Exploring the Initial Period of Settlement Among Immigrant Women

Experiencing Intersectional Barriers in Toronto Through a Photovoice Project

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ABSTRACT

Numerous women embark on migration journeys, driven by aspirations to secure enhanced opportunities for themselves and their families. However, they often encounter significant impediments due to intersecting systems of oppression related to gender, race, immigration status, and other social dimensions. This study aims to elucidate the experiences of immigrant women during their initial settlement period. Employing Community-Based Participatory Research and Arts-Based Research approaches, the research used the photovoice method, with collages and storytelling, to explore the experiences of twenty immigrant women. Grounded in an intersectional feminist framework, this thesis presents findings based on visual and narrative data gathered from a creative empowerment program at Newcomer Women Services Toronto. Three predominant themes emerged: (1) pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities, (2) welcome and reception of settlement support, and (3) barriers experienced during initial settlement. The study offers a detailed examination of a range of experiences, both positive and adversarial, that immigrant women navigate throughout their migration journey. The research implications include recognizing the holistic needs of newcomers and providing a comprehensive support system to foster a more inclusive and equitable experience.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will describe my Master's research and the unique challenges and experiences faced by immigrant women during their initial years of settling in Canada. Rooted in my personal encounters and inspired by a myriad of stories of struggle and resilience, this study seeks to shed light on the often overlooked complexities inherent to the journey of migration. I commence with a reflection on my personal experiences and observations in Canada, revealing the disparity between expectations and reality. After that, I delve into a detailed background of the study, examining the vast tapestry of global migration patterns and the vital role of immigrants in shaping Canada's multicultural identity. Recognizing the pivotal importance of the initial settlement phase, I identify the multifaceted challenges that immigrant women face. This provides the foundation for the rationale of this study, emphasizing the urgent need for a holistic understanding of these experiences to influence policy-making. The chapter culminates with a delineation of the research objectives and questions, setting the stage for an analysis of the experiences of immigrant women in Canada.

1.1 Background of the Study

During my time in Canada as an international student and newcomer, I have had the privilege of engaging with immigrants from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. A common thread emerged among many of these individuals: the belief in Canada as both a developed country and a bastion of multiculturalism. This outlook fuelled their expectation that life in Canada would offer immediate improvements to their circumstances. These views are substantiated by research, such as a survey conducted by

Korean employment platforms, which identified Canada as the most desirable migration

destination (Ju, 2018). Further support comes from the Korean Ministry of Foreign

Affairs (2021), which ranks Canada as the fourth most popular country for Korean

emigrants.

      Inspired by this overwhelmingly positive image of immigration into Canada, I

arrived here filled with hope and anticipation. Unfortunately, the reality I encountered

frequently did not align with the rosy expectations held by many of my peers. As I got to

know other international students and immigrants, a common theme emerged: a feeling of

enduring life in Canada, tied to the obligations and consequences of the decision to move.

A surprising number of these individuals were even considering or preparing to return to

their home countries. These stories often exposed a painful gap between initial hopes and

the actual challenges faced. It became apparent that many were unprepared for the day-to-

day experience of living in a new society, their understanding obscured by insufficient or

incorrect information to accurately predict post-migration life.

      These repeated encounters with unfulfilled hopes drove me to delve into the

complexities of immigrant integration, particularly focusing on the initial obstacles faced

by newcomers. The opportunity to further explore this area presented itself when my

supervisor connected me with the non-profit agency Newcomer Women Services Toronto

for my thesis project. Through this collaboration, I sought to investigate the significance

of accurate information for guiding immigrant women's decision-making processes, thus

facilitating their adaptation to a new country. This work underscores the importance of

realistic expectations and tailored support to empower immigrants in their transition, a subject I believe to be both timely and vital.

Immigration, concentrated only in some countries in the past, is gradually increasing in importance as a global social phenomenon. In 2020, the number of people residing in a country other than their birth country was almost 281 million worldwide (IOM, 2020). Migration has always played an essential role in developing and reshaping societies globally (Faruk & Abdullahi, 2023). Individuals moving to other nations often seek improved educational and employment prospects, enhanced health, and superior quality of life (Bodvarsson & Berg, 2013). Migration can result in enhanced cultural diversity in the receiving nation (Bove & Elia, 2017), potentially leading to various societal challenges. This movement and settlement pattern is particularly significant in Canada, a nation built on immigrants' contributions.

Canada stands out as one of the foremost destinations for migrants, with one in every five of its residents born abroad (Statistics Canada, 2022). Given that Toronto hosts the largest number of immigrants in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022) and ranks as one of the world's most multicultural and multiracial cities (Canadian Census, 2021), it is imperative for the city to be well-prepared to accommodate newcomers. Such diversity brings vibrancy, but the integration of immigrants into their host communities still remains a complex issue, consistently addressed in both policy-making and scholarly research (Kyeremeh et al., 2021).

Newcomers to Canada greatly enhance the country's rich multicultural tapestry, adding to the diverse languages, places of worship, cuisines, traditions, and perspectives

prevalent nationwide (Smith et al., 2021). Beyond cultural contributions, these individuals

significantly influence the labour market and bolster the economy as students, investors,

consumers, and taxpayers, driving both economic and social development (IOM, 2020;

Statistics Canada, 2018). Yet, while many immigrants come to Canada in pursuit of a

brighter future, the journey brings emotional, social, physical, and cultural challenges

(Choudhry, 2001; Smith et al., 2021). The pressures of adapting to a new land often push

them to reevaluate and navigate their cultural beliefs and values (Choudhry, 2001; Smith

et al., 2021).

In order to understand and support immigrants, there has been an increasing

interest in studying immigration settlement policies and practices in Canada. These

studies have focused on various aspects, such as federal-provincial-municipal

governmental relations concerning settlement issues, the historical and organizational

changes in immigrant-serving organizations/institutions, funding and distribution of

settlement services, and the specific needs of immigrants within settlement programs

(Zhu, 2016). Moreover, in the field of social work, scholarly efforts have predominantly

concentrated on addressing matters related to employment access, equality, social and

occupational mobility, identity, citizenship, and disparities in migration modes and

outcomes among diverse groups of migrants (Ressia, 2013).

However, the ideas of settlement, the needs of immigrants, and the welfare state

are contentious because they have been framed within a discourse dominated by male-

centric, capitalist, and imperialist views (Zhu, 2016). Particularly, research on immigrant

women's lived experiences has been ignored (Zhu, 2016). Immigrant women have often

been overlooked (MacDonnell et al., 2012) as well as their lived experiences (Zhu, 2016)

in the Canadian immigration context, even though they make up about half of the

immigrants who arrive each year (Statistics Canada, 2023). Furthermore, in the realm of

social work research, there has been a notable absence of using intersectionality as a

primary analytical framework (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018), a tool crucial for comprehending

the experiences of immigrant women.

1.2 Problem Statement

As immigrant women navigate their journey to settle in new lands, they grapple

with unique adversities shaped by their gender, race, and an array of other social

determinants, including culture, language, and disability. These determinants are fluid,

evolving over time and influenced by the context of their new surroundings (T. Collins &

Magnan, 2018; IRCC, 2018; Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005). Their transition is often

marred by challenges: the mental burden of acculturation, the logistical and emotional

pressures of relocation, economic constraints, a disconnection from familiar social

networks, and disruptions in traditional gender roles. Each of these factors, either in

isolation or combined, can have a profound impact on the mental and physical well-being

of these immigrants (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Delera et al., 2016; Guruge et al., 2015a;

Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Immigrants, especially during their formative years in a new country, often

grapple with the complexities of dual identities (Singh, 2014). This duality can foster

feelings of apprehension and mistrust toward their new cultural surroundings. This

transition is further complicated upon their immediate arrival in places like Canada,

where the overwhelming pressure to assimilate rapidly exacerbates emotional, social, and cultural stressors (Choudhry, 2001; Gillespie et al., 2023; Kaufmann, 2021). Effective involvement and thorough, cohesive assistance during the initial years of settlement empower new migrants to achieve their goals (Shergold et al., 2019) and foster a sense of identity and belonging (Abood et al., 2022; A. M. Renzaho et al., 2011; A. M. N. Renzaho et al., 2011). However, many participants in Danso's (2002) study pointed out that they were either uninformed about the available orientation and settlement services or found the provided services to be inadequate. Moreover, despite the increasing number of immigrants worldwide, research focusing on the initial settlement experiences of these new arrivals remains surprisingly sparse (Danso, 2002). The challenges and adjustments newcomers face during their early days in a new country are pivotal, as they can significantly impact their long-term adaptation and integration. Yet, the academic community and policymakers seem to have given inadequate attention to this crucial phase, highlighting a pressing need for more comprehensive studies in this domain.

In a metropolis as diverse as Toronto, where every second person has roots in foreign soil, it is concerning that there is a shortage of research focused on the nuanced challenges encountered by immigrant women during their initial settlement phase. The vast array of immigration services in Canada prompts further evaluation in the context of the lives of these women. The pressing questions remain: How accessible and effective are these services to immigrant women who grapple with intersectional barriers? Are their voices and unique challenges adequately represented and addressed within the current

framework? Delving deeper into these experiences is not merely for academic comprehension. It holds the potential to shape policy, refine existing services, and foster inclusivity for these women.

1.3 The Rationale for the Study

While migration research is expanding globally, its scope remains limited (IOM, 2020). More research is required to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse experiences of newcomer women in Canada. As per the population projections of (Statistics Canada, 2023), immigration rates are expected to rise in the next 15 years, potentially leading to up to 30 percent of Canada's population being foreign-born by 2036. This makes supporting the successful integration of newcomer women significant for policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and newcomer communities. The proposed research aims to explore the initial settlement experiences of immigrant women and the intersectional barriers they face during their resettlement in Canada. Several key factors necessitate this study, which I will describe below.

Firstly, addressing settlement challenges is crucial. Immigrants often encounter unique difficulties during their settlement process, such as finding housing, employment, education, healthcare services, and adapting to local customs and laws. These challenges can be particularly pronounced for immigrant women due to intersecting factors like gender, race, and nationality. Understanding and addressing these issues is essential for facilitating the successful integration of immigrant women into Canadian society (Shields et al., 2016). Additionally, the study highlights gendered challenges faced by immigrant women. They often experience gender-based hierarchies and unequal opportunities,

further compounded by race and ethnicity (Graham & Thurston, 2005). Immigration policies may reinforce traditional gender norms and male dominance, increasing the risk of intimate partner violence (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018). Balancing work and family life can be particularly challenging for newcomer mothers, impacting their integration into the local labour market and limiting opportunities for language skill development (Zhu, 2016). Furthermore, it is vital to recognize that racialized immigrant women represent a diverse group, and various factors like class, educational background, age, immigration path, proficiency in official languages, and support from male household members distinctly influence their experiences (Premji & Shakya, 2017). Exploring these gendered and racialized challenges is crucial for understanding and addressing the specific needs of immigrant women during their settlement process.

Secondly, the research delves into the challenges women experience when accessing settlement services. Existing settlement services may not fully meet the needs of immigrant women, resulting in significant deficiencies in critical areas like income, education, employment, housing, and parenting support (Makwarimba et al., 2013). Language barriers, discriminatory practices, and cuts in essential services further complicate the settlement process for newcomers (Stewart et al., 2008). Understanding the challenges and gaps in settlement services is vital for enhancing their effectiveness and inclusivity.

Lastly, while some studies have explored aspects of immigrant women's resettlement experiences, more research is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intersectional barriers they face (Smith et al., 2021). Existing studies often focus on

specific aspects of resettlement or particular immigrant groups, leaving gaps in our knowledge about the overall settlement experiences of immigrant women. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a holistic view of the challenges and opportunities faced by racialized immigrant women during their initial settlement in Canada.

In conclusion, this study is motivated by the necessity to better understand and address the intersectional barriers faced by immigrant women during their initial settlement in Canada. By investigating the challenges in accessing settlement services, the role of social support, and the gendered experiences of newcomer women, this research seeks to inform policies and practices that promote successful integration and inclusivity for this diverse and important population.

1.4 Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to derive insights from a select group of immigrant women confronting intersectional challenges, both social and personal. Utilizing art-based methods in this qualitative study, I intend to:

- Delve into the experiences, obstacles, and perceptions of immigrant women during their early post-migration phase,
- Elevate the voices of these women and empower their community by sharing their lived experiences through an arts-based group program, and
- Apply the acquired knowledge to advocate for policy reforms and craft programs that promise improved results for incoming immigrant women.

1.5 Research Questions

The core question driving this research is: *How do initial migration experiences impact the settlement of immigrant women grappling with intersectional barriers?* To comprehensively address this, I will probe into three sub-questions:

- How do the pre-migration expectations of immigrant women compare with their actual experiences post-migration?

- What challenges do immigrant women encounter when experiencing settlement services and support?

- Which intersectional barriers do immigrant women face during their early adaptation phase?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I commence by delineating the profile of immigrant women, subsequently delving into the annals of Canadian immigration history and policy to understand the nation's perspective on these women. I then shift focus to the immigration settlement services within Canada, elucidating the concepts of settlement and integration and highlighting the essential role these services play during the initial settlement phase. This exploration further unpacks the specific services catered to newcomer women while also highlighting the extant gaps and challenges. Concluding the chapter, I critically navigate the journey of immigrant women as they confront and negotiate intersectional barriers during their settlement in Canada.

2.1 Immigration in Canada

2.1.1 Immigrant Women

Conceptual Definition of Immigrant Women in the Study

The term *immigrant women* encompasses both a legal and a social dimension, reflecting their dual status in Canada. Legally, an immigrant woman is an individual who has obtained permanent residency status in Canada, granting her many of the same rights as Canadian citizens (Statistics Canada, 2016b). However, the societal position of immigrant women is distinct (Ng & Estable, 1987). Ng and Estable (1987) argue that the label immigrant women are a product of societal constructs originating from the economic and legal systems. This label embodies biases related to gender, race, and class (Ng & Estable, 1987). As noted, it often refers to women of colour, including those from southern Europe and the Global South, women with limited English proficiency or

accented English (not of British or American origin), and women in lower occupational

positions (Jagire, 2019; Ng & Estable, 1987; Szekely, 1990).

In the context of this study, the term *immigrant women* is broadened to include

newcomer women accepted as immigrants, refugees, and international workers/students

who have settlement experience in Canada. Thus, immigrant women in this research

represent a combination of technical-legal criteria and social factors, encompassing

women who fulfill the following two requirements: possessing permanent residency or

refugee status and being racialized women or having limited English proficiency.

The population of Immigrant Women in Canada

Canada has welcomed immigrant women from diverse countries and

backgrounds through different immigration forms. As of 2021, out of a total of over 8.3

million Canadian immigrants, women comprise over 4.3 million, or 28.4 percent of

Canada's female population (Government of Canada, 2022). Examining the gender ratio

of recent immigrants, in 2022, out of the total 492,984 immigrants who arrived in Canada,

female immigrants accounted for 49.6 percent. Except for the last two years (2021 and

2022), the number of female immigrants in the 2000s has been higher than male

immigrants (Statista Research Department, 2022).

According to the data from 2016 in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2017), it was found

that 49.5 percent of the city's total population of 1,332,090 residents were born in Canada.

Immigrants make up 50.5 percent of Toronto's population, which is significantly higher

than the national rate of 21.9 percent for immigrants in Canada. Additionally, 3.5 percent

of Toronto's population consists of non-permanent residents, indicating they may

potentially become immigrants. Notably, among the immigrants in Toronto, a higher

percentage are females. Specifically, while 50.0 percent of Canadian-born city residents

are female, 53.9 percent of immigrants living in Toronto are female (City of Toronto,

2017).

The data on women who have immigrated to Canada in recent years demonstrate

trends and characteristics in age, professional background, and education. The largest

group of immigrant women are between the age of 25-44, which accounted for 62 percent

of female immigrants to Canada in 2019 (Sicuro, 2023). In recent years, immigrant

women come to Canada with various professional backgrounds, such as education,

healthcare, technology, and finance (Sicuro, 2023). Having proficiency in either English

or French is a crucial prerequisite for immigration to Canada, and numerous female

immigrants possess strong language skills. Nevertheless, language barriers can still pose

challenges, especially for women originating from non-English or non-French-speaking

countries (Sicuro, 2023).

2.1.2 Immigration in Canada

Canada's foundation is deeply rooted in immigration. Yet, for much of Canada's

history, the immigration policy has been overtly biased based on race and gender (Agnew,

2009; Nwoke & Leung, 2020), accompanied by a track record of excluding individuals

from racialized backgrounds (Epp & Iacovetta, 2016). During the mid-nineteenth century,

as part of its nation-building strategy, Canada actively encouraged immigration to

promote the settlement of Western Canada (Epp & Iacovetta, 2016; Nwoke & Leung,

2020). This initiative coincided with a significant rise in migration from the United States

and other European regions, leading the Canadian government to enact an immigration

act in 1910 (Epp & Iacovetta, 2016; Nwoke & Leung, 2020). By 1919, this legislation

underwent amendments that expanded the government's discretion over the ethnic profile

of immigrants based on their country of origin (Green & Green, 2004; Nwoke & Leung,

2020). Subsequently, a bifurcation emerged, categorizing nations into *preferred* and *non-*

preferred segments (Green & Green, 2004). Immigrants hailing from Britain, the United

States, and predominant regions of Northern and Western Europe were designated as

preferred, enjoying favourable immigration policies (Green & Green, 2004; Nwoke &

Leung, 2020). In contrast, migrant groups of colour were often viewed as foreign or

uncivilized and were expected to abandon their cultural identities to integrate into

predominantly White Canadian communities (Ma, 2021).

Immigration policies historically enshrined racism, as exemplified by the 1885

Chinese Immigration Act. This act followed the influx of Chinese migrants employed as

indentured labourers for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. These workers

were paid half the wages given to their White peers and were often assigned the riskiest

tasks (Ma, 2021). Following the completion of the railway, the Canadian parliament

introduced a head tax targeting Chinese individuals to deter their entry into Canada (Ma,

2021). Subsequently, the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act was enacted, effectively halting

Chinese immigration with limited exceptions, such as certain business owners (Côté et

al., 2001; Ma, 2021). Numerous instances of racialized immigrant discrimination in

Canada's immigration policies trace back to the early 20th century (Nwoke & Leung,

2020). Examples include barring Black farmers from Oklahoma, denying entry to 376

prospective South Asian immigrants aboard the Komagata Maru at Vancouver's port, and isolating European Jews escaping fascism before World War II (Black, 2013; Nwoke & Leung, 2020; Shepard, 1983; Troper, 1993).

Due to these exclusionary and biased immigration policies, women faced additional sexist legislative measures. When the Immigration Act of 1910 was implemented (Dyk, 2019), policymakers emphasized the roles of immigrant women, regarded by Belshaw (2016) as *the mothers of future Canadian generations*, thus warranting more attention than their male counterparts. During World War I, due to conscription and discriminatory border control measures that reduced the number of male immigrants, there was an increased encouragement for women to immigrate (Green & Green, 2004). While certain immigrant women of European descent promptly gained advantages from family reunification immigration categories, this privilege was not afforded to women of colour or racialized immigrant women. It was not until the late twentieth century that racialized immigrant women from African nations were permitted entry into Canada (Côté et al., 2001).

Additionally, immigrant women often encountered prejudiced screenings at borders and workplace biases. The significance of farmers and female domestic workers during global economic downturns was underscored by Green and Green (2004). The World War I era saw many female immigrants in Canada venturing into domestic and healthcare domains (Belshaw, 2016). Interestingly, a segment of these women branched out into professions generally occupied by men. Their endeavours led to the creation of the Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization, focusing on moderating

immigrant women's engagement in such professions (Belshaw, 2016). However, factories persisted in their discriminatory actions, often limiting women's skills to inhibit wage demands (Hale, 2013).

After World War II, Prime Minister Mackenzie King was adamant about dismantling the prejudiced immigration protocols, driven more by fiscal motivations than societal ones (Green & Green, 2004). However, Canada's immigration procedures remained stringent, particularly scrutinizing women's pasts (Belshaw, 2016). Despite these invasive procedures, the allure of Canada persisted for female immigrants, especially given the access to public resources. This assistance, though, was contingent upon them adhering to certain societal norms, notably domesticity (Belshaw, 2016). Conversely, immigrant men faced fewer professional constraints and lesser societal judgment (Dyk, 2019; Green & Green, 2004).

The 1976 Immigration Act was implemented in response to decreasing population growth and workforce requirements, succeeding historically stringent immigration regulations (Ma, 2021; Thobani, 2007). This policy was touted as unbiased, aiming to eradicate existing prejudices by choosing immigrants based on their linguistic proficiency, skills, and educational credentials (Agnew, 2009; Arat-Koc, 1999). The revised Immigration Act eliminated overt preferences based on race for migration, introducing a scoring system where potential immigrants are assessed based on education, profession, language proficiency, and skills rather than their national or racial background (Ma, 2021; Pon et al., 2011). However, this can be seen as a subtle form of racism; there exist more immigration offices in *high-income* countries compared to *low-income* ones

(Henry et al., 2010; Ma, 2021). Additionally, the scoring system prioritizes economically advantageous migrants with high skills while sidelining those deemed unsuitable for life in Canada, mirroring past immigration policies. This scoring approach subtly reinforces White dominance in public discussions, labelling racialized migrants as *newcomers* or *immigrants* in Canada (Ma, 2021).

Since the early 1990s, Canada has embraced a relatively large number of new immigrants. Recently, just over 1.3 million newcomers settled in Canada from 2016 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023), the highest figure ever recorded in the Canadian Census. By 2022, nearly half a million individuals had found a new home in Canada, even amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (Thevenot et al., 2022). This migration trend underscores Canada's appeal and immigrants' critical role in its workforce dynamics (Reitz, 2021; Thevenot, 2023). Still, historical events indicate a biased stance of the Canadian government towards immigrant men and women. Immigrant narratives often grapple with prejudices rooted in race, nationality, status, and gender. The societal roles ascribed to women, ranging from caregivers, mothers, sex workers, and victims to professionals, intensify their integration challenges (Papillon, 2002; UN Women, 2017). Reports by Hale (2013) and UN Women (2017) underscore that immigrant women often find themselves confined to domestic tasks, with restricted access to several industries. This migration trend of women seeking improved economic prospects has been dubbed by UN Women as the feminization of migration and underscores women's evolving societal roles (Paiewonsky, 2009).

This study focuses on Toronto, which has the most immigrants in Canada (Lucie, 2023) and is one of the most multicultural and multiracial cities in the world (Ashleigh, 2019). In 2016, approximately half of the population was born in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2017), which means about half of Toronto's population are immigrants, refugee claimants, or people from other countries with work or study permits. (Alba et al., 1999; Kosny et al., 2012; Schellenberg, 2004; Syed, 2013, 2014, 2020). Nonetheless, previous studies highlight an often-overlooked truth of socioeconomic inequalities within these racialized urban settings (Syed, 2020). Therefore, examining Toronto offers a nuanced understanding of both the opportunities and challenges inherent in such dynamic urban settings.

2.1.3 Concepts of Canadian Immigration Policy

Migration encompasses the global act of relocating from one area to another. Immigration is a subset of migration; as noted by Blackwood (2020), immigration involves the shift in one's country of residence with an aim to settle indefinitely, whereas migration has a broader meaning and is not always permanent. Nowadays, individuals frequently migrate, often favouring large capitalist nations like Canada as their new home. Every year, Canada's federal government establishes immigration targets based on the nation's socio-economic requirements. As per the Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act of 2001, the government recognizes three primary immigration categories: a) Economic immigrant, b) Immigrant sponsored by family, c) Refugees, and d) Other immigrant (Statistics Canada, 2016e). Economic immigrants are chosen due to their potential economic contributions to fit labour market demands (Statistics Canada, 2016e).

The visa types in this segment include skilled workers, Québec-selected skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial nominees, and the Canadian experience class (Gogia & Slade, 2016). Family immigrants come to Canada through sponsorship by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, based on familial ties like spouses, partners, parents, grandparents, children, or other relatives (Statistics Canada, 2016c). This group can access visas for spouses, partners, dependent children, and certain other relatives (Gogia & Slade, 2016). Refugees earn permanent residency due to genuine fears of returning to their home countries (Statistics Canada, 2016d).

