

South Asian Needs Assessment Survey—2019



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Introduction

Durham Region and the City of Oshawa have experienced a noticeable growth in the South Asian population, particularly amongst the 55+ age cohort. In response to this increased diversification and aging, the Oshawa Senior Community Centres (OSCC) identified the need to gain a better understanding of diversity as it exists in the Oshawa senior community. The 2013 report, *Diverse Seniors: An Exploration of Senior Social Participation and Inclusion in Oshawa*, provided research and broader recommendations on engaging all diverse groups but did not specifically address the South Asian population within Oshawa and Durham Region.

To better understand barriers to participation for the South Asian seniors, the OSCC engaged the Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) to undertake a needs assessment. A survey was developed in partnership with the 55+ Desi Connect Committee and Ontario Tech University's Social Research Centre (SRC) to gain insight into the lives and realities of South Asian seniors living in Durham Region.

The purpose of this needs assessment is to inform next steps and propose actionable recommendations in enhancing participation from the South Asian senior population in Oshawa.

Demographic Profile of Seniors in Durham Region

Over the course of the decade, the South Asian population in Durham has grown exponentially. According to the 2006 Community Profile, seniors were 21% of the population in Oshawa (1). As mentioned in *Diverse Seniors: An Exploration of Senior Social Participation and Inclusion in Oshawa*, both the Region of Durham and the municipality of Oshawa experienced 3% increase in their seniors' populations in 2011. Projections for the 2018 population estimates from the Ontario Ministry of Health indicate that the seniors' population will increase by 31% (2). Similarly, the immigrant population in Durham has been steadily increasing at an annual rate of 3% between 2008 and 2036, meaning that in 2019, the immigrant population will be about 25% of the total population. (3)

The table below is a summary of the estimated populations of the seniors age cohorts throughout Durham Region, and provides some comparison with estimated provincial populations as well (4).

Chart 1: Senior Age Cohort – Durham Region

Age Groups	Ontario	Durham Region	Pickering	Ajax	Whitby	Oshawa
55 to 64	1,962,942	94,660	14,832	16,309	17,048	23,899
65 to 74	1,371,721	59,001	8,737	8,946	10,525	16,030
75 to 84	728,818	29,458	4,098	4,015	5,121	8,755
85+	324,279	12,517	1,759	1,387	2,359	3,975
Total	4,387,760	195,636	29,426	30,657	35,053	52,659

Source: Ontario Population Estimates (2018), Ontario Ministry of Health

The 55 to 64 population remains the largest age group in Ontario and Durham.

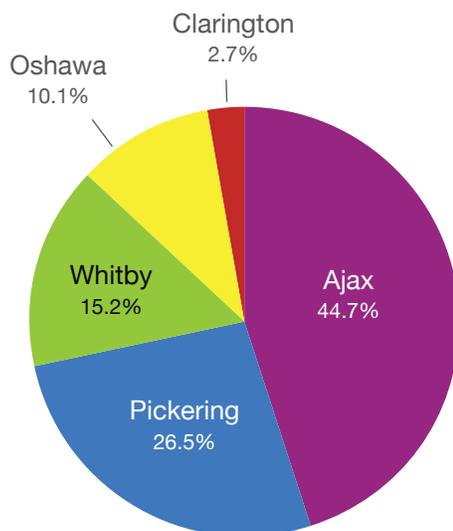
According to 2016 census data, the visible minority population in Oshawa is made up of 64,560 people, representing 17% of the total Oshawa population. Approximately 15,930 people (or 24.7%) of all visible minority populations in Oshawa are from South Asia, marking it as the largest visible minority population. Comparisons to the 2006 census data indicate that there has been a 157% increase in the population between 2006 and 2016. (5)

Chart 2: South Asian Population (Oshawa)

2006 South Asian Population (Oshawa)	2016 South Asian Population (Oshawa)
6,195	15,930

A total of 10,105 South Asian older adults, aged 55 and over, live in Durham, representing 5.8% of all older adults. In Durham, 17.7% of older adults are racialized (30,800); 32.8% of racialized older adults are South Asian.

South Asian Older Adults (55+) Live in Durham



This paper reflects the communities of Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, and Oshawa.

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. EO2766 Table 8-TGP_Age groups – Part 2 (CD-CSD). Accessed through the Community Data Program.

Methodology

The survey was developed in partnership with Community Development Council of Durham (CDCD), Oshawa Senior Community Centres (OSCC), the 55+ Desi Connect Committee, and the Social Research Centre (SRC) at Ontario Tech University.

Hard copies of the survey, both in English and Urdu, were distributed at local events, and were available at both the OSCC and CDCD offices. Translation support into requested languages was also available through the Ajax Welcome Centre. An online English survey was available through Ontario Tech.

A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

With the support of OSCC and the 55+ Desi Connect Committee, the survey was released in July of 2019. A total of sixty-seven (67) self-identified South Asian seniors responded to the survey.

