ABSTRACT

“I DON’T CONSIDER THEM BAD”: THE WEEKEND EXPERIENCE OF SENIOR CENTER REGULARS WHO LIVE ALONE

by Anastacia Lynne Thomas

Senior centers provide numerous benefits over the week, but what do senior center ‘regulars’ (those who attend four or more times per week) who live alone do while the center is closed? The literature suggests that senior center attendees have negative weekend experiences (Aday, Kehoe & Farney, 2006). However, little is known about the socialization, nutrition, and activities that ‘regulars’ experience over the weekend. This investigation used two descriptive qualitative interviews combined with a weekend log to shed light on participants’ weekend experience. Five senior center ‘regulars’ from a rural Midwestern senior center participated in the study. The data were separated into two domains (meaning of the center and weekend experience), coded, and themes emerged. For participants, the senior center meant: “It’s a place for socialization,” “Something to do,” “I don’t eat as well when I’m by myself,” and “I’m treasured.” Four themes emerged from discussions of the weekend experience: “Just visit,” “I’m not going to cook for me,” “I just do simple things,” and “I wouldn’t consider them bad.” Surprisingly, this group of senior center ‘regulars’ did not view their weekends negatively and had numerous social interactions, although they do not prepare their own food over the weekends. These findings indicate a potential need for supplemental weekend transportation and nutrition services.
“I DON’T CONSIDER THEM BAD”: THE WEEKEND EXPERIENCE OF SENIOR CENTER REGULARS WHO LIVE ALONE

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all the wonderful older people who have inspired me to strive towards making the world a better place for older adults:

My grandparents

My dear friend, Wayne.

The artists that I have had the pleasure of meeting throughout my participation in the Opening Minds through Art program. They have inspired me in so many ways.

Mary Tony, the senior center ‘regular’ featured in Junk Mail, and a major inspiration for this research.

The older adults of Haywood County, North Carolina.

The influential older adults who I have met along the way, especially Faye, Lorraine, Lola, Betty, Frances, Shirley, Delores, Erna, Helen, Patsy, Inez, David, Art, Irene, Evie, George, Ted, Alberta, Fran, Carol…

And the older adults who I have yet to meet.

“Sometimes people come into your life for a moment, a day, or a lifetime. It matters not the time they spent with you, but how they impacted your life in that time.”

– Unknown

Thank you.
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I would like to thank everyone at Central Michigan University who led me towards a career in gerontology. I would like to thank everyone involved in the Alternative Breaks program. My involvement with this program inspired me to work with older adults. I would like to thank my undergraduate mentors, Dr. Eileen MaloneBeach and Renee Babcock, for believing in me and encouraging me to make a difference in this world.

I would like to thank my cohort, along with the preceding and following cohorts. The moral support was instrumental in getting this done. Thanks for counting down the days with me. I never could have done any of this without the support of my grandparents and parents. I’d like to thank my friends and family near and far. Finally, I’d like to thank Sergey Stepanov for providing our office with his high-quality saxophone sounds.
The literature suggests that weekends may not be positive experiences for older adults. Studies note that weekends tend to be lonely times for older people (Victor, Scrambler, & Bond, 2009; Victor, Sullivan, Woodbridge, & Thompson, 2015). For retired older adults, subjective wellbeing is lower on the weekends. (Heo, Kim, Kim, & Heo, 2014). Older men who live alone have reported feeling that the weekends were painful and lonely (Bergland, Tveit, & Gonzalez, 2016). Similarly, women who live alone and attend a senior center (Aday, Kehoe, & Farney, 2006) and widowed older adults (Bennett & Victor, 2012) have shared experiencing feelings of loneliness during the weekend. Recently, a viral video highlighted a senior center regular’s negative experiences when the center is closed (Frank, 2015). Overall, the literature indicates that weekends are unpleasant experiences for older adults who live alone.

The senior center is an important fixture in American communities. Approximately one million older people are impacted by senior centers each day (Roberto, Weaver, & Wacker, 2014). Today’s typical senior center model originated in 1965 through the passage of the Older Americans Act (Turner, 2004). Senior centers provide socialization, nutrition, transportation, information and referral assistance, and opportunities for wellness, recreation, volunteerism, and education (Turner, 2004; Pardasani, 2010). In a survey of senior center attendees, 70% reported attending the center three or more times per week (Turner, 2004). Through studies of senior center attendee demographics, researchers have been able to compile a profile of a “typical” senior center attendee: a female with lower levels of income and education who lives alone. This demographic information paints the picture of a population at risk for isolation, poor nutrition, and poverty; senior centers serve a true need (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Kowlessar, Robinson, & Schur, 2015; Turner, 2004; Vesnaver, Keller, Sutherland, Maitland, & Locher, 2016). However, most senior centers are not open on the weekends (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). What happens to senior center regulars when the senior center is closed for the weekend?

While preceding investigations signal the possibility of a problem, they do not provide enough insight into ‘regular’ senior center attendees’ weekend experiences. At this time, very little is known about the weekend activities, socialization, and nutrition of senior center regulars. Female senior center regulars have been the focus of past investigations (Aday, et al., 2006; Frank, 2015); the literature does not focus on males. The weekend makes up over 25% of one’s week, but it is still a mystery. It is impossible to understand the lived experience of senior center regulars without understanding how their weekends are spent.

The purpose of this study is to fill gaps in the literature about what senior center regulars do over the course of the weekend. This study focused on the lived, weekend experience of regular senior center attendees through descriptive qualitative interviews. The study explored the activities, socialization, nutrition, and feelings associated with the weekend. To provide context, the study also focused on the senior center’s meaning for participants.

**Background**

**Living Alone and the Weekend.**

Existing literature notes that nights and weekends (times where social service organizations are usually closed) are times of peak loneliness for older adults (Bennett & Victor, 2012; Victor, et al., 2015). Heo, et al., (2014) explored the weekend experiences of retired older adults. They found that participants’ subjective wellbeing tended to be lower on the weekends. There was a
significant difference in subjective wellbeing scores depending on whether the person was alone or with others; spending time with friends was associated with the highest levels of wellbeing (Heo et al., 2014). Additionally, they found that participants’ weekend wellbeing was highest when participating in active leisure activities.

