

# Neighbourly Environments of the Canadian and Foreign-Born<sup>1</sup>

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September 11, 2015

## ABSTRACT

Using a pooled sample of approximately 38,000 respondents drawn from the Canadian General Social Surveys of 2010 and 2012, this study examined differences in the reporting of neighbourly environments in the community of residence by Canadian-born and foreign-born individuals. An eight-fold exploratory typology based on impressions of neighbours, social contact and help exchanges was developed which examined those living in positive and/or negative neighbourly environments. This study also examined how immigration related markers, such as socio-demographic and residential characteristics of survey respondents, were associated with reporting of positive and negative neighbourly environments. The data revealed important variations in the reporting of these environments by immigrant status and length of residence in Canada. Negative environments with low neighbourly interaction were more frequently reported by foreign-born, particularly recent immigrants. Targeted programs aimed at fostering neighbourly interactions could promote civic participation in groups living in less positive environments.

## INTRODUCTION

For both immigrants and Canadian-born residents, neighbours are important agents of civic integration within local communities. Good neighbours enhance an individuals' sense of safety, security, and health, while potentially improving access to goods and services (Unger and Wandersman, 1985; Brown et. al. 2009; Gray, 2009). Neighbours can also watch and monitor living environments, provide valuable information, assist in development of language and cultural skills, and enhance living environments. For recent immigrants, in particular, neighbours may be vital to survival during initial settlement, as they create support systems, networks and sources of help.

The concept of a neighbourly environment refers to the social context and climate of prevailing attitudes and interactions established with neighbours in the community of residence (Martinez.et.al, 1991). Individuals who

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<sup>1</sup> Paper to be presented to the 2016 Canadian Population Society Meetings.

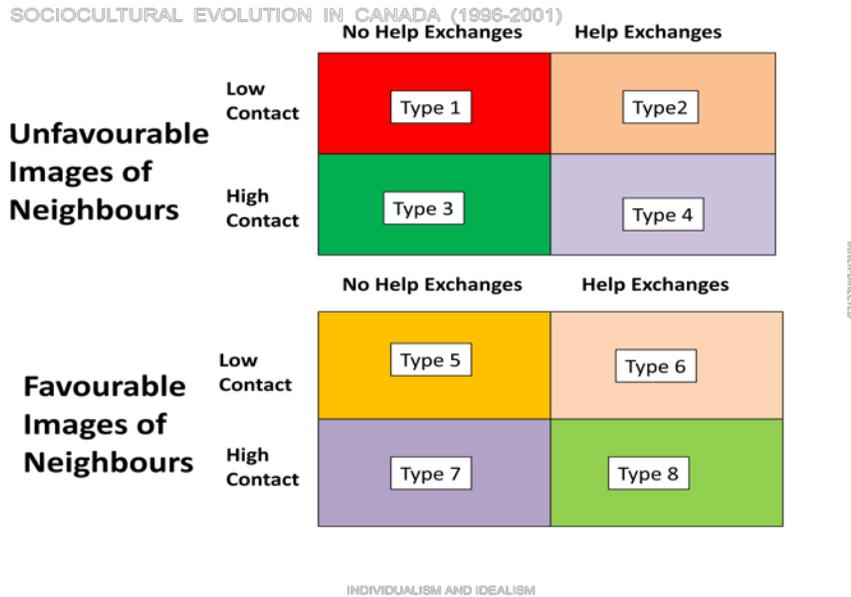
view their neighbours more positively and frequently interact with them are likely to achieve higher levels of civic integration, social cohesion and social capital than those who do not (Bourdieu, 1986; Bridge, 2002; Van Oorshot et.al, 2006). Bonding with other community residents is established on the principles of mutual trust, reciprocity, and solidarity (Worley, 2005). Conversely, individuals who live in "hostile" neighbourly environments are likely to disengage with neighbors and abstain from participation in any complex interpersonal exchanges (Korte, 1988, Lancee and Dronkers, 2011; Wong, 2003; Stolle et al, 2008). In Canada, there is some concern that recent immigrants and visible and religious minorities may frequently establish themselves in unwelcoming neighbourly environments. The lively social policy debate over the limits of "reasonable accommodation" for minorities reflects this preoccupation regarding the present state of civic integration and adjustment to communal life (Kymlicka, 2007).

