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Demystifying Indian Immigrant Participation in Sport and Physical Activity in New Zealand

Summary of a Research Study

A Report to Sport New Zealand on Indian Immigrant Participation in
Sport and Physical Activity, Auckland.

By
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2021

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Sport and physical activity are important contributors to health, socialisation, and community. Yet, too few people take part in it.

Today, New Zealand is home to a growing Asian population [1]. Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Cambodian, and Vietnamese are the everyday New Zealanders.

Research on sport and physical activity engagement has focussed on Maori, Pacific Islanders, and the Chinese community [2, 3]. During 2001-2013, the Indian community grew 48%, surpassing the Chinese community at 16 % [1]. Exploring Indian participation in sport and physical activity is overdue.

Understanding what impacts Indian immigrants can offer direction for a policy that improves uptake of physical activity, health and quality of life in New Zealand.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

For New Zealand, this is the first research to explore physical activity and sport among Indian immigrants. Previous studies have focussed on either sport or physical activity.

A key feature of this research design, is the focus on family dynamics which operates within the value system of Indian culture.

The use of personal stories untangles rich insights untapped by only numerical data/findings.

Insights from this research study can support the tailoring of policy/programs for Indians in New Zealand's sport and recreation system.

THE RESEARCH



Understanding how to integrate sport and physical activity would help create happier, healthier Indians, better connected to communities, and build a stronger New Zealand.



Background

For Indian communities, increasing physical activity is important to address type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (4,5). International insights show Indian immigrants have low levels of physical activity (6-8) and in New Zealand, South Asians spend less time on exercise than their European counterparts (9,10). Despite these findings, research into the underlying reasons is insufficient.

This study looks into a range of recreational behaviours that Indian parents and children engage in, as immigrants in New Zealand.

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA



Enrolling

Indian immigrant families registered interest by replying to an online flyer or through word of mouth.



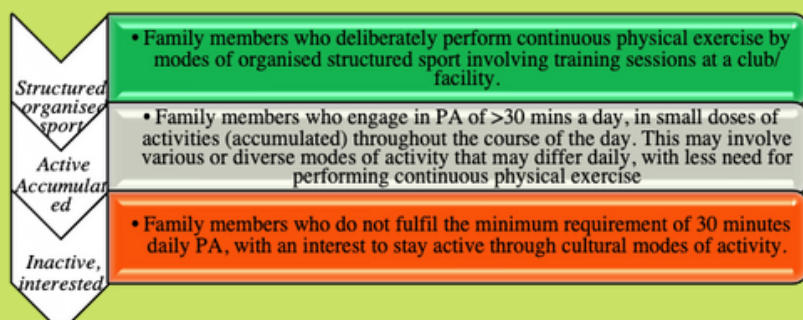
Family-Centred

Six parents, three children met both the background characteristics and specific inclusion criteria.



Broad Categories

Broad categories were set for participation in physical activity and sport, one family per category.



Culture-Specific

A culture-specific inclusion criteria allowed exploring characteristics typical of Indian immigrant communities.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Both parents born in India and settled in New Zealand
- Families (Father, mother, & minimum one child)
- Immigrants (early-settler or long-term, no fixed requirement)
- Children 13-25 years Indian-born or New Zealand-born

COLLECTING DATA

Approach

The research adopted a review of literature, a case-based approach, and qualitative analysis. Qualitative analyses examine a specific phenomenon from many perspectives within local contexts [11].

Process

Below is a stepwise process of different methods used to collect information:

Step 1: Gathering individual participant characteristics and trends with a questionnaire. This information informed the interview guide and provided an opportunity to build rapport with each member of the family.

Step 2: Conducting separate interviews for each father, mother, and child. This gave an open personal exchange of information

Step 3: Personal diaries reduced researcher impact from leading questions or the researcher. Diaries allowed free descriptions of sport and physical activity between India and New Zealand.

