

Youth immigrating to Canada don't meet physical activity guidelines

February 26 2014, by Anne Craig

Ethnicity and the time spent since immigrating may work together to determine whether or not youth will be physically active after moving to Canada.

Queen's researcher Atif Kukaswadia examined young [immigrants](#) coming to Canada and their levels of [physical activity](#), and discovered they are less active than Canadian youth during their first one to two years in Canada. However, within three to five years of moving to Canada, the physical activity level of most immigrants equals that of Canadian youth.

"Every year Canada admits over 200,000 immigrants, and around 25 per cent of these are below the age of 14," says Mr. Kukaswadia, a PhD Candidate in the Department of Public Health Sciences. "These youth form a large and growing part of the Canadian population. However, despite how important physical activity is to the health of youth, very few studies have investigated the role of immigration on physical activity levels."

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity seven days a week. Mr. Kukaswadia found that youth who immigrated within the last 1-2 years were 40 per cent less likely to meet the guidelines.

Using data contained within the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children survey, a national survey of youth in Canada, Mr. Kukaswadia

examined youth immigrating to Canada from East and Southeast Asia, Africa, East India and South Asia. He found that as immigrants live longer in a country, their physical activity behaviours more closely approximate those of the host culture, although this did vary by ethnic group.

"The results for East and Southeast Asian youth were the most striking," says Mr. Kukaswadia. "Regardless of if they were born in Canada, or if they immigrated within the last one to two years, youth who identified as being East and Southeast Asian reported consistently lower levels of physical activity than other ethnic groups."

With this phase of the research completed, Mr. Kukaswadia will next investigate how to remedy the issue of a lack of physical activity in immigrant youth. "We need to find out what the barriers are – is it the cost involved, a comfort level with the climate, or a third reason? I want to talk to the youth to find out."

More information: Kukaswadia A, Pickett W, Janssen I (2014) "Time Since Immigration and Ethnicity as Predictors of Physical Activity among Canadian Youth: A Cross-Sectional Study." *PLoS ONE* 9(2): e89509. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0089509](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0089509)

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