

Community connectedness and depressive symptoms among older Vietnamese immigrants

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The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No Relationships to Disclose



Community connectedness and elder depression study

- **Background: Acculturation experiences contribute to social isolation in older Southeast Asian immigrants.**
- **Limited research exists on the relationship between social connectedness and depression in this at-risk population.**
- **Objectives: To determine the relationship between depression and social connectedness in a sample of older Vietnamese immigrants in Philadelphia.**

General health survey
117 items
9 SE Asian
languages

Southeast Asian Health Disparities Survey

Penn, Jefferson, Drexel

Community connectedness and depression among SE Asian elders

Penn, Jefferson, Drexel,
Hall Mercer Mental
Health

Cross-sectional survey
Geriatric Depression Scale
Lubben Social Network Scale
100 SE Asian immigrants
Age 60+ years

**Academic partners:
Penn, Jefferson,
Temple**

**Southeast Asian
Mutual Assistance
Associations Coalition**



Our Stories, Our Health

WHYY Public Broadcasting
Penn, Jefferson, Temple

Community media project involving academic, immigrant, and media partners

Central to the project: a SE Asian Elders Council that chose health topics (HTN, communication), received video training, and interviewed community members

Videos will be edited and incorporated into community health workshops

**new
routes
to community
health**

***A Community-Based
Participatory Research
project***

***Funded by the RWJ and
Benton Foundations***



A community-academic partnership

- **Community partner:**
 - **SEAMAAC, a non-profit social service agency serving the SE Asian and other immigrant populations in Philadelphia**
- **Academic partners:**
 - **University of Pennsylvania**
 - **Thomas Jefferson University**
- **Survey protocol developed to account for cultural barriers to study participation**
- **Recruitment and data gathering by trained Vietnamese outreach workers from SEAMAAC**



Observations from the community

- **SEAMAAC**
 - **Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Association**
 - **non-profit CBO**
 - **immigrant and refugee populations in Philadelphia**
- **SEAMAAC outreach staff**
 - **recognized how acculturation and language barriers caused isolation and depression**
- **For elders, the stress of acculturation was a particular cause for distress**
 - **loss of autonomy, authority, and respect that they were accustomed to in their native lands**



Study Hypotheses

- **Based upon direct experience with this community,**
- **Increased social connectedness will be associated with lower depression.**
- **higher utilization of group-level services provided by a community-based organization (CBO) will be correlated with higher social connectedness scores and lower depression scores.**



Study Design

- **Cross-sectional study design**
- **Vietnamese immigrants age 60+ years**
 - **Recruited by SEAMAAC within the context of community outreach work**
- **Administered in-person in Vietnamese**
 - **Private location to avoid being overheard**
 - **Any participants identified as potentially depressed were offered referral to MH programs**
- **Previously translated materials reviewed by bilingual research team**
- **Other materials were translated by a bilingual translator and independently back-translated into English**



Survey instruments

- **Demographics**
 - Age, gender, marital status, education
- **Acculturation**
 - Yrs in the US, how well speak English
- **Self-reported exposures to social services provided by CBO**
- **Previously validated Vietnamese version of the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)**
- **New translation of the Lubben Social Network Scale 18 (LSNS18).**



Geriatric Depression Scale, Vietnamese version

- **The Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS)**
- **15 items**
 - **Self-reporting screening questionnaire**
 - **Asks about feelings and/or thoughts for a specified amount of time**
 - **Validated Vietnamese version obtained**



Sample GDS questions

- **1. Are you basically satisfied with your life? YES / NO**
 - Q1. Về cơ bản, ông/bà có thấy hài lòng với cuộc sống của mình không? 1. Có 2. Không

- **2. Have you dropped many of your activities and interests? YES / NO**
 - Q2. Ông/bà có từ bỏ nhiều hoạt động và giảm bớt các mối quan tâm của mình không? 1. Có 2. Không

- **3. Do you feel that your life is empty? YES / NO**
 - Q3. Ông/bà có cảm thấy cuộc đời trống trải không? 1. Có 2. Không



Lubben Social Network Scale (LSNS)

- **LSNS18**
 - **18 items**
 - **Longer and shorter versions are available**
 - **Developed specifically for elder populations**
- **Characterizes social networks of family, friends, and neighbors**
- **Was translated to and back-translated from Vietnamese**



