

aging news

NEWSLETTER OF THE INSTITUTE ON AGING (IOA) |

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON |

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Under Radler's Leadership, Managing Complex Data Becomes Easier

IOA Affiliate **Barry Radler**, a key member of the MIDUS research team, is playing a prominent role in developing more efficient ways to manage data from large-scale studies. MIDUS (Midlife in the US) now has over 12,000 participants & 25,000 variables, many of which have been assessed repeatedly since 1995.

helped make MIDUS the most popular study at NACDA, where it has been accessed by more than 24,000 researchers.

- Dr. Radler is also involved in promoting the widespread adoption of DDI. In April 2015, he hosted the *3rd annual North American DDI User Conference* (www.ssc.wisc.edu/naddi2015) at UW-Madison, which brought together members of the scientific community from around the world to discuss the challenges & opportunities of using DDI.

Metadata Helps Researchers Across the Country

- MIDUS, a publicly available dataset, has captured the attention of scientists all over the U.S. and beyond. To facilitate effective use of MIDUS data, Dr. Radler and others (Dr. Gayle Love who oversees biomedical data) ensure the provision of critically needed information about each variable (e.g., survey question wording, how biological samples were tested) as well as information needed about the design of the larger study. Such descriptive data, known as metadata, is typically presented in codebooks.
- In an electronic era, codebooks benefit greatly when created with a standardized metadata system, one of which is the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI). DDI is based on a web language called XML that allows computers to use metadata intelligently. This facilitates searchability and analysis of complex inter-related datasets such as the multiple projects (survey, cognition/thinking, daily diaries, biomarkers, neuroscience) found in MIDUS.

Groundbreaking DDI Upgrades

Dr. Radler was recently awarded a grant from the National Institute on Aging to upgrade the MIDUS codebooks using the latest version of DDI. This will accomplish two key goals:

- **Custom data extracts-** A researcher who wants to investigate whether improved psychological well-being affects risk of chronic illness currently must download several complete datasets from various MIDUS projects and extract the needed variables from among thousands. The upgrade will allow researchers to bypass this time-consuming task and download only the specific variables needed.
- **Harmonization of all survey variables-** A researcher who wants to investigate the impact of lengthy periods of unemployment on health would find that length of unemployment was measured differently at different time points in MIDUS (weeks vs. months). The upgrade will allow these variables to be more easily converted to the same measurement so they can be readily compared.



Dr. Barry Radler

Radler Innovates in Metadata Management

- Under Dr. Radler's leadership, MIDUS is one of the first large-scale studies to make DDI codebooks available at its public archive (National Archive of Computerized Data on Aging, NACDA). This cutting-edge, user-friendly approach to data management has

For further information, see: midus.colectica.org

- Since 1995, MIDUS (Midlife in the US) has been studying the complex factors that affect people's health and well-being as they age.
- MIDUS has repeatedly collected social, behavioral, psychological, biological, and neurological data from a national sample.
- More than 620 scientific publications have utilized MIDUS data, including almost 300 from public users. They are archived at: midus.wisc.edu/findings



The Importance of Neighbors to Older Adults

There is a growing interest in programs that strengthen ties among neighbors so as to help older adults age more successfully in their local communities.

Neighbors typically help each other with non-intimate tasks, such as transportation, and are seen as being an especially important resource during emergencies. Interactions among neighbors can also provide a sense of community or an outlet for personal expression. Few studies have examined whether relations with neighbors affect older adult's well-being, although recent work from MIDUS has addressed this gap.

Over 1000 respondents, aged 40-80, were asked about their:

- **Emotional well-being-** both positive affect (feeling cheerful, satisfied, peaceful) and negative affect (feeling sad, nervous, hopeless).
- **Psychological well-being-** including having a sense of purpose, experiencing continued self-growth, and feeling in charge of one's environment.
- **Contact with neighbors-** how often they had any contact with their neighbors, even something as simple as saying "hello," and how often they had a real conversation or got together socially with their neighbors.

▪ **Perceived support from neighbors-** how much they could call on a neighbor for help if needed, and how much people in the neighborhood trusted each other.

Results:

- **Emotional well-being-** Participants reporting continuously *low levels of perceived support* from neighbors over a 10 year period reported *less positive affect* over time.
- **Psychological well-being-** Those who reported continuously *low or declining levels of contact with or support from their neighbors* over a 10 year period were at greater risk for *lower psychological well-being*.
- **What matters most-** *Perceived support was more important* in predicting psychological well-being than contact with neighbors.
- **Did anything improve?** Participants whose relationships with neighbors *improved* over time had comparable levels of psychological well-being as those who maintained continuously high levels of perceived support or contact with neighbors over the 10 years.

