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GLOBAL AGING E-BRIEF

Newsletter from the Global Aging & Community Initiative

Global Aging & Community Initiative Update

BY ZACHARY ZIMMER, DIRECTOR, GACI

In May, the principal investigators of the Vietnam Health and Aging Study (VHAS) met at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California, to plan the next phase of this ongoing research program. Stanford provided an ideal venue, as our valued GACI affiliate, Puk Teerawichitchainan, Associate Professor of Sociology at the National University of Singapore, was in residence there as a Visiting Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. VHAS comprises a broad portfolio of studies examining the long-term consequences of conflict and trauma for health and aging, with particular attention to Vietnamese men and women whose lives were shaped by war during the 1960s

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(l-r): Kim Korinek, Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Utah; Bussarawan ("Puk") Teerawichitchainan, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Co-Director of the Centre for Family and Population Research at the National University of Singapore; Mevlude Akbulut-Yuksel, Professor of Economics, Dalhousie University; Zachary Zimmer, Director of the Global Aging and Community Initiative, Mount Saint Vincent University; and Tran Khanh Toan, Associate Professor at Hanoi Medical University, met in Palo Alto in May to discuss the VHAS project.

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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 in the Department of Aging and Family Science. 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 32 collaborators from eight countries.



GACI Spotlight: Renee Field

Storyteller and Community Builder

For the past seven years, Renee has worked as the Research Program Manager for the Global Aging Community Initiative, where she has enjoyed exploring the international impact of the work led by Dr. Zachary Zimmer. The part-time role allows her to balance research with her lifelong passion for creative writing.

Raised along the rugged shores of Nova Scotia, Renee draws inspiration from the untamed Atlantic Ocean that shaped her childhood.

A versatile author with more than two decades of writing experience, Renee works across multiple genres, including romance, young adult, women's fiction, and speculative science fiction. Her award-winning debut novel, *Rapture*, earned the EPPIE Award for Best Paranormal/Fantasy Romance and

established her as a compelling voice in digital publishing. Since then, she has published with Ellora's Cave and HQN Spice Briefs, building a reputation for emotionally rich and genre-spanning fiction.

Writing under several pen names, Renee tailors her voice to different audiences.

As Renee Pace, she crafts gritty coming-of-age and dark paranormal stories featuring strong female protagonists. Her novel *Off Leash* was a semi-finalist in the Amazon Breakthrough Novel Contest and remains a reader favourite. In 2023, under the name B. Kinde, she launched a speculative science fiction trilogy imagining an alternate future in which Princess Diana survived and forged a secret new life. Recently, Renee launched her third women's fiction novel, *The Promise of Family*, part of her Saga of the Shores series, which centres on women in small towns who overcome obstacles as they reclaim their identity with love and the support of family.

Beyond writing, Renee is deeply committed to community service. Over twenty years ago, she founded a local residents' association to represent 400 homes to raise funds for a new playground and address safety issues. Ten years ago, she helped bring a Syrian refugee family to the community, and five years ago founded the first community garden in her neighbourhood.



Renee Field, GACI Research Program Manager

"SALTWATER RUNS THROUGH MY VEINS. GROWING UP IN A SMALL FISHING COMMUNITY MY IMAGINATION AND LOVE OF BOOKS ALLOWED ME TO ESCAPE."

-RENEE FIELD-

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RESEARCH UPDATE

Congratulations to Rui (Zoe) Huang—now Dr. Huang—on receiving the International Association of Population Health Science’s 2026 Student Award. Zoe recently completed her PhD in Sociology at the University at Buffalo, where her dissertation research drew partly on data from the Vietnam Health and Aging Study (VHAS) to examine how exposure to war and violence early in life shapes the experience of chronic pain in later adulthood. Her work revealed important links between wartime trauma and later-life pain, with much of this relationship operating through physical and mental health challenges experienced across the life course. Zoe also found that individuals exposed to violence as children faced more enduring adverse consequences than those who were older when the conflict occurred, highlighting the lasting impact of early-life experiences on health in later years. A link to the Zoe’s published paper on this topic can be found here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00221465251401249>. Following the completion of her doctorate, Zoe has joined the University of Washington’s Children’s Research Institute as a postdoctoral fellow. Congratulations to Dr. Huang on this well-deserved recognition and on the exciting next stage of her career. We look forward to following her continued success.



Dr. Rui (Zoe) Huang

GACI SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

The garden started with 15 plots, and has expanded today to 30 garden beds. When the Russo-Ukrainian War began in 2022, Renee opened her home to two young Ukrainian women refugees who lived with her for months until they got settled in Halifax. Today, the lasting friendship with the young women and their extended family prospers, and this past December one of the Ukrainians, who married a Canadian, gave birth to a baby girl. “I’ve become the unofficial “auntie” and I’m so thrilled to see everyone prosper,” said Renee.

Mother to four young adults, Renee is an avid birder and spends her summer biking the provincial trails while dividing her time between city life and her seaside cottage. With two of her children now working and living in Ottawa, she’s looking forward to spending more time visiting the capital of Canada.

CONDOLENCES

We are deeply saddened by the loss of our GACI collaborator, Dr. Yasuhiko Saito. He will be remembered internationally as a leading scholar in demography, gerontology, and population health, with landmark contributions to the development of health expectancy research and sustained leadership within the REVES network. But beyond his scholarly achievements, he will be remembered for his generosity,

collegiality, and enduring support of colleagues across the global research community. On a personal level, I remember him most as a kind and generous friend who gave of himself unselfishly. His passing is a profound loss to the field and to all who had the privilege of working with him. He will be greatly missed around the world by those whose lives he influenced.



Dr. Yasuhiko Saito

GLOBAL AGING & COMMUNITY INITIATIVE UPDATE CONTINUED

and 1970s and who are now entering later life. Building on nearly a decade of research, the team is preparing several new initiatives. These include a third wave of data collection focused on cognitive health and aging, as well as expanded research on the adult children of study participants to better understand the intergenerational transmission of trauma and its long-term implications. I am excited to continue contributing to this important international collaboration and to the next generation of discoveries emerging from VHAS.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Hangqing Ruan, Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk, Zachary Zimmer and Anna Zajacova. Educational Disparities in Disability in Mid- to Late-Life: How Much is Attributable to Pain. *Journal of Aging and Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08982643251413824>

Yu, Chang, Ashley B. Barr, Yulin Yang, and Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk. “Beyond Pain Presence: The Impact of Multisite Pain and Pain Interference on Cognitive Functioning Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults.” *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B (Psychological Sciences)* 81(1):gbaf220. PMID: PMC12771511.

Ruan, Hangqing, Yulin Yang, and Hanna Grol-Prokopczyk. “Which is More Predictive of Mortality—Pain Severity or Pain Interference? Evidence From 20-Year Longitudinal Data.” *The Journal of Pain* 40(March):106192. PMID pending.

Wenqian Xu, Biying Yang, Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan, Digital Technologies in Care for Older Adults Living Alone: A Scoping Review, *Innovation in Aging*, 2026;, igag048, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igag048>