

## The Participation of Immigrants in Outside Home Activities in Finland

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*The purpose of this study is to describe the views of immigrants on outside home activities and the support they have received. The data were collected via semi-structured questionnaires (n=113) during 2019 and analysed using statistical methods. The open questions were subjected to thematic analysis. The respondents' mean age was 41 and they came from 29 countries. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents participated actively in an association or group. Participation had a positive correlation with their ability to speak and understand Finnish. A principal component analysis performed on the causes hindering participation produced seven factors, which explain 70% of the phenomena. The greatest causes were: 1) cultural rules, 2) fears and lack of skills, 3) lack of a computer and computer skills, 4) lack of time, 5) the costliness, 6) food and customs culture and 7) lack of a car. Causes supporting participation produced two factors: 1) Finnish friends, neighbours, authorities, other immigrants and study and work friends and 2) one's own parents and family. This study reinforces earlier results about the advantages of participating in activities in learning the language and integrating into the culture and the environment of the new country.*

**Keywords:** *asylum seekers, integration, immigrants, outside home activities, third sector*

### Introduction

The migrant crisis of 2015 saw more than one million people, mainly from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, seeking refuge in Europe. One of the countries affected was Finland, which gave 2915 residence permits in 2015 and must thus integrate them (Ministry of the Interior 2017).

The integration of immigrant women who are in a vulnerable position is particularly difficult, as the state's child home care allowance allows them to remain at home to care for their children (<https://www.kela.fi/web/en/child-home-care-allowance>). The three-year allowance is seen as too long and passivizing

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(OECD 2018). It also affects the integration of the family's children, as being cared for at home gives them fewer contacts with Finnish society.

The integration of immigrant women and their children would be helped if the women were offered low-threshold opportunities to participate in activities such as helping older Finnish adults (e.g., DeSilver 2015). This would also help them learn the language. According to the OECD report (2018), the official Finnish education system is not succeeding in teaching immigrants Finnish.

There have been good experiences of immigrant women and older adults working together in Austria (Loferer-Lainer 2019). Older adults help women integrate through concrete actions such as offering their own home as a space where they can work together on everyday tasks, sometimes even without a common language. There are many lonely older adults in Finland who need company and help in managing their lives (Uotila et al. 2010).

The study reported in this article is part of an EU-funded project (SMDno-2018-1819) whose aim is to strengthen immigrant women's participation in society and to improve their integration. The project is developing, in cooperation with immigrants, a training model for immigrant women that prepares them for social participation by familiarizing them with Finnish culture, ways of communicating, the social and welfare service system and work culture. The project aims to create opportunities for immigrant women to spend time with older adults and network with home care professionals. The contacts they form would ideally continue after the project has ended. The project seeks to advance cooperation between immigrant women and organizations offering services to older adults and to encourage the women to move from home to participating in society (Salin 2019).

The position of immigrants, regardless of their education background, is weaker than that of the majority population on the job market. This is particularly true of immigrant women. Only half of all immigrant women living in Finland are employed. Those with a low education level or weak job-seeking skills or networks are in a particularly weak position. Internships, hiring allowances and networking initiatives to employers may offer a window into working outside the home (Larja 2019). This article examines the participation of immigrants in activities outside the home from the perspective of social integration and well-being. In this study, outside home activities refer to sports, performed alone or in group, and various hobbies such as participation in associations.

## **Literature Review**

It is important to note that immigrants are not a homogenous group. They are from different cultures and countries and have left their countries of origin for different reasons. Some are asylum seekers while others have moved to Finland for work. The question of how to improve their integration is however relevant to all of them. In this study, 'immigrant' refers to people from foreign countries who have received a Finnish residence permit.

Studies show that speaking the language, education and work are the best ways of integrating into a new country. Learning about work culture through internships may give immigrants opportunities to be active members of society, which also eases their cultural integration and learning the language (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Calzada et al. 2016, Akua-Sakyiwah 2016). Studies show that leisure time activities are also important in integrating immigrants to a new culture (Gerber et al. 2012, O'Driscoll et al. 2013, Koca and Lapa 2014, Kim et al. 2016, Lenneis and Pfister 2017). The topic still requires further research (Zacheus et al. 2011, O'Driscoll et al. 2013).

A new sociocultural context offers immigrants and their families opportunities to enrich their lives. Women in particular appreciate gender equality, which allows them to plan their lives in ways that would not have been possible in their countries of origin (Khawaja and Milner 2012, Gupta and Sullivan 2013). Women's liberation and independence may also cause tensions in family dynamics (Khawaja and Milner 2012). Lenneis and Pfister (2017) find that women's experiences of leisure time are not universal, as they are greatly affected by age, the nature of their work, living conditions and social factors such as ethnic and cultural background. Women described leisure time as all the factors that supported their physical, emotional and spiritual health (Suto 2013). Immigrant women in particular should be encouraged to pursue physical activities during their leisure time by emphasizing their benefits related to health, relaxation and social contacts (Zacheus et al. 2011).

