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Through Their Eyes: Experiences of Rural Immigrants

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Abstract

As rural communities struggle with the out-migration of their youth and an ageing population, they are increasingly looking to immigration as a partial solution to their dilemmas of a shrinking tax base and labour market shortages. There has been a great deal of research on immigrants, but little in the way of rural research and what rural research there is has tended to examine how to attract immigrants to rural and small communities. There has been very little research that has examined the rural immigrants' experience, a gap this study begins to address. This is a qualitative study that examines the experiences of 12 immigrants who are now residing in rural communities in Ontario. The study reports back on three themes: employment issues, social issues, and cultural issues.

Keywords: rural, immigration, employment, social issues, cultural issues

1.0 Introduction

Caldwell, Labute, Khan, & D'Sousa Rea (2017) have noted that while Canada's small and rural communities desire a viable future, they face a demographic challenge as their population ages and their young people leave. In fact, they note that by 2026 this may manifest as an economic and demographic crisis for these communities. This, as Caldwell et al. report, will create challenges for communities to maintain their tax base while struggling with labour market shortages.

One way rural communities are seeking to address these challenges is through immigration, yet to date they have not been overly successful. For example, as of 2011, 97.2% of immigrants arriving in Ontario chose urban residences (Moazzami, 2013), with 68.3% living in Toronto and surrounding areas (ElDakiky & Shields, 2009). According to Ambard (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, and given that rural is different than urban, it is not known if the urban immigrant experience is the same for rural immigrants. The urban preference by immigrants is related to three primary reasons: job opportunities, social networks, and cultural amenities (Vatz-Laaroussi & Bezzi, 2010). Given the absence of desirable job opportunities, lack of social networks for immigrants and the absence of many of the cultural amenities they require, immigrants in rural areas can face numerous challenges.

One of the challenges for immigrants is Canadian professional credentialing systems which are designed to be complex and expensive, often excluding immigrants from realizing their full potential; immigrants are left to work in ‘survival jobs’ (Bauder, 2003). As Bauder further argued, these jobs tend to be plentiful in urban areas and often there are more established social and ethnic networks in bigger cities providing social and cultural support. Hence, immigrants prefer to stay in urban areas to work in ‘survival jobs’ if that means they can be closer to family or other immigrants. Furthermore, it is easier to obtain licenses for immigrants in gateway cities which imply that rural areas and small cities may lose out on the opportunity to hire international talent (Girard & Bauder, 2005).

Safdar, Fuller, and Lewis (2007) highlight that rural immigrants are not worse off than their urban counterparts in terms of their psychological well-being, psychophysical well-being and ethnic identity, that is, their sense of belonging to their cultural group. This means that the socio-cultural adaptation of rural immigrants in their 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 their study reported receiving less social support from both family and others (Safdar et al., 2007). They had fewer social interactions with ‘in group members’, that is, members of their own cultural group and ‘out group members’, that is, members of the society at large (Safdar et al., 2007). McAreavey and Argent (2018), drawing on the new immigrant destination literature, argue that while civil society organizations do a good job of alleviating some of the short-term challenges, immigrants in rural communities face long-term challenges of social and cultural integration and these challenges are often not met. As they further note, many of these communities have little experience with immigrants and often there is inadequate institutional and infrastructural support for them. This is further exacerbated by the fact that much of social and cultural integration is a function of the interactions between immigrants and their hosts in their day-to-day interactions. If these interactions are not positive, it can serve to further isolate immigrants in these communities. Bernosky de Flores (2010) highlights the importance of social relationships, or social capital, for immigrants accessing the resources they need. However, we believe much of the host community perspective on immigrants is very instrumental with a focus on economic integration, operating on the assumption that once their financial need is met that integration into the community will simply happen. While financial need is important, it is from our day-to-day lives and interactions that we derive our sense of belonging. This really addresses the long-term needs of immigrants in rural communities, and how they ultimately become members of the community. If these interactions are not positive, then immigrants may feel alienated and isolated in the community. This isolation and alienation may also be a product of rurality that privileges whiteness and excludes ‘others’ (Pannelli, Hubbard, Coombes, & Suchet-Pearson, 2009). As Pannelli et al. (2009) argue, “White identity is accorded the normative and often unspoken category against

which all other racialized identities are marked as other, and rurality is its spatial corollary” (p. 357).

