



# BOSTON COLLEGE

## School of Social Work

### Documenting the Health, Well-being, and Experiences of Older Asian Workers in the Senior Community Service Employment Program

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#### Topline Massachusetts Results

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#### Authors

**Cal J. Halvorsen**, PhD, MSW

Assistant Professor, Boston College School of Social Work  
Faculty Affiliate, Center on Aging & Work at Boston College  
Project Lead & Investigator, Harvard Center for Work, Health, and Well-being  
Senior Fellow, Encore.org

**Patrick Ho Lam Lai**, LCSW, MSW

Doctoral Student, Boston College School of Social Work

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# Introduction and Methodology

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**This report documents preliminary data of Asian SCSEP respondents within Massachusetts** from the project, *An Interdisciplinary Evaluation of the Health Benefits of Participating in a Federally Funded Community-Service Employment Program for Low-Income Older Adults: A Pilot Study*.

## **Purpose**

There is limited research focused on the employment of older Asian adults in the U.S., particularly within the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). Asian SCSEP participants may be especially underrepresented and vulnerable due to intersecting issues of race, age, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status. **In response, our survey asked participants about their experiences in SCSEP as well as six dimensions of health and well-being: physical, cognitive, psychological, social, financial, and interpersonal.**

## **Survey development and fielding**

The survey instrument was developed using feedback from several feasibility interviews with SCSEP program managers throughout Massachusetts as well as in consultation with members of our study's team. Attribution of survey items from existing measures are indicated with footnotes. All other items were developed for this study.

We translated our survey, developed in English, into five languages to increase inclusion: Spanish, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and both traditional and simplified Chinese. We also offered our survey online and on paper. All surveys analyzed for this report were completed in Chinese (traditional or simplified) or Vietnamese.

**The Greater Boston Chinese Golden Age Center (GBCGAC) was an instrumental support in engaging Asian SCSEP participants in this study.** As a result, most surveys analyzed for this report were completed on paper and in person during designated meeting times. (Vietnamese: April 15, 2022 at the VietAID Community Center; Cantonese and Mandarin: April 21 and 28, 2022 at GBCGAC.)

## **Reporting**

**This report provides descriptive ("topline") results for all respondents who identified as Asian (N=39). For open-ended questions, we provide a brief summary of the findings.** Some percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Please reach out to the study's principal investigator, Dr. Cal Halvorsen, with any questions at [cal.halvorsen@bc.edu](mailto:cal.halvorsen@bc.edu).

# Part 1: Demographic Questions

	<b>Mean (Range)</b>
1. Age	65 (58-73) years old
	<b>Percent</b>
2. Do you have an email account?	Yes: 79% No: 21%
3. [If yes:] How often do you use your email account?	Not at all: 13% Once a month or less: 32% A few times a month: 23% A few times a week: 16% Basically every day: 16%
4. About how long have you been in SCSEP? (An estimate is ok.)	1 year or less: 50% 1 year to 2 years: 24% 2 years to 3 years: 16% 3 years to 4 years: 8% 4 years to 5 years: 3%
5. What is your gender?	Male: 23% Female: 77%
6. What is your current marital status?	Married / Partnered: 64% Widowed: 18% Separated: 3% Divorced: 15%
7. Do you live alone?	Yes: 31% No: 69%
8. [If no:] Do you live with any of the following people? <i>Percentages include all who said "yes" to the following groups of people.</i>	Your spouse / partner: 51% Your children: 33% <i>No other relatives or non-relatives identified</i>
9. Is English the language you usually speak at home?	Yes: 3% No: 97%
10. [If no:] What is the language you usually speak at home? <i>Adds up to more than 100% due to rounding and because of households where more than one language is spoken.</i>	Cantonese: 38% Mandarin: 8% Taishanese: 8% Undefined Chinese: 18% Vietnamese: 28% Spanish: 3%