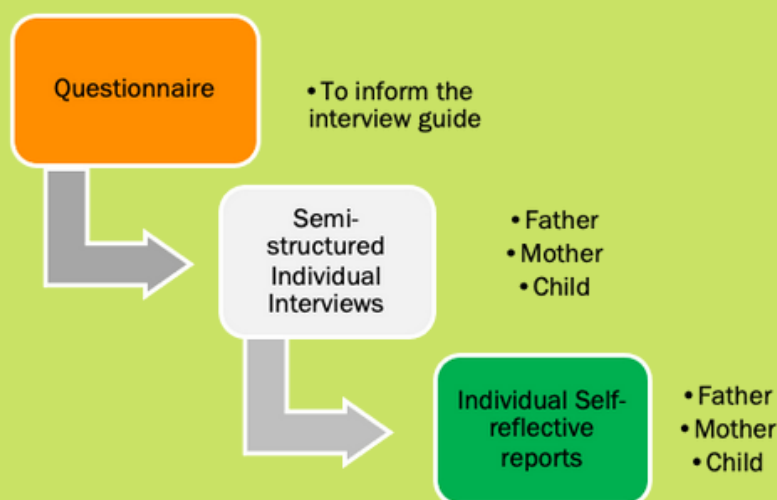


Figure. A progressive approach with diverse methods to gather information.

THE KEY THEMES

Below are key themes that emerged from a six-step analysis of the information.

Theme 1: Neighbourhoods

Indian families felt social connections were not spontaneous with neighbours in New Zealand. In India, social connections are made with their neighbours. Indian neighbourhoods had an open ground-a space to connect and play a sport or some activity. Thus, allowing mothers, fathers, and children in the neighbourhood to connect. In New Zealand, with weak social connections, children were prone to being sedentary.

"In India, small communities are formed within your own living space. Families get together to interact with each other, children play sport in a common area, ...in India communities mingle more easily..."

- Father



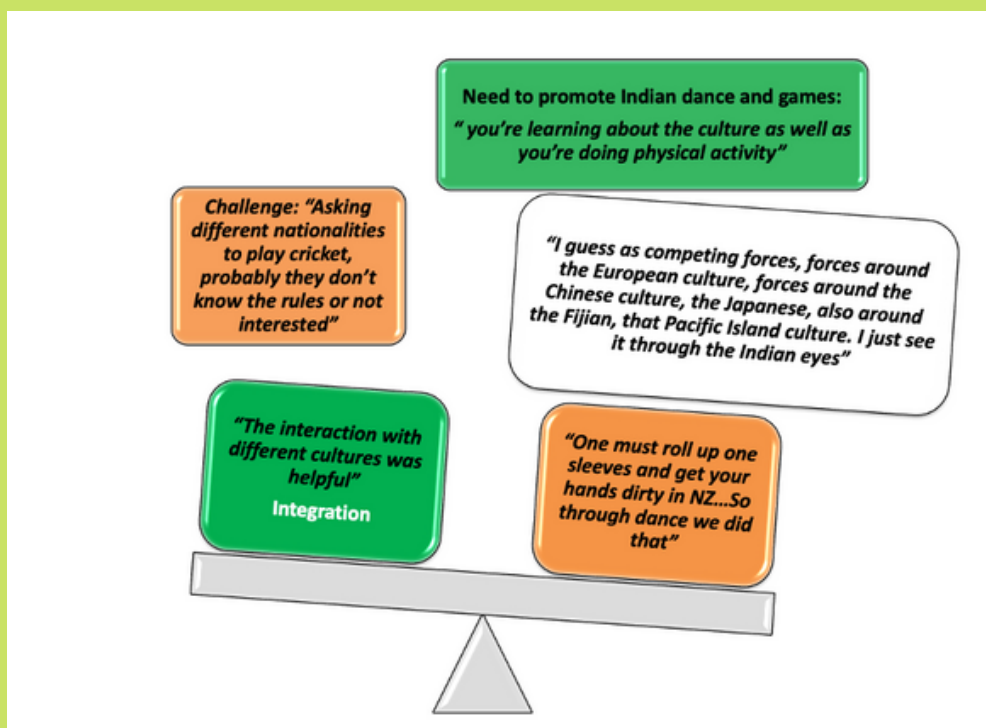
"Here (New Zealand neighbourhoods), there's nobody to play with, no place to play,... it's just a driveway, and what can I play in a drive way? "

- Female Child

Picture: Participant's quote on neighbourhood experiences in India and New Zealand

Theme 2: Multiculturalism

Indian immigrants felt it was difficult to find a sport where others could also join in. They felt a common sport like cricket could be a medium to help connect them with others in their community. Few parents regarded it as important to promote Indian cultural activities.



