondary immigrants i.e. they arrived elsewhere in Canada and then moved to the counties. The study excluded refugees, although there is an increasing population in Bruce-Grey. I strongly believe that the journey of a refugee cannot and should not be compared with that of a willful economic immigrant. A project focussing on refugees and their transitions should be left for a specialised study.

3.5.1 Recruiting Participants

My experience with Bruce and Grey counties was limited to short visits for field study, beach trip etc. So the first step was to build connections with some key informants in the area. I met the Executive Director of Huron-Bruce-Grey Planning Board who introduced the context of the area and some resources for immigrants. After obtaining approval from the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board, I got in touch with the adult learning centres in both Bruce and Grey and
the staff introduced me and the project to the participants. I did not know any of the participants prior to the interviews. Due to a small population of immigrants in the areas, it was quite challenging to find participants for this study. Most participants were former students of the centre or had known the staff members one way or another. When I called them to set up interviews, there was some hesitation from participants since I was not based in Bruce and they didn’t know me personally. However, after a few minutes of building rapport participants became more open to discussion. A few women were denied participation as they didn’t get approval from their husbands. In another case, a couple expressed doubt at the intentions of the researcher although they had heard about the project from the key informant. We spoke multiple times on the phone, and I even spoke to spouse to clear any confusions or doubts, after which everything went smoothly. In general, there was slight wariness in few participants but all the informants who participated later appreciated the opportunity to voice their concerns.

### 3.5.2 Sampling

The number of immigrants who fit my criteria is limited in Bruce and Grey, as was told to me by the key informants. Therefore, I relied heavily on the connections of the learning centres to reach out to participants. A purposive and snowball sample was feasible and used in the process. In every case, a key informant or a participant obtained permission from another participant before the researcher contacted them. The sample size was limited because I wanted to focus on quality of data collected as opposed to the quantity. Each interview lasted between 1-2 hours, and considerable time was spent on ensuring that all aspects of their experience were covered including the positives and the negatives.
3.5.3 Interview process

All the participants were given the option of either conducting an in-person or phone interview. The participants preferred phone interviews citing travel distance and weather conditions as unnecessary hurdles. Although participants were assured that travel was not a hassle for me, they preferred conversations over the phone. This led me to question if anonymity over the phone and comfort of a known setting (in most cases, their home) helped in creating a comfortable setting for them to interview in. A list of questions was prepared that were used as guiding questions to allow for the interview to flow as the participants wanted. These questions are based on the objectives of the project and the list is attached in the Appendix 1.

Thus, the questions were separated into three categories: economic, social and cultural. Each of these categories aligns with the research objectives of the study i.e. to explore economic, social and cultural transitions that participants underwent. A lot of clarifying questions were asked when participants expressed the need and probing questions were used to follow up on interesting ideas. The interviews were conducted in English except for two, where the participants expressed more comfort in speaking Hindi or Punjabi, which are my native languages. I found that speaking in the local languages helped create a greater trust with the participant and they opened up to me more. I translated these interviews and transcribed them, along with the remainder interviews that were conducted in English.

3.6 Data Processing

All the interviews were recorded with consent, except for one where notes were taken. Once an interview was done, the audio files were transferred to an encrypted computer. The original audio files were deleted from the recorder. All audio files were deleted at the end of the project.
Each interview was carefully transcribed and later coded by hand, details of which are provided in the data analysis section.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed word-for-word. Once transcribed, I printed out all transcripts and read them thoroughly to get familiar with the data. Then I used three different coloured highlighters to code the data as per the three research objectives. For instance, I used a yellow highlighter for all references to social transitions, pink highlighter for all references to economic opportunities and challenges and a blue highlighter whenever the participant discussed cultural concepts. I repeated the highlighting process for each interview. This helped me to get quite familiar with my data.

As I read the interviews and highlighted themes, I assigned them a category title and moved on. This helped me classify quotes into broader themes as I included different references to the same concept or idea in one category. Then I wrote this category title down on a separate piece of paper with a little description under it. For instance, I created a category called ‘motivation to move to Bruce’ so that when Participant 3 said they moved to Bruce due to spouse’s job I would write that under the ‘motivation to move’ category as ‘due to spouse’s job-P3.’ I continued this process of visually categorising all interviews as I read them to identify any patterns, trends, or concepts that stood out.

I wrote all these categories on three different documents titled by each research objective. For instance, anything that a participant mentioned about finding a job went into the ‘economic document’, anything about meeting new people went in the ‘social document’ and anything related to traditions went in the ‘cultural document’. I repeated this process for each interview
and at the end I had an inventory of all references to economic, social and cultural concepts or ideas. Since my interview questions were based on these three categories, it was easier to recognise the key words. This process of initial coding was long but allowed me to reduce the massive amount of data in the interview transcripts into a series of categories or codes. This process is referred to as open coding (Saldana, 2009, p. 42).

I read these initial codes a couple of times to get familiar with them and then I took the analysis further by performing comparisons across the interviews to identify recurring themes and patterns. This helped me to recognise the most frequent codes and I narrowed them down to fewer categories than I started with it. This analysis took place on my living room wall with color coded post-its and stickers to highlight linkages between different codes. I wrote codes for each category on a single coloured sticky note and put them up on a blank wall. For instance, each ‘social code’ was on a green post-it, each ‘cultural code’ on an orange post-it and each ‘economic code’ on a pink post-it. I am a visual learner so having the codes mapped out on a wall helped me imagine the connections between them. I compared the codes under each category, ‘economic’, ‘social’, and ‘cultural’ and highlighted the cross-overs and linkages.

During the coding and analysing phases, colours became my best friends and I have attached pictures in the Appendix 2 to showcase some of this process. The second step in this process can be referred to as axial coding, where I analysed the data to prepare the findings to be included in the thesis. Thus, I performed open coding the first time I read individual interviews and then axial coding to identify relationship between codes and draw connections between various codes. The result from the analysis process is presented in the findings and discussion chapters.
3.8 Writing

As a researcher who is working from a phenomenological perspective, the coding process was a little tricky. The main aim of this project was to get a deeper understanding of the individual stories that were graciously shared with me. However, the thesis writing process requires me to condense the interviews into findings to be presented to the public. Therefore, throughout the process I ensured that I took a step back to check my biases and preconceptions, to ensure that I was maintaining the integrity of these stories that were often so complex. I can confidently say that my analyses revealed certain themes that were recurring in multiple interviews which appear as broad categories in the findings. When I explain these categories I have tried to ensure that I used participant’s original thoughts and words as much as I can.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological underpinnings of this research project. I undertook a phenomenological approach to my research as I focus on the perceptions of the research participants. A deeper understanding of someone else’s experience can be gained only when the researcher’s self consciousness is put aside and they immerse themselves fully in the process of listening and understanding. I collected the data through a series of interviews conducted over the phone and later transcribed them. The transcription was followed by coding and analysis using lots of colour coding. Although I am familiar with the NVivo software for coding, I chose a more traditional approach to the coding process as I believe it helped me in immersing myself in the data. I categorised my codes according to the three research objectives, economic, social and cultural transitions. While recognising the fact that these three (economic, social and cultural) are sometimes interconnected, I present the findings from this project in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction
The project findings are derived from experiences of immigrants in Bruce and Grey counties. Although it was not the focus of my interviews, I collected some demographic data in the beginning of each interview, which will be presented in tables below. Then I delve into the key findings that came out of this research project. This chapter is an important piece to the thesis, as this is where my role as a researcher becomes critical. In this section, I tell the stories of the people who I interviewed over the course of three months. These are not my stories but I have the means to share them with the world and I try to present them in a way that protects the authenticity of the voices that were presented to me.

4.2 Demographic Summary
This project set out to interview 15 people and I started the data collection by connecting with the local language training centres as they have direct interactions with immigrants in the area. The aim was to get 15 participants between ages 18 to 64 who had moved to Canada not as refugees but as economic migrants. and had been living in Bruce-Grey area for less than or up to 10 years. The idea behind only interviewing people who are in the age range of 18 to 64 years was to capture those who are the most likely to be involved in the labour force because I wanted to find out about their economic experiences in Canada. I wanted to include only those who had been in the Bruce-Grey area for 10 or less years because my focus was on ‘contemporary immigrants’ (Wiginton, 2013). Wiginton (2013) refers to contemporary migration as the phenomenal shift in migration trends after the passing of the Federal Immigration Act 1967. This
shift introduced the point system which led to a high increase in migrants from non-traditional regions such as Asia, Central and South America etc. (Wiginton, 2013). I would like to add that as we experienced this shift in source countries, it combined the issues of immigration with race. Therefore, contemporary migrants don’t just face the challenges of being an immigrant but race becomes a prominent factor as well. This intersectionality means that when people face discrimination due to their socio-cultural status, it is not just anti-immigrant, it also becomes racist.

The last and perhaps the most important aspect of the inclusion criteria was that they had to be economic migrants and not refugees or not have chosen to retire in the rural area. These requirements were to ensure that I spoke with people who chose to move to Bruce-Grey for economic reasons i.e. look for or accept a job opportunity and not because they wished to retire in a quiet environment or were placed there as per the government’s priorities. An immigrant’s choice to live in the rural area was an important consideration for me because I wanted to enquire about the qualities, characteristics and circumstances that attracted them to the area. In total, I interviewed 16 immigrants who had moved to Bruce-Grey within the last 10 years. However, I was restricted in including only 12 of those interviews as the remaining 4 did not match all the criteria I laid out at the beginning of the project. Therefore, the data collected from these 12 participants was included in the analysis.

As I mention above, this project did not place emphasis on collecting demographic information about the interviewees. However, in order to build rapport, I started the interviews by asking them about the place of birth, life before Canada and then moving onto reasons that brought them to Canada. As I explored these broader questions with them, I enquired briefly
about the year that they arrived in Canada, the year that they moved to Bruce-Grey area etc. A short summary of these details for the 12 interviews is presented below.

### 4.2.1 Sex

The sex of participants, as reported in the interviews is shown below. As can be seen in Figure 4, 9 participants were females, whereas 3 of the participants were males. I got the chance to listen to stories of some resilient women, who talked about the sacrifices they made to be where they are in life. In most cases, male partners were financially supporting their families and I will discuss this phenomenon in detail later.

![Sex of Participants](image)

*Figure 4: Sex of Participants*

### 4.2.2 Geographical Origin

The two tables below showcase information about the geographical origins of the interviewees based on the country and region of origin.
Table 1 outlines the number of participants by the region that they were born and grew up in. As can be seen below, most number of participants came from Asia, followed by South America, Eastern Europe, Caribbean and the Middle East.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of origin</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Number of Participants by Region of Origin*

Table 2 below outlines the number of participants by the country that they were born and grew up in. As can be seen above, participants came from all over the world. There isn’t a big cluster of immigrants from a specific country. India and Columbia are the only countries which had two participants. All the others i.e. Russia, Brazil, China, Yemen, Pakistan, Haiti, Philippines and Serbia each was the country of origin for one participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Number of Participants by Country of Origin*
The tables above relay information about the participants before they came to Canada, and the graphs below discuss post-migration statistics.

As I mention in the ‘Choice of Site’ section, Grey county has a higher number of international migrants than Bruce. However, this was not reflected in the sample of the project. I was able to connect with more international migrants from Bruce than from Grey county. Of those included in the analysis for this project, ten participants were from Bruce county and two were from Grey county. Here is a graph showcasing the county that participants were currently living in:

![County of Residence Graph](image)

*Figure 5: Participants by County of Residence*

### 4.2.3 Motivations to move to Bruce-Grey area

The motivations that led participants to migrate to the Bruce and Grey counties were interesting findings. Most people moved to Bruce county due to an employment opportunity at Bruce Power. This confirms Wiginton’s (2013) research that points out that employment and social
relations are the two most important reasons for people to move to rural areas. In these findings, there is an additional category that is found i.e. love for outdoors. These participants moved there to enjoy nature and quiet environment of the area. It must be noted that most immigrants in this area are secondary migrants i.e. they lived elsewhere in Canada before moving to the Bruce-Grey area. Of participants that I interviewed, 10 lived in an urban area, mostly Greater Toronto Area, Hamilton or Kitchener before they moved to the rural area. The remaining two participants moved directly to the rural area since they were married to Canadian spouses who were already living in the county.

The following table showcases the specific reasons that brought these participants to the county:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation to move</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bruce Power</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/Family</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature/outdoors</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3 Motivations to Move to Bruce-Grey*

These tables and graphs illustrated above give a quick overview of some of the demographic details of the people I interviewed. Further discussion about these will appear throughout the findings and discussion section as I incorporate these findings with direct quotes from participants.

### 4.3 Emergent Themes

In this section, I provide an overview of the themes that emerged in the interviews. I use the words of the participants to convey these themes as much as I can. I attempt to convey the transition process that the interviewees went through and are still going through, as they shared their struggles with me. Our conversations started with exploring their life stories before coming
to Canada, and this brought out some reminiscing about the ‘past life’ that they had elsewhere. Then we moved on to exploring the motivations to pick Canada as their destination for a new life. Sometimes Canada picked these people and sometimes they picked Canada. And then began the story of transitioning into a new world, with a new language, and new people. Moving to a new country, leaving your loved ones behind is a tough decision and it was reflected in the strength and resiliency that these interviewees exuded through their words and actions. Living the life of a migrant is often a marriage of conflicting feelings. Where there is excitement for a new life, there is also a sense of loss of the known ways. There is love for the great Canadian outdoors, and longing for the comfort of your own people. Where there is pride in achievement of success against all odds, there is a sense of losing one’s culture and language. There is hope for the future of their children and yet there is the sadness of separation from their parents. It is a world of constant reconciliation, and reminders to be thankful for what Canada has offered immigrants.

