Older Detroiters Adjust to New Retirement Realities

“The Lifespan Investigation of Family, Health, and Environment (LIFHE) Project data collection is complete,” according to project director Lisa Ficker, Ph.D. “We have achieved our goal of interviewing 500 African American elders age 55 and older. “We say ‘thank you’ to everyone who participated and to our wonderful team of interviewers.”

Dr. Ficker says the survey took a snapshot of information about people’s lives. The goal was to understand senior activities, family relationships, attitudes, health, and challenges at home and in the community. The surveys will be a great resource for many different types of research at the IOG and its collaborator the University of Michigan.

Here are some key findings of the LIFHE study that interviewed 431 women and 70 men:

• Many participants have some experience in college (41%) or are college graduates (29%) and one quarter said they had a high school diploma (25%). Less than 25% of interviewees are currently married with about equal numbers report being divorced (29%) or widowed (30%) and almost 13% report having never been married.

  About half of the participants live alone (54%), 19% live with a spouse, and 9% live with an adult child.

• Almost 80% of the elders interviewed have grandchildren and 77% of grandparents live in the same household with a grandchild or great-grandchild. About half of these grandchildren are over age 18.
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- Multi-generational households are often necessary in the current economic situation, as it is difficult for young people to get established, even after they graduate from high school or college. Indeed, even in retirement, about one third of grandparents provide financial support to grandchildren that they do not live with.

- Many grandparents (42%) reported they had lived with grandchildren in the past and even more participated in childcare for one or more grandchildren. Often grandparents do not consider it ‘babysitting’ because the grandchildren are merely gathering at the grandparent’s house. Nevertheless, they reported that the time spent with their grandchildren allowed their children to work to support the family and/or pursue an education.

- One third of grandparents are providing childcare for their families now and 73% of them reported providing childcare for grandchildren in the past.

Regarding health and mobility, researchers were not surprised to hear about some commonly known challenges:

- About 28% of seniors reported that they have a disability and 27% use a mobility aid such as a cane or walker. Almost two-thirds report that they experience pain often.

  - Over a third of elders reported making changes to their home to improve safety or independence and another 26% of seniors reported that they need such changes to their home. Guardrails for staircases (or second railings) and grab bars in the bathroom were the most popular equipment mentioned. Many participants were able to drive (77%), but 27% reported that they had limitations to their driving. The most frequent problems were not being able to or not feeling comfortable

  - About 28% of seniors reported

  - About 30% of seniors reported

  - About 25% of seniors reported

  - About 20% of seniors reported

  - About 15% of seniors reported

  - About 10% of seniors reported

  - About 5% of seniors reported

  - About 0% of seniors reported

Community Engagement Fuels Research Participation

Building a Registry of Research Volunteers among Older Urban African Americans: Recruitment Processes and Outcomes from a Community-Based Partnership by Letha A. Chadiha, PhD, Olivia G. M. Washington, PhD, Peter A. Lichtenberg, PhD, Carmen R. Green, MD, Karen L. Daniels, and James S. Jackson, PhD., was published in this year’s The Gerontologist outlining the strategy of research subject recruitment.

African American older adults are underrepresented in health research. The MCUAAAR is doing something to change that. The MCUAAAR’s research participant registry has over 1600 individuals. But it wasn’t always this way; it took a lot of effort. In 2004, the MCUAAAR began providing year round educational and health programming.

According to Dr. Letha Chadiha, co-director of the Healthier Black Elders Center “recruiting African American older adults as research subjects increases as researchers’ commitment to community outreach activities increases.” Dr. Chadiha is also co-director of the Community Liaison Core for the HBEC’s parent entity, the Michigan Center on Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR), and faculty associate in the Program for Research on Black Americans in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

To learn more about research, visit: www.iog.wayne.edu/participants.php
Healthy Marital Relationships Protect Health Over Time

Although research shows that marital quality is related to health outcomes, very few researchers have considered whether this relationship is similar for African Americans. Using survey data from the Health and Retirement Study, Dr. Jennifer Bulanda examines how satisfaction with one’s marriage is related to health outcomes.

The Health and Retirement Study is a national survey of over 20,000 Americans aged 50 and over and their spouses, and each individual respondent is interviewed every two years. Respondents are asked a variety of questions about their employment, economics, family, and health. This includes questions specifically about one’s marriage to their spouse, such as how supportive their spouse is and how often their spouse criticizes them or lets them down. Respondents also report their overall health and how many health problems they have been diagnosed with.

