

**PERCEIVED BARRIERS BASED ON LIVED EXPERIENCES OF RECENT
VISIBLE MINORITY IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE INTEGRATION
– A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY BASED IN PRINCE GEORGE, BC**

by

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Abstract

The study investigated the lived experiences of visible minority immigrant (VMI) women and their economic integration in Canada, using Prince George as a case study. The thesis explored the barriers to labour market integration of a sample of VMI women, using phenomenological research methods. For data collection face- to -face interviews were conducted with 10 recently migrated VMI women residing in Prince George, BC. Major findings of the study revealed nine barriers, out of which, four (cultural differences, lack of access to affordable and reliable childcare, discrimination, and credential assessment challenges) were found to be more prominent. The study concluded with recommended policy initiatives that may ease the economic integration of VMI women, such as bridging programs and subsidized childcare. The study concluded that a proactive shift in the mind frames of immigrant women may facilitate their integration by better preparing them to handle various challenges accompanying the settlement experience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

Various research studies have indicated the presence of structural, cultural and socio-economic barriers to the economic integration of immigrant women in Canadian society (Shields, Lo, Zikic & Atlin, 2011; Nangia, 2013; VanderPlaat, 2007; Wayland, 2006; Women's Economic Council, 2011; Xue, 2007). Most of the barriers that decrease the economic stability of immigrant women are not merely circumstantial but systemic. These barriers are rooted in various institutional, social, and even cultural factors (Boyette & Mihaylova, 2014; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). Such barriers are deemed to be even more pronounced for immigrant women who are visible minorities (Access Alliance, 2011; Premji et al., 2014; Sethi & Williams, 2015). What is less clear in the literature are the experiences of visible minority immigrant (VMI) women with the systemic barriers they face when attempting to integrate into paid workforce in Canadian economy. Qualitative research on the study of the women is lacking, this thesis is an attempt to increase an understanding of the travail of the women in Canada, and to partially fill that gap in literature.

Rationale for the Study

While quantitative empirical studies have played an important role in identifying various factors impeding the economic integration of immigrant women (Alboim, Finnie & Meng, 2005; Xue, 2007) such studies fail to present a complete picture. Quantitative studies in the field of immigrant settlement miss the feelings of alienation, self-doubt, stress and anxiety or, alternatively, acceptance, optimism, resilience and determination that shape immigrants' perceptions about their settlement journey and integration into a new society and economy. The objective of this qualitative phenomenological study captured the missing

elements, while defining the labour market struggles and obstacles experienced by VMI women.

Labour market outcomes which indicate the disadvantaged position of immigrant women in terms of incomes, participation rates, and job-to-education mismatch (Hudon, 2015) also form the rationale for this study. Such negative outcomes point to the fact there are certain barriers which are impeding the labour market integration of immigrant women. By using a phenomenological approach, this study was intended to explicate the factors which are contributing to such a dismal scenario. Using phenomenological research design methods, the experiences of VMI women's labour market integration were explored to uncover the meanings, perceptions, and beliefs associated with the hurdles these women faced in the process of labour market integration.

Problem Statement

Family migration is a difficult step bringing multiple challenges for all family members especially women (Rashid, 2011). Immigrant women experience greater downward mobility in their careers after migration as compared to immigrant men (Hudon, 2015). Various studies indicate that immigrant women face economic discrimination in the job market as compared to all other segments of workforce and face barriers to their economic integration (Man, 2004; Sethi & Williams, 2015; Women's Economic Council, 2011).

Objective of the Study

The objective of this thesis was to explain the perceived labour market barriers for immigrant women in the light of their lived experiences. Phenomenology involves capturing the essence of human experience to give meaning to a certain phenomenon of interest (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology has the potential to present a more holistic picture of the life-

world of immigrant women participants, the challenges they encounter after migration, and coping with the challenges. Hence, this study was based on a phenomenological method. By identifying and understanding the labour market barriers from the perspective of immigrant women, this study aimed to address the problem of economic discrimination faced by these women in the Canadian job market.

Labour force integration is vital to the economic empowerment of immigrant women. Immigrant women have been actively involved in community institutions, not only to overcome barriers of labour force participation but also to improve their quality of life and those of others in the society (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2000). Better labour force integration of immigrant women in Canada is not just socially justifiable but also economically desirable for Canada. This study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors impeding the labour market integration of immigrant women and hence facilitate their economic empowerment.

Research Question

The main research question of this study was “How are perceived labour market barriers hindering the labour market integration of recent VMI women residing in Prince George, BC?” By exploring the research question through the lived experiences of sample women as recent permanent residents to Canada, specifically BC province between 2010 and 2015, from a racialized and gendered perspective, this study aimed at enriching knowledge of phenomenon of labour market barriers, as well as their impact and effects on the women participants.

Significance of the Study

By studying the labour market barriers for VMI women through a phenomenological lens, findings of the research provided a deeper, and clearer understanding as to why and how certain factors work to the detriment of recent VMI women entering the Canadian labour market. The report of my thesis may also be beneficial to policy makers for policy innovations and extension in the area of labour market access and integration of new immigrant women. By identifying the labour market barriers for VMI women, this report sought to motivate all stakeholders - settlement workers, community organizations, human resource practitioners, employers and government, to work towards reducing such barriers and thereby empower immigrant women socially and economically.

I explored the labour market experiences of the participants, not only as a researcher, but as an immigrant woman myself. My experiences as a VMI woman motivated me to explore and bring to light the experiences of other recent VMI women trying and working to integrate into the Canadian workforce. My personal experiences and knowledge helped me to deeply reflect upon the phenomenon of labour market barriers as revealed through the lived experiences of the study participants.

At least two perspectives can be taken on the barriers to economic integration of immigrant women. One perspective is taken by governmental policy and decision-makers, as well as by many academic researchers who rely heavily on government statistics and position papers. Another perspective, which has gotten considerably less research attention, is from the experiences of the immigrant women themselves who must face the difficulties and challenges posed by the barriers identified by governmental and academic experts. The literature review reported in the next section of this thesis focuses predominantly on the

perspective taken by external experts on the question of barriers to the economic integration of immigrant women. Reference will also be made to reports on the women's experiences of these barriers as they appear in the literature. The intention is to present the broader context to the issue of barriers with respect to economic integration of VMI women into the Canadian labour force, as this phenomenon is seen through the eyes of the external experts in government and academia. The question of immigrant women's lived experiences of these barriers will then be explored through much of the rest of this thesis, as contrasted with the perspective taken by the external experts from government and academia.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature from a Policy Perspective

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the problem of immigrant women's economic integration as well as the barriers to that economic integration proposed from the policy perspective. The first part of this literature review covers the broader Canadian context in which immigration is set, including the group composition of recent immigrants. The second part of this literature review focuses on the matter of economic integration, especially as it applies to immigrant women as a group that is subject to racialized gender disparity (Tastsoglou & Preston, 2012). The third part of this literature review identifies barriers to immigrant women's economic integration that have been reported by previous researchers.

Immigration as an Economic and Social Issue in Canada

Similar to other developed countries, Canada is facing the challenge of an aging population. Komarnicki (2012) stated that Canada is faced with the issue of maintaining a strong and healthy labour force in the midst of a declining number of working age people (15-64 years). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), immigration is an essential tool in addressing upcoming labour shortages and ensuring a robust labour market (Kustec, 2012). As reported by the National Household Survey (2011), 20.6% of Canada's total population comprised of immigrants, which is the highest proportion among the G8 countries. Kustec (2012) explained that there are a number of factors that attract new permanent residents to Canada, including better economic opportunities, reunion with family members or refuge from repressive governments. Regardless of their different motives for migration, the majority of permanent residents participate in the workforce (Kustec, 2012).

There was a massive influx of immigrants entering Canada after the end of Second World War (Miedema & Tastsoglou, 2000). Research indicates that, until 1962, Canadian

immigration policies favoured and facilitated European immigrants by excluding non-European immigrants through restrictive immigration policies (Agnew, 1996; Kubat, 1993; Miedema & Tastsoglou, 2000). Miedema and Tastsoglou (2000) explained that this discriminatory scenario changed in 1967, when the immigration policy makers ended the blatant racial biases by establishing a more egalitarian policy framework for future immigration. The revised immigration policies and legislation enabled potential immigrants that met admission criteria to enter Canada, regardless of their country of origin. Consequently, thousands of people from non-European countries started to migrate and settle in Canada through a point-based immigration system, which intrinsically favoured upper-middle class and highly-educated immigrants (Miedema & Tastsoglou, 2000).

Immigration is highly valued in Canada for various reasons. Canada's immigration system selects individuals who have the skills and education to contribute to the economic growth and prosperity of the country. Immigration also enriches the country's socio-cultural fabric by enhancing ethno-cultural diversity. It strengthens the humanitarian tradition of Canada by re-uniting families and by providing refuge to the needy (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2013). Based on data from 2005 to 2014, an average of 255,000 individuals immigrate to Canada as permanent residents every year (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2015). Recently, the Canadian government has committed to raising this number to 300,000 in 2017; with a minimum of 280,000 immigrants with a maximum limit of 320,000 immigrants (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2016).

Canada is one of the most popular immigrant destinations and attracts immigrants from all over the world. Picot (2008) outlined some reasons why immigrants prefer Canada. These include the following:

- Canada offers a high overall standard and quality of life. Immigrants value the equitable access to top-class health and educational facilities in Canada.
- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom (Constitution Act, 1982) offers democratic freedom and the right to freedom of religion, culture, language choice and individual expression. It also protects the legal rights of all Canadians.
- With its wealth of natural resources and highly-developed industries, Canada offers good business and job opportunities.

The Government of Canada sets a target for the intake of immigrants annually based on Canada's economic requirements, family reunification and humanitarian objectives (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2016). Immigration is an integral component of Canada's history and current political and economic priorities. Data from Statistics Canada (2016) shows that the earliest immigrants to Canada came from Britain, France, Scotland and Ireland. However, based on the more recent immigration data of 2014, the largest percentages of immigrants to Canada come from Asia (primarily from Philippines, China and India) (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015). Malenfant, Lebel and Martel (2015) reported that, considering these current trends in immigration, the ethno-cultural diversity in Canada may continue to rise. It was projected that, by 2031, three out of every 10 Canadians could be a member of a visible minority group. This ratio was expected to be double for large Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) like Vancouver and Toronto (Malenfant et al., 2015).

Classes of immigration. Immigrants are admitted to Canada as permanent residents under various classes set by the government. According to CIC, the terms permanent resident or landed immigrant, are used to describe a person who has been admitted to Canada and granted the legal right to live in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016a). There are five

groups of landed immigrants based on the criteria used to grant landed immigrant status: (1) Skilled Workers and Professionals, (2) Provincial Nominees, (3) Investors, Entrepreneurs and Self-Employed Persons, (4) Family Members and (5) Humanitarians (Government of Canada, 2016b). The first three classes relate to immigrants admitted to Canada for economic reasons and are classified as Economic Class Immigrants. They are admitted using an established process through which they must meet qualifying criteria based on level of education, work experience, language skills in English or French, and employment prospects in Canada. The fourth group represents Canada's commitment to allow its citizens to sponsor a family member under the Family Class to join them in Canada. The fifth group is made up of individuals who are refugees and are applying to be admitted to Canada to seek asylum.

Rashid (2011) stated that, although the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) categorizes refugees as immigrants, the circumstances and motives to immigrate for refugees are very different from those of immigrants belonging to other classes. Most refugees migrate from their homelands due to fear of persecution, oppression and violence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1996). Owing to the fact that their immigration context is different and they may suffer from the effects of trauma faced in their home countries, the experiences of refugees need to be examined differently from immigrants belonging to other classes of immigration (Rashid, 2011; Sethi & Williams, 2015). Consequently, this research focused on the labour force integration of new female permanent residents, excluding refugees.

The profile of immigrant women in Canada. As of July 1, 2014, the number of females in the Canadian population (17.9 million) was slightly more than males (17.6 million). The Canadian female population has been growing consistently over many decades.

It rose significantly from 4.3 million in 1921 to 17.9 million in 2014. As per population projections, this trend is likely to continue in the future too (Statistics Canada, 2014).

Canada's female population is also becoming increasingly diverse with respect to ethnicity, language, religion and race (Milan, 2015). According to the National Household Survey (2011), 3.5 million females were immigrants representing 21% of the total Canadian female population. The amount of time spent in Canada as a permanent resident varied among the female immigrant population. In 2011, 17% of immigrant women had arrived in Canada between 2006 and 2010, 15% between 2001 and 2005, and 68% had arrived before 2001. More than two-thirds of the female immigrant population in 2011 had been living in Canada for more than a decade (Milan, 2015).

According to Hudon (2015), more than 260,000 immigrants arrived in Canada in 2014, of which 52.3% were females. Milan (2015) reported that in 2013, based on the immigration facts released by CIC in October, 2014, the majority of female immigrants could be identified as visible minorities and had arrived from Asia; the largest proportion of female immigrants belonged to the Philippines (15%) followed by India and China (each at 12%), and Pakistan and Iran (approximately 4% each).

Milan (2015) further reported that, in 2013, the majority of female immigrants arrived in Canada under the Economic Class (61.3%). These women immigrated as principal applicants or as the dependents of skilled workers, entrepreneurs or self-employed, provincial/territorial nominees or as live-in caregivers. An additional 28.1% of female immigrants arrived under the Family Class in 2013; they were sponsored by relatives and family members residing in Canada. Lastly, 10.6% of female immigrants arrived under the Humanitarian Class (Milan, 2015)

Milan (2015) stated that, in 2013, majority of the immigrants were younger than the average age of the Canadian population. Both male and female immigrants (at 49% each) belonged to the core working age group of 25-44 years. This figure was substantially higher than for Canadian-born citizens, of whom only 27% were in that age bracket. In 2013, approximately 17% of the female immigrants were younger than 15 years old. This figure was close to 16% for the overall Canadian female population aged younger than 15 years. Only 7% of female immigrants were aged 65 and over, compared to approximately 17% for the overall female population in 2013 (Milan, 2015).

Hudon (2015) reported, based on the data from National Household Survey (2011), that both immigrant men and women prefer to settle in Canada's large urban areas. In 2011, the trend to live in large CMAs was more significant for immigrant women as compared to Canada's total female population; 91.1% of female immigrants lived in large CMAs as compared to 69.6% of total females in Canada. In 2011, the majority of female immigrants lived in Toronto (37.9%) followed by Vancouver (13.7%) and Montreal (12.2%) (Hudon, 2015).

Economic Integration of Immigrant Women in Canada

From the perspective of policy makers, the concept of immigrant integration is understood as the process by which immigrants adjust well in a host country and become productive members of the mainstream society (Li, 2003).

The concept of economic integration. Li (2003) suggested that the term *integration* generally implies a desirable outcome relating to immigrants' adjustment to the norms of a host society. He further suggested that integration may be considered as a benchmark by which the performance of immigrants can be evaluated and by which the success of the

immigration policy may be gauged. Those immigrants who do as well or better than non-immigrants are viewed by Li (2003) as well integrated; those immigrants who cannot compete in the labour market would be viewed as a drain on the larger society. The underlying assumption of this view is that the value of immigrants lies in their capacity to benefit the host country and, in order to do so, their performance in the labour market should be comparable and competitive to the performance of a native-born. Immigrants may have a different view of what it means to successfully integrate into a host country's economy. Plante (2011) pointed out that, from the immigrants' perspective, integration may mean being employed in a field or occupation which matches their qualifications and training while being able to earn compensation at prevailing rates. The idea that governmental/social policy decision makers and immigrants may have different perspectives on economic integration is explored further as the major topic of this thesis where immigrant women describe their lived experiences of integration into Canadian economy.

Labour market disadvantage of immigrant women. Hudon (2015) cited data from the National Household Survey (2011) which showed that immigrant women are disadvantaged compared to Canadian-born women, immigrant men and Canadian-born men when it comes to labour market outcomes. Some job market variables that contribute to the job market disadvantage for immigrant women have been compiled in Table 1. The unemployment rate for recent immigrant women is higher than all other groups presented in Table 1. On the other hand, immigrant women were more likely to be university graduates than all other groups; however, the level of education of immigrant women is not a strong predictor of their income levels (Salaff & Greve, 2004).

Table 1

Comparison of Immigrant Women to Canadian-born Women, Immigrant Men and Canadian-born Men for Some Job Market Variables

<u>Target Population</u>	<u>Unemployment Rate</u>	<u>University Graduates</u>	<u>Job-to-Education Mismatch</u>	<u>Prevalence of Low Income</u>
Immigrant women	14.7%	27.7%	48.7%	28.3%
Canadian-born women	5.2%	19.2%	30%	14.6%
Immigrant Men	10%	31.2%	41%	27.6%
Canadian-born men	6.1%	16.6%	28.2%	12.7%

Note: Reproduced From the National Household Survey (2011)

Due to systemic barriers resulting from the non-recognition of foreign credentials by employers, licensing requirements and the need to gain Canadian experience, most immigrants obtain low paying, precarious jobs that do not match their skills and qualifications (Weiner, 2008). Hudon (2015) reported, based on the data from the National Household Survey (2011) that 48.7% of working immigrant women had a job-to-education mismatch. This number is significantly higher than the Canadian-born women's job-to-education mismatch ratio. As shown in Table 1, compared to all other groups, the prevalence of low incomes is also greater for immigrant women.

Immigrant women also face a huge disparity when it comes to their income. According to data from the National Household Survey (2011), the average employment income for immigrant women of core working age (25-44 years) was \$33,793, which was significantly less than that of Canadian born women (\$38,531) and immigrant men (\$48,848). The highest income gap was between immigrant women and Canadian-born men in the same age group (\$54,906). Moreover, research shows that immigrant women are not able to overcome this earnings gap with Canadian-born women until they were in the labour

force for 10 years (Wilkinson, Peter & Chaturvedi, 2006). All these labour market statistics indicate that immigrant women face a gender disparity in the job market and are disadvantaged, thereby further emphasizing the need to explore, understand and remove the barriers hindering their economic progress in Canada.

Various studies show that the labour market disadvantage is even higher for immigrant women who are also visible minorities (Man, 2004; Reitz, 2001a; Sethi & Williams, 2015). VMI women have a higher earnings disadvantage and wage gap in the Canadian labour market as compared to non-visible minority immigrant women (Li, 2001; Reitz, 2001a). Through an extensive literature review covering the period between 1980 and 2011, Sethi and Williams (2015) concluded that gender, visible minority status and immigrant status all combined together result in “multiple negative effects” leading to economic discrimination and de-skilling for these women in Canadian labour market (p. 137).

