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Beyond the City Limits: An Examination of Adjustment among Immigrants in Rural Canada

Abstract

The present research sought to investigate some of the key elements that are related to rural immigration in the province of Ontario where the experience of declining immigration to rural areas is typical for Canada. 104 immigrants living in rural Canada participated in the study. Those who reported a high level of psychological well-being were less likely to report socio-cultural difficulties; those who perceived high levels of discrimination were more likely to report socio-cultural difficulties and psycho-physical distress; and low levels of linguistic competence predicted psycho-physical distress. Acculturation attitudes also predicted socio-cultural difficulties in that those who endorsed integration, assimilation and marginalization were less likely to report socio-cultural difficulties. The cultural adaptation problems of rural immigrants were found, in this study, to be similar to those of their urban counterparts, which indicates that services to support adaptation and higher levels of integration should also be offered to rural immigrants. The results of the present study are important for policy making, economic development and service delivery in rural Canada.
Rural immigration patterns and motives are largely understudied in the Canadian immigration research, with most of the literature on recent settlement patterns of immigrants in Canada focusing on the urban centres (e.g., Lo & Wang, 1997; Safdar, Lay, & Struthers, 2003). The case is similar internationally; researchers have focused on immigrants in large metropolitan areas such as Chicago, San Francisco, Helsinki, London, and Sydney (Pamuk, 2004; Kauppinen, 2002; Newbold & Spindler, 2001; White, 1998). The study of immigrant settlement patterns involving smaller cities and rural areas, however, has been neglected.

There was a time when most immigrants settled in rural areas in Canada (Knowles, 1995, cit. after: DiBiase & Bauder, 2005). In large part, this was due to a constant stream of European farmers coming over to the New World for better land. Now, however, over 70% of recent immigrants are of non-European descent (Statistics Canada, 2001) and most settle in larger cities. In 2001, immigrants constituted 18.4% of Canada’s population (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003). The vast majority of these immigrants were located in urban zones and industrialized provinces (Beshiri & Alfred, 2002).

In fact, recent immigrant settlement patterns in Canada reflect inter-regional and intra-regional disparities. In 2002, Ontario, the second largest and most populated province in Canada, received 58.3% of all immigrants to Canada, most of them settling in Toronto (Citizen and Immigration Canada, 2003). Although Ontario has a long history of rural immigration into many of its diverse rural areas, mainly to work in agriculture, forestry and mining, it has experienced very low levels of rural immigration since the Second World War, as immigrants have increasingly concentrated in cities. There were very few immigrants to rural Ontario in 2001 (hardly 10% of the total), a percentage that had declined since 1991 (Rural Secretariat, 2005).

DiBiase and Bauder (2005) report that the perception of a desired life was an influential factor in determining where immigrants would settle in Ontario. Rural areas were less popular because immigrants knew little about them prior to arriving. Walton-Roberts (2005) also examined reasons for immigrant settlement in a rural context in another Canadian province, British Columbia. She reports that municipal governments do not actively recruit immigrants and that attraction and retention of immigrants is related to social and economic factors within small communities. Walton-Roberts (2005) suggests that with greater governmental involvement through the provision of funding for settlement and language services, smaller communities could develop cultural
diversity within an economically strong social framework. She also argues that extreme clustering of a minority in urban centres can be detrimental to their integration into society as a whole (Walton-Roberts, 2005).

In sum, there is an increased interest in Canada in understanding rural immigration. There have been calls for further investigation of the geographic distribution of immigrants in non-metropolitan regions, and for greater understanding of the characteristics of immigrants who settle in rural zones (Hiebert, 2000; Citizenship and Immigration, 2001; Beshiri & Alfred, 2002; Walton-Roberts, 2005). There is also a particular need to learn more, in terms of both processes and outcomes, about the psychological and social adjustment of immigrants in rural areas.

Acculturation

Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) define acculturation as changes in cultural patterns of groups of individuals with different cultures that come into direct contact. An examination of the literature indicates that there are a number of factors that contribute to successful acculturation. These factors include demographic characteristics of immigrants such as length of residence in the new society and level of education (Zlobina, Basabe, Paez, & Furnham, 2006), immigrants’ cultural competence (Ward & Kennedy, 1993), their stress and perceived hassles (Safdar & Lay, 2003; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), and acculturation strategies (Berry, 2003; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997).

