

# Learning from Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants

## Elder Abuse Forum

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Calgary, Alberta Site Report  
August 11, 2019  
Arts Commons Learning Centre

Based on notes by Gabriel Abes and Angelo Bodoso

Prepared by Edwin Chavez and Ilyan Ferrer

**Mmessage from Joshua Dalledonne, Producing and Engagement Associate for Arts Commons.**

Thank you so very much for the opportunity to welcome you into Arts Commons and I hope that this is one of many visits for you, your friends and your family. I am travelling today, otherwise I would certainly be there with you to share these thoughts! The opportunity to participate in events like the Immigrant Seniors Project, are particularly meaningful for Arts Commons as a way to build community through the arts. We aim for the spaces here to be a gathering place for all Calgarians and we're grateful that you chose to spend your time here today. As always, if you'd like to share your thoughts I would like to hear them – please do not hesitate to email or call: jdalledonne@artscommons.ca or 403-294-7455, extension 1451.

- Josh Dalledonne



## Acknowledgements

### Land acknowledgement

Welcome to the University of Calgary. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

### Research team

Ilyan Ferrer (University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work)

Maribel Javier (Action Dignity), Coordinator

Mae Chavez (Action Dignity), Facilitator

Edwin Chavez (Action Dignity), Facilitator

Gabriel Abes (Action Dignity), Facilitator

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### Partners



### Funders



Social Sciences and Humanities  
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## **I. Introduction**

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### **Project overview**

The “Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: Photovoice Project” is a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded art exhibit that shares the stories, perspectives and photos of older racialized immigrants in Montreal, Quebec and Vancouver, British Columbia. Many people have contributed to ensure the success of this project, which showcases the challenges and strategies that older racialized immigrants face in accessing supports and services throughout their lives. The findings of our research highlight the experiences of (1) poverty, (2) precarious housing, (3) difficulties in accessing health care, (4) well-being and meaningful social connections for immigrant seniors, and (5) stories of resistance and resilience. The project hosts Photovoice exhibits in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Quebec City.

### **Research team**

The Calgary site is led by Dr. Ilyan Ferrer, an assistant professor at the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Social Work; and in partnership with Action Dignity. ActionDignity is a community-based organization that facilitates the collective voice and action of ethnocultural communities to pursue the vision of a just and equitable society for all. It uses collaboration to create positive impacts for individuals, families, communities and systems. It has a membership of more than 70 ethnocultural organizations and individual members, and wide-ranging collaborative relationships with service providers, institutions and policy makers. Our research team includes:

- Marichu Antonio (Executive director, Action Dignity)
- Maribel Javier (Calgary site coordinator, Action Dignity)
- Mae Chavez (Forum facilitator, University of Calgary)
- Edwin Chavez (Forum facilitator, University of Calgary)
- Gabriel Abes (Notetaker, University of Calgary)
- Angelo Bodoso (Notetaker, University of Calgary)

### **Description of Calgary Site Report**

The forum was held on August 11, 2018, with different stakeholders—mostly representing seniors’ service organizations in Calgary. These organizations included: The Centre for Newcomers, Immigrant Services Calvary, Calgary Catholic Immigrant Services, Calgary. The forum was centered along the viewing of a photovoice exhibit, titled the Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants, which facilitated discussions on the topic of “*Elder Abuse*.”