An investigation into the experience of men who live alone exposed more about the loneliness associated with their weekend. One participant said, “I don’t like weekends, they are difficult to get through. Saturdays may be okay, but on Sundays everything is closed” (Bergland, et al., 2016, p.116). When Aday, et al. (2006) studied how the senior center affects older women who live alone, they found that some of these women also experience loneliness and negative affect due to the senior center’s hours of operation. One woman described her weekend, “The worst is Saturday….On Saturday, you’re home all alone” (Aday et al., 2006, p. 69). The short documentary, Junk Mail, showed the evening experience for one senior center regular who lived alone, 98-year-old Mary Tony. The video showed Tony eating and having fun with friends at the center, but the tone changed once the setting moved to her home. When talking about her time outside of the center, she said:

Saturday and Sunday, there’s nobody here. You know what I do? Don’t laugh. I get junk mail. I strip it, and after I strip it, I cut it up small, put it in a bag, put it for garbage. I have to do something. Otherwise, I’d go nuts” (Frank, 2015).

The Senior Center

Senior centers are not all the same, but they do have similar attributes (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). Title V of the Older Americans Act designated senior centers as the “focal point in communities for the development and delivery of social services” (OAA 1973, Sec. 501[a]). The National Council on Aging defines senior centers as a location where “older adults come together for services and activities that reflect their experience and skills, respond to their diverse needs and interests, enhance their dignity, support their independence, and encourage their involvement in and with the center and the community” (NCOA). According to Krout (1989), a senior center has the following characteristics:

serving the elderly; occupying a designated physical place; providing a broad range of activities and services; development from a community planning process; working with other organizations; acting as a visible focal point; and providing opportunities to the elderly for community involvement, social interaction, friendship, and personal growth. (p. 140-141).

Social support, life satisfaction, energy, perception of independence, and improved health have all been associated with senior center usage (Aday, 2003; NCOA; Pardasani, 2010). Senior centers have been found to decrease feelings of isolation, worry, loneliness, and stress (Aday, 2003; Pardasani, 2010). Senior center attendees have also reported benefiting from the routine and structure that the center provides (Bergland, et al., 2016).

Older women living on their own participate in more senior center activities than older women living with their significant others (Aday, et al., 2006). There is not a significant difference by gender in the perceived social benefits of the senior center, but attendees with
lower income perceive greater social and health benefits than those with higher incomes (Fitzpatrick, McCabe, Gitelson, & Andereck, 2006).

**Profile of senior center attendees.** For the majority of senior center participants, the center is a consistent part of their lives. Three out of four senior center attendees frequent the center one to three times per week, with the average visit spanning approximately three hours (NCOA). In general, most senior center attendees have attended the senior center for several years (Aday, 2003). While some senior center attendees attend infrequently, most attendees have made the senior center a steady fixture in their week.

Through studies of senior center attendee demographics, researchers have been able to compile a profile of a “typical” senior center attendee. On average, senior center attendees are 75 years of age and half of senior center attendees live alone (NCOA; Pardasani, 2010). Women make up the majority (approximately 75%) of senior center attendees (NCOA; Pardasani, 2010). Across the country, typical senior center participants tend to be Caucasian, with lower incomes and with less education (Pardasani, 2010; Turner, 2004). Additionally, this group tends to have lower rates of physical disability than the general population, but most attendees have at least one chronic condition (Kowlessar, et al., 2015; Pardasani, 2010).

Other factors have been shown to influence or predict senior center attendance. Senior center participation has been linked to church attendance, a ‘just-right’ number of attendees, knowledge of activities, and availability of transportation (Walker, Bisbee, Porter, & Flanders, 2004). Rural residents are more likely to be senior center attendees compared to those who live in urban or suburban areas (Pardasani, 2010). Compared to those who do not attend the senior center, senior center participants are more likely to interact with family and friends (Ashida & Heaney, 2008). Strenuous caregiving or employment is linked to a decreased likelihood of participation (Pardasani, 2010).

**Meaning of the senior center.** The primary motivation for senior center attendance is often reported to be the desire for socialization (Aday, et al., 2006; Dattilo et al., 2015; Pardasani, 2010). Although programming and services are important, older adults report frequenting senior centers to experience, “friendship, companionship, spending time with friends, fellowship, and peer support” (Pardasani, 2010, pp. 64). An ethnography of senior centers in New York explored the meaning of the center for senior center attendees who considered themselves regulars. Weil (2014) found that the senior center regulars view the center as a social hub; the friendships benefit their mental and emotional health. When discussing senior center friendships, one participant shared, “…It’s like now I have a family…I would come every day if the van would come for me,” (Aday, et al., 2006, pp. 69). Some senior center attendees even go as far as calling the center their “home away from home,” (Salari, Brown, & Eaton, 2006, p. 238).

For a smaller segment of senior center attendees, nutrition programs are the main incentive (Aday, et al., 2006). Other research has found that reasons for attending a senior center include “[needing] something to do, [receiving] invitations from friends and relatives, and a desire for company or to make friends,” (Turner, 2004, pp. 40). Senior centers may also be a place for older adults to serve as a volunteer or engage in hobbies with their peers (Salari, et al., 2006).
Nutrition. The cornerstone of most senior centers is the congregate meal program: a reduced-cost lunch program that provides socialization and adequate nutrition (Pardasani, 2010). The congregate meal program is funded by Title III of the Older Americans Act (Colello, 2011). The goals of the program include “reducing hunger and food insecurity, promoting socialization, promoting health and well-being, and delaying adverse health conditions” (Kowlessar, Robinson, & Schur, 2015, p.2). Older adults 60 years of age and older are eligible to receive a balanced meal through the meal program for a suggested donation. In fiscal year 2010, approximately 97.8 million congregate meals were served throughout the country (Kowlessar, et al., 2015).

The majority of congregate meal participants claim the congregate meal is their largest meal of the day (Kowlessar, et al., 2015). Colello (2011) reported that “57% [of congregate meal participants] reported that the congregate meals program provided one-half or more of their daily food intake” (p. 8). Most congregate meal participants report that the program benefits them by facilitating “seeing friends more often, eating healthier, feeling better” and being able to remain in the community (Kowlessar, et al., 2015, p. 6).

