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Social Networks and Health-Promoting Lifestyles in Korean Older Adults

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Background: Older adults' social networks, the relationships they have with family, friends, and the community, are closely related to their health and mortality (Santini et al., 2015). Although a decrease in an individual's social network size could be considered a natural part of aging, an older adult's social network size and frequency of contact with network members can directly affect the health of that individual (Park et al., 2013). In addition to robust and engaging social networks, older adults can improve their health and well-being through health-promoting lifestyles—such as physical activity, good nutrition, and stress management—which can lead to successful aging (Kim & Sohn, 2012). A few studies have identified the relationship between some aspects of older immigrants' social determinants of health and quality of life (Kim, 2014; Lee & Song, 2014; Park et al., 2013). However, thus far, no studies have tried to specifically compare the associations between the social networks and health-promoting lifestyles of South Korean older adults and Korean immigrants living in the United States (U.S.).

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to understand predictors on social networks and health-promoting lifestyles in the two groups. We examined the relationships between several socio-demographic characteristics and the health-promoting lifestyles of each group, and then we compared to what extent each group's health-promoting lifestyles was related to their social network scores to determine if relationships between these variables differed between the two groups.

Methods: This study employed a cross-sectional, comparative research design. The data collection took place in the two countries at various locations such as churches, community events, senior citizen centers, and senior learning centers among individuals who are 65 years of age or older between July 2015 and April 2016. The measurements were consisted of socio-demographic variables, social network scale (6 items) and health-promoting lifestyles (52 items). The health-promoting lifestyles have six subscales including spiritual growth, nutrition, health responsibility, physical activity, interpersonal relationship, stress management. T-test, two-ways of analysis of variance, and post hoc (Scheffe) test were used for data analysis using SPSS program.

Results: A total of 226 old adults living in South Korea and 128 old adults' Korean immigrant living in the U.S. participated in this study. The social network score and health-promoting lifestyles including all subscales were higher in the Korean immigrant groups. Most socio-demographic factors were significantly positively associated with health-promoting lifestyles except gender, driving ability, and employment. Furthermore, most variables were significant interaction effects with a residence area (Korea vs. U.S.) except driving ability and religion. For example, Korean adults with no schooling experience reported lower scores of health-promoting lifestyles compared to those of Korean Immigrants; however, when individuals have more than middle school level of education, participants in both groups reported high levels of health-promoting lifestyle scores. In the immigrant group, the relationship between social networks and health-promoting lifestyles was stronger than the Korean older adults.

Discussions: Korean immigrants living in the U.S. reported higher scores on the measure of health-promoting lifestyles than their South Korean counterparts in that the immigrant participants scored the highest in spiritual growth and stress-management subdomains of the measure compared to other subdomains of health-promoting lifestyles. This finding suggests that the immigrant participants in the

study might invest a large amount of time and energy preparing for future years, as most of them had already settled in the U.S. more than a decade previously. It could be beneficial in the future to study the relationship between the subdomains of health-promoting lifestyles and social networks in older South Korean adults. Such a study could offer healthcare providers and health educators' insight into specific facilitators and barriers affecting Korean older adults' health-promoting lifestyles, so that targeted interventions could be developed for this population.

Conclusion: Since differences in the degree of health-promoting lifestyles can lead to population inequality (Jang et al., 2016), it is significant to identify predictive variables that differ in the degree of health-promoting lifestyles between the two groups. We suggest that health policymakers and healthcare providers develop targeted programs that are designed to promote health-related lifestyles that are associated with older adults.

Title:

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References:

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Abstract Summary:

This study was to understand predictors on social networks and health-promoting lifestyles(HPLS). Total of 354 old adults residing in South Korea and immigrants in the U.S. participated. The scores of two variables were higher in the Korean immigrant. There was a positive relationship between social networks and HPLS in both groups.

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