According to Berry’s psychological acculturation model, there are two fundamental dimensions that contribute to acculturation strategies: maintenance of the original culture and participation in the larger society (Berry, 2003). According to a person or group’s positioning on these two dimensions, four acculturation attitudes or strategies can be distinguished: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (see: chapter by Berry & Safdar in this volume for definitions of these strategies, pp. ...). Berry, Kim, Minde, and Mok (1987) reported that integration is the most beneficial acculturation attitude for the adaptation of immigrants while marginalization is the least beneficial.

Ward and colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) distinguish between two types of adaptation: psychological and socio-cultural. Psychological adaptation refers to psychological well-being and is related to
coping and stress. Socio-cultural adaptation is related to social skills, such as engagement with cultural activities associated with the larger society and ability to make friends with members of the larger society, and knowledge of local social customs.

Ward and Kennedy (1993) draw a distinction between core and peripheral factors that predict psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. Core factors are robust predictors that affect the adjustment process of all acculturating groups, while peripheral factors are situation or culture specific. Safdar et al. (2003) developed the notion of core factors suggested by Ward and Kennedy (1993) and suggested that because many immigrants face similar challenges and engage in similar types of information processing, the process of adjustment to a new culture has some pan-cultural characteristics.

Safdar et al. (2003) propose a Multi-dimensional Individual Difference Model of Acculturation (MIDA) that incorporates many of the core factors identified in previous acculturation research. Like Berry (e.g. Berry, 2003), they suggest that successful acculturation is a function of immigrants’ attitudes toward the larger society and their heritage culture. The model also accommodates the distinction drawn by Ward and colleagues (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) between psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Three predictor variables are included in the MIDA model, psycho-social resources (a composite of psychological well-being, cultural competence, and social support from larger society), co-national connectedness (a composite of ethnic identity and perceived in-group social support), and hassles (both acculturation-specific irritants and daily problems that are not specific to acculturation). Their test of this model has indicated that successful acculturation outcomes for immigrants, involving low levels of psycho-physical distress and high levels of contact with members of both in- and out-groups are influenced in varying degrees by all three composite predictor variables.

Present Study

The present research sought to investigate some of the key elements that are related to rural immigration in the province of Ontario where the experience of declining immigration to rural areas is typical for Canada. As well as exploring demographic characteristics of immigrants living in rural Canada, similar psychological and social variables were included as those identified by Safdar et al. (2003) in the development of their MIDA model with immigrants
in urban Canada. Acculturation was measured in terms of: 1) low level of socio-cultural difficulties, 2) low level of psycho-physical distress, 3) high level of in-group contact, and 4) high level of out-group contact. Successful adaptation is indicated by low levels of socio-cultural difficulties and psycho-physical distress and high levels of contact with both in- and out-groups. The following hypotheses were considered:

Hypothesis 1: Immigrants with high psychological well-being, general social support, and language competence (measures of psycho-social resources) were more likely to maintain contact with out-group members and were less likely to report psycho-physical distress and socio-cultural difficulties.

Hypothesis 2: Immigrants who perceived high levels of discrimination were more likely to report a high level of psycho-physical distress.

Hypothesis 3: Immigrants with a strong sense of ethnic identity and sufficient family social support (measures of co-national connectedness) maintain contact with members of in-group.

Hypothesis 4: Immigrants who endorsed an assimilation or integration attitude were more likely to maintain contact with the larger society (out-group contact).

Methods

Participants

104 immigrants living in rural Ontario participated in the study. The following criteria were used for the selection of the participants: that they had moved to Canada after 1990; that they lived in a county which was logistically accessible and had less than 100,000 residents.

Of those who indicated their gender (all but one), there were 75 females and 28 males. 35% (N = 36) of participants fell in the age category 35–44 years, 33% (N = 34) were in the 25–34 years age category, and 19% (N = 20) were between 45–54 years of age. 84% (N = 87) of participants were either married or were in a common-law relationship and, on average, three people were living in a household. 82% of immigrants in rural Ontario were living in a household of two (22%), three (36%), or four (24%). These numbers are higher than national/provincial averages for household size and there are fewer one person households.
40% \((N = 42)\) of the participants had a university degree, 19% \((N = 20)\) had a graduate degree, and 19% \((N = 20)\) had a college certificate or some form of post-secondary education. 94% \((N = 96)\) of participants reported their first language to be neither English nor French (Canada’s two official languages). The two religious affiliations identified most frequently by participants were Catholic (26.5%) and Protestant (or non-Catholic Christian) (22%). 28% of the participants indicated that they had no religious affiliation. Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims each accounted for between 1% and 5% of the sample. The majority of participants (56%) reported that they attended church, temple, mosque, etc. on a regular basis.