The Western conception of time is often different from that of immigrants' countries of origin (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013). A strict conception of time and the scheduling of everyday life are a way of life that requires adjustment. Scheduling their days makes women feel like 'organizers or conductors' (Suto 2013). A lack of time has been found to lessen the creation and maintenance of friendships both with members of one's own ethnic group and with others. Women may hold two minimum wage jobs while going to a language school. It can be difficult for them to find time and energy for physical activities, as they have more duties to their families than men (Lenneis and Pfister 2017). Immigrant men have been found to participate more in physical activities than women (O'Driscoll et al. 2013). A study conducted in Finland also found that immigrant women participate less in physical activities than immigrant men and the majority population (Zacheus et al. 2011). It is also easier for men to enter physical group activities, as they tend to be braver than women. Issues related to immigrant men's participation also tend to be handled better than those of immigrant women (Zacheus et al. 2011).

However, studies also show that immigrant men can feel their opportunities decrease in the new country. Many prefer to live in areas with other immigrants, which hinders their integration (Avenarius 2012, Khawaja and Milner 2012). Men even use their isolation as a survival strategy, through which they resist the new culture by e.g., maintaining their authoritarian and patriarchal role in the family (Khawaja and Milner 2012). Systematic literary reviews conducted by various researchers have found strong evidence for the positive effect of physical activities and sports on integration (Gerber et al. 2012, O'Driscoll et al. 2013). Intervention

programs that seek to aid integration through physical activities should thus be directed particularly to those with difficulties in integration (Gerber et al. 2012).

Maintaining bonds with one's culture is important, as it protects immigrants from e.g., mental problems (Cuevas et al. 2012). Castaneda and Kuusio's (2019) study conducted in Finland found that supporting immigrants' and their descendants' social networks also has a positive effect on their integration and health. A large-scale Finnish study found that immigrants from several language groups were united in seeing friends and family as extremely important for one's personal identity (Pitkänen et al. 2019). Traditional family roles and the lack of social networks are detrimental to women's integration in particular (Phan et al. 2015).

Work and having a profession have been shown to lessen immigrants' pain of separation from their country of origin and loved ones, as they keep their minds busy. Separation is more traumatic to those whose friends and family have disappeared as a result of war or are scattered throughout the world (Gupta and Sullivan 2013). They may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, which explains why participating in physical activities or even considering it is not a priority for them (O'Driscoll et al. 2013).

Previous studies show that immigrants have few contacts with the majority population not derived from work or education (Avenarius 2012, Gupta and Sullivan 2013). Civil servants such as social workers, language teachers and schoolteachers offer immigrants valuable help in integrating into society (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013). Avenarius (2012) finds that the shrinking of women's social networks and the lowered frequency of contacts are not solely negatives, as they also mean a lessening of responsibilities and duties compared to life in their countries of origin. According to a study conducted in Finland (Zacheus et al. 2011), immigrants' low participation in physical activities was caused by both practical reasons and cultural differences. Hindering causes included a lack of information and money and lacking language skills. According to a Swedish study (Jönsson et al. 2012), language skills had a meaningful correlation with leisure time physical activities (cf. Gerber et al. 2012). The better the immigrants' command of Swedish was, the more they participated in physical activities. Immigrant women wanted to do physical activities together with other women rather than alone. Such groups would offer a natural way for immigrants and the majority population to become familiar with each other (Zacheus et al. 2011).

In many cultures religious activity offers a natural setting for socializing with people from the majority population as well as other immigrants (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Kim et al. 2016, Pearce et al. 2017). According to immigrant women themselves, community centres are important in building resilience. Communal meals are one way of understanding between cultural groups, as is offering physical space for cultural expression such as religious rituals, language and family values (Pearce et al. 2017). A Korean study (Kim et al. 2016) found that leisure time activities can aid the integration of immigrants into Western societies. Participation in hobbies and indoor activities predicts a successful integration, while immigrants' participation in cultural and voluntary activities within their own immigrant society predicts a failed integration.

Immigrants' professional choices, living routines and personal habits can be difficult to change due to their physical environment. They often live in areas where the lack of public transportation prevents them from going to stores, gaining an education and finding work (Gupta and Sullivan 2013), as such important locations are rarely within walking distance of one's home (Ho and Cheung 2011). Immigrants' command of the local language is often lacking, which makes it difficult for them to gain a driver's license, which would ease their movement. Shopping and other activities are important for maintaining women's social connections, as they enable them to meet their friends (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013). According to a Finnish study (Zacheus et al. 2011) women from Muslim countries in particular needed physical activities to have a practical purpose. For instance, they found it difficult to go for a walk if it did not have a destination. Some considered taking care of their home physical activity and did not see the need for more of it.

