

University at Buffalo

Title: Free Tranportaiton Service Can Prevent Depression and Loneliness

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Effects of loneliness on one's health is the same as having 16 cigarettes a day and may lead to depression. We investigated on loneliness, depression, and quality of life in 66 older adults with limited social connectivity who have not jointed a free community transportation service ((G1) and 67 those who have involved for two years (G2). Hypothesis was that more social connectivity benefits older adults' psychological outcomes. This study was one-time face-to-face interview with 133 community-dwelling older adults (60+ years old) in two counties in Western New York. Free transportation service has been available in the past five years through volunteer drivers for older adults with driving cessation and/or limited driving capability. Both groups' demographic characteristics were equivalent. The mean age was 75.5. G1 was close to showing a depressive symptom (M=13.6) using Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D) while G2 had no depressive symptom (M=5.2) (p=.000016). G1 had a higher level of loneliness (p=.0000015) using an item of the CES-D, and scored worse for all 10 items of Older People quality of Life Questionnaire (OPQOL-35): QOL of your life; overall QOL; health; social relationship, independence, control over life, freedom; home and neighborhood; psychological and emotional well-being; financial circumstances; and leisure and activities (p=.00435 for financial circumstances – p=.000019 for social relationship). Further analyses revealed that for service recipients, financial circumstances and health, and for volunteers, leisure did not show differences between these two groups. Regular personal contact, even once a week, can prevent depression and loneliness in older adults.

Biography

Machiko Tomita has completed her PhD from University of Minnesota, USA. She is the director of Aging & Technology Research Center in the Department of Rehabilitation Science at University at Buffalo. She has over 100 publications in peer reviewed journals and has been serving as an editorial board member of five journals and grant reviewers for national organizations. Currently she is developing technology to detect early onset of dementia and burnout of caregivers.

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