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The Role of Nonprofit Organizations in the Context of Increased Living Costs in Ontario

By

Hashem Al-Dimashki

An Internship Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Political Science
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

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2024

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The Role of Nonprofit Organizations with the Increased Cost of Living in Ontario

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April 23rd, 2024

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ABSTRACT

This research highlights the crucial role of non-profit organization in supporting the well-being of local communities in Ontario, particularly amidst increased cost of living. The increased cost of living has led to a higher CPI, negatively impacting the quality of life for many Ontarians and Canadians. While the vulnerable population become increasingly uncertain about the future, the role of non-profit organizations becomes prominent as effective community leaders. This research will illustrate how non-profit organizations address the most significant challenges the vulnerable population face today in terms of their quality of life, which are: housing insecurity, food insecurity, and transportation. The research methodology section will illustrate a case study of a local non-profit organization within the Windsor-Essex region in Ontario. The results indicate a growing demand and reliance on non-profit organizations of their services.

Keywords: Non-profit Organizations, Increased Cost of Living, Quality of Life, Vulnerable Population

DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to my wonderful family, especially my parents Oussama Al-Dimashki and Maisa Al-Tabaa, who have shown unconditional love and support. This research project is in honour of their sacrifice. And to my siblings who have instilled strength and confidence in me.

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INTRODUCTION

Canadians currently face a cost-of-living crisis. Indeed, the rising cost of living poses a significant challenge for Canadians and newcomers. Housing costs, stand out as the most daunting reality for many Canadians. In cities such as Vancouver and Toronto soaring real estate prices have led to an unaffordable housing market. Rent prices have also increased dramatically, making it difficult for individuals to secure affordable accommodation. The average cost of day-to-day living essentials has become increasingly expensive. In the face of these crises, non-profit organizations (NPOs) have played a key role in maintaining their communities by tending to the vulnerable population. NPOs witness, firsthand, the consequences of the increased cost of living and are a potential source of aid to individuals. Conducting research on this topic is important as it will help illuminate the role NPOs can play in times of socio-economic turbulence.

This study examines the province of Ontario and the role that non-profit organizations play in addressing the rising cost of living through their services. It asserts that the increased cost of living in Ontario has heightened the demand for NPOs, rendering them pivotal agents with respect to vulnerable populations in Ontario.

This paper begins by examining the extent of the vulnerable population in Ontario. Vulnerability is defined as groups or individuals who are at a higher risk of experiencing socio-economic adversity. Within the context of increased cost of living, the vulnerable population is disproportionately affected by rising economic expenses and economic pressure. The paper then examines the role that NPOs play in assisting the vulnerable population in Ontario. Non-profit organizations are, according to section 1 of *The Not-for-Profit Corporations Act* of 2010, charitable corporations intended for the relief of poverty, advancement of education or religion, or any other charitable purposes. The paper will begin by providing an overview of non-profit

organizations and their place in Canadian society and politics. Existing literature says that NPOs can be understood using two theories, community development theory and normative institutionalism. The former theory contends that NPOs can be effective agencies that aid local citizens in addressing issues directly affect their quality of life. The latter theory explains the principles NPOs operate on, which explains their behaviour and reason for existence. Within the normative framework, NPOs function and are guided by communal norms and beliefs that explain their actions. Indeed, the collective initiative comes down to altering social life for the better. Moreover, the location of NPOs within the Canadian political system must be stated. Indeed, NPOs are a public benefit at the grassroots level of communities that operate in conjunction with the federal, provincial, and municipal government.

This paper argues that in the context of rising prices for shelter, food, and transport, NPOs have an increasingly important role in providing for vulnerable populations. The paper starts by examining the place and role of NPOs in Ontario as well as existing views on their importance to society. The paper then focuses on the current economic situation and examines the role of one NPO in particular – the Community Support Centre of Essex County (CSC). The CSC was selected for analysis because of the author’s internship at the CSC which allowed him to see firsthand the impact of NPOs on the vulnerable population. I hypothesize that the CSC continues to be a key actor in catering to the vulnerable population due to the ever-increasing demand and dependency on it. The discussion of the case study will illustrate the CSC’s client impact over the years of 2021 – 2023. The data signifies that the organization experienced a notable increase in demand for their services (which is only expected to increase), which highlights their pivotal role within Essex County region.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What role do non-profit organizations play in tackling issues prevalent to the increased cost of living crisis in Ontario? The purpose of this research is to understand the heightened cost of living in Ontario and the vital role played by NPOs in addressing these economic challenges. An examination and evaluation of one NPO, the Community Support Centre of Essex County, will be conducted to measure and examine the role of NPOs and their effectiveness.

JUSTIFICATION

The scope of this research applies to the province of Ontario, and more specifically, within local cities. This research paper focuses on the dynamics of civil society at the ground level in Ontario. The subject being discussed concerns citizens who are experiencing financial difficulty: the student, the elderly, the immigrant or refugee, or the graduate seeking employment and struggling to make ends meet. The justification for this research stems from the heavy burden Ontarians are facing. There is a widespread agreement among Ontarians that the cost of living continues to skyrocket, which essentially makes the quality-of-life decrease. This research examines the relationship between the rise in living expenses and proactive engagement of NPOs, and how local communities are what keep a country together. As such, this research can offer informative potential strategies that can be developed to empower the role of NPOs.