Maintaining immigrants' own culture in a new country requires great effort, particularly from women. According to Ameeriar (2012), immigrants feel otherness, even if their grasp of the local language is good. According to a study conducted in Finland, as many as 40% of immigrants experience some form of discrimination (Rask and Castaneda 2019). Research shows that experiences of otherness force immigrants to redefine themselves in a new context, which is not easy for them. Cultural differences hinder women's integration in particular. Many even change their own behaviour in public and abandon cultural practices under social pressure (Gupta and Sullivan 2013). According to Walseth and Fasting (2004), most European studies on immigrant women's leisure time physical activities found that the obstacles to their participation are related to culture, religion or racism. Those who organize physical activities do not offer opportunities that consider immigrants' cultural characteristics.

As part of their identity, immigrants consider work and education extremely important, along with friends and family. Even unemployed respondents emphasize the importance of work (Pitkänen et al. 2019). Volunteer work has also been found to advance integration and social inclusion, particularly for women (Khorostianov and Remennick 2017, Loferer-Lainer 2019). This study examines the integration of immigrants into Finnish society from the perspective of outside home activities.

### **Aims and objectives**

The aim of this study is to describe the views of immigrants with residence permits in Finland on outside home activities and the support they have received. The study answers the following questions:

1. How do immigrants participate in outside home activities?
2. Which factors hinder immigrants' participation in outside home activities?
3. Which factors support immigrants' participation in outside home activities?

## Methods

### *Data Collection Instruments*

The data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire designed by the researchers for this study. The questions were about the following themes: a) respondent background (7 questions), b) education and language skills (4 questions), c) participation in outside home activities (3 open questions, 3 multiple choice questions), d) factors hindering participation in outside home activities (21 statements, available replies: never, sometimes, often, always), e) need for support in participating in outside home activities (11 statements, available replies: never, sometimes, often, always) and f) need for support in integrating into Finnish society (3 open questions and one multiple choice question). Some of the questions were ordinal scale variables ( $f=34$ ) and some open questions ( $f=6$ ). The questions were formulated based on earlier research literature, after which the questionnaire was sent for consultation to four professionals with long experience in working with immigrants. The questionnaire was then amended based on their suggestions by making the concepts used less ambiguous and clarifying the wording of the questions. The amended questionnaire was then pre-tested with five immigrants who have lived in Finland for years and have an excellent command of the language. Their response led to a few more clarifications on the wording and the layout. The questionnaire was then translated to Dari, Arabic, Somali and English by a translation agency.

### *Data Collection*

The data were collected during autumn 2019 at three Finnish cities, which all have weekly activities aimed at immigrants. The activities are organized by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, other religious groups or secular third sector organizations such as the Settlement movement. The purpose of the activities is to offer immigrants diverse activities that aid in integration, help with services and teach Finnish and everyday skills. Immigrants can come to the activities freely without prior enrolment.

The data were collected at community centres meant for men ( $f=1$ ), women ( $f=3$ ) and both ( $f=2$ ). The researchers visited the centres on days with activities ten times, during which they met with immigrants, introduced the project and asked them for their consent in participating in the study. The only requirement was a Finnish residence permit. The immigrants' attitude towards the study was positive, as all wanted to participate in the questionnaire. Some answered the questionnaire independently, while others did so with the aid of the researchers. The respondents were allowed to choose which language they wanted to use. Answering the questions took from 20 minutes to an hour. Responses in languages other than Finnish or English were sent to be translated to the same translation agency that had translated the questionnaire. There were 116 responses, of which three had to be discarded because the respondents lacked a residence permit. This left 113 responses to analyse.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were analysed with the SPSS for Windows 25.0 statistics program by using percentage and frequency distributions, distribution statistic, Cronbach's alpha, the Spearman correlation test and factor analysis. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to examine the dependencies between phenomena and variables, as the variables were chiefly on an ordinal scale. The level of statistical significance was defined as  $p < 0.05$ . The causes hindering (question 17, 21 statements) and supporting (question 19, 11 statements) participation in outside home activities were subjected to factor analysis using principal component analysis and varimax rotation, with the goal of condensing the results and discovering explanatory factors.

The questionnaire's reliability was assessed by using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability of question 17, which deals with the causes hindering immigrant participation in outside home activities ( $n=21$ ), was  $\alpha=0.83$ . The reliability of question 19, which deals with the causes supporting immigrant participation in outside home activities ( $n=11$ ), was  $\alpha=0.81$ . The results are not presented by gender, as only 26% ( $n=29$ ) of the respondents were men.