Data from Statistics Canada (2023) shows that from 1980 to 2021, women made 3.5 million applications across economic, family, and refugee programs. Merely 22.8 percent of these women were the main applicant for the economic scheme. The majority came as secondary applicants (31 percent) or through family sponsorship (29.6 percent). 15.2 percent arrived as refugees, with a small fraction (1.3 percent) categorized as other immigrants. This information echoes findings by Statistics Canada (2022b) and UN Women (2013): many women are secondary applicants or fall under different categories, partly due to visa accessibility. Among immigrant women in Canada, roughly 50 percent (about 2 million) arrived during their prime working age (15 to 64) (OECD, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023). Yet, few were primary applicants in the economic sector.

Canada's journey towards gender equality has spanned decades, starting in 1929 when women were officially recognized as individuals, progressing to 1960 when they secured voting rights, and further to 1977 with the proclamation of the Canadian Human Rights Act. The Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) toolkit, introduced in 2011, is a

testament to this ongoing evolution (Government of Canada, 2022). The toolkit assesses

and refines issues related to diversity in public institutions, formulating strategies,

policies, programs, and laws that emphasize gender equity (Government of Canada,

2022). With GBA Plus, there is a richer understanding of gender dynamics and an

emphasis on intersectionality, considering factors like disability and race (Government of

Canada, 2022). However, the pursuit of true gender equality, especially in immigration

policy, remains an ongoing challenge.

<div align="center">**2.2 Immigration Settlement Services in Canada**</div>

2.2.1 Settlement and Integration

The process of settling and integrating immigrants into a new society is nuanced

and multifaceted. Thus, it is crucial to clarify the meanings of settlement and integration.

Various sources highlight that settlement primarily focuses on the initial stages of

addressing immigrants' basic needs, such as housing, enrolling children in schools,

starting language lessons for adults, availing of mainstream services, and understanding

basic rights and obligations (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). In a similar vein, integration

emphasizes an immigrant's ability to contribute without hindrance to all sectors of

Canadian life—be it economic, social, cultural, or political (Murphy, 2010). It is a term

often associated with the broader assimilation process of immigrants in Canada (Li,

2003). Effective integration is marked by immigrants becoming valuable members of

their adopted society. This concept aids in assessing the achievements and challenges

faced by immigrants while also gauging the efficacy of the Canadian immigration policy

(Kaushik & Drolet, 2018). For instance, integration is evident when immigrants obtain

<div align="center">20</div>

and sustain jobs commensurate with their skills, participate in mainstream organizations, commit to community projects, resonate with Canadian fundamental values, and engage in political endeavours, ranging from voting to running for office (Murphy, 2010).

Rather than being a finite destination, settlement and integration represent a continuous journey. This journey varies based on personal backgrounds and does not stick to a set timeline. It requires both the immigrant and the hosting society to adapt, supported by resources and upholding their respective roles (Murphy, 2010). This continuum encompasses addressing immigrants' essential needs, their robust involvement in economic activities and civic duties, and cultivating a feeling of community belonging (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Murphy, 2010).

Pivotal to this journey is the idea of a Welcoming Community. This denotes a society's capacity to include immigrants, refugees, and minority groups (Murphy, 2010). It is about the measures communities take to back the settling and integration of immigrants and racialized groups and institutionalizing culturally adept policies. Crafting such a community demands multifaceted considerations and transformations on various fronts (Murphy, 2010).

2.2.2 The Need for Initial Settlement Support

While the journey of settlement and integration is a long and complex one, the most pressing challenges tend to manifest during the initial phase of immigrant settlement. Richmond and Shields (2005) have delineated this process into four general stages: pre-arrival, initial reception, intermediate, and long-term. A detailed breakdown of these stages will be provided in the subsequent table.

Table 1

Settlement Process Stages

Pre-Arrival	Initial Reception	Intermediate	Long-Term
At this phase, newcomers are gearing up for their relocation to Canada and forming anticipations about their future lives in the country.	Upon arrival, newcomers have pressing requirements like essential information, references, language instruction, and short-term accommodation.	After the initial phase of settlement, newcomers seek stable employment, permanent residences, educational opportunities, and other essentials to firmly establish themselves in the country.	During the extended phase, newcomers start forging a connection and sense of belonging in Canada while maintaining ties to their native countries. This stage is pivotal for achieving deeper levels of integration and inclusion.

Note. The stages of pre-arrival, initial reception, intermediate, and long-term settlement are sourced from Richmond and Shields (2005).

In this crucial initial phase, newcomers grapple with the fundamental tasks of establishing a new life. Danso (2002) emphasizes their struggles, from understanding their rights and responsibilities to building their first connections in a new land. Kirmayer (2011) further explores the emotional spectrum of this journey, suggesting that initial feelings of hope and excitement can sometimes give way to disillusionment, despair, and even depression. This emotional shift can be attributed to factors like severed social ties, emerging feelings of isolation, economic challenges, and the often jarring disconnect between prior expectations and the new reality (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Pandey et al., 2022). In this context, Shergold (2019) underscores the importance of providing robust

and coordinated support to immigrants during these early stages. Such support can significantly enhance their ability to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Therefore, this study zeroes in on the early settlement phase, acknowledging the profound impact it can have on an immigrant's comprehensive journey of integration into Canadian society. By focusing on the challenges experienced during this phase, we aim to facilitate a smoother transition for immigrant women and advocate for a holistic approach to settlement and integration.

The need for settlement support to address the challenges faced by immigrants who have recently arrived in Canada is highlighted by Shields, Drolet and Valenzuela (2016). Given the obstacles newcomers encounter, a robust settlement sector is essential to facilitate their integration into Canadian society (Shields et al., 2016). The concept of settlement encompasses many aspects, including finding housing, employment, education, healthcare services, and adapting to local customs and laws (Omidvar & Richmond, 2005). Social support encompasses a feeling of belonging to a community, where individuals perceive themselves as fitting into their neighbourhoods and have trust in the availability and accessibility of both formal and informal forms of support (e.g., family network, co-workers, friends, ethnic community, or agencies) within the host society (Sethi, 2013).

Stewart and colleagues (2008) further emphasize the importance of social support requirements and interventions in the process of (re)settlement and integration for newcomers, as it is believed to promote better health and alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation (Makwarimba et al., 2010). In this context, settlement services play a crucial

role in assisting immigrants in establishing themselves, fulfilling essential requirements, and actively engaging in various aspects of Canadian life. Additionally, addressing the issue of immigrant settlement has become a significant question of public policy in Canada, as the country faces challenges in fully utilizing the skills and talents of newcomers in the economy and public life (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018).

Settlement services are designed not only for newcomers but also for longer-term resident immigrants, supporting them in settlement, adaptation, and integration into Canadian society (IRCC, 2023). The settlement process is seen as a lifelong journey that extends beyond the first year of arrival or acquiring Canadian citizenship and consists of four general stages: pre-arrival, initial reception, intermediate stage, and long-term (Richmond & Shields, 2005). However, throughout the integration process, immigrants often face structural obstacles, such as challenges with credential recognition, institutional barriers, and discrimination, as mentioned earlier. Coordination difficulties among various levels of government and other societal actors further complicate the immigrant settlement and integration experience (Richmond & Shields, 2005). Therefore, the need for comprehensive settlement support to address the challenges immigrants face during their journey of settling, adapting, and integrating into Canadian society is highlighted. These supports are crucial in promoting successful integration and ensuring immigrants can fully contribute to Canada's social and economic fabric.

2.2.3 Overview of Canadian Settlement Services

The settlement and integration of newcomers pose significant and intricate public policy challenges in Canada, such as and new forms of irregular migration, the growing

reliance on temporary foreign workers, and new debates among governments about the

division of responsibilities for immigration and integration (Béland et al., 2022). Despite

this, Canada maintains one of the most robust immigration programs globally (Braun &

Clément, 2023; Fleras, 2015). In Canada, settlement services fall under the purview of

Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Although provinces have taken

an active role in supporting immigration settlement, the majority of settlement services in

Canada are provided by civil society organizations, commonly known as non-profit

organizations (Praznik & Shields, 2018). These organizations encompass five types of

settlement service providers: a) universal service providers offering services to both

newcomers and Canadian-born individuals, b) immigrant serving provider organizations,

also known as settlement agencies, c) issue-based organizations typically focusing on

employment, language, and health, d) colleges and universities, and e) multicultural non-

governmental organizations (Praznik & Shields, 2018).

Maharaj and Wang (2015) conducted an examination of Canadian formal and

informal services within the context of immigration settlement. The formal programs for

immigration settlement are funded by IRCC and include several initiatives such as the

Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP), Language Instruction for

Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Job Search Workshops (JSWs), Host (a volunteer-

newcomer matching program), Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), and Resettlement

Assistance Programs (RAPs) for refugees. Additionally, provincial and municipal

governments also offer formal services, including official language training (ESL funded

by the province through local school boards), bridging programs, internships,

mentorships, support for temporary foreign workers, and collaborative initiatives involving key agencies.

Private sectors, such as universities and colleges, play a significant role in supporting international students and potential immigrants (Maharaj & Wang, 2015). On the other hand, Maharaj and Wang (2015) emphasize the importance of informal settlement services, which involve social support networks that help newcomers establish connections and assist each other in integrating into local society. However, the distinction between formal and informal settlement services is not clearly defined. The practices and services of both formal and informal types are often interchangeable and mutually influence each other. The dynamic power relations between the state, settlement agencies, and immigrants play a crucial role in recognizing and understanding the significance of formal and informal services in the immigration settlement process (Maharaj & Wang, 2015).

As most settlement services in Canada are offered without cost to recipients, securing funding from various sources is essential to sustain these services. Non-profit organizations play a crucial role in delivering settlement services and receive financial support from both the federal and provincial governments to cater to the specific needs of local communities (Praznik & Shields, 2018). IRCC stands as the primary funding provider for settlement services in Canada. Following IRCC, provincial and territorial governments are the second-largest contributors to funding settlement services. However, the amount of funding and the specific services supported may vary from one province to another. Provincially-funded settlement services are designed to complement IRCC-

funded services and avoid duplications (IRCC, 2018). Apart from the federal and

provincial governments, other entities also contribute to funding settlement services

(Praznik & Shields, 2018). This includes municipal governments, United Way and

community foundations, businesses, and fundraising initiatives. All of these sources play

a significant role in ensuring the continuation and effectiveness of settlement services for

newcomers in Canada (Praznik & Shields, 2018).

2.2.4 Settlement Services for Newcomer Women

Although a network of immigrant service agencies accelerated when the

government contracted with local organizations to deliver settlement services to new

arrivals between 1970 and 1990, several studies during that time highlighted the

inadequacy of services provided to new immigrants, especially racialized women. For

instance, a majority of agencies dedicated to specific ethnic groups were limited in size,

and mainstream agencies did not provide culturally appropriate services to ethnic

communities (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe, 2018; Truelove, 2000). Challenges persisted for

immigrant women, including disadvantages in occupational status and income (Man,

2004; Ng, 1986; Reitz, 2007). Remarkably, there are no programs explicitly aimed at

improving employment opportunities, such as providing occupational training for

immigrant women (Ng, 1986; Shan, 2005). To address these barriers, immigrant service

agencies serving women were established in the late 1900s (Truelove, 2000). These

agencies aimed to secure equality by advocating for social services from the government

and addressing race and gender biases that resulted in oppression towards racialized

women (Truelove, 2000). Subsequently, the Canadian government has implemented

diverse institutional endeavours to address the distinct requirements and obstacles immigrant women encounter. Through the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) department, the government offers customized assistance, resources, and initiatives to facilitate the effective integration of immigrant women into Canadian society, enabling them to actively contribute to the nation's social and economic advancement (IRCC, 2021).

Settlement services encompass a comprehensive range of support measures, including language instruction, job training, social connections, educational and healthcare referrals, childcare facilities, and aid in accessing housing and social assistance (Bhuyan & Schmidt, 2019). Service providers adopt a gender-sensitive approach, tailoring programs to address systemic challenges encountered by newcomer women, including sexism, isolation, poverty, and mental health issues, with the aim of empowering their clients. These women-centred service providers, particularly those sharing similar language or cultural backgrounds, offer emotional support to facilitate the exploration of their clients' identities in the new environment (Bhuyan & Schmidt, 2019). Employing a gender lens is particularly crucial in identifying and addressing gender-based violence, connecting women with legal support, women's shelters, or providing a space to learn about gender-based violence perspectives in Canadian assistance services (Bhuyan & Schmidt, 2019). Furthermore, there are various parenting and family programs in Canada for immigrant mothers, such as Parenting and Family Supportive Counselling (Zhu, 2016). Despite these services provided for immigrant women, there are still challenges and gaps reported. Specifically, the emotional and physical experiences of

immigrant women during the integration and settlement process are often overlooked (Zhu, 2016).

2.2.5 Challenges and Gaps in Settlement Services

The provision of adequate support for immigrant women faces multiple obstacles (Guruge et al., 2015a). Various studies highlight significant deficiencies in settlement services, with Makwarimba et al. (2013) emphasizing the lack of sufficient support in crucial areas like income, education, employment, parenting, and housing. Existing services are often constrained by language barriers, insufficient information, and discriminatory practices. Immigration itself leads to a separation from familiar social networks, resulting in a decline in customary levels of support, such as childcare or assistance with marital issues (Guruge et al., 2015a; Guruge & Humphreys, 2009).

Social support plays a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and reducing isolation for immigrants and refugees (Salami et al., 2019). However, Canada's economic restructuring has adversely affected available services, as cutbacks in areas like citizenship education, welfare, skill retraining, language training, childcare, and healthcare create challenges for newcomers' settlement and integration (Stewart et al., 2008). Settlement programming in Canada is a shared responsibility among the federal government, provincial governments, and the not-for-profit sector, aiming to facilitate newcomers' effective integration into Canadian society (CIC, 2004). Nevertheless, some argue that settlement services should extend beyond immediate needs to facilitate a more profound integration process for immigrant populations (Shields et al., 2016). A study on immigrants and refugees revealed that mainstream social organizations often prioritize the

needs of funders, operating within narrow mandates, and might not effectively address the complexities faced by newcomers (Garang, 2012). This raises concerns about whether settlement agencies are adequately providing necessary services and programs for their users.

Post-migration social support may differ depending on the specific social context of immigrant women (Guruge et al., 2015a). For instance, educated and English-speaking immigrant women might access support that others cannot due to language proficiency. Limited English language skills can lead to dependence on family members proficient in English, restricting social interactions with others (Guruge et al., 2015a). While providing services in a person's native language can eliminate language barriers and foster a more inclusive environment, such services are often difficult to locate. Additionally, individual and contextual barriers, such as lack of transportation and financial constraints, along with systemic issues, like the absence of culturally safe or linguistically appropriate services, can further constrain connections with informal or formal social support systems (Guruge et al., 2011; Guruge & Humphreys, 2009). Immigrant women from racialized backgrounds may face exacerbated challenges due to experiences of social exclusion (Alvi et al., 2012; Guruge & Collins, 2008). Furthermore, newcomers often lack awareness of available support services due to limited outreach, language barriers, cultural differences, complex systems, and information overload. Limited resources and restrictive mandates within the social services sector hinder the provision of comprehensive and sustainable social support. These challenges can lead to insecurity and

stress, especially during the initial settlement months, particularly for refugees arriving

without adequate planning or personal resources (Simich et al., 2005).

2.3 Settling as Immigrant Women

Settling in a new country after migration across international borders can be a

daunting experience, as immigrants encounter various uncertainties. While many

newcomers arrive in Canada with hopes for a better future, the process of migration also

brings forth emotional, social, physical, and cultural challenges as they adapt their beliefs

and values to the new environment (Choudhry, 2001). These challenges are particularly

pronounced for women, who make up half of the yearly newcomers to Canada (Statistics

Canada, 2016a). Their experiences are shaped by the intersection of gender, race, and

other social factors, such as culture, language, and disability, which can evolve over time

(Collins & Magnan, 2018; IRCC, 2018; Tastsoglou & Preston, 2005).

In this section, I critically review the barriers immigrant women encounter in

their dual position as immigrants and women. By examining the complex interplay of

gender, race, culture, language, and disability, I aim to shed light on the unique

challenges immigrant women face during the settlement process in Canada.

2.3.1 Gendered Challenges Faced by Newcomer Women

While some newcomer women express gratitude for the improved gender

equality and opportunities in Western countries (Gupta & Sullivan, 2013; D. J. Smith et

al., 2021), a significant number of women still face gender-based hierarchies,

compounded by factors related to race, ethnicity, and nationality (Graham & Thurston,

2005). During migration, women encounter challenges stemming from unequal

opportunities, particularly during crucial decision-making phases in the migration and

resettlement process, where many immigrate to Canada as dependents of male family

members (Chui et al., 2011). For instance, a considerable portion of women immigrate as

spouses or dependents of male principal applicants (Hudon, 2015), resulting in

diminished autonomy and heightened reliance on their partners (O'Mahony & Donnelly,

2007; Thurston et al., 2013).

Immigration policies play a complex role in influencing a woman's risk

of experiencing abuse in intimate relationships, which becomes a pressing concern for

immigrant and newcomer women in Canada (Alaggia et al., 2009; Jayasuriya-Illesinghe,

2018). Many immigrant women arrive as sponsored spouses through the family class, and

these policies can reinforce gender norms and male dominance, perpetuating

disadvantages and harm to women after migration into Canada (Jayasuriya-Illesinghe,

2018). Research suggests that intimate partner violence experienced by immigrant

women, particularly from traditionally patriarchal societies like China, Portugal, India,

and Sri Lanka, often begins after their arrival in Canada (Barata et al., 2005; Guruge,

2010, 2014; Hyman et al., 2006; MacLeod & Shin, 1990; Tyyskä & Dinshaw, 2009).

Gendered familial roles and the prioritization of their partner's economic

integration can also hinder skilled newcomer women from effectively utilizing their

qualifications in Canada (Phan et al., 2015). Many immigrant women and mothers face

conflicts between work and family life. Global migration tends to negatively impact

highly skilled migrant women, leading to increased domestic responsibilities (Zhu, 2016).

In a new country, immigrant mothers may lack social support and find themselves

restricted to traditional gender roles within the family (Zhu, 2016). Despite playing a significant role in reproducing Canada's next generation and contributing to its culture, economy, institutions, and society, immigrant women's care work remains undervalued and overlooked by the state, market, and society (Meares, 2010; Root, 2014). Immigrant mothers often experience isolation from the local community and encounter difficulties balancing childcare responsibilities with integration into the local labour market (Zhu, 2016). Additionally, gendered roles may limit opportunities to develop new language skills for newcomer mothers staying at home. While many immigrants use non-official languages at home, a higher percentage of female immigrants require language training compared to male immigrants (Government of Canada, 2016).

Moreover, gender disparities exist in the labour market for newcomer women. In comparison to newcomer men, they experience higher rates of unemployment and wage gaps (Hudon, 2015). They are also more likely to accept jobs for which they are overqualified, resulting in the lowest median annual income among all newcomer groups (IRCC, 2018). Data from A Gender-Based Statistical Report indicates that it takes female immigrants longer than their male counterparts to enter the labour force and secure employment (Government of Canada, 2016). Newcomer women who arrive in Canada as dependents of primary applicants often accept survival jobs to support their families while their husbands seek recognition for their foreign qualifications and pursue career employment. Unfortunately, these survival jobs are often characterized by low wages, low status, and lack of benefits and future security (Nichols, 2018; L. Nichols & Tyyskä, 2015).

2.3.2 Racialized Challenges Faced by Newcomer Women

Race is a societal invention meant to classify and differentiate individuals (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009). Conversely, racism operates on various levels, such as personal, systemic, institutional, or societal, perpetuating the mistreatment and prejudice against certain groups, particularly racialized immigrants (Kihika, 2013; Nwoke & Leung, 2020). The concept of race was formulated in a system that justified the oppression and extermination of non-White individuals, promoting the dominance of White people (Dei, 2008; Ma, 2021). Racist beliefs assume inherent and unchanging differences between groups, overlooking the diversity within these groups (Ma, 2021). Such beliefs, rooted in the idea that certain biological traits can be deemed inferior or superior, position racialized groups on a hierarchical scale. This viewpoint neglects societal impacts and views racial disparities as absolute and fixed (Ma, 2021).

In the past two decades, most of Canada's immigrants have come from South and East Asian regions, leading to a more racially diverse population (McKenzie et al., 2016; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2019). Since 1980, there has been a rise in the number of women migrating to Canada. A significant portion of these women are racialized immigrants originating from developing nations, including India, Pakistan, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, and Nigeria (Nwoke & Leung, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2017). Of the immigrant women, 61 percent came from racialized backgrounds, while only 19.3 percent of Canada's entire female population identified the same way (Statistics Canada, 2016a). The immigrant community in Canada is varied, and a combination of individual and socio-cultural factors shapes their experiences. These

factors encompass their country of origin, age, racial background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, settlement location, educational background, language skills, employment situation, financial and socio-economic standing, experiences of discrimination, and language challenges (Hansson et al., 2012; Khan & Khanlou, 2021), which intersect to define the unique immigrant experience (Hansson et al., 2012; McKenzie et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2022).

Racialization often leads to racism. Immigrants who are racialized frequently encounter racism and discrimination (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 2013; Lee & Hadeed, 2009), along with obstacles to economic growth and inclusion (Creese, 2011; Nwoke & Leung, 2020). When gender intersects with immigrant status, the barriers to fully participating in mainstream society increase (Hogarth, 2011). The identities of racialized immigrant women are understood to encompass a diverse array of intersecting elements such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, Indigenous ancestry, religion, social status, body size, and both physical and mental capabilities (Arthur, 2019; Kassan & Sinacore, 2016). Immigration can amplify women's vulnerabilities, making them more reliant on their husbands, romantic partners, sponsors, employers, immediate or extended families, and their respective ethnic or racial communities (Erez, 2000; Hogarth, 2011). Moreover, women of racialized backgrounds earn 47 percent less than their non-racialized male counterparts, and immigrant women have historically made 59 percent less than non-immigrant men (Statistics Canada, 2016a). As a result, racialized immigrant women in Canada likely face the largest wage disparity (Nwoke & Leung, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2016a). These challenges, whether faced individually or collectively, along with

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linguistic nuances, accent-based discrimination, and language obstacles, can negatively influence physical health, mental well-being, and psychosocial health during the settlement process. Racism is not only a unique factor affecting health, but it also underlies other health determinants like poverty and insufficient housing. The stress induced by racism has a clear negative effect on health (Brondolo et al., 2009; Nwoke & Leung, 2020; Veenstra, 2009). These factors can also impact their experiences with public services (Creese, 2011; Hankivsky, 2011; Nwoke & Leung, 2020).

Linguistic capital refers to the cultural value attributed to certain accents or ways of speaking. Individuals with accents considered prestigious or upper-class are often granted more legitimacy and are seen as more credible compared to those with less recognized accents (Bourdieu, 1977). Creese (2011) highlights how accent discrimination is prevalent among Canadian employers, with African accents in particular being viewed as indicators of incompetence, regardless of the individual's actual qualifications or achievements. Language is not just a means of communication but also a tool of power. It can influence an individual's integration into social circles, identity formation, and access to knowledge (Nwoke & Leung, 2020). Furthermore, language barriers can exacerbate racial bias in Canada. Newcomers who do not speak English or French might be perceived as less valuable than those who are fluent in one of the official languages (Grondin, 2005). Immigrants unable to speak the dominant language of their new home, such as Canada, are often viewed as outsiders, leading to their reduced participation in societal roles and decision-making processes. These further isolates and marginalizes them (Grondin, 2005; Nwoke & Leung, 2020)

2.3.3 Settlement Experiences of Newcomers as Foreign-Born Women

Immigrant women embarking on life in Canada present unique hurdles as they navigate new social relationships, group affiliations, language learning, and access to essential resources (Smith et al., 2021). Their resettlement experiences in Canada are influenced by the social, political, and cultural contexts, intersecting with systems of power across various aspects of life. However, Canada's existing systems of power predominantly reflect a Eurocentric perspective, lacking the multicultural framework and sensitivity needed to effectively address the needs of non-European immigrants (Tator et al., 2006). Premji annd Shakya (2017) explored racialized immigrant women's experiences in Toronto. They found impacts on their physical and mental health (such as social isolation), along with difficulty finding employment due to rejection of their foreign credentials, discrimination by employers, language and communication barriers, citizenship or immigration status, lack of knowledge of or access to professional networks, and limited access to services (L. J. Nichols, 2018).

