
Young rural workers, the pursuit of education, and employment opportunities: Canadian and Irish perspectives

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Agenda

- Purpose of study
- Selected lit review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions & Discussion



Purpose of study

- To explore the choices of 15 young adults (aged 18 to 29) in terms of their pursuit of education and employment options.
 - These individuals typically are located in communities throughout rural Ireland and the two Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Ontario, between February 2009 and June 2011.
 - As luck would have it, these tend to be relatively educated individuals.



Selected lit review (1 of 4)

- While a minority enjoys good pay, benefits, access to training and other attractive working conditions, many others are only able to acquire 'secondary market' jobs which tend to be lower paying, have few benefits, training, or promotion opportunities, and have less security and stability of work hours (e.g. Betcherman and Lowe, 1997; Bosch, 2006; Atkinson, 1987; Saunders, 2003; Vallée, 2005).
 - Employers have the most influence over employment conditions (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie [KKM], 1986). Moreover, each employer has a range of strategic options available in response to the changing business environment, ranging from providing very favourable working conditions to having a cost-minimization approach to labour (see Verma and Chaykowski, 1999; Cooke, Zeytinoglu, Agarwal and Rose, 2008).
 - The unstated corollary is that only some individual workers are able to find desirable employment conditions offered by certain employers, or are able to elicit favourable conditions of work from their current employer. Although the causes and effects are complicated, the essential point is that powerful workers are more likely to acquire favourable working conditions from employers, and to resist the implementation of unfavourable conditions (Zeytinoglu, Cooke and Mann, 2009). While Bosch (2006) suggests that even powerful workers are having trouble retaining their favourable treatment, it is nonetheless clear that their treatment is better, on average, than less-powerful workers.
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Selected lit review (2 of 4)

- Acquiring education is a key strategic response by young workers. Individuals holding higher levels of skills/education hold better quality employment in terms of pay, benefits, and work schedules (Cooke, 2007; Kapsalis and Tourigny, 2004; OECD 2006; Lin, 2008).
 - Workers in rural locations face additional complications (see Donaghey, Cooke and Zeytinoglu, 2011). Employment quality tends to be poorer and with fewer and less diverse options in rural locations (Kapsalis and Tourigny, 2004; Matthews, Pendakur and Young, 2009). Even if rural workers have a job, there could be fewer advancement opportunities, especially for those with lower skills/education levels (Vera-Toscano, Phimister and Weersink, 2004).
 - Compared to older individuals, young workers tend to have difficulty acquiring a good quality job due to a lack of experience and/or education (e.g. OECD, 2005). However, while acquiring education is a key for these young workers to seek and acquire a good job, receiving enough social support is also influential (Simmons, Braun, Wright and Miller, 2007), since their decisions are shaped by those around them, for better or worse, in terms of the acquisition of valued skills (Locke, 2010).
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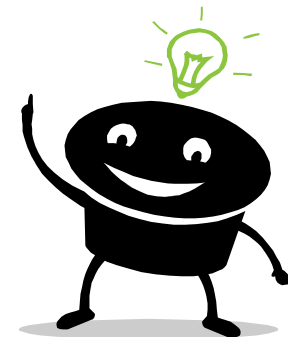
Selected lit review (3 of 4)

- As outlined by Shucksmith (2004), at an individual level, (only) some young workers are choosing the path towards education and a career, but others are taking a different path, perhaps travelling or out-migrating to a different location for work or adventure, or postponing career decisions (see also Nixon, 2010).
 - As one might expect, net out-immigration (i.e. leaving one location for another) is higher among younger, single workers than those more entrenched with work and family, as are those in areas with weak employment conditions relative to those in areas with stronger job markets (Bernard, Finnie and St. Jean, 2008).
 - But recent evidence from Tang (2009) among impending Newfoundland university graduates indicates that almost half of the participants preferred that their first job after graduation was outside of the province, while others were willing to take any available local job, regardless of quality.
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Selected lit review (4 of 4)

- It's also worth noting that a reality of Canada, and Ireland is that almost all post-secondary institutions are located in larger towns, if not cities/urban areas. Thus, young rural individuals are lucky if there is a nearby post-secondary institution, thereby negating the need to commute or move to acquire education.