This raises the issue of integration, and the question—are rural immigrants truly integrated into their new rural communities? In describing integration, Berry (1992) draws on acculturation theory and highlights four potential outcomes for immigrants. They are:

- Assimilation: this outcome assumes the full adoption of the host culture and the shedding of the previous culture;
- Integration: the continued maintenance of one’s own culture while adopting select elements of the host culture;
- Separation-Segregation: traditional culture is maintained but there is a detachment from the host culture; and
- Marginalization: individual renounces their traditional culture while being excluded from participating in the host culture.

And as noted by Banting and Kymlicka (2010), under Canada’s policy of multiculturalism, the optimal outcome for immigrants is integration which would include economic, social and cultural integration.

Given the limited success of immigration in rural communities, this study starts by simply, asking the question—what is the experience of new immigrants in rural communities as it relates to their economic, social and cultural integration?

2.0 Methodology

This research can be broadly framed as interpretivist. This perspective begins with the assumption that people are meaning-making creatures and that experiences and actions are imbued with meaning, and it is meaning which drives behaviour and actions. The meaning we derive from our experiences and actions are a function of the constellations of our experiences and past actions which manifest itself in a system of meanings (Schwandt, 2000). From a researcher’s perspective this requires empathic identification whereby the researcher seeks to get an “’inside’ understanding—the actor’s definition of the situation” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192). The researcher does not seek to describe behaviour or experience, but to assess what the experience or behaviours mean to the individual. This methodological approach is appropriate for this study as we sought to explore the experience and meanings as it relates to work, social relationships and culture of new immigrants in rural communities.

It should be noted that the field researcher for this project was an international student from India. She had completed an undergraduate degree in Canada and was now completing a master’s degree. She spoke fluent English without an accent. This situated her well to engage in empathic identification for she shared a set of experiences of being a foreigner and person of colour new to Canadian culture.

2.1 Data Collection and Analysis

In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 residents of Grey and Bruce Counties who fit the sampling criteria. In order to be part of the study, residents were required to be within the age limits of 18–64 years, that is, the normal full time, working age. This was included in the criteria because one of the objectives of the study was to gather information about employment issues experienced by immigrants when they move to a rural community. Furthermore, they should have been living in the county for less than 10 years which for the purpose of this study we defined as newcomers to the rural area. They may have lived in Canada for a longer period but did not reside in a rural area.

The first step was to build connections with key informants in the area who could help us connect with immigrants in the two counties. This included the Executive Director of Huron-Bruce-Grey Planning Board who explained the context of the area and resources available to immigrants. This was followed by contacting the adult learning centres in both Bruce and Grey Counties and their staff introduced us and the project to the participants. We did not know any of the participants prior to the interviews. Due to a small population of immigrants in the area, it was quite challenging to find participants for this study. Therefore, we relied heavily on the connections of the learning centres to reach out to participants. A purposive and snowball sample was used. In every case, a key informant or a participant obtained permission from another potential participant before we contacted them to determine their interest in participating in the study. Each interview lasted between 1–2 hours. Most participants were former students of the centre or were acquainted with the staff members of the adult learning centres. A few women declined participation as they couldn't get approval from their husbands to participate. In general, there was a slight wariness of participants but all the informants who participated later reported that they appreciated the opportunity to voice their thoughts and experiences.

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 an issue for the field researcher, participants preferred conversations over the phone. This led us 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. The questions were focused on work, social relationships and the cultural dimensions of their experience.

The interviews were conducted in English except for two, where the participants expressed more comfort in speaking Hindi or Punjabi, which were the field researcher's native languages. She found that speaking in the native languages helped create a greater trust with the participant and they seemed to speak more freely. These interviews were translated and transcribed along with the remainder interviews that were conducted in English. All the interviews were recorded with consent, except for one where notes were taken.