A Review of Research Identifying Barriers to Immigrants' Labour Market Integration

Immigrants go through an adjustment phase after relocating to a new country. Over time, they become more familiar with the dynamics of a new job market (Banerjee & Phan, 2015). In the hope to achieve rapid labour market integration, most immigrants focus on improving their language skills and on acquiring local experience and education. However, most of the time, such improvements in human capital are not matched by proportionate success in the job market (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Chiswick & Miller, 2003; Reitz, 2001a). This mismatch indicates the presence of barriers to immigrants' labour force integration.

Various studies have explored the barriers to the economic integration of immigrants in Canada. The results of these studies are summarized in Table 2. Several patterns can be

seen in this table. First, the available studies have employed a variety of methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative, to studying the barriers to the participation of immigrants in the Canadian labour market. Three of these studies in Table 2 discussed the lived experiences of immigrant women with respect to their participation in the labour force. Second, a number of barriers are identified by the studies in Table 2. There is considerable convergence among the studies in Table 2 as to the barriers to economic integration faced by immigrants to Canada, especially regarding the non-recognition of foreign credentials, the lack of Canadian experience, and the lack of sufficient language skills. Third, most of the studies reported in Table 2 and elsewhere in this thesis study immigrant populations without taking into account the unique, gendered experiences of immigrant women. Fourth, much of the research reported in Table 2 was conducted in larger urban centres; there appears to be a relative shortage of research into the barriers faced by immigrant women who live in smaller centres. This thesis adds to the literature by (1) adopting a qualitative (phenomenological) approach to inquiry from a racialized and gendered perspective, (2) by studying VMI women who live in a smaller Canadian city and (3) by exploring their lived experience of the barriers identified in the relevant literature, as reported in Table 2. In this way, the present thesis seeks to make a unique contribution to the literature studying barriers to VMI women's labour market integration.

Table 2

Research Studies on Labour Market Barriers for Immigrants in Canada

<u>Author(s)</u>	<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Research Methodology</u>	<u>Sample/Data</u>	<u>Labour Market Barriers Identified</u>	<u>Discussed Lived Experiences of Immigrant Women?</u>
Alboim, Finnie, & Meng (2005)	What are the factors that lead to the discounting of immigrants' human capital in the Canadian job market?	Empirical analysis	A cohort of 2102 men living in Canada in 1989 obtained from Statistics Canada's Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA) database	Canadian language skills, Canadian experience, Canadian education	No
Basran & Li (1998)	What are the perceived barriers that impede the labour market integration of professional immigrants in Canada?	Survey based on self-administered questionnaire	404 professional immigrants in Vancouver, BC	Non-recognition of foreign credentials, unfair credential evaluation, devaluation of foreign experience, language skills, racial/ethnic discrimination, lack of opportunities to gain local work experience	No
Bauder & Cameron (2002)	What are the barriers leading to occupational downgrading of immigrants?	Grounded theory analysis of data obtained from personal interviews and surveys	Settlement workers and employers from 39 institutes having experience dealing with immigrants from South Asia and former Yugoslavia who settled in Greater Vancouver	Non-recognition of foreign education and experience, cultural competence, discrimination, labour market norms, language skills, lack of Canadian experience	No

<u>Author(s)</u>	<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Research Methodology</u>	<u>Sample/Data</u>	<u>Labour Market Barriers Identified</u>	<u>Discussed Lived Experiences of Immigrant Women?</u> Yes
Persad & Lukkas (2002)	What kind of barriers and discriminations are experienced by Muslim women wearing a "hijab"?	Consultation, focus group, survey, in-person field testing, applications to employment agencies	16 community organizations servicing Muslims, 50 Muslim women participants for focus groups and survey, 16 job sites based in Ontario	Religious discrimination based on head covering hijab worn by Muslim women	Yes
Premji, et al., (2014)	What are the barriers experienced by racialized immigrant women working in low-paid precarious jobs and what are the impacts of such work?	Community-based action research based on semi-structured personal interviews	30 racialized immigrant women based in Toronto, ON	Non-recognition of credentials, Canadian experience, racial/ religious discrimination, lack of information and professional networks, household and child caring responsibilities, lack of spousal/family support, language	Yes
Wayland (2006)	What are the legal and policy barriers to the settlement of immigrants in Canada?	Focus groups, interviews and literature review	33 participants (23 female, 10 male) based in Hamilton and Toronto., ON	Communication barriers, lack of funding for settlement agencies, licensing issues, non-recognition of foreign credentials, lack of civic engagement and social isolation, lack of employment opportunities, systemic discrimination	No
Women's Economic Council (2011)	What are the key barriers to the economic security of immigrant women?	Focus groups	70 immigrant women across Canada	Precarious employment, childcare issues, lack of affordable housing, lack of community support, non-recognition of credentials, language skills	Yes

<u>Author (s)</u>	<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Research Methodology</u>	<u>Sample/Data</u>	<u>Labour Market Barriers Identified</u>	<u>Discussed Lived Experiences of Immigrant Women?</u> No
Xue (2007)	What are the barriers faced by new immigrants and what resources are relied upon to counter these barriers in the first four years of settlement?	Statistical analysis of data from longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada	157,600 immigrants who landed in Canada in or after 2000	Lack of employment assistance, non-recognition of foreign credentials, financial constraints, language barriers	

Factor-wise Review of Related Research on Barriers to Labour Force Integration for Immigrant Women

In order to ensure women's economic security, they must be equipped with the right facilities and opportunities leading to their economic wellbeing. Many of the factors hindering the melioration of immigrant women's economic security can potentially influence all women. In order to get a more comprehensive picture of the various perspectives on labour market barriers for immigrant women, this section presents a review of various factors that are considered to be barriers to immigrant women's economic integration in the light of existing research.

Access to childcare is an issue for many Canadian families, but the problem may be more complex for immigrant families (Women's Economic Council, 2011). Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) highlighted the issue of traditional gendered norms in immigrant families where childcare is thought to be the primary responsibility of women. Women in such families are left with less time and freedom to pursue their careers. Childcare responsibilities also constrain immigrant women's careers due to a lack of social networks (Salaff & Greve, 2004). Immigrant families prefer to have culturally appropriate childcare" for their children; a lack of which forces immigrant women into unemployment or underemployment (VanderPlaat, 2007, p. 19). Some studies have also pointed out that the cost of childcare is a burden for newly migrated families with tight finances (Donkor, 2004; Khan & Watson, 2005).

Tight finances may also act as a labour force integration barrier for immigrants (Heilbrunn, Kushnirovich, & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010). The fact that almost 25% of all female immigrants (and over one third of recent female immigrants) live below the poverty line, and

that there is rise in the incidence of single parenting among immigrant women (Milan, 2015) also poses additional monetary challenges leading to a direct negative impact on the economic well-being of immigrant women.

With regards to the role of culture in the economic integration of immigrant women, most of the existing literature focuses on the gendered role expectations associated with women. Cultural perceptions, which ascribe breadwinning responsibilities to males and housekeeping responsibilities to females, restrict the careers of women (Kabeer, 2012; Read, 2004). Bauder and Cameron (2002) discovered that labour market integration of immigrants relates to a set of inter-connected cultural factors. These factors included “immigrant class and employment credentials, cultural meanings of work, cultural competence, discrimination, culturally differentiated labour market conventions and job search patterns, and language.” (Bauder & Cameron, 2002, p. 2). Cultural adjustments may also lead to social isolation and economic dependence (Choudhry , 2001).

Social networks and the economic success of immigrants are intertwined. Social capital may be explained in terms of “the material advantages a person derives from connections with family, friends and acquaintances” (Thomas, 2013, p. 52). Since immigrant women also use their social and kinship networks to obtain support in childcare, the lack of these networks in a host country poses a hindrance to their career advancement (Salaff & Greve, 2004; VanderPlaat, 2007). Social networks are a source of emotional support for immigrant women and may act a “buffer to negative adjustment experiences” (Martins & Reid, 2007, p. 216). A study conducted by George and Chaze (2009) distinguished between the role of pre-existing and self-created social capital in labour market integration. It was found that self-created social capital helps immigrant women with gaining employment that

is more aligned with their skills and qualifications. Pre-existing social capital may facilitate labour market integration through moral, emotional and informational support.

Lack of informational resources is also a systemic barrier which most immigrant women face with respect to their entry into the labour market. "Information gaps about where and how to find stable jobs, about how to build long-term employment security, how to file complaints or counter discrimination in the labour market and about workplace safety" lead to poor labour market integration of immigrant women (Access Alliance, 2011, p. 3). Most immigrants, including women, have poor access to informational resources (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Weiner (2008) stated that immigrants lack information on job search patterns, workplace norms and credentialing requirements.

Language is one of the most important vehicles for immigrants to adjust in a new host country. In 2006, 20% of the Canadian population comprised of allophones (Statistics Canada, 2011). Communication skills specific to Canadian workplaces are critical to the job market success of immigrants (Weiner, 2008). Language barriers are more pronounced for immigrant women than they are for men (Beiser & Hou, 2000). Although immigrant women tended to benefit more from English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, they had fewer opportunities to attend such classes due to household and child caring responsibilities (Beiser & Hou, 2000; VanderPlaat, 2007). Cultural pressure to maintain the use of traditional languages at home also affects the language skills of immigrant women (VanderPlaat, 2007). Weak language skills limit employment opportunities for otherwise well-qualified women (CLMcCracken Consulting, 2006). Andrew, Kiodawsk and Siitanen (2014) stressed that soft skills facilitate the labour market integration of immigrant women. Andrew et al. (2014) described soft skills as the ability "to work with others and to develop the complete

collection of our social, communication, and self-management behaviours.” (p. 73). Soft skills may help immigrants to “fit in’ at the workplace” and consequently facilitate labour market integration for these women (Andrew et al., 2014, p. 73).

Various studies have indicated that foreign skills and credentials are not duly recognized in the Canadian job market and act as a systemic barrier for immigrants (Basran & Li, 1998; Bauder & Cameron, 2002; Premji et.al., 2014; Wayland, 2006). Weiner (2008) stated that employers are generally reluctant to recognize foreign credentials and experience on the grounds that immigrants are unaware of local job market norms and practices. Immigrants fail to assess the degree of devaluation of their foreign credentials because most “regulatory bodies are not set up to assess foreign credentials” prior to their arrival in Canada (Bauder, 2003, p. 702). Non-recognition of foreign credentials leads to “occupational downgrading” and the “loss of social status” for most immigrants (Bauder, 2003, p. 713). The careers of immigrant women suffer more than of immigrant men due to such non-recognition of credentials restricting them to low-paying precarious jobs (McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Rashid, 2011).

Due to non-recognition of foreign credentials, most employers prefer to hire candidates with Canadian work experience (Weiner, 2008). The lack of volunteering and internship opportunities makes it hard for immigrants to acquire comparable experience (McCoy & Masuch, 2007) and leads to de-skilling. The requirement for Canadian work experience becomes more of a challenge for immigrant women than for immigrant men due to traditional gendered norms, racism and gender discrimination (Man, 2004). Studies also point to the fact that the Canadian work experience requirement is perceived by immigrants as a means to exclude them from upper segments of the labour market (Bauder 2003; McCoy

& Masuch, 2007) since this requirement is more evident for regulated and managerial jobs and comparatively less so for menial jobs. The Canada Business Network defines a “regulated occupation as “one that is governed by a provincial, territorial or sometimes federal authority” (n.d, para. 2). In regulated professions, licenses are issued after the assessment of certain entry requirements and standards of practice. Licensing costs, requirements and procedures act as prominent labour market barriers for skilled immigrants (Access Alliance, 2011; Bauder, 2003).

Due to the requirement of Canadian work experience and non-recognition of foreign credentials, immigrant women often attempt to penetrate the job market by means of low paying survival jobs, volunteer work or through working at multicultural organizations (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). Moreover, internships, co-op placements and volunteering are also identified by some research studies as favoured and meaningful ways to acquire Canadian work experience for immigrant women (McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Miedema & Tastsoglou, 2000). Therefore, a lack of such opportunities may act as a labour market barrier for immigrant women. However, sometimes immigrants are less likely to take up volunteer work due to the costs involved (George & Chaze, 2009; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). As George and Chaze (2007) stated, “volunteering involves costs- related to travel; training (in some cases), finding, and paying for suitable child care; and time that could be spent looking for employment.” (p. 400). Immigrants may find volunteering beneficial only when there is high degree of congruence between their skills and the volunteering opportunity and when they can foresee a high probability of getting hired (George & Chaze, 2007; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005).

Although employment discrimination is legally prohibited in Canada, studies have indicated that immigrants face employment discrimination, as evidenced by pay inequities, lack of recognition of foreign credentials and Canadian work experience requirements (Reitz, 2001a). Immigrants face systemic discrimination rooted in legal and policy barriers (Wayland, 2006). Immigrants may also face discrimination based on ethnicity and race (Access Alliance, 2011; Agnus, 2009; Reitz, 2005; Wayland, 2006). When it comes to discrimination against immigrants, women face additional barriers in certain circumstances because of their gender. Immigrant women employed in fields considered as male-dominated in the Canadian job market (e.g., mechanics, repairers and construction) may face additional hurdles in their career progression (Weiner, 2008; McMullen, Gilmore & Le Petit, 2010).

Religious practices and beliefs may also sometimes act as a barrier to labour market integration for immigrant women. Based on quantitative techniques and analysis, several authors (e.g., Heineck, 2004; Lehrer, 1995) found that women who are strongly associated with a religious group tend to have lower Labour Force Participation (LFP) rates compared to those who are not. Many religions include elements of gender conservatism and traditional gender roles that result in negative work outcomes for women (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2003). Various studies have pointed out that Muslim immigrant women in Canada were subjected to discrimination in the job market based on the head scarf hijab worn to cover their heads (Access Alliance, 2011; Persad & Lukas, 2002).

Chapter 3: Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to further explore the barriers to labour market integration for visible-minority immigrant women. Researchers' main objective when adopting a qualitative design is to present a unique perspective on an existing situation and to provide useful insights on the issue under study (Myers, 2000). Moreover, qualitative methods are more appropriate when there is lack of conclusive information on an issue, (Strauss & Corbin, 2015) which is the case in this study. The phenomenon of immigrant women's labour market integration has been researched under various government agendas as well as under independent research studies (Bauder, 2003; Bauder & Cameron, 2002). However, there is limited amount of qualitative research that specifically focuses on the labour market barriers encountered by VMI women. Furthermore, immigrant women's labour market integration has either been studied under the overall settlement experience of immigrants, without taking into account their unique gendered paradigms (Basran & Li, 1998; Bauder, 2003; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Reitz, 2001b; Reitz 2005) or under a general female labour market analysis, without taking into account their immigrant status (Phimister, Vera-Toscano & Weersink, 2002). Most of the existing studies are older than five years and do not represent the current circumstances of immigrant women. Hence, using a qualitative research design, this study aimed to explore and evaluate the labour market barriers encountered by recent immigrant women in Canada. A qualitative research design not only helped to identify the various labour market barriers present in the contemporary Canadian context, but also provided useful insights into how, why, and whether any particular factor was considered a barrier by the study participants.

Racialized Gender Parity Theory as Theoretical Framework

Tastoglou and Preston (2012) took a theoretically-oriented approach to understanding the challenges of economic integration for immigrant women who come to Canada. They proposed that the economic integration of immigrant women needs to be explored with a gendered paradigm. That is, it is important to explore and understand labour market barriers through a female's perspective. This thesis builds on this basic premise by investigating the impact and effect of barriers to economic integration from immigrant women's perspective. Tastoglou and Preston (2012) argued that immigrant women and men occupy different positions in a society with respect to economy, education, social dynamics and cultural patterns. Immigrant women therefore encounter different life experiences. The authors stressed that labour market integration is more challenging for immigrant women especially those who belong to racialized groups. Recognizing the unique position of immigrant women in society is critical for their empowerment and well-being. Tastoglou and Preston (2012) stated that integration theories at the time fail to explain integration as a gendered experience. In order to overcome shortcomings of existing theories, they proposed their racialized gender parity theory as a normative means to evaluate the success of immigrant women's economic integration. According to Tastoglou and Preston (2012), "parity is measured relative to the economic experiences of Canadian-born men from European backgrounds that are an ideal yardstick against which to assess the integration of actual immigrant women." (p. 48).

This research applies the racialized gender parity theory of Tastoglou and Preston (2012) to gauge the economic integration of immigrant women. Participants were not questioned directly whether they deemed themselves economically integrated or not; rather

an attempt was made to evaluate the attainment of racialized gender parity for labour force integration by gathering information related to job profile, length of employment, satisfaction with earnings, ethnic and professional background. As proposed by the racialized gender parity theory this study recognizes that economic integration is an ongoing process unique to the experiences of each individual immigrant woman.

According to this theory, successful economic integration of immigrant women implies that the work they do is commensurate with their skills and education. Time is also of the essence in gauging the economic integration of immigrant women; immigrant women should be deemed well integrated only if they are able to achieve equitable employment within a time period that matches or exceeds that of any Canadian born with similar qualifications. Overlooking the time required for immigrant women to succeed in the labour market would mean ignoring all the extra efforts that went into achieving that employment status. Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) stressed that economic integration is not only an outcome, but rather a process that poses different challenges for different immigrant women. This observation is highly relevant to the experiences of the immigrant women interviewed later in this thesis. The racialized gender parity theory recognizes that economic integration cannot be generalized for all immigrant women and is unique for each individual immigrant women. Likewise, this thesis focuses on the individual experiences of immigrant women; more specifically, this thesis identifies and explores immigrant women's experiences of the barriers to their labour market integration.

Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) proposed that more qualitative studies need to be conducted to understand the economic integration of immigrant women as such "studies would complement quantitative analyses by exploring immigrant women's experiences of the

interacting effects of gender, education, visible minority status, and period of immigration on employment”.(p.54). This study is an endeavour to fulfill that proposal and investigate the various barriers which hinder immigrant women's successful assimilation into the Canadian labour market.

Situated Researcher

In this study, I would be considered to have been a situated researcher. Situatedness is an important issue in qualitative research. It describes the involvement of a researcher within the context of research (Given, 2008). From the standpoint of bias, it is important for me to recognize how I was situated in this research study.

My commitment to this research study stemmed from my own lived experience as a landed immigrant in Canada. Being a newly migrated professional woman striving to make my place in a new culture and a new job market, I personally encountered some difficult transitions. I experienced a huge disparity between the government's agenda to attract new skilled immigrants to fill labour market shortages and employers' attitudes in the labour market. My venture in a new labour market, culture and environment appeared to be more daunting than I had anticipated. It gave rise to a sense of curiosity and wonder in me which drove me to explore the labour market predicaments of other immigrant women like myself.