Understanding the various factors that escalate the cost of living is informative for decision-making bodies, policymakers, all levels of government, and other political agents. More importantly, the justification of this research becomes evident in inspiring individuals to contribute to the prosperity of our local communities. By shedding light on the importance of local NPOs, the reader can be informed and can feel a sense of engagement and responsibility

towards their local communities. Thus, this research can promote the underlying responsibility of civil society to a country's well-being.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines two theoretical frameworks that have been used to examine Non-Profit Organizations. The two main theories of analysis are: *Community Development Theory* and *Normative Institutionalism*.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THEORY

A community refers to a well-defined social entity, such as a collective or organization of individuals united by shared needs, interests, functions, and values. Additionally, community development represents a procedure in which agencies aid local citizens in recognizing and collectively addressing issues directly affecting their quality. This process aims to empower residents, fortify communities, and foster connections among community members. Over time, community development has evolved into one of the most influential social catalysts in facilitating purposeful and impactful change (Abiddin, Ibrahim, & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

Sustainable community development emphasizes the importance of striking a balance between addressing socioeconomic concerns and development objectives while also enhancing local social relationships. Sustainable communities not only protect and enhance the social environment but also promote more humane local societies. Community development can help local communities improve their socioeconomic situation and make better use of available resources (Abiddin, Ibrahim, & Abdul Aziz, 2022).

Kang states that the function of NPOs in community development is simply aimed at improving people's lives (Kang, 2011, pg. 224). Kang further explains the reconciliation between

the role of NPOs and community development theory: “benefiting the disempowered by providing needed services, assistance in essential necessities of human survival, and capacity to control economic and social outcomes” (Kang, 2011, pg. 224). Indeed, the role of NPOs within the theoretical framework of community building operates through “bottom-up” development. The bottom-up development approach also encourages local collective action and attempts to identify the issues that local people think are the most important (Kang, 2011, pp. 224 – 226).

NORMATIVE INSTITUTIONALISM

Normative institutionalism in political science focuses on the role of norms and values of institutions. When applying it to this research paper, NPOs function through the shared belief in catering to the public. Indeed, NPOs operate through their outlined mission statements.

Normative institutionalism helps us understand how these organizations operate within the backdrop of socio-economic hardship. Andre Sorensen states that the theory of institutionalism is defined by institutions operating upon a set of rules and principles that shape their action (2017). This sociological approach to institutionalism affirms that NPOs indefinitely share a common set of principles, or what Andre calls “moral templates, which guide their behaviour, with the mission of altering social life for the better (Sorensen, 2017).

The theory of New Institutionalism is considered "new" relative to the traditional institutionalism approach in political science, which predominantly focuses on the formal structures of public administration and their comparative functionalities. The older institutionalism faced criticism for its descriptive nature without a robust theoretical framework. New Institutionalism emerged in the 1970s, particularly within political science and organizational sociology, aiming to comprehend the roles institutions play in social and political

realms. The core tenet of New Institutionalism is the assertion that "institutions matter" in social and political life (Lecours 2005).

While normative institutionalists emphasize the integration of political institutions within temporal and cultural contexts, rational choice theorists argue that institutions are purposeful human constructs designed to address collective action problems (Lowndes, 2018, pg. 58). Thus, the rational choice approach reflects the ethical drive NPOs have in addressing community hardship. Local community engagement norms significantly impact how NPOs interact with and serve communities. The core principles of community development theory are embedded within NPOs, which influence and outline their mission statements to become a beacon of morality and local improvement. Community development theory and institutionalism go hand in hand, the former shapes the values, principles, and norms for the latter to operate on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the role of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) amidst the increased cost of living in Ontario. Firstly, the terms ‘vulnerable population’ and ‘NPOs’ will be defined in order to gain a concrete understanding of those terms. Then, the main cause of the increased cost of living in Canada will be explained. Finally, the three essential services provided by NPOs will be demonstrated: housing, food insecurity, and transportation.

THE VULNERABLE POPULATION AND THE INCREASED COST OF LIVING

This research paper's main scope of interest is the vulnerable population and their experience with the increased cost of living in Ontario. The term "vulnerable population" refers to groups or individuals who are at higher risk of experiencing adverse social, economic, and health outcomes. Within the context of Ontario, the vulnerable population includes, as James

Hugh Hamilton Lee defines, low-income individuals, the young (mainly students in college or university), individuals with mental needs, individuals with a physical disability, and the transient population (Lee, 2023, pg. 6). Newcomers and marginalized groups who face increasing socio-economic difficulty are also an important addition to the spectrum of the term "vulnerable population". Further, Renne and Mayor specifically mention vulnerability in terms of "individuals who cannot drive or who do not have access to a vehicle" (Renne & Mayorga, 2022)

The rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) remains the primary measure of inflation and hence the increased cost of living in Canada. The CPI is a paramount economic metric, and Canadians suffering from the increased cost of living are witnessing their income lose its value. The CPI measures the overall change in prices of goods and services that consumers regularly use. As such, the CPI continues to be the most common measure of inflation, indicating the health and direction of the economy (Fernando, 2024). Indeed, vulnerability grows as the CPI metric inflates, resulting in a decreased quality of life with high living expenses.