Immigrant women not only experience higher rates of non-employment and a wider pay gap compared to immigrant men but also face similar challenges when compared to Canadian-born women (Government of Canada, 2016). Immigrant women are more likely to be unemployed than their Canadian-born counterparts (Lamba & Krahn, 2003; L. J. Nichols, 2018) or underemployed in traditional female jobs, often part-time, earning lower incomes than Canadian-born women (Boyd, 1984). Recent immigrant women of core working age had an unemployment rate of 14.7 percent, compared to 5.2 percent among the educated Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada, 2016a). These

findings and statistics are concerning, particularly considering that newcomer women are generally well-educated. For instance, in 2011, 27.7 percent of newcomer women had attained a university certificate or degree at the bachelor's level or above, compared to 19.2 percent of Canadian-born women (Hudon, 2015; Nichols, 2018). This remains true despite their having more education than Canadian-born women and living in cities with more job opportunities (L. J. Nichols, 2018; Premji et al., 2014).

Immigrant women experience particular difficulty obtaining employment in their field of specialization (Sinacore et al., 2011; S. C. Walsh & Brigham, 2007). Nonrecognition of foreign credentials and demands for Canadian experience perpetuate unemployment, underemployment, and deskilled labour among foreign-born women (Man, 2004). Obtaining Canadian certification proved challenging for foreign-born women who faced competing demands of contributing to family income, fulfilling domestic responsibilities, and advancing their careers (L. J. Nichols, 2018; Suto, 2009). Often, internationally educated women accepted lower-paid employment while trying to complete their recertification (Phillion, 2003; J. P. Walsh, 2011). Women reported having to conceal their professional skills and work experience in order to accept lower-paying employment outside their careers (Shan, 2009, 2015). Additionally, low language proficiency kept foreign-born women in low-skilled and dangerous jobs (Fuller, 2011) and inhibited access to information about their rights concerning workplace health and safety (Premji et al., 2008; Nichol, 2018).

Newcomer women encounter intricate obstacles in obtaining public services, encompassing financial and transportation barriers, language and communication

difficulties, disparities in services compared to their previous experiences, and a lack of culturally competent care (Ganann et al., 2019). Recent studies indicate that compared to Canadian-born women, newcomer women are significantly less likely to receive routine cancer screenings (Bacal et al., 2019; Lofters et al., 2019), face a higher risk of postpartum depression (Daoud et al., 2019), and encounter greater challenges in accessing care during the postpartum period (Ganann et al., 2019). Isolation is also prevalent among newcomer women (Meadows et al., 2001), which can negatively affect their mental health (Graham & Thurston, 2005). For instance, Zelkowitz and colleagues (2004) found that pregnant newcomer women who reported less social support and satisfaction with their social support were more likely to experience symptoms of depression. Despite facing complex challenges in accessing mental health services (Crooks et al., 2011), the Mental Health Commission of Canada (McKenzie et al., 2016) reported that, overall, newcomers have lower rates of mental health problems than the general population. However, due to conflicting research results and the limited validity of mental health assessments with diverse populations (Wong et al., 2013), further research is necessary to gain a better understanding of the intricate mental health challenges among newcomer women.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In my deep exploration of the literature surrounding immigrant women's experiences in Canada, the intricate nuances of their lives became evident. It became clear that these women are far from being a homogeneous group; rather, they possess diverse identities influenced by factors like nationality, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status (Tastsoglou, 2019). The literature consistently revealed that many of their challenges arise from intersecting forms of discrimination (Greenwood et al., 2017). For instance, an immigrant woman of colour might grapple with challenges not only linked to her immigrant status but also intertwined with her gender and racial identity (Liu, 2019).

Given the patterns identified in the literature, I sought a theoretical framework capable of capturing the depth and breadth of these experiences. Intersectional feminism surfaced as an apt choice. The foundational principle of intersectional feminism lies in understanding the intersections and overlaps of various oppressions (Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). This resonates strongly with the multi-dimensional experiences of immigrant women as presented in existing research (Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). This approach does more than just skim the complexities; it delves into understanding systemic issues, encompassing various intersecting identities (Tastsoglou, 2019). Thus, the extensive insights from the literature compelled me to adopt an intersectional approach. To comprehensively and authentically address my research question, intersectional feminism presented itself as the most fitting theoretical framework. Adopting this perspective ensures that my research will not only align with the realities of immigrant women but it

will also provide a framework for understanding their experiences, making significant contributions to both academic discourse and practical solutions.

Feminism is a well-known ideology for achieving gender equality for many women, but intersectional feminism is relatively less well-known. *Intersectionality* and *intersectional feminism* are the terms that encompass overlapping discriminatory impacts based on gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, nationality, ability, socio-economic status, social class, citizenship, etc. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights advocator, coined the term intersectionality. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term intersectionality as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (Alani, 2022). By adding this concept of intersectionality to feminism, the framework comprehensively includes women of all races, identities, religions, and economic statuses and grasps the intricacies of these disparities and their interconnections within a particular context. (Taylor, 2016). Though various types of feminism exist, this project is informed by an intersectional feminist lens as theorized by feminists of colour to understand the intersecting experiences of newcomer women within a larger socio-legal and political context.

In this theoretical framework chapter, I provide an overview of an intersectional lens as a theoretical framework to apply in understanding racialized immigrant women's experiences. In the first section, I describe how intersectional feminism emerged as an analysis tool, including overviews of feminist theory and intersectionality to understand the conceptual basis of the theoretical approach in this study. In the second section, I

discuss how intersectionality within my research can provide an analysis of how immigration status, gender, race/ethnicity, and language and culture differences intersect to shape newcomer women's experiences during their settlement in a new country.

3.1 Intersectional Feminism

3.1.1 Feminist Theory

Overview of Feminist Theory

Feminist theory emerged as a response to biased approaches and a critique of objectivity by recognizing that gender is a hierarchically constructed social composition category in a particular society (Hesse-Biber, 2007) that intersects systems of oppression and marginalization based on social identities (Hunnicutt, 2009). Gender inequalities function on individual experiences, levels of identities, and interpersonal relations, but they are mainly embedded in social structures and institutions (Tastsoglou, 2019).

The ultimate goal of feminist research is to pursue social change by emphasizing social and gender injustices (Belenky et al., 1986; Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist theorists employed new knowledge systems instead of traditional frameworks that depend on positivist dualism and exclude emotions from research (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist research addresses the historical exclusion of women and adopts women's embodied knowledge and lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. It views the influence of women's social location and subjective experiences rather than considering reality as a single and objective entity (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Feminist Analysis in Migration Studies

Gender analysis was initially integrated into migration studies in the 1970s and early 1980s, viewing gender as a fixed individual-level category determined at birth (Nawyn, 2010). This approach compared women and men based on binary male and female variables, providing a basic understanding of gender differences in migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000; Indra, 1999; Kofman, 2000). Although it improved upon studies that neglected gender differences or only focused on men and generalized their findings to all migrants, it still had limitations (Nawyn, 2010). For instance, up to this point, studies have not thoroughly engaged a diverse set of immigrant women in analyzing their experiences through a specifically gendered and feminist lens (Yakushko & Morgan-Consoli, 2014). As the field evolved into the mid-and late 1980s, feminist migration scholars shifted their focus from studying women to studying gender as a system of relations influenced by migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). This transition is exemplified in Morokvasic's (1984) article, which explored women's experiences within the context of gender relations systems. Her theoretical framework continued to guide feminist migration scholars through the rest of the decade (Nawyn, 2010).

More recent scholarship has progressed to viewing gender as a constitutive element of immigration, exploring how it permeates various practices, identities, and institutions implicated in migration (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011). This interdisciplinary research conceptualizes gender as a practice or ideology rather than a fixed biological category and recognizes its role in shaping power relations within families, communities, and societies (Nawyn, 2010). Scholars draw heavily on gender relations theory,

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particularly focusing on how gender relations change due to migration and settlement. Connell's theory of gender relations provides a way to understand the fluidity of gender power relations under the influence of macro-structures like global labour markets and state regimes (Connell, 2009; Nawyn, 2010). Feminist migration scholars have linked normative gendered expectations to macro-structural forces and individual agency, demonstrating how shifting gender relations within families have opened up new opportunities for women to migrate and led to new female migration flows. Additionally, some studies have shown that men's and women's roles in migrant households are not fixed but rather change with the evolving socio-economic contexts of sending and receiving countries (Menjívar, 2000; Nawyn, 2010).

3.1.2 Intersectionality

The Emergence of Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality emerged as one of the tools claiming a more egalitarian and democratic society to answer the issues of social justice struggles (Chun et al., 2013) and multiple oppressions in the twentieth century (Bilge, 2013). Before the term intersectionality was used, the definition and roles of feminism were challenged by Black female scholars based on the assumption that white middle-class women could not represent all women (Coleman, 2019). In 1989, American civil rights advocator Kimberlé Crenshaw began to use the term "intersectionality" in her essay to express the barriers faced by Black women as race and gender intersect.

Crenshaw likens the concept of intersectionality to a traffic intersection; when cars from different directions collide at an intersection, it is hard to distinguish what the

cause is, but a car accident can occur (S. Smith, 2013). Likewise, the barriers that Black women face are caused by not only racism or sexism but a combination of different discriminatory factors. In Crenshaw's essays, the notion of intersectionality explains how women marginalized due to the intersection of gender and race are affected in analysis and politics (Crenshaw, 1989; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). Initially, the perspective of intersectionality was used to describe Black women's experiences of discrimination, which were ignored by mainstream feminism and brought to attention the anti-discrimination laws that had not protected their rights (Adewunmi, 2014). Intersectionality was popular in feminist research as a way to understand how women are located within oppressive systems because of race, but now it has been increasingly applied to research social phenomena across various fields (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019; Mattsson, 2014).

Definition of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a systematic approach to understanding marginalized people's experiences (Dill & Zambrana, 2009) by analyzing gender, race/ethnicity, and social class as complicated and intertwined categories of social structures and systems of oppression (Davis, 2008; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). The notion of intersectionality originated from Crenshaw's essay, which delves into how the interplay between gender and race/ethnicity affects the American labour market. It underscores how Black women positioned at the crossroads of gender and race/ethnicity face sidelining in both analytical discussion and political arenas (Crenshaw, 1989; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018). At that time, Crenshaw perceived that protection for women focused on White women and protection for people

of colour focused on Black men. Black women's lived experiences stressed that sexism or racism should be discussed within a different concept instead, not only focusing on race, gender, and class privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). According to Crenshaw, using a one-dimensional lens renders the experiences of Black women invisible because they encounter discrimination that can be connected to and opposed to the experiences of White women and Black men. (Crenshaw, 1989). Since socially constructed categories are not additive or multiplicative in this lens, the realities of Black women's experiences are not simply added to sexism and racism experienced by White women and Black men (Crenshaw, 1989). The intersection of these categories results in a unique social position of non-White women by creating multi-dimensional experiences based on mutually constituted social inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Application of Intersectionality

The notion of intersectionality contributed to feminist and anti-racist theory by shifting theoretical focus from intentional prejudice toward systemic dynamics and institutional power (Chun et al., 2013). Initially, intersectionality encompassed gender, race, and class; however, scholars suggested it is not enough to consider just these three to analyze oppression. Therefore, more constructs were contemplated to explain how various societal effects could intersect with people's identities and how these multiply their difficulties (Andersen, 2005). As a response, not only gender, race/ethnicity, and class, but sexuality, skin colour, nationality, culture, ability, age, origin, sedentariness, religion, regionality, wealth, stage of social development, weight, accent, gestures, and

intonations have been proposed by social scholars to identify characteristics of differences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Lutz, 2014).

The intersectional theoretical framework is employed in diverse ways by differently situated analysts in different fields of social sciences. Examining the socio-cultural position of underprivileged groups has become an increasingly significant area of research within the intersectionality framework (Bürkner, 2012; Verloo, 2006). Intersectional analysis should emphasize situational discrimination, often overlooked in structuralist inequality concepts, while also prioritizing the complex interplay of various categories of inequality across analytical dimensions (Bürkner, 2012; Winker & Degele, 2015). For instance, the intersectional lens has been applied to research regarding the healthcare system in Canada for minority populations, people experiencing race-related issues and other systemic inequality (e.g., Hankivsky et al., 2010; Pauly et al., 2009; Van Herk et al., 2011; Viruell-Fuentes et al., 2012; Weber & Fore, 2007); sexuality and queer studies (Lee & Brotman, 2013; Meyer, 2012; Sadika et al., 2020); exploring sex worker's experiences of discrimination and violence (e.g., Ham, 2020; Logie et al., 2011); analyzing immigration policies/law and immigrant workers' experiences (e.g., (Fitzsimmons et al., 2020; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Kofman, 2014; Liu, 2019).

Intersectionality has become a prominent analytical approach in social work research as in other fields. Through this approach, people in the social work field understand complex identities and how social structures affect people's living conditions (Fahlgren, 2013; Mehrotra, 2010; Y. Murphy, 2009). Social work scholars use intersectionality as a useful analytical tool to sensitively understand oppression and

dynamic power relations within/among groups (Mattsson, 2014). With ontological and epistemological positions, social work scholars are demanded to develop and apply various intersectional approaches to analyze the interconnection of multiple oppressions and identities in their academic work.

3.1.3 Intersectional Feminism

History of Feminist Intersectionality

In the late 1900s, feminist theorists influenced by post-movements—such as postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism—raised the problem of analyzing various experiences and characteristics of women by reducing them into one viewpoint (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Feminist scholars questioned whose experiences are included and not included, rejected the concept of a universal and essential experience, and emphasized the diversity of women's lives. This wave led to 'difference research,' which focuses on challenging the production of dominant forms of knowledge and including the voices of those traditionally excluded and at the margins of the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2007). During this period, "intersectional feminism" emerged with criticism that White feminists reflect every woman's experience and use a homogeneous and essential category of women as they began to expose the dominant knowledge production and question the interrelationship of differences. Black feminists rejected inappropriate analysis of White feminists focusing solely on gender (Crenshaw, 1989).

Understanding of Feminist Intersectionality

The feminist intersectional perspective operates under the assumption that women and men cannot be simply categorized as homogenous groups with uniform

experiences. Instead, they are distinguished by various power dynamics, unequal social standings, and the identifications that arise from these differences. These power relations, social positions, and identifications exist within a broader and constantly changing matrix of intersecting structural inequalities and oppressions, particularly within the global capitalist context (Tastsoglou, 2019). Over three decades, feminist intersectional theorizing has evolved since Kimberle Crenshaw's influential speech and law review article in 1989, which highlighted the need to move beyond a simplistic "single-axis analysis" and introduced the term "intersectionality" in the realms of feminist and anti-racist theories (Tastsoglou, 2019). Since then, an extensive and continually expanding body of literature has come to understand intersectionality within the field of social science research.

Choo and Ferree (2010) highlight the overlooked potential of intersectional analysis in robust research—especially in understanding stratification in a non-hierarchical manner and recognizing the intertwined nature of racial, gender, and class processes. This insight can guide sociologists to address these issues more effectively in their work (Choo & Ferree, 2010). Hill Collins (1990) introduced the concept of a *matrix of domination*, which involves intersecting axes of race, class, and gender (Collins, 1990). She later expanded this to include ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, and nationality, emphasizing their reciprocal construction (Collins, 2010, 2015). In 2015, she characterized intersectionality as a *knowledge project* that focuses on power relations and social inequalities. It operates as a field of study situated within the power relations it examines, serving as an analytical strategy and a *critical praxis* (Collins, 2015). Haraway

(1988) criticized the detachment of intersectionality from its original *situated and embodied* character in Black and Third-World feminist theory. Contemporary neo-liberal academic and government environments often apply it as a methodological approach to diversity research, leading to concerns about its loss of critical potential (Salem, 2018). Some argue that revitalizing intersectionality requires infusing it with a solid Marxist feminist and historical materialist analysis (Tastsoglou, 2019).

Furthermore, intersectionality is referred to as a *travelling theory* that has been removed from its original *situated and embodied* context in Black and Third-World feminist theory (Haraway, 2020) due to its adoption by contemporary neo-liberal academic and government circles for diversity research purposes. This transformation has led to concerns about the loss of intersectionality's critical potential (Salem, 2018). However, proponents argue that by infusing the theory with a strong Marxist feminist and historical materialist analysis, its critical potential can be revitalized (Tastsoglou, 2019). In Carbado's social science research, intersectionality is characterized as highly flexible, capable of traversing various disciplines, scholarly subfields, and diverse research methodologies while being applicable across national boundaries and diverse institutional contexts (Carbado et al., 2013; Marfelt, 2016). She also sees intersectionality as an ongoing work in progress, encouraging researchers and activists to continuously broaden its application to understanding the struggles of marginalized and excluded groups fighting for social justice (Carbado et al., 2013). Intersectionality possesses an activist orientation or social movement dimension akin to feminist theory. Although not all users of intersectionality identify as activists, the concept itself is driven by the imperative of

promoting social change (Carbado et al., 2013). This aligns with Hill Collins' view of intersectionality as a *critical praxis that informs social justice projects* (Collins, 2015).

Intersectional Feminist Approach

Intersectional feminism is a theoretical approach that delves into the intricate interplay of multiple and interconnected forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Hankivsky et al., 2010; Nash, 2008). The ontological perspective of intersectional feminism rejects the reduction of individuals to simplistic, one-dimensional categories and acknowledges that social identities are contextually specific, socially constructed and shaped by historical and social locations (Crenshaw, 1989; Dhamoon, 2011).

Central to intersectional feminism is the examination of experiences influenced and maintained by hierarchical power structures and processes (Colfer et al., 2018; Dhamoon, 2011; Hankivsky, 2014). Drawing on Foucault's (1991) ideas, the concept of power extends beyond just the privileged few; rather, it pervades various systems and narratives (Colfer et al., 2018). This pervasive influence of power contributes to the formation of ranking and reinforcement of societal categories, such as the notion of *race*, along with the racialization process experienced by different groups and individuals, exposing them to acts of racism (Colfer et al., 2018). Moreover, power is recognized as relational, wherein individuals can find themselves in positions of both empowerment and marginalization depending on the social context (Collins, 1990). At the individual level, power dynamics operate within interpersonal relationships, wherein one party exercises authority over the other (Weber, 2006). Meanwhile, at the structural level, power

manifests through legislation, policies, and laws that perpetuate hierarchical structures that favour the dominant group while marginalizing subordinate groups (Weber, 2006).

Therefore, narratives concerning identity, difference, and power are intricately intertwined. Intersectional feminism highlights the interconnectedness of identification, differentiation, and domination, recognizing their dependence on one another to operate effectively (Dhamoon, 2011). This interconnectedness is reinforced by the notion that systems of oppression cannot be fully achieved without the existence of gender and racial hierarchies and other forms of discrimination like class exploitation, sexism, and heterosexism (Fellows & Razack, 1997).

Intersectional research represents a crucial and transformative approach to generating knowledge, as it actively seeks to reform social structures (Gopaldas, 2013). By aligning with the objectives of feminist research, this framework aims to achieve a more comprehensive and intricate comprehension of identity that surpasses simple categorical divisions (Nash, 2008). In direct opposition to conventional knowledge production methods, an intersectional approach amplifies the voices of individuals with diverse social positions, particularly women of colour, thus prompting novel inquiries (Weber & Fore, 2007). The primary goal of this framework is to address the interconnectedness of social categories and markers of difference while emphasizing social change as an essential component of the knowledge-production process (Weber & Fore, 2007).

The evolution of intersectional feminism, rooted in the late 1900s, has reshaped understanding of the diverse realities and challenges women face. Scholars like Kimberle

Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins deepened this framework, emphasizing intersectionality's broader applicability and the multifaceted nature of oppression. It serves as a pivotal lens to understand power dynamics, societal categorizations, and the interplay of forms of oppression. As a research approach, intersectional feminism challenges conventional knowledge paradigms, emphasizes marginalized voices, and promotes a comprehensive grasp of identity. In essence, this framework is not just descriptive but transformative, aiming for societal change. This chapter underscores the enduring relevance of intersectional feminism in contemporary research.

3.2 Immigrant Women and Feminist Intersectionality

As a country that welcomes many immigrants, Canada has maintained an interest in newcomers' settlement and integration experiences. Past studies on migration were conducted to identify generalizable findings and broader patterns (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). Recognizing general patterns in migration research can be valuable, provided that these patterns consider the power dynamics between various groups. However, the pursuit of solely generalizable findings may result in the loss of various contextual understandings and failure to recognize how categories of difference (i.e., gender, class, race/ethnicity, age, ability, nationality) intersect and shape meaning (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). Although, in the social work field, scholarly efforts have predominantly concentrated on addressing matters related to employment access, equality, social and occupational mobility, identity, citizenship, and disparities in migration modes and outcomes among diverse groups of migrants (Ressia, 2013), past research has abstained from using intersectionality as a main analytical framework (Kaushik & Walsh, 2018).

Recent scholars have argued that an intersectional feminist theoretical framework can be highly beneficial, especially in highlighting that both migrants and receiving societies are not homogeneous entities (Savaş & Dutt, 2023). This approach recognizes the diverse and multifaceted nature of individuals and communities involved in migration processes, acknowledging the various intersecting social identities and experiences that shape their lives.

Intersectional Feminist Lens in Immigration Studies

The intersection of gender and migration has faced historical challenges, finding itself in an ambiguous position as migration studies primarily focused on a male migrant model while gender studies tended to associate migrant women solely with ethnic studies (Tastsoglou, 2019). Over time, scholarship on gender and migration emerged in the latter part of the 20th century and has since experienced significant transformations. Initially, research adopted an approach referred to as "add-women-and-stir" in the early 1970s, but it gradually shifted towards a more comprehensive theoretical emphasis on gender (Tastsoglou, 2019). Gender was reconceptualized as a relational and central organizing category throughout the entire migration process, influencing migration decisions, circumstances, and outcomes (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kofman, 2000; Willis, 2007).

Scholars began exploring gender divisions and inequalities influenced by other intersecting social factors such as race/ethnicity, class, citizenship status, religion, sexuality, national origin, age, and more (Bonifacio, 2012; Tastsoglou, 2019). Pessar (1999) published an article reviewing "how migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy" (Pessar, 1999). He argued that migrant women contend with the

hegemony of Western culture and a capitalist labour market (Pessar, 1999). This argument underscores the reality that women often face the challenges of dealing with shrinking kinship networks and the loss of family and community support more significantly than men do following migration (Cheung & Phillimore, 2017; Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). Around the same time, Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality by exploring Black women's experiences of discrimination in the labour market. It influenced research about immigrant women's labour markets and provided intersectional analysis tools to describe the relationship between immigration status and gender (Leung et al., 2019).

Despite the need for awakenings of intersectional approach from the 1980s, migration research began to explicitly address gender from the mid-to-late 2000s (Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). Deaux and Greenwood (2013) argued that understanding gender in the context of immigration necessitates an intersectional approach, as a simple analysis of individual effects will not suffice to grasp the intricate lived experiences of migrants. Aligning with this perspective, Greenwood (2017) provided evidence from Ireland, showing that immigrant women of colour reported facing significantly more overt discrimination compared to white immigrant women (Greenwood et al., 2017). In addition, Settles and Buchanan (2014) emphasized that migrants can have positive psychological outcomes depending on how they make sense of their multiple positionalities within their contexts. This highlights the need for a nuanced and intersectional understanding of the complexities of gender, race, and other identities in the experiences of migrants.

As such, in the last two decades, an intersectional understanding of gender has become pivotal in examining transnational migration experiences, processes, outcomes, and institutional contexts (Tastsoglou, 2019). In this context, gender serves as a crucial entry point to understanding the intricate interplay of various social divisions that shape identities and experiences within migration. Maintaining a feminist analysis of migration, wherein gender is recognized as a structuring category for *migrants* rather than an *additional* characteristic, remains both pertinent and necessary (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006).

Newcomer Women Via an Intersectional Feminist Framework

As a researcher who identifies as a newcomer woman experiencing intersectional barriers, I am acutely aware of the multi-dimensional challenges that define the migration and settlement journey. The confluence of my personal experiences with the historical and prevailing academic discourse on immigration cemented my belief in the paramount importance of adopting an intersectional feminist lens for this study. Grounded in this intersectional feminist framework, my research delves deep into the lived experiences of immigrant women.