The homogeneity of my context with the study participants helped me as a reflexive researcher engaged in phenomenological inquiry. It facilitated my quest to derive meaning from the lived experiences of my participants. Usher (1997) explained that the context of a researcher is a necessary part of the research and cannot be segregated from the process of research. As Usher (1997) said, “these are ‘biases’, ineliminably part of us, which can be

recognized but not willed away. They are the marks of the trajectory of our desires and emotional investments in the research act.” (p. 33)

As a situated researcher, I remained conscious of my own preconceptions and beliefs throughout the research journey. Although my situatedness was the impetus for this study, I ensured that it did not lead me to alter the perceptions of the study participants. I used my background as an immigrant woman to develop rapport and empathy with my participants. It helped me when reflecting upon the lived experiences of the study participants. I was mindful to bracket my own experiences and perceptions while exploring the lived experiences of the study participants.

Research Methodology

A research methodology reflects upon the philosophical stance and the social and ethical foundations underlying a study and guides the progression of a research project (Neuman, 2003). In order to adequately address the research question, this study is based on a qualitative methodology. As Sloan and Bowe (2014) stated

Qualitative methodologies seek to depict a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and dynamic. Therefore qualitative methodological approaches tend to be based on recognition of the subjective, experiential life-world of human beings and a description of their experiences in depth (p. 4).

Such an approach is well suited to the purpose of this thesis.

Two qualitative approaches were considered to conduct the research, namely ethnography and phenomenology. In the following sections, I explain why phenomenology was chosen over ethnography and how it better suits the objectives of this research.

From ethnography to phenomenology. Initially, I approached this research project as ethnographic design. Baran and Jones (2016) argued for ethnography as a qualitative approach that shines a light of description and interpretation on the patterns and meanings of cultural themes held by and enacted within a particular group.

My intended ethnographic focus was on the study of the labour market barriers specific to immigrant women. However, when I piloted my interview guide, I noticed that immigrant women tended to explain the phenomena of labour market barriers through concrete, vivid accounts of their lived experiences in the labour market. The labour market barriers, as explained by the participants, were very personal and subjective; the barriers were not merely cultural patterns that could be generalized for immigrant women, but rather each barrier was a lived experience that was distinct to the situation of each participant. As a result of the pilot testing, I realized that, although my interview guide focuses on labour market barriers, it had the potential to evoke deeper accounts. While responding to the questions related to labour market barriers, participants described their overall settlement experience and their coping strategies as well as their future career aspirations. Moreover, the specific labour market barriers appeared to be different for each participant depending upon her unique circumstances and experiences. Ethnography's focus on groups failed to take into account the individuality of the experiences of my participants that defined what labour market barriers meant to them. The ethnographic approach did not appear to have the potential to allow me to fully understand and capture the meanings ingrained in the lived experiences of the participants. So, I considered alternative strategies of qualitative research.

As previously mentioned, the main objective of this study was to understand the perceived barriers to VMI women's labour force integration in light of their lived

experiences. In contrast to ethnography, the focus of phenomenology is on the lived experiences of individuals rather than on cultural themes in specific groups as studied by ethnographers. After the pilot testing of my interview guide, it became clear that a thorough understanding of the perceived labour market experiences of immigrant women required phenomenological reflection and analysis rather than an ethnographic approach. Considering the expected experiential quality of the data and the expected individuality of each interview account, I changed my research methodology from ethnography into a phenomenological approach.

A primer on phenomenological research. Sloan and Bowe (2014) described phenomenology as having multiple objectives: It can be a philosophy or a methodology, or it can be used as both for a research study. The findings of a phenomenological study are a “collection of descriptions of meanings derived through individuals’ lived experiences; the meanings of concepts or phenomena of interest” (Sloan & Bowe, 2014, p. 5).

Sloan and Bowe (2014) pointed out that the broader phenomenological philosophy espoused by thinkers such as Husserl and Heidegger have been taken in more recent years, by many researchers as a methodology. As a result, there are a number of different types of phenomenological methods that are used primarily in academic research. Some of these methods have their roots in descriptive phenomenology and some in hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology. This study is based on an hermeneutic phenomenological approach, as outlined by Max van Manen. Van Manen (2014) outlined what constitutes hermeneutic phenomenology and what falls outside of its domain. Hermeneutic phenomenology relies on lived human experiences to derive the meaning of a

phenomenon. However, the extraction of meaning depends upon interpretation and reflection by a researcher. Van Manen (2014) explained that phenomenology is distinct from various methodologies as it does not aim to make generalizations. Rather, phenomenology seeks to present fresh perspectives on a phenomenon in the light of human experiences. Writing is a vital component of phenomenology as it is believed that it is through words that meaning is revealed. Writing, from this perspective, is not merely a mechanical procedure, but has a powerful creative aspect (van Manen, 1990).

Importance of reflexivity and reflection in hermeneutic phenomenology. Van Manen (2014) suggested that both reflection and reflexivity play an important role in conducting hermeneutic phenomenological studies. According to Sloan and Bowe (2014), reflexivity means that phenomenological researchers must be reflective on how their research methods, presuppositions and personal context affect the data that they collect from their participants. Van Manen (2014) suggested that, in fact, reflexivity is an integral part of the interpretation of data.

Reflection upon a lived experience helps qualitative researchers to discover meaning from the descriptions or to enrich the resulting interpretations (van Manen, 2014). Sloan and Bowe (2014) succinctly described this aspect of phenomenological research in their observation as follows:

Reflection is not an explanation for the nature of a phenomenon, but allows a description of it as it appears in consciousness, where 'nature' is that which makes something what it is, and without which it could not be what it is. Not only is the essence important, but the reflection by the observer is also. (p. 11)

Moreover, phenomenological reflection is always based on past experience and is a re-collective process (van Manen, 2014). As a result, phenomenological reflection has a psychological element as well.

Lien, Pauleen, Kuo and Wang (2014) stated that, for a phenomenological inquiry to be effective, it is imperative that reflection should be rational and objective. They explain that objectivity requires a researcher to be able to look at an interviewee's lived experiences through the interviewee's eyes. Objectivity requires a researcher to drop all preconceptions and biases about a phenomenon and truly adopt an interviewee's perspective while analysing the lived experiences. Lien et al. (2014) further clarify this point when they state that, in order to obtain rationality, it is important to explain data analyses in detail. Reflection is both objective and rational when a researcher is able to put aside their biases, to enter into the lived experiences of the other, and to communicate the resulting insights in a way that a reader can readily understand (Lien et al., 2014).

Husserl's concept of epoche, well known to phenomenological researchers, is highly relevant to my attempts as a researcher to achieve objectivity in understanding the lived experiences of my study participants (van Manen, 2014). In order to undertake this phenomenological inquiry, I attempted to achieve epoche by bracketing all my pre-suppositions and beliefs about labour market barriers and the immigrant women's reactions to these barriers. Van Manen (2014) described bracketing as dropping or setting aside any personal assumptions brought by the researcher to the situation that might interfere with comprehension of the meaning of others' lived experience. . Although a researcher's experiences and attitudes cannot be completely removed from research and do play a role in interpreting data, epoche helps a phenomenological researcher to approach their data with a

fresh, open and self-critical mind (van Manen, 2014). In other words, epoche is a shift in one's frame of mind which ensures that nothing is presumed about the phenomenon under study.

My role as a reflexive researcher and an immigrant woman. It is almost impossible to deeply reflect upon a phenomenon without any prior knowledge of it. In this context, the fact that I am a recent immigrant woman myself not only afforded me trust and empathy for my participants, but also made me well equipped to meaningfully reflect upon the phenomena in question. As a researcher, being a part of the sub-group of immigrant women, I was very cautious not to project my own thoughts and biases into the research findings. As suggested by Boyatzis (1998) I did not try to fill in language left unstated by the study participant or ambiguous to the researcher. I therefore tried my best to focus on the raw data in order to develop codes and themes, and to write up my analysis without any personal biases. Tacit knowledge of the phenomena under study is a must for good qualitative analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). As already explained, as an immigrant woman I had personally faced barriers to my labour market integration and hence possessed tacit knowledge of the phenomenon under inquiry. Although my contextual knowledge of the phenomenon of labour market barriers did help me in interpreting the lived experiences of the participants, I tried to look at the participants' lived experiences through their perspectives.

Data Collection Process

In this study, I used face-to-face interviews and a reflective journal for data collection procedures. Interviewing participants afforded me the opportunity to capture the views of my participants in a conversational setting. The journal helped me capture my reflections in writing

subsequent to each interview. The journal notes served as memos which guided my analysis and data interpretation.

Interviews. This study primarily employed face to face interviews conducted with ten participants. Creswell (2012) proposed the use of interviews as the primary means of data collection for a phenomenological study. The author emphasized the selection of a limited number of individuals who have knowledge of a phenomenon to be researched, and then collect data on the relevant experiences through interviews (Creswell, 2012). This is the approach I adopted for this research.

An interview was carried out individually with each participant in person. The interview was semi-structured so as to elicit detailed responses. Each interview was conducted in English language. Overall, 10 participants were interviewed for the study; one interview was held with each participant. The interview time varied from as short as 15 minutes to as long as 42 minutes. The average time for the 10 interviews was approximately 25 minutes.

Prior to data collection, the interview guide (Appendix A) was piloted with two immigrant women. The pilot testing helped to assess the face validity of the interview guide; it helped to ensure that the interview questions were effective, clear and relevant to the study. Data from the two interviewees who took part in pilot testing were not included in the final sample.

Van Manen (1990) stated that, in a phenomenological interview, researchers and participants are partners in a quest to find meaning. As a result, it is critical to maintain a balance between structure and flexibility in interview questions. The introductory questions in the interview were aimed at capturing relevant demographic information regarding the interviewees. These questions also attempted to gauge the level of labour market integration of participants as per the racialized gender parity theory of Tastsoglou and Preston (2012). Further questions were based on the factors that have already been identified in the published literature as labour force

integration barriers. The participants were prompted (where appropriate) to provide more details as to why they perceived a certain factor to be a barrier.

Bevan (2014) suggested adopting a semi-structured approach for conducting interviews in phenomenological studies is to retain focus during data collection. Hence, I adopted a semi-structured approach and designed the interview guide based on the labour market barriers already identified in literature. Such an approach helped to keep the conversations centered on the research question. Prompts and probes helped me to elicit detailed responses and clarification whenever needed. An open-ended question was also included in each session to identify any barrier that had not already been covered in the interview guide and when any barrier was unique to a participant's situation. Each interview was recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Later, I transcribed each interview verbatim for data analysis.

Researcher's journal. As suggested by Saldaña (2013), I also maintained a researcher's journal (memos/ field notes) while conducting the interviews to record my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and reactions subsequent to each interview. I also noted the participants' non-verbal cues, including intonations, pauses, and body language as suggested by Letherby (2003). I also took note of various observations during the interview, including each participant's appearance, emotion and facial expressions. Writing down my thoughts and reflections after each interview also helped me to critically question my own preconceptions about the phenomenon under inquiry. Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves (2000) suggested that the process of data analysis actually starts during data collection, when a researcher starts listening to and actively thinking about the meaning of what is being conveyed in the data. My field notes acted like a precursory data analysis (Saldaña, 2013)

and also helped me to develop a focus while interpreting the transcribed interviews in detail later on.

Participant Recruitment

Sample selection for the interviews was accomplished with the help of the Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society (IMSS) of Prince George. IMSS is a non-profit organization that provides an array of settlement services to immigrants and refugees. It is located in Prince George, BC and serves all the northern area of British Columbia. Considering its client base and services, IMSS proved to be an ideal facilitator for sample recruitment. A letter (see Appendix B) describing the objectives of this study and requesting support for participant recruitment was provided to the management of IMSS. I asked IMSS to identify potential participants and to subsequently send a request and information letter on my behalf to the prospective participants for taking part in the study (see Appendix C). After a potential participant expressed her willingness to take part in the study, the IMSS passed along her contact details to me. I scheduled the interviews according to the participants' availability and convenience. A total of 10 participants were recruited for the study with the help of the IMSS. All of the interviews were conducted at the IMSS office. A private room was provided by IMSS for conducting each interview. Conducting the interviews at the premises of the IMSS provided the interviewees with a non-threatening and neutral setting which is one of the requirements for effective face to face interviewing as proposed by Levy and Hollan (1998).

Selection process. Criterion and convenience sampling were used for participant recruitment. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases according to pre-defined criteria (Patton, 2002). Convenience sampling involves choosing study participants because of their ease of access by a researcher (Patton, 2002). According to Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad (2012), participants in convenience sampling are chosen randomly "if they meet

certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer.” (p. 785). All four factors were a consideration for convenience sampling in this study. My participants comprised of recent VMI women residing in Prince George, BC. The rationale behind selecting only recent VMI women was the fact that the barriers to labour market are more pronounced for this segment of immigrant women. In the initial years of migration, the process of resettling in a new culture and society poses additional challenges (Li, 2003; Reitz, 2007).

Inclusion criteria for study participants. Participants were selected based on the following six criteria:

1. Immigrant women who migrated to Canada as permanent resident under the federal skilled worker class (as a principal applicant or dependent) or under the family class.
2. Immigrant women who had obtained permanent resident status any time within the last five years (2010 - 2015).
3. Immigrant women who were capable, willing and comfortable to be interviewed in English.
4. Immigrant women currently residing in Prince George, BC.
5. Immigrant women who demonstrated willingness to share their experiences for the purpose of this research and signed the consent form.

Immigrant women who were living in Canada as refugees or temporary residents were excluded from the study. An effort was also made to recruit participants who were diverse with respect to their age, class of immigration and ethnicity.

Ethical Considerations

Although ethical considerations are important for any research, they are much more critical for a qualitative study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Prior to starting this research, I obtained approval for this study from the Research Ethics Board, University of Northern British Columbia. The Research Ethics Board ensured that the study meets all ethical standards set by the university (Appendix D).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) identified three main ethical issues in qualitative research: the requirement for participants to give informed consent; participants' right to privacy; and protection of the participant from harm. All three issues were dealt with in this study (see Appendix C). As well, maintaining the confidentiality of participants is an important ethical concern (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The anonymity of participants was ensured through the use of pseudonyms in the write-up of this thesis. The audio-recorded interviews were erased from the recording device after being transcribed. An electronic copy of the recordings was saved in a password-protected folder that will be deleted after five years. Although excerpts from the transcripts were included in the reporting of findings in this study, no direct information was used in the write-up of this thesis from which participants could be identified.

Data Analysis Process

A descriptive thematic analysis was employed to analyze the study participants' interview responses. Thematic analysis is a method of analysis that is used to reflect upon and explain patterns in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Responses to the interview questions were analyzed and coded in conjunction with the field notes to identify themes and patterns with respect to the labour market experiences of immigrant women. The field notes

supplemented the coded data by providing additional information for developing interpretations. Though themes were primarily identified from the coded transcripts, field notes proved invaluable in developing a focus for identifying dominant patterns in the data. The field notes added tone and texture to the phenomenological interpretations made by the author.

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized that, in qualitative research studies, data analysis is never linear where a researcher proceeds step by step as per a set of rules; rather, it is recursive where a researcher moves back and forth between different steps of analysis. I followed the six phase thematic analysis guidelines as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006); however, to review and refine my analysis wherever needed, I switched between these phases as discussed below. As these six phases are described some illustrative material from the data is included which demonstrates the process of thematic analysis more clearly.

In phase one I familiarized myself with the data. The interview transcripts provided rich accounts of labour market experiences of immigrant women. However, the participants were not very organized in expressing their thoughts. For ease of reference and retrieval of data extracts, I numbered all the transcripts from 1 to 10 and referenced the participants' quotations according to this numbering. I thoroughly read and reread each interview transcript and arranged the key points of each interview transcript for easier review and coding as suggested by Saldaña (2013). I read the field notes in conjunction with the transcripts to develop a holistic picture of the meanings embedded in each transcript. To illustrate this first phase of the thematic analysis two extracts from interview transcripts 9 and 10 are now presented.

Quoting Zara: "Childcare is expensive...for sure! I pay to the daycare all that I earn. If

I was to run the house with my income I could never have done that because all my

income goes to the daycare. I am lucky that my husband earns enough to take care of the household expenses and support my career goals.” (Interview 10, p.3).

Quoting Sana: “have a son who is seven months. When I joined this job he was only 3 to 4 months old. I had to look after him and I was not able to find a proper daycare for him in the beginning so it was very difficult. Secondly the costs were steep.”

(Interview 9, p. 2).

In phase two, I started to code the data. I extracted words and short phrases from my raw data in order to identify the basic meaningful elements contained in the participants' responses. Saldaña (2013) mentioned that coding the data can be done in two cycles; first level coding may entail coding the whole data set comprehensively and second-cycle coding may simply involve refinement and reconfiguration of first-cycle codes. In the second cycle, I refined my codes by using axial coding to identify core categories from the interview transcripts as proposed by Saldaña (2013). Participants had shared their lived experiences in response to the interview questions which, at times, deviated from the study's research question. However, during this phase of the analysis, I made sure to code all aspects of the data irrespective of the fact whether or not they were related to my phenomenon of interest. The illustrative example begun under the first phase is now reprised below with additions made in the second phase. The first cycle codes are represented by italicised text in the two interview extracts; and are indexed by the superscripted numbers behind each of these first-cycle codes.

Quoting Zara: “*Childcare is expensive*¹ ...for sure! I pay to the daycare all that I earn.

*If I was to run the house with my income*² I could never have done that because *all my*

*income goes to the daycare*³..I am lucky that *my husband earns enough to take care of the household expenses*⁴ and *support my career goals*⁵” (Interview 10, p. 3).

Quoting Sana: “have a son who is seven months. When I joined this job he *was only 3 to 4 months old*⁶. I *had to look after him*⁷ and I *was not able to find a proper daycare*⁸ for him in the beginning so it was very difficult. Secondly the *costs were steep*¹” (Interview 9, p. 2).

The list of codes generated from first cycle coding of the above data extracts is as follows:

1. Childcare “expensive.”
2. Not primarily responsible for household expense.
3. “All income” to “daycare.”
4. Financial support from spouse.
5. Moral support from spouse.
6. Child’s age.
7. Childcare responsibility.
8. Childcare arrangement.

Subsequent to first-cycle coding in phase two of the thematic analysis, I refined my codes by merging some codes that appeared to be related to a similar issue. For example, from the above list, codes 1 and 3 were merged to form a core category named childcare expense.

