



The Collective and Distinct Influences of Culture, Access, and Belonging on Physical Activity Among First- and Second-Generation Immigrants

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Abstract

Background: Physical activity (PA) and physical literacy are associated with enjoyment, self-efficacy, and engagement in adolescence and early adulthood, suggesting that PA patterns established in childhood may continue into adulthood (Husøy et al., 2024). Cultural, social, and structural factors affect PA participation, creating complex realities for immigrants adapting to new environments (Curtin et al., 2018; Gerber et al., 2012). Family, cultural values, access to resources, and sense of belonging may further inform how PA is understood, accessed, and practiced within immigrant communities (Aljayyousi et al., 2019; Lenneis et al., 2020). However, less is known about how these influences may operate similarly or differently across generations within immigrant families. This study explores how these factors interact to shape PA behaviours among first- and second-generation immigrant families in Ontario.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative interpretive design (Patton, 2015) and received approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Researchers recruited three immigrant families representing diverse cultural backgrounds and migration histories through convenience and snowball sampling. One-on-one semi-structured interviews captured perspectives of multiple family members across generations. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis in NVivo to identify and interpret themes related to barriers and facilitators of PA across immigrant families.

Findings: Findings suggest that although generations framed and accessed PA differently, both contrasting and shared themes emerged. *Cultural framings and shifting priorities of PA* contrasted across generations, with first-generation participants viewing PA as secondary to academics and other responsibilities. Meanwhile, second-generation participants described balancing their cultural identity with Canadian peer norms and expectations, including experiences of stereotyping and appearance-based teasing that affected their sense of belonging. *Access and resource navigation* also differed, as first-generation individuals described structural and



language-related challenges when adapting to programs in Canada, whereas second-generation individuals reported greater familiarity and comfort accessing facilities and opportunities. *Belonging, identity, and social experiences* emerged as shared influences across generations, with participants emphasizing social support and autonomy as key motivators of PA participation and consistency.

Conclusion: By centering intergenerational immigrant perspectives, this study challenges assumptions that participation in PA is universally experienced or valued. Findings inform culturally responsive and equitable PA programs and policies that reflect the lived realities of immigrant communities while underscoring the need for future research across diverse contexts and age groups to better understand lifelong intergenerational PA dynamics within physical and health education.

Keywords: physical activity; immigrants; intergenerational experiences; cultural influences; physical and health education

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