



Immigrants Who Actively Participate in Receiving Communities have Better Mental Health

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Community Psychologists may intuitively know that it is essential to support immigrant participation in the receiving/host countries and

communities. We know less about why it is important as well as how immigrant participation predicts positive mental health.

Promoting immigrant wellbeing is an

issue of social justice to build a fairer society. When immigrants engage within community-based organizations, they can feel a sense of belonging.



*Figure 1 Photograph by Matheus Bertelli:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-diverse-people-gathering-around-speaker-on-mat-3856019/>
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There is a “need for generative social policies to move beyond the welfarist perspective in which immigrants only ‘receive’ to embrace an active perspective in which immigrants can also ‘give’.”

Highlights

Active community participation is positively associated with a sense of community and adding value which, in turn, increases immigrant wellbeing.

Supporting organizations in their outreach to immigrants and promoting their active engagement in the community can contribute to support immigrant mental health.

Methods

We examined whether members and non-members of migrant organizations differ in their levels of community participation, subjective wellbeing, sense of mattering (feeling valued and adding value), and sense of community. We used an online self-report questionnaire to measure 308 first-generation immigrants living in Northern Italy. Through our work, we developed a model that helps to explain the mechanism through which community participation is positively related to subjective wellbeing among immigrant members.

Results

- Immigrants participating in the community have a higher subjective wellbeing, higher sense of mattering, and higher sense of community in comparison to immigrants who do not participate.
- Beyond belonging, the more immigrants actively participate, the more they perceive adding value, sense of community, and subjective wellbeing.
- Adding value and sense of community mediate the relationship between community participation and subjective wellbeing.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology cares for people and groups who are suffering from injustice, which is often the case for immigrants in host societies. It also re-claims everyone's potential to become a bearer of change and fight to improve their living conditions by connecting with others. This is why this work focuses on the participation that immigrants carried out within migrant community-based organizations; spaces where immigrants gain the belonging and appreciation.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: We provide evidence that community participation is positively related to immigrant subjective wellbeing through two paths: a sense of adding value and a psychological sense of community.

Practice: Professionals should promote spaces for gathering and participation among immigrant people. Within such spaces they must support immigrant people in becoming key actors in charge of developing activities for the community to feel useful and increase feelings of social belonging.

Social Action: Social policies should promote the community participation of immigrants to support their positive mental health. They should replace the traditional view of helping immigrants only through the coverage of their basic needs, and promote a new approach rooted in social generativity, where immigrants can “give” to the new society from an active position.

Similar Settings: People working with immigrants should know and be in contact with migrant organizations that are active within their territories and should direct immigrants toward these community spaces.

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