Journal of Rural and Community Development

Reasons to Leave: Does Job Quality Affect Rural Outmigration Intentions?

Authors: Rachel McLay & Karen Foster

Citation:
McLay, R., & Foster, K. (2023). Reasons to leave: Does job quality affect rural outmigration intentions? T*he Journal of Rural and Community Development*, *18*(4), 21–43.

Publisher:
Rural Development Institute, Brandon University.

Editor:
Dr. Doug Ramsey

ISSN: 1712-8277 © Authors
www.jrcd.ca

Reasons to Leave: Does Job Quality Affect Community Outmigration Intentions?

Rachel McLay
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
rachel.mclay@dal.ca

Karen Foster
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
karen.foster@dal.ca

Abstract

There is a strong correlation between macroeconomic conditions and migration in general, which drives population loss in rural areas with fewer job opportunities. This relationship between work and migration resonates with people's experiences and is backed up by large quantitative studies. But qualitative research on community outmigration yields more nuanced insights into migration as a biographical, subjective process that is influenced as much by perceptions and discourses linking success with big cities as by actual job opportunities. These insights have shifted recent scholarship away from job-centric explanations toward a greater appreciation for other place-related factors that affect life satisfaction and well-being. In this paper, we seek to apply these insights in a quantitative analysis looking at why Atlantic Canadians plan to leave their communities. We further consider how several job quality and satisfaction measures intersect with community characteristics and demographics to shape migration intentions. Using data from a 2019 survey of 1,277 Atlantic Canadians, we find that respondents from both urban and rural areas are motivated to leave their communities by a variety of factors—not only for work, but also for social and lifestyle reasons—although people under 30 are especially likely to cite work or school as their reason for leaving. While most job quality and satisfaction measures did not significantly influence migration intentions, we find that job *stability* factors—for example, permanent contracts and stable hours—are linked to lower migration intentions among rural residents, in particular.

Keywords: outmigration, interprovincial migration, rural communities, job satisfaction, employment, Atlantic Canada

ISSN: 1712-8277

Raisons de partir :

La qualité de l'emploi affecte-t-elle les intentions d'émigration de la communauté ?

Rachel McLay
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
rachel.mclay@dal.ca

Karen Foster
Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
karen.foster@dal.ca

Résumé

Il existe une forte corrélation entre les conditions macroéconomiques et la migration en général, qui entraîne une perte de population dans les zones rurales ayant moins d'opportunités d'emplois. Cette relation entre travail et migration fait écho aux expériences des gens et est soutenue par de vastes études quantitatives. Mais la recherche qualitative sur l'exode communautaire donne un aperçu plus nuancé de la migration en tant que processus biographique et subjectif influencé autant par les perceptions et les discours liant la réussite aux grandes villes que par les opportunités d'emploi réelles. Ces idées ont fait évoluer les recherches récentes des explications centrées sur l'emploi vers une plus grande appréciation d'autres facteurs liés au lieu qui affectent la satisfaction dans la vie et le bien-être. Dans cet article, nous cherchons à appliquer ces connaissances dans une analyse quantitative examinant les raisons pour lesquelles les Canadiens de l'Atlantique envisagent de quitter leurs communautés. Nous examinons en outre comment plusieurs mesures de la qualité et de la satisfaction de l'emploi se recoupent avec les caractéristiques et les données démographiques de la communauté pour façonner les intentions de migration. À l'aide des données d'une enquête menée en 2019 auprès de 1 277 Canadiens de l'Atlantique, nous constatons que les répondants des zones urbaines et rurales sont motivés à quitter leur communauté par divers facteurs – non seulement pour le travail, mais aussi pour des raisons sociales et de style de vie – même si les personnes de moins de 30 ans sont particulièrement susceptibles de citer le travail ou l'école comme raison de leur départ. Même si la plupart des mesures de la qualité de l'emploi et de la satisfaction n'ont pas influencé de manière significative les intentions de migration, nous constatons que les facteurs de stabilité de l'emploi – par exemple les contrats permanents et les horaires stables – sont liés à des intentions de migration plus faibles parmi les résidents ruraux, en particulier.

Mots clés : émigration, migration interprovinciale, communautés rurales, satisfaction au travail, emploi, Canada atlantique

1.0 Introduction

Every year in Canada, hundreds of thousands of people migrate from one province to another, and many more from one community to another within the same province. The flows of people across different parts of the country, and the resultant shifts in the geographical distribution of the Canadian population, have far-reaching impacts on national, provincial, and local labour markets, tax bases, resource allocation, social life, and many more facets of society. Historically, much of this internal migration is driven by people moving from the easternmost provinces of Atlantic Canada (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick) to Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Within individual provinces, in line with general trends toward urbanization, people are more likely to leave rural communities for urban communities than the other way around.

Thus, while Atlantic Canada's urban centres have struggled to grow, losing residents primarily to interprovincial migration, the struggle is compounded in its small towns and rural communities, which lose population both to the region's own urban centres and to oil- and job-rich provinces further west. In the public discourse about outmigration from rural Atlantic Canada, the assumption is that people leave the region or move from its less populated areas toward density because they are pushed by lack of jobs in their home community, pulled by jobs elsewhere, or a combination of both. Thus, as discussed below, the proposed solution to population loss in Atlantic Canada is usually job creation, with a few exceptions (Kennedy, 2012).

This public assumption about why people leave is supported by large quantitative studies of migration across Canada, which show a correlation between macroeconomic conditions and migration (Millward, 2005). But qualitative research on Atlantic Canadian rural–urban and outmigration yields more nuanced insights into migration as a biographical, subjective process that is influenced as much by perceptions and discourses that link success with big cities as by actual job opportunities (Corbett, 2007, 2012). The qualitative approach in Atlantic Canadian migration research is part of a broader shift, taking place over the last 40 years, in academic understandings of why people move. Recent scholarship has shifted somewhat away from job-centric explanations—that people move to find work—toward a greater appreciation for the so-called non-economic factors, such as relationships and desires for new experiences (Bygnes, 2017; Cook & Cuervo, 2020), with an understanding that a multitude of factors intersect to shape peoples' movement. But these deemed non-economic factors are mostly studied using qualitative methods, in contrast to the economic-focused research, which is still dominated by quantitative methods.

Between these two approaches and their respective emphases, there is a wide gulf where both qualitative and quantitative research can capture some of the nuance in migration explanations and challenge the artificial distinction between 'objective' economic factors best measured quantitatively, and 'subjective,' non-economic factors best captured qualitatively. With some notable exceptions discussed below, there is little research happening in this gulf, particularly in Atlantic Canada.

Here we take a small step toward challenging the unhelpful binary distinction and methodological bifurcation of the field with a more nuanced *quantitative* examination that includes 'objective' facts of employment (status, income, hours, etc.), community characteristics, demographics, and subjective assessments of employment quality, grounded in a theoretical appreciation of how such factors

might overlap or intersect and be experienced as such. Our hope is that this intervention is particularly useful to scholars studying outmigration from rural and peripheral regions.