Sample Lubben questions:

FAMILY *Considering the people to whom you are related either by birth or marriage...*

- **Likert responses**

- **0 = none 1 = one 2 = two 3 = three or four 4 = five thru eight 5 = nine or more**

- **1. How many relatives do you see or hear from at least once a month?**
- **2. How often do you see or hear from relative with whom you have the most contact?**
- **3. How many relatives do you feel at ease with that you can talk about private matters?**
- **4. How many relatives do you feel close to such that you could call on them for help?**
- **5. When one of your relatives has an important decision to make, how often do they talk to you about it?**
- **6. How often is one of your relatives available for you to talk to when you have an important decision to make?**

Demographics Vietnamese Elders

	N	%	Mean GDS (std)	Mean Lubben (std)
TOTAL	50	100.0%	3.9 (2.4)	34.0 (11.8)
Demographics				
Age group				
60-69	27	54%	3.5 (2.5)	35.1 (11.8)
70-79	19	38%	3.9 (2.0)	34.6 (11.6)
80+	4	8%	6.3 (3.3)	23.8 (11.2)
Gender				
Male	22	44%	3.7 (2.4)	35.0 (14.4)
Female	28	56%	4.0 (2.4)	33.2 (9.6)
Marital status				
Married	34	68%	3.2 (2.0)	35.2 (10.2)
Widowed/divorced/single	16	32%	5.4 (2.6)	31.4 (14.8)

Acculturation Vietnamese Elders

	N	%	Mean GDS (std)	Mean Lubben (std)
TOTAL	50	100.0%	3.9 (2.4)	34.0 (11.8)
Years in the US				
0-9	8	16%	1.8 (1.5)	40.0 (11.6)
10-19	32	64%	4.0 (2.1)	32.9 (10.8)
20+	10	20%	5.3 (2.8)	32.7 (15.0)
Mean years in US (std)	15.2 (6.8)			
How well do you speak English?				
Well	4	8%	3.3 (2.2)	28.3 (11.3)
Not well	13	26%	3.2 (2.5)	38.4 (14.9)
Not at all	33	66%	4.2 (2.4)	33.0 (10.4)



