Studying in a New Home; Geographies of International Student Housing at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Abstract

International students are vital to Canada's economy and immigration systems, with their contributions surpassing $21 billion annually. Despite their significant economic and immigration impacts, they face housing insecurity, a lack of affordable options, and exclusion from government-funded settlement services. Limited research exists on their experiences outside major metropolitan areas, posing challenges for smaller urban centres like St. John's and Corner Brook. My research aims to address this gap by examining MUNL international students' housing experiences and their perceptions of (un)welcoming communities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Grounded in concepts of international student mobility, geographies of student housing, and welcoming communities, this study incorporates a mixed methodology, involving interviews, a photovoice study, and a survey. The findings highlighted significant housing challenges faced by MUNL international students, exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic as well as mobility challenges due to the pandemic's travel restrictions. Results also revealed a generally welcoming atmosphere in NL communities, with student participants describing friendly interactions and a sense of neighbourhood but expressed their incomplete sense of being at-home. Thus, this thesis calls for comprehensive solutions to address the housing needs of international students in NL while contributing to broader discussions on immigration and housing.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

International students play an important role in Canada's economy and immigration systems (Government of Canada, 2020). The growing dependence of Canadian universities on the international education market can be attributed in part to the gradual decline in public investment in post-secondary education (Brennan et al., 2021). The transformation of Canada's post-secondary education from a "publicly funded" to "publicly aided" sector has exacerbated this trend, with international student revenue even surpassing provincial grants as a source of funding at some institutions (Esses et al., 2021, p.693). International students in Canada spend $22 billion on tuition and living expenses annually, a figure larger than the value of exports in key sectors such as "auto parts, lumber, or aircraft" (Government of Canada, 2022a). Consequently, Canadian universities regard international students as a significant revenue source (IRCC, 2021a), and the international education industry as one that involves over 200,000 employees (Laadliyan, 2023). Furthermore, governments view international students as human capital, framing them as potential highly skilled immigrants critical to addressing labour market shortages (Firang & Mensah, 2022). As the largest group of temporary migrants in Canada, 60% of international students wish to stay in Canada after completing their studies (Canadian Bureau of International Education, 2023). These students typically follow a three-step migration process, transitioning from a study permit to a post-graduate work permit, and ultimately seeking permanent residency (PR)[1] (Netierman et al., 2022; Akbar, 2022).

Despite the significant economic and immigration contributions of international students, housing insecurity is one of the major challenges that they face in Canada (Hari et al.,

[1] It is valuable to note here that not all international students follow this three-step migration process to obtain PR. This process of three-step migration is lengthy and challenging for many international students, and since 2000, only 30% of international students in Canada have obtained PR within 10 years of receiving their study permits (Akbar, 2022).

2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022). While Canada grapples with a housing crisis, there is a lack of affordable and appropriate housing options (Revington & August, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021). The absence of student-focused initiatives within the National Housing Strategy reflects a policy gap at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels of governance in Canada (Government of Canada, 2017). In response to these issues, there have been major changes to international educational rules in Canada. These changes include an increase in the cost of living requirement and a cap on visa applications, which the federal government has recently framed as a response to concerns about international students and housing (Government of Canada, 2023b; 2024a).

Financial strain is common among international students due to high tuition and living costs (Beech, 2015; Brennan et al., 2021; Calder et al., 2016; Ike et al., 2020). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the vulnerability of international students, as they were excluded from not only government-funded settlement services but also some pandemic-related financial aids due to their temporary migration status (Esses et al., 2021; Hari et al., 2021; Akbar, 2022; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Various factors contribute to international students' precarious housing conditions, including limited housing information, online scams, misinformation, and experiences of housing market discrimination (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Farbenblum et al., 2020; Reynolds 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022; Laadliyan, 2023). Researchers identify affordable and suitable housing as a crucial pillar of welcoming communities, and the experience of housing insecurity as one that can detrimentally affect international students' feelings of being welcomed and at home – and ultimately their migration decisions after graduation (Esses et al., 2021; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014).

Most international students are drawn to major Canadian cities, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Brunner, 2022). This geography presents a challenge for small and mid-sized cities as they struggle to attract and retain international students after graduation

(Hanley, 2017; Esses et al., 2021). International students, however, are not only underrepresented in migration studies, but research on their experiences focuses disproportionately on large destination cities (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009; Fireng & Mensah, 2022). Additionally, there is limited understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on international students, and few studies that have explored the concept of welcoming community for international students and their sense of belonging. Therefore, there is a need for increased attention to the experiences of international students, including their housing experiences, in these non-traditional immigration centres with smaller immigrant populations (Pottie-Sherman & Graham, 2020).

This thesis investigates the housing experiences of international students at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUNL). It provides a timely illustration of what their housing concerns are, how the pandemic worsened them, and underscores that the international student housing crisis is not just a Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal problem but one that also impacts students in small and mid-sized cities. MUNL provides an important case study for examining the housing experiences of international students in small and mid-sized cities in Canada. With nearly 5,000 visa students in 2023, MUNL hosts the second largest international student population of the 16 universities in Atlantic Canada. Like other universities across Canada, international students represent an increasing share of its study body, comprising 30% of total full-time enrolment in 2023 compared to 14% in 2014 (Association of Atlantic Universities, 2023). In 2022/2023, international students paid 47% of MUNL student fees and 67% of all graduate student fees (Memorial University, 2023). Besides these economic contributions, these students also play a significant role in the long-term immigration, demographic, and cultural dynamics of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) (Knutson, 2020; Graham & Pottie-Sherman, 2022). Increasing reports of housing struggles in the off-campus housing market – particularly as local rental market vacancy rates declined in

2021 – underscored the critical need for an in-depth examination of international students housing at MUNL (e.g. CBC News, 2021b; 2023; 2024a).

1.2. Context

1.2.1. St. John's and Corner Brook: Demographic Profiles

The majority of international students at MUNL study in St. John's, the provincial capital (population 212,579 in 2021). Situated on the eastern tip of the Avalon Peninsula. Approximately 200 international students are also enrolled at the Grenfell Campus, located in Corner Brook on the west coast of the island of Newfoundland (population 29,762) (Statistics Canada, 2021; Memorial University, 2024).

Table 1.1 summarises the population profile of St. John's census metropolitan area (CMA). The data indicates a modest 2% population growth between 2016 and 2021, notably slower than the other provincial capitals and major urban centres in Atlantic Canada. For instance, Halifax (CMA) experienced a growth rate of 9.1%, Charlottetown (CA) 9.8%, Moncton (CMA) 8.9%, and Fredericton (CA) 5.8% over the same period (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Table 1.1: St. John's Metro Area Census Profile (Statistic Canada, 2021a)

2021 Census Profile St. John's [Census metropolitan area]	
Population	212,579
Immigrants	9,505
Non-permanent residents	4,375
Population changes 2016-2021	2%

International students play an increasingly important demographic role in St. John's. In 2023, there were 4,889 visa students enrolled at MUNL from more than 100 countries, mainly at the St. John's campus (Memorial University, 2023). Among this student body, 50% were from Asia, 26% were from Sub-Saharan Africa, 13% from the Middle East and North Africa,

5% from Latin America and the Caribbean, 4% from Europe, and 2% from the United States (Memorial University, 2023). For comparison, in 2021, there were 9,505 immigrants (i.e., permanent residents) living in St. John's, representing 4.6% of the total population. Moreover, only 6% of the population identified as a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2021). While these figures belie a diversifying population – for example, in 2001, only 1.3% of the St. John's population belonged to visible minority groups – it is notably lower than the Canadian average of 26.5% (ibid). Thus, international students, who are predominantly racialized, have a significant presence in the city, and reflect the increasing presence of non-permanent residents (foreign workers, international students, or individuals on temporary visas) in Canada more generally. Moreover, 19% of immigrants in St. John's held a student visa prior to becoming landed immigrants, indicating the importance of MUNL as an immigration gateway for the province (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Despite its geographic proximity to the mainland of Canada, Corner Brook has experienced population decline in recent years (see Table 1.2). Its visible minority population is also lower than the provincial average, with only 2.8 percent in 2021 (Statistic Canada, 2021b). The population decline in Corner Brook contrasts with the overall population growth trend observed in St. John's.

Table 1.2: Corner Brook and its Adjacent Area Census Profile (Statistic Canada, 2021b)

2021 Census Profile Corner Brook [Census Agglomeration]	
Population	29,762
Immigrants	660
Non-permanent residents	160
Population change from 2016-2021	-3.9%

1.2.2. International Students at MUNL

Most international students in Canada are concentrated in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver (MTV) and three provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec host about 80% of international students, (Esses et al., 2021). Despite the increasing number of international students in Atlantic Canada, total university enrolment growth in the Atlantic provinces has been notably slower than the national average (Esses et al. 2021; Usher & Balfour, 2023). This slower growth is attributed to a decline in the youth population, and it would have been even slower without significant gains in the enrolment of international students (Usher & Balfour, 2023). Usher & Balfour (2023) also highlight the significance of the correlation between a province's population and its university enrolment as an indicator of the impact of the higher education system. For example, despite New Brunswick (NB) having a 52% larger population than NL, its postsecondary sector is only 10% as large (ibid). Additionally, over the past decade, NB has experienced a significant decline in overall enrolment (-15%), while NL has seen little change in total enrolment (3%) (Usher & Balfour, 2023). Thus, Usher & Balfour (2023) emphasise the importance of the share of international students in NL's total university enrollment and the role of MUNL as the sole NL institution in international higher education.

The Memorial Fact Book, a comprehensive collection of statistical data regarding various facets of MUNL, provides evidence of the consistent upward trajectory in international student enrolment in recent years. This document shows that international student enrolment has steadily risen over the past seven years, increasing from 2,744 in 2017 to 4,889 in 2023 (Memorial University, 2023). From 2017 to 2023, international student enrolment at MUNL has shown a steady increase, climbing from 2,744 to 4,889. Table 1.3, derived from data in the Memorial Fact Book, illustrates this continuous growth in international student enrolment.

Table 1.3: MUNL International Student Enrolment from 2017 to 2023

School Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
International Student	2,744	3,067	3,481	3,495	3,885	4,502	4,889
Enrolment Growth to Previous Year	11%	12%	13%	0%	11%	16%	9%

Data: Memorial University, 2023

However, Table 1.3 reveals fluctuations in the annual growth rates of international student enrolment. Notably, 2020 was the only school year with 0% growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic, marked by visa delays and travel restrictions. This observation aligns with the Government of Canada's (n.d.) report, which noted a 28.4% decline in the number of study-permit holders in NL in 2020 compared to projections absent the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MUNL, like other Canadian institutions, transitioned to remote learning modalities. Consequently, many international students engaged in online studies as they awaited the relaxation of border and travel restrictions. Furthermore, the data in Table 1.3 indicates a lower growth rate in international student enrolment in 2023, falling 5% below the previous year's growth rate. This decline coincides with a slight decrease in MUNL total enrolment in 2023 compared to the preceding year (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 compares total enrolment and international student enrolment for the school years 2022 and 2023, including the percentage of international students relative to total enrolment. It also provides a breakdown of international student enrolment into undergraduate and graduate categories for both years. In 2022, international students accounted for 24% of the total enrolment, amounting to 4,502 students. By 2023, despite a slight decrease in total enrolment to 18,896 students, the share of international students rose to 26%.

Table 1.4: MUNL Total Enrolment and the Number of international Students in 2022 & 2023

School Year	2022		2023	
Total Enrolment	19,020		18,896	
International Students Enrolment	4,502 (24%)		4,889 (26%)	
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Undergraduate	Graduate
	2,551	1,951	2,472	2,417

Data: Memorial University, 2023

While the number of international graduate students notably increased in 2023, there was a slight decline in international undergraduate student enrolment. These trends can be attributed to the tuition increase at MUNL in the Fall of 2022. The end of a tuition freeze and nearly doubling of international tuition fees (to approximately $20,000 per year for undergraduate students), may deter prospective students from low- to middle-income backgrounds (CBC News, 2021). This ‘tuition hike’ also reflects broader trends in Canadian educational institutions, which have experienced declining government funding in recent years (Graham & Pottie-Sherman, 2021). Provincial transfers to institutions in Newfoundland and Labrador declined by 21% between the 2011-12 and 2021-22 school years, with the most substantial decrease occurring in the 2022 school year (Usher & Balfour, 2023, p.39).

The Memorial Factbook not only sheds light on the overall trends in international student enrolment but also provides insight into the diversity of international student mobility (ISM) at MUNL, showcasing students from various countries. Table 1.5, derived from data in the Memorial Fact Book, shows that several countries contribute significantly to MUNL's international student population. In the 2022 school year, from a total number of 4,502 international students at MUNL, significant contributors included Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, and Iran, with notable representation from China, Pakistan, Ghana, Egypt, and the United States (Memorial University, n.d.-a).

Table 1.5: Countries with Highest Number of MUNL International Students in 2022

Country	2022 Enrolment
Bangladesh	878
India	701
Nigeria	511
Iran	332
China	253
Pakistan	193
Ghana	168
Egypt	133
United States	125

1.2.3. MUNL On-campus Housing

The provision of on-campus housing at MUNL in St. John's and Corner Brook campuses is crucial to hosting students but faces persistent challenges related to accessibility and affordability. On-campus spaces total around 2,500 beds across all of MUNL's campuses (CBC News, 2021b). With approximately 1,647 beds available in St. John's, including Paton College and Macpherson College (Memorial University, 2024), affordability issues arise due to mandatory meal plans associated with most of these beds. Paton College, boasting around 900 beds, stands as the largest on-campus housing facility, followed by Macpherson College with 500 beds. Notably, Paton College and Macpherson College impose mandatory meal plans, compounding the financial burden for students. This practice raises significant concerns regarding affordability, particularly for student populations already grappling with escalating tuition fees.

Grenfell campus in Corner Brook provides residential options for students at the Arts & Science Residence, Residence Complex, and Chalet Apartments and meal plans are optional in all of them (Grenfell Campus, n.d.). With approximately 600-700 beds available across these accommodations, Grenfell aims to meet the housing needs of its student population in Corner

Brook. However, all residences in St. John's and Corner Brook have long waiting lists, particularly at the start of each academic year (CBC News, 2021b; CBC News, 2023; Whiffen, 2022; Roberts, 2022). Similar to the challenges faced at the St. John's campuses, ensuring affordability and accessibility remains paramount, especially considering high demands for on-campus housing and financial constraints experienced by students, including international students facing higher tuition fees.

Both the increasing internationalisation of MUNL's student body, alongside the diverse national origins of its students, poses potential implications for various aspects of university support infrastructure, notably concerning housing accommodations. The growing number of international students at MUNL means student demographics are changing, and the housing needs are also changing. This situation prompts a critical examination of the university's capacity to accommodate the evolving needs of its diverse student population, particularly regarding equitable access to housing resources and support services.

1.2.4. Off- Campus Rental Market in St. John’s and Corner Brook

The NL housing crisis and the challenges of rental housing markets in St. John’s and Corner Brook have been well-documented in recent years. Data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2024) indicates that the pandemic has posed considerable challenges to the rental housing markets in St. John’s and Corner Brook, characterised by decreasing vacancy rates and escalating average rents. Table 1.6 demonstrates this trend in St. John’s, where the vacancy rate plummeted from 7.5% in October 2020 to 1.5% in October 2023, while the average rent for a two-bedroom unit surged from $974 to $1,198 during the same period. Similarly, in Corner Brook, the vacancy rate decreased from 2.8% in October 2020 to 1.2% in October 2023, accompanied by an increase in the average two-bedroom rent from $813 to $897 (CMHC, 2024), as shown in Table 1.7. These findings underscore the

heightened housing demand amid the pandemic, leading to a shortage of available rental units and escalating rental costs in both cities.

Table 1.6: St. John's Vacancy Rate and Average Two-Bedroom Rent

	Oct 2020	Oct 2021	Oct 2022	Oct 2023
Vacancy Rate	7.5%	3.1%	2.9%	1.5%
Two-Bedroom Rent	$974	$1,026	$1,038	$1,198

Data: CMHC, 2024

Table 1.7: Corner Brook Vacancy Rate and Average Two-Bedroom Rent

	Oct 2020	Oct 2021	Oct 2022	Oct 2023
Vacancy Rate	2.8%	1.4%	1.7%	1.2%
Two-Bedroom Rent	$813	$814	$844	$897

Data: CMHC, 2024

The decreasing vacancy rates and increasing average rents in both St. John's and Corner Brook post-pandemic, coupled with limited housing options, present significant challenges for renters in both cities. With a dwindling number of vacant units, renters encounter heightened competition, potentially resulting in increased discrimination and a power shift favouring landlords (Brown, 2017; Ziersch et al., 2023). Additionally, the escalating rental costs worsen the housing affordability crisis, particularly for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

These challenges are compounded for student populations, including international students, who must seek off-campus housing options due to the limited availability of on-campus accommodation at MUNL. As the discussion shifts from the challenges of on-campus housing provision to the broader rental housing market dynamics, it becomes apparent that the housing landscape in St. John's and Corner Brook is influenced by multifaceted factors beyond university accommodations. As both cities face a tightening rental market, finding affordable options becomes increasingly arduous for all renters, especially those with lower incomes.

Consequently, students find themselves competing with other renters for the limited housing supply, exacerbating the affordability crisis. The interconnectedness of these on-campus and off-campus housing dynamics underscores the necessity for a comprehensive approach to accommodate the increasing number of international students in both St. John's and Corner Brook. Urgent attention from university administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders is essential to address these housing challenges and ensure equitable access to affordable housing options for this population.

1.2.5. Immigration Pathways for MUNL International Student

NL has one of the oldest populations in Canada and is the only province that experienced population decline between 2016 and 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021). It faces many overlapping demographic challenges, including outmigration and declining fertility and birth rates (Knutson, 2020; Kennedy, 2022). Thus, attracting and retaining international students is particularly critical to the province's economic and social development. The 2021 CBIE International Student Survey underscores this significance, revealing that only 53.2% of NL's current international student participants intend to stay in the province after receiving permanent residency, the lowest rate among all Canadian provinces (CBIE, 2022). Recognizing the critical role that universities in smaller centres play in social and economic development by attracting and retaining international students as permanent residents, Esses et al. (2021) emphasise the need for strategies to enhance retention efforts. Consequently, MUNL – as the only university in the province – has a key role to play in supporting provincial immigration goals and enhancing the province's profile through tailored programs and pathways for international students to establish their homes in NL (Knutson, 2020).

There are a number of immigration pathways for MUNL international students to obtain permanent residency after graduation. Federal, these include the Express Entry system, or provincially, the Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Nominee Program (NLPNP) and the

Atlantic Immigration Program (AIP). According to the Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism at the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the NLPNP offers various streams, including the International Graduate Stream (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2024a), which targets graduates of eligible NL post-secondary institutions, such as MUNL. The AIP facilitates the immigration of skilled workers and international graduates in Atlantic Canada, including NL. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador can designate employers to participate in the AIP and endorse eligible applicants who have a job offer from a designated employer (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2024b).

MUNL's international students are also provided some resources and support for their post-graduation plans and pathways to permanent residency. First, The Immigration Advising Team within the Internationalisation Office (IO) offers guidance on Canadian immigration regulations, policy updates, and legal interpretations, ensuring compliance with IRCC laws. Alongside this, the IO provides informational resources and conducts sessions, workshops, and demonstrations to assist students in navigating their immigration journey (Memorial University, n.d.-b). Additionally, the Study and Stay NL Program, a collaboration between International Education Newfoundland and Labrador (IENL), MUNL, and College of the North Atlantic (CNA), offers a free nine-month online initiative for eligible international students in their final year of studies at MUNL or CAN. The program's objective is to support international student integration into the local job market and entrepreneurial sphere, providing access to mentors, workshops, and networking opportunities (International Education Newfoundland and Labrador, n.d.).

Yet as this study illustrates, housing inaccessibility and unaffordability continue to frame the everyday lived experiences of international students at MUNL, including their sense of belonging and integration in their host communities. While MUNL attempts to provide a host of services to support international students in their integration at the university and in the

local labour market, there remains a dearth of support for assisting international students in navigating the challenges of housing. This study aims to address this gap in support by better understanding the barriers faced by international students in the local housing market as well as illuminating the factors that international students identify as significant to their sense of belonging in their host communities.

1.3. Research Purpose, Questions, and Conceptual Framework

This study's purpose is to investigate the housing experiences of international students at MUNL, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these experiences, and how these experiences shape students' understanding of their host communities as welcoming (or unwelcoming).

Thus, this study's primary research questions are as follows:

1. What are the housing experiences of MUNL international students in the small and mid-sized cities of St. John's and Corner Brook?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact international student housing and mobility experiences?
3. How do housing experiences impact the ways international students perceive receiving communities as welcoming/ unwelcoming?

To conceptualise international student housing experiences, I engage with three sets of literature on: (1) international student mobility (ISM), (2) the geographies of student housing, and (3) welcoming communities. These three concepts are interconnected and form the guiding structure for this thesis and create a cohesive conceptual framework (see Figure 1.4).

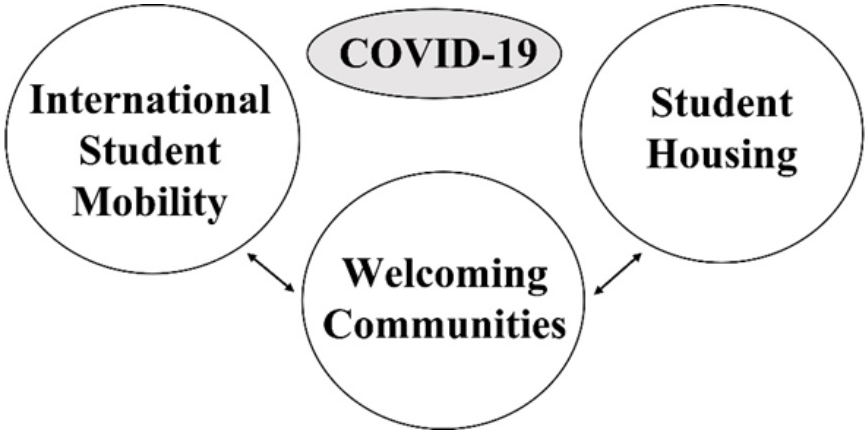

Figure 1.4: Conceptual Framework

Firstly, ISM is a growing field of research encompassing the study of the internationalisation of higher education, the organisation of the international education migration industry, cross-border student flows, and student migration-decision making and understanding of educational mobility (Varghese, 2008; Smith, 2009; Beech, 2015; Reynolds, 2020). Secondly, as studies stress the need for safe, affordable housing and highlight its role in facilitating equal access to higher education and shaping student mobility patterns (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Reynolds, 2020), I also engage with literature on the geographies of student housing that focuses on the availability, accessibility, and affordability of housing for student populations, including international students. Lastly, the literature on welcoming communities foregrounds the importance of housing in the settlement and integration experiences of newcomers and its intersections with notions of inclusion, receptivity, sense of belonging, and feeling at home (Esses et al., 2010; Wiginton, 2013; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014; Campbell et al., 2016; Brown, 2017).

By integrating these three perspectives, the conceptual framework allows for a nuanced examination of how international student mobility, housing geographies, and welcoming communities intersect and influence one another within the context of MUNL international student experiences. This interconnected approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape international students' housing experiences. Through literature review,

data collection, and analysis guided by this framework, the study aims to uncover patterns, relationships, and implications relevant to understanding the dynamics of international student mobility and housing within welcoming communities.

1.4. Research Methods

The methodology for this study involved a combination of quantitative, qualitative, and visual approaches in two phases. Phase 1 involved a quantitative survey. I worked with a team of researchers and community partners to design and implement a survey of newcomer housing experiences in NL which included international students as a key target group. The NL Newcomer Housing survey was conducted from September 2021 to February 2022 and open to anyone living in the province who had lived in Canada for ten years or less, including both permanent and non-permanent residents. The 40-question survey contained a range of questions about housing tenure and experiences. This project was led by my MA supervisors, Drs. Yolande Pottie-Sherman and Julia Christensen, with four community partners: the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PLIAN), Municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL), and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition. Other local organisations also provided feedback on the survey design, including the St. John's Local Immigration Partnership Wellness and Welcoming Working Group, the City of St. John's (Housing), the St. John's Affordable Housing Working Group, and Memorial University's Internationalisation Office. In total, 138 MUNL international students responded to the survey, and I use basic descriptive statistics to analyse this data. This survey paints a 'big picture' of the housing experiences of international students at MUNL.

Phase 2 involved qualitative research techniques of interviewing and photovoice, allowing me to capture more subjective and personal experiences of international students at MUNL. I conducted a total of 21 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five key informants

and 16 international students living in St. John's (N=12) and Corner Brook (N=4). I recruited international student interviewees among survey respondents who indicated interest in participating in a follow-up interview. The follow-up interviews with international students employed a photovoice technique which helped students deeply reflect and uncover nuances of their housing experiences by bringing participant-generated images to the interview sessions.

1.5. Thesis Overview

The main argument of this thesis is that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted international student housing vulnerabilities in NL, particularly in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, and quality of housing. While housing challenges for international students are not just a 'big city' problem, affordable and safe housing is a critical piece of fostering a welcoming community for MUNL international students in St. John's and Corner Brook as mid-sized and small cities in NL. Thus, this thesis aims to address the pressing need for heightened attention to the housing experiences of international students in NL.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on ISM, the geographies of student housing, and welcoming communities, highlighting their significance in understanding the housing experiences of international students. Additionally, it discusses the impact of COVID-19 on international student populations and their housing situations, setting the stage for the empirical investigation. The literature review stresses the critical importance of safe and affordable housing for international students, and notes how COVID-19 exacerbated their vulnerabilities, contributing to financial strain, housing insecurity, and social exclusion. I also underscore the importance of considering the intersectionality of factors influencing ISM and international students' housing experiences and their integration into welcoming communities in these two cities, highlighting the need for a comprehensive migration system approach. The literature

review also illustrates the need for more evidence-based studies at the micro-scale that consider students' everyday lives and their diverse experiences.

Chapter Three outlines the research design and study methodology, including my data collection procedures, participant recruitment strategies, and analytical techniques. I provide the rationale for a mixed methods study that incorporates qualitative and quantitative data in order to examine the housing experiences and perceptions of welcoming amongst international students from a variety of critical angles. The combination of in-depth interviews, an online survey and photovoice allowed for a deep and nuanced exploration of the research questions. In this chapter, I also reflect on my insider positionality and the role it played in my access to student informants as well as my data analysis.

Chapter Four analyses the housing experiences of international students in NL, drawing from data obtained through the NL Newcomer Housing Survey. This analysis is structured into six distinct sections, each focusing on different aspects of the housing journey: respondents' profiles, housing status, positive and negative housing experiences, availability of housing information and support, the impact of COVID-19 on housing, and the sense of belonging experienced by international students in their housing situations. This chapter presents a broad overview of the challenges and opportunities MUNL international students experience in navigating the housing landscape in NL. The survey findings show that the vast majority of MUNL international students rely on the off-campus private rental market where housing affordability is a key concern. Most respondents were extremely rent burdened, meaning they devote more than 50% of their income to housing costs, significantly exceeding the recommended threshold of 30%. The related challenges of housing affordability and accessibility are compounded by other barriers associated with small and mid-sized cities, especially poor public transit. The survey highlights that the pandemic worsened these challenges. At the same time, the survey data also underscores the important role of housing in

the positive settlement experiences of migrant students: 49% of international students agreed that their "current housing situation makes [them] feel like [they] are part of a community."

In Chapter Five, the focus shifts to the qualitative analysis of data gathered through key informant interviews and follow-up interviews and photovoice activities with international students at MUNL. Through an analysis of eight intersecting themes, I examine how international students navigate the lack of housing options both on and off-campus in St. John's and Corner Brook, how housing shapes their everyday lives and their spatial experiences of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on these dynamics. My examination of MUNL's on-campus housing infrastructure underscores critical issues of accessibility and affordability, particularly against the backdrop of escalating tuition fees for international students who are paying higher tuition rates. Additionally, the exploration of the rental housing market dynamics sheds light on broader challenges faced by renters in both cities, with limited availability of residence beds across MUNL campuses exacerbating housing barriers for international students. This chapter thus illustrates the interconnectedness of international students' housing challenges with other institutional changes at MUNL, such as the closure of the off-campus housing office. Ultimately, this qualitative exploration enriches our understanding of the lived experiences of MUNL international students, providing valuable insights for policymakers, institutions, and community stakeholders.

Chapter Six synthesises the main findings of the thesis and its contributions to the literature on ISM, geographies of student housing, and welcoming communities. This research highlights MUNL international students' housing challenges, such as informational barriers, social network limitations, and rental market discrimination. While some of the findings validate existing literature, it contributes to limited literature on student housing and international students' perception of welcoming communities in mid-sized and small Canadian cities. It is also one of the first studies investigating the pandemic's effects on international

students' housing experiences in Canada. The final chapter concludes by highlighting avenues for future research and policy interventions aimed at enhancing the housing experiences of international students in NL. Recommendations include expanding university housing, utilising government loans for affordable student accommodations, re-establishing an off-campus housing office, providing accessible housing information, and fostering welcoming community initiatives and policies.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the most significant research related to this thesis. I define the key research concepts and draw together the major existing arguments, theories, and debates related to and around my research subjects. As a result, I situate my study in broader literature, identify the knowledge gap in the previous research, and set up a theoretical framework for data gathering and analysis in the following chapters. I ground this literature review in a conceptual framework of international student mobility, geographies of student housing, and welcoming communities (see Figure 1.4 in the previous chapter), that aligns with this study's three research objectives: (1) to examine the housing experiences of international students in NL, (2) to investigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on these experiences, and (3) to consider how these experiences shape students' perceptions of being (un)welcomed.

In this chapter, I review relevant literature from each of these three fields, beginning with international student mobility (ISM), a key concept within the student migration literature. I use the main theoretical migration models that can explain ISM, including neoclassical economic theory, push–pull model, political economy, and imaginative geography, to explain what literature highlights about the globalisation of higher education and normalisation of mobility culture and how economic, social and political factors influence patterns of ISM to top-receiving countries. Secondly, I review the main academic discussions around the geographies of student housing and divide them into four sub-sections, including (1) commodification and marketization, (2) studentification, (3) student housing precarity, and (4) coping with housing insecurity.

Thirdly, I review the literature around welcoming community with focus on its four main characteristics, including (1) suitable employment opportunities, (2) fostering the social

capital, (3) affordable and suitable housing, and (4) positive attitudes toward newcomers. Then, I highlight the research around the concepts of belonging and feeling at home. Lastly, I examine the impact of COVID-19 on the international student population and their housing experiences. Then, I provide a summary that ties together all the literature related to these topics and recap the main points, knowledge gaps, and limitations within existing research. These include challenges such as the integration of international students into broader Canadian immigration studies, gaps in understanding housing dynamics in smaller Canadian centres, and a lack of research on welcoming communities for international students. This study also underscores the need for more studies, particularly on international students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic to inform supportive policies.

2.2. International Student Mobility (ISM)

In recent years, mobility has become increasingly popular in migration studies as a concept encompassing various forms of human movement, both across borders and within society (Holton & Riley, 2013; Mau et al.'s, 2015; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Brunner, 2022; Netierman et al., 2022). Within this field, international student mobility (ISM) refers to the various patterns of movement of international students, including cross-border student flows and the study of universities' international activities, as well as how knowledge production transcends national boundaries (Varghese, 2008). Smith (2009), for example, identified international students as one of the most mobile social groups with frequent shifts between visa categories whose movement across international borders is normalised. Other researchers conceptualise international students as transnational migrants, sojourners, or potential movers (Beech, 2015, p.335; Reynolds, 2020; Hari et al., 2021). Beech (2015) describes mobility as a "taken-for-granted stage" for international students, who may also become more mobile over time (p.335). From this lens, international students are portrayed as having "a sense of unlimited global mobility" (Hari et al., 2021, p.2).

With growing numbers of international students worldwide, ISM has also become a key concept within the migration studies literature. Reynolds (2020) uses the term "massification" to describe the globalisation of higher education and to refer to this growing number of international students enrolled globally and their migration patterns. Canada is among the top-ISM-receiving countries where the international education sector has a significant economic impact. A recent report conducted by IDP in March 2023 identifies Canada as one of the top destination countries for students worldwide[2] (IDP Connect, 2023). According to Global Affairs Canada and the IRCC, international students play key roles in the economic and cultural prosperity of Canada (Government of Canada, 2022b; 2023a). Statistics Canada (2021) data also demonstrates that international students pay, on average, four times more tuition fees than their domestic counterparts in Canadian universities, illustrating their economic significance to the Canadian higher education funding landscape.

Researchers have generally conceptualised ISM through three main theoretical migration models: (1) neoclassical economic theory, (2) push-pull model, and (3) political economy perspectives (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Firang & Mensah, 2022). In the following, I examine ISM through three dominant theoretical models revealing how each model offers unique insights into the complexities of ISM. Then, I highlight the migration system approach, which integrates multiple perspectives to understand the intricate dynamics of ISM followed by a discussion on ISM within the context of Canada.

2.2.1. Neoclassical Model

The neoclassical model underlines the impact of maximising economic utility (mostly employment and income) and the invisible hand of the market in migration decisions, and migration flows in this model are conceptualised as the cumulative outcome of individual

[2] IDP Education Limited is an international education organisation offering student placement in Australia, New Zealand, USA, UK, Republic of Ireland and Canada, and this survey considers these countries as destination countries.

decision-making processes (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Mobility can be an opportunity for international students to access new forms of capital, and thus, ISM can enhance their employability and job prospects (Beech, 2015). As Beech (2015) highlights, international (especially Western) education is also seen as cultural capital. In other words, the worldwide recognition of the degree and obtaining cultural competencies are among reasons that such education is seen as socially and culturally valuable in local and global job markets (Hari et al., 2021; Beech, 2018; Holton & Riley, 2013; Waters & Brooks, 2021). For example, a recent survey of over 21,000 prospective and current international students from over 100 countries revealed that post-study work opportunities are the main influence in study destination (IDP Connect, 2023). Therefore, the neoclassical model explains ISM based on economic rationales and the role international education plays in advancing students' career wage aspirations.

2.2.2. Push-Pull Model

The push-pull model which has provided the conceptual basis for an abundance of migration research, has also been applied to understand ISM (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Firang & Mensah, 2022). This theoretical framework was first laid out by Everett Lee in the 1960s, who introduced four main factors that shape migration flows: push factors in origin, pull factors in destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors (Lee, 1966). Seeing ISM as "economically, socially, and politically embedded" (Hari et al., 2021, p.5), then requires investigating the countless push and pull factors that make ISM an uneven and dynamic practice. Aside from expectations of better employment and/or higher wages foregrounded by the neoclassical model (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016), other economic determinants of the choices that influence ISM include critical budgeting factors such as moving costs, the cost of education, living costs, housing costs, and funding and scholarship packages (Beine et al., 2014; Beech, 2015; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; Reynolds, 2020). Some of the non-economic factors that influence ISM include the reported quality/reputation of a university, admission

requirements, the presence of kin at the destination, social networks (peer group, friends, and family), and the perception of higher quality of life and amenities (Beine et al., 2014; Beech, 2015; Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

Moreover, some research findings suggest that ISM is also dependent on political factors; in particular, immigration policies and policy changes on students' mobility and their choices (Beech, 2015; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Netierman et al., 2022). The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) (2022), for example, emphasises the significant impact of visa access on mobility (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Moreover, Hari et al. (2021) argue that political context can even determine international students' future migration trajectories and their ability to stay and work after graduation.

While considering the impacts of various economic, social, and political conditions in the home and host countries on ISM, the push-pull model also emphasises the roles of two factors: individual decision-making and intervening obstacles (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). As a result, the significance of push-pull factors significantly varies by individuals' personal circumstances that might affect their choices. Such constraints include lack of information, limited access to resources, and financial circumstances (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). For example, students from underprivileged backgrounds are less likely to study farther from home (Reynolds, 2020). Also, transnational relationships based on home and host countries' economic, socio-cultural and political conditions can impact students' choices (Hari et al., 2021). Consequently, some researchers in this field have argued that ISM might be "an elite practice" that does not necessarily reflect the diversity of experiences (e.g., Smith, 2009, p.1799). From this perspective, ISM might be a privilege that those who are not from elite or middle-class backgrounds have limited access to. Therefore, ISM can be exclusionary and potentially reinforce existing privileges (Beech, 2015).

2.2.3. Political Economy Model

Thirdly, political economy perspectives apply structural theories like neo-Marxism to understand ISM and critique political-economic trends such as neoliberalism. These theories emphasise how inequalities and power relations shape migration patterns, highlighting the concentration of wealth and financial power in a small number of states and global cities, and consequently seek to challenge capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, and neo-imperialism in the global capitalist economy (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Structural theorists argue that such large-scale processes lead to uneven development among states, as a fundamental characteristic of capitalism, where capital continually searches for new labour sources, resources, and investment opportunities, thus driving the demand for mobility (including ISM) and perpetuate inequalities (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016). Such theories serve to explain patterns of ISM from "East to West" and the attraction of students from the Global South to countries in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (Holton & Riley, 2013, p.64). However, more recent scholars criticise the structuralist theories' tendency to view migrants as merely possessing the necessary qualities of labour to meet the demands of capitalist accumulation, arguing that such theories are overly deterministic (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016).

2.2.4. Migration System Approach

While there are many similarities and differences across the migration models and theories detailed here, contemporary migration scholars have attempted to identify intersections between migration theories in order to illuminate the complexity of migration experiences and transcend the limitations of previous models. Such views criticise both political economy's deterministic and neoclassicist' economist, individualist accounts of migration and suggest viewing mobility through the migration system approach that integrates various perspectives and multiple factors shaping migration patterns and processes (Mavroudi

& Nagel, 2016; McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). In other words, there is interplay of both individual and structural factors in framing migration geographies.

Apart from these three dominant theoretical models, various scholars have introduced other migration theories to explain ISM. For instance, Beech's (2014) imaginative geography model emphasises the importance of perceptions of place in international students' decision to study abroad, in shaping patterns of ISM, and in normalising mobility cultures. Beech's studies (2014) on ISM in the UK sheds light on the significance of information, advice, and overseas lived experiences shared through online social media or by social networks in contributing to the creation of ISM and students' desire to become internationally mobile. Such perceptions are mostly formed by marketing strategies that sell specific places, such as offering world-class education and social networks of peer groups and family (Beech, 2015). Beech (2018) also demonstrates that despite the infrastructural developments of higher education in some traditional sending countries such as in Southeast Asia, the preference for studying abroad persists, supporting her assertion of imaginative geography to explain ISM.

However, international students' migration aspirations do not necessarily result in their migration because of the many factors that may block their mobility. Therefore, it is important to differentiate between migration aspirations and the actually existing "migration infrastructures" that shape migration flows (McCaulliffe & Triandafyllidou 2021, p.196). Migration infrastructures include multiple elements such as migration agents, social institutions, international programs, ICT (information and communications technology) and mass media, state regulations, (in)ability to access a visa, transport, and transnational social networks (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016; McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Although recent migration studies stress that digitalisation of migration systems can reduce the inequality of migration and mobility systems (particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic) (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), the lack of access to migration infrastructures limits students' ability

to be mobile. For instance, Mau et al.'s (2015) research illustrates that people in wealthier nations have far greater access to regulated mobility regimes than people in developing nations due to visa access and migration policies. This evidence shows that despite the migration aspirations of students from less developed countries to obtain international education in top ISM destinations (emphasised by imaginative geography and other models), their chances and choices might be limited due to migration infrastructures constraints.

Thus, although recent literature highlights that the globalisation of higher education and the digitalisation of migration systems have led to increased ISM, this scholarship also emphasises the pervasive inequalities in access to migration infrastructures among prospective students around the world that can limit their ability to participate at ISM and exercise agency (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). These scholars demonstrate that such social and political inequalities have created immobility among the student population (Holton & Riley, 2013; Reynolds, 2020). Similar to both Lee's intervening obstacles in the push-pull model (Mavroudi & Nagel, 2016) and structural inequalities stressed by the political economy model, a lack of migration infrastructures can limit patterns of ISM and individuals' agency to choose to study abroad. However, the categorisation of students as either "disadvantaged stayers" or "affluent movers" (Reynolds, 2020, p.13) or simply assuming middle-class trajectories (Sotomayor et al., 2022) ignores the nuances and complexity of students' individual choices, their diverse identities, aspirations, and challenges. Holton & Riley (2013) argue that an increase in the number of students from more varied social backgrounds and diversity in the mobilities of students have created more equitable access to higher education and a more complicated understanding of student geographies and ISM.

Thus, despite the multiple migration drivers underlying ISM, I argue that large-scale structures and processes are as significant as individual, micro-level mobility experiences. I also argue that ISM and international students' experiences are diverse, and migration

infrastructures influence not only international students' access to ISM and where they choose to study but also their migration experiences and quality of life after moving to the destination. In the following sections, I will further discuss the impacts of social inequities and migration infrastructures (especially ICT, social media, and social networks) on international students' housing experiences and ISM's challenges after the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.5. Three-Step Student Migration in Canada

In Canada, ISM and international students in particular make significant impacts through their contribution to the GDP as well as revenue for universities, providing a highly skilled workforce and meeting labour market gaps, alleviating an ageing population, and enriching Canada's multiculturalism (Akbar, 2022; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Scholars have argued that the neoliberalisation of immigration policies and the privatisation of universities in Canada are significant structures shaping ISM (Graham & Pottie-Sherman, 2021; Pillai et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022). On the one hand, due to the increasing commodification of higher education and the "over-reliance" on international enrolments as a source of revenue to offset the decrease in public funding (Brennan et al., 2021, p.872), universities have become neoliberal subjects (Pillai et al., 2021). On the other hand, immigration policies that are designed to retain international students after graduation to address labour market needs consider them as 'designer' future skilled immigrants who are already familiar with Canadian culture and education system by the time they obtain permanent residency (Esses et al., 2021; Brunner, 2022; Netierman et al., 2022). This framing of international students as being potential skilled immigrants is reflected in the more than 80 economic class immigration streams across Canada to which international students are now eligible to apply for if they wish to remain in Canada after graduation (Esses et al., 2021, p.693).