To that end, we analyse the relationship between (a) employment status, (b) job quality, (c) job satisfaction, (d) work values, (e) community type, (f) demographics, (g) income, and (h) migration intentions in a sample of 1,277 Atlantic Canadians who were surveyed about work and community life in 2019. We find that respondents from both urban and rural areas are motivated to leave their communities for many reasons—not only by work, but for social and lifestyle reasons as well. We find differences in motivations by age, income, and education, as well as notable differences in the effects of job stability, age, and social class on migration intentions between urban and rural areas, with the migration intentions of rural residents especially sensitive to job stability factors such as permanent contracts and stable working hours.

2.0 Outmigration From Atlantic Canada

Interprovincial migration in Canada is not random. There are patterns in the flows of people from one province to another, and at any point in time, there are winners and losers—provinces that gain more population than they lose, and provinces with net losses. Since 2009, Alberta and British Columbia have been the net beneficiaries of much interprovincial migration, while Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and—until very recently—the Atlantic Provinces have seen the steepest losses of population to other provinces (Saunders, 2018). In Atlantic Canada, population decline has been a top concern in the public sphere, as population growth is widely understood as a necessary driver of economic growth. At the same time, economic conditions are believed to be a primary driver of migration. The Atlantic Growth Strategy, launched in 2016, is just one prominent example of policy that reflects the assumption that economic growth (via job creation) and population growth (via attraction and retention) are mutually reinforcing.

The problem of outmigration, and the tendency to explain it by way of labour market pulls and pushes, is much older than the Atlantic Growth Strategy. Over the Atlantic region's long history, Atlantic Canada has tended to lose population to whatever province is booming and looking for labour. There have been occasional exceptions to this rule, however. Notably, the region experienced substantial net gain from interprovincial migration in 2020–2021, due largely to effects of the COVID-19 pandemic: relatively low case numbers and housing prices attracted people to the region, and work-from-home policies enabled some to move without changing jobs. It remains to be seen how the explosion of remote work opportunities, especially in the knowledge industries, will affect longer-term migration patterns. But these opportunities are only available to a minority of workers. Most jobs cannot be done entirely from home, and most employers still expect in-person availability. Therefore, we can expect that migration patterns will continue to be influenced and explained by the ebbs and flows of the labour market. Historical accounts focus on these job-driven flows. For example, in the late 1800s, thousands of young, single women left the Maritimes for Lynn, Massachusetts, in search of work in shoe and textile factories to bring income back to their families (Beattie, 1992). Contemporary explanations are generally similar: when Alberta's oil extraction is going strong, as it had been for much of the 2000s, most of the people moving there to work were from the Atlantic provinces (Saunders, 2018).

Hit hardest by these trends are Atlantic Canada's rural communities, which have historically lost population, especially their youngest inhabitants, to nearby cities as well as to other provinces, and continue to do so today (Burrill, 1992; Corbett, 2007; Dandy & Bollman, 2009; Harling Stalker & Phyne, 2014; Kealey, 2014; Phyne & Harling Stalker, 2011; Reimer & Bollman, 2005). Atlantic Canadians, like other people around the world, leave their communities for myriad reasons: they go to further their education, to pursue careers, to broaden their cultural experiences, to follow friends and loved ones, to feel like they belong, to branch out on their own as young adults, and to achieve some quality of life—a different pace, proximity to specific amenities—they cannot get in their place of origin (Cook & Cuervo, 2020; Farrugia et al, 2019; Halfacree, 2004). There is even compelling evidence that young people leave rural Atlantic Canada in particular because discourses that link 'moving out' with 'moving up', and staying put with failure, put pressure on them to leave their home communities even when there are viable ways to stay (Corbett, 2007). On the other hand, research from around the world suggests that 'place attachment' can counter the forces encouraging migration, and this is likely the case in Atlantic Canada too (Abbott-Chapman et al., 2014; Altman & Low, 1992; Elder et al., 1996; Theodori & Theodori, 2015; Wiborg, 2004).

In and beyond Atlantic Canada, migration is also partly explained by demographic factors. Social class has been found to have a strong correlation with community outmigration. Parents' education, social and economic capital influence young people's chances of outmigration, and also the benefits they gain from moving away (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Jones, 1999; McLaughlin et al., 2014; Rye, 2011; Shucksmith, 2004; Stockdale, 2004). Gender also plays a role; young rural and urban women leave home earlier than their male counterparts (Jones, 2004), and are more likely to leave rural communities for education (McLaughlin et al., 2014) and labour markets with more and better opportunities for women (Johansson, 2016; Kloep et al., 2003; Leibert, 2016; Measham & Fleming, 2014; Rauhut & Littke, 2016; but cf. Looker & Naylor, 2009; Wiest, 2016).

But the reigning perspective in the region is that people are evenly 'pulled' from the Atlantic provinces by labour markets elsewhere (OneNovaScotia, n.d.), with less weight given to place attachments (Farrugia et al., 2019; Jones, 1999), discursive pressures (Corbett, 2007), or the draw of social relations. One exception is the case of international migrants leaving the region, whom researchers consider to be drawn not only by job opportunities but also by the larger, more expansive social worlds of big cities, where they may have relatives or sizable co-ethnic communities (Frenette, 2018; Hou, 2007; Krahn et al., 2005). Among those born in Atlantic Canada, motives for interprovincial migration are commonly reduced to the most rudimentary: macroeconomic conditions, and the availability of jobs, period. There appears to be less consideration of whether the available jobs are *good* jobs, or a good fit with the skills, specializations and aspirations of the people leaving. This limited view of economic or job-related factors, and a bifurcation of the field into studies that attend to macroeconomic conditions and employment rates, and studies that attend to everything else, is reflective of migration research outside Atlantic Canada as well, with some notable exceptions (Williams & Jobes, 1990; Speare et. al., 1982; Groutsis et al., 2019).

But the solution to this separation is not only to consider and evaluate a greater variety of explanations for migration choices; a powerful explanation should also entail some consideration of the overlap between economic and putatively non-

economic factors. For instance, a person's commute time is simultaneously a quality of their job and a measure of leisure time; a longer commute might be enjoyable depending on the mode of travel, or the other people along for the ride, but it also represents time not spent doing something else that might have been more valuable. Is it an economic factor or not? Or is it both? Likewise, a person's sense that their job is contributing to the greater good is a quality of their employment, falling on the economic side, but it is also a quality of their life—central to a sense of purpose and belonging. People also move, or stay in place, with other people in mind—if a person chooses a job in another city that pays less but is closer to family, have they made an economic decision or not? And can their movement be meaningfully captured by existing data collection and understood by quantitative analysis?