While I may not be able to convey all aspects of the participants’ lives, some very deep emotions and moving experiences were shared with me in our conversations. I will attempt to highlight the main themes that emerged in the lived experiences of these people. It is my hope that as I include their words and parts of the conversation, it will allow the reader to get a glimpse of what it means to be an immigrant and the hopes and challenges that come with it. It should be noted that English is not the first language for the interviewees, and that might be reflected in the quotes that I include below. I chose to not modify the sentences to maintain the authenticity of the voices that I am sharing here, with the exception of two translated interviews. Although all participants consider Canada as their home, I chose to replace the name of their birth country with the term ‘home’ or ‘home country’ to protect their identities. For instance, if
someone said “things were harder in India,” I reported that as “things were harder at home” if I thought their identity could be revealed. Immigrants have more than one home. While they consider Canada their home, at times they also referred to their country of origin as home.

Since this is an exploratory study of the lives of immigrants in a rural area, I relied on the three research objectives (economic, social and cultural) to add focus to my data collection instruments and analysis. Therefore, I present the findings based on the three objectives, as economic, social and cultural along with two additional themes. The additional themes are motivations for moving to Canada and the different services that they use such as healthcare, schools etc. Both these themes came up in my conversations a lot due to which I assigned them separate categories. Although the focus remains on the three research objectives, I wanted to honour the stories that people shared with me including as much as I could within the realm of this project. An important thing to keep in mind is that a person’s life does not occur in these neatly placed categories of economic, social and culture. There is overlap, where an event at the economic front affect a person’s social life etc. Especially, social and cultural transitions are interlaced even more and often termed as socio-cultural. I attempt at recognising these intersections while hoping to get at the most important aspects of the story of an individual’s transition to a new place in the following sections.

4.3.1 Motivations for immigrating to Canada

The goal of this research project was to explore and understand the experiences of immigrants as they go through transitions to settle in a smaller town or area. This goal was achieved by focussing on three aspects i.e. the economic, social and cultural aspects of their transition stories. As I briefly mentioned before, I started the interviews by asking about their life before moving to Canada and the things that they enjoy about living here. As we discussed their motivations to
migrate everyone talked about the things about Canada that they are grateful for. I want to dedicate the next paragraph to the hope that people carry in their hearts as they start new beginnings and continue building their lives.

One of the most common phrases I heard during the interview was “we came here for better opportunities.” And, for some that meant the opportunity to support their dear ones at home and for some it meant an opportunity for a better future for their children. This is in line with the idea of the ‘American Dream’ or perhaps the ‘Canadian Dream’. This sense of added opportunity was also followed by a sense of safety. Canada is perceived as a safe place for raising children, safer for women, a safe place to “practice any religion” and safe from “street violence.” At least two participants contrasted the culture in Canada to that of the U.S. and expressed feeling grateful for living here especially since the U.S. is perceived as being more racist. These comparisons were made on experiences while visiting their (immigrant) family or friends living in the U.S.

Another important opportunity that attracts immigrants to Canada is better education. A participant said, “our Dad brought us here (Canada) for education because it was not very good at home.” The same sentiment carried on for their children, “schooling is free here and it is better than at home. Here they give benefit to children for studying. In my home country, there are so many donations (bribes) to get into school, so in that way it is really good for the children.” Generally, there was a recognition that the education system is good in Canada and their children have better chances of getting good jobs here. Overall, Canada is perceived as a good place to be an immigrant. Another participant summed it up well when he said,

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1 The term ‘Canadian Dream’ is a play off the term ‘American Dream’ which I use to reflect participants’ hopes for better employment, education, safety and freedom when they moved to Canada.
There are good opportunities, education is good for the children, and education is free for my children. The healthcare system is good and the environment is better here. There is no pollution. We decided to be move to Canada for betterment.

In general, people stated the cold weather as a tough change to get used to but at the same time acknowledged the beauty of the summer, especially the summers in Bruce-Grey area. After her first winter in Bruce, one of the participants said, “I started liking it more with the warmer weather. Summer came and I loved the beach. It is right there and it is amazing.” Another added, “I like it here, there is a beach where we can go in the summer and my son really enjoys it. Those people have come here from the city to see the beach and for us it is only a two-minute ride.” Another participant added, “we have been camping here for so many years and we came here every year. My husband is an outdoors guy, he loves hiking, the water. We wanted a family environment so we decided to move here and we love it.”

Along with a sense of gratitude for the good things that came with living in Bruce-Grey area, there is acknowledgement that it came with sacrifice for children and for a better life for family. Participants didn’t use the exact term ‘sacrifice,’ but I picked up on the theme during my interpretation, therefore it was an indirect code. One participant expressed this sense of sacrificing for a better future for her children by saying, 

For my husband, the job was waiting back home, but we saw better prospects for our children here. Equality, good life they can have... the sense of security that is in Canada that we found is not there back home, especially being a mother of a girl so yeah it was tough. We went through a lot of hardships; we never knew what a weekend or long weekends are. We worked every weekend and every long weekend. We worked almost 18 hours a day, that is how our schedule was.

Another participant echoes this sentiment about her sacrifice of separating from her extended family by saying,
I know that missing your family is the main thing. When you have to go immediately and you can’t go. Like my brother had a son and I can’t go right away and hold him. Or when someone is sick there we can’t go quickly. These are some feelings where you have to compromise here. It is peaceful here, safety is here. So then parents also feel like they are happy but I know this part is hard staying away from family.

This theme continued when another participant expressed that he feels the first generation of immigrants who come to Canada must suffer so that the following generations can live an easier life. He couldn’t find a job as an engineer in Canada which prompted him to go back and work in his home country while his children got their education here. Post-migration, his family faced an additional 10 years of separation where his spouse continued to live here to support the children and he worked as a civil engineer at home. These are his words,

Unfortunately, I was unable to find a job here for an engineer and so I went back. My children stayed here and got education here. In my opinion, the first generation to come here have to face problems, second generation can enjoy and reap the fruits of their parents.

The theme of sacrificing comfort and familiarity for a new journey appeared in all the interviews. While participants were grateful for the amenities Canada provides them, they were also cognisant of what they had to sacrifice to be here.

4.3.2 Public Services

With fewer residents and smaller economies of scale it is harder for smaller municipalities to provide the same level of public services that cities do. All rural inhabitants deal with inequitable access to public services, however this has more significant implications for immigrants and newcomers who might not have the social and economic capital to find alternatives to public services. In this section, I focus on three public services, the education system, the healthcare system and public transportation. Issues related to these three services came up in my
conversations with participants and I will present some of the key elements of those conversations below.

**Education System**

In this section I detail participants’ views on the local public schools in the area. Participants had mixed reviews about the schools in Bruce-Grey counties. Some parents were happy with the schools there as they thought their children were getting a better education than they would if they were in their home countries. One participant said that in the area children have the option to join hockey, play soccer, and learn music. She thought the proximity to these extra-curricular activities had allowed her son to avoid travelling too far. Other parents however, had different experiences with the school system. Some of those experiences that deal with discriminatory teachers are elaborated in the ‘cultural’ section. Here I talk about the other issues related to the education system that were expressed by participants.

For instance, one participant was forced to move her family back to Hamilton, their first home in Canada while her husband continued to work in Bruce county. This had caused a lot of distress in her family as separation was not easy for the children or the parents. When all you have is your immediate family in the entire country, it is possibly one of the hardest things to separate from them post-migration. She explained her dilemma,

I moved to Bruce but once my children grew, my younger one started going to school and the older one in grade 3 now. The education and other facilities in Bruce are not enough. Being an immigrant parent… I know because of her color she has to be really good to get anything here. Things are getting tougher here so we need to prepare her to face everything and Bruce doesn’t provide those things. There are no activities there. I have to travel to Owen Sound Goderich Port Elgin and the weather conditions are not good for six months; you are ‘locked in.’ I cannot take country roads and keep moving around to different towns for activities for them. So last September I moved back here permanently.
She explained that she had to make this sacrifice for her children because she wanted them to have the best opportunities. She was aware of the systemic racism present in the society and believed that only education could give her children a fair playing field. She went on to say that her husband was having a hard time coping with separation from the children and wasn’t sure how long they could continue this set-up.

Another participant had similar experience where she moved to Toronto to enroll her children in a better school but ended up moving back to Bruce to reunite her family. She said she gave in to family pressure to move closer to her extended family so her children could go to a better school there. Once she moved there she said her daughter started enjoying school and was excited to go everyday. In her opinion,

The school (in Toronto) is very different, so multicultural so she enjoyed the environment too. There were ethnic people, Africans, Indians, White children, all so well mixed she loved it. She didn’t want to leave.

However, she added that her younger child had a harder time living without their dad. Due to this she moved back to Bruce within a year and chose to homeschool her children instead. She said,

We tried for one year and it was a disaster, I left Toronto in May. Even the teachers were yelling on me I had one more month and I couldn’t do it. It would stress me out because my husband would leave from Bruce and it would take so much time to get to Toronto every weekend in the winter, it was scary. We tried it and it was not worth it and didn’t work.

She added that she didn’t believe in separating families and it was important for her that everyone lived together which prompted her to move back. She also mentioned that three other immigrant mothers had moved to bigger cities to educate their children while their husbands worked in Bruce county. This is a serious issue that needs the attention of Regional Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education if communities wish to retain immigrants.
**Healthcare System**

The healthcare system in Canada is universal so there are minimum guaranteed services that everyone receives. However, an immigrant’s experience of maneuvering the system may differ from those who have grown up with this system their entire lives. All participants I talked to were extremely thankful for the universal healthcare. They expressed their gratitude for having a system that takes care of them and their families, especially in cases where they had to pay for these services in home countries. A participant expressed her gratitude for the publicly funded healthcare system as she said,

> Here the healthcare benefits are very good, that is the main thing to take care of your health. So you can go to the doctor without any worries, without worrying how much it will cost especially for new immigrants who are not settled or have less pay.

Although they were appreciative of the healthcare, they also talked about challenges with the wait times and inability to find doctors.

> In rural areas, population numbers are not high enough to have a full range of services, impacts of which were felt by the participants. One participant said that not having a walk-in clinic to address minor issues meant that she had to go to the Emergency every time. This required hours of waiting which was neither affordable and nor worthwhile for her. A woman who moved to Kincardine during her pregnancy said,

> It was very difficult to find doctors here in Kincardine... very very difficult. We had to talk to too many people and ask for that to finally get a family doctor here. In Toronto, we had a structure, we had a good doctor and everything there but here it is nothing like that so some things are very difficult here.
Another participant echoed this by expressing the difficulties she had to undergo to deliver her baby. She said that she could not build a good personal relationship with the doctor who was delivering her baby since she didn’t get to see them very often. She explained,

Even for a normal delivery you cannot have it in Kincardine. Either you go with midwives or they send you to Owen Sound or Walkerton. Travelling 1.5 hours to see your doctor when so close to delivery date is hard. You see them once a week, and you would like to see the doctor who will deliver your baby and not a different General Practitioner every time. Family physician thing is there in this town but they work half time for four days a week only. You don’t get same day appointments, and have longer wait times. The doctors are good but they keep changing because no one wants to stay there for a long time. Once you start building a rapport, they are gone and you start again with the next one.

Another issue in the healthcare system was that of waiting times, although the appreciation for the healthcare benefits remains. A participant said that she was very pleased with the medical system here and trusted that “they try their best to look after me.” However, she then went on to comment on the long wait times at the hospital by saying,

When you go to emergency, it takes so long to see the doctor. You want to see them and you don’t know what is taking them so long. When I go to see my family doctor it takes 10 to 15 minutes. I wonder if it is because they want to discourage people. I said to myself that I wouldn’t go to emergency for fun, I go because I have a need.

These issues are not unheard of in rural areas in general. As she mentioned it is hard to find a family doctor as the retention of practitioners is a challenge that rural areas face. If you are new in the community, you might have to wait longer depending on the capacity of the doctors in the area. Another participant also expressed frustration at not finding a suitable doctor in the area. She said that most of the doctors in the area are older so she thinks they moved to the rural area to retire “so either they are not taking new patients or are planning to retire soon.” This has caused her to look for doctors in the city where she was living before.
Another interesting issue that came up was lack of culturally appropriate or alternative medicines. Many cultures respect herbal and traditional treatments, however, Canadian doctors usually rely solely on western medicine. For those people who wanted to access alternative medicine either the option is unavailable or too expensive. One participant explained,

I am getting used to, because we are in a different culture so I am getting used to the situation. Like back home, when someone is sick you go to see the doctor and they usually give them some leaves to treat headache or high blood pressure. We use a lot of leaves in Haiti and here we only have pills or injections.

Another participant also resonated with this sentiment and expressed that she hopes non-medicinal treatments like physical therapy, massages etc. become cheaper. She referred to the ease in obtaining alternative treatments in her home country as she too thought that doctors here do not consider herbal treatment as an option.

**Transportation**

It is no secret that rural areas often lack or have poor public transportation systems. From my conversations with the participants I gathered that it is hard to move around the counties without a car. When families have one car, it is used by the spouse who is working which often happens to be male. The female spouses are the ones staying at home, and without a car their mobility is quite restricted. This further implies that they are unable to socialise and make connections with people in the community. Therefore, a family needs two cars to fulfill their needs and that is often not an affordable option until they have settled in for a few years.

A participant noted that when he wants to go grocery shopping in the area he must wait for his son to come back from work as he is the only one with a car. He added that when he needs to go to the hospital, his son has to drive him before going to work or during his lunch. For him it has created a dependency on his son as he finds the taxis to be very expensive. According
to him, “the problem number one is transportation, number two is finding job is difficult” in the small town he is living in.

Another participant adds her perspective to this issue by saying that “there is no public transit system in the area so one must have your own vehicle or you walk everywhere.” She added,

There is nothing, I have not seen or heard of anything. Since people are not very open you cannot expect somebody to give you a ride. Social networking is also not there which could help you commute anywhere. It is very expensive you know if people don’t know how to drive. If they want to go to Toronto and come back it is 50 dollars, 60 dollars for one side, not a round-trip. There are no inter-city buses, nothing like that.