Survey Design

The survey was divided into five sections: Demographic information, Specific participation and interest in OSCC events, Leisure and social activities, Health and well-being, and Volunteerism.

The survey was intentionally designed with both open-ended and closed-ended questions to encourage responder opinions, suggestions, and comments. These comments were then reviewed and analyzed to understand how to better engage the South Asian senior population in Durham.

The section topics were chosen to reflect an understanding of the social determinants of health, and how they influence the senior population.

Project Framework

In designing the project, there was recognition that South Asian seniors face significant barriers to participation such as language, health limitations, and limited access to transportation. Efforts were made to address and reduce those barriers.

Surveys were purposefully chosen over other methodologies (such as focus groups) because it allowed for larger sample sizes (and more data collection), did not require the respondents to travel, and carefully considered respondents' time and other commitments. The survey questions were designed to highlight South Asian seniors' relationship to OSCC, as well as how the population can experience a better quality of life in Durham.

The attention to the project process allowed the project team to develop an overview of the lived realities of South Asian seniors.

Definition of 'South Asian'

For the purpose of both the survey and this report, the definition of "South Asian" has been limited to the broader ethnic identities from the following countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan.

While there is acknowledgment of the complexity of South Asian identity and history, members of the Diaspora were not included in the definition.

Key Recommendations

Based on analysis of the survey data and previous experiences with the target population, the following recommendations are suggested to further explore the survey results:

1. Develop a working group of peer educators and/or community animators to continue to engage and assess the needs of the South Asian senior community in Durham. The engagement can include methodologies such as focus groups or stakeholder interviews, preferably in languages spoken by respondents (ie. Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, etc.). Hosting open-ended one-on-one conversations or group discussions, in familiar venues such as the Pickering Islamic Centre, may greatly support the development of an outreach strategy. Additionally, it would encourage respondent buy-in and help establish a stronger relationship with OSCC.
2. Develop a thorough Outreach and Engagement strategy that creates opportunities for expanded partnerships, considerations for engaging other family members and friends, and continued culturally relevant programming, services, and events.
3. Future programming implications may include programs or celebrations specific to individual South Asian countries or identities, continually minimizing barriers to participation such as language and transportation, and family-focused events.

Summary of Survey Findings

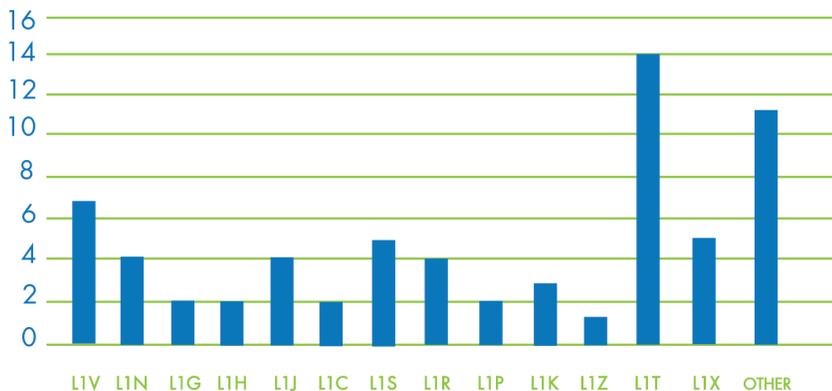
Respondent Demographic Breakdown

The following section is a summary of the first eight questions of the survey, which focus on respondent demographics.

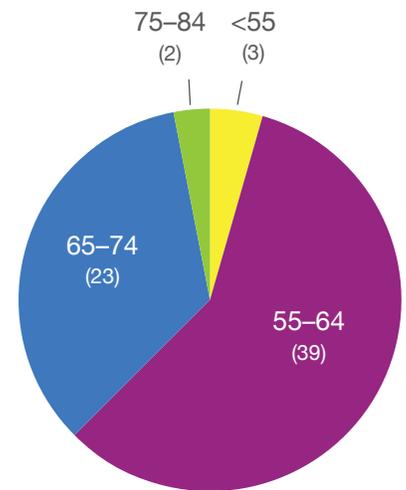
Postal Code

While survey respondents are scattered throughout Durham Region, almost twenty-two (22) percent were either housed or situated in postal code L1T (Ajax).

This finding also indicates that the survey may not have generated responses from seniors who reside in proximity to OSCC and may explain why participation is varied.



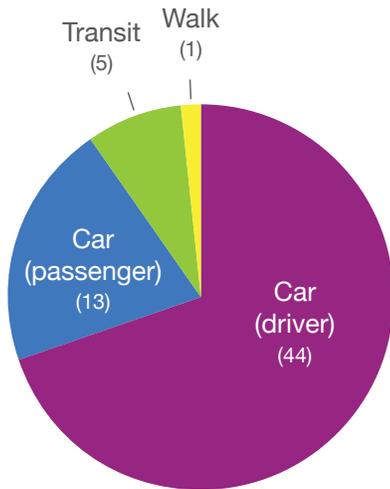
Participant Age



The majority of survey respondents (62) were between the ages of 55-74. Only five respondents were under the age of 55 or between the ages of 75-84.

