



Sport Canada Research

Combating Social Exclusion in Sport and Recreation through Participatory Policy Development (2009)

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Project Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how experiences with physical activity for recent immigrant Chinese women living in Vancouver can inform Canadian sport and recreation policy at the local, provincial, and national levels to increase their participation. The Chinese population is the largest 'visible minority' group in Canada, yet little is known about the role of physical activities in local community centres in their settlement into a new country. While many important sport and physical activity initiatives are aimed at children and youth, much less emphasis is placed on adults or immigrants, which is surprising given immigration rates, the aging of the Canadian population, and the related costs to the health care system. Our focus was on women because their sport and physical activity participation rates are lower than men and our previous research has shown that women want to be positive role models for their children, they desire the health benefits, and they have a major influence over sport participation decisions within the family (Frisby, Reid, & Ponc, 2007).

Research methods

Multiple qualitative data collection strategies included:

- i) an analysis of documents related to multiculturalism, sport and physical activity participation,
- ii) interviews with immigrant Chinese women in Mandarin, Cantonese or English (n=50),
- iii) interviews with local, provincial, federal policy makers (n=36) and staff from an immigrant service agency (n=5).

In addition, we organized a two-day workshop that brought the immigrant women, policy makers, immigration workers, and researchers together to discuss the findings and identify action steps which continue to be tracked through ongoing email communications with study participants.

Research results

Our analysis reveals that involvement in community sport and physical activity has an important role to play in helping immigrant Chinese women with settlement. While many of them expressed interest in continuing activities done in their homeland, they were also interested in learning more about "Canadian activities" to improve fitness, decrease stress and social isolation, be good role models for their children, and adjust to their new country. Yet, most receive no information on the opportunities available to them.

Even though 1 in 5 Canadians are born outside the country (Statistics Canada, 2008) and we were able to find sport and recreation equity policies for girls and women, persons with disabilities, people on low income, and aboriginals - no policies were found related to multiculturalism and sport or physical activity. This confirms the findings of an earlier study by Donnelly and Nakamura (2006).



Local, provincial and federal policy makers saw multiculturalism as an important policy development area, but were often unsure how to proceed because of the complexities involved. Government jurisdictions that create divisions in how sport, physical activity, and recreation are defined, resourced, and operationalized are a contributing factor.

Another overall finding was that sport and physical activity are not seen as a priority by immigration workers because of the emphasis placed on housing and employment, even though some had portfolios in the areas of health, community services, and public education. Yet the immigration workers saw potential health benefits for their clients by developing partnerships with local community centres to promote sport and physical activity programs, and expressed interest in being involved in future discussions on the topic.

Several action ideas on how to promote inclusion were generated when the new Canadians, sport and recreation policy makers, immigration workers, and researchers came together at the workshop. These included: providing free passes in the first year (and in subsequent years for those who continue to live on low income); partnering with immigration services; providing free facility tours and information sessions; childcare; multi-lingual communications, and family instruction in “Canadian sports.”

Key stakeholders and benefits

- Sport Canada and their provincial/territorial government departments responsible for sport and recreation
- Canadian Parks and Recreation Association and their provincial affiliates
- Local sport organizations, clubs, leagues, teams
- Local community centres in municipal recreation
- Non-profit sport organizations (e.g. YWCA, YMCA)
- Immigration and social service organizations
- Local health authorities

Policy implications

The results of this study contribute directly to the Canadian Sport Policy goal, that has been adopted by the Federal-Provincial/Territorial governments, of increasing access and equity in sport for under-presented groups including visible minorities. It also informs Leisure Access Policies in recreation departments/community centres in Canadian municipalities.

We are preparing a Multiculturalism, Sport, and Physical Activity Workbook to share the ‘learnings’ obtained through this study with others and we plan to make it available through the Leisure Information Network (LIN). It is not our intent to provide a simple ‘recipe’ for policy development that can be implemented in other communities, because needs and interests differ both within and between different cultural groups. Rather our intent is to emphasize a process that includes partnerships and citizen engagement that can be adapted by different individuals, groups, and organizations to meet their specific aims and circumstances.

Next steps

Replications of this study are needed to determine if the findings can be transferred to other Chinese immigrants and immigrants from other cultural groups. More research with cultural groups that considers intersections with gender, age, social class, disability, sexuality, etc. will enhance our understanding of the importance of sport and physical activity in their lives, the barriers they face, and the distinction, if any, between sport and physical activity for these groups.

Research is also needed on the sport and recreation policy and program development at the local, provincial and federal levels that can build capacity to support the inclusion of new Canadians and increase their participation rates (including those of adults), so they can reap the same benefits as other citizens. In addition, future research should examine multiculturalism, sport, and physical activity policy and success stories in other countries that could serve as a guide to new initiatives in Canada.

This document will be electronically archived at, and disseminated in whole or in part, by the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC) and Sport Canada.