Notably, international students are also currently the largest category of temporary migrants in Canada (Akbar, 2022), with Canadian immigration policies for international

students often termed “education-migration” or “edugration” (Brunner, 2022, p.79). The Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) launched in 2006, the Canadian Experience Class beginning in 2008, permitting international students to work off-campus in the 2009 regulation, and additional points for completed tertiary education in Canada under some pathways, e.g. the Express Entry system, have all been efforts to highlight international students’ potential as skilled immigrants. These plans allow students to remain in Canada after graduation and facilitate permanent residency (PR) applications (Hari et al., 2021). Due to the ease of obtaining PR permitted through these plans, most international students wish to stay in Canada after graduation and want to apply for PR (Netierman et al., 2022). According to the results of a 2018 study by the CBIE, approximately 70% of international students wish to stay and work in Canada after graduating, and 60% intend to seek permanent residency (Netierman et al., 2022). Although this migration system has added a layer of incentive to ISM in Canada, some researchers like Akbar (2022, p. 4) emphasise the “lower-than-expected transition rate” to PR among international students despite their high aspiration. This process of three-step migration (study permit, post graduate work permit, and PR) is lengthy and challenging for many international students, and since 2000, only 30% of international students in Canada have obtained PR within 10 years of receiving their study permits (Akbar, 2022)[3].

Moreover, some scholars also suggest that excessive emphasis is given to international students in Canada as recruitment targets with perceived market value, thereby rendering them commodities (Gupta & Gomez, 2023). Akbar (2022) also highlights that most federal and provincial policies only focus on ISM and the initial attraction of international students in Canada and not their post-arrival retention and success. One example is their exclusion from government funded settlement services while they are studying as temporary residents. Esses

[3]It is valuable to note here that not all international students entered Canada by study permit status. Sometimes immigrants already living in Canada might seek to study or feel forced to study (Hanley, 2017) to obtain Canadian credentials and professional networks. So, such groups may choose to be an international student later in their immigration journey.

et al. (2021) argue the delay in receiving settlement support during the time international students may need these services the most can have a negative impact on their ability to settle and integrate into Canadian society. Even though the majority of international students aspire to become PRs, policies mainly neglect to assist and support them during the lengthy process of their three-step migration, and they do not receive enough support as they pursue their studies and enter the workforce (Akbar, 2022).

2.3. Geographies of Student Housing

In this section, I discuss the relevant literature on the geographies of student housing and its significant impact on international students' lives. As Forbes-Mewett (2018) highlights, international students need safe and affordable housing in a supportive environment. Meanwhile, Reynolds (2020:12) emphasises student housing's prominent role in equal access to higher education and producing patterns of student im(mobility) and geographies of (in)exclusion. Studies also have revealed the interrelations among studying, residing, and student migration (Holton & Riley, 2013; Beine et al., 2014) and student housing's impacts on ISM as an economic determinant of international students' choice of location (Beine et al., 2014). Moreover, the perception of student housing has evolved in the literature from "somewhere to live" to a "place" where students can develop a "student experience" (Holton & Riley, 2013, p.63).

I divide the academic literature on student housing into four subsections: (1) commodification and marketization, (2) studentification, (3) student housing precarity, and (4) coping with housing insecurity. First, I explain how studies highlight the marketization of higher education and increased student housing needs in Canada and other top-ISM-receiving countries and emphasise that student housing is becoming increasingly dependent on private sector involvement at Canadian universities. Second, I explore how students' over-reliance on the private rental market can change some urban areas and neighbourhoods, as explained by

the concept of 'studentification.' This term, first described and well-documented in the UK by Smith (2005), indicates the process of social, cultural, economic, and physical changes to particular urban areas with concentrations of students. Third, I attend to the growing issue of housing precarity affecting all student demographics, with a particular focus on international students. Research indicates that international students commonly face challenges in securing suitable housing that meets their needs beyond mere shelter (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Hari et al., 2021). To explore this issue further, I examine four key themes related to student housing precarity, including unaffordability, the lack of housing information, rental market discrimination, and overcrowding and inadequate housing conditions. Lastly, I review the literature on international students' strategies to cope with their housing vulnerability, such as living further from university, bedroom-sharing, tolerating lower quality, subletting, and short-term outlook toward housing options.

2.3.1. Commodification and Marketization

The literature on student housing sheds light on the global marketization of higher education, privatisation of student housing needs, and increasing housing precarity among all student populations. Scholars underline that the connection of increasing university enrolment, and the limited university housing provision has created a supply gap and led many students to be housed in private housing markets more than university residences in Canada and worldwide (Smith, 2009; Holton & Riley, 2013; Revington et al., 2020; Pillai et al., 2021). Furthermore, some studies underscore that student housing insecurity is also a product of an increasingly financialized and unaffordable broader rental market (Pillai et al., 2021), and that the increased student need for "bed space" is connected to the housing crisis and "the property boom" (Holton & Riley, 2013, p.63). Moreover, the commercialization of student housing has resulted in private sector participation and new initiatives like the purpose-built student accommodation

(PBSA), which is off-campus, exclusive, and often high-cost mainly in the UK, the US, and Australia (Smith, 2009; Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Reynolds, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021).

Writing on the inequality of student housing in the UK and Ireland, Reynolds (2020) explains that the expansion of higher education has led to a growth in student housing demands and the increase of PBSA which serves to exacerbate exclusion and unaffordability of the rental market as well as students' housing precarity. Reynolds (2020) argues that PBSA functions similarly to gated communities for students, while Smith (2009, p.1796) views the rise in demand for PBSA as a symbol of commercialization of the "student experience" and "student lifestyles." Likewise, highlights the longstanding issue of inadequate housing options near Australian campuses for tertiary students, especially when compared to the US and the UK[4]. She notes that the majority of Australian post-secondary students study in their home city, and live with their families or in private rentals with friends. Also, most international students consider the recent PBSA unaffordable in Australia, and they therefore encounter many housing challenges as a result (Forbes-Mewett, 2018).

Pillai et al. (2021) illustrate a similar commodification of both higher education and student housing in Canada and shed light on several issues that impact the unavailability and unaffordability of student housing. On one hand, they explain that Canadian neoliberal policies incentivise privatisation and push universities to rely on public–private partnerships as a new strategy for addressing student housing needs. On the other hand, they highlight the policy gap or "crisis of state policy" in addressing student housing, with no dedicated funding for student housing at federal, provincial, and municipal levels of governance (Pillai et al., 2021, p.4). For instance, no specific funding is provided for student housing construction by the state-run Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), although the federal Government

[4]Forbes-Mewett's (2018) study demonstrates also that the US has a higher standard of student housing compared to the UK and Australia.

recently announced a low-cost loan program via CMHC to support the construction of on- and off-campus housing (Revington & August, 2020; Government of Canada, 2024). In absence of a student housing policy, Pillai et al.'s (2021) study demonstrates that the combination of a reduction in government funding alongside ageing residences with increasing maintenance and operation costs (more than half of the student accommodation available are over 50 years old), Canadian universities are unable to self-finance new residence development and keep up with the rising enrolment rates. Similarly, Sotomayor et al. (2022, pg.2) argue that the costs of construction and maintenance of university-provided housing are not taken into consideration under the Canada's grants-based funding mechanism and have been "delegated" to partnerships with "private developers" who have seen student housing as opportunities for capital investment by building "luxury dorms."

The research literature also highlights the underdeveloped PBSA market (only 3%) in Canada compared to other countries like the US and the UK (with 10%–12%) (Pillai et al., 2021; Revington & August, 2020). Revington and August (2020) investigated Canadian PBSAs in Waterloo, Ontario, the country's largest PBSA market, and discovered that the development of PBSA in Canada is being pushed by the need for a capital investment other than just student demand for housing. While PBSAs are perceived to serve predominantly international students in Canada, Sotomayor et al. (2022) argue that this housing type isolates them and hinders their interactions with domestic students. Likewise, Revington & August (2020) demonstrate that these new-built PBSA constructions have increased housing costs and created age segregation and displacement. Pillai et al. (2021) also explain the negative impacts of overreliance on private sector participation as an exclusive student housing solution that does not resolve student housing's availability and affordability in Canada.

Despite the growing privatisation of student housing demands in Canada and other top-ISM-receiving countries and initiatives like PBSAs, most studies underline that student

populations (including international students) perceive these new housing options as unaffordable, leading them to search for more affordable options in shared housing in the rental market (Smith, 2009; Holton & Riley, 2013; Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Revington & August, 2020 ; Reynolds, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022). National results of the 2021 CBIE International Student Survey found that most international students live in off-campus rental housing in Canada and only 13.8% of them live in Canadian university residences (CBIE, 2022).

Aside from the growing unaffordability of housing options, housing costs as one of the economic determinants of choice, can also play an important role on international students' decisions around location, enrolment, and ISM (Beine et al., 2014). Beine et al.'s (2014) research on international students' choice of location in 13 OECD countries sheds light on the insignificance of tuition fees compared to the relatively strong impact of living costs (including housing costs). They explain that international students sometimes benefit from financial support like grants, they mostly cover their registration fees, but not always living expenses and housing costs (Beine et al., 2014, p.50). Therefore, although the private sector and PBSAs target the growing enrolment of international students and their housing demands, I argue that housing affordability and managing housing costs have become major concerns, particularly for racialized and less privileged international students, challenge the equality of access to ISM and internationalisation of higher education in Canada and other top-ISM-destinations.

2.3.2. Studentification

Student activity is not restricted to university campuses and can play a central role in the life of a city (Holton & Riley, 2013). The knowledge economy and massification of higher education impact cities and urban areas, including physical changes (e.g., science and technology parks, new branch campuses) and social transformation such as diversity, youthification, and tech-sector related gentrification (Revington et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al.,

2022). This impact on cities and the influx of students into off-campus neighbourhoods manifests as 'studentification,' in urban areas concentrated with students (Revington et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022; Smith, 2005), often described as "student ghettos" or "enclaves" (Holton & Riley, 2013, p.63). Revington et al. (2020, p.1) also suggest the term "urban dormitory," referring to broader areas across the city in which privately rented off-campus student housing is located.

Similarly, Sotomayor et al. (2022) found that when there is a lack of affordable housing offered by universities, students search the private market for "student areas" which serves to alter the surrounding neighbourhoods. For instance, in Toronto, students' housing patterns are primarily concentrated in downtown areas and around university campuses; however, they are also found throughout the metropolitan area and the inner suburbs (Sotomayor et al., 2022). Revington et al. (2020) explain that studentification is also dependent on local factors like the provision of on-campus housing and housing market characteristics and is more relevant in small or mid-sized cities where the "student population represents a relatively large share" (Revington et al., 2020, p.3). Revington & August (2020) argue that PBSAs, as student-oriented gentrification, are a new form of studentification.

However, Sotomayor et al. (2022) suggest that studentification can contribute to the continued marginalisation of students through negative, stereotyped representations of their presence in the neighbourhoods in public discourses. For instance, locals might assume that students diminish the value of properties (Sotomayor et al., 2022), escalate housing prices, displace other residents, or create noise disturbances, put pressure on parking space due to an increase in shared housing, fail to follow curbside garbage pickup routines, and contribute to a general deterioration of the physical environment (Revington et al., 2020). Therefore, Sotomayor et al. (2022) argue that studentification discourse increases students' housing challenges. Apart from the studentification discourse that emphasises the impacts of students

on university locations and urban environments, Reynolds (2020) reminds us that attention should also be paid to how these locations impact students in other ways. In the following section, I discuss the literature on the housing experiences of student populations, including international students, and their vulnerability while navigating the private rental market.

2.3.3. Student Housing Precarity

The research literature illuminates international students' varied levels of housing vulnerability and precarity as well as other life challenges, such as food insecurity. Reynolds (2020) argues that the inequities resulting from neoliberalisation are manifested through student housing and have resulted in three different outcomes: "exclusivity, precarity, and (im)mobility" (p.1). Sotomayor et al. (2022) called unmet students' housing needs a "hidden curriculum" of higher education. They explain that while expanding university enrolment has been linked to the objective of promoting social mobility and inclusivity for low-income post-secondary students, in reality, there is mounting evidence of their unequal access to housing options in Canada. Indeed, many less privileged and racialized students have inadequate housing (Sotomayor et al., 2022). As a result, growing housing insecurity combined with rising tuition has caused the growth of the "student precariat" phenomenon (Reynolds, 2020, p.12). In the following section, I review four general themes around this international student housing precarity in the academic literature, including (1) unaffordability, (2) lack of housing information, (3) rental market discrimination, and (4) overcrowded, low-quality and inadequate housing conditions.

<u>Unaffordability</u>

The first theme around housing precarity is the affordability challenge experienced by international student populations in top ISM countries, including Canada. As discussed above, the literature demonstrates that with the limited availability of university-provided housing and unaffordability of PBSAs or luxury dorms, international students rely mostly on private off-

campus housing markets around university campuses despite having low-quality or unsafe conditions. Sotomayor et al. (2022) emphasise that a large portion of the student housing developed with the "ideal" student in mind was created for "middle- and upper-class" students who have financial support from their parents (p.3), leading to class division and exclusivity among the student population in Canada. Their study demonstrates that in the absence of affordable housing options for students in the expensive Toronto rental market, as the country's main receptor of international students, "rooming houses" or "multi-tenant homes" are the most affordable housing options, even though they might have lower quality (Sotomayor et al., 2022, p.3).

Similarly, Forbes-Mewett (2018), by focusing on security in relation to housing, identifies cost and distance as two major factors students consider in choosing where to live in Australia, the UK, and the US. However, this study highlights that despite the benefits of on-campus housing and PBSAs like the shortest access to university and a safer environment, international students consider them unaffordable. Therefore, Forbes-Mewett (2018) explains that many international students may decide to rent low-cost, off-campus housing in the private market because of cost considerations, which sometimes carry higher risks of exploitation and safety, such as living in cramped and poor maintenance conditions. Moreover, students who live in shared homes or do not have a formal tenancy agreement are not protected by The Residential Tenancies Act (RTA), so they may experience more vulnerable housing conditions (Farbenblum et al., 2020).

Studies also highlight the importance of paid employment and part-time jobs in the hustle economy for low-income international students to manage their housing costs (Morris et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022). Forbes-Mewett (2018) demonstrates that international students prioritise their housing needs based on their personal situations because of their

housing vulnerability. For instance, employment might be the priority for the less financially secure students before housing and then studying.

Lack of Housing Information

The second theme around international housing precarity is international students' limited familiarity and access to housing information. Arranging pre-arrival housing accommodation in the host country is a challenge faced by many international students (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; Farbenblum et al., 2020). International student participants in Berg & Farbenblum's (2020) study arranged their housing before arrival most frequently because they were anxious about not planning it or unsure where to stay while searching for housing. Before arrival, students often utilise unofficial channels and platforms to secure housing in shared houses or under subleasing, including social media, websites, word-of-mouth, and social networks like friends and community (Farbenblum et al., 2020). According to Forbes-Mewett (2018), affordability is the frequent basis behind the pre-arrival accommodation choices, but coupled with little familiarity and misunderstanding of distance, it can lead some international students to live in unsuitable locations with respect to distance, transport, and safety. Even after arriving, many international students may not be aware of better housing choices and have complications in navigating housing options as off-campus rentals can have a more complicated application process than university housing, and students need to deal directly with landlords, housing agents or roommates (Forbes-Mewett, 2018). Therefore, Forbes-Mewett (2018) suggests arranging short-term accommodation for international students upon arrival and offering information and advice on housing options, two of the main ideal housing supports from institutions.

Studies have also highlighted the overreliance of international students on online and social media platforms to obtain housing information; however, they may face misinformation and possible scams using such technologies (Farbenblum et al., 2020). As previously discussed,

ICT (information and communications technology) and mass media are among the migration infrastructures impacting ISM. Although digital technology has generated much interest among migrants to obtain information and guidance instantly using various social media platforms, apps, and online chatbots, it has raised many concerns about privacy, exploitation, and misinformation (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). International students find it challenging to verify if online housing advertisements are accurate and legitimate (Farbenblum et al., 2020). Similarly, Laadliyan's report (2023) on 35 women international students in Ontario demonstrates the high number of housing scams and experiences of overcrowded and precarious housing conditions. This study also highlights student participants' vulnerability due to a lack of information about their rights and responsibilities, cultural norms and expectations, lack of community support, immigration status, and misinformation (Laadliyan, 2023). Sotomayor et al. (2022) also highlight incidents in which landlords exploit students' lack of legal knowledge by adding illegal clauses in the rental agreement, such as threats of eviction or the risk of losing access to the unit.

Rental Market Discrimination

The third theme around housing precarity among international students is their experience of overt or hidden discrimination. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including landlords' behaviours, the terms and conditions of available housing, and even when facing eviction or termination of their housing arrangements (Farbenblum et al., 2020). Notably, housing discrimination can target all student populations, not just international students. As Reynolds (2020) explains, some landlords take advantage of the housing crisis, and the "undersupplied" and unaffordable private rental market has made students vulnerable to "rent hikes, scams and substandard conditions" (p.11). Such landlords also may not always respect the "residential laws" and exploit the high demand for cheaper housing by becoming "perpetrators" (Forbes-Mewett, 2018, p.155). Sotomayor et al. (2022) demonstrate that some

students encounter predatory practices in the Toronto housing market, especially in their search for market-rate housing near university campuses. These include asking for higher rents from students than other tenant groups, requiring unlawful and non-refundable application fees, collecting students' private information illegally, like passport images from international students, and requiring larger than legally required deposits (Sotomayor et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the literature also sheds light on housing discrimination experienced by newcomers and international students based on their racialized identities. Ziersch et al. (2023) highlight the inherent competitiveness in the tenant selection process and various housing-related discrimination factors that marginalise racialized groups, including requirements such as evidence of rental experience and stable employment, negative perceptions regarding their immigration status, or even assumptions like they can only afford to live in lower-income neighbourhoods or substandard housing. Brown (2017) explains the discrimination felt by some newcomers in North Bay, Ontario, because landlords were reluctant to rent to them. Similarly, Teixeira (2009, pg.336) underlines the issue of housing discrimination against immigrants based on ethnic and racial backgrounds in Kelowna, British Columbia. He argues that landlords act as “urban gatekeepers” in the rental market, with the authority to “filter” housing and information and scrutinise rental applications based on newcomers’ race or ethnic background. Sutherland & Cheng (2009) also report discrimination experienced by visible minority international students in Kingston, Ontario, and suggest that female international students experience more discrimination during the summer months after much of the student population leaves campus. Moreover, Sotomayor et al. (2022) found that some students have even anglicised their names to lessen racial discrimination in the Toronto rental market.

Besides the housing market, international students may also experience discrimination in their workplace, day-to-day interactions, and even in online platforms and social media. Research demonstrates that international graduates may encounter discrimination in the host

community's job market (Waters & Brooks, 2021; Akbar, 2022). Other studies have also stressed the experience of discrimination in international students' workplaces, including being passed over for promotions, managers' mistreatment, and making racist jokes (Red Deer LIP, 2022). Laadliyan's organisation report (2023) also confirms this often undocumented and unreported abuse and mistreatment experienced by 35 South Asian women international students in their workplace in Peel, Ontario. Additionally, some scholars emphasise the existence of overtly racist remarks on local social media targeting immigrants and persons of colour (Red Deer LIP, 2022) or even the experience of racism in higher education environments (Kubota et al., 2021).

However, studies underline that "covert racism" and elements of "systematic racism" are culturally embedded in the modern Canadian society leading to social and economic barriers for racialized people (Red Deer LIP, 2022, p.12). Discrimination and microaggressions against immigrants and international students can be as "simple" as asking someone who belongs to a visible minority group "where they are from" (Champaigne, 2022, p.10), or adherence to some social norms like "keeping distance" from persons of colour (Red Deer LIP, 2022, p.12). While Netierman et al. (2022) acknowledge that one of the attractive features of Canada to international students is its reputation as being tolerant of cultural diversity, experiences of racism and discrimination can negatively impact their decision to stay in Canada post-graduation. Moreover, experiences of overt and hidden discrimination can foster a sense of being unwelcome and not-belonged, a topic I will delve into more deeply in the subsequent section (2.5) in more detail.

Inadequate Housing Conditions

The last theme around international student housing precarity is overcrowded, low-quality and inadequate housing conditions (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Berg & Farbenblum, 2020). Sotomayor et al. (2022) reported students' poor housing conditions in Toronto with examples

like accounts of black mould causing respiratory and other health problems, lack of fire safety equipment or building codes, overcrowded housing, and inadequate and unsafe living conditions or neighbourhood to reduce the rent or live closer to the university campus. Likewise, Goel (2023), in examining the residential segregation of visible minorities in Toronto, finds that they make major sacrifices in terms of housing quality and location due to financial constraints with lower housing suitability, more repairs, and over-crowdedness. Moreover, Pillai et al. (2021) highlight owners' negligence in maintenance and upkeep as a reason leading to deteriorating, overcrowded, and possibly unsafe living circumstances for student tenants.

While overcrowded housing is typically measured by the ratio of persons to bedrooms, Morris et al. (2020) explain that overcrowding is mostly felt when the common spaces like bathrooms and kitchens become "congested" (p.20). Farbenblum et al. (2020) also emphasise the relations between housing unaffordability and over-crowdedness that can increase the possibility of safety problems. However, Morris et al. (2020) argue that living with multiple people is not always a sign of overcrowded housing and can help with sociability, bill-sharing, and liveliness. However, some students may find themselves in overcrowded and overpriced housing situations, negating the affordability advantage typically associated with shared living arrangements (Farbenblum et al., 2020). Additionally, the literature highlights that overcrowding is more common in larger urban areas, and immigrants have better access to suitable and affordable housing in smaller cities with more detached homes and fewer high-rise apartment buildings (Esses et al., 2021).

Some researchers also emphasise that housing conditions for newcomers also connect to mobility issues and transit system accessibility. For instance, Brown's (2017) demonstrates that the newcomers' choice of housing is influenced by the convenience of public transit. In Brown's (2017) study on housing experiences in North Bay, Ontario, mobility issues arising

from an inconvenient transit service is one of the main barriers for recent immigrants. Likewise, Forbes-Mewett (2018) identifies that infrastructure considerations such as public transport, and distance to university are significant for international students' housing choices. Research on newcomers' barriers in St. John's also revealed their limited access to reliable public transportation in this city (Graham & Pottie-Sherman, 2021; Clark, 2009)

All in all, international students experience housing precarity due to Canada's general shortage of affordable housing options and lack of government and institutional housing support. While scholars demonstrate the impact of housing choice on students' well-being and academic performance (Sotomayor et al., 2022), many international students live in overcrowded, substandard, and unsafe housing conditions and deal with discrimination and exclusion in the private rental market (Forbes-Mewett, 2018). Furthermore, the research also highlights policy gaps and a lack of access to settlement services and housing support. Because of their temporary migration status, international students have limited access to government-funded settlement services, including housing support, especially while attending post-secondary institutions (Akbar, 2022) and even after graduation as holders of post-graduate work permits (Gupta & Gomez, 2023). Besides, the federal or provincial governments do not obligate universities to offer such targeted settlement services to international students (Akbar, 2022). As Gupta & Gomez (2023) highlight, they are reduced to the status of "outsiders," unworthy of Canada's government's support (p.81). Therefore, aside from the main theme around international students' precarity, I argue their temporary migration status and associated service gaps also contribute to their increased housing precarity; thus, more support and services from the government and universities are needed to address their housing insecurity.

2.3.4. Coping with Housing Insecurity

The literature also highlights the coping mechanisms that students engage when confronting the limited and unaffordable housing options (Sotomayor et al., 2022). Jindal-

Snape & Rienties (2016) use the "acculturation theories" and "resilience theory" to investigate the transitional experiences of international students in the process of change and their adaptation to new environments. They argue that finding proper housing is one of the basic needs and daily-life issues that international students try to adapt to upon arrival (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016). They also underline the multi-faceted nature of experiences and the critical role of positive experiences like academic success, prior cultural knowledge, language fluency, or building social networks as buffers in helping students more easily deal with major problems, including finding suitable accommodation. However, they argue if the problems are too difficult to cope with, such positive buffers may not be effective (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016).

The literature also underlines students' coping strategies in response to housing unaffordability challenges. Sotomayor et al. (2022) reported that many students in Toronto claimed they had to work longer hours to pay for their expensive rent and other living expenses, which interfered with their ability to attend school and socialise. They also report "living at a distance" as one of the strategies for some students who endure long commutes and live far from the university campus (Sotomayor et al., 2022). Morris et al. (2020) also report other coping strategies such as "bedroom-sharing," living further from university, or "tolerating lower quality" and more insecure housing by international students in Australia (p.101). In the similar way, Forbes-Mewett (2018) demonstrates that the tendency to reduce costs can be seen in attempts like signing a lease without specifying the correct number of occupants in a rental property and "sub-letting" space to others, which is a typical practice among international students who may find it difficult to obtain housing for a group of people (p.136). However, it is important to note that behaviours to make housing options more affordable sometimes might put students at greater risk and further marginalise them (Sotomayor et al., 2022). For example,

subleasing and bedroom-sharing might make reporting to landlords harder in case of housing maintenance or unsafety (Forbes-Mewett, 2018).

Some researchers also highlight that student populations are temporary residents, so they have complex and quite temporary household arrangements (Morris et al., 2020; Revington et al., 2020) that might help them cope with housing challenges and adaptation. Kenyon (1999) calls this short-term and communal nature of student housing as the "term-time" home, which is neither lasting and stable nor worthy of commitment and investment (p.90). Kenyon (1999) also explains that students do not consider or even call their home as home in the full sense of the word: "we've known it's all very short term… we've always been moving or thinking about moving" (p.90). She argues that students' "flexible and changing" experiences of home are a clear reflection of their transitional nature of life showing and their adaptation in home experiences supports their identity and status changes (Kenyon, 1999, p.86). Therefore, these students' short-termism in their housing experiences can provide opportunities for growing their autonomy, freedom, independence, and adaptation.

Studies also illustrate the significance of social networks in coping with housing challenges and the positive impact of informal channels like word of mouth, family and friends and using online platforms like same cultural and identity groups in social media for securing housing opportunities. Sotomayor et al. (2022) found that many students look for roommates online or use social networks, word of mouth, or using online "shared identity groups" for finding housing options in platforms like Facebook in Toronto (Sotomayor et al., 2022, p.8). Similarly, Hanley (2017) emphasises the reliance on mini-cultural communities in terms of offering social networks for housing among newly arrived migrants in Quebec. Forbes-Mewett (2018) also indicates that although some international students prefer to live with other local cultural groups (e.g., to experience their lifestyles) living with friends and people from the same culture is more common. Social networks likely offer a more comfortable social environment

for international students, which they may even compromise on poor housing conditions and facilities (Forbes-Mewett, 2018).

Scholars also highlight the diversity of student perspectives and lived experiences, and criticise the often-homogenising outlook towards international students' experiences (Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016; Sotomayor et al., 2022). Jindal-Snape & Rienties (2016) highlight several factors that influence the transition and adaptation of international students, including cultural distance, educational stage, age, and family dynamics. For instance, postgraduate students may experience easier adaptations compared to undergraduates if they have a smaller cultural distance to the host community. Additionally, the experiences of family members, such as spouses or children, play a significant role in adaptation. This includes considerations like how children adjust to a new school system or how the transition affects the spouse's employment status. By examining students' housing challenges and preferences in Toronto, Sotomayor et al. (2022) also illuminate the intersectionality of marginalisation and discrimination that produce unequal access to housing security. For example, students from socially, ethnically, or economically marginalised groups have lower access to potential guarantors and co-signers (Sotomayor et al., 2022). Therefore, I argue that international students' ability to implement housing coping strategies can be limited by a range of barriers such as being new to the country, temporary migration status, language barriers, and being far from family and familiar social systems.

2.4. Welcoming Communities

Within the migration studies literature, the concept of welcoming community is defined as a place with desire to attract, receive, and retain newcomers (Clark, 2009; Esses et al., 2010; Wiginton, 2013; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014). Welcoming communities play a crucial role in facilitating effective settlement and retention of newcomers (Campbell et al., 2016; Brown, 2017). This concept also intersects with other concepts such as "inclusion," "receptivity,"

"long-term integration," "sense of belonging," and "feeling at home" (Esses et al., 2010, pp. 8-9). While Canada promotes its welcoming and multicultural environment to attract international students (Gupta & Gomez, 2023), only a few studies have explored what a welcoming community for international students might involve, nor their sense of belonging and feeling at home (e.g., Walton-Roberts, 2011). Therefore, I draw on the literature on similar newcomer groups' experiences to understand these concepts as they relate to the international student population. The main objectives here are to explore how international students feel about their new environment, the neighbourhood, and their new home while attending university, and in what ways they feel (un)welcomed, (not)belonged, (not)at home. In the following sections, I review the literature around welcoming community with a focus on its four main characteristics. Then, I highlight the literature around the concepts of belonging and being at home.

2.4.1. Feeling welcomed

Esses et al. (2010) define the term 'welcoming community' as a place with desire to attract, receive, and retain newcomers, or a location with capacity to meet their needs and promote their inclusion. Similarly, Clark (2009) demonstrates that how communities accept and integrate immigrants is the goal of the welcoming community. Lund & Hira-Friesen (2014) stress that a welcoming community can increase the feelings of acceptance and a sense of belonging and decrease experiences of hatred, discomfort, and discrimination. Esses et al. (2010) also highlight the dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of this term, which encompasses both the spatial dimension such as a "physical location" or a "place," and social dimension such as host community's agency and engaging in facilitating actions and "collective efforts" that resulted in newcomers feel "valued and included" (p.6). For example, Danson & Jentsch (2012) emphasise the dynamic relationships between local communities and immigrants in welcoming communities, highlighting the reciprocal impact of immigrants'

experiences and their presence on economic and social changes in these areas. Terms such as "welcoming people," "nice locals," or "friendly population" also capture the concept of welcoming community (Hellstrom, 2020, p.36). Clark (2009) also highlights the perception of "friendliness of people" as a key theme that immigrant respondents expressed about feeling welcome and included (pp. 39-40).

According to Wiginton (2013), the notion of welcoming communities and attracting newcomers in smaller communities in Canada refers to actions and practices aiming to shift the demographics in those areas. The concept of 'aspiring gateway' introduced by Pottie-Sherman & Graham (2020) refers to non-traditional immigration destinations with lower immigrant numbers that aim to become more welcoming to newcomers as a way of addressing economic or demographic challenges. However, such destinations encounter many interrelated challenges ranging from suitable employment, appropriate housing, transportation systems, lack of settlement services and resources, and community tolerance impeding attraction to smaller centres in Canada (Wiginton, 2013). Canadian immigration researchers stress the important role of stakeholders such as municipal governments, community organisations, and post-secondary institutions in fostering welcoming communities by responding to newcomers needs like suitable housing and developing community support and acceptance (Walton-Roberts, 2011; Teixeira & Drolet, 2018). Esses et al.'s (2010) study is one of the most comprehensive studies on welcoming community initiatives prepared for the Government of Canada. Among 17 key indicators of welcoming communities identified by Esses et al. (2010), the top four characteristics for attracting and retaining newcomers are: (1) suitable employment opportunities, (2) fostering the social capital, (3) affordable and suitable housing, and (4) positive attitudes toward newcomers. In the next section, I use these four main characteristics to review the literature on welcoming communities.

Suitable Employment Opportunities

First, employment opportunities are shown to be the most important factor in newcomers' retention (Hellstrom, 2020) and the most important characteristic of a welcoming community (Esses et al., 2010; Wiginton, 2013). Being among working-age migrants, Hanley (2017) argues that one main aspect of welcoming community for international students is their integration into the job market. Hanley (2017) explains that although international students do not have other high-skilled immigrants' challenge of foreign credential recognition, lack of Canadian work experience and workplace discrimination are their two main barriers in the hiring process. Moreover, while the lack of employment opportunities and lower wages are cited as primary barriers to the retention of immigrants and international students in small urban centres in Canada (Wiginton, 2013), contrasting evidence suggests that immigrants with postgraduate education earn more in Atlantic Canada compared to traditional destinations like Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver (MTV) (Sano et al., 2017), indicating a mixed picture regarding the economic prospects for immigrants in Canadian smaller urban centres.

Fostering Social Capital

Social capital is a shared resource that provides individuals with social credits, enabling them to pursue specific goals and actions within their community (Campbell et al., 2016). The Northspan organisation (2022) identified that social capital 'equity' can result in greater socioeconomic mobility for marginalised groups and creating a truly welcoming community. The provision of social capital can provide newcomers with resources to overcome barriers, (including housing issues) in the host society (Clark, 2009). Esses et al. (2010) emphasise that a portion of the economic and psychological divide between immigrants and Canadians can be linked to the variations between their social capital. Upon arrival and at early stages of settlement, most newcomers rely on "primary networks", such as family and friends (Esses et al., 2010, p. 24). For instance, Wiginton (2013) illustrates the help of ethnocultural communities with new arrivals of newcomers in navigating housing opportunities, and Clark

(2009) in her study on welcoming communities in NL, demonstrates that family and friends help immigrants with their housing and life skills. However, with time, newcomers begin to build relationships with "secondary networks" from "mainstream" society and "locals," such as neighbours, coworkers, and other gender, religious, culture, or volunteer networks (Esses et al., 2010, p. 24). For instance, Brown (2017) suggests that interactions with neighbours and landlords and the relationships with coworkers and the employer have strong impacts on immigrants' feelings about the host community. Thus, Esses et al. (2010) highlight that both of these primary and secondary networks are essential for their coping in the host society and growing a sense of belonging.

Affordable and Suitable Housing

Affordable and suitable housing is one of the top characteristics of welcoming communities and attracting and retaining newcomers (Esses et al., 2021). Housing is also a main factor in newcomers' decisions where to settle, and then a determinant of their satisfaction with life in Canada (Esses et al., 2010). Finding housing is "more than simply choosing a place to reside;" and it is connected with many other infrastructural considerations such as public transport and the local neighbourhood environment (Forbes-Mewett, 2018, p.142). Housing as an essential need also affects newcomers' accessibility to key services (Esses et al., 2010). However, the literature underlines that finding housing is one of the main barriers that newcomers experienced due to high rental prices, limited availability, and low-quality housing options (Champaigne, 2022), especially smaller centres in Canada (Clark, 2009). For instance, the Northern Policy Institute's (NPI) report (2022) on building a welcoming community in Sudbury, Ontario, highlights the significance of housing challenges for newcomers (Champaigne, 2022). Thus, Teixeira & Drolet (2018) suggest the need for specialised housing services and information and assistance to new immigrants as part of welcoming community strategies to attract and retain newcomers.

Positive Attitudes Toward Newcomers

Positive attitudes can be demonstrated by thoughts, feelings, and public's reactions directed towards newcomers and have a strong correlation with other characteristics of welcoming communities and lack of discrimination (Esses et al., 2010). Hanley (2017) argues welcoming and inclusive communities encourage openness to diversity and intercultural exchange. Danson & Jentsch (2012) argue that the perceived impact of newcomers on the local economy and public services and the role of local governments and policymakers with regard to welcoming new arrivals are also critical. While Canadians are generally more accepting of immigration than other nations (Esses et al., 2010), Hanley (2017) reminds us immigrants' settlement experiences "may be deeply coloured by racism" (p.280). Wiginton (2013) highlights that unwelcoming feelings of host community members toward immigrants can be seen as underlying "rhetoric or grumbling" expressions of discrimination, demonstrating the importance of anti-racism practices in building a welcoming community.

When it comes to attitudes toward international students, Sutherland & Cheng (2009) highlight that the local host community rarely can identify and recognize them and their challenges, concerns, and experiences. International students can be perceived as either part of the university community and treated the same as domestic students, or they can be mistaken for and recognized as immigrants, particularly if they belong to a "visible minority" and/or speak with a non-English accent (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009). Moreover, as discussed in the studentification section, the negative impacts of studentification in neighbourhoods around university campuses might create negative attitudes towards student populations (Revington et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022). In this sense, Smith (2009) also draws attention to the how new student geographies are evoking debates in political, policy, and media discourses, such as social exclusion, increasing lack of affordable housing, marginalisation and polarisation, the fragmentation of community cohesion, and deepening segregation. Due to all of these concerns,

I argue that welcoming community policies need to promote local communities' awareness of the international student population and the challenges they encounter in the new community, including in housing.

2.5.2. Belonging and Feeling at Home

Belonging is defined as a sense of attachment to a certain place and to particular social groups (Al-Hamad et al., 2024). Antonsich (2010, p.644) asserts that the definition of belonging should be examined both as a private, intimate sense of being "at home" in a location and as socio-spatial inclusion⁄exclusion. Place-belongingness is an individual's attachment to a particular place resulting in that place being felt as home (Antonsich, 2010). The sense of home is also the understanding of home as something more than physical structure or the built environment, but rather as a meaning of become home, even "homes away from home(s)" establishing a "positive sense of place" or a sense of "dwelling" in a larger residential community (Campbell et al., 2016, p.226). Home here refers to a metaphorical location of "comfort," "familiarity," "safety," and "emotional attachment" (Antonsich, 2010, p.645). Basnet (2016) suggests that through everyday homemaking practices, home is experienced, lived, and recreated.

Moreover, belonging can be impacted by the length of time lived in a place (Al-Hamad et al., 2024), and it is evident that the feeling at home or not at home are complex, and "varied" and can "change over the time and place" (Basnet, 2016, p.16). Besides, belonging occurs at various geographical scales like a housing unit, neighbourhood, a small community, or national homeland (Antonsich, 2010; Al-Hamad et al., 2024). As a social matter, belonging is the attachment to a social group and community, and a person's feeling of belonging will inevitably be destroyed if they feel unwelcome by the people living in that place (Antonsich, 2010). Therefore, as Esses et al. (2010) also highlights, the concept of a welcoming community intersects with a sense of belonging and feeling at home (pp. 8-9).

Developing a thorough sense of belonging is a complex process impacted by multiple factors such as social capital, financial stability, secure living conditions, feeling safety, building new habits, creativity, and acquiring familiar food (Basnet, 2016; Al-Hamad et al., 2024). For instance, participants in Basnet's (2016) research expressed that their home is their family demonstrating that family and home are connected. This research also found that strong neighbourhood ties and strong bonds with neighbours/people can contribute to feeling at home (Basnet, 2016). As previously discussed in the welcoming community section, fostering social capital and developing both primary and secondary social networks over time, can contribute to newcomers' sense of belonging (Esses et al., 2010). Social networks in the host community provide a range of support, both material and emotional (Al-Hamad et al., 2024). However, financial challenges and racial discrimination can diminish the feeling of comfort and familiarity, and thus, undermining sense of belonging and leading to social exclusion (Al-Hamad et al., 2024). Basnet (2016) explains that long-term residents may view newcomers as threatening their way of life, competing for economic and other resources, stoking prejudices which damage the connection between newcomers and place.

But how do international students experience the feeling of belonging and being at home in the new environment? Jindal-Snape & Rienties (2016) explain that international students experience academic and interpersonal transitional processes and may experience varying life issues, ranging from cultural differences and isolation to suffering from a "sense of loss" (p.2). In her study on British undergraduate students' experience and meaning of home in Sunderland, UK, Liz Kenyon (1999) explains 14 elements of the home-meaning illustrating a variety of students' perceptions, including elements like home as being a personalised space, a sense of belonging, memories, a sense of freedom, adulthood, and independence, a comfortable environment, a friendly neighbourhood, and a supportive atmosphere (Kenyon, 1999). Kenyon (1999) argues that students may see the home as a place of support where their

"social and emotional needs" are satisfied, in a "friendly" neighbourhood where they feel "belonged" (p.90). However, students in Kenyon's research (1990) referred to themselves as "outsiders" and not accepted by the locals in their neighbourhoods (p.92), which can negatively impact the sense of belonging.

2.5. The COVID-19 Pandemic and International Students' Housing and Mobility

According to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) migration report, the COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent seismic geopolitical event with a significant impact on global movement and mobility (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). Despite the reduction in international travel and migration in the pandemic, "the desire to migrate continues," and the number of international students has even increased in some countries like the UK and Germany (Volante et al., 2021, p.42). However, according to Firang & Mensah, (2022), there is evidence of decline in international students' admission after the pandemic resulted in negative economic impacts on the Canadian universities, and Canadian GDP in general.

Studies highlight the increased concerns among international students about their futures with the unprecedented and unique challenges introduced by the pandemic and resulting disruptions to ISM through unprecedented policy measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 across borders (Hari et al., 2021). As argued by Hari et al. (2021), the transitional phase of student migration may introduce growing uncertainty and precariousness regarding their future migration trajectories and their eligibility to remain in Canada and pursue employment after completing their degree. Gallagher et al. (2020) also reported other concerns of international students related to mobility interruptions in Australia such as their fears of deportation, not affording to leave the country, and fewer availability of flights. Therefore, COVID-19 outbreak has created major mobility issues for international students in top ISM-receiving countries.