Further responses to survey questions indicate the majority of respondents were actively participating in community events.

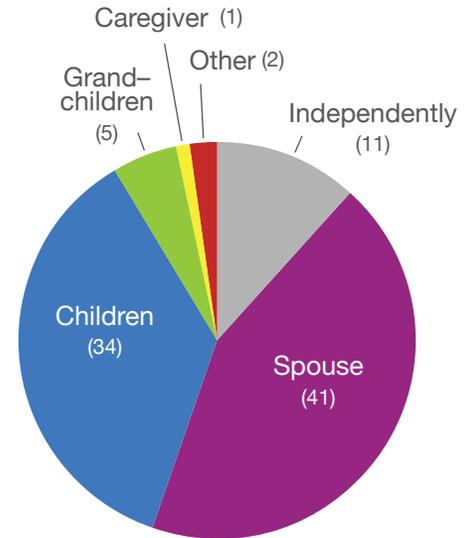
Primary Mode of Transportation



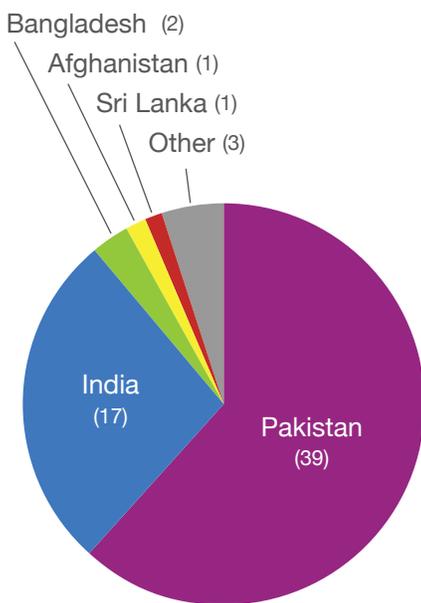
Nearly all respondents (57) indicated that they are reliant on an automobile- either as a driver or as a passenger- to get to where they need to go. Very few respondents (6) indicated that they either rely on public transportation or walking. The data indicates that most respondents have access to a vehicle, are able to drive, and use this method as their primary form of transportation. This information might suggest a high level of independence amongst survey respondents

All respondents indicated that they were not born in Canada and self-identified as immigrants.

Living Arrangements



Majority of respondents live with their spouse and/or with their children. A small number live independently, with their grandchildren, caregiver or with someone other than the options provided.



South Asian Ethnic Community

Acknowledging the diversity within the South Asian population, respondents were asked how they identify with specific ethnic communities. The majority of respondents mentioned they self-identify with the ethnic communities of Pakistan (37) or India (17). Very few respondents (4) indicated that they self-identified with the ethnic communities of Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Few respondents mentioned that they were of a mixed background, West Indian or from Kenya. Those who were not from a South Asian community may have filled out this survey until this point as they had attended events that were for predominantly South Asian seniors.

Brief Analysis of Demographic Breakdown

Some of the information that has emerged from the first section of the survey is surprising:

- The federal definition of “senior” is anyone aged 65 and older, while the term “older adults” is used for anyone aged 55 to 64. The two age cohorts are distinct in their access to employment, financial resources, and physical and mental limitation due to health complications; people aged 55 to 60 do not qualify for Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and are therefore not usually on fixed income, and do not usually report the same levels of hypertension, arthritis, and back problems as other age cohorts. (5)
- While Oshawa has the largest population of seniors, the highest number of survey respondents reported residing in Ajax.
- While India had the highest number of the immigrants in the Region, most of the survey respondents indicated that they self-identified as immigrants from Pakistan. This may be indicative of surveys being translated into Urdu and not in other languages.
- The high numbers of respondents that reside with either their spouse and/or their families may impact the respondent ties to the OSCC, as they have a “built in” social pathway and may not need to rely on service providers or the broader community. There is some evidence that residing with family can act as a “shield against depression, loneliness, and isolation in later life.” (6)

Recommendations from Demographic Breakdown

1.1 Develop specific outreach and engagement strategies that:

- Are geared towards South Asian seniors aged 55-74;
- Are expanded to include amenities frequently visited by seniors, such as grocery stores, shopping centres, and religious facilities;
- Consider engaging adult children/caregivers as potential target populations in increasing senior participation;
- Acknowledge distinct traditions from individual South Asian countries, such as Independence Day celebrations;

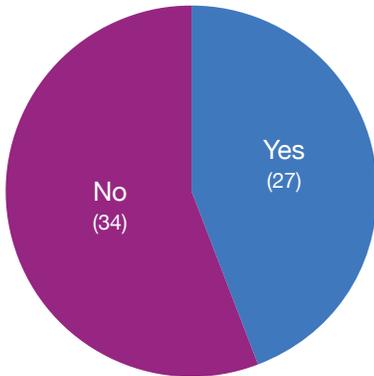
1.2 OSCC may wish to deepen its understanding of the senior immigrant experience. Further exploration into the senior immigrant experience, with an emphasis on senior expectations pre- and post-migration, may be conducted through peer educators or community animators and can support the development of programs that meet senior needs. Posing open-ended questions for discussion, such as “what do you miss most about your country of origin?” may provide more information on replicating familiar environments and experiences.