The answers to the open questions were analysed using thematic analysis (Vaismoradi et al. 2013). The first phase of the analysis consisted of reading the data several times to form a general picture. The chosen units of analysis were word, sentence or idea. These units of analysis, i.e., original expressions, described immigrants' participation in outside home activities and the support needed to integrate into Finnish society. During the second phase of the analysis, the original expressions were coded, compared and then collated into similar themes. In the final phase of the analysis, the frequencies for the contents of each theme were counted.

### *Ethical Approval*

The study was conducted following good scientific practice (TENK 2012). Permission to conduct the study was given by the organizations. The cover letter accompanying the questionnaire explained this study and the project to which it belongs. The purpose of the study and ethically significant issues such as voluntariness, anonymity and the option of ceasing participation were explained in writing and orally. The filled questionnaires were returned in sealed envelopes. The identity of the respondents is not revealed by the questionnaires. Returning the questionnaire meant the respondent's conscious agreement to participating in the study.

## Results

### *Respondents' Background*

Of all respondents (n=113), 73% were women. The youngest respondent was 18 and the oldest was 78. The average age of the respondents was 41. They had arrived in Finland between 1983 and 2019 from 29 different countries. Most came from Afghanistan, Iraq and Nigeria (Table 1), and 85% had arrived in Finland in this century. They had lived in Finland for 0-36 years, the average being 11 years. Eleven percent had only a primary or high school equivalent education, 21% had a vocational school degree, 40% had a college degree and 28% had no education.

The respondents had 24 different native languages, of which Dari (f=12), Somali (f=10), Russian (f=8), Yoruba (f=6), Kurdish (f=6), and Arabic (f=6) were the most common. Six percent of the respondents (n=113) estimated their ability to speak Finnish as excellent and 31% as good. In their estimation, their ability to understand Finnish was slightly higher than their ability to speak it (Table 1). As their stay in the country increased, both their ability to speak ( $r=0.306$   $p=0.001$ ) and understand ( $r=0.307$   $p=0.307$ ) Finnish increased.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of the Study Participants (n=113)*

Variable	n (%)
Gender	
Female	83 (74)
Male	29 (26)
Total	112 (100)
Age	
18-28	14 (13)
29-39	36 (34)
40-50	29 (27)
51-61	21 (20)
62-78	6 (6)
Total	106 (100)
Country of origin (three most common)	
Afghanistan	19 (17)
Iraq	15 (13)
Nigeria	10 (9)
Year of arrival in Finland	
1983-1999	17 (15)
2000-2010	45 (40)
2011-2019	50 (45)
Total	113 (100)
Ability to speak Finnish	
Excellent	7 (6)
Good	35 (31)
Satisfactory	43 (38)
Bad	24 (21)
None	4 (4)
Total	113 (100)
Ability to understand Finnish	
Excellent	13 (11)
Good	37 (33)
Satisfactory	37 (33)
Bad	23 (20)
None	3 (3)
Total	113 (100)



*Immigrants' Participation in Outside Home Activities*

Seventy-five percent of the respondents thought that their area of living offered enough activities for them and their family. Fifty-seven percent participated actively in an association or group. Of them, 34% participated in a Finnish-speaking association or group, 16% in an association or group that spoke their native language and 15% in both kinds of groups. Thirty-five percent had left this field blank.

The ability to understand Finnish correlated with finding the level of offered activities satisfactory ( $r=0.267$ ,  $p=0.005^{**}$ ). The better the respondents estimated their ability to understand Finnish, the more likely they were to be active in a group ( $r=0.251$ ,  $p=0.008^{**}$ ).

The open question 'what are your hobbies in your leisure time' was answered by 103 of the respondents. Athletic hobbies emerged most clearly, as the respondents listed 108 different sports. The most popular ones were walking ( $f=39$ ), gym ( $f=14$ ), swimming ( $f=14$ ), jogging ( $f=9$ ), cycling ( $f=8$ ) and football ( $f=6$ ). Volleyball ( $f=4$ ), gymnastics ( $f=3$ ) and dance ( $f=3$ ) were also mentioned.

*I exercise a lot when the weather is good*

The most popular cultural hobbies were reading ( $f=17$ ), listening to music ( $f=7$ ), watching films or going to the cinema ( $f=7$ ) and drawing and painting ( $f=3$ ). Other hobbies that were mentioned included writing poetry and singing in a choir. The respondents also had fun hobbies with their families ( $f=10$ ):

*I spend my free time with my family and we go to the library, the playing field or we cook*

Hobbies done at home included crafts ( $f=10$ ), cooking ( $f=8$ ), cleaning ( $f=3$ ) helping others ( $f=2$ ) and going to the sauna ( $f=2$ ). Taking care of flowers, prayer and baking were also mentioned. Other hobbies included learning Finnish ( $f=8$ ), going to community centres ( $f=7$ ), meeting friends ( $f=4$ ) and traveling to nearby cities ( $f=4$ ). Shopping, camping, billiards, fishing and picking berries and mushrooms were also mentioned.