These above associations held even when taking into account the quality of people's relationships with family and friends.

Although neighbors have been relatively overlooked as a resource for aging individuals, these results suggest the need to promote communities where contact among neighbors is not only frequent but also supportive, as a means of improving the lives of non-institutionalized elders. Community initiatives that aim to help people develop and maintain stronger ties with their neighbors are a worthy future objective.

Source: Greenfield, E. A., & Reyes, L. (2014). *Continuity & change in relationships with neighbors. Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences. Advance online publication. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbu084.* See the article at: midus.wisc.edu



Less contact and support between neighbors is linked to lower well-being among older adults, which may affect their ability to age successfully in their own homes.





Students Working in the Community to Help Those with Dementia

Since 2014, the Center for Aging Research and Education (CARE) at the UW-Madison School of Nursing, led by IOA Affiliate & Professor, **Barbara Bowers**, has supported students volunteering with community organizations to assist those with memory loss, Alzheimer’s disease, and other dementias. CARE received a grant from Bader Philanthropies to expand these efforts and allow more students to work with community partners in Madison, Middleton, and Watertown.

Some students have volunteered with the Watertown Dementia Awareness Coalition, whose goal is to make Watertown, WI one of the first “dementia-friendly” cities in the US. The new grant allowed students to play a vital role creating a community conversation about dementia, while contacting local businesses and health-care professionals to promote meetings where community needs and priorities were discussed.

Creating Dementia Friendly Businesses

- The Coalition educates residents and businesses about dementia and how to support those with memory loss.
 - During business trainings, employees are taught to avoid overwhelming a person with dementia by offering them too many choices.
 - For example, instead of reciting a long list of daily specials, restaurant staff are taught to provide simpler options, such as, “Would you like something hot or cold to drink?” and if they want something hot, asking if they want coffee or tea.
- When training is complete, businesses display a purple angel decal, an international symbol for dementia awareness.
- People with dementia are taught that if they become confused, they can receive assistance wherever they see this purple angel.



The Purple Angel symbol signifies dementia awareness



Restaurant staff are taught not to overwhelm people with dementia by offering them too many choices.



Why are Dementia Friendly Communities Important?

- ▶ **Two-thirds of people struggling with memory loss live in the community, not in nursing homes.**
 - ▶ By creating dementia friendly communities, people with memory loss may feel less isolated, as well as safer leaving their homes.
 - ▶ The Coalition hosts monthly “Memory Cafes” at a local restaurant that allows community members with dementia to get together & socialize.



Spring 2016 Student Seminar

In response to increased student interest in dementia, CARE will be offering a service learning seminar in 2016, *Community Supports for People with Dementia*, for students from varied disciplines (nursing, medicine, pharmacy, social work, business, etc.).

Resources:

CARE (608) 265-4330, care@son.wisc.edu, www.son.wisc.edu/CARE.htm

Watertown Dementia Awareness Coalition
community.tlha.org/watertown-coalition

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*The idea is to die young
as late as possible.*

— Ashley Montagu



27th Annual Colloquium on Aging

See more details at:
aging.wisc.edu

Speakers:

Keynote: Advancing the Science of Population Health and Aging through Interdisciplinary Research

Parminder Raina, PhD, CRC, McMaster University, Canada

Can I Reduce My Risk for Developing Alzheimer's Disease?

Barbara B. Bendlin, PhD, UW-Madison

Work and Family Experiences Across the Life Course: Implications for Well-Being at Older Ages

James M. Raymo, PhD, UW-Madison

Understanding Pathways to Type 2 Diabetes

Vera Tsenkova, PhD, UW-Madison

Health and Resource Fair:

Dozens of organizations offer resources to improve quality of life as we age.

Poster Session and Awards:

UW-Madison faculty, students, and trainees present posters & compete for awards of excellence in aging research.

**Tues., Sept. 22, 2015, in Madison, WI
at our New Location:**

The Gordon Dining and Event Center

- Recently constructed in 2012, Gordon is located on the UW-Madison campus near the Kohl Center, at the corner of N. Lake & W. Dayton.
 - The 1st floor of Gordon is a public dining hall. The 2nd floor is the event center, all of which has been reserved for our event.
 - The speaker's room features three large screens that allow everyone to sit within easy viewing distance of the presentations.
- Nearby Parking:**
- Several public parking lots, both campus & city run, are available within 1-3 blocks of the event.
 - Parking permits for campus lots can be purchased in advance to guarantee parking availability.



Free & Open to the Public • Pre-registration Required • Registration opens August 3rd