This is a major problem faced by immigrants residing there especially who have recently moved there. Having a personal vehicle is expensive but participants realised that it was important for their autonomy as expressed by one of the interviewees. She had just received her license and bought their family’s second car. She said she felt a lot better now that she can move around town.

Now it is better, because now I have my own car so I can do my shopping and I can take the kids to the after-school program... yeah... I can take advantage and I have... And I can go here and there. It is easier for me here in this town as a new driver because it is less busy here than in Kitchener.

She appreciated having a vehicle as it made her feel more confident and independent. She added that she can now meet up with people in the community and that has helped feel her connected.

It must be kept in mind that not all immigrants are able to afford a vehicle which means that lack of public transportation not only restricts their movement but their opportunity to connect with the community. This again is an issue that might be faced by low-income families who are not able to afford two vehicles. It likely results in dependency and isolation from the community as
well. However, for an immigrant isolation from the community is combined with being a visible minority with few social connections. In their opinions, lack of a vehicle hampered their abilities to feel like they belonged to the community.

4.3.3 Economic

After laying out some of the motivations that bring people to Canada and their experiences of using public services, I want to talk about the transitions they undergo when they arrive in Bruce-Grey area. As I mentioned before, most people moved to the area because their spouse or a family member had an employment opportunity at Bruce Power, the nuclear power plant in Bruce. I suspect that due to this, the immigrants who move there tend to have highly specialised skills and have a higher average income. However, the high incomes are not reflected in the situation of their spouses, who formed the majority of my sample size. I talked to a lot of women whose spouses were working in Bruce Power while they were either taking care of their children at home or looking for jobs. Therefore, lack of recognition of previous education qualifications and precarious work were very common themes in all interviews. I discuss the economic challenges faced by immigrants in the Bruce-Grey area in detail below.

Lack of recognition of previous qualifications

It is widely known that one of the biggest challenges faced by new immigrants in Canada is the lack of recognition of their past educational qualifications. Canadian employers are not open to accepting foreign qualifications and often prefer candidates with Canadian experience. This results in newcomers not being able to take advantage of their previous work experience to find jobs, rather they are left to volunteer or do low-paying work. Participants expressed feeling like they had to “start from zero” or “start from the bottom” when they arrived in Canada. This was especially true for those who had professional qualifications. A trained dentist commented, “my
degree was zero here. I was just a grade 12th pass student... It is hard for me to go from being a dentist to standing at a store and working.” People with foreign professional degrees have the option to transfer their credentials to Canadian equivalent qualifications however, the equivalency process is long, hard and often quite expensive thereby making it extremely inaccessible to new immigrants. The same participant added,

My degree was not recognised unless and until I did anything to upgrade it. Those four years of dentistry didn’t fetch me anything here... It was very... I must have applied... When I was working at Hasty or Shell, we had newspapers for selling and I would look at the job ads, take them out and call them or send my CV online but never heard from anyone. Then I gave up. I cannot work until I go back to school but our economical conditions were not like that. We didn’t have enough money, we were barely surviving. With a child at home and the expenses that come with it I couldn’t go back to school.

Another trained engineer commented on his experience of having to start afresh in Canada as his degree was not recognised when he came here. When I asked him if his qualifications were recognised in Canada, he responded by saying, “absolutely not, my credentials…. When I got here we are like new-borns here. None of our past is valuable here and we have to make it valuable some other way.” He went on to explain that immigrants often have a hard time with finding jobs in their field of expertise. He said,

In our case, you are so scared and you are so inexperienced in this new environment. I guess part of it that they want you to also have the Canadian experience. And you always have to have references. When I got the job as an electrical engineer, I was lucky that the guy who interviewed me was a guy from Cuba. He had a Latin background too so he kind of gave me the opportunity to start this job. He gave me this opportunity and I took it from there I became a Professional Engineer and then I guess I show Canadians that I have the knowledge experience and the credentials like any other Canadian. So I couldn’t be discriminated against.

Unfortunately, this experience of starting from scratch is far too common amongst immigrants. Another participant explained her experience at the airport when she was coming to Canada for
the first time. She was a translator in her home country and when she was moving to Canada, a Canadian security worker at the airport warned her against having high expectations about employment opportunities in Canada. Here is what she told me,

When I was coming here in immigration they said don’t expect that the good jobs that you did in your country that you will be able to do those in Canada. That you will have to start from zero, I wanted to find something to do and I was looking for jobs- different places, shops, hotel, restaurants.

She didn’t say what might have inspired the officer to make such a comment but she expressed that she had found the statement to be true. However, she is not the one to give up, as she said,

Whatever education I had from home, when I came to Canada I had to be willing to start at zero. Because they want to look like, for whatever reason, that the education we have is not enough for Canada to work here. I said I have to go to school and I will do my best to go to school in Canada.

She wanted to go back to school and her resilience and hard work helped her in taking online and evening courses to get her Personal Support Worker certificate. She was still looking for a sustainable job opportunity but nonetheless was very proud of her perseverance.

This brings me to another theme that emerged in my conversations that was, the need to upgrade qualifications. Since immigrants’ previous qualifications are not recognised, almost all participants expressed interest and need to get some Canadian education and work experience, even if that meant volunteering while raising a family. They expressed that it is difficult to get a job without connections here. Since all their networks are in their home countries they have to rely on doing low-paying jobs or volunteering to ‘Canadianize’ their resumes. One of the participants expressed her frustration at not receiving any call backs even when she believed she was qualified by saying,

They will not say it that why didn’t they hire you they will not even call you and not just me. I have so many friends who are immigrants and only networking can
fetch you. And who takes you in are those people who are themselves immigrants and have established themselves but what do you face there you will get paid very less or you work for free to be in the system and get some hands on. I wasn’t ready because I didn’t have time. I have done so much volunteer work but not like this I don’t want anyone taking advantage of me for something. I don’t have less qualification and because I am an immigrant you cannot just use me. I was not ready for that. If I have to, then you give me what I deserve. A lot of my friends are doing that they are working once or twice. They are families or newly wed couple and they don’t have children to come back home to. I can’t work somewhere for free or I have to put my kids in daycare so I need to be paid at least to break even to come to you.

A participant said that although she had a Bachelor’s degree and a post-graduate certificate from her home country she is pursuing a college certificate in office administration here. She hopes that it will increase her chances of finding a job in Canada. Another participant had her PhD from her home country and yet had to enroll in an administration certificate program at a college here. She expressed her concerns about finding a job here by saying,

Oh yeah it is very difficult, even though you have the experience they don’t. It is hard to have reference from your country, so you need to start here something and make your Canadian experience because when you have that it is better because you have to have Canadian experience. That is really a challenge because they are asking for a reference and you have like to find from your country so it is really hard to find a job here.

These are a couple of examples of when participants were enrolled in college certificates to add Canadian qualifications to their resumes. The challenges of finding a job do not stop there, as many immigrants find themselves in manual, low-paying jobs. I discuss the challenge of precarious employment amongst immigrants in the next section.

**Precarious employment**

With the traditional job market undergoing rapid changes, the rise of precarious employment conditions is inevitable. There is no agreed upon definition of the term ‘precarious employment’ but it refers to jobs that are not the typical 9-5 job with health and retirement benefits. Precarious
jobs tend to be shift work, inconsistent and unsustainable for a household. As I mentioned before, it was interesting to find out that most participants that I interviewed had moved to Bruce-Grey area because someone in their family was working with Bruce Power. This was true for most women I interviewed. They are spouses of highly skilled immigrant workers and have post-secondary education themselves. However, their experiences with the labour market mirror those of immigrants at large because jobs at a nuclear power plant tend to be exceptions. These women often talked about working at chain stores, retail positions or odd jobs in order to sustain or to decrease dependency on partners. This is an important issue that I will discuss more in the discussions chapter. Here are some examples of when interviewees were working in low-paying odd jobs.

One of the participants talked about her experience with working odd jobs with the hope that one day she will teach at a school in the area. She said,

I have friend she is artist, she always invites me for different projects to paint. She brings me to a local theatre where I did painting jobs for theatre, there are many interesting people actors, musicians there. Neighbours sometime help me so I cut grass, replace flowers, landscaping, cleaning rooms for them. I got some money for investing in my interest which is crafts, sewing and I sell them sometimes. My husband always sponsoring me so it helped me with fabric for crafts. I did volunteer to find out how it is here in Canada and then in April last year I started working in a food processing company and also contract job with child and family services for health.

After this she said that she believes it is still possible for her to be a teacher here like she used to be back in her home country. She added, she is trying to meet with local schools to form connections so that something might come of it in the future. Until then, she said “these jobs are helping me contribute to the family expenses a little.”
Another participant recognised this challenge faced by immigrants and termed it an advantage of having immigrants in rural areas. She said,

Immigrants are more willing to work to do whatever they want to do to settle so I think that is a positive thing instead of some people who don’t want to work. And I think that in general they are willing to do whatever they need to do to find a good job.

Another participant puts this challenge of finding jobs that match immigrants’ skill levels in perspective by saying,

Here they get the people who are highly educated and skilled people but they actually need people of labour for Tim Hortons, gas stations, taxi drivers. When these educated people come they are law abiding citizens, they are well educated, they know English. Everyone struggles for the first 2-3 months and after that people start working wherever they can find a job. For my kids, they are okay those kids are not having any problem. If they can get good education they can get jobs easily. I have already told you in this country, the first generation will suffer and the second generation, if they know that they need university education or need to work hard then it is good.

Here, this participant talks about the hardships all immigrants have to face in the beginning when they are trying to get settled. In his opinion, when you can’t find a job that suits your qualifications you will give up after a while and do whatever job you can to feed your family.

Similarly, another participant talked about her experience of working odd jobs for years. She said although these jobs were hard she appreciated that there is a certain level of respect for all types of work in Canada. She explained that even when she was working at the convenience store, people did not look down upon her because of her work. She is now upgrading her education in hopes to resume her previous career. Comparing across these stories, it is evident that immigrants face a host of economic challenges in Bruce-Grey area, as the current system fails to recognise their qualifications forcing them to be underemployed.
4.3.4 Social

In this section, I will discuss the social aspect of immigrant lives in the Bruce-Grey area. In my interviews, I asked them about how connected they felt to the community around them, if they had made meaningful connections and what was their social life in general. As we know, urban areas have a much higher number of immigrants as compared to rural areas. This allows migrants to make connections with other immigrants who are going through similar journeys and in general, meet people from all walks of life. When I interviewed people for this study, they talked about the notion of ‘welcoming Canadians’ which aligns with the perception of Canadian society as ‘immigrant-friendly.’ They discussed challenges in making meaningful relationships with both immigrant and non-immigrant members in the community. However, I found that schools played an important role in helping immigrants in making connections with other parents. I discuss these findings in detail below.

**Lack of a robust social network**

The participants who moved to Bruce-Grey usually did not have any family members or social networks in the area. A paper by Di Biase & Bauder (2005) points out that in urban areas, immigrants are more likely to be concentrated in neighbourhoods whereas in rural areas they are spread all over the county. This makes it even harder to make connections and when they are made, people might be living too far from each other to maintain them. Lack of social capital hinders with the integration process of immigrants and many suggested that they will only stay in the area until they are tied to their job opportunity. This is an important consideration for municipalities hoping to attract immigrants. Participants often expressed feeling lonely or removed from the community even in cases when they had been living in the area for almost 5 years. Upon asking to explain the social life in rural areas, a participant said,
What do you mean social life, it doesn’t exist here? That is one of the main shocking things here. You are so lonely, you are just with your family, especially here in Kincardine right. Maybe in Toronto you have more opportunity to go visit friends kind of the social circle you build but here it is basically impossible. In that regard, that is the main thing. If I go and try to socialise with Canadian people I wouldn’t feel myself. In back home country, we have jokes, we have that kind of humour, you know what I mean. Here it is different, I wouldn’t do that here. I am not comfortable with making a joke, because people might find it offensive. Like in my home country, who cares about that, everyone knows it is just a joke.

Here he is not only expressing a lack of opportunity to make social connections but also the lack of comfort in expressing and being himself. The feeling of being excluded from the mainstream society hinders in creating a connection to the community and place that they are living in. He continued to express difficulty in making friends, and fear of offending others due to the culture of political correctness in Canada. This can have major impacts on social and emotional well-being. When I asked him if that meant that he did not have any friends in the community, he continued the discussion by saying,

Yes, definitely. I can’t say (that I have friends in the community)...I don’t think we have friends around here what you call friends in our country. We actually tried to make some friends here with a couple from India actually but then it was a coincidence. I got sick and I met them at the hospital but now they don’t live in the same town. They live in a town 50 km away from here, Port Elgin. It sounds like it is close but it is not easy. You are at home, you are not going to drive 50 km going out in the cold to meet your neighbour right.

Thus, the need for high mobility and large distances in rural areas do not allow for deeper connections to be made and sustained. Another participant was living in the GTA before and she compared her experience of living in a rural town with that of the city.

We are still trying (to feel connected to the community). We are not as comfortable as we would be in the city but it is not too bad, we just do our own thing and we try to avoid conflict. I work in the hospital in the lab so everyone knows me but you don’t really hang out with them or get invited to their house or anything.
An older participant added to this by saying that he found the social circles in rural areas to be closed. He had become friends with one individual in the community and would go to the local Tim Hortons with him and he found that he was unable to connect with the ‘regulars’ there. He said,

These people socialise with each other, I have seen them sitting in Tim Hortons, in McDonalds, there are 10 men and 10 women who sit and talk together. I notice them when I go with my friend Fred. I saw them for 1 day, 2-3 days I look at them and every time they socialise with each other. Especially the retired ones.