The average Canadian basket of essential goods and services includes (1) Food - including groceries and restaurant meals; (2) Shelter – rent and mortgage costs, insurance, repairs and maintenance, taxes, and utilities; (3) Transportation – vehicle payments, gasoline, public transit; (4) apparel – essential types of clothing throughout the seasons. The CPI rise signals heightened spending by Canadians, as more is needed for essential purchases. This struggle against CPI's upward trend raises significant concern and uncertainty, particularly for vulnerable populations (Bank of Canada, 2021).

DEFINING NON-FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

According to section 1 of the Not-for-Profit Corporations Act of 2010, non-profit charitable corporations are incorporated for “the relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the advancement of religion or other charitable purpose”. Section 1 of the act locates NPOs within the institutional framework of the Canadian political system, recognizing them as entities that provide public benefit, often receiving grants or comparable financial aid from federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

The term non-government organizations (NPOs) is also in need of further clarity to achieve cohesiveness and a better understanding. Thomas Babila Sama from the Department of Social Science and Philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland offers a concise definition: "NPOs serve in different ways to fulfill numerous functions and sometimes they are used as intermediaries to channel funds and in the execution of projects to local individuals or target groups of people" (Sama, 2009). Borgaonkar *et al.* add further details to the definition by explaining that an NPO is defined as a classified organization which conducts activities to ease sufferings, endorse the interests of the deprived, and provide essential communal services or undertake community development" (Borgaonkar, Bhargava, Kushwaha, 2022).

The following table represents the key differences that shape the uniqueness of non-government organizations as compared to private and public bodies:

	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	NON-PROFIT
NORMATIVE GOAL	Maximize stake holder wealth	Achieve politically mandated mission	Achieve social mission
DEFINING SOURCE OF REVENUE	Sale of products and services	Appropriated tax dollars	Charitable contributions: money, volunteer

			time, and contributed materials
MEASURE OF PERFORMANCE	Financial performance and customer satisfaction	Mission effectiveness and efficiency, constituent satisfaction, and financial sustainability	Mission effectiveness and efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, financial sustainability, and accountability
KEY CALCULATION	Find and exploit distinctive competitive competence of the firm.	Find better ways to achieve the politically mandated mission	Find better ways to achieve the social mission
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION SERVED	Technologically, sociologically, and economically privileged	Technologically, sociologically, and economically advantaged	Technologically, sociologically, and economically disadvantaged

Table 1. Basic Differences Between sectors (Lee, R. L., & Bhattacharjee, 2011, pg. 104)

The table outlines the key differences and presents a clearer picture of the framework this paper. Lee and Bhattacharjee also consider the significant characteristics of the population being served. They state that the private sector typically focuses on maximizing shareholder wealth and is inclined to serve individuals/clients with higher educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and active access to the Internet. In contrast, public sector organizations prioritize accomplishing politically mandated missions and are responsive to the needs of a clientele with higher socioeconomic status. However, nonprofits cater to the specific needs of local communities, they typically serve a client base with lower socioeconomic status and encounter lower levels of internet use (Lee & Bhattacharjee, 2011, pg. 104).

Therefore, with the framework being outlined and by understanding the theoretical conceptualization of NPOs, it is made clear that the scope of this research applies to the ground level of local communities towards the vulnerable population. Indeed, NPOs cater to the unsatisfied demand for public goods and services in society. NPOs are pivotal in maintaining civil society when the government or market cannot provide public goods for all or serve the general interests of everybody. Therefore, this research will consistently use the terms *non-government organizations* (NPOs) and *non-profit organizations* (NPOs) as agents that directly cater to the needs of their communities.

NPOS IN CANADA AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

The formalization of nonprofit structures in Canada began with the establishment of permanent European settlements in the 17th century. In New France (present day Quebec), the Roman Catholic Church initially managed education, health care, and aid to the poor, receiving support from individuals and the French Crown. (Hall, 2005, pg. 21). From the late 18th century until the early 20th century, Canadian history was dominated by waves of immigration and an expansion westward. In particular, the intense immigration of non-French immigrants in Canada founded the essence of multiculturalism in which each community required specific needs. As such, NPOs became pivotal in maintaining such communities in a vibrant Canadian state (Hall, 2005, pg. 22). Historically, the role of NPOs was critical in sustaining vulnerable individuals and groups across Canada.

Because of its long tradition of relying on nonprofit and voluntary entities to address the needs and concerns of its populace, Canada prides itself in having one of the largest and most spirited nonprofit and voluntary sectors globally (Hall, 2005, pg. IV). This sector encompasses

organizations engaged in "service delivery," covering areas such as health, education, social services, community development, and housing. Additionally, it includes entities serving "expressive" functions in arts and culture, religion, sports, recreation, civic advocacy, environmental protection, and business, labour, and professional associations. Findings from research conducted in Canada and thirty-six other nations involved in the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project reveal distinctive characteristics within Canada's nonprofit and voluntary sector (Hall, 2005, pg. IV). These unique characteristics will be illustrated in the following paragraphs.

In 2020, the gross domestic product (GDP) of Canada's non-profit institutions totalled \$185.8 billion, constituting 9.0% of the nation's GDP. Community non-profits accounted for \$29.9 billion of this amount. The economic impact of the non-profit sector varied across provinces and territories, with Nova Scotia leading at 12.4%, surpassing the national average. Other regions, including Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec, Manitoba, and the Northwest Territories, also exceeded the national average. However, Nunavut had the lowest share at 3.4% of its economy-wide GDP. Notably, the non-profit sectors in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon fell below the national average (Statistics Canada, 2022).