The open question 'what hobby opportunities would you like to have more of' received 79 replies. The most common athletic opportunity mentioned was swimming. Gyms ( $f=5$ ), dance ( $f=5$ ) and football ( $f=4$ ) were also mentioned. Badminton, wrestling and flying were also mentioned. For responses wished for women-only exercise spaces, two ones for children-only exercise spaces and two for immigrants-only exercise spaces.

Many of the respondents wished for activities that could be performed together with Finns, which would allow them to integrate better:

*Activities that improve integration and teach more about Finnish culture*

The replies showed a desire for togetherness and pursuing hobbies together. Helping other people was also of interest.

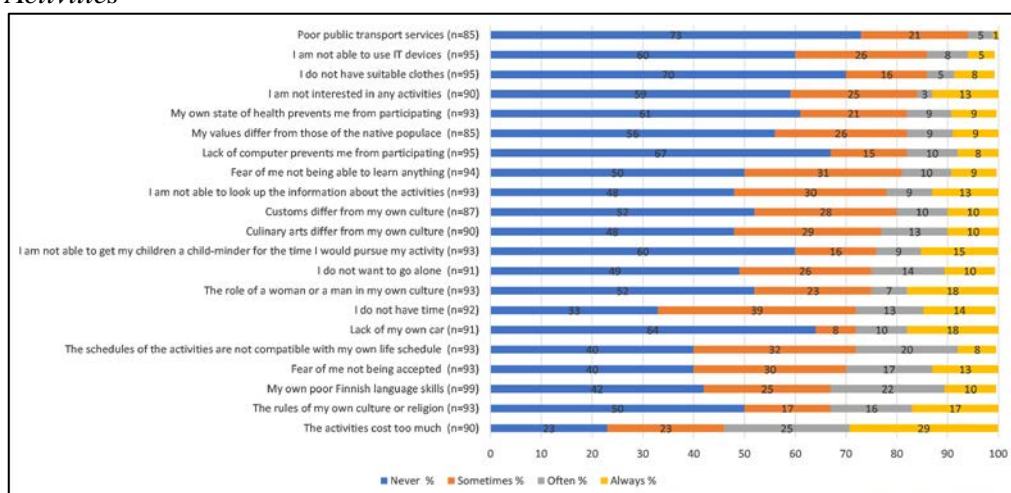
*I live alone so I always want to spend time with people*

Learning languages was seen as important, as along with Finnish (f=7), there was a desire to learn English (f=2) and Swedish. Respondents were also interested in travel (f=6), visiting museums (f=2) and learning about culture.

*Factors Hindering Participation in Outside Home Activities*

Factors hindering participation in activities were charted using 21 statements (Figure 1). Respondents were often or always hindered by high costs (54%), a lack of time (27%), fear of not being accepted by the group (30%), rules of one's culture or religion (33%), low level of language skills (32%) and schedules (28%). Factors such as the role of men or women in one's culture, differing culinary arts and an inability to find information about activities were somewhat hindering. Approximately a quarter of the respondents did not want to go to an activity alone or did not have a child-minder or a car. Some were afraid of learning nothing. Matters such as transportation, clothing, IT devices or health rarely hindered participation.

**Figure 1.** Causes Hindering Immigrants' (n=113) Participation in Outside Home Activities



Seventy-three percent of the respondents reported that they had never been hindered from participating in activities by a lack of transport services, 70% had never been hindered by a lack of suitable clothes and 60% had never been hindered by a lack of their own car. Younger respondents were less hindered by scheduling conflicts with public transport than older ones ( $r=0.284$   $p=0.005^{**}$ ).

Those who had lived in Finland for a shorter time were more hindered by a weak command of Finnish than those who had lived in the country longer ( $r=0.205$ ,  $p=0.048^*$ ). The ability to speak ( $r=0.267$ ,  $p=0.010^{**}$ ) and understand Finnish ( $r=0.300$ ,  $p=0.004^{**}$ ) also had an inverse correlation with a fear of not being accepted.

Those who had lived in Finland for a shorter time had a greater fear of not being accepted than those who had lived in the country longer ( $r=0.253$ ,  $p=0.017^*$ ). The better the respondents' assessment of their knowledge of Finnish was ( $r=0.244$ ,  $p=0.018^*$ ), the less afraid they were of not learning anything.

The results show that the better the respondent's assessment of their ability to speak ( $r= .277$ ,  $p= .008^{**}$ ) and understand Finnish ( $r=0.293$ ,  $p=0.005^{**}$ ), the less hindered they were by culinary differences. The same applied to Finnish skills and IT devices ( $r=0.211$ ,  $p=0.040^*$ ).

