Syrian refugees, sport and belonging: A proposed photovoice inquiry
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In the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War, Canada has welcomed 40,081 Syrian refugees from 2015 to date (Canadian Immigration and Citizenship, 2017). Subsequently, there has been a focus on efforts to provide and fund services and programs for resettlement. Previous research has defined successful settlement as a key milestone that refugees achieve through earning income, and finding housing and employment (Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; Omidvar & Richmond, 2003). On other hand, other research suggests that settlement goes beyond these basic needs, and social networks, feelings of belonging, and social inclusion are equally important (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003; Simich 2003). Sport could be one way through these other components of settlement could be addressed. While researchers and policy makers in Europe have deployed sport as a vehicle for cultivating social inclusion and successful settlement among refugees (Amara et al, 2005; Hancock et al.,2009; Spaaij, 2015), there is marginal support or funding for recreational sport programs for refugee settlement in the Canadian context.

This presentation will elaborate on a proposed study to investigate the relationship between sport and feelings of belonging among a group of Syrian refugees within a Canadian context. Specifically, this study aims to understand the ways in which Syrian refugees participating in sport experience social inclusion and belonging, and the place and meaning of sport in their lives. The participants of this study will be recruited from a recreational soccer team based in Toronto, entirely composed of Syrian refugee players.

This study draws on Maxwell et al.’s (2013) modified application of Bailey’s (2008) social inclusion framework, as well as Antonsich (2010) approach to belonging. Together, their work will serve as the foundation upon which the study will incorporate participants’ ideas of inclusivity and belonging. Photovoice methodology, a form of participatory action research (PAR) which utilizes visual images and photographs to gather data, will be used in this study.