Intersectional feminist approaches play a vital role in comprehending the intricate power dynamics that influence immigrants' lives, encompassing both their present experiences and historical relations that led to this point (Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). By applying these approaches to analyze institutional and political factors that influence policies and the treatment of immigrant women, I gain insights into the mechanisms that perpetuate or worsen inequities. Moreover, adopting an intersectional feminist

perspective allows me to explore new possibilities and envision practices that can foster more equitable and just futures for immigrants by emphasizing both local and global systemic shortcomings that restrict women's autonomy (Kirkendall & Dutt, 2023). These perspectives offer a lens through which we can challenge existing power structures and work towards creating more inclusive and compassionate solutions for those who have been displaced and marginalized.

The intersectional feminist theoretical framework is applicable to my research because it is difficult to understand immigrant women's unique experiences through a single-axis framework. Immigrant women's experiences are shaped by their specific positions within the matrix of domination, where various intersecting dimensions of power, privilege, and oppression intersect rather than a single form of social stratification. The intersectional feminist lens can allow for a more nuanced understanding of how multiple systems of oppression intersect and their relation to people's positionality to shape the complexities of immigrant women's experience at the initial stage of settlement, providing a comprehensive and contextualized analysis of their unique experiences.

For example, although I am a newcomer woman with international student status, I understand through the framework of intersectionality that settling in Canada will differ significantly from newcomer women who do not have school experiences or similar education. Utilizing an intersectional feminist theoretical framework in my research allows me to investigate how immigrant women perceive the distinct obstacles they face when arriving and settling in Canada within the context of settlement services for newcomers. Understanding these different experiences can offer valuable insights to

support future newcomer women adjusting to a new society. Crenshaw (1991)

underscores that women of colour are situated differently in economic, social, and

political realms, and existing reforms at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels often fail to

consider an intersectional perspective, thus falling short in meeting the needs of women

of colour.

In my research, I apply intersectionality to question the structures, processes, and

policies that perpetuate unequal opportunities for immigrant women from non-European

and non-English speaking countries due to patriarchal norms and racialization. Previous

studies indicate that the intersecting factors of not only race and gender but also racialized

immigrant women's embodied identities and personal histories contribute to challenges

such as housing discrimination, hate crimes, economic disparities, and gendered practices

in cultures that significantly disadvantage and disempower immigrant women in many

different ways (Chun et al., 2013; Saito, 1998). Hence, employing an intersectional

feminist analysis becomes essential to comprehensively grasp the reasons behind barriers

faced by immigrant women in (re)settlement, to identify these barriers within immigration

services, and to devise effective solutions to address them. To truly understand, address,

and ultimately dismantle the barriers immigrant women face, I decided to recognize and

analyze them in their entirety via this intersectional feminist framework rather than in

isolated fragments. Therefore, utilizing an intersectional feminist lens in my thesis is not

just an academic choice but a deeply personal and essential one. It allows for a more

empathetic, comprehensive, and ultimately transformative exploration of the experiences

of immigrant women during their early post-migration phase.

Application of the Intersectional Feminist Framework in The Study

Intersectional feminism, with its foundational emphasis on understanding and amplifying the voices of those at the intersections of various oppressions (Dhamoon & Hankivsky, 2011), finds synergy with the principles underlying community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR, in its essence, prioritizes the voices and experiences of community members, allowing them to be not just subjects but active participants and collaborators in research about their own lives and communities (Vaughn, 2015). This collaborative ethos resonates with intersectional feminism's advocacy for working across different identity markers to bring about systemic change. Moreover, both frameworks are anchored in the pursuit of social justice. Intersectional feminism seeks to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression (Carbado et al., 2013; Marfelt, 2016), while CBPR aims to produce research that directly and tangibly benefits the community, thereby furthering informed advocacy and promoting social justice (Salma & Giri, 2021).

Similarly, arts-based research (ABR) aligns with intersectional feminism in its methodological approach. Recognizing that experiences at the intersections of oppression are nuanced and multifaceted, intersectional feminism underscores the necessity of diverse mediums for effective expression (Salem, 2018). ABR meets this need by leveraging art as a primary medium for research, providing participants with a means to articulate their experiences in ways that traditional language-based methods might inadequately capture (Clover, 2011; Skop, 2016). This artistic engagement not only allows for an alternative presentation of narratives that might challenge dominant societal views (Finley, 2008), but it also empowers participants. Just as intersectional feminism

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empowers individuals at different intersections, giving them agency to define and

navigate their experiences, ABR offers tools and platforms that foster self-expression and

agency among participants (Fathi, 2022). In weaving these methodologies into the

tapestry of intersectional feminist research, it becomes evident that they share a common

commitment: uplifting marginalized voices, advocating for meaningful social change, and

promoting practices that are both collaborative and inclusive (Fathi, 2022)

Intersectional feminism and a photovoice method that I use for the data collection

of this research can intersect in profound ways within the realm of research. At its core,

intersectional feminism emphasizes the nuanced experiences of those situated at the

crossroads of multiple marginalized groups (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This perspective

underscores the significance of recognizing and voicing the unique challenges and

strengths borne out of the interplay of race, gender, class, and various other identity

markers (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Collins, 2010). Similarly, photovoice equips participants

with the means to visually encapsulate their lived realities, creating tangible records of

both individual and community strengths and concerns (Castleden et al., 2008). Beyond

mere documentation, both frameworks champion the promotion of critical dialogue.

Intersectional feminism perpetually invites discourse on the intricacies of intertwined

oppressions, enriching the understanding of multifarious identity facets (Salem, 2018).

Photovoice complements this by instigating discussions based on photographic evidence,

facilitating dialogue that delves deep into personal and communal matters, and promoting

enriched comprehension of the subjects at hand (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009).

With intersectional feminism as the guiding framework, the analysis of data sheds light on the multiple dimensions of oppression that immigrant women navigate (Collins, 1999, 2015; Tastsoglou, 2019). These range from systemic issues in settlement services to deeply ingrained societal biases based on gender, race, and immigrant status. Interpreting findings through this lens, the research underscores the nuances and intricacies of their experiences, highlighting the urgent need for multifaceted solutions that recognize and address these challenges (Carbado et al., 2013).

In essence, melding the intersectional feminist theory with CBPR and ABR methodologies, this research lays bare the stratified challenges confronting immigrant women. Yet, it does not pause there; it lauds their tenacity and spirit. It beckons policymakers and service facilitators to re-envision and recalibrate systems, ensuring that these women find robust, encompassing support (Carbado et al., 2013) as they chart their courses in their new Canadian homes. To better grasp how the tools used to amplify these women's narratives, the subsequent chapter delves into the specific methodologies and methods employed.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

In the first section of this chapter, a comprehensive exploration is presented

regarding the concepts and underlying principles of community-based participatory

research and arts-based research methodologies, with a specific focus on their

significance in investigating and analyzing the unique experiences of immigrant women.

These research paradigms are particularly relevant when examining the multifaceted

experiences of immigrant women, as they offer inclusive and participatory frameworks

that prioritize the voices and perspectives of individuals within the community under

study. Then, the second section elucidates the process of data collection and analysis.

This study adopts the photovoice method as the research method. This chapter outlines

the employed research design, highlighting the rationale behind choosing the photovoice

approach to gather and interpret data. This method empowers participants to utilize

photography for self-expression and storytelling and provides a means to articulate their

lived experiences and convey nuanced emotions.

4.1 Research Approach

4.1.1 Community-Based Participatory Research

Principles of Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-based participatory research (CBPR), an overarching concept,

encompasses various research designations, such as action research, participatory

research, participatory action research, and collaborative inquiry (Castleden et al., 2008;

Kauper-Brown & Seifer, 2006). These terms are sometimes used interchangeably by

scholars due to their shared foundational goal of effecting social change (Minkler &

Wallerstein, 2003). The origins of CBPR can be traced back to the twentieth-century

social and political movements. In the 1940s, Kurt (Lewin, 1946) introduced the concept

as a means to address issues of social justice and challenge the notion of researcher

objectivity (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Building on Lewin's ideas, Paulo (Freire,

1970) further developed the concept by emphasizing research and education for critical

consciousness, which centred on community-based identification of problems and

solutions (Castleden et al., 2008; Tandon, 2002).

Kenneth C. Hergenrather (2009) explains the process of CBPR, which typically

involves several interconnected eight stages. Firstly, it begins with the identification of a

research question that aligns with the community's needs and interests. Secondly, a

thorough assessment is conducted to understand and recognize the strengths, assets, and

concerns present within the community. Subsequently, priorities or specific targets for the

research are carefully selected based on the findings from the assessment. To effectively

proceed with the research, a comprehensive research plan is developed, incorporating

appropriate data collection methodologies. This plan is then implemented, encompassing

data collection and subsequent analysis. The interpretation of the study findings follows,

which involves in-depth analysis and contextual understanding of the collected data. The

knowledge derived from the research is disseminated to relevant stakeholders, ensuring

that the community members and other key actors are well-informed about the study's

outcomes. Finally, the research findings are applied to develop actionable plans aimed at

promoting the well-being of both individuals and the community at large. These action

plans are designed to address the identified priorities and contribute to positive social change and community development (Hergenrather et al., 2009).

CBPR approaches distinguish themselves from other research methodologies by striving to achieve equitable involvement of community partners in the research process. They actively draw upon the knowledge and experiences of these partners, share decision-making responsibilities with them, and work collaboratively to build and enhance the capacity of the community (Castleden et al., 2008; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). CBPR is a process to increase the value of research and knowledge for researchers and community members to impact community well-being (Hergenrather et al., 2009). The partnership serves as a conduit that connects communities and researchers, integrating knowledge and action rooted in the lived experiences of community members (Hergenrather et al., 2009). By fostering collaboration, it ensures the joint development of research endeavours aimed at positively impacting the well-being of both individuals and the community as a whole.

Community-Based Participatory Research with Immigrant Women

The utilization of CBPR with immigrant communities is a relatively recent development, but it is rapidly gaining traction and expanding in its application (Vaughn et al., 2017). In the realm of immigrant research, traditional empirical approaches have been commonly employed, involving data collection from immigrants, the design of interventions targeted at immigrants, and the subsequent formulation of research findings solely pertaining to immigrants Chang et al., 2013). However, such conventional research often characterizes immigrants as homogenous groups, overlooking the distinct

cultural nuances present within individual immigrant groups or subgroups (Vaughn et al., 2017). To gain a comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon and to develop culturally sensitive interventions, it is crucial to consider the experiences and insights of different immigrant populations (Wallerstein et al., 2008).

CBPR has emerged as a particularly valuable approach when studying immigrants, as it endeavours to tackle the complex disparities impacting their communities while respecting and valuing their cultural identities and values (De La Torre et al., 2013; Dong et al., 2012; Ellis et al., 2007; Minkler, 2005). By involving the population of study actively from the outset of the research project, CBPR ensures that the collected data are deeply rooted in a cultural context and accurately reflect the lived experiences of that particular population (Barrera et al., 2011; Jagosh et al., 2012). This collaborative and inclusive approach enables researchers to better address the unique challenges and needs of immigrant communities, ultimately fostering the development of interventions that are more relevant, effective, and culturally supported.

This research project adopts the CBPR methodological approach to empower immigrant women in addressing their lived experiences through democratic inquiry. The primary objective is to actively engage participants of NEW's program throughout the research process, from the design phase to the knowledge translation stage. Recognizing the importance of building trust with participants from the outset of the project, the program team (Programs and Special Projects' staff of NEW, the project facilitating storytelling artist, and myself as a researcher) prioritized fostering a partnership. As the entire program team, including myself, consisted of immigrant women, we were

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inherently recognized as members of the community. This shared background facilitated

the formation of a trustful relationship among community partners, researchers, and study

participants (Chang et al., 2016; Hacker, 2013; Israel et al., 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein,

2011). Together, we made decisions to shape the research journey. Participants

collectively determined the themes for their stories (research topics), the creation of art

pieces, the selection of materials for the artistic process, and the methods for presenting

and exhibiting their work. By embracing the principles of CBPR, this research project

strives to empower immigrant women to actively participate in shaping their narratives,

experiences, and the outcomes of the research. Through an inclusive and collaborative

process, the study endeavours to create a platform for meaningful dialogue, fostering

mutual understanding and facilitating positive social change within the community.

4.1.2 Arts-Based Research

Understanding Feminist Arts-Based Research

In the realm of academic and research endeavours, conventional methodologies

have traditionally relied on epistemological dichotomies such as generalizability,

objectivity, and logic (Hesse-Biber, 2007). However, in response to perceived limitations

and oppressive elements associated with conventional scientific research, a novel

approach emerged known as arts-based research (ABR) methodology, aiming to explore

alternative avenues (Butterwick, 2002). By positioning art, subjectivity, and emotion at

the heart of the research design, arts-based approaches offer unconventional modes of

communication that effectively capture the depth and intricacies of embodied emotions

and lived experiences (Clover, 2011; Skop, 2016). This epistemological shift in research

methodology has prompted the adoption of diverse artistic forms as research methods, seeking to attain a profound understanding of social realities (Skop, 2016).

Aligned with the principles of CBR and feminist research, arts-based methodologies provide pathways for knowledge production that bring to light systems of oppression, identify sites of resistance, and prioritize transformative practices and interventions (Finley, 2008). This distinctive research methodology stands as a powerful means for conducting radical, ethical, and revolutionary research, characterized by a forward-looking perspective, social responsibility, and practical applications in addressing social inequities (Finley, 2008). Historically and in contemporary contexts, women have actively employed the arts as a conduit for innovative knowledge production, shedding light on diverse experiences, posing critical questions, and seeking solutions (Clover, 2011). Consequently, feminist scholars have embraced artistic practices as an integral aspect of knowledge generation, facilitating a deeper comprehension of the social world and challenging patriarchal narratives and conventions (Butterwick, 2002; Clover, 2011). Within the framework of arts-based feminist research, particular emphasis is placed on recognizing and challenging inequitable power dynamics and knowledge imbalances through creative modes of representing novel perspectives, emotions, and embodied experiences, with the aim of confronting prevailing discourses (Clover, 2011).

Grounded in the epistemological underpinnings of feminist research, ABR empowers participants by providing a platform for them to assume a leading role in the knowledge-production process through the creation and representation of their experiences through alternative means (Clover, 2011). I emphasize the lived experiences,

emotions, and stories of study participants, drawing inspiration from both feminist

frameworks and arts-based research, aiming to amplify the voices of women and other

marginalized genders. It is vital to employ this methodology as a powerful instrument for

participant empowerment. Given my own feelings of marginalization, stemming from

my identity as a newcomer navigating intersectional challenges in a new society, this

approach offers participants, including myself, the agency to dictate how their

experiences are showcased. I firmly believe that through this ABR methodology, the

distinctive voices and experiences of underrepresented groups, which I, too, identify with,

can become integral to the knowledge-production process.

Arts-Based Research with Immigrant Women

ABR methodologies have gained significant traction in fields like visual

sociology and participatory action research, with scholars emphasizing the importance of

participant engagement and collaboration (Kunt, 2020; Lee et al., 2020; O'Neill, 2018).

This innovative approach involves using various artistic forms, such as visual arts,

photography, storytelling, dance, music, and theatre, to inquire and collect data in

research studies, particularly when exploring issues faced by marginalized communities,

including immigrant women. By employing arts-based methods to capture the lived

experiences of immigrant and racialized adults, we can enhance our understanding of

related support needs (Salma et al., 2023). Although there have been reviews of arts-

based methodologies with other populations (Fraser & Al Sayah, 2011; Seitz & Orsini,

2022), there is a paucity of reviews focused on their use with immigrant women who face

intersectional barriers due to their immigrant status, gender, and racialized experiences.

To be effective in knowledge production, arts-based methodologies must be sensitive to and incorporate the contextual nuances of the target population (Leavy, 2015). They have been successfully applied to immigrant and racialized communities (Gerber, 2022). Additionally, ABR proves valuable in working with individuals who encounter challenges in communicating in the dominant language, especially when they are learning a new language (Salma et al., 2023). The strengths and challenges of these approaches, particularly when applied to immigrant and racialized individuals, warrant specific attention (Salma et al., 2023).

In this project, immigrant women creatively expressed their lived experiences through the ABR method. The program team firmly believes that arts-based research empowers immigrant women to challenge and redefine stereotypes, presenting their identities and stories in ways that defy simplistic categorizations and societal preconceptions. Given the capacity of artistic forms to transcend language barriers, immigrant women can communicate their experiences and emotions in profound ways, fostering a deeper connection with other participants and the facilitating team members. Furthermore, through this ABR program, immigrant women's voices are given the opportunity to share their perspectives and insights on their own terms, countering the marginalization often experienced in traditional research approaches. By employing ABR methodology in the study of immigrant women, I, as the researcher, can gain deeper insights into the complexities of their experiences, challenges, and resilience. This human-centred and empathetic approach contributes to a more comprehensive and sensitive understanding of the lived realities of immigrant women.

4.2 Research Method

The research was conducted within a creative empowerment program established and conducted by Newcomer Women Services Toronto (NEW), a community-based service organization with a rich history of empowering immigrant women and their families. Founded in 1983 by a group of Latin American refugees, NEW has been a cornerstone in building strong communities for nearly four decades. Currently led by Sara Asalya, an immigrant woman who serves as the Executive Director, the agency has been internationally recognized for its work, receiving a Peace Award in December 2019 for outstanding service to immigrants and newcomers. NEW's vision underscores the importance of strong women in strong communities. Their mission is to connect immigrant women and their families to social and economic opportunities in Canada, fostering a sense of belonging. Unique in its approach, NEW offers a myriad of programs that address immediate settlement needs, including language training, employment coaching, and pathways to various economic opportunities. With a commitment to inclusion, empathy, integrity, empowerment, diversity, and innovation, NEW has developed a holistic approach to empower immigrant women in five critical areas: cultural, economic, social, and political integration and advocacy.

This program encompassed six different art activities, including storytelling, natural dye painting, photography self-portrait, dance/movement, and beading, all of which were designed to foster a sense of community and empowerment by means of sharing stories and engaging in artistic expression. Upon mutual agreement between NEW and myself as the researcher, the photovoice research project was implemented

during the storytelling workshop, which comprised four sessions, along with an

exhibition event day. Incorporating the photovoice method into the storytelling workshop

provided a space to explore the community members' experiences regarding the research

question agreed upon by both NEW and myself.

4.2.1 Participant Recruitment

Twenty women living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) participated in four

photovoice workshops. This study analyzed the data collected by NEW in the Creative

Empowerment Program and was facilitated by the project team comprised of organizers,

Toronto-based local immigrant women artists, and an immigrant women researcher.

Participant recruitment was facilitated by the Programs and Special Projects team of

NEW. Project and recruitment information was distributed via social media (Instagram

and Twitter), email newsletters and in the community where immigrant women receive

support and services from a community-based organization, NEW. Interested participants

completed an online registration form to establish interest and eligibility (immigrant or

refugee status and availability to attend the project and following events).

4.2.2 Method: Photovoice Project with Collage and Storytelling

The photovoice project encompasses three primary art activities: photograph

selection, collage creation, and storytelling. At the project's outset, participants were

engaged in selecting photographs that resonated with their experiences as newcomer

women. These images served as a foundation for building the narratives of their lives.

Through collaborative discussions with the project team, the participants collectively

agreed to construct a collage that interwove their present-day stories with historical

photographs that depicted the support provided to newcomers in the past. In this collage-making process, the aim was to visually represent the lived experiences of newcomer women, drawing connections between their current realities and the historical context of newcomers' support. The collage thus served as a dynamic expression of their stories, bridging the past and the present to depict their journeys and aspirations. Beyond the collage, the project also entailed an extension of these stories into the realm of written storytelling. Participants planned to translate their narratives from the visual medium into the written form, thereby organizing and conveying their knowledge and experiences as newcomer women in a literary format. This written storytelling aspect aimed to further enrich and preserve their stories, providing a means to share their perspectives, challenges, and triumphs in a manner that could be disseminated and appreciated more broadly.

By combining photography, collage creation, and written storytelling, the photovoice project sought to empower newcomer women to express themselves creatively, foster a sense of community, and contribute their unique voices to the broader discourse surrounding immigrant experiences.

Photovoice

Photovoice, as an innovative research approach, engages participants in utilizing photography to document and analyze significant community issues, identifying participants' lives and/or communities (Wang, 1999), and advocating for transformative change (Leavy, 2009; Osei-Kofi, 2013; Wang, 1999). Photovoice has emerged as a methodology within CBPR (Hergenrather et al., 2009) and is rooted in feminist inquiry

(Osei-Kofi, 2013). It is especially well-suited for anti-oppressive social justice

endeavours, as it deeply acknowledges and values the subjective experiences of those

involved (Osei-Kofi, 2013). By granting community members the autonomy to shape the

representation of their lives through captured images, photovoice challenges entrenched

assumptions and prevailing societal narratives (Osei-Kofi, 2013). This research method

explicitly strives to advance progressive social change, aligning with the overarching

mission of promoting equity and justice within society (Wang, 1999).

Photovoice offers distinct advantages over other research methods, such as

interviews, when investigating social phenomena (Brunsden & Goatcher, 2007; Tsang,

2020). Firstly, interviews may not fully capture the meaningful lived experiences of

participants due to the potential influence of the researcher's agenda and preconceptions

(Tsang, 2020). In contrast, photovoice empowers participants to take control of how they

present and express their thoughts, views, and emotions throughout the research process

(Asaba et al., 2014). As a result, photovoice allows researchers to capture the profound

lived experiences of participants concerning a particular phenomenon (Plunkett et al.,

2013). Secondly, traditional interview methods heavily rely on narratives and verbal

expressions. However, as argued by Kirova and Emme (2006), many layers of lived

experiences may not be easily conveyed and understood solely through narratives and

words. Visual images, such as photographs, serve as valuable tools for participants to

delve into deeper meanings of their world. These images encourage reflexive thinking,

recollection, reflection, and representation of feelings, thoughts, events, and other

significant aspects of life within a specific moment (Glaw et al., 2017; Raggl & Schratz,

2004). In this regard, photovoice emerges as a more effective method for social

investigation, as it enables participants to explore and express their experiences in a

multi-dimensional and visual manner (Tsang, 2020).

The study explores the meanings of the early initial settlement for immigrant

women experiencing intersectional barriers using data on their lived experiences via the

photovoice method. Originally applied in research by Wang and Burris (1997),

photovoice has gained popularity as a powerful method for researching marginalized

populations, particularly immigrant and refugee women. This approach prioritizes

participants' voices and captures their lives' intricate complexities. By encouraging critical

reflection on the factors influencing their daily experiences, photovoice enhances self-

awareness among underrepresented and marginalized groups (Wang & Pies, 2004). In

this regard, this photovoice method presents numerous advantages by engaging with

photography in working with migrant women (Fathi & Nasimi, 2022).

Collage

The study employed the collage technique as a novel approach for gathering,

analyzing, synthesizing, and presenting information. Drawing upon Vaughan's (2005)

perspective, the utilization of collage in research reflects a borderlands epistemology, one

that embraces an inclusive and liberatory agenda capable of traversing the intersections of

multiple disciplines. As described by Butler-Kisber (2007), collage can be harnessed in

various ways within research, including its application for conceptualization purposes.

Notably, collage has the potential to challenge the dominance of linear and hegemonic

written texts, thereby enhancing the expression of voice and reflexivity throughout the

research process. Moreover, college expands the horizons of possibility, accommodating multiple realities and diverse understandings, fostering a more enriched and nuanced exploration of the subject matter (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Within the scope of this research, the act of creating collages serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it informs experiential research methodologies, becoming a pivotal tool for participants to express their life stories as narratives. The process of collage-making itself becomes a catalyst, eliciting meaningful discussions and reflections from the participants(Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010). Moreover, fundamental abilities such as cutting and pasting are acquired early in life and become ingrained in everyone's skill set, making collage accessible to novices even as they refine their aesthetic and compositional capabilities (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010).

Storytelling

Storytelling emerges as an especially advantageous modality when working with immigrant and refugee-background populations for several compelling reasons. Firstly, its historical significance and value within marginalized communities make it a well-established and culturally resonant practice (Lenette et al., 2015). Moreover, storytelling serves as a powerful means to amplify the voices of these populations, which is particularly crucial given the prevalent portrayals of immigrants and refugees as victims, vulnerable individuals, traumatized beings, potential threats, dreamers, or those lacking in education (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). Additionally, storytelling enables individuals to cultivate critical awareness regarding their own narratives, fostering a deeper understanding of their journey and circumstances (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017).