Recent research highlights the vulnerability of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada and other top-ISM destinations (Hari et al., 2021; Firang,

2020; Gallagher et al., 2020). Moreover, the lack of migrant-specific policies, and in some cases, anti-immigration measures in response to COVID-19, such as the exclusion of non-citizens from emergency funding, further exacerbated the vulnerabilities faced by international students (Volante et al., 2021). Hari et al. (2021) illustrate that international students encountered amplified challenges during the pandemic in Canada, particularly between April and June 2020, characterised by strict border closures, travel disruptions, and shutdowns. They demonstrate how financial hardships, including unemployment and limited job opportunities, coupled with ineligibility for government relief programs[5], heightened international students' reliance on transnational and familial financial support (Hari et al., 2021). Despite their precarious situation, international students were often overlooked as a vulnerable group and excluded from government relief efforts (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Similarly, Gallagher et al. (2020) observed financial difficulties among international students at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, due to job losses and exclusion from government relief packages during the pandemic.

These precarious financial conditions undermined international students' ability to afford basic rights such as food and shelter (Gallagher et al., 2020; Esses et al., 2021). Gallagher et al. (2020) found that some international students in Australia experienced financial hardships, starvation, and homelessness during pandemic. As Gallagher et al. (2020) show, some students moved in together during the pandemic to avoid homelessness, resulting in overcrowded living conditions which made using the internet and studying online significantly challenging. Apna Health's report (2021) on international students' lived experiences in Peel Region, Ontario, highlighted that many students struggled to pay for accommodation and food during the COVID-19, and had difficulty completing their study programs. Hari et al. (2021)

[5] International students were ineligible for the Canadian Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) due to temporary status. Also, since most international students cannot work full-time, they did not work the required hours for the Employment Insurance (EI), and only those that worked part time were eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Fund (CERB) (Firang & Mensah, 2022).

also examined experiences of food and housing insecurity amongst international students in Canada, finding that campus closures, and in some cases, on-campus housing closures, significantly heightened these experiences (Apna Health, 2021; Hari et al., 2021)

Moreover, scholars have found that during the COVID-19 pandemic international students experienced social exclusion, overt racism (Firang & Mensah, 2022), feelings of isolation, shame, stigma, fear (Gallagher et al., 2020), and xenophobia (Volante et al., 2021). Gallagher et al. (2020) highlight the increasing prevalence of anti-Asian xenophobic attitudes during the pandemic and their impact on international student experiences, including in public spaces such as on buses. Additionally, while lockdown protocols and university shutdowns forced international students to stay at home (Firang & Mensah, 2022), Corbera et al. (2020) highlight that the Covid-19 pandemic reproduced and deepened inequities in educational opportunities and "inherent inequities in confinement" (p.192), due to unequal access to the necessary computer and network facilities and unsuitable home-working environment. They indicate that some students were confined in a single bedroom or in an overcrowded home, or some female students experienced increased labour burden at home as a result of care-based activities (Corbera et al., 2020).

2.6. Summary and Knowledge Gap

This chapter examines the most significant research related to this thesis. Following the conceptual framework, I structured this literature review around four main sections: international student mobility (ISM), geographies of student housing, welcoming communities, and the impact of COVID-19. First, this chapter highlighted ISM as an uneven and unequal practice for multiple social, economic, and political factors impacting prospective students' agency and mobility choices. Thus, the literature review underscores the need for a comprehensive view through the migration system approach that integrates various migration theories, such as neoclassical theory, push-pull factors, and political economy, to understand

complex patterns of international student migration. This approach emphasises the interaction between individual decision-making and structural influences, reflecting a rapidly changing global landscape. In Canada, ISM and the internationalisation of higher education intersect with immigration, economic, and educational agendas, and international student recruitment has long been of importance to Canadian postsecondary institutions and federal and provincial governments (Kim et al., 2023). Despite the extensive literature on ISM, there is a notable absence of research that integrates international students into broader immigration studies in Canada, despite the recognition of international education as an immigration policy by Global Affairs Canada and the IRCC (Government of Canada, 2022b; 2023a). This gap underscores the growing importance of examining the 'education-migration' nexus in contemporary research.

Second, the literature underscores the significance of safe and affordable housing for international students, integral to their educational access and overall experience, yet reveals their housing precarity driven by the supply-demand gap, reliance on private housing markets, and marketization, particularly impacting marginalised student groups (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Reynolds, 2020; Holton & Riley, 2013; Smith, 2009). This situation prompts international students to navigate challenges such as exploitation and discrimination, resorting to coping strategies like increased work hours and social network reliance (Farbenblum et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022). Literature confirms the limitation of newcomers' and international students' housing experiences in smaller centres in Canada as a result of the majority of immigrants and international students residing in the larger urban centres. (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009; Teixeira, 2009; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014; Brown, 2017). While universities have a significant impact on diversity representation in smaller cities (Walton-Roberts, 2011), the attraction and retention of international students are vital for the development of such areas (Fang et al., 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Knutson, 2020), more thorough research is needed to

investigate their housing experiences in these non-traditional immigration centres. Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that regardless of whether international students are viewed as potential immigrants, providing them with safe and secure housing remains imperative, as neglecting this obligation carries multifaceted consequences.

Third, as outlined in the literature, creating a truly welcoming community that attracts, receives, and retains newcomers involves various interconnected factors, such as suitable employment opportunities, fostering social capital, and affordable and suitable housing (Esses et al., 2010). The concept of a welcoming community also intersects with a sense of belonging and feeling at home, influenced by factors such as time lived, social capital, and neighbourhood ties, yet challenged by issues such as financial constraints, racial discrimination, and cultural differences. However, little research (e.g., Walton-Roberts, 2011) has explored what the welcoming community means for the international student population, prompting an examination of their experiences in relation to this concept.

Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on global movement and mobility, particularly ISM and a decline in international student admissions in Canada, with the majority of Canadian universities using remote online mode of learning while travel restrictions were in place (Matias et al., 2021; Firang & Mensah, 2022). The literature highlighted that COVID-19 exacerbated international students' vulnerabilities, contributing to financial strain, food and housing insecurity, social exclusion, and existing inequities in education (Volante et al., 2021), underscoring the urgent need for targeted support and policies tailored to the unique challenges faced by this population (Corbera et al., 2020). However, studies on international students' experiences during the pandemic are limited, and further research is needed to investigate their concerns and experiences (including housing experiences) during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on their transition in the post-

pandemic study and work environment, their migration trajectories. (Hari et al., 2021; Firang & Mensah, 2022).

Lastly, this study on international students' housing experiences at MUNL contributes to the limited yet expanding body of research on both geographies of student migration and student housing, as well as the welcoming community for international students. Moreover, it underscores the importance of considering the intersectionality of factors influencing international students' housing experiences and their integration into welcoming communities, thus providing valuable insights for policymakers, institutions, and researchers striving to enhance the overall well-being and success of international student populations.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological approach that aims to address main research objectives, the study design, data collection procedures, participant recruitment, and analysis methods.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology and Design

3.1. Methodological Approach

The methodology and research design in this study aims to answer the three main research objectives presented in Chapter One: (1) to explore the housing experiences of international students who are studying at MUNL and live in NL, (2) to examine the impact of COVID-19 on these experiences, and (3) to consider how their housing experiences can affect the ways international students perceive the receiving society as welcoming. Based on these research objectives, I implemented a mixed methodology and a triangulated research strategy to study international student housing experiences. According to Ghinoi et al. (2020), triangulating data sources can reduce the limitations and biases of using a singular data source and produce more rigorous findings. Thus, I employed a combination of quantitative (survey), qualitative (semi-structured interviews), and visual methods (photovoice) in this study. This mixed methods design produces two forms of empirical data: quantitative data in the form of numerical descriptions and qualitative data which provide a deeper understanding of the research questions, therefore, strengthening the results.

The literature on student geographies, student housing, and the consequences of COVID-19 on the international student population illustrates the need for more "evidence-based studies" at the "micro-scale" that consider students' everyday lives and their diverse experiences (Holton & Riley, 2013, p.69; Reynolds, 2020, p.13; Firang & Mensah, 2022, p.15). Therefore, although I use quantitative information collected through an online survey to triangulate my findings, using an online survey, the main methodological focus of this thesis is on qualitative epistemology and inductive reasoning. In other words, this research focuses on the subjective perspectives and insights in qualitative and participatory methods rather than the general objective aspects of housing experiences. To emphasise the personal and particular

aspects of this research, I employ in-depth and participatory research approaches to understand international student experiences in multiple frames. Semi-structured interviews and photovoice are research tools that provide personal narratives and participant-generated images, by which international students share experiences grounded in their everyday lives.

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss the study design and data collection procedures, beginning with the survey design. Then I discuss the procedures for the follow-up interviews and photo-voice and explain my strategy for participant recruitment and obtaining informed consent. Lastly, I illustrate the ways I analysed various data and reflect on my insider positionality in this research.

3.2. NL Newcomers' Housing Survey

The NL newcomer housing survey launched in September 2021, and data collection continued until February 2022. The survey was offered in five languages: English, French, Arabic, Tagalog, and Tigrinya. Our team selected these languages to reach recently arrived newcomers in NL and to examine their housing experiences. To run the survey we used Qualtrics, the current approved online survey tool for our academic institution. At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked which language they preferred, and they also were informed that they could skip any questions they did not want to answer. The main objectives of this survey were to examine how newcomers experience housing, how COVID-19 has impacted these experiences, and how housing barriers can be addressed. The 40-question survey was designed to reflect these research objectives in 7 sections: (1) Respondents' Profile, (2) Housing Status, (3) Housing Experiences, (4) Housing Supports, (5) Housing & COVID-19, (6) Housing Experiences and Belonging, and (7) Profile Questions.

We employed a mixture of closed-ended, open-ended, and evaluative continuum survey questions to capture data in both numerical and descriptive formats. According to McGuirk &

O'Neill (2016), closed-ended questions generally seek quantitative information by providing fixed, easier coded and analysed answers than open-ended questions where respondents answer the questions in their own words instead of the researchers'. Our survey also contained evaluative continuum questions designed to measure respondents' attitudes or opinions by scaling their answers from strongly agree to agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Some of the closed-ended questions in our survey contained multiple-choice options that allowed participants to select multiple answers. Additionally, we provided an 'other' answer option to allow respondents to answer some of the close-ended questions in their own words. However, to explore more in-depth and less structured responses, we employed some open-ended questions to give more voice to respondents and to capture their personal experiences (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). Appendix II contains the survey variables at a glance, and I discuss the detailed survey results for international students in chapter four.

3.2.1. Survey Participant Recruitment

In the NL newcomer housing survey, we employed a non-probability online survey sampling strategy involving self-selected and list-based surveying. The former strategy involved recruiting participants online using social media posts, emails, and links. The latter strategy involved community partners[6] and other local organisations who helped us recruit participants by sharing our call for participation via their email lists and social media channels. We also placed recruitment posters in strategic locations (telephone poles and cork boards at local organisations). The poster featured a quick response (QR) code to enable participants to access the survey using a smartphone. Appendix I contains the recruitment letter for the survey.

[6] Four community partners included the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PLIAN), Municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL), and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition.

Most of the questions in survey section one 'Respondents' Profile' were designed as prerequisites (i.e., screening questions) for participation in the survey. The survey inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Over the age of 18;
- Living in NL (permanently or temporarily);
- Born outside of Canada; and, having spent 10 years or less in Canada;
- Came to Canada first as an international student, temporary worker, refugee, an immigrant, and/or a visitor (tourist or family member of one of the other categories);
- Canadian citizens were also eligible if they met the above criteria.

In total, our survey generated a final dataset of 188 respondents from 57 countries of origin. These respondents represented various newcomer groups in NL including permanent residents, temporary workers, refugees, and international students. We aimed to achieve as much diversity within the sample as possible to capture the greatest variety of experiences from multiple newcomer groups. Access to this online survey provided me with an overview of the broad patterns in the housing situations of various newcomer groups in NL. It also provided a starting point for qualitative data-gathering. Two important characteristics of the final dataset are pertinent for this thesis. First, a large percentage of survey respondents came from within the St. John's metro area, representing 95% of participants. This pattern reflects the demographic concentration of newcomers in and surrounding the provincial capital. In 2016, for example, 67% of immigrants and 80% of non-permanent residents[7] of NL lived in St. John's metro (Statistics Canada, 2016). St. John's thus provides the basis for this thesis because of the trends and its status as the provincial capital, a medium-sized city, the location of the main campus of MUNL, and its significant role in the attraction and retention of multiple newcomer

[7]In Statistics Canada reports, '*immigrants*' are defined as persons with permanent residency status, whereas *'non-permanent residents*' includes persons from another country who have a work or study permit or who are refugee claimants (Statistics Canada, 2016).

groups, including international students. The survey also captured a handful of responses from Corner Brook (N=6 or 3%)[8]. This small city is the location of the MUNL Grenfell Campus and the second major urban centre in the west part of NL province. Thus, the qualitative sampling for this thesis focused on St. John's but also included Corner Brook as a point of comparison.

Second, another significant characteristic of survey respondents is the over-representation of international students at MUNL: 81% of respondents arrived in Canada as international students (Figure 2). This characteristic reflects the importance of the internationalisation of higher education and the unique role of MUNL in attracting newcomers to NL province.

The target population of this thesis is current MUNL international students with study permit status who lived either in St. John's or Corner Brook at the time of the study. Thus, my analysis of the survey data in this thesis excludes the 50 respondents who were not in Canada on study permits. I focus exclusively on the 138 respondents (75%) who indicated their current status in Canada as "study permit" (question 7: "*What is your current status in Canada?*"; see Figure 2). While I focus here on current students, it is important to mention that approximately half of all work permit holders and permanent residents who responded to the survey had also first arrived in Canada as international students, further demonstrating the role of MUNL in attracting immigrants to NL. In addition to analysing the survey sample of 138 international students, I also used the sample to select and recruit the potential interview participants for the next study stage.

[8] The other 2% of participants located in other NL rural areas or small towns

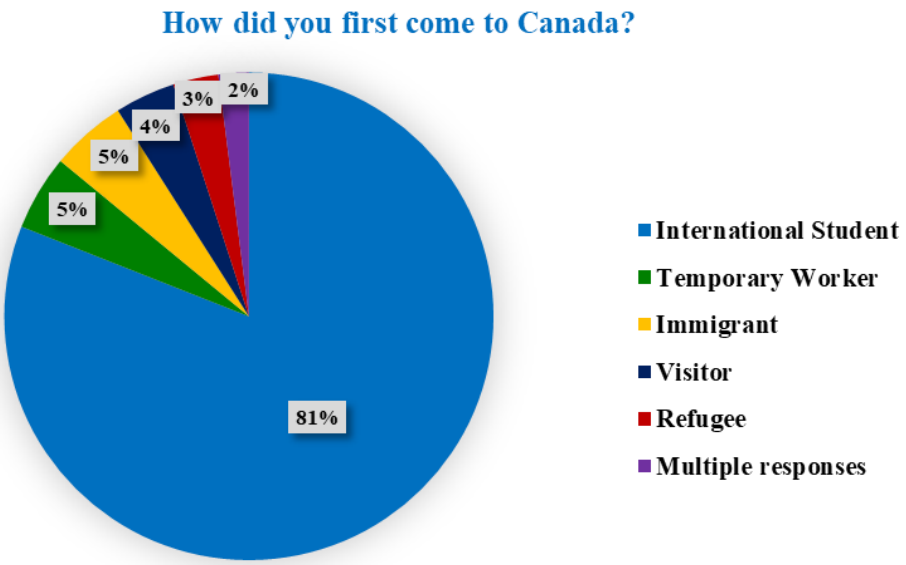

Figure 3.1: Representation of Different Arrival Statuses in the Survey

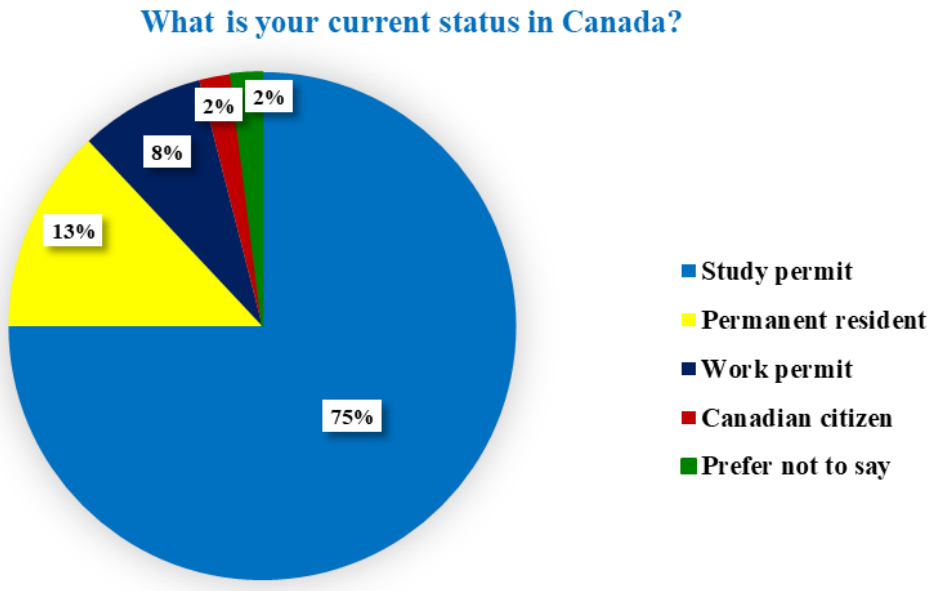

Figure 3.2: Current Status of Survey Respondents in Canada

3.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

The main purpose of implementing interviewing as a qualitative method is the in-depth exploration of international students' experiences it provides. As McDowell (2010) illustrates, interviewing can capture a variety of meanings and experiences, provides personal contact and interaction, and highlights the significant position of participants in the research. Unlike the

quantitative survey's role of discovering larger-scale patterns, semi-structured interviewing is an in-depth investigation of personal experiences and detailed data (McDowell, 2010) that are co-constructed with participants. Such a data gathering approach provides less amount of control for the researcher and more agency and subjectivity for the interviewee during the interviewing process.

In this study, the interviews explored the individual perspectives of experts on the NL housing market, the internationalisation of higher education, and most importantly, the lived experiences of international students. As the flexibility and spontaneity of semi-structured interviews are their main benefits, I explained the topic and the goals to the interviewees and had a list of questions based on the interview guide. But I freely chose and changed the order of questions based on the natural conversation flows and adapted to let participants determine the direction of the interview. Moreover, Charmaz (2009) highlights that conducting multiple interviews allows both researcher and participant to explore themes arising in previous interviews. In other words, the interaction of the researcher with participants builds the foundation for constructing concepts. Therefore, throughout the process, I continued to gain insights and identified new challenges and needs for more detailed views and further information.

Interviews in this study followed the flow of a conversation conducted in a relaxed and comfortable environment. Interviewees were provided with space and time for sharing their stories and insights, making them feel comfortable and that their participation was highly valued. I was also careful about the language and question types while actively listening flexibly. I arranged the questions to begin with more general ones before proceeding to more specific queries. I also used easy-to-understand language without using academic jargon, terminology, and abbreviations. The interview guide started with 'how,' 'what,' 'tell me about' questions rather than asking 'why' and 'closed-ended' questions. Furthermore, although I

attempted to put myself in my interviewees' shoes and show empathy, I also asked probing questions to explore experiences from their points of view. Lastly, to prepare for the interviews, I conducted a mock interview with my supervisors. This mock interview allowed me to gain feedback on my interview techniques and to prepare for actual interviews.

3.3.1. Interviewee Recruitment; Key Informants & International students

According to McDowell (2010, p. 162), recruitment is based on the 'agreement' and 'willingness' of interviewees to share information. In this study, my process for recruitment interview participants consisted of identifying potential participants, contacting them, and arranging to meet interviewees in person or online. In total, I conducted 21 in-depth interviews, five with key informants and 16 with international students. These interviews focused on international students' housing challenges and related issues such as COVID-19 and their perception of the community as welcoming. Interviewees lived in both St. John's and Corner Brook, which allowed me to explore housing experiences in these two small and mid-sized urban centres (Table 1).

Table 3.1: Interviewee Locations

Interviewee Location	**St. John's**	**Corner Brook**	**Total**
Key Informants	3	2	5
International Students	12	4	16
Total	15	6	21

Key Informants

The five key informants were drawn from housing and internationalisation experts in the province, including experts based at the university and in community organisations. I contacted potential key informants by email using a key informant interview recruitment letter which explained the research information, objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and

asked them about their availability. All interviews with key informants were online based on the participants' availability and preferences.

International Students

The follow-up interviews with international students at MUNL targeted the study permit holder participants in the NL Housing survey who left their names and contact information (emails) indicating their interest in participating in a follow-up interview. Since international student participants in this survey had different characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, original home country, education level, housing type, and housing experiences, I devised a sampling strategy for the follow-up interviews that allowed me to capture the spectrum of housing experiences within this population. More specifically, I created an index based on the six experience questions contained in the survey and used this index to select participants who had generally positive housing experiences, generally negative experiences, and also those in between. I created this index by assigning 5 points for the more positive end of the spectrum and 1 point for the more negative. These six questions are:

1. I understand my housing rights (strongly agree = 5 points)
2. Landlords won't rent to me because of accent, name, etc. (strongly agree = 1 point)
3. I feel taken advantage of by my landlord because I'm a newcomer (strongly agree = 1 point)
4. My current housing situation makes me feel like I am part of a community (strongly agree = 5 points)
5. When it comes to housing, I generally received the help I need (strongly agree = 5 points)
6. During the pandemic, my local town, etc. has felt like home (strongly agree = 5 points)

Each respondent was assigned an index score ranging from 6 (representing the most unwelcomed) to 30 (representing the most welcomed), from which I determined the three housing experience groups: group 1) highest index score between 22-30, the most positive housing/welcoming experiences; group 2) middle index score between 16-21; and group 3) the lowest index score between 6-15, most negative housing/unwelcomed experiences. I contacted

potential international student participants from each group by email using the international student recruitment letter, and if they responded to that email and agreed to be interviewed, I arranged the interview. Sixteen one-on-one interviews were conducted from November 2021 to January 2022 with 16 MUNL international students living in St. John's and Corner Brook. Based on my access to St. John's campus in Fall 2021, all of the 12 interviews with students based in St. John's were conducted in person at the Department of Geography. I conducted interviews with four additional international students living in Corner Brook online through the Zoom application. All in-person interviews were recorded and transcribed and ranged in length from 45 to 74 minutes. Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the international students who participated in these interviews.

Table 3.2.: Characteristics of International Student Interview Participants (N=16)

Housing/welcoming experiences Index	Most positive experience/ welcomed (5)	Middle experiences (5)	Most negative experience /unwelcomed (6)
Location	St. John's (12)	Corner Brook (4)	
Country of Origin (12 countries)	Malaysia (1), Philippines (1), China (1), Iran (3), Tanzania (1), United States (1), Federated States of Micronesia (1), Bangladesh (3), Peru (1), Ecuador (1), Brazil (1), Ghana (1)		
Age	18 - 24 (9)	25 - 34 (5)	35 - 44 (2)
Gender Identity	Men (9)	Women (6)	Non-binary (1)
Educational level	Undergraduate (6)	Graduate (10)	
Language	Although most of the participants were not English native speakers, they communicated fluently in English		
Visible Minority	Other than one white international student, others identified as visible minorities		
Housing Type	On-campus (5)	Off-campus Rental Market (11)	

Appendix IV contains the recruitment letter for the follow-up interviews with international students and the key informant interview recruitment letter.

3.4. Photovoice

Photovoice is a visual, qualitative methodology that opens up new opportunities for participants to share their lived experiences and knowledge(s) creatively. As a relatively new method, photovoice was developed in the 1990s, and is mostly used in community participatory research (Hannes & Parylo, 2014). Photovoice consists of participant-generated photographs representing their emotions, concerns, thoughts, and interpretations of a topic/theme. Sutherland & Cheng (2009) define photovoice as a participatory-action research methodology and a "vivid and powerful mode of translating experience" (295) that provides participants a voice to "tell stories about their lives" (290). It is also a potentially powerful means for marginalised, discriminated, and hard-to-reach groups to visually portray personal experiences that may be hard to express with words alone and a way of including voices and stories silenced by traditional textual and linguistic methods (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Oduro, 2018; Hannes & Parylo, 2014).

Newcomers and immigrants are among various population groups with whom scholars have employed photovoice collaboratively. For example, Langhout et al. (2016) illustrate how photovoice can help newcomers think more deeply about and reflect upon their lives, and generate more dialogue and communication. Likewise, Teixeira & Li (2009) confirm that using innovative methods such as photo-voice produces more complex and nuanced data that enhances researchers' understanding of under-studied fields such as immigrants' experiences in smaller centres in Canada. Sutherland & Cheng (2009) used photovoice to explore lived experiences of (im)migrant women in two smaller cities in Ontario, Kingston and Peterborough. Immigrant women and female international students in this study, conveyed meanings, feelings, and interpretations of their lived experiences through their selected visual images (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009).

In this thesis, combining photovoice and interviews helped international student participants more deeply reflect on their housing experiences. To implement this strategy, I asked interviewees to bring two or three photos of their housing/living experiences to the interview session. In my email communication with participants, I explained that students were free to choose and bring any digital or printed photos of their housing experiences that were important to them.

Participants showed me the photos (and sometimes their videos) during the interview sessions, and I followed up with probes about the photos. The usual probes were "*Where and when did you take this photo?*" and/or "*How do you feel about this photo?*" Such questions elicited further discussion between the participants and me. As each participant described their photographs, the dialogue centred on that image (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). Furthermore, the use of photographs helped participants to speak about topics or challenges that otherwise might be difficult to identify or express (Langhout et al., 2016). Therefore, using the photovoice method brought 'words' and 'pictures' together during the interview sessions and sometimes was a basis for triggering further discussions around the housing experiences, thus, highlighting more complex realities of housing experiences through visual images.

Control, comfort, and confidentiality are three key criteria I employed during the photovoice data collection. During the recruitment process, through pre-interview emails, and also later during the interview sessions, I made it clear that participants were free to choose the photos of their personal living stories. Moreover, I would ask participants to share photos later with me only if they were comfortable. At the end of each interview session, interviewees were asked to send the photos through email that they were comfortable with and consented to share in this thesis. This strategy ensured that the interviewees had control over what they were consenting to. Thus, student participants were decision makers and could choose whatever

photo(s) they wanted to show during the interviews and had a separate opportunity after the interview to offer photos they were willing to share in publications resulting from the research.

Although photovoice is an effective tool to include participants' perspectives and to promote their control and involvement in the research, this method has several challenges. Given the coursework, research, job responsibilities, and challenges of everyday life of international students, not only was setting the interview time sometimes hard but also the photovoice method was sometimes prohibitive or too demanding due to the required time and commitment for taking photos or looking for old photos. The participants all used personal cell phones to take new photos or used old photos from previous experiences.

Additionally, photovoice has some potential ethical risks around confidentiality and anonymity (Hannes & Parylo, 2014; Palibroda et al., 2009; Wang & Hannes, 2014). To make every effort to maintain anonymity, I discussed these potential ethical issues with student participants before and during the interviews. I explained to them that privacy matters and that the photos must not violate their and other people's privacy. Sometimes, participants were not sure if a photo was useful for the project or if a photo violated any privacy by showing shared living areas or could compromise their anonymity when connected to some parts of the interview. I actively listened and acknowledged their concerns and asked them to be cautious about what they were sharing and to avoid sharing recognizable photos. Therefore, a participant might show a photo in the interview session but not send it to me for inclusion in this thesis because of personal reasons or cautions about potential ethical dilemmas. Due to ethical considerations, I also did not reveal a few photos with identifiable people and places in the finding chapter (chapter five) that could compromise the anonymity of participants and their roommates.

3.5. Informed consent

As a sub-project of the larger Future Oceans and Coastal Infrastructures [FOCI]: Designing safe, sustainable, and inclusive coastal communities and industries for Atlantic Canada," project this research was reviewed twice by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University, consistent with the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2). The first ethics process involved seeking approval for the larger FOCI sub-project ("Inclusion, social justice, and equity in urban and rural coastal communities" – which involved conducting the NL newcomer housing survey and follow-up interviews with newcomers and key informants). However, because this thesis targets a specific population of newcomers (MUNL international students) and adds photovoice as a method, an additional (sub-project) review by ICEHR was required. The sub-project ethics approval (ICEHR Number: 20220804-AR) was granted collecting data between October 26, 2021 – October 31, 2022.

During the recruitment process and before the interview sessions, I sent the larger project's interview consent form to participants. This consent form introduced the study and outlined its purposes, possible benefits and risks, researchers' contact information, the confidentiality and anonymity of their involvement, and the possibility of withdrawal at any time during the interview. To obtain informed consent around image use, I also used an additional sub-project consent form addendum in which I explained the photo-voice portion of the study and procedures for using student-generated photos in this research. Appendix IV contains the consent forms for the larger project and the sub-project approved by the Memorial University internal review board (ICEHR).

To engage participants further in this study, I also included a section in the consent form on 'Reporting of Results' explaining that participants would have access to the final project report and a 1-page summary of results online through the Memorial University

Research Repository. This section also informed them that this thesis would be publicly available via the QEII thesis collection and accessible online. Lastly, international student participants received a $25 visa gift card as an honorarium thanking them for their time at the end of each interview.

Possibility of Harm

Qualitative methods usually involve human interaction that entails underlying issues of ethics, power, responsibility, equity, status, and power in the social sciences (Bikos, 2019; Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; McDowell, 2010; McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). McDowell (2010) highlights the possibility of harm in interview methods when participants may share the intimate and occasionally painful details of their lives but receive little in return from the research process. This imbalance means that researchers must understand their responsibility as the "recipients of people's lives," as well as unfairly greater returns from the research (McDowell, 2010, p.3). In this study, it is important to acknowledge how the interviews may create emotional stress for the student participants who share their stories. These emotions may be especially felt by participants when discussing issues like being far from family and their home country, their lack of support systems, negative housing experiences and hardships, sense of (un)belonging and not feeling at home, or discrimination experiences. As an international student myself, a visible minority woman, and a newcomer in this province, I sometimes became emotional myself when students spoke about their hardships. I discuss further and reflect on my insider role in this thesis in the positionality section (3.5).

The photovoice method can also pose ethical challenges and potential confidentiality and anonymity issues (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Hannes & Parylo, 2014). To minimise the harm in this case, I raised participants' awareness about such ethical aspects in the recruitment emails and then during each interview session. I reminded students to consider the privacy of themselves and others in their photos and avoid taking photos with recognizable

people and places or identifiable personal and private details. Such discussions could increase participants' sensitivity to sharing photos that compromised their or others' anonymity (Hannes & Parylo, 2014).

3.6. Data Analysis

I employ a mixed methodology approach in this study, using descriptive statistics, textual analysis of interview transcripts, and visual data (i.e., photos). While the first method uncovers the characteristics of a sample, qualitative data analysis involves interpretation and uncovering meanings. The mixed methods approach allows me to triangulate the findings by checking and connecting each method's findings with the other two methods (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Ghinoi et al., 2020; McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016; Knigge & Cope, 2006). As a result, data analysis in this study consisted of multiple phases to analyse and represent multiple realities and diverse understandings of participants' words and images. In the following section, I discuss the specific analysis approach for each methodology.

3.6.1. Survey Analysis; Broader Patterns

First, I analysed the NL Housing survey dataset using basic descriptive statistics appropriate for a non-probability sample. Descriptive statistics are a means for extracting meaning and making sense of numerical data through organising, categorising, and summarising them (Anastas & MacDonald, 2000). I examined various aspects of the NL Housing survey dataset using measures of frequency (count and percent) to describe the dataset, such as students' demographic profiles, housing status, positive and negative experiences with housing, the impact of COVID-19 on this population, and their perceptions of belonging and sense of being at home. I summarised the findings with tables, graphs, and figures illustrating the housing experiences of the 138 student respondents in the sample. The reported totals do not always equal 138 because of blank or "Prefer not to say" responses. Despite limited direct interactions with the participants in the survey and more researcher

control over many aspects of the survey study, the open-ended questions and the *other* option in most of the survey's questions create flexibility in obtaining unexpected results and findings. I coded these responses and either assigned them to existing categories or created new categories. The NL Housing survey findings are summarised in chapter four.

3.6.2. Interview Analysis; Interpreting the 'Talk'

Given the interpretative nature of interviewing (McDowell, 2010), I used an inductive thematic analysis method to code interviews inductively according to the emerging themes. Inductive thematic analysis involves multiple stages of coding data, identifying patterns or themes in the data, and organising the emergent themes (Cope, 2010). According to Hannes & Parylo (2014), "familiarisation with the interview data" is the first step in the interview analysis (p.260). Then, coding assists the researcher in managing and distilling a large amount of data into key themes. Two common types of qualitative coding are: (1) descriptive codes that reflect the obvious themes or come directly from participants' statements, and (2) analytic codes created by delving further in the context and connections between the data, which sometimes can reveal nuanced insights and important themes (Cope, 2010; Knigge & Cope, 2006; Smith & Davies, 2010).

In this study, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. These transcripts provided records of original, nuanced responses from interviewees in their own words, and I used these as a basis for the coding process. During the coding process, I began by annotating the transcripts, highlighting the passages, and writing memos alongside the text which flagged key ideas while listening to the recordings. These annotations also noted important participant behaviour like pauses in speech or laughter which may also indicate meaning. I also paid attention to the participants' wording and language and the context in which they discussed their view while trying to be unbiased and acquiring a critical perspective on the data. For instance, some international students laughed when they talked about the

friendly (and welcoming) behaviours from the NL local community such as when ‘random’ people said “hi” and smiled at them when passing in the street, leading me to develop a code named ‘feel welcomed.’

Using Cope's (2010) qualitative coding method, I created 38 descriptive and analytical codes during this initial coding. One example of these initial codes that was apparent from the beginning of analysis was that international students start searching for housing pre-arrival. Some participants looked for temporary accommodation upon arrival (and before finding a long-term housing option), and some started their housing search through online platforms or conducted virtual viewings before arrival. I named this code as ‘arranging pre-arrival accommodation.’ Some other examples of initial codes were discrimination, unaffordability, social media reliance, quietness, privacy, incomplete sense of home, scams, transport issues, proximity to university, short-termism, social network, food insecurity, feeling safe, travel restrictions, self-isolation, competitive rental market, lack of information, co-ethnic community, family and friendship, and supportive landlords.

After establishing an initial list of codes, I then reviewed the transcripts again to familiarise myself fully with the material while also taking notes to keep track of emerging themes. Next, I looked for patterns and connections within the initial set of codes and organised them thematically. I based the thematic categorising of codes on several factors such as the frequency of their occurrence within the interviews (Lincoln, 2021), intensity, specificity, connectivity and overlapping among the codes, and their relation to existing literature and the research questions (Smith & Davies, 2010).

During the final step of analysis, I collapsed all of my codes into families to manage them and structure my findings (Swain, 2018). I recategorized or merged connected codes and key themes to develop eight main categories: (1) informational needs, (2) lack of housing options, (3) affordability challenges, (4) living conditions, (5) mobility challenges, (6) social

relationships, (7) discrimination & exclusion, and (8) feeling welcomed and at-home. I also developed some subcategories for each category. As an example, informational needs as a main category consisted of subcategories such as pre-arrival housing search, hectic first days upon arrival, arrival self-isolation experience, hardships of arranging the first accommodation, and trust and scams.

Finally, since thematic analysis is seen as a continuous, organic, and iterative process (Swain, 2018), I was flexible and reflective through the whole process of analysis. I summarise these interview outcomes in chapter five and discuss each thematic category and subcategory. The final findings reflect the new knowledge gained from the perspectives of participants and my interpretation of the meanings. Therefore, whenever needed in the finding chapter, I made a connection between interview outcomes and my research questions, existing literature, concepts, and survey and photovoice findings to triangulate my results and structure my analysis.

3.6.3. Photovoice Analysis; Comparing the 'Talk' to the Visual

Engagement with visuality is a significant part of the qualitative methodology in this study. The famous expression "*a picture is worth a thousand words*" indicates photos' subtle but significant ability to illustrate realities. Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield (2018) argue that photo-voice is an "arts-informed, qualitative method with participatory features" (p.2) that offers a creative representation of experiences. Thus, photovoice as an art medium contributes to knowledge production in this study by using photos in data collection, analysis, and knowledge mobilisation, thereby enhancing critical understanding of housing experiences.

Analysing and interpreting photographic and interview transcript data together enabled me to contextualise and codify the photos in relation to the interview discussions (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018). This approach enabled me to identify respondents' feelings and their positive and negative experiences underlined behind those photos. More specifically,

while coding the interviews with the 16 international student participants, I coded their responses to the interview probes during the photovoice activity as well. I conducted the thematic analysis on these codes that developed identified interview main categories and subcategories. I then linked all the photos to particular subcategories and selected the "most representative photos" to illustrate the finding (Wang & Hannes, 2014, p.72). I report the results of the photovoice analysis alongside the interview findings in chapter five.

3.7. Positionality

Noh (2019) defines positionality as being the "multiplicities of identity" and "where one stands in relation to the other" (p.4), or in the case of research, whether the researcher is a member of the population they wish to study (Bikos, 2019). Positions are not static but are complex, negotiated, and constructed during the research (Noh, 2019). Since this study is close to my personal life, participants may have regarded (and welcomed) me as an insider while I found myself transiting between my role as a researcher and the research population: as an international student, a visible minority, and a newcomer; new identities that I acquired after coming to NL and Canada. As a result, I was welcomed by participants as an (eager) insider who was engaging in the conversation and showed sympathy. This insider position helped me build rapport and trust with participants and encouraged them to voice their *critical views on their housing experiences and* feelings of discrimination and exclusion.

At the same time, I must also acknowledge the impact of my insider positionality on my understanding of the research problem (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Bikos, 2018), and how it forms the type of questions I asked, the study design, my interpretation of the interview discussions, and even sometimes, the participants' unwillingness to share detailed explanations in areas they assume I have already known or experienced. Other challenges in this study included cultural and language barriers that sometimes limited the possibility for in-depth discussions. Based on international students' English proficiency, the interviews were all in

English (without any translation) and in a conversation format. Nevertheless, differences in accent, group dynamics, gender identities, cultural competencies, and the general inability to express some of the meaning for non-native speakers could create difficulties during the interviews. Like the international student participants in this study who came from diverse language-speaking backgrounds, as the researcher, I acknowledge my personal identity as being a woman, Iranian, Persian with a secular background, and also my abilities as a non-native English speaker.

I was aware of these limitations from the beginning and tried to adopt a neutral position when designing the interview guide and when engaging with participants through active listening and asking for clarification to avoid misunderstandings. I was also prepared for possible questions that international student participants might (and did) ask about my own experiences during the interviews. Other techniques I used to navigate this insider status included listening without judgement, concealing my disapprovals, keeping my opinion to myself, and being careful about body language while interviewing. Cultural and language barriers were also a significant reason for adding photovoice as an appropriate and relevant participatory method in my research design to provide more avenues for creativity, discussion and transmitting meanings.

After completing the interviews and during the analysis process, I aimed to foreground participants' experiences by using "reflexive approaches" that would maximise the accountability of the process, my analysis, and later this study's outcomes (Pennisi, 2019, p.2). Following Pennisi (2019), the *reflexive tools I used when coding the interview* (brackets, memos, and field notes) allowed me to continually reflect on my own feelings, observations, and emerging themes and mitigate any assumptions I brought to the research. Finally, the most significant lesson learned during this research process is that although I cannot separate my

individual self and my lived experiences from the research project, I can occupy both the roles of researcher and the researched.

3.8. Conclusion

In summary, based on the research questions (Chapter One), knowledge gaps (Chapter Two), and methodological goals described above, this study employs three main methods: an online survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and photovoice. While a survey is a quantitative method to capture general trends and provides a rough sketch of respondents' situations, the interviews and photo-voice are qualitative methods to obtain more complex, unexpected, and participant-defined data that shed light on individual experiences in this research.

In the following chapters, I discuss the results and findings of the research. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the NL housing survey's findings and outcomes. Chapter Five presents my analysis of the interviews and photovoice, including a discussion of each thematic category and its subcategories. In Chapter Five, I also consider how the interview findings connect to the literature and three research concepts of international student mobility, student housing, and welcoming communities. In the final chapter (Chapter Six), I consider the central takeaways of the findings for these three fields and reflect on the study's limitations and my own interpretation of results in connection with my positionality.

Chapter Four

Findings and Outcomes 1: NL Newcomer Housing Survey

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the responses of 138 study permit holders who participated in the NL Newcomer Housing Survey. These responses illustrate the broader reality of the housing experiences of international students living in NL. This chapter is organised in six sections: (1) Profile of respondents, (2) housing status, (3) negative and positive housing experiences, (4) housing information and supports, (5) housing & COVID-19, and (6) housing experiences and belonging. Each section explains the main results of housing experiences of international students with a combination of numerical, narrative, and graphical presentations of outcomes. The survey data highlights international students' reliance on the private rental market, with affordability being a significant concern. Despite facing housing market exclusion and limited support, students experienced community and neighbourhood satisfaction, enhancing their sense of belonging and feeling welcomed.

4.2. Profile of Respondents

This section analyses participants' data from the survey's initial and final sections, focusing on demographic details such as age, gender identity, country of origin, immigration status upon arrival, education level, employment status, and living location in NL. Results show a predominantly young, culturally diverse group of international students with a great desire for participation in the job market, with many residing in the St. John's metro area.

Age and Gender Identity

Most international student participants in this survey were between 18 and 34 years old: 55% were 24 years old or younger, and only 10% were 35 years old or older. Most participants

identified as women or men, with 3% being from gender minority groups. Figure 4.1 and 4.2 depict international students' age group and gender identity in the survey.