Once transcribed, all transcripts were printed and read thoroughly in order to become familiar with the data. Transcripts were then manually coded using the broad categories of work, social relationships and cultural dimensions. Using a constant comparison analysis, we developed codes within each of the categories in one interview. Then we moved to the next interview and used the existing codes

generated previously, and if a code could not accommodate within existing codes, we would develop a new code within that category. Once all interviews had been coded, we re-examined the codes in each theme to collapse or expand where necessary.

3.0 Findings

The findings will be reported back under economic, social, and cultural issues. We begin with a brief description of the participants and their motivations for moving to either Bruce or Grey Counties, followed by a presentation of the three main themes.

The participants consisted of nine females and three males between the ages of 18–64 who had resided less than 10 years in the Grey-Bruce area. They came from a variety of places: six from Asia, three from South America and one each from Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

Of the 12 participants 10 had lived previously in a major Ontario urban area and two moved directly to the area when they married residents of the area. Their reasons for immigrating to Canada were for better economic opportunities or for better education for their children. For those who moved to the Grey-Bruce area from an urban centre, eight had a partner who had secured employment at Bruce Power prior to moving to the area and two cited the natural environment as their reason for moving to the area. The presentation of the quotes has not been corrected for grammar to ensure the authenticity of the participants' perspective and understanding.

3.1 Employment Issues

One of the themes that arose for many of the participants, particularly for those whose spouse was working at Bruce Power was the lack of recognition of the credentials that they had earned in their home country, limiting their employment opportunities. They also noted the importance of having Canadian experience, which most didn't have, and consequently they were either engaged in volunteer work or non-skilled low paying employment to gain Canadian experience. As participants expressed it, they had to "start from zero" or "start at the bottom". One participant commented, "my degree was zero here. I was just a grade 12 pass student...It is hard to go from being a dentist to standing at a store and working." While professionals can work toward achieving their Canadian equivalency the process is long, hard and expensive according to the above participant, and this is challenging for new immigrants. As one participant explained,

My degree was not recognized unless and until I did something to upgrade it. Those four years of dentistry didn't fetch me anything here....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 economic 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 professionally trained engineer, when asked if his qualifications were recognized here, responded by saying “Absolutely not....When I got here, we are like newborns. None of our past is valuable here and we have to make it valuable some other way.” As he further noted, this elicits a certain amount of fear: “In our case, you are so scared, and you are so inexperienced in this new environment. I guess part of it is that they want you to also have the Canadian experience. And you always have to have references.” Another participant who was a translator in her home country was informed when she entered the country not to have high expectations:

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. You will have to start from zero, I wanted to find something to do and I was looking for jobs- different places, shops, hotel, and restaurants.

She did persevere and through taking online courses received her certification as a personal support worker.

Other participants expressed frustration at applying for positions, even unskilled positions and never receiving even a call. They often attempted to get Canadian experience through volunteering or taking on low wage work. However, for those with young children this creates a dilemma as volunteering or working for low wages can cost them financially if they have to pay for childcare. Furthermore, they became convinced that the only way to get employment is through networks and connections. As this participant explained,

They will not say that is why they didn’t 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. 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.

One participant commented poignantly on Canadian immigration policy which rewards education, while paradoxically these jobs are not available for immigrants, particularly in rural areas:

Here they get the people who are highly educated and skilled people, but they 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.

Others reported that they had to work at what they called ‘odd jobs’, in other words jobs that would be considered precarious, for years.

3.2 Social Issues

DiBase and Bauder (2005) point out that in urban areas immigrants have opportunities to network with other immigrants, particularly from their home country and they may be concentrated in neighborhoods. They argue that rural areas are very different and that often a few immigrants will be spread over a large geographical area. Thus, there needs to be a more concentrated effort in rural areas to connect and integrate the immigrants into the community. Many participants lamented that they felt lonely and removed from the community, even if they had been there for five years or more. As one participant explained to us,

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.