A 2013 John Hopkins study found that in the eight developed countries studied, the non-profit sector was found to be outpacing the growth of GDP. Safa Youness from the University of Windsor further details the significance of the study:

The Canadian non-profit sector's growth was no exception, growing at 6.4% annually, outpacing the 5.6% growth of the GDP. Reflective of this growth, every year millions of

Canadians financially contribute to charitable organizations dear to them and, by doing so, contribute to the well-being of their fellow citizens and advance the principles and values they share with the charities to which they donate (Youness, 2021, pg. 6).

Contributions by the non-profit sector cannot be solely measured by its economic involvement in dollar terms, but also by its social initiatives. Non-profits continue to play a role in preventing the vulnerable population from falling into unprecedented socio-economic crisis by offering valuable services continue to be difficult to attain (Youness, 2021, pg. 7). That is further emphasized by Emmett and Brian who state that the Canadian charitable sector is too substantial to ignore in economic discussions. It seeks to align with economic principles, aiming to showcase its role in job creation, innovation, and growth within the modern economy (Emmett, Brian, 2015, pg. 7).

HOUSING INSECURITY

The vulnerable population as whole has trouble with accessibility to secure housing in Ontario. The measure of vulnerability in housing insecurity is determined by assessing individuals' quality of life. Vulnerability arises from the inability of individuals to secure stable housing. While housing insecurity is a concern for the broader vulnerable population, this section will focus specifically on seniors. This section will define housing services then explain why seniors as a demographic has been chosen, as well as their socio-economic difficulties. Indeed, this section will exemplify the important role NPOs in this crisis.

Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing defines social housing as any housing for which the owner receives a subsidy. Within the context of seniors, social housing becomes a critical form of service as they cater to low-income seniors who can no longer

function independently due to declining health (Jones, 2007). Housing affordability is the main driver behind the usage of social housing. Indeed, housing affordability is driven by issues related to both supply and demand. The rising costs of housing has been extremely disproportionate to increases in personal and household income across the broader population (Markey, 2016, pg. 171).

Adults aged 65 and older are the fastest growing demographic in Ontario, with about 75,000 currently residing in social housing. Toronto alone has a waitlist of over 80,000 seniors (City of Toronto Social Housing Report, 2023). This study focuses on social housing regarding the senior population due to them being the fastest growing age group in Ontario. Seniors living in social housing experience exacerbated social isolation, which is defined as a lack of social contacts or limitation in the frequency of interaction. As a result, loneliness dominates the psychology and mental health of seniors in social housing. In relation to the increased cost of living, seniors become especially vulnerable given their decreasing economic resources and limitations in mobility (Agarwal et al, 2021).

By 2041, individuals aged 65 and above are anticipated to make up 25% of Ontario's population, a notable increase from the 16.4% recorded in 2016. Moreover, food prices and the overall cost of living continue to escalate throughout Canada, further worsening the circumstances. The proportion of seniors living beneath the Low-Income Measure (LIM), which is a popularly used poverty indicator, skyrocketed from 4.7% in 2000 to 12.1% in 2017. This notable increase continues to be attributed to the escalating costs of living (Pirrie, 2020). The precautions become further exacerbated when considering the increased rate at which seniors are more likely to live alone in upcoming years. For seniors who live on their own, the percentage of

them living in poverty increased from 12.1 to 30.5% between the years 2000 and 2007. This has only increased with the COVID-19 pandemic (Pirrie, 2020). The Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) reported that the proportion of seniors on the waitlist for social housing, a service in which rent is heavily subsidized to typically equal 30% of a family's income, has increased from 21% in 2006 to 44% in 2014 (Pirrie, 2020).

The ONPHA study conducted a quantitative data collection strategy in assessing the quality of life of seniors affected by food insecurity and unaffordable housing across 14 communities in Ontario. The findings of the study showed that the various housing services conducted by non-profit organizations played a role in reducing relative poverty among low-income seniors. Although the endangerment of seniors persists with increased food insecurity rates, the poverty rate was lower than the hypothesized 14.9%. The non-profit sector in Ontario alleviated housing insecurity and helped reduce relative poverty among low-income seniors (Pirrie, 2020).

FOOD INSECURITY

One of the most significant factors of quality of life is food accessibility and quality of food. Radimer explains that food insecurity arises when “there is a lack of access to safe, nutritious food or when it is difficult or unpredictable to obtain food in ways that are acceptable to society. Hunger is the uncomfortable or painful feeling brought on by a shortage of nourishment” (Radimer, 2002). Food Banks Canada states that the increased cost of essentials such as food and shelter will continue to soar food bank visits (Food Banks Canada, 2024). Naturally, this becomes an apparent issue for Canada, especially when considering the relevant number of visits with the overall Canadian population.

The most affected group with respect to food insecurity is the transient population, which refers to a demographic of people who frequently move from one place to another, often without permanent residence. Within the context of vulnerability, it applies to homeless individuals who are unable to afford shelter for themselves. The transient population in Ontario experiences extreme difficulty in maintaining food security due to a lack of stability in a fixed place of residence, which leads to further unpredictability in the chance of getting their next meal. Thus, food banks have the potential to improve food security outcomes when operational resources are sufficient and provisions cater to the needs of their client (Bazerghi, McKay, Dunn, 2016).

