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Barriers to social participation in rural, urban and suburban areas, according to gender and age, in Québec, Canada

Daniel Naud and Mélanie Levasseur
Université de Sherbrooke, Canada

Social participation in older adults is positively associated with their health and well-being. With increasing age and fluctuating capacities, the social and physical characteristics of the local environment can help older adults having challenges by providing, for example, support and access to resources. However, local environment can also become a barrier to social participation by, for example, creating insecurity and lacking accessibility to public transportation. As they differ in terms of environmental characteristics, rural, urban and suburban areas can present different facilitators and barriers to social participation. Still, little is known about social participation according to rural, urban and suburban areas, and specifically barriers in social participation and according to gender and age. This study thus aimed to describe and compare older adults' barriers to social participation, according to environment (rural, urban and suburban areas), gender and age. Secondary analyses were realized from the cross-sectional 2008-2009 Canadian Community Health Survey, "Healthy Aging" thematic, conducted among 5,217 respondents from the province of Quebec. Pairwise comparisons identified significant differences and logistic regressions considered the influence of the environment on the barriers, controlling for gender, age and chronic disease. Some barriers don't appear to be specific to environments (e.g. too busy, health problems) or are universal (e.g. physical inaccessibility), while others were mostly found in rural (unavailability, 10.5%; transport, 6.9%), urban (not wanting to go alone, 14.3%; cost, 11.2%) or suburban (personal responsibilities, 13.2%) areas. When comparing genders, these barriers are restricting more women than men. In all three areas, transportation problems are increasing with age, reaching 27.0% of the rural population aged 65 and over, while being too busy is a barrier for half the adults aged 45-64. The reference group, i.e. rural women aged 60, with a chronic disease, had 2.7 more chances (odds ratio; OR) to report barriers ($p < 0.001$), compared to 3.5 and 3.2 in urban and suburban areas, respectively. Personal responsibilities (OR=1.4) and cost (OR=1.1) were the most likely barriers for the reference group and schedule (OR=0.5) was less likely, but they were aggravated in urban (cost, OR=1.3) and suburban (personal responsibilities, OR=1.7, and schedule, OR=0.6) areas. Knowing barriers in social participation according to area, gender and age will increase awareness of decision makers planning for local and regional action strategies to promote social participation in older adults.

Biography

Daniel Naud recently completed a PhD in Cultural Geography at the University of Montreal, Canada. He teaches Geographic Information Systems at Concordia University, Montreal. Currently, he is a Post-doctoral fellow at University of Sherbrooke (Canada), collaborating on the development of the Social Participation Potential Index, to improve health and quality of life of aging populations.

daniel.naud@concordia.ca

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