In phase three, I looked across the codes from each transcript that were extracted in phase two in order to identify recurrent patterns. I reread each interview transcript quoted above along with the associated field notes to ensure that my coding represented the meaning that the participant originally intended to convey. For the illustrative example, I analysed the

transcripts across the data set to see if childcare was a challenge for all participants with young children. In the given example, disregarding other codes, childcare challenges emerged as a consistent pattern.

I also organized my codes into two distinct categories for ease of analysis. The first category of codes were those directly related to the research question and the second category of codes were for data that did not appear to be related to the research question. I reviewed the coded data extracts with similar codes across the entire data set to ensure the presence of a consistent pattern. This process of review sometimes led me back to the coding from phase two whereby I felt the need to recode my data for better consistency and clarity.

In the fourth phase, I formed raw themes comprised of groups of related codes and recurrent patterns identified in the previous phases. I also determined the relative strength of these themes based on the number of utterances by relevant participants. In this fourth phase, I also decided which overall themes could be coherently combined and which ones needed to be distinctly classified. With respect to the illustrative example, when defining a theme, I collated all the relevant categories (child's age, childcare expense, childcare arrangement, childcare availability, and childcare responsibility) under the title of 'childcare challenges.' I proceeded to count the total number of utterances for the theme of childcare challenges across the whole data set to determine its relevant strength. I also took note of how many participants found this factor as a challenge. I categorized this theme as a strong theme because 100% of the participants with young children were faced with childcare challenges. I refined my theme by clarifying the theme's title as 'lack of access to affordable and reliable childcare.'

In phase five of thematic analysis, the phenomenological themes of this study were refined and finalized. The final phase entailed writing the explanation for each theme which formed the core of the thesis findings. These findings are given in the next chapter of this thesis.

Demonstration of Data Quality

Qualitative research has been often criticised by positivist researchers for lacking rigour and transparency (Guba, 1981, as cited by Shenton, 2004; Sandelowski, 1986). Shenton (2004) presented various strategies to demonstrate trustworthiness in a qualitative study. The author's strategies were based on the 4 constructs introduced by Guba (1981) to ensure trustworthiness. These 4 criteria are "(a) credibility (in preference to internal validity); (b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability); (c) dependability (in preference to reliability); and (d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity)" (Guba, 1981 as cited by Shenton, 2004; p. 64). In order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this study, I tried to satisfy these four criteria by taking various measures as discussed below.

Credibility. Credible data warrants that any interpretation by a researcher will reflect the real meaning of a phenomenon as intended by the participants (Koch, 2006; Shenton, 2004). Out of the various strategies proposed by Shenton (2004) to achieve credibility, I adopted "member checks," "peer scrutiny," "examination of previous research findings," and presentation of "background of investigator" (p. 73). Member checks involved the review and validation of the interview transcripts by the participants. My supervisory committee analysed the findings to ensure and enhance the accuracy of the methods employed and the findings presented. "Examination of previous research findings" involved reviewing the existing literature "to assess the degree to which the project's results are congruent with those of past studies." (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). This was done by evaluating

each theme in the light of existing literature as presented in the next chapter. I also explained my own background to demonstrate how I am situated in the research.

Transferability. Shenton (2004) mentioned that “[s]ince the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations” (p. 69). However, the author proposed that a researcher can attempt to achieve transferability by providing sufficient details for how the study was conducted, what methods were employed, physical settings and participants. I provided these details in the study so that a reader can visualize the context of the study and decide if the findings are applicable to his or her own specific context (as proposed by Shenton, 2004).

Dependability. Shenton (2004) explained that a study's dependability relates to the stability of the data over time. For a qualitative study, it implies that a researcher should provide sufficient details for a study “enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Dependability in the study was developed by providing in depth details on research design, participants profile, methods and analysis (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability. According to Shenton (2004), “The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity.” (p. 72). I attempted to enhance the confirmability of the study by maintaining a journal of field notes. As previously discussed, the field notes helped me to develop a self-awareness of my preconceptions about the phenomenon of labour market barriers for immigrant women. Such self-awareness helps a researcher to reduce bias from the findings and hence enhance confirmability (Shenton,

2004). I also presented an in-depth description of my analysis which allows for the “integrity of results to be scrutinized” (Shenton, 2004, p. 73).

Summary

This chapter strengthens the foundation of this study by detailing and clarifying various methodological aspects of the research. It clarified and explained why hermeneutic phenomenology was used as a method to conduct the study and how it adds value to the findings. Using a phenomenological lens not only helped me identify various labour market barriers but also helped me look beyond those factors and identify the underlying mechanics forming those barriers. Additionally, issues of data quality and ethics which are critical in determining the integrity of any qualitative study were also addressed in this chapter. Data analysis process comprising of thematic analysis was explained in detail for demonstrating the transparency of findings which are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Two major sets of themes were identified by using thematic analysis across all 10 visible minority immigrant women. The first set of themes describes the labour market barriers previously discussed in the literature, and the effects of these barriers on the women, as these barriers were perceived by them. The second set of themes describes the personal attributes and coping strategies of the women as they dealt with these barriers and how they worked toward labour market integration. In order to understand the labour market experiences of the participants, it is imperative to understand their backgrounds. The background information of the participants will help the readers to understand the context that shaped the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

The Participants

Ten immigrant women, who had migrated to Canada within the last five years i.e. between 2010 and 2015, took part in the study. All of these women were visible minorities. In order to conceal the identity of participants, pseudonyms have been used when presenting a general profile of each woman. Table 3 presents an overview of the participants' profiles.

In addition to the demographics presented in Table 3, information related to participants' current job profile and status, length at current job, number of all paid jobs held in Canada, and satisfaction with current pay scale was also collected. Such information, combined with various demographics related to the ethnic, professional and personal backgrounds of the participants, was intended to depict the level of economic integration of participants in the Canadian labour market as suggested by Tastsoglou and Preston (2012). In order to clearly articulate the labour market barriers, as perceived by the study participants, it is necessary to have some insight on their level of integration in the Canadian job market.

Table 3

General Demographic Information of Participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u> <u>(Years)</u>	<u>Country of</u> <u>Origin</u>	<u>Education</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Immigration</u> <u>Category</u>	<u>No. of</u> <u>years in</u> <u>Canada</u> ^a	<u>Number</u> <u>of</u> <u>children</u>
Mona	27	Peru	Bachelor's	Christianity	Family	4.6	0
Ella	37	Mexico	Bachelor's	Christianity	Economic	4.0	2
Jenna	30	India	Bachelor's	Sikhism	Family	2.5	0
Jill	22	India	Grade 12	Sikhism	Family	5.0	0
Jody	25	India	Bachelor's	Sikhism	Family	5.0	1
Sarah	34	Kyrgyzstan	Bachelor's	Islam	Family	5.0	1
Kathy	50	Philippines	MBA	Christianity	Economic	2.0	1
Kate	40	Philippines	Master's	Christianity	Economic	4.0	2
Sana	31	Pakistan	PhD.	Islam	Economic	0.8	1
Zara	32	Pakistan	MBBS	Islam	Family	2.0	1

^aNumber of years in Canada shows the time participant has spent in Canada as a permanent resident at the time of the interview. All interviews were conducted in July, 2015 with the exception of Sana and Zara who were interviewed in November, 2015.

Below, I present a brief profile of each woman at the time of her interview. This profile gives additional information regarding each participant's job market endeavours. It is hard to state with certainty whether or not a participant was fully integrated into the Canadian job market. As Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) explained, integration is "an ongoing process as long as the ideal is not achieved" (p. 48). All of the study participants were relatively new to Canada (migrated between 2010 and 2015), and although some were satisfied with their professional pursuits, it was implied that the ideal was yet to be achieved for all of them. Despite this fact, the following information will give some indication on the labour market integration of the participants. This information forms the contextual basis needed to understand the labour market barriers as revealed through the participants' lived experiences later in the study.

Mona. Mona is a single, 27-year-old immigrant woman who migrated to Canada from Peru under the Family Class about five years ago. Mona currently lives with her mother and stepfather and plans to move to an independent accommodation soon. Mona is a Catholic

Christian by origin, but claims to be non-practicing. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Communications from Peru, but is currently pursuing online education in accounting. In Peru, Mona acquired one year's work experience as an administrative assistant. However, after migration, Mona changed her educational field in the hope that accounting education would give her better job prospects in Canada as compared to communications. In addition to studying, Mona is also working full time as an accounting assistant in a large-scale construction company for the last six months. Mona has changed jobs four times since she landed in Canada. Her survival jobs included working as a sales person at a shoe shop, as a bank teller and as a customer service representative. Although Mona is not fully satisfied with her current earnings, she believes her current job is better than the previous ones because it is career-making.

Ella. Ella is a 37-year-old Mexican immigrant woman, recently divorced, who acquired her permanent resident status under the Skilled Class category in Canada about three months ago. However, Ella has been living in Canada on a temporary student visa for the last four years. She has two young children, aged six and three living with her. Ella is Christian by faith, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education from Mexico. She also has substantial work experience from Mexico; approximately twelve years working as a business manager and as a physiotherapist at a gym. Ella has been working as a cashier in a coffee shop for the last four years, and she is dissatisfied with her job and her current compensation level. Ella works part time because of her care giving responsibility for her young children. In order to enter the job market in her area of expertise, Ella is currently upgrading her credentials by pursuing a Master's degree in Physiotherapy.

Jenna. Jenna is a 30-year-old, married, Indian immigrant woman with no children. She came to Canada under the Family Class, sponsored by her husband, and has been a Canadian permanent resident for the last two and a half years. Jenna follows Sikhism. She is a nursing graduate from India, but her previous qualification was not fully recognized in Canada. The fact that she also had four years of work experience as a clinical instructor at a nursing school in India did not aide recognition of her credentials in Canada. Jenna had two options to get into her profession in Canada. She had to either challenge the Registered Nursing exam or to pursue an entire graduate nursing program starting anew in Canada. Jenna found that challenging the exam a more stressful and time consuming option; therefore, she enrolled in a nursing graduate program. Currently, she is also working full time as a residential care worker in a seniors' care home, and has done so for the last two years. Jenna believes that her current pay scale is satisfactory as per her current position. However, since her current occupation does not match her professional background, she feels there is still a long way for her to go in terms of professional achievement in Canada.

Jill. Jill is the youngest participant in the study at 22 years of age. She is Indian by origin and single. She has been living in Canada as a permanent resident for the last five years. She came to Canada under the Family Class; she was adopted by a Canadian Indian family. Jill is Sikh by faith but she claims not to be a strict follower of religion. Since Jill was very young when she came to Canada, she enrolled in high school after immigrating and did not face any trouble with regards to acceptance of previous educational credentials. However, she did not have any past work experience when she arrived in Canada. Jill had to work very hard to improve and acquire English language skills after coming to Canada because her knowledge of the language was very basic. Currently, Jill is working as a cashier in a large

retail store, and has done so for the last two years, but is not satisfied with her earnings. She is also pursuing a graduate degree in engineering and is currently in the first year of the program.

Jody. Jody is a 25-year-old Indian immigrant woman. She is married and has a three-year-old child. Jody is Sikh by faith and has been living in Canada as a permanent resident for the last five years. She came to Canada under the Family Class; she was sponsored by her husband after they were married. Jody holds two degrees from India: a Bachelor's of Arts degree and a three year diploma in Accounting and Management. Although Jody's previous qualifications were recognized and given credit in Canada, Jody chose to enrol herself in a Canadian high school because she was not very confident of her English and Mathematics skills. Enrolling in high school and starting from a basic level helped her improve her language skills. Currently, she is pursuing a college social worker program. She also completed a family law professional certificate here in Canada. Jody is currently employed full time as a settlement practitioner for the last three years, but this is not her first Canadian job. When Jody landed in Canada, she entered the job market by taking a part-time job at a fast food restaurant. After her son's birth, she took a break from work and then re-entered the job market in a slightly better position as an assistant manager in a small loan company. Her current job is her third job in Canada. Jody finds her current work satisfying with respect to her career prospects, but believes she is under paid relevant to other settlement workers with similar profiles.

Sarah. Sarah is a 34-year-old, married woman who migrated to Canada from Kyrgyzstan about five years ago under the Family Class. She was sponsored by her husband. Sarah has a 10-year-old child and is Muslim by faith. However, Sarah claims that she does

not practice her religion regularly. Sarah holds Bachelor's degree in English degree from Kyrgyzstan, and had worked as a teacher in her home country. Sarah's previous education was recognized in Canada, and she obtained her teaching license in Canada after completing some additional courses and exams. Currently, Sarah is working as an English language instructor which was her desired and original profession. Sarah has been working as an instructor for the last year. She feels satisfied with her current compensation level. Initially, she worked at other jobs in Canada to gain local market work experience, but none of her previous jobs were related to her core profession. She had worked as a fashion consultant, as an office assistant in a financial company, as a beauty advisor and as a youth coordinator. Despite the fact that her previous jobs were not related to her profession, Sarah claims that she enjoyed working at those jobs and they not only helped her financial situation but also accustomed her to the local job market.

Kathy. Kathy is the oldest of the participants, a 50-year-old married woman who migrated to Canada from the Philippines. She was the principal applicant on her immigration application, and came to Canada as a federal skilled worker. She has been a permanent resident of Canada for the last two years. Kathy is a Catholic Christian by faith. She has a son who is 21 years old. Kathy's highest qualification is a Masters of Business Administration degree from the Philippines. She also has substantial work experience from her home country; about 20 years of broad-based experience including accounting, retail management, general management and auditing. Kathy currently works as an accounting clerk in a health management company. She has been with her current employer for eight months and feels satisfied with her job and compensation. However, this is her third job in Canada, and she had to work two survival jobs in her initial year in Canada as a book keeper and as a sales

associate. Kathy is also required to write some exams to attain the designation of Certified Professional Accountant in Canada. She found this goal hard to achieve in the first year in Canada when her personal finances were difficult. Currently, she is hopeful that she will be able to write the exams in the near future because her current employer funds employees' educational pursuits.

Kate. Kate is also from the Philippines. She is a 40-year-old married woman with two children, 16 and 11 years of age. Kate has been a permanent resident of Canada for the last four years. She came to Canada as dependant of her husband under the Economic Skilled Workers Class. She is Catholic by faith. Kate holds a Master's degree in Counselling from the Philippines and has about 15 years of work experience in her home country as a Human Resources manager. Kate is the only participant who is self-employed. She started a Filipino specialty store with her husband one year ago and is satisfied with her business venture. Kate worked full time as a produce manager in a specialty store for two years after coming to Canada and is still associated with that specialty store in part-time work as a store manager.

Sana. Sana is a 31-year-old married immigrant woman from Pakistan who has been in Canada for approximately 10 months. She is Muslim by faith and migrated to Canada as a skilled worker. Sana has a young baby who is seven months old. She is one of the highest-qualified participants of my study, holding a doctorate degree in Economics from France. She worked as an assistant professor in Pakistan for approximately two years. Presently, she is working as a lecturer in Prince George, BC. Sana feels her pay scale is not satisfactory according to her job position. Though not dissatisfied with her current job, Sana also believes she qualifies to work at a higher rank of university teaching and was not offered that role owing to lack of experience in the Canadian job market.

Zara. Zara is a 32-year-old married immigrant woman who has been a Canadian permanent resident for two years. Zara is Muslim by faith and was sponsored to come to Canada by her husband. She has a three years old daughter. She is a medical doctor by profession and has about three years of clinical experience from Pakistan. Currently, Zara is working as a clinical assistant because she is unable to practice medicine in Canada until she passes the licensing exams. She is working on completing the licensing process; a task that she, as an international medical graduate, is finding to be very challenging.

First Major Theme Set: Labour Market Barriers within the Lived Experiences of Visible Minority Immigrant Women

As a result of analyzing the interview transcripts in conjunction with the field notes, nine themes were identified from the data that portray experiences of labour market barriers by the visible minority immigrant women interviewed in this study. Table 4 presents the nine themes which emerged from the data as labour market barriers. Each theme is presented along with a listing of the relevant codes which were combined to form the theme. A poignant quote from the participant is also presented that is relevant to the theme. The number of utterances for each theme was counted to determine how many times a theme appeared in the data per participant. Table 4 shows that, although there were commonalities in some of the themes described by some participants, the women often differed in the number and types of barriers that they encountered during their labour market integration. Some themes were mentioned by the majority of women and other themes were mentioned by a minority of the women, but there was no single barrier identified by all women.

Table 4

Participants' Perceptions of Barriers to their Labour Market Integration in Prince George, BC

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Relevant Codes</u>	<u>Sample Quote from the Participants</u>	<u>Number of Applicable Participants</u>	<u>Number of Utterances for each Theme</u>
Cultural differences	Adaptation challenges, Different traditions, "Cultural shock", Maintaining cultural identities, Lack of knowledge of local culture, Locals' lack of knowledge of immigrants' culture, Different workplace culture	"The challenges of a new relationship and a new society, new system, new workplaces, new culture, new family."	7	30
Lack of access to affordable and reliable childcare	Childcare responsibility, Childcare expense, Child's Age, Childcare Arrangement, Childcare Availability	"When I started looking for daycare first of all they were not willing to accept a child of that age. Secondly the costs were steep."	4	27
Discrimination	Discrimination - "age", Discrimination - appraisals, Discrimination - compensation, Discrimination - job evaluation, Ethnic/racial discrimination, Discrimination from immigrants, Home country biases	"I walked in and handed over my resume to be passed on to the supervisor or manager and right after I started walking away that lady tore my resume and threw it in the garbage."	4	27
Challenges related to assessment of foreign credentials	Cost of credential assessment, Credentials not recognized, Upgrading credentials, Evaluation challenges, "No credits" for foreign skills, employer preference-local credentials	"They don't give us any credit for what we have done. They don't have any criteria to evaluate our experience or education. "	5	26
Canadian experience requirement	Working for job market entry, Working for local experience, "Canadian experience" preferred, Job/education mismatch, Job/previous experience mismatch, Stuck in survival jobs, employer's lack of knowledge of immigrant's foreign experience, lack of Canadian experience	"It is very important to get work experience in Canada that is why I have been selling shoes and other jobs."	6	23

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Relevant Codes</u>	<u>Sample Quote from the Participants</u>	<u>Number of Applicable Participants</u>	<u>Number of Utterances for each Theme</u>
Licensing issues	Licensing cost, Licensing process, Licensing requirement, Licensing time	"To get licensing here I need to pass exam, get into residency, complete that and then get a license."	3	22
Lack of access to informational resources	"No one platform", Lack of information - potential jobs, Lack of information - credentialing, Lack of information - legal rights, "Learnt the hard way"	"Someone needs to inform immigrants because they do not know. They need to communicate. I learnt the hard way. "	6	22
Accented English	Language challenges, Foreign accent, Hesitation to communicate	"Sometimes the accent and the way I communicate. It made them wonder where I am from."	6	14
Lack of social networks	Lack of family/spousal support, Lack of social networks	"Before I had support from my husband but now I have no family member to take care of my children."	2	4

It is important to acknowledge at this point that segregating and identifying each barrier as a separate theme was a challenging task. Research has shown that factors affecting socio-economic integration of immigrants are interconnected (Berry, 2001; Reitz, 2007). This interrelation of factors was evident during the data analysis process. For example, a lack of social networks was identified as a labour market barrier when social connections were perceived as strong sources of moral and emotional support by the participants, but the lack of the same affected the women's overall well-being, job search efforts and performance at jobs. In addition to this, a lack of social networks overlapped with some other factors; it contributed to intensifying the barriers of childcare challenges and lack of access to informational resources. Due to this often strong interrelationship between the themes, the

relative strength of each theme should be considered as an indication of its impact on labour market integration of participants.