According to recent studies, one in eight Canadian households experiences some degree of food insecurity, which is a persistent issue in Canada. Collected national data on food insecurity occurred in 2012. A study at that time illustrates that 4,005,000 individuals were living in households reporting some degree of food insecurity. Food banks and food pantries run by non-profit organizations remain the primary public response to food insecurity in Canada, as well as other living essentials such as hygiene products (Tarasuk, 2020).

NPO-led food banks and food pantries offer relief from food insecurity. This is i food insecurity is significantly associated with poor mental health and physical malnourishment, which often leads to chronic diseases. Within Ontario, local non-profit agencies provide food assistance in the form of a pre-packaged box of essential foods (bread, milk, a type of protein, and canned goods) (Rizvi et al, 2021).

The study conducted by Anita Rizvi, Rania Wasfi, Aganeta Enns and Elizabeth Kristjansson examines a change in food security over 18 months (from November 2017 to December 2019) across eleven food banks in Ottawa. The results illustrate that there were

significant reductions in food insecurity for people who were regularly accessing food banks. The "choice model" method conducted by food banks significantly reduced the strain of food insecurity, a model in which clients pick their preferred option from a menu of meals. The issue of food insecurity remains prevalent. The initiative by NPOs in providing food to the public does not solve the problem, rather it continues to be a short-term compromise that offers baseline survivability (Rizvi et al, 2021). Indeed, there continues to be a clear demand for an effective long-term solution that will alleviate suffering for a sizable segment of the Canadian population. Due to financial constraints that cause food insecurity, scholars within Ontario continue to push public policy changes that include social support payments or implementing a guaranteed basic income that addresses increased unemployment and cost of living (Pereira, 2014). In Canada food insecure people with insufficient incomes currently have “to rely on a bureaucratic, costly, and stigmatizing ‘patchwork’ of social assistance programs administered by different levels of government; because of the shortcomings of existing social safety nets, many researchers have advocated specifically for a simplified guaranteed basic income as a more effective solution” (Rizvi, 2021).

While a basic income can be an effective strategy to support the vulnerable population, a cultural divide and a tendency towards polarization may occur. Fundamentally, the cost is at the heart of this initiative, and the day-to-day Canadian worker already shoulders a substantial income tax burden.

TRANSPORTATION

The CPI measurement includes transportation costs, which is sensitive to the influence of oil prices. Energy prices increased through 2021 and 2022 due to the robust economic recovery

from the COVID-19 pandemic and lagging oil production from key countries of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Further, the Russian invasion of Ukraine led to skyrocketing energy prices (Chen, Tombe, 2023). As such, the overall escalation of energy prices inevitably increases the required energy to fuel a vehicle for transportation at the ground level for individuals. Statistics Canada further illustrates the phenomenon of inflated gasoline CPI:

“The rise in the price of gas influenced a rise in the 'all-items CPI in October 2022 which rose to 6.9%. The price of gasoline rose by 9.2% in October 2022 even after a decrease of -7.4% in September 2022 due to the declaration to reduce future production of oil by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and a weaker Canadian currency. Comparing the figure to October 2021, the price of gasoline increased by 17.8% in October 2022 following a 13.2% rise in September 2022” (Statistics Canada, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine war has significantly impacted the oil supply (Mbah, 2023). As a result, the transportation sector of society is experiencing a crisis as automotive production continues to experience hardship through supply chain bottlenecks coupled with inflated gas prices.

NPOs in Ontario have played a pivotal role in assisting individuals with transportation challenges amidst inflated gas and car prices. Indeed, NPOs break through the barriers of active travel or transportation of Canadians living in Ontario. Lyeo et al from the University of Toronto stated that transportation-related barriers influence the overall health of a population. Indeed, mitigating transportation barriers amidst a transportation crisis plays a significant role in mobility and accessibility for the vulnerable population: "Transportation-related barriers to healthcare

access have the potential to exacerbate health disparities in suburban areas by disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations" (Lyeo et al, 2022). Transit services by NPOs are most popularly used for healthcare access since a sizeable proportion of the vulnerable population needs to regularly attend healthcare services (the elderly as a prime example). In the cities of Toronto and Scarborough, the popular use of transit services are individuals facing extreme economic challenges with the increased cost of living, struggling with a disability, or poor mental health (Lyeo et al, 2022).

Without the capacity to afford a vehicle to attend necessary medical appointments, NPOs offering transportation services introduce a sustainable method of minimizing the burden of transportation and accessibility for people in need. Moreover, NPOs that offer transportation often do so in collaboration with municipal governments. While NPOs fill in the gaps within civil society, government bodies acknowledge this dynamic as well, the result being collaborative governance with non-government agencies (Hardi, 2020). In other words, NPOs become the bedrock of government and civil society collaboration since such organizations fuse both sides. As Heneberry and Lafirest from Queens University explain:

The development of such macro scale relationships with the “voluntary sector,” “nonprofit sector,” and “social economy” is relatively well documented. Whether under the name of the “voluntary sector,” the “social economy,” or the “third sector,” sectoral actors have been very successful over the past decades at gaining attention and support from their respective governments in the form of agreements that recognize the unique role of nonprofits and voluntary organizations and strengthen the collaborative relationships between their sector and government (Heneberry and Laforest, 2011).

