Factors Affecting Leisure Sports Participation of Immigrants: A Scoping Review

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Sport for Development - Social Capital (Immigrant Sport)  Abstract 2021-250
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Mode: Asynchronous
Session: Live Q&A for Sport for Development (Asynchronous) Saturday June 5, 2021, 1:40 PM - 2:40 PM

Immigration is a long-standing social phenomenon that affects the majority of countries around the world. In 2016, 21.9% of the population of Canada were reported to be either a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Of this, 1.3 million were Chinese immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016). Past research has focused on economic implications of immigrants (e.g., financial status) (e.g., Xiong, 2007) and has noted that immigrants may avoid leisure sports participation due to social, environmental and cultural differences (e.g, Stodolska, 2002). However, immigrant leisure sports participation has largely been neglected despite research pointing towards the positive impact on participant’s psychological health and quality of life (Juniu, 2000). This research study undertook a scoping review of 20 years of research in sport and leisure journals pertaining to immigration of Chinese people and their participation in leisure sports in Canada. Scoping reviews help synthesize a research area, enable a researcher to identify gaps and clarify key concepts (Peters et al., 2015).

Between January 2020 and April 2020, an online search of the literature exploring the factors affecting leisure sports participation among the population of Chinese immigrants was conducted. Electronic databases searched included Google Scholar, SPORTDiscus, Physical Education Index, PsycNet, and PsycINFO. Keywords included (e.g., ‘Chinese immigrants’, ‘leisure activities’, ‘sports participation’, ‘immigrant sports’, ‘immigrant leisure’, ‘leisure sports participation’). Our focus was peer reviewed articles published between the start of 2000- to the end of 2019 (in English). We followed a five-stage process based on recommendations from Peters et al (2015), specifically: 1) identify the research question, 2) identify relevant studies or appropriate data sources, 3) select specific inclusion/exclusion criteria, 4) review and conduct a critical appraisal, 5) collate results, summarize and report.

A total of 19 articles were identified that examined Chinese-Canadian leisure sports participation and that met the specific inclusion/exclusion criteria. These included three review papers, one opinion paper, and 15 primary studies. Of the 15 primary studies, 10 used quantitative designs, and five used qualitative methods (interviews). Of the quantitative studies, five were longitudinal, and 10 were cross-sectional. 18 of the 19 articles explored both sexes; one, however, investigated only female Chinese-Canadian leisure sport participants.

The majority of the research concentrated on constraints to participation and only one examined motivational factors (Walker et al., 2011). Unsurprisingly, participation in leisure sports is highly influenced by an individuals’ cultural background (Chick & Dong, 2005). It was apparent that immigrants lack crucial information regarding the new society due to different cultural values and beliefs, languages, and traditions (Kim et al., 2011). This has implications on using sport as a tool for development, specifically, for immigrants to help them integrate into their new society (Frisby, 2011). The presentation will go further into details about the need for future research on leisure and sport for immigrants. The research presented here is of particular importance for both academics and practitioners; providing suggestions for administrators and researchers will be advanced to help them alleviate the stress related to settlement issues in immigrant experience.