Respondent Participation in OSCC Programs, Services, and Events

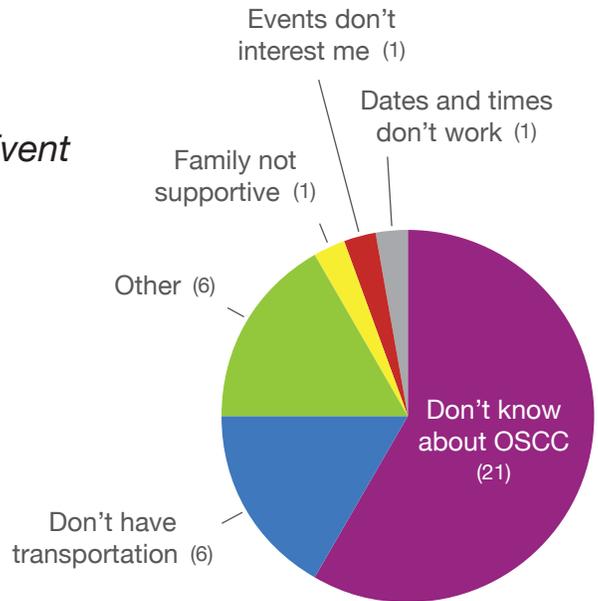
The following section outlines respondents' relationship with the OSCC and their participation in OSCC programs, services, and events.

OSCC Event Attendance



When asked if they had attended an OSCC program, service, or event, majority of respondents (55%) indicated that they had not attended any OSCC program, service, or event.

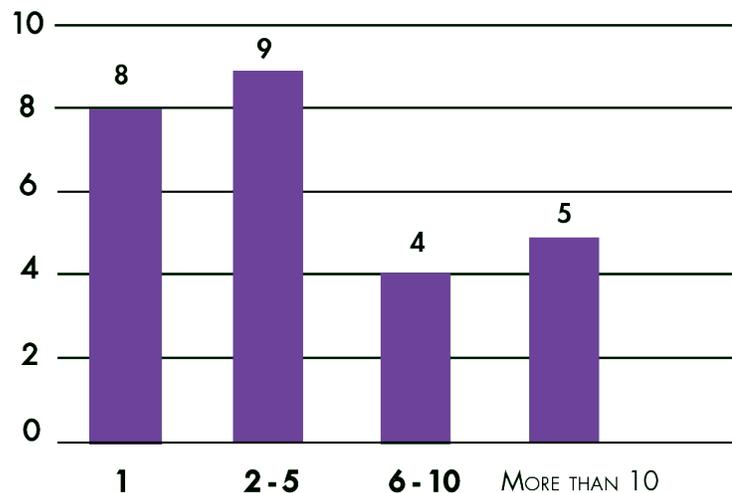
Reasons for Not Attending OSCC Event



In reference to the question above, respondents were asked to identify their reasons for not attending OSCC events. Most respondents (58%) indicated that they did not know about the OSCC or its services, events, and programs. A small portion of respondents (16%) indicated that they do not have transportation to attend OSCC services, events, and programs.

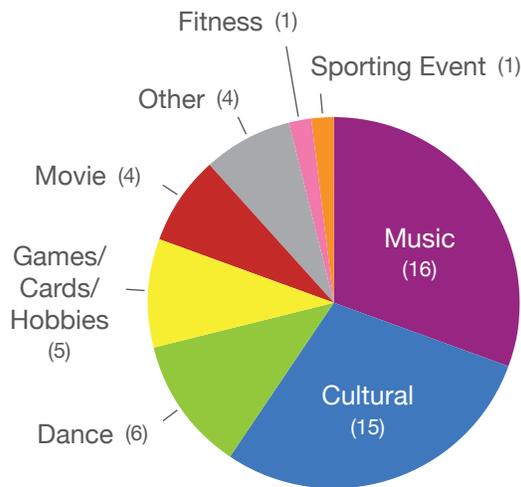
Number of OSCC Events/Programs/Services Attended

Respondents who had previously indicated that they had attended OSCC events, programs, and services were asked to specify how many OSCC events, programs, and services they had attended. The majority of respondents (65%) had attended OSCC events, programs and services five times or less.



