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Building Connected Communities: Reducing Loneliness and Social Isolation in Immigrants 65+ – February 2017 – Research Update

Sheridan Centre for Elder Research

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Our progress

The Centre is now in the second year of this 3-year study to build community capacity and support older immigrants age 65+ who may be experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing loneliness/social isolation in Peel and Halton. In the first phase of the study, the research team explored the types of programs and strategies that already exist in the Regions of Peel and Halton. Next, the team began to connect with older immigrants themselves to learn about their experiences living in Canada as well as their experiences with loneliness and isolation. To date we have collected data from over 100 older immigrants through surveys and interviews.

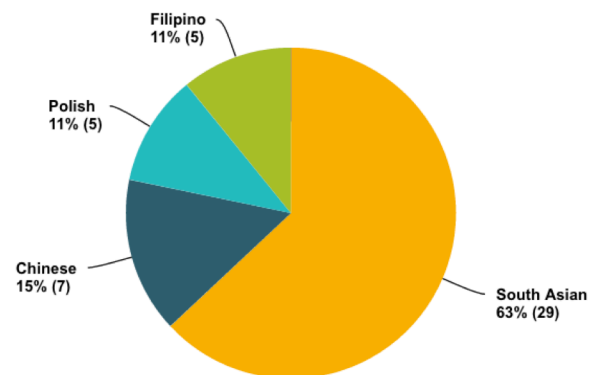
A Snapshot of the Results

Before a thorough analysis of the data is completed, we have summarized the data from 46 participants here. To date, most participants come from Mississauga, Brampton or Milton. We have connected with participants through agencies, faith communities, clubs and housing complexes. Most of these participants:

- Are in the 65-74 or 75-84 age groups
- Are settled immigrants (living in Canada for more than 15 years)
- Speak at least one language other than English everyday
- Live with family in multigenerational homes
- Have trouble accessing services because of lack of knowledge or lack of services available in their language
- Have recently experienced a life transition (i.e. change in health, retirement, loss of loved one)

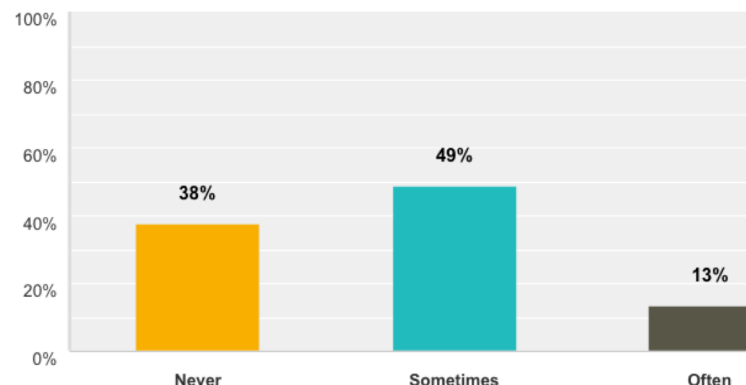
Which ethnic groups are represented in the data?

Answered: 46 Skipped: 0



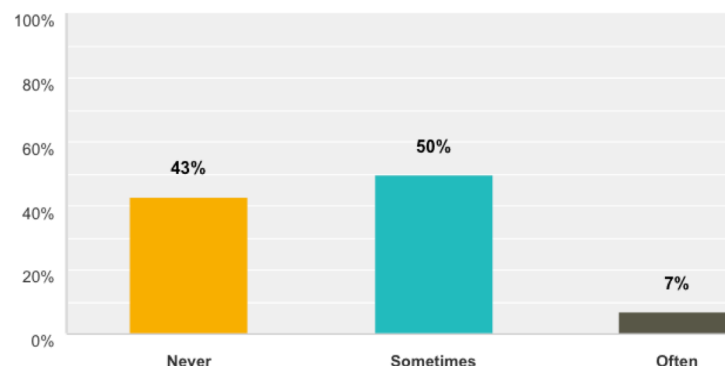
How often do you feel that you don't have friends?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 1



How often do you feel isolated from others?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 4



Research: New strategies

In an effort to overcome some initial recruitment challenges, we have adopted some new strategies. We are encouraging our Research Assistants to step out from behind their computers and to immerse themselves in the community. Each student has selected a neighbourhood that has a large population of people from the ethnic group with which they are working (Chinese, South Asian, Filipino or Polish), as well as the following services:

1. A community hub such as:
 - A place of worship
 - A community centre/library
 - A seniors housing complex
2. A good variety of other businesses and services including:
 - Pharmacies
 - Banks
 - Grocery stores/markets
 - Restaurants
 - Malls/plazas

Although we have been able to collect a good amount of data so far, we have been experiencing some difficulties in reaching individuals who are truly isolated or lonely. This is, perhaps, inevitable, as people who are experiencing isolation are by definition, difficult to reach. Recognizing this, we started to think 'outside the box' to consider who else might be aware of individuals who may be isolated and/or lonely (e.g. pharmacists, property managers, restaurant owners).

We believe that our grassroots neighbourhood approach may overcome some of the recruitment challenges we have been experiencing. To date, our Research Assistants have reached out to housing complexes, local markets and pharmacies, becoming familiar with and familiar to the people in their neighbourhoods. They are building relationships and trust and we anticipate that this will result in additional data collected from older immigrants who are at risk of experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation.

How can you help?

You know your communities and you have the trust of your stakeholder groups. You may be able to help us to identify and, subsequently, speak with immigrants who are:

1. Potentially lonely/socially isolated
2. Age 65+
3. From one of the following groups:
 - a) Chinese
 - b) South Asian
 - c) Filipino
 - d) Polish
4. Community dwelling in Peel or Halton
5. Have no identified cognitive impairment

If you are able to identify individuals who may be willing to be interviewed by one of our Research Assistants, please connect with the appropriate person from the list below. Please note, that although most of our data is being collected in English, we do have some limited access to translated materials and language interpreters if required.

Chinese

Sarah Gianias: gianiass@sheridancollege.ca

South Asian

Tulsi Radia: radia@sheridancollege.ca

Filipino

Melissa Borja: borjam@sheridancollege.ca

Polish

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
Phone at 905-845-9430, extension 4282
Email at marta.owsik@sheridancollege.ca

We are committed to working collaboratively with your 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

In the news:

Social isolation and loneliness are being addressed more and more in the news as one of the major health risks facing older adults in general and older immigrants specifically.

<http://newamericamedia.org/2016/12/growing-isolation-is-an-invisible-killer-of-older-people.php>

<https://www.thestar.com/life/2017/01/23/keeping-lonely-seniors-company-keeps-them-healthy.html>

The good news is that there are initiatives underway, both in Canada and abroad to address social isolation and loneliness. For example, the Campaign to End Loneliness in the UK:

<http://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/>

The Hamilton Seniors Isolation Impact Plan:

<http://socialisolation.ca/>