Procedure

After identifying Census Sub-Divisions (counties or towns) with less than 100,000 residents, contact was made with organizations such as multi-cultural centers and ESL (English as Second Language) services that had programs for immigrants. Researchers either travelled to these towns and facilitated a session where questionnaires were distributed and collected on the same day, or they mailed the questionnaires to the organizations and had participants complete the survey and mail them back in a pre-stamped return envelope. Participants were provided with a small remuneration for their participation. The return rate of questionnaires was above 60%.

Measures

The following scales were administered in the order described below.

Demographic Profile. Demographic data including participants’ age, gender, occupation, education, religion, income, ethnicity, and secondary migration pattern within Canada were collected.

Ethnic Identity Scale. The 15-item ethnic identity scale is a measure based on the scale developed by Cameron, Sato, Lay, and Lalonde (1997). The scale measures three aspects of ethnic identity: the cognitive centrality of one’s ethnic origins (e.g. “I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic group”), in-group ties and similarity to one’s ethnic group (e.g. “I feel I fit in well with other members of my ethnic group”) and affective evaluation of one’s ethnic group (e.g. “I feel good about the value system of my ethnic group”). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly
disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the scale was .90.

Acculturation Attitude Scale. This 16-item acculturation attitude scale was a revised version of Kim’s (1984) Acculturation Attitudes Scale. The following eight topics were used with reference to both Canadian and participants’ ethnic culture: food, music, friendship, marriage, naming children, club membership, newspaper readership and TV viewing, and their preferences about the ethnic composition of their neighbourhood. The following are examples of items: “I like to listen to music from my ethnic background” and “I like the social customs of Canadian society (Christmas, Halloween, etc.)”. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the 8-item sub-scale measuring attitudes toward participants’ ethnic culture was .82 and for the 8-items measuring attitudes toward Canadian culture it was .78.

Psychological Well-being Questionnaire. This 18-item scale is a short form of Ryff’s (1989) psychological well-being scale. Psychological well-being refers to the presence of ‘wellness’ rather than just the absence of illness; i.e. it is a measure of positive psychological functioning, as opposed to psychological dysfunction (Ryff & Singer, 1996). Ryff and Singer (1996) suggest that there are six components of psychological well-being: self-acceptance (example item, “I like most aspects of my personality”), positive relations with others (e.g. “People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others”), autonomy (e.g. “I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important”), environmental mastery (e.g. “I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life”), purpose in life (e.g. “Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them”), and personal growth (e.g. “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth”). There are three questions for each sub-scale. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was .76.

Perceived Social Support Questionnaire. This 12-item scale is based on the Multi-dimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). The scale contained four items pertaining to friends, four items referring to support received from family, and four items referring to a special person. Each item is rated on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha co-
efficient for the 4-item sub-scale measuring family social support was .89 and the Cronbach’s alpha for the 8-item sub-scale measuring general social support was .88.

**Psycho-physical Symptoms Scale.** This 18-item scale was based on the 20-item Health Problems Inventory-Revised (Kohn, Gurevich, Pickering, & MacDonald, 1994) and the 18-item Stress Symptoms Checklist (Cheng & Hamid, 1996). Safdar, Lay, and Struthers (2003) used the scale and reported high reliability. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale representing the extent to which respondents report experiencing each symptom during the past week, from “rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)” (1) to “all of the time (5–7 days)” (4). Examples of items include: insomnia, back pain, feeling depressed, and feeling lonely. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was .88.

**Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS).** The 29-item SCAS is based on Searle and Ward’s (1990) scale and includes a number of skills that are necessary in managing everyday situations experienced when living in a new cultural environment (e.g. dealing with people in authority, going shopping, making friends, accommodation). Each item is rated from “no difficulty” (1) to “extreme difficulty” (5); thus, higher scores reflected greater difficulty. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was .90.

**Self-rated Language Competence Scale.** This 4-item scale measures reading, writing, understanding, and speaking skills in English. Each item was rated from “not at all” (1) to “very well” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this scale was .94.

