

Research Insight



Analyzing Access to Opportunities, Sociodemographic Differences, and Impacts on Quality of Life in a Racialized Neighbourhood

A complete community aims to provide all residents access to essential services, opportunities, and diverse housing options regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. Building a complete community can be a valuable strategy to address inequality and promote greater equity and inclusion in Canada.

Scarborough, Ontario has a diverse population, and its poverty rates are high. Since housing is often considered unaffordable in complete neighbourhoods, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds such as:

- low-income,
- single parents who are women,
- people with disabilities,
- racial and ethnic populations,

are less likely to live in them. By focusing on Scarborough, we can learn more about these populations and their housing and neighbourhood needs. By measuring completeness across different neighbourhoods in Scarborough, this research examines different populations' access to services like stores, banks, and schools.

In this research, completeness is defined as having sufficient access to preferred amenity categories. Sufficient access/sufficiency is when a person has access to at least a minimum number (usually at least 1) of the amenities within that amenity category. A person would have higher completeness if they had sufficient access to the amenity categories they most preferred. In contrast, lower completeness indicates a greater disconnect between what a person desires access to versus the amenities they have sufficient access to. We also explore how access to these amenities impact residents' quality of life and well-being.

Research Questions

This project answers the following questions:

1. How do we define completeness? How is completeness related to quality of life?
2. How complete are Scarborough neighbourhoods? What's the level of accessibility?
3. How do different population groups define their preferences and their satisfaction with their neighbourhood?
4. What are the impacts of living in different neighbourhoods?
5. Are these impacts different for people?

Research Methods

This research used 4 research methods:

- **Literature review:** reviews academic and planning sources on complete neighbourhoods
- **Scarborough survey analysis:** contains 1,846 survey participants from Scarborough
- **Multimodal access analysis:** evaluate neighbourhood completeness and access to amenities
- **Focus groups:** 36 participants provided a greater understanding of their lived experiences in Scarborough

Key Findings

Literature review findings suggest that completeness is generally defined as communities or neighbourhoods where people can access services and amenities to meet their daily needs in a relatively short distance. The idea of a complete community has recently been related to community development and land use planning concepts, such as the 15-minute city (see Appendix A: Glossary for full definition).

Findings also suggest a relationship between completeness and improved quality of life. For example, some studies indicate that elements of a complete community, such as access to destinations and land-use mix, are likely to encourage transportation or recreational outdoor walking and physical activity, which can reduce the likelihood of chronic disease. Very little research exists on complete communities and racialized populations in Canada. To address some of the gaps in literature, **we highlight key findings from this research:**

Completeness scores were low:

- 27% of survey participants in Scarborough can access all 3 of their top 3 most preferred amenities by walking, and 40% can access them by transit.
- Survey participants rated restaurants and bars as being the most accessible amenities in their neighbourhood. Cultural facilities were considered the least accessible.

Access to amenities depends on where you live:

- Completeness scores were the lowest further away from major roads. They're commonly found near Scarborough's eastern border.
- The report found that higher completeness scores were closer to major roads and near the Western side of Scarborough.

Completeness scores and neighbourhood satisfaction are related:

- There was a clear relationship between completeness scores and neighbourhood satisfaction.
- Higher completeness scores had lower neighbourhood satisfaction.
- This suggests that other external factors, such as high noise levels and congestion, can play a role in neighbourhood satisfaction.

Findings from this study show that survey participants' choices for amenities didn't always match with the most accessible ones:

- The 2 most preferred amenities among survey participants were shops / grocery stores and healthcare facilities.
- Around half of survey participants didn't have sufficient walking access to their most preferred amenities.
- 35% of survey participants reported problems reaching the destination they need.
- More than half of survey participants found moving around the city unaffordable.