Another participant added that it was hard to make friends with white folks in the county. When I asked if she had close friends in the county she said,

White friends, no. You meet them at the park or centre so you see them and I socialise with them easily. To go out for dinner, come or go to the home not really. I had a friend in Kincardine, she is from America and her parents got sick so she moved back. She was really nice and is the only person who clicked. We would go to each others’ home. I have Pakistani friends a lot and Indian and Pakistanis are a majority. I had Arab friends but they left. They did the same thing where the husbands send them to Toronto for better education (for the children). One went to Waterloo, Vaughan. The husbands are here in Kincardine twice a week and then the family is in Toronto.

A few others also talked about separating families post migration due to lack of appropriate educational opportunities for children in Bruce-Grey area. I will discuss this in the section below.

**Community’s attitudes**

The difficulty that participants expressed in connecting with the residents of Bruce-Grey area disrupts this broader notion that Canadians are friendly and welcoming. Canada has an international reputation for being a friendly place for immigrants. It cannot be refuted that with the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment globally, Canada is perhaps one of the most welcoming places for migrants right now. However, there is a slight caveat to this perception. Canadians are
friendly yet the friendliness seems to be limited to greetings and niceties. The friendliness might not translate into meaningful connections or deeper friendships. When I asked the participants about their first impressions of Canada or rural areas, most people said that residents were nice to them and “really friendly.” However, when I asked them about having close friends in the community, most people said they didn’t have meaningful relationships outside of their families. One participant attempted at explaining the ‘cold culture’ she encountered here by saying that in her experience, people can talk to you for days if they need something. However, when they don’t see you for some time, they can easily forget you. In her words,

People here talk, talk and after a couple of weeks you don’t see them. They act like they don’t know you. I said I am not going to get involved with someone if they act like they didn’t know me.

She was not alone. As I highlight in the previous section, many participants reported lack of deep connections with people in the community. In these situations, religious or community institutions often take the role of providing personal support. A participant who came to Bruce relied heavily on her local church to act as a support system. Although she didn’t call fellow church-goers her friends, but she still appreciated the support from them. She said,

I didn’t have friends up till now, I can talk to people now but I don’t really have friends here in Canada. I can talk to people and say hi, they are not my friends. A friend is someone with who you can share you can tell them what is going on and tell them what makes you feel good and some days you feel bad. Sometimes at church you can see people but they don’t really care outside and outside the church you can see some people but they don’t really care. At church some ladies say my doors are open for you anytime for a visit, we can find some people that you can rely on them. That has made the difference. At church it is a family and we wash our dirty clothes together so you can rely on them. They will be there for you. That is the only place where you can find people to help you.

She considered herself lucky to have found a group of people she could rely on. However, as one might expect a church is more common than a mosque, a gurudwara or a temple, especially in
rural areas. In cases where participants didn’t practice Christianity, there were no religious institutions to provide support. The language and daycare centres provide some opportunity for people to meet but as one participant notes they do not form lasting friendships at these centres. She said,

I am meeting some people at the language centre, we have a discussion group there. So we get together once a week and just talk to practice English with a Canadian volunteer. Yeah just these people, not like a friendship, we are not friends like those who visit your home something like that, no.

Another participant compared her experience with that of living in Hamilton and Kincardine. She said when she was living in Hamilton she had made friends with people from all ethnic backgrounds, which was not the case in Kincardine. In Kincardine, she found that people were more closed. She explained,

Yes, Bruce is a white town especially Kincardine. Not a lot of Asians there are people who work at Bruce or other consultancy, so there 10 to12 families at max. So they have their own community, Gujaratis, Pakistanis have their own community. People like us who fall nowhere, we find it hard to have anything. Like I took my daughter for gymnastics and hockey, very prevalent in Bruce. They are all hockey moms and dads here. I took my daughters there and they were not very friendly. I tried, I am very friendly, I like talking and meeting people but they were not very friendly. Very blunt to the point, were not open. They had their own circle and they were not ready to get anyone in. In Hamilton I have tons of white friends, but in Kincardine other than these two people no one else.

Another participant added to this sentiment and said that she finds the social life to be very formal. She added that back home you can just go to people’s house and you spend an evening together and have dinner. In her words, “if you want to invite people to your house, you don’t make a Facebook event you don’t have to invite people 10 days in advance.” She felt that this formal behaviour of setting up a meeting before visiting a friend’s house felt cold and closed.
Another issue that came up during the conversations was that of gossip in rural towns, which flows with this overarching theme of the ‘small town culture’ in rural areas.

**Gossip in small towns**

As participants noted, they found that although Canadians were friendly people the interactions with them were often restricted to greetings. When discussing their social life, there was an overarching theme that Canadian culture tends to be individualistic and people find it hard to make friends or deep connections. In my conversations participants mentioned gossip as being an important factor preventing them from connecting with the people in the community. I hadn’t expected to hear this but when multiple participants discussed this issue, it became apparent that this was not a ‘one-off’ incident but quite common.

One of the participants talked about her experience with gossip in the town. She said,

> It is a very closed community they say hi and are very nice but it is not like... you cannot really stand out and hang out with your neighbour so you do your own thing because people gossip about you. You don’t just assume that people gossip about you because you hear things from other people.

It is a small community so word travels fast. To avoid gossip about them she said that she and her husband “do their own thing.” She added that they go hiking, skiing or take long walks in the neighbourhood in hopes that this will help them avoid the drama. She also went on to say that the only reason she felt welcomed in the area was due to connecting with other people from the Filipina community in the nearby town.

Another participant talked about her fear of gossips in small towns. She said she is wary of people judging her since she is the only black person in the area which has caused her to fear getting too close to people in her town.
I don’t like that and I don’t want to get close to people. Some people talk behind their back and I don’t want to get close to people like that because I am the only black person who lives in the neighbourhood, I better stay away. If I am not working, I talk with my laptop, I can see my friends, we talk and spend time together by chatting. I talk with my laptop and I won’t get in trouble with anyone and not get involved.

She preferred to talk to friends in her home country via Skype of Facebook due to her distrust in people around her. This has caused her to be aloof from the community she is living in while maintaining friendships at home through technology.

**Role of schools in building social capital**

Some of my conversations with the women I interviewed highlighted the fact that they were only able to meet new people through schools. Since most of these women were either looking for work or working shift jobs, it was harder for them to make connections in the community. One of the women said that she was randomly approached by another parent at school and they became friends later. One of the participants attributed her new social connections to the fact that her children went to school in a small town where everyone knows each other. She found that it was easier to meet people once her children started going to school. She said,

> At school, if we know this one person and they are talking about a friend and then you realise that actually oh yeah I know the friend too. That is the way and oh we need to join in ... become friends with them or talk to that person and have a conversation. I think that is better here.

Another parent had a similar experience as she explained, “when he (her son) started school, I found out that there is a community here and they started sending emails, and we started organising functions.” She said that she is now able to go meet other people in the community and they sometimes organise potlucks or play dates for their children.
Similarly, another woman fondly recounted her first connection with a close friend who she had met at the bus stop while dropping her children off one morning. She told me they would go for walks, have tea together and visit each other’s house. She also added that she didn’t think immigrants with older children in Bruce would be able to meet people since the only way she ever met people were through her child’s school. She explained,

In Bruce you will not know people who have older kids. If I didn’t go to drop the kids I wouldn’t know them. So the people that I know are from the school not through the community or to know other people, it is through my kids. If the other parents are there from our community, okay they are friends and you get introduced and exchanged numbers. If they miss anything or there is a snow day or play dates so we would talk for something like that but not very often. It was better than nothing.

As she notes it has been hard for these women to form connections with people in the county. Evidently the schools played a major role in introducing them to other immigrant and non-immigrant parents. However, the issue of not having a social network remained for those who did not have children or if their children were older.

4.3.5 Cultural

As I mentioned before, the social and cultural findings are interconnected. In this section, I focus on the accommodations and compromises participants made to fit into small towns. Many participants expressed that since moving to Bruce-Grey area their cultural and religious practices were restricted to private spaces. There is a lack of cultural amenities for residents to enjoy and express their heritage and despite popular beliefs, systemic racism is still a reality. I discuss these issues below using direct quotes from participants and my interpretations of our conversations.
Lack of appropriate cultural amenities

One of the first things that I heard from participants about cultural transitions was lack of any kind of cultural amenities in the community. They said there were no grocery stores that carry ethnic foods, no ethnic restaurants, no cultural centre to meet other people from the same ethnic background or any places of worship beyond churches. Many participants who had lived in bigger cities like Toronto or Hamilton before could avail these facilities there and felt the lack of them even more. A participant compared living in GTA with living in the Bruce-Grey area by saying,

Oakville was also a good place to live near Toronto and Mississauga and there was a lot of communities, people from our back home countries and we have our social connections with them. Here there are a few families and to live in the Bruce county, you don’t have your social connections here.

This participant found himself “drifting here and there” to pass time as he was faced with loneliness and isolation in the area. Some other participants also mentioned the lack of ethnic foods and vegetables in the area. In some cases, this hindered their ability to celebrate festivals and events centred around food and in other cases they were not able to consume the food at all. A participant mentioned that her family would go to Toronto or London with freezers in their car. They would then bring back vegetables or meats in bulk back with them. According to one participant,

Another difference here is that in Toronto or cities like that you can find restaurants and stores that you can buy things from your country but here there is no store like that. You cannot buy those things so you need to go to the place that is London, that is another difference with Toronto. It is a big city that you can find stores like Chinese or Indian food that helps you feel more… I don’t know.

She was not the only one feeling that way. Another participant said, “halal food is not even an option for us here” citing the utter lack of culturally appropriate food options. Another
participant expressed difficulty in finding vegetarian food due to lack of an Asian store, where the options are plenty. In her words,

That is the only thing there is a little bit of adjustment, the grocery stores don’t really have Asian things so that was difficult for me at first because I am used to cooking that. My husband is a vegetarian, so I was having even a harder time. Because you can go to the Chinese store and get everything, it is all good. Here they have stores like Sobeys and everything is just so expensive grocery wise.

So not only they found the groceries more expensive but that the stores lacked a variety in options. Changing one’s diet to suit the dominant culture might not seem like a big deal but these are little things that can have effects on retention rates in these small communities. Another participant added that in general she found that there are no art museums, or movies from different cultures anywhere in the community. She compares,

In Toronto you have the option to go to so many places and do more things, for example the library that was close to my place in Scarborough and I remember that they had a lot options in other languages in DVDs and the books in Chinese and sometimes in Spanish. But here you don’t have this option. There is a library in Southampton and there is another one in Port Elgin but they don’t have many options.

Like food options being unavailable, participants mention that in general there are no spaces to access their culture or safely showcase their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. One participant explains that she and her husband take their son to Toronto every once a while to introduce him to their cultural heritage. They take him to the temple in the city in hopes that it would help him connect to his roots. She explains,

When we go to Toronto for festivals, like this we expose him a little to our culture. So, if we every want to show our kid the culture we can show him that this is our god, this is our mandir and tell him about things we used to do back home. I have heard that Swami Narayan come there to do classes. We don’t get that chance because we are here so it is a little hard we miss out on some of these things. They do some classes in music for kids and to go and come back it takes 3 hours and it is not possible.
However, the story doesn’t end here. In cases where there are no public spaces of expression, people come up with private spaces in attempts to preserve their heritage and pass on their culture to the next generation. A participant explains how a community member had built a small temple in their house where they all celebrated festivals. She explained,

There is this family who every Thursday does a religious gathering and everyone gets together. Here the uncle who does it at their house, they have a small corner in their basement which is a mandir (temple). So when it is Janamashtami, they decorate a swing and have Lord Krishna’s idol.

This was something she was very proud of and said her entire family enjoyed such gatherings.

She continued,

Slowly when we found out about these gatherings we started attending and met people around. We celebrate all festivals together, Holi, Diwali, Navratri. We book a hall each time and celebrate together. There are lots of families here within an hour from here. Some are in Port Elgin, in Goderich, but mostly in Kincardine. And when we meet on festivals we wear our clothes and we do Navratri for two days, and Holi for one and then Diwali.

She was the only participant who mentioned having a network of families that had formed some sort of community in the area. She added that having these few family get togethers with others from the same cultural background gave them a sense of familiarity.

One participant who had left Bruce to live in Hamilton, while her husband still worked in the county, said that she preferred living in the city. According to her, children had better educational opportunities in the city and she was able to still hold on to things about their religious background in the city. In her words,

A few things I would like to keep from our culture like you need to show respect to elders. Plus the religious background we have. There are ample resources in Hamilton to get to know our religion. I want them to know everything and understand difference about from where we are, and our culture heritage. Certain things need to be there to hold on to our identity but no one is right or wrong.
She referred to the local mosque and the activities there as important in helping pass on their culture to her children. Another participant said that although she struggled to show their culture to her children but she is trying her best to preserve some elements of it. She said her husband was worried that the children might be bullied at school and hence they did not need to learn the cultural language. However, she thought it was important for them to at least understand their language and she wanted to enroll them in classes. It is hard to find ethnic language services for children in small towns so local families had started teaching the children at their house. She explains,

Yeah, I think in Waterloo they have some Chinese school but here we don’t. But I know some of the Chinese families, not in this town like it is another town. There are a couple of families, they make a group in another town called Kincardine. This week all the kids go to their house and the parents teach them Chinese. I think everyone is trying to teach the kids the culture where we are from and the language.

Although most participants expressed a desire to pass on their cultures to the children, some were also incorporating elements from the ‘Canadian culture.’ For instance, two participants said they now celebrate Christmas by bringing a tree in the house. They also celebrated Easter and Halloween to ensure that their son “doesn’t feel too different than his friends at school.” In my conversations, it appeared that some families changed their traditions to blend in with the dominant culture in Bruce-Grey area in hopes to avoid discrimination and exclusion. However, discrimination is very much a reality in Canada, especially in small towns and I discuss it further in the following section.