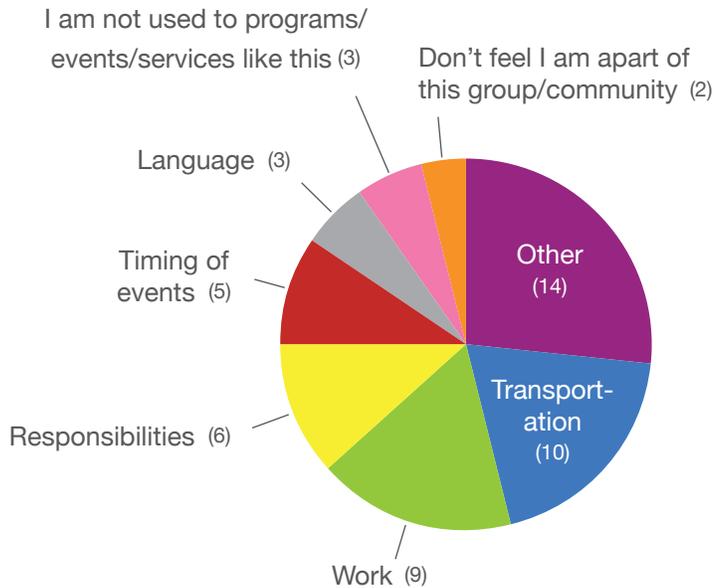
Types of Programs/ Events/Services Attended

Respondents who previously indicated that they had attended OSCC events, programs, and services were asked to categorize the type of event, program, or service. Respondents most frequently attended cultural or musical events, programs, and services. Fitness and/or sporting events, programs, and services were least attended.



All respondents indicated that they had enjoyed the OSCC event(s), program(s), and service(s) that they had attended.

Barriers to Attending OSCC Events



Respondents indicated that barriers to participation included lack of transportation and competing time commitments such as work or other responsibilities. Interestingly, most respondents used the “other” category to indicate a host of other barriers, including lack of knowledge about upcoming events and lack of awareness of OSCC events, programs, and services. Very few respondents indicated that factors such as familiarity, community belonging, or language, acted as barriers.



Brief Analysis of Respondent Participation

Some of the noteworthy data that has emerged from the second section of the survey includes:

- The survey was predominantly filled out by participants who do not attend OSCC programs, services or events. This impacted other survey responses, as these participants were unfamiliar with the OSCC or had no prior knowledge of its programs, services or events.
- OSCC should continue to provide cultural and musical events, programs and services. All respondents who have attended OSCC programs, services, or events reported enjoying them. This may be indicative of OSCC efforts to create a welcoming environment, design programs and services that are culturally relevant and attractive, and employ staff that are knowledgeable of the population and its needs.
- Barriers to attendance may stem from characteristics of the age group of 55-65, as several seniors in this age group may not have retired and/or have younger families and therefore more competing time commitments.

Recommendations From Respondent Participation

2.1 Incorporate a communication strategy or awareness campaign into the broader Outreach and Engagement strategy to increase familiarity with OSCC services, events, and programs. The communication strategy may include the following:

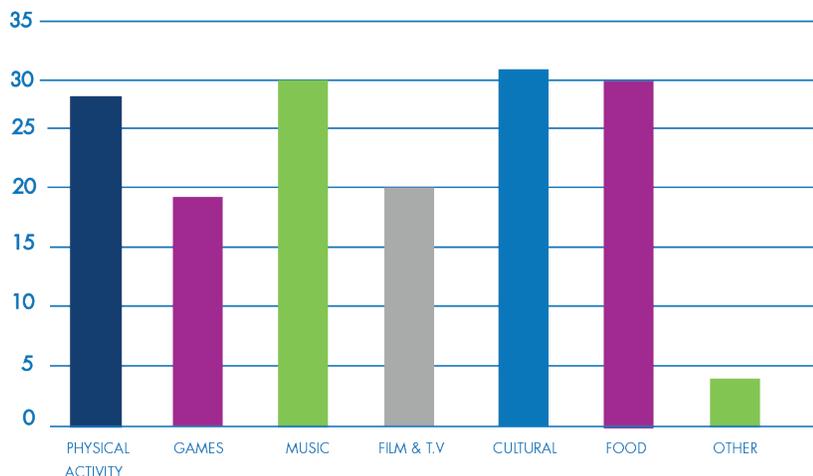
- Partnerships with other senior services or congregation points, such as religious or medical facilities, to increase awareness of services, programs, and events.
- Placing printed materials in high traffic areas frequented by this target population, such as in shopping malls or ethno-specific stores.
- Advertising services and upcoming events with culturally-specific media outlets, such as local or ethnic newspapers, radio shows, etc.

2.2 Considerations to minimize transportation barriers may be expanded to include reimbursement for public transportation or offering a “pick-up” service.