When the congregate meal program is closed over the weekend, participants may not be eating properly. Older adults who live alone are at risk of poor nutrition habits (Hanna & Collins, 2015; Vesnaver, et al., 2016; Wham & Bowden, 2011). Studies have found that people who live alone eat less produce and seafood than those who do not (Hanna & Collins, 2015). Some older men who live alone have trouble cooking and may be at nutritional risk (Hughes, Bennett, & Hetherington, 2004; Wham & Bowden, 2011). Older widowed people tend to eat more prepared or basic meals, as cooking for themselves reminds them of their loss (Vesnaver, et al., 2016). A study of congregate meal participants found almost half believe they would benefit from meals over the weekend (Turner, 2004).

Socialization. As mentioned above, socialization is the primary reason for senior center attendance. In a survey of 734 senior center attendees, almost all participants reported forming close relationships with other center participants (Aday, 2003). For senior center attendees living alone, the impact of the senior center is even stronger. The majority of older women who live alone perceive their senior center friendships to be close and report receiving emotional support from friends at the senior center (Aday, et al., 2006). Senior center attendees who live alone are more likely to believe that reduced loneliness, along with increased life satisfaction, laughter, and independence is caused by their involvement at the senior center (Aday, et al., 2006). A recent inquiry into the experience of men who live alone found similar benefits of senior center attendance. These men enjoyed the routine and social opportunities that the senior center offered them, even though the routine was only available five days each week (Bergland, et al., 2016). Due to the magnified impact of the senior center for those who live alone, it is essential to understand how these individuals are experiencing their time away from the senior center on the weekends, when most senior centers are closed.

The majority of senior centers are not open on the weekend, as funding is not typically available (Pardasani & Thompson, 2012). Previous research indicates that many senior center attendees receive their only social contact of the day via programming at the senior center (Turner, 2004). If these individuals are receiving their only social interactions through senior
center programming, many may receive no social interaction during the weekend, negatively impacting their wellbeing (Ashida & Heaney, 2008).

The objective of this investigation is to add knowledge of senior center regulars’ weekend experience to the literature. The lived, weekend experience of regular senior center attendees was examined through descriptive qualitative interviews. Interviews included questions about the meaning of the senior center to provide context. The study inquired about the activities, socialization, and feelings that senior center regulars encounter over the weekend.

Method

Research Strategy

This investigation used descriptive qualitative methods to understand the weekend experience of regular senior center attendees who live alone. Two semi-structured interviews aimed to uncover the activities, socialization, and nutrition associated with the weekend. Questions focused on typical weekends, ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ weekends, and the weekend experienced between interviews. Additionally, participants shared what the center means to them to provide background of their involvement.

Participant Recruitment

After IRB approval was received from Miami University, the researcher began recruitment at a local senior center. The researcher purposively recruited from the population of older adults who live alone and attend the center regularly (at least four times per week). Attending the senior center at least four times a week suggests that attendance is a routine; routines provide valuable structure during retirement (Bergland, et al., 2016). A description of the study was included in the senior center newsletter and flyers were displayed at the center. Senior center staff also helped to identify regular attendees. The researcher spoke with ten senior center regulars about participation in the study. Two individuals refused participation, and three were unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts or personal/family emergencies. Five participants completed the study.

Data Collection

Once the researcher obtained informed consent from participants, the interviewing process began at the senior center. Most interviews were held in quiet rooms immediately preceding or following the congregate meal. The first semi-structured interview began with questions about what the senior center means to the participant (see Appendix A). Additionally, participants were asked what a typical weekend is like and what differentiates a ‘good weekend’ from a ‘bad weekend.’

Over the weekend following the first semi-structured interview, participants were asked to complete a log of their weekend experience (see Appendix B) and the procedure was explained, as is recommended for this method (Nicholl, 2010). Participants were instructed to use the log to take notes on their activities several times a day. The researcher presented participants with a sample log entry to clarify the expectations. This method was chosen for several reasons. Participant diaries a) provide a “contemporaneous” log of the weekend, b) reduce recall bias, and c) give researchers insight into what occurs over the course of the weekend (Kenten, 2010). Although observations could have provided an objective measure of
weekend activities, participant logs are less intrusive and less susceptible to the observer influence. The second interview was scheduled at the end of the first interview.

After the weekend log was completed, the researcher conducted a second semi-structured interview (see Appendix C). In this semi-structured interview, participants’ past weekend experience was explored. Participants reviewed their log of the weekend with the researcher and elaborated on their experiences. Additionally, participants were asked about the typicality and unusual aspects of the weekend. Following the discussion, the researcher asked standard demographic questions (age, gender, race, education, and marital status) and inquired about availability of transportation (see Appendix D).

Each interview was audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Afterward, she reviewed the transcript for accuracy. The researcher transcribed the interviews, to immerse herself in and become well-acquainted with the data, as recommended by Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998).

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were imported into Dedoose, a data management software. The data was divided into two domains: the meaning of the senior center and the weekend experience. Then, the researcher used thematic analysis to identify themes for each of these sections using a bottom-up analytic process. Data from the semi-structured interviews were coded sentence-by-sentence within Dedoose. Afterwards, the researcher thought broadly about which codes fit together in mutually exclusive categories. The code excerpts were exported, printed, and reviewed. Themes were identified using in vivo coding in order to use the voice of the participants. Afterwards, the researcher printed interview transcripts to reread them and confirm that the weekend experience

Additionally, the researcher wrote memos throughout the study. These memos included nonverbal data from the interviews, preliminary analysis, and reminders for the researcher (Birks, Chapman & Francis, 2008). These memos were integrated into the findings. For example, the researcher observed two participants regularly playing bingo at the center, although they did not mention that in their interview.