What are the major attitudinal and behavioural domains which have to be considered in a study of neighbourly environments? The first domain explains how positive and/or negative images that individuals have of neighbours defines the way individuals relate with fellow community residents (Unger and Wanderman, 1985). These images generate various cognitions and emotions which are hard to quantify but are critical to developing a sense of cohesiveness among residents. Secondly, the level of social contact that individuals establish with their neighbours is a vital constituent of the neighbourly environment (Oliver and Wong, 2005). This contact includes the sharing of daily activities through formal and informal encounters, visits, social events and causal friendships (Beatley and Manning, 1997). A third behavioural domain is the participation in exchanges of help with neighbours. These exchanges of help have often been studied under the guise of "informal" volunteering (Taniguchi, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Helping activities with neighbours may take different forms such as working at someone's home, providing health-related care, shopping, driving someone to a store or appointment and assisting neighbours in other ways (Statistics Canada 2009; CCSD, 2005).

When the three neighbourly environment domains cited in the literature are measured empirically at a basic dichotomous level (no, yes), eight possible environment types may be anticipated (see Chart 1). According to this basic typology, the *most negative* of all neighbourly environments is **Type 1**. In a **Type 1** environment individuals have unfavourable images of neighbours, minimal social contact with them and do not participate in any exchanges of help. In a **Type 2** environment, despite unfavourable perceptions and decreased social contact, neighbours may engage in giving and receiving help. Residents in **Type 3** environments are interesting to study because, despite a higher contact level with neighbours, individuals decide not to participate in any help exchanges with neighbours in contrast with **Type 4** where individuals would choose to do so. In **Type 5 and 6** environments, climates with low social contact differ only in terms of participation in help exchanges. In a **Type 7** environment, individuals withdraw from any exchanges of help despite holding favourable images of neighbours and reporting high levels of social contact. The *most positive* of all neighbourhood environments is **Type 8**. Here, individuals view their neighbours favourably, have social contact, and participate in bi-directional

exchanges of help (giving and receiving help).

**Chart 1: Typology of Neighbourly Environments**



What types of neighbourly environments are most likely to be reported by various neighbourhood groups? Will there be a difference between responses reported by Canadian resident and foreign born residents? It is suspected that there would be some over-representation of environmental reporting of **Types 5, 6, 7 and 8** among Canadian-born and established immigrants compared to recent immigrants. Given that recent immigrants have resided in communities for less time and face greater challenges such as cultural and language barriers, it was expected that residence in environment **Types 1,2,3 and 4** would be the most frequently reported. It was also expected also that several socio-demographic and residential characteristics of individuals would impact the reporting rates of neighbourly environments but the precise direction of these is unclear. Using a sample drawn from the *General Social Survey*, the purpose of this paper is to determine the prevalence in the reporting of eight neighbourly environments across Canadian-born and immigrant sub-populations while examining the associations between socio-demographic and residential characteristics of individuals in different neighbourhood environments.

## DATA AND MEASURES

The data for this analysis is drawn from a pooled sample of the 2010 and 2012 *General Social Surveys* (GSS 2010 and 2012, (Cycles 24 and 26 respectively). *General Social Surveys* provide important information about attitudinal and behavioural aspects related to neighbourhood life. Pooling respondents from the two GSS surveys offered important analytical advantages for the study of neighbourly environments reported by the Canadian and foreign-born residents. A larger sample size contributes to a larger minority population counts, which helps to increase levels of confidence in point estimates and decrease standard errors of population parameters. Merging

the 2010 and 2012 datasets produced a pooled dataset containing 38,006 individuals representing a weighted average population of approximately 28 million adult Canadians.<sup>2</sup> The composition of the sample was as follows: Canadian-born (82.0%), foreign-born with 20+ years residence (10.4%), foreign-born with 10-19 years residence (3.9%), foreign-born with 5-9 years of residence (1.8%) and foreign-born with less than 5 years residence (1.8%).