Each theme is explained in terms of the results followed by a discussion as to why and how each factor was experienced as a labour market barrier for the participants at the time of the interviews. In addition to the presentation of findings, I also discuss how each identified theme can be located in the existing literature.

1. Cultural differences. None of the seven women who reported that cultural differences as a barrier were able to reflect and articulate as to how and why the cultural differences posed a challenge to their labour market integration. As Jenna put it, "When I came here it was all new for me. I became all stressed and depressed which was a barrier but now I am ok; I am getting used to it" (Interview 3, p. 2). A closer analysis of the responses of these seven participants revealed various meanings ascribed to cultural challenges as job market impediments. To these participants, cultural challenges manifested in their lives as differences between Canada and their home countries in traditions, differences in dressing norms, lack of knowledge of Canadian cultural values, lack of knowledge of local workplace norms, social isolation, and adaptation while maintaining home country's values.

Mona explained how cultural differences made social interactions difficult for her. Cultural adaptation had a negative impact on Mona's personality and she lost friends in the initial years of settlement. When Mona was less knowledgeable about local norms and practices, she even felt less confident at her workplace. Mona referred to the cultural gaps as follows: "To other people you might sound stupid, and it becomes really difficult then because you cannot really interact with others. Their traditions might be weird to us and they might find our traditions little bit weird too" (Interview 1, p. 4). Such a gap in cultural

knowledge affected Mona's interactions in and outside the workplace. It led to stress and social isolation. While recollecting and sharing her experience of cultural adaptation challenges, Mona's voice quivered and the painful expressions on her face made it evident that it had been a traumatic experience for her. Another participant, Sarah, termed her experience of adjustment in the initial years after her arrival as "cultural shock" (Interview 6, p. 2). Sarah focused on learning about the Canadian culture and adjusting to a new society in her first year in Canada and did not even look for jobs during that period of cultural adjustment. DeRango-Adem (2011) defined culture as "the product of a particular community's history, traditions, values and practices" (para. 1). The way people interact in a society, the food they eat, the way they dress, the lifestyles, sports, festivals, all can be considered manifestations of culture. Every country has its own culture and, in the context of the job market, every organization has its own culture. Research has shown that cultural challenges such as pressures to maintain home-country values while adapting to a new culture, culturally-different workplace norms and practices, and social isolation resulting from cultural differences may all have a negative impact on immigrant women's labour force integration (Bauder & Cameron, 2002; Kouritzin, 2000; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005).

The participants mentioned how and why cultural differences were a challenge for them for their labour market integration. The participants mentioned various cultural challenges relating to their resettlement in Canada, and they also pointed to the effects of this cultural adjustment, including depression, stress and social isolation. Resettlement in a new society may cause stress and social isolation due to the cultural adaptation involved (Choudhry, 2001). Cultural differences may make it hard for new immigrants to interact with those around them (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005). Not knowing about a new country's

cultural norms and expectations can affect an immigrant's confidence to connect with new people. As a result, social isolation, depression or anxiety may result because of these differences. The participants linked cultural differences and the process of adaptation to stress, anxiety and depression. Stress and depression played a negative role in the women's job market endeavors. Not only can such factors affect job market efforts, but they may also affect one's overall integration into a new society (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2005; Timberlake, Farber, Wall, Taylor & Sabatino, 2003).

Most of the participants talked about adapting and assimilating to Canadian culture and did not mention the challenge of maintaining their own cultural identities while doing so. For all of these participants, the key to overcome this challenge of adaptation and assimilation was to adapt to the new culture and blend in. This perception paralleled the findings of Berry (1997) who stated that successful integration into a new society depends upon how well immigrants can adjust to new cultural contexts. When talking about cultural differences, most participants talked about the need to connect to others in the society as well as in the workplace. Blending in was important to them so that they could connect more successfully to the people around them either at the workplace or in the community. A lack of knowledge of Canadian norms, values and traditions produced hesitation in the participants to initiate social interactions. It negatively affected the women's confidence to reach out and make new social and professional connections, thereby impeding their job market integration indirectly.

The challenge of accepting and adapting to cultural changes may lead to depression, stress and ultimately to social isolation. Cultural shock becomes even more intense when immigrants are trying to acquaint themselves with and adjust themselves to a new culture

while at the same time wishing to maintain their own values and cultural identities (Kouritzin, 2000). Most of the study participants lauded Canadian society for being truly multicultural and respectful towards the values of immigrants. Still, these participants did not deny the fact that new cultural norms and practices can be a challenge during the settlement process. From the participants' experiences, it can be construed that cultural barriers are complex and that they have the potential to subtly affect the labour market integration of recent immigrant women. In the light of this study, issues ranging from something as simple as a particular dress code to something as complex as specific information related to a particular Canadian job may all be defined as indicative of cultural challenges directly impeding economic integration of immigrant women.

2. Lack of access to affordable and reliable childcare. Seven out of the ten immigrant women in this study have children. Four of the participants have children young enough to require the services of a caregiver. All of these immigrant women with young children are working full time and perceived childcare as a job market barrier because of its relatively high cost, lack of availability and difficulty of arrangement. The responsibility of being a mother itself was also mentioned as an aspect that slowed down job market progress.

Most of the daycares in Canada start accepting children from the age of six months or one year. This may stem from the fact that working mothers or fathers have the option to take parental leave for up to one year. Such a leave can be availed by a parent if he/she had worked six hundred hours in the year immediately preceding the time such leave is applied for. However, new immigrants are mostly under financial pressures and often need to return to work sooner than that.

Jody, who is working full time and has three-and-a-half-year-old son, had the support of her spouse and in-laws for childcare. However, despite having family members to take care of her child for the full time she works, Jody still uses the services of a daycare on a part-time basis. Jody feels that, at a certain age, children need a structured environment outside of home to help them learn and develop social skills. Jody, like the participants mentioned before her, also finds that childcare costs are steep despite having to use childcare only on a part time basis. Quoting Jody, "Childcare is quite expensive even though my son is going part time but it is expensive" (Interview 5, p. 2). Jody's case also shows that childcare cost is an issue, not only for full-time care arrangement, but may also be an issue for part-time care arrangements.

Childcare responsibility in itself may prove to be daunting to some mothers and slow down their career progress. This was the case with Jody who was very ambitious with respect to her career goals but had to take time off from work due to childcare responsibility. Quoting Jody, "I really wanted to start something when I landed here but when I got pregnant I had to stop. It is a big time responsibility - especially to be a first time mother so I had to take a break" (Interview 5, p. 23).

It is apparent from the participants' experiences that all these mothers want the best care for their children while the mothers work. They wish to entrust their children into reliable, affordable and beneficial care in their absence. A spouse or any other family member can play a pivotal role by facilitating the labour market integration of new immigrant women. A spouse can help indirectly through financial support or directly by helping to take care of children. In instances where these mothers felt that they did not have a proper care arrangement for their child (e.g., a spouse, family member, licensed childcare

facility or a structured environment), they experienced anxiety which was evident from their expression, voice and body language while they were sharing their experiences. Such anxiety may disrupt a mother's focus at work, while her child is not in proper care in her absence. Childcare is something that no mother wanted to compromise on, and each of these participants tried their best to arrange for suitable childcare. However, the challenge of finding this suitable care and the lack of such suitable care translated into a labour market barrier.

Childcare was perceived to be expensive by all four participants mentioned above, irrespective of whether or not they were receiving a government subsidy for it. As Zara said:

Childcare is expensive...for sure! I pay to the daycare all that I earn. If I was to run the house with my income I could never have done that because all my income goes to the daycare. I am lucky that my husband earns enough to take care of the household expenses and support my career goals (Interview 10, p. 3).

High childcare costs associated with a working mother may reduce economic incentives to work, thereby directly affecting job market integration. Women's labour force participation decisions are directly affected by the cost of childcare (Del Boca, 2015).

Participants' experiences suggested that the unavailability of childcare becomes less of a hurdle when family or spousal support is involved. This is in line with the findings of existing literature where studies indicate that immigrant women rely on family support networks for childcare arrangements (Choudhry, 2001). The absence of such networks exacerbates the challenge of childcare responsibility, consequently leading to a negative effect on labour market integration (Man, 2004; Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). Since many new immigrant women may not have such support when they first move to Canada,

improving childcare availability and subsidizing childcare costs may prove to be a major facilitator for their labour market integration.

Although some of the participants found childcare arrangement and availability to be a challenge, none of them mentioned the need for a culturally appropriate childcare as their preference, as suggested by VanderPlaat (2007). Rather, participants emphasized the need for a licensed facility or a “structured environment” (Interview 5, p. 3). Existing research also indicates that most immigrant women who are pursuing higher education in addition to managing household responsibilities find childcare even more challenging (Donkor, 2004; Khan & Watson, 2005). However, contrary to existing studies, participants in this study did not indicate that educational pursuits compounded the childcare challenge.

3. Discrimination. Out of the 10 study participants, four experienced some kind of discrimination in the job market. Jody was one of these women. She experienced racial discrimination while looking for a job during her first year in Canada. She found the discrimination to be highly discouraging and stressful. She narrated, “I walked in and handed over my resume to be passed on to the supervisor or manager and right after I started walking away that lady tore my resume and threw it in the garbage” (Interview 5, p. 2). During her job search, Ella experienced that people tend to stereotype on the basis of ethnicity; as she mentioned, “people think Mexicans do cleaning; they categorize according to nationality” (Interview 2, p. 2). Jenna, who works as a residential care worker, experiences racial discrimination from the clients she serves, who openly condemn her brown colour. Jenna's employer did not take any action to protect her from the racism she is facing at work. In Jenna's words, “the discrimination is not coming from the employer but from the people I am working with. My employer tells them that this is your staff and you have to respect your

staff' (Interview 3, p. 2). Some participants said that they found immigrants to be more discriminatory towards other immigrants compared to the local people. These participants lauded the Canadian society for truly embracing the values of tolerance and multiculturalism.

Though Canadian society is based on principles of equitable rights and fair treatment for all, existing research indicates that discrimination remains a problem for immigrants; especially those who are also visible minorities and women (Access Alliance, 2011; Reitz, 2001a; Wayland, 2006). Some participants in this study did perceive that discrimination exists in the job market. Some participants believed that they were subjected to differential treatment on the basis of their colour, accent or religion. Sources of discrimination also varied for the participants, with discrimination sometimes originating from clients, at other times from existing or potential employers, and sometimes surprisingly from other immigrants. For all of these participants, discrimination in the job market increased the challenges related to their economic and socio-cultural integration.

At times, racial discrimination at work is so subtle that it is hard to pinpoint and take any action against (Weiner, 2008). Moreover, new immigrants are also disadvantaged at times due to lack of necessary knowledge about their workplace rights and any relevant labour laws (Access Alliance, 2011). Ella noticed that her employer was not happy accommodating her request for a Saturday off for religious duty, but she was unable to pinpoint and take action against this subtle form of discrimination. Mona was given fewer working hours due to a heavy foreign accent, but did not pursue any legal action due to lack of information and confidence. Both of these women wanted to keep their jobs secure despite feeling dissatisfied with the employers' attitude and hence accepted the subtle discrimination at work.

Nangia (2013) found that immigrants who are also visible minorities are more likely to experience discrimination in the labour market as compared to Canadian born non-immigrants. Nangia (2013) found that ethnic and racial discrimination was the most common form of discrimination experienced by immigrants, followed by language skills, gender and physical appearance. Jody and Jill both faced racial discrimination at work. This led to frustration and dissatisfaction. When Jody was narrating her experiences related to unfair treatment while job hunting and at work, her voice raised and her face flushed. Her anger and frustration, along with the feeling of helplessness, was evident from her voice and body language. It was apparent that she felt humiliated when a prospective employer "tore her resume" and she could not receive due consideration for a potential position. She also felt wronged at her current job when she perceived that her compensation was based more on her ethnicity rather than on her job performance. Perceptions of discrimination impeded labour market integration by giving rise to feelings of injustice, dissatisfaction, humiliation and helplessness.

4. Challenges related to assessment of foreign credentials. Five out of the 10 participants identified challenges related to the assessment of their foreign credentials as a job market barrier. These challenges varied from the cost of credentialing to the transferability of foreign credentials to the Canadian job market. By foreign credentials, participants meant academic qualifications, work experience and professional designations acquired in their countries of origin. In the event that the foreign credentials of applicable participants were considered not fully transferable to the Canadian job market and further upgrading was required, participants believed that their skills had been discounted or not

recognized. Such non-recognition of foreign credentials impeded the labour market integration of these participants and they perceived it as a job market constraint.

Three out the five participants belonged to regulated professions and they believed that non-recognition of their foreign credentials was a major challenge for them which prevented them for practicing their professions in Canada. Two of the women believed that their professional licenses from their home countries should have been transferable to Canada by means of a bridging program rather than by extensive licensing requirements. Their past work experience was not recognized by the licensing authorities. As Jenna elaborated, "They don't give us any credit for what we have done. They don't have any criteria to evaluate our experience or education. That's the biggest barrier; they need to have some bridging program for immigrants" (Interview 3, p. 2). Zara felt that her skills were not duly valued, as she complained "If they recognized our credentials then they might have kept the licensing requirements a bit less stringent" (Interview 10, p. 2).

Undoubtedly, it is a major challenge for assessment agencies to evaluate the credentials awarded by different countries that use different educational standards and processes. However, from the participants' perspectives, the credential evaluation process, criteria and cost were all major challenges to their successful job market integration. As a result of such discounting of their skills, all these participants were pushed to go back to school or do more coursework. They were unable to use their skills in the job market, and found themselves working at jobs not at par with their qualifications or in an entirely different field altogether.

The experiences of the participants discussed above parallel the findings of existing literature which shows that non-recognition of foreign skills and credentials, along with the

costs associated with credential assessment, are major labour market barriers for recent immigrants to Canada (Cullingworth & Bambrah, 2004; Weiner, 2008). The participants discussed above not only found the credential evaluation process to be lengthy, but also unduly expensive.

Alboim, Finnie and Meng (2005) investigated the earning disadvantages faced by recent immigrants to Canada and found that most of it could be attributed to discounting of their foreign skills and credentials. When credential evaluation processes prevent foreign professional immigrants from practicing their skills in the job market, they are forced to work at jobs which do not utilize, or else underutilize, their skills. Such a scenario also leads to a financial loss for immigrants whereby they are unable to realize earnings matching their potential (Alboim et al., 2005). The cases of the participants presented above demonstrated a similar scenario. Alboim et al. (2005) discussed the inconsistencies and diffuseness of credentialing for immigrant workers and argued for improvements in this area as lacking and mentioned the need for more bridging programs to help integrate immigrants into the economy. The participants of this study also stressed the importance of and need for bridging programs as a means to counter the credential assessment challenges.

The participants perceived their credential assessment to be unfair as they believed that the process did not give their professional foreign experience due recognition and value. The sentiments and experiences of the participants in this study can be clearly understood in terms of the racialized gender parity theory (Tastoglou & Preston, 2012). It can be inferred that the feelings of bitterness and resentment of the study participants concerning the Canadian credential evaluation systems result from the devaluation of their foreign experience by such authorities. The fact that these VMI women are unable to practice their

professions in Canada despite having relevant work experience indicates the existence of a system that promotes racialized gender disparity as proposed by Tastsoglou and Preston (2012).

5. Canadian experience requirement. Six out of the 10 study participants mentioned and stressed the need to acquire work experience in the Canadian job market. These participants believed that internationally acquired credentials and work experience is not valued much in the job market as employers often lack knowledge of their foreign skills and prefer candidates with local work experience. As Jody explained, “Any single job in Canada wanted you to have local work experience, for example even if you look for a job at Tim Horton’s they want you to have local experience in customer services i.e. in Canada” (Interview 5, p. 3). In order to gain local work experience, most participants took low-paying survival jobs in their initial years of settlement. Mona related how she worked at various survival jobs primarily to gain local work experience, “It is very important to get work experience in Canada that is why I have been selling shoes and other jobs” (Interview 1, p. 2). For professionals belonging to regulated professions, local work experience was needed as a prerequisite to attain a license to practice. These professionals also took up jobs not at par with their skills and qualifications, simply to enter the industry and gain some local experience. The job-to-education or -skills mismatch was an undesirable outcome experienced by most participants primarily resulting out of the necessity to gain Canadian work experience. Instances in which participants failed to progress further from such survival jobs intensified the barrier of Canadian work experience requirement for the participants and they felt, for example, “boxed in” (Interview 8, p. 1) within an undesirable job scenario.

None of the three women belonging to regulated professions were working at jobs that matched their professional backgrounds. They faced the systemic hurdle of licensing requirements that forced them to work at jobs other than their original professions. They took up these jobs primarily to gain local work experience in Canada. But since these jobs led to the underutilization of their professional skills, they felt dissatisfied. As shown by the discussions with my participants, most of them were faced with a paradox whereby they could not work in their desired profession until they got local work experience but they could not get local experience unless someone was willing to forego that requirement and gave them a chance. Tastsoglou and Miedema (2005) described this dilemma of Canadian experience requirement for immigrant women as a “catch-22 situation for foreign-trained professionals” (p. 223). The most challenging part for most participants in my study was to get their first job in Canada. The majority had accepted jobs not matching their educational or work background in order to enter the job market.

Tastsoglou and Miedema (2005) found that immigrant women may acquire local work experience by volunteering, working for multicultural organizations or by taking on any available job even if they are over-qualified for it. All the participants in my study adopted the strategy of working at any available job to enter the job market regardless of their skills and qualifications. Only one participant worked as a volunteer as well after working at three different low-paying jobs.