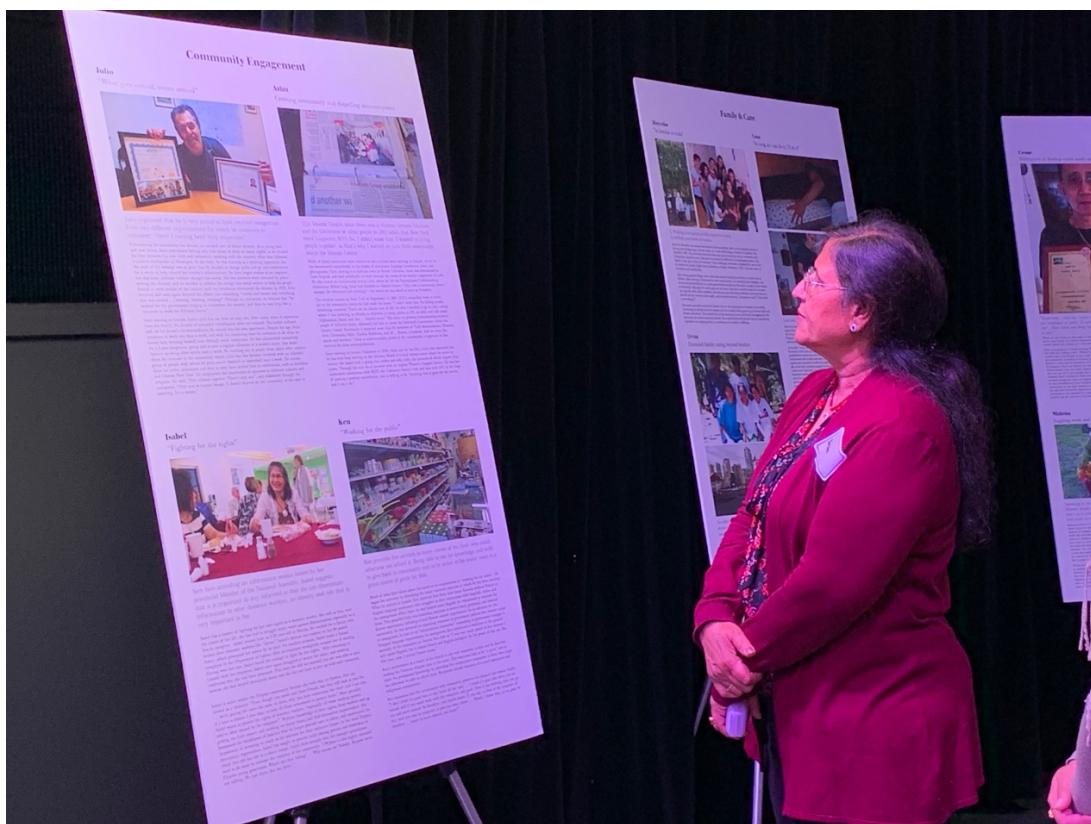
The forum was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). It is one of a series of forums and workshops to be held across four metropolitan

centres (Greater Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, and Quebec City). Following completion of the forums, a consolidated project report will be released to participants.

The forum was organized in partnership with ActionDignity Society (formerly Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary). Dr. Ilyan Ferrer, the lead of the Calgary site, offered a cursory introduction to the exhibit and how discussions were being held across four sites (Montreal, Quebec City, Calgary and Vancouver). Lalita Singh, the Project Coordinator, North of McKnight Communities Society, initiated the discussion by offering a comprehensive presentation on elder abuse. She highlighted that elder abuse means any action or inaction that puts the wellbeing of the elderly into jeopardy. It can be financial, emotional, physical, sexual, religious or cultural. She also noted that Alberta ranks as the third-highest in Canada in terms of elder abuse.

This site report for the *Calgary Elder Abuse Forum* summarizes the key themes and ideas that were discussed during the forum and the final concluding discussion that occurred at the end of the forum. Discussion on elder abuse happened as a part of World Café style discussions, where small groups of 5-6 people discussed each theme. The concluding discussion at the end of the forum consisted of a broader group discussion.

Please note that the opinions contained in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the research team or all participants in attendance, but rather reflect the diversity of the views and comments made by all of our participants





## II. Keynote Presentation

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Selected slides from the "Elder Abuse" Keynote by By Lalita Singh



**SOCIAL ISOLATION** is commonly defined as a low quantity and quality of contact with others.

### FAST FACTS

- ▶ 1 in 4 Calgary seniors living independently live alone.
- ▶ 1 in 4 Alberta seniors don't feel they belong in their local community.
- ▶ Each year, 400 - 600 seniors in Alberta remain in hospital after treatment because of the lack of affordable supportive housing.
- ▶ Women are more vulnerable to higher levels of loneliness, in part, because of their greater longevity compared to men.
- ▶ 63% of single, low-income seniors are women.
- ▶ 30% of Canadian seniors are at risk of becoming socially isolated.



## Signs of loneliness

- ▶ Withdrawing from previous activities enjoyed-can't hear or see
- ▶ Focusing almost solely on your health issues-
- ▶ Going without a few meals
- ▶ Becoming intolerant with people
- ▶ Being tearful whenever your family does visit-overwhelm with joy
- ▶ Avoiding telling your family about the time you fell and left the stove on-afraid to move to seniors home

## Risk factors

- ▶ Emotional distress because of loneliness, depression and poor physical and mental health are associated with social isolation.
- ▶ Seniors, immigrants and refugees, and people with disabilities are more likely at risk of becoming isolated than the general population due to lack of positive social ties
- ▶ **Other Risk Factors:**
- ▶ Alcohol or substance abuse, Change of environment, like moving into assisted living, Dementia-causing illness (e.g. Alzheimer's disease), Illness or loss of a loved one, Long-term illness, Medication interactions, Physical disability, Physical illnesses that can affect emotion, memory and thought, Poor diet or malnutrition.