Three domains of neighbourly environments were measured by the following GSS questions: 1) Would you say this neighbourhood is a place where neighbours help each other? (coding: 0=no, 1=yes); 2) Would you say that you know most, many, a few or none of the people in your neighbourhood? (coding; 0=knows no neighbours or a few neighbours, 1=knows many or most neighbours); 3) In the past month, have you done a favour for a neighbour or had one done for you? (coding: 0=no, 1=yes); Answers to these questions were used to classify GSS 2010 and 2012 respondents into a basic eight-fold typology of environmental reporting.

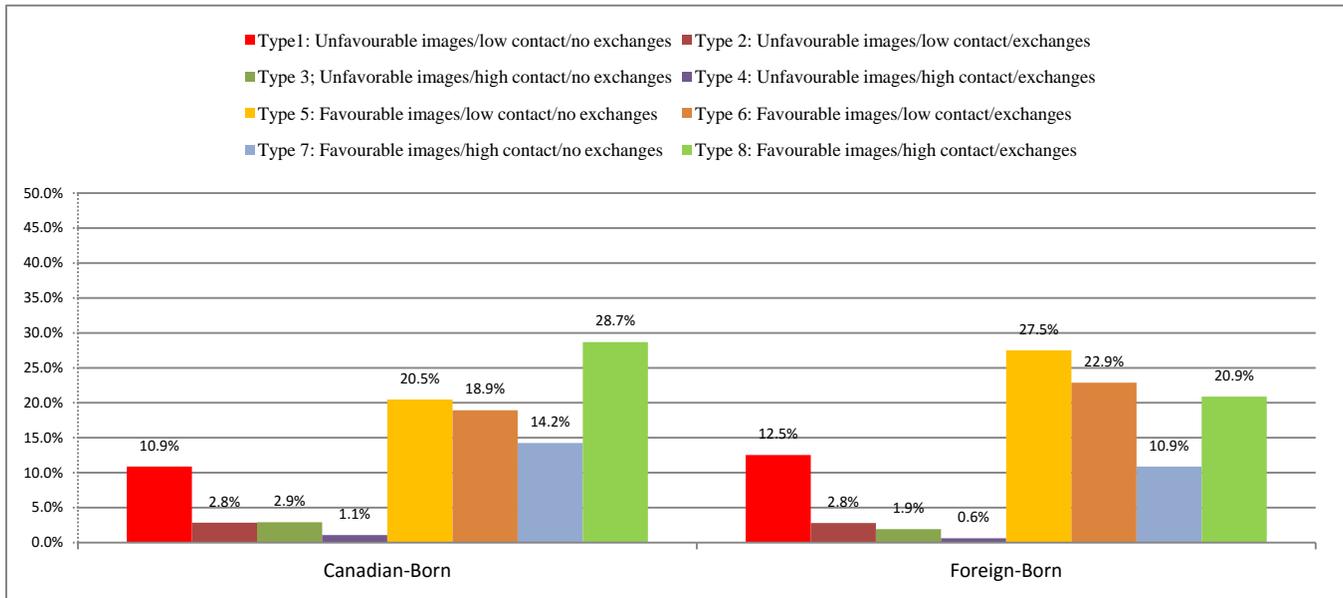
## FINDINGS

Regardless of immigrant status, adult Canadians viewed their neighbourhood environments in a favourable way. Four out of five Canadian-born and foreign born residents (82% and 81% respectively) described their neighbours as helpful. There were differences however, in the levels of social contact, and participation in help exchanges with neighbours. About 45% of the Canadian-born knew many or most neighbours in their neighbourhoods compared to only 32% reported among the foreign-born residents ( $t=-15.98, p<.01$ ). Similarly, 50% of the Canadian-born had participated in exchanges of help with their neighbours in the last month compared to 45% of the immigrant respondents ( $t=-5.24, p<.01$ ).

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<sup>2</sup> Merging the datasets required a thorough examination of the content, coverage and mode of data collection in surveys (Thomas and Wanell, 2009). In terms of weighting strategies, Wendt's proposal is of merging the datasets and dividing the global person weight by the number of cycles (two in this case) is followed here (Wendt, 2007). This new global weight in combination with 500 bootstrap weights were used in the multivariate analysis of the data.