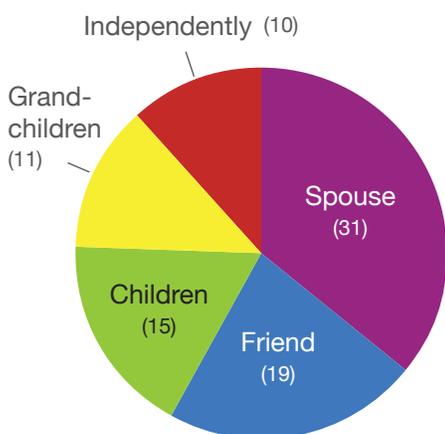
Respondent Participation in Leisure and Social Activities

The following section outlines respondent participation in personal leisure and social activities.



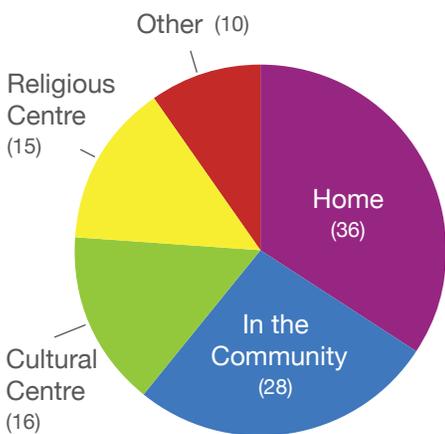
Types of Leisure Activities by Enjoyment

Respondents were asked to identify the leisure activities they enjoy. Their interests significantly ranged among food, cultural activities and music. Very few respondents felt that games and media were leisure activities that they enjoyed, which aligns with previous responses indicating a preference for more music and cultural events.



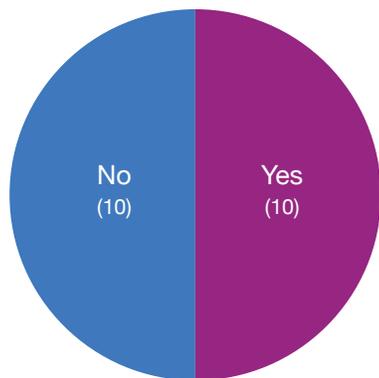
Group Participation in Leisure Activities

The majority of responses (76) indicated that respondents were accompanied during their leisure activities by either their family member or friend. Only 10 respondents indicated that they are unaccompanied during their leisure activities. The sharp contrast between the two sets of responses indicates most respondents have an existing network of friends or family, and that their friends and family members either share similar interests or are comfortable and available to participate in leisure activities.



Location of Leisure Activities

Respondents indicated that they attended leisure activities locally, mainly at home or throughout their community. Some also attended leisure activities at cultural or religious centres. This strongly suggests that respondents preferred locations that are familiar and accessible, which minimize their barriers to participation.



Missing Cultural Activities

There was an even split in responses to whether there are missing cultural or leisure activities within Durham Region.

For the following question, respondents were asked to list what activities they would like to see added in Durham Region. Responses varied with mentions of additional activities such as Eid celebrations.

Brief Analysis of Respondent Participation in Leisure and Social Activities

Some significant findings from this section include:

- Respondents enjoyed a wide variety of leisure and social activities. The higher portion of responses indicating a preference for activities such as music, food, or attending cultural events, are consistent with immigrant values around emphasizing and valuing cultural/religious traditions post-migration. (7)
- Since most respondents reside with family members, their social lives and access to leisure activities is somewhat contingent on others.
- The high number of respondents who access leisure and social activities from home was strongly indicative of their existing social networks and likely limited exposure or participation to community services and events that are outside their more immediate geographical neighbourhoods.

Recommendations from Respondent Participation in Leisure and Social Activities

3.1 Partnerships with other organizations or informal social groups may enable more family-centred events, programs, and services:

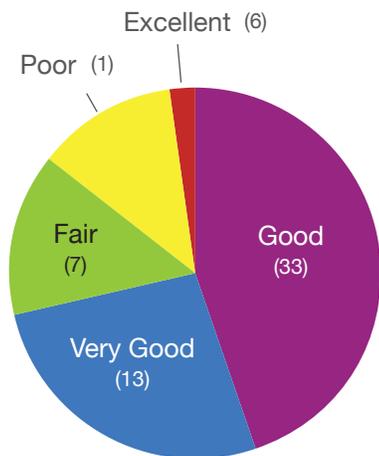
- Community outreach should clearly indicate that families are welcome at certain events, programs, and services.

3.2 Additional individual follow-up and/or a group community mapping exercise would allow for respondents:

- to better explain their definition of “in the community.” This information may be incorporated in the outreach strategy as possible outreach venues;
- to better list what leisure activities are taking place within the home, and determine what factors can be replicated in services, events, and programs to ensure that participants feel “at home”;
- to indicate what, if any, non-essential “at home” services can support some seniors in slowly transitioning to more OSCC-based programs, services, and events.
- Closer review of the activities that respondents feel are missing, as well as an internal review of existing resources/funding allocations, may provide opportunities to plan future events and celebrations.