11. Were you born in the United States? Yes: 0%  
No: 100%
12. In what country were you born? Mainland China: 59%  
Hong Kong: 8%  
Macau: 3%  
Vietnam: 31%
13. In about what year did you first come to live in the United States? 1980 to 1989: 5%  
1990 to 1999: 10%  
2000 to 2009: 23%  
2010 to 2020: 62%
14. Do you consider yourself Hispanic or Latino? Yes: 0%  
No: 100%
15. What race(s) do you identify most closely with? (Select all that apply.) *No other races were selected in addition to Asian.* Asian: 100%
16. What Asian subgroup(s) do you identify with? (Select all that apply.) Chinese: 72%  
Vietnamese: 28%
17. What is the highest grade of school or year of college you completed? 6<sup>th</sup> grade or below: 15%  
7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grade: 31%  
High school or equivalent: 28%  
Some college or above: 18%

## Part 2: SCSEP Experiences

18. Overall, what is the main reason you enrolled in SCSEP?

The main reasons were to learn job skills, look for job, earn money, get experience, learn English, and kill time.

How, if at all, has your participation in SCSEP influenced your:  
*On a scale from 1 = "Improved a lot" to 3 = "No Change" to 5 = "Worsened a lot". **Lower** average scores mean that the average respondent experienced more improvement in that area.*

	<b>Mean</b>
19. Personal finances	1.7
20. Physical health	2.1
21. Mental health	1.9
22. Social engagement	1.7
23. Family life	1.8
24. Technological skills (such as using computers and email)	2.4
25. Self-confidence	1.8
26. Abilities to find paid work	2.0

The next two questions ask you about your supervisor at the host agency where you are working. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:

	<b>Percent</b>
27. My supervisor understands the goals of SCSEP	Strongly disagree: 8% Disagree: 3% Agree: 67% Strongly agree: 23%
28. My supervisor is supportive of me	Strongly disagree: 5% Disagree: 0% Agree: 69% Strongly agree: 26%

After your participation in SCSEP ends, what is the likelihood that you will search for:

29. A paid job?	Very likely: 23% Somewhat likely: 59% Not very likely: 18% Not at all likely: 0%
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30. A volunteer role?	Very likely: 28% Somewhat likely: 67% Not very likely: 3% Not at all likely: 3%
31. Through your SCSEP participation, did you learn about services or supports to help you financially, such as SNAP benefits (“food stamps”), housing assistance, home energy (“fuel”) assistance, or others?	Yes: 85% No: 15%
32. [If yes:] Have you told friends, family members, or acquaintances about these services or supports?	Yes: 97% No: 3%
33. Through your SCSEP participation, did you learn about services or supports to help you understand your health insurance options, such as for Medicare, Medicaid, MassHealth, or others?	Yes: 92% No: 8%
34. [If yes:] Have you told friends, family members, or acquaintances about these services or supports?	Yes: 89% No: 11%
35. Through your SCSEP participation, have you learned about free or low-cost classes you can take to increase your skills or knowledge, such as computer classes or English-language classes?	Yes: 87% No: 13%
36. [If yes:] Have you told friends, family members, or acquaintances about these classes?	Yes: 94% No: 6%
37. Have you encouraged friends, family members, or acquaintances to sign up for SCSEP?	Yes: 90% No: 10%

Indicate how often, if at all, you have generally felt that way about your work over the last month:

*From the Thriving from Work Questionnaire (short form). Peters et al. (2021). Answer options: 1 (Never), 2 (Rarely), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Usually), 5 (Almost always), 6 (Always). Higher average scores indicate higher levels of thriving.*

	<b>Mean</b>
38. I love my work	4.9
39. I am treated fairly at work	4.7
40. I can achieve a healthy balance between my work and my life outside of work	4.6
41. I am paid fairly for the work I do	4.9
42. I am happy with how much input I have in decisions that affect my work	4.8
43. I can easily manage the demands of my work	4.6
44. I feel psychologically safe at work	4.8

45. I can voice concerns or make suggestions at work without getting into trouble	3.9
46. Overall, what do you see as the major benefits of participating in SCSEP?	The common benefits were being healthy and joyful, earning income, having a job, learning English and culture, contributing to society, and participating in community activities.
47. Overall, what do you see as the major drawbacks to participating in SCSEP?	Most participants mentioned “no drawbacks” to participating in SCSEP. However, some individuals mentioned that they would feel disappointed after ending their training in a familiar working environment. Some others mentioned inflexible working hours and relatively low income as well as limited training.
48. If you weren’t participating in SCSEP, what would you be doing instead?	Common answers included looking for suitable jobs (although they stated this may bring more stress); doing housework, volunteer work, and charity activities; staying at home and waiting for assistance; and taking care after school children.
49. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your experience in SCSEP?	“Nothing” was mentioned by most participants. Some gave praise to GBCGAC. Others mentioned considerate leaders in the workplace, unfriendly treatment in the workplace, learning more knowledge and skills, meeting old friends, not being bored and lonely, not worrying about the income sources, understanding society more, and the need for improved organizational communication.

