

# ELDER ABUSE AND AGING IN ALBERTA

Learning from the lived experiences of aging immigrants

## 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.

The Calgary site was led by Dr. Ilyan Ferrer (assistant professor at Carleton University) and in partnership with ActionDignity Society. 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 (former executive director of ActionDignity), Maribel Javier (Calgary site coordinator), Mae Chavez (forum facilitator), Edwin Chavez (forum facilitator), Jose Gabriel Abes (notetaker) and Angelo Bodoso (notetaker).

## A RESEARCH PROJECT USING THE INTERSECTIONAL LIFECOURSE PERSPECTIVE

This project follows up on the study named Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: A narrative-photovoice study. The initial data collection focused on the lifecourse histories of immigrant older adults and was conducted between 2014-2017, in Vancouver and Montreal. The research design integrated a narrative approach and the photovoice method with the aim of exploring how the immigration process influences the life course of older adults. The results of this study were showcased in a traveling photo exhibition, summarizing the life histories and experiences of 19 immigrant older adults who came from Afghanistan, Chili, Colombia, Guyana, Korea, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Philippines and Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the main goals of the project is to contribute to efforts to increase our ability – as researchers, practitioners and activists – to work together to fight discrimination and social exclusion affecting immigrant older adults, by strategizing about actions necessary to adapt programs and policies to better meet the needs, and address the realities of diverse older adult immigrants, their families and communities.

## ROUNDTABLE

This policy brief draws from the discussions from a meeting held on **August 11, 2018**, at the ArtsCommons Learning Centre. with different stakeholders– mostly representing seniors’ service organizations in Calgary. These organizations included: The Centre for Newcomers, Immigrant Services Calgary, Calgary Catholic Immigrant Services, Calgary. The forum was centered along the viewing of a photovoice exhibit, titled the Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants, and facilitated discussions on the topic of “**Elder Abuse.**”



# 1. STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

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The forum began with Dr. Ilyan Ferrer offering 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, continued the forum by offering a comprehensive presentation on elder abuse. She highlighted that elder abuse means any action or inaction that puts the well-being of older adults into jeopardy. Abuse can come in many forms, including financial, emotional, physical, sexual, religious or cultural. Ms. Singh also noted that Alberta ranks third-highest in Canada in incidents of elder abuse in Canada. This policy brief is informed by Lalita Singh's keynote address.

Following Ms. Singh's keynote, World Cafe style discussions were held with small groups of 5-6 people discussing the theme of Elder Abuse.

## **KEY FACTS AND STATS**

- Social isolation is commonly defined as low quantity and quality contact with others.
- 24.6% of the Canadian population over the age of 65 lives alone; 36.6% of women over the age of 85 live alone, 21.8% of men over the age of 85 live alone (Statistics Canada and Comfortlife.ca, n.d).
- 1 in 4 older adults in Alberta do not feel they belong in their local community.
- Women are more vulnerable to higher levels of loneliness
- 63% of single, low-income older adults are women (Government of Canada, 2016)
- 30% of Canadian older adults are at risk of becoming socially isolated (MacCourt, n.d).



## 2. ISSUES AND REALITIES - PART I

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### **ELDER ABUSE**

- Elder abuse is defined as intentional acts that lead to physical, psychological, or emotional harm.
- An estimated 1 in 10 older adults are victims of elder abuse (Nursing Home Abuse Center, n.d).
- Only one in five instances of elder abuse are reported (WHO and INPEA, 2002).
- Alberta ranks 3rd highest among provinces for elder abuse.
- Approximately 23,000 older adults are experiencing one or more forms of abuse in Alberta (Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, 2019).
- Statistically, 9,000 older adults are affected by elder abuse in Calgary (City of Calgary, 2016)
- Since 2011, over 600 cases handled by Elder Abuse Response Team (EART) in Calgary
- In Canada the total cost of prevention and intervention of elder abuse is \$6 billion (Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council, 2019).
- Approximately one-third of police reported violence of older adults were committed by a family member (Savage, 2019).

### **LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS**

- As a settler-colonial state, Canada is characterized by its immigration policies, where 21.9% of the Canadian population is foreign born (Statistics Canada, 2020).
- A language barrier is the inability to communicate and to be informed.
- Language barriers lead to loneliness, lost/lack of knowledge
- A study by Stewart et al. (2011) found that immigrant older adults reported financial and language difficulties, health problems, discrimination, family conflicts and social location.

### **Intersectional analysis and the lifecourse perspective**

A critical perspective that considers the ways in which the interactions of individuals with social structures, public policy, institutions, state services and programs shape the lifecourse trajectories and experiences of older adults.