**Perceived discrimination**

Racial discrimination can exist in a variety of forms such as blatant prejudice, systemic discrimination, microagressions etc. It is not discriminatory only when someone calls people of colour names. It is also discrimination when they showcase a hiring bias and do not employ
someone due to the way their name sounds. It is also discrimination when someone dismisses the prejudice faced by visible minorities or says that they don’t see colour. Prejudice against colour exists in urban and rural areas, and it exists at the workplace, at the hospitals and even in schools. However, as one of the participants of this study notes, “you must be very smart to understand that you are a victim of racism.” I echo that from my own experiences that it takes time to understand when someone is being discriminatory towards you. Sometimes it easier to write racist comments off as insignificant, rather than deal with the fact that you are being discriminated against due to your background. All these thoughts appeared in different conversations I had with the participants. I have tried to organise them based on the places that discrimination occurred in such as the workplace, the neighbourhood, the hospital and the school. Sometimes it was worse than others but nonetheless it had affected the participants enough for them to remember it and share it with me.

Racism at the workplace is hard to recognise and harder to report since discriminating against a person due to their race is illegal in Canada. When an employer is prejudiced, it is often impossible for the employee to prove unless there is hard evidence. One of the participants struggled with this dilemma where she perceived her employer to be discriminatory but was unable to take the issue up with authorities for a variety of reasons. This participant had just received her first job offer in Bruce after many applications. She said she was hired to help in the kitchen but ended up working at the dishes every day, which worsened her arthritis. Then she expressed this issue to the manager and she said she was treated differently since then. The manager charged her for on-job amenities that are provided for free to everyone else. When she talked to other workers she said, only she had been charged. In her words, “I said I still have my proof and I can show that only I was charged.”
She said that this behaviour continued until when she was confronted by the manager who told her that the nature of her employment could not be what was promised to her at the time of hire. The participant said that even when she explained her physical discomfort with exposure to hot and cold water simultaneously, the manager didn’t change her mind and eventually fired her. Although the participant had wanted to address the issue of discrimination with the boss, she said she was advised by her husband to leave it alone. She said her husband, (a white man who grew up in the county) told her that it was better for her to not pay attention to such things. There is no way that the participant thought she could prove the racist intents of her manager but it is important to understand that her perception was that it was discrimination against her skin colour. As a researcher for this project, it was not my role to find out the ‘true turn of events’ in this situation but to respect that the participant perceived this as discriminatory.

Another participant reported experiencing ‘less obvious racism’ or what could be referred to as micraggressions at work. The Mirriam-Webster dictionary defines a microagression as a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude towards a member of a marginalised group, such as a racial minority. A participant who had just moved to the area with her husband had started working at the local healthcare facility. She would bring rice for lunch as that is an important food in her culture. She never thought this would stand out as different, and was almost shocked when her colleagues were bewildered that someone would eat rice for lunch. She continued to say that she also usually got stared at when she talked to her mom on the phone in her native language. Although this kind of behaviour made her uncomfortable, she laughed at these comments and reconciled by saying that she didn’t intend to change it to please others. In her opinion,
Culture wise, they are very conservative here. It is a small town and they are very faithful with their culture, who they like… but I never really felt like I needed to hide my culture. I bring rice to work and for us it is normal.

These behaviours might seem insignificant to the perpetrator but to an individual from the minority group, these can make them feel disconnected from the community they are living in.

This theme of xenophobia continued as sometimes neighbours and acquaintances became too curious about the participants’ lives and backgrounds. One of the participants I interviewed identified herself as an Asian woman who is married to a Black man. According to her, the interracial nature of her marriage drew quite the looks and comments in her locality. She told me that the first few days they had moved to their newly bought house in a small town, her husband was tending to the backyard. The next day her neighbour came and asked her about what a black man was doing in her backyard, invoking the stereotype of distrust in black men in public. She also narrated another incident of neighbours being uncomfortable with the presence of too many people of color in the locality. This participant’s family visits her from the city to spend time at the beach every summer and they were recently met by rude comments from a neighbour. She explained,

My family comes here every summer on my birthday and there are 40 to 45 people who come here every summer. One of my neighbours said can you do something else why do you have to do this? Can you do a destination birthday? This is too Asian for us. My family heard her and they acted differently because they don’t know her and she was just ignorant. I mean it is a small town and there are mostly Scottish people living here and they are never really exposed to the different races so they don’t realise what they are saying.

She brushed these comments off as ignorance but emphasized that her family was quite hurt when they were forced to listen to the neighbour disrespecting them. Comments from neighbours don’t have to be as elaborate as the ones mentioned above for them to make someone uncomfortable.
In another conversation, a participant narrated an incident where someone yelled at her “go back to your country.” She said, once she was driving and had made a wrong turn which scared a woman walking her baby. The participant then said that she got out of the car to apologise to the woman who had then proceeded to yell and swear at her telling her to return to her country. The participant laughed it off saying that perhaps she would have reacted the same way if she felt her baby was threatened and said that she took no offense to the woman’s words. However, it is noteworthy that the woman on the street took the liberty to point out to her that she doesn’t belong there and needs to go back.

Such ignorant and often racist comments can easily make people feel unsafe in a neighbourhood where they stand out due to their colour. Another participant noted that people couldn’t understand her accent. She said she believes it is easier for people to understand you in bigger cities as they are exposed to people from all kinds of cultures. However, she said the people from small town have probably never left the area or met people from other cultures. She also expressed slight frustration at always being asked where she is from and being perceived as an outsider. While no participant said they would move out of their neighbourhood due to such behaviour they did express discomfort.

Experiencing and relaying perceived discrimination at a public institution like the hospital (much like the workplace) is tricky because historically it would invoke the image of someone being denied treatment at a hospital due to their colour. However, an action like that would be illegal today so racism takes the form of microagressions and xenophobia.

A participant pointed out that the county doesn’t have a walk-in clinic so people must use the Emergency services to seek healthcare out of office hours. She narrated an incident to me where she would go to the hospital to seek treatment for her arthritis and in that week, it had
flared up twice. To paraphrase, the doctor saw her and expressed his disapproval at her visits to the hospital while she was already on medication. She replied by saying that it is not her fault that her arthritis is bad and that she didn’t have any other choice than to come to the hospital. Her voice rose as she felt attacked and explained her response to the doctor. She said, “I said to him that I only come here when my pain was really intolerable.” According to her, the doctor left her alone after that. She said that she thought the doctor was probably just having a bad day and that he treated her better the next time she saw him. Although the doctor mended his mistake, it is important to note that he had implied that she was wasting taxpayers’ money by coming there too often. This cannot be classified as an appropriate way to treat any patient and especially someone who is new to the community.

Another participant did not however have a ‘subtle incident’ like the one detailed above. Her interactions with the doctor at the local hospital led her to lose her trust and switch to another doctor in Toronto. She told me about an incident when her three-year-old son had an ear infection and the doctors at the local hospital misdiagnosed him. Upon insisting to review their diagnosis, the doctor felt offended and told her to go home since he thought she was exaggerating. The participant expressed feeling extremely upset and dismissed. She said as a mother she knows her son more than anyone else but she felt that the doctors had perceived her as “the immigrant mother who exaggerates to get antibiotics for her son.” She said that after the incident she did not trust the doctors there, and thought they had a lack of knowledge. She then switched to another pediatrician in Toronto and preferred making the three-hour journey to see the doctor there rather than go back to the local hospital in the county. She said it hurt to take her child on a long commute to see the doctor when he was suffering in the back of the car but she refuses to take him back to the county doctor. She said,
They are racist to the people; we see that in emergency or walk-in clinic during the day. They think that I over-exaggerate, why would I make up stuff about my son’s fever. Why would you think I am a liar, you don’t even know me it is the first time I am talking to you.

Admittedly, emergencies are places of high stress and can result in harsh comments or behaviours towards any individual. However, when an immigrant is singled out and yelled at in a public setting, it is highly likely that they might perceive it as due to their colour. For instance, if the doctor said the same words to a white woman she might never attribute the disrespect to her colour. However, when a brown person is being yelled at in a room full of white people, it is highly likely that she might perceive that the doctor is not regarding her comments as intelligent due to her colour. And this perception is what matters, as my study deals with what is perceived as the ‘truth’ by the participants. Incidents like this not only make the community members lose trust in the public systems but may also reduce the retention rates of the families in the county.

Another public system in the area that has struggled to retain the trust of immigrants is the school system. In smaller communities, schools can become more than just institutions of knowledge. They become places where connections are made with other parents and teachers alike, therefore resulting in building a sense of community. Some of the participants noted that parents who had been living in the Bruce-Grey area for longer (referring to those who were born and brought up there) have prior connections with the teachers. They elaborated that this has become an issue as teachers treat students differently based on their relations with the parents. A participant elaborated that as immigrants who moved to the area recently, the teachers “take them for granted and do not work on their children.” She said,

If you know the teacher and my child is in that class she will go on and beyond for my child, and if my friend’s child is in that class she will go beyond for them too. It is a circle and you are not part of that circle because you are an outsider.
She added that the school board was trying to change this system but she does not want to send her children back into the school system that is designed to discriminate against immigrants. She is now homeschooling her children like a few other families in the area who are facing similar issues.

The same participant then narrated an incident that involved the teacher telling her that her daughter was not performing well in school because they didn’t speak English at home. According to the participant, this claim was ridiculous since they only communicated in English at home. She went on to explain the entire incident. She said that the regular teacher had been on leave for personal reasons which led to her child having a new substitute teacher very often. This had led to the pace of education being disrupted and an utter lack of connection with the teacher for her daughter. At the end of that school year she said she realised that her daughter had learned nothing. As the participant was discussing this issue with the new grade teacher, she said the teacher told her that their daughter cannot speak English because she is an immigrant child. The participant said she was dumbfounded at this claim because her husband and she did not speak the same language which meant that the family communicated only in English. When the participant told this to the teacher, she went on to say that then it must be that her daughter has a learning disability. This really upset the parents and affected their child’s experience at the school.

Further, she said her daughter started disliking her school a lot and asked questions like why is everyone else white while she is darker? She said that her daughter started comparing herself to other children who were light-skinned and asking why did other girls have more friends than her? The participant added that her daughter was sometimes even bullied for being friends with the other dark-skinned student in the class. This led to the parents deciding to
homeschool their children as they did not want them to grow up in a completely “white environment.” She said, she was complementing educating her children at home by involving them in the local hockey team and theatre classes instead. She concluded by saying that now they have more flexibility to take their children to Toronto and show them a more diverse society and different cultures. This, according to her, has led to both her children performing much better than before and being happier in general. This is a shameful incident and she said they did not take it up with authorities due to fear of gossip about their children, they did not want everyone to find out about this. Such incidents can have serious implications for not just the development of children in the community but also the reputation that community wishes to build for attracting future newcomers.
4.4 Summary

Finally, I want to present a summary of the findings of this research in a visual manner through a Venn diagram below which places the emergent themes in the three categories: economic, social and cultural. I want to point to a few subtleties in this diagram. As you can see the economic segment is placed at the top because it played out as an important and dominant theme in all my conversations with the interviewees. It was a major stressor when economic aspects of their lives were challenging and a big relief when they were sorted out. The social themes that emerged in the conversation were the second most dominant theme and closely tied to the cultural themes that appeared. Hence, there is more overlap between the social and the cultural segments (i.e. spheres). As can be seen in the overlapping sections of the diagram, there were some recurring social and economic themes, fewer cultural and economic themes and some themes that affected all these three areas. I will present the findings from the project in the diagram to reflect the key words and phrases that appeared in the conversations.
Figure 6: Summary of Findings
Figure 6 places all the key findings in three themes. As can be seen, ‘sacrifice for children’ is at the core of this diagram, meaning that it was the most important for immigrants. The participants explained that they moved to Canada in hopes of attaining good education, better job opportunities and a higher quality of life. These relate to economic advancement but also reflect hope of leading a better social life. They also talked about being grateful for the universal healthcare and having a safe environment to raise their children. Economic challenges formed a major portion of the conversations I had with participants. When one goes to another country in search of ‘a better life,’ it can be extremely challenging and disheartening to not find appropriate employment opportunities. There is clearly an ongoing gap in the skills that immigrants possess prior to migration and the skills that they utilise in the Canadian labour market. This underemployment causes stress, and in some cases dependency in households where only one spouse is able to get a relevant job despite both being professionally trained. In most cases, immigrants are required to upgrade their qualifications to get some Canadian education.

Another major challenge that immigrants face in rural areas is lack of social connections as mentioned in the section ‘lack of a robust social network.’ It was surprising to find out how few people said that they have meaningful connections around them. Further, gossip played an important role in making the participants feel the need to stay aloof to avoid any troubles. Although Canadians have a reputation of being open-minded and welcoming, they are not able to form meaningful connections with newcomers, especially in rural areas. Smaller towns have a closed culture which makes it harder for immigrants to feel connected and ‘at home’ in these areas. Newcomers felt excluded from social circles and often didn’t have ample opportunity to meet new people. There are often no institutions or centres in rural areas that help in facilitating
these bonds and new connections. Some participants said they were able to make friends through their children’ schools, where they connected with other parents. For those who didn’t have this opportunity, they either accepted the reality of not having any connections or relied on their networks in the home country for emotional support. Some also mentioned that they had met people at events run by Bruce Power, the largest employer of immigrants in the Bruce-Grey area.

Lack of social connections also impacts their cultural experience in the county as they feel unsupported. Participants talked about not having access to cultural amenities, like ethnic foods and vegetables, places of worship etc. This, along with, lack of a social network has forced them to restrict their cultural practices within the private household. Further, participants expressed perceived discrimination and xenophobia at the workplace, in neighbourhoods, and in public institutions like school and hospital. This affects all aspects of their life, hence this finding intersects all three circles in Figure 6. Participants also mentioned lack of connections with other immigrants or people from the same cultural background as them. This has caused some families to live in separation so their children can have exposure to more opportunities and diversity around them. Most of all at the centre of the immigrant experience is sacrificing for their children in hopes of a better life for them.