## Part 3: Physical Health

	<b>Percent</b>
50. Would you say your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?	Excellent: 0% Very good: 31% Good: 44% Fair: 26% Poor: 0%
51. How many total hours of physical activity or exercise did you complete in the LAST 3 DAYS?	None: 5% Less than 2 hours: 54% Less than 3 hours: 15% Less than 4 hours: 18% 4 hours or more: 8%
52. Do you currently have any of the following conditions? <i>No participants reported cancer, chronic lung disease such as chronic bronchitis or emphysema, heart problems / heart disease, or chronic kidney disease. Percentages add up to more than 100% because some participants reported more than one condition.</i>	No chronic conditions: 21% High blood pressure: 31% Diabetes: 10% Arthritis or rheumatism: 41% Other chronic conditions: 13%
53. How well do you see in adequate light (with glasses or a vision aid, if you use one)? <i>No participants mentioned "I can only see light, colors, or shapes. I can track movement but cannot identify objects"; or "I have no vision."</i>	I can see regular print in newspapers or books: 69% I can see large print but not regular print in newspapers or books: 26% I cannot see newspaper headlines, but I can identify objects: 5%
54. How well do you hear (with hearing aid, if you use one)? <i>No participants mentioned "I have problems hearing normal conversation. I need a quiet setting to hear well"; "I have difficulty in all situations (for example, others have to talk loudly or speak very slowly; all speech is mumbled)"; or "I have no hearing."</i>	I have no difficulty in normal conversation, social interaction, listening to T.V.: 85% I have difficulty in some settings (for example, when person speaks softly or is more than 6 feet [2 meters] away): 15%
55. In the last 3 days, how many hours in total did family members, friends, or neighbors help you with tasks of daily life like dressing, bathing, shopping, or housework?	0 hours: 77% 1 hour: 8% 2 or more hours: 15%

## Part 4: Cognitive Health

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	<b>Percent</b>
<p>56. How well do you make decisions about daily tasks (for example, when to get up or have meals, which activities to do, when to take medications)?</p> <p><i>No participants stated "I need help at all times" or "Others make all decisions for me".</i></p>	<p>No problem: 95%</p> <p>I have some difficulty in new situations: 3%</p> <p>I have difficulty in specific repeating situations: 3%</p>
<p>57. How often is memory a problem for you (for example, forget appointments, get lost, repeat yourself)?</p>	<p>Never: 36%</p> <p>Rarely: 31%</p> <p>Sometimes: 31%</p> <p>Most of the time: 0%</p> <p>Always: 3%</p>
<p>58. How well do you make yourself understood verbally or nonverbally?</p>	<p>I can express ideas without difficulty: 79%</p> <p>I have difficulty finding words or finishing thoughts, BUT I am understood if given time: 13%</p> <p>I have difficulty finding words or finishing thoughts AND I usually need prompting: 3%</p> <p>I can only make simple requests: 5%</p> <p>I am rarely or never understood: 0%</p>
<p>59. How well do you understand others (with hearing aid, if you normally use one)?</p>	<p>I have no difficulty understanding others: 72%</p> <p>I miss some part or meaning BUT understand most conversation: 15%</p> <p>I miss some part or meaning BUT often understand conversation with repetition or explanation: 10%</p> <p>I can only respond to simple conversation: 3%</p> <p>I rarely or never understand others: 0%</p>