A principal component analysis performed on the statements in Figure 1 produced seven factors which explain 70% of the phenomena. The first factor (coefficient of determination 13%) includes cultural rules: gender roles, cultural and religious requirements and one's own values. The second factor (coefficient of determination 12%) includes fears and a lack of skills: the fear of not being accepted or learning anything, weak command of the language and an inability to find information about activities. The third factor (coefficient of determination 11%) includes a lack of a computer and computer skills. The fourth factor (coefficient of determination 9%) included a lack of time and problems with scheduling. The costliness of activities did not become relevant until the fifth factor, whose coefficient of determination is 9%. Food and customs culture in the sixth factor has a coefficient of determination of 9%. The seventh factor includes the lack of a car (coefficient of determination 7%).

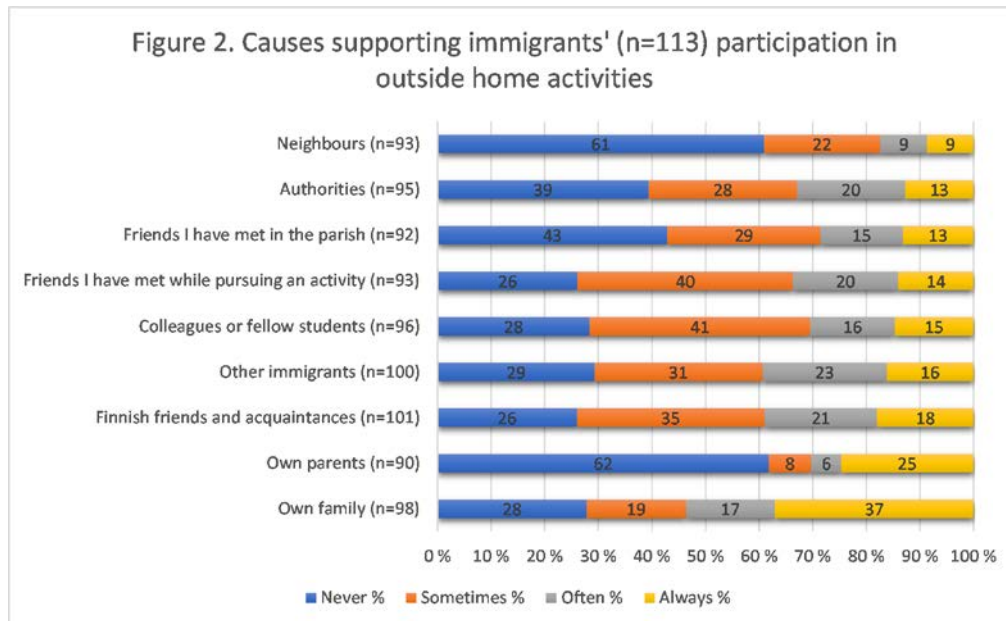
The open question 'what else would you like to tell us about the things that make it difficult for you to participate in activities or groups' was answered by 50 respondents. The responses partially repeated the themes of the previous question such as a lack of money ( $f=10$ ) and time ( $f=5$ ) and problems related to health ( $f=6$ ) and language skills ( $f=6$ ). A lack of support ( $f=8$ ) was mentioned frequently:

*I don't yet have female friends [...] I don't know how to find such a friend through networks, since these things happen so fast these days*

Four responses hoped for a child-minder that would enable them to participate in activities, as some respondents were single parents. Some had difficulty finding information and some had found age limits in certain activities. Beginning a new activity was seen as difficult, as were Finland's cold climate and cultural and religious differences. The respondents did not know of activities in which Finns and immigrants could participate together, which they saw as a problem.

#### *Factors Supporting Immigrants' Participation in Outside Home Activities*

Participation in activities was often or always supported by one's own family (54%), Finnish friends and acquaintances (39%), other immigrants (39%), friends met during activities (34%) and work and study friends (31%). Approximately one fifth of the respondents were often or always supported by their neighbours. Other supporters included authorities and friends from the parish (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Causes Supporting Immigrant (n=113) Participation in Outside Home Activities

Sixty-one percent of the respondents never received support from their neighbours and 62% never from their parents. The younger the respondent the more likely they were to feel supported by their parents ( $r=-0.241$ ,  $p=0.030^*$ ). Respondents who saw the amount of offered activities as sufficient felt they had received support in their activities from authorities ( $r=0.377$   $p=0.000^{***}$ ) and Finnish friends and acquaintances ( $r=0.224$   $p=0.026^*$ ).

A principal component analysis of the statements in Figure 2 yielded two factors with a coefficient of determination of 57%. The first factor (coefficient of determination 34%) consists of Finnish friends met in parishes, during activities or elsewhere, neighbours, authorities, other immigrants and study and work friends. Factor two (coefficient of determination 23%) included one's own parents and family.