The summary diagram above has been produced to give a quick overview to the reader about the main ‘take-aways’ from this project. I discuss the implications of these findings in the section below.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Rural areas in Canada are struggling to maintain their populations and immigration has been suggested as a possible revitalisation solution. Municipalities across the country are being encouraged to start attracting immigrants as a means for economic development. However, immigrants need to be considered as more than just a means to an end. With this mindset, I started this research project. I had read that municipalities are interested in attracting and retaining immigrants, but what do the immigrants think? What are their stories and why are we not talking about them or to them?

With the aim to illuminate the immigrant perspectives, I interviewed people in Bruce-Grey counties who had been living there for the last ten years or less. I had long, insightful and sometimes emotional conversations with the participants as they shared their struggles and hopes. They bestowed on me, a stranger, the privilege to be privy to a snippet of their life stories. As I listened I felt honoured but also felt the responsibility to share their voices genuinely and do justice to their stories. In the findings chapter, I report on the content of our conversations and here I will attempt at making sense of the stories they shared with me. So what if the wife has to look for shift work? What happens when a child asks their mother ‘why no one else looks like me in my class?’ Why do these stories matter? These are the kinds of questions I will discuss in this chapter.

I start this chapter by presenting the section titled, ‘The Rural Canadian Dream.’ It is a play off the term ‘American Dream’ and since these immigrants moved to rural areas in Canada to fulfill the promise of this land, I call their hopes ‘The Rural Canadian Dream.’ In this section,
I discuss the economic challenges faced by immigrants, including precarious work and lack of recognition of previous qualifications. The next section is titled ‘Integration to Canadian Society’ where I discuss the lack of social connections for immigrants in the local community. I also discuss some literature on integration of immigrants in ‘host societies.’ The next section is titled ‘Welcoming Canadians?’ which questions this notion that Canada is an immigrant-friendly place and racist attitudes are non-existent in the society. I also discuss the implications of discriminatory attitudes against children in schools. Finally, I present some recommendations based on the findings of this project.

5.2 The Rural Canadian Dream

At the heart of every immigrant’s life story is a tale of hope. Hope that arises when one starts planning to move to another country and continues as they chase their ‘Canadian dream.’ All participants I talked to expressed hope for a better future for themselves and for their children. Canada has a reputation for being a welcoming land for immigrants that holds the promise of higher paying jobs, better education and a safe environment. All participants mentioned these as motivations to move to Canada. They said they were excited to make the move and see a new country. However they said, once they came here reality kicked in and the struggles began. They were grateful for the opportunities this country had provided them and their families but there was also a conscious realisation of the sacrifices that had to be made to get here. These sacrifices included working low-paying survival jobs while you are a trained dentist, separating your family so your children can have a better education, or volunteering at the local library so you can gather Canadian work experience.

Most participants I interviewed had lived elsewhere in Canada before moving to Bruce-Grey area, hence they were secondary migrants. Wiginton (2013) has identified that immigrants
move to rural areas for five reasons. They relocate to work in large manufacturing firms; tourism industry, such as in Jasper; to start their own small businesses; to work as skilled and unskilled labour, like in the mining industry; or to join a pre-existing cultural community such as the Mennonites (Wiginton, 2013). According to Wiginton’s (2013) classification, in Bruce-Grey the ‘knowledge economy’ would be the largest attractor of immigrants to the area, as Bruce Power hires people with expert knowledge and highly specialised skills. Some participants moved to the rural area due to their love for nature and increased access to outdoor recreation activities. Although she does not include ‘marriage as an attractor to rural areas’ in her classification, some participants in this study fall into that category. In two cases participants moved to the area because they married someone from the community. These participants had met their husbands while the men were visiting the women’s home countries. Their husbands were born and brought up in the Bruce-Grey area, so when they eventually got married their wives, who are immigrants, moved to the county. I did not expect marriage to be a pull factor for immigrants but apparently, it is not that uncommon. Although the significance of marriage as an attractor is not clear, research by the Local Immigration Partnership of Renfrew and Lanark (2012) revealed that international marriages have been found in the area. Certainly, municipalities cannot use marriage as an attraction strategy, however further research can be done to find out if immigrants who move to the county due to marriage have different experiences than those who move for other reasons.

Participants frequently talked about an economic challenge they faced which was, lack of recognition of their previous qualifications. They mentioned having to “start from zero” in Canada since Canadian employers are unwilling to recognise their educational qualifications and work experience. Even when immigrants have foreign work experience, it is a challenge to
provide references from another country to Canadian employers. Employers in Canada are also less likely to trust foreign education and connections (Girard & Bauder, 2005). Participants said there was lack of trust in foreign credentials for professional and non-professional qualifications. This challenge has existed for a long time and continues to exists without any solutions in sight. The government controls the process of selection of immigrants based on their employable skills, whereas the professions in Canada are controlled by private professional regulatory bodies. Hence, immigrants are invited to Canada on the basis of their skills and qualifications and yet once they arrive here the same qualifications are used to exclude them from the job markets. The government can invite them to the country but cannot guarantee a respectable job position that is suited to their qualifications due to tough professional criteria set by private professional bodies.

Immigrants have the option to transfer and accredit their foreign qualifications by undergoing examinations through the equivalency process. However, the equivalency process is long and expensive and hence cannot be afforded by most people. A participant mentioned that he thought once someone is required to enter the job market in a low-paying position to sustain their family, it is very hard to leave for upgrading qualifications. Leaving the job to pursue equivalency not only requires immigrants to put aside a large amount of money but to also forego income, making it an inaccessible and unfeasible option. Thus, immigrants end up working in precarious positions such as low-paying manual labour positions, factory line workers or in the informal economy, such as caring for children and family (Girard & Bauder, 2005).

The exact definition of precarity in employment is contested but it is used to refer to jobs that lack labour security. This refers to “paid work characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health” (Vosko, 2006, p.
4). Over the past few years Canada has experienced a growth in temporary, and part-time positions as the standard employment relationship (SER) is changing (Cranford, Vosko & Zukewich, 2003). The SER refers to the traditional model of employment where an employee has one employer, is working a typical eight hours long shift, is entitled to benefits and pension (Vosko, 1997). This became the most popular form of employment after World War II with mostly men working in blue collar and white collar jobs (Cranford et al., 2003). The SER model remains the basis on which labour legislations, laws and policies have been based, although the reality is changing rapidly (Cranford et al., 2003). Today, Canada is experiencing a growth of “non-standard jobs” and rising precariousness that takes the form of atypical working hours, limited social and health benefits, job insecurity, shorter tenures putting workers at high risk (Vosko, 1997; Cranford et al., 2003). However, precarious positions have historically been and continue to be gendered and dominated by young people, women, people of colours, migrants and other marginalised groups (Cranford et al., 2003).

In the Canadian labour markets, a higher percentage of women than men work in precarious jobs (Cranford et al., 2003). It is also known that life events like child birth and relocation can increase women’s chances of working in precarious employment (Fuller 2009; MacDonald, 2009). It is assumed that the role of social reproduction allows women to freely pick flexible hours, however that is often accompanied by lower benefits and less security (Cranford et al., 2003). Research shows that men pursue part-time work when enrolled in school but almost never due to child care (Cranford et al., 2003) and women report care-giving as one of the most important factors or giving up full-time jobs (Vosko, 2002, p. 28). Hence the issue of social reproduction leading to precarious employment affects women exclusively.
Working in precarious jobs and sectors can have direct implications for health and well-being of the workers. Research shows that workers in precarious positions were more likely to work disorganised and irregular hours creating work-life conflicts (Bohle, Quinlan, Kennedy & Williamson, 2004). This causes disruption to their social and family life and they also report higher levels of stress, fatigue, sleep disturbance, and poorer exercise and dietary regimes (Bohle et al., 2004). Therefore, increasing inequality in labour force markets is likely to generate increasing inequalities in health in women, immigrants, and people of colour (Block, n.d.; Arat-Koc, 1997). Not only women, immigrants are more likely to end up in precarious jobs but also get affected by the emotional and mental health challenges as a result of these work conditions.

These claims about the gendered and the marginalised nature of precariousness were confirmed in the findings of this research project. As mentioned before, a lot of the participants I interviewed were female spouses of men working at the Bruce nuclear power plant. In some cases, these women were also professionally trained and practiced their profession in the home country. However, since they had not completed their equivalency process they were not able to practice in Canada. The women expressed that the process was expensive and time-consuming which meant that it was not considered a priority for the family. The women I interviewed were all working in shift jobs or looking for jobs while taking care of their children and family. This situation often reflected traditional gender-roles in a family where males are primary breadwinners and women are caretakers whose work is excluded from the formal economy.\(^2\) These women hold a very important role for the family and community as they raise their children,

\(^2\) Women who give birth and stay home to care for children or family members play extremely important roles in our economies. Their unpaid contributions add directly and indirectly to our economies as they rear future generations and decrease the taxpayers’ burden by providing care. Inclusion of women’s contribution through unpaid labour in the formal economy is a much larger debate that is outside the scope of this thesis. However, by acknowledging this work as important, I want to honour these women’s importance, time, efforts, love and selflessness.
however this is not accounted for in the formal economy. This can have important implications for gender relations within the family and in the community. I suspect that it creates dependency in women who must then rely on their spouses for all financial matters without family or friends around. It might even change power dynamics in the household, potentially affecting the inclusivity of women in the decision-making process. However, further analysis is needed to find out the effects of gendered precariousness of work on the family unit and the women’s emotional well-being and mental health.

As highlighted above, the issue of lack of recognition of foreign credentials affects women and immigrants in rural areas more than others. The women are frequently left out of the formal economies and the rural areas lose out on attracting immigrants (Girard & Bauder, 2005). For instance, if an immigrant is going to be working a manual job, they are more likely to do that in a city where they will have contacts with people from their cultural background (Girard & Bauder, 2005; Safdar et al., 2007). Also, immigrants are more likely to have support in undergoing the equivalency process in a city as compared to a rural area, where there is generally a lack of immigrant services (Girard & Bauder, 2005). From the immigrant’s point of view these practices are discriminatory and make it hard for them to succeed in the job market and achieve their full potential as members of this society. There have been many recommendations calling for a redesign of the licensing process (Girard & Bauder, 2005; Schwartz, Dhillon-Penner, 2012). Precarious employment is a cycle that it hard to break and disproportionately affects immigrants, especially women. It is important that credential equivalency is modified to remove the systemic social and cultural barriers that result in discrimination against immigrants and not perpetrate them.
From the government’s perspective, Ontario’s PNP program has not been as successful as others in using immigration as a community development tool in smaller cities and rural areas (Wiginton, 2013). When immigrants move to rural areas, they are faced with a host of challenges and yet there is no ‘reward’ to face them outside of an economic opportunity. A shift in importance of PNP can allow municipalities to attract immigrants and retain them by providing them the option of fast-tracked immigration if they are based in a rural area (Wiginton, 2013). This must be complemented by settlement services for integration of immigrants, especially for women. As I mention in this project, women are more likely to be working in precarious positions and taking of care of children at home. This implies that they might have a harder time making connections in the community unless they have a child who goes to school. Women face distinct challenges than can be met with specialised service for them.

5.3 Integration to Canadian Society

As with the term ‘precariousness,’ ‘integration’ does not have a universally agreed upon definition. The Canadian policy dialogue has traditionally discussed integration as a process of two-way accommodation. It expects both the immigrants and the members of the host society to accommodate and achieve integration (Belkhodja, n.d.). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), now called the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) have also adopted the following definition:

Integration can be conceptualized as a multidimensional two-way process in which newcomers and the host society work together to eliminate barriers and facilitate the full engagement and participation of immigrants in all aspects of Canadian life. Integration does not imply forced assimilation or require a loss of cultural identity. (Dorais, 2013).
IRCC’s integration strategy is aimed at enabling newcomers to settle, adapt and integrate so they can become contributing members of the society while keeping their identities (Dorais, 2013). According to the government, Canada plays a role in facilitating this process by offering a variety of settlement services, integration promotion activities and programs (Dorais, 2013). Arguably, integration is not a simplistic two-way process where both the immigrants and host society accommodate and ‘voila the immigrant is now integrated!’ It is a complicated process where the existence of settlement services does not guarantee that an immigrant will receive the help they need. As was seen in the research findings, accepting immigrants along with their race, ethnicity, religious and cultural beliefs is not easy for communities. This is especially true for rural communities where the social fabric might have looked a certain way for a long time. Change is hard and it is harder when perceived as a threat to the community’s identity. This sentiment was showcased when a neighbour requested one of the participants to not bring her family to their house because “we are not used to so many Asians here.”

Through the findings of this research project, one can argue that Canada needs to do more to hold up its end of the bargain in facilitating integration of immigrants in rural areas. According to IRCC, some indicators of integration are: pride in Canada, feelings of belonging to the local or national community, no discomfort due to one’s ethnic, racial or cultural background; absence of discrimination and hate crimes; and participation in community association, the education system, politics and civic activities (Gilkinson, 2009 as cited in Wiginton, 2013). In my conversations with participants, most of them said that they thought they belonged to the community, which is a positive measure of integration. However, at the same time most people also said that they did not have meaningful connections outside their immediate families in the community. They were not part of any associations except a couple
who knew people from the ‘Filipino community’ or the ‘Indian community’ in the area. Participants also reported multiple incidents of discrimination in the form of hiring bias or microaggressions in the neighbourhood, school, and workplace. One participant mentioned that she is wary of becoming a topic of gossip in her community as she is the only black person in the neighbourhood. One’s race becomes a much more conscious entity when living in a neighbourhood of white people. Although it is less talked about in public setting xenophobia and discrimination are still a reality for people of colour.

