

INTERGENERATIONAL BEFRIENDING: AN ANTIDOTE TO SOCIAL ISOLATION OF OLDER ADULTS

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BACKGROUND

Older adults account for 16.9% of the population, by 2060, nearly 1 in every 4 U.S. residents will be over 65 years.

The surge of aging population has increased the problem of social isolation leading to enhanced feelings of boredom and loneliness.

OBJECTIVE

The research aims to explore the effectiveness of the friendly visitations/befriending approach on older adults through undergraduate service-learning classes at TXST

STUDY DESIGN

Design

Qualitative study
Community based participatory research- Data: weekly artifacts provided by undergraduate students enrolled in a course with a special focus on multicultural sensitivity.

Sample

- Service-learning students (n= 48)
- Older adults (n=46)

INTERGENERATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING

Service-learning sessions are an essential component of the undergraduate course in Healthcare Administration at TXST. Students are paired with an older adult in the community and document their unscripted interactions weekly for eight weeks. Students then write two reflections—one at the end of their fourth interaction and another at the end of their eighth conversation.

RESULTS

Study Constructs, Definition and Sources

Construct	Definition	Source
Meaningful engagement	Frequency of socially interactive activities Feeling of reduced boredom Cohesive interaction (confidence, safety)	questions on general life experiences and satisfaction contextualized from Diener et al. (1985).
Internal motivation to participate	Discussion of life story Level of happiness ability to exert personal control of the situation	questions on satisfaction with life contextualized from Kozma & Stones. (1980).
Intergenerational approach to befriending	Perceived benefits from the friendly nature of interaction ability to comfortably connect with students Positive feeling and attitude towards the student	questions on human feelings contextualized from Diener et al. (1985) and Ng et al. (2015) for this study

Understanding Pathways out of Social Isolation

Themes and Factors Identified

Name of constructs	Number of times specified
Intergenerational befriending	256
Comfortability	79
Positive Emotions	80
Perceived benefits	97
Internal Motivation	277
Feeling of happiness	96
Life story discussion	181
Meaningful engagement	253
Feeling safe	58
Increased confidence	98
Reduced boredom	97
Total	786

Participant Comments on Key Constructs

Meaningful Engagement

- “Like to talk about you and the multicultural sensitivity project in the Zumba classes three times a week, and ballet classes twice a week” [senior participant # 2]
- “Feel glad, I seem to have more control on anger unlike before, we have opportunities for social interaction and there is less counterproductive behavior” [senior participant # 45]
- “She plays for the Texas State women’s basketball team. Since Texas State is so close to Austin, I get to attend all her games and is eternally grateful for this” [senior participant # 5]
- “The student group hosts a couple of social events every day, so there is always an event to attend and enjoy. Some of these events include- bingo, bible studies, stretching class, and physical fitness classes as well.” [senior participant # 42]
- “She is physically very active, I enjoyed our workout discussion last week, me and my husband, engaging in either yoga, meditation, or going on 30-minute walks” [senior participant # 16]

Internal Motivation to Participate

- “Family reunion was over; it was a good day of our weekly conversation.” [senior participant # 39]
- “She loves everything about her life. Our hobbies are the same. She is blessed to be healthy at her age, and she wouldn’t change a thing.” [student participant # 12]
- “Grateful to be able to wake up each morning and do the things that I enjoy, like art and seeing family and talking to my student friend over the phone” [senior participant # 3]
- “Like to talk to you about school, do you enjoy the simple pleasures in life like cooking?” [senior participant # 28]

Intergenerational Approach to Befriending

- “Now look forward to our weekly conversations.” [senior participant # 40]
- “I write down events worth mentioning every week, so he wouldn’t forget to tell me” [student participant # 41]
- “I don’t get to see my grandchildren as often as I would like, so having a person of the younger generation to talk to weekly reminds me a lot of them.” [senior participant # 25]
- “How he was excited waiting for our weekly phone calls.” [student participant # 33]

FINDINGS

Three main conversational trends were identified:

- intergenerational approach to befriending
- meaningful engagement
- internal motivation to participate in the program.

LIMITATIONS

- Findings are not generalizable
- Data was specific to the needs of the course, however, they are replicable in other service-learning classes
- Several students reported being unable to contact seniors
- Drop out of seniors after the first half of the project

CONCLUSION

- Specialized interventions help to build social cohesion and connect the older adults to social network.
- A befriending approach combats social isolation
- Reduced boredom and loneliness improves the quality of life of older adults

IRB APPROVAL

Study was approved by Texas State IRB # 7046

