Although the city of Lowell is home to over 14,000 seniors (defined as adults 60 and over), community organizations, including the Lowell Senior Center know surprisingly little about the strengths, resources, needs, and goals of this population.

The Lowell Seniors Count project was initiated to get a clearer picture of this population through a comprehensive needs and well-being assessment adapted from a similar study done in Boston a decade ago. Over the period of June 2008 to August 2011, over 300 volunteers, including UML service-learning students, were trained as community researchers. Then, based on registration rolls for voters 60 and over (13,000+), they went door to door throughout the city, delivering approximately 8,000 resource bags and collecting 1,842 surveys.

Interview respondents answered questions related to their living and financial arrangements, health and well-being, and social and community activities. The proposed paper will report on some of the basic descriptive findings from these interviews, focusing on those findings related to social and community involvement, and will supplement this quantitative data with qualitative data from life-history interviews with mature adults from a related study.

Although I was not involved with data collection for Seniors Count, I did participate in data entry and analysis, and I conducted several of the life-history interviews. Previous research suggests that social support and community involvement are strong predictors of overall health and well-being among seniors, and findings from this study will hopefully add to the growing body of research on this topic, inform future research, and help Lowell-area community organizations to identify and build on the strengths of local seniors, while also providing needed resources.

**PROJECT SUMMARY**

**FACTORS ASSESSED**

Quality of life, finances, and social supports

Transportation issues

Physical and mental health

Use of community resources

**RESEARCH**

Page 1 of the 8-page questionnaire

Of the many variables studied, here are some of the preliminary findings from the 1842 respondents:

- 85% reported never having been a victim of fraud or scam.
- 93.4% reported having no trouble paying their rent or mortgage.
- 85.7% said they felt like valued members of the community.
- 91.9% said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their social activities and relationships.
- 72.5% said they do not participate in any neighborhood or community organizations (excluding religious worship).
- Only 13.7% said they used to Lowell Transit Authority (LRTA) public bus system.

**PRELIMINARY RESULTS**

**IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY**

- The survey also showed that 80% of respondents were white, and therefore the sample population is not highly representative of Lowell residents, so more respondents of different ethnicities would be a good next step.
- Also, further analysis of differences in genders, comparisons of multiple factors, and further comparisons against which neighborhoods the respondents came from would be potential next steps in the data analysis process.

**QUALITATIVE DATA FROM A RELATED PROJECT PAINTS A RICHER PORTRAIT OF LIFE FOR SENIORS IN LOWELL**

Some quotes from interviews with seniors:

"I've probably underused resources, and I don't know where to look for them, where to find them."

-64 year old white male living in Lowell

"Outreach workers like Linda (at the Senior Center) help a lot with daily things like mail, or sometimes I don't know what people are talking about. I don't know where to go for things. So it's nice to have somebody to speak to, and who can speak for me."

-64 year old Cambodian woman living in Lowell, who doesn't speak any English

"[There should be] more bicycle areas so you can bike, that sort of thing, but you know, you laugh-- somebody eighty, eighty-five years old, you don't think of them as riding a bike or anything, but I certainly, if I was reasonably healthy, I would do that."

-71 year old white woman living in Lowell

**WHAT THIS RESEARCH EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT ME**

- How to write a professional email and set up meetings
- The importance of networking
- How to conduct interviews
- How to write a literature review for a research article for publication
- How to seriously multi-task
- The importance of organizing and being able to skillfully analyze data in SPSS and NVIVO