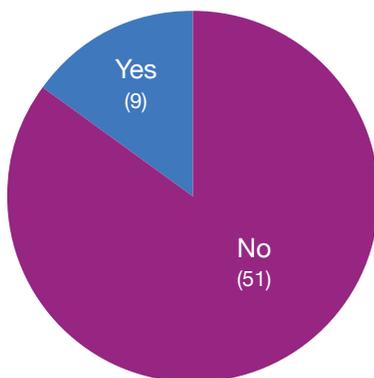
Health and Wellbeing

The following section of the survey briefly explored the overall health of South Asian Seniors.



Health of Senior Citizens

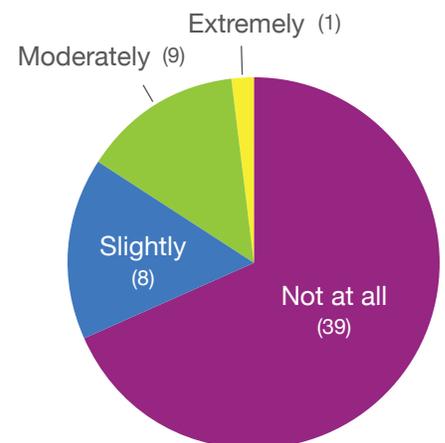
Respondents were asked to self-report on their overall health. Most respondents (46) felt that their health was either very good or good, with a small numbers of respondents indicating that their health was excellent, fair, or poor.



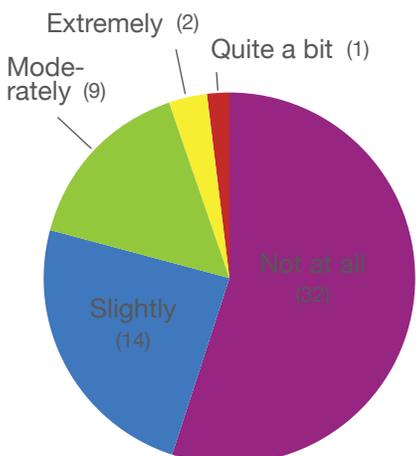
Help of a Support Worker/Family Member

Majority of respondents (51) indicated that they do not require the help of a support worker or family member to participate in OSCC services, programs, and events.

Emotional Interference with Social Activities



Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which emotional problems interfered with their normal social activities over the past 4 weeks. Majority indicated that they did not experience any recent emotional interference.



Physical Health Interference

Majority of respondents (46) indicated that their physical health does not or slightly interferes with their daily lives and schedules. Only a few respondents indicated any interference in their daily lives and schedules due to their physical health.

Brief Analysis of Respondent Health and Wellbeing

Some considerations from this section include:

- In summary, most respondents' participation in social and cultural events were not limited by their physical or emotional health.
- The data indicates that factors such as lack of knowledge about OSCC programs, services, and events play a more significant role in South Asian senior participation in comparison to respondent emotional and physical health and wellbeing. It may be important to note that a larger survey sample may have yielded greater variance in responses, particularly with representation from higher age brackets. Additionally, individual definitions of "health" are strongly influenced by culture and is often seen as a comparison to peer cohorts; there is no universally accepted definition of good or poor health. Similarly, some of the terminology used in developing the survey, such as "help", "support", and "emotional interference" may be viewed through a cultural context that may impact responses.
- Additionally, this survey sample may be unique in that they predominantly live with family and may not experience acute loneliness or social isolation. This in turn may positively impact their physical and emotional health.

Recommendations from Respondent Health and Wellbeing

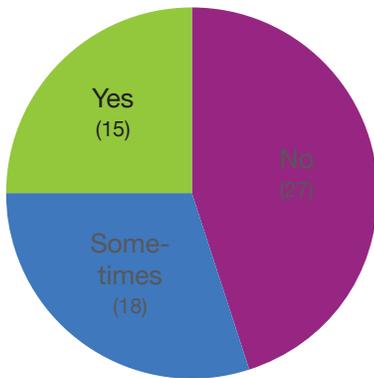
- 4.1 Further engagement with target population should include a greater understanding of cultural definitions of health and wellbeing, and how they are translated into English or into other languages. For example, asking respondents about specific health issues may generate better understanding of medical or mobility limitations. More in-depth individual or group discussion on the relationship between their health and family or worker support may further data.
- 4.2 Host group or individual discussions on how physical health interferes with senior daily lives and schedules, whether respondents have had to shift or change their routines to meet their responsibilities, and what factors would minimize or support these shifts could assist program planning and outreach efforts.



Volunteerism

The final section of the survey considers respondent relationship to volunteerism.