- When looking at this literature as a set, it seems like the main options available to young rural workers are to:
 - i) move away to seek post-secondary education,
 - ii) to attend whatever post-secondary institution and/or program that is available locally or within a manageable commute,
 - iii) to move away to seek better-quality employment opportunities, or
 - iv) to try to find local employment without seeking post-secondary employment. Needless to say, there are pros and cons with each option, although the last one would seemingly involve the poorest quality employment, on average.



Methodology

- Exploratory analysis based on responses of 15 young adults regarding their education and/or employment choices, plus 2 older individuals employed within a rural post-secondary education institution. Using a ground theory approach; not using qualitative software.
 - Views captured via semi-structured interviews conducted throughout rural Ireland and two Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Ontario between February 2009 and June 2011.
 - The set of 15 young adults happened to be highly educated. 10 of them have either acquired, or are acquiring, post-secondary education. As is typical in Canada, many no longer live in their hometown. Several have moved to acquire employment &/or education, and some have migrated to Canada for better quality employment opportunities.
 - Is part of a much larger comparative study of the employment, lifestyle, and well-being issues among 150 individuals involving researchers from McMaster University, University of Guelph, and University of Warwick.
 - In main study, particular attention was paid to rural individuals 40+ years of age.
 - In terms of location type, approximately 20% of participants were from urban locations, and about 80% were from rural communities of varying sizes.
 - Presumption was that, at some point in life, perspectives can change, with employment and career paths becoming less important relative to issues outside of work, such as family, hobbies, and lifestyles.
 - Implicitly, then, younger individuals necessarily must change choices in terms of the acquisition of skills, education, and the pursuit of work experience.
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Findings (1) – Selected participant details: Those not pursuing post-secondary education

P1: Male, mid 20s, living in rural Newfoundland outside of St. John's (the provincial capital). Had at most high school education, and had out-migrated to other areas of Canada at least twice for several months. He would like to stay in his current rural location, but he indicated that his lack of education is preventing him from finding much employment locally. He is reluctantly expecting to have to out-migrate again. Has spotty employment history.

P3: Male, mid 20s. After high school, he had tried to commute from his rural Newfoundland hometown to St. John's to make a living, but only sporadic unsocial work was available. He and his partner have much better employment prospects (in terms of job security, pay, and benefits) in urban Ontario. He had also out-migrated to Western Canada in the past to participate in their booming economy. Found high paying work, but had housing and finally health issues forcing him to quit. In NL, faced major transportation problems since he could not afford a vehicle.

P5: Female, early 20s, lives in rural Ontario. She has completed high school, and has chosen to stay in her rural hometown, and commutes for about 45 minutes to a large urban area for employment. Her work experience in high school had been in the secondary market, consisting of sporadic, retail jobs. After graduation, someone in her social circle was able to get her an administrative/clerical job. She feels fortunate to have a secure, full-time white collar job with daytime hours. Plus, with chances for overtime, she is satisfied with her earnings. She indicated that 'better jobs' are for those with more education.

P8: Female, not yet 20, lives in rural Donegal, Ireland. She is unwilling to move away to acquire post-secondary education. She freely admits that she is making a choice that could affect her career. She expects to have to take whatever employment opportunities are available locally. She feels that it is worth it, since it means that she gets to stay and enjoy the benefits of friends, family, and lifestyle.

Findings (2) – Selected participant details: Those pursuing post-secondary education

P2: Male, late 20s, living in a small rural Eastern Newfoundland community. He had to move away to attend university, but has been lucky enough to find a permanent full-time job in his chosen field (in arts/culture) in his hometown. Upward mobility is limited, and work demands are high, but he has a rewarding job. He lives in a small community having a tangible seasonal tourism industry, but is otherwise small and isolated from urban areas. He is trading-off employment quality for lifestyle.