**Elder abuse:** An estimated 1 in 10 senior citizens are victims of elder abuse, the intentional acts by a caregiver that lead to physical, psychological, or emotional harm.

**KEY FACTS OR STATESTICS:**

only one in five instances of elder abuse reported (WHO and INPEA, 2002).

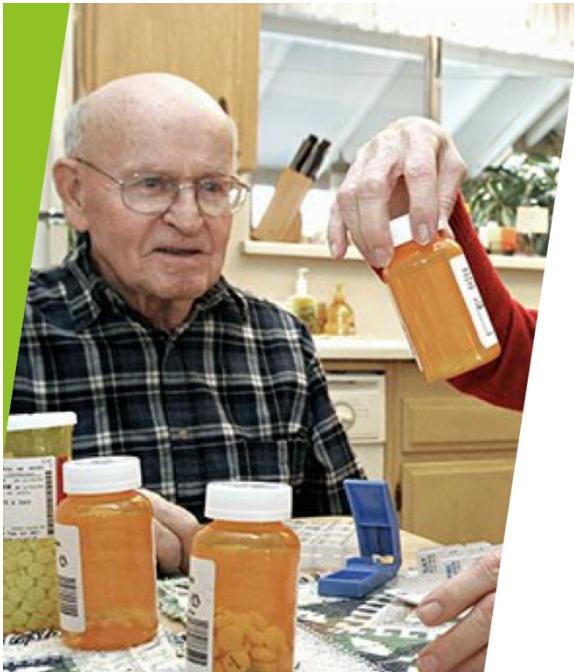
Alberta ranks 3rd highest among provinces for elder abuse.

Approximately 23,000 Alberta seniors are experiencing one or more forms of abuse.

Last year elder abuse was 7.5% affecting 9,000 older adults in Calgary. since 2011, over 600 cases handled by (EART)

In Canada the total Cost on Prevention and Intervention on Elder Abuse is \$6 billion

Approximately 25 per cent of crimes against older adults are committed by family members, usually a spouse or adult child.



**Physical health and Wellbeing:** Aging can bring unique health issues which varies from malnutrition, sensory impairment to chronic health concerns

**KEY FACTS :**

- ▶ 4 in 5 older adults will battle at least one chronic condition or illness such as heart disorders, arthritis, or osteoporosis. 50% will battle at least two.
- ▶ Only 3.6% of people over 65 years old are in nursing homes.
- ▶ As of 2016, about 1/3 of people aged 85 and over were living in “collective dwellings” such as nursing homes, long-term care facilities and seniors' residences
- ▶ By age 75, about 1 in 3 men and 1 in 2 women don't get ANY physical activity.

## Accessibility and Transportation



### KEY FACTS OR STATESTICS:

Mobility reductions become more evident as people reach 80 years of age.

75+ years and over age group is characterized by lower income, lower ownership rates and greater physical limitations than younger cohorts

The percentage of seniors with disabilities increases considerably with age. Which reduces accessibility for transportation.

61.3% for the older adult above 75 years have reduced accessibility for transportation.

**Language and cultural barriers:** Canada has been a nation of immigrants, with 16-20% of its citizens being foreign born.



Inability to communicate and to be informed

Language barriers leads to loneliness, lost, lack of knowledge

Seniors reported financial and language difficulties, health problems, discrimination, family conflicts, and social isolation.

## Few Solutions



As people age, they don't just need sickness care, they need communities and services that allow them to keep living and thriving.

The areas of focus should be social connectedness, physical activity, healthy eating, falls prevention and tobacco control