### **PHYSICAL HEALTH, WELL BEING AND CARE FACILITIES**

- Aging can bring unique health issues which can range from sensory impairment to chronic health concerns.
- 4 in 5 older adults will battle at least one chronic conditions or illness such as heart disorders, arthritis, or osteoporosis; 50% will battle at least two (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d)
- By age of 75, about 1 in 3 men and 1 in 2 women don't get any physical activity (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d)
- According to census data, 160,000 people lived in long-term care facilities in Canada (Library of Parliament, 2020)
- Alberta has a total of 186 long-term care homes; 46% are publicly owned, 27% are owned by private for-profit organizations and 27% are owned by private not-for-profit organizations (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2021).

### **ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPORTATION**

- According to the National Institute on Aging (2020), older adults face a diversity of transportation obstacles.
- The percentage of older adults with disabilities increases considerably with age, raising concerns about accessibility for transportation.
- The National Institute on Aging notes that there is inadequate federal enforcement of accessibility measures and accountability

These realities can stem from multiple and intersectional social dimensions that can accumulate and change along individual life course trajectories, based on the multiple positions of individuals and groups in relation to various factors, including: social class, gender, migration journey and immigration status, sexual orientation, ethnocultural identity and ability.

## 2. ISSUES AND REALITIES - PART II

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### **FEW SOLUTIONS**

- According to Lalita Singh (North of McKnight Communities Society), older people require need communities and services that allow them to keep living and thriving. Areas of focus in elder abuse prevention among immigrant communities should center on social connectedness, physical activity, healthy eating, fall prevention and tobacco control.

### **SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY**

- Addressing barriers that prevent older adults 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 older adults 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 forward creating valuable connections and reducing isolation.

"Elder abuse starts at home and can end at the highest level of government."

"Elder abuse is defined by relationships. The better the family relationship, the lower the chance of elder abuse."

- Excerpts from the roundtable



"Most seniors are not fully aware of the rights and programs for seniors."

"Lack of awareness about elder issues creates isolation among the immigrant older adults."

"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."

-Excerpts from the roundtable

## 3. WAYS FORWARD

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"Age and racism hinder senior's independence"

"Budget cuts are happening in Alberta. Seniors programs may be affected. It may worsen the situation for the seniors."

- Excerpts from the roundtable

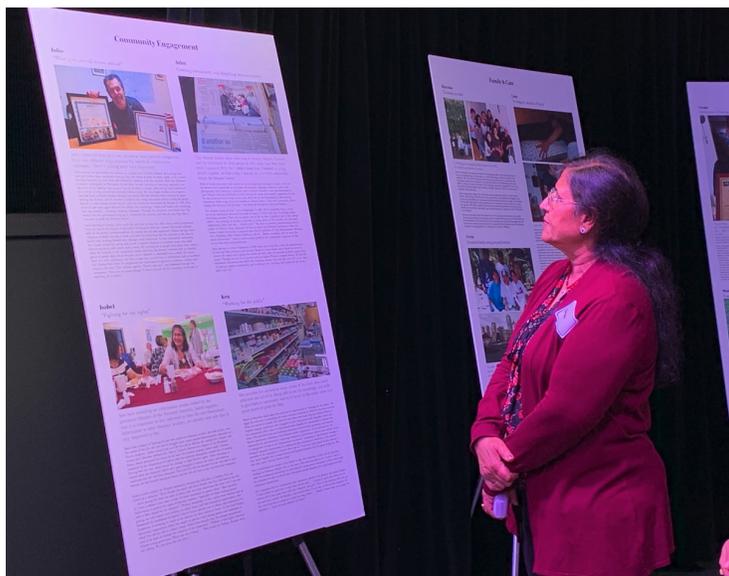
### WHO NEEDS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY? VOICES FROM THE ROUNDTABLES

- Older adults "have to **take action in advocating** for their welfare and knowing their rights."
- Policymakers must themselves the following question: "**Are policymakers aware of the senior's issues [on elder abuse], and are they prioritizing it?**" because "[government officials] should be aware of the situation of immigrant older adults."
- City officials need to **advocate for collective household income**. One roundtable discussed how "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."
- The roundtables discussed **the urgency of a National Strategy for Seniors**. Participants shared that "there is a need to formulate a National Strategy for Seniors and engage with national policymakers" and "the strategy/policy **should include income and tax on seniors**" to address their financial precarity.
- In Alberta, "Alberta Health Services is usually with in-home care, which is affiliated with AHS. This [should be prioritized] with the Ministry of Seniors"



# 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACT INFO

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## **PARTNERS**

We would like to thank our partners for this project, ActionDignity Society and ArtsComons.

## **CALGARY TEAM - ELDER ABUSE**

**Ilyan Ferrer** (Carleton University, Calgary lead)

**Maribel Javier** (University of Calgary, Coordinator)

**Lalita Singh** (North of McKnight Communities Society and Keynote)

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**Jose Gabriel Abes** (University of Calgary, Notetaker)

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## **NATIONAL TEAM**

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## **LINKS**

# Website of the project

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