Fortunately, measuring such things does not require their binary classification into economic and non-economic factors. Job satisfaction is one factor that straddles the objective economic and the subjective perceptions, but its impact on migration intentions has not been studied very much. Some researchers have examined the impact of migration *on* job satisfaction—that is, are people who move for work rewarded with more satisfying jobs than people who stay (Rodríguez-Pose & Vilalta-Bufí, 2005)—but the inverse question is rarely asked.

3.0 Methodology

In this paper, we examine the relationship between intentions to move, reasons for leaving, job satisfaction, and terms of employment, alongside demographic variables. Our data come from a telephone survey on community, work, and income conducted in 2019 by the Rural Futures Research Centre at Dalhousie University, with a total of 1,277 respondents from the four Atlantic Canadian provinces: Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Respondents were recruited through a random selection of landline and cellphone numbers assigned to the sampled region. Participants aged 16 or over who resided in one of the four selected provinces were eligible to participate.

We begin by examining respondents' intentions to leave their communities and their stated reasons for leaving, including a bivariate analysis showing who is planning to leave by age, education, income, community type, and gender. We consider both urban/suburban and rural residents in order to develop a more complete understanding of Atlantic Canadians' migration decisions—who is planning to leave the region, and whether they are motivated primarily by employment or other considerations. Next, we consider whether leaving intentions vary by job satisfaction and other employment factors. We use logistic regression to test how some of these work-related factors are linked to respondents' intentions to leave their communities, controlling for differences in demographics such as age and education. Last, we show how the factors associated with outmigration intentions differ between urban/suburban and rural residents using predicted probabilities from logistic regression models with interaction effects.

Comparing survey respondents to the broader demographic composition of the region, we note that women are overrepresented in our sample by approximately 8 percentage points. Respondents also skew older than average for the region, while people under 40 are underrepresented in the data. Because data were collected using a telephone survey, a disproportionate number of respondents were retirees or otherwise not employed at the time and, therefore, were more likely to be available to complete the survey. In total, 581 of the 1,277 respondents were employed

(45.5%). The relatively small number of working people is a limitation of the analysis. However, this number includes a diverse array of working people in Atlantic Canada, and it is large enough to observe patterns that can subsequently be explored with more depth and precision in future analyses using larger datasets.

3.1 Variables

To consider the effect of various job factors on outmigration, our main dependent variable of interest is whether survey respondents anticipated moving away from their current communities. Response options for this question were yes, maybe, and no. Those who said yes were then asked to say approximately when: in the next year, 2–5 years from now, 5–10 years from now, or more than 10 years from now. Our analysis focuses on those who said they would be leaving their communities within the next 10 years, to maintain our sample size while excluding those for whom leaving is only a very distant prospect. Thus, our dependent variable is migration *intentions* among those living in Atlantic Canada, not actual migration. Whether the question is asked prospectively or retrospectively, explanations for migration are necessarily subjective, relying on beliefs, values, attitudes, and interpretations. Therefore, while we do not assume that a person's reasons for planning to move away will in all cases be the same as their reasons for actually moving away, we nevertheless consider migration intentions as highly valuable to consider, as they speak to needs, desires, and degrees of satisfaction that undergird future migration decisions.

Respondents who said they would be moving away were also asked why. While the question was open-ended, interviewers could select one or more of several reasons, including (a) for their job, (b) for their spouse's–partner's job, (c) to search for job opportunities, (d) because they just want something new, (e) to follow adult children, and (f) for family or social connections. Any responses that did not fit in one of the response categories were recorded verbatim by interviewers and then coded for this analysis by two researchers. We created categories to reflect the most frequent responses provided. These final categories are as follows: (a) work and school opportunities; (b) preferences or lifestyle factors; (c) social connections and 'moving home'; (d) aging, retirement, and downsizing; (e) other economic reasons (non-employment, e.g., cost of living); and (f) other. A limitation of this analysis is that we do not know precisely where participants planned to move, or how far away. However, the 'where' is linked to the 'why,' for example, for those moving for work opportunities, to be closer to family, and so on. We also do not know whether participants ever planned or hoped to return, though it has been noted by Harling Stalker and Phyne (2014) that many, particularly young people, leave the Atlantic region for work or education temporarily, intending to return.

To examine how employment characteristics might be linked to respondents' intentions to leave their community, respondents were asked their employment status. Of those who were employed, interviewers inquired how satisfied respondents were with a number of different job factors. Response options were given on a 1–5 rating scale, where 1 meant 'very dissatisfied' and 5 meant 'very satisfied.' To maintain a robust sample size in each category and to reveal patterns more clearly in the analysis, we use binary variables indicating whether respondents considered themselves satisfied (4–5) or not (1–3). Satisfaction with the following 13 variables was considered: (a) income stability, (b) income quantity, (c) leisure time, (d) job safety, (e) schedule predictability, (f) commute time, (g) clean work environment, (h) adventure and excitement, (i) challenge, (j) autonomy and control,

(k) flexibility in work time/place, (l) meaningful or worthwhile work, and (m) coworkers. Several other job factors were included in the analysis, including whether respondents reported being salaried, whether they had full-time hours, whether their hours were stable, whether they were union members, whether they had permanent contracts, and whether they considered their job to be a lifelong career.

In addition to these subjective and objective employment factors, we consider several demographic characteristics. First, we look at age in the following five categories: 16–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, and 60 or older. We consider respondents' highest level of education: high school or less; postsecondary certificate or diploma; bachelor's degree; and post-graduate degree. We look at respondents' household income in the following four categories: $20,000 or less, $21,000–$60,000, $61,000–$100,000, and more than $100,000. We also consider respondents' community type, urban, suburban, or rural, based on their own subjective assessment. Respondents who reported living on a First Nations reserve were excluded due to small sample size. We asked for respondents' gender with the options man, woman, and non-binary; however, non-binary respondents have also been excluded from the analysis due to the small number of responses in this category. In our logistic regression analysis, we control for whether respondents report ever living outside their current communities, as migration research has shown that previous migration experiences increase the likelihood of further mobility (see, e.g., Jones, 1999).

4.0 Findings

Respondents were asked whether they anticipated leaving their current communities. Of the 1,277 respondents, 20.5% said yes, and, among these respondents, 81.4% expected that they would be moving within the next 10 years. The first part of this analysis will focus primarily on this group of 214 people who anticipate leaving their communities within 10 years.

4.1 Reasons for Leaving

When asked to state their reasons for leaving, respondents gave a variety of responses, summarized in Table 1. While work and educational opportunities were the most common motivations for leaving, at 31.9% overall, personal preferences and lifestyle factors, social connections, 'moving home,' and retirement were all cited nearly as frequently, and 16.4% of respondents gave multiple reasons. Few respondents cited economic factors other than their own employment (e.g., cost of living, spouse/partner's job, etc.) or gave different answers entirely. Work reasons were slightly more common among rural residents, at 34.0% compared to 30.0% among urban and suburban residents. Moving as a result of aging, retirement, or downsizing was also notably more common among rural residents, at 32.3% compared to 20.0%; rural areas often lack infrastructure and amenities that become especially desirable to some in older age (e.g., nearby hospitals). Rural residents were also more likely to cite multiple reasons for leaving. On the other hand, leaving for social connections was slightly more common among urban and suburban residents, at 25.0% compared to 20.4% among rural residents.