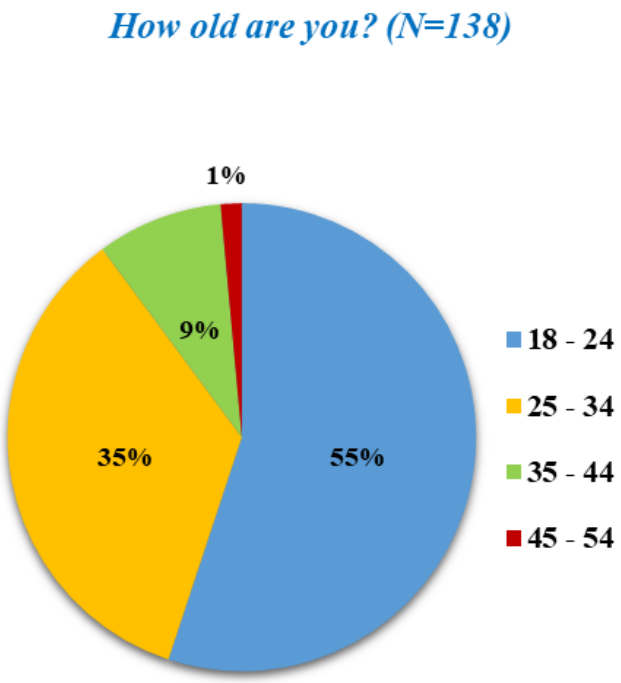

Figure 4.1: Age Group of International Student Participants

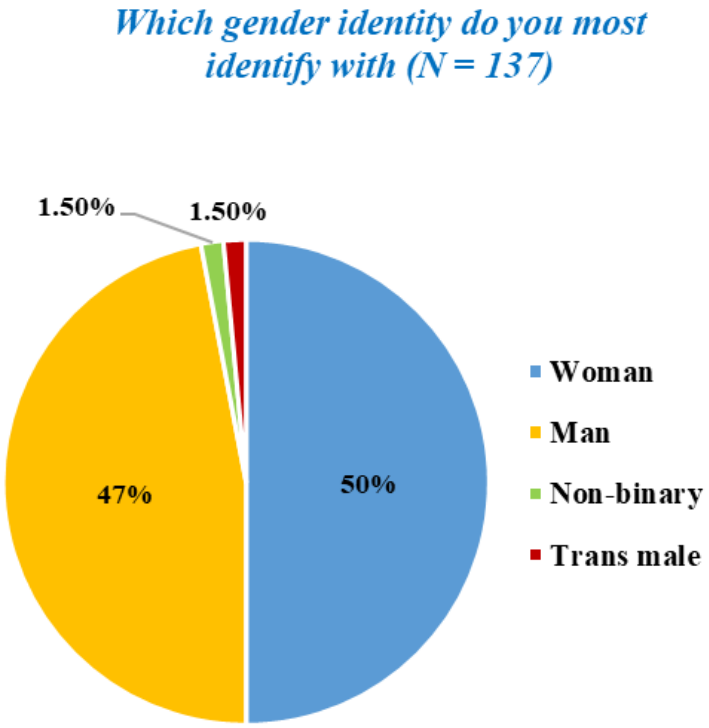

Figure 4.2: Gender Identity of International Student Participants

Country of Origin and Population Group

International student participants in this survey came from 47 countries of origin, illustrating this population's diversity of cultures and lived experiences. The five countries with the most international student participants were Bangladesh, India, USA, Nigeria, and Iran, representing approximately 48% of total research participants. The five dominant self-reported population groups among international students in this survey were South Asian, White, Black, West Asian/Middle Eastern, and Latin American. Table 4.1 summarises the number and percentage of international student participants by country, and Figure 4.3 illustrates the geographical distribution of participants' countries of origin on the world map.

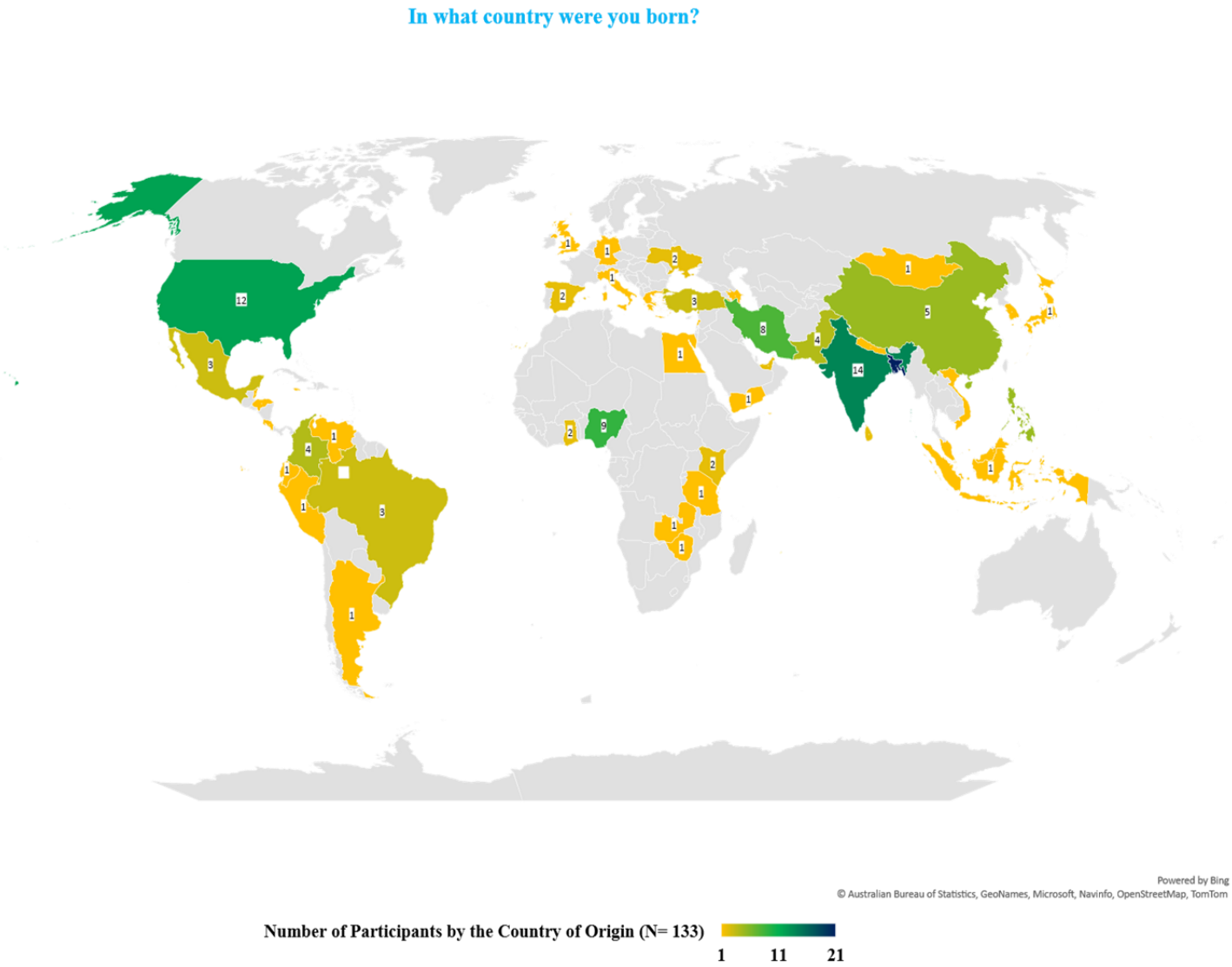

Figure 4.3: Map of Participants' Countries of Origin

Table 4.1: International Student Participants' Countries of Origin (N = 133)

Country	N	%	Country	N	%
Bangladesh	21	15.8%	Egypt	1	0.8%
India	14	10.5%	Federated States of Micronesia	1	0.8%
USA	12	9.0%	Germany	1	0.8%
Nigeria	9	6.8%	Honduras	1	0.8%
Iran	8	6.0%	Greece	1	0.8%
China	5	3.8%	Indonesia	1	0.8%
Philippines	5	3.8%	Italy	1	0.8%
Columbia	4	3.0%	Jamaica	1	0.8%
Pakistan	4	3.0%	Japan	1	0.8%
Brazil	3	2.3%	Kashmir	1	0.8%
Mexico	3	2.3%	Lebanon	1	0.8%
Turkey	3	2.3%	Malaysia	1	0.8%
Ghana	2	1.5%	Nepal	1	0.8%
Kenya	2	1.5%	Mongolia	1	0.8%
Mauritius	2	1.5%	Peru	1	0.8%
Spain	2	1.5%	South Korea	1	0.8%
Sri Lanka	2	1.5%	Tanzania	1	0.8%
Ukraine	2	1.5%	United Kingdom	1	0.8%
United Arab Emirates	2	1.5%	Vietnam	1	0.8%
Argentina	1	0.8%	Venezuela	1	0.8%
Azerbaijan	1	0.8%	Yemen	1	0.8%
Belize	1	0.8%	Zambia	1	0.8%
Costa Rica	1	0.8%	Zimbabwe	1	0.8%
Ecuador	1	0.8%			

Location in NL

The majority of the international student participants in this survey lived in the St. John's metropolitan area, representing approximately 96% out of 136 respondents. Only five participants lived in Corner Brook, and just one student lived in another rural area or small

town. This overrepresentation of survey respondents in St. John's metro area means the survey outcome mainly reflects international students' housing experiences in this city and cannot be generalised to other small cities in NL, even Corner Brook. To alleviate this limitation, I recruited four of the five survey respondents from Corner Brook for the follow-up interviews to better capture international students' housing experiences in this city. Figure 4.4 illustrates the geographical distribution of international student survey participants within Newfoundland, with Labrador excluded as no student participants were located in this region.

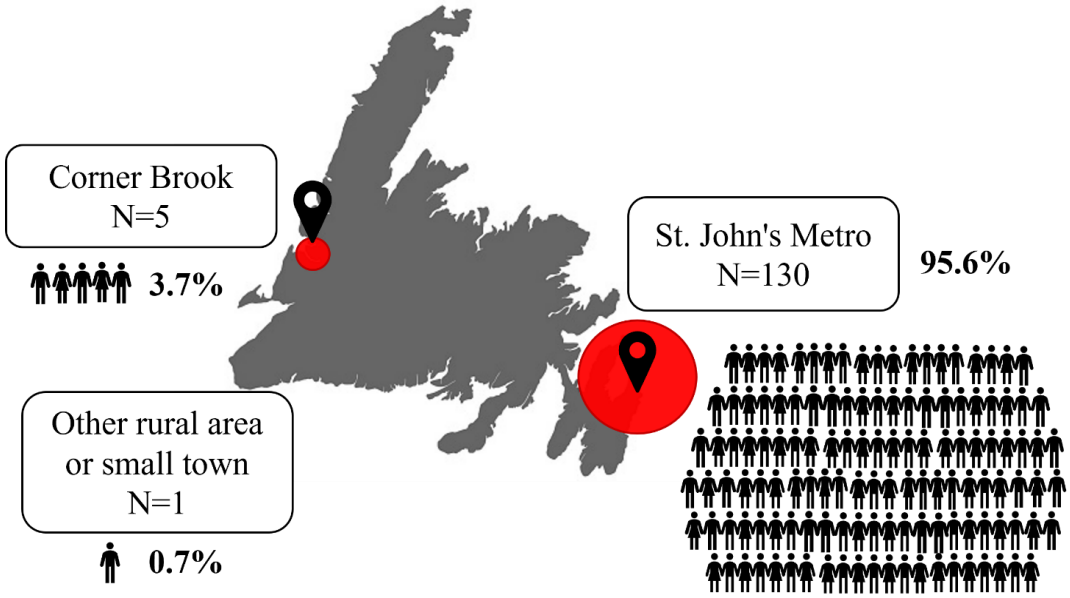

Figure 4.4: Location of International Student Survey Participants (N=136)

Arrival Immigration Status

The majority of study permit holders in this survey arrived in Canada as international students (93.5%), and only 6.5 % of all participants came to Canada with other arrival statuses before holding a study permit (e.g., such as worker or visitor status).

Highest Degree/Level of Education

About half of the international student participants (52%) had at least another university degree, whereas 47% of this population had not completed post-secondary education before starting their studies in NL.

Employment Status

About 40% of international students in this survey were employed, and a quarter of unemployed participants expressed their desire to find employment. In comparison, only 36% of international students in this survey did not work while studying (see Figure 4.5). This participation of international students in the Canadian job market highlights the financial burdens of this population, who are already paying more tuition than Canadian students with fewer opportunities for scholarships.

The importance of Canadian work experience for future career paths and immigration pathways to permanent residency is another factor that motivates international students to find a job while studying. However, most student participants in this survey were employed in part-time positions, reflecting the 20-hour-per-week limitation[9] for most study-permit holders in Canada. This finding is consistent with previous literature that highlighted the importance of paid employment and part-time jobs in the 'hustle economy' for low-income international students to manage their housing costs (Morris et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022).

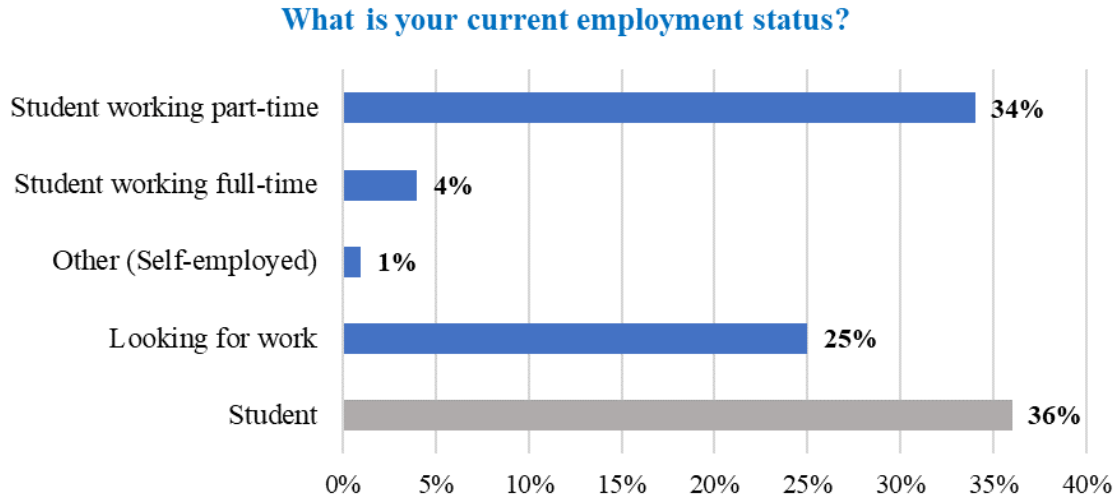

Figure 4.5: Respondents Employment Status (N = 138)

[9]This regulation changed to allow international students with off-campus work authorization on their study permit to work more than 20 hours weekly from November 15, 2022, until April 30, 2024. The latest announcement from the Immigration Minister indicates that the weekly work limit will return to 20 hours until September 2024, after which the government may permanently increase it to 24 hours (CBC News, 2024b).

4.3. Housing Status

This section analyses data in response to the second part of the survey, housing status in areas such as housing type, housing tenure, affordability and suitability of housing, and respondents' housing arrangements. The data shows that international students rely on the private rental market and that housing unaffordability is a major challenge for student participants. Moreover, the results demonstrated that most respondents lived in a housing unit with two or more bedrooms and the majority of them had enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of their household.

4.3.1. Housing Type and Tenure

One of the key survey findings is international students' dependence on the off-campus private rental market. The majority of international students in this survey rented off-campus housing, and only 25% of respondents lived in student dorms and residences. This finding supports the previous studies on Canadian student housing that highlighted the limited university-provided housing and the privatisation of student housing demands (Revington & August, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022). Moreover, not surprisingly given the recent federal Prohibition on the Purchasing of Residential Property by Non-Canadians Act (IRCC, 2023), home ownership was very low among this population. No participant owned their housing and only 3% of participants lived in housing owned by another household member.

Remarkably, the most common rental housing type among survey participants was houses and not apartments. Half of the participants rented either a house or an apartment in a house (e.g., basement or top floor). However, limited apartment building options for international students in the NL rental market are illustrated by the very low number of respondents who lived in apartment buildings (5%). This is consistent with Statistics Canada data (2016), which revealed that NL primarily consisted of single-detached houses, comprising

73.3% of occupied private dwellings, contrasting with the national average of 53.6%. NL also had lower proportions of high-rise apartments (0.3%) compared to the national average (9.9%), while Apartments or flats in a duplex (11.5%) were more prevalent in NL than nationwide (5.6%) (Statistics Canada, 2016). Renting a room was another trend among international student participants who lived off-campus, with 18% of survey respondents dwelling in this housing type. Among the respondents, 74% reported renting their accommodations, with 2% residing in arrangements where a household member rents on their behalf. Tabel 4.2 and Figure 4.6 illustrate the housing type and tenure among student participants.

Table 4.2: Housing Type of Survey Respondents (N = 138)

Housing type	N	%
Apartment in a house (i.e., basement, top floor)	40	29%
Student dorm/residence	35	25%
House (single-detached, semi-detached, row-house)	30	22%
Room rental in a house	25	18%
Apartment building	7	5%
Other (Hotel Apartment)	1	1%

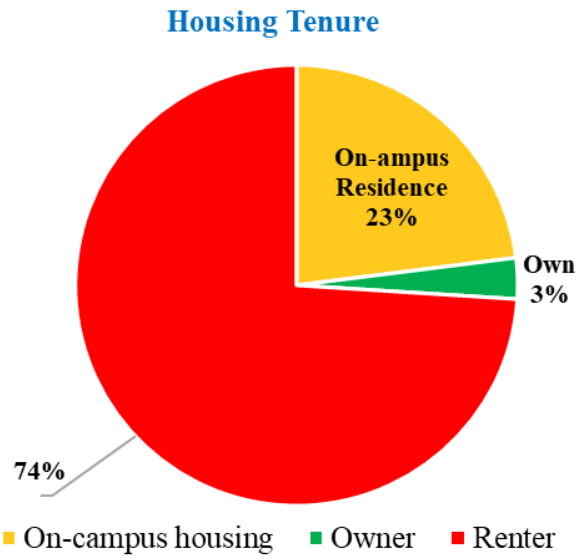

Figure 4.6: Housing Tenure of Respondents (N = 137)

4.3.2. Housing Affordability

Housing affordability is determined based on a balance of a household's income and housing expenditure. One measurement to assess housing affordability is the shelter-cost-income ratio. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), housing is deemed affordable if it costs less than 30% of a household's before-tax income (CMHC, 2019). To evaluate international students' housing affordability, we asked participants about their annual before-tax household income. We also asked respondents how much their household spends monthly on housing and related costs, including rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, home energy, water, and repairs.

However, two significant issues for evaluating housing affordability are the financial dependency of international students on their families and the general unavailability of a fixed income among the student population. About 50% of international student participants in this survey reported they either did not know or were unsure about their annual household income. Students might participate in various types of paid work on and off campus. Still, in most cases, part-time jobs, internships, scholarships, teaching assistantships (TA), and research assistantships (RA) are not available year-round. So, students are usually not paid on a fixed and regular basis, which is one possible reason behind the fewer responses to affordability questions in this survey.

Only 60 out of 138 international students in this survey responded to these affordability questions, and the outcome showed student incomes were primarily low, and the majority of them reported that housing costs represent a large percentage of their income, with 90% spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs. Notably, all students with an annual household income below $12,000, and most students with a $25,000 annual household income or less were spending more than 50% of their income on housing costs. Based on this result, housing was found to occupy a significant portion of international students' expenses. As one

student survey respondent explained: “Nowadays, international students are struggling to find a suitable place, and if you find it costly, even the on-campus is also expensive.”

Table 4.3: Shelter-Cost-Income Ratio of Survey Respondents (N = 60)

Shelter-cost-income ratio	**N**	**%**
Extreme rent burdened (50% and above)	33	55%
Rent burdened (30% and above)	21	35%
Not rent burdened (below 30%)	6	10%

The last part of the survey housing status section highlighted international students’ desire to participate in the job market. The results showed the importance of paid work as a way to manage students’ living and housing costs. In this sense, 33% of students who were extremely rent burdened with the shelter-cost-income ratio of more than 50% (11 out of 33) reported that they were looking for employment. Yet, having paid work still does not necessarily make housing affordable. In fact, 87% of student respondents with employment paid more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Therefore, the unaffordability of housing is an added financial burden for international students who pay higher tuition but have the same income from low-paid jobs or usually receive the same financial assistance as domestic students (Calder et al., 2016). Moreover, the financial dependency of many international students on their families means this financial burden is harsher for students from less affluent backgrounds or countries with changing currency rates.

4.3.3. Housing Suitability

According to the National Occupancy Standard (NOS) and CMHC, housing suitability is connected to whether the housing unit has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of residents (CMHC, 2019). Based on this standard, enough bedrooms mean one bedroom for each cohabiting adult couple, one for each unattached household member 18 years of age and over, and one for each same-sex pair of children under age 18. While housing suitability can

be related to both housing type and affordability, the lack of housing suitability usually entails issues of overcrowding and a lack of access to privacy.

To assess housing suitability, we asked survey participants how many bedrooms their housing had and how many people they lived with. The survey outcome demonstrated that most respondents lived in a housing unit with two or more bedrooms (80%), and 53.7% of international students lived in housing with 3 or more bedrooms. Only 20% lived in housing with less than two bedrooms, with no participant residing in a studio apartment unit off-campus (see figure 4.7). According to Esses et al. (2021), the prevalence of detached homes and fewer high-rise apartment buildings has resulted in a high number of bedrooms and better housing suitability in smaller urban centres. So, although living in a house as the common housing type in St. John's and Corner Brook reflects the limited provision of small and affordable units available for international students, it provides advantages in terms of the suitability of their housing.

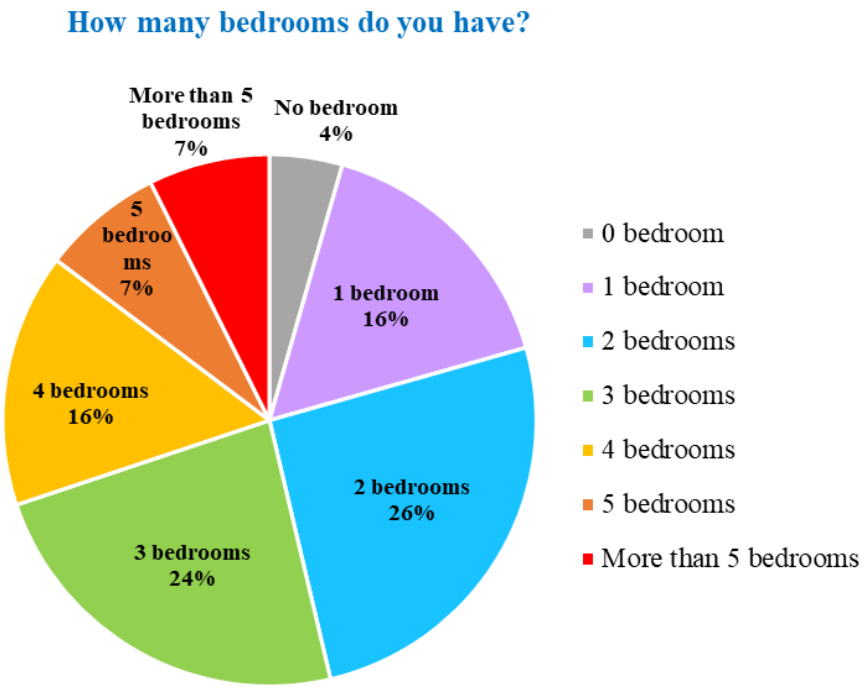

Figure 4.7: Number of Bedrooms (N = 136)

Nevertheless, housing with more bedrooms typically accommodates more occupants, which can impact the living arrangements and the feeling of overcrowding. Morris et al. (2020)

demonstrate that “living with many other people is a common experience for international students” (p.17). Sometimes, students choose to live with others and share their living spaces to reduce the cost of housing; trends such as subletting rooms or even sharing one room are to save on rent, bills, and energy and have more affordable housing. In this survey, we asked international students how many people live with them and who those people are. Then, to assess the suitability of their housing, I compared the number of people with the number of bedrooms. 72% of international student participants reported more or enough bedrooms compared to the number of people living in their home, and only 10% did not have enough bedrooms for the size and composition of their household residents. In 18% of cases, one bedroom was too few because one cohabiting couple lived together and used a shared bedroom. Unlike many other studies (Morris et al., 2020), the survey results showed overcrowding is not among the major housing problems facing international students in NL.

Table 4.4: Housing Suitability (N = 138)

Enough bedrooms for the household size and composition	**N**	**%**
Suitable	124	90%
Unsuitable	14	10%

4.3.4. Housing Arrangements

We also asked international students about their co-living arrangements, and if someone lived with them, who those people were. Only a small number of students in this survey reported living alone (16 out of 138 participants). Among those not living alone (N= 122), the majority of respondents (60%) cohabited with roommates only. In contrast, approximately a third of them (30%) resided with people they knew, including family members, spouse/partner, and/or children, or another relation (see table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Who Are Living with Students? (N = 122)

Who do you live with?	N	%
Roommate(s) only	73	60%
Partner/spouse	19	16%
Partner/spouse *and* children/dependants	9	7%
Another relation (i.e., cousin, uncle, or other relation)	8	7%
Other	7	6%
Roommate(s) *and* landlord	4	3%
Landlord only	2	2%

4.4. Negative and Positive Housing Experiences

We also asked survey participants about their negative and positive housing experiences in NL with a response list of 15 housing challenges and 13 positive housing experiences. In both questions, respondents could select all the options that applied to them, and we also provided an "Other" option where respondents could add another item (see Figure 4.8 and 4.9).

4.4.1. Housing Affordability is a Major Challenge

The survey shows that the most challenging housing experience for international students was housing unaffordability, with 59% of the participants reporting affordability challenges. Figure 4.8 shows the list of 15 housing challenges and the rate of international student responses for each challenge. The identified high shelter-cost-income ratio and the unaffordability of student participants' housing echoed in their negative housing experiences as well. About 70% of students who were extremely rent burdened or spent 50% and above of their income on housing costs reported affordability as one of their main housing challenges. Some students also reported increasing prices in the time of this survey (Summer and Fall 2021) due to rising demands for the first in-person semester at Memorial University after the spread of COVID-19. One respondent living in St. John's described:

> As many international students are entering St John's the landlords are taking advantage of it and raised the rent a lot. The room which used to be 350$ per month just 1 year ago now it's 550/600$. Which is ridiculous. [sic]

Affordability is also a challenge for students who live in university residences, and 43% of students living on campus (N=35) selected affordability as one of their negative housing experiences. One reported reason for on-campus housing unaffordability was the mandatory meal plan in some of the residences[10], which is "not affordable" for some students according to one survey respondent living in a university residence at St. John's campus mentioned.

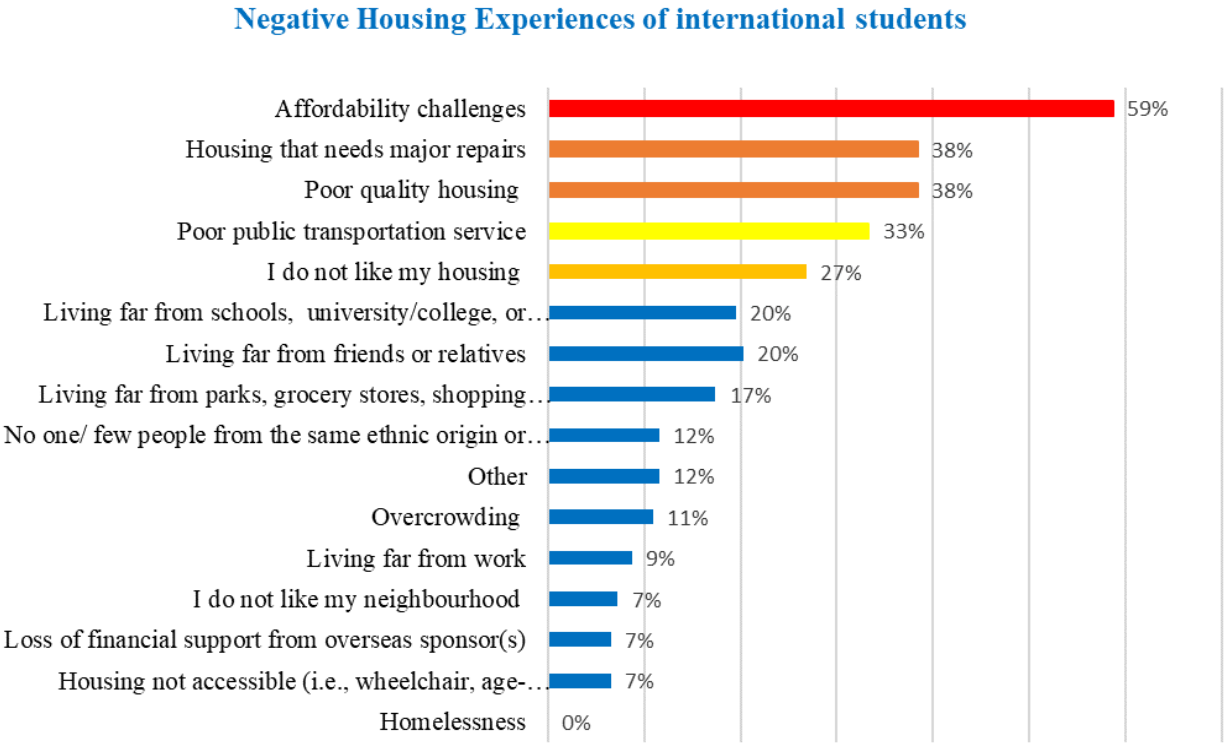

Figure 4.8: Negative Housing Experiences (N = 138)

4.4.2. Housing Quality Issues

A lack of adequate housing was the second most frequent challenge expressed by students. 38% of them reported that their housing was in need of major repairs, and 38% lived

[10] Many Canadian universities require students living in residence to have meal plans, though the structures of these plans vary across institutions.

in poor-quality housing. Some students selecting the "Other" option also reported housing inadequacy issues such as insulation problems, housing in need of repair, the need for pest control, substandard living conditions, old furniture, poor maintenance, and a lack of elevator. For instance, a student survey respondent living in St. John's explained:

> I have found that the houses that are available for students are mostly not well maintained. The appliances are more than 10 - 15 years older at some places and are working with huge flaws in them. I did not get the proper maintenance help when I needed [it].

This quote highlights the widespread issue of poorly maintained housing and the lack of adequate support for maintenance concerns among student participants.

4.4.3. Poor Public Transportation and Mobility Challenges

The third major issue reported by student participants was the poor public transportation service. One third of international students mentioned that they had difficulties with the public transit system in their cities, illustrating the mobility challenges experienced by international students in NL. This finding supports Sutherland & Cheng's (2009) study in two small cities in Ontario that showed international students tend not to own cars and require to use public transportation when they need to be mobile: "the reality is that whether a person has a vehicle or not can make a huge difference in one's ability to be mobile" (Sutherland & Cheng's, 2009, p.300). Sutherland & Cheng's (2009) study also highlighted that socioeconomic status is a major variable influencing individuals' mobility. Given the lower car ownership and licence possession among NL international students, they mostly rely on public bus systems in St. John's and Corner Brook. Furthermore, the need for better public transit is more evident when considering other connected negative housing experiences reported by international students in this survey such as living far from university/college, schools, and daycare (20%), far from friends and relatives (20%) and far from work (9%). As articulated by a survey respondent living in Corner Brook:

> Public transportation is a real issue at Corner Brook which affects students significantly. There is no public transportation past 6 pm on weekdays and they stop for an hour (12-1pm) for cleaning purposes related to COVID. Most importantly, no service is available during weekends. This has already impacted me and many others.

This quote underscores the critical impact of limited public transportation services, particularly outside of typical weekday hours, which significantly affects students' mobility and daily routines in Corner Brook.

4.4.4. It Is Hard to Find Housing

The last significant housing challenge among NL international students was finding accommodation. This finding aligns with Wiginton's (2013) study which showed how lack of affordable and appropriate housing is a challenge for new immigrants in small communities. Given that newcomers face a completely different context after arrival, helping with finding housing is one of their immediate arrival needs (Wiginton, 2013). In this survey, some students reported the limited availability of different housing options as one of their main housing challenges, along with a competitive rental housing market, which makes it a struggle to find and secure a place to live. Some "Other" responses noted that there were not enough housing options or space available with incredible competition for available options. As a student living in St. John's explained: "This was the longest, most difficult housing search I have ever experienced…we had to pay to live in a hotel for 4 weeks while house hunting."

4.4.5. I Like My Neighbourhood

The most positive housing experience among the international student participants was their satisfaction with their neighbourhood, and 55% of respondents selected "I like my neighbourhood (i.e., safe, quiet)." This outcome underlines the significance of the urban environment for international student experiences. Neighbourhood satisfaction is related to factors like the location and the presence of facilities and perceived characteristics such as

safety, attractiveness, quietness, place attachment, and social cohesion (Mouratidis, 2020). Figure 4-9 shows the list of 13 positive housing experiences and the rate of international student responses.

4.4.6. My Housing Is Close

The second most positive experience was proximity to school (in the case of international students, proximity to the university), with 45% of international students selecting these responses. In addition, 41% of students also considered living close to other locations such as parks, grocery stores, shopping centres, and places of worship as a positive experience. This finding highlights the importance of location and distance in positive housing experiences which is consistent with Forbes-Mewett's (2018) study that identified cost and distance as two major factors international students consider in choosing where to live.

4.4.7. Suitable and Adequate Housing

The third most frequent positive housing experience was ‘housing in good condition’, indicating qualities such as cleanliness, brightness, good layout, and maintenance (43% of participants). In addition to this measure – 40% identified suitable housing size as a positive experience. Moreover, “Other” responses included related factors such as having a “nice landlord,” “ample storage space,” and a “good outside view” as other positive aspects of their housing.

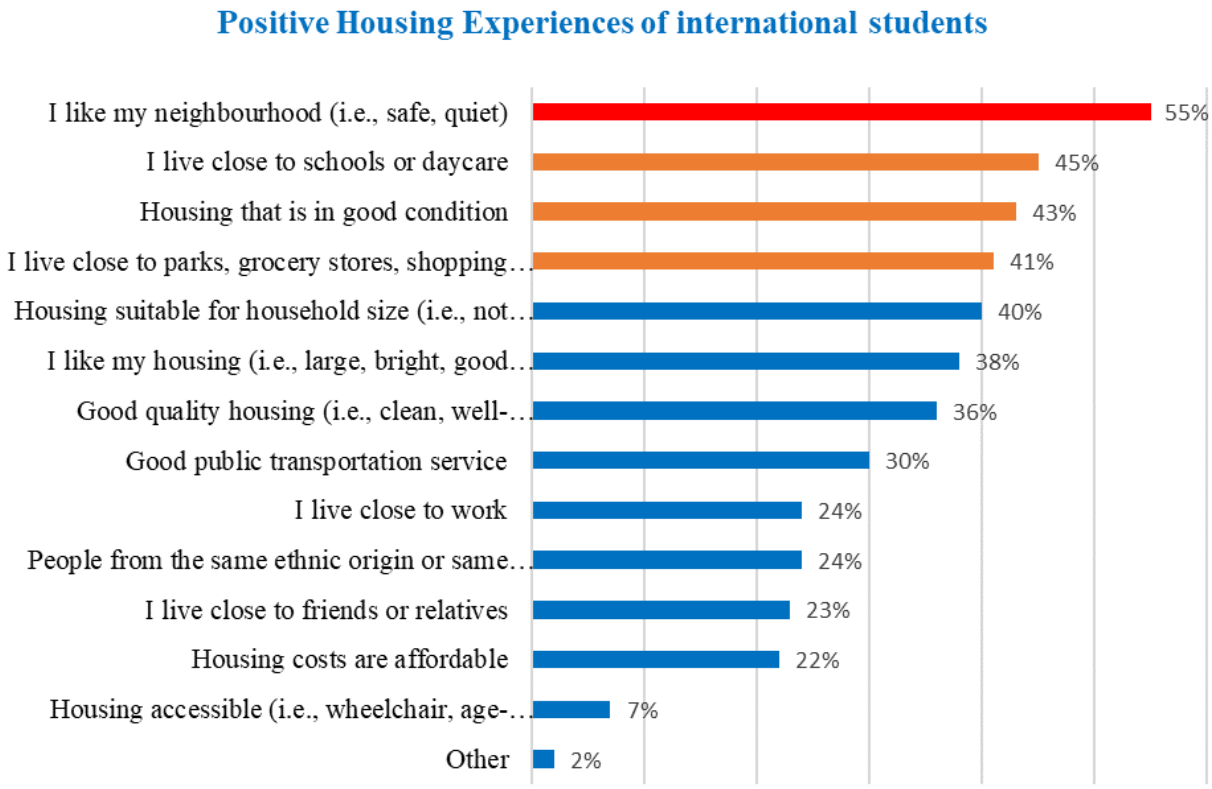

Figure 4.9: Positive Housing Experiences (N = 138)

4.5. Housing Information and Supports

This section of the survey aims to understand how international students access housing information and how and from which organisation they seek housing support. The survey findings illustrate the significance of online platforms for accessing housing information and participants' lack of familiarity with housing supports outside the university.

4.5.1. Reliance on Online Platforms

We asked participants which sources they would use if they needed any housing information. The results showed that international students are primarily using online platforms such as Facebook (85% of responses) and Kijiji (79% of responses) to search for housing, alongside other real estate websites such as Remax and Redfin. Survey respondents also highlighted the challenges of using these platforms to find housing. As one survey respondent living in St. John's explained:

> Sites like Kijiji and rentals.ca are clogged with automated posts from property management companies for units that are not available at old rent prices, which gave us a false impression of housing costs and availability before arriving. We were also given an inappropriate estimate of housing costs by the university.

This quote illustrates the overlapping challenges international students have when searching for housing even before they arrive in Canada. As Figure 4.10 shows, international students also rely on 'word of mouth' social networks for housing information, mainly from friends (50%), but also from family members (7%), community and cultural groups (7%), and religious organisations (2%). Additionally, one third of participants reported using university housing resources.

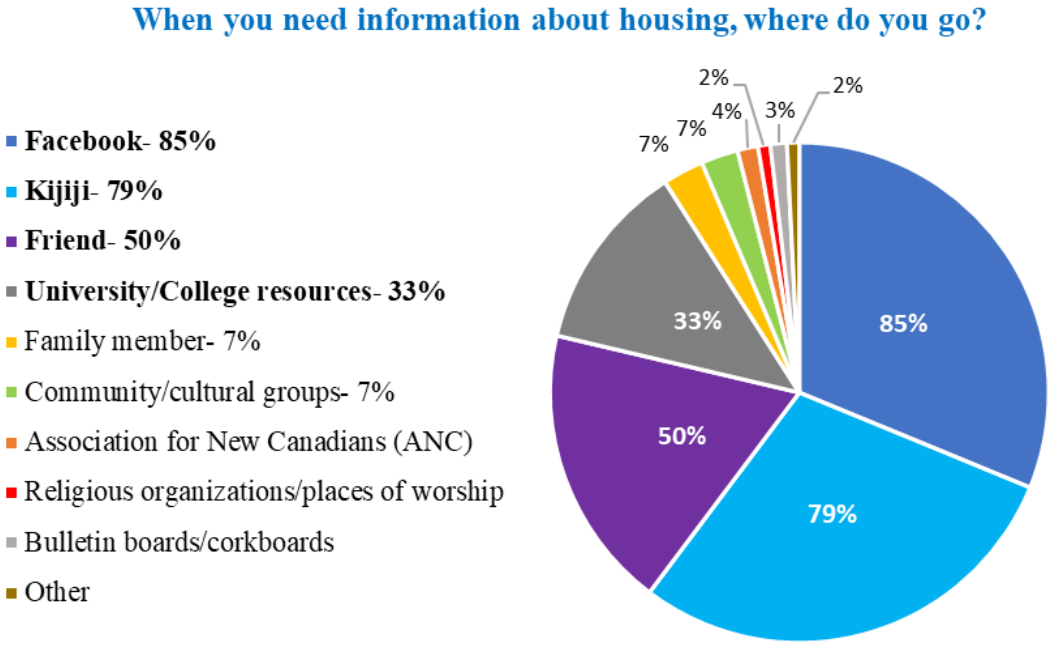

Figure 4.10: Housing Information Sources (N = 138)

4.5.2. Limited Familiarity/Connection with Local Organizations

We also asked participants about their familiarity and engagement with local organisations providing housing information and support. The survey results show that most international students are familiar with the university's Internationalisation Office (IO) – which maintains an online resource on "Housing Options for International Students" containing

information on renting, tenancy resources, and legal services on and off campus – and 38% had already connected with the IO about their housing needs (see Figure 4.11).

Off-campus, international students are the most familiar with the Association for New Canadians (the local settlement service provider). Given that this organisation's primary mandate is to serve permanent residents, it is not surprising that only a small minority had connected with this organisation about their housing needs. Most participants, however, were not familiar with off-campus housing supports available to them such as those offered by the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PLIAN), which provides free legal advice, including programming on the housing rights of newcomers, including international students. Moreover, the majority of respondents had never contacted any organisation about their housing needs (see Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Familiarity and Connection with Local Organisations (N = 138)

While 60% of respondents felt they 'understood their housing rights' (Figure 4.12), they lack knowledge of the legal aspects of housing. Only 14% of participants were familiar with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), the board that handles issues between renters and

landlords such as complaints and disputes. Only one respondent had direct experience with the RTB and reported having no support person to help prepare their case for this board. The survey also shows that international students are unfamiliar with the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC), the division of the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador providing housing policy and programs.