**Chart 2: Neighbourly Environmental Types (%): Canadian-born and Foreign-born**



Source: 2010 and 2012 General Social Surveys

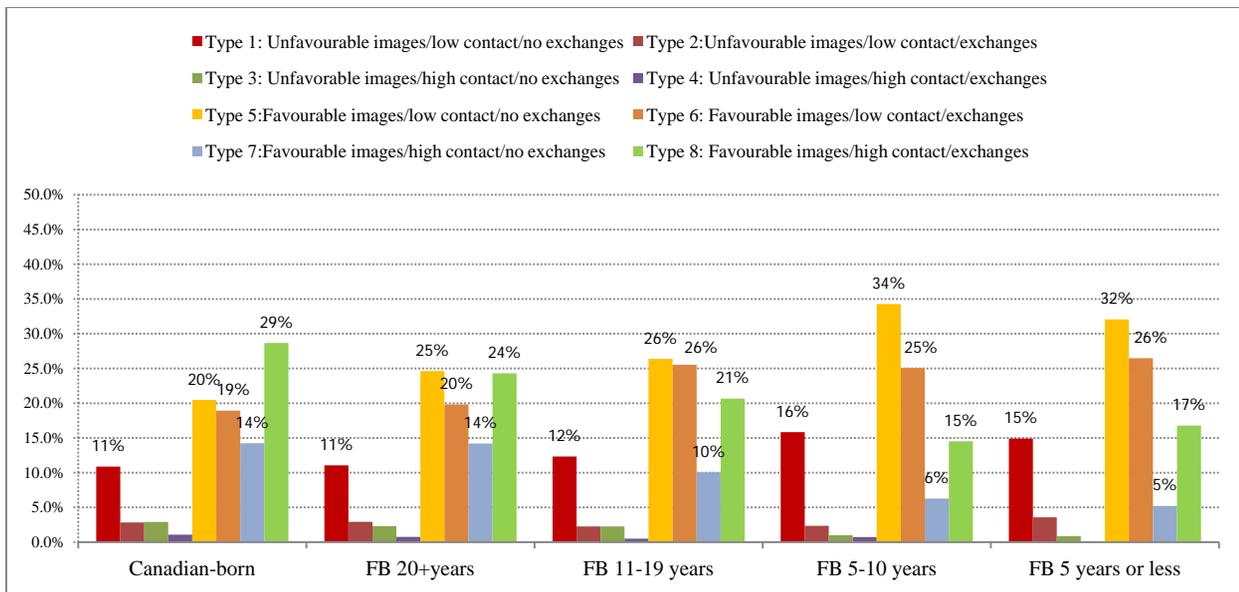
**Chart 2** presents the distribution of the eight environmental types reported by Canadian and foreign-born residents in the 2010 and 2012 GSS. Differences between these two groups were found to be statistically significant with the exception of environment **Type 2**, ( $t = -.24, p > .05$ ). While 29% of Canadian-born respondents reported they reside in the most positive environment, **Type 8**, only 21% of foreign-born residents believed as such. Immigrants most commonly reported living in a **Type 5** (favourable images, low contact, no help exchanges) or **Type 6** environment (favourable images, low contact, and help exchanges). The latter environments accounted for almost half (49%) of all types reported by the foreign-born population compared to 39% among the Canadian-born. There was also a slightly higher proportion of foreign born-reporting residing in the most negative environment **Type 1** (13%) compared to the Canadian-born (11%). For both Canadian and foreign-born groups, environmental **Types 2 to 4** were the not frequently reported (less than 3% each). The GSS data also suggests that in spite of favourable views and high contact with neighbours, approximately one in ten individuals in their respective populations, did not participate in help exchanges with their neighbours (**Type 7**, 14% and 11% respectively).

Further data probing revealed that women of visible minority were the highest reporters of a Type 1 environment (18%). These women were foreign-born, spoke neither French nor English, and had resided in Canada for 5-10 years (16% respectively). Higher rates of reporting residence in neighbourly environment **Type 5** was found among foreign-born whose home language was other than English or French (35%) and among those immigrants whose length of residence was either 5-10 years and/or less than 5 years in Canada (34% and 32% respectively). With respect to the most positive environment, **Type 8**, the highest rates of this reporting were found among

Canadian-born 35-64 (32%). Those individuals had spoken English as their first language and/or belonged to Christian religious denominations (30% each).

