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GLOBAL AGING E-BRIEF

Newsletter from the Global Aging & Community Initiative

Our Mission and Our Team

The Global Aging and Community Initiative (GACI) is a research organization at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), located within the Nova Scotia Center on Aging. It is directed by Dr. Zachary Zimmer, a Tier I Canada Research Chair and Professor of Family Studies and Gerontology. The GACI aims to create knowledge on issues related to the quality of life of older persons worldwide through collaborative research across a broad global scientific community. GACI is currently working on a number of research projects focusing on the health and well-being of older persons in different areas around the world. We currently list 22 collaborators from eight countries.

Pictured below is the current MSVU team: From left to right; Nikita Rose, Master's student and Research Assistant; Zachary Zimmer PhD., Director; Renee Field, Research Program Manager; Kathryn Fraser MSc, Research Assistant.



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Project Update: The Vietnam Health & Aging Study

With the aim of understanding the long-term impact of wartime trauma, the Vietnam Health & Aging Study (VHAS) completed Wave 1 data collection three years ago. Wave 2 follow-up data collection is scheduled for 2021. While it is still early in the process, analysis of Wave 1 data thus far is indicating that those that survived the wars in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s and were exposed to traumatic conditions and events carry the trauma and legacy into old age. Those more exposed to trauma are more likely to face a variety of health challenges in old-age, including psychological distress, chronic conditions, pain and disability.

The VHAS involves primary data collected from about 2,500 adults aged 60 and older living in various districts in Northern Vietnam. An international and multi-disciplinary team of researchers, including sociologists, demographers, gerontologists, epidemiologists, biologists and medical professions, from Canada, the U.S., Singapore and Vietnam, are using these data to study the likelihood that the wars in Vietnam resulted in long-term 'scarring' among survivors.

Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country with over 95 million inhabitants. Today the country is known for its beaches, pagodas, bustling cities, stunning landscapes and delicious food. However, its legacy of what is known as the American War in Vietnam, and the Vietnam War in the U.S., exposed both military personnel and many civilians to trauma, stress, and suffering. Indeed, you did not need to be in the military in Vietnam to feel the effects of the war. Destruction occurred in the villages, neighborhoods and communities within which people lived. About 12% of Vietnam's population today is aged 60 and older, and this percentage is expected to increase dramatically over the next few decades. Today, the survivors who lived through the peak periods of war, are now entering ages where chronic disease and functional limitations prevalence begins to rise.

VHAS data collection takes place in 12 'Communes' in northern Vietnam. These study locations were selected to represent a spectrum of bombing intensity during the war. The participants of the study were exposed to tremendously varying levels of wartime exposure, from very little to extraordinarily traumatic. A structured survey interview is conducted by staff, who asks participants a broad range of questions about their health, families, social, demographic and economic conditions and their wartime experiences. A second part of the study collects blood samples and conducts various physical and anthropometric tests.

"Our team is interested in determining whether the stressors of war leave enduring effects on health in later adulthood. We are asking questions such as what types of wartime experiences are most influential long-term, and what other factors moderate the relationship between wartime exposure and health," says Dr. Zimmer

VHAS is funded by National Institutes of Health (NIH)

"Having an understanding of the life-long impact of war will enable policy makers to better look at the supports that may be needed for this aging population."

- Zachary Zimmer -



A Vietnamese elder participates in the Hanoi Medical University blood collection sampling project as part of VHAS.



International Team Member Spotlight: Kim Korinek

Kim Korinek is the current Director, Asia Center, at the University of Utah and previously she was a Visiting Senior Research Fellow, at the Asia Research Institute and Centre for Family and Population Research, at the National University of Singapore.

Kim is working closely with GACI as Principal Investigator of the U.S. National Institutes of Health funded project entitled: “Health and Aging Post Conflict: War’s Enduring Effects among Survivors in Vietnam”. Kim has a PhD from University of Washington in Seattle. Today, she lives in Salt Lake City Utah with her family and is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Utah. She has always been interested in social demographic changes and how they affect peoples’ lives as they age. Kim has extensive experience working in Southeast Asia. With funds from the Henry Luce Foundation, she heads up the Mekong Region Development Research Group Initiative, a program that is working to both expand social research in Southeast Asia and at the same time develop research capacity. When not teaching or conducting research, Kim enjoys outdoor activities with her active family and friends in the Salt Lake City area. Among her favorites are skiing in the winter, hiking in the summer, and of course, tasting the beer brewed by Nick.

Kim’s contributions to science have been extensive and we at GACI are grateful to be working in collaboration with her on research being conducted in Vietnam and elsewhere. Word has it, Kim also enjoys visiting Halifax.



As the Principal Investigator for VHAS, Korinek works with the GACI to create an international team of researchers to investigate exposure to armed conflict during the Vietnam War and the health and aging of Vietnamese war survivors.

My research examines
the mutually
transformative effects
of social demographic
changes, like population
aging and population
mobility...

- KIM KORINEK -



Below is a selective list of recent publications by GACI international research collaborators. For more information on all our collaborators and the projects undertaken, visit our [website](#).

Korinek, K., Young, Y., Teerawichitchainan, B., Chuc, N. T. K., Kovnick, M., & Zimmer, Z. (2020). Is war hard on the heart? Gender, wartime stress and late life cardiovascular conditions in a population of Vietnamese older adults. *Social Science & Medicine*, 265, 113380. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113380>

Yang, Y., & Grol-Prokopczyk, H. (2020). Chronic Pain and Friendship among Middle-Aged and Older US Adults. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa185>

Kang, E., & Grol-Prokopczyk, H. (2020). Comparing South Korean and US self-rated health using anchoring vignettes. *Quality of Life Research*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-020-02599-y>

Ghachem, A., Fried, L. P., Legault, V., Bandeen-Roche, K., Presse, N., Gaudreau, P., & Cohen, A. A. (2020). Evidence from two cohorts for the frailty syndrome as an emergent state of parallel dysregulation in multiple physiological systems. *Biogerontology*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10522-020-09903-w>

Cohen, A. A., Legault, V., & Fülöp, T. (2020). What if there's no such thing as "aging"? *Mechanisms of Ageing and Development*, 192, 111344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mad.2020.111344>

Whitfield, K. C., Shahab-Ferdows, S., Kroeun, H., Sophonneary, P., Green, T. J., Allen, L. H., & Hampel, D. (2020). Macro-and Micronutrients in Milk from Healthy Cambodian Mothers: Status and Interrelations. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 150(6), 1461-1469. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxaa070>

Zimmer, Z., Chiu, C. T., Saito, Y., Jagger, C., Ofstedal, M. B., & Lin, Y. H. (2020). Religiosity dimensions and disability-free life expectancy in Taiwan. *Journal of aging and health*, 32(7-8), 627-641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264319843445>

- Other Research Projects -

The Demography of Chronic Pain: A Population Approach to Pain Trends, Pain Disparities, and Pain-Related Disability and Death, funded by National Institutes of Health

Religion, spirituality, physical and psychological well-being in Muslims: Exploring associations within new and unique Pakistani contexts, funded by SSHRC Explore Grant

Contact Info:

The Global Aging Community Initiative
166 Bedford Highway
McCain Centre 201C
Halifax, Nova Scotia,
Canada B3M 2J6
<https://globalagingandcommunity.com/>
gaci@msvu.ca
902.457.5552