

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Exploring entrepreneurship among immigrant women in Brandon, Manitoba

By Shirlyn Minoja Kunaratnam, MRD student



*Emerging immigrant woman entrepreneur showcasing her talent.*

### Why this research is important

Canada is known for welcoming immigrants and offering them better opportunities for life and prosperity. Immigrant women entrepreneurs arrive in Canada with high hopes for their families and host communities, playing a vital role in the local economy. According to Statistics Canada 2021, Brandon comprises 18% of the immigrant population, and out of that, 68% of them arrive under the economic category. However, like immigrants across Canada, those in Brandon face challenges such as limited English proficiency, lack of suitable jobs, perceived gender discrimination, and difficulties certifying foreign credentials. Immigrant women, in particular, face additional barriers due to the multiple roles they play at home and in society, preventing them from fully utilizing their skills. Despite these challenges, immigrant women

### What you need to know

Immigrant women in Brandon, Manitoba, face challenges such as childcare responsibilities, language barriers, limited access to resources, a lack of suitable job opportunities that match their skills, difficulties in certifying foreign credentials, and cultural differences. Consequently, many turn to entrepreneurship out of necessity, driven by motivating factors. However, these immigrant women entrepreneurs continue to encounter challenges and barriers that undermine their full economic potential.

show remarkable resilience, contributing to Brandon's economy by participating in minimum-wage labour markets (e.g., Maple Leaf, Sobeys, Safeway, Home Depot, Walmart) and establishing small businesses such as Karla's International Food, Sabor Latino, and Coffee Culture. Addressing these barriers could unlock their economic potential, enabling Brandon to benefit from more dynamic, prosperous immigrant entrepreneurs who contribute significantly to the city's growth and development. This research is essential because it examines the unique challenges faced by immigrant women entrepreneurs in Brandon and explores opportunities to enhance their economic contributions. It also fills a critical gap in knowledge, as no published research currently focuses on immigrant entrepreneurship or immigrant women entrepreneurship in Brandon. Furthermore, the lack of

accessible statistical data on immigrant entrepreneurship in the city makes it difficult for researchers and service providers to understand and support Brandon's entrepreneurial landscape effectively.

### How this research was conducted

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach, employing snowball sampling to identify immigrant women entrepreneurs or immigrant women who are starting entrepreneurship in Brandon. Data collection included five focus group discussions with six immigrant communities, involving 25 participants and five individual interviews. Additionally, representatives of five immigrant service providers were also interviewed. In total, 35 participants contributed to the study. Semi-structured questionnaires were used as a guide for the discussions and interviews.

### What the researcher found

1. Immigrant women in Brandon pursue entrepreneurship for financial security, independence, and socio-economic improvement. Challenges such as limited English proficiency, low-wage jobs, non-recognition of foreign credentials, lack of Canadian work experience, inadequate networks, gender discrimination, multiple low-paying jobs, childcare shortages, and work-life stress push them toward entrepreneurship. Motivating factors such as financial independence, prior entrepreneurial experience, flexible work hours for childcare, and the potential to earn more, push them toward entrepreneurship.
2. The study also found the entrepreneurship sectors where immigrant women start entrepreneurship. This sector-wise data is unavailable in Brandon, making it difficult for City and immigrant service providers to provide targeted support.
3. The study also identified that Brandon does not have adequate and suitable programs and services that meet the needs of immigrant women entrepreneurs. The support systems available in Brandon need to be modified to support immigrant entrepreneurs. There

should be better collaboration among the stakeholders and service providers to achieve this.

4. There is an absence of collective entrepreneurship initiatives in Brandon to help immigrant women learn about the benefits of collaboration. The discussion with immigrant women participants and organizations validated that a collective effort could be a potential strategy to overcome some of the challenges and needs of immigrant women entrepreneurs.

### How this research can be used

This research can be used to strategize and foster collaboration among business-oriented organizations to provide better support for immigrant women entrepreneurs and to promote policies that can reduce barriers for immigrant women entrepreneurs to gain equal access to opportunities and foster an inclusive business environment.

### About the researcher

Shirlyn Minoja Kunaratnem is a master's student of Rural Development and serves as the immigration research coordinator at the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University.

### Keywords

Immigrant, women, entrepreneurship, Brandon

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