The group with the highest reporting of negative environments, **Type 1**, were Canadian and foreign-born residents residing in the province of Quebec (15% and 21% respectively), and the foreign-born residents of British Columbia (17%). Environment **Type 1** reporting rates for both Canadian and foreign-born living in large cities (CMAs) were found to be twice as high when compared to those living in non CMA areas (12% to 5%). The group with the highest reporting rate of the most positive environment, **Type 8**, was found among both Canadian and foreign-born individuals residing in non CMA areas (41% and 36% respectively). These initial findings suggest that residential characteristics of respondents play a major role in the reporting of experience in neighbourly environments.

**Chart 3: Environmental Types (%) by Immigrant Status and Length of Residence**



Symbols: FB=Foreign-born

In the next phase of analysis, logistic regressions used binary (0,1) dependent variables such as membership in one of eight environmental types to explore selected variables related to immigration-related markers, residential and socio-demographic characteristics of respondents<sup>3</sup>. Of special interest was to determine if the effects of

<sup>3</sup> Variance parameter estimates (balance repeated replicates or BRR) of logistic regressions were obtained using the new person weight in combination with 500 bootstrap weights which were provided in micro-data files taking into account the survey design and estimate the variances of the effects. Estimates for memberships in environmental type 4 could not be calculated due to insufficient counts in the sample data

immigrant status and length of residence disappeared after the introduction of other statistical controls. The predictors used were as follows:

*Immigrant Status/Length of Residence:* These comprised four dummy variables (0,1) representing the following categories: immigrants with 20 years or more of residence, immigrants with 11-19 years of residence, immigrants with 5-10 years of residence and immigrants with less than 5 years residence. Reference category: Canadian-born

*Visible Minority status:* A dummy variable measuring whether the respondent reported belonging to a visible minority group was used (0=no, 1=yes). Reference category: non- visible minority

*Home Language Group:* Two dummy variables (0, 1) measuring whether respondent's home language was French or Other. Reference category: English

*Non-Christian Religious Affiliation:* Two dummy variables (0, 1) representing whether the respondent's religious affiliation was non-religion and other: Reference group: Christian affiliation

*Large Urban Centre Residence:* One dummy variable (0, 1) represented residence in a large urban centre (CMA). Reference category: residence is a small city, town or rural area

*Female:* A dummy variable measuring whether the respondent said he/she was female was used (0=no, 1=yes).

*Age Groups:* Age effects were measured by four dummy variables: 35-44 years old, 45-64 years old, and 65+ years old. Reference category: 15-34 years old

*Marital Status:* Two dummies represented single and other marital status. Reference category: married or common law status

*Young Children (under 14) in household:* A dummy predictor was also used to represent this presence (0=no, 1=yes)

*Work status:* Two dummies representing student and other status in the labour force were used. Reference category: full or part time work

*Education Level:* Three dummy variables representing high school diploma, college and some university, and post-secondary university. Reference category: no high school diploma

*GSS Cycle:* One dummy variable represented the cycle effect of the GSS 2012 period of observation: Reference category: GSS 2010 period

Results from logistic regressions (odds ratios) predicting memberships in the environmental categories are presented in **Table 1**. With respect to the most negative environment, **Type 1**, the GSS data suggests that, net from other predictors, residents of CMA areas were most likely to report living in this type of environment compared to those who did not (OR=2.61,  $p<.01$ ). Higher propensities were also observed for those immigrants who had resided in Canada for between 5-9 years, those whose home language was French, those who reported no religious affiliations and/or had a marital status other than married or single. Women were also more likely to report residence in this type of environment than men (OR=1.19,  $p<.01$ ). The enhancing effects of French as

home language (OR=1.37,  $p<.01$ ) and CMA residence (OR=2.37,  $p<.01$ ) were also observed in the reporting of environmental **Type 2**. Logistic predictions of environmental **Type 3** suggests that, in addition, to the French home language effect (OR=1.33,  $p<.01$ ) being single was a key characteristic associated with residence in this type of environment (OR=1.60,  $p<.01$ ).