The Ethnic Diversity Survey reports that 65% of visible minorities experience discrimination at their workplace (Khan, 2006). Research by the Federal Government, academic literature and anecdotes from visible minorities also continue to highlight their experience of systemic racism (Khan, 2006). Racial discrimination is a major factor leading to gaps in income and economic security of minorities as compared to whites (Khan, 2006). It is also known that non-minority Canadians perceive racism to be a problem of the past, something that has been left behind and is not characteristic of the society they are living in (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). However, as was discussed in the findings, children of immigrant parents face discrimination at schools. This could have major implications for their mental health (Maynard, Vaughn, Salas-Wright & Vaughn, 2016). Research has shown that immigrant youth are more likely to experience bullying than non-immigrant youth (Maynard et al., 2016). They are also more likely to report interpersonal, social, health and emotional challenges due to bullying, greatly affecting their socio-emotional well-being (Maynard et al., 2016). Therefore, unless there is acceptance of the fact that discriminatory attitudes still exist in our society, there cannot be attempts to change the systemic barriers against immigrants.
Participants of this study also reported the lack of cultural amenities in the area, such as lack of places of worship or places for celebration of culture in the community. One event was brought up by participants which was the annual multicultural festival held by Bruce Power. Families are invited to celebrate their culture by bringing foods from all around the world and participants said they enjoyed meeting other people. This is an example of privatisation of settlement services, where major employers are performing activities that are traditionally delivered through government programs. This finding confirmed that with increasing neoliberalism, social services are being outsourced to non-governmental organisations and for-profit agencies (Shields, Drolet & Valenzuela, 2016). It must be noted that rural areas have always lacked equitable access to services because of costs. This issue continues to challenge rural areas as they try to cope with declining fiscal resources while more responsibilities of service delivery being centralised and now regionalised. A lower tax base and lower personal and corporate taxes restrict the financial capacity of rural municipalities, making it harder for them to provide services for residents. In such a scenario, efforts to welcome and support immigrants by employers like Bruce Power gain increasing importance.

The delivery of settlement services is a multi-government process in terms of sharing fiscal resources and division of power and work (Tolley, 2011, p. 4). Currently, the federal government provides majority of the funds to deliver settlement services through a variety of streams, such as orientation, language training, community connections etc. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Although cities and towns receive immigrants directly, they do not receive settlement funds from the federal government, but rely on provincial support (Tolly, 2011, p. 4). Although traditionally, mandated under the federal government’s jurisdiction, settlement services in Canada have morphed into a para-state system resulting in privatization of
service provision (Sadiq 2004, p.1). For instance, the premier of Nova Scotia assured the public that the launch of the PNP program would not cost tax payers as it was designed to ensure that nominees and employers bore all costs (Haddow, 2011). The state is increasingly contracting non-governmental settlement service providers to provide support for housing, language, education etc. (Sadiq 2004, p.1). Arguably, this type of uncoordinated restructuring has created spatial mismatch and further gaps in service delivery (Evans, Richmonds & Shields, 2005). With the rising importance of PNP stream, employers can select immigrants that are most economically valuable to them (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Therefore, the PNP programs rely heavily on employers to provide language and settlement support, creating a vacuum of services where the public actors have yielded responsibility and there is absence of substitution by private actors (Baxter 2010, p. 3).

In larger cities, immigrants can reach out to Immigrant Service Providers (ISPs) but that is not true in smaller centres and rural areas (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). This has necessitated that in smaller areas employers take on the role of providing language, integration support to their employees, like in the case of Alberta’s oil industry (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). This can also be seen in the Bruce area, where Bruce Power has initiated some community events in attempts to make its immigrant workers feel more connected. However, there is a caveat to this arrangement. The private sector is neither mandated nor has the specialized expertise to provide comprehensive settlement services (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Additionally, these services are then only accessible to those immigrants who are hired by the employer, which creates inequality at the community level (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Although the private sector is performing an important role by providing settlement services, there is need to ensure their accountability to quality and justice (Flynn & Bauder, 2015). Above all, statistics show that in Canada most
employers are medium to small with 80% having less than 20 employees (in Lauzon, 2016). Further, less than 1% employers are large i.e. that have 500 employees or less (in Lauzon, 2016). Although Bruce Power is providing important services to immigrants, rural areas often don’t have big employers with similar capacity and financial standing. In areas lacking big employers, immigrants are likely to not have access to any settlement services unless provided by governmental agencies. Therefore, all levels of governments have an important role and responsibility to ensure provision of settlement services in rural areas beyond private programs to ensure higher retention rates.

Immigrants in the study expressed a need for a ‘community hub’ such as an immigration centre where people can meet and celebrate their community and culture. It might be hard for a rural municipality to provide an entire building for an immigrant centre but the local government could organise community events. The events could invite both newcomers and other residents to mingle, learn and connect. This process was championed by a local immigrant leader in Perth county, where his charisma and passion had helped building bridges between immigrants and other residents (Caldwell et al., 2015). This is one way to build a welcoming multicultural community, through interaction and exchange.

One of the findings of this research was the important role schools are playing in building social connections in immigrant parents. This needs further analysis to understand the potential for educational institutions to act as means of integrating new families. Schools provide a great opportunity for parents to connect with each other due to their children. This helps them feel connected and supported in the community as they rely on each other for help in raising children. These connections become even more crucial when one doesn’t have family or other close relatives around. Therefore, schools become informal spaces of communal exchange. Rural
schools present a great opportunity for fulfilling the need for a ‘community hub’ for immigrants as this concept is already being explored by the Ontario government. Yet at the same time, the province is also in the process of closing down more rural schools due to fiscal challenges, meaning that increasingly students will be bussed to one school from various surrounding areas. Despite government’s conflicting agendas, community hubs have the potential to become places of meaningful connection for residents.

Community hubs have been around for years; however, they have gained renewed traction under Ontario’s provincial government. Community hubs are designed to act as centres for provision of a variety of social, cultural and health services, and green and recreational spaces (Ontario Government, 2016). They are perceived as spaces that the community can come together in and use to share, plan, build, and grow (Ontario Government, 2016). These hubs are a means to decentralise policy making by allowing communities to respond better to local needs and include local voices (Ontario Government, 2016). A community hub does not require new buildings but can be created in a school, an elderly-persons centre, a community health centre or an old factory (Ontario Government, 2016). An example of a pre-existing community hub is the Fusion Youth Activity and Technology Centre in the Town of Ingersoll (Ontario Government, 2016). The Town acquired a school and repurposed it as a space providing arts, music, sports, job training and host of other youth-focused programs (Ontario Government, 2016). It is also used by other service agencies during ‘non-fusion hours’ including the Victorian Order of Nurses, counselling services, and services for adults who are developmentally challenged, to name a few. Bruce and Grey counties could establish similar structures in the local school to serve as a community centre or hub for immigrants in the area, providing them with a space to
express and connect. This is an example of utilizing rural assets to build a better and more inclusive community.

5.4 Welcoming Canadians?

As I discuss in the findings, participants had no or few social connections in the community. These findings confirm the claims by Safdar et al. (2007) that rural immigrants have low social contact with both in and out-group members of the society. One participant called her husband’s job at Bruce Power as “once in a lifetime opportunity” for which they moved to the county. She also said, like most other participants, that she did not have any close friends or family in the community. Except for one participant who had been living there for 7 years, no other participant reported having deeper meaningful connections in the local community. There is obviously an expectation that forming deep friendships takes time but all participants found the county’s culture to be “closed” and “hard to break into.”

There are no opportunities in place for immigrants to meet other immigrants or other residents of the community. In cases where they had some friends in the community, it was due to their children’s school where they met other immigrant parents. Thus, participants reported feeling lonely, isolated and excluded at times. Many who came as a single-family unit mentioned that the transition was eased by having their children and spouses with them. These findings support the literature about mental health in recent immigrants. A study by Robert and Gilkinson (2012) reveals that immigrants are likely to report higher levels of emotional health concerns than non-migrants. In general females tend to experience higher levels of emotional stress than males, which applied to immigrants as well (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012). Further, it was noted that immigrants from Asia, Africa and Central and South America reported higher levels of stress than their counterparts in U.S, UK and other Western European countries (Robert &
Gilkinson, 2012). Therefore, social exclusion has the potential to lead to stress, anxiety and hamper emotional well-being, especially for immigrants.

Another interesting observation from the study was the experience of children in rural schools where there is little or no racial diversity. A participant explained that her daughter had started asking her questions about her skin colour and why she was darker than her other friends. She also perceived that she had less friends than other students who were lighter-skinned. The participant, along with her children, had once moved back to Toronto for a few months so that her children could go to school there. She said that her daughter felt more comfortable in the school in Toronto in a multi-racial student population. Her mother added that she was happier and enjoyed going to school, whereas when she was in Bruce she would get anxiety related stomach aches every morning. This child was conscious of her marginalised status at a very young age and it was affecting her educational and developmental experience at the local school. Her mother had now started home-schooling her to relieve the distress that her daughter started associating with learning. This is an instance where social exclusion has clearly affected the physical and emotional well-being of a young child.

Another participant I interviewed discussed her husband’s discomfort in teaching their children the cultural language due to fear of them getting bullied at school. They feared that since it was a rural school, their children might stand out too much and become victims of bullying. Another participant invited her son’s friends to celebrate ‘Canadian festivals’ like Easter and Halloween at their house so his friends wouldn’t think of him as too different. These are real concerns for parents and their children and this might influence the child’s’ emotional-wellbeing in school. Further research is needed to find out about experiences of immigrant children in rural areas, the fears that they hold and their perceptions of their racial background.
When people don’t have social connections or cultural amenities in the community, it is unrealistic to expect them to stay there for a long time. Upon asking their long-term plan, many participants said that they would stay in the community for as long as the job with Bruce Power would last. In general, participants described experiencing challenges in making deep social connections in the rural areas they were living in. According to a participant, the people living there have a close-knit circle which is hard to ‘crack’ as an immigrant and she did not want her children to grow up in that environment. One participant I interviewed had landed in a city initially, and moved to Bruce and then moved back to the city. She gave her insights about the difference in making social connections in rural area versus in the city. According to her, the people in the city were more open-minded about connecting with someone who didn’t look like them. She found the rural community to be close-minded and hard to connect with. She was also concerned about the quality of education in rural areas and thought the schools in cities had more opportunities and a more diverse environment. Even though the family was experiencing stress from separation, she believed that it was worth it so her children could have a better education. And, she was not alone. There was another woman who had tried living separately with her children in a bigger city, while her husband worked in Bruce county. She said although she was closer to extended family and her children were happier, she could not bear the separation of her family anymore. She eventually moved back to Bruce to be with her husband. There were at least two more families who were separated between the Bruce-Grey area and a bigger city.

This showcases that Bruce Power has the ability to offer well-paying jobs to immigrants but these opportunities can also force them to make hard decisions about how to live. It is an example of economic prosperity at the cost of social and emotional well-being. The separation of families in rural areas is bound to have implications for immigrants’ overall emotional health as
they feel isolated and disconnected from the community. This issue is important to understand the effects of separation on children and the spousal relationships. Although, I did not explore the issue of mental health specifically, research targeting issues of immigrant well-being in rural areas needs to be further pursued. A longitudinal study monitoring the mental health and well-being of immigrants in a rural area would be necessary to fully understand concepts of immigrant well-being.

Evidently, lack of social and cultural connections in the area is one of the biggest barriers to immigrants’ long-term stay in the community. This is partly because they don’t have any extended family or friends in the area. Also, the spatial distribution of population in rural areas is sparse which makes it harder for immigrants to keep in touch. Michael Haan (2017) suggests an interesting and innovative solution to this issue. He suggests that counties wishing to attract newcomers can focus on ‘cluster recruitment.’ This means that for instance, if a few Filipinos settle in the community they might refer it to their other friends abroad or in the city. This might attract more Filipinos to move to the county and once they arrive they will already have some connections. If immigrants from all over the world settle in a county, it is harder to build connections and they don’t feel like they have an ethnic community supporting them. Although presented as an innovative practice, there are numerous challenges associated with the implementation.

Firstly, the act of preferring employees from a certain background can have serious implications on employment equity and human rights. Secondly, congregating people from one ethnic and cultural background could lead to cultural enclaves or ‘ghettos’ causing visible and invisible racial divides in the rural community. Finally, moving groups of people for one manufacturing firm creates a direct financial and social dependency on that employer. If the firm
shut down, that would leave an entire community, who uprooted their lives to the rural area for it, without a livelihood. Haan (2017) also notes that cluster recruitment can be viewed as a retention strategy to avoid immigrants from moving back from to urban areas in search of their ethnic community. Cluster recruitment is also reflected in the successful approaches used by Brandon, Manitoba but further thought and experimentation are necessary to understand this phenomenon. Research can explore communities who are experiencing this phenomenon organically, without any role of municipalities or employers to understand the dynamics and implications of cluster recruitment.

From an immigrant’s perspective, the people and municipality of Bruce-Grey have not been able to model the behaviour of a ‘welcoming community.’ Rural municipalities can use jobs as a strategy to attract immigrants, but integration and retention takes more than just job offers. Municipalities which have or are planning to have a formal immigration strategy can learn from initiatives in similar jurisdictional areas. For instance, the local municipality of Brandon, Manitoba is using collaborative networks to integrate and retain immigrants. A similar community or regional level group can aim to explore immigration opportunities, strategies, targets and create a plan for the municipality (Gibson et al., 2017). It is also important to establish that immigration is the responsibility of all levels of government, which requires training around building partnerships, conflict resolution etc. (Gibson et al., 2017). Brandon achieved the creation of such a group by creating the ‘Brandon Welcoming Communities Dialogue Group’ (Gibson et al., 2017). This dialogue group was created as a forum to disseminate information, build collaborative networks across all government levels (Gibson et al., 2017).
One of the initiatives that came out of this partnership in Brandon was provision of frontline services in multiple languages (Gibson et al., 2017). This alone has the potential to attract newcomers and make them feel welcomed after they arrive. The Dialogue Group also opened lines of communication between stakeholders which often cited as one of the barriers to creating comprehensive strategies (Gibson et al., 2017). These initiatives need to be complemented with discussions with the community about the changing social fabric and the value of multiculturalism to promote a welcoming attitude in its literal sense. Awareness about anti-immigrant behaviour and measures to create a more open-minded community are essential to ensuring that newcomers feel as part of the community.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Immigration is an important feature of the Canadian economy as it has helped in maintaining the population levels and the labour markets in the country for a long time. In recent history, cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver have received the largest number of immigrants. However more recently, the focus has shifted to attracting immigrants to smaller cities and rural areas, away from the gateway cities. It is argued that immigrants can help revitalise the rural areas in the country, which are currently experiencing outmigration of youth and struggling to grow their populations. Although rural areas arguably have the potential to offer a beautiful countryside, cheaper living costs and ‘friendly’ neighbours, it is important to understand the experiences of immigrants who are currently living there. This project aimed to capture the stories of immigrants who have been residing in Bruce-Grey area, in South-West Ontario, for the last ten years or less.