Focus group discussions also show differences in choices for urban amenities based on their life stages and living arrangements:

- Families with children prefer living next to a school.
- Older adults like living closer to healthcare facilities, places of worship, and grocery stores.
- For those who didn't drive, being close to transit stops was important.
- Areas with higher estimated accessibility measures showed positive self-reported health.
- Low perceived accessibility (how effective transportation systems are at allowing people to reach opportunities, including jobs, healthcare, education, and other key services or activities) was negatively associated with self-reported health.
- People living with a disability also reported poorer health.

Survey analysis shows differences by population groups:

- More than half the people who reported low life satisfaction and trust levels for people in general were women.
- 36% of immigrants said they had low levels of life satisfaction and 40% indicated low levels of trust.
- More than 60% of the 339 people who reported low life satisfaction belong to racialized populations.
- 40% of people living below the poverty line indicated low life satisfaction and trust levels.
- Most participants in the focus groups reported that their social life with their neighbours or within the neighbourhoods barely exists.

Dwelling type impacts social connections:

- Based on focus group discussions, multi-unit buildings helped build social connections.
- Some participants mentioned the importance of growing up with similar communities for the purposes of social support.
- Dwelling types, housing conditions, and affordability of housing had impacts on the quality of life.
- People living in single-detached homes report lower completeness scores and higher neighbourhood satisfaction than those living in apartments.

Some participants mentioned the impacts of housing conditions:

- Overcrowded housing negatively impacts quality of life and well-being.
- Participants also mentioned how indoor air quality and temperature impact their health.
- Many participants said unaffordability was the main barrier to moving out of units with poor housing conditions. They reported that a lack of choice of housing types made it even more difficult.

Some characteristics have negative impacts on neighbourhood conditions:

- High noise levels.
- High crime rates and drug activity.
- Congestion, increased density, and not enough infrastructure.

Future Research Opportunities

This research fills an important gap on the links between complete communities and quality of life in Scarborough. Complete communities may look different for different populations.

Findings from this study can support the creation of more complete and accessible communities based on demographic needs. One of the key findings from this study is that a complete community doesn't necessarily result in better quality of life. Other factors, including poor housing conditions, have a direct impact on peoples' well-being.

Also, people's preferences for amenities depend on their life stage. Understanding life stages within a particular neighbourhood can help determine what amenities residents prefer to improve their quality of life.

Future research would benefit from more analysis looking specifically at racialized populations and people with diverse abilities.

Full Report

Farber, S., Higgins, C., Tiznado-Aitken, I., Jamal, Shaila, Pedro Parga, J. (2024). Analyzing access to opportunities, sociodemographic differences, and impacts on quality of life in Scarborough, Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Scarborough.
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Appendix A: Glossary of Key Terms

- **15-minute city:** Urban planning concept that aims to have a city layout where daily necessities can be reached within a 15-minute trip. The concept usually focuses on the use of active transportation, such as walking or cycling, but sometimes includes public transit too.
- **accessibility:** how effective transportation systems are for reaching opportunities, including jobs, healthcare, education, and other key services or activities.
- **completeness:** Having sufficient access to preferred amenity categories. A person would have higher completeness if they had sufficient access to the amenity categories they preferred most.
- **complete neighbourhood:** A neighbourhood where people can access essential services to meet their daily needs within a short distance.
- **sufficiency:** A person has sufficient access to an amenity category if they have access to a minimum number of amenities within that category. Usually, the minimum is 1, but it can differ by type of amenity.
- **quality of life:** This concept captures the well-being of a population or individual at a specific point in time.

Appendix B: Additional Tables

	Low trust people in general level (1 to 2)	Low life satisfaction level (1 to 5)
Characteristic	N = 604 ¹	N = 339 ¹
Gender		
Female	329 (55%)	187 (56%)
Age		
Older adults	67 (11%)	16 (4.7%)
Status		
Immigrant	241 (40%)	122 (36%)
Race		
Visible minority	351 (58%)	209 (62%)
Indigenous	12 (2.0%)	8 (2.4%)
Income		
Household below LIM	242 (45%)	119 (40%)

¹n (%)

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