Table 1. *Reasons for Leaving Community in Next 10 Years*

	Urban/suburban		**Rural**
Work or educational opportunities	31.9%	30.0%	34.0%
Preferences or lifestyle factors	25.4%	25.0%	24.7%
Aging, retirement, or downsizing	25.4%	20.0%	32.3%
Social connections or 'moving home'	23.0%	25.0%	20.4%
Other economic reasons (e.g., cost of living)	5.6%	7.5%	--[1]
Multiple reasons	16.4%	13.3%	20.4%
Other	8.0%	8.3%	7.5%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to some respondents giving multiple reasons. (n=214)
[1] Not reported because too few responses in category.

4.2 Leaving Patterns by Demographics

To offer a broader picture of who in Atlantic Canada is most likely to plan to leave their communities, we consider the demographic make-up of those with intentions to leave (see Table 2). We also note the percentage of respondents in each category who cited work-related motivations for leaving. Unsurprisingly, age is strongly correlated with the intention to move away: more than half of respondents under 30 planned to leave their communities within 10 years, and 72.1% cited work as the reason. Less than one-quarter of those aged 30–59 intended to leave their community, and less than one-tenth of those aged 60 and older. For those in their 30s, work-related motivations for leaving remained very common, at 52.0%. But respondents aged 40 and older were more likely to cite other motivations for leaving. These factors include lifestyle preferences, simply 'wanting a change,' family reasons, downsizing, or 'moving home.'

A greater proportion of those with university degrees also intended to leave their communities compared to those with high school or college diplomas. But their motivations for leaving varied, and there was no significant difference between the groups in the proportion claiming work-related motivations. About one fifth of the lowest income-earners, earning $20,000 or less, intended to leave within 10 years, with the majority (59.1%) citing work reasons. People earning between $21,000 and $60,000 were the most likely to remain in their communities, with only 11.9% expecting to leave. But it is those in the highest-earning category, earning more than $100,000, who were most likely to plan to leave. Nearly one-quarter of respondents in this category expected to leave their community, but their motivations for leaving were mixed. These findings show that both high- and low-income earners are more likely to leave their communities than middle-income earners, but low-income earners more frequently move for work-related reasons. More than half of those in the latter category are under 30.

Table 2. *Leaving Community for Work-related Reasons in Next 10 years*

	% Leaving	% Citing work reasons
Age		
Under 30	55.1%	72.1%
30 to 39	22.9%	52.0%
40 to 49	22.9%	25.0%
50 to 59	19.8%	24.0%
60 and over	8.6%	--[1]
N	1,272	212
$\chi 2(4)$	124.02	58.18
P	0.000***	0.000***
Education		
High school or less	13.1%	36.4%
Postsecondary certificate/diploma	16.0%	29.7%
Bachelor's degree	21.0%	31.8%
Postgraduate degree	20.5%	29.6%
N	1267	212
$\chi 2(3)$	9.61	0.71
P	0.022*	0.871
Annual household income		
Less than $20,000	21.0%	59.1%
$21,000–60,000	11.9%	26.3%
$61,000–100,000	18.9%	30.5%
More than $100,000	24.8%	32.8%
N	1,154	202
$\chi 2(3)$	21.09	8.07
P	0.000***	0.045*
Community type		
Urban	18.3%	28.9%
Rural	14.7%	34.4%
Suburban	20.4%	32.4%
N	1267	213
$\chi 2(2)$	4.48	0.61
P	0.107	0.736
Gender		
Man	20.7%	40.6%
Woman	14.2%	23.2%
N	1,274	214
$\chi 2(1)$	9.18	7.49
P	0.002**	0.006**

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$; [1] Not reported because too few responses in category.

Outmigration patterns are often linked to rurality, but we do not find that leaving intentions are most common among rural dwellers in Atlantic Canada. Instead, suburbanites appear the most inclined to leave. The greater focus on rural outmigration can be explained by the fact that while the number of people leaving rural communities is not necessarily higher than the number leaving urban communities, the impact of each person leaving is higher in a smaller community, and population replacement by in-migration is typically lower. The impacts of the pandemic notwithstanding, Atlantic Canada experiences relatively high outmigration from its urban areas, as well, due to their smaller size and distance from major urban centres like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, or Calgary. From each community type, those leaving are motivated by a mix of work and non-work factors. There are significant differences by gender: men are more likely to report migration intentions than women, and 40.6% cited work-related factors, compared to just 23.2% of women.

Overall, we find that respondents who intend to leave their communities are disproportionately male, university-educated, and motivated by work-related factors. The strongest relationships are with youth and with income, both high and low. Differences by community type are present in our data but not statistically significant.

4.3 Leaving Patterns by Job Quality

To better understand how job factors influence intentions to leave or stay in one's community, we examine how subjective (i.e., satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a number of different elements of one's job) and objective (e.g., job stability, permanence, union membership, etc.) employment factors are associated with leaving intentions (see Table 3). In this analysis, we include only those who are currently employed. We also limit our focus to the working age population, excluding respondents 60 years and older; such respondents, at or nearing retirement age, were highly unlikely to report work-related motivations for leaving their community. Here we consider both rural and urban–suburban residents to maintain sample size and observe general trends among Atlantic Canadians.

We find little evidence in this bivariate analysis that dissatisfaction with one's job motivates individuals to leave their communities. In fact, *satisfaction* with some elements—commute time, adventure, and excitement—is more strongly linked to leaving intentions, although these findings are not significant. Income stability is the only factor where dissatisfaction can be linked to a notably greater likelihood of planning to leave, at 34.0% compared to 25.7%.

A few other job factors appear to have meaningful associations with leaving intentions: respondents without stable hours and permanent contracts are significantly more likely to intend to leave their communities, as well as those who do not see their jobs as lifelong careers. These findings suggest that some people are, in fact, leaving their communities due to employment needs or preferences. In particular, those without stable work hours or permanent contracts may be pulled elsewhere, as well as those unable to find work or earn more than a very small income. More generally, those without an established career are also more likely to anticipate moving; many of these respondents are under 30 and may be working less desirable or prestigious jobs, so mobility may increase their ability to pursue new opportunities that may improve their quality of life.