Results

Five people (Table 1) who met the inclusion criteria participated in this study, but only four completed both interviews. Their names have been changed to protect their identity. Participants lived in a rural community in the Midwestern United States; four participants lived within one mile of the senior center. Most participants were in their 80s. All of the participants identified as Caucasian and had been previously married. The majority of participants were still driving and had access to a reliable vehicle. Table 2 breaks down participant characteristics.
Table 1. Participants’ Involvement at the Senior Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Average Visit Duration</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gerald</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>Congregate meal, bible study, woodworking, pool, bingo, computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
<td>Congregate meal, bingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nellie*</td>
<td>Depends on the day</td>
<td>Congregate meal, educational presentations, Monday evening supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>Congregate meal, bible study, woodworking, Monday evening supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>5-7 hours</td>
<td>Congregate meal, volunteer, bingo, cards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* did not complete second interview

Table 2. Participant Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>75-79</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you drive?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have access to reliable vehicle?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first interview lasted between 14-28 minutes, with an average of approximately 20 minutes. The second interview lasted 16-38 minutes, with an average of approximately 27 minutes. Data from the fifth participant’s first interview is included in the analysis; she was unable to complete the second interview due to health concerns. One participant was not able to complete her second interview the week immediately following her tracked weekend, so the interview was rescheduled for the following week. In her second interview, two weekends were discussed.

The data was split into two domains: the meaning of the senior center and the weekend experience. Four major themes emerged in regards to the senior center’s meaning: “It’s a place for socialization,” “something to do,” “I don’t as well when I’m by myself,” and “I’m treasured.” The weekend experience included information about typical weekends, the recorded weekend, and good or bad weekends. Four major themes related to the weekend emerged: “Just visit,” “I’m not going to cook for me,” “I just do simple things,” and “I wouldn’t consider them bad.”

What is the Meaning of the Senior Center?
The first interview began with questions about what the senior center means to this group of senior center regulars. Participants were asked about their first visit to the senior center, their involvement at the senior center, and friendships developed through the center. Four themes emerged: “It’s a place for socialization,” “Something to do,” “I don’t eat as well when I’m by myself,” and “I’m treasured.”

**It's a place for socialization.** Everyone reported viewing the senior center as a place to talk to other older adults living in the community. When asked what the senior center means to them, participants responded with:

Being with people. And I enjoy the paperwork. And, of course, I enjoy the cards, well it's mostly just to be with people. - Eileen

The people I talked to were nice and I felt safe here .... this place seemed to be a safe place for me to come and to relax. - Gerald

Louis has met many friends through his time at the senior center. Although he typically eats lunch and leaves, he always arrives “a little early to talk to people.” He enjoys the opportunities to make new friends to spend time with outside of the senior center’s walls:

“You know, where I live, I live out [in the country], been there 38 years, but I got neighbors, but you know, you just speak to those once in a while.... But here you get to set down and talk with people, run around with them if you want to, go places, go out to eat or whatever.” - Louis

**Something to do.** Most of the regulars mentioned that the senior center was “something to do.” Louis and Gerald both found the senior center as something to do after the loss of a loved one. Louis’s daughter encouraged him to join the senior center after his wife passed away, while Gerald found the senior center after the death of his mother.

“I was grieving at that time and so forth. I was really not into anything much and she knewed that I needed something, you know, like this, so she brought me over here...signed me up, and I’ve been coming ever since....it means some place to go and have something to do and be around people. - Louis

Several participants claimed that their week would be ‘dull’ without the center. Eileen compared her weekday experience at the senior center to her weekend experience at home. Of the participants, Eileen spends the most time at the senior center during the week.

“Something to do so I don't have to sit at home by myself all day, cause my husband's gone. He's been gone since ’05, and so it's just something, somewhere to come be with people instead of sitting at home alone .... just like I said, just something to do, so I don't sit at home. I do that on the weekends.” - Eileen
I don't eat as well when I'm by myself. All of the participants are frequent attendees of the center’s congregate meal program. Some cited their daily congregate meal as their main meal for the day, so they were very appreciative of the program.

“The meals are really good, so I just keep coming.” - Nellie

The men frequently mentioned the food as a primary reason for attending the center. In fact, when asked about his favorite part about coming to the senior center and what keeps him coming back each day, Louis began with, “food,” before laughing and mentioning the other benefits to attending the senior center. Gerald mentioned the benefits of the meal program for men who live alone:

…the meals cause I was, I'm a bachelor, so I like someone fixing my stuff for me ya know I don't eat as well when I'm by myself as I do when I'm in a facility.

I'm treasured. In this small senior center, volunteerism keeps the center running smoothly. Volunteers work in the kitchen, activity rooms, or help with special events. Many of the senior center regulars volunteer their time in some capacity at the senior center. In fact, Frank first arrived at the center looking for a role:

I came to the senior center and said, “Is there anything I can help with and on a volunteer basis?” and they said, see someone here knew me and knew my background as a teacher, woodworker, and so forth. And they, said, put me on the role pretty quick.

The men also pride themselves in being available to help other center attendees. Whether someone needs eyeglasses repaired or a tire inflated, the men can be called upon to help them. Gerald and Frank feel especially useful in this role:

“Well, anytime that a person comes in here and has to have something done that is, uh, physically done, like that takes knowledge and, um, dexterity. I do that. I help people. I like to help people and, umm, I'm able to help people, so I'm treasured in that respect.” - Gerald

Like I've been saying … I can help people, and it does a little more, get me out of the house and help with things around here.” – Frank

What is the weekend experience of senior center regulars?

Through discussion of the weekends and review of participants’ weekend logs, the researcher was able to gain insight into participants’ weekend experience. Four themes emerged through discussion of the weekend: “Just visit,” “I’m not going to cook for me,” “I just do simple things,” and “I wouldn’t consider them bad.”