Overall, transportation is essential for individuals. Unfortunately, the costly automobile prices coupled with inflated gas prices render cars widely unaffordable. The primary issue does

not solely become purchasing the vehicle, but maintenance and gas overrule the decision to purchase a car. As a result, the vulnerable population experiences further deprivation of accessibility and mobility since purchasing a vehicle becomes an invalid option. The role of NPOs becomes significantly apparent as they provide one of the most important services to human function in an urbanized era. Amidst the transportation crisis with costly and inflated prices, NPOs and government collaboration have become essential agents catering to the needs of the vulnerable population. The vulnerable population which consists of the elderly has access to attending vital medical appointments, persons with a physical disability are also catered to, as well as students within the diaspora community who are still navigating through the country have access to education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods research approach to understand the impact NPOs play in alleviating the strain of the increased cost of living in Ontario. The qualitative approach is a case study of the Community Support Centre of Essex County (CSC), an NPO in Belle River, Ontario. The historiography technique will be employed to conceptualize the organization and illustrate its significance. In conjunction with the qualitative approach, a quantitative method will be utilized in a statistical analysis of the organization.

The research design adopts a Small-N study due to the analysis of one NPO. The Small-N study allows for a more concise analysis of the impact of NPOs at the local and ground level. Through the small-N approach, a degree of appreciation will be presented in recognizing the efforts done by a singular NPO and having that perspective will offer insight into how much impact NPOs have when accounting for all the organizations that exist in Ontario.

The operationalization of the research variables is of importance. The dependent variable illustrates the outcome of a particular phenomenon, while the independent variable examines the probable causes of the phenomenon. The dependent variable in this study is the impact of NPOs on the local community, which in this case study will be the Windsor-Essex region. The independent variable is the very existence of NPOs and their goals of helping vulnerable individuals. The operationalization of both variables will be illustrated by how programs and services of the CSC contribute to the overall well-being of the community. That will be elaborated on in the data collection and discussion section, which examines to what degree has the CSC been influential to its community. I hypothesize that the client impact report of the CSC on their local community will demonstrate a growing role in supporting the well-being of individuals facing socioeconomic challenges, aligning with the trend of expanding nonprofit services in Ontario. The CSC client impact will be measured through a discussion of data presented through the years between 2021 to 2023. As of 2024, there continues to be a gap in the literature with little to no publications regarding the impact of NPOs within the Windsor-Essex community. Thus, this research fills that gap by publicizing up-to-date information and data that signifies the impact of the Community Support Centre that often time goes unnoticed.

CASE STUDY

The scope of this data collection and case study will solely examine the impact of the CSC towards the Windsor-Essex community.

HISTOGRAPHY

The Community Support Centre of Essex County was founded on April 21st, 1983, as a Community Information Centre in Belle River that gathered surveys for local needs. The group

of citizens that founded this facility advocated for community development and assessed the needs of their community, which resulted in the formation of a committee. From humble beginnings and forty years later, the Community Support Centre of Essex County, a non-profit organization, continues to be an integral part of its community (Chesu, 2019). The CSC is specially formed to develop and deliver innovative, client-oriented health and community support services. (CSC website ‘about us’).

The organization excels in catering to marginalized and vulnerable populations, as a testament to that, the organization acquired the FOCUS Accreditation status. FOCUS, an accreditation agency for community service organizations, reflects excellence in the effectiveness of the operation of any non-government organization. The agency standard is known to be of the highest stature within the province of Ontario, and granting accreditation to an organization signifies extreme impact (CSC website accreditation page).

FUNDING

The literature by Henderson, et al explain two core reasons why NPOs get funded (Henderson et al, 2002, pp. 33 – 39):

1. **Community Improvement:** Government funding aims to provide overall backing for NPOs aimed at improving the community. To illustrate, a municipality might seek to aid homeless individuals by providing financial support to a nonprofit-run shelter or community kitchen. Similarly, a county could aim to foster job creation by funding initiatives like an economic development corporation or Chamber of Commerce. Furthermore, elected officials may tie funding expenditure with certain goals they

may have. If an elected official's main goal is literacy among the youth, funding will be attributed to such NPO who offer such services.

2. **Cost Efficiency:** Another rationale for local governments funding nonprofits is to delegate specific programs or services to them. Rather than constructing and managing a swimming pool independently, a town could opt to collaborate with a nonprofit organization and contribute to its capital or operational costs for the pool. That way, the cost for facilitating such services is lifted from the backs of government and allowing for NPOs to offer services through volunteers.

Both reasons for funding are prevalent regarding aid towards Ontario Community Support Association (OCAS) which the CSC is a member of. Aid and funding are thus provided to OCAS members because of advocacy efforts that include cost efficient methods that improves services and allows for community development. OCAS is community-based member organization offering services for their clients to maintain their independence in their communities. As such, full OCSA members (such as the CSC and many others) are contracted and funded by the 14 Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) in Ontario. OCSA advocates on behalf of its members and their clients to government and stakeholders, create partnerships, facilitate knowledge sharing, and offers training, resources and benefits that enable members to continue providing vital services to the public (OCSA, About us). With over 225 not-for-profit members, OCSA serves as a means of representation of its members at the provincial advisory council. OCSA is also a voice for its members by advocating for increased investment and present legislative matters and policy recommendations (OCSA, Membership).