Through storytelling, participants contribute their unique perspectives to the broader discourse surrounding immigrants and refugees, ensuring their voices are heard and valued in the construction of a more comprehensive and authentic narrative.

4.2.3 Data Collection

The photovoice project was conducted during the arts-based empowerment program and underwent four workshops and an exhibition day. At the preparatory stage, a program manager of NEW organized several meetings with the project facilitator (a storytelling artist) and me, as a researcher, to share the project's general framework, objectives, and timeline and to decide on the themes that photographs would cover. The project facilitator and I discussed building themes for each photovoice workshop based on the potential research questions, which took about a month with weekly meetings.

During this process, I undertook the responsibility of scanning the photographs that would be utilized in the photovoice project. The scanned photos are from Montgomery's Inn, a heritage site hosting newcomers for hundreds of years and one of Toronto's history museums (Toronto, 2017). The photos were taken during the 1830s and focused on the inn, the surrounding area and people with stories about newcomers, travellers, and visitors. By linking these historical accounts to the participating immigrant women, the stories emanating from these photographs offered a powerful medium for fostering connection and resonance with their own experiences as newcomers.

According to the principles of CBPR, which emphasizes the strengths and resources of every partner by valuing co-research, empowerment and capacity building, combining of knowledge, and bi-directional leadership and decision making (Vaughn,

2015), the program team regarded partnership with participants as important. Throughout the duration of the photovoice workshops, I maintained a dedicated commitment to seek input and feedback from the participants, the facilitator, and the program manager during each workshop session. This inclusive and participatory approach ensured that all stakeholders were actively engaged in the project's development and execution. Also, childcare services were offered during the workshops in separate rooms, allowing immigrant mothers to fully engage in the photovoice project without worrying about attending to their younger children.

Table 2

The Photovoice Process in the Study

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
Identifying Issues & Photo Selection	Creating Collages	Writing Stories	Interpreting & Sharing Circles	Exhibition
Building relationship Thinking about the topic through brainstorming Photo selection	Selecting a topic for an individual story Develop individual photo-narratives Creating collages	Learning storytelling and how to write a story Writing own stories Supervision and support	Sharing individual stories with the group Identifying common issues and differences Planning strategy for sharing stories	Sharing stories with audiences Celebrating the photovoice project

Session 1: Identifying Issues and Photo Selection

In the initial phase of the workshop, engaging storytelling activities like the *story of my name* and the *story of safe places/persons* were conducted to foster relationships

and familiarize participants with the arts-based method. These exercises emphasized the significance of imagery in connection to their personal stories. Subsequently, participants brainstormed and discussed potential photovoice story topics such as *imagined life in Canada* and *Canada as an immigrant woman*. An overview of CBPR and the photovoice method was provided to facilitate the exploration of settlement experiences. Participants then selected photographs that held memories of their own stories, sharing these life experiences with their partners and then the wider group. Toward the end of the session, all participants collaboratively decided on the art activities and artistic materials they would use to build their stories.

Session 2: Creating Collages to Build Stories

During this session, participants embarked on creating collages to capture their experiences as they delved into their immigrant stories. The facilitator and researcher encouraged them to work on this ongoing project throughout the session to reflect on their emotions and experiences at different points in time. This arts-based approach served as a self-reflexive tool during the session and offered valuable insights into their life experiences. The variety of work produced by the participants was striking, showcasing a deep level of self-reflexivity through imagery and text. The transformation of participants, who initially doubted their artistic abilities, was truly impressive as they gained confidence in creating their art. It was equally remarkable to witness the women who possessed artistic talent produce exceptional and captivating collage pieces during the project.

Session 3: Writing Immigrant Women's Stories

The participants learned how to shape their personal stories with simplicity and clarity from the facilitator (storyteller). In contrast, the instruction was to write stories or captions that conveyed the meaning of their collages. Collages helped the participants articulate their writing and elicitation approach. All immigrant women were given the option to write their statements in their preferred language. Some participants with English language barriers sought assistance from other participants who used the same language or the language teaching professionals of NEW during or after the project.

Session 4: Interpreting Experiences Through Sharing Circles

In this session, participants took turns presenting their stories. Some recounted their stories orally, while others chose to read from what they had written. The atmosphere was supportive, with participants encouraging one another throughout the presentations. Subsequently, the group engaged in discussions about the commonalities in their stories, the collective learning from hearing each other's experiences, and how these stories empowered them as immigrant women. Despite language barriers, the discussion stage proved significant, as many participants expressed that it was the first time they felt comfortable speaking about their settlement experiences. The space created during the group discussions allowed participants to share more safely and openly about their experiences.

Session 5: Disseminating Knowledge Through an Exhibition

The process of preparing the program exhibition was a collaborative effort involving consultation with the participants and the program team. The exhibition was hosted at a local museum, Montgomery's Inn, which featured historical accounts of newcomers. Participants actively engaged in public talks about their settlement stories in

English, and their collages and stories were displayed alongside other art creations from different workshops.

4.2.4 Data Analysis

Phenomenological Approach to Data Analysis of Photovoice Project

I analyzed the data using a phenomenological approach. This analytic approach ties in well with the theoretical framework of intersectional feminism. In this study, the phenomenological approach allows for a deeper understanding of immigrant women's lives by giving space to their narrative and visual representations, thereby making room for the complexity and intersectionality of their experiences. When analyzing data from a phenomenological standpoint, the researcher is not just looking at the what but also the how and why of participants' experiences (Tsang, 2020). This reflects the goals of intersectional feminism by considering the realities of systemic oppression (Tastsoglou, 2019).

In photovoice projects, data analysis involves a systematic examination of the photographs and narratives captured by the participants (Latz, 2017; Tsang, 2020). Despite the growing popularity of the photovoice method, it remains a developing and emerging approach, presenting several methodological challenges in social research (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016; Power et al., 2014). One such challenge pertains to data analysis. Researchers face difficulties in effectively utilizing both the photographs and narratives produced by participants during photovoice data analysis to theorize the studied phenomenon (Oliffe et al., 2008). Additionally, the article by Power et al. (2014)

highlights the tension between participant-led and researcher-led analyses of photographs in photovoice research.

Two predominant approaches in photovoice analysis are the critical and phenomenological approaches (Tsang, 2020). These approaches diverge in their aims and analytical processes. In response to the limitations of the critical approach, which may offer relatively few in-depth theoretical analyses and explanations (Tsang, 2020), researchers have developed phenomenological approaches to enhance photovoice's application in social research. Utilizing the critical approach in photovoice analysis poses challenges in offering theoretical explanations and advancing our understanding of phenomena, as participants' analyses might be constrained by common sense knowledge (Tsang, 2020). Although the participant-led analysis strategy encourages critical thinking about their lives and communities (Asaba et al., 2014), it may not fully contribute to theorization in photovoice research. Therefore, during the analysis process of this study, I adopted the perspective of a phenomenological analytic approach to analyze data from the photovoice project. From this perspective, photovoice is regarded as a means of eliciting the significance that participants attribute to their photographs or other art creations utilizing their photographs (Tsang, 2020).

In contrast to the critical approach, the phenomenological approach in photovoice research adopts a researcher-led analysis strategy (Tsang, 2020). However, this does not imply that researchers disregard the participants' interpretations of the photographs; rather, they view these interpretations as valuable narrative data that helps them grasp the participants' lived experiences and analyze the phenomena under study. In the

phenomenological approach, photographs are considered as data antecedents rather than data per se (Latz, 2017; Tsang, 2020). Consequently, in phenomenological photovoice research, only a limited number of formal analyses of photographs focus on the narrative data (Oliffe et al., 2008). Nevertheless, photographs, being visual data, offer supplementary and meaningful information that enhances our comprehension of participants' interpretations of the world (Harper, 2012; Tsang, 2020).

The Process of The Data Analysis

The main aim of data analysis is to gain valuable insights into the lived experiences, perspectives, and concerns of immigrant women. The data for analysis encompasses various components, such as a) group conversations centred around brainstorming, b) photographs and the participants' verbal reflections on the photographs during the group conversation, c) collage creations, and d) written stories, which all were obtained from the photovoice project held as part of the creative empowerment program organized by NEW. All data are instrumental in exploring the meanings of immigrant women's lived experiences of settlement in Canada. The data were analyzed manually by me, the researcher, and if necessary, translated into English by getting help from participants during the analysis process.

The initial step in the data analysis process for the photovoice project involved transcribing all verbal narratives obtained during the group conversation related to brainstorming and photographs. Subsequently, researchers perform a thematic analysis to identify recurring codes and themes in the transcripts, and the detailed findings are presented in a publication (Nykiforuk et al., 2011). I coded using Microsoft PowerPoint

and Word to categorize and identify key themes and patterns within the data. My

supervisor and I met during the coding process, discussed questions, and identified any

new emergent themes. By coding the data, I discerned common themes that recurred

throughout the participants' narratives and photographs, representing their shared ideas,

emotions, or experiences. To comprehend the significance behind these themes, I engaged

in the process of interpretation, delving into the context and connections between

different themes. Throughout this analysis, I remained reflexive, critically reflecting on

my own biases, assumptions, and potential positions of power that could impact the

interpretation of the data. For example, to enhance my understanding, I delved deeper into

the participants' diverse backgrounds and why they chose to immigrate to Canada.

Recognizing the significant challenges many faced before arriving, I sought to familiarize

myself with their individual histories. Numerous participants hailed from regions where

they contended with issues such as terrorism or the influence of non-democratic

governments. These situations are markedly different from those in my own country,

underscoring the importance of approaching their experiences with both empathy and

openness. In doing so, I aimed to honour their stories and provide thoughtful, respectful

analysis. Additionally, member checking was employed, involving sharing the analyzed

data and emerging themes with some participants who were willing to be involved in this

process to validate their accuracy and ensure a faithful representation of their voices.

The participants' visual data, which included photographs and collages, were

utilized to complement the thematic analysis of their narrative data. It is essential to

emphasize that their stories were centred around specific photographs and/or collages

from each participant. The visual data produced through the collages was not merely an additional component to a text-based analysis of the personal stories revealed during the collage-making process, as explained in Bagnoli (2009). Instead, the visual data from the collages played a significant role in comprehending the participants' experiences at various stages of the analysis. Both images and text were examined to understand the narratives being conveyed. Following Bagnoli (2009), images are able to represent concepts concisely. An analysis incorporating interpretations from multiple sources allows for the validation and contextual use of participants' own metaphors in understanding specific moments of their lives.

It is important to acknowledge that data analysis in photovoice projects is an iterative and ongoing process (Tsang, 2020). As a researcher continually engages with the data, I could gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences, leading to the revisiting and refinement of the analysis. Furthermore, this data analysis process was conducted collaboratively with the participants, underscoring the centrality of their perspectives and voices in shaping the research process.

4.2.5 Ethical Considerations

Regarding ethical considerations during data collection, participants were provided with prior information that all data gathered within the program would be employed for research purposes during the registration process. In the online registration form, NEW announced the program's purpose was to empower the immigrant women's community, and the data generated through the program would be utilized for research endeavours. Participants were given guidance in making their choice, and ultimately, all

participants consented to contribute their data for research purposes. On the first day of

the photovoice project, I reiterated this information to the participants and presented

potential research directions on how their data could be used. Furthermore, I created a

supportive environment where the women were encouraged to ask questions and engage

in discussions about the research's implications and uses of their data. This approach

aimed to ensure transparency and foster open communication regarding the research

process and data utilization.

According to Mahalingam and Rabelo (2013), immigrants are marginalized

individuals who are commonly perceived as culturally deficient and frequently subjected

to pathologizing. To address this concern, meticulous attention was exercised in this study

to ensure that the research process did not adversely impact the participants. For instance,

participants received clear and detailed information regarding the study's purpose,

procedures, potential risks, and benefits associated with their involvement. Additionally,

they were informed about how research data would be utilized, the anonymization of

data, and the measures in place to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, participants

were reminded that their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw

from the project at any stage without facing any negative consequences. This

comprehensive approach towards ethical considerations aimed to safeguard the

participants' well-being and uphold their autonomy throughout the research process.

I volunteered with the NEW program, and my role mainly involved research

activities. In consultation with my supervisor, I decided to focus on the data from the

photovoice project instead of using all data from the creative empowerment program

because of my scope and the timeline of the MSW thesis. In preparation for the photovoice project, I, as a researcher, was responsible for scanning historical photos related to immigration. I was also a co-facilitator for a four-session photovoice workshop, including collage and storytelling activities. After the workshop, I took part in analyzing the data collected and was involved in setting up the exhibit showcasing the project. To use the data for my MSW thesis, I received a letter of support from NEW for the ethics application. Ethics approval for using this secondary data collected for the NEW's programming purposes was received from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB).

4.2.6 Researcher Positionality

Positionality is a critical aspect of research that acknowledges the researcher's subjective position, background, and identity and how these factors may influence the research process and findings (Muhammad et al., 2015). As a researcher studying immigrant women's settlement experiences, it is crucial to recognize and reflect on my own positionality as an immigrant woman and international student with racialized barriers, language barriers, and other generalized barriers. This awareness is vital in understanding how my unique perspective may impact data collection, analysis, interpretation, and overall research outcomes.

As an immigrant woman and international student, I bring lived experiences that intersect with the participants in my study. Having personally faced challenges related to immigration status, language barriers, cultural adjustment, and socio-economic struggles, I can empathize with the complexities and nuances of settling in a new country. This shared identity can be an asset in building rapport with the participants and gaining their

trust, as they may perceive me as someone who understands their struggles and experiences. However, my positionality also raises potential challenges in maintaining and avoiding bias in the research. It is essential to acknowledge that while I share certain experiences with the participants, our experiences are not identical, and their narratives may vary significantly from my own. Therefore, I must be vigilant in not assuming that my experiences are representative of the broader immigrant women population.

Recognizing my positionality requires ongoing reflexivity throughout the research process. I must continuously reflect on my biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions that may influence data collection and interpretation. Reflexivity allows me to be transparent about my subjectivity and approach the research with humility and open-mindedness. Additionally, ethical considerations are paramount when studying marginalized populations like immigrant women. As a researcher with shared experiences, I must prioritize the participants' well-being, autonomy, and privacy. Ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity are ethical imperatives in the research process. Moreover, I need to be mindful of the potential power dynamics that may arise due to my status as a researcher and a Master's student and take steps to mitigate any potential harm or exploitation of participants.

My positionality may influence data collection methods and the types of questions I ask. My shared identity with the participants may enable me to create a safe environment for sharing sensitive experiences. However, I need to be cautious not to lead or influence participants' responses, as my experiences may unintentionally bias the data collection process. During data analysis, my positionality may impact how I interpret the

findings. I will adopt a reflexive approach to critically analyze my interpretations, seeking input and feedback from colleagues and supervisors to ensure a robust and balanced analysis. Triangulation of data sources and perspectives will be employed to mitigate potential bias.

As a researcher studying immigrant women's settlement experiences while being an immigrant woman and international student myself, my positionality adds both complexity and richness to the study. It enables me to connect with the participants deeper and gain valuable insights into their lived realities. However, it also demands vigilance, reflexivity, and ethical sensitivity throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and rigour of the study. By acknowledging and navigating my positionality with transparency and humility, I aim to conduct research that contributes meaningfully to understanding immigrant women's settlement experiences and supports more inclusive and empowering settlement practices.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the experiences of immigrant women during their initial settlement in Canada are described. Drawing from the photovoice project, the data discussed here encompasses contributions from twenty women. The analysis focuses on the collages crafted by the participants, along with photographs taken from Montgomery's Inn Museum, an institution known for its commitment to aiding newcomers. The chapter also considers the personal narratives and group conversations shared by participants. The goal is to delve deeply into the intricate nuances of the initial settlement phase and identify the factors that shape an immigrant's experience in Canada. From the collected data, three salient themes emerged. The first theme examines the alignment or discrepancies between women's anticipations before migration and the experiences they confront after arriving in Canada. The second theme explores how newcomer women perceive and engage with the welcoming efforts and social support systems set up by Canadian Immigration. The third theme sheds light on the unique challenges faced by participants due to their multiple identities as women and as immigrants during their initial settling period.

Demographics

Twenty immigrant women took part in this study. Before participating in the creative empowerment program, each woman filled out a brief demographic questionnaire collected by NEW. The questionnaire solicited information on the length of time living in Canada, their racial background, self-assessed language proficiency (with scores ranging from 1 to 5) and educational attainment.

Table 3

Demographics of Participants

Length of residence in Canada	Less than four years (16)
	Five to ten years (2)
	More than ten years (2)
Place of origin	Arab (5)
	Latin American (5)
	West Asian (3)
	South Asian (5)
	East Asian (1)
	Back (1)
English language proficiency (Self-assessed from 1 to 5)	5 (7)
	4 (6)
	3 (3)
	2 (2)
	1 (1)
Highest level of education	Doctorate degree (2)
	Master's degree (7)
	Bachelor's degree (7)
	High school graduate/diploma or the equivalent (2)
	Trade/Technical/Vocational training (2)

5.1 Pre-Migration Expectations and Post-Migration Realities

To fully grasp the settlement experiences of newcomer women in Canada, it is

crucial to understand their expectations about life in the country before migration. While

most studies of immigrant arrivals have focused on their post-migration settlement

processes in new countries, pre-migration expectations about their new homes have not

been considered (Covington-Ward, 2017). This is significant because newcomers and

immigration systems, such as immigration officials and other stakeholders, can be better

prepared for immigrants' realities while settling in a new country.

5.1.1 Pursuit of Safety and Security

A recurring theme that prominently emerged from the participants' narratives was the pivotal role of safety and security as the driving force behind their decision to migrate to Canada. This fundamental pursuit was deeply rooted in the harsh and often distressing realities of violence, threats, and instability that pervaded their countries of origin. During the brainstorming activity that invited participants to jot down their perceptions of imagined life in Canada, the recurring appearance of safety-related words such as "safe walks" and "safety" underlined the significance of this aspect. This collective sentiment was fortified by several participants who referred to distressing statistics concerning missing women and girls and the looming presence of terrorist groups within their home countries. These safety-related factors heavily influenced their unwavering resolve to uproot their lives and relocate to Canada, as vividly described by Participant 7 in her story and collage:
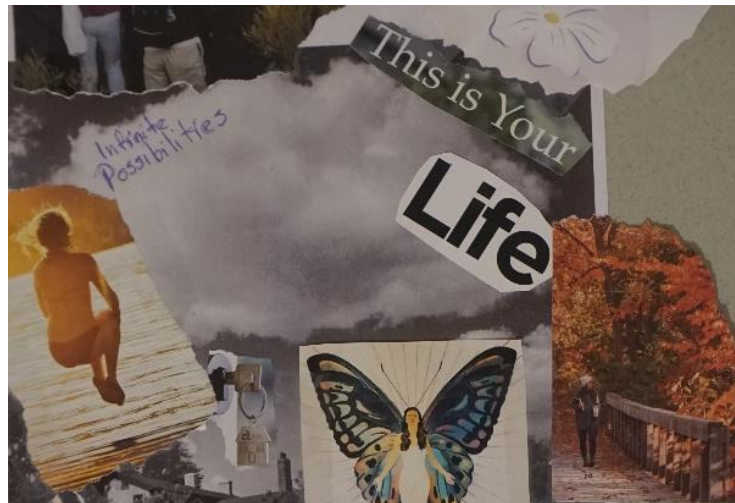
I accepted the offer with no hesitation, mainly due to the lack of security in my country, especially for women-more than 1,227 women and girls were reported missing just in the first months of 2019. So, we took a plane to Canada…. Most

girls came to Canada to escape Cartel threats against their families or small businesses.

These poignant accounts vividly illustrate the context in which the pursuit of safety led these women to undertake the significant journey of migration. The urgency was further evident as other participants shared, "We fled the violence in our country… it was for safety, we had no choice" (Participant 10), and "The Taliban terrorist group came to power, I left Afghanistan with my husband and two children" (Participant 13). In essence, the participants' stories collectively emphasize that the pursuit of safety was not merely an abstract notion but a deeply ingrained motive woven into their migration narratives. The decision to leave behind their familiar surroundings and embark on a new journey was intrinsically linked to the aspiration for a life free from the looming shadows of violence and insecurity.

Following the expectation of safety, the participants' post-migration experiences in Canada often affirmed their expectations and reinforced the significance of their pursuit. Participant 10's acknowledgment of a newfound sense of security underscored the transformative impact of their migration journey, wherein the promise of safety became a tangible reality that significantly impacted their lives: "We felt completely certain we were safe here. That was important. Since having a comfortable bed in our country did not give us the peace of mind that we feel here" (Participant 10). Moreover, the participants' narratives echoed a prevailing sentiment that Canada, as their chosen destination, offered an environment conducive to personal and professional growth. The participant described Canada as "a country full of professional and personal growth and learning opportunities with good people and lots of support." This realization not only

reaffirmed their decision to migrate but also highlighted the tangible advantages of living in a secure and supportive environment.

5.1.2 Empowerment and Belonging

The theme of adaptation and belonging emerges as a profound testament to the transformative journey undertaken by immigrant women as they navigate the complexities of integrating into Canadian society. Their immigration stories reveal a process marked by expectations, challenges, and, ultimately, a sense of empowerment and connection.

The expectations regarding settlement as women in society are poignantly encapsulated in the words of Participant 8, who lamented the corrosive impact of living in a male-centred society on her confidence: "Living in a male-centred society had gradually eroded my confidence over the years. I felt empty and apprehensive about a future in which I inevitably had to accept my inferior position as a woman." She vividly expressed feelings of emptiness and apprehension about a future where she seemed destined to accept a subordinate role as a woman.

The participants' post-migration experiences reveal a journey toward adaptation and belonging with positive dimensions. Resettling in Canada presented an opportunity for rediscovery and healing. For example, Participant 8 shared, "By knowing myself better and feeling more at home in Canada, I was able to heal my relationship with my country." Her words underscore the pivotal role that Canada played in not only shaping her self-perception but also fostering a sense of belonging that reverberated beyond national borders. Additionally, in a group conversation, one participant expressed, "I feel

like a competitive woman because, despite my disadvantage [as an immigrant woman], I have no limits regarding self-improvement and development." This testament to personal growth and determination reflects how the integration process can catalyze an increased sense of agency.

Furthermore, Participant 5's testimony describes the evolving relationship between immigrant women and their newfound home, affirming the transformational journey of integration and the profound sense of belonging it engenders: "Canada became her home, and she was proud to be a part of its rich and diverse community." This statement stands as a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of resilience, growth, and the pursuit of a meaningful place in their adopted homeland. As these women grapple with the challenges and triumphs of integration, their narratives speak to a remarkable evolution that encapsulates the profound quest for belonging and the resolute empowerment that arises from navigating the intricate pathways of a new society.

5.1.3 Professional Aspirations

The exploration of the theme of professional aspirations offers a glimpse into the intricate web of expectations, challenges, and varied realities that immigrant women encountered in their pursuit of career advancement and professional recognition upon settling in Canada.

These expectations of embarking on a journey of professional fulfillment and success resonated powerfully in Participant 5's story and collage:

> She came to Canada with a dream of pursuing her academic career and making a name for herself in her field of expertise. She worked hard day and night, studying diligently and putting in endless hours of effort to prove herself to others and secure a job in her field.

She vividly recounted her dreams of pursuing an academic career and carving out a niche for herself in her field of expertise. Driven by determination, she committed herself to relentless efforts, investing day and night in her studies and tirelessly honing her skills. However, the stark reality she faced was a nuanced struggle characterized by a sense of invisibility and alienation. Cultural differences and language barriers acted as formidable hurdles, often overshadowing her impressive qualifications and achievements. Her narrative summarized her experience: "But even with all her hard work, she often felt invisible and overlooked because of the cultural differences and languages."

Participant 7's initial optimism of seamless integration into the Canadian workforce collided with unforeseen challenges. Despite the pre-arrival recognition of her credentials, obtaining a job commensurate with her qualifications proved a difficult undertaking. Her words epitomize the dichotomy between official validation and the

pragmatic roadblocks encountered: "It is difficult to find one [job] in my career, although they [the Canadian government] have accepted my credentials even before arriving." Further enriching the exploration are the narratives of Participant 14, which lay bare the intricate interplay between initial expectations and subsequent realities. Her introspective reflection underscores the dissonance between her pre-migration confidence and the obstacles ahead. Her story demonstrates the difference between pre-migration expectations and post-migration real situations:

> I came to Canada for a better me. I came to Canada with the confidence of 'I got it all.' I am a skilled migrant. I wish someone had told me more about real Canada and that it was the opposite of what I aimed for.