Just visit. All of the participants typically spend at least part of their weekend with other people. None of the participants spend the weekend completely alone. Participants most frequently socialize with other older people in the community.
**Being with good friends.** For senior center regulars, the weekend is a time to spend time with friends. All of the senior center regulars reported typically seeing friends over the weekend. Frank spends every weekend with Karen, his ‘lady friend’. They met at a singles group several years ago. She lives about a half hour away, so Frank visits her on the weekends, when he is not visiting the senior center. Before heading up to visit her, he frequently meets with friends at a local restaurant. Eileen plays cards with three neighbors almost every Saturday night from 6:00PM – 9:30PM. They play two games of Shanghai Rum and one game of golf every time. When asked about what card playing is like, she said:

> It’s just a lot of fun just being with somebody and being with good friends. - Eileen

Nellie and Gerald consider helping friends a part of a good weekend. Since Nellie and Gerald both are in good health, they are able to help others who aren’t so lucky:

> “I like to go to the rest home. I don't get there often, but I visit people.” - Nellie

> “I visit people in the hospitals. I visit people who are sick a couple times a week. I've got a friend that has Agent Orange. He got into Agent Orange in Vietnam …. Mow the grass for other people. Um, don't charge them anything….I mow grass for a fella that couldn't mow grass …. and so I had a good weekend by running a mower for him and, uh, doing his chores. No charge. That's a good weekend.” - Gerald

While the senior center’s walls may not be open over the weekend, the social networks formed at the senior center provide support to some of the senior center regulars who live alone. In fact, Louis spent time with three different friends from the senior center over the tracked weekend. He went to church twice with Gerald, and he spent time with two women who he had met through the center. One of the women recently underwent surgery, and Louis has been helping out with her food and errands.

> “At noon … got a pizza, and then went to see a friend from the center here …. she's been coming here a long time. Me and her started going kind of going out together, you know, to eat and stuff on the weekends, just friends, just friends, my wife's dead.”

> “Picked up a friend at the center …. I cooked for her, ya know, fed her what I had, she likes, she gets tired of sitting in her apartment, you know alone, I know how that is being lonely, so I go and get her. I've done that several times. Picked her up, took her over to my house, feed her, watch tv, then take her back home, you know, after three or four hours”

**There's usually people there to socialize with for a little while.** While the senior center is closed over the weekend, the regulars seek out socialization at other locations within the community. Conversation groups for older adults organically formed at the local McDonald’s. Some tables are meeting spaces for older adults who have retired from the local university while other tables hold conversation groups for farmers. Gerald and Frank regularly take part in these groups over the weekend.
“McDonalds came to town. It's a good place to meet people to have a coffee and converse. A friendly conversation with your friends. And it's just a common knowledge that you go there at 9 and 3. That's when they come in there. Then you meet up with them at 9 and 3 and have a friendly conversation….That's among old folks. That's when there's nothing else going on, like the senior center … I've always got something else to do, but I usually go over there and see. It's, uh, a place where you go where you're treasured and not tolerated.” - Gerald

Fellowship. For most of the participants, church is a significant social activity of the weekend. Frank, Gerald, and Louis all attend church services twice each Sunday. Gerald picks Louis up from his home, and they go to church together. Louis reported that going to church with Gerald was his favorite part of Sunday. Nellie attends mass on Saturday, an extant routine remaining from her second marriage.

Church is a place for Gerald and Frank to socialize with friends. Over the tracked weekend, Gerald caught up with friends, played the rain stick, and arm-wrestled the youth Pastor. Frank really appreciated the fellowshipping that his small congregation provides:

I help with a men's class Sunday school. And we go from 10 o'clock Sunday school to our services were usually over little after 12… maybe a group that was from the church would go out to eat together, … I'm also … worship and music leader …. We're kind of a close knit congregation, uh, we're an older congregation.

Eileen was the only participant who does not attend church. However, when asked about what a typical Sunday was like, she said:

“I used to go to church. I don't know, I just kind of got away from it, but I'm considering getting back with the lady that would pick me up, back with her, talk to her, and probably start back to church. That'll take care of my morning.”

Spend time with family. For Louis, a typical weekend includes seeing his great-grandson and granddaughter. One of his sons also comes to visit about one weekend each month:

My son comes up, you know, a lot of times we'll watch ball games and stuff together. Uh I've got a video … Tiger Woods Golf Tournaments … on my Playstation … I've played that for years and he'll come up and we play each other and take win money off each other you know it's not real money but yeah… I have a lot of fun doing that.

Eileen also visits with her sons about once a month. When Saturday’s plans were canceled, one son drove nearly an hour each way to pick her up from her home. She spent that Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon with her family over the tracked weekend:

It helps take the boredom away from the other weekends. It’s nice to see my son and his wife.
Eileen mentioned that the only good weekends are the ones spent with her family. When asked about a recent good weekend, both women recalled weekends when their families were together:

A good weekend is when I go to my kids’ for the weekend….We go shopping, watch tv, uh, and just visit generally [with the closest son]….[or] we, uh, play a lot of games and cards [with another son that lives a few hours away]. - Eileen

**I'm not going to cook for me.** All of the participants are regular attendees of the congregate meal program at the senior center during the week. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that these senior center regulars are not typically cooking meals for themselves over the weekend. Fast-food, restaurant meals, TV dinners, and snack food are the norm. Over the weekend, the male participants typically eat at least two meal at a restaurant over the weekend tacos, pizza, or casual American. Eileen usually eats at home during the weekend. When asked about what she eats, she said:

“The weekend, I have TV dinners. I'm not going to cook for me. Just me. So I don't cook anymore, but I have TV dinners …. and I have a TV dinner for lunch …I just can't see it. I did cook at first, but it would be leftovers and then I, I don't want it, and I decided no, I'm going to buy TV dinners. As far as I'm concerned, that's takes care of it.”

When the participants are not going out to eat or heating up a TV dinner, they are not typically eating full meals. Gerald consumes diet shakes for some meals, as he is trying to lose weight. When asked about dinner, Louis said:

Maybe a peanut butter sandwich or, I don't know, maybe I’ve eaten enough for lunch. I’m not even hungry and I’ll have some juice….and I have juice and ice cream once in a while. - Eileen

Well, usually I just snack for supper…. I'm really not all that hungry for supper, so I'll eat a lot of ice cream (laughter) and, uh, we have donuts, little powdered cake donuts I buy, and, that's about it. - Louis

Typically, the only home-cooked meals that senior center regulars eat are cooked by or with others. In Frank’s case, if he is not going out to eat, Karen cooks dinner for him over the weekend; she cooked two meals for the pair over the recorded weekend. When Eileen visited her son, his wife prepared a pasta dish for the family. Although Louis eats out often, he also prepares small meals for other people. When a friend from the senior center came to his home, he “fed her what I have,” and if his son comes to visit, he uses his slow cooker. Over the recorded weekends, Gerald was the only participant who prepared one full meal for himself: a pork loin on the grill.