Table 3. *Percent of Working Participants Intending to Leave Community, by Job Factors–Satisfaction*

	Not satisfied	**Satisfied**	**N**	**$\chi^2(1)$**	***p***
Satisfaction					
Income–stability	34.0%	25.7%	443	2.61	0.106
Income–quantity	25.6%	28.8%	443	0.54	0.462
Leisure time	26.6%	28.0%	443	0.10	0.753
Job safety	23.6%	28.1%	443	0.48	0.489
Schedule predictability	29.1%	27.0%	443	0.18	0.668
Commute time	20.0%	29.8%	443	3.74	0.053
Clean work environment	23.3%	28.7%	443	1.03	0.310
Adventure & excitement	23.9%	30.5%	443	2.41	0.121
Challenge	28.8%	27.5%	443	0.14	0.710
Autonomy & control	30.1%	26.2%	443	0.75	0.387
Flexibility in work time/place	26.8%	27.5%	443	0.02	0.867
Meaningful/worthwhile work	30.7%	26.6%	443	0.65	0.419
Coworkers	27.0%	26.8%	443	0.00	0.973
Other job factors	**No**	**Yes**	**N**	**$\chi^2(1)$**	***p***
Salaried	26.9%	28.4%	445	0.13	0.722
Full time	32.3%	26.4%	445	1.25	0.263
Stable hours	33.0%	22.3%	445	6.38	0.012*
Union member[1]	28.8%	25.0%	385	0.68	0.409
Permanent contract[1]	41.0%	26.0%	385	3.96	0.047*
Job as lifelong career	39.0%	24.6%	445	7.72	0.005**

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$; [1] Self-employed respondents excluded.

4.4 Logistic Regression Analysis

To see whether these relationships are still evident while controlling for other factors, we ran a logistic regression on working respondents' intentions to leave their community, including demographic factors as independent variables alongside several of the job factors that were found to be most salient in our bivariate analysis (see Table 4). We find that satisfaction with one's income stability decreases odds of intending to move by 42%, while satisfaction with one's commute time or level of adventure/excitement at work increases odds by 77% and 68%, respectively. Only the latter finding is significant at the 0.05 level.

Having stable work hours decreases odds of intending to leave by 29% compared to those without stable hours. Compared to having a permanent contract, having a temporary contract does not substantially affect odds of leaving in this model, but being self-employed decreases odds by about 46%. Controlling for other factors in the model, thinking of one's job as a lifelong career decreases odds of leaving by about 42%. While none of these findings are statistically significant, in part due to

the relatively small number of employed respondents who expressed migration intentions, they nonetheless point to some relationships between job satisfaction, job quality, and the decision to stay in or leave one's community.

Table 4. *Logistic Regression on Intentions to Leave Community in Next 10 Years*

	OR	**SE**
Satisfied with:		
Income stability	0.578†	0.182
Commute time	1.768†	0.575
Adventure & excitement	1.679*	0.441
Stable hours	0.707	0.183
Job tenure (ref: Permanent contract)		
Temporary contract	0.971	0.418
Self-employed	0.535	0.215
Job as lifelong career	0.583	0.194
Ever lived outside community	5.142**	3.047
Age category (ref: 30–39)		
Under 30	5.299***	2.368
40–49	0.822	0.303
50–59	1.361	0.460
Education (ref: High school or less)		
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	0.947	0.325
Bachelor's degree	2.047†	0.751
Postgraduate degree	2.124†	0.964
Household income (ref: $21,000-60,000)		
Less than $20,000	1.322	0.790
$61,000–100,000	0.949	0.34252
$More than $100,000	1.202	0.362
Community type (ref: Urban)		
Rural	0.759	0.213
Suburban	0.972	0.335
Gender (ref: Men)		
Women	0.576*	0.150
Constant	0.089**	0.070

n=413, Pseudo R2=0.154

† $p<0.10$, * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

Having previously lived outside of one's current community increases odds of planning to leave more than five-fold compared to those who had never moved communities before. Being under 30 also increases these odds more than five-fold compared to those aged 30–39 in the model. Both findings are statistically significant. Having a bachelor's degree or higher doubles respondents' odds of

planning to leave. Considering household income, this model shows increased odds of planning to leave among those in households earning less than $20,000, relative to those earning $61,000 to $100,000, but this result is not significant. Controlling for other factors in the model, community type—rural, urban, or suburban—has little effect on the decision to leave, but living in a rural area actually decreases odds slightly. Being a woman decreases odds of planning to move by 42% compared to men, and this is significant at the 0.05 level.

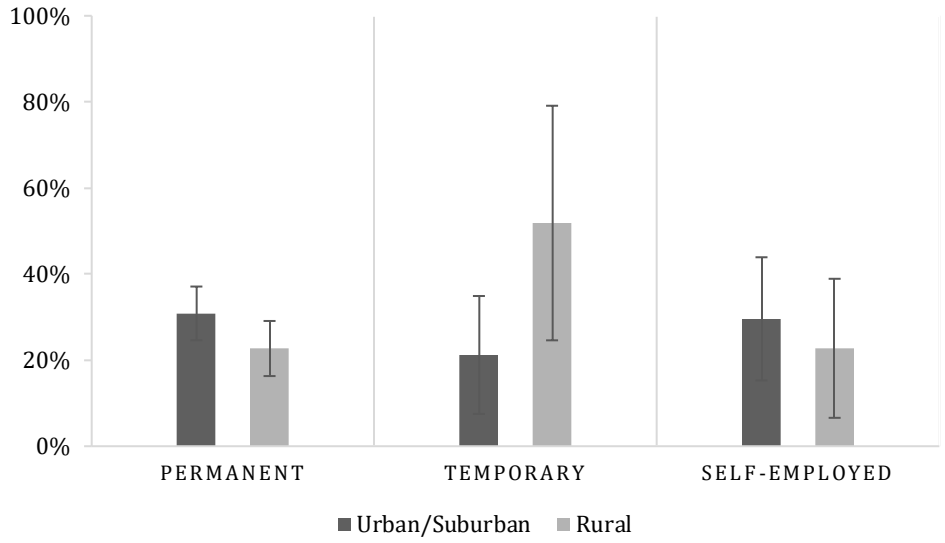
4.5 Differences by Community Type

While these findings provide an understanding of general patterns and relationships between job factors, demographics, and intentions to leave one's community, they do not rule out the possibility that 'leavers' are, in fact, a highly heterogeneous or bifurcated group. Respondents in rural areas are no more likely to expect to move than those in urban areas; nevertheless, results could reflect the existence of both a mobile class of urban/suburban educated professionals—who may relocate to advance their careers or pursue new opportunities, and often for other social or personal reasons—as well as the more quintessential Atlantic Canadian outmigrants: young men, often from rural areas, willing to 'go west' to find decent (or decent-paying) employment. If such a division exists, job factors—although they are likely to influence both groups—are also likely to influence these groups in different ways.

To explore this possibility, we turn to results from a series of logistic regressions with interaction effects on community type, which reveal several important differences between urban/suburban respondents and those living in rural areas. Based on these regressions, which use the same control variables as in Table 4, we plotted the predicted probabilities of leaving one's community.