**Individual Network of Ethnic Contacts (INEC).** The 12-item INEC scale is based on a questionnaire devised by Landry and Bourhis (1997) and was used to measure participants’ contact with members of Canadian society, of their own ethnic group, and other immigrant groups. An example item is “How often are you (or were you) in contact with your friends who are...?” (A) members of your own group; (B) English Canadians; (C) immigrants settled here. Each item is rated from “rarely” (1) to “very frequently” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the 4-items measuring contact with ethnic group was .73, the 4-item measuring contact with Canadians was .81, and the 4-items measuring contact with other immigrants was .78.

**Perception of Self-Discrimination Scale.** This 3-item scale was adopted from Barrette et al. (1994) and measures perception of being the victim of discrimination. An example item is: “To what extent have you been
personally victim of discrimination in stores, banks, or restaurants?”. Each item was rated from “not at all” (1) to “always” (5). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the scale was .76.

Results

Exploratory analyses of the distribution of the variables indicated that the scores were normally distributed (for means and standard deviations; see: Table 1). First, in order to classify participants according to which of the four acculturation strategies they endorsed on the Acculturation Attitude Scale, a median split method was employed. 29% of participants (N = 26) fell into the integration category, 26% (N = 23) into the marginalization, 24% (N = 22) into the assimilation, and 21% (N = 19) into the separation categories.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables used in the study

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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>SD</th>
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<td>Attitudes toward Canadian Culture</td>
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<td>Attitudes toward Ethnic Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>– In-group social support</td>
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<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Out-group social support</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<td>Psycho-physical Distress</td>
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<td>Socio-cultural Difficulties</td>
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<td>Language Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Out-group Contact</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Contact with Canadians</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Contact with other immigrants</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>0.11</td>
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<td>Perception of Discrimination</td>
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Table 2. Correlation coefficients between all the variables and the four measures of acculturation adaptation

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<td>−.17</td>
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<td>9. Integration</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>−.33**</td>
<td>−.36***</td>
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<td>10. Marginalization</td>
<td>−.17</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>−.32**</td>
<td>−.22*</td>
<td>−.24*</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<td>−.33***</td>
<td>−.37***</td>
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<td>11. Socio-cultural Difficulties</td>
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<td>−.32**</td>
<td>−.34**</td>
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<td>.48***</td>
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<td>−.29**</td>
<td>−.16</td>
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* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Next, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were performed predicting the four measures of adaptation: socio-cultural difficulties, psycho-physical distress, in-group contact, and out-group contact, using demographic and psycho-social factors as predictor variables. In each analysis the following demographic variables were entered in Block 1: gender, age (three categories: 18–34, \( N = 35 \); 35–44, \( N = 38 \); 45 or older, \( N = 31 \)), occupation (four categories: employed, \( N = 29 \); unemployed, \( N = 25 \); student, \( N = 26 \); retired or homemaker, \( N = 19 \)), education (four categories: high school diploma or below, \( N = 22 \); some post-secondary education or college degree, \( N = 20 \); university degree, \( N = 42 \); graduate degree, \( N = 20 \)), and years living in Canada (three categories: under 2 years, \( N = 35 \); 2–4 years, \( N = 38 \); above 4 years, \( N = 31 \)), and practicing religion (two categories: yes, \( N = 56 \); no, \( N = 36 \)). In Block 2, psycho-social resources (a composite factor consisting of psychological well-being, general social support, and language competence), co-national connectedness (a composite factor consisting of ethnic identity and family social support), and the measure of perceived discrimination were entered. In Block 3, acculturation attitudes were entered. No demographic variables predicted the outcome variables except education, which predicted psycho-physical distress (\( B = −.28, p < .05 \)). Furthermore, \( R^2 \) for Block 1 was not significant for any of the four regression analyses. In addition, no gender differences were found with regard to demographic characteristics or any other variables. A summary of hierarchical regression analyses is presented in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Psycho-social Difficulties</th>
<th>Psycho-physical Distress</th>
<th>In-group Contact</th>
<th>Out-group Contact</th>
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In the first hierarchical regression, in Block 2, the number of years living in Canada ($B = -.29$, $p < .01$), psychological well-being ($B = -.40$, $p < .01$), and perception of discrimination ($B = .37$, $p < .01$) were the three predictors of socio-cultural difficulties, $F (12, 49) = 4.45$, $p < .001$. In Block 3, in addition to the same three factors, integration ($B = -.31$, $p < .05$), marginalization ($B = -.38$, $p < .01$), and assimilation ($B = -.53$, $p < .001$) also predicted socio-cultural difficulties, $F (15, 46) = 5.97$, $p < .001$. This is consistent with Hypothesis 1.