P6: Male, mid 20s, was interviewed in urban Ireland. He holds an apprenticeship in a technical/trades occupation, and had worked in his urban hometown after high school. Due to an urge to travel, he quit his secure, good quality job for an overseas adventure. However, he returned to Ireland after the financial crisis had arrived. Since employment was unable, he out-migrated to North America, and worked in permanent, full-time well-paying position, as long as legally allowed. Planning to acquire a new permit.

P7: Female, not yet 20, was interviewed in rural Ireland. She has already moved to an urban centre in Ireland, to get a university degree, and was home temporarily. She has already travelled internationally for a short-term tourist job for the work experience and adventure. Although she likes her hometown, she is planning to start a professional career in the urban centre after graduation. She will only return if having children, and if she can find comparable employment or the opportunity to be self-employed.

P14: Female, not yet 20, was interviewed in rural Newfoundland. She is employed in a publicly-funded, full-time job at a tourist site for the summer. She is currently a full-time student at a local college. She chose that institution to avoid having to out-migrate to acquire post-secondary education. Upon graduation, she hopes to find the best available local employment in, or very near, her childhood hometown. She recognizes that she is potentially going to have to make some financial sacrifices (in terms of pay, benefits, security, and upward mobility) to be able to be in proximity with friends and family, and to enjoy the lifestyle she seeks.

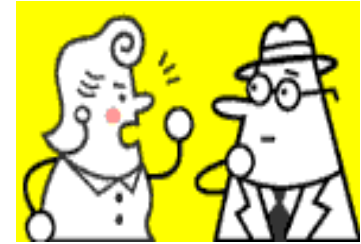
Conclusions & Discussion (1)

- Consistent with expectations and the reviewed literature, several of these young participants are struggling with their employment and education choices, and the rurally located ones appear to have extra complications.
 - Moreover, the ones without post-secondary education have faced more uncertainty and have faced the decision whether or not to out-migrate. In other words, there are logistical hurdles facing young individuals, and especially rural ones, that essentially forces them into one of a small number of rigid streams/categories.
 - More specifically, after attending high school, the young rural workers who were interviewed had to decide whether or not to seek additional training/education, and whether or not to seek employment.
 - Due to the lack of local post-secondary education options, these young people were faced with commuting, or moving temporarily or permanently to another location.
 - It would be desirable for rural individuals had an affordable, practical, accessible way to obtain at least some post-secondary education without having to relocate.
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Conclusions & Discussion (2) – Proposed Typology

- High Fliers pursue university education, and, in many cases, a professional occupation. They often move to an urban area to pursue that education. After graduation, there can be limited options in their chosen occupation within their hometowns. Thus, these individuals are unlikely to remain in (return to) rural communities. However, once they have attained education and experience, they are potentially in a position to find the elusive good quality rural employment, if they so choose.
 - Mid Fliers are interested in upgrading their skills/education while residing in, or near, their hometown. Often, these are the ones aspiring to attend available local college programs or apprenticeships, or to commute daily to be educated in a different location. Often, people in this category are acquiring the types of blue-collar and/or practical skills that are valued by rural employers. Nonetheless, many will have to leave their hometown to see experience or advancement opportunities and/or additional education.
 - Upstream Swimmers either do not finish high school, or do not acquire additional post-secondary skills. They are likely to be stuck in low-paid, 'secondary market' jobs of a part-time, seasonal or transient nature. These individuals are also relatively likely to live at home which allows them to survive despite low annual earnings. Simply put, workers in this category are prioritizing non-work issues over work/career issues, in the sense that they are choosing their place of residence and then seeking available work, rather than seeking the best opportunity for work, regardless of location. On the other hand, it is fair to say that the higher levels of pay, benefits, and security that are available by out-migrating remain as a temptation.
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Questions? Comments? Complaints!?!



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