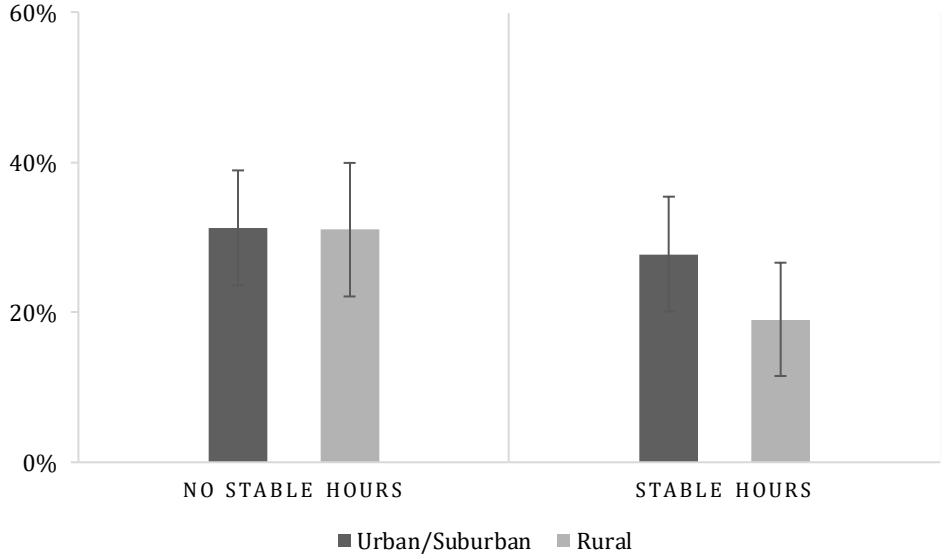
Of the various job factors, differences between urban/suburban and rural respondents were particularly noteworthy on job tenure (see Figure 1) and stable working hours (see Figure 2). Among respondents with permanent jobs or who were self-employed, a greater proportion of those living in urban and suburban areas were predicted to have migration intentions: 30.9% and 29.6% respectively, compared to 22.7% and 22.8% in rural areas. For those with temporary contracts, however, a much higher proportion of rural dwellers were predicted to have migration intentions: 51.9%, compared to 21.2% among urban and suburban residents. Thus, more urbanites and suburbanites who plan to move have stable, permanent positions in their current location, while it is temporary workers in rural areas who appear most likely to plan to leave their communities. Due to limitations of the data, confidence intervals are large; these are shown in Figure 1. Nevertheless, the predicted differences are substantial. After their temporary contracts are finished, it may be more difficult for those in rural areas to find new work in the same community, while urban workers may have more options.

Figure 1. Predicted probabilities of migration intentions, by community type and job tenure with 95% Cis.



Whether one works stable, consistent hours also yields different probabilities of moving away for urban and rural residents. Without stable hours, residents of urban/suburban and rural areas are equally likely to plan to move, with predicted probabilities of 31.2% and 31.0%, respectively. Urban/suburban residents who do have stable hours have nearly the same probability, at 27.7%. On the other hand, those with stable hours living in rural areas are much less likely to plan to move away, at only 19.0%. Job stability measures—permanent contracts and stable, consistent work hours—thus seem to be important considerations for rural residents, in particular.

Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of migration intentions, by community type and working stable hours with 95% Cis.



In addition to these job factors, differences in demographic factors between urban/suburban and rural residents are also notable, especially age (see Figure 3), income (see Figure 4), and education (see Figure 5). While young people (under 30) are by far the most likely to move away from both urban/suburban and rural areas, this tendency is more pronounced in rural areas, with two-thirds (66.8%) predicted to have migration intentions in this model, compared to about one-half (51.7%) of those in urban areas. Among those 30 and older, on the other hand, it is urban- and suburbanites with higher rates of migration intentions. At both very low ($20,000 or less) and high (more than $100,000) income levels, urban and rural residents are about equally likely to plan to move, but substantial differences appear in the middle-income categories: the probabilities among urban residents making $21,000–60,000 and $61,000–100,000 are 32.2% and 32.1%, respectively, compared to only 16.9% and 16.7% among rural residents. Finally, we find that, at most education levels, it is urban/suburban residents who are more likely to plan to leave their community. There is a notable gap among those with bachelor's degrees, 39.3% compared to 25.8% of rural residents. Among those with postgraduate degrees, however, the trend is reversed: our model predicts that 41.7% of rural residents with postgraduate degrees intend to move, compared with 30.0% of urban residents. Other predictors were tested but showed negligible differences.

Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of migration intentions, by community type and age with 95% CIs.

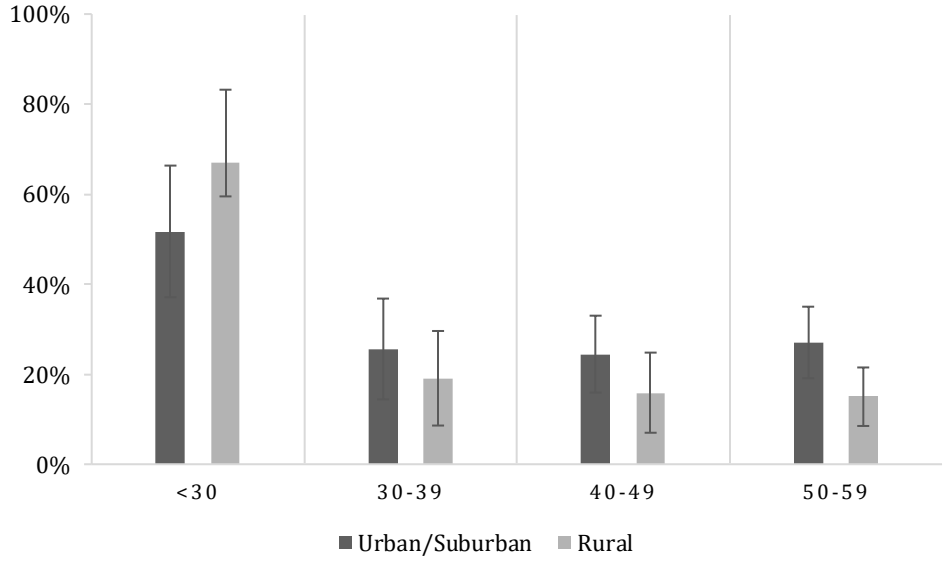


Figure 4. Predicted probabilities of migration intentions, by community type and household income with 95% Cis.