The refusal to recognize credentials that immigrants have acquired in their countries deprives immigrants of their core abilities and professional qualifications, as well as their acquired experience. For example, Canada acknowledges driving qualifications from specific pre-agreed countries yet subjects immigrants from many other countries to retake basic driving tests, irrespective of their extensive driving experience. This can lead to a sense of deprivation for immigrants who rely on driving for their livelihood or immigrants with substantial driving expertise. Thus, the necessity of validating foreign credentials and the requirement for prior experience pose formidable obstacles, particularly for immigrant women who often navigate additional complexities. Participant 3's mention of needing to undergo a driving test to obtain a license despite her extensive experience in her home country serves as a tangible illustration of the challenges faced.

However, Participant 5's narrative takes a heartening turn, showcasing the transformative impact of relentless dedication and hard work. Through her unwavering commitment, she gradually experienced a sense of belonging and validation within Canadian society. Her immigration journey stands as a testament to the affirmative facets of professional aspirations, as she eloquently conveys:

> The young woman began to feel more confident and accepted by society through accomplishments in her study and work. She found that her hard work and dedication had paid off, and she was finally being recognized for her talents and contributions.

The theme of professional aspirations sheds light on the complicated journey immigrant women undertake as they seek career advancement in Canada. The stories reveal the nuanced struggles, unanticipated challenges, and the dissonance between initial expectations and subsequent realities. Acknowledging and addressing these challenges can foster a more equitable and supportive environment that recognizes the skills, expertise, and determination of immigrant women, empowering them to achieve their professional aspirations.

5.2 Welcome and Reception of Settlement Support

Immigrant women frequently face a multitude of obstacles. They typically have fewer social support networks compared to Canadian-born women (Guruge et al., 2015b; Sword et al., 2006). Additionally, their available support systems tend to diminish over time (Guruge et al., 2015b). In this section, I describe how Canadian immigration settlement programs function for newcomer women, drawing from the personal stories of the participants. These narratives highlight how women often found immigration support lacking during their transition to life in Canada, with challenges amplified during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these hurdles, many women benefitted from the aid of non-profit organizations and built meaningful relationships with both Canadian locals and fellow immigrants.

5.2.1 Insufficient and Limited Immigration Support

Through the stories, some participants portray newcomers' challenges and difficulties as they navigate the insufficient and limited immigration support in Canada when arriving. Expressing gratitude for being accepted as immigrants or refugees in Canada, some women experienced a stark reality: the support they received fell short of their expectations. The support from Assistance Canada often fell short of needs, especially during their initial settlement, leaving them to navigate their new life environment with less comfort than anticipated.

Participant 10's account sheds light on the struggles of newcomers, particularly refugees, who arrive with scant resources and face the obstacles of language barriers and an unfamiliar environment. The narrative encapsulates the initial adversity and isolation experienced by these women upon their arrival.

> It has been very hard to arrive here with nothing or nobody, having a language barrier, and facing a totally unknown world. We had to sleep on the floor for the first few days with my one-year-old baby.

Participant 13 used a photograph presenting a small room to build her initial settlement story, and her story and collage further highlight the strain of limited support systems as she vividly details living conditions that hardly provide a sense of home.

> For 5 months [after arriving in Canada], we lived in a small hotel room…[which] was very small and boring, in which we slept and ate, and the children played…. This hotel room was like a prison with an open gate, but we had nowhere else to go.

The limitations inherent in the settlement process are further underscored by Participant 18's account of her experience in a makeshift shelter. The comparison of her initial settlement period in Canada to a state of "limbo," defined as an uncertain period of awaiting a decision or resolution, encapsulates the ambivalence and instability that marked her journey. Through her story and collage, the insufficiency of Canadian support for refugees becomes painfully apparent.

> We were housed in this makeshift encampment. That space comprised identical
> rooms with identical beds and no doors. While that offered me an intimate
> glimpse into the countless lives of refugees, each fleeing their own monsters on
> journeys that may never be told, it provided little privacy or control. There were
> no dryers… So, I would wash our clothes over the sink and set them out on the
> bunk bed to dry.

Her narrative and collage not only speak to the physical confines but also to the emotional

weight that such conditions carry. The portrayal vividly conveys the shared struggles of

refugees who arrive seeking solace from their individual traumas. Amidst the stark

depiction, her story symbolizes the collective yearning for a more dignified and

accommodating environment.

Housing issues persist as a recurring challenge, with Participant 13 revealing that

landlords denied them rental opportunities due to their immigrant status, lack of credit,

and employment history. Participant 19's story amplifies this struggle as she candidly

shares her quest for a suitable home, only to find herself confined to transient

accommodations.

> I soon realized that settling in was not as easy as I thought it would be…. I did not
> take long for me to realize that it was not I who would be choosing a home; rather,
> it would be moving into the home that would choose me. Life became tough.
> There were endless nights when I felt cold and nervous.

Participant 2's experience highlights the urgency of comprehensive support

systems. Intertwined with medical complications during her pregnancy, her story

intersected with the rejection of her application for a Canada spouse sponsorship

immigration visa, leaving her in a dire situation devoid of essential medical care and

assistance.

Participant 2's collage vividly encapsulates both the joys and challenges she encountered

during her settlement journey. The imagery of a mother and wife in her collage represents

the bright side. However, it is the contrasting image of the big empty room that adds

depth and complexity to her narrative. This visual representation powerfully conveys the

feelings of isolation, alienation, and emptiness that often accompany the settlement

process.

> My husband received an email stating that he was not eligible to sponsor me. I felt
> devastated, as during my pregnancy, I had no access to medical care or assistance.
> My sponsor was my only hope, and now that hope had been shattered by the
> application's rejection. I felt like a piece of my life had been torn away, leaving
> me stranded and alone.

This narrative underscores the critical role that the immigration system, such as the

sponsorship program, plays not only in the immigration process but also in the broader

context of accessing crucial medical care and support during vulnerable times. It lays bare

the interdependence between immigration status, family ties, and overall well-being.

Participant 2's experience exposes the intricate vulnerabilities immigrant women face,

whose lives can be upended by unforeseen events, bureaucratic decisions, and the complexities of immigration systems.

The insufficiency of support for newcomers extends beyond physical living conditions, as Participant 9 describes concerns about exorbitant daycare centre costs for newcomers. Her words reflect the broader issue of high thresholds for accessing essential services, particularly for immigrant mothers, in the face of economic constraints within the initial settlement period.

> Daycare centres are extremely expensive, and I think that the competent authorities should think about that so there would be more economically productive people, precisely in these times when the prices of the family basket go through the roof. This, I think, is a basic necessity.

In sum, the theme regarding insufficient and limited immigration support uncovers challenges immigrant women face upon their arrival in Canada. These narratives stress the critical need for enhanced and comprehensive support systems that address housing, essential services, and medical care, ensuring that these women are provided with the opportunity for a smoother transition and integration into their new homeland.

5.2.2 Delayed Support Due to the Pandemic

A large number of participants in the project arrived in Canada during the Covid-19 pandemic. These individuals have candidly shared their stories, focusing on the central theme of delayed support due to the pandemic. Through these stories, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Canadian immigration system becomes evident. The support for immigrant settlements, significantly affected by the pandemic, reveals the harsh realities that immigrants confront. These challenges include grappling with restricted

access to medical care, enduring extended waits to reunite with family in Canada, and

facing economic hardships without adequate support.

Participant 2's story brings to light the confluence of life-altering events:

> I agreed to this arrangement [which is a sponsorship program], and we patiently
> waited for months…. Unfortunately, this coincided with the start of the COVID-
> 19 pandemic, which threw everything into chaos. At the same time, my son was
> born, and I was overwhelmed with anxiety and worried that we would not survive
> this pandemic.

Her narrative captures the overwhelming uncertainty and vulnerability that paralyzed her

family as the pandemic disrupted their settlement plans. The interplay between the

sponsorship program and the pandemic is further illustrated. The pandemic-induced

turmoil not only upended their anticipated timeline but also heightened the emotional

strain and uncertainty they faced.

Participant 3's experience highlights the substantial delays introduced by the

pandemic: "After he came to Canada in 2020, he also sponsored me to come here. But,

the process took a long time because of Covid-19…. I came to Canada in 2022." The

pandemic's far-reaching effects are evident in the extended separation and prolonged

process, underscoring the unexpected toll it took on family reunification.

Furthermore, Participant 7's experience exemplifies the pandemic's economic

aftermath: "[My employer] offered me a job here in Canada as her trade consultant….

Then, COVID appeared in everyone's life, and my boss began struggling with my payroll,

so I also found a [different] job in a Mexican restaurant." The abrupt economic upheaval

triggered by the pandemic compelled individuals to make swift adjustments and

reevaluate their career paths. This adjustment was undertaken without the safety net of comprehensive support systems tailored to newcomers.

In essence, newcomer women's experiences during the pandemic stress the unprecedented challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which are intricately intertwined with participants' settlement stories. The pandemic disrupted plans, prolonged timelines, heightened anxieties, and heightened feelings of isolation, prompting immigrant women to navigate complex and ever-changing environments as they settled in Canada.

5.2.3 Positive Interactions and Supports

Through the project, the intricate web of interactions and social support that immigrant women experienced within their new society is illuminated, underscoring the transformative influence of various forms of assistance and connections during their settlement process in Canada. This finding unveils how non-profit organizations, personal relationships, and the collective resilience of fellow immigrant women emerged as vital sources of empowerment, belonging, and personal growth.

Non-profit organizations were pivotal in extending a welcoming hand to newcomers, facilitating their integration into Canadian society. A group conversation showcases the significance of this support: "One of them [roommates] gave me the agency number, I called and started working." These connections forged through these organizations not only opened doors to tangible employment opportunities, but also showcased the potential for positive transformation within these networks. Participant 9's expression of gratitude resonates deeply: "I thank God for allowing me to be part of the

Newcomer Women Services Toronto, where I have the opportunity to meet wonderful

people." Her words convey the intrinsic value of these services in fostering connections

and support that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries. Non-profit organizations

played a role beyond practical assistance. Participant 11's collage and story exemplify the

transformative power of programs that facilitate personal growth and empowerment:

> She started attending different kinds of programs to complete her community
> hours or graduation, experience new things, make new friends, and get involved in
> the community. Thanks to this program, she could frame one of her experiences as
> an immigrant in Canada into a good story.

These initiatives empower immigrant women to find their voices and establish their

presence in their new homes.

Furthermore, the sense of community cultivated among immigrant women who

collectively navigated similar challenges within these non-profit organizations provided

them with a secure space to share their profound narratives. Personal relationships and

connections, whether with fellow immigrants or new acquaintances, significantly

contributed to a sense of belonging and personal growth. Additionally, their settlement

journey was enriched by support from Canadian friends and neighbours. Participant 5's

collage and story vividly illustrate the transformative power of cultivating relationships

with like-minded individuals, nurturing a profound sense of camaraderie and strength to

overcome new challenges.

> She found supportive friends and mentors that showed her the way to success,
> which brought her more sense of confidence and belonging to Canada. Canada
> became her home, and she was proud to be a part of its rich and diverse
> community.

Participant 10 eloquently conveys her gratitude and mixed emotions about the support

received:

> Despite the fact that it was a mixture of mixed feelings. I am grateful to have
> found very good people who trusted us and offered us their hand. It has been one
> of my most wonderful experiences in this country to receive help from people, see
> the great union that exists, experience the hospitality, and discover the great
> human beings from different cultures and countries who live here. It is a great
> satisfaction.

Participant 5's refusal to be defeated by setbacks exemplifies the determination to forge

new connections and avenues for growth:

> She refused to let this setback defeat her. She looked for new ways to build a
> connection with herself…and connect with others through social media to build
> relationships and find new opportunities [with them].

The collective support and shared experiences among these immigrant women facilitated resilience, fostering the courage to confront new challenges and create meaningful connections that transcend borders and backgrounds.

Overall, the theme of positive interactions and support sheds light on the power of community, collaboration, and collective strength. Non-profit organizations, relationships, and the resilience of fellow immigrant women provide essential pillars of support that enable these women to navigate the complexities of their settlement journey with a renewed sense of agency, connection, and hope.

5.3 Barriers Experienced During Initial Settlement

The challenges of settling into a new country and culture are extensive and multifaceted, particularly for immigrant women. Their stories, captured through narratives and collages, provide valuable insights into their unique struggles during their initial years in Canada. Navigating a new culture, confronting racial prejudice, bearing the burden of entrenched gender norms, and grappling with the emotional depth of isolation often present intersecting challenges that magnify their impact. The stories shared by the participants not only highlight the individual hurdles faced by these women, but also bring to the fore the collective experiences that many immigrant women endure in their pursuit of a better life.

5.3.1 Racial Discrimination

The stories shared by the participants offer a detailed insight into the multifaceted obstacles faced by immigrant women during their early stages of settling in Canada. The narratives illuminate the profound challenges encountered by immigrant women,

emphasizing not just the usual hurdles of settling in a new country but the distressing experiences of racism woven into the fabric of their daily lives in Canada.

Participants 7 and 9 vividly portray the unsettling experiences of racial prejudice they endured. Despite Canada's reputation as a progressive and inclusive nation, Participant 7 recalls facing racial biases and labour exploitation, commenting on the irony of such experiences even when working with Mexican women: "Even in a First World Country such as Canada, they faced racism and labour abuse, regardless of our employees being a Mexican woman." Participant 9's anecdotes about the racial encounters involving her children stand out as particularly unsettling:

> On two occasions, my girls and I even had bad experiences with various racist people, and I actually got really scared being helpless with my two girls. In my country, we are used to greeting people even if we don't know them, and here [in Canada], most people even avoid looking at you.

Their narratives show that even in supposed progressive countries such as Canada, which prides itself on its multicultural ethos, racial biases persist. Discrimination intensifies when one adds the layer of being an immigrant woman, speaking to the intersectionality of their experiences. Their stories give voice to the countless racialized women who silently endure microaggressions, racism, and, in some instances, outright hostility.

Participant 12's account reveals a stark contrast between her initial expectations and the harsh reality she faced in Canada. She shared photographs depicting her anticipation of Canada as a multicultural haven, remarking, "This picture symbolizes what I envisioned before coming to Canada. In it, I observe diversity represented by varied skin colours. Yet, the common uniform symbolizes an equal environment."

However, her actual experiences in Canada were discriminatory and aggressive.

Recounting a particularly distressing incident, she shared: "I was even scared to go out

after the experience when one lady yelled at me: 'Go to your country with the virus, you

dirty Chinese.' Just because I have yellow skin." This striking account highlights the

intersections of race and ethnicity in the discrimination faced by immigrant women,

spotlighting the deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes they often confront.

Participant 7's account underscores the myriad challenges faced by women of

colour in environments tainted by discrimination. Through her lived experiences, it

becomes evident how these discriminatory practices and prejudices are often internalized,

overlooked, and inadvertently condoned, both by those directly affected and the wider

community.

> Those stories [regarding racism and labour abuse] connect me to the reality we sometimes take for granted. But it was there, revealed as a part of a person with dreams, hopes, and fears…. By helping these women defend themselves against the discrimination they were experiencing, I started to remember my life purpose.

Her reflections offer a profound understanding of how intersectional identities contribute to the normalization of discrimination in the lives of immigrant women. These stories shape their perceptions, moulding their expectations and experiences. Moved by these social and systemic challenges, which Participant 7 described as "racism" and "labour abuse," she not only recognized the depth of discrimination as a significant issue in Canada but also felt an imperative to act, providing support and advocacy for women who share similar stories, as evidenced in her collage and narrative.

In sum, the stories shared by the participants provide a deep and multifaceted view of the challenges immigrant women face in Canada. These stories, ranging from unsettling encounters with discrimination to advocacy for immigrant women thereafter, unveil the layers of struggle at the nexus of gender, race, and cultural identity. Particularly poignant is Participant 7's reflection, which serves as a powerful reminder of the often unseen or overlooked hardships these women endure. While Canada prides itself

on multiculturalism, the testimonies of these immigrant women indicate that there is a gap between this ideal and their lived reality.

5.3.2 Gender Norms

The settlement journey of immigrant women to Canada unfolds with numerous challenges deeply rooted in established gender norms and roles. While these norms shape their migration decisions, they also profoundly influence women's experiences as they adapt to a new culture. Alongside the universal challenges of integrating as immigrants, these women's stories further reveal internal conflicts arising from traditional roles, the expectations around motherhood, and the complexities of their marital dynamics.

Many participants in the project migrated to Canada due to marital reasons or decisions made by their husbands. For instance, Participant 2's story was prompted by her marriage, stating, "My immigration story started with my marriage. My husband grew up in Canada…. After he came to Canada, he also sponsored me to come here…. After arriving in Canada, one month was spent crying." Such accounts shed light on the patriarchal undertones in migration decisions, where women frequently migrate based on their husbands' choices. Participant 4's experience amplifies the gender dynamics at play in migration decisions: "My husband decided to leave our country in search of a better life. We had a perfect life. He probably was looking for other options and opportunities." These participants' story accentuates the dilemmas women navigate when relocating due to the choices of their spouses.

The intersection of gender and motherhood is evident in the narratives, showcasing the additional challenges immigrant women with children face. A participant

in a group conversation notes the complexity of restarting life as a mother of a child with special needs: "To start again is the most complex challenge…. Add these challenges to being a mother of a child with special needs." This quote underscores how the gendered role of caregiving intersects with the demands of immigration, compounding the obstacles faced by these women. The role of motherhood as a barrier to employment emerges in participant narratives. In a group conversation, one participant described her situation: "For women, it is hard to get a job because I have to stay at home to care of my child…. I have to stay at home for my kids and housework." Also, Participant 9's account highlights the dilemma of finding a job while caring for children:

> Thinking about getting a job when you have small children, and you don't have the support of a family member, is like a broken dream because you prefer to stay at home and take care of the children until they reach the appropriate age of study.

These stories expose how traditional gender roles can limit immigrant women's economic participation and mobility.

The gendered nature of dependency is apparent in the experiences of immigrant women, especially in relation to their husbands. A participant's sentiment encapsulates this: "I cannot go anywhere [without] my husband driving. I feel I cannot do anything without him in Canada." This quote reflects the way traditional gender roles can reinforce dependence and restrict women's autonomy in their new environment.

These narratives highlight the interplay of gender norms, motherhood, and marital dynamics in shaping immigrant women's experiences and challenges during their initial settlement in Canada. The stories underscore the importance of recognizing and

addressing the intersectional dimensions of gender, caregiving, and dependency in developing comprehensive support systems for immigrant women.

5.3.3. Language and Cultural Barriers

Participants' narratives shed light on the profound effects of linguistic and cultural challenges faced by immigrant women in their early years of settling in Canada. Their experiences not only highlight the tangible struggles of settling in a new land but also offer insights into the emotional and psychological journey of settlement. For Participant 4, juxtaposing Canadian culture against her homeland became a daunting endeavour. She eloquently draws a parallel between assimilating into a foreign culture and the intricate dance of learning to skate – both experiences replete with stumbles, unexpected setbacks, and a persistent will to persevere.

I realized that settling in a new country was like learning how to skate: it was difficult and at times overwhelming. We struggled to communicate with others and to understand the new culture. It was like trying to balance on skates for the first time…. [Skating is] similar to the first month in Canada.

Participant 5's story captures the intersection of cultural differences and language barriers, shedding light on the complex challenges immigrant women face: "Even with all

her hard work, she often felt invisible and overlooked because of the cultural difference

and languages." Such experiences emphasize that barriers are not just external; they are

deeply internalized and intertwined with one's identity as a woman from a different

cultural background. Participant 3's story vividly highlights the struggles associated with

language barriers. In her collage, she pinpoints "language" as a primary obstacle after her

immigration. When envisioning her future, the term "speak" stands out.

> Since I came to Canada, my challenges are the language…. [In my home country]
> I always was strong because I always did everything by myself. But I can't do it
> here because I don't speak English. Normally, I am a very talkative person in my
> country, but I am very shy here. When I cannot speak English, I want to return to
> my country.

Her words encapsulate the deep emotional distress caused by the inability to

communicate effectively, amplifying feelings of helplessness and a longing for home.

Additionally, Participant 11's experience emphasizes the practical challenges posed by

language barriers: "She struggled with language barriers; she could not understand people

so well or talk to them in English." This narrative highlights the difficulties of everyday

interactions, from understanding others to expressing oneself effectively.

On the other hand, Participant 8's story demonstrates the resilience and growth that can result from overcoming language barriers:

> Studying and living in a new language was extremely challenging. But I tried, failed, tried, and felt more and more comfortable. Now, English is the language of my confidence, as I gained back the confidence I lost once through learning to be myself in an English context.

Her story highlights the transformative process of language learning, where embracing and mastering English not only aids in communication but also in restoring and fortifying one's identity and confidence.

These stories underscore the intersectional nature of language barriers, as they intersect with factors like confidence, communication, and integration. Moreover, they reveal the potential for language acquisition to empower immigrant women in their settlement journey. Understanding and addressing language barriers become crucial aspects of creating inclusive and supportive settlement processes for immigrant women.

5.3.4 Isolation and Loss

The participants' stories underscore the significant emotional toll that isolation, loss, and loneliness can have on immigrant women during their initial settlement in Canada. These themes are deeply intertwined, highlighting the complex interplay between personal connections, cultural displacement, and mental well-being.

Participants' narratives reflect the profound isolation experienced by immigrant women upon arrival. A participant in a group conversation articulates this feeling: "For me, the hardest thing was like coming on my own when I didn't know anybody." This sentiment is echoed by another participant who expressed feeling trapped and disconnected, stating, "Staying at home all the time makes me sad and depressed."

Further underscoring the weight of this isolation is Participant 12's visceral representation

through her collage and story. Her analogy of the *square* evokes feelings of confinement

and being boxed in.

> I was stuck in a small square room. I met people through a square screen…. I saw
> colourful leaves through a square window…. The biggest reason that I wanted to
> quit everything was loneliness.

This imagery of the *square*—whether it is a room, a screen, or a window—captures the

limited scope of her interactions and experiences, reinforcing the confinement and limited

exposure that exacerbated her feelings of loneliness.

The intertwined emotions of homesickness and loss emerge strongly through

participants' stories. Participant 9's reflection on missing familiar aspects of her

homeland, such as "the streets of my city, even the smell of wet earth when it rained,"

captures a palpable sense of yearning. More emotionally charged sentiments include the

lamentation of Participant 18, who felt she was a "little girl... trapped in a limbo state,"

and Participant 13's poignant depiction of migration as a series of losses, including

"losing the homeland... being away from all family and friends."

Participant 14's story resonates deeply with themes of homesickness and loss

during her initial settlement period in an entirely new environment. Her words weave a

story of trying to reconcile her past stable life with the pressing demands of her Canadian

life, revealing an inner turmoil marked by the quest for belonging amidst unfamiliarity.
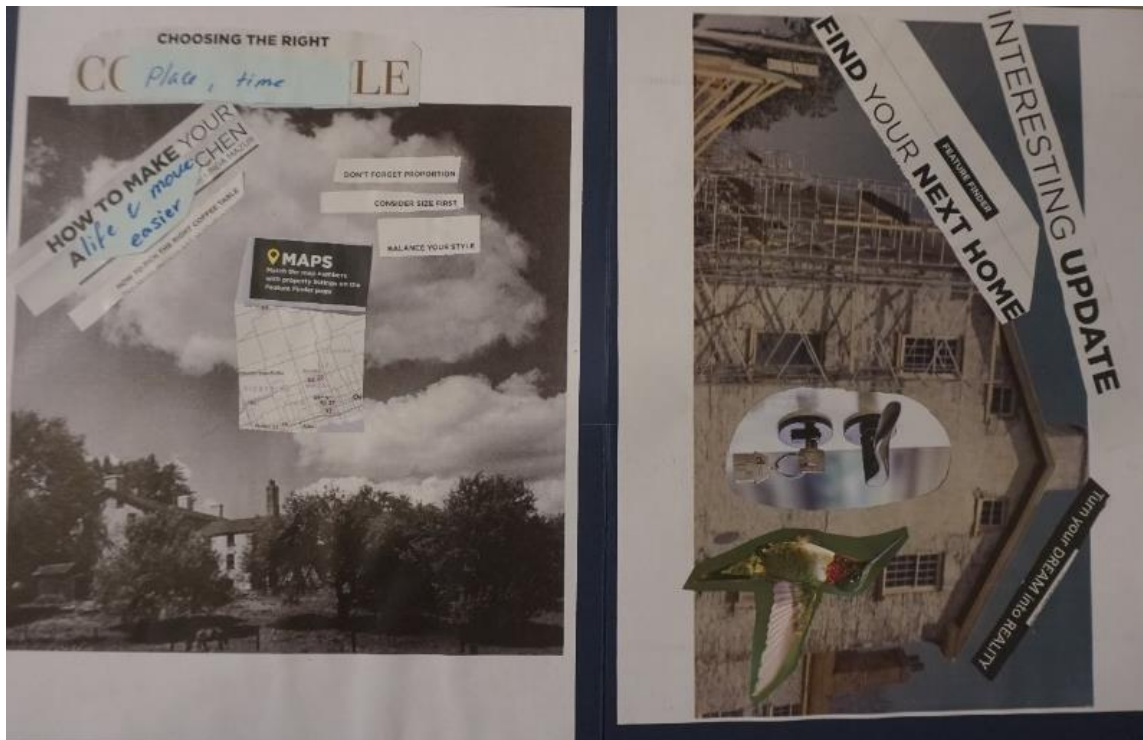
The imagery she associates with her homeland depicts tranquillity and stability.