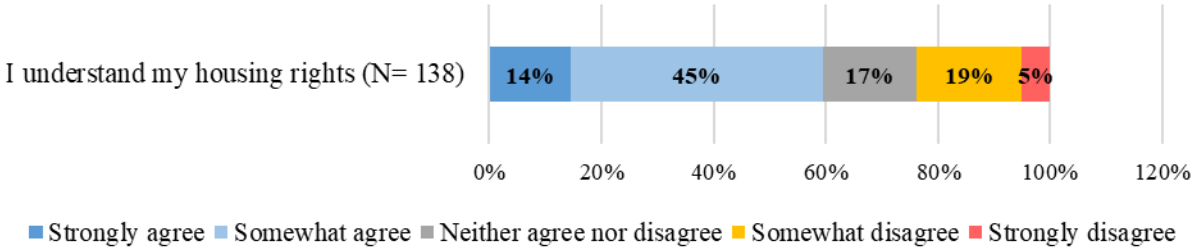

Figure 4-12: Understanding Housing Rights

Taken together, these findings –students' unfamiliarity with local support options, a lack of connections with local organisations, limited university housing supports, and over-reliance on online platforms – illustrate the need for more and better efforts to engage with international students on housing concerns, both on and off-campus.

4.5.3. Communication Type and Language Preference

We asked participants about the communication modes they used to connect with local organisations about housing matters. Among the minority that had connected with organisations, most had done so through email (see Figure 4.13).

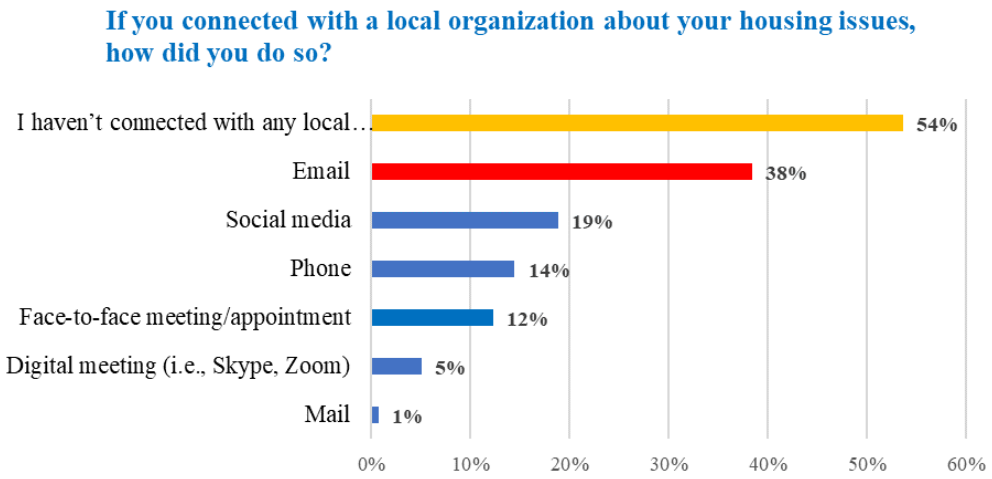

Figure 4.13: Type of Communication for Obtaining Housing Information (N = 138)

Nearly all respondents prefer to get housing information in English only (Figure 4.14).

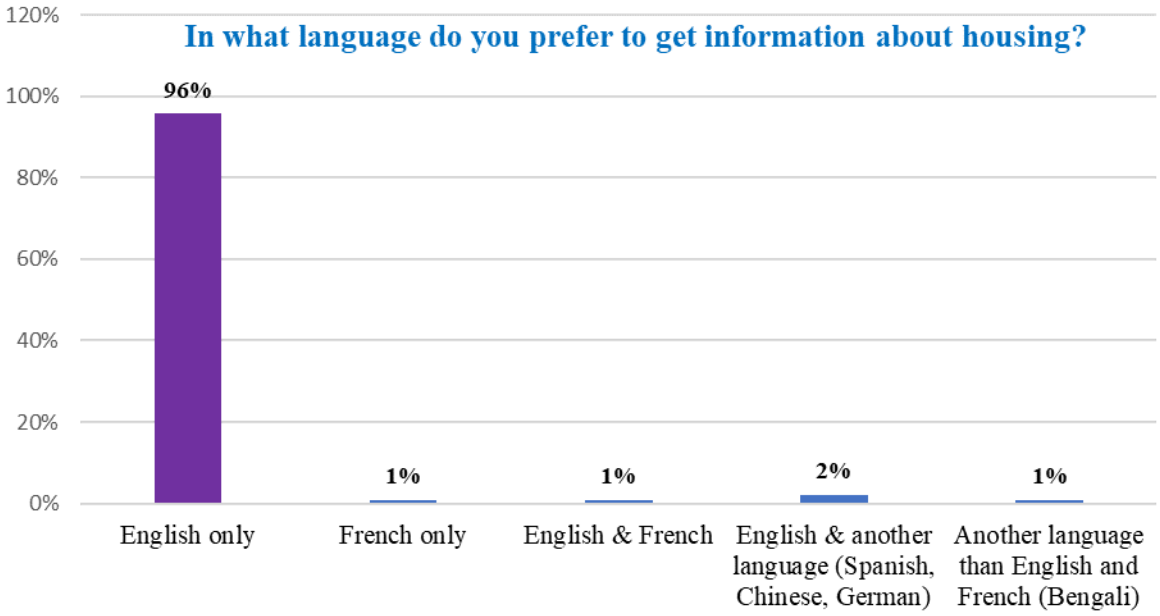

Figure 4.14: Housing Information Language Preference (N = 138)

Respondents primarily preferred email to obtain housing information from local organisations, with social media, phone, and face-to-face communication also being common channels. English was unanimously chosen as the preferred language, reflecting the respondents' high proficiency and comfort with the language.

4.6. Housing & COVID-19

We also asked a series of questions about the pandemic and its impact on international student housing experiences. The findings reveal that international students encountered financial difficulties, issues of housing unsuitability, and higher utility costs during the pandemic.

4.6.1. Housing challenges since the COVID-19 pandemic

The first pandemic-related survey question explored whether or not the pandemic had introduced new housing challenges for respondents. While 50% of respondents did not experience new housing challenges related to COVID-19, other international students struggled with financial difficulties and housing unsuitability. University shutdowns and the shift to online learning during subsequent waves of COVID-19 required students to stay at home to observe public health measures. These impacts increased students' housing costs in some cases and also led to their loss of on and off-campus jobs. Higher utility costs was the most frequent COVID-related housing challenge reported by international students, including higher energy and WIFI needs for 32% of participants. COVID-19-related financial difficulties resulted in 12% of students falling behind their rents, two students encountering eviction, and one respondent experiencing homelessness. Other students reported that their housing was unsuitable for working from home or even for observing public health guidelines, including self-isolation and social distancing requirements.

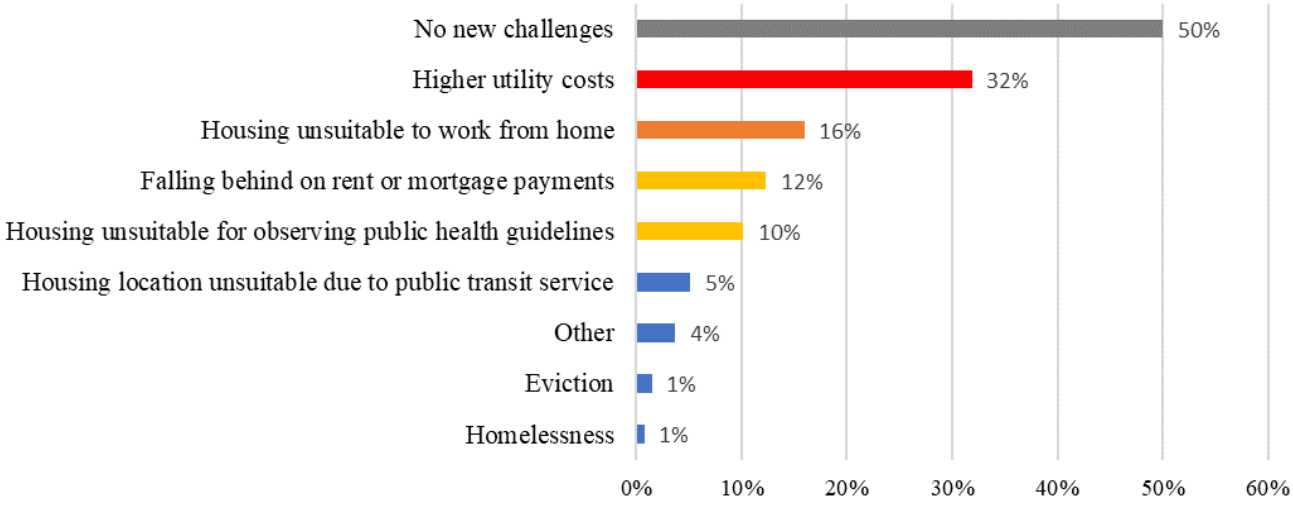

Figure 4.15: New Student Housing Challenges Since the COVID-19 Pandemic (N = 138)

4.6.2. The Limitation of Pandemic Financial Supports

The survey responses also confirmed that many international students were not eligible for government pandemic relief programs, with 93% of student participants reporting they had not received any COVID-19-related financial support. For instance, the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) provided financial support for post-secondary students who could not find employment due to COVID-19, however,only Canadian citizens and permanent residents were eligible. Although international students working part-time were eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), only 9 out of 138 (7%) student survey respondents reported receiving CERB (Figure 4.16), a finding explained by the CERB earnings threshold (an international student needed to have earned at least $5,000 during the 12 months prior to the date of their application) and its residency requirement (if a student had returned to their home country due to job loss or remote learning, they were not eligible for CERB).

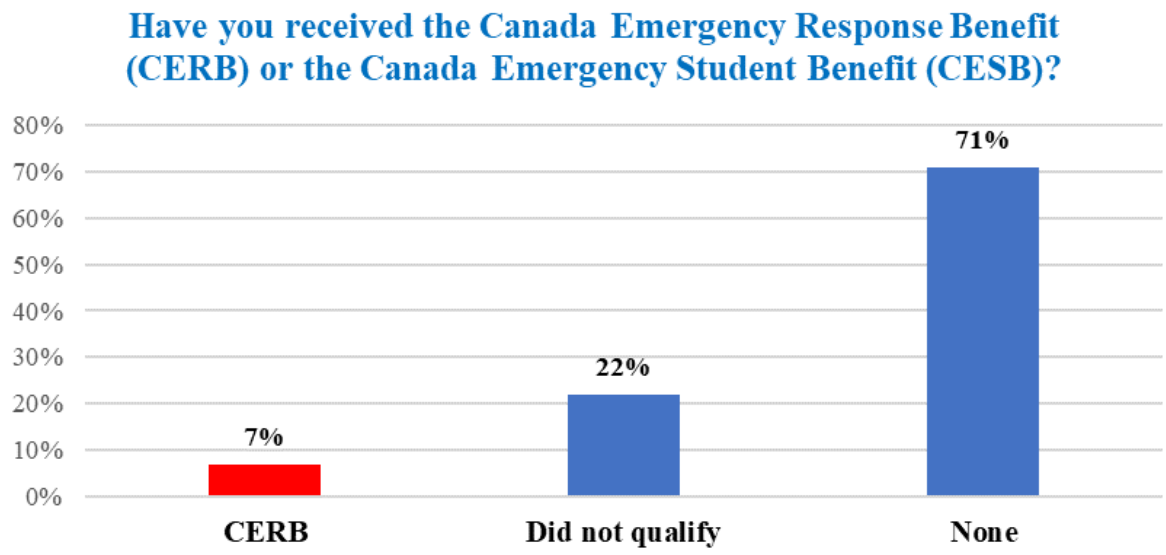

Figure 4.16: Receiving the Government's Pandemic Financial Help (N = 138)

4.6.3. Self-Isolation Experiences

We also asked participants if they had completed a 14-day self-isolation period at any point during the pandemic and if so, what their experiences were. This question was open-ended. Federal, provincial, and university self-isolation requirements changed repeatedly during the pandemic and had been lifted by the time this survey launched in the fall of 2021. 70% Almost three quarters of student respondents (N=84), however, had self-isolated at some point since the start of the pandemic. Most international students self-isolated in a location other than their home, and only 15% of respondents (N=59) used their off-campus home as the location of self-isolation. Many international students could not arrange a place to stay pre-arrival, and many respondents noted that their housing was unsuitable for observing the quarantine mandates due to shared common areas like bathroom and kitchen or because of their landlord's unwillingness to allow them to self-isolate inside their rental homes. As a result, many international students relied on university-provided self-isolation accommodations in university residences, or at hotels, Airbnb apartments, or other short-term rental spaces (see Figure 4.17).

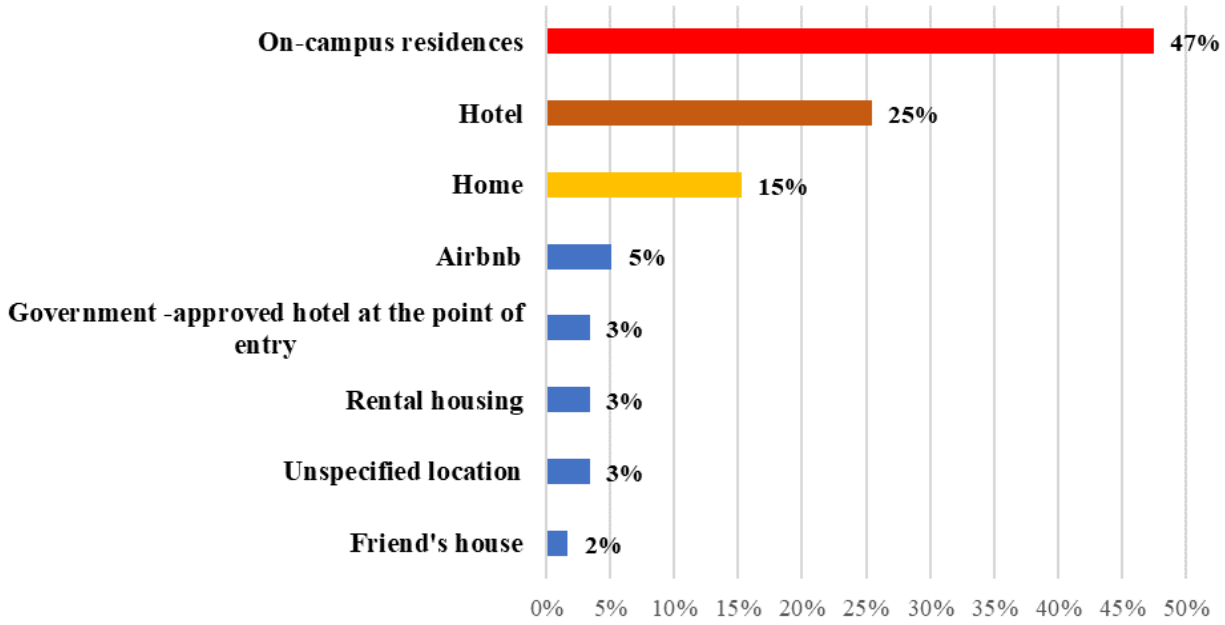

Figure 4.17 : Survey Participants Self-isolation Locations (N = 59)

Those students who had self-isolated on campus were generally satisfied with this experience, although some expressed frustration with the university meal plan during this period. International students who isolated off-campus had to order food and grocery items online, which was expensive, and some had difficulties with online payments and credit cards. Some students reported the unavailability of affordable self-isolation places in university residences or elsewhere during peak periods, forcing them to use expensive hotels. Other students who self-isolated upon arrival reported feelings of loneliness and being 'stuck inside' when they wanted to explore their new surroundings. Moreover, some experienced hardships in finding housing during self-isolation when they could not attend viewings in-person, and some reported feeling stressed about where to live after finishing the quarantine period.

4.7. Belonging and Feeling at Home

Finally, we also asked participants questions about their experiences of housing discrimination and exploitation, and how their housing experiences connected to their sense of belonging and feeling of being 'at home.'

4.7.1. Housing Discrimination

Researchers have previously documented racialized immigrants experiencing discrimination in the rental market (Morris et al., 2020). Teixeira & Li (2009) considered tight economic and housing markets as challenging factors contributing to discrimination that may lead immigrants into marginalisation, exclusion, or even homelessness. To assess housing discrimination, we asked students whether they felt taken advantage of by their landlords because they are newcomers and how they felt about the statement: 'landlords won't rent to me because of my accent, name, skin colour, ethnic origin, and religion' (See Figure 4.18).

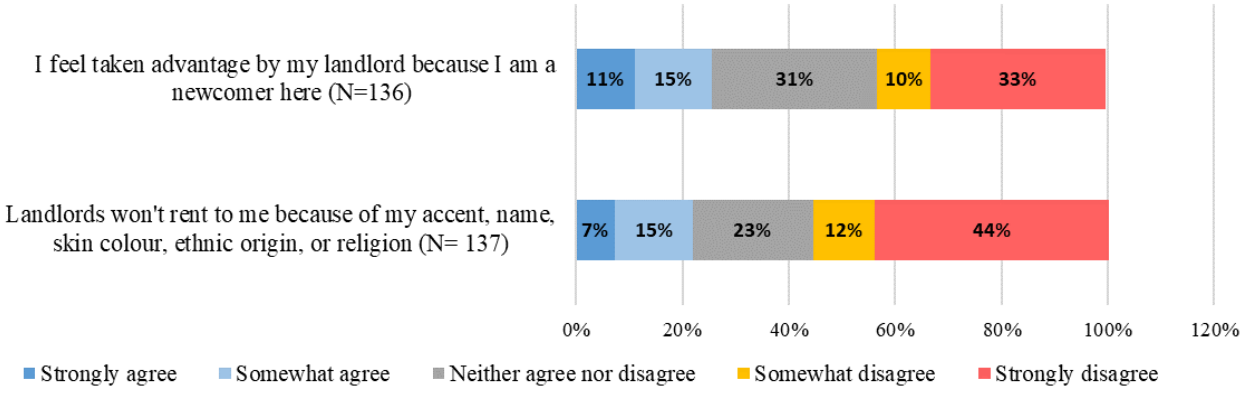

Figure 4.18: Survey Participants' Feelings of Housing Discrimination

Overall, most students did not report experiencing landlord discrimination and 43% did not feel taken advantage of by their landlords. However, it is concerning that more than a quarter (26%) of students strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the first statement ("I feel taken advantage of by my landlord because I am a newcomer here"). Furthermore, 22% somewhat or strongly agreed with our question about landlord discrimination. One survey participant mentioned:

> Since moving here in January 2021 I have lived in 3 homes. The first two housing situations were very bad where the landlord did not fix things in the home. I was living with minority groups, and I have a strong feeling that the landlord was trying to take advantage of us. I am from the US, so I am very familiar with my rights as a tenant.

This statement underscores the importance of students' knowledge of their housing rights when dealing with landlords. Notably, some international students emphasised '*hidden'* experiences of discrimination and exclusion from the housing market in NL, where landlords prefer locals over international tenants. As described by a Latin American student living in St. John's:

> My roommate and I had to move to a new house during the pandemic. She is Canadian. When both of us were contacting landlords to arrange a viewing of their properties, she received more, quicker and more detailed responses than I did…. Had my roommate been an international student like me, we would neither be able to find a new place in a timely manner.

The survey results underscore that discrimination and favouritism in the rental market do not only reflect racial prejudice, but other biases as well. For example, one survey respondent reported experiencing discrimination based on their family composition. "The landlords don't reply to inquiries when they find out I am an international student with a young kid," she explained. Other survey participants highlighted the biases against international students as ingrained in the rental applications process. For instance, landlords might require information such as tenancy history, Canadian references, and banking history, which international students may not be able to provide, thus excluding them from the housing market.

4.7.2. A Sense of Community

In this section, we asked student participants if their current housing situation made them feel like they were 'part of a community.' About half of student respondents agreed with this question, while 21% disagreed (see Figure 4.19). This finding confirms previous research highlighting housing and the welcoming community as main factors contributing to successful settlement and immigrants' quality of life (Teixeira & Li, 2009).

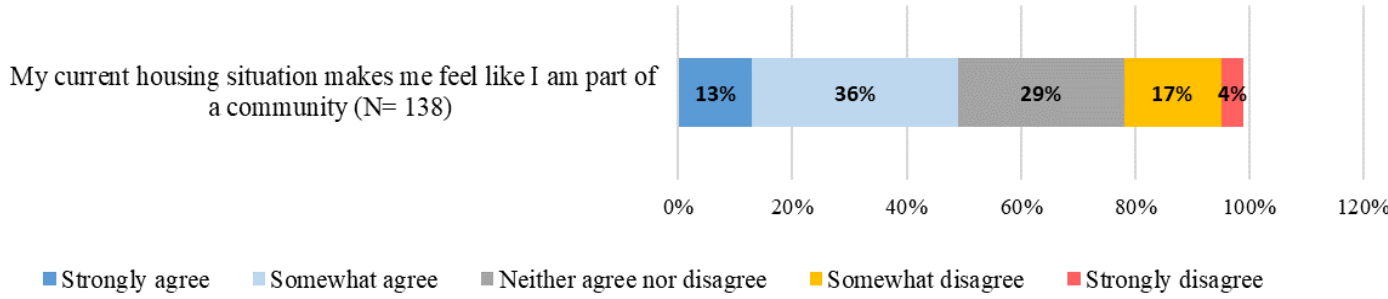

Figure 4.19: Survey Participants' Sense of Community

4.7.3. Feeling at Home

The survey also shows that while many international students are having positive experiences in their housing neighbourhoods, most did not 'feel at home' during the pandemic. More specifically, 24% of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement: "during the pandemic, my local town, municipality, or rural area has felt like home," while 38% were neutral (see Figure 4.20). This pattern aligns with Teixeira & Drolet's (2018) finding that satisfaction with dwelling and neighbourhood does not necessarily lead to feeling at home.

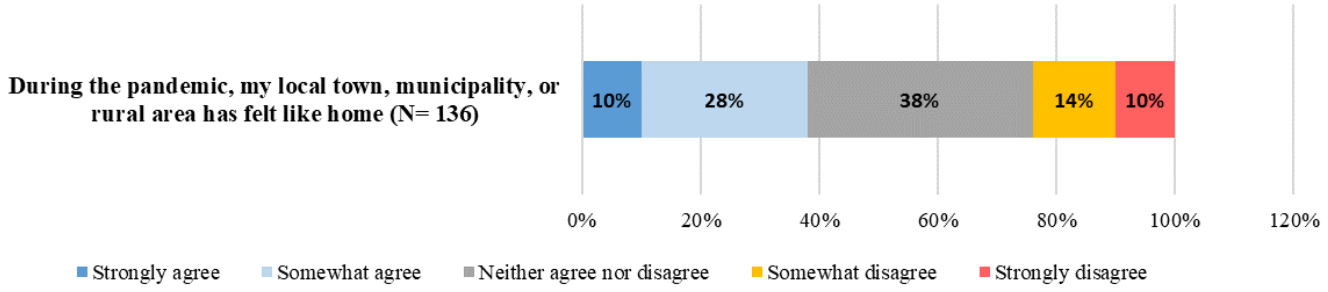

Figure 4.20: Survey Participants' Feeling at Home

4.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, my analysis of study permit holders in the NL housing survey underscores the dependence of international students on the province's private rental market. Adequacy, maintenance, size, landlord-tenant relations, location and distance, are all found to be essential factors for housing satisfaction. Most international students in this survey tended

to be residing in a house with two bedrooms and more with roommates or family members, reflecting the limited provision of small and affordable units in St. John's and Corner Brook. Some international students also reported mobility challenges because of the limited public transit system in these cities.

Moreover, the survey shows that housing affordability is a challenge for most international students in NL. Most respondents are rent burdened, with housing occupying a significant portion of international students' expenses. Thus, international students reported having to juggle employment and their studies to manage housing and other living costs. Students also reported increasing housing prices in Summer and Fall 2021 due to rising demand and new arrivals for the first in-person semester at Memorial University post COVID-19. This time period was particularly difficult, and some respondents reported experiencing hardships in finding housing due to the limited housing availability and competitive rental market.

The most significant impact of COVID-19 on housing challenges reported by international students in this survey were higher utility costs and housing unsuitability for studying and working from home or observing public health guidelines. Those who were required to self-isolate in NL used university-provided self-isolation locations on university residences, hotels, Airbnb, and other short-term rental spaces. While international students struggled with more financial difficulties during the pandemic, many were not eligible for this financial assistance due to their temporary immigration status in Canada. This financial barrier and a general sense of isolation among international students brought about by the reduced number of social opportunities during the pandemic needs to be addressed in post-pandemic decision-making. I will discuss and explain these challenges in chapter six in more detail.

The survey outcomes highlight barriers with respect to the availability and accessibility of housing information as well as potential housing market exclusion among international students in NL. Many student participants reported not having connections with any

organisation offering housing support. Students' reliance on online platforms and unfamiliarity with local sources of housing information and support lead to a lack of knowledge of legal aspects of housing. Some international student participants reported discrimination and exclusion from the NL housing market based on their backgrounds or immigration status. This survey also showed that many international students in NL did not feel at home. However, many student participants felt a sense of community and satisfaction with their neighbourhood, which can positively impact their sense of belonging and feeling welcomed in NL communities.

In the next chapter, I present my analysis of the follow-up interviews and photovoice with international students and key informants.

Chapter Five

Findings and Outcomes 2: Interviews & Photovoice

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I analyse the qualitative data generated by the interviews and photovoice on the housing experiences of international students in St. John's and Corner Brook, the impact of COVID-19 on these experiences, and the degree to which students feel (un)welcomed and (not)at-home. To analyse this data, I first allowed themes to emerge from the data, then created and evolved codes by comparing insights and meanings across the data sources, before organising and labelling the codes. I used grounded theory to identify key themes and conceptualise the main thematic categories by shifting back and forth between the research questions, theories, and evidence in the interview transcripts and student-generated images. This strategy enabled me to build knowledge from multiple meanings and explore unknown and hidden agendas (Knigge & Cope, 2006). In the following chapter, I discuss eight themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with international students and key informants, and the photovoice activity. The findings from these two groups of interviewees revealed quite similar challenges and experiences. While international student participants provided nuanced personal narratives and visual accounts of their housing and lived experiences at a micro-scale level, key informants emphasised the interconnectedness of the housing challenges facing international students and offered some solutions to address these challenges.

One-on-one interviews and photovoice activities with international students in St. John's and Corner Brook revealed their housing barriers, including unaffordability, competitiveness, and discrimination. Despite relying heavily on the private rental market and online platforms, students faced challenges in securing suitable housing and encountered financial precarity in meeting basic needs. COVID-19 further intensified housing demands and

changed students' needs, while also impacting social isolation and interrupting their mobility. Key informants also highlighted the interconnectedness of these challenges and proposed solutions, such as providing more housing support, access to food banks, and developing protocols for future lockdowns.

5.2. Results of Follow-Up Interviews and Photovoice

I analyse 16 one-on-one semi-structured interviews and photovoice activities with MUNL international students and five interviews with key informants. My thematic analysis of interview transcripts and student-generated photos identified eight main themes: (1) informational needs, (2) lack of housing options, (3) affordability challenges, (4) living conditions, (5) mobility challenges, (6) social relationships, (7) discrimination & exclusion, and (8) feeling welcomed and at-home. In the following sections, I discuss each theme in greater detail.

5.3.1. Informational Needs

My interviews with international students and key informants highlighted international students' need for housing information before and upon arrival. Like many other newcomer groups, when an international student arrives in a new city in a new country to live and study, securing a place to live is one of the first settlement steps. The interviews explored the confusion, challenges, and stress international students experience when arranging their first accommodation in the province. Many international students begin looking for housing while they are unfamiliar with housing resources, rental agreements, and tenancy rights and responsibilities. Student participants emphasised that the housing search process starts pre-arrival on social media and online platforms. Participants, however, reported this pre- or post-arrival housing search as one of the most challenging settlement steps. This finding is consistent with previous studies that demonstrate the difficulties international students encounter when looking for housing pre-arrival (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; Farbenblum

et al., 2020). The interviews also highlighted the importance of having access to housing information for recently-arrived international students in alleviating this confusion and stress and avoiding housing scams while navigating a new housing landscape. Below, I discuss these informational needs with respect to international students' (1) pre-arrival housing search, (2) arrival and self-isolation experience, (3) hectic first days upon arrival, (4) hardships of arranging the first accommodation, and (5) housing advertising, trust, and scams.

Pre-Arrival Housing Search; *"I didn't know how to get accommodation"*

MUNL international students start their housing search before arriving via social media or other online platforms. Searching for housing online, however, is challenging, especially for international students who do not have friends or family living locally to help them. An Iranian student living in St. John's explained:

> We used to be really worried about this whole process of finding a place. I myself and almost all of my friends started this process before we even arrived here. So, a few people could have the chance of having someone finding a place for them before they arrive, and it made it really easier for them. (Interview#3)

This student's narrative highlights the role of social capital in finding the first housing arrangement in a new country. Moreover, this student and some other participants reported having limited access to some online platforms in their home country before coming to Canada. Due to these hardships, international students may look for short-term accommodations such as in hotels, Airbnbs, or a subleased short-term rental before arriving. Once in Canada, students will seek longer-term housing. During COVID-19, temporary accommodations also provided a place to quarantine, given the public health mandates that some international students were asked to comply with at the Canadian border and in NL in the 2020 and 2021 academic years.

Arrival Self-Isolation Experience; *"It was like a prison"*

The majority of international student participants in this study arrived in Canada and NL in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. These participants were required to complete

different durations of self-isolation based on the public health mandates at various pandemic alert levels. These students experienced multiple challenges upon arrival, including higher costs of flights and isolation spaces, difficulties ordering food, and feelings of loneliness and social disconnection during self-isolation. My interviews with key informants confirmed that the pandemic also changed some of the housing needs of the international student population. Pre-arrival accommodation became more critical after the pandemic began. Most new MUNL international students needed to arrange a pre-arrival self-isolation space with specific public health measurements upon arrival in Canada. MUNL offered some isolation spaces on campus residences between the falls of 2020 and 2021, with other isolation supports such as airport arrival service, meal delivery, and peer support online check-ins. These on-campus isolation spaces were fully booked in the summer and fall of 2021, requiring some international students to secure off-campus isolation spaces in hotels, Airbnb, and the rental market. Some participants had to complete an extra 3-day self-isolation period at a designated point of entry hotel (in Toronto and Montreal) before continuing to NL and completing 14-days of self-isolation in St. John's and Corner Brook. Beyond the high costs these students incurred, they also described the feelings of loneliness they experienced in these quarantine spaces. An Iranian student who self-isolated in hotels in Montreal and St. John's in 2021 described his 14-day hotel in St. John's in the following way:

> There was a difference between rooms at the hotel. And some of them didn't have such a window or something. So, you can't have fresh air. That was my case. So not only I couldn't walk out, I couldn't even open a new window for some fresh air. And it was exactly like a prison. So even worse in prison, I guess people can just socialise with each other. So, that was tough. (Interview#3)

This quote exemplifies the loneliness of self-isolation upon arrival expressed by many international student participants in this study. Interviewees also underlined food challenges during self-isolation. Some students complained about the lack of choice in university meal plans, whereas others had issues ordering food from their hotels because of high delivery costs

or credit card issues. The meals provided to students in quarantine by the university were not always culturally suitable. As one student in Corner Brook from Bangladesh explained:

> I had to do 22 days' quarantine at campus because my second swab from the Federal government, while they were transporting my swab kits, they broke it somehow… So, everything was good in here rather than the food... the thing is the foods are mostly Canadian foods. Coming from a culturally diverse country like Bangladesh or Indian salvation continent, we are used to eat like spicy foods or other spice, but they were giving us like Jiggs' Dinner or like salt beef, so I couldn't eat that. Sometimes the taste was not suitable for me or the smell. (Interview#6)

This student also described the loneliness he experienced during self-isolation:

> On the residence there was only me who was doing quarantine. There was no one else in the entire place. So, only one guy was coming in the day to just give my food and he was the only guy I was meeting in a day. So, it was like a prison, for me. I just got an experience about how the prison feels like. (Interview#6)

Some students also reported feelings of depression as well as stress about finding a place to live after leaving self-isolation. The interviews, however, also illustrate participants' positive experiences with the Internationalisation Office airport greeting service and the peer support program that provided one-hour daily online meetings for international students in self-isolation.

Hectic First Days Upon Arrival; *"Everything is so new for us"*

Upon arrival (and leaving self-isolation), participants expressed the hectic first days as the most challenging time of adjusting to the new country. Most interviewees mentioned that they were unaware of different aspects of life in the new environment, ranging from being unfamiliar with cold weather, street names, and bus systems, getting lost in the city and on campus, and being confused about multiple settlement steps. A student from Bangladesh who was living on campus in St. John's articulated her experiences of getting lost in the campus area during the first days as follows:

> I would get lost every single day, like while coming back from my classes, because I didn't get that time to explore around and look around and just know my way around. I got lost frequently. Like every single building had four exits. And I would like take another exit, and then I'll be like, Oh, my gosh, where do I go? I can use Google Maps now. But back then, I would just go in the opposite direction and just get further lost. (Interview#2)

Some interviewees had arrived during the Atlantic hurricane season, but were unfamiliar with hurricanes, hurricane preparedness, and related-power outages. One student reported that she did not know that banks required appointments to open a bank account, and another student was confused about health insurance options. Upon arrival, international students also need to complete several settlement steps, such as buying a Canadian SIM card for their cellphones, opening bank accounts, applying for Social Insurance Number (SIN), and the NL Medical Care Plan (MCP). My interviews showed that language barriers make these processes more difficult for some recently arrived international students, for example, when they must undertake long and complex phone calls in English with landlords or to set up utilities right after arriving in Canada.

Hardships of Arranging the First Accommodation; *"We had to get settled in"*

The interviews illustrate that arranging the first accommodation is the most difficult housing challenge facing international students. Participants emphasised their lack of housing knowledge about rental opportunities, legal aspects of rental contracts, and tenancy rights during the post-arrival housing search. One student from Malaysia living in St. John's explained this lack of information upon arrival:

> When I arrived here, I did not know anything about the housing or anything to do with the attributes to the agreements and stuff. (Interview#4)

Moreover, arranging the first accommodation is one of the most significant settlement steps for any newcomer, including international students, since many first settlement

applications require an address and postal code. A woman from the Philippines living with her spouse and their child in St. John's explained:

> After a week, we didn't find that place yet. And time was ticking. So, we were a bit stressed about that, and had to process as well, other things like our SIN. We had to get settled in and all that. (Interview#7)

This quote reflects this student's stress about finding a place to live upon arrival and needing a postal address to proceed with other settlement services such as the Social Insurance Number (SIN). Key informants confirmed that new cohorts of students are generally concerned with finding temporary or long-term housing upon arrival, and that the housing search starts before international students arrive in Canada. However, no matter when an international student begins the housing search, their limited knowledge about the private rental market is a challenge. One key informant at the Internationalisation Office discussed this lack of knowledge about tenancy among international students, explaining:

> They don't understand some common – like common terms that they use when they want to rent. They don't know exactly what's the Tenancy Act, what's the rental agreement, so they come back to me and ask more questions. (Key informant at MUNL Internationalisation Office)

Language barriers can also negatively impact international students' communications with landlords. One key informant argued that, international students need access to housing information and guidelines in their own language:

> Without the information, everyone is helpless. Information is the key to everything. And that includes being able to understand that information too. Access to (housing) information in more languages is a great solution.

Another limitation to securing a place to live upon arrival is the ineligibility of international students for some rental applications. Interviewees asserted that some recently arrived students do not meet application requirements, for instance because of their (lack of) Canadian tenancy background, or reference letter from a previous landlord in Canada, or proof of financial stability. Like other newcomer groups, these international students do not have

established credit and tenancy histories in Canada. To mitigate these challenges, the Internationalisation Office supports international students by providing them with tenancy reference letters. My interviews with key informants underscored that MUNL plays a critical role in informational support, disseminating housing information and tenancy advice, and connecting international students with local organisations active on housing and legal advice. However, MUNL international student narratives portrayed the dissatisfaction with the university's housing support, especially for off-campus options. This disconnect highlights the gap between institutional perspectives and student lived experiences, urging for a more tailored and responsive approach to address the diverse housing needs of international students.

Housing Advertisement, Trust, and Scams; *"Don't trust the photos"*

The interviews confirm MUNL international students mostly rely on online housing advertisements, such as Kijiji and Facebook marketplace, to find rental market housing. Also, they commonly use some active local Facebook groups advertising NL housing market options or offering tenancy advice. Two key informants in this research were also active users of these facebook groups. As one of these key informants explained:

> I tried to – you know, I reached out to people in St. John's and I did go on and post things that were posted on Kijiji and just in case people didn't see it but of course if you're a student and you're desperate for a place to live you are checking those pages every 15 minutes probably.

Interviewees also stressed that trust is an issue in their housing search process before or upon arrival due to the possibility of housing scams, fraud, and misleading photos on online platforms. While landlords might not trust international students and might not respond to their inquiries, international students also need to be careful about potential scams in the housing markets, such as rental advertisement scams or fake photos. Some students expressed that they experienced online scams. One student from Ghana and living in Corner Brook explained:

> Some of my friends paid [them] deposits for people and then they ran away with their money. So, it's really tough for internationals, especially if you are arriving for the first time, you don't know anybody. You can just fall victim because a lot of people post things on Facebook, classifieds or whatever, you have to be careful because not all of them are real. (Interview#16)

Interviews also underline the significance of advertised photos, video calling, and viewing in the housing search process among international students. While the interviews highlighted the significant impact of housing photos on students' decisions, some landlords provide video call home viewing for international students who have not yet arrived. This trend has also become prevalent after COVID-19, the isolation mandates, and restrictions on face-to-face interactions. However, the interviews illustrated the risks of signing leases without actually viewing the home. Some interviewees chose unsuitable and substandard housing based on advertised photos or video calling. As a result, in some cases, they lost the security deposit, or the in-advance months rent because the place was unsuitable for living. As described and pictured in the photo below, an international student from China expressed that the advertised photos for his first place in St. John's were misleading: "And this photo is the landlord sent to me. Okay, it's really nice, right? but the reality (was not)!" (Interview#1). The students reported that upon moving into the house, it was in a state of significant uncleanliness and filled with trash.

Figure 5.1: Advertised Photo of a Rental Unit on Facebook (Interview#1)

This student's narrative illustrates the reliance of international students on online platforms when searching housing and and confirms the findings of previous studies that this reliance makes international students particularly vulnerable to housing scams, exploitation, and misinformation (Farbenblum et al., 2020; McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Laadliyan, 2023). Participants recognized the need for in-person home viewing before signing long-term leases as an effective way to protect themselves against such scams. Therefore, interviews underline international students' need for more information about online housing advertisements and tips on avoiding housing scams in navigating their options on the private NL rental market.

5.3.2. Lack of Housing Options

The majority of international student participants experienced the lack of housing options in the competitive rental markets of St. John's and Corner Brook. As discussed in the previous section, the interviews demonstrate the over-reliance of MUNL international students on online platforms for finding housing. However, increasing rental prices and competitiveness are also major challenges students face when navigating and securing housing in the NL rental market. Moreover, interviewees highlighted the limited MUNL on-campus housing options and lack of university off-campus housing support. In this section, I discuss this theme in more detail, with a focus on four sub-themes: (1) rising housing demands and rental shortages, (2) lack of on-campus housing option and university housing support, (3) over-reliance on online platforms and social media, and (4) short-termism in navigating housing options.

Rising Housing Demands and Rental Shortages; "*I got nowhere to live*"

Given the limited MUNL on-campus housing capacity, many international students depend on the private rental market in St. John's and Corner Brook. But their options in the private rental market are limited, especially after the spread of COVID-19. Rising housing demand, coupled with the general rental shortages in both cities, have resulted in intense

competition for available units and increased rental prices. Both student participants and key informants emphasised the limited housing options and the unaffordability of available options. As one key informant at MUNL explained:

> I'd say the first and the most frequent complaints that I'm receiving is the shortage of rentals [sic] properties. So, it's very difficult to find some place.

This sentiment exemplifies the challenge of finding housing in the competitive NL rental market. According to key informants, some property owners take advantage of this housing crisis by raising rents or renting unsuitable housing units. As a result, the interconnectedness of housing affordability, availability, and the financialisation of housing impact vulnerable, low-income populations, including international students. As one key informant who is active in the NL housing market expressed, "across the board, not even just for students, it was really tough for people to find anything affordable at all." Key informants, however, highlighted that the NL housing crisis is harsher for international students for several reasons, including discrimination and a lack of information and on-the-ground housing supports pre- and upon-arrival. During the peak summer months, and before the start of the MUNL school year in September, these rental markets are even more competitive (i.e., when new cohorts of international students come to St. John's and Corner Brook and struggle to find accommodation). As one key informant in Corner Brook explained:

> It was early September because that's when people were calling and saying I got no place to live...I don't think it's a problem just for international students, either. It makes it harder because they don't have somebody on the ground looking for them.

This statement illustrates the difficulty students have when searching for housing from outside of the area at peak times.

One student participant also discussed the hardships of finding a place and how he had navigated this hardship. When searching for housing in the summer of 2021, he had created an Excel sheet to keep track of potential apartments and the 60-70 applications he had submitted.