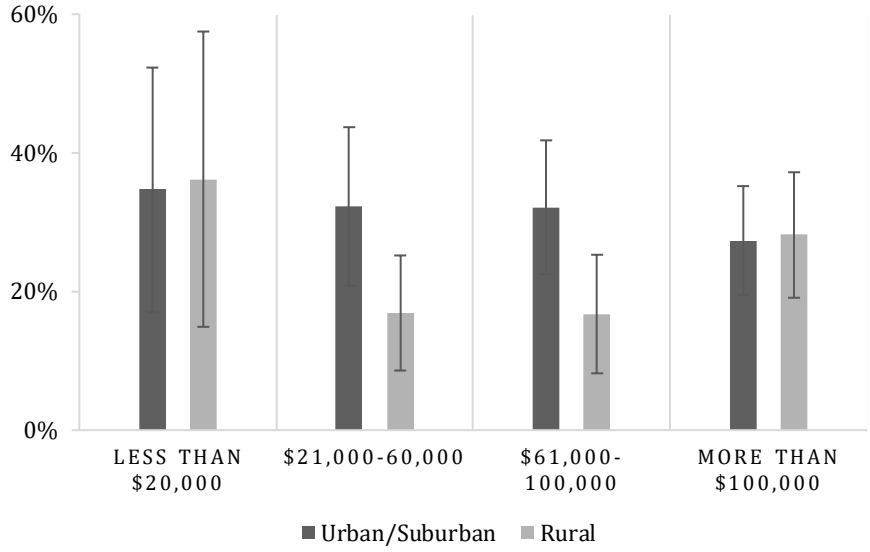
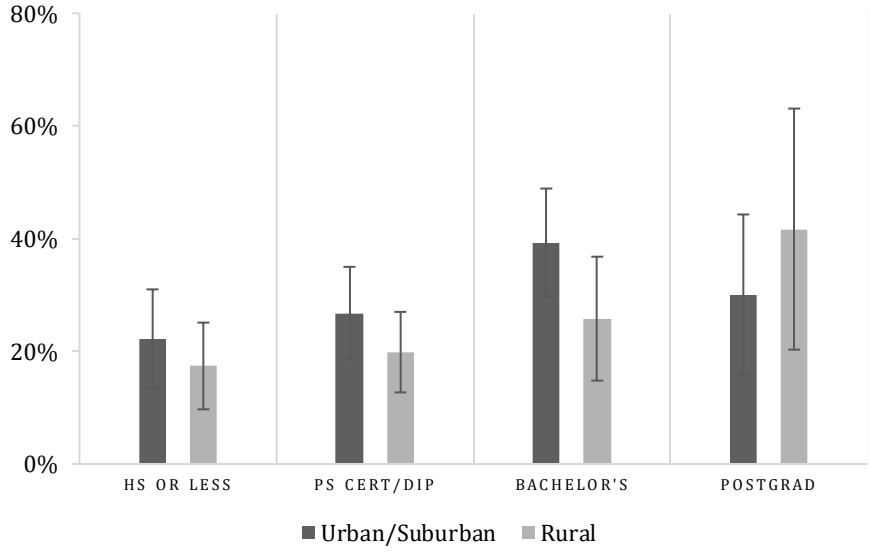


Figure 5. Predicted probabilities of migration intentions, by community type and education level with 95% Cis.



5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

These findings point to satisfaction with certain aspects of employment and, to a greater extent, measures of job and income stability, as affecting migration intentions among rural Atlantic Canadians. But the impacts of these job quality factors are intertwined with biographical factors such as age, gender, migration history, and educational attainment, as well as participants' community type. This analysis provides further support for the already well-established biographical character of migration decisions (e.g., Ní Laoire, 2000).

Differences between urban/suburban and rural residents, while limited due to small sample sizes, were particularly illustrative. First, among rural Atlantic Canadians, the greater importance of job stability in participants' migration intentions largely supports popular narratives about the pull of jobs in other provinces and larger urban centres, with one minor caveat: it is not merely a *lack* of jobs in rural areas but their greater precarity that has people contemplating migration. In cities, such instability may carry less weight in migration decisions because one precarious job is more easily replaced by another. Second, confirming decades of research in this area, both the young and the highly educated are more likely to migrate from rural areas (Corbett, 2007), but not merely to find work: youth may leave to explore possibilities and opportunities unavailable in rural areas, to establish their lives without the constraints of rurality (Foster & Main, 2018). The highly educated, meanwhile, tend to leave rural areas for myriad social, cultural, and lifestyle reasons, not only for work. In urban areas, residents also move for a variety of reasons, but their migration is less clearly linked to factors such as job stability, age, or educational attainment.

The importance of a better appreciation of the factors influencing migration—in this case, outmigration from Atlantic Canada as well as intra-provincial migration—cannot be overstated. Whether the goal is population retention, attracting new immigrants, shrinking with grace and stability, or the increasingly relevant challenge of managing rapid population growth, knowing why people leave is crucial for public policy, social programs, employer decisions, and grassroots community action alike. It is our contention that it is possible to build an aggregate understanding of outmigration without losing the nuance shown to be important by qualitative research.

Overall, there is enough to support a deeper exploration through a more focused survey instrument that asks more questions about job satisfaction, community attachments, relationships, migration intentions and histories, to avoid reducing migration to an economic, overdetermined process while reaping the benefits—statistical validity, comparability, replicability—of quantitative survey methods. We hope that this paper sparks interest in quantitative methodologies that can tackle the interconnections between the objective, structural determinants of migration and the subjective, interpretive elements of values, identity, relationships, and biography, particularly in light of the changes occurring in the region as a result of the pandemic.

How has the increased availability of remote work, at least for some workers, shaped or transformed migration decisions? Will Atlantic Canada continue to be a desirable location, or a sufficiently affordable one? Can rural areas reverse the trend towards decline in resources and infrastructure, creating more opportunities for their residents and more stable work? While the post-pandemic world presents new possibilities, their realization will depend to a great extent on policy decisions and investments. But these must be informed by a nuanced understanding of why people leave their communities and what they need to stay.

References

Abbott-Chapman, J., Johnston, R., & Jetson, T. (2014). Rural belonging, place attachment and youth educational mobility: Rural parents' views. *Rural Society, 23*(3), 296–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/10371656.2014.11082072

Altman, I., & Low, S. M. (Eds.). (1992). *Place attachment.* Springer.

Beattie, B. (1992). "Going up to Lynn": Single, maritime-born women in Lynn, Massachusetts, 1879–1930. *Acadiensis, 22*(1), 65–86. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30302890

Bjarnason, T., & Thorlindsson, T. (2006). Should I stay or should I go? Migration expectations among youth in Icelandic fishing and farming communities. *Journal of Rural Studies, 22*(3), 290–300. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2005.09.004

Burrill, G. (1992). *Away: Maritimers in Massachusetts, Ontario, and Alberta*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Bygnes, S. (2017). Are they leaving because of the crisis? The sociological significance of anomie as a motivation for migration. *Sociology, 51*(2), 258–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038515589300

Cook, J. & Cuervo, H. (2020). Staying, leaving and returning: Rurality and the development of reflexivity and motility. *Current Sociology, 68*(1), 60–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118756473

Corbett, M. (2007). *Learning to leave: The irony of schooling in a coastal community*. Fernwood.

Corbett, M. (2012). Standardized individuality: Cosmopolitan and educational decision-making in an Atlantic Canadian rural community. In N. Rao (Ed.). *Migration, education and socio-economic mobility* (pp. 87–102). Routledge.

