



Recreation, Settlement, and the Welcoming Community:

Mapping Community with African-Canadian

Youth Newcomers

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Social capital, immigration, place meanings, social places, community, integration, newcomer youth, cultural identity

POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety;
Coordinated & Youth Friendly
Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Academic

“Engaging newcomer youth in discussions of their new surroundings and sensitizing domestic youth about the challenges of settlement may bring these groups together more effectively and enable positive outcomes.”

1. What is the research about?

There is a lack of research on the settlement experiences of Canadian newcomer youth. Leisure and recreation provide opportunities for newcomer youth to interact with the local community, develop language skills, and explore a range of aspects of their new society. This research explores how recreational community-based spaces and programs support the integration of immigrant youth.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about newcomer youth (age 15 – 20) who migrated to Canada from countries including Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Sudan.

4. How was the research done?

This study explored data collected as part of the African-Canadian Youth Leadership Project (ACYLP), which was a three-day workshop to discuss leadership opportunities for youth. The data for this specific project was collected through a cognitive mapping exercise. To better understand the settlement challenges facing African-Canadian adolescent youth, researchers asked each participant to draw a map of their communities, which was followed by one-on-one open-ended interviews. The researchers asked the following three questions:

1. “Which places in your community do you find desirable/undesirable and why?”
2. “In which places do you feel safe/unsafe, welcome/unwelcome and why?”
3. “Which places contribute to your quality of life in a positive/negative way and why?”

5. What are the key findings?

The level of integration of newcomer youth in this study depended on the extent of their willingness to maintain their original cultural identity as well as their desire to blend in with the broader Canadian society. This study found that three major themes define the level of success of adolescent youth’s settlement experiences in Canada: home, social places, and (un)supportive places.

The African-Canadian youth in this study spend most of their time with family members at home. For them, the family home is more than a physical space; it has significant psychological and emotional importance. Their familial connections enable them to maintain aspects of their cultural identity. As well, responsibilities at home limited their mobility and ability to access community spaces and opportunities.

Social places, such as sport facilities, parks, libraries and gymnasiums, played a significant role in facilitating the integration of the study participants into Canadian society. The spaces themselves were less valued than the social connections they enabled. Many participants in this study stated that they improved their language and communication skills in these social places, which supports cultural integration.

Informal support networks were also important to these newcomer youth. While many community spaces provide structured engagement, development and integration supports, informal connections made through friends, community members and sometimes even strangers were also identified as important. These supportive interactions can develop anywhere and do not require a physical space or program.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research emphasized the importance of “home,” which provides a sense of security and can also be equated with a strong and supportive family life. A strong family helps to mitigate the stresses of migration and settlement. Recreation spaces provided the physical context for many relationships and processes that support the settlement process. Building social

connections also builds social capital which advances settlement and integration. Language and social class created barriers to accessing and building social networks and social mobility.

It is important to support newcomer youth to develop a sense of belonging and positive relationships with their new communities. Youth workers can promote the settlement of newcomer youth by providing family supports and facilitating intercultural opportunities and programming that enable youth to access and build new relationships with peers and members of the broader community. These engagement opportunities enable newcomer youth to expand their social networks, experience new environments, and build stronger bonds with their new country.



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