

research snapshot

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Community Engagement Is Difficult for Immigrants

What is this research about?

Community engagement plays a central role in the well-being of people in communities. It helps them to gain full access to education, employment or housing. Lack of social connectedness can also be linked with social unrest, as well as a weakening of social values in the community as a whole. Despite these benefits, research shows that community involvement among immigrants is relatively low in diverse communities. Newcomers participate less than those born in Canada. Between 2003 and 2004, about 30% of immigrants volunteered, compared to 45% of people born in Canada. Furthermore, about 60% of newcomers voted in elections, while 75% of those born in Canada voted. Thus, this research is about the barriers that exclude newcomers from participating in the community and how to remove these barriers.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers reviewed past academic work on community engagement. These included findings from Statistics Canada, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, as well as other Canadian based data that identified factors that prevent or facilitate civic engagement among

What you need to know:

Being involved in community activities is important for the social well-being of a person and a community. However, engagement is low among immigrants in communities that are growing in diversity. There are specific barriers that prevent them from joining in social activities. These include language, time, knowledge and money barriers. These barriers can be eased if service organizations and the government address the challenges faced by newcomers when they first settle.

newcomers. They also interviewed 21 recent newcomers who came from a range of different countries and had lived in Canada for an average of 18 months.

What did the researchers find?

Recent newcomers are involved in social activities such as visiting neighbours, joining support groups, and participating in fairs or street parties. They also volunteer for the benefit of others, either as individuals or as a group. These activities can enable a community to take action as a group to achieve social and political change.

Newcomers agreed that community bonding is important. However, barriers such as language differences, time and money held them back from participating. Many were unable to attend English language classes because they didn't have time between work and taking care of children. Some reported that they didn't join community events because they felt that their unique experiences as newcomers were not understood.

Another barrier was that immigrants did not know about the ways that they could engage in their community. Increasing education and publicity for community events and services may address this issue. For example, The Welcoming Communities Initiative tries to raise awareness about racism and ways to address it. Another goal of the initiative is to inform immigrants about their rights and what they are entitled to in Canada.

How can you use this research?

This research may be used by community service providers to remove barriers to community participation faced by newcomers. Government agencies can also provide support by addressing the limited resources available in the first years of settlement.

About the Researchers

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