Here we can see not only is he not connected in the community, but he is afraid to be himself. As he further explained, he had difficulty connecting with people and making friends because he was afraid, he might say something that offended them. We followed up by asking him if that meant he had no friends, and this was his response: “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.” As another participant told us, “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.” An older participant explained that he had one friend but when he went to Tim Horton’s he would see groups of older people there every day talking, but from his perspective they were not open or approachable. Another participant when asked if she had any white friends, responded no. The only friends she had were other immigrants.

Part of the challenge, from the participants’ perspectives, was community attitudes. As our participants explained, while people were friendly and would greet them, it was really about the ‘niceties’ with no opportunities to deepen relationships or friendships. One participant described it as a ‘cold culture’ and noted that “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.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating:

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.

She did note however, explaining that she was able to connect with some people at church over time: "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." However, this would only be a place to connect for those immigrants who were Christian as there are no other places of worship for other faiths. Some participants even noted that not even meeting people at the language centre led to developing friendships. Another participant compared the rural area to the larger urban centre where she had resided before. As she explained,

Bruce is a white town, especially Kincardine. Not a lot of Asians. There are people who work at Bruce or other consultancy, so there are 10 to 12 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. 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 let anyone in. In Hamilton I have tons of white friends, but in Kincardine other than these two people no one else.

Another participant talked about the formality of friendships and how people just don't stop in, but people arrange what she called a 'Facebook event'.

Some participants talked about the 'smallness' of rural areas and how from their perspective gossip was rampant and often participants believed that they were the subject of that gossip. In some cases, they expressed a fear of being judged. One woman, who said she was the only black woman in town, told us this,

I don't like that [gossip] 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, she said, to talk via skype with friends from her home country as she did not trust the people in her community.

One of the saving graces within the community in terms of helping immigrants develop friendships was the school. One participant explained that when her son “started school, I found out there is a community here and we started sending emails, and we started organizing functions.” She then said because of these connections she was able to connect with others and organize potlucks or play dates. Others too, talked about how it was through the school that they made connections with others in the community.

3.3 Cultural Issues

While the previous section dealt with social issues, this section deals with cultural issues, however it must be acknowledged that cultural issues are closely related to social issues.

Part of the challenge for immigrants in rural areas is the lack of cultural amenities, or opportunities to celebrate their culture. One of the chief issues was the lack of culturally appropriate food. Simply stated, grocery stores did not always carry the foods they were used to, and there were no culturally appropriate restaurants in the area. For those who moved here from Toronto and the larger GTA this was a significant change. As one participant told us, reflecting on the contrast between the urban communities and the rural communities:

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.

She was not the only one to note this with one participant telling us “Halal food is not even an option for us here.” citing the utter lack of culturally appropriate food options. Another participant responded:

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 (in the city).

In some cases, participants reported making regular trips to the larger urban centres to grocery shop.

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 explained,

When we go to Toronto for festivals, like this we expose him a little to our culture. So, if we ever 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.

Others noted the lack of cultural opportunities or celebrations also:

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 of 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.

In some cases, there is a response from the immigrant community to develop private spaces for sharing. It was explained to us how one member of the immigrant community had built an altar in his basement and invited others into his home to worship or celebrate:

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 helps in connecting the immigrant and building a sense of connection and ethnic-cultural community within the region. As was further explained to us,

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.

But to warrant such gatherings there need to be enough numbers of any one ethnic-cultural group in the area. As we heard from one participant who was Asian there were not a lot of Asians in the area who shared her culture, so this was not a possibility.

Other participants noted the challenge of maintaining and affirming their culture while passing it on to their children. As one participant told us,

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.

Our participants also expressed concerns with their children's experience in the educational system in Bruce and Grey Counties and reported that in some cases they felt their children were disadvantaged or discriminated against. In some cases, the mother and her children moved back to the city while the father stayed and then commuted back to the city on his days off. One participant reported her husband and she decided to move her and the children 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 county, 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 (the city).