Dandy, K., & Bollman, R. D. (2009). *Seniors in rural Canada: Aînés des régions rurales du Canada.* Retrieved from https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1224857/seniors-in-rural-canada/1777933/

Elder, G. H., Jr., King, V., & Conger, R. D. (1996). Attachment to place and migration prospects: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 6*(4), 397–425.

Farrugia, D., Hanley, J., Sherval, M., Askland, H., Askew, M., Coffey, J., & Threadgold, S. (2019). The local politics of rural land use: Place, extraction industries and narratives of contemporary rurality. *Journal of Sociology, 55*(2), 306–322. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783318773518

Foster, K., & Main, H. (2018). *Finding a place in the world: Understanding youth outmigration from shrinking communities* (Knowledge Synthesis Grant final report). Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/73932

Frenette, M. (2018). *Economic immigrants in gateway cities: Factors involved in their initial location and onward migration decisions*. Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series. Catalogue no.11F0019M2018411.

Groutsis, D., Vassilopoulou, J., Kyriakidou, O., & Özbilgin, M. F. (2019). The 'new' migration for work phenomenon: The pursuit of emancipation and recognition in the context of work. *Work, Employment and Society, 34*(5), 864–882. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019872651

Halfacree, K. (2004). A utopian imagination in migration's *terra incognita*? Acknowledging the non-economic worlds of migration decision-making. *Population, Space and Place, 10*(3), 239–253. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.326

Harling Stalker, L., & Phyne, J. (2014). The social impact of out-migration: A case study from rural and small town Nova Scotia, Canada. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development, 9*(3), 203–226. Retrieved from: https://journals.brandonu.ca/jrcd/article/view/919/206

Hou, F. (2007). Changes in the initial destinations and redistribution of Canada's major immigrant groups: Reexamining the role of group affinity. *The International Migration Review, 41*(3), 680–705. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2007.00090.x

Johansson, M. (2016). Young women and rural exodus—Swedish experiences. *Journal of Rural Studies 43*, 291–300. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.04.002

Jones, G. (1999). 'The same people in the same places'? Socio-spatial identities and migration in youth. *Sociology, 33*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/S0038038599000012

Jones, G. (2004). A risky business: Experiences of leaving home among young rural women. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 7(2), 209–220. https://doi.org/10.1080/1367626042000238721

Kealey, G. S. (2014). *Workers and Canadian history*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Kennedy, J. (2012). Young love: Will generation Y ever get that special feeling for Atlantic Canada. Atlantic Institute for Market Studies. Retrieved from http://aims.wpengine.com/site/media/aims/Young%20Love.pdf

Kloep, M., Hendry, L. B., Glendinning, A., Ingebrigtsen, J.-E., & Espnes, G. A. (2003). Peripheral visions? A cross-cultural study of rural youths' views on migration. *Children's Geographies, 1*(1), 91–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280302189

Krahn, H., Derwing, T. M., & Abu-Laban, B. (2005). The retention of newcomers in second- and third-tier Canadian cities. *The International Migration Review, 39*(4), 872–894. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27645556

Leibert, T. (2016). She leaves, he stays? Sex-selective migration in rural East Germany. *Journal of Rural Studies, 43*, 267–279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.06.004

Looker, E. D., & Naylor, T. D. (2009). "At risk" of being rural? The experience of rural youth in a risk society. *Journal of Rural and Community Development, 4*(2), 39–64.

McLaughlin, D. K., Shoff, C. M., & Demi, M. A. (2014). Influence of perceptions of current and future community on residential aspirations of rural youth. *Rural Sociology, 79*(4), 453–477. https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12044

Measham, T. G., & Fleming, D. A. (2014). Impacts of unconventional gas development on rural community decline. *Journal of Rural Studies, 36*, 376–385. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.04.003

Millward, H. (2005). Rural population change in Nova Scotia, 1991–2001: Bivariate and multivariate analysis of key drivers. *The Canadian Geographer, 49*(2), 180–197. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0008-3658.2005.00088.x

Ní Laoire, C. (2000). Conceptualising Irish rural youth migration: A biographical approach. *International Journal of Population Geography, 6*(3), 229–243. https://doi.org/10.1002/1099-1220(200005/06)6:3%3C229::AID-IJPG185%3E3.0.CO;2-R

One Nova Scotia (n.d.). Inter-provincial migration deep dive. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from https://www.onens.ca/goals/goal-1-inter-provincial-migration/deep-dive

Phyne, J., & Harling Stalker L. (2011). *"Good to be Alberta bound": Out-migration, in-migration and the Strait Region of Nova Scotia, 2001–2006* (Atlantic Metropolis Centre Working Papers Series). Retrieved from: https://canadacommons.ca/artifacts/1190664/good-to-be-alberta-bound/1743788/

Rauhut, D., & Littke, H. (2016). 'A one way ticket to the city, please!' on young women leaving the Swedish peripheral region Västernorrland. *Journal of Rural Studies, 43*, 301–310. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.05.003

Reimer, B., & Bollman, R. (2005). The new rural economy: Key observations for research and policy in the Canadian context. In *The changing nature of country towns*. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247933536_The_New_Rural_Economy_Key_Observations_for_Research_and_Policy_in_the_Canadian_Context

Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Vilalta-Bufí, M. (2005). Education, migration, and job satisfaction: The regional returns of human capital in the EU. *Journal of Economic Geography, 5*(5), 545–566. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbh067

Rye, J. (2011). Youth migration, rurality and class: A Bourdieusian approach. European *Urban and Regional Studies, 18*(2), 170–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776410390747

Saunders, D. (2018, June 5). *Internal migration overview, 2015/2016*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-209-x/2018001/article/54958-eng.htm

Shucksmith, M. (2004). Young people and social exclusion in rural areas. *Sociologia Ruralis, 44*(1), 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00261.x

Speare, A., Jr., Kobrin, F., & Kingkade, W. (1982). The influence of socioeconomic bonds and satisfaction on interstate migration. *Social Forces, 61*(2), 551–574. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/61.2.551

Stockdale, A. (2004). Rural out-migration: Community consequences and individual migrant experiences. *Sociologia Ruralis, 44*(2), 167–194.

Theodori, A. E., & Theodori, G. L. (2015). The influences of community attachment, sense of community, and educational aspirations upon the migration intentions of rural youth in Texas. *Community Development, 46*(4), 380–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2015.1062035

Wiborg, A. (2004). Place, nature and migration: Students' attachment to their rural home places. *Sociologia Ruralis, 44*(4), 416–432. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00284.x

Wiest, K. (2016). Migration and everyday discourses: Peripheralisation in rural Saxony-Anhalt from a gender perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies, 43*, 280–290. https://doi.org /10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.03.003

Williams, A. S., & Jobes, P. C. (1990). Economic and quality-of-life considerations in urban–rural migration. *Journal of Rural Studies, 6*(2), 187–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167(90)90005-S