



JUNE 2021

# GLOBAL AGING E-BRIEF

Newsletter from the Global Aging & Community Initiative

## Global Aging Community Initiative Update

Even during these challenging times, the international team of collaborators working with Mount Saint Vincent University's Global Aging and Community Initiative (GACI) have worked diligently to advance our current understanding of issues such as aging, pain, and health outcomes around the world. Several of our team's key publications recently appeared in print, one of which, examines the recent global rise in grandparents acting as sole caregivers for their grandchildren, as highlighted in our Project Update (page 4). In addition, our team and collaborators have recently been awarded several research grants. Under the direction of Dr. Zachary Zimmer, the GACI received a Project Grant from the Canadian Institute of Health Research, entitled: "The Long-term Effects of War on Health of Older Persons within a Rapidly Aging Population: The Case of Vietnam." This award provides us the opportunity to continue our research on the impacts of traumatic wartime exposure on later life health in Vietnam, allowing us to examine long-term biological implications of early life stress and trauma. Dr. Anna Zajacova, of the University of Western Ontario, featured in our Collaborator Profile (page 3), was awarded an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada entitled: "Social Causes and Consequences of Chronic Pain." The GACI has been heavily engaged in research on chronic pain, and this project, involving several researchers, will improve our understanding of pain, and how people experience it. The GACI is also happy to announce that Feinuo Sun, currently a Ph.D. student at SUNY Albany, will be joining the team as a postdoctoral researcher this summer. She will be funded by a National Institute of Health project that studies the demography of chronic pain; a study led by another affiliated researcher, Dr. Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk, University at Buffalo.

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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.

# GACI Team Member Spotlight - Kathryn Fraser



**Over the next year, Kathryn will continue to work with the GACI and expand their research skillset by undertaking various statistics courses offered through Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.**



Kathryn Fraser started their academic career in psychology at Dalhousie University. While studying psychology, they found their passion in the complex relationship between food, social environments, and health, so decided to complete their BSc in Nutrition at Acadia University. Once graduated, they completed a Master of Science in Applied Human Nutrition (MScAHN) at MSVU and subsequently passed the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam to become a fully registered dietitian.

Over the last two years, Kathryn has also worked as a research assistant with the GACI. Since joining the GACI, Kathryn has been involved in multiple projects, including the Vietnam Health and Aging Study and cross-country comparative research on chronic pain. They have recently moved into a Research Associate role and taken on greater responsibility in several research projects. Longer term, Kathryn seeks to combine research with their passion for community health and socially just health care. They will continue to work with the GACI and expand their research skillset by undertaking various statistics course offered through Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. As a dietitian, Kathryn is developing a private practice that aims to provide anti-oppressive, anti-racist, body-liberating, trauma-informed, and anti-diet health care to those experiencing body image concerns, disordered eating, and eating disorders, with a particular focus on supporting and engaging with the LGBTQ+ community. When not juggling career goals, Kathryn aims to dismantle oppressive health care systems and support community health initiatives by volunteering with Eating Disorders Nova Scotia and adding to their voice to projects that support LGBTQ+ health. In their spare time, Kathryn enjoys swimming, biking, knitting and weaving, fermentation, gardening, and writing and reading.

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## Collaborator Profile - Dr. Anna Zajacova

**“I was immediately smitten – chronic pain is such an important dimension of health; we all have suffered chronic pain at some point, whether with our own pain or watching our loved ones’ pain with helplessness.**

**Yet there was effectively no demographic research on the topic.”**



ANNA ZAJACOVA

Four years ago, Dr. Anna Zajacova began to collaborate on demographic research into chronic pain with Zachary Zimmer, Director of GACI, and immediately knew this was the field she wanted to pursue. “It’s very exciting to be a part of a team that’s on the forefront of this scholarship,” says Anna.

Anna was recently awarded an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to lead a team for a project entitled: “Social Causes and Consequences of Chronic Pain.” She is also lead author on several papers now appearing in leading journals. “Sociology of Chronic Pain”, which is appearing in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, summarizes relevant sociological research and lays out new directions for the social study of chronic pain. Regarding “Pain Trends among American Adults 2002-2018: Patterns, Disparities, and Correlates,” published in *Demography*, Anna notes: “Our team also recently published findings about the increasing prevalence of pain over time among all segments of the American population.

“I am now examining, with terrific student and collaborator teams, how pain is distributed across US and Canadian states/provinces. Another set of projects will describe the complex race/ethnic differences in chronic pain in the US and Canada. It’s startling that we know very little about the disparities in pain, except the fairly well-studied comparison between Black and white comparison,” says Anna.

Anna was always interested in health-related topics but didn’t want to pursue medicine. In graduate school, she discovered the field of population health and never looked back. Today, as an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, at Western University, she draws on her backgrounds in sociology, demography, and social epidemiology to study how social factors influence our health and wellbeing.

Today, Anna spends a lot of time reading non-fiction across all disciplines when not working. Like most people, Anna can’t wait for post-COVID opportunities where she can spend more time outdoors hiking, biking, kayaking, or skiing in winters with her family.

# Project update:

## Trends in skip-generation households in low- and middle-income countries

One of the research streams we pursue at The Global Aging and Community Initiative is the subject of intergenerational relations and living arrangements of older persons around the world. In a recent contribution, Zachary Zimmer and Emily Treleaven systematically investigated trends in skip-generation households, from 1990 to 2016, across a range of lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Their findings have been published in a recent issue of the journal "Population and Development Review".

Skip-generation households are homes where one or more grandparent lives with one or more grandchild, with parents of the grandchild, or middle generation, absent. In many cases, the middle generation, or parents of the grandchild, have left to work elsewhere. In fewer, though not an unsubstantial number of cases, the parents are deceased. This latter situation is found with some frequency in sub-Saharan African countries with high rates of HIV/ AIDS mortality.

Using data are from Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), an important demographically oriented data source, in 49 countries, Zimmer and Treleaven first estimated whether skip-generation households, defined as households with grandchildren and grandparents and no other household members present, had increased or decreased over time in each country. A sample of the results are shown in the Figure below. The figure shows the proportion aged 60+ in a skip-generation household in the earliest versus most recent round of DHS data. The average number of years that elapsed between these two observations is 16.) Each dot represents the findings for one country, with names of several exemplar countries indicated. When points are above the line, the country experienced an increasing trend, and below the line, a decreasing trend. Thirty-one of the 49 countries experienced an increase, with relatively large increases in some countries. The cross-country average living in skip-generation households increased from 5.4% in the earliest DHS round to 6.7% in the most recent.

Zimmer and Treleaven then move on to try and explain this rise in skip-generation households in term of macro country-level factors. To do this, they perform a statistical procedure called multilevel regression modeling. Results indicate that skip-generation households were likely to increase as a function of increasing AIDS-related death rates, increasing female labor force participation rates and increasing dependency ratios, and decrease as a function of increasing gross national income.

The conclusion is that skip-generation households are increasing across LMICs, with rises in prevalence being particularly large in a broad range of countries such as Cambodia, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Zambia. In fact, the percent of older persons that live with a grandchild and no middle generation is extremely high in some countries, reaching nearly 20% in Uganda. While some of this is explained by demographic and economic factors, such as changes in the structure of the labor force, results also reflect cultural and normative changes related to household formation around the world. The phenomenon is clearly important given that living arrangements have implications for quality of life and well-being of both children and older persons.

Access the publication by Zimmer and Treleaven on the GACI website [HERE](#):

Proportion of adults aged 60+ in skip-generation households in 49 countries, comparing earliest versus most recent DHS rounds, and showing cross-country averages.