**I just do simple things.** When senior center regulars are not visiting with others or eating, they occupy themselves with simple things. All of the participants reported filling their time with television and reading. In fact, some senior center regulars spend the majority of their weekend participating in these activities.
“Well, uh, sometimes I stay home all weekend or Sunday, besides not doing anything but watching television or reading. So when you get older, you're more satisfied sometimes doing nothing, or like that. I am anyway than going out or coming here.” – Nellie

“This weekend [not the recorded weekend] I just had … I did nothing. I stayed at home. We did, we did play cards Saturday night. … Other than that I was at home … I did laundry, I watched TV, but lot of it is watching tapes. - Eileen

I have a chair. A favorite chair …. If I'm [not] taking care of my property, then I'm in the chair, watching television. – Gerald

While all of the participants watched television alone, some also watched television with others. Frank, Eileen, and Louis watched television with others over the weekend. Gerald and Louis both spent the weekend watching several football games. Louis’s son love sports, as well. Although they are watching the game in different states, it still gives them an opportunity to connect on the phone. Participants reported reading with others. Before Frank gets the new daily paper, he rereads the prior day’s paper. When he goes to visit Karen they read the papers together both days:

I get [one paper] and she gets [another paper], and then we read newspapers….One of us may finish the paper before another one, and then you take a little nap - Frank

When the weather is nice, some of the senior center regulars enjoy spending time outside. Eileen and Louis enjoy watching the birds:

I set outside a lot and watch the traffic. I used to set in the back on my patio but them hummingbirds I don't have no more. They quit coming around, but I do have bird feeders and I watch you know birds, I like to watch the birds and to they mow that field….I just do simple things. - Louis

Oh it's the warm weather and I can get outside, I'll sit outside and usually I do that and the two neighbors come over and we sit for a little while and talk just about anything and everything … warm weather will make it nicer because then I'll sit outside. I won't stay in the house …. there's a basketball the skateboarding, tennis swimming pool, and I can sit there and watch all that activity and the little playground for kids and it's just sitting there listening to the birds and watching them and it's just being outside. - Eileen

Just like everyone else, senior center regulars have obligations to take care of. Since they spent their days at the senior center during the week, the weekend is a convenient time for senior center regulars to catch up on housework and errands. Frank takes some time out of his mornings to “do a little clean up around his hog-pen.” Gerald owns property in town, and he typically uses the weekend to take care of maintenance at his property. Louis and Eileen devote the majority of their Saturdays to chores around the home.
“I hardly ever do anything on Saturday except mow the grass, mow the lawn, you know things like that around the house. Clean my house, I gotta do ‘em all, I gotta do my own house cleaning now which is terrible, I'm not a very good at it, but I'm learning.” - Louis

“I uh, do laundry if the weather permits, because I have to. I live just down the street….so I have to walk up to the next level to the laundry, our laundromat, so if the weather permits, I do that on the weekend. Saturday or Sunday.” - Eileen

On Saturday, Gerald made trips to the post office and the grocery store. Frank stopped at the bank and the gas station before heading up to visit Karen. He says that there is usually someone there to socialize with for a while. Typically, Eileen does her shopping on Thursdays, while the senior center van is running. However, since she spent the tracked weekend with her son, she could go to shopping for binoculars and DVDS: items that will entertain her on subsequent weekends.

I don't consider them bad. The researcher went into the interviews planning to discuss the differences between good and bad weekends. However, it was quickly apparent that participants did not view their weekends on this dichotomy. Gerald and Louis both believed that all of their weekends were good.

“All of my weekends are good, and all of them are especially good. Because I'm well. Umm, I have a family that are healthy. I'm satisfied with the people around me. Uh. I'm satisfied that I'm considered saved. I'm, uh, I'm pretty well, got it made. I've made that I worked hard all my life and, uh, I've got enough saved up where it will last me whenever.” - Gerald

Good weekends? What do you mean good? Well yeah, they're all pretty good. I go and do what I want, you know, not a whole lot of wanting, not a whole lot of going either.” - Louis

For other participants, the absence of bad weekends was an important factor. Eileen reported that she has a good weekend when she visits her son, but said the following when asked to describe a bad weekend:

”I don't consider them bad, it's just a little lonesome being by myself but not really bad.” - Eileen

Overall, the weekends are not considered to be “bad”. In fact, some of the participants even considered it to be good. However, there were two factors that could turn the weekend into a negative experience: “I hate staying in the house” and “when you’re missing your right arm.”

I hate staying in the house. All of the participants’ definition of a good weekend relied on the ability to leave his or her home. When asked about what a good weekend would be like, participants responded:

“Taking a ride somewhere or, uh, visiting a friend somewhere else.” - Nellie
“Maybe get in the car and go out and eat or whatever if I can get somebody to go with me or go by myself.” – Louis

“Go to church. Rest. Maybe get something done around the house that needs to be done. Um, don't ride anymore so that's out….I go to McDonald's, have a coffee, talk to some of my friends or something.” – Gerald

Four of the five participants still drove regularly, so this was usually not a problem for them. Eileen stopped driving several years ago, and she is no longer able to walk for long distances due to pain. When asked what prevents her from having a good weekend, Eileen said:

“I don't drive. I have to depend on other people and that's hard for me. Hard to ask.”

Since Frank drives to visit Karen over the weekend, if the weather is bad, they may be prevented from seeing each other. This study took place during the autumn and winter seasons. Louis and Eileen prefer to spend their weekends outside. Both participants mentioned bad weather causing them to “stay in the house” and cause an unpleasant weekend.