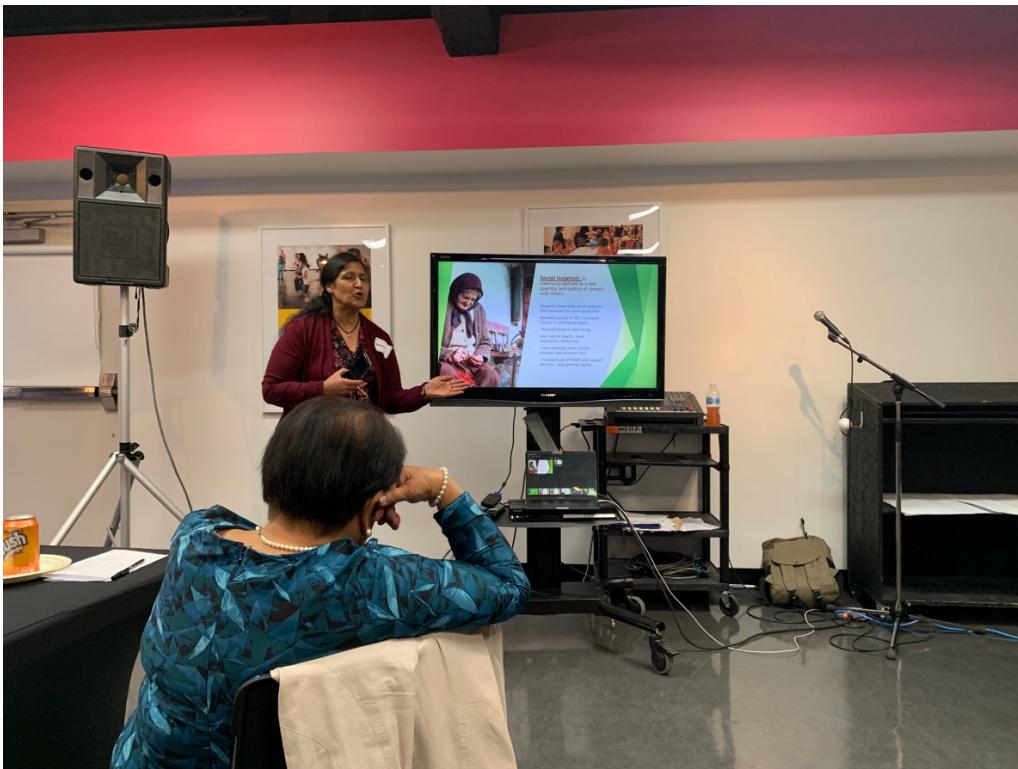
## Social Inclusion & Accessibility



Eliminating barriers that prevent seniors from fully participating in society is key for social inclusion and active living.

Having access to adequate public transportation or other senior transportation services is key to seniors' accessing programs and resources, as well as their feelings of connectedness and independence.

Referring isolated older adults to senior centers, activity programs and transportation services can go a long way toward creating valuable connections and reducing isolation.





### III. World Café Discussion

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The first significant part of the forum was a table discussion called “World Café.” Participants were asked to discuss two questions. The participants were divided into two groups/tables to discuss the posed questions.



**Question 1: What are your impressions about elder abuse in relation to immigrant older adults based on viewing this exhibit**

**General thoughts and impressions about elder abuse**

- Elder abuse starts at home and can end at the highest level of government.
- How to determine elder abuse? Can be doing it unknowingly.
- Elder abuse is defined by relationships. The better the family relationship, the lower the chance of elder abuse.
- Disability also worsens vulnerability. Telling about the participant's personal experience, her mother is vulnerable to abuse. It made her rethink if she has been accidentally abusing her mother.
- If explanation or attention is lacking, the immediate need is not addressed, which can be abused and lead to misunderstanding.
- Selective hearing is also a problem because it causes misunderstanding, which can lead to isolation.
- Extended family – can benefit the family but not the seniors
- There is not enough funding to address elder abuse.
- Financial abuse – parents have been used as scapegoats to control finances
- Communication within the family is essential to prevent elder abuse
- Even established immigrant older adults and are not victims of abuse have a fear of the future. They are not sure if they will be treated the same when their health or mental condition, as they grow older, worsen.

**Health issues:**

- Ageing parents have the problem of loss of hearing
- Disability worsens the situation

**Caregiver:**

- Having a strong relationship with a caregiver, where the caregiver's characteristics are well known, can reduce the issue of elder abuse.
- If the caregiver has to care for themselves and have to stop caring for their senior, then it is up to the government to uptake the care for seniors
- The more disabled, the higher the risk for elder abuse if there is no respite given to caregivers
- It is not elder abuse if a caregiver has to enforce respite care; Challenge is to create more effective respite care
- Caregiver's burden
  - Talked about if caregivers should care for themselves or their elderly parents

- Their reaction can worsen if they regularly neglect themselves
- There is stress to the family when they cannot prioritize care
- The more disabled, the higher the risk for elder abuse if there is no respite given to caregivers

### **Causes of elder abuse :**

#### **Lack of education and awareness contribute to elder abuse**

- Most seniors are not fully aware of the rights and programs for seniors.
- Family members are not aware as well. Families who sponsor their older parents are not aware that what they are doing are already forms of abuse.
- Lack of awareness about elder issues creates isolation among the immigrant older adults.