In the second hierarchical regression, in Block 2, perception of discrimination was the only predictor of psycho-physical distress ($B = .27$, $p < .05$), $F (12, 63) = 2.89$, $p < .005$. In Block 3, in addition to perception of discrimination, language competence also predicted psycho-physical distress ($B = -.28$,
p < .05), F(15, 60) = 2.69, p < .005. This is consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2.

In the third hierarchical regression, in Block 2, ethnic identity was the only predictor of in-group contact (B = .43, p < .001), F(12, 63) = 2.94, p < .005. In Block 3, the same variable, ethnic identity, remained the only predictor of in-group contact (B = .45, p < .001), F(15, 60) = 2.41, p < .01. This provide partial support for Hypothesis 3, as ethnic identity but not perceived in-group social support predicted in-group contact.

In the last hierarchical regression, in Block 2, language competence was the only predictor of out-group contact (B = .30, p < .05), F(12, 63) = .84, p > .05. In Block 3, the same variable, language competence, remained the only predictor of out-group contact (B = .31, p < .05), F(15, 60) = .88, p > .05.

The results of third and fourth regression analyses do not provide support for hypotheses 3 and 4, as none of the acculturation attitudes predicted in-group and out-group contact. The correlation coefficients, however, provide partial support for our prediction. Those who endorsed assimilation were more likely to engage in out-group contact (r = .22, p < .05), and those who endorsed integration were more likely to engage in in-group contact (r = .28, p < .005).

Other findings. 40% of participants were from Asia (including East Asia and South Asia), 8% were from Africa, 6% from Middle East, and 16% were from Latin America and Caribbean. Only 15% of immigrants indicated their ethnic background as European. The ethnic distribution in our study is consistent with Safdar and Bauder’s (2006) findings that reported an increase in the percentage of visible minority immigrants in Ontario. These researchers reported that visible minorities constituted only 4.1% of immigrants who arrived to Canada before 1961 while they accounted for approximately 77% of immigrants in both 1991–1995 and 1996–2001. This is an indication that Ontario has become increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic since World War II.

With respect to employment, we found that 25% of our sample were unemployed, 14% were homemakers, and 5% were retired. Of the 29% of participants who reported that they were employed, 23% were in the professional occupational category, 23% in the service sector, 15% in administration, and 15% were self-employed. Safdar and Bauder (2006) compared the immigrant shares on various employment and income attributes against the total population in Ontario and found on nearly all of the measures, the immigrant share was within a few percentage points of their share of total population and there
were only minor differences between the immigrant and non-immigrant population.

Overall, there were no major differences in terms of psycho-physical and socio-cultural factors between the rural immigrants in this study and those in urban areas that had been studied by our research team in the past (Safdar, 2005; Safdar et al., 2003). They had similar levels of psychological well-being, psycho-physical distress, and ethnic identity, suggesting that for these rural immigrants, socio-cultural adaptation was comparable with immigrants in urban settings in Canada. The only difference was in the level of social support; immigrants in the rural area reported receiving less social support from family and others (in-group and out-group members, i.e. other immigrants and members of the larger society). Regarding the lack of in-group social support, this finding probably reflects the smaller numbers of immigrants located in rural areas and, therefore, less extensive support networks.

Discussion

In the present study it was found that different variables predicted the four measures of adaptation, socio-cultural difficulties, psycho-physical distress, out-group contact, and in-group contact.

As had been hypothesized (Hypothesis 1), those with high level of psychological well-being were less likely to report socio-cultural difficulties. This indicates that those with high levels of autonomy, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, having purpose in life, personal growth, and self-acceptance (the constituent components of the psychological well-being composite) were more socially and culturally adjusted than those with low scores on these measures.