“Oh, well if the weather's bad, then that kills everything for me. I mean you've got to stay in the house, and I don't, I hate staying in the house a whole lot, you know, but, uh when you're by yourself, it's a different life, it's a different story, I'll tell you, it is. But, I don't know…. I wasn’t used to it until but now I am. I’m not used to it, don’t like it, but I got to. I don’t have no choice.” – Louis

“And now if it's nice weather when we get to summer, I’m outside. I do a lot of sitting outside, and then the neighbors come out and we, we can sit and talk, but winter is kinda we'll stay in the house, you can't go out and sit.” – Eileen

Additionally, two of the participants mentioned illness as the only possible cause of an unpleasant weekend. Despite Gerald’s claim that “nothing stands in my way to have a good weekend,” poor health could cause him to have a bad weekend.

“If I was sick, but I'm really very fortunate because, knock on wood, because I don't. I very seldom get colds or anything that's going around. I guess I have a pretty good immune.” – Nellie

“I don't know what would be a bad weekend. If I was sick, that would be a bad weekend.” – Gerald

**When you're missing your right arm.** For two of the widowed participants, it was clear that they prefer to spend the weekend around others. Eileen values her independence living at home, but would like to spend the weekends with her family, since the senior center is closed. Speaking about a past weekend, she said:
Just wish somebody would call a lot of times, I just wish somebody would call. Well, my family, but I get a phone call once in a while, but not this, not this past weekend.

Although Louis claimed that all of his weekends were “pretty good,” he misses his late wife over the weekend. In the past, they enjoyed the outdoors together. Now, when asked what a good weekend would be like for him, he responded with:

“Yes, if I had the wife (laughter) and go on a picnic, stuff that I used to do, you know, out to the parks and stuff. I’d love to do that, but I can’t anymore. You know when you’re missing your right arm. It’s become a rough.”

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived weekend experience of senior center regulars who live alone. Two semi-structured interviews and a weekend activity log shed light on the meaning participants ascribe to the center along with the participants’ weekend experience. The activities, socialization, and nutrition that comprise participants’ weekend were explored. Additionally, the researcher investigated the participants’ concept of a good versus a bad weekend.

The senior center is an integral fixture in the lives of senior center regulars who live alone. In order to properly understand participants’ weekend experience, it was essential to explore how the center affects their daily lives. Originally, participants’ sought out the senior center for something to do. The senior center quickly became a place where they could socialize with others and eat a nutritious lunch. It’s also a place where they can feel “treasured, not tolerated.” These motives are consistent with previous literature on the meaning of the senior center (Aday et al., 2006; Pardasani, 2010; Salari et al., 2006; Turner, 2004; Weil, 2014). On weekdays, senior center regulars spend time with friends and eat nutritious meals. While the center is closed, the regulars are still socially active, but may not be eating as well.

The key finding from the study is that senior center regulars were socially engaged over the weekend. These findings differ from the prior literature in which older adults volunteered information about their unpleasant and lonely weekend experience (Aday et al., 2006; Bennett & Victor, 2012; Bergland et al., 2016; Heo et al., 2014; Victor et al., 2009; Victor et al., 2015). While other senior center attendees have reported being entirely socially isolated while the center is closed (Ashida & Heaney, 2008; Frank, 2015; Turner, 2004), all of the participants reported spending time with same-aged others over the course of the weekend.

Consistent with prior investigation of senior center friendships (Aday et al., 2006; Weil, 2014), the senior center has created a social network that some regulars draw upon over the weekend. While previous research solely focused on women’s friendships in relation to the senior center, this investigation also shed light on the importance of senior center friendship for male attendees. Gerald and Louis’s friendship provides the same weekend benefits that female attendees have reported: meals, church, support, and conversation (Aday et al., 2006; Victor et al., 2009; Weil, 2014). Friendships made at the senior center extended beyond the walls of the physical building and positively influenced senior center regulars’ weekends.
In congruence with the literature (Aday et al., 2006; Victor, et al. 2009), church friendships also played a substantial role in the weekend experience of senior center regulars. Similar to senior centers, churches are a community focal point for many older adults. Senior center regulars reported enjoying the fellowship, but also the routine of church attendance. Eileen, the only regular who did not attend church services, is considering rejoining a community church; church attendance would “take care of her Sundays.”

The benefits of this population’s extensive social networks cannot be understated. While many older adults who live alone feel lonely and isolated over the weekend (Aday, et al., 2006; Bennett & Victor, 2012; Bergland, et al, 2016), these senior center regulars had a thriving social network including neighbors, friends from the senior center or church, community connections, and their own family. Several participants reported enjoying regular chats with peers at the local McDonald’s. These coffee groups have proven beneficial for older men; they provide social support, a sense of belonging, pleasure and friendship (Broughton, Payne, & Liechty, 2017). These senior center attendees dispelled the notion that senior center regular sit at home by themselves each day.

All the senior center regulars were regular congregate meal participants. This was to be expected, as the congregate meal program is the most popular program at most senior centers, especially for those who live alone (Pardasani, 2010). Congregate meals satisfy two motivations for senior center attendance: socialization and nutrition. While senior center regulars can eat a nutritious meal at the senior center five days a week, they are on their own over the weekend. It was rare for participants to cook a full nutritious meal for themselves, as consistent with the literature (Hanna & Collins, 2015; Hughes, et al., 2004; Vesnayer, et al., 2016). The absence of nutritious, home-cooked meals over the weekend is concerning. Widowed older adults are especially likely to avoid cooking for themselves, as it can bring feelings of grief (Vesnayer, et al., 2016). Participants’ typical weekend diet consists of fast food, TV dinners, and restaurant entrees. In a time when the funding for Title III-C nutrition programs is uncertain, these results emphasize the necessity of maintaining federal nutrition programs. These senior center regulars can depend on eating one warm, balanced meal each weekday. Without the program, regular congregate meal participants’ daily nutritional intake could resemble their weekend intake.

Senior center regulars spend their time at the senior center during the weekdays, so they spend the weekends catching up on housework, errands, and relaxation. For some senior center regulars, Saturday is dedicated to housework. This schedule adds to the routine and structure of their weeks, a noted benefit to older adults (Bergland, et al., 2016). Regular senior center attendance mimics the structure provided by a workday; chores and relaxation are done in one’s ‘free time’ over the weekend. All of the participants spent several hours watching television over the weekend. For older adults, especially widowed older adults, time spent watching television has been viewed as a positive adaptation; television programming provides distraction, illusory companionship, routine, and entertainment (Van Cauwenberg et al, 2014; van der Goot, Beentjes, & van Selin, 2012).