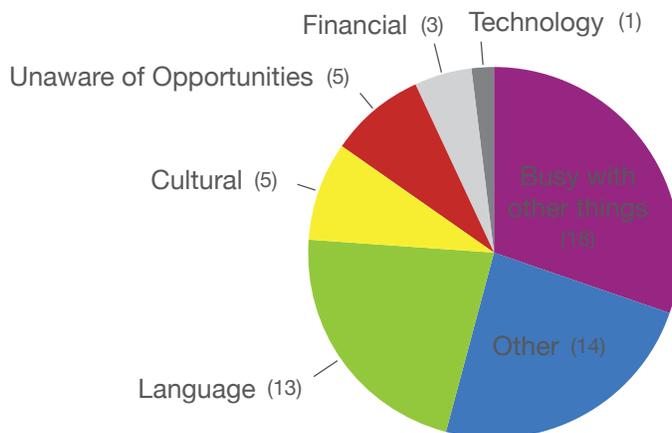
Volunteering in the Community



Responses were fairly split between respondents who indicated that they do not volunteer, those that volunteer more frequently, and those that sometimes volunteer.

In response to the following open-ended question about volunteer venues, common responses included mosques, food banks, and hospitals.

Respondents were also asked about the benefits of volunteering. Responses included feeling connected to their communities, keeping busy, and that it was gratifying. Volunteering allowed respondents to purposefully engage in community events and helped them socialize with other South Asian seniors.



Barriers to Volunteering

In response to an open-ended question on barriers to volunteering, respondents stated that barriers included language, a lack of information, and conflicts with existing time commitments. These responses align with previous responses, with a majority of respondents indicating that they were busy with other things and that language was a significant barrier.

Brief Analysis of Respondent Volunteerism

It is important to note that similar to definitions of health and wellbeing, there are significant cultural nuances to the understanding and importance of volunteerism. These nuances may have influenced responses to the survey questions. For example, certain activities, such as creating and distributing food to poorer community members, may be seen as a cultural or religious obligation and not fit the Canadian definition of “volunteerism” even if it occurs regularly through non-profit entities.

Recommendations from Respondent Volunteerism

- 5.1 Planned individual follow-up or group discussions may consider cultural nuances in developing volunteer opportunities.
- 5.2 Opportunities to volunteer in other languages, a mixture of long-term and short-term opportunities, and different volunteering time slots may be well-received by this population.

Conclusion

The overarching goal of this report is to better understand the increasing South Asian senior population in Oshawa. This report provides some basic demographic information on these seniors, and briefly explores their relationship and knowledge of the OSCC and its programs, services and events. It also delves into their leisure and social activities, overall wellness, and volunteer habits. The information and recommendations provided may be useful in developing outreach and engagement strategies in program design and development.

The recommendations in this report reflect two basic concepts: firstly, that more research and discussion is needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the community and its needs; and secondly, that the South Asian seniors' community must be actively and intentionally engaged in developing their programming. For example, one question for exploration might be what other age groups may need to be targeted to ensure seniors can fully participate. The findings of the survey strongly suggest that outreach to South Asian seniors may need to be accompanied by outreach to their adult children, as many of the households are multi-generational.

Perhaps the most striking survey finding is that the survey respondents are all immigrants who live mostly with family and friends, and already have established social networks; this is not a population that is predominantly experiencing social isolation. Additionally, most respondents reported that they attended leisure and social activities with friends or family, and many of them displayed a strong preference for cultural leisure activities with music and food. However, almost half of them were unfamiliar with OSCC and its programs, services, and events.

Creating avenues for the population to participate in OSCC programs, services, and events is an iterative process that will need to address disconnection between the seniors' social lives and what the OSCC offers.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1.1 Develop specific outreach and engagement strategies that are geared towards the diverse lived experiences of South Asian seniors, with careful consideration of concurrently engaging adult children/caregivers.
- 1.2 Explore further understanding of the senior immigrant experience, with an emphasis on senior expectations pre- and post-migration.
- 2.1 Incorporate a communication strategy or awareness campaign into the broader outreach and engagement strategy to increase familiarity with OSCC services, events, and programs through targeted partnerships with other South Asian senior congregation venues
- 2.2 Minimize transportation barriers by providing public transportation tokens/tickets or offering a "pick-up" service.
- 3.1 Develop partnerships with other organizations or informal social groups may enable more family-centred events, programs, and services.
- 3.2 Host group community mapping exercise to explore what services and amenities are locally available, what leisure activities are taking place at home, and which "at home" services can support some seniors in slowly transitioning to more OSCC-based programs, services, and events.
- 4.1 Further engage with target population, through in-depth individual or group discussion, to better understand cultural definitions of health and wellbeing and how they impact participation in OSCC programs, services, and events.
- 5.1 Develop and plan both long-term and short-term volunteer opportunities, with considerations for volunteering in other languages and various time slot options.

Notes

1. Statistics Canada. 2007. Oshawa, Ontario (Code 532) (table). 2006 Community Profiles. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007
2. Durham Region Health Department, Health Statistics Reports (2019). Population at a Glance 2018. Retrieved from Durham Region Health Department website: <https://www.durham.ca/en/health-and-wellness/resources/Documents/HealthInformationServices/HealthStatisticsReports/Population-at-a-Glance.pdf>
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4. Ibid.
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