OCSA receives a wide variety of revenue that contribute to the funding of the CSC and other NPOs. Based on their annual reports, the funding on behalf of the government of Ontario can be examined. However, as of 2023, government funding cuts are endangering one million fewer hours of community services by members of OCSA. Further, a survey on behalf of 82 member organizations that without urgent investment from the provincial government, there will be a 27 per cent reduction in services in 2023 and leading up to 2024. CEO of OCSA uttered the following statement (Alghoul, 2023):

“The threat of reductions in service and increased wait lists essentially means that many Ontarians will no longer have access to the care they need. We are calling on the province to address the situation as a matter of urgency and ensure that these services receive adequate funding in order to combat the impacts of inflation and increased operational costs.” (Alghoul, 2023).

As per the pre-budget submission to the government of Ontario, OCSA recommends that the province commit to an investment of \$533 million to fortify and stabilize the home and community sector of nonprofits. The CEO further states that:

“Unfortunately though, our sector is facing a perfect storm - a health human resources crisis due in large part to wage inequity between sectors, as well as skyrocketing demand for services. Without significant financial investments and dedicated strategic planning over the next few years, this storm will continue to worsen, and many vulnerable Ontarians will be denied the services they rely on to live well and safely at home and in their communities.” (OCSA Pre-budget Plan 2024)

DATA COLLECTION

This section examines the CSC's impact on the community.

To test my hypothesis, this section examines the CSC's impact on the community in two periods of time, which is 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. My data collection was acquired from my internship at the Community Support Centre of Essex County, and with the help of the Human Resources Department, I have been granted access to the organization's Community Impact Reports to fulfill my research goal. The data was collected and formatted into a table for better understanding. The table illustrates the services and programs the Community Support Centre of Essex County provided to the Windsor-Essex region. A total of nine services and programs are shown in the table within two-time frames: 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. Thus, the table consists of data and information regarding the impact and performance of each category of service or program within both time frames.

Service	2021 -2022	2022 - 2023
Transportation	600 Clients received 28,000 trips to life sustain medical appointments	321 clients received 15,639 trips to medical appointments
Social Visits	272 Clients received 19,000 social visits	1,016 clients received 29,317 Social & Crisis Visits. Additionally, 2,759 Clients supported with 46,976 caring conversations
Adult Day Program	17 clients accessed the Adult Day Program for a total of 156 days	246 clients accessed the Adult Day program for 3,662 activities
Congregate dining	100 clients were served 1560 meals in a congregate social setting	167 clients were served 4,111 meals in a congregate dining and social session

Meals on Wheels	17,344 meals delivered to 175 clients' homes	19,007 meals delivered to 235 client homes
Children Care	80 children received new backpacks for the school years, 120 where children were kept warm thanks to Coats 4 kids	120 children were kept warm with Coats 4 Kids
Home Support	80 clients received Home Support visits 1.600 times	111 clients received 3,739 Home Support Visits
Foot Care	524 Clients received 1825 medical foot care treatments	658 Clients for 2,529 Medical Foot Care Treatments
Food Sustainability	provided 1960 people with food security	2,271 recipients received food security

Table 2: The Community Support Centre of Essex County Client Impact Report (data based on unpublished data)

As the table demonstrates, the Community Support Centre provides a variety of services. The transportation service includes the transport of vulnerable clients, including the elderly and persons with a physical disability to their required medical appointments. Social Visits include friendly visits by Home Support (HS) workers from the CSC. The Adult Day Program (ADP) is a cost-free physical activity initiative for people 55 years or older. The Congregate Dining category is for people to enjoy a meal in a social setting. The Meals on Wheels Program is the delivery, Monday to Friday, of meals to clients. The Children's Care Program offers children the essentials for daily living or school equipment. The Home Support Program consists of social workers offering services in maintaining cleanliness within the household of clients. The Foot Care Clinic caters to patients struggling with foot issues. The Food Sustainability Service offers a basket of food for highly food-insecure households.

DISCUSSION

The data presented in the table reveals a substantial growth in the services provided by the CSC over two consecutive years, 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. The transportation service witnessed a decrease in the number of clients served, from 600 to 321, but still managed to facilitate a significant number of trips to medical appointments. While the number of clients decreased within the '22-'23 time frame, the trips to medical appointments remained consistent regardless of half the clients leaving the service. As such, it signifies the loyalty and importance clients have towards the transit service, and with roughly 300 clients, over 15,000 visits were made, (beyond half of the 28,000 trips). My prediction is that the transportation service will experience growth as the vulnerable population continues to be unable to own a vehicle with increased energy cost and production.

Social Visits demonstrated a remarkable surge. The number of clients receiving social visits increased from 272 (19,000 visits) to 1,016 (29,317 visits). The 2022-'23 time frame saw 46,976 caring conversations signifying a massive outreach in the scope of the CSC. This increase can be viewed from the perspective of social isolation. As mentioned earlier, seniors are at extreme risk of social isolation which is further exacerbated by poverty and the increased cost of living. Social visits become vital in the role of the CSC because their social impact is critical to the well-being of seniors.

The Adult Day Program (ADP) is designed as means of promoting physical activity and accessibility to its community, improving physical health and by extension mental health. The ADP experienced a substantial increase in participation, with 17 clients accessing the program for a total of 156 days in the first year expanding to 246 clients engaged in 3,662 activities in the

following year. The ADP becomes crucial in alleviating the strain of the cost of living in the Windsor-Essex region as the program offers free physical fitness during a time of inflated prices, especially when considering gym memberships. Indeed, the impact is associated with the physical well-being of the community since the ADP actively hosts physical exercises .