“I myself filled like more than 60 to 70 applications. I remember I had an Excel file, writing the addresses and the prices and the situation. It was tough” (Interview#16). This quote exemplifies how finding suitable housing can be problematic for many MUNL international students. This finding aligns with Brown's (2017) research on recent immigrants in Northern Ontario which found the availability of rental housing to be among the biggest obstacles for newcomers. Interviewees also stated that some landlords are taking advantage of this rental market competitiveness by insisting that student renters pay the deposit as soon as possible to reserve the place. Some participants who desperately looked for a place to live paid the security deposit to secure a housing option without visiting it or checking the housing condition. As one Latin American student explained, “I remember I had sent notifications for every post, and so I would see it the minute they would be posted, just to be sure that I would go first, you know” (Interview#15). Because of the highly competitive rental, students must make risky decisions that might result in unsuitable housing, forcing them to move out or lose their deposit in some cases. As one South Asian student living in St. John’s explained:

> I was really reluctant to take it because it's a basement. So, I called my friend, and she was like if you feel it right, just take it because you don't have a choice anymore. Since we had no choice, we just said okay, and we paid a deposit on the spot. We paid $500, and we secured the house. And it stated in the contract [...] when he's returning the deposit to us, they would cost $100 for cleaning services. So, we did not say anything. (Interview#4)

Key informants confirmed this rental market competitiveness and lack of affordable housing options causing affordability challenges and substandard living conditions for many MUNL international students. Interviews with key informants also demonstrate that the pandemic has exacerbated many housing challenges among this population by increasing housing demands and rising rental prices. They also highlighted some coping strategies and the new trends in response to this competitive rental market and the lack of affordable options. For instance, some students may rent larger, unaffordable housing units and hope to find

roommates or sublet rooms. Others also may rent a room in a family house when they cannot find a suitable and affordable housing unit. International students, however, emphasised the general lack of above-ground and small housing units in the NL private rental market, while the most affordable rental options are basements or rooms in three- or four-bedroom units. This finding supports previous studies on housing challenges in small and medium-sized cities in Canada, such as Wiginton's (2013) research stressing that the lack of small-unit rental housing is a major problem in small centres where the single-family housing type dominates.

Moreover, my interviews with students and key informants illustrate how rental shortages and rising demand in the housing market resulted in new initiatives such as re-use of office spaces. For instance, one interviewee stated that his previous rented room was in a building unit that was originally an office space in St. John's:

> I found my first place on Kijiji. Like, the person who was renting that place, he was a businessman. And due to COVID, the graduate students didn't move from the city. So, there was like shortages of living places here. So, that was an office. He renovated that office and make that a living place like, four or five rooms in one apartment, one kitchen one more washroom. (Interview#8)

This quote aligns with the findings of Heath's (2001) research on repurposing obsolete office buildings into residential units to alleviate housing shortages and cater to evolving urban needs, showing entrepreneurs' adaptation of office spaces into living quarters to meet contemporary housing demands. In section 5.3.3., I discuss the unaffordability challenges experienced by MUNL international students and their coping strategies in more detail.

Lack of On-Campus Housing Option and University Housing Support; *"I was waitlisted"*

Apart from the limited and competitive off-campus rental market, interviews show that demand for on-campus housing exceeds its supply at MUNL. Some international student interviewees contacted MUNL's campus housing office and requested residence spaces before or upon arrival but could not obtain them or were waitlisted for an on-campus housing option

in St. John's or Grenfell Campuses. One woman student from the Philippines living with her family in St. John's explained:

> First, I reached out to the university to find housing here, close by. But they said everything was full. So, I couldn't get a family housing in the university campus. I was waitlisted because there were a lot of other people who were waiting. And most of the families didn't move out of the housing they were currently in. So, there was no vacant place. (Interview#7)

This statement illustrates that international students with families have particular difficulty securing on-campus housing, and that MUNL residences have limited capacity, and sometimes long waitlists. The interviews also revealed the lack of university off-campus housing support and emphasised the need for more university services and guidance where housing is concerned. The Internationalisation Office currently offers the only off-campus housing service at MUNL, providing international students with housing information, tenancy advice, and maintains an online list of available rentals in St. John's submitted by local landlords. As one key informant at IO explained:

> We started this (rental listing) in the beginning of September (2021), we ask them to submit their available rental properties on our website, but unfortunately, we don't have enough resources and funding and this sort of stuff to monitor the submissions.

This quote illustrates the external constraints on the housing support offered by the IO. Most student participants complained that most of the housing information the university provides is general and not tailored to students' needs. The lack of an off-campus housing office at MUNL is a major service gap. Previously, MUNL had an off-campus office which maintained a list of vetted rental listings for students, an effective service according to key informants that was halted several years ago. Key informants stressed the need to re-initiate this service, which would mean having a staff member responsible for off-campus housing on MUNL campuses, including connecting students with landlords and community members in St. John's and Corner Brook. One key informant in Corner Brook explained, "The university

doesn't even have really off-campus housing supports in Grenfell Campus. So, that's part of the reason…they send out information but there's no direct person to help."

In addition to reinstating the off-campus housing office, key informants also noted the importance of preparing housing information in different languages, and that the university should advocate more for international students' housing needs and allocate more funding for housing programs in connection with community members and local organisations. An important theme of the key informant interviews concerned the need for MUNL to develop on-campus residence capacity, which could include building affordable residential complexes within walking distance of MUNL campuses as well as making changes to existing residence space (e.g., by providing more access to kitchen spaces so that students can avoid paying for expensive meal plans).

Over-Reliance on Online Platforms and Social Media

The interviews underscored the overreliance of international students on social media and online platforms like Facebook and Kijiji when searching for housing. In both St. John's and Corner Brook, international students described their experiences with these platforms as tough, time-consuming, highly competitive, and stressful. One interviewee reported spending whole days on online platforms, applying to numerous listings over two weeks before finding a suitable housing option. Besides, as discussed before, there is always a possibility of scams on online platforms.

Importantly, the students living in Corner Brook were more likely to say they used 'face-to-face' strategies to search for housing, including word of mouth, face-to-face interactions in public spaces, or by searching for advertised housing on the streets. Two interviewees found their accommodation through this face-to-face search method. As one student from Bangladesh and living in Corner Brook explained:

> So, I just went outside and was asking Canadians around the places like at Valley Mall or the grocery stores that if they have any places there… And at the end, I met my current house owner. I found her (the landlord) at Colemans, I was literally going everywhere. (Interview#6)

This student also stressed that some landlords in Corner Brook do not tend to advertise their housing on online platforms, especially elderly landlords who might not be familiar with such online tools:

> Many people have, like empty spaces in their houses. But the only problem is they couldn't rent it there because like many older people, they don't know how to give a listing on their Facebook marketplace or places like Kijiji. So, they were telling me they have (a space), but they don't know how to do it. (Interview#6)

This word-of-mouth method can disadvantage students who just arrived in Corner Brook and those who lack social capital, thus illustrating the need for university rental listings that can connect international students with potential landlords and community members.

Short-Termism in Navigating Housing Options; *"We're not going to stay here for long"*

The interviews also highlighted the short-term perspective of MUNL international students when navigating their housing options as most participants preferred signing short-term lease agreements rather than long-term contracts. As one undergraduate student living in St. John's explained, "you can't really go with your ideal situation because you are just a student, and this is just a *temporary* moment" (Interview#13; my emphasis). This finding is consistent with previous literature that illustrated how students will tolerate lower quality housing in temporary housing arrangements as a coping strategy in the face of housing challenges (Kenyon, 1999; Morris et al., 2020; Revington et al., 2020).

While participants framed this short-termism as a coping strategy to deal with unsuitable housing conditions in the NL rental market, it might also reflect their intention to stay in St. John's or Corner Brook only in the short-term. For example, one student in Corner Brook explained that she planned to move to St. John's or another larger city to find

employment after graduation. “We don’t have a long [term] plan to stay here [...],” she explained. “We have a plan to move out of this city because I need to find a job and I am sure that we have maybe limited opportunities here” (Interview#9). This quote demonstrates the relationship between international students’ housing strategies and experiences and their long-term retention in the labour markets of small and medium-sized cities.

5.3.3. Affordability Challenges

Housing affordability was a challenge for most international students interviewed for this study. Participants emphasised that they must devote a large part of their income to their housing costs which amplifies the financial burden of paying higher tuition fees (compared to domestic students). Some students also encountered other overlapping financial hardships during the pandemic. In this section, I explore the housing affordability challenges international students at MUNL face through five five sub-themes: (1) hardships in managing housing and living costs, (2) food security and kitchen spaces in housing experiences, (3) multiple interpretations of affordability, (4) affordability of living with roommates, and (5) unaffordability of living on-campus with mandatory meal plans.

Hardships in Managing Housing and Living Costs; *“My income is not really too much”*

According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CHMC), housing is considered ‘affordable’ if it costs less than 30% of before-tax household income (CHMC, 2019). During the interviews, I presented participants with a printed sheet containing the CMHC definition of housing affordability, allowing them time to reflect on their own housing cost-to-income ratio. The interviews underscored that housing costs comprise an enormous part of international students’ income. As one graduate student from Iran living in St. John’s explained, “I think it might be a bit more than half of my income from university (research funding). So, based on this definition, it's not. It’s not 30%, but like 50%” (Interview#3). At the time of the interviews, the Canadian Government limited international students off-campus

work hours to 20 hours per week[11], and some participants argued that this limitation made it impossible to secure affordable housing because of their part-time, low-paid employment and lack of a fixed income. Although some interviewees were financially dependent on their parents, they also expressed experiencing financial stress, especially those participants from families with lower socio-economic backgrounds or in countries with economic issues. These participants tried to find a part-time job to pay their living (and housing) expenses and help parents who are already paying their tuition. As one student from Bangladesh and living in Corner Brook explained:

> I guess current rental [cost] is just too much. It almost takes 50 or 60 percent of my initial income...if I could [find] a cheaper place, that will be better for my other expenses. As a bachelor student, the tuition fee is really high for us, comparing with graduate students. So, my family is paying my tuition, but I will try to help them as much as I can. So, I am trying to get my expenses as lower as I can. (Interview#6)

As this statement shows, working part-time is often essential to MUNL international students seeking to manage their housing costs. This finding aligns with Sotomayor et al.'s (2022) study which showed that students are working longer hours to pay for their expensive rent and other living expenses. While it may mitigate housing unaffordability, working longer hours can also interfere with students' ability to attend (and success in) courses and socialise (Sotomayor et al., 2022).

Key informants confirmed the financial difficulties international students face related to not only the rising cost of housing, but also increased tuition fees. Government cuts to MUNL's operating grant resulted in the end of a tuition freeze (and a 'tuition hike') for all students beginning in the fall of 2022. This shift had a particularly severe impact on international students who already paid higher tuition. Besides these higher fees, key informants also stressed that COVID-19 and its associated impacts had increased the cost of

[11] The Canadian Government temporarily authorised full-time off-campus work for international students on study period from November 15, 2022, until December 31, 2023 (and extended until April 30, 2024) (IRCC, 2024).

living in NL (and across Canada), causing financial difficulties for low-income groups, including international students:

> But it is a situation where government has cut a lot of our funding, as far as tuition and things like that…Especially over the last two years since COVID, we've been looking for every option, we need to be able to hire students to help them out because students have really struggled the last two years. (Key informant at Housing Office, Memorial University)

This statement illustrates that international students face a series of layered financial vulnerabilities related to housing and that the pandemic made them even more vulnerable, with rising costs of food, rent, and related housing costs such as utilities.

Food Security and Kitchen Spaces in Housing Experiences

My interviews also revealed that some MUNL international students are experiencing food insecurity, and that this insecurity is also linked to housing costs. When discussing housing issues, some student participants emphasised the high cost of food, groceries (and vegetables in particular), expensive on-campus meal plans and their challenges in accessing food items. A few participants even evaluated their housing affordability alongside their ability to manage food costs. To mitigate these challenges, students often share grocery items with roommates. One student from Bangladesh and living in St. John's selected a housing option with the opportunity to have free meals with his landlord instead of living with his friends, "I used to remain hungry," he explained, "but here [with my landlord], I don't remain hungry. If I don't have good, I can have good with them [landlords]. It's free and they're not asking money from me" (Interview#8).

While student participants emphasised the many benefits of on-campus housing, such as having a furnished and utility-included place, feeling safe, having access to more social activities while living in the student community, and proximity to university buildings, many interviewees expressed that campus residences are not affordable, particularly those with mandatory meal plans at the St. John's campus. The cost of mandatory meal plans can be equal

to or more than residence fees in some residences on St. John's campus. According to MUNL Housing, a single student pays about $550 to $700 monthly on St. John's campus and $700 - $725 per student on the Signal Hill campus.[12]. But if a student lives in a residence with a mandatory meal plan, such as Paton Collage and McPherson College residences, they need to pay about $700 monthly for the meal plan (Memorial University of Newfoundland, n.d.). These costs force students who may otherwise prefer to live on-campus to enter the private rental market (e.g., Interview#13). For example, one participant decided to leave the student residence after not getting a place in the Burton's Pond residence, the only residence on St. John's campus without a mandatory meal plan (Interview#2). Interviewees who live in residences with mandatory meal plans also expressed their preference for having the Residence Assistant (RA[13]) job, which will waive the housing costs, and they only need to pay for the mandatory meal plans.

Key informants also highlighted the issues of food insecurity and mandatory meal plans for international students. International students, for example, are major users of the campus food bank (Interview#5). Mandatory meal plans make those residences unaffordable for most international students who are "already paying an exorbitant amount of fees," explained one key informant at the Grenfell Campus, continuing, "so we look at our housing fees and residence fees and add that to massive tuition hikes and meal plans" (Interview#5). This key informant also argued that removing meal plan requirements and offering access to kitchen spaces in university residences (where students can cook and manage the cost of food) can make Memorial residences more affordable for all students. Similarly, student participants also highlighted the unaffordability of MUNL meal plans and the lack of food choices for

[12]One of the Memorial University campuses in St. John's which only houses graduate students in its residence
[13]Undergraduate students can apply for RA jobs after the first semester living in the St. John's campus residence.

international students with food restrictions. For example, vegetarians and students restricted to Halal food have limited dining hall options but pay the same rate (Interview#2).

The photovoice activity underscored the importance of international students' access to kitchen spaces to their overall housing experiences, which echoes the findings of other research showing the importance of food to sense of belonging and feeling 'at home' (Basnet, 2016; Al-Hamad et al., 2024). As described and pictured in the photo below, a woman international student living in Paton College, one of the residences with mandatory meal plans in St. John's Campus explained that sometimes students will "bake in the [shared] kitchen]. They bake cookies. It is fun" (Interview#2).

Figure 5.2: Paton College Kitchen Space, St. John's Campus (Interview#2)

This student's quote illustrates the benefit of access to kitchen space for students and exemplifies the importance of kitchen spaces stressed by many participants in the interviews, whether living on-campus or off-campus. Ten out of the sixteen students participating in the photovoice activities brought in photos of kitchens to the interview sessions. Figure 5.3 presents some of the photos that were taken and brought to the interview session by student participants highlighting the central role of kitchens to their housing experiences. Both students and key informants also expressed the importance of access to the kitchen, their experiences of preparing food, the smell and taste of familiar food, or sharing meals with their landlords or

their roommates during the interviews. As Basnet (2016) emphasised, food is frequently used as a tool to bridge cultural gaps, discover different cultures, and adjust to a new host country. Therefore, student-generated photos of kitchen spaces in this research can be attributed to the significant role of food in their housing/living experiences and home-meaning.

Figure 5.3: Kitchen Space Importance in Student-Generated Photos

Multiple Interpretations of Affordability; *"Affordability is not just rent"*

The interviews also illustrated that housing affordability is relative. Participants evaluated their housing costs in comparison to NL rental market rates, on and off-campus housing rates, and even sometimes comparing their rent with other larger cities. Therefore, although most participants' housing cost more than 30% of their income, they described their housing as affordable (or at least acceptable) *compared* to other housing options. As one student living in St. John's explained, "My housing is not affordable, but in this market, it is the best choice I can get" (Interview#8).

International students take multiple factors into account when evaluating housing affordability, such as utility costs, access and distance, furniture, housing quality, space size, and the number of roommates. Some participants stressed that the only affordable housing options they could find were far from the university, a finding consistent with the strategy of 'living at a distance' incorporated by students in response to housing unaffordability in Toronto (Sotomayor et al. 2022). In St. John's metro area, however, some lower-cost suburbs do not have any access to the transit system, such as Conception Bay South, Torbay, Portugal Cove-St. Philips, or have limited access (e.g., Paradise) or long bus routes to MUNL St. John's campus like the Mount Pearl area. Thus, some student participants discussed looking for "in-between" housing options that are affordable but not too far from the university campuses and also served by the bus service (e.g., Interview#7).

One student, from the Philippines, living in St. John's, also mentioned that they had found more affordable options in the suburban areas of St. John's, such as Mount Pearl area, but they did not consider those options because of the long-distance commute to the university:

> There were other housings that were offered, but it was quite far from the university in Mount Pearl or somewhere further, like maybe 10 kilometres away. In terms of budget, it was good because it actually was affordable. But it was far away from the university. (Interview#7)

This quote illustrates the importance of distance and transit access to affordable housing options for international students who are mostly dependent on bus services. This finding also underscores the spatialized experience of housing (in)exclusion for the international student population.

Furthermore, student participants emphasised unaffordable utility costs and the challenge of heating precarity in NL. In this sense, many participants preferred utility and internet-included housing options. Another factor international students use to assess housing affordability is whether or not a unit is furnished, including if it comes with kitchen utensils. While a few participants expressed that furnished housing is more cost-saving, some interviews also reported buying second-hand furniture and kitchen utensils as a strategy to manage their housing-related costs.

Most international student participants were also sharing housing units with roommates to make their housing more affordable. As one Latin American student living in St. John's explained:

> I still was sharing it with my partner and another roommate, and that's how we used to afford it, because just one person wouldn't have been able to afford that, plus paying for the internet and the heat and the power. (Interview#15)

As articulated in this quote, sharing the rent, utilities, and the internet with other roommates is a strategy used by some students to manage their cost of housing. Students also reported adjusting the rent based on room size, demonstrating the interconnection of housing suitability and affordability. Other participants emphasised the unaffordability of living with fewer roommates and considered one- or two-bedroom units unaffordable. A few participants also claimed that subletting a room is the cheapest housing option in the rental market. All of these strategies mentioned by student participants in this research are similar to previous literature on international students' strategies to cope with their housing unaffordability (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Morris et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022).

5.3.4. Living Conditions

The interviews revealed that the quality of living spaces is central to MUNL international students' housing experiences. The CMHC defines adequate housing as not needing major repairs and suitable housing as housing conforming to the national occupancy standard of two people per bedroom (CMHC, 2019). Access to adequate, safe housing is also identified as a determinant of health by the World Health Organization and Canada's population health framework. However, as Goel (2023) highlighted, financial constraints can lead tenants to make major sacrifices in terms of housing adequacy and suitability. Due to rental shortages and the unaffordability of higher-quality housing options in the NL private rental market, some participants in this research were forced to live or remain in poor, substandard, and sometimes unhealthy living conditions. Therefore, the quality of living conditions had a major role in both negative and positive housing experiences and was one of the main themes emerging from the interviews. I discuss this theme in three sub-themes: (1) low-quality housing, (2) housing suitability, and (3) housing, health, and cleanliness.

Low-Quality Housing; "*It was the worst place I have ever stayed*"

Interviews highlighted the low-quality housing as a significant issue for many international students at MUNL. While no participants mentioned inadequate living conditions with major problems as defined by CMHC as one of the findings from the interviews, they demonstrated the quality of housing by maintenance, renovation, repair, concerns such as the materials used, building standards, and appliances. Student participants with positive housing quality experiences mostly live in new and renovated housing or have landlords or property managers that help with repairs and conduct regular maintenance. In contrast, delays in maintenance, old, and low standard housing, old kitchen and laundry appliances, and issues in the heating system negatively impacted student participants. As described in the quote and pictured in the photos below, a South Asian student living in Burton's Pond Housing, St. John's

campus explained: “The stove is kind of old and it really smells like something's burning every time we turn the heat on. Here's a picture of the rusting in the bathroom, these grey splotches that we can't scrub off” (Interview#10).

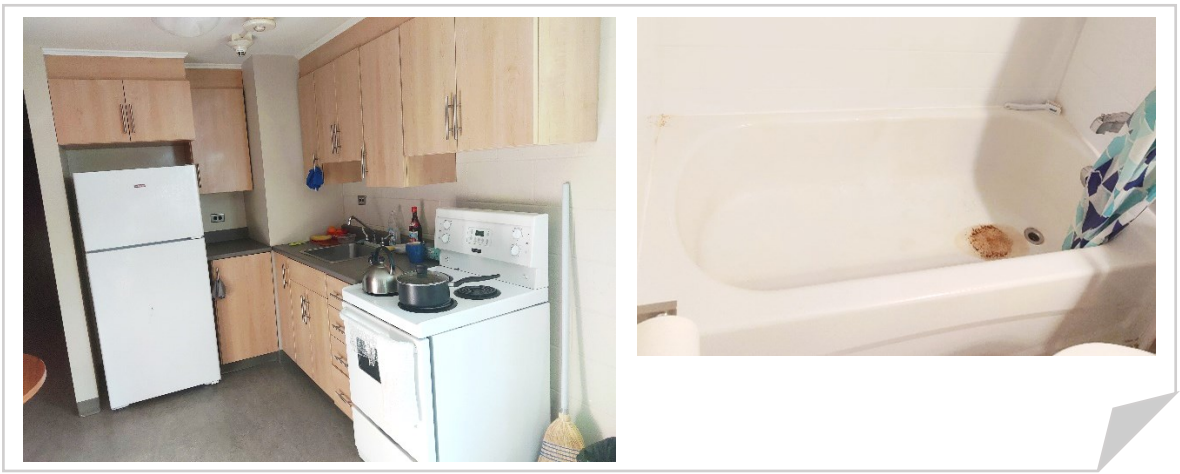

Figure 5.4: Burton’s Pond Housing, St. John’s Campus (Interview#10)

Another Latin American student living in an off-campus housing unit in St. John’s explained in the below quote and photo: “The appliances are a little old, and especially the stove. It looks like it’s probably older than me or my mum…Everything looks old; I would love to have a nicer house” (Interview#15).

Figure 5.5: An old stove, off-campus housing, St. John’s (Interview#15)

These two students' quotes and photos exemplify the issue of low-quality housing conditions experienced by many international students on and off-campus. Previous studies about housing precarity have also demonstrated the low housing condition as a main theme and highlighted that owners' negligence in maintenance and upkeep can lead to deteriorating and poor living circumstances for student tenants (Pillai et al., 2021).

Housing Suitability; *"Sometimes there's little space"*

Suitability or overcrowding of housing indicates the ratio of persons to bedrooms and if housing as having enough size and number of bedrooms (CHMC, 2020). During the interviews, students usually evaluated their housing suitability by the number of rooms, size of living spaces, and access to open areas like backyards or decks. Most interviewees did not experience overcrowding and indicated that they had enough space in their housing, which was reflected at the NL Housing survey results as well. Previous research highlights that overcrowding is more common in larger urban areas, and newcomers have better access to suitable housing in smaller cities with more detached homes and fewer high-rise apartment buildings (Esses et al., 2021). As small and medium-sized cities, most student interviewees experienced positive housing suitability in St. John's and Corner Brook. However, some student participants stressed that living with multiple people was the only way they could afford their rent and bills. As one student from Malaysia stated about his first housing in St. John's: "It was cheap, because there were so many problems in the house" (Interview#4). This quote underlines the relations between housing unaffordability and over-crowdedness. While this type of multi-tenant home is sometimes referred to as a 'rooming house' (Sotomayor et al. 2022) affordability benefits, some participants expressed a lack of space in shared living areas, such as washrooms, kitchens, and fridges. One student living in St. John's described this overcrowded kitchen and their fridge in the quote and photo below:

> The kitchen gets crowded a bit. The fridge gets a bit crowded. Sometimes there's little space because four people, one fridge... I think honestly if you and the people you live with are just nice to each other, the amount of space isn't really bad. Because as long as you have space to stretch your legs, I think it's not that bad. (Interview#13)

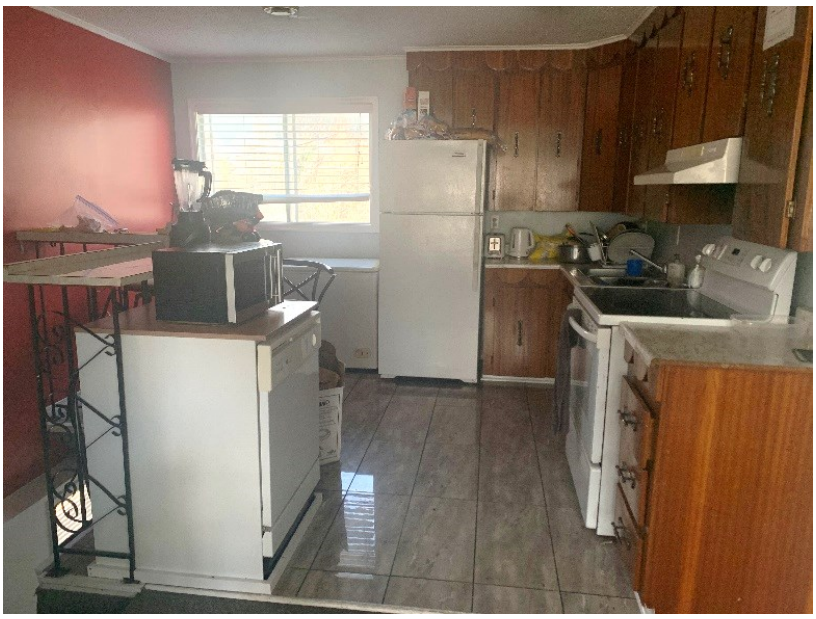

Figure 5.6: Overcrowded common space in a multi-tenant house, St. John's (Interview#13)

This finding echoes that of Morris et al.'s (2020) in their research on international students in Australia. They emphasised that overcrowding is mostly felt when the common spaces like bathrooms and kitchens are congested. Another interesting and unexpected outcome of the interviews is that some international students evaluated their new living conditions by comparing them with their previous housing situation back home. One student from South Asia and living in Burton's Pond Housing described in the below quote and photos: "It's a lot better than my old (home) environment in my old country, she explained, "my bedroom is a lot bigger than my old bedroom back in my country" (Interview#10).

Figure 5-7: Burton's Pond Housing, St. John's Campus (Interview#10)

In contrast to the previous statement, another student from Tanzania living in St. John's explained that their housing in their home country was bigger and had more spaces: "Back home we came from a really big house" (Interview#13). The phrase "back home" was also frequently used by other participants and referred to their home country. This is similar to Basnet's (2016) research on sense of home among refugees in New Zealand that found when participants talked about the present experiences, they frequently brought up the past. Therefore, international students' assessment and expectations of housing size and quality in this thesis might be impacted by their housing experiences in their home country or their previous housing options.

Moreover, the interviews highlight the importance of quiet living environments for MUNL international students. Some interviewees stressed this need for rest and concentration on their studies, and some complained about their noisy living spaces on or off campuses. One Latin American student who lived in Paton College residence at St. John's Campus explained, "At 5:00 in the morning I heard a lot of noises. People were making a party and it was so disturbing. So, I just opened the door, and I was like, "Please, I need to sleep. It's 5:00 in the morning" (Interview#14). This student also brought the picture below of her residence to the

interview (Figure 5-8) and described that although she enjoyed and benefited from easy access to several study spaces, she struggled with the noise level at nighttime and during the regulated silent hours.

Figure 5.8: Paton College residence, St. John's Campus (Interview#14)

Housing, Health and Cleanliness; *"There's mould growing here"*

The interviews also underlined the importance of living conditions to participants' perceived health. Apart from the health concerns of spreading COVID-19 expressed by some interviewees, some students experienced health concerns of living in substandard living conditions, including the presence of mould in their living spaces. Participants expressed some specific areas as riskier for health, such as basements, bedrooms, washrooms, flooring carpets, and shared areas in campus residences. A few interviewees also emphasised their lack of preference for living in the basement areas due to more humidity and the potential for mould. One participant also stressed his safety and health concerns in one previous housing experience with a lack of oxygen and ventilation in the bathroom. In another example, one interviewee reported health concerns about having mice in housing with pest control issues. These students'

housing-related health concerns are similar to previous research that reported students' poor housing conditions in other cities like Toronto with examples like accounts of black mould causing respiratory and other health problems (Sotomayor et al., 2022). As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, an international student from Iran expressed health concerns about the carpet in her rental apartment in Corner Brook: "Carpets make me mad. The doctor advised me that please do not sleep in a bedroom that has carpets. I have no choice, you know? I'm trying to find a place that doesn't make my allergy worse" (Interview#9). This student's narrative stressed the importance of housing as a determinant of health.

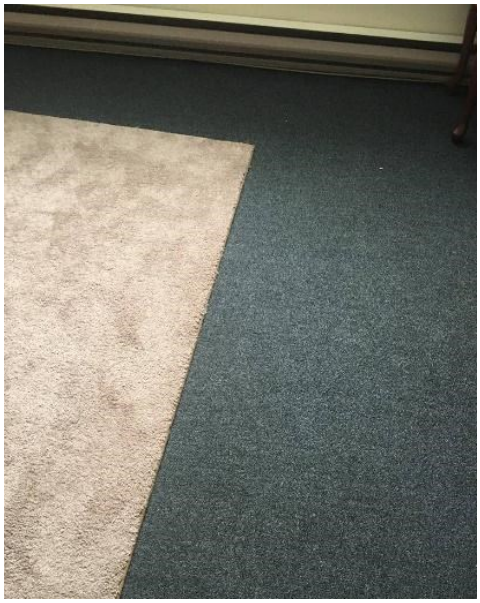

Figure 5.9: Health Concerns about Carpet, Corner Brook (Interview#9)

The Healthy Homes Adequacy Standard report by CMHC (2022), also highlighted the infestation conditions in housing as an issue resulting in negative health outcomes for affected populations, that is not included in the current housing adequacy standard. The analysis reveals that Indigenous and visible minority renters are most likely to report living in dwellings with the presence of mould or pests, highlighting the intersecting inequalities in housing (CMHC, 2022).

Interviews also emphasise cleanliness's major role in participants' living quality and housing satisfaction. Interviewees expressed their negative experiences of unclean housing environments. For instance, a few students told stories of the first move-in day to a place full of trash and dust and needing cleaning service. As described by a woman student from the United States living in a shared housing unit in St. John's explained: "It was so dirty. I don't think it had been cleaned for like three years. It was so bad…It was years of not cleaning" (Interview#11). Similarly, another student from China and living in St. John's described his first encounter with a house he had rented his other student friends:

> She (the owner) says this house is perfect and clean but actually is like a trash. Oh, yeah. A lot of trash in there. And this really mess…and a lot of trash like 10 bags, trash on street…the landlord asked us could you please throw [out] this trash? (Interview#1)

This student described the messy and unclean house full of trash, and the landlord's negligence in cleaning the rental house before they moved in. This student brought the following photos to the interview:

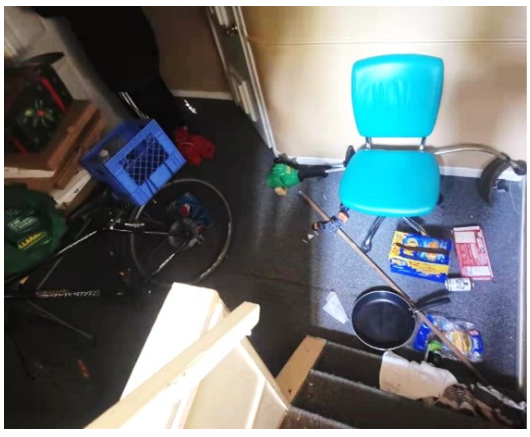

Figure 5.10: Messy and Unclean House 'Full of Trash,' St. John's (Interview#1)

Some students also complained about unclean shared spaces with their roommates, such as unclean shared washrooms and fridges and issues with cleaning schedules among

roommates. As one student and living in a shared apartment in St. John's stated:"Outside of my room is messy because they're living in that house, and it's not to be like in the perfect condition every time" (Interview#8).

The photovoice activity also illustrated the importance of (un)cleanliness in participants' housing experiences through submitted photos that show both negative and positive aspects of their living conditions. In a sense that one student from Bangladesh and living in Corner Brook showed me a photo (Figure 5-11) of the clean kitchen space and described it as an ideal space in the house: "I took a picture of the kitchen area because it's always clean, they explained. "My house owner cleans it. She always keeps it clean, so, ideal spot in the home" (Interview#6).

Figure 5.11: Clean kitchen, Corner Brook (Interview#6)

5.3.5. Mobility Challenges

The interviews highlighted various mobility challenges among international student participants and how they intersect with their housing experiences. Given the transnational nature of the international student population, COVID-19 introduced mobility distributions with travel restrictions, self-isolation regulations, and other public health mandates. Aside from mobility challenges at Canada's and NL's borders, the interviews also illustrate the urban mobility challenges among MUNL international students in St. John's and Corner Brook.

International students emphasised their limited access to personal vehicles and drivers licences, and the inefficiency of public transportation in St. John's and Corner Brook. Therefore, interviews underline the significance of proximity, access, and walking distance in the housing preferences and choices among this population. In this section, I discuss findings related to mobility challenges in three sub-themes: (1) COVID-19, uncertainty, and travel restrictions, (2) transportation exclusion, and (3) proximity and access.

COVID-19, Uncertainty, and Travel Restrictions; "*My whole plan changed*"

The pandemic has been a time of uncertainty, uneasiness, and worries about constant change in regulations and travelling during COVID-19 has been restrictive, expensive, complicated, and stressful for international student participants. According to interviewees, COVID-related mobility challenges impacted them in various ways ranging from travel restrictions and border closures between certain countries**,** hardships of giving biometrics and medical exams for visa applications, visa delays, and higher expenses of flights and self-isolation. Restrictive and expensive self-isolation mandates also disrupted some international students' arrival plans. For instance, a few participants stated that the policy of expensive mandatory hotel self-isolation at the border of Canada was a reason for delaying their plans to come to Canada. A student from Tanzania living in St. John's explained:

> The regulations are changing every time. You had to quarantine for three days at Toronto. As soon as I booked, the next day they sent an update that oh you no longer have to quarantine in Toronto anymore. (Interview#13)

This student's narrative highlights the challenges and stress of changing travel and self-isolation regulations. This same student also described how having a positive PCR test just before his flight to St. John's had changed his whole travel plan:"I got positive (before my flight). I couldn't believe it, the whole plan changed. I had to pay $900 extra for the new ticket because it's so much closer (date)" (Interview#13).

Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, each country implemented its own regulations regarding the validity of PCR tests for entry, which posed challenges for MUNL international students travelling to NL. These regulations specified the duration for which a negative PCR test remained valid, and missing a connecting flight could jeopardise the validity of the test if it exceeded the mandated time frame. This complexity was compounded by the limited time allowed for passengers to stay at airports or hotels during layovers, making it difficult for students with multiple connecting flights to ensure compliance with testing requirements. Interviewees also experienced several health concerns related to travelling to Canada and NL during COVID-19, such as lacking access to approved vaccinations and stresses concerning the many tests required before and after the flights. For instance, one participant reported conducting four COVID-19 tests, two tests before the departure flight, one at the border of Canada, and another on day 8 of self-isolation in NL. One student from Iran who is living in St. John's described his stress about the COVID-19 tests: "I kind of stressed about the tests in the middle of the travel. And I was like OK if I get COVID positive, what should I do?" (Interview#12).

Therefore, these mobility and health concerns made planning to come to Canada during the pandemic challenging. Sometimes, international students must make last-minute decisions based on travel restrictions and public health measurements or wait for official university announcements to return to in-person classes. Online learning has been an opportunity for international students who encountered mobility challenges and got 'stuck' in their home county. However, some interviewees reported difficulties studying in a different time zone, falling behind in their academic goals, and in a few cases, the educational hardships of moving to Canada in the middle of the semester. One interviewee stated that he had a final exam exactly after a 23-hour flight and arriving at the hotel quarantine at the Canadian border, and stated, "That's the lowest rate (exam mark) in my university history" (Interview#6). Notably, given

fewer travel restrictions and exemptions from self-isolation for fully vaccinated international students after September and fall of 2021, some participants encountered fewer mobility challenges. Students who were fully vaccinated were not required to self-isolate themselves and reported fewer issues and stress about COVID-19 impacting their mobility.

Transportation Exclusion; "*We don't have enough transportation*"

Transportation is a key social exclusion domain in the Canadian context. As explored by Hyman et al. (2014), this domain is characterised by differential access to personal mobility tools (such as car ownership and licence possession), availability and accessibility of transport, alternatives to car use, and availability of transport through social support from friends and family. The interviews also demonstrate that MUNL international students encounter mobility challenges and limited transportation choices inside their city. Participants highlighted this transit exclusion and their limited transportation options in various ways during the interviews. First, most participants have limited access to personal mobility tools due to the hardships of obtaining a driver's licence and affording a car. Most international driving licences are not valid in Canada, and most interviewees reported that having a personal vehicle is out of reach for them. They cannot afford a car and its related costs, including obtaining a new driving licence, car insurance,[14] and gas rates. As one student from Bangladesh living in St. John's explained:

> I'm a student and for me to buy a car, I need the licence. I do have the licence from my country, but they don't accept the licence here. So, to travel anyplace, I need the bus. (Interview#8)

Therefore, as articulated in the quote above, without access to private cars and expensive taxi services, most participants depend on bus systems, the only public transportation choice in St. John's and Corner Brook. However, the interviews highlight students' needs for

[14]According to interviewees and my personal experiences as an international student, NL insurance companies do not accept foreign driving insurance records, and do not have any discount for international students and newcomers. Therefore, even if an international student can afford to buy a car, in some cases, they cannot afford monthly car insurance.

better bus services and bus stops in both cities. Most participants complained about inconvenient and infrequent public transit, particularly in Corner Brook, with no services on weekends and after 6 pm on weekdays. Notably, key informants at Corner Brook also highlighted the limited operating time and infrequency of bus services which has caused accessibility challenges for international students in this city. Therefore, they suggested that MUNL could offer more taxis and shuttle bus services at the Grenfell campus to enhance MUNL students' mobility in Corner Brook. As one key informant explained:

> If you're in Corner Brook, if you're not walking distance, it is very hard. The bus routes are long, and they don't come. People have places for rent in Massey Drive, which to me is part of Corner Brook, but the bus don't go there. (Key informant in Corner Brook)

Even though the Metro bus service in St. John's has a better service compared to Corner Brook, it is still infrequent in some routes and its weekend services are lacking. As Clark's (2009) research previously showed, newcomers encounter significant transportation challenges such as long waiting times for the bus in St. John's. My findings further demonstrate that participants find St. John's bus services to be lengthy and time-consuming. A few participants also identified the need for better bus stop infrastructure to cover them in the rainy and windy weather. One participant shared stories of standing further from the bus station underneath a shade from rain, and the bus driver did not let him in. Moreover, COVID-19 introduced some limitations on bus services in both cities during some waves of the pandemic. For instance, interviewees in Corner Brook mentioned COVID-related ceasing operations between 12:00 pm to 1:00 pm to sanitise the bus.

Such urban mobility challenges also limit international students' housing options, satisfaction with their housing, and access to their workplace and university campuses. The lack of sufficient public transportation limited MUNL International students' housing options in suburban areas of these two cities. For instance, housing options in St. John's suburban areas,

such as Mount Pearl, Paradise, Conception Bay South, and Torbay, are out of reach for most international students since they have no or limited Metrobus services. These are areas that may provide more affordable housing options than the city centre.

International student participants highlighted the importance of transportation in their housing experiences in different ways. Some participants described a housing option in the vicinity of a bus stop and on a frequent bus route as favourable. Meanwhile, others mentioned that offers for rides by their landlord were one extra benefit of their housing. As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, an international student from Bangladesh and living in St. John's explained, "This is the building from the bus stop. I can see the bus stop from my window. So, it's easy, I don't have to go for bus, 10 or 15 minutes before and the buses are frequent on that bus stop" (Interview#8).

Figure 5.12: Housing in the vicinity of a bus stop, St. John's (Interview#8)

Students who lived in campus residences or near campuses indicated the benefits of university shuttle bus services. MUNL offers Monday to Friday shuttle bus services between various campuses in St. John's, a Tuesday grocery shuttle bus at St. John's Campus, and a bi-weekly Saturday shopping shuttle/taxi at Grenfell Campus. As an example, one interviewee expressed this bi-weekly shopping shuttle service at Grenfell Campus has been a significant help for him with easier access to different stores and planning for grocery items. Participants,

however, also underlined the impacts of public transportation challenges on their ability to commute to their workplaces and MUNL campuses. Even one Latin American student stated this transport exclusion has led to his exclusion from the job market: “A lot of the jobs for most students it’s not something that’s doable. They (employers) ask that you have a driver’s licence? And sometimes they even ask do you have your own car?” (Interview#15).

Therefore, the interviews revealed that part of housing and everyday life challenges of participants resulted from their transportation challenges. As a student from the Philippines living with her family in St. John’s explained: “My ideal home would be one that has good access to, of course, transportation, where we can be able to mobile, and go around” (Interview#7). As this student reflected on her ideal type of housing, she expressed how access to suitable transportation and being mobile have central roles in her experiences. This finding supports previous studies such as Wiginton (2013), who highlighted that accessible transportation can be an effective way in addressing housing challenges in small urban centres in Canada. Similarly, Brown's (2017) study on recent immigrants in North, Ontario, revealed comparable findings, indicating that mobility challenges arising from inconvenient transit services underscore the necessity for immigrant-friendly infrastructure, particularly in the realm of public transportation.