Reflecting upon it, she reverently labels it as "how to make your life move easier,"

suggesting a longing for the predictability and comfort of her past life. Yet, when she

turns her focus toward her initial stages of immigration, the visual narrative shifts

dramatically. The collage she crafts to represent this phase features a key, symbolically

locked within an unfinished house structure. This can be interpreted as a representation of

her unsettled feelings and perhaps a hint of the barriers she perceives in her quest to feel

truly at home in Canada.

> The first one [photograph] was my expectation about Canada, to be like big
> enough to welcome me and hug me. The second one was my feeling about myself.
> Like there is always something missing I need to fix in myself to adapt to Canada.

This story, enriched with visual metaphors, underscores the intricate dance of emotions

and identity negotiations that immigrant women like Participant 14 navigate, seeking

solace and acceptance in their adopted homeland.

 These experiences of isolation, loss, and emotional struggles reveal how

immigrant women's identities as mothers, wives, and individuals intersect with their

settlement processes. The isolation and loneliness are often compounded by traditional

gender roles, such as the role of being a mother that restricts social engagement due to

childcare responsibilities. Moreover, the loss and homesickness speak to the ties to home

countries, where cultural norms and societal roles often define their identities.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the complex narratives of immigrant women during their initial settlement phase in Canada, using the lens of intersectional feminism. In pursuing this understanding, I aim to discern the ways in which systemic structures and influences inform and shape the challenges these women confront and the strategies they employ in response. I initiate the discussion with a summary of the principal findings. Subsequently, the analysis unfolds across four predominant themes: (1) the disparities between pre-migration expectations and post-migration, (2) insufficient settlement support for immigrant women, (3) the intersectional challenges of immigrant women during initial settlement, and (4) resilience: immigrant women's narratives. To conclude the chapter, I contemplate the broader ramifications of these findings, particularly in relation to their implications for the field of social work and prospective research trajectories. Further, I shed light on the potential limitations of this study, ensuring a transparent and reflective approach to the research process.

6.1 Summary and Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings in the previous chapter elucidated immigrant women's experiences during their initial years of settlement in Canada by visually and narratively examining their pre-migration expectations, the support they received post-migration, and the challenges they faced in their new environment. Most of these immigrant women harboured optimistic views about their future in Canada, envisioning increased opportunities, greater inclusivity, and a superior quality of life. However, the post-migration reality often diverged sharply from these expectations.

While some found stability and success, others wrestled with unexpected challenges. Upon arrival in Canada, the degree of support and guidance these women received varied considerably. While some benefited from structured aid that eased their transition, others felt as though they were traversing unfamiliar territory with scant guidance. These accounts highlight the pivotal role of robust support mechanisms in shaping immigrant women's initial impressions and experiences.

The participants' narratives also revealed a myriad of barriers they faced during their initial settlement period. Cultural discrepancies, encounters with racism, and language hindrances were predominant challenges. Traditional gender roles added another layer of complexity to their adaptation journey. Beyond tangible obstacles, emotional challenges like feelings of isolation, homesickness, and loneliness were pervasive among the participants.

6.1.1 Disparities between Pre-Migration Expectations and Post-Migration

Migration is often perceived as a journey that brings significant gains to recipient countries and provides an opportunity for a better life for migrants (Engler et al., 2020). Earlier studies on immigrant adaptation indicate that having realistic and positive expectations improves outcomes after the migration (Caligiuri et al., 2001; Mähönen et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2008) and imply that anticipating one's post-migration future can reduce the ambiguity surrounding the choice to relocate (Blackl, 1992; Mähönen et al., 2013). Such expectations can shape subsequent experiences (Mähönen et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2008) and aid in behavioural adaptation following the move (Bürgelt et al., 2008).

Expectations—visions of safety, empowerment, and professional success in a new land—are found as central to the immigration journey for immigrant women in the study. Drawing upon the narratives of immigrant women in this study, this discussion adopts an intersectional feminist perspective to critically examine the pronounced disparities between pre-migration expectations and post-migration realities. By unravelling the implications of these disparities, I aim to shed light on the intricacies of immigrant women's initial settlement experiences, the complexities they navigate, and the profound impact on their settlement and integration. Through their stories, I do not merely explore the dichotomies of expectation and reality but delve into an intersectional understanding of how gender, race, and immigration status intersect to shape the unique challenges and triumphs of immigrant women in Canada.

The expectation of *safety* emerged as a foundational expectation in the photovoice project. With distressing statistics and stories of violence in their home countries, these women anticipated Canada to be a haven. While many found this to be true, it is essential to ask critically: Does this sense of safety extend uniformly across the spectrum of immigrant women? Can an immigrant woman of colour feel as safe as her White counterpart, especially in light of discussions on racial profiling and systemic racism? Such disparities in experiences shape not only their overall well-being but also their trust in their new homeland.

In fact, much like many other countries, Canada is also facing challenges related to gender-based violence. The Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces data conducted by Statists Canada sheds light on the extent and nature of such violence against

women in the country. One in three women encountered unwanted sexual behaviour in public. Common manifestations included unwanted sexual attention (25 percent), physical contact (17 percent), and inappropriate comments about sex or gender (12 percent) (Cotter & Savage, 2019). The likelihood of experiencing such behaviours was not only higher for women, but the aftermath was notably more severe. The effects were profound enough to change routines, trigger negative emotional responses, and push women to discuss their experiences post-incident (Cotter & Savage, 2019). The issue of violence is more pronounced among racialized groups, specifically Indigenous or immigrant women (Cotter & Savage, 2019; Pietsch, 2010). Previous studies indicate that immigrant women might be susceptible to different forms of violence upon arriving in a new nation. This violence against immigrant women can manifest within their families, communities, places of work, or even within broader societal, institutional, and administrative frameworks. The perpetrators might range from intimate partners and employers to unknown individuals (Freedman et al., 2008; Gonçalves & Matos, 2016).

An immigrant woman of colour, for instance, might not always experience the same level of security and belongingness as her White counterpart. In an examination of participants' narratives, Participant 12 recounted an incident where she was subjected to a verbal assault based solely on her appearance as she walked by. Similarly, Participant 9 expressed her apprehension about residing in Canada with her two daughters due to their racial background. These distressing experiences underscore the challenges faced by people of colour. Canada, while celebrated for its diversity and inclusivity, is not entirely devoid of challenges associated with individuals' racial trauma and systemic racism

(Williams et al., 2022). Consequently, while safety might be a tangible reality for some, it could be a more elusive construct for others. This differential sense of safety, influenced by one's racial or ethnic identity, can profoundly impact immigrant women's trust in their new environment, self-confidence, and overall well-being.

Moreover, the broader socio-political landscape of Canada can further complicate these experiences. Racism extends beyond mere individual prejudicial actions or violence against people of colour. It is ingrained in societal structures that often curtail the access of people of colour to various social, educational, economic, and political avenues (Carter, 2007; Williams et al., 2022). It is intricately woven into the societal frameworks and institutions where these individuals reside and seek to achieve their objectives, manifesting as barriers and disparities that frequently remain unrecognized (Williams et al., 2022). Thus, while the participants' narratives paint a picture of Canada as a sanctuary, it is imperative to delve deeper to understand the layered experiences of immigrant women. The disparities in their experiences, stemming from the chasm between expectation and reality, are not just individual stories; they are reflective of the broader dynamics of the settlement process and integration in the context of modern-day Canada.

Participants in the study also expressed significant pre-migration expectations of *empowerment*, *belonging*, and *professional aspirations*. These anticipations of empowerment and belonging stem from Canada's proclaimed gender equality ethos, which informs that Canada is dedicated to promoting equality concerning sex, sexual orientation, and gender expression by ensuring the participation of all genders, including

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women, in Canada's economic, social, and political spheres (Government of Canada, 2016). However, the actual experiences can be more complex, occasionally challenging these foundational beliefs.

The discrepancies between the anticipated sense of empowerment and belonging and the lived experiences can be stark. In environments, especially those dominated by patriarchal or ethnocentric norms, racialized immigrant women may feel the weight of being *othered* (Dixon, 2015, 2019). This sense of otherness not only curtails their expected sense of belonging (Neiterman et al., 2015) but can also infringe on their perceived empowerment. When acceptance is not as forthcoming as imagined, feelings of disillusionment can set in, casting shadows over their sense of self-worth and place in the new society (Neiterman et al., 2015). This disenchantment becomes even more pronounced in professional realms (Neiterman et al., 2015). Immigrant women's qualifications, often hard-earned in their home country, are testaments to their skills. The narratives in the group conversation and stories of participants 3, 7, and 14, however, highlight a chasm between the hopes pinned on these credentials and their actual reception in Canada. The clash between expectation and reality here is multi-faceted. On the one hand, there is the systemic challenge of unrecognized qualifications (Shan, 2009), making their professional journey in Canada feel like starting from scratch. On the other, there is the more subtle but equally insidious challenge of cultural misunderstandings, which can sometimes sideline them in workplaces, making integration a continuous struggle (Ertorer et al., 2022).

The combined weight of these experiences – both in social and professional spheres – can be significant. For many immigrant women, their profession is not just a means to economic stability but a core component of their identity (Gupta & Sullivan, 2013). When faced with hurdles in this domain, not only is their career trajectory affected, but also their feelings of acceptance into a new homeland (Bauder, 2003). The devaluation or non-recognition of their credentials can amplify feelings of alienation, casting doubts on their decision to migrate and their place in the Canadian fabric (Bauder, 2003). In essence, while empowerment, belonging, and professional success are distinct realms of experience for immigrant women, they are deeply intertwined. Each domain feeds into the other, and challenges in one can reverberate across the others. To truly understand their migratory experience and support their integration, it is crucial to approach these narratives with a holistic lens, acknowledging the interplay between these facets and their profound impact on an immigrant woman's sense of self and belonging.

Understanding how these varied expectations impact the overall well-being and settlement process is crucial (Mähönen et al., 2013). Immigrants feeling disappointed by the lack of work opportunities might also face challenges in integrating effectively into the host community (Bauder, 2003), further complicating the settlement process. Through an intersectional lens, these narratives underscore the need for a multi-dimensional understanding of the immigrant experience. As I juxtapose their stories of hope with their experiences of reality, it becomes evident that the chasm between expectation and reality, shaped by layers of gender, race, and migrant status, has profound implications for their

holistic well-being. To ensure more positive outcomes, a multi-faceted strategy that offers

accurate information pre-migration, coupled with robust post-migration support, is vital.

6.1.2 Insufficient Settlement Support for Immigrant Women

Canada is recognized as one of the leading nations worldwide in welcoming

immigrants (Smith et al., 2021). To support newcomers, Canadian settlement services

provide a broad range of assistance, including language classes, job training, community

integration, referrals for education and healthcare, childcare services, and help in securing

housing and accessing social benefits (Bhuyan & Schmidt, 2019). In this section, utilizing

an intersectional feminist framework, I discuss how participants experience Canada

welcoming and supporting newcomer women during the initial settlement. The

intersectional framework posits that various social categorizations, such as race, class,

and gender, intersect, contributing to systemic injustice and social inequality (Tastsoglou,

2019). Within the context of this study, this lens discusses how immigrant women with

multiple intersecting identities can be limited and marginalized in receiving settlement

support.

The narratives of participants arriving as refugees contrast the anticipation

surrounding Canada's reputation as a haven for refugees and the real challenges faced

upon their arrival. These firsthand accounts echo a dual sentiment: while gratitude

abounds for the opportunity to rebuild in Canada, there is a poignant realization about the

inadequacies of the settlement services. Participant 10's harrowing experience of sleeping

on the street with her one-year-old baby and Participant 18's description of constantly

having to pack and unpack in a refugee encampment void of privacy highlight these

disparities. For Participant 13, the ordeal was distressingly reminiscent of being in *prison*. Viewing these experiences through an intersectional feminist lens, we are reminded of the exacerbated challenges faced by women due to their layered identities. Immigrant women, shaped by their gender and newcomer status (in these cases, refugee status), often grapple with magnified adversities (Tastsoglou, 2019). In unfamiliar settings, they, as refugees, struggled with insufficient support, further complicated by language and cultural barriers, and faced uncertainties regarding their status. Their gender also made them particularly vulnerable, amplifying their physical and mental risks to potential threats. Previous studies underscore the issue of diminished privacy for refugees. The confluence of overcrowded and inadequate living environments with a pronounced absence of privacy has been linked to reduced self-assurance, an overwhelming preoccupation with their current situation, inactivity, a lack of hope for the future, and intra-refugee conflicts (Rosenegger, 1996; Steindl et al., 2008).

As such, intersectionality provides a nuanced lens through which we can examine the confluence of systemic barriers that amplify challenges for immigrant women. The narratives of participants facing rejection from landlords—attributed to their immigrant status, lack of credit, and absence of employment history—underscore the intricate interplay of gender, race, and immigration status. Immigrant women do not just grapple with one isolated form of prejudice; they often face a confluence of biases (Enns et al., 2021). For example, a woman of colour who is also an immigrant might confront challenges not only due to her newcomer status but also from racial biases, especially in the housing sector. Prior research indicates that people of colour frequently receive

inferior service, experience higher rates of rejection, and are offered smaller, more expensive loans than their White counterparts (Friedman & Squires, 2005; Loya, 2022; Massey, 2005; Stuart, 2019; Williams & Nesiba, 2005). Furthermore, the challenges faced by these women are accentuated when gender-specific issues, such as Participant 2's health concerns related to pregnancy, come into play. Such compounded difficulties are particularly acute for women embodying multiple marginalized identities. Numerous studies have indeed validated the intersectional barriers immigrant women encounter within healthcare services (Hanley et al., 2019).

The onset of sudden, large-scale challenges, like the COVID-19 pandemic, exposes and often amplifies the pre-existing cracks within settlement services (Arya et al., 2021). During the pandemic, marginalized immigrant women have felt the most profound effects of challenges and setbacks (Katherine & Shamira, 2021). Due to the delays or interruptions in settlement and medical services caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants felt isolated in a new land without any support and doubted their own and their family's survival. These stories vividly represent immigrant women's struggles. As a racialized newcomer woman, the pandemic also accentuated my feelings of isolation without any support. The testimonies shared by participants mirrored those experiences but also reminded me of the additional layers of challenges that many immigrant women face, like familial responsibilities, which I did not necessarily experience. As such, for many, the pandemic compounded feelings of isolation, exacerbated by language barriers and the absence of established social support (Arya et al., 2021). Additionally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrant women who faced socioeconomic difficulties

found the long-term effects of the pandemic exacerbating their problems (Katherine & Shamira, 2021). Financial strains, often intensified by limited access to employment opportunities, coupled with disruptions in settlement services, prolonged their hardships (Katherine & Shamira, 2021). The delays and shortcomings in providing support during these trying times rendered the participants arriving or settling during the pandemic disproportionately disadvantaged. The effects of the pandemic, when examined through an intersectional feminist lens, further underscore the need for adaptable and resilient support systems that recognize and cater to the unique challenges faced by immigrant women. Their experiences, characterized by multiple layers of marginalization, demand nuanced and multifaceted support structures.

However, amid these systemic challenges, the role of informal support networks cannot be ignored. Social support rooted in connections among families, community members, and ethnic groups reinforces, aids, and empowers newcomers (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Elliott & Yusuf, 2014). Many immigrant women in this study leaned on informal connections with fellow immigrant women, finding solace and assistance that formal services could not provide. Participant 13 mentioned how she found hope to belong to the new society through a fellow immigrant woman she met at a community gathering, while Participant 17 spoke about receiving guidance on navigating local schools and public and banking services from a new neighbour and local community. Through these stories, participants underscore that while formal support systems may have their limitations, the new relationships and the solidarity of immigrant women play a crucial role in helping each other navigate the intricacies of settlement in Canada. As

such, the power of bonds formed through support groups, new friendships, and community ties plays a crucial role in fostering personal accountability and healing from the challenges and losses experienced during migration and resettlement (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).

The testimonies of the immigrant women in this study underscore the urgent necessity for a more inclusive, intersectional approach in structuring and implementing settlement services in Canada. When I first arrived in Canada, the scope of services available to newcomers like myself seemed vast. However, as I settled, the reality of navigating these services and finding ones that truly cater to the intricate nature of my challenges became clear. The discrepancy between Canada's reputation and the actual experiences of newcomers is not just observed in this study; it is a reality I have lived. With Canada consistently opening its doors to immigrants from varied backgrounds (Smith et al., 2021), it becomes imperative to fortify support systems that are attuned to the multifaceted challenges women encounter. Addressing these issues goes beyond mere administrative or policy shifts; it reflects Canada's dedication to its core principles of inclusivity and integration. By genuinely acknowledging and addressing these intersectional challenges, Canada can truly become the haven that aligns with the aspirations of these resilient women.

6.1.3 Intersectional Challenges of Immigrant Women During Initial Settlement

The initial settlement period is a particularly vulnerable time for immigrants (Danso, 2002). When one evaluates this phase through the lens of intersectional feminism, it becomes evident how race, gender, and newcomer status intersect (Bilge,

2013). Immigrant women occupy a unique space in the discourse on migration, often positioned at the intersection of multiple complex identities (Dixon, 2019). As a racialized newcomer woman, I have felt the weight of layered identities. I had been in situations where I was unsure if the challenges I faced were because I was new to Canada, because of my race, or because of my gender. The narratives from participants highlight that newcomer women not only grapple with the standard challenges faced by immigrants, like adapting to a new culture and system or overcoming language barriers, but they also confront deeply rooted gendered and racialized prejudices. The emotive terms used by participants, such as "scared," "sad," and "afraid," reveal that these are not just innocent observations of a new society but stark manifestations of deeply ingrained racial and gendered prejudices.

Despite Canada's portrayal as an emblem of inclusivity, the accounts shared by participants 7, 9, and 12 offer critical insight into the illusion of multiculturalism that many immigrants anticipate before settling in Canada. Despite its global image as a bastion of inclusivity and diversity, the lived realities these women articulate starkly contrast this idealized perception. The poignant experiences of racism, as described by Participant 9, who expected friendly interactions but was met with aversion, underscores the gap between the aspirational multicultural image and the ground reality. Participant 12's experience highlights a potent issue: Microaggressions and explicit racial confrontations are not just mere incidents; they contribute to an environment of fear, impacting an immigrant's psychological well-being. While intersectional feminism

highlights the simultaneous oppressions faced by individuals based on race, gender, class, etc., these experiences demonstrate how these intersections can exacerbate vulnerability.

In terms of the expectation of diversity, the term *multiculturalism*—which evokes in newcomers, including myself, an optimistic anticipation that Canada welcomes immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds— necessitates a thorough assessment of its users and their underlying intentions. Internationally lauded for its pioneering commitment to multiculturalism (Gomá, 2020; Thobani, 2018), Canada supports multiculturalism at a policy level, both legislatively through the Multiculturalism Act and constitutionally via section twenty-seven of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Beaman, 2017). However, on a deeper level, multiculturalism may be understood as a biopolitical governance system that manages the interplay among Canadian settlers (both English and French), Indigenous groups, and immigrants from various racial backgrounds (Gomá, 2020; Thobani, 2018; Winter, 2014). Canadian critical race and feminist scholars argue that a superficial celebration of diversity pushes the challenges faced by communities and individuals of colour into a non-political sphere of cultural identity, overshadowing ingrained racism and socioeconomic disparities (Bannerji, 1996; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007, 2018). Furthermore, certain philosophers like Tully (1996) and Kernerman (2005) have completely abandoned the idea of a unified Canadian identity. For those most affected by the influence of Canada and its approach to multiculturalism, namely racialized immigrants and people of colour, the potential for multiculturalism to act as a liberating, anti-racist mechanism remains restricted (Gomá, 2020). This limitation persists as long as multiculturalism endeavours to dictate and oversee cultural variations

from a dominant perspective (Bannerji, 1996; Cannon, 1995; Gomá, 2020; Thobani, 2007). Likewise, the personal narratives from this study also underscore a significant disparity between the ideal of Canada's multicultural values and policies and the reality. These experiences reveal a need to examine and redefine its approach to multiculturalism critically.

As shared by participants 2 and 5, many immigrant women embark on this journey influenced predominantly by male-driven decisions, reflecting the patriarchal undertones even in migration choices. This demonstrates that even the act of migration is embedded within patriarchal norms, limiting women's agency from the outset. Upon arrival, these women, carrying the weight of these gendered expectations, might find themselves confined to roles such as primary caregivers or limited to job opportunities in sectors traditionally deemed "suitable" for women. This gendered experience during the initial settlement period can significantly impact their integration process. Cultural barriers during the initial settlement phase are not just about adapting to a new way of life. Through an intersectional feminist lens, one can see how gendered cultural expectations further complicate this phase for immigrant women. Participants 1 and 8's experiences, for instance, highlight how the pressure to uphold cultural and familial norms can hinder women's ability to seek help, learn a new language, or pursue job opportunities, deepening their isolation.

In closing, the initial settlement period for immigrant women is not a mere transitional phase but an ongoing negotiation of their multifaceted identities in the face of systemic biases. This period symbolizes more significant societal issues — deeply rooted

racial, gendered, and other different identities that extend far beyond the immigrant experience.

6.1.4 Resilience: Immigrant Women's Narratives

Shifts in economic, social, and physical environments significantly influence an individual's well-being, health, and resettlement process (Casado et al., 2010; Khan et al., 2005; Rashid & Gregory, 2014; Schmitz et al., 2013), but many immigrant women navigate these challenges with marked resilience (Rashid & Gregory, 2014). Resilience is understood as a positive adjustment in the face of adversity (Bandura et al., 1999). Factors like social support from family, friends, and the broader community, which result in information sharing, emotional backing, and support tapping into community resources, are crucial for fostering resilience among immigrant women (Brennan, 2008; Martins & Reid, 2007; Rashid & Gregory, 2014). Among the diverse landscape of participants' stories in the study, their experiences stand out with unique intensity, marked by their specific challenges and achievements. Their narratives, filled with resilience and self-determination, offer crucial insights into the intricate support systems from which immigrant women derive strength. Viewed through intersectional feminism, these interactions become especially significant. They highlight not only the common challenges faced by all immigrants but also emphasize the layered struggles of women managing multiple, overlapping identities.

Personal relationships enrich the intricate landscape of their experiences. In resilience research, it has been confirmed that supportive social environments and relationships help people resist risks, mitigate the effects of risks, and enhance adaptation

(Greene & Conrad, 2002; Rashid & Gregory, 2014). The study participants' narratives exemplify the transformative power of these connections, providing us with a deeper perspective on empowerment, collective resilience, and autonomy. Their stories echo a deep-rooted feminist value that applauds communal strength and unity, emphasizing the transformative potential of shared struggles.

In examining Participant 5's narrative, her unwavering determination amidst considerable challenges aligns with the core tenets of intersectional feminism. Her account powerfully attests to the inherent agency of women, highlighting their consistent capacity to innovate, build relationships, and thrive despite facing significant obstacles. Stories such as hers emphasize a necessary shift in our discourse: rather than viewing immigrant women as passive figures shaped by their surroundings, we should recognize them as active architects of their own destinies, even in the most demanding and unfamiliar contexts.