She explained that she had to make this sacrifice for her children because she wanted them to have the best opportunities. She told us she was aware of the systemic racism present in 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 a similar experience when she moved back 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 into 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 every day. 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 at 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.

Despite wanting to retain elements of their culture, two participants told us about celebrating Halloween and having a Christmas tree despite not being Christian. This was done to fit in and in particular to have their children fit in with their friends at school, what they viewed as a partial antidote to the challenges their children faced as ‘outsiders.’

Racial discrimination can exist in a variety of forms such as blatant prejudice, systemic discrimination, microaggression, and so on. It is not discriminatory only when someone calls people of colour names. It is also discrimination when they exhibit 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.” As it was further explained to us, sometimes it is easier to write racist comments off as insignificant, rather than deal with the fact that you are being discriminated against due to your background. These issues appeared in different conversations we had with the participants.

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 prepare food in the kitchen but ended up washing the dishes every day, which worsened her arthritis. Then she explained this issue to the manager, and she said she was then treated differently. For example, the manager started to charge 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 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 as a result of her arthritis, 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 based on her skin colour.

Another participant reported experiencing 'less obvious racism' or what could be referred to as microaggressions at work. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Microaggression, n.d.) defines a microaggression 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 and 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 the issue 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, which 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 a 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 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 us 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 over and asked her 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.

Another participant told us about being yelled at to “Go back where you came from” in public.

Clearly there are several cultural issues that can make it difficult and uncomfortable for immigrants in these rural communities.

4.0 Discussion

As Bauder (2003) has noted, immigrants often face employment challenges because their credentials are not recognized in Canada. Most of the research conducted on immigration has had an urban focus and while rural immigrants also face this challenge, rurality can make it more complicated. Girard and Bauder (2005) have noted that rurality can be a barrier to accessing education that would allow for Canadian credentialing. The respondents in this study noted it was a barrier. As they noted, they are often removed from accessing education that would allow them to access educational opportunities for credentialing purposes. Many of them sought alternative employment, much of what could be considered precarious employment or what Bauder (2003) described as ‘survival jobs’. And yet, even these jobs could prove to be challenging as some respondents noted Canadian experience was often a prerequisite, something they did not have. Or even if they did secure this type of employment, it could be challenging if they had young children at home as this would then mean paying for childcare. Often in larger urban areas they would have access to family or community resources who could assist with childcare, but in the rural communities in which these immigrants were situated, this was not an option. In fact, as Safdar et al. (2007) noted, rural immigrants often lack any form of social support from family or others. Bernosky de Flores (2010) points to the importance of access to social capital in acquiring resources for rural immigrants, and this is absent in the experience of those we interviewed. It is also worth noting that for eight of our participants they moved to this rural area because their partner had secured employment at Bruce Power. Typically, these jobs would be reasonably good paying jobs with benefits. However, immigrant couples are often both professionals and while one has secured satisfactory employment, the partner—who is often female—who has not had satisfactory employment experiences ongoing frustration in terms of securing work and the quality of employment opportunities available to them.

Socially, most of participants report feeling disconnected and isolated, not being able for the most part to connect with the community in meaningful ways. We heard them report on their lack of friendships and despite some efforts to connect they believe that most community members were not open to developing friendships on the terms that participants expected while noting they had white friends when they lived in major urban centres. For others, they noted the lack of members from their ethnic or cultural background-community magnified their experience of loneliness and isolation. One individual spoke about how she preferred to skype with friends back ‘home’ rather than making new friendships in her current community. Even

participation in programs for immigrants did not appear to lead to long lasting friendships with other immigrants of this study, often because of geography and distance; the centres served larger geographical areas in rural communities. This would support Safdar et al. (2007) claims that immigrants in rural areas lack support, but perhaps even more significant, many of them report that they lack friendships. The only exception to this was for one participant who responded she made friends through her children's school and another who made friends through her church. However, making friends through church is only available to those who attend a Christian church as there are not other places of worship for other faiths.

Perhaps the greatest struggle for the participants in this study was cultural.