Proximity and Walking Distance; “*I wish I were closer to campus*”

One of the main findings of interviews with international students is the importance of walking distance for this population. Interviews showed that the meaning of convenience for most interviewees is walking distance which is another reflection of urban mobility challenges and the lack of transport options in St. John’s and Corner Brook. As one student from Tanzania and living in St. John’s stated: “I like walking and I don’t even want to buy a car here. I want somewhere that’s very close to grocery stores” (Interview#13).

According to participants, the ideal housing is close to the university, with the advantage of proximity and walking access to university campuses. In fact, international students emphasised proximity as being the most beneficial aspect of living on-campus residences and underlined the competitiveness of the private rental market around St. John's Campus, the main campus of Memorial University. As one student from Ghana living in Corner Brook explained: "If you're staying far away from campus, transportation is really not good. So, a lot of international students have difficulties, especially in the winter" (Interview#16).

Therefore, the significance of proximity is reflected in participants' preference for housing options within walking distance to grocery stores, workplaces, schools, and childcare centres (for students with children). This finding is consistent with Forbes-Mewett's (2018) study that found that international students in Australia, the UK, and the US often look for housing choices close to the university and reported their preference for walking.

5.3.6. Social Relationships in Housing Experiences

International students have left their country of origin and come to a new home with a new culture, social norms, and (in some cases) a new language, where most of them do not have established social relationships. Apart from the emotional burdens of leaving the family for a long time and the need for social connection among this population, interviews illustrated the impact of social relationships and social capital on MUNL international students' housing experiences pre- and post-arrival. Like other newcomer groups, international students have co-ethnic community groups in social media by which they benefit from shared information and experiences. Some interviewees could find their housing options, roommates, or landlords from the same cultural community in these groups. Furthermore, interviews underline the impact of compatible roommates and supportive landlords on housing experiences among international students. Thus, the importance of social relationships as a main theme emerged from the

interviews with four sub-themes: (1) social capital in housing experiences, (2) roommates' compatibility, (3) relationships with landlords, and (4) independence, agency, and privacy.

Social Capital in Housing Experiences; "*We bond like a family*"

As previously discussed in the literature review, social capital is one important characteristic of a welcoming community for newcomers. Interviews with MUNL international students also confirmed the significant impact of social capital on their housing experiences ranging from co-ethnic communities and family members to friends. Many interviewees emphasised the significance of this social network support in their housing and everyday life experiences. As Esses et al. (2010) described, both primary and secondary networks can help international students overcome barriers and cope in the host society. While some participants expressed their reliance on a friend or a family member who has already lived in NL, others have connected to or found friends from their co-ethnic community group. As a student from Peru and living in St. John's explained:

> I have a friend from my country, which is really good. Because we have the same culture, the same traditions. It's similar. She introduced me to (other) friends. I have a lot of friends from Latin America. We have actually a WhatsApp group. People that are from Brazil, from Mexico, Costa Rica and everybody speaks Spanish. (Interview#14)

This student's narrative highlights the role of co-ethnic community as one of the most beneficial social capitals that allow international students to connect with people in the same language and similar culture, particularly for international students who struggle with language barriers.

Regarding housing supports, social capital helped student participants find temporary first accommodation or long-term housing options, house viewing, or offering housing information, advice, and suggestions. This finding supports previous studies which have illustrated the help of social networks and ethnocultural communities with new arrivals of newcomers in areas housing opportunities (Clark, 2009; Esses et al., 2010; Wiginton, 2013).

In this sense, interviews showed the importance of social media and online platforms. Some interviewees stated that they had found their housing option or second-hand (or sometimes donated) furniture and kitchen items in their community social media groups. As a student from Tanzania and living in St. John's explained: "We actually have a group chat on WhatsApp. So, if anything happens, maybe someone could send there- Mostly it's that my room is free (available), if you know someone" (Interview#13).

Similarly, an Iranian student living described the same housing support from the co-ethnic community through online platforms:

> In our Persian community we try to do the same thing with a (housing) Google shared spreadsheet. it's accessible through their MUN emails…The community helped really much and I'll pay back the community (with doing house viewing for new students). (Interview#12)

Apart from their co-ethnic communities, student participants highlighted the value of making new friendships to their quality of life and housing experiences. Since international students leave their family and friends back home, friendship and co-ethnic communities can help them not only in their housing experiences but in building a support system, adapting to new life, and growing a sense of home in the new environment. As a student from Iran living in Corner Brook described: "It could be impossible for me to understand my situation and feel myself in the new situation. You know, I can't imagine without my friends, I could do it" (Interview#9).

Meanwhile, some participants described the need for more community connections and socialisation. Interviews demonstrate that the opportunities for social connection that come with some housing options can significantly affect international students' networks. For instance, living in campus residences has helped some participants to make new friends and have a better social life. Some international students also expressed a need for socialisation in their tendency to live in neighbourhoods around university campuses to cultivate social connections with friends and other student communities at MUNL. However, some

interviewees expressed the issue of isolation and loneliness in their housing experiences. For example, some interviewees expressed a lack of social connection and a sense of social division between international and local students. One Latin American student living in St. John's explained:

> Canadians, especially from Newfoundland, they already have their own cliques, their own people that they know. So, they aren't really on the lookout to get new friends or meet new people. So, still to this day, I mostly have international friends than Canadians. (Interview#15)

More social connection issues were also experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. A few students highlighted the negative impact of COVID-19 on university social life. For instance, requiring masks in residences' shared areas such as kitchens, shared washrooms, laundry rooms, staircases, and hallways or disruptions in social events and programs on campuses negatively impacted the social interactions of international students. As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, an international student from Brazil and living on Grenfell Campus residence explained:

> Since we have to use masks all the time in the kitchen, in the living spaces, I feel like this affects how students interact with one another. So, I try to greet and say at least hello to everyone that I meet in the corridors and in the kitchen, and I don't get a response very often. (Interview#5)

Figure 5.13: Grenfell Campus residence, Corner Brook (Interview#5)

Roommates' Compatibility

As discussed previously, multi-tenant (rooming) housing can provide more affordable housing options for international students. Affordability challenges have forced most participants to rent a room or share their housing unit with other roommates. However, interviews highlight the importance of roommates' compatibility with international students' housing experiences. In other words, the extent to which international student participants are compatible with their roommates can impact their housing experiences and satisfaction with their housing options. While participants might live with roommates from family members, friends, co-ethnic community members, landlords, or strangers, finding compatible roommates can play a critical role in international students' housing arrangements and feelings of social connection. Interviews illustrate that age, personality, gender, and culture are important factors in roommates' compatibility. As a South Asian woman student living in St. John's explained: "When you're at different stages in your life, like one is older and the other is younger. It's hard especially with dividing responsibilities and keeping the apartment clean" (Interview#10).

As reflected at this quote, age difference is one of some students' main concerns. Moreover, others expressed that having roommates from their co-ethnic culture helped them with emotional support, as it facilitated the ability to communicate in the same language and share in food preparation and mealtimes. In this sense, one student from Iran living in St. John's described that having roommates from the same culture and language could provide meaningful emotional support:

> I have people to talk in my own language, when I'm home, to have fun with them to share my emotions. So, we kind of try to help each other… The way that we cook, the material we use, and the smell of cooking, might not be easy to tolerate for different groups of people. (Interview#3)

A few participants highlighted the issues of cultural differences in finding roommates. For instance, one woman interviewee from Bangladesh who lives in MUNL residences spoke of the impact of cultural differences in restricting her housing options when navigating the off-

campus rental market. She expressed that her parents obligated her to find same-gendered roommates due to their cultural norms:

> My parents will not allow me to stay in a house with boys, even though it's funny, because in the dorm that I live there are boys all around; it's a coed university! (Interview#2)

Figure 5.14: Paton College, St. John's campus (Interview#2)

Regardless of cultural norms, some other women participants preferred living with same-gender roommates. One South Asian woman living on St. John's Campus residence stated: "I'm not comfortable with living with people of the opposite gender" (Interview#2). Likewise, another student woman from the United State and living in St. John's expressed: "I don't want to live just in a house of men" (Interview#11). Thus, interviews illustrate gender as essential in finding compatible roommates for women international students.

International student participants shared both positive and negative experiences of living with roommates. Some participants expressed positive experiences of living with compatible roommates, such as making friendships, having fun and enjoyable time with roommates, cooking together, helping each other, providing emotional support, reducing homesickness, and even continuing social connection with roommates after leaving the place. However, some participants expressed negative experiences of living with roommates, such as issues with communication and sharing responsibilities and cleaning schedules caused by

different personalities, expectations, or habits and might lead to conflicts and fights among roommates. One student living in a multi-tenant rental house in St. John's stated that:

> Having three roommates is very hectic because they're all boys... They don't wash their dishes. It's very annoying. Recently, their toilet broke, so they started using mine and they're not as clean as you would like people to be. Ideally, I'd love to live in a place where there was a nice cleaning schedule. (Interview#13)

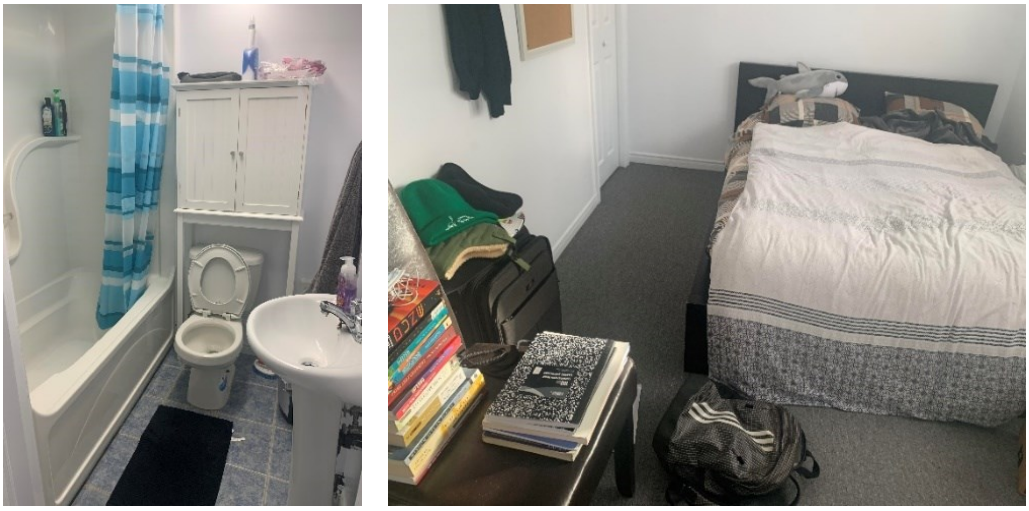

Figure 5.15: A room rental in a multi-tenant housing, St. John's (Interview#13)

Relationships with Landlords; "***We had no housing history in this city***"

International students' relationship with landlords begins in their housing search pre- or upon arrival. As mentioned before, some participants described the hardships of communication and initial online contact with landlords during their housing search. Meanwhile, other participants highlighted the lack of landlords' understanding of their situation as newcomers and rental applications' requirements such as a reference letter, tenancy history, proof of financial status, or credit check, all of which can be difficult to obtain. Such requirements are restrictive and exclusionary for many new international students who have just arrived and have not established any social relations or financial history, thus decreasing their chances of success with housing applications. Some participants described how they had

requested reference letters for housing from their university supervisors, professors, university staff, or even other students. As one student from the Philippines living in St. John's with her family explained: "A lot of the houses that I saw that I actually wanted, said they need references. How would I give a reference if I don't know anybody here yet and it's the first time I'm coming?" (Interview#7).

To circumvent these barriers, a few participants described renting from a landlord from their home country, with whom they experienced easier communication and more understanding and support due to similar cultural backgrounds. Yet overall, like social relationships with roommates, student participants have expressed diverse experiences of their relationship with landlords, which impacted their perceptions of their housing. While some participants found their landlord to be helpful, supportive, and caring, others expressed negative experiences ranging from disputes, feeling taken advantage of, to eviction. The positive experiences were mostly related to landlords who supported their international student tenants by providing furniture items, kitchen utensils, conducting regular maintenance, offering rides, taking care of their child, and providing information about different aspects of life in St. John's and Corner Brook. A few participants also rented a room in a family house and expressed feeling included as part of the family when sharing meals or taking part in family ceremonies or gatherings. As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, a student from Ghana and living in Corner Brook with his family: "My landlord is an awesome man; He does care about us, and he does check on us sometimes. He bought extra heater, just for us to feel warm enough. And he bought us a dehumidifier machine to be able to soak all the wetness" (Interview#16).

Figure 5.16: A rental apartment in Corner Brook (Interview#16)

Nevertheless, some participants have negative experiences of relationships with landlords. Some participants experienced disputes with their landlords, and a few students felt they were victims in the private rental market because some landlords or rental companies targeted them and took advantage of their lack of information on tenancy rights. Some participants expressed that their landlord refused to pay back their security deposit without a convincing reason, and provided examples of abusive or illegal behaviour like being threatened by landlords or receiving an eviction notice to leave the housing within 24 hours. For example, a student from the United States and living in St. John's expressed:"I do think that this landlord tried to bully us because we're international students… I said, no, this is not the law. You can't evict someone in 24 hours. Let's file with the tenant association and figure this out" (Interview#11).

Such experiences underscore the role of housing information, university supports, and connections to local organisations for the provision of legal advice in reducing international students' vulnerability in landlord-tenant disputes.

Independence, Agency, and Privacy; "*I'm on the lease*"

The interviews with international students also illustrate the importance of independence and agency in their housing experiences. Many participants expressed that they need to make their own decisions and, thus, feel more independent in the new environment

living far from their families. However, having more independence and agency brings more responsibilities for international students in their new housing environment. For instance, some students articulated their new responsibilities during the interviews, such as cleaning, preparing food, cooking, and budgeting their costs. A student from Tanzania explained:“It’s nice because once you’re used to being independent compared to being dependent, living with your parents back home. I’d never cooked before at home” (Interview#13).

In a similar way, another Latin American student described the independence and the new responsibilities:

> I have travelled alone before, but it was like the first time that I knew that I was going to be by myself. You have more responsibilities. You [are] also learning to be more independent, make good choices, good decisions. (Interview#14)

These above quotes reflect what Kenyon (1999) described about the perception of student housing as a source of growing adulthood and independence. A greater sense of agency is also reflected in students’ housing choices and their tendency to have more control over their rental agreement. In this sense, some interviews underscored the issues of renting a room or subleasing a place without having much control over the housing situation or not having direct contact with their landlord. Due to such negative experiences, a few others expressed their unwillingness to sublease their housing unit from someone else, which might make them vulnerable in their housing experiences. Participants stated examples of eviction notices or unresolved conflicts due to this lack of agency and control in their housing. “I think it's just a lot better (now) that I'm on the lease. I have direct contact with the landlord. Just because you're at the mercy of other people's… [and] what they think is the right thing to do” (Interview#11).

Aside from participants’ preferences for independence and agency, this research illustrates international students’ need for more privacy in their living spaces. While affordability challenges force many international students to live with roommates and share their living areas, they highlighted the challenge of lack of privacy in their housing. Therefore,

some participants stated that they wished they had fewer roommates, lived in a private room or unit with a private washroom, a separate entrance, or even had a private and in-unit washer and dryer. For instance, one Iranian participant expressed her tendency to have a private washer and dryer in her housing unit in Corner Brook: “If we had separate washing and dryer machine (in-unit), it would be much better. We have a laundry room that we are using a shared one” (Interview#9).

Figure 5.17: Shared Laundry Space, Corner Brook

Many interviewees also highlighted their negative experiences of shared washrooms and stated that their washrooms were not as clean and comfortable as they desired. One student from Bangladesh sharing her room with one roommate in Paton College residence at St. John’s Campus explained: “I would rather for sure to have my own room - even though she’s (roommate) really nice, she’s really cool, sometimes I just want to be alone and she’s there” (Interview#2). This student also described the issues of unclean and uncomfortable gender-neutral public washrooms and the need for more washroom privacy in this residence:

> Washrooms on my floor are gender neutral...At McPherson (residence) [it] is nice because it's more private, there is a shower on one side and the other side is the toilet. Over here (Paton college residence), these are like airport stalls. When boys shower, you can see them. You can also see people's legs. It gets uncomfortable, especially for shy people. At first, I would go upstairs (to female toilets), but now I've got used to it. They're like slits. You can see here! (Interview#2)

Figure 5.18: Lack of privacy in public washrooms, Paton College residence (Interview#2)

5.3.7. Discrimination and Exclusion

According to Teixeira & Li (2009:224), "discrimination can manifest itself in diverse ways, and in the process undermine social cohesion in pluralist democracies such as Canada." Interviews underlie the issues of discrimination and exclusion among MUNL international students in St. John's and Corner Brook. Some student participants experienced discrimination in different overt and hidden forms, ranging from microaggression and favouritism to discrimination and exclusion from the NL housing market, the job market, and daily life. Therefore, discrimination in the new community is one of the main emerging themes of this

research, with two sub-themes: (1) Discrimination in the NL housing market, and (2) Discrimination in the workplace, job market, and everyday life.

Discrimination in NL Housing Market; *"I don't look like someone from here*"

The interviews highlight that international students have experienced discrimination in the NL housing market based on their status, race, nationality, skin colour, name, accent, language proficiency, and family composition. Given the rental shortages and competitiveness in rental markets in St. John's and Corner Brook, landlords receive many housing applications and, thus, may become selective of who they choose as their (ideal) tenants. Therefore, interviews depict the exclusionary and discriminatory treatment in the NL rental market towards students, non-locals, racialized identities, non-native English speakers, and familial structure. In sharing their housing experiences, some interviewees expressed various forms of discrimination in the private rental market. One student from Iran living in St. John's explained:

> What I myself found out was that if the case is between me, and a local person, they will go with them…You've been through rejected for a while, and statistically there is a pattern here. So, people care about their tenants' nationality, pronunciation, speaking. Sometimes I found out that they were more interested when we were texting. (Interview#3)

Apart from local favouritism, some international students described landlords' unwillingness and lack of trust to rent to international students. For instance, some students expressed that after being rejected by some landlords, they noticed that those landlords kept the housing advertisement on social media. One student said he messaged the landlord after seeing the housing advertisement again to check if the unit was still available. He received this reply: "We're still searching for better tenants." Therefore, some participants felt they have lower priority among other tenancy applicants in the private rental market. Key informants also confirmed rental market discrimination against international students and argued it might happen due to cultural unawareness, fear of the unknown, or stereotypes about a specific culture, race, country, religion, and family status. One key informant indicated that some

insurance companies have discriminatory regulations targeting student renters that they will not cover the homeowner if they rent to a student, which might result in their avoidance of student renters.

According to participants, housing discrimination can happen in different stages of the housing search process, from initial contacts to viewings and housing applications. This finding is similar to Farbenblum et al.'s (2020) finding that international students may encounter housing discrimination not just during the housing search itself, but also in the terms and conditions of that housing, or when their housing is terminated. Some interviewees highlighted the issue of blatant discrimination against visual/racialized minority international students during their housing search. For instance, one student participant from the United States described an atmosphere of white privilege in navigating housing options in the St. John's rental market:

> I ended up finding a place pretty easy…It has a lot to do with the fact that I'm white. I know that because my partner is Black and was having a lot of problems... I said "I'm going to go with you and pretend that I'm going to live there with you. So, they will accept your application. (Interview#11)

This participant acknowledged her privileges as being white and a native English speaker and compared her housing search experiences with other visible minority international students, including her Black partner and other friends. Interviews also illustrate that even after securing housing, landlords might display discriminatory behaviour towards international student renters. One instance of such overt racial discrimination was experienced by a student from Ghana and living in Corner Brook who was evicted because of a racist assumption by his landlord:

> We were kicked out of that place. Just gave us a week or two to leave. Because there was [an] infestation of insects or whatever. For me, I felt like he was being racist [towards] us because you have no proof or no reason to say that those insects only came from our place. They were all over the place. But apparently,

> he [landlord] was of the view that they came from us because we probably brought them from Africa. (Interview#16)

Interviews also demonstrate that housing exclusion and discrimination are not always racialized but can occur along many dimensions of (often intersecting) social differentiation, including a student's family composition. For instance, some international students with children expressed that some landlords do not prefer to rent to students with young children: "They asked how old is [your] child? I think when I tell them that my child is six years old, they think that, oh, he's going to be noisy, he's going to be very messy. So, they said we don't accept kids in our basement" (Interview#7).

Key informants suggested that the lack of tenancy and human rights information among international students can increase their vulnerability to housing discrimination. Some landlords might take advantage of international students' language barriers or unfamiliarity with housing agreements' legal aspects. According to one key informant, COVID-19 introduced extra housing barriers and more housing, discriminating against international students in the NL housing market. For example, key informants provided anecdotes of landlords who had health concerns to rent to international students, required student renters to show proof of vaccination, forced them to self-isolate in another place before entering their rentals, and charged extra cleaning fees. Moreover, interviews illustrated that it is hard to prove and file discrimination in the housing market. According to one expert in the NL housing market, housing discrimination is beyond the jurisdiction of the NL Residential Tenancy Board in most cases, and it needs to be filed with the Human Rights Commission:

> How are you going to go and file a complaint to the Human Rights Commission? What sort of proof? The landlord is not going to write you a note and say, "I'm not renting to you because you're from somewhere else." (Key informant active in NL housing market)

Language barriers can also negatively impact international students' ability to file and articulate disputes with their landlords. Key informants indicated previous examples of some

international students who were not confident enough to defend their rights or to attend hearing sessions due to such language barriers. Therefore, key informants emphasised that having access to more housing information and tenancy education among NL's international population would decrease their vulnerability in the housing market. For example, international students need more housing information on rental leases, their tenancy rights, human rights, and legal housing advice to resolve any possible dispute with their landlord:

> A lot of times when people come here, they don't even know what their rights are to know that they can even file a complaint in the first place… if you don't even know what your rights are, you don't know they've been violated. (Key informant active in NL housing market)

One key informant at MUNL highlighted international students' contribution to the NL housing market, particularly before the pandemic and rising demands. However, this population continues to struggle to find and secure suitable housing in the current housing crisis after the COVID-19 pandemic."I find it disturbing to see how people can easily forget how the housing market was dead here and how international students contributed to that during the past few years" (Key informant at Memorial University).

Therefore, key informants highlighted the need for more public awareness around promoting diversity and inclusion in the province. In fact, one key informant argued that acknowledging racism and discrimination in the NL housing market is the primary solution to addressing housing discrimination. Despite NL's reputation of being welcoming and friendly, the on-the-ground housing experiences of international students illustrate the need to address housing discrimination. "Newfoundland has this reputation of being friendly and welcoming and caring and all of this stuff. And I think a lot of people are afraid to acknowledge the problems that we have with discrimination, because it tarnishes that reputation" (Key informant active in NL housing market).

While the province already has many demographic and economic challenges hindering international students' retention, interviews overwhelmingly emphasise the need for promoting

welcoming attitudes and anti-discrimination policies in order to boost international students' retention rate in NL after graduation.

Discrimination in the Workplace, Job market, and Everyday life

Aside from the housing discrimination, participants highlighted discriminatory behaviours in the job market, workplace, and their daily lives as international students living in NL. Some students stated that they experienced discrimination in everyday life and felt they were not treated the same as locals or experienced ignorance and disinterest from some local people in public areas. As a South Asian student living in St. John's expressed: "When they see that you're, you know, international or you don't look White basically, they don't really treat you the same way… if you look different, then you won't experience anything harmful or negative, just the bare minimum" (Interview#10).

However, participants did not experience discrimination just from white Newfoundlanders. Some students also experienced discriminatory and judgmental behaviours from within their co-ethnic community. As one student from Malaysia explained:

> You're a South Asian, I am a South Asian. I know how you speak, and you know how I speak. You don't have to come and tell me excuse me (pretending you are not getting what I'm saying). It's really offending…the ones who are discriminating are the people from my own nation. (Interview#4)

Moreover, during the interviews, some participants stated they had encountered various forms of discrimination while working at part-time jobs, such as racist remarks from a customer, discriminatory behaviour from their manager, or feeling of hidden discrimination judgments and preconceived ideas from some people. As a student from Bangladesh shared his experience of overt discrimination in his workplace in Corner Brook: "An old guy came, and he was asking me about like 'where are you from?' I told [him] where I am actually from…he was saying that we are coming here and taking out the jobs and doing other stuff. We don't belong to here" (Interview#6).

Another student from the Philippines explained the hidden experience of discrimination in her workplace in St. John's:

> I do part-time work at Tim Hortons. I feel during that time, when I started working there, there was a bit of discrimination… Maybe they know you're Filipino and, not really maligning, but I feel that they somehow look down on you a bit, like preconceived notion that this person comes from this country, maybe education wise, things like that [crying]. (Interview#7)

Some other interviewees also highlighted that international students experience inequalities in the NL job market. One student participant expressed the feeling of white privilege in the NL job market, where international students do not have equal opportunities as Canadians and locals. Other students emphasised the lack of career opportunities for international students and their ineligibility for some government-funded job positions and summer internships. As a Latin American student living in St. John's explained:

> During the summer, there was the whole government trying to put out more jobs for students, but all of these were mostly for Canadians. No international people could apply for them. One of my roommates graduated from Grenfell with a fine arts degree. A lot of the galleries that he wanted to work with, because they're government-funded, they wouldn't hire him. (Interview#15)

While international students need Canadian work experience for their professional development and permanent residency pathways, some participants expressed that there are too many limitations, including discrimination and lack of provincial government support. Both the survey and interviews demonstrate international students' high contributions and their desire to participate in the NL job market, and such perceived discrimination can limit this population's job opportunities. Therefore, the interviews underline the need for more government support for international students' employment in the province during and after graduation in order to obtain meaningful Canadian job experience and, thus, enhance their retention rate after graduation.

5.3.8. Feeling Welcomed and At-Home

During the interviews, I asked participants how much they feel welcomed as international students living in St. John's and Corner Brook and how welcoming they perceive their host communities. The interviews show that most participants experienced welcoming and friendly attitudes from NL communities in both cities, and some students expressed a strong sense of neighbourhood. Moreover, I delved into the feelings of belonging and at-home of participants in their new environment. I acknowledge that being an international student myself, feeling at-home was a personal challenge as I did not feel at-home in St. John's at the time of the interviews. Therefore, I was curious to explore to what extent other international students feel at home. These interviews illustrated that most participants felt an incomplete sense of being at home. Interviews also highlighted the importance of social interactions, culture and a sense of place in enhancing the feeling of being at-home. Interestingly, some participants remarked that this interview question was the most challenging question of the interview and most interviewees spent more time thinking about this question before answering compared to others. Similar to Basnet's (2016) findings, participants' accounts about being at home touch on deeply private matters and personal feelings, evoking both positive sentiments and intense, painful recollections. However, interviews demonstrate participants' adaptability and resilience in adjusting and making their new environment their new home. In the following sections, I discuss this theme in two sub-themes: (1) friendly atmosphere and feeling welcomed and (2) Incomplete sense of being at-home.

Friendly Atmosphere and Feeling Welcomed; "*Random people say hi*"

The interviews illustrate that feeling welcomed is connected to students' community social interactions and feelings of safety, social freedom, and a sense of neighbourhood. At the same time, experiencing discrimination and housing challenges can reduce international students' feelings of being welcomed in their host communities. Most international student

participants felt that local communities in St. John's and Corner Brook were welcoming toward them. Most interviewees described the friendly atmosphere of their city and provided examples of friendly and helpful strangers who greet them, engage in short conversations and small talk in public areas like bus stops, or helped them by providing information or answering their questions. As one student from Bangladesh and living in St. John's explained: "Everyone is welcoming and nice…I used to wait in the bus stop, I used to talk with the people if they're besides me…Whenever I say them anything, they just carry the conversation" (Interview#8).

This quote is similar to previous studies that found that experiences with nice 'locals' or friendly people are important to newcomers' feeling of being welcomed (Clark, 2009; Hellstrom, 2020). Furthermore, the interviews highlighted the importance of social capital and community interactions to feel welcomed. This finding supports the study Esses et al. (2010) that found fostering social capital to be one of the main characteristics of welcoming communities.

Aside from the role of social interactions in feeling welcomed, the interviews also highlighted a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood as another factor contributing to feeling welcomed. Participants underlined welcoming attitudes from their neighbours and their sense of belonging to their neighbourhood. One interesting finding was that interviews showed the positive impacts of studentification (off-campus student areas near MUNL campuses) on enhancing international students' sense of belonging in specific areas around MUNL campuses in St. John's. For instance, a few interviewees who live near St. John's Campus expressed this university atmosphere and their sense of neighbourhood by living among neighbours affiliated with MUNL, a finding which aligns with previous research underscoring the role of universities in creating 'welcoming second tier cities' (Walton-Roberts, 2011). As one student from Iran and living near St. John's Campus explained:

> Almost all the people are always into conversation, helping you whenever you ask. It happens in my neighbourhood a couple of times, I asked people for some

> help and stuff, so, they were so nice. Basically, most of our neighbours are somehow working at MUN. (Interview#8)

Interviews also showed that feeling welcomed can be connected to feelings of safety and freedom. When discussing welcoming attitudes in their city, some participants described their sense of safety in their neighbourhood. This strong feeling of safety and social freedom was especially reported and appreciated by women international students who felt safer and freer than in their home country. In the two below quotes two students explained their feeling of safety, freedom of clothing, and not feeling as judged:

> I think that here you are so safe. Sometimes I walk around during the night, here, and nothing has happened to me. For example, in my country, I couldn't [wear] for example this (the piece of garment the interviewee wore in the interview session) because I would be judged, for sure. (Interview#14)

> I have a lot of freedom here which I didn't have back at home, to be honest. My parents trust me a lot, but they don't trust the country. So, outside it wasn't safe, and I always had someone with me, especially at night. (Interview#2)

This feeling of freedom described by women students was one of the underlying factors of feeling welcomed and at-home, and was previously articulated in Beech's (2015) research that limitations in the home country like gender bias against women and lack of freedom are one motivation (push factors) for studying abroad and ISM. The qoute also underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding gendered experiences of fear in public spaces.

Although almost all participants felt welcomed in their host communities, a few interviewees spoke of how discrimination and housing challenges experienced by international students can disturb their feelings of being welcomed in St. John's and Corner Brook. This finding is consistent with previous literature that highlighted both lack of discrimination and suitable housing as contributing factors of a welcoming community (Esses et al., 2010). One student also described a disconnect between the welcoming atmosphere of NL and the obstacles within the NL housing market, given the reluctance of some landlords to rent to international students. She explained: "I feel like to a certain extent, they're welcoming like, Oh, hi,

welcome. But not welcoming like, oh, do you need a place to stay? OK, come over" (Interview#11). This quote supports Esses et al.'s (2021) finding that highlighted affordable and suitable housing as one of the top characteristics of welcoming communities for newcomers and international students.

Incomplete Sense of Being At-Home; "*I am trying to make it home*"

Despite feeling welcomed and a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood among participants, the interviews demonstrate an incomplete sense of home among international students, and most do not feel at-home. According to interviewees, such incomplete senses of home can be connected to various reasons such as homesickness, missing family and friends, lack of established social supports, lack of access to cultural food, and disruption in the sense of place. Many participants stated that they could not emotionally feel at-home, and in St. John's and Corner Brook, missing family, friends, and previous home environments were the most common reasons for not feeling at-home among participants. As one student from Peru and living in St. John's expressed:"I don't know. This is a really hard question. Because home for me means being with my mom, with my sister, with my dog. I miss my family so much" (Interview#14).

This student's quote is similar to Basnet's (2016) research where refugee participants expressed that their family is their home, demonstrating that family and home are deeply interconnected. The photovoice activity also confirmed that students miss family and previous home environments. Student participants were asked to share photos of their housing; a few brought photos from their previous housing in their home country. As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, an international student from Peru living in St. John's explained:

> This was my room back in my country. And this is my dog. She's so sweet. We adopted her during the pandemic... During the pandemic, I spent all the time in my house. I was just in my house with my dog…I have a lot of good memories in my house (back home). (Interview#14)

Figure 5.19: Back home, Photo of student's room in her home country (Interview#14)

Sharing such photos or expressing memories with the family or events from their home country demonstrated that what they perceive as being at-home can be attached to their previous housing back in their home country. The interviews also underline that feeling at-home can be linked to cultural foods. For instance, some participants who lived with roommates or landlords from their co-ethnic community expressed that the smell of their cooking can make them feel at-home. A few participants also stated that limited access and the high shipping cost of international food resources and ingredients are barriers to feeling at-home. As a student from Ghana and living in Corner Brook explained:

> There are some things I want, as an international student that I wouldn't be able to get some authentic, traditional dishes that I can have access to, because sometimes we have to order them online from [the] city of Toronto or St. John's. And it's expensive. Sometimes the cost of shipping is more than the cost of buying the item. (Interview#16)

Moreover, some interviews illustrate that feeling at-home might be related to the city lifestyle. Being midsize and/or small cities, St. John's and Corner Brook lack some aspects of larger cities, such as high-rise buildings, efficient public transit, and being lively, vibrant and diverse. Therefore, international students who have lived in large cities around the world might

miss larger cities' atmosphere and lifestyle living NL mid-sized and small cities. As a student from Malaysia and living in St. John's expressed: "I can't see buildings- I miss the city life!" (Interview#4). Outmigration and the ageing population are other possible reasons for lacking such a lively city atmosphere. For instance, one interviewee emphasised the transit issue in Corner Brook and expressed that he feels Corner Brook is a city for retirement and unsuitable for young generations: "The feeling that the city is not suitable for young generation; I think Corner Brook is mostly designed to be a city for people at the age of retirement" (Interview#15).

Interviews also demonstrate international students' efforts in homemaking as part of their adjustment, adaptability, and resilience in their new home and growing a sense of belonging. In this sense, one student from Ghana and living in Corner Brook reflected: "I make my home where I lay my head. So, I'm able to lay my head here peacefully. That's where I've called home" (Interview#16).

Another student from the Philippines living in St. John's also emphasised that the length of time lived in a place can impact the sense of home:

> We are in the adjusting period and there are a lot of things that are new that we need to learn to do. But eventually, I hope in the long run, we will be able to say it is gonna be home. (Interview#16)

Thus, as articulated in this quote, the feeling at home or not at home are complex, and "varied" and can "change over the time and place" (Basnet, 2016, p.16). Moreover, decorations are a common way of homemaking among interviewees to make their housing feel like home. Some interviewees shared their experiences decorating their living spaces with lights, plants, photo frames, or Christmas trees to make them feel at-home. As described in the quote and pictured in the photo below, a Latin American student living Paton College residence explained:

> This is in the house. And I think that this made me feel at-home for just a second... We have a Christmas tree. My friends and I, we did it. That's good, you know, because it makes me feel close to home. (Interview#14)

Figure 5.20: Christmas tree, Paton College residence, St. John's (Interview#14)

Another student from Brazil living at Grenfell Campus residence in Corner Brook also described in the quote and the below:

> This is my working space in my room… it shows people have enough space to decorate and make their own space. And for me, that is in a way of trying to make it feel like home. Since I am not here for a very long [time], I still want to put some pictures on those blanket spaces over there, having more plants as well…So, that's basically me trying to make it feel like home.

These student-generated photos of the decorations of their housing supports Al-Hamad et al.'s (2024) research findings that highlighted the importance of creativity and self-expression in growing a sense of belonging and feeling at home.

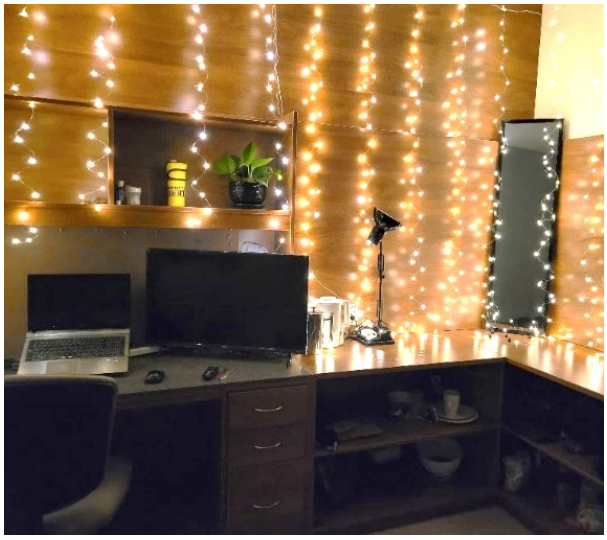

Figure 5.21: Room decorations, Grenfell Campus residence, Corner Brook (Interview#5)

5.3. Outcomes Summary and Conclusion

One-on-one interviews and photovoice activities with MUNL international students and key informants in St. John's and Corner brook demonstrated how international students' housing barriers have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Interviewees also shared various daily life challenges, and positive experiences of their living as a newcomer group in the NL province. These interviews also showed spatialized experiences of inclusion and exclusion faced by this population in the NL housing market. The three main housing barriers among this population, revealed by interviews, are: unaffordability, competitiveness, and housing discrimination. Given the limitation of MUNL on-campus housing and its limited off-campus housing support, the interviews also underlined the over-reliance of international students on the private rental market and the online platforms. Despite the major benefits of access to safe digital spaces that build social capital for international students, such as shared google drives or WhatsApp groups for sharing available housing options or organising furniture swaps, they are vulnerable to possible scams and misinformation, and thus experienced difficulties in securing a suitable place to live. Interviews also illustrated that international students start their housing search pre-arrival and prefer short-term rental agreements. Their housing satisfaction was impacted by multiple factors, including proximity to the university campus and access to above ground apartments that are safe, clean, connected to transit, and well-maintained with adequate space to live and thrive as students in a new country.

Interviews also highlighted the financial precarity in meeting their basic needs, including shelter, food, and living costs. In this sense, housing affordability is the most challenging barrier for international students. While privacy was found to be a major preference in international students' housing experiences, they usually choose to have roommates to share and manage their housing and living costs. Interviews also highlighted that COVID-19 introduced even more precarity in the housing markets of both cities and raised these housing

demands and also changed some housing needs among the student population, including the need for private study spaces, self-isolation spaces, better internet access, or more utility usage. Interviews also highlight the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students' social isolation during the lockdowns and suspending programs and social events on MUNL campuses.

Student participants also shared stories of their first hectic days of arrival in St. John's and Corner Brook, and some experienced arrival self-isolation in the first days. They also highlighted their urban mobility challenges inside St. John's and Corner Brook with inefficient public transportation. Moreover, interviews underline other everyday life challenges like transport exclusion, food insecurity, informational needs, and an incomplete sense of being at-home. Students recounted the high costs of food and university mandatory meal plans, and coping strategies, including sharing the cost of food with their roommates or choosing housing options that provide free meals from the landlords. Photovoice activity also showed the importance of kitchen space in their housing experiences, and many student participants decided to share photos of their kitchens. Despite the challenges, most MUNL international student participants felt welcomed and belonged in their city of living. Interviews demonstrated a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood among most participants. However, most student participants did not feel at-home and missed their family and friends and lacked social support and cultural foods and activities. Interviews also showed resilience, adaptability, and homemaking efforts among MUNL international students in their new homes in St. John's and Corner Brook.

While international students shared their personal narratives and nuances of their lived and housing experiences, key informants articulated the interconnectedness of housing challenges for international students in these two cities. They underlined that the NL housing crisis, rental shortages and competitive NL rental markets are linked to rising prices,

unaffordability challenges and housing discrimination. Besides, the COVID-19 extra barriers to the housing market with increasing demands, rental costs, and exacerbating housing discrimination. Figure 5.21 summarises the interconnectedness of these housing challenges uncovered through my thematic analysis of interviews with key informants and international students.

Furthermore, key informants offered some possible solutions to meet international students' needs. They suggested various solutions to address MUNL international students' challenges. Such suggestions ranged from providing housing informational support, more as off-campus housing supports and rental submission listings, more access to university food banks and kitchen spaces in residences, and the need for developing protocols and procedures for future possible lockdowns.

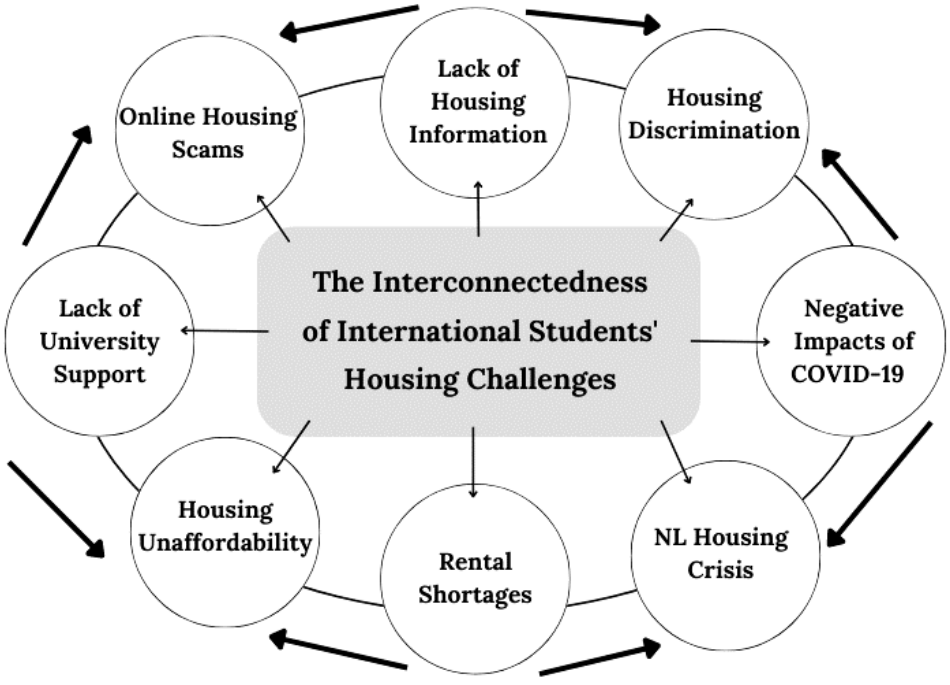

Figure 5.22: Interconnection of housing challenges

In the final chapter (Chapter Six), I will summarise the study findings in relation to its three research objectives and reflect on their implications.

