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Building Connected Communities: Reducing Loneliness and Social Isolation in Immigrants 65+ – September 2016 – Research Update

Sheridan Centre for Elder Research

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Research Project

The Centre has received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), to explore strategies to effectively reach and support immigrants age 65+ who may be experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation.

Phase 1 of the Research

In the first phase of the study the research team explored the types of programs and strategies that already exist in the community to identify and reach out to older adults. An environmental scan and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of agencies to learn more about the ways in which they reach out to and support older adults in general and, where appropriate older immigrants.

Agency Interview Results

The final environmental scan included 218 ethno-specific, multicultural and mainstream agencies as well as faith communities in the Regions of Peel and Halton. Of these, 115 agencies were contacted for interviews and 34 interviews were completed.

Barriers encountered by older immigrants as reported by interviewees included:

1. Social isolation/loneliness (27/34 reports)
2. Language/cultural barriers (20/34)
3. Transportation (14/34)
4. Lack of ethno-specific programs (7/34)
5. Elder abuse (6/34)
6. Financial barriers (6/34)

Outreach strategies reported by interviewees from 34 agencies

General outreach strategies	Number of reports
Using community partnerships (i.e. networking with other agencies/groups, attending events)	28
Word-of-mouth (through family/friends)	22
Online materials (website, social media, email)	18
Print materials (flyers, newspaper ads, mail)	18
Events hosted by the agency	5
Educational sessions presented by the agency	4
Phone outreach	3

Outreach strategies for socially isolated/lonely individuals	Number of reports
Referrals from community partners	18
Word-of-mouth referrals from current clients/members/families	16
Personalized methods (i.e. keeping in touch with current members, personal visits, personal invitations)	5
Print materials distributed at popular community sites (libraries, community centres, grocery stores, places of worship)	5
Minimizing barriers (language, transportation, financial)	4
Building and maintaining the reputation of agency	4

Research: Next Steps

With the work plan for Year 1 completed, we are excited to begin the next phase of this important research study and would like to thank all the agencies that have contributed to date. Starting in September and continuing into the New Year, the Centre for Elder Research student Research Assistants will be interviewing adults 65+ living in the community who are at risk of social isolation and/or loneliness.

Moving forward, our focus turns specifically to both settled immigrants (living in Canada six or more years) and recent immigrants (having arrived in Canada since 2010). Individual participants must be:

1. Community dwelling
(living alone or with family)
2. Age 65+
3. Have no identified cognitive impairment
(as self-reported)
4. Represent one of these groups:
 - a. China
 - b. South Asia
(individuals originating from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other people from the South Asian Diaspora)
 - c. Philippines
 - d. Poland

These four target groups are the ones identified on our proposal for funding. It should be noted that the results of our research will have the potential to shape and inform culturally appropriate strategies with other groups as well. We hope to interview a robust sample of men and women 65+ representing these groups in the coming months.

In addition to individuals living alone or with their families, we plan to interview, as appropriate, individuals on wait lists of existing programs and care partners of individuals who attend day programs (*in addition to the potential for social isolation and/or loneliness to impact older immigrants, care partners have also been identified as possibly being at risk). However, in this research update, it is specifically immigrants 65+ living alone or with their families for whom we seek assistance in recruiting study participants.

How can you help?

We recognize that identifying and reaching out to immigrants 65+ living in the Regions of Peel and Halton may pose challenges. Individuals who are most at risk of social isolation and/or loneliness are, by default, difficult to reach. Historically, this has often resulted in very small sample sizes in studies trying to reach and support isolated older adults. You know your communities, you have the trust of your stakeholder groups and you may be able to help us to identify and, subsequently, speak with immigrants representing the previously referenced target groups.

If you are able to identify individuals who may be willing to be interviewed by one of our Research Assistants, please contact the following Research Assistants who will be working with and on behalf of these groups.

China

Sarah Gianias: gianiass@sheridancollege.ca

South Asia

Zahra Sayyed: sayyedz@sheridancollege.ca

Tulsi Radia: radia@sheridancollege.ca

Philippines

Melissa Borja: borjam@sheridancollege.ca

Poland

Liam O'Neill: oneilli@sheridancollege.ca

Should you have questions about the study or more general ideas about how to best reach participants, please contact Marta Owsik, Project Coordinator. You can reach Marta by phone at 905-845-9430, extension 4282 or by email at marta.owsik@sheridancollege.ca

We are committed to working collaboratively with our communities and thank you, in advance, for your contributions to this research study.

We appreciate your ongoing interest and support.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Did you know?

Did you know that up to 16% of seniors experience social isolation (Statistics Canada, 2010)

The causes of social isolation are complex but there are risk factors that we can be aware of when reaching out to older adults who may be at risk. We need to keep in mind that, while loneliness may be related to social isolation, loneliness represents a more subjective response of the individual.

Risk actors for social isolation

- **Disabilities**
- **Chronic illness/poor health**
- **Experiencing a loss (of spouse, home, job)**
- **Experiencing abuse, sexism, racism, homophobia, financial issues**
- **Language issues**
- **Living alone**
- **Reduced social networks**
- **Transportation issues**
- **Poverty or low income**
- **Low self esteem**
- **Being female**
- **Being a single man**
- **New to country**
- **Lack of housing**

* Source: Nelson Allan Project Connecting Seniors *From Isolation or Activation*