OLDER AMERICANS ACT MEALS PROGRAMS: Responding to the Pandemic

Katie Jantzi, Meals on Wheels America, Arlington, Virginia, United States

This session provides insights into how the pandemic challenged the capabilities and ingenuity of the Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and the aging network. Speakers will include key aging network stakeholders, who will discuss the overnight evolution of programs serving often isolated older adults.

OLDER AMERICANS ACT SUPPORTS AND SERVICES: Adapting to the Pandemic

Amy Gotwals, National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Washington, District of Columbia, United States

This session provides insights into how the pandemic challenged the capabilities and ingenuity of the Older Americans Act (OAA) programs and the aging network. Speakers will include key aging network stakeholders, who will discuss the overnight evolution of programs serving often isolated older adults.

Session 3145 (Symposium)

THE TIES THAT BIND: How Online and Offline Interactions Affect Social Support and Quality of Life for Older Adults

Chair: Shelia Cotten

Though a digital divide still exists, older adults are increasingly using a range of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – smartphones, apps, tablets, and computers – to communicate and engage with social ties. This symposium focuses on modalities of interaction – whether online or offline – that older adults use to interact with social ties. The research projects detailed examine the frequency of different interaction modalities, as well as impacts of these interaction modalities on older adults’ perceptions of social support and quality of life. Kadylak and colleagues focus on social robots and how older adults may engage with this evolving technology to improve social engagement and aging in place. Kim and Fingerman investigate whether daily social media use is associated with same-day negative or positive mood in later life. Xie and colleagues examine older adults’ patterns of both online and offline social interaction during COVID-19, and how older adults perceive these interactions. Schuster and Cotten, using a national sample of individuals aged 65 and older, examine whether social media use may be related to a range of quality of life indicators. Each of these studies provides additional insights into the ways through which older adults interact and communicate with social ties, and potential impacts of the different ways through which they interact, which may provide insights into groups seeking to increase social engagement among older adults in general and during times when social isolation may be exacerbated due to societal stressors, such as pandemics.

OLDER ADULTS’ ONLINE AND OFFLINE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Kristina Shiroma, Atami De Main, Nathan Davis, and Bo Xie, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, United States

Using data from the Daily Experiences and Well-being survey (N=798). Participants were recruited from community-dwelling older adults in Central Texas. Data collection took place via the telephone during June-August 2020 (N = 200; age range: 65-92 years; Mean: 73.6; SD: 6.33). Participants used a variety of communication modes, including phone or texting (used by 99% of the participants); email (44%); in person (35%); video chat (31%); social media (24%); and postal mail (4%). Most participants (77%) used more than one communication mode. Participants discussed their preferences for and challenges of technology (i.e., smart phones) and its applications (i.e., video chat, telehealth, and social media). Participants’ self-reported experiences ranged from positive (50%), mixed (35%), to negative (15%). These findings will inform policy and community interventions to promote older adults’ social interactions during the pandemic.

WELL-BEING FACTORS THAT RELATE TO FACEBOOK-USING OLDER ADULTS’ PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON FACEBOOK

Travis Kadylak, Shelia Cotten, Amy Schuster, 1. University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, United States, 2. Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina, United States

The majority of literature on Facebook use and well-being focuses on younger demographics. The number older adults using Facebook continues to increase. Facebook use by older adults has been found to increase well-being and decrease feelings of depression. This study investigates the effect that perceived social support on Facebook may have on loneliness, depression, social support (offline), and fear of missing out (FOMO) for older adult Facebook users. Older adults aged 65 and older in the U.S. completed a Qualtrics survey (N=798). Participants were, on average, 74 years old. Perceived social support on Facebook had a positive association with social support, depression, and FOMO. The results suggest that among Facebook users older adults, higher levels of perceived social support were associated with higher levels of social support, feelings of depression, and FOMO. Future research should investigate the possibility that depression could be driving perceived social support on Facebook.

DAILY SOCIAL MEDIA USE, SOCIAL TIES, AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN LATER LIFE

Karen Fingerman, and Yijung Kim, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, United States

Research has seldom explored older adults’ daily social media use and its interface with ‘offline’ social ties. Using data from the Daily Experiences and Well-being Study (N = 310; Mage = 73.96), we investigated whether more daily social media use was associated with the same-day negative or positive mood in later life, and how these