First, one the major challenges the participants in this study face was access to cultural amenities, be it food or other cultural or religious resources. For those who have lived in a large urban centre prior to moving to a rural area, this was a bit of a shock. Some participants reported driving to major urban centres to get culturally and/or religiously appropriate food, while others talked about driving to urban areas to get access to cultural service-supports etc. The latter was noted by some as being important for teaching children about their cultural-ethnic heritage, something that was not available in the rural areas.

Second, is the issue of cultural celebration, and the lack of opportunities to celebrate publicly their celebrations. For some, where there were cultural connections with others, it was reported that private spaces were developed, and this could accommodate some of this need, but it required a certain critical mass who shared similar backgrounds. And while this was possible for some of our participants, we heard it was not possible for all as they lacked a critical mass of people who came from the same cultural-religious-ethnic background. As McAreavey and Argent (2018) note, many of these communities do not have adequate experience with immigrants, and subsequently the infrastructure and institutional supports are not there. It should also be noted that some of the participants explained that they were adapting 'community traditions' such as putting up a Christmas tree to help their children fit in or feel connected to other children. Participants did not report on whether this was an effective strategy.

A third issue that arose, and it is the proverbial 'elephant in the room', is micro-aggression and perhaps overt discrimination. Our participants relayed several stories about comments or actions of members of the community that could be categorized as either microaggression or discrimination. This may be understood simply as a function of not having experience with immigrant communities as suggested by McAreavey and Argent (2010), or perhaps it is more a function of 'White identity' which casts other racial identities as other (Pannelli et al., 2009) and the normalization of Eurocentric values and beliefs. Pannelli et al. (2009) characterize this as 'White privilege'.

One issue that arose for two participants, and it was reported that others had done this also, was the partner and children moved back to the urban centre and the other partner who was working at Bruce Power commuted back to the urban centres on weekends. For the most part, this was done within the context of getting a better education for their children, but there was also the issue of having family and community support in the urban centre, something they did not currently have. One participant reported that this situation was untenable and returned to living in the rural community but opted to homeschool her children. One must question whether

this was helpful, or simply amplified the isolation experienced by immigrants in rural communities.

5.0 Conclusions

Based upon the responses of the participants in this study, rural communities have ongoing challenges in terms of meeting the needs of immigrants. While rural communities may often meet the short-term needs of immigrants in their communities, it is the long-term integration needs that require addressing.

The participants in this study reported ongoing employment issues, much as urban immigrants do. They lamented that often their credentials meant little in the Canadian context and to do the mandatory upgrading was neither convenient nor affordable, and subsequently the employment opportunities available to them were lacking the quality they had hoped for. Furthermore, in some cases, just securing employment, any employment was challenging. Many believed employment was secured through networks, and they did not have the requisite networks.

The lack of networks is also related to their social lives. Most of the participants reported few friends and feeling lonely and isolated. Some participants reported that they tried to get to know people, but the community people were not open to getting to know them.

The isolation was also experienced culturally, with some of the participants not having immigrants in their community that shared their cultural or religious background, and this made it difficult for them. There were few opportunities to celebrate their culture and this was exacerbated by the absence of cultural amenities available to them locally, with participants reporting that they often travel to urban areas to get culturally appropriate food or resources, or simply to connect with their culture-religion. They were also exposed to microaggression and various forms of racism which make life uncomfortable and isolating.

If integration is the goal for Canada's multicultural policy, then these rural communities have a long way to go. If rural communities are to be successful in attracting immigrants to their communities, they must not only address their short-term instrumental needs (i.e., providing English instruction), they must address the long-term needs of these new community members and make concerted efforts and develop strategies to integrate these new citizens into the community in meaningful ways, and not allow them to flounder in isolation and loneliness. They need to help them become connected, provide opportunities for them to share what is unique to their culture and how it enriches the community. And it must be remembered that with the looming demographic crisis that is quickly approaching rural communities (Caldwell, et al., 2017), rural communities need these new community members as much as these new community members need them.

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