

Immigrant Women's Health and Wellness Project

RESEARCH THEMES

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Delbrook Community Recreation Centre



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

School of Kinesiology

Purpose

- To better understand the role of physical activity in easing the settlement of newcomer women
- To better understand how the North Vancouver Recreation Commission and a number of community partner organizations approach providing community physical activity for newcomers



Who was interviewed?

- 30 recent immigrant women
 - Iran (13), China (7), Korea (2), the Philippines (2), the Czech Republic, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, and Mexico
 - Conducted in English (14), Farsi (13), Mandarin (2), Korean (1)
 - Skilled workers (18), family class (5), business class (2), live-in caregivers (2), investor class, refugee



Who was interviewed?

- Staff and managers from North Vancouver Recreation (10 Managers and Staff Members)
- Community partners (15 people from 6 organizations)
 - North Shore Multicultural Society
 - North Shore Neighborhood House
 - Vancouver Coastal Health
 - Public Library
 - North Shore Women's Centre
 - North Shore Welcoming Action Committee



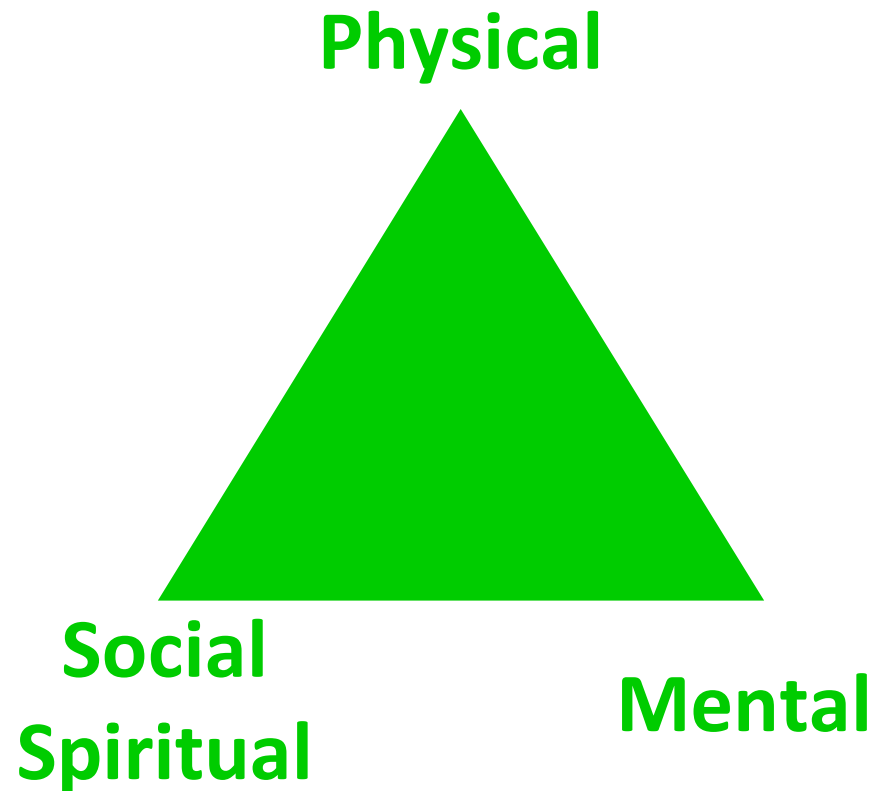
RESEARCH THEMES FROM
INTERVIEWS WITH
RECENT IMMIGRANT WOMEN



Meanings of health

Health was primarily described as:

- a holistic sense of well-being
- a balance of physical, mental, and (for many) social or spiritual aspects



Meanings of health

“Wellbeing means the balance of physical body, emotional body, mind body and spirit. When they are totally harmonized it brings health.”

- As well some defined health as not becoming ill or having a chronic condition.
- For others, health was about healthy lifestyles, like eating healthier diets, being physically active, sleeping well, and not being overweight.



Mental health after migration



Mental health after migration

- For many, mental health decreased after moving to Canada:
 - depression, stress, crying, low energy, anxiety, sleeplessness, frustration, unhappiness
- When interviewees discussed poor mental health, it was often related to stress and uncertainty after moving to Canada because of:
 - new environment; social isolation; communication difficulties; work status; financial pressure; and family separation



Mental health after migration

“And very stressful because you’re away from your family, your friends, your husband, and I’m here alone to be with my son and we need adapt a new life, and looking for new job, and also feel very uncertain. And still language is a problem because language is fine for me in daily life, but for some deep conversation... you need high level language communication and it can be a problem. So I feel very frustrated and I feel my value is decreased here, so that affect my health condition. Typically, mentally I feel very unhealthy...”