Well-qualified participants interviewed in this study were experiencing de-skilling as a result of job-to-skills mismatch. Bauder (2003) found that de-skilling is more prevalent for newly migrated immigrants who are highly qualified. In fact, three of the study participants were highly qualified with substantial work experience from their home countries. They were

experiencing de-skilling mainly because of the necessity to acquire local work experience. From the perspective of human capital theory, the underutilization of immigrants' skills results in a loss of brainpower, which is damaging not just for immigrants, but for Canadian society as a whole (Bauder, 2003; Reitz, 2001a).

From immigrants' perspective, where they have to accept jobs not consistent with their skills and qualifications, and only to gain local market experience, this requirement seems unfair (Weiner, 2008). For those immigrants who are able to benefit from starter jobs and are finally able to attain their ultimate professional goals, the requirement of local work experience may not feel very cumbersome. However, for those immigrants who fail to move forward with their career aspirations and remain stuck in a job-to-skills mismatch, local work experience may be the ultimate barrier to their professional growth (Tastsoglou & Miedema, 2005). The study findings reported here lead to the same conclusions.

6. Licensing issues. Professionals in regulated professions are required to attain a license to legally practice their profession in Canada. Licensing requirements are often complex and time consuming; they may entail the assessment of one's academic credentials, writing exams, qualifying interviews and/or fulfill professional work experience requirements in Canada and/or abroad. Three out of the 10 participants belong to professions which are regulated in British Columbia, Canada. All three of these participants are working towards the attainment of licenses to practice in Canada, and are currently not working in their original professions. All three of these participants indicated that they find the licensing requirements to be very challenging. To these participants, licensing issues appeared to be a job market barrier because it interfered with their career aspirations. For Zara, who is trained as a family physician, licensing requirements translate in stress and struggle. Zara's

following words reveal the crux of licensing issues that are perceived as labour market barriers. Her words portray the specific challenges experienced due to licensing requirements and how these may hinder the labour market assimilation of other internationally qualified medical professionals like her.

To get licensing here I need to pass exams...get into residency...complete that and then get a license. Sometimes, it takes more than 10 years for international graduates to reach there. It is so difficult and expensive to pass exams...even if you do...you have one in thousand chances to get residency because they do not have many seats for international graduates. It is ironic that on one hand they say they need doctor on the other hand their system is so difficult to enter (Interview 10, p. 1).

The complexity of the licensing process, its cost both in terms of time and money and the fact that it prevented them from practicing their professions in Canada constituted a constraint to labour market integration by these participants.

Two out of these three participants found the licensing process to be so complex that they chose to repeat their graduate education in Canada rather than follow the steps to attain a license. Looking at the licensing requirements in their respective fields, both of these participants decided that attaining a license through graduating in Canada (i.e. as a local student) was easier as compared to attaining a license as a foreign qualified professional. Despite having substantial work experience as qualified professionals from their home countries, the two women are studying again in Canada to avoid the complex licensing requirements for foreign qualified individuals. Jenna mentioned that, while talking about the licensing requirements for nursing, that "it takes too long here; they have few tests. English language test, practical test and then study for 2 years and then you can challenge the main

exam. So I chose to do graduation rather. It's the same but less stress" (Interview 3, p. 1). Jenna believed that her past skills and qualifications were not given due recognition by the licensing authorities and that the myriad of licensing requirements were unfair considering her professional skills. The complex licensing requirements compelled Jenna to go back to nursing school in Canada while working part time as a residential care worker. In Jenna's case, licensing requirements slowed down her labour market integration substantially leading to stress and frustration.

The participants mentioned above clearly perceived licensing issues as a job market barrier. They linked the licensing requirements to stress, struggle, and dilemma. The frustration and dissatisfaction that they experienced because of the licensing issues was reflected through their gestures, facial expressions and voice pitch. Licensing issues meant that they could not practice what they believed they were qualified to practice (e.g. nursing, medicine or physiotherapy); this meant going back to school and working at jobs not at par with their skills, it meant paying fees that were difficult to afford, and it meant many more years of struggle accompanied by uncertainty at the end. Licensing requirements brought strain and dissatisfaction into the lives of these participants.

Strict licensing requirements for various regulated professions are one of the major hindrances and stressors for many well-qualified professional immigrant women (Rashid, 2011). The licensing fees, time and requirements were all regarded as prominent job market barriers for the participants discussed above. Non-recognition of foreign credentials and requirement of Canadian experience were also identified as two aspects of the licensing requirements that hindered the labour market assimilation of applicable participants. These licensing challenges somewhat also mirror the findings of Cullingworth and Bambah (2004)

that identified the various aspects of licensing requirements hindering the labour market integration of different immigrant groups belonging to regulated professions.

7. Lack of access to informational resources. Six of the participants clearly indicated that a lack of informational resources impeded their labour market entry and integration. These participants indicated having such a lack of information on potential jobs, credentialing and their legal rights. Additionally, my study participants said that information platforms are not consolidated, and that it is hard to access information on various settlement resources. These participants believed that at times they simply had no access to information about relevant jobs. As a result, the participants were unable to compete for those jobs despite having relevant credentials. Moreover, some participants had experienced that, at times, jobs were not advertised externally from an organization, and that hiring was done based on candidate referrals or from among internal candidates.

Most of the participants had secured jobs through social and professional referrals. In Mona's words, "There is a hidden job market; it is not easy to find job information" (Interview 1, p. 2). Jody, who got her first job at a fast food restaurant through the referral of a settlement worker, echoed the same sentiment: "When I was looking for jobs, I found out that there are jobs but not all of them were advertised. A settlement worker helped me get my first job here in Canada" (Interview 5, p. 2). Zara, who is a medical doctor, found that it was difficult to access and comprehend information related to medical licensing in Canada. She had to rely on professional networking to better understand her career options. She mentioned that "The system is complex and there is no one platform where you can find information. I had to struggle a lot to get in touch with professionals in my field who can guide me" (Interview 10, p. 2). A lack of employment information impedes immigrant

women in competing for their desired jobs; therefore, even for menial jobs, they need to rely on social networks and referrals (Access Alliance, 2011). The study participants also faced the same predicament and thus recognized information challenges as a job market barrier. As my participants mentioned, the barrier is not that jobs and resources are not available; the barrier is the fact that the information on the jobs is not easily accessible. Due to the lack of easy access, the participants were indirectly forced to access such information through their social contacts leading to wastage of time. Difficulties in accessing information affected their professional and personal lives through reduced job opportunities and added struggle.

8. Accented English. Six out of the 10 study participants faced challenges based on their language skills in the job market. Despite having good language skills, participants acknowledged that having a different accent sometimes acted as a labour market barrier for them. As Ella said, "In the beginning language was a barrier for me. My native language is Spanish. Sometimes the accent and the way I communicate. It made them wonder where I am from" (Interview 2, p. 1). Kathy, who is a proficient English language speaker, also considers language as a barrier because of her different accent. As Kathy narrated, "Because the way we speak is different. If you do not know the language it is hard to find a job" (Interview 7, p. 3). Almost all the participants acknowledged that, with the passage of time, they improved their language skills either by working at any job or by going back to school. The more the participants got to communicate with local Canadians, the more they were able to overcome their foreign accents learn the local jargon and talk like a typical Canadian.

Participants indicated that having a foreign accent contributed to various challenges at the workplace. For some participants, it led to hesitation to communicate with colleagues. For others, it raised a question about their ethnic background and, in one case, it also led to

being discriminated against. The ability to communicate in one of Canada's official languages (English and French) is one of the most basic factors that can either impede or facilitate an immigrant's labour market and overall integration in Canada. Weak language skills can prove to be one of the major impediments in the labour market success of new immigrants in Canada (CLMcCracken Consulting, 2006; Weiner, 2008). The participants mentioned above perceived their foreign accent as a job market barrier, though they experienced the barrier differently. In some instances, it affected their confidence to communicate with others while in others it directly became grounds for subtle discrimination. Participants said that improved language and communication skills strengthened their position and potential in the job market. This resonated with the findings of Beiser and Hou (2000) who found a positive correlation between labour market activity and language skills for immigrant women.

Interacting with local people through jobs, either entry level or advanced, can be a beneficial tool to refine immigrants' language skills. Almost all of the participants in this study worked at entry-level menial jobs soon after landing in Canada, which contributed to their improvement of language skills. Being adept in the English language improves an immigrant woman's confidence and social interactions, which in turn helps in job market integration and overall integration into a new society (Weiner, 2008).

9. Lack of social networks. Seven out of the 10 study participants were married women. Six out the 10 participants had migrated to Canada through the Family Class in the immigration system. Therefore, most of the participants had some form of social support and network. Consequently, the lack of social networks did not surface as a strong theme. Only two out of the 10 participants experienced a lack of social networks as a job market barrier.

Ella, who was newly divorced with two young children, was struggling to balance her professional goals with household responsibilities. As Ella mentioned, "Before I had support from my husband but now I have no family member to take care of my children" (Interview 2, p. 2). Although Mona had migrated under the Family Class and currently lives with her mother, she still experienced a lack of social networks as a barrier to her labour market integration. The lack of social networks affected her personality and she felt both depressed and socially isolated. As Mona mentioned, "I lost friends and I experienced that when I came here that sometimes you have nobody to talk to" (Interview 1, p. 4). The depression that Mona experienced due to lack of social networks also affected her workplace interactions.

Social networks can play an important role in the labour market integration of immigrants (Thomas, 2013) as well as provide emotional support and help in childcare. Martins and Reid (2007) stated that social networks are sources of moral and emotional support for immigrants. Thomas (2013) found out that immigrant women use their kinship networks to obtain help in childcare. A lack of social networks was found here to be a job market barrier when the participants experienced social isolation and depression due to it. Social isolation also exacerbated the challenge of maintaining work and family life balance.

Second Major Theme Set: Personal Attributes and Coping Strategies in Response to Perceived Labour Market Barriers

While describing their experiences with respect to the labour market barriers, most participants also tended to talk about personal attributes and qualities as well as coping strategies that enabled them to deal with those barriers. Table 5 presents a summary of these themes which emerged from the data.

Table 5

Participants' Beliefs, Resources and Personal Attributes for Coping with the Perceived Labour Market Barriers

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Relevant Codes</u>	<u>Sample Quote from the Participants</u>	<u>No. of Applicable Participants</u>	<u>Number of Utterances</u>
Positive attitude and flexibility	Adaptation, optimism, gratitude, appreciation for Canada, acceptance of differences, initiative, confidence	"I was willing to work somewhere, anywhere. My mind was open to options."	9	57
Ambition and resilience	Persistence, ambition, resilience, many jobs, self initiative for upgrading	"I just did not want to get stuck and boxed in into that kind of situation; I had the courage and will to break out of that cycle."	8	33
Mentorship and social support	Family support, family guidance, mentor support, networking benefits	"She is the person, because of whom, I am who I am today."	7	25
Smaller city-better start	Prince George - lower cost of living, Prince George - "easier commute", Prince George - less competition in job market, Prince George - close knit community, Prince George - educational opportunities	"But I found the jobs are better here, more opportunities, cost of living is less expensive, less stressful for me."	3	10

Positive attitude and flexibility, followed by ambition and resilience, appeared as dominant personal traits that helped the participants to cope successfully with barriers to their labour market integration. Mentorship and social support, followed by the benefits of living in a smaller city (Prince George, BC) were two prominent external factors that helped the

participants to integrate into the job market. Personal traits appeared to have the strongest effect on labour market integration.

The four themes in Table 5 are now discussed in more detail in their roles as beliefs, resources and personal attributes for coping with the perceived labour market barriers as reported by the participants. Direct quotes from participants are given to elaborate on the participants' experiences under each theme. Each theme is also discussed in terms of how it converges with existing literature.

1. Positive attitude and flexibility. No matter what stage of struggle and settlement the participants were at, almost all of the participants clearly demonstrated a positive attitude and flexibility. They acknowledged and explained the labour market barriers with a tone of acceptance, hope and understanding rather than one of anger, anxiety or complaint. Nine out of the 10 study participants exhibited both a positive attitude and flexibility toward to meeting the challenges presented by their immigrant experience. These participants showed willingness to adapt to the Canadian culture as a whole and to workplace norms in particular.

When Mona narrated her struggle of the initial years of settlement, her tone and words reflected acceptance rather than disappointment. While recalling her initial years of settlement, Mona said,

I never thought about doing such [survival] jobs in my country which I got to do here. It is exhausting for sure because you are in a new country; you don't even know the language. Then you know that you have to do it (Interview 1, p. 1).

Kathy, like other participants, faced the challenges of entering and adjusting to a new job market in a new country. However, she took the challenges in a positive stride and

countered them with a willingness to adjust. As Kathy stated, "I was willing to work somewhere, anywhere. My mind was open to options" (Interview 7, p. 1).

Kate also acknowledged that there were hardships associated with her initial settlement and job market experiences in Canada, but her attitude was non-complaining and optimistic. Currently, Kate is successfully running her own business with her husband; however, in her initial two years, like most new immigrants, Kate and her husband both worked at various survival jobs. Kate considered those jobs to be a learning experience. In Kate's words, "So coming here we knew we had to change. I conditioned myself to have this humility and flexibility to adjust. I believe you need to have a mindset" (Interview 3, p. 3).

Most of the participants expressed respect and gratitude for the Canadian values of respect, multiculturalism and tolerance. As Zara mentioned, "People are different but they are tolerant and respectful. I have also tried to adapt myself to the professional norms here - as an immigrant I feel adaptation is a must" (Interview 10, p. 3).

It is quite evident from the above accounts that having and demonstrating a positive attitude helped the participants to more successfully face the challenges that they encountered in the job market. Flexibility and adaptation were seen as major coping strategies to succeed in the job market by these participants. Berry (1997) identified major coping strategies employed by immigrants in response to acculturation. Berry (1997) argued that assimilation and integration strategies provide an "increased fit" (p. 14) between the demands of a host country and an immigrant's background. He attributes a successful immigration experience to an adaptive strategy of changing attitudes and behaviours to the host country's context. In the above cases, the participants exhibited positive attitudes that facilitated their adaptation in Canadian society. Their flexibility and positive attitudes sustained them successfully in the

job market. Having an optimistic approach, being open minded and cooperative were major success factors that not only helped the participants to land into the right job, but also to succeed in the workplace.

2. Ambition and resilience. Eight of the participants demonstrated ambition, which emerged as a dominant theme in the context of their labour market endeavours. The majority of the participants exhibited a strong desire and determination to achieve their career goals. When talking about the barriers they faced in pursuing their professions, most participants showed resilience rather than giving up in the face of obstacles. Drawing upon their positive thinking and professional commitment, the participants coped well with the problems they faced. Their ambition, combined with resilience, successfully sustained them in the job market.

Almost all of the participants had very clear goals and a vision with respect to what they wanted to achieve in terms of a career in Canada. They also demonstrated high levels of commitment and drive to pursue those goals. As Ella, who wanted to get back into her original profession of physiotherapy, said "I am going to start upgrading next month because I can't just be working in a coffee shop" (Interview 2, p. 1). Jenna, a graduate nurse from India, was also actively working to get back into her profession in Canada. As she narrated, "I don't need to graduate again but I chose to do that. I am working and funding my education; no loan or scholarship" (Interview 3, p. 1). Jody also demonstrated ambition and clear direction for her job market efforts. After arriving in Canada, Jody upgraded her skills by acquiring local education. She chose a career based on the drive to serve and give back to the community.

Kathy, who was told by a credential recognition agency to complete more coursework, resisted this recommendation and continued her job market endeavours. Kathy finally found a permanent job in accounting after one and a half years. Sarah, who was an ESL teacher in her home country, was told by everyone that she would not be able to practice that profession in Canada because she was not a native English language speaker. Sarah, like Kathy, also refused to give up her professional dreams and finally, after volunteering and some upgrading, she is now successfully employed as an ESL instructor. Sarah's account was a commendable example of resilience and goal orientation. Quoting Sarah:

She told me that I could not expect anything in my field. I said no no no - I do not want to be a waitress or anything of that kind. I wanted to be in the field where I was interested (Interview 6, p. 1).

Sarah also mentioned that “[l]anguage is a basic and that was one of my major strengths which helped me to adjust and succeed in the job market. Also I was very ambitious and persistent in my goals” (Interview 6, p. 3).

Similarly, Kate did not let financial pressures stop her from pursuing a better opportunity. After working at various survival jobs, Kate took the risk and initiative to start her own business. Kate's words and account truly demonstrated her resolve and courage.

Quoting Kate:

I worked there for six months and worked at Costco for a year and a half. But then you get boxed in, in that kind of environment. The longer you stay there the better your wage becomes and then you are stuck. I just did not want to get stuck and boxed in into that kind of situation. I had the courage and will to break out of that cycle (Interview 8, p. 1).

On average, most of the participants had worked in three jobs - switching jobs mostly for better ones. None of the participants showed stagnancy in their career paths. Whether they were deterred by credential recognition or a lack of childcare facilities, they kept working towards achieving their career objectives with drive and persistence. They demonstrated resilience. Resilience can be understood as the ability of a person to recover or overcome any adversity in life (Rashid, 2011). Rashid (2011), who studied resilience in the life of immigrant women in Canada through a qualitative study, argues that resilience is not just a matter of "bouncing back" (p. 36), or eliminating the challenges in life. Rather, resilience is an indication of one's strength to overcome such challenges and integrating them into one's life in a meaningful way. In this context, resilience is an attitude that stems from hope, optimism and determination. The accounts of the participants presented above shows that having clearly defined career objectives and being passionate about them can really facilitate one's path to the attainment of such aims. Resilience and ambition can serve as major facilitators for new immigrant women in the Canadian job market (Rashid, 2011).

3. Mentorship and social support. Seven of the participants talked about the importance and role of social support for their overall settlement experience in Canada. This social support was either from a mentor or an immediate family member, a friend or a colleague. The participants deemed that social support and networking was vital to their labour market integration and felt that support acted as a major facilitator to their integration in the labour market.

Two participants, Sarah and Jody, mentioned how the advice and support of a mentor eased their labour market journey in Canada. Both the participants considered a settlement worker as their mentor. They met the settlement worker at an immigrant services office soon

after landing in Canada. While referring to her mentor, Jody said, “She is the person because of who; I am who I am today. She encouraged me so much for my studies and everything that I can say she is like a mother to me. She guided me through everything” (Interview 5, p. 2). For Jody, her mentor was a source of emotional and moral support. Jody's mentor also referred her to her first job in Canada and guided her in defining her professional and educational goals. Sarah clearly mentioned how her mentor's advice and guidance landed her into the career of her choice. As Sarah said, “Next year when we moved to Prince George, I started looking for a job and met a counsellor here at IMSS. She was very helpful. My counsellor guided me to volunteer. That helped a lot” (Interview 10, p. 3).