## Discussion

This study analysed the integration of immigrants into Finnish society from the perspective of outside home activities. Nearly 60% of the immigrants who participated in this study (n=113) participated actively in an association or a group. According to Castaneda and Kuusio's (2019) study, one indicator of high social well-being is participation in leisure time activities, which is a significant factor in supporting both immigrant's integration and health. Based on this study, the physical environment seemed to support immigrants' participation, as 75% of the respondents saw the activities offered in their environment as sufficient for themselves and their families. This result differs from earlier studies, according to

which a significant cause hindering social well-being were a lack of physical locations for e.g., meeting friends (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Ho and Cheung 2011).

One of the main factors in integration is learning the new country's language (Castaneda and Kuusio 2019, Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Jönsson et al. 2012). Slightly fewer than 40% of the respondents in this study estimated their ability to speak Finnish as good or excellent and slightly above 40% estimated their ability to understand Finnish as good or excellent. The result can even be seen as bad, as the respondents had lived in Finland for 11 years on average. The result supports the OECD (2018) criticism of the Finnish education system's ability to teach Finnish to immigrants. Finland should create a national language program for immigrants, which would ensure the responsibilities of language training, an efficient execution and regular tests for learning and creating incentives for learning, such as increased social benefits or access to internships. There is a great deal of research showing that learning the new country's language advances integration, social well-being and health (Castaneda and Kuusio 2019, Gupta and Sullivan 2013). This study shows that those who were more confident in their Finnish skills participated more in activities than those who considered their Finnish lacking.

According to the factor analysis, the greatest hindrance to immigrants' participation in outside home activities were the rules of one's culture. This reinforces the findings of Walseth and Fasting (2004) on religious and cultural rules. However, unlike their data, our respondents did not directly discuss racism as a hindrance, though there were indications of it in their fear of not being accepted. Those who organize outside home activities should offer more varied opportunities that consider cultural and religious characteristics. In Gupta and Sullivan's (2013) study, women were particularly concerned with maintaining their own culture in the new country, which partially hindered their integration into the new country. It is understandable that it is easier to make and maintain friendships within one's own ethnic group and to make culturally approved decisions regarding e.g., leisure time (Avenarius 2012, Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013.) However, this may also hinder integration as found by Kim et al. (2016). Other significant hindrances in this study were fears of insufficient language skills and experiences of personal inability, such as challenges related to computers.

Participation in outside home activities was hindered by a lack of money for half the respondents and a lack of time for a third of the respondents. Immigrants also mentioned a lack of money and time in earlier studies (Zacheus et al. 2011). Activities in Finland are expensive. High costs are particularly prohibitive for the unemployed, while the employed might be hindered by a lack of time. In Finland, as in other Western countries, everyday life is highly scheduled and busy. A lack of time can make it difficult to create and maintain friendships (Pajnik and Bajt 2012, Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013), which led immigrant women in particular to consciously prioritize their own family. A lack of time can also be seen as a problem of perception, as immigrants may have a more fluid concept of time than Finns (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Suto 2013), who are used to activities starting and ending at a specified time. Immigrants might be more comfortable with activities that allow them to participate when they have time. Zacheus et al. (2011)

also found that women wanted to pursue physical activities in groups rather than alone. The need for accessible artistic workshops dedicated to pursuits such as painting and woodwork could be met by services developed by e.g., civic organizations.

The fear of not being accepted was a significant hindering factor, as 30% were sometimes afraid of it and another 30% were often or always afraid it. Some Finns have become increasingly opposed to immigrants over the past few years, largely as a result of the increased number of immigrants and a tightening economic situation in Finland. Work-based immigration is frequently seen as a positive, but there is also a great deal of political discourse regarding supposed 'standard of living refugees' who are not truly escaping oppression. This challenge should be met by each city through means such as networks that would assemble various actors and immigrant representatives to invent new and innovative forms of enabling Finns and immigrants to meet each other.

Approximately half of the respondents received support from their family for their outside home activities. Many (40%) also received support from Finnish friends and other immigrants. Support from neighbours was lesser, as clearly over half reported receiving no support from them. Earlier studies have found support from neighbours an important factor in integrating into the new country (e.g., Tsai et al. 2011). Approximately 60% received support from authorities in handling practical matters. From the perspective of integration, the number could be higher, as immigrants have a great deal of contact with authorities regarding matters such as employment and education. One might ask if the services provided to immigrants have been insufficient if so many feel unsupported by authorities. Earlier studies show that support from authorities is important in integrating into a new society (Gupta and Sullivan, 2013, Suto 2013). In this study respondents received more support from non-family members (34%) than their family and parents (23%), which shows that immigrants have developed their own support networks. This suggests a good level of integration.

