

Living in between: A narrative inquiry of 1.5 generation Iranians' experiences of belonging and mental well-being in a transnational context

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Abstract

Forging belonging is a particularly complex experience for those who migrate before adulthood, or the 1.5 generation. The sentiments of, and oscillation between, being “neither here nor there,” commonly attributed to their relationship to the home and host countries, can lead to isolation, itself a driver of poor mental health. This oscillation may be more pronounced for 1.5 generation Iranians whose “in-between” state can further distance them from the homeland, due to their limited bonds and memories of it, and from the host land, in which they are perceived to be outsiders due to negative public images and turbulent political relationships between Iran and host lands. This particular position impacts the ways in which transnational connections with the homeland can be established, interrupted or re-routed for 1.5 generation Iranians. Recognizing the vitality of mental well-being to participation in society and the unique position of the 1.5 generation, this research explores how this generation experiences, navigates and forge belongingness.

This research examines two questions: first, what are the experiences of belonging of 1.5 generation Iranians currently living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and Istanbul, in a transnational context? Second, what is the relationship, if any, of Iranian 1.5 generations' sense of belonging and their experience of mental well-being? An innovative arts-based method of life mapping, along with semi-structured interviews with adult participants in the GTA and Istanbul, will be used during the study. Life-maps allow a greater breadth of introspection, reflection and expression from participants by allowing them to convey important life events in an order they choose. Simultaneously, semi-structured interviews give participants the space to co-construct knowledge and demonstrate how they make sense of and experience home, belonging and mental well-being. This research highlights the role of transnational connections in influencing 1.5 generation Iranians' ways of belonging and, in turn, their perceived mental well-being. Contributing to the emerging field of Iranian diasporic studies, this project considers exclusively the experience of 1.5 generation Iranians in both the Global “North” (Toronto) and the Global “South” (Istanbul). This timely research will provide insight on how events such as current uprisings in Iran might influence transnational connections, belonging and wellbeing, providing insight that can significantly impact the wellbeing and future success of immigrant youth.

Biography

Shiva Mazrouei is a PhD candidate in the Health, Aging and Society Department at McMaster University. She is interested in exploring 1.5 generation Iranians' transnational conceptualization of belonging and its potential connectedness to place, emotions and mental well-being. Shiva

completed her Master of Arts at McGill University and Sciences Po in Political Science, with a specialization in International Development Studies. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Middle East Studies from McGill University. A lifelong learner and educator, Shiva has also carried out national research on made-vulnerable women's access to the labour market with YWCA Canada, and researched, designed and facilitated various trainings focused on improving workforce access for marginalized groups.