Picture: Participant's quote of neighbourhood experiences in India and New Zealand

Theme 3: Evolving mindsets and beliefs

a. Equal rights and opportunities: Egalitarian society

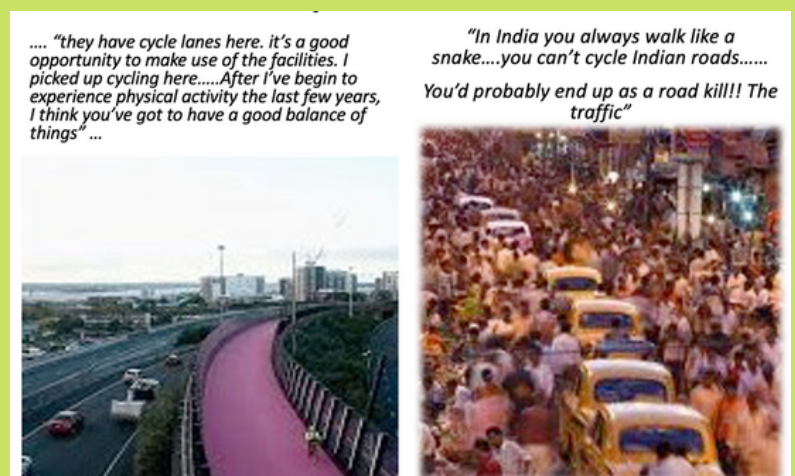


Picture: Participant quotes on egalitarian norms in New Zealand

Indian immigrant women felt motivated to evolve from traditional beliefs and practices. New Zealand's social norms allow for other family members to do housework duties. This, for some women, created time to engage in sport or other recreational activities.

b. Experiencing good infrastructure, 'safe and enjoyable' outdoor practices

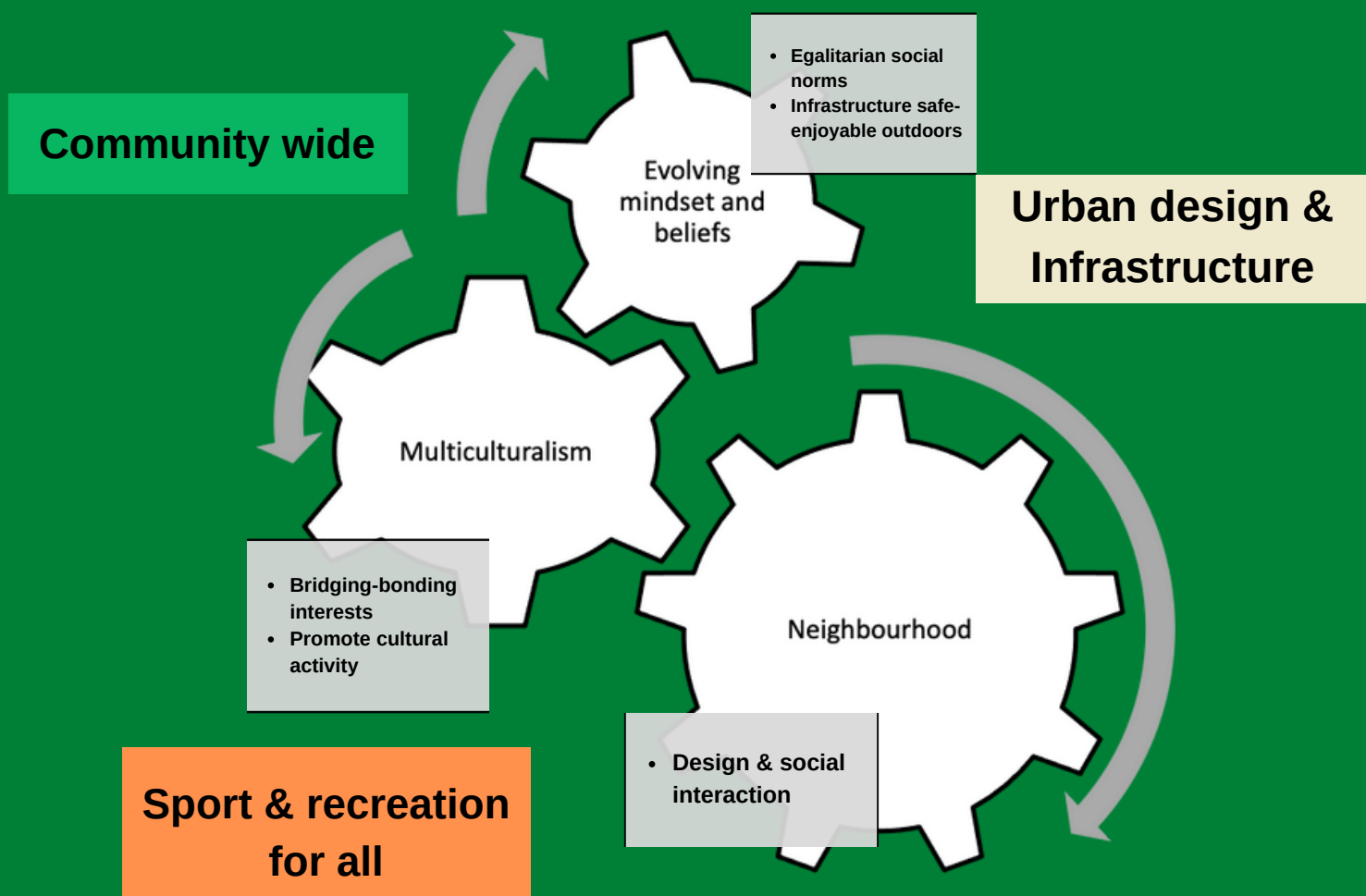
Cycle lanes and dedicated footpaths in New Zealand motivated some Indian immigrants to stay active. Inadequate access to such infrastructure in India challenged their participation in outdoor activities.



