

Understanding how can food experience serve as a medium for social integration among Immigrant seniors in Canadian society?

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Background

- Immigrants comprise one-third of the senior population in Canada. They are among the most vulnerable to adverse socialization and health outcomes due to limited relationships and capital (14, 17).
- Social integration involves familiarizing and adopting certain dietary habits, foodways, and norms while keeping some accustomed foods and daily practices to promote healthier living (24).
- Inequities, including a lack of inclusive practices and mutual understanding of diverse groups, result in exclusionary practices, which affect integration.
- It is thought that foodways and experiences can limit social isolation and facilitate social integration in Canadian society.

Purpose

- To evaluate how immigrant seniors create relationships through food by exploring their food experiences.
- To understand the role of food norms and preferences to immigrant seniors in Canadian society through interviewing and group discussions.
- To identify barriers and other factors affecting senior immigrants' foodways and food security in Canada by addressing their experiences.
- Understand how food experiences and knowledge can assist senior immigrants in developing new relationships in Canada.

Methodology

- This study uses an interpretive paradigm to understand the subjective experiences of immigrant seniors. An interpretive phenomenology is used to make meaning of those experiences by assessing their underpinnings (2, 20).
- This approach seeks to understand the processes that create the phenomena between a participant and the worldview they experience. It can be framed as a way to understand the meanings of everyday life by evaluating the 'what' and 'how' of human experiences (20).
- The study incorporates the modified dietary transition for Canadian immigrants' integration model and the Defining Core Domains of Integration as conceptual frameworks that detail enablers and domains important for social integration (5, 24).

Methods

- We recruited participants from local immigrant centers, online recruitment and snowball sampling.
- Inclusion criteria:
 - Able to communicate basic consent in English at a basic level;
 - Legally immigrated to Canada and have either Canadian; Citizenship/permanent residence;
 - Are at least sixty-five years old.
- We used individual semi-structured interviews to collect the data.
- We analyzed the data thematically through a five-step process:
 - An initial reading of the transcript;
 - Note-taking and memo preparations;
 - Identification and development of emerging themes;
 - Connecting and refining themes in other interviews;
 - Finalization of themes, review, and verification.

Conceptual framework

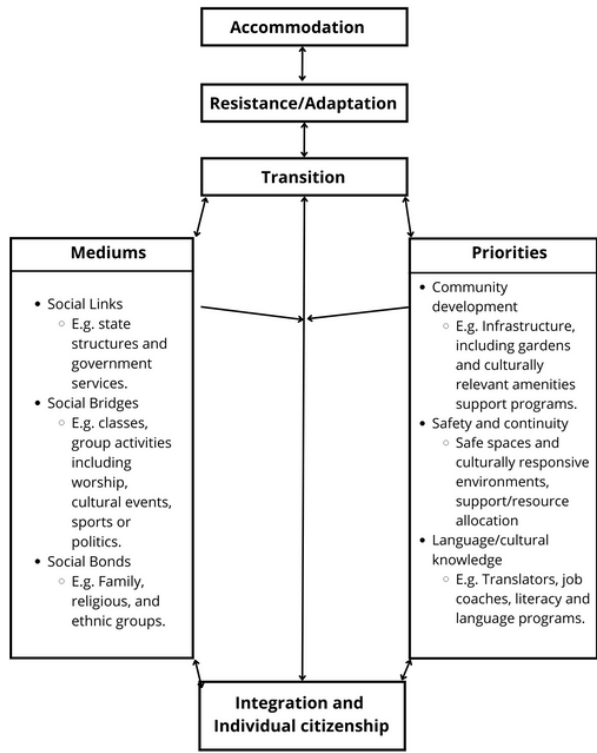


Figure. 1 Illustrating the process of social integration and important enablers.

Participant Profile

Participant (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Country of Origin	Location
Jeanine	76	Female	Guyana	Halifax
Susan	86	Female	Guyana	Toronto
Anastasia	60	Female	Ukraine	Halifax
Aamira	70	Female	Sudan	Halifax
Charles	70	Male	St. Kitts and Nevis	Halifax
Devna	62	Female	Nepal	Halifax
Kareem	76	Male	Afghanistan Indonesia	Halifax

Preliminary results

Themes:

- Participants spoke about their tensions in maintaining their sense of identity in a new country, mainly due to differences in cultural norms and daily social practices. Support through social networks, availability of basic resources and early experiences all shape the ease of integration.
- Food knowledge and experiences, including cultural norms, rituals and settings, were focal to belongingness in a new social environment.
- Participants noted how food knowledge and experiences helped them overcome barriers by acting as a social bridge or mediator.
- Significant life experiences and histories of immigrant seniors were used to demonstrate their transition and identify their relationship with food.
- Food was used to comfort and cope with traumatic experiences, including loss, Covid-19 and health ailments.

Discussion

- Food experiences, knowledge, and norms are focal to all individuals' daily lives and experiences (18).
- The study's results were consistent with previous research on the importance of food as a medium to encourage cultural exchange and knowledge (1, 3, 4, 18).
- The study's findings demonstrate the importance of intersectionality, a framework that recognizes differences in the daily life experiences of immigrant seniors depending on one's social context.
- The results corresponded with 'Tarraf's integration model' and the 'Defining Core Domains of Integration framework, which illustrate factors that influence social integration (Figure. 1).
- The experiences with social integration and transitioning to Canadian society are not uniform and therefore require a dynamic approach based on the demographic's needs.
- Community-level approaches such as community gardens and support groups use this dynamic approach and may keep the 'healthy immigrant effect' where immigrants have better well-being before coming to a new country (24).

Conclusion and Implications

- Health professionals, social institutions and policymakers should factor in the diverse needs of this population by lessening the social and economic barriers to promote safer, inclusive and accessible spaces.
- A proactive approach to facilitating social inclusion can limit the outcomes of isolation, chronic diseases and other health deficits that disproportionately affect immigrant seniors.
- Further research can be done to address other factors impacting immigrant seniors' integration, along with how these priorities change depending on the demographic or geographical location.

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