#### **Cultural barriers**

- Immigrant seniors are restricted by their community's cultural beliefs like giving priority for family care, e.g. taking care of grandchildren. However, there can be a form of abuse because they are not getting paid for the job they are doing. It is also manifested by seniors contributing to income of the family or sending money to family members back home.
- Abuse can be hidden by "way of life." Some participants consider cultural norms as a way of life.
- One participant asked, "What is permissible in each culture, and what counts as abuse?"
- **Taboo**
  - Most of our seniors do not want to talk about abuse, especially with agencies and other members of the community because it may be taboo.
    - Fear is deeply rooted because they want to protect the dignity and ego of the family. They fear that if abuse is put in the open, the family will lose respect from the community. So better hide it. The problem is that it contributes to deeper abuse of elders.
    - "It exists, but they don't want to talk about it."



## Question 2: What actions do we need to take in order to remove barriers/ build on strengths?

Educate and raise awareness about older adults, especially among multi-cultural communities

- There should be programs that will facilitate and encourage seniors to educate themselves. Seniors should start educating themselves. It should be an “inside job.”
- Awareness building programs should also focus on family members (family members, kids). It can be integrated into their application for sponsoring parents.
- Awareness of elder abuse (forms of abuse, causes of abuse).
- Awareness on a community level is important
- Increase multigenerational awareness. Young people should be aware of and engaged in
- Seniors should also be aware of not only what constitutes as abuse but the programs available to mitigate the harmful effects and to prevent abuse.
- Education about elder abuse should be integrated into educational systems
- Raising awareness would lead to the breaking of cultural barriers.

Strengthen community programs from government and non-profit service providers

- Establish service providers that will focus specifically on immigrant seniors.

- More visits from social workers and development practitioners .
- Expand dissemination of information, e.g. emergency contact numbers, literature on elder abuse, access to resources, capacity and awareness building.

### **Networking and organizing**

- Raise the senior's self-esteem through increased community activities.
- Strengthen existing seniors' organizations and develop more programs that would facilitate increased seniors' participation in community engagement.
- Get businesses involved to address elder abuse, e.g. senior-friendly pharmacy.

### **Advocate for better policies for immigrant older adults**

- More resources for seniors especially those who do not have OAS benefits.
- Senior community homes that are culturally friendly.
- Attached room to home for seniors. Senior parents will have their privacy, but they still live close, and this shall be separate from the mortgage.
- Remove senior income from collective income.
- Homebuilders should consider three-generational homes.
- Senior homes that are age and culturally friendly More affordable respite care when caregivers need to leave.
- Short term care
- Integrate older adult awareness in the school system curriculum.
- Advocacy to engage policymakers



#### **IV. Plenary Discussion**

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##### **Gaps in understanding that prevent action:**

- Jobs and family dynamics. Jobs take away the presence of people within the family environment. Eventually, it disrupts relationships.
  - Social class differential issue
  - Most of the time, seniors want to live independently, but there is a stigma for how employers think.
  - Age and racism hinder senior's independence
  - Overqualified
- Daycare is expensive
  - Communication is essential to reduce the burdens of seniors taking care of children.
  - Quality and quantity time issues
- Financial Barrier- most seniors are obliged to find work to help families back home and families where they currently stay.
- Budget cuts are happening in Alberta. Seniors programs may be affected. It may worsen the situation for the seniors.

##### **Who needs to take responsibility?**

- Seniors themselves. They have to take action in advocating for their welfare and knowing their rights.
- Policymakers. But a participant raised the question, "Are policymakers aware of the senior's issues, and are they prioritizing it?"
- City policy -> collective household income. Now seniors do not get low-income benefits because their income is tied to their household. This results in a lack of transportation and recreation, which isolates the seniors.

##### **There is a need to formulate a National Strategy for Seniors and engage with national policymakers**

- MPs should be aware of the situation of immigrant older adults.
- The national strategy should be juxtaposed with child abuse
- The strategy/ policy should include income and tax on seniors. Taxes are high, which dissuade seniors from working which promotes isolation and depression.
- Criteria for OAS: \$607 divided quarterly
  - GIS criteria: < \$18k

- Alberta government cuts
  - Employment insurance
- AHS is usually with in-home care, which is affiliated with AHS. This associates with the Ministry of Seniors.
- Schools for seniors-> intergenerational, which teaches children to respect seniors when they grow up; Get more seniors to tell stories in elementary schools.