We also found that those who perceived high levels of discrimination were more likely to report socio-cultural difficulties. This is consistent with Hypothesis 2. Perception of discrimination also predicted psycho-physical distress, a finding that was not predicted. Nevertheless, the link between life stressors, including discrimination, and psychological distress has been well documented (K. L. Dion, K. K. Dion, & Pak, 1992). Gil, Vega, and Dimas (1994) found a negative relation between perceived discrimination and self-esteem in a sample of Hispanic adolescents born in the United States, and R. Clark, Anderson, V. R. Clark and Williams (1999) have provided an extensive model incorpo-
rating the perception or experience of racism in predicting psychological and physical distress.

It was found that linguistic competence also predicted psycho-physical distress. That is, those who reported a high level of skill in the English language were less likely to report psycho-physical distress. The relation between linguistic competence and adaptation has been documented by other researchers (Kang, 2006; Safdar et al., 2003). Kang (2006) reported the importance of English competency in predicting psychological adjustment of Asian American students. Additionally, Safdar et al. (2003) in testing their acculturation model, reported a negative association between psycho-physical distress and “psycho-social resources,” a composite factor consisting of three factors including linguistic competence.

Linguistic competence also predicted contact with members of out-groups; those with more developed skills in English reported more contact with members of out-groups (including both Canadians and other immigrants) than those who were less able in English. Safdar et al. (2003), also reported a positive association between linguistic competence, as a measure of “psycho-social resources,” and out-group contact.

The only demographic variable that predicted adaptation was the number of years living in Canada. It was found that those who lived longer in Canada were less likely to report socio-cultural difficulties. This finding makes intuitive sense as the longer that people live in a new society, the fewer difficulties they have in making themselves understood. They have fewer problems in dealing with the system, and less trouble in following rules and regulations.

Another measure of adaptation in the present study was maintenance of contact with members of one’s in-group. It was found that those with a high level of ethnic identity were more likely to report more contact with their in-group. The positive relation between ethnic identity and in-group contact can be interpreted in terms of Social Identity Theory, according to which ethnic identity is a subjective sense of belonging to a cultural group (or groups) and the value of, significance of, and feelings about that membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, those who value their group membership and perceive themselves as belonging to that group are more likely to maintain contact with the group. This finding is also consistent with Safdar et al.’s (2003) finding of a positive association between co-national connectedness and in-group contact.
We found no support for the fourth hypothesis as acculturation attitudes did not predict in-group or out-group contact. However, the correlation coefficients between two of the acculturation attitudes and group contact were significant. Assimilation was positively related to out-group contact, and integration to in-group contact. The lack of a clear relation between acculturation attitudes and engagement with members of either in- or out-groups could be explained by a lack of consistency between attitude and behaviour. It is possible to have positive attitudes toward Canadian society, including liking its social customs or liking having Canadian friends, but to have limited opportunity to come into contact with Canadians at work or in the community. Furthermore, in under-populated and remote rural areas of Canada opportunities to meet other immigrants are much more limited than in populated urban settings.

Furthermore, we found acculturation attitudes predicted socio-cultural difficulties. Those who endorsed integration, assimilation and marginalization were less likely to report socio-cultural difficulties. Positive attitudes towards integration and assimilation have, consistently, been found to be associated with fewer socio-cultural difficulties (e.g. Berry, 2003). However, this finding of an association between a positive attitude to marginalization (i.e. a rejection both of one’s culture of origin and of Canadian society) and fewer socio-cultural difficulties is not the usual finding. Perhaps, it is more feasible to lead a relatively marginalized life, if one chooses to, in a rural setting. This would be akin to what Bourhis et al. (1997) refer to as individualism, a choice to lead a relatively marginal life.

The results of the present study are important for policy making, economic development and service delivery in rural Canada. The cultural adaptation problems of rural immigrants are similar to those of their urban counterparts, which indicates that services to support adaptation and higher levels of integration should also be offered to rural immigrants. It is interesting that few specifically rural characteristics emerge as significant in the adaptation process, other than the low density of immigrants. This would suggest that if few special problems are likely to occur for immigrants in rural Canada, then the strategies known to work in support of immigrants in urban centers could, or should, be applied in rural areas. Although these findings are preliminary, they do indicate that rural immigration is a feasible prospect in rural development policy. It should be noted however that immigrants who reported low levels of linguistic competence and social support had high level of socio-cultural difficulties. Therefore, it is of particular importance to facilitate language acquisition by offering programs of ESL classes and to provide a support system to those
immigrants who live in isolated areas, such as rural settings, where informal support through ethnic networks is limited.

References