Picture: Participants quotes of infrastructure and physical activity

Summary of Research

Neighbourhoods, multicultural and physical settings don't exist in silos and can differ from India. Policy for sport and physical activity engagement could aim to integrate diverse contexts to get immigrant Indians active.



Fernandes et al., 2017

"In India, people connect you to sport,
in New Zealand sport connects you to people"

INSIGHTS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Policymakers, health-promotion practitioners, and advocates - where do you go from here?

Approach for groupthink

01 Contexts

It's not understanding the deeper and specific function of social and cultural influences that are important, but that such traditions and contexts can evolve when living in western settings.

02 Blindspots

Stakeholder gaps in knowledge on evolving trends and traditions affect the desirable health outcomes for immigrants sought through New Zealand's sport and recreation programs.

03 Co-design

Cultural insider-led collaborations are critical to service gaps and to ensure that interpretations/recommendations are responsive and reflective of the complex values, and customs of Indian communities.



STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS

A few ideas various stakeholders could consider towards advancing their efforts at engaging Indian immigrants in New Zealand's sport and recreation:

Government agencies governing sport and recreation

Crown entities that influence the policy for sport and recreation should improve their understanding of how they adopt, and adapt, cultural norms of Indian communities in western sport and recreation settings. For this recommendation and all those below, collaborating with cultural researchers and consultation with cultural champions/leaders with backgrounds in sport and physical activity in western setting is encouraged.

Sport and physical activity program providers

Promote mixed-culture programs that target Indian communities. Mixed-culture programs integrate Indian immigrants with other members of their adopted society. This may help integrate Indian women with Maori, Pakeha women, and women from other migrant communities.

City Planners

Within the framework of housing clusters, consider building open spaces with benches, bike stands, appropriate lighting, and reduced speed limit if required. Capacity for building community and aspects of safety may better assist Indian immigrants to engage in sport and recreation.

Media messaging to promote sport and physical activity

Communicate how initiatives have supported the connection of Indian immigrants with different communities. How existing programs are helping Indians connect and stay active in New Zealand. Such messages dissolve any unspoken racial barriers and foster a sense of inclusiveness. For Indians, it may help them adopt ways other communities stay active in New Zealand.

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Research Study Reference

Fernandes, S., Hinckson, E., & Ferkins, L. (2017). When culture speaks: Indian immigrant families' participation in sport and physical activity (Master's thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand)

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Logo 'Inspire a generation',

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Your collaborative effort to understand and support the inclusion of Indian communities in the sport-for-all experience is encouraged.

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