The growth in congregate dining and social sessions is also noteworthy, with an increase in the number of clients served meals from 100 to 167 and from 1560 meals shared in a congregate dining setting to 4,111. The ratio is remarkable when examined. While an additional 67 clients may seem insignificant, the 4,111 meals shared illustrate a dramatic increase in the use of this service. As such, congregate dining offers a unifying atmosphere among individuals with the community to feel a sense of solidarity amidst the crisis in the cost of living.

Meal deliveries experienced a relative increase with the increase of meals from 17,344 to 19,007 deliveries and an increase in clientele from 175 to 235. Indeed, with the continuous trend of inflated CPI and the purchasing of essential nutrition to live a healthy lifestyle becoming too difficult to maintain, meal deliveries and clientele will only increase in the coming years.

Furthermore, the organization's commitment to community welfare is evident in the sustained efforts on behalf of Children Care, Home Support, Foot Care, and Food Sustainability. The Coats 4 Kids service remained constant, and while no growth was evident, the data signifies the consistent reliability of the service for the vulnerable population. Home Support and Foot Care services experienced growth in both clients served and the frequency of visits. Finally, the Food Sustainability initiative witnessed an increase in the number of recipients, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to combating food insecurity.

Overall, the vulnerable population continues to rely on the role of the CSC. The overall growth in the use of programs and services signifies that the cost of living is encouraging individuals to depend on NPOs more frequently. This is proved through a survey published by the Ontario Nonprofit Network: "Demand for nonprofit services is higher than ever before. 74% of organizations reported an increase in demand for services in 2022, a significant jump from 2021 which was 63% percent and 2020 which was 47 percent. The increase is manifesting across all subsectors (Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2022, pg. 2).

APPLICATION OF THEORIES TO CASE STUDY

The discussion illustrated the growing reliance of vulnerable population on the CSC regarding multiple realms of quality of life, whether it is physical and mental health, food, transportation, or essential goods and services. This is evident as the CSC operates in accordance with Kang's notion of a "bottom-up" approach to development (Kang, pg. 226). The increasing demand for CSC services over time indicates that the organization's behavior aligns with the principles of community development theory, as it delivers vital services and resources necessary for building a sustainable community.

Within the framework of normative institutionalism, the theory as mentioned focuses on the role of norms and values in shaping behaviour of NPOs. Both OCSA and the CSC have entrenched mission statements that take on the rational choice approach of selfless public service. The CSC's mission statement is "to serve the community by developing and delivering client-oriented health and community support services" (CSC, About us, Our Mission). As such, the CSC operates on what Sorensen mentioned earlier as moral templates that guide the behaviour of NPOs for altering social life for the better. The data collected illustrates this theory due to the

services being provided as a means of lessening the strain of the increased cost of living in Ontario.

LIMITATIONS

The scope of the research methodology is narrow, which leads to the limitation of this study. It does not offer a representative study of all NPOs in Ontario; what can be said for the CSC may not hold true to NPOs as a whole. While the CSC may be experiencing growth, other NPOs may be suffering from the opposite. The provided case study is intentionally conducted to provide firsthand insights at the grassroots level for Windsor-Essex region residents. The focus on a case study of a singular organization, which is the CSC, helps paint a picture of the services NPOs provide. While the CSC experiences consistent growth, this study is limited in its capacity to reflect the broader performance of NPOs in Ontario. In other words, is the case of the CSC unique to them only or does it accurately reflect the performance of the entire NPO sector in Ontario? For that question, the limitation is evident.

It is of utmost importance to note that the role of NPOs is not the underlying solution to alleviate the struggles faced by the vulnerable population. NPOs merely lighten the burden amidst inflated cost of living prices. As such, NPOs continue to operate with limited budgets and with the uncertainty regarding government funding (Chesu, 2019). Also, while there is great dependency on them and their impact is notable, the dominant literature explains that NPOs are not the solution to the increased cost of living. Indeed, their capacity is limited and not the responsibility of NPOs to completely reverse the entire socio-economic status of Ontario and Canada as a whole. It is up to leadership, good governance, and effective policy to revive Canada to its much-praised reputation of freedom and good fortune. Charitable organizations merely fill

the gaps within civil society that is associated with government shortcomings of effective policies that foster economic independence (Hillel, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underscores the integral role NPOs play in the well-being of local communities in Ontario especially considering the increasing costs of living. Indeed, the increased cost of living in Ontario, and Canada as a whole, resulted in inflated CPI that lowered the quality of life for many Canadians. More specifically, the concern then becomes the struggle for the vulnerable population amidst socio-economic challenges. While the vulnerable population continues to experience severe anxiety and uncertainty about the future, Non-profit organizations excel in their role as community leaders. Indeed, such organizations cater to their communities in all realms of human endeavour, be it financial, physical, mental, social, and much more. The most difficult obstacles the vulnerable population faces are as follows: housing insecurity, food insecurity, and transportation. This research has shown that nonprofit organizations are multifaceted in their operation, which temporary eases such insecurities. The research methodology section illustrates firsthand statistics regarding local NPOs within the Windsor-Essex region. The results signify that there continues to be an ever-increasing demand for NPO services.

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