The analysis revealed that the Bruce county nuclear power plant was a huge pull factor for immigrants to the area. Some had also moved there because they had a family member who was already living in the area. Once immigrants moved there, they enjoyed the outdoors, the beach and the quiet environment. However, they faced a lot of economic, social and cultural challenges while going through the transitions to settle in a rural area. Precarity of jobs remained an important issue especially for immigrant women whose spouses were working in highly-skilled jobs in the area. Since their foreign credentials were not recognised or valued in Canada, these women were underemployed in all cases and were working or volunteering to gain the infamous ‘Canadian experience.’
Participants also mentioned lack of social and cultural connections in the area. This is partly because they did not have any extended family or friends in the area. The spatial distribution of population in rural areas is sparse which makes it harder for immigrants to keep in touch. Lack of public transportation created dependency on personal vehicles, or family members with vehicles. This resulted in lower opportunities to form social connections in the county. Participants also reported that it was hard to adjust into the close-knit culture of a rural town as newcomers. They said that they felt as if the longer-term residents did not make efforts to build relationships with immigrants. However, participants with children reported that they had met other parents at the schools, which had become places of community building. Participants said when they saw other immigrant parents they would reach out to each other and introduce them to their own acquaintances. That is how they got to know the community and build their support system in the area. At the same time, some participants also mentioned concerns about the quality of the education and their children’s experiences at school. This caused some families to separate, in which case the husbands worked in the county and the wives moved to a bigger city with their children. This is causing stress and anxiety in the families.

Finally, lack of cultural amenities was discussed as a challenge facing immigrants in rural areas. Participants mentioned lack of ethnic foods and restaurants as a cultural challenge they face in the county. Some travelled to Toronto or Hamilton to get their food in bulk and then froze it until the next opportunity to go back. There was also a lack of religious places of worship or cultural centre to celebrate one’s religion, culture and ethnicity. Some participants also shared their narratives of dealing with xenophobic comments and behaviours in the neighbourhood, workplace, hospitals and in the classroom. Immigrants tend to report higher levels of stress and
mental health challenges as compared to non-immigrants, and these are exacerbated in rural settings due to lack of social support.

Rural areas are struggling to maintain their labour market needs and wish to tap into the immigrant population to fulfill the gaps. The findings of this project highlighted that attracting immigrants to rural areas is not enough. It needs to be complemented with building the community’s capacity to provide a healthy and vibrant living environment for immigrants and newcomers. Retention and integration measures are as important, if not more, than attraction strategies. Immigrants tend to settle in urban areas as cities have other ethnic and cultural communities to support them, cultural food and entertainment options etc. These choices allow them to live in a different country while holding on to some parts of their identity and culture. When resettling in rural areas, they have to give up the social connections in hopes of economic advancement. Immigrants are not likely to move to a rural area for precarious job positions and if they do, then government and employers need to have infrastructure in place to support their transitions.

The experiences of participants from this study give an insight into challenges of living as a visible outsider in a rural area. They felt isolated from the larger community as they had very few social connections in the area. This study is a reminder to community members and government agencies that although Canada has been a land of immigrants, it also needs to become a land that accepts immigrants beyond the borders and into the society. I encourage readers and community members at large to imagine their life as an immigrant, as an outsider in a community where English is not the first language. What are the challenges you might face and how would you want to be treated by the members of that society? These participants have made hard choices by leaving families and friends behind in search of a better life, in hopes for more
than just economic prosperity. The stories participants shared with me are unique to these individuals. They might share commonalities with immigrants living in other rural areas but are in no way generalizable. They offer deep insights into an immigrant’s struggle and give us an opportunity to witness and learn from their stories.

### 6.1 Recommendations

The most important recommendation for the municipalities is to listen to its immigrant members and find out what they need. Have a conversation, include immigrants in your community programs and boards. This requires not just inviting them but making connections with immigrant residents of the community and facilitating their connections with the local representatives. I also list here some specific changes that Bruce-Grey municipalities can consider to make transitions easier for their immigrant residents.

1. Smaller areas like Bruce-Grey need to organize and prepare to become a welcoming community by establishing a multi-stakeholder group focusing on immigration as their first step (Gibson et al., 2017; Bruce & Lister, 2005 Deschamps et al., 2001; Silvius & Annis, 2007). This process requires collaboration, networking and resources; municipalities need to consider the cost-benefit implications of undertaking such an initiative. The group can then become a centre for discussing current issues and future steps that can help with the integration of immigrants in the larger community.

2. Secondly, there are some important settlement services that the county needs to provide. There is a language learning centre in the area, which is well utilized by immigrants. However, participants mentioned lack of awareness about services in the area. It is important to ensure the counties offer the appropriate service to newcomers, along with marketing them in an accessible manner.
3. As I mention in this study, women are more likely to be working in precarious positions and taking care of children at home. This implies that they might have a harder time making connections in the community unless they have a child who goes to school. Women face distinct challenges such as isolation, precariousness, and separation affecting their mental health and well-being. I believe that women are powerful beings and when their energies combine they can hold each other up through any challenge. Groups and programs bringing immigrant women together by offering them a platform to engage and listen can act as powerful support systems.

4. Immigrants living in the area expressed need for more cultural amenities. They would like to have access to more ethnic foods in the grocery stores. The county could negotiate with local grocers to provide specific food items that are high in demand or create a system for residents to place monthly bulk orders.

5. Participants expressed lack of social connections and spaces to celebrate community in the area. Creation of ‘community hubs’ in schools can offer immigrants in Bruce-Grey opportunities to create connections with other immigrants and community members at large.

6.2 Limitations

This qualitative study solely relied on the narratives of immigrants’ experiences, and hence cannot be used to build generalisations about immigrants in all rural areas in the country. It must be noted that most participants were picked using purposive sampling techniques. Most participants I interviewed had a family member, usually the male spouse, who was working in Bruce Power. This meant that they were skilled labour, with higher than average education levels and high incomes. It is a different picture than that of a new immigrant who comes with limited resources and no connections. Although ‘Bruce Power jobs’ are exceptions, they are the primary
reason for attracting these immigrants to the area. This fact was overrepresented in the sample and could be considered as one of the limitations of the study. It was hard to find immigrants in the area as there is no central place of connecting with them. Further, some of the discussion pieces rely on the academic research in small cities, which might not be best predictors of successful integration in rural areas. Therefore, a low number of participants and lack of literature focusing on rural immigrants are some of the limitations of this study.

6.3 Further Research

Immigration in smaller centres and rural areas is a relatively new topic in academia. This project adds to the slowly growing literature on rural immigration. It provides an overarching image of the kinds of challenges being faced by immigrants in rural areas. It can be used as a springboard for future, more complicated research projects dealing with rural immigration. It solidifies the basis of the immigrant experience for researchers who for instance, can now conduct a study on gender relations in immigrant families living in rural areas. Most importantly, with rising interest in attracting immigrants to rural areas, it is necessary that immigrant voices are not lost in the midst. This project is an attempt to bring those voices to light and listen to what is important to the people who are already undergoing the transition from urban to rural or sometimes from another country to rural Ontario. Here are some topics concerning rural immigrants that can be further analysed.

1. How does migration to rural areas affect the emotional well-being of professional qualified women who move to rural areas due to their partners (usually male) finding highly skilled jobs?
2. What are the experiences of immigrant children in rural areas and how do they navigate the ‘white rural spaces’? How does racial bullying in rural schools affect the mental health of immigrant youth?

3. Can immigrant focused community hubs facilitate the creation of social and cultural support systems currently missing in rural areas? What is the role of such public spaces in community development for immigrants and newcomers?

4. Although, I did not explore the issue of mental health specifically, research targeting issues of immigrant well-being in rural areas needs to be conducted. A longitudinal study monitoring the mental health and well-being of immigrants in a rural area could yield important insights.

5. Separation of families between the rural area and the city are important aspects to further analyse. What are the effects of such a family set-up on children and the spousal relationships?

6. Two women moved to Bruce-Grey area after they married men who were born and raised in the county. Having a family member in the area can have a positive effect on their transitions. How are experiences of spouses who ‘marry in the county’ different than others?

7. This project revealed cases of immigrants who once lived in rural areas but have now moved back to an urban area. Their stories make for interesting case studies in understanding the most serious challenges immigrants face in rural areas. Further research is needed to gain insights into the perspectives of these immigrants.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1

Interview guide

Research Goal
The research goal of this project is to explore the transitory experiences of new immigrants who move to rural areas in Ontario. This will entail researching the impact these experiences create on their lives.

Objectives
1. Explore the economic transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario
2. Explore the social transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario
3. Explore the cultural transitory experiences of immigrants who move to rural Ontario

Notes to self
Talk about the project. Why you are doing this. “I am learning a lot, so any information is good. Any feelings that you have are important, and please feel free to tell me what you are thinking.”

At any point in the interview, you can discontinue if you are feeling uncomfortable. You don’t have to answer any questions that you don’t feel comfortable with. You can ask questions at any time, or ask me to clarify it if something doesn’t make sense.

As I mentioned last time, your name will not be released. Any other information about you that can tell other people who are, will not be included. So if in the interview you say something that you don’t want to be written in the thesis, then please feel free to let me know and I will take it out.

I would like to record the interview so that I don’t miss anything you say because it is hard to take notes when speaking. The recording will only be saved until my thesis is done. After this interview I will type the audio file and remove your name and personal information from there so no one can identify you. But if you are not comfortable with that then please let me know and I will take notes.

Are you okay with me recording?
You have rights as a participant which I outlined above. Would you say you understand these rights?

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Can I use direct quotes from our interview today without your name with them?

**Introductory rapport building**

Introductions- Talk about your own background a little.

1. I would love to know a little bit about you now. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and your family before you came to Canada?
2. Now, can you talk about your move to Canada?
   a. When did you move to Canada and why?
   b. Did you come here alone or with someone?
   c. How did you feel when you moved away from your family? Did you miss them? Do you still miss them?
   d. How often do you go back?

3. Where did you first arrive in this county? What made you want to move to this place in particular?
4. So, when you moved to Canada, what were your first experiences, first impressions in the month or the two months or so that you moved in? Did you experience culture shock?
5. Were these experiences different when you moved to Bruce county?
   a. When you arrived in this area that you are living in now, what made you feel welcomed?
      i. What things didn’t make you feel welcomed when you first moved here?
   b. What were things that you liked about this county?
      i. and what did you not like about here?

**Economic well-being**

6. So let’s talk about finding work in Canada. In terms of employment, how has your experience been in this area?
   Probe question-
   a. Was it hard to find a job?
   b. Were your qualifications recognised?
   c. In my personal life, I have questioned many times if people perceive me differently when they find out that I didn’t grow up in Canada especially when I am applying for a job. Sometimes people change their names when they are applying for jobs and other little things that we do to fit in. Have you ever felt a need to do that? Did you feel like an employer was treating you differently because you are an immigrant? Again, as I said before your name will not be included in the results. If you haven’t experienced something like this, do you know of any other people who have?
7. Many communities have services for immigrants like language assistance, employment services, and people who help you find your way around in the community. Have you accessed any services since you came here in this county? How was your experience using them?

**Social well-being**
8. So making a move to an entirely different country is possibly one of the hardest things that we did. Leaving behind our friends and family is never easy but we also get to make new connections here. How connected do you feel to the community around you?
   a. Do you have family or close friends in this community?
   b. Did you meet other immigrants in this area?
   c. Are you part of any clubs/organisations/association outside of workplace?
   d. Do you go out for dinners, events, parties etc?

9. Do you feel like you belong here in this community? Have people accepted you, have you accepted the community?

**Cultural well-being**
10. I always like to see both sides of coin. It is hard to move to a new country, but I feel it is possible one of the most life-changing decisions that helps a person grow in many ways that they didn’t imagine that they would. One thing I know for sure is we are strong. In your opinion, as immigrants what strengths do you bring to this community?
   a. Do you feel valued as part of this community? (Probe if people are answering just due to job)

11. When you moved here initially, what things about the Canadian culture were extremely different than your own family culture and traditions?
   a. Did you have a hard time adjusting to these new traditions?
   b. What were some of your favourite traditions or cultural things that you did before moving to Canada?
   c. How did you have to change these to adjust into this new culture?

12. What are some things that you (and your family) enjoy the most in Canada?
13. What do you wish was available here that you have not been able to find/access? Services, restaurants, community gatherings etc?

**Concluding thoughts**
14. Would you like to add anything about your transition to the Canadian culture or to Canada?

15. Do you want to have a copy of the thesis when it is completed?
APPENDIX 2

The Coding Process

Step 1:

The first step of coding was going through each transcript and highlighting the various sections in the different colours assigned to the three research objectives. For instance, here the excerpt refers to economic challenges, and hence is highlighted in pink. Further down, the excerpt about social challenges is highlighted in yellow and cultural challenges is highlighted in blue.
**Step 2:**

The second step in coding process was to list all different excerpts, verses, conversation texts on different sheets of paper to combine related ones. Two statements referring to the same issue were combined under one code. The yellow is all social codes, pink all economic codes and blue are all the cultural codes.
Step 3:

The last step required all codes to be compared across for themes and patterns. These colour-coded sticky notes are three categories: social, economic and cultural. Here I mapped them out on a wall to see possible connections and intersections.