

Settlement and Housing Experiences of Recent Immigrants in Small-and Mid-sized Cities in the Interior of British Columbia

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- Most immigrants prefer to settle in the major metropolitan areas of Canada (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal). The urban bias of Canadian immigration has led to policies intended to redirect immigration away from major metropolitan areas. At this stage, all levels of government have developed measures to attract and retain immigrants, thus rebalancing Canada's population.
- **In Canada, we know relatively little about immigrants' settlement experiences, including their access to local services and their housing experiences/outcomes in small- and mid-sized cities – both of which are key factors in successful integration (Walton-Roberts 2005; Teixeira 2011; 2009; Drolet, Robertson, Multani, Robinson and Wroz, 2008).**

- **GAPS in the Literature** --- There is very little published data/literature in Canada on immigrants' settlement experiences, including access to local services and their housing experiences/outcomes –in small/mid-sized cities.
- Within this context, **KELOWNA** and **KAMLOOPS** are good social laboratories/study areas.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS GUIDING THIS STUDY:

- a) What are the socio-demographic profiles of immigrants living in Kelowna and Kamloops?
- b) What is the state of local services supporting immigrant communities? What role do services play in the successful integration – attraction and retention – of immigrants to these cities?
- c) Do available settlement/community services and housing matter in their decision to locate in Kelowna and Kamloops? What housing services exist to support immigrant settlement in Kelowna and Kamloops?

- d) What were the major barriers/ challenges that immigrants encountered in settling in Kelowna and Kamloops? What is their current housing situation, and what barriers (e.g., ethnic background/race, language, income, source of income) have they faced in locating and obtaining affordable housing?
- e) What strategies are immigrants using to cope? Do the housing conditions of this group change or improve over time?
- f) What integrative role, if any, does a welcoming community play in the successful inclusion of new immigrants in Kelowna and Kamloops' society? Finally, what policy changes are recommended to remedy issues identified in this study?

DATA COLLECTION SUMMER 2015

Informal Interviews:

19 Key Informants

(10 in Kelowna and 9 in Kamloops)

Questionnaire Survey:

TOTAL – 80 RECENT IMMIGRANTS (born outside Canada),
arrived in Canada between 2000 and 2014, and RENTERS.

(40 Kelowna and 40 in Kamloops)

A. IMMIGRANTS' SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES IN KELOWNA AND KAMLOOPS

Table 1a: Renters' Socio-Demographic Profile

	Kelowna	Kamloops
	(N=40)	(N=40)
Sex		
Female	65.0%	75.0%
Male	35.0%	25.0%
Marital status		
Married	77.5%	70.0%
Single	15.0%	15.0%
Divorced	2.5%	7.5%
Common- Law	2.5%	-
Other	2.5%	7.5%
Average age	36.9	38.5
Ability to speak English		
Fluent/Very good	55.0%	40.0%
Moderate/Poor	45.0%	60.0%

Source: Questionnaire Surveys, 2015

Table 1b: Renters' Socio-Demographic Profile (Continued)

	Kelowna	Kamloops
	(N=40)	(N=40)
Highest Education		
University degree	62.5%	67.5%
Some university/some post-secondary education	12.5%	25.0%
High school diploma	25.0%	5.0%
Other	-	2.5%
Past 12 months main activity		
Working at a job or self-employed	52.5%	62.5%
Looking for paid work	12.5%	7.5%
Going to school	15.0%	10.0%
Unpaid: caring for own children/caring for other family members/household work	20.0%	15.0%
Other	-	5.0%
Current immigration status		
Landed immigrant	45.0%	60.0%
Citizen	30.0%	10.0%
Temporary visa holder	12.5%	25.0%
Other/D.K.	12.5%	5.0%

Source: Questionnaire Surveys, 2015

- *65% in Kelowna and 50% in Kamloops* -- Experienced **BARRIERS/CHALLENGES IN OBTAINING EMPLOYMENT** on arrival in Kelowna and Kamloops

Respondents from **Kelowna**:

- “I got help from KCR and websites....but in my personal experiences it is really hard to get a good employment and the wages are so low.” (R#2)
- “Very difficult to obtain a full time, permanent job in Kelowna...the local community is not as open to receiving ‘expatriates’ [members of visible minorities]” (R#5)
- “It is very hard to find a job with children and daycare is also very expensive.” (R#7)
- “It has been a little difficult because they don’t recognize my diploma here so I need to evaluate it...” (R#11)

SETTLING IN KELOWNA AND KAMLOOPS

- The majority of immigrants had arrived in Canada **between 2006 and 2014** -- *Kelowna 76% and Kamloops 87.5%*
- A significant number came directly to *Kelowna (47.5%) and Kamloops (62.5%)*
- Reasons for choosing Kelowna or Kamloops: (a) “Quality of life/ weather conditions”; (b) “to join members of their families”, (c) “economic opportunities”, or (d) “the city size/ safety”

SETTLING IN KELOWNA AND KAMLOOPS (Continued)

- *52.5% in Kelowna and 67.5% in Kamloops* – declared knowing someone (relatives, friends and/or employers) before coming to their city.
- **“Networks of contact” (relatives, friends and/or employers)** – played a determining role in helping our immigrants find a place to live and/or a job when they first arrived

HOUSING AND SETTLEMENT EXPECTATIONS

- **“CULTURE SHOCK”** on arrival in Kelowna and Kamloops with respect to finding HOUSING and JOBS! Numerous barriers/challenges encountered...!