Logistic regression predictions of environmental **Types 5** through **8** were particularly informative about the environmental reporting propensities of both Canadian-born and foreign-born residents. As indicated previously, in all these environments favourable images of neighbours were the common pattern. Predictions of environment **Type 5** (low contact, no help exchanges) revealed that, net from other predictors, immigrants of different periods of residence in Canada said they resided in this type of environment when compared to the Canadian-born (OR's = or  $>1.38$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Other significant predictors included CMA residence, home languages other than English or French and single marital status. In the predictions of environment **Type 6** (low contact-help exchanges) it was found that there was a higher reporting propensity by recent immigrants of 5 years or less (OR=1.36,  $p<.01$ ), CMA residence as well as by those with higher levels of education and income. Additionally, individuals who had children under 14 living at home were found to be more likely to report this type of neighbourly environment (OR=1.12,  $p<.01$ ). Participation in help exchanges, thus, appears to be related to a variety of potential drivers which include immigration, SES and family cycle aspects. Predictions of environment **Type 7** suggest demographic factors at play: older individuals (65 years old and over) tend to report more frequently compared to younger ones (OR=1.90,  $p<.01$ ). Finally, predictions of the most positive environment **Type 8** reveal the lower propensities of immigrant groups to report residing in these types of environments and the higher propensities of older individuals (ORs= or  $>1.36$ ) and respondents with young children at home (OR=1.46,  $p<.01$ ) to do so as well.

**Table 1: Logistic Regressions Predicting Memberships in Environmental Types: Odds Ratios (ORs)**

Predictors	Type 1 Odds Ratios	Type 2 Odds Ratios	Type 3 Odds Ratios	Type 5 Odds Ratios	Type 6 Odds Ratios	Type 7 Odds Ratios	Type 8 Odds Ratios
<i>Immigrant Status/Lenght of Stay</i>							
FB 20+years	0.92 ns	1.11 ns	0.85 ns	1.38 **	0.98 ns	1.16 ns	0.78 **
FB 11-19 years	1.15 ns	0.73 ns	0.58 ns	1.40 **	1.20 ns	0.97 ns	0.65 **
FB 5-10 years	1.55 **	0.92 ns	0.38 *	2.08 **	1.20 ns	0.62 ns	0.34 **
FB 5 years or l	1.37 ns	1.27 ns	0.26 ns	1.73 **	1.36 *	0.48 **	0.50 **
<i>Visible Minority Status</i>							
Yes	1.08 ns	0.79 ns	1.37 ns	0.81 *	1.05 ns	0.65 **	1.32 *
<i>Home Language</i>							
French	1.43 **	1.37 **	1.33 *	1.07 ns	0.98 ns	1.02 ns	0.69 **
Other	1.08 ns	0.89 ns	1.42 ns	1.16 *	0.99 ns	0.90 ns	0.82 **
<i>Religious Affiliation</i>							
Non Christian	1.00 ns	1.17 ns	0.73 ns	0.99 ns	1.01 ns	0.97 ns	1.04 ns
No religion	1.31 **	1.33 **	0.83 ns	1.11 ns	1.05 ns	0.86 **	0.82 **
<i>Large City Resident</i>							
Yes	2.61 **	2.37 **	0.73 *	2.00 **	1.88 **	0.49 **	0.46 **
<i>Gender</i>							
female	1.19 **	0.94 ns	1.00 ns	1.06 ns	0.83 **	1.05 ns	1.00 ns
<i>Age Groups</i>							
35-64	0.80 **	0.72 *	1.49 **	0.78 **	0.87 *	1.36 **	1.35 **
65+	0.69 **	0.63 *	1.17 ns	0.79 **	0.77 **	1.90 **	1.33 **
<i>Children Under 14 at home</i>							
Yes	0.67 **	1.28 ns	0.72 *	0.70 **	1.12 *	0.96 ns	1.46 **
<i>Marital Status</i>							
Single	1.21 *	0.72 ns	1.60 **	1.13 *	0.67 **	1.31 **	0.92 ns
Other	1.43 **	1.32 *	1.14 ns	1.15 **	1.01 ns	0.83 **	0.76 **
<i>Work Status</i>							
Student	0.61 **	1.03 ns	0.46 **	0.97 ns	0.89 ns	1.31 *	1.15 ns
Other	1.12 ns	1.06 ns	0.97 ns	1.03 ns	0.86 **	1.04 ns	0.99 ns
<i>Education Level</i>							
High school dip	0.84 ns	1.26 ns	0.71 *	0.91 ns	1.18 *	1.01 ns	1.10 ns
University/colle	0.91 ns	1.10 ns	0.83 ns	0.92 ns	1.28 **	0.78 **	1.12 ns
Post-secondary	0.97 ns	1.27 ns	0.81 ns	0.92 ns	1.28 **	0.75 **	1.09 ns
<i>Income Level</i>							
11-30K	1.11 ns	1.12 ns	0.85 ns	1.12 ns	1.03 ns	0.85 *	0.91 ns
31-80K	0.89 ns	1.14 ns	0.58 **	1.10 ns	1.21 **	0.82 **	0.98 ns
80+K	0.68 **	1.19 ns	0.47 **	0.99 ns	1.21 **	0.64 **	1.31 **
<i>2012 GSS Cycle</i>							
Yes	0.95 ns	0.92 ns	1.04 ns	1.25 **	0.93 ns	1.26 **	0.79 **
Regression F	13.89 **	3.25 **	4.52 **	16.95 **	15.97 ns	21.03 **	33.79 **
N Replications	500	500	500	500	500	500	500