Chapter Six

Discussions and Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

Housing security is one of the determinants of choice for ISM, and at the same time, international students' well-being and their overall quality of life (Beine et al., 2014; Sotomayor et al., 2022). It is also one of the main characteristics of a welcoming community (Esses et al., 2010). Therefore, in order to bridge housing with wellbeing and quality of life, it is crucial that international students have access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing options in their host communities. However, the literature highlighted that international students often face housing insecurity in Canada, particularly due to high living costs and limited affordable housing options on and off campuses.

In this thesis, I explored MUNL's international student housing experiences through the frameworks of international student mobility, geographies of student housing, and welcoming communities, addressing three main questions about housing experiences, the impact of COVID-19, and perceptions of (un)welcoming communities. As existing research primarily focuses on major metropolitan areas, I aimed to fill the gap in understanding international students' experiences and the need for an in-depth examination of their housing barriers in non-traditional immigration centres like St. John's and Corner Brook (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009; Teixeira, 2009; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014; Brown, 2017; Graham & Pottie-Sherman, 2021). Through employing a mixed-method approach involving qualitative interviews, photovoice, and data from the NL newcomer housing survey, I sought to investigate the intricate dynamics shaping MUNL international students' experiences. Integrating analyses of quantitative, qualitative, and visual methods enabled the triangulation of findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of housing experiences among this population.

The results revealed that while MUNL plays a significant role in supporting provincial immigration goals to attract and retain international students in NL (Knutson, 2020), many of these students face pressing housing challenges, exacerbated by the broader housing crisis impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research also found these COVID-related housing challenges included rising rental prices and decreasing vacancy rates, leading to limited housing options and competition in the rental market. Compounding these housing barriers is the limited availability of on-campus housing at MUNL. Housing affordability emerged as a major concern among student participants, with many allocating a substantial portion of their income towards rent and related housing costs such as utilities. The study underscores the interconnected dynamics between on-campus and off-campus housing barriers, calling for comprehensive solutions to address the housing needs of international students in NL.

In this chapter, I summarise and synthesise the most significant findings of this study, providing insights and recommendations to foster a more inclusive and supportive housing environment for MUNL international students. I also propose future research areas linked to the findings and literature review. Finally, I draw conclusions on key points, lessons learned, implications, and the research's impact for the future.

6.2. Summary of Results

International Students' Housing Experiences

The findings presented throughout this thesis shed light on the myriad challenges faced by MUNL international students in securing housing, with the following eight key takeaways:

(1) Pre-arrival, there is a critical need for housing support, including access to accurate housing information: The research underscores the critical need for access to accurate housing information to alleviate confusion and prevent scams during the pre-arrival housing search process, aligning with previous studies documenting the housing acquisition difficulties for newcomers (Forbes-Mewett, 2018; Berg & Farbenblum, 2020; Farbenblum et

al., 2020). The findings show the reliance of international students on online platforms like Facebook and Kijiji for housing information, where they encounter many challenges such as outdated listings and misleading prices and photos. Most students cannot access in-person home viewings pre-arrival, which are essential for them to avoid exploitation and ensure suitable accommodations. Particularly in Corner Brook, where some landlords have limited online presence, students resort more to face-to-face strategies like word of mouth, highlighting the importance of university rental listings to bridge this gap. Additionally, the research highlights how limited local social networks exacerbate pre-arrival challenges, underscoring the importance of social capital in finding a suitable housing option pre- and upon arrival.

(2) On-campus and off-campus housing challenges are interconnected: The findings highlight the interconnection between on-campus and off-campus housing challenges faced by MUNL international students, and how these were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the study confirms international students' reliance on off-campus housing, echoing previous research on the limited university-provided housing (Revington & August, 2020; Pillai et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2022), post-pandemic challenges, including falling vacancy rates and rising rental costs in both cities heightened competition and affordability concerns within the private rental market. Consequently, students were often compelled to make risky decisions, such as paying deposits without viewing properties. Moreover, the inadequate provision of on-campus housing at MUNL with long waiting lists, exacerbated the housing crisis for international students, and illustrates the urgent need for a critical examination of the university's capacity to meet the diverse and changing needs of its student body.

(3) International students are navigating the housing affordability crisis in various ways: The survey and interview findings also highlight housing affordability as a prominent concern among international students, exacerbating financial stress amid constraints like

limited work hours, high tuition fees, and the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings are consistent with existing literature, which highlights the challenges they face in finding affordable housing, potentially leading to class division within the student population (Farbenblum et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Sotomayor et al., 2022). However, my interviews revealed a nuanced understanding of housing affordability among MUNL international students. Students compared their housing costs to various market rates and deemed them acceptable despite exceeding the recommended shelter cost-to-income threshold, or considered factors like utility costs, transit access, furnishings, and roommate arrangements when assessing affordability, with some opting for shared accommodation or adjusting rent based on room size to manage housing costs.

(4) There is an important link between housing costs and food security for international students: The interviews also highlight a correlation between housing costs and food security among MUNL international students. Mandatory meal plans at MUNL residences impose a significant financial strain. Students noted the unaffordability of MUNL meal plans and the limited food options for those with dietary restrictions, such as vegetarians and Halal eaters, despite paying the same rates. Participants advocated for their removal and for kitchen spaces to be made available in all university residences to enhance affordability and better support students with diverse dietary needs. The photovoice activity also underscored the significance of kitchen access, with participants emphasising its role in fostering a sense of belonging and cultural adjustment. This finding aligns with existing research highlighting food's importance in shaping living experiences and home-meaning (Basnet, 2016; Al-Hamad et al., 2024).

(5) Housing conditions and location shape the experiences of international students: MUNL international students predominantly live in rental houses (or apartments and rooms in houses), rather than apartment buildings, and their living arrangements are generally

suitable for their household size according to national occupancy standards. This finding aligns with NL's housing characteristics of single-detached houses and is supported by previous literature indicating the greater availability of homes with a high number of bedrooms and better housing suitability in smaller urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2016; Morris et al., 2020; Esses et al., 2021). While most studies focus on student housing in larger urban centres with apartments and purpose-built accommodations, these findings contribute to the literature on student housing in cities with a significant stock of single-detached houses. My interviews also revealed significant concerns about the quality of living spaces, with maintenance delays, old appliances, and heating system issues being common grievances. Health concerns related to substandard living conditions, including mould presence and cleanliness issues, were also raised by participants, underscoring the many intersecting inequalities in housing for vulnerable renters. Additionally, the survey responses revealed a significant level of satisfaction with their neighbourhoods, underscoring the importance of location and housing suitability in shaping positive experiences. These findings also resonate with prior research emphasising the crucial role of housing conditions and location in influencing the experiences of international students (Sutherland & Cheng, 2009; Wiginton, 2013; Forbes-Mewett, 2018).

(6) The housing experiences of international students are deeply influenced by their social relationships: The social networks of MUNL international students served as a crucial support system in navigating the challenges of adapting to a new environment. The interviews highlighted the significance of social capital derived from co-ethnic communities, family members, and friends in assisting students with housing options, roommates, and landlords. Co-ethnic community groups on social media platforms played a pivotal role in providing support and information, facilitating connections, and offering emotional solace amidst the challenges associated with the transition to a new country and community. Additionally, the compatibility of roommates and relationships with landlords significantly

shaped students' housing satisfaction, illustrating the importance of fostering supportive living arrangements and positive landlord-tenant dynamics. Participants also valued independence and agency in housing decisions but struggled with privacy in shared accommodations. Issues with landlords, influenced by cultural norms and communication barriers, significantly affected housing satisfaction. These findings support previous literature on the significance of social capital and social networks in housing inclusion and welcoming communities. They also underscore the importance of access to secure digital spaces that foster social capital for international students, thereby enriching existing scholarship in this area.

(7) Limited public transportation systems constrain international students' housing choices: This thesis highlights the intersection of mobility challenges and housing experiences, and MUNL international students' significant mobility challenges due to the limited public transit systems in St. John's and Corner Brook. Student participants mostly relied on buses with inconvenient schedules and routes and did not have access to personal vehicles. Consequently, transportation limitations directly impacted their housing options, with students preferring accommodations within walking distance of essential amenities and university campuses. These findings support earlier studies indicating that accessible transportation is crucial for addressing newcomers' housing challenges in small Canadian urban centres (Brown, 2017; Wiginton, 2013), and this study contributes to the literature by emphasising its importance for international students as well.

(8) Housing experiences are critical to the long-term retention of international students in small and medium-sized Canadian cities: The interviews showed that MUNL international students typically prioritise short-term lease agreements over long-term contracts, considering their current living situation as temporary and indicative of their transient status as students. This finding aligns with existing literature on students' acceptance of lower quality housing conditions as a coping mechanism (Kenyon, 1999; Morris et al., 2020; Revington et

al., 2020). However, this short-term perspective may also reflect their intention to relocate to larger cities for employment opportunities upon graduation, highlighting the connection between housing experiences and the long-term retention of international students in small and medium-sized Canadian cities.

Impacts of COVID-19 on International Students

This thesis also illustrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ISM, initially resulting in a marked decline in international student admissions in Canada and exacerbating pre-existing disparities in access to higher education, living conditions, and housing challenges (Hari et al., 2021; Firang & Mensah, 2022). The empirical evidence from this thesis underscores the profound mobility disruptions caused by the pandemic on ISM and the enrolment trends at MUNL during the COVID-19. These challenges encompass difficulties with border crossings, navigating changing public health regulations, and enduring expensive and stressful travel experiences. Additionally, interviews unveiled the hurdles faced by many international students upon arrival during the pandemic, particularly during self-isolation periods. These challenges include heightened costs, feelings of loneliness, and encounters with culturally unsuitable meals. Nevertheless, some students reported positive experiences with airport greeting services and peer support programs. Meanwhile, survey findings indicated that many students relied on university-provided accommodations.

The survey and the interviews also revealed the exacerbated housing challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the most significant impacts of COVID-19 on housing challenges reported by student participants were increased utility costs and housing inadequacies for remote studying and working or adhering to public health guidelines. Moreover, data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC, 2024) indicates that the pandemic has posed considerable challenges to the rental housing markets in St. John's

and Corner Brook, characterised by decreasing vacancy rates and escalating average rents, leading to heightened housing demand and a shortage of available rental units in both cities.

Despite these adversities, the majority of student participants in this research did not receive government aid such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) while experienced financial strain, which is consistent with previous studies showing the vulnerability of international students during COVID-19 caused by temporary status and exclusion from governmental financial assistance (Firang & Mensah, 2022). Student participants, therefore, expressed a strong desire to participate in the job market to manage their living and housing costs. It is important to note the intersection of significant financial burdens of international students during the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy responses that lifted the 20-hour work limit for this population during and post-pandemic. Facing rising costs of rent, utilities, tuition, and food, these students experience exacerbated financial burdens. However, they were allowed to work more during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic as the Government of Canada lifted the 20-hour work limit for international students with off-campus work authorization, initially from April 22 to August 31, 2020, and later from November 15, 2022, to April 30, 2024 (Government of Canada, 2020; 2022). This change was framed as a measure to address labour shortages, stimulate economic recovery, and alleviate the financial burdens of international students. But it had uneven results and implications for international students. While this policy shift facilitated increased employment opportunities, especially during the pandemic's peak, it restricted employment to essential sectors only during the initial period in 2020, such as health care, critical infrastructure, or the supply of food or other critical goods (Government of Canada, 2020), which mostly do not meet PR applications' professional job experience requirements (Hari et al., 2021). In the second phase of removing the work-hours cap, however, they were allowed to work in any employment off-campus, and over 80% of international students worked more than 20 hours per week during this period

(CBC News, 2024b). Although international students contributed significantly to Canada's economy during and post-pandemic through increased workforce participation, concerns about balancing work commitments with academic responsibilities persist. Therefore, according to the recent government announcement (CBC News, 2024b), the weekly work limit reverted to 20 hours from May 1, 2024, there are discussions about permanently increasing it to 24 hours starting September 2024. In light of these challenges, rising rents and costs of living in the post-pandemic period demand more attention, and there is a pressing need for more affordable housing for international students.

Finally, this research is among the first studies to investigate the pandemic's impacts on international students' housing experiences in Canada, contributing to the limited research on their overall experiences during this period, particularly concerning financial precarity, housing insecurity, and mobility challenges.

Perceptions of Welcoming Communities and Feeling at Home

The literature outlined that the creation of a truly welcoming community that desires to attract, receive, and retain newcomers involves various interconnected factors (including affordable and suitable housing), intersecting with the sense of belonging, and feeling at home (Esses et al., 2010; Clark, 2009; Danson & Jentsch, 2012; Wiginton, 2013; Lund & Hira-Friesen, 2014; Basnet, 2016; Hanley, 2017; Hellstrom, 2020; Al-Hamad et al., 2024). However, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Walton-Roberts, 2011), the research has not explored what this means for international students. This thesis attempted to fill the gap by exploring MUNL international students' perception of welcoming communities in St. John's and Corner Brook.

The survey and interviews results revealed a generally welcoming atmosphere in NL communities, with participants describing friendly interactions and a sense of neighbourhood. However, despite this warmth, many student participants expressed an incomplete sense of being at-home in their new environment. Factors contributing to this feeling included

homesickness, lack of access to cultural foods, and a disconnect between the welcoming atmosphere and challenges within the NL housing market. While students felt welcomed in their communities, they often struggled with a sense of belonging and missed family and cultural connections. Despite these challenges, students demonstrated adaptability and resilience, with efforts to make their living spaces feel like home through decorations and personal touches.

This research also affirmed the findings of prior literature regarding structural racism and discrimination in housing exclusion. The results found that discrimination poses significant challenges for MUNL international students, particularly in the housing market and workplace. Students reported instances of discrimination based on nationality, race, language proficiency, and family composition, influencing access to housing and job opportunities. Discriminatory practices by landlords, such as favouritism towards locals or reluctance to rent to international students, perpetuate housing exclusion and limit housing options. Moreover, discrimination extends to the workplace, where international students encounter unequal treatment, racist remarks, and limited job prospects due to systemic barriers and prejudices. Thus, welcoming community policies should be promoted that address discrimination and other multifaceted challenges to foster inclusivity, embrace diversity, provide equitable opportunities, and enhance international students' well-being and retention rates in NL.

6.3. Recommendations

Based on the key findings outlined in the previous section, several recommendations are proposed to address the housing needs of MUNL international students, necessitating targeted support and tailored policies from educational institutions and policymakers. Firstly, MUNL needs to expand the provision of university-provided housing and purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) to address the limited housing options experienced by international students and the evolving housing needs of all MUNL student populations. One opportunity

for MUNL to provide more student housing is the Government of Canada's plan (2024b) to accelerate the construction of student housing by offering low-cost loans aiming to provide affordable accommodations for students and alleviate housing shortages in nearby communities. One example of PBSA in St. John's is the Werkliv project, scheduled for construction in two phases during 2024 and 2025. Situated at 6 Lambe's Lane near MUNL St. John's campus, this development will offer 205 units and 670 beds. Managed by Werkliv, a Montreal-based student housing specialist (Kucharsky, 2023), this project is a step toward addressing student housing needs. However, considering the total enrolment, limited available beds in MUNL residences, and the rental market shortages, this project does not sufficiently meet the demand. Therefore, there remains a pressing need for more student housing and MUNL needs to benefit from these low-cost housing loans to construct more on-campus housing and additional PBSA projects.

Notably, the Canadian government has recently implemented a two-year cap on international student permit applications that reduces study permits by 35% for 2024 and increased the cost-of-living financial requirement for study permit applicants to stabilise international student numbers and address pressures on housing and services (Government of Canada, 2023b; 2024a). However, this policy shift unfairly blames international students for housing, ignoring their economic contributions and longstanding policy failures at all government levels to address the housing crisis. Instead of focusing on academic restrictions, the focus should be on increasing housing supply and supporting international students' housing needs (York University, 2024).

The concerns voiced by international students in this study also highlight the need for a comprehensive and tailored approach to housing support at MUNL that will benefit all MUNL student populations, and not international students. The complexities involved in securing suitable accommodation require a nuanced response beyond simply the provision of

information. A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate for addressing the diverse needs of international students, particularly in navigating off-campus housing. As indicated in the interviews, there is a crucial need to re-establish an off-campus office to maintain a list of vetted rental listings and assign a staff member responsible for off-campus housing on MUNL campuses, facilitating connections between students and landlords/community members. Additionally, a critical examination of the university's capacity is necessary to meet the diverse needs of MUNL student populations, including improving access to kitchen spaces, meal plans, and services like the grocery shuttle bus to enhance campus housing experiences.

Secondly, providing accessible housing information and rental lists for students, such as through a dedicated website or online toolkit, can be an effective measure to alleviate confusion and stress among international students during their initial settlement period. Collaboration between MUNL and other community organisations in housing and settlement services, with translated resources in various languages, can further support this effort. For instance, the recent launch of an online platform called SpacesShared, which connects seniors with spare rooms to students in need of housing, can serve as a positive response to housing shortages (CBC News, 2024a). Utilising an algorithm, SpacesShared pairs students with compatible older hosts, offering reduced rents in exchange for assistance with household tasks and can foster meaningful intergenerational relationships. Thus, more initiatives like this are needed from social economy-based multistakeholder, community-centred, cooperative, or nonprofit initiatives for student housing to address the needs of the MUNL student population.

Furthermore, promoting welcoming community policies in NL, emphasising attraction and retention of international students while highlighting anti-racism, anti-discrimination, and reconciliation efforts, can enhance public awareness of the benefits of internationalisation of higher education and immigration to the province. This can be achieved through government messaging, social media campaigns, increased funding towards cultural programs and events,

and incorporating education on immigration and different cultures in schools and workplace diversity and inclusion training. Welcoming community initiatives should also include promoting employment opportunities and training programs for international students to help them secure meaningful employment and remain in the province after graduation. Finally, addressing the intersection of mobility challenges and housing experiences underscores the urgent need for improved transportation infrastructure and enhanced housing accessibility for international students in both cities.

6.4. Future Research Directions

Exploring the complexities of MUNL international student housing experiences and the implications of immigration and internationalisation of higher education in NL opens avenues for future research. Potential directions include:

(1) Public Perception of Immigration and Internationalisation of Higher Education: Future research could explore the public perception regarding the impacts of immigration and internationalisation of higher education in cities like St. John's and Corner Brook. Understanding how residents perceive the influx of international students and immigrants can provide valuable insights into community dynamics, attitudes towards diversity, and the social integration of newcomers.

(2) Comparison of Housing Experiences and Welcoming Community Perceptions: A comparative analysis of housing experiences among international students in Atlantic Canada and major metropolitan (MTV) cities could offer valuable insights. Contrasting factors such as housing affordability, availability, and quality between these regions could shed light on regional disparities and inform policy interventions to address housing challenges faced by international students.

(3) Impacts of Increased Job Market Participation: Investigating the impacts of increased job market participation of international students during and after the COVID-19

pandemic, facilitated by the lifting of the 20-hour work limit, is crucial. Research could examine how this policy change affects international students' academic performance, job prospects, and overall integration into the Canadian workforce, providing valuable implications for immigration and employment policies. Also, a study that attempts to identify and measure this economic impact for private business owners in St. John's and Corner Brook of the availability of international student labour could complement this research.

(4) Long-term Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Migration Trajectories: Exploring the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students' migration trajectories in Canada is essential. Research could investigate how pandemic-related disruptions, such as travel restrictions, visa delays, and economic uncertainties, influence international students' decisions regarding their stay in Canada post-graduation, potential changes in migration patterns, and their contributions to Canada's labour market and economy.

(5) Policies and Practices: Further research could delve into the effectiveness of policies and practices aimed at supporting international students' social, cultural, and economic situations in Canada. Examining the implementation and outcomes of various initiatives, such as language programs, cultural orientation sessions, mentorship programs, and community engagement initiatives, can provide valuable insights into best practices for promoting international student experiences.

(6) Socioeconomic Impacts of International Students: Investigating the socioeconomic impacts of international students on local economies and communities is another area for future research. Analysing the contributions of international students to job creation, the concentration of ownership and the benefits for the local owners, consumer spending, and cultural enrichment can inform policy decisions regarding the retention and attraction of international talent and the development of strategies to maximise the benefits of international education for local communities.

(7) Support Services for International Students: Research focusing on the effectiveness of support services and resources available to international students, both on-campus and within the broader community, is essential. Evaluating the accessibility, adequacy, and responsiveness of support services, such as academic advising, mental health counselling, housing assistance, and career development programs, can identify areas for improvement and inform the development of holistic support frameworks for international students.

(8) Utilising Qualitative and Visual Methods: Incorporating other qualitative and visual methods, such as focused groups, narrative interviews, and participatory photography, can enrich our understanding of international student experiences and their unique challenges. These methods allow for in-depth exploration of the complexities of international student life, providing nuanced insights into their perspectives, aspirations, and struggles. By capturing diverse voices and experiences, qualitative and visual methods complement quantitative data and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the international student journey.

6.5. Conclusion

This study contributes to the limited yet expanding body of research on international students' housing experiences and their perception of welcoming communities in small and mid-sized cities in Canada. The research findings encompassed various challenges encountered by MUNL international students in securing housing, such as their lack of access to housing information, affordability concerns, lack of social capital, low housing quality, reliance on online platforms with potential scams and misinformation, the issue of rental market discrimination and mobility constraints. Moreover, the examination of MUNL's on-campus housing infrastructure has underscored critical issues of accessibility and affordability, particularly against the backdrop of escalating tuition fees for international students who are paying higher tuition rates. Additionally, the exploration of the rental housing market dynamics has shed light on the broader housing crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with

rising average rent and decreasing vacancy rates. Empirical evidence from the survey and interviews also revealed that the pandemic heightened housing barriers, financial strains, and mobility challenges among this population. Finally, the exploration of their perception on welcoming communities highlighted a generally welcoming atmosphere in St. John's and Corner Brook, but showed students' incomplete feeling at home, while discrimination was found to pose significant hurdles for international students, impacting housing and job opportunities. Thus, this thesis aimed to address these critical issues and the need for heightened attention to the housing experiences of international students in NL amid the COVID-19 pandemic while contributing to broader discussions on international student migration, housing, and welcoming communities.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Survey Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

We are researchers in the Department of Geography at Memorial University. We are conducting a research study called, "COVID-19 and the housing experiences of newcomers and temporary residents living in Newfoundland and Labrador."

I am contacting you because of your expertise on [housing in Newfoundland and Labrador, etc.] At this stage, we are interviewing key stakeholders involved in the housing or immigration sectors in Newfoundland and Labrador, including city planners, community leaders, institution representatives, and non-profit organisations.

We are doing this research in partnership with the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PLIAN), Municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition. Participation in this study is not a requirement for access to any programs and services offered by these organisations.

The purpose of this study is to compare the housing experiences of immigrants, refugees, and temporary residents (including international students, migrant workers, and visitors), and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these experiences in NL. We also want to consider how the barriers and needs of these populations can be addressed.

Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on your time and level of interest in our project. The interview will take place by telephone or video chat, depending on your preference.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me to arrange a meeting time If you have any questions about my project or me please contact me at [team member contact info] or the Principal Investigator, Yolande Pottie-Sherman at ypottiesherm@mun.ca.

Thank you in advance for considering my request,
[researcher name]

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861

Appendix II: Survey Variables at a Glance

I. Screening & demographic	II. Housing status
Screening: • Live in NL (Q1) • Age (Q2) • Country of birth (Q3) • 10 yrs or less in Canada (Q4) **Demographic info:** • Location (Q5) • Arrival status (Q6) • Current status (Q7) • Household income (Q12) • Population group (Q37) • Gender identity (Q38) • Employment status (Q39) • Education (Q40)	• Housing type & tenure (Q8-9) • New home purchase since March 2020 (Q10) • Affordability: monthly housing expenses (Q11) • Suitability: persons per bedroom (Q13-Q14) • Who do you live with? (Q15) • Social housing/waitlist (Q26-27)

III. Housing experiences	IV. Housing supports	V. Housing & COVID-19
• Housing challenges & positive experiences (Q16-17) • Migrant worker housing: paycheck deductions, and expressing housing concerns (Q31-34) • Housing perceptions (Likert): rights, discrimination, part of community, receiving help, feeling at home (Q35) • Open-ended question (Q36)	• Familiarity with local organisations (Q18) • Connected with local organisations (Q19) • Sources of housing information (Q20) and how connected (Q21) • Housing info language preference (Q22) • Appearance before RTB, support with case, and experience (Q23-25)	• New housing challenges since pandemic (Q28) • CERB or CESB (Q29) • Experience with self-isolation (Q30)

Appendix III: Survey Consent Form

Title: COVID-19 and the Housing Experiences of Newcomers and Temporary Residents Living in Newfoundland and Labrador

Researcher(s): Dr. Yolande Pottie-Sherman (Principal Investigator, Assistant Professor), Dr. Julia Christensen (Co-Investigator, Associate Professor), Maryam Foroutan (MA student), Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Contact: Dr. Yolande Pottie-Sherman: ypottiesherm@mun.ca

Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "COVID-19 and the Housing Experiences of Newcomers and Temporary Residents Living in Newfoundland and Labrador." This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. To decide whether you wish to participate in this study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. Take time to read this form carefully and to understand the information given to you. It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. Please contact the researcher, Dr. Yolande Pottie-Sherman by email (ypottiesherm@mun.ca) or by telephone (709-986-9234), if you have any questions about the study or would like more information before you consent.

Who We Are

We are researchers in the Geography department at Memorial University. We are doing this research in partnership with the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PLIAN), Municipalities of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Happy Valley-Goose Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition. Participation in this study is not a requirement for access to any programs and services offered by these organisations. This project is funded through the Ocean Frontier Institute initiative, "Future Ocean and Coastal Infrastructures: Designing Safe, Sustainable, and Inclusive Coastal Communities and Industries for Atlantic Canada," and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to learn about the housing experiences of newcomers and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these experiences. We also want to consider how the housing barriers and needs of newcomers can be addressed. Newcomers are any persons who are immigrants, refugees, or temporary residents in Newfoundland and Labrador (including international students, migrant workers, and visitors).

Eligibility to Participate

-Are over the age of 18
-Currently live in Newfoundland and Labrador (permanently or temporarily)
-Were born outside of Canada and have spent 10 years or less in Canada
- Came to Canada first as an international student, temporary worker, refugee (Protected Person), immigrant, and /or a visitor (tourist, or family member of the other categories)
- Canadian citizens are eligible if they meet the criteria above

Participation

Your participation is voluntary. Participation involves answering questions about your housing experiences while living in NL. The survey contains questions about your housing status, housing experiences (before and since the COVID-19 pandemic), and demographic information. You can skip any questions you don't want to answer.

Length of Time

The survey should take you no more than **25 minutes** to complete.

Compensation

At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to enter a draw to win one of 25 visa gift cards of $50.

Withdrawal from the Study

You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw mid-way through the survey, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed unless you provide specific permission for it to be kept and used in the study. If you choose to withdraw from the survey at any time, you can still enter the gift card draw by clicking through to the end of the survey and choosing the option to withdraw. You will be taken to a separate page to enter the gift card draw. We are collecting this data anonymously which means that you or your answers cannot be removed once you have submitted the survey. If you complete the survey in paper form at the My New St. John's LIVE Expo Event at the St. John's Farmers' Market on October 14th, you can withdraw mid-way from the survey (keep your copy of the survey and destroy it). You can still enter the gift card draw by placing your contact information in the secure yellow container at our booth. Once you have placed your survey in the secure green dropbox, you or your answers cannot be removed.

Possible Benefits

We hope that the information collected here will provide a better understanding of newcomers' housing experiences and will be used to provide better, more accessible information about housing resources in NL and the pandemic's impact.

Possible Risks

Some persons may have experienced social or emotional stress from the COVID-19 pandemic, the process of migrating to Canada, and/or housing experiences. Should stress arise during or after the survey, we encourage participants to seek assistance from NL's Mental Health Crisis Line at 1-888-737-4668, by dialling the 211 Helpline (confidential free 24-hour referral assistance in 170 languages), or the Crisis Intervention Services offered by the Association for New Canadians Settlement Social Workers at 1-833-222-0921 (for Government Assisted Refugees or other Permanent Residents in NL).

Confidentiality

We will not collect identifying information such as your name, birth date, email, or IP address unless you **choose to provide it** at the end of the survey. For the online survey: at the end of the survey, you can choose to leave your email address to enter the gift card draw. This information will not be linked to your survey answers. You can also choose to leave your email address so that we can contact you over the next few months for a follow-up interview by telephone or video chat where we ask you more about your housing experiences. If you choose this option, your contact information *will* be linked to your survey answers. For the in-person survey on October 14th: at the end of the survey, you can choose to leave your email address to be contacted for a follow-up interview (in this case, your contact information will be linked to your survey answers). You can also enter the prize draw by placing a slip of paper with your email address in a secure yellow container at our booth. We will keep your identity strictly confidential and will only identify your answers by a pseudonym. Your name will never appear in any publications stemming from or be associated with information you provide. **You can also choose not to leave any contact information at all.**

Anonymity

We will make every reasonable effort to make sure the data you provide is anonymous. This duty is essential because our study includes small communities. Although the data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences, we will report the data in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. To make sure that groups of people, groups of workers, families or individuals in small communities can't be identified we will only ask you to identify your community if it has more than 5,000 people. In reports stemming from this research, when there are fewer than 50 respondents in a community we will present aggregate results as necessary. For example, if we had only 35 respondents from Happy Valley-Goose Bay and 20 respondents from Labrador City, we would combine these two areas when reporting data. We will also aggregate the data to protect potentially vulnerable communities such as temporary workers at a particular job-site. If you complete a paper survey at the My New St. John's LIVE Expo Event, you will return your completed survey to a sealed green dropbox that will not be opened until after the event has concluded. You will have an opportunity to enter a prize draw by placing your contact information in a separate sealed yellow container that will remain sealed until the prize draw takes place. While we will make every reasonable effort to make sure the survey data you provide is anonymous, there are limits to anonymity for a paper survey since it is likely that members of our research team will see that you have participated in the survey even if we cannot identify individual responses.

Use, Access, Ownership, and Storage of Data

Only Dr. Pottie-Sherman, Dr. Christensen, the MA student, a graduate and undergraduate research assistant, and translators will have access to the raw survey data collected from the survey. The research assistants and translators will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. This data will be hosted and stored electronically by Qualtrics. We will also store this data on a password protected computer in the Storytelling Lab at Memorial and in a password protected and encrypted folder on the Geography Department's institutional shared drive in perpetuity. Paper copies of consent forms and surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, separate from the data. Memorial's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research requires that we keep the data for at least five years. After the five-year retention period, we will shred any paper copies of the consent forms and surveys. In accordance with SSHRC's Research Data Archive Policy, we will place an aggregate summary table of the survey data in Memorial's repository (for use by others, including our community partners) within two years. All archived data will be anonymous.

Third-party Data Collection and Storage

Data collected online from you as part of your participation in this project will be hosted and/or stored electronically by Qualtrics and is subject to their privacy policy, and to any relevant laws of the country in which their servers are located. If you have questions or concerns about how your data will be collected or stored, please contact the researcher and/or visit the provider's website for more information before participating. Qualtrics' privacy and security policy can be found at:
https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/getting-started/data-protection-privacy/

Reporting of Results

Participants will be able to access the project report and a 1-page summary of results online without having to contact us directly through the Memorial University Research Repository: https://research.library.mun.ca. The data from this project may also be published in journal articles, MA student theses, and conference presentations. One MA student, identified in this consent form, will use the data for their thesis which will be publicly available via the QEII thesis collection and accessible online at http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses. Although the data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences, we will report the data in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. When reporting results from open-ended survey questions, we will not report direct quotations and will aggregate responses so that small communities, families, and/or workers are not identifiable.

Sharing of Results with Participants

Participants will be able to access the survey report and a 1-page summary and infographic independently via Memorial's online Research Repository.

Questions

You are welcome to ask questions before or after your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact Yolande Pottie-Sherman at ypottiesherm@mun.ca. The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent

By completing this survey you agree that:

-You have read the information about the research.
-You have been advised that you may ask questions about this study and receive answers prior to continuing.
-You are satisfied that any questions you had have been addressed.
-You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
-You understand that you are free to withdraw participation from the study by closing your browser window or navigating away from this page, without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future (if you are completing a paper version of the survey, you can choose not to submit the survey to the green dropbox).
-You understand that you can skip any questions you don't wish to answer.
-You understand that this data is being collected anonymously and therefore your data **cannot** be removed once you submit this survey.

By answering the survey questions, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Please keep a copy of this consent information for your records by downloading it as a PDF. If you are completing a paper version of the survey, please keep this consent form for your records.

Clicking Accept below and submitting this survey means that you give your consent to participate and implies that you agree with the above statements.

Submitting your survey to the sealed green drop box implies that you give your consent to participate and implies that you agree with the above statements.

Appendix IV: Interview Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Maryam Forouatn, and as part of my master's program, I am conducting a thesis study called, "Studying in a new home; Geographies of international student housing at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and the impact of COVID-19," under the supervision of Dr. Julia Christensen and Dr. Yolanede Pottie-Sherman at the Department of Geography at Memorial University. I am contacting you because you recently participated in our survey of housing experiences and indicated that you would like to be contacted for a follow-up interview.

The purpose of this study is to compare the housing experiences of MUNL international students and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these experiences. It would be beneficial for this study if you could please bring two or three photos of your housing situations that matter to you. You are free to select and bring these photos (digital or printed) to the interview session. These photos can be later used in my thesis only based on your consent.

Participation is entirely voluntary. The interview should take between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on your time and level of interest in our project. The interview will take place in the Department of Geography in Science Building (SN 2007 or SN 2000) at St. John's Campus. At the end of the interview, you will receive a $25 visa gift card.

Participation in this study is neither a requirement of Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. To be eligible to participate in this study, you are:

- ✓ Over the age of 18
- ✓ Currently a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador
- ✓ Currently live in Newfoundland and Labrador
- ✓ Were born outside of Canada and have spent 10 years or less in Canada
- ✓ Came to Canada first as an international student and currently have study permit status

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me to arrange a meeting time If you have any questions about my project or me please contact me, Maryam Foroutan, at mforoutan@mun.ca.

Thank you in advance for considering my request,
Maryam Foroutan

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix IV: Sub-Project Consent Form Addendum

Title of Sub-Project: *Studying in a new home; Geographies of international student housing at Memorial University of Newfoundland and the impact of COVID-19*
Researcher(s): *Maryam Foroutan, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences\Department of Geography, mforoutan@mun.ca, 7097639064*
Supervisor(s): *Dr. Julia Christensen and Dr. Yolanede Pottie-Sherman, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences\Department of Geography, jchristensen@mun.ca and ypottiesherm@mun.ca*

My name is Maryam Foroutan, and as part of my master's program, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Julia Christensen and Dr. Yolande Pottie-Sherman. In addition to participating in the research project "Housing Experiences of immigrants, refugees, and temporary residents living in Newfoundland and Labrador," as outlined in the preceding consent form, I am asking for your consent to use your data for my sub-project. This does not alter what you will be asked to do. It simply documents your consent to use your photos of the housing situation during the COVID-19 pandemic. While you are entirely free to select and bring these photos (digital or printed) with you to the interview session, these photos can ONLY be used later in the thesis, based on your consent here.

Consent:

You agree to the use of your photos in this research. Yes No

This is a supplement to the informed consent form for our Dr. Yolande Pottie-Sherman's project. Signing of the larger project's consent form and initialling this page signifies that you have read and understood this supplemental information. All information provided in the larger project's consent form regarding confidentiality, anonymity, storage of data, withdrawal, etc., applies equally to my project unless otherwise stated. Once published, my thesis/dissertation will be publicly available at Memorial's QEII library.

If you have any questions about your participation or how your data will be used for this sub-project, please contact me or my supervisor using the information provided above.

_____ _____

Participant Initials Date

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix V: International students Interview Guide

Script

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this research study. This project's goal is to learn more about the housing experiences of international students at the Memorial University of Newfoundland and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these experiences. We also want to consider how the barriers and needs of international students can be addressed.

At this stage, we are interviewing international students about their housing experiences. During this interview, I will ask you a series of questions about your housing experiences in NL before and since the pandemic began. This interview will run between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on your time and level of interest in our project. You can end the interview at any time, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. We will not use your name in any publication stemming from the research.

I would like to record this interview so that we can transcribe it later. As per University policy, data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Do you give me permission to record this interview?

Do you give me permission to begin the interview?

[we will ask questions such as the following…]

I. Opening Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. (i.e., How did you decide to study at MUN? How long have you lived in NL? Where do you live? [on-campus or off-campus, near or far from university]? How long have you lived in this place? Have you lived in any other communities in NL? If so, why did you leave [community]?)

2. Tell me about your housing.

Probes for discussion:

What kind of housing did you live in when you first arrived in NL?

How did you find this housing?

What kind of housing do you live in now?

How long have you lived in this housing?

How satisfied are you with your current housing?

II. Housing status, needs, and information

3. We want to know if the housing that students have access to is affordable, suitable, adequate.

Probes for discussion:

- When we talk about housing affordability, we mean that your household should spend no more than 30 percent of its income on housing and related costs every month. Related costs would include rent or mortgage payments, property taxes, home energy, water, and repairs. How much of a problem do you think it is to find housing that is affordable for international students like you? Why or why not?
- When we talk about housing suitability, we mean that housing is the right size for your household, meaning it has enough bedrooms. How much of a problem do you think it is to find housing that is suitable for you and other international students you know? Why or why not?

· When we talk about housing adequacy, we mean housing that does not need major repairs. How much of a problem for international students do you think it is to find adequate housing? Why or why not?

4. When it comes to housing since living in NL, would you say that you have generally received the help that you needed? (If so, who helped you? If not, why not?)
5. Who is the first person or organisation that you contact if you have any problems with your housing? (specify)_____
6. Since living in NL, have you ever lived in one of the university residences? Did you feel about Memorial on-campus housing?

III. Housing Experiences

7. Before the pandemic started, what housing challenges (if any) did you experience?
8. Before the pandemic started, what positive experiences (if any) did you experience?
9. If you are a renter, who is your landlord (i.e., a company, individual, university, relative, etc.)
10. Do you think that landlords in [community] are generally well-meaning and helpful? Tell me about your experiences with landlords in NL.
11. Tell me about your experiences with your roommates (if any).

IV. COVID-19 and Housing Experiences

12. Has the pandemic changed your living situation? (example: did you move during the pandemic? Buy a house? Gained/lost roommates?)
Probes for discussion:
· If you moved during the pandemic, tell me about that experience (for example, what is hard to find new housing?)
· If you lost roommates, how difficult was it to find new ones? How did losing them impact your renting experience? (i.e., changes to rent affordability)

13. We are trying to determine what new housing challenges came about because of the pandemic. Has housing become more of a challenge for you since the pandemic began? Since the pandemic started, what have been the biggest challenges you experienced (if any?) (Examples: higher utility costs, behind on rent due to lost wages, housing insecurity, eviction, housing unsuitable for studying from home or observing public health guidelines, service changes to public transit)
14. Do you belong to any organisation, club, or community group that has helped you with housing since the pandemic began? If so, what was the organisation and what was the nature of the help? (for example, financial help or other types of support?)
15. Have you experienced any mobility challenges during the COVID-19 due to travel restrictions or border closures?
16. Did you re-enter Canada at any point during the pandemic? If so, what was your experience in quarantine?
Probes for discussion:
· Where did you stay?

· Was it adequate?
· Who arranged it for you?
· Did the self-isolation accommodations Memorial University arranged for you meet your needs?
· What concerns, if any, did you have about the self-isolation accommodations Memorial University arranged for you?)
· Did you have to stay at a government hotel?

V. Housing experiences and belonging

17. Do you feel at home in [community] (or Memorial University)? Has this changed since the pandemic?

18. Have you considered leaving NL (or Canada) because of any housing challenges you have faced?

18. Do you think people in [community] are welcoming? What about staff and other students at Memorial University?

19. Have you ever felt that a landlord wouldn't rent to you because of your accent, name, skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion? If so, would you like to tell me about your experience?

20. Have you ever felt taken advantage of or harassed by your landlord (or roommates) because you are a newcomer here?

21. How much of a problem do you think housing discrimination is in your town, municipality, or rural area? (example: people being denied housing because of their accent, name, skin colour, ethnic origin, or religion).

Probes for discussion:

· If you haven't experienced discrimination related to housing, do you know anyone that has?
· If you haven't experienced feeling taken advantage of or harassed by a landlord because you are a newcomer here, do you know anyone that has?

V. Photo-elicitation

22. I want you to show me two or three photos (if any) that you have brought today of your housing situations during the COVID-19.

Probes for discussion:

· Where and when did you take this photo?
· How do you feel about this photo?

General/ending questions

23. In your survey, you mentioned x. Could you tell me more about your answer?

24. What would you like to change (if anything) about your housing situation in the short-term? What about in the medium- or long-term?

25. Please describe your ideal type of housing and your ideal neighbourhood. What would these look like?

26. Is there anything else that I have not asked you, or we have not talked about, that you'd like to mention and/or add?