## Part 5: Psychological Health

In the last 3 days, how often have you	<b>Percent</b>
<b>60.</b> Had little interest or pleasure in things you normally enjoy?	Not in last 3 days: 85% Not in last 3 days, but often feels that way: 8% In 1–2 of last 3 days: 3% Daily in last 3 days: 5%
<b>61.</b> Felt anxious, restless, or uneasy?	Not in last 3 days: 85% Not in last 3 days, but often feels that way: 13% In 1–2 of last 3 days: 0% Daily in last 3 days: 3%
<b>62.</b> Felt sad, depressed, or hopeless?	Not in last 3 days: 92% Not in last 3 days, but often feels that way: 5% In 1–2 of last 3 days: 3% Daily in last 3 days: 0%
<b>63.</b> How often do you feel lonely? <i>No participants mentioned "I feel lonely frequently, but less than daily" and "I feel lonely every day".</i>	I do not feel lonely: 67% I only feel lonely in specific situations or events (for example, anniversary of my spouse's death): 13% I feel lonely occasionally, but less than weekly: 21%
<b>64.</b> Does stress have a negative effect on your quality of life?	Yes: 49% No: 51%
<b>65.</b> Do you feel valued? (e.g., through role within community, relationships)	Yes: 82% No: 18%
<b>66.</b> How satisfied are you with your life as a whole in the last 3 days? (e.g., in terms of your physical health, emotional and psychological well-being, social life, participation in recreational activities, and other personal issues)	Delighted: 15% Pleased: 51% Mostly satisfied: 28% Mixed: 3% Mostly dissatisfied: 3% Unhappy: 0%
<b>67.</b> Do you find meaning in day-to-day life?	Yes: 90% No: 10%

## Part 6: Social Health

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	<b>Percent</b>
<b>68.</b> When was the last time you participated in social activities that are of long-standing interest to you?	Never: 18% More than 30 days ago: 33% 8–30 days ago: 28% 4–7 days ago: 5% In last 3 days: 15%
<b>69.</b> Do you participate as a volunteer in the community?	No, not interested: 18% No, would be interested: 54% Yes, < 3 hours/week: 15% Yes, > 3 hours/week: 13%
<b>70.</b> Do you have a close friend in the community where you live?	Yes: 87% No: 13%
<b>71.</b> In the past month or so, how has your participation in social activities been impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? <i>Surveys were completed in late April 2022 for context.</i>	Reduced by a lot: 46% Reduced a little bit: 33% Hasn't changed: 18% Increased by a lot: 3%

## Part 7: Financial Health

- Percent**
72. Because of limited funds, during the last 30 days have you made trade-offs among purchasing any of the following: adequate food, shelter, clothing, prescribed medications, sufficient home heat or cooling, or necessary health care or home care? Yes: 64%  
No: 36%

How well does this statement describe your situation?

*Questions from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Financial Well-Being Scale*

73. Because of my money situation, I feel like I will never have the things I want in life  
Completely: 13%  
Very well: 21%  
Somewhat: 49%  
Very little: 10%  
Not at all: 8%

74. I am just getting by financially  
Completely: 13%  
Very well: 18%  
Somewhat: 38%  
Very little: 21%  
Not at all: 10%

75. I am concerned that the money I have or will save won't last  
Completely: 21%  
Very well: 31%  
Somewhat: 38%  
Very little: 8%  
Not at all: 3%

How often does this statement apply to you?

*Questions from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Financial Well-Being Scale*

76. I have money left over at the end of the month  
Always: 10%  
Often: 8%  
Sometimes: 38%  
Rarely: 44%  
Never: 0%

77. My finances control my life  
Always: 10%  
Often: 28%  
Sometimes: 46%  
Rarely: 10%  
Never: 5%

**78.** Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, did anyone living outside your household, such as a parent, adult child, other relatives, or friends, help you with money or by paying bills?