Particularly with other immigrant women, these bonds become havens of support. They offer essential moments of understanding and solidarity amidst challenges deeply rooted in gender, race, or cultural differences (Ryan, 2011). Participant 7 took the initiative to assist female immigrants in circumstances similar to hers. By mutually relying on and sharing their experiences, these women not only harness the strength to navigate their distinct adversities but also forge a unified voice advocating for change. Participant 7's story exemplifies this notion, emphasizing the significance of solidarity among immigrant women and illustrating that mutual experiences and support serve as drivers for resilience and empowerment. Drawing from my own journey, the resilience of

immigrant women is not merely a scholarly observation but a lived reality. The initial

steps in Canada as a foreign-born student were rife with doubts and challenges. However,

like the women in these narratives, I, too, found strength in connections, especially with

fellow international students and newcomer friends. Our shared experiences, challenges,

and insights formed a bedrock of support.

In conclusion, when viewed through the discerning lens of intersectional

feminism, the stories of immigrant women, especially in the early stages of their

Canadian settlement journey, are not just chronicles of mutual support and camaraderie.

They are powerful testimonials emblematic of the unparalleled strength, resilience, and

agency of women standing at the confluence of diverse identities. Their stories challenge

prevalent norms and illuminate the intricate pathways they carve in new lands. These

narratives compellingly highlight the pressing need for comprehensive support systems

that are sensitively attuned to their singular challenges, ultimately furthering the universal

feminist aspiration for an inclusive, equitable advancement of all.

6.2 Implications for Social Work and Future Research

The findings and conclusions drawn from this research are instrumental to the

realm of social work research, policy, and practice concerning the initial settlement of

immigrant women in Canada. This thesis underlines the intricate challenges faced by

these women, demonstrating that these challenges are not merely individualistic but are

deeply embedded within societal structures that may fail to respond to their unique needs,

often magnifying their sense of displacement and vulnerability (Shergold et al., 2019).

The role of settlement services, cultural negotiation, racialization, community engagement, and evolving family dynamics highlighted in this study converge to underscore the multifaceted experiences of immigrant women. The nuances elucidated support the broader body of literature on immigrant women's experiences in Canada. However, this research brings a distinctive contribution by emphasizing the initial settlement needs of these women, both visible and submerged. This perspective provides a refreshing conceptual framework that acknowledges the urgent and specific period contexts rather than the broad needs during the whole settlement of newcomer women.

6.2.1 Implications for Policy

Housing: Beyond the Basics

Housing emerges as a primary concern for many participants in the study. A place to call *home* is crucial in aiding the settlement process, providing a sense of stability and belonging (Tasleem et al., 2020). However, securing housing is not straightforward, as the participants' narratives suggest. The barriers faced are not just about affordability but also intersect with racial biases, perceived creditworthiness, and prejudices related to employment status. As a newcomer woman without a stable job or credit history in Canada, procuring housing can become daunting. When combined with potential racial and/or gender biases, the challenges multiply. Studies have shown that immigrant women, especially those from racialized backgrounds, can face heightened housing discrimination based on their race, family size, or even perceived economic stability (Dunn, 2002; Darden & Kamel, 2002).

To address housing issues, measures such as stricter regulations against housing discrimination, more inclusive credit evaluation systems, and rental assistance programs tailored for newcomers can be instrumental. Additionally, it is essential to develop women-focused housing assistance policies. Emphasis should be placed on supporting single mothers or those escaping domestic violence situations. Prioritizing housing projects that cater specifically to women and their families will further address the unique challenges faced by immigrant women during this transitional phase, ensuring they receive targeted support tailored to their needs.

Childcare: Striking the Balance

Childcare is another pivotal concern. Immigrant women, especially those with young children, find it challenging to strike a balance between their professional aspirations and caregiving responsibilities. Canada, with its dual-income household model, often necessitates that both partners work to maintain a certain standard of living (Ferrer & Riddell, 2008). Without affordable and accessible childcare, many immigrant women are forced to either put their professional ambitions on hold or make compromises in the jobs they accept. This can create feelings of being trapped in a cycle where the lack of quality employment reduces their ability to afford better childcare options. For childcare, expanding affordable childcare options, perhaps through subsidized programs or community-led initiatives, is crucial. Investing in community centers that offer childcare services and programs to assist immigrant families can alleviate some of the pressures faced by newcomer women.

Employment: Beyond Just a Job

Securing meaningful employment that respects their credentials and experience is a primary aspiration for immigrant women. However, challenges like unrecognized foreign qualifications, cultural barriers, and gender biases often hinder this journey (Man, 2004). The absence of adequate employment can lead to economic instability, making other facets of life, like housing and childcare, even more challenging. To address these multifaceted challenges, policies need to be proactive and empathetic. For example, bridging courses or programs can be a pivotal solution. These programs can help immigrant women align their foreign qualifications with local standards without negating the value of their prior education and experience. Such courses can focus on filling gaps in knowledge, updating them about local industry trends, or even assisting in getting their credentials recognized.

Resilience During Crisis: Learning from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic served as an unexpected and brutal stress test for systems worldwide. It highlighted the gaping holes in many support structures, especially those catering to vulnerable populations such as immigrant women. As per the participants' narrative, one woman could not see her husband for more than two years, and another participant despaired from the delayed immigrant process. Given this revelation, policy frameworks should undergo a shift – a move towards more resilient and adaptive structures. Rather than merely offering support as usual, these services must be equipped to pivot rapidly in the face of unforeseen challenges. This requires embedding provisions for contingency planning within the very fabric of settlement services.

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For immigrant women, this means not only providing immediate relief in terms of housing, employment, and healthcare during normal times but also ensuring that they have a safety net during crises. Whether it is setting up emergency funds, creating rapid response teams to assist with urgent needs, or having digital platforms to offer continuous support and guidance even during lockdowns, these measures can be lifesavers. Moreover, policies must recognize and emphasize the compounded vulnerabilities of immigrant women. Their experiences, coloured by various intersections of identity and circumstance, mean they might face disproportionate impacts in times of crisis. As we have learned from the pandemic, a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. Tailored interventions, crafted with a deep understanding of these unique challenges, are imperative.

Towards Comprehensive Policy Development

The stories of the participants, as well as my own experience as an immigrant, reveal that although we all fall under the label of immigrant women and share empathetic narratives, beneath this collective identity lies a rich tapestry of individual experiences. These are shaped by our unique cultural backgrounds, languages, and reasons for immigrating. Each story is, therefore, unique in its contours. Given the varied challenges that immigrant women encounter, there is a need for a policy framework that is robust, adaptive, and deeply rooted in empathy. For genuine systemic change, it is essential to craft strategies grounded in a profound, holistic grasp of these women's diverse needs and aspirations.

A thorough needs assessment is foundational. The lived experiences of the participants extend beyond mere economic or physical challenges. They encompass a spectrum of socio-cultural nuances, psychological stresses, and economic hardships, further intensified by their unique intersectional identities. By mapping out these complexities, we can ensure that policies are proactive, predictive, and preventative, aligning support structures seamlessly with their multifaceted requirements.

However, solutions should not be devised in isolation. Top-down approaches often lack the richness of grassroots insights (Fraser et al., 2006). Immigrant women are not just beneficiaries of these policies but should be considered essential collaborators in their formulation. Their stories, struggles, and successes provide invaluable insights. Direct engagement can reveal nuanced challenges, such as patriarchal pressures influencing migration choices or subtle forms of discrimination in daily interactions, ensuring that the resulting policies genuinely reflect their needs and aspirations.

In addition, the policy development process must be iterative. Post-implementation, it is vital to establish a cyclical feedback mechanism. Immigrant women should have platforms to share their experiences and provide input on policy effectiveness continually. This process not only refines existing policies but also ensures they remain dynamic and aligned with the lived realities of these women.

In essence, crafting policies for immigrant women is more than a bureaucratic exercise. It is a pledge to understand, empathize, and effectively support a group with unique strengths and challenges. Through a comprehensive, collaborative, and adaptive approach, we can ensure our policies truly resonate with their needs and aspirations.

6.2.2 Implications for Social Work Practice

Holistic Approach

Social workers should adopt a holistic approach when assisting immigrant

women, which involves understanding the intricacies of their intersectional identities.

This would allow them to identify and address not just the immediate challenges faced by

these women but also the layered racial, gendered, and cultural prejudices underlying

their experiences. Recognizing the interplay of gendered expectations, racial biases, and

cultural pressures in the lives of immigrant women, social work services should integrate

multidisciplinary teams — including counsellors, language trainers, and employment

specialists — to offer comprehensive support during the initial settlement period.

Moreover, training programs for social workers should incorporate intersectional

feminism as a fundamental principle. By understanding the multiple overlapping

challenges immigrant women face, they can offer targeted assistance and develop more

effective intervention strategies.

Advocating for Intersectional Change in Canada's Immigration Policy

Drawing from my own experience as a newcomer in Canada and this study, I

argue that social work professionals have a crucial role to play in advocating for

intersectional policy reform. This study elucidates the layered complexities that

immigrant women face—a multiplicity of identities that span ethnicity, gender, socio-

economic status, and more. This depth is often unaccounted for in current Canadian

immigration policies, which, as I have outlined in my literature review, have historical

roots in systemic racism and gender bias. It is essential for social workers to influence

policies that genuinely cater to the intricacies of these overlapping identities.

Similarly, participants in the study underscore the remarkable resilience of immigrant women. As someone who has navigated the labyrinthine pathways of immigration, cultural adaptation, and employment, I can affirm that immigrant women exhibit a strength that is often understated and undervalued. Workers in the social work field should harness these narratives of resilience when advocating for policy changes. These stories could serve as powerful testimonials to policy-makers, providing empirical evidence for the need for more targeted support systems that empower immigrant women economically, socially, and emotionally.

As a study focusing on the Toronto area, which boasts one of the most diverse immigrant populations in Canada, participants' stories show firsthand the chasms of social and economic inequalities that can be easily masked by the city's celebrated multiculturalism. Social workers must, therefore, be vigilant in identifying these gaps and bringing them to the forefront of policy discussions.

Canada's historical mistreatment of immigrant communities, particularly women, cannot be overlooked when framing new policies. The narratives of immigrant women must be included in these discourses, not just as footnotes or afterthoughts but as central elements that shape and define policy guidelines. After all, policies not rooted in the lived realities and experiences of those they are meant to serve are doomed to fall short.

In conclusion, the onus is on social work professionals to be more than just passive observers. They must become active advocates, pushing for an intersectional approach in policy-making, influenced by the resilience, experiences, and multiple

identities of immigrant women. I believe that when social work melds with policy advocacy in this nuanced manner, we will begin to see policies that are not just diverse but inclusively equitable.

Community and Resilience in Immigrant Women's Settlement

Drawing from the lived experiences of newcomer women, the findings of this study underline the urgent need for a more nuanced, intersectional approach to structuring and implementing settlement services in Canada. However, beyond identifying systemic flaws, this study also highlights immigrant women's incredible resilience and ingenuity, primarily when formal settlement supports fall short.

One of the critical implications of these findings is the importance of fostering community-driven initiatives. For example, working closely with grassroots organizations deeply embedded in these communities offers an avenue for social workers to facilitate, rather than dictate, the kinds of support provided. By adopting participatory methodologies similar to the Community-Based Participatory Research and Photovoice methods used in this study, social workers can engage more authentically with immigrant women, thereby co-creating solutions that are rooted in the community's specific needs and challenges.

Another crucial consideration is the role of social workers as more than just service providers; they should also serve as connectors and co-creators. For example, establishing places such as community forums created in partnership with grassroots can offer a more sustained form of assistance beyond transactional interactions. By doing so, social services and agencies can provide a safe space where immigrant women can share

experiences, pool resources, and offer mutual emotional and practical support.

The implications also extend to recognizing the power of women as service users at the micro-level. The findings of this study illustrate that when formal systems fail, immigrant women often turn to each other for support, displaying an impressive range of coping mechanisms and adaptability. Instead of simply *filling gaps*, social work practice should aim to amplify these inherent strengths. This involves not only offering services but also equipping these women with the tools, information, and platforms they need to be active agents in their own lives.

In summary, the study calls for a reformed Canadian settlement service system, emphasizing the resilience of immigrant women. It advocates for social workers to collaborate with grassroots organizations, going beyond mere service provision to act as community connectors. The research also highlights that immigrant women are resourceful and resilient, suggesting that social work should aim to empower them as active participants in their own lives and communities.

Social Networks and Practitioner Support

The experiences shared by participants in this study resonate strongly not just within the context of systemic limitations but also highlight the importance of personal connections. Some participants found hope and belonging through a relationship with another immigrant woman they met at a community gathering and/or new relationships in Canada. This speaks to the significance of creating avenues for such encounters, which social work practitioners are uniquely positioned to facilitate. As a researcher and an immigrant woman, I have also experienced the transformative power of these informal

support networks, particularly during the isolating circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. These individual narratives, mirroring my own experiences, underscore that the relationship between social workers and newcomer women is not just about provision but about genuine connection.

To capture this, social workers should look to foster environments where these kinds of organic relationships can flourish and recognize and respect the power dynamic between themselves and the service users. The fact that many immigrant women found more meaningful support from their peer networks than from formal services should serve as a humbling reminder. Social workers have the opportunity to learn from these organic support systems and adapt their practices accordingly. For example, in the instance of participant 17, who received invaluable local guidance from a new neighbour, social workers could act as connectors, introducing newcomer women to other community members who have navigational knowledge, thereby building a community web of support.

By acknowledging and harnessing the rich social capital among immigrant women, social workers can better align their services with the actual needs and strengths of these communities. Instead of social workers being the sole providers of service, they can become facilitators of community resilience, empowering women to take active roles in their own support networks.

This study, combined with my own lived experience, serves as a powerful testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of immigrant women. Practitioners must embrace this not as a challenge to their professional roles but as a valuable asset. Such a

shift not only benefits immigrant women but enriches the practice of social work itself, creating a more responsive, humane, and effective system. This could ultimately bring Canadian settlement services closer to the ideals of inclusivity and integration they aim to represent.

Enhancing Engagement and Accessibility for Immigrant Women

During the photovoice project, a standout feature that garnered considerable appreciation from the participants was the childcare service offered throughout the program. At NEW, a thoughtful approach was adopted: volunteers were designated to care for participants' children in a separate space within the facility. This arrangement ensured uninterrupted program engagement for the women, with the added comfort of knowing their children were nearby and could visit as needed. This provision allowed the participants to immerse themselves fully in the program without the looming concern of childcare.

In a broader context, traditional gender roles often saddle women with responsibilities like household chores and childcare. This burden sometimes acts as a barrier, preventing them from accessing vital services, even when they know various services exist. This challenge can be even more pronounced for immigrant women, given the cultural and societal nuances they might encounter. Recognizing these unique challenges, it becomes imperative that services catered to immigrant women be crafted with added sensitivity, precision, and a women-focused approach. This ensures not only accessibility but also effectiveness in addressing their specific needs.

6.2.3 Implications for Future Research

In this section, I provide implications not only based on the study findings but also based on the theoretical framework and methods used to achieve those results.

Research on the Early Settlement Experiences of Immigrants in Canada

First and foremost, there appears to be a notable gap in research centred on the early settlement experiences of immigrants. Given Canada's historical role as a primary destination for immigrants, the journey of an individual immigrant is extensive, stretching from the initial days post-arrival to several years of residency. Challenges confronted during this lengthy period can differ significantly. There is a pressing need for studies that probe into the immediate obstacles immigrants confront, ranging from securing housing and initial job placements to navigating cultural shifts and overcoming language hurdles. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the diversity in immigrant experiences. Aspects like their country of origin, socio-economic status, educational background, and other factors are pivotal in shaping their initial experiences in Canada. Hence, research endeavours should be directed toward cataloging the myriad challenges distinctive to different immigrant cohorts during their initial acclimatization phase.

Bridging the Gap: Multicultural Narratives and Immigrant Experiences

Through the results and discussions of this study, I identified a discrepancy between the portrayed image of Canada as a multicultural country and the real-life experiences of immigrants. Despite Canada's self-presentation as a multicultural haven, it becomes imperative for future research to delve deeper into the practical implications of such policies on immigrants' day-to-day lives. How do these professed inclusive policies

manifest in the lived realities of immigrants? Are they comprehensive enough to address the myriad and often intersecting challenges faced by immigrant women, particularly those from racialized communities? There is a pressing need to examine whether these policies are merely symbolic or if they hold substantive weight in facilitating a genuinely inclusive society. This inquiry can provide actionable insights for policy revision, ensuring that multicultural ideals are not just aspirational but realized in practice.

Intersectional Feminism: A Crucial Lens for Researching Immigrant Women

Utilizing an intersectional feminist theoretical framework significantly enriches research concerning immigrant women. These women, far from being a homogenous entity, carry with them a vast tapestry of backgrounds, lived experiences, and multifaceted identities. It becomes crucial for subsequent studies to illuminate the intricate interplay between various identity markers such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, especially when they converge with an immigrant status. Each of these overlapping identities contributes unique dimensions, profoundly shaping the experiences and outcomes of immigrant women in their adopted countries.

Furthermore, the lens of intersectional feminism critically foregrounds the intricate web of power dynamics at play. There is a pressing need for future investigations to explore the ripple effects of overarching power structures on immigrant women. These dynamics, deeply rooted in historical contexts like colonial legacies, the intricacies of global geopolitics, and overarching economic paradigms, play pivotal roles in shaping the everyday realities of immigrant women. Such an exploration will not only unravel the

nuances of their experiences but also pave the way for more empathetic and holistic

approaches in policy and practice.

Collages in Photovoice: Expanding the Canvas of Immigrant Narratives

Incorporating collages into the photovoice method yielded profound insights into

the multifaceted experiences of participants. By utilizing collages, participants were not

just limited to static photos but had the freedom to embellish and transform them by

integrating various chosen images. This approach essentially provided them with a more

expansive canvas to narrate their experiences, allowing for a more prosperous and deeper

exploration of their stories. The resulting collage works went beyond mere photographic

representation, enabling participants to embed a broader spectrum of their narratives and

emotions. Every participant's drawing, photo, image from magazines, and textual

fragment became a unique piece of their larger narrative. Moreover, during the art

activity, where we pieced together and attached each fragment within the group, we not

only continuously shared our experiences and emotions but also formed a solid

community. As such, by capitalizing on the adaptability of collages within the photovoice

method, researchers can redefine narrative techniques, facilitating a deeper,

multidimensional understanding of participant experiences.

6.2.4 Implications for Future Immigrant Women

As mentioned in the objective of this study, this research aims the intent to assist

and guide future immigrant women. Through active communication with participants and

by analyzing the findings from this study, I have drawn several implications, which are

detailed in this section. These implications not only elucidate the lived experiences of

these women but also provide potential strategies and guidelines for future immigrants to navigate their journey in a new country.

Many of the women were drawn to this project for its emphasis on narrative creation. The endeavour empowered them, fostering the growth of their story-making abilities. This highlights the importance of giving immigrant women platforms to express themselves. Encouraging them to share their tales of hardship, triumph, dreams, and everyday life is crucial. Such stories can serve a dual purpose: they can be sources of inspiration for those in similar situations and valuable resources for others trying to understand the intricacies of immigrant life. By sharing these narratives, we not only amplify our voices but also emphasize the importance of diverse stories in shaping a healthy multicultural society.

Further, the participants' enthusiasm for sharing their stories extended beyond the confines of this research. Participants saw me, a fellow immigrant woman researcher, as a conduit to relay their experiences more broadly. Many expressed a keen desire to delve deeper into their personal stories or even discuss tales from other communities they identify with. This revealed an essential aspect of their immigrant journey – the need for validation, understanding, and a wider platform to be heard. Their eagerness to communicate their experiences underscores the significance of ensuring that such narratives reach a broader audience, not just for their personal catharsis but also to foster greater societal understanding and empathy.

In essence, the importance of narrative and community cannot be overstated. Immigrant women, armed with their unique stories, are not just survivors but also

trailblazers, laying down markers for those who come after. Their stories, when shared, celebrated, and learned from, can guide, inspire, and illuminate the path for many more.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

The methodological framework of this thesis project presents two limitations. First, although the study utilized a CBR approach, the participants were not engaged in every aspect of the research as co-researchers. The entire creative empowerment program was pre-planned by NEW, with its objectives and direction already solidified before the inclusion of this research. As a result, the foundational CBR approach encountered challenges in fully incorporating participants as co-researchers from the outset. Throughout the photovoice project, I made conscious efforts to prioritize and respect participants' decision-making. However, I mainly completed the narrative and visual data analysis without co-researchers. My interactions with them were primarily confined to conversations only in a group chat (WhatsApp). A genuinely participatory analysis with the co-researchers remained unrealized, primarily due to the constraints inherent in the timeframe of the Master of Social Work thesis program.

The second limitation revolves around the depth of data collection. It is plausible that the study would have unveiled richer insights if a more robust data collection strategy had been employed. Moving beyond just using participants' collages and storytelling, a deeper dive through extensive focus groups or thematic interviews might have offered a more comprehensive analysis. Such an enriched methodology would have illuminated the intricate and varied experiences of immigrant women, especially when considered through a cross-feminist theoretical lens.

Additionally, my position as a researcher introduces another layer of challenges. My background as an international student and racialized migrant woman living in Canada allowed me to resonate deeply with data collection and the interpretation of participants' emotional experiences. However, my newcomer status in Canada presented occasional barriers, making me less attuned to the nation's deeply rooted societal and institutional nuances. This perspective possibly created a gap in fully grasping the immigrant experiences within the unique Canadian context.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Utilizing the powerful lens of an intersectional feminist theoretical framework, this thesis embarked on a profound journey to unpack the intricate experiences of immigrant women during their initial settlement in Canada. Through the compelling medium of photovoice, the narratives and imagery collected delivered a poignant tableau of the emotional whirlwind, challenges, and aspirations of these women as they navigate their newfound environment.

The process of using photovoice itself became an enlightening journey for both the participants and the researcher, myself. Engaging immigrant women in this method fostered a sense of community and support among them. Although we came from different backgrounds, spoke different languages, and had different cultures, during the five weeks of the photovoice project, we laughed and cried together over similar challenges. This dynamic added another layer of richness to the findings, demonstrating the transformative power of collective narrative.

Central to our exploration was an emphasis on the voices of immigrant women, ensuring their narratives remained at the forefront. An intersectional feminist analysis offered a comprehensive view of their experiences, illuminating the dynamic interplay of multiple identities that arise during the settlement process. Such a vantage point is essential in grasping the depth and breadth of their lived experiences, highlighting the importance of addressing the complexities of race, gender, culture, and migration.

The findings from this study resonate with existing literature, shedding light on the spectrum of emotions immigrant women grapple with, ranging from excitement to

homesickness. However, a unique contribution of this thesis is its vivid portrayal, through photovoice, of the intersections of these women's identities with their settlement experiences. This exploration uncovers the myriad ways in which the challenges they face, such as securing housing or adjusting to new cultural norms, are intricately intertwined with their identities as women, immigrants, and bearers of rich cultural tapestries.

Furthermore, the revelations from this research extend beyond mere understanding. They call for a critical reflection on existing settlement services and underscore the need for services that are attuned to the multifaceted needs of immigrant women. The necessity of a tailored approach, rooted in the tenets of intersectional feminism, becomes apparent.

In essence, this thesis amplifies the narratives of immigrant women, lending a voice to their struggles, aspirations, and resilience during their initial years in Canada. Through their stories and the unique insights offered by photovoice, we are challenged to reconceptualize our understanding of immigrant settlement. This work stands as a testament to the richness of their experiences and serves as a beacon for future research, social work practice, and policy reform, advocating for more holistic and empathetic support mechanisms in the Canadian settlement landscape.

As we journeyed through their stories, ascending triumphs' pinnacles and delving into the depths of the challenges they experienced, the steadfast resilience and graceful adaptability of these women radiated powerfully. One narrative weaves this delicate tapestry of spirit and determination, drawing a parallel between settlement and skating:

"Sometimes I fell, but I always got back up and tried again. It wasn't easy to learn it, but I succeeded. I kept practicing and learning, slowly but surely improving my skills. It's true that I'm still struggling here, but this is not my first day in skating. In the end, I realized that settling in a new country was like learning how to skate: it was difficult and at times overwhelming, but with practice, perseverance, and support, I'm able to achieve my goals and build a new life in my new home."

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