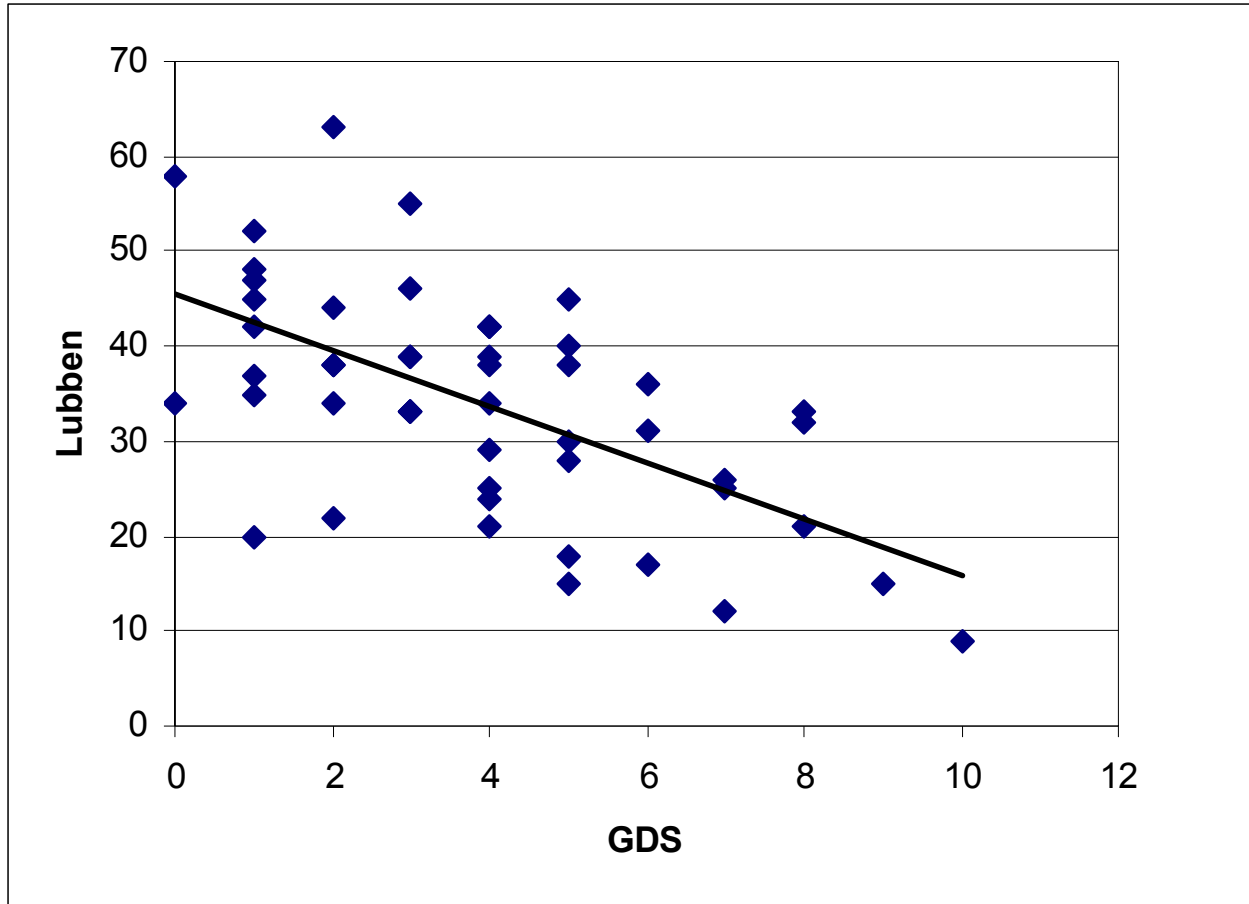
Results

50 Vietnamese Immigrant Elders

- Mean age of 69.4 years (mean 15.2 years since immigrating to the US).
- 90.2% reported speaking English “not well” or “not at all”
- Mean GDS scores were 3.9 (3.7 male, 4.0 female; 3.2 married, 5.2 widowed/divorced).
- GDS scores were significantly correlated to the LSNS18 ($R=-0.61$, $p<0.001$), indicating a negative relationship between depression and social connectedness.
- Results from Lubben subscales were also consistent with these findings.



GDS and Lubben Correlation Vietnamese Elders



R2 = -0.60500, p<.0001

Factors Related to Depression in Vietnamese Elders

Variable	Estimate	SE	P value
Intercept	3.34504	2.89355	0.2538
Lubben Social Connectedness Score	-0.10836	0.02153	<.0001
Age	0.07818	0.03930	0.0528
Male	0.17498	0.50766	0.7319
Married	-1.89236	0.54622	0.0012



Discussion

- **Confirms anecdotal observations that Vietnamese elders who are socially isolated may be at increased risk of depressive symptoms.**
- **Provides justification for interventions that increase the social interactions**
- **Programs can reduce depressive symptoms among an group of people who, due to linguistic and cultural factors, are at high risk of social isolation.**
- **Married participants were also significantly less depressed**
 - **marital status is not something that can necessarily be changed through community intervention programs**



Discussion

- **Elders living in the US for longer periods of time appeared to be at higher risk of depressive symptoms.**
- **More recent immigrants may have stronger familial connections**
- **Also may be targeted more heavily by programs designed for newly arrived immigrants**
- **Longer duration in the US also means that the person is getting older, and progressing age might bring more physical limitations that could prevent social interaction**



Limitations

- **Convenience sample, not aiming to identify population level incidence or prevalence**
- **Relatively small sample size**
- **Participant responses were reported directly to outreach staff**
 - **Fear / embarrassment**
 - **Outreach workers are highly trusted and respected**
- **Few had low LSNS scores**
 - **Socially isolated might not come to programs**
- **Cross-sectional design prevents causal interpretations**
 - **Calls for longitudinal study**



Conclusions

- **Lower social connectedness significantly predicts depressive symptoms in this sample of older Vietnamese immigrants.**
- **Intervention trials should assess the potential impact that programs for immigrant elders might have upon social connectedness as well as on depression.**
- **Need to take into account the social realities faced by these immigrants, as well as the cultural and linguistic characteristics and differentiate them from mainstream elderly populations.**