Yes: 33%  
No: 67%

## Part 8: Interpersonal Health

	<b>Percent</b>
79. Do you provide care to someone UNDER the age of 18?	Yes: 21% No: 79%
80. [If yes:] For how many people under the age of 18 do you provide care?	75% of those who said "yes" cared for 1 to 2 children
81. Do you provide care to someone OVER the age of 18?	Yes: 13% No: 87%
82. [If yes:] For how many people over the age of 18 do you provide care?	80% of those who said "yes" cared for 1 to 2 adults

*The following statements are from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support by Zimet et al. (1998).*

*Response options range from 1 (Very strongly disagree) to 4 (Neutral) to 7 (Very strongly agree). Answers closer to 7 indicate more perceived social support.*

	<b>Mean</b>
83. There is a special person who is around when I am in need	4.9
84. There is a special person with whom I can share joys and sorrows	5.5
85. My family really tries to help me	5.6
86. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family	5.8
87. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me	5.6
88. My friends really try to help me	5.1
89. I can count on my friends when things go wrong	4.5
90. I can talk about my problems with my family	5.6
91. I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows	5.1
92. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings	5.6
93. My family is willing to help me make decisions	5.7
94. I can talk about my problems with my friends	5.2

## Summary

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A total of 39 SCSEP Asian participants responded in this study. Although most responses by non-Asian participants in Massachusetts have been online (these are not covered in this report), 100% of Asian respondents have been on paper. The biggest reason is due to the careful planning by GBCGAC to create survey meetings in late April. Additional reasons may be due to participants' preferences, limited access to the internet, and limited knowledge of using electronic devices.

Respondents ranged in age from 58 to 73 years old, with an average age of 65 at the time of the survey. Half have been in SCSEP for 1 year or less, with 11% for 3 or more years. Most participants are female (77%) and married or partnered (64%). Almost all (97%) speak a language other than English at home. Of those, Cantonese and Vietnamese are the most common. All respondents were born outside of the U.S., mostly coming from mainland China (59%) and Vietnam (31%). Further, most (62%) immigrated to the U.S. after 2010. Further, nearly half (46%) have an education level of below a high school degree or its equivalent.

Respondents reported joining SCSEP to learn job skills and earn money, among other reasons. Among a list of outcomes, respondents were most likely to say that their personal finances, social engagement, family life, and self-confidence improved as a result of SCSEP, and least likely to say that their technological skills and physical health improved as a result of SCSEP. Further, most either agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisors understand the goals of SCSEP (89%) and that their supervisors are supportive of them (95%). While most say it is at least somewhat likely that they will search for a paid job after exiting SCSEP (23% very likely, 59% somewhat likely), they are more likely to say that they will search for a volunteer role (28% very likely, 67% somewhat likely). Importantly, the vast majority of participants learned about services and supports to help them financially (85%), to help them understand their health insurance options (92%), and to help them find classes to increase their skills or knowledge (87%). They were highly likely to tell their friends, family members, and acquaintances about these resources, too.

On a scale from excellent to poor, all respondents rated their health as somewhere in the middle. About four in five (79%) reported having at least one chronic condition; arthritis or rheumatism was the most common (41%) followed by high blood pressure (31%). In general, participants experience few problems related to their cognitive health. While more than nine in 10 did not report feeling sad, depressed, or hopeless, one in three reported feeling lonely occasionally (21%) or in specific situations or events (13%). Most (90%) reporting finding meaning in their day-to-day lives.

More than half have not participated in social activities that are of long standing interest to them in at least 30 days (51%). While 28% already volunteer, an additional 54% are interested in doing so in their communities. Further, about nine in 10 (87%) have a close friend in the communities where they live.

Regarding financial health, about two in three (64%) have made trade-offs among purchasing important items and services (e.g., food, shelter, medications) in the past 30 days due to limited funds. Almost half (44%) state that they rarely have money left over at the end of the month.

About one in five (21%) participants care for someone under the age of 18, and about one in eight (13%) care for someone over the age of 18. Participants were most likely to say that they get emotional help and support from their families and least likely to say that they can count on friends when things go wrong.

### **Final Thoughts**

As shown in this report, Asian SCSEP participants in Massachusetts are an incredibly diverse group. Yet many are in financially precarious positions and have enrolled in SCSEP to help them find work and earn money. Many are contributing to their communities by caring for children and adults in need and, if they are not already volunteering, many report interest in finding volunteer work. In addition to their financial precarity, these participants share experiences and traits that may make them more vulnerable or underrepresented in the U.S. context. These include their status as immigrants, speaking languages other than English at home, and having low educational attainment. Due to the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes and bias over the past few years, they may also be experiencing negative consequences that were not covered in our survey.

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