According to Castaneda and Kuusio's (2019) study, social well-being consists, among other things, of good friends and satisfaction with interpersonal relationships. Many of the respondents expressed a wish to befriend someone from the majority population. The open answers mentioned the lack of social support as a factor hindering participation. The respondents had few social contacts with people from the majority population outside of work and education, as in previous studies (Avenarius 2012, Gupta and Sullivan 2013). Nine out of ten respondents had a hobby they enjoyed, such as walking, gym training, swimming or art appreciation, but only 34% belonged to a Finnish-speaking group or association. The results suggest that only a third has integrated into working with the majority population while two thirds pursue their hobbies either alone or with other immigrants. Participation in outside home activities has been found to be a significant factor in integration (Gerber et al. 2012, Jönsson et al. 2012, O'Driscoll et al. 2013).

The respondents expressed a desire for more community centres for both immigrants and Finns and immigrants. The idea of opening immigrant-only centres should be met with reservation, as they may increase an experience of otherness and further separate immigrants from the majority population (Kim et al. 2016, cf.

Buchert 2015). Earlier studies (Gupta and Sullivan 2013, Pearce et al. 2017) show that immigrants work actively together with the majority population in religious activities, which also increases their sense of community and familiarity with the majority culture. Finland is not so much lacking in available and open community centres as participants. Such activities should try to activate both immigrants and people from the majority population. Many respondents wished they could befriend a Finn, which should be possible at such centres. The respondents also wished that Finns were more active in trying to form contacts with them.

Women, particularly those who were single parents, mentioned the lack of child-minders as a factor hindering their participation in activities outside the home. Earlier studies show that mothers often bear the main responsibility for their children (Khawaja and Milner 2012, Lenneis and Pfister 2017, Phan et al. 2015). The family dynamics in immigrants' cultures may be vastly different from those of the new country, in which fathers participate in caring for their children in a more egalitarian fashion.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The study sought for immigrants in three cities, who were discovered at various community centres. Those present were likely active people with the energy, skills and desire to participate in activities outside the home. The respondents were already active people, which can be seen in their responses. The respondents came from various ethnic backgrounds, which means the data represents a heterogeneous group. As the sample size was also small, the results are thus approximate and cannot be generalized to all immigrants. This study was mainly concerned with the factors hindering and supporting immigrant participation in outside home activities, which has previously received little scientific attention.

The questionnaire was created for this study based on previous literature and research. The study's reliability was improved by pre-testing the questionnaire on four professionals with long experience in working with immigrants and immigrants who have lived in Finland for a long time. The questionnaire was amended somewhat after the pretesting. The questionnaire was translated by qualified professionals at the same agency, so it can be assumed that the questions retained their meaning in translation. It would however have been more reliable to double translate the questionnaires.

The analysis phase showed that content validity had been achieved, as the replies showed that the respondents had understood the questions as the researchers intended and no questionnaires had to be discarded for this reason. The reliability of the two statement sections was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which showed a high reliability ( $\alpha = > 0.80$ ). The questionnaire can thus be said to be internally consistent (Polit and Beck 2014).

Factor analysis should offer a meaningful interpretation of the factors' contents, there should be as few factors as possible and they should explain the variables' covariation as much as possible. In the analysis of causes hindering participation, the first four factors explain more than 50% of the covariation. In the analysis of causes supporting participation, the first two factors explain more than

50% of the covariation. The factors formed by both analyses can be interpreted in a meaningful way.

The target group of the study, immigrants with a residence permit, are often people in a vulnerable position and difficult to reach through mailed questionnaires. The researchers visited their community centres in person, where they could directly answer questions about the study, the project and the uses of their replies, which increased their willingness to participate. Answering the questionnaire was based on self-evaluation, which carries the risk of the respondents answering in a socially accepted rather than the true way.

Despite the small sample size (n=113), the results can be seen as valuable, as there has been little research on immigrants' perspectives on outside home activities as part of integration.

## **Conclusion**

There have been relatively few studies of immigrant participation in outside home activities in Finland. The results of this study strengthen earlier results about the advantages of participating in activities in learning the language and integrating into the culture and the environment.

To enable better integration, Finland should create a national language program that would ensure the responsibilities of language training, an efficient execution and regular tests for learning. From the perspective of immigrant employment and participation in society, learning the language is of utmost importance and should be prioritized for each immigrant.

Creating community centres and common activities for immigrants and the majority population would make the majority's attitudes towards immigrants more positive and enable friendships to form between immigrants and Finns. This would also improve the language skills of immigrants.

One hindering cause for immigrant participation in activities that was mentioned was the high cost of hobbies. Finland needs more social benefits that would support the activities of low-income immigrant families, particularly those with children.

Creating regional and citywide networks between organizations and immigrants to increase participation opportunities would advance new ideas and innovations.

Disseminating the results of this study among immigrants might motivate them to study Finnish more. The project will send copies of the article to immigrant community centres.

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