\*=significant OR at the p<.05 level, \*\*=significant OR at the p<.01 level

Symbols: **Type 1:** Unfavourable images/low social contact/no help exchanges; **Type 2:** Unfavourable images/low social contact/ help exchanges; **Type 3:** Unfavorable images/high social contact/no help exchanges; **Type 4:** Unfavourable images/high social contact/ help exchanges; **Type 5:** Favourable images/low social contact/no help exchanges; **Type 6:** Favourable images/low social contact/ help exchanges; **Type 7:** Favourable images/high social contact/no help exchanges; **Type 8:** Favourable images/high social contact/help exchanges.

## DISCUSSION

This study looked at the neighbourly environments in the community of residence reported by the Canadian and foreign-born residents during 2010-2012. Some shortcomings in the data used for this analysis should be noted.

The pooled sample included limited numbers of immigrants with short periods of residence in the country (less than 10 years of residence) and this may have had an impact on the reliability of their reported rates of giving and receiving help from neighbours. Information collected was limited to a one month period of observation previous to the GSS surveys of 2010 and 2012. By nature, neighbourly environments are dynamic, and the picture provided here is a static one. Some conceptual considerations are also worthwhile mentioning. The environmental typology used has oversimplified the complex nature of neighbourly environments. As no relational data was present in the GSS data, it was not possible to determine the kind of neighbours being appraised and/or neighbourly behaviour was being experienced.

The main story which emerges from the analysis of the GSS data reveals noticeable differences between Canadian-born and foreign-born residents in their appraisals of their neighbourly environments. For the Canadian-born, the most positive environment **Type 8** was the most frequently reported, yet the foreign-born residents, more than half reported living in **Type 5 or 6** environments. Logistic regressions revealed that the effect of immigrant status and length of residence did not disappear in the prediction of the reporting of environment **Type 6**. The data also suggests that greater involvement with neighbours is related to life cycle (age, presence of younger children) and that SES related factors such as education and income, were common for those who reported a **Type 6 or 7** environment. Changes in the positions of the life cycle and socio-economic social status can have impact on relations established with neighbours over time.

Somewhat higher propensities to report residence in the most negative environment **Type 1** were detected for immigrant groups, particularly for those residing 5-9 years in Canada, CMA area residents, who had French as their home language and/who were visible minority women. These groups may be experiencing the greatest challenges in terms of civic integration to their community milieus. Negative experiences with neighbours, lack of access to social networks and other barriers may contribute to missing out on an important opportunity to create strong bonds with fellow neighbours. To increase the local civic engagement of these groups, provincial, and federal programs should devise initiatives that foster frequent interactions with neighbours and create more welcoming images which depict a prejudice-free environment.

More research on how individuals appraise their neighbourly environments is needed to determine what groups have the greatest need for interventions. This may be particularly pressing in view that social disengagement with the community is at stake if the process of civic participation in the community is hampered by the nature of the neighbourly environment. Social policy developers should identify culturally appropriate mechanisms for strengthening community bonds with neighbours and providing opportunities to know each other, share communal life and reduce personal, family and social isolation.

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