HOUSING EXPECTATIONS BEFORE COMING TO CANADA:

a) 82.5% in Kelowna and 57.% in Kamloops though it would be relatively easy to find affordable housing (“cheaper prices”)

b) 32.5% in Kelowna and 45% in Kamloops seem to have expected Canada would have better quality housing

HOUSING AND SETTLEMENT EXPECTATIONS (Continued)

EXPECTATIONS ABOUT SETTLEMENT:

a) 72.5% in Kelowna and 77.5% in Kamloops thought it would be a much easier experience (“positive”) than they initially thought

b) 32.5% in Kelowna and 22.5% in Kamloops were expecting better programs and more support from the government

A. HOUSING EXPERIENCES IN KELOWNA AND KAMLOOP'S RENTAL HOUSING MARKET

Table 2a: Current Housing Situation

	Kelowna (N=40)	Kamloops (N=40)
Tenure type		
Rent entire unit	62.5%	55.0%
Rent room only	12.5%	25.0%
Rent ground floor/basement	20.0%	15.0%
Other	5.0%	5.0%
Subsidized housing		
Subsidized	2.5%	7.5%
Non-subsidized	82.5%	75.0%
Don't Know	15.0%	17.5%
Current type of housing		
Single-detached house	25.0%	42.5%
Apartment w/less than 4 storeys	35.0%	17.5%
Basement apartment	15.0%	12.5%
Townhouse	12.5%	10.0%
Apartment w/more than 4 stories	10.0%	5.0%
Other	5.0%	12.5%

Source: Questionnaire Surveys, 2015

Table 2b: Current Housing Situation (Continued)

	Kelowna (N=40)	Kamloops (N=40)
Length of occupancy		
Less than 1 year	25.0%	7.5%
1-3 years	37.5%	55.0%
4-6 years	12.5%	20.0%
More than 6 years	25.0%	17.5%
Current monthly rent		
Less than \$500	12.5%	17.5%
\$500 - \$1,000	52.5%	35.0%
\$1,000-\$1,500	30.0%	30.0%
More than \$1,500	5.0%	2.5%
Don't Know	-	15.0%
Percent of monthly income spent on housing		
Less than 30%	32.5%	22.5%
Between 30% and 50%	37.5%	40.0%
More than 50%	17.5%	20.0%
D.K.	12.5%	17.5%
On social housing wait list	N=2 (5%)	N=2 (5%)
Plans of owning a dwelling		
Yes	72.5%	82.5%
No	10.0%	10.0%
D.K.	17.5%	7.5%

Source: Questionnaire Surveys, 2015

C. MOBILITY, CURRENT HOUSING CONDITIONS AND RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION

- Affordability (“high rents”) is a major issue for this group of immigrants...but almost all participants (*72.5% in Kelowna and 82.5% in Kamloops*) **aspire to become homeowners** in Kelowna/Kamloops.
- Main **PUSH-PULL FORCES** for moving/present residence:
 - a) Housing location/accessibility (to be close to public transportation; close to work or to schools...);
 - b) “Unfordable housing”/”rents too expensive”;
 - c) “bad or not acceptable quality of their neighbourhood” (e.g., unsafe, unfriendly, noisy area lacking also green spaces/parks).

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE HOUSING SEARCH

- *60% in Kelowna and 40% in Kamloops* – declared that the search for affordable housing was, in general, a **STRESSFUL EXPERIENCE** (“very difficult” or “difficult”):
 - a) “rents too expensive” (income level versus housing costs);
 - b) “size/number of rooms”;
 - c) “housing location/accessibility-neighbourhood quality”;
 - d) lack of in-depth and reliable housing information about the local housing markets (e.g., rent prices, types of housing, renter’s rights, location/accessibility).

INFORMATION SOURCES USED/ SEARCH PROCESS

SOURCES USED:

- a) websites/ social media;
- b) relatives/ friends;
- c) local newspapers;
- d) around in the city/ rental signs

● **NOTE:** Very few participants in both cities (around 10% in both cities) used mainstream private or non-private market organizations or institutions when looking for their present residence.

**TYPE OF SERVICES OR PROGRAMS THEY HAD
ACCESSED SINCE ARRIVING IN KELOWNA OR
KAMLOOPS**

- a) community/settlement services (e.g., KCR; KIS);
- b) employment programs/job training;
- c) language services/ESL classes;
- d) housing programs/services

CONCLUSION

- Immigrants **highly recommended** that more information sources be available (before their departure or just after their arrival in Canada), specializing in settlement and housing services that are appropriate to new immigrants' housing needs and preferences.
- Making such specialized (culturally oriented) information available before new immigrants' departure and/or on arrival in Canada could play a determining role in helping settlement experiences, including access to local services, as well as finding a place to live and/or a job.

CONCLUSION (Continued)

- It is evident that both Kelowna and Kamloops can benefit from immigration.
- However, for policies to succeed in **attracting and retaining immigrants** to these cities in the interior of British Columbia depends on the presence of
 - (a) more subsidized/affordable housing;
 - (b) job opportunities that match immigrants' qualifications and that offer an adequate income, and (c) quality services and programs to integrate new immigrants into the community.

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