Kathy looked up to her aunt for advice and support. In Kathy's words,

We stayed here with my aunt. She was so helpful. She has been here in Canada since 1985. She convinced me that I don't need to go back to school. I had so much work experience and well qualified. She convinced me to apply for jobs (Interview 7, p. 2)

Taking up her aunt's advice, Kathy tried her luck in the job market first, rather than taking up further studies. Kathy succeeded in her job search efforts and ultimately found a job as per her preferences.

Mentors can play a vital role in integrating newcomers in a job market through a variety of means. For example, mentors may provide information and support, facilitate professional networking and coach new immigrants about workplace norms and practices (Reitz, 2005). The accounts of Jody and Sarah substantiate the positive role a mentor may play in the economic integration of recent immigrant women.

Social support and networking are crucial to one's successfully adjusting in a new job market. New immigrants may be connected to mentors formally through government-funded mentorship programs. Even if an immigrant fails to avail herself or himself of such an opportunity through the government-provided channels, social support and mentorship may be sought from any family member or friend given the fact that he or she is already well established and well acquainted with the Canadian job market and culture. Social support can play an important role in the socio-economic integration of new immigrants by "enhancing coping" and "moderating the impact of stressors" (Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005, p. 259). Such support and guidance can truly aid new immigrants to enter the job market and help them to sustain a professional career.

4. Smaller city - better start. This study was based on the experiences of new immigrant women currently residing in Prince George, British Columbia. Out of the ten participants, six immigrant women directly arrived in Prince George, which was their intended city of residence. The remaining four participants had moved from different cities to Prince George after a few months of their arrival in Canada. Out of these four, three had relocated from large cities like Vancouver and Montreal and one had relocated from a smaller area - Fort Fraser. Comparatively affordable housing, shorter commute times, lucrative job and educational opportunities, and easier networking opportunities appeared to be merits of Prince George for the participants.

Sarah, who had moved from Fort Fraser, definitely found Prince George to be better than her first destination because Prince George offered her more opportunities in terms of jobs and social networking. Prince George was the place where Sarah got her first job in Canada.

Sana, who had initially landed in Montreal and spent almost four months there, also got her first job opportunity in Prince George, BC, which was quite unexpected for her. One of the reasons why Sana, like most other immigrants, had chosen Montreal as her landing destination was the expectation that Montreal would have more job opportunities for her. But Sana got a good job offer from Prince George in her original profession (teaching), which she immediately accepted as a promising opportunity.

Another participant, Zara, who migrated to Canada under family sponsorship from her husband, moved to Prince George from Vancouver. Zara had to relocate because her husband got a job offer at Prince George. Zara found Prince George to be a better starting place for new immigrants because of a number of factors. Quoting Zara:

Also I would say we are kind of lucky that we are living here in Prince George. We did not know much about the city when we came to Canada and moved here because my husband got a job here. But I believe it is a good place to take a start, the cost of living is lower, it is easier to commute, small seasonal jobs are always available, less competition in the market. The community here is small and it is easier to make connections. The social network I found here has really helped and supported me! In bigger cities I think you need to work more to find your kind of people (Interview 10, p. 3).

Similar sentiments resonated in Kathy's narrative. Kathy initially moved to Prince George because this city offered better continuing education opportunities for her only son. Initially, Kathy had the impression that Prince George might not have much more to offer than Vancouver, but that impression was changed soon after their relocation. Kathy also

found her settlement experience to be less stressful here as compared to a bigger city like Vancouver. In Kathy's words,

We thought it's not the same as Vancouver. We travelled here by road and I thought it's a laid-back community. But I found the jobs are better here, more opportunities, cost of living is less expensive, less stressful for me (Interview 7, p. 3).

Kate came to Prince George directly after migration on the advice of her family and friends already settled in Canada for many years. As Kate said, "We landed here in Prince George direct because our friends advised its easier here to go to school to rent or buy a house as compared to Vancouver" (Interview 8, p. 2).

Statistical data indicates that large cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver are preferred destinations for most new immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2015). The findings of this study were unexpected whereby new immigrant women favoured a smaller city like Prince George as a better starting point for their resettlement journey as compared to any larger city. Prince George is a small city where the maximum amount of time needed to get to anywhere in the city by road is about twenty minutes if using a private vehicle. This commute may be even shorter in summer. Housing in Prince George is much more affordable as compared to larger cities. Communities are smaller; hence people are relatively more connected to those around them. These three facts alone appeared to be strong merits for choosing to resettle in a smaller city for the participants. New immigrants usually have financial constraints (Access Alliance, 2011) and few or no social networks (Thomas, 2013). The participants' accounts imply that smaller cities like Prince George may provide a huge relief to recent immigrants by offering relatively affordable housing, lower commuting costs and better social networking. Moreover, most participants also pointed to the fact that Prince

George had much to offer in terms of job opportunities. Although larger cities may appear to have more job openings, larger cities also have stiff competition for those jobs. Participants perceived that it was relatively easier to get hired in Prince George because of less competition in the job market. If the merits for new immigrants settling in a smaller city can be promoted to attract new immigrants, such a strategy may ease the pressures on many new immigrants. It may also make a valuable contribution to the economic growth of the city.

A Model Relating Labour Force Integration Barriers to Immigrant Coping Strategies

The racialized gender parity theory of Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) was described in an earlier section of this thesis and, as noted earlier, only gendered (female) and racialized (visible minority) immigrant women were interviewed in this study. Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) described a “dismal picture” (p. 46) of the labour force integration of immigrant women in Canada and proposed that racialized gender parity, from an “equity and feminist perspective” (p. 47), is the benchmark for the successful integration of visible minority immigrant women into the Canadian labour force and economic life. They recognize that the integration of visible minority immigrant women is a two-way process: Both the society of the host country and the women themselves have influence in the process and are changed as a result. Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) conceptualize the integration of visible minority women as a “process” that involves “various challenges that have different relevance for different women” (p. 48). Their insights are well reflected in the findings of this study: The women interviewed in this study experienced the impact of labour market barriers, but they also creatively and proactively pushed back against perceived injustices that might work against their achievement of racialized gender parity. For most participants, it was as if their experiences of a barrier and experiences of dealing with any barrier were inseparable. Although the interview process concentrated on discussing the labour market obstructions that were faced by the participants, most of the participants’

responses included some kind of coping strategy as a reaction to any difficult circumstances with regards to pursuing their career goals. The coping strategies were rooted in the participants' personal attributes.

I now present a model depicting the relationship between one's perceived labour market barriers, coping mechanisms and perceived labour market facilitators that I developed from the findings of this study. Figure 1 presents this model which brings together all of the themes that were identified through phenomenological inquiry contained in this thesis and illustrates the interrelationships between these themes. It is important to note here that this model is not intended to drive future empirical confirmatory research but is intended as a heuristic that captures and presents a holistic picture of the findings of this study.

The model depicts the two-sided process envisaged by Tastsoglou and Preston (2012). The study participants perceived labour market barriers as constraints that push them behind in their career endeavours and exert a downward pressure on them in the job market. In response to these job market constraints, participants attempted to cope with them by using positive internal attributes and resources like flexibility, resilience, ambition and optimism. Participants appeared to fight back against the constraints with their assertive attitudes. These internal attributes weakened the participants' perceptions of labour market barriers, helped them deal effectively with perceived labour market constraints, and facilitated their professional endeavours. In addition to the internal attributes, external factors like being located in a smaller city (Prince George, BC) and better social support (from family, friends or a mentor) were also perceived as labour market facilitators by the participants. These facilitators provided direct support to the participants in the job market and strengthened them to deal effectively with any labour market barriers.

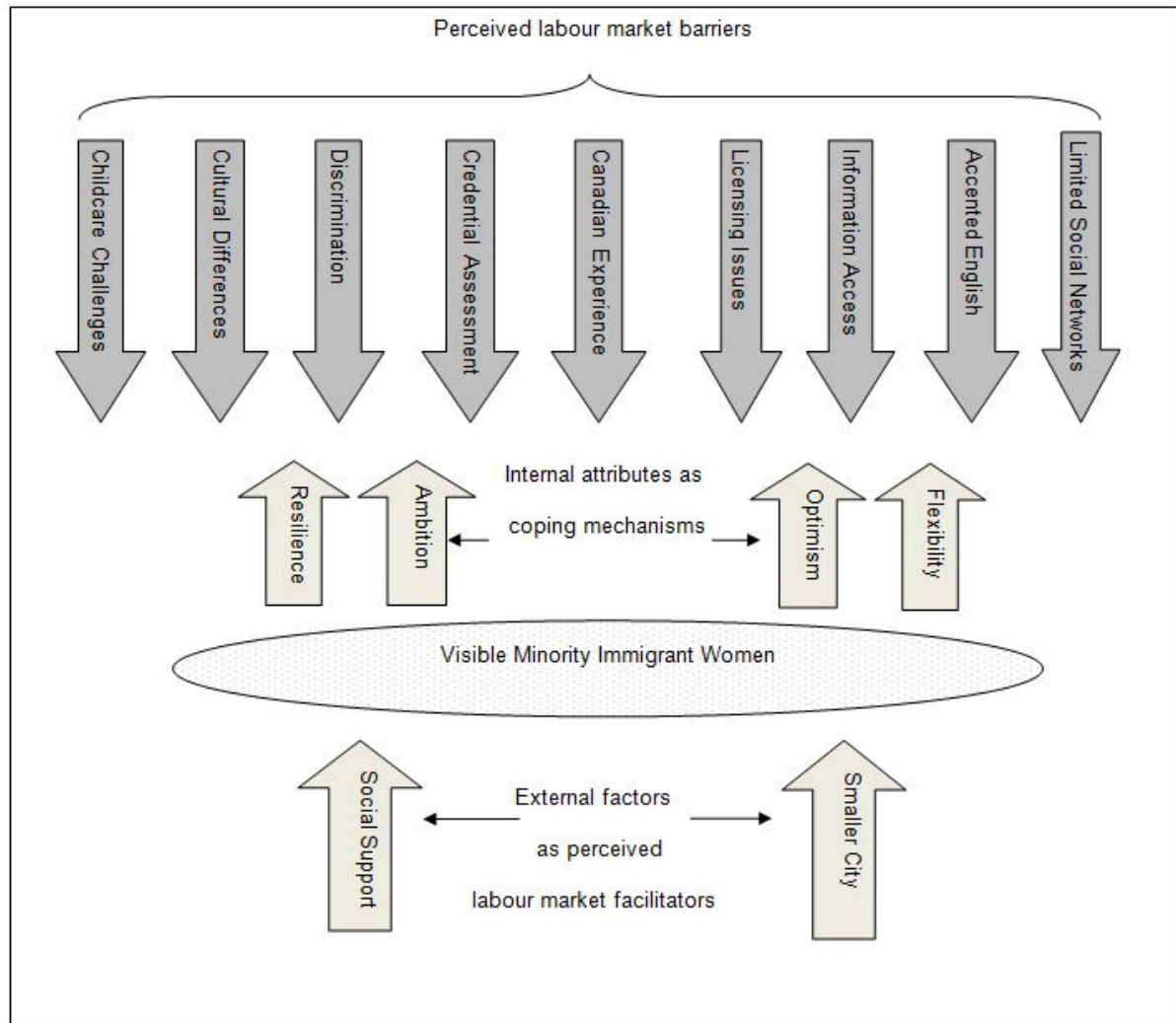


Figure 1. Model depicting the relationship between perceived labour market barriers, coping mechanisms and perceived labour market facilitators developed by the author of this thesis.

Most of the study participants exuded a strong positive attitude comprising of initiative, optimism, acceptance and understanding. Although they acknowledged the stressors of adjusting and making their place in a new labour market, their focus was on adaptation and flexibility rather than complaint. Most participants were highly persistent in their career advancements and showed resilience in the face of adversities. Such personal attributes emerged as dominant labour market facilitators for the participants.

In addition to these personal factors, the participants' accounts also indicated that mentorship programs and social support networks can prove to be major labour market facilitators for new immigrant women. Contrary to the common perception, this study supported the idea that a smaller city like Prince George can prove to be a better starting place for recent immigrants as compared to larger cities. The shorter commute times in Prince George, the relatively affordable housing, close community setting, good educational facilities and abundant job opportunities all promoted Prince George as a lucrative destination for new immigrants.

Participants perceived two external factors, being located in a smaller city and better social support, as labour market facilitators. Supported by these two factors, most participants appeared to successfully cope with perceived labour market barriers relying on strong personal attributes such as flexibility, ambition, persistence and resilience. By weakening the participants' perceptions of labour market barriers, positive internal attributes enabled most participants to effectively cope with any labour market constraints.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This study revealed the various factors that are perceived as hindrances to the labour market assimilation of immigrant women. It also described how each factor manifested in the lives of immigrant women and how each affected their professional endeavours. It showed that, not only circumstances, but internal attributes and personal mind-frames play a role in determining what may or may not constitute a perceived labour market barrier. The fact that the study participants mentioned labour market facilitators and coping strategies while narrating their experiences of labour market barriers implies that the acts of perceiving a barrier and dealing with it are closely intertwined. When something is perceived as a barrier, there is a natural reaction to cope with it which, in this context, involves an immigrant woman's resilience and optimism or dejection and stress. Most of this study's participants exhibited positive attitude and ambition to join the Canadian workforce. Participants did not deny the existence of labour market barriers; however, they implied that the barriers are surmountable.

Most of the existing research in the context of economic integration of immigrant women is based on quantitative analysis and statistical surveys. Undoubtedly, statistics and demographics are necessary to illustrate the labour market disadvantages for immigrant women, but a qualitative approach is needed to better understand the causes leading to those statistical and demographic outcomes. This study was based upon a qualitative phenomenological approach. Such an approach provided a deeper insight into the labour market barriers faced by immigrant women and also filled an important gap in existing qualitative literature in the field. The report of my thesis may also be beneficial to policy makers as a guideline for aligning their integration policies with the needs of new immigrant

women. By identifying the labour market barriers for immigrant women, this report sought to motivate all stakeholders (including settlement workers, human resource practitioners, employers and government) to work towards reducing such barriers and hence, empower immigrant women socially and economically.

By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study provides a rich understanding of the labour market experiences of recent immigrant women based in Prince George, BC. It informs how and why certain factors impede or facilitate the job market endeavours of immigrant women in their initial years of settlement. Before presenting the implications of this study for immigrant women, industry practitioners and policy makers, I will discuss some future research opportunities and recommendations as suggested by the findings of this study. This chapter also presents some important lessons I learned from this research journey.

Future Research Directions

A smaller city proved to be an easier starting point for most of the participants for their overall integration into a new society. Statistics point to the fact that the majority of immigrants choose to settle in large cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2015). This study was based on the experiences of participants residing in Prince George, British Columbia, which is a much smaller city as compared to those mentioned above. The majority of the participants favoured Prince George as an immigrant destination and found that their settlement experience here was comparatively less stressful due to the lower costs of housing and commuting, better job opportunities and better opportunities for social networking. Further research needs to be conducted to compare the labour market integration of immigrants choosing to settle in bigger cities with those who chose to settle in smaller cities like Prince George. Such research may not only open up avenues for better

labour market success and settlement experience by immigrants, but may also prove to be beneficial to the economy of smaller cities like Prince George. Small cities like Prince George are often faced with challenges such as a stagnant or eroding population due to out-migration of residents. Such challenges might result in “an eroding infrastructure, a decreasing economic base and a loss of long-held social capital” (Beshiri & He, 2009, p. 4). Attracting immigrants to such cities may act as a means to further develop social institutions, stimulate economic development, and curb population loss (Beshiri & He, 2009). Immigrants channelled to smaller cities may also find that their labour market and overall integration experience in Canadian society to be less challenging as compared to those immigrants located in larger cities.

The main aim of this research was to understand the labour market barriers of recent immigrant women through their perspectives and experiences. A deeper understanding could be attained by interviewing the settlement practitioners who regularly work with new immigrants to facilitate their settlement in the society. Similarly, interviewing some potential employers with regards to their perceptions, observations and experiences of immigrants' labour market integration may also complement the findings of this research and add more depth to these results. Such a holistic study may further enrich the understanding of labour market dilemmas for immigrants.

Another interesting future research direction may be to compare and contrast the labour market experiences of immigrant women to those of white Canadian-born women and Aboriginal women. Such research may bring forth interesting perspectives which might help to elucidate the gender gap issues prevalent in the Canadian labour market for different segments of women.

This research validates the call by Tastsoglou and Preston (2012) for more qualitative research from immigrant women's perspectives. The evidence from the women reported in this thesis supports the claim that immigrant women, at least the women interviewed for this study, lacked racialized gender parity. This was evident by their responses to the questions about various barriers found in the previous literature. However, these women were not merely passive actors who were inhibited by these barriers in their attempt to achieve economic integration. Most of the women interviewed for this study reported that they used creative strategies of their own choosing to lessen the impact and effect of those barriers to their economic advancement. More research into this aspect of the immigrant experience would be a valuable addition to the literature.

Policy Recommendations for Government and Employers

This report provided an insight into the meanings associated with various socio-cultural and systemic barriers that recent immigrant women residing in Prince George, BC encountered for their workforce integration. It is imperative to ensure that immigrant women are empowered to utilize their skills and resources for Canada's economic gain, for humanitarian reasons, and for the continued enrichment of Canadian culture and society. There are numerous programs and initiatives by the government, businesses and community to address the settlement issues of immigrants. To list all of these programs and assess their effectiveness in tackling the labour market issues faced by immigrant women is beyond the scope of this paper. However, based on the findings of this paper, some broad-based general recommendations are made which may help counter some of the most pronounced labour market barriers for immigrant women as identified through this study. These ideas for action are presented as follows:

Improved access to information. Consolidated information on various settlement resources, more transparency in advertising potential jobs and easily accessible and comprehensible information platforms may facilitate labour market integration of immigrant women. Easier access to job market information and information on settlement resources can have a direct positive impact on labour market penetration and integration of immigrant women (Access Alliance, 2011).

Better access to various informational resources (like job opportunities, housing, education, health, legal rights, financing/loans, and childcare) can play a major role in addressing, not only the job market, but overall settlement challenges for immigrant women (Access Alliance, 2011). The participants of this study reported that there are many resources available to help immigrants with their settlement into Canadian society. However, they felt that there is a lack of a single, consolidated platform where all the needed information can be accessed. For example, one participant mentioned that, despite being in touch with a settlement agency, she was unaware of the fact that subsidized housing and student loans are available. A few participants found it difficult to access information on licensing requirements and credential assessment. Most participants had little information on their legal rights as employees or about the employment law that governs all employers. Over time, participants did gain such knowledge, but the lack of information in the initial years of settlement compounded all the other labour market barriers. The findings of this study imply that settlement services and web forums that fail to provide all of the needed or useful information add to the weight of many systemic labour market barriers. Comprehensive information is available at the BC government's website (www.welcomebc.ca), but only in English or French. Having such information available in the typical native languages of

immigrants may prove to be a beneficial step in improving the access to information for newcomers. A proactive approach on part of settlement workers may also benefit immigrant women in this regard. A proactive approach includes providing women with an access to appropriate information, foreseeing their needs, linking them with other services, and reaching out to them instead of expecting them to access the services.