Dr. Bulanda examined a group of 368 African Americans aged 50 and over who were married in 2006. Her analysis assessed their health outcomes over a two-year time period based on positive and negative aspects of their marriage. Results show that African Americans who report receiving more positive support from their spouse are healthier two years later. However, negative interactions with one’s spouse do not appear to affect short-term health outcomes. Results of Dr. Bulanda’s project suggest that having a supportive spouse does not translate into better health because the spouse encourages better health behaviors (e.g., more exercise, less drinking or smoking). Instead, a supportive relationship with one’s spouse may protect health over time by buffering the negative effects of other types of stress on health.

How Healthy or Unhealthy is the Artificial Sweetener Splenda?

A. Sucralose, the main ingredient in Splenda, is a non-nutritive sweetener synthesized from sucrose (table sugar). The body does not metabolize sucralose; therefore, it provides zero calories. Most of the sucralose that is absorbed (approximately 15% of an oral intake) is excreted unchanged and it does not accumulate in the body.

Sucralose is 600 times sweeter than sugar, and it can replace or be combined with sugar in cooking and baking to reduce the total calories and carbohydrates. Products containing sucralose are often lower-calorie products and can help people lose weight by reducing calorie intake from sugar. Because sucralose has no effect on blood glucose or insulin levels, it is a preferred option for people with diabetes, who must monitor their carbohydrate intake.

Sucralose has been studied extensively over the last 20 years and more than 110 studies concluded that there are no harmful effects from consuming sucralose, and it is safe for its intended use by public health authorities worldwide, including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The amounts found safe were, for an average-weight adult, equivalent in sweetness to more than 40 lbs. of sugar per day over the lifetime, meaning that people can consume a variety of foods and beverages sweetened with sucralose on a daily basis without concern. Sucralose was found safe to be used by pregnant women and children, and it does not cause dental cavities or tooth decay.

Both sucralose and the retail product Splenda No Calorie Sweetener are safe and may be a useful adjunct to the diet in meal plans designed to reduce unwanted calories or carbohydrates from nutritive sweeteners.

To learn more about HBEC, visit www.MCUAAAR.wayne.edu
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Driving at night, fatigue, cost of gas or car repairs, and disliking freeways.

The study also revealed that many older adults of this generation of seniors are very comfortable where they live with 54% feeling that they will always live in their current setting. At the present time, about two-thirds of the participants live in a single-family home with 20% living in an apartment or condo and an additional 10% living in a senior residence or apartment. Almost one-third of elders have a plan for the future in case they need help and 90% had discussed this plan with someone they can count on: a family member, friend or confidant. About 5% of seniors did not know who they would turn to if they needed help and could not live independently anymore.

Most of the participants (90%) considered themselves retired and most people (70%) reported that their income was lower than it had been before they retired. Almost 50% of seniors report that they are somewhat satisfied with their income. And 28% are not at all satisfied.

Most participants agreed they had to adjust their expectations about what they can and can not afford during retirement and this is not always an easy process.

Dr. Ficker is especially grateful for the wonderful response she received from the members of the HBEC Participant Resource Pool. “Without these folks being willing to share their time, lives, and opinions with us, this project would not be possible,” she adds.

Save the Date

Loving Yourself From Death
Wednesday, February 29, 2012 Noon -1:30 pm
Gabrielle Senior Apartments, Community Room
14201 Second Ave. Highland Park MI 48203
To RSVP, call (313)664-2604

Senior Wealth: Wellness and Safety
Wednesday, March 14, 2012 10:30 am – 12:30 pm
Chene Park Commons, Community Room
2001 Chene Detroit, MI 48207
To RSVP, call Ms. Dotson at (313)567-7275
Apartment tours will follow

Understanding Dementia Behaviors
Wednesday, April 11, 2012 10:30am-12:30pm
Ellis Manor Apartments of Greater Grace Temple, Community Room
19200 Shiawasse Dr. Detroit, MI 48219
To RSVP, call Ms. Lisa Rodgers at (313)592-4991

Good Aging Requires Good Planning
Tuesday, May 15, 2012, 10:00am – 12:00pm
Catholic Social Services of Wayne County
9851 Hamilton, Detroit, MI 48206
To RSVP, call Ms. Barbara Keys at (313)883-8323
All forums are free, but an RSVP is required.