All of these factors resulted in participants’ positive views of the weekend. Unlike past investigations of older adults’ weekends, none of the participants viewed their weekends
negatively (Aday, et al., 2006; Bergland, et al., 2016; Frank, 2016; Heo, et al., 2014; Victor, et al., 2009; Victor, et al., 2015). The inability to leave one’s home and missing a deceased spouse were the only factors participants reported cause a weekend to be a negative experience. Older adults who attend a senior center are less likely to be depressed than those who are homebound (Choi & McDougall, 2007). Weekend loneliness for widowed older adults is common, but older adults can cope with their loss by joining the senior center and making friends within the community (Bennett & Victor, 2012). Regular senior center attendees’ social life and weekly structure prevents them from having negative views of the weekend.

Limitations

In this study, participants self-reported their weekend activities. It is possible that participants excluded or forgot about experiences. The weekend logs were used to improve the reliability of participants’ recall. This study asked participants to complete a log over the course of one weekend. The study may not account for the variety that occurs between weekends, nor extraneous factors influencing that weekend in particular. However, the first semi-structured interview asked participants to describe a typical weekend. Additionally, participants were asked if the recorded weekend represented a typical weekend and if there was anything unusual about that weekend. This study was conducted during a Midwestern fall and winter. Participants noted having different experiences when the weather was warmer. Although participants’ spring and summer may be different, it is still important to understand what the colder months are like for this population.

The sample consisted of five senior center regulars. The researcher does not believe that saturation was reached, since the last participant interviewed did not drive. New themes emerged from her interview. Future studies should include both individuals who drive and do not drive. However, it still gives the first look into the weekend activities of senior center regulars. The sample is not generalizable to other populations, but it demonstrates the importance of understanding what clients are doing while the organization’s doors are closed. Additionally, all study participants were Caucasian with the majority being highly educated. While the sample was not ethnically diverse, male senior center attendees were strongly represented, which is atypical for senior center research.

Future Directions for Research

Senior centers are an integral part of the lives of many older Americans. This investigation’s findings have implications for research and practice. This investigation was the first to explore the weekend experience of senior center regulars. In line with the literature, the interview guides (see Appendices A & C) included questions about both good and bad weekends. Participants were surprised by this subset of questions because they did not consider any of their weekends to be bad. Future research should account for this perception and pilot test questions. Furthermore, all the participants were regular attendees of the senior center’s congregate meal program. Since the senior center is not open on the weekend, the regulars must find meal on their own during the weekend. This investigation asked participants about their meals, but did not inquire about the nutritional or financial components of weekend meals. Future research could focus on the meal experience of senior center regulars who live alone over the weekend. Additionally, all but one participant still drove. Due to the heightened likelihood of isolation for those who do not have a car, the weekend experience may be different for those
who don’t drive. Future studies could focus on senior center regulars who live alone and do not have access to a reliable vehicle.

Future studies could investigate the experience of a diverse sample of senior center regulars. Studies have shown that racial and ethnic minorities may experience more benefits from senior center participation than Caucasian participants (Giunta, Morano, Parihk, Friedman, Fahs, & Gallo, 2012; Turner, 2004). Investigating the weekend and senior center experiences of a more diverse population would be highly beneficial. Previous research has investigated the impact of the senior center on female senior center attendees who live alone (Aday, et al., 2006). For the first time, this study gave voice to some of the male senior center regulars who live alone; future senior center research should continue to include their perspective, as the center is an important part of their lives.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

Senior centers serve a major role in the life of regular attendees during the week, but are not involved in regulars’ weekends. The primary recommendation for practitioners is to engage clients in conversation about their weekend. Communities have different needs, and it’s essential to understand what’s right for the organization’s clients. This study found that it’s important to understand the weekend activity, socialization, and nutrition patterns of senior center regulars who live alone. Once the community’s needs have been uncovered, senior centers can use their influence and expand their reach beyond the walls of the center.

In this investigation, participants have developed friendships that provide companionship over the weekend; the senior center is positioned to build and foster these friendships for older adults who live alone. During the week, senior center staff have the capability to improve weekend wellbeing through facilitating friendships. Stephens and Kwah (2009) found that centers can create a welcoming environment to make new friends by discouraging reserved seats and development of cliques; some centers even host a monthly meal where seating assignments are randomized. They also discovered that some centers introduce new members to an active senior center member to catalyze new members’ integration into the center. Minor changes to existing programming, such as formal introductions or snack break mingling, can also foster relationships that may extend to the weekend (Gitlin, et al., 2008; Matthieu, 2008).

Senior centers are not the only organizations poised to impact the social lives of older adults who live alone. Community organizations could host informal weekend meetups at local restaurants, similar to the coffee groups taking place in this community. Senior housing complexes, such as the one that several participants live in, could host occasional social events to promote socialization between residents. These small changes can foster meaningful relationships that reduce the likelihood of weekend social isolation. Community organizations that already meet over the weekend, such as churches, could host a Sunday potluck luncheon, where individuals who live alone would be able to cook for and socialize with others.

Senior center regulars who live alone expressed that they did not cook and may not be getting appropriate nutrition over the weekend. Policymakers and advocates should consider the implications of poor weekend nutrition and advocate for the expansion of Title III-C programs opposed to proposed decreases in funding. Many older adults who live alone are not cooking full
meals or reaching recommended nutrient intake (Hanna & Collins, 2015; Hughes, et al., 2004; Vesnayer, et al., 2016). Some congregate meal program regulars who live alone may not have the financial means to eat at restaurants as often as the participants of this study. Congregate meals are especially influential in the lives of marginalized older adults and cuts to the program would disproportionately affect ethnic minorities, females, and lower income older adults (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2006).

Over the weekend, most senior centers do not offer transportation; this center only offered transportation on Sundays. Vehicles operated by the senior center are some participants’ sole source of transportation. Senior centers or other community organizations, such as churches or community centers, could utilize the friendships fostered within its buildings to extend services beyond their physical location. Helping circles or ride boards could allow senior centers to fill the gaps over the weekends