Subsidized and improved childcare. Immigrant women, like all other Canadian women, are faced with the barrier of finding suitable and affordable childcare. This study reiterated the fact that the cost and availability of childcare facilities is one of the major labour market barriers for working women with young children. Considering the fact that finances are tight in the initial years of settlement (Heilbrunn et al., 2010), expensive childcare facilities limit many aspiring recent immigrant women's career choices and commitments. Recent immigrant women also lack the family support networks to assist with childcare that they had back in their home countries (Man, 2004). The findings of this study imply that childcare is not only expensive but also inadequate. That is, the number of available spots is almost always less than the demand, which makes it harder for women with young children to work. The childcare subsidy, which is a government initiative to help with childcare cost, still leaves the major portion of a child's daycare expense to be covered by parents. Childcare costs and availability varies considerably throughout the various cities and provinces in Canada. Out of all the Canadian provinces, Quebec's subsidized childcare program, popularly called the \$7 a day program, is unique. As explained by Fortin, Godbout and St-Cerny (2012), Quebec launched \$5-a-day childcare program in September of 1997, which initially catered exclusively to 4-year-old children. By January, 2004, the program was expanded to include all children from birth to 12 years of age, and the cost was raised to \$7 a

day. Fortin et al. (2012) estimated that the low-cost childcare program attracted an influx of “70,000 additional Quebec mothers” (p. 26) into the workforce, representing “an increase of 3.8% in women employment” (p. iv). The increased economic activity in Quebec led to a “\$5.1 billion increase in the provincial domestic income” (p. 26) and more than covered the province's \$1.6 billion program costs in 2008 (Fortin et al., 2012). Quebec's model is an encouraging example of how subsidizing childcare costs and making childcare more accessible to needy families may not only benefit women, but the economy as a whole. Considering the fact that tax payers' dollars always have so many competing priorities, policy makers may initially extend such affordable childcare facilities only to more vulnerable segments of society, like new immigrants, aboriginal people or low income families. Undoubtedly, in the long term, a uniform subsidized childcare program may benefit all the segments of society.

Bridging programs and training opportunities. Immigrant women, akin to their male counterparts, are faced with systemic barriers related to credential recognition and licensing requirements (Cullingworth & Bambrah, 2004). Most of the participants who got their foreign academic credentials evaluated by an assessment agency were not satisfied with the process. Almost all of the participants who were required to attain a license to practice their profession in Canada (e.g., doctor, physiotherapist, nurse), were dissatisfied with the licensing requirements, and believed that their foreign experience and qualifications were not given due recognition. Those who were required to gain local market experience as part of their licensing requirements also found it hard to enter the job market. These systemic barriers resulted in the wasting of the potential and skills of the participants. The findings of this study suggest that there is a need to reassess the methods used to assess foreign

credentials and make the process more uniform and transparent. Bridging programs designed to fill gaps in a professional's record may also prove to be a much-welcomed opportunity for many recent immigrants who are highly demoralized and deterred by the need to start their career over in some professions. The availability of more internship, co-op, and placement opportunities may facilitate the labour market integration of recent immigrant women by providing worthwhile opportunities to gain Canadian work experience (Weiner, 2008).

Take a strategic approach. The systemic barriers to immigrant women's labour force integration and economic empowerment need to be subjected to collective strategizing. As per Wayland (2006), "All sectors in Canada – government, business, and the non-governmental and community sectors – need to put their heads together to figure out how to help immigrants not only settle, but thrive." (p. 1). Canadian organizations should work towards establishing on-site childcare support systems since this measure has the potential to attract several qualified young mothers while critically benefiting immigrant women with children. Additionally, organizations can spread awareness through education, instructions, and distribution of information regarding legal rights of employees and employers.

Human Resources Management (HRM) practitioners can ensure the enforcement and implementation of laws that protect the rights of immigrant women and consequently help immigrant women to obtain suitable employment. Furthermore, enforcing laws of equal employment, distribution of minimum wage, and equal pay for women for a given job position may not only help immigrant women but may also reap many benefits for the larger economy.

Finally, HRM practitioners can encourage and promote immigrant women by providing them with an opportunity to portray their skills, expertise, and previous work

experience through structured interviews that are designed to select and recruit the best job candidates. These practitioners can further combat discrimination based on individuals' appearance or accent. These practitioners can articulate and model the practices of equitable hiring, an organizational norm of the discrimination-free workplace, while maintaining a climate of ethical decision making.

It is important to account for the many needs that immigrant women face before proposing further solutions. In order to empower immigrant women, the government needs to intervene at multiple levels while showing respect and sensitivity to the issues of newcomers to Canada. Immigrant support policies and programs can assist women to break through the systemic barriers, facilitate their access to information, meet their material needs and minimize their social isolation. This study may help build the case for needed policy reforms. It may also guide community organizations as to where they can best invest their resources for empowering the immigrant women around them.

Implications of this Study for Immigrant Women

An examination of the lived experiences of immigrant women aspiring to make their place in a new country's job market can prove to be very informative and highly inspiring for potential and existing immigrant women. Immigrant women can learn about the challenges they may face in the Canadian job market and can prepare themselves better to cope with such challenges. Those immigrant women who are already grappling with similar issues can gain solace from the fact that they are not the only ones striving in the face of such difficulties. Not only did this study provide an insight into the various socio-cultural and systemic labour market barriers, it also brought to light various strategies that the participants adapted to successfully deal with those barriers. These adaptive strategies, described as

labour market facilitators, may help many immigrant women to break through the labour market barriers and achieve their potentials. The fact that this study presented each labour market barrier and facilitator in terms of the participants' lived experiences can make it very effective for other immigrant women to identify with those experiences and to learn from them. An increased awareness of the labour market barriers can motivate immigrant women to unite together and work to deploy significant amounts of force against any barriers to ensure their economic advancement.

Increased labour force integration is one of the major enabling factors for economic empowerment of immigrant women. Women's economic empowerment means their ability to bring about economic change for themselves (International Centre for Research on Women, 2014). It means that they are better prepared to participate in the economy as workers, entrepreneurs and leaders so that they can control their own economic futures. It also means that women have better access to education and health, and are protected by more supportive policies, laws, and regulations (CESO, 2009). Empirical research has shown that an increase in women's labour force participation results in reduced gender discrimination and lower child mortality rates (Kishor, 1993), improved health for girls (Thomas, 1994), and having more say in household decisions (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

My Lessons Learnt

Investigating the concept of labour market barriers from the perspective of recent immigrant women proved to be a very insightful, motivating and influential journey for me. There are a number of lessons which I gained through this research experience which are mostly based on my personal reflections regarding the participants' lived experiences.

Delving into the lived experiences of the participants regarding their labour force integration in Canada taught me that the concept of labour market barriers differs from person to person. A factor that may be a barrier for one woman may not be a barrier for another woman, as individuals' circumstances, personalities and perspectives are unique. Looking at these barriers through a phenomenological lens gave me hope and optimism as an immigrant. I learnt that a labour market barrier is not solely shaped by an immigrant woman's experiences and interactions with a new job market environment around her.; rather, the impact of a barrier is profoundly influenced by a woman's attitudes and perspectives. Although external factors may play a role in shaping attitudes, stronger attitudes towards such factors may also determine one's behaviour which may affect one's external environment. An immigrant woman can either look at a barrier as an absolute wall which blocks her way to economic progress, or she may look at it as a constraint which may slow her down in the achievement of professional goals but never stop her. Alternatively, a woman may look at barriers as a natural consequence of immigration and a challenge to be prevailed over, or she may consciously refuse to recognize anything in her professional path as a barrier to attain greater focus and drive. An immigrant woman's perspective will determine how she defines a barrier and consequently it will determine how she deals with it.

I learnt that it is not easy to assign a common meaning to the concepts of labour market integration and labour market barriers because human experiences are diverse, complex and multi-faceted. Although collective strategizing by governments, immigration advocacy groups and community organizations, may ease the economic pressures of immigrant women, immigrant women's positive attitudes and mind frames may also play a major role in this regard. If immigrant women can be better informed of the various

challenges that are a necessary part of transitioning into a new job market, new country and new society, and adopt a positive and persistent attitude to overcome any challenges, their labour market integration can be greatly facilitated. Through this study I learnt that change is needed, not only from the perspective of policy making, but also from the viewpoint of immigrants' mind-frames and preparedness in order to achieve seamless labour market integrations. Such a two-way approach can truly knock down any existing or perceived labour market barriers for immigrant women.

A phenomenological approach provided an in-depth understanding of why a certain factor is perceived as a labour market barrier and how it affects the lives of recent immigrant women residing in Prince George, BC. Understanding the barriers to immigrant women's labour market integration is a necessary first step towards making any effort to remove those barriers. This research study sought to provide such an understanding. Gaining such understanding has the potential to motivate industry players and the relevant policy makers to redouble their commitment to immigrant women's socioeconomic empowerment and hence make gender equality a reality. Successful achievement of these goals will provide immigrant women with greater control of their lives and wellbeing while reinforcing their potential as strong sources of progress and development. Women's economic independence is imperative to a strong economy and a better quality of life for immigrant women.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your age?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. Are you married?
4. Do you have any children under the age of 10?
5. What religion do you follow if any?
6. What is your highest education level?
7. Do you have any previous work experience in your home country? If yes, how many years/months?
8. How long have you been in Canada as a permanent resident?
9. Under what class of immigration did you migrate to Canada? Were you the principal applicant?
10. Are you currently employed/working? If yes-
 - i. What is your current occupation?
 - ii. How long have you been working?
 - iii. Are you working full time or part time?
 - iv. Do you believe your current compensation/earning is fair (as per your skills/qualifications)?
11. If no - Do you wish to or intend to work and look for paid employment here in Canada?
(If not, why?)
12. What channels have you used to look for jobs?

13. Are your credentials/qualifications and past work experience (if any) recognized in Canada?

14. Did you use the services of any Canadian evaluation agency to get your international qualification or experience recognized in Canada?

With respect to your labour force participation and integration in Canada,

15. Do you consider lack of informational resources (like social networks, access to job bank sites, print media job advertisements etc.) as a barrier? (If yes, please explain)

16. Do you consider lack of monetary resources as a barrier?

17. Do you believe discrimination is a barrier?

18. Do you believe credential recognition is a barrier?

19. Do you believe lack of experience in the Canadian job market is a hindrance?

20. Do you consider language i.e., the ability to communicate effectively in English/French a barrier?

21. Do you consider your family obligations or circumstances (e.g. housework, very young children etc.) as a barrier?

22. (Only if the interviewee has children) Do you believe lack of suitable childcare facilities or the cost of childcare is a barrier?

23. Do you believe difference in culture is a barrier?

24. Do you consider existing legislation/labour laws/licensing requirements to be a barrier?

25. Are you in any way hindered to work by your faith/ religious obligations?

26. Is there any other factor you consider responsible to your lack of integration in the Canadian labour market?

Appendix B

Letter to Immigrant Services

May 8, 2015

Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society

1270 2nd Avenue

Prince George, BC V2L 3E7

Re: Request for Research Support and Access to Participants

I am a M.Sc. Business Administration student at University of Northern British Columbia. I am seeking your help to conduct research for my Master's thesis . Since IMSS aims to help out new immigrants in various areas including settlement and employment, I believe your organization is very synergistic to my research goals and can provide ideal support.

My thesis is entitled "Barriers to Immigrant Women's Labour Force Integration in Canada." I aim to uncover and explore the various factors which hinder new immigrant women's entrance, participation and integration into the Canadian workforce. These barriers may be societal, cultural, or systemic. For the purpose of my research I need to conduct in depth interviews with a sample of eight to ten immigrant women. I would be conducting the interviews on a one to one basis as per a semi-structured format. I do not expect each interview's duration to exceed sixty minutes. The potential participants will be all females, eighteen years of age or older, who have immigrated to Canada within the last five years. They will be living in Prince George, BC with an immigrant status other than refugee and be willing to participate in the study. Immigrant women comfortable being interviewed in English will be considered for this study. Since IMSS facilitates new immigrants in a variety of areas, your organization attracts many new immigrants. In this context, I believe you can facilitate me to

identify and get in touch with any potential participants meeting the afore-mentioned criteria. Also I would be very grateful if you can allow me to conduct the interviews at your premises since that will provide the interviewees with a very neutral and non-threatening environment. I have attached an information and consent letter for the information and agreement of potential participants. This research proposal has also been approved by the Research Ethics Board at University of Northern British Columbia. A copy of the approval letter is also attached for your record.

My research supervisor is Dr. Rick Tallman. He can be contacted at rick.tallman@unbc.ca. If you have any further questions you may contact me at my email iqbal@unbc.ca or at my cell no. 778 281 2121. I can also drop in at your office to discuss my research plans and requirements further. Any concerns can also be directed to my research supervisor. I am hoping to have your kind cooperation for my research project. Your approval shall be a major support.

Thanks and regards,

Sunenani Iqbal

MSc Business Administration candidate

University of Northern British Columbia

Appendix C

Information Letter and Consent Form**REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

Research Project Title: Barriers to immigrant women's labour force integration in
Canada

Principal Investigator: Sunenan Iqbal
MSc. Business Administration Candidate
University of Northern British Columbia, Prince George BC
V2N 4Z9

Email: iqbal@unbc.ca Tel: 778 281 2121

I am conducting research to explore the various barriers faced by immigrant women in Canada with regards to labour force participation and integration. Facts and figures presented by Stats Canada support the fact that immigrant women represent a largely underprivileged and untapped segment when it comes to labour force participation. Finding suitable employment can be a challenge for immigrant women, especially those seeking work that reflects their training and qualification.

The main purpose of this study is to uncover the factors which hinder the Canadian immigrant women's labour force participation and integration. This research will also analyze the government policies presently in practice for the facilitation of immigrant women's labour force integration and make recommendations for further improvement where necessary. Such a research and analysis may contribute to the economic empowerment of immigrant women in Canada and may reap individual as well as societal benefits.

This study is being conducted as a graduate thesis research under the aegis of School of Business at University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). The target audience for this study is immigrant women who have migrated to Canada within the last five years. Data will be collected through one to one structured interviews conducted by the principal investigator. The interviews will last for about half an hour approximately and would be conducted in privacy at the premises of IMSS (Immigrant and Multicultural Services Society, 1270 2 Ave, Prince George, BC V2L 3E7; Tel: 250 562 2900).

You are being selected as a participant in this study since this study is targeted to uncover the potential labour force entry and integration barriers faced by new (those who have migrated to Canada within the last five years) immigrant women in Canada, and you meet this criteria. Your participation in this study is voluntary. All data collected from the interviews shall be aggregated and no response shall be identified as individual. All responses shall be kept in strict confidentiality and you will remain anonymous. All information shall be aggregated and there is no opportunity to identify you as an individual. The interviews shall be recorded using a recording device and transcribed later for the research analysis. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcribed data. The maximum duration for which the results shall be retained is six months (starting after data collection is completed) after which all recordings shall be erased.

It is expected that participants to this study might feel some emotional stress during the interviews considering the subject of the study is directly linked to the personal and circumstantial barriers faced by the participants. Another potential risk of this study is social risk. Participants may feel that their privacy is being threatened since the interviews involve the gathering of personal information. Please note that every effort will be made to preserve

anonymity and confidentiality, but given the setting and the small sample size this cannot be guaranteed. Also please note that all information from the interviews will be held in strict confidentiality and shall only be used for the purpose of this study. All responses shall be aggregated and you will not be identified as an individual in this study. Interviews will be held in a private room at IMSS and best possible efforts will be made to ensure privacy.

If you experience any emotional stress as a result of participating in this study, please note that psychological counselling is offered free of charge to women at the Elizabeth Fry Society of Prince George (www.pgefry.bc.ca). It is located at 1575, 5th Avenue, Prince George, BC V2L 3L9. The Society can be contacted during business hours from Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm [Tel: 250-563-1113](tel:250-563-1113) or at the Confidential 24 hours Crisis and support Line 250-562-5868. As an additional resource, you may also call the 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week crisis line at Tel: 250-563-1214 or toll free at 1(888)562-1214. This crisis line is operated by the Crisis Prevention, Intervention & Information Centre for Northern BC which is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing emotional support and referral information to the residents of Northern British Columbia at no charge. This crisis line guarantees free, confidential, 24-hour access to psychological counselling.

By taking part in this study, you will play an important role in identifying and uncovering the various factors which hinder the immigrant women's participation and integration in the Canadian labour market. Since the identification of these barriers is the first necessary step for the economic empowerment of immigrant women, your participation in this study may be considered as a direct contribution to support the cause of economic empowerment of immigrant women.

In case you have any questions regarding this study or your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact me (the principal investigator) at my contact no. 778 281 2121 or at my email: iqbal@unbc.ca or my supervisor Dr. Rick Tallman at rick.tallman@unbc.ca / Tel: (250) 964 5404. Any concerns or complaints may be directed to the Office of Research at reb@unbc.ca/ Tel: (250) 960 6735. This research project is expected to be complete by September, 2015. If you wish to obtain a copy of your interview recording, your transcripts or complete research study please contact me at iqbal@unbc.ca.

In case you decide to withdraw from the study at any point, kindly notify me at iqbal@unbc.ca. In case of your withdrawal, any information that you have provided for this study shall be withdrawn and destroyed.

If you agree to participate in this study, kindly complete the consent section below and reply back to this email. Kindly print this email to obtain a copy of this information letter and consent form. Thank you for your time and support.

CONSENT

I have been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES

NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES

NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree to be recorded for the interview for this project.

YES NO

If you require a copy of the interview transcription kindly provide your email address below along with your complete name.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

MEMORANDUM

To: Sunenan Iqbal
CC: Rick Tallman

From: Michael Murphy, Chair
Research Ethics Board

Date: June 11, 2015

Re: **E2015.0513.040.00**
Barriers to immigrant women's labor force integration in Canada

Thank you for submitting revisions to the Research Ethics Board (REB) regarding the above-noted proposal. Your revisions have been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

If you have any questions on the above or require further clarification please feel free to contact Rheanna Robinson in the Office of Research (reb@unbc.ca or 250-960-6735).

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Murphy
Chair, Research Ethics Board