Mental health after migration

- Mental and physical health are highly interrelated - one can and does influence the other

“I feel more stressed and it was even more before my husband got his job. Tension really changes everything and maybe even changes physical health, not maybe, it 100% changes it. Stress of what will happen tomorrow? Can you work or not? When can you finally work? What would happen to your child’s education? ...But stress is the worst thing.”



Mental health after migration

- Some interviewees spoke of good mental health after migration because of:
 - less pressure in the work environment (after being able to secure employment);
 - sense of personal safety;
 - ability to enjoy physical activity
 - equality for women;
 - sense of balance;



Physical activity before and after migration



Physical activity before migration

- Some participants played sports, went to gyms and fitness facilities, participated in outdoor activities (jogging, skiing, hiking), or workplace activities before migration
- Some participants had no experience with physical activity at all
- The way physical activity is delivered in Canada is not the same as internationally:
 - Publicly funded recreation centres don't really exist so some women didn't even know these opportunities are available



Physical activity after migration

Physical activity is sought out for:

- Minimizing & coping with stress and anxiety
 - Time for self care
- Potential to build social networks and connections with people
 - With other immigrants & with Canadians



Physical activity after migration – stress relief

“I think the activity will help your health. That’s true... because in China I worked in high-pressure environment, the company will supply opportunity to you to release this pressure. You can attend physical activity. That’s a good way to release your pressure because practice this activity, practice this program, you can meet some person... during the exercise you can get to relax. That’s true. I like.”

- Relieve anxiety & tension
- “Recharge batteries”
- Boost morale



Physical activity after migration – social connection

“I guess people are interested in you and that you are not from Canada and about your history and where you come from and stuff, but that’s where it stops. It doesn’t go behind that...”

- Isolation due to separation with family & communication difficulties
- Superficial connections with Canadians
- Programs sought out as places to meet people, but become discouraged



What's working well



What's working well

- Lots of high quality community centres and variety of opportunities
- Community is cleaner, walkable & bike-friendly
- \$2 swim times are helpful
- Convenient online registration & good information in Leisure Guide

While the existing system works very well for some, others face a number of interrelated challenges.



Challenges and difficulties

Although some interviewees had few challenges accessing public programs and services, there were many for whom participation was difficult.



Challenges & difficulties in participation

- Financial cost can be a significant barrier to participation
- Lack of useful translated materials and multilingual signage and staff
 - More detailed information about rules and opportunities are not readily available
- Limited opportunities to communicate in a language other than English
 - Includes finding out more information from staff, as well as during the program with the instructor or other participants



Challenges & difficulties in participation

- Lack of availability of women-only facilities/times
- Women's childcare responsibilities sometimes prevented participation
- Children's participation was prioritized over parents' participation
 - Even though interviewees saw physical activity programs as a possible way to address their stress and isolation concerns



Challenges situated among *interrelated* & *compounding* difficulties in broader life:

- Persistent under- and unemployment
- Limited, unstable, or low-income situations
- Learning English is a difficult and long-term process
- Daily life takes much mental focus
- Unfamiliarity with 'public recreation' and new norms & ways of doing things
- Fear of making mistakes (social, language, decisions based on limited information)
- Children and family are prioritized
- Few opportunities that facilitate interaction



Challenges & difficulties

“When a newcomer comes here she/he stops doing many things. I mean she stops the activities that she used to do in Iran. The first thing is learning English and the second is finding a job. So she puts aside all the entertainments she once had. Firstly you think that this is not important but it is.

So, I think if you have these entertainments from the first days your mental pressure would be less and you can get familiar with the circumstances more easily. I think if they could have these classes with lower cost and conditions in which every one can use them that would be so helpful.”



Suggestions for improvement



Suggestions for improvement

1. Ensure immigrants can be involved in multiple ways
 - instructors, advisors, volunteers, participants
2. More intercultural opportunities
 - desire for social interaction across cultures
3. Reduce multiple barriers
 - understanding that they are interrelated



Suggestions for improvement

4. Information & communication

- More detailed translated information; basic information in English is usually easily understood
- Staff/volunteers who can speak different languages
- So that people can follow up on basic information and continue participation

5. Improve partnerships

- Work with other organizations to promote & deliver programs & services (multicultural society, schools)



Mix & match programming ideas

Addressing multiple & interrelated barriers might mean providing a range of programs & services that *combine* a number elements:

1. offered in a variety of languages, and/or
2. specifically for immigrants, and/or
3. conducted in English by multi-lingual staff, and/or
4. address concerns like cost, women-only, childcare, AND
5. integrate social interaction (eg. buddy system, conversation, etc.)



*Or maybe, like some class only for newcomers...
A newcomers' gathering area...*

It's kind of like a social group. You have different language, but the same situation like immigration. You will have more to talk [about]. You don't feel like embarrassed.

...'Cause you get a friend and then those friends can go to the same group and then you build up. We need those sport social groups.



RESEARCH THEMES FROM
INTERVIEWS WITH
NORTH VANCOUVER RECREATION
& COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
STAFF



Themes

1. What are organizations in North Vancouver doing well with regards to including newcomers?
2. What are some of the challenges that organizations face?



What is done well?

- Increased recognition of cultural diversity in North Vancouver
 - Resources are available in multiple languages
 - More organizations are making efforts to ensure that they provide services to all people in North Vancouver
- Increase in Partnerships
 - Sharing information, creating awareness, and providing information
 - Referrals between organizations
 - Marketing



What is done well?

- Successful programs are the ones that have been able to build strong social and support networks for participants
- Participation and continued engagement is more likely to occur when there are existing relationships, or when people are able to facilitate connections or build bridges
- Strong networks also provide a greater chance of sustaining programs through fostering community champions and ownership



What are the challenges?

- Funding
 - Grants for initiatives are good, but they are often short-term and often first to be cut
 - Short-term funding can result in unstable programming
 - May not allow for the initial engagement and relationships building necessary for programs to succeed and be maintained



What are the challenges?

- Partnerships
 - Balancing the need for partnerships with being able to develop them effectively
 - Relying on partners may be difficult when other organizations also face time and financial pressures



What are the challenges?

- Creating a Welcoming Environment
 - Difference between creating a sense of welcoming and a sense of belonging
 - Translated materials are good, but only provide an introduction and then many organizations struggle to provide support at various levels of participation
 - It takes time to build relationships and engage with people – across organizations, staff time is often not provided for the initial relationship building and engagement needed for successful programs



IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Based on overall findings from interviews with recent immigrant women, and recreation & community organization staff



Implications for organizations

Social interaction & stress relief are possible, but not automatic

- Physical activity programs are sought out by newcomers to meet new people and relieve stress and anxiety
 - incorporate components to programs that *intentionally* facilitate social interaction
 - opportunities can sometimes create stress when participants cannot easily communicate



Implications for organizations

One-size doesn't fit all

- Develop opportunities that take into account different and overlapping needs
- Multilingual programs, staff and information provide avenues to ask questions, get more detail, and continue participating



Implications for organizations

Involve immigrant women more often, in more roles, and at all levels

- Not only want to participate in programs
- Also want to contribute their voices and ideas
- Draw on their skills as leaders, instructors, and volunteers



'NEXT STEP' ACTIONS



'Next steps' summary

Workshop participants worked in groups to brainstorm 'next step' ideas based on suggested improvements by interviewees (see discussion notes for details):

- Involving immigrants more
- Information & communication
- Reducing multiple barriers
- More intercultural opportunities
- Improving partnerships



Involving immigrants more

- Volunteer opportunities, including:
 - Info sharing & coordination with multicultural society, introductory workshops, welcome volunteers, help with translation & interpretation
- Input sessions:
 - Facilitated sessions for immigrants to discuss barriers & successes (2-4 times per year)



Information & communication

- Multiple communication strategies needed to address multiple barriers
 - See detailed discussion notes for a list of possible communication strategies
 - e.g. multilingual voicemail box, hiring practices to meet multilingual needs, bring a friend for free
- Build on NSNH ‘Welcoming Neighbours’
 - Also utilize www.immigrantguide.ca started by NSNH, maintained by NV Library



Reducing multiple barriers

- Staff education & awareness
 - Build-in to interview process and staff orientations
 - Front desk reminder: first impressions are important
- Get feedback from immigrants
 - Ensure immigrants know that feedback is welcome, and how this can be done
- Programs need to address simultaneous barriers (see notes for ideas)



More intercultural opportunities

- This includes facilitating interactions with:
 - a) Other immigrants & international people
 - In order to meet and build support with other people who are adapting to a new community;
 - b) 'Local' Canadians
 - In order build social connections with Canadians
- Programs should focus on interactive activities, while accommodating for varying languages and language levels
 - Possible role for volunteers



Improving partnerships

- Partner organizations need:
 - A better understanding of immigrants' needs;
 - A common understanding of inclusion (welcoming/assimilation vs. interculturalism/two-way dialogue);
 - To plan who will lead & fund the partnership.
- Possible partnership projects include:
 - Centralizing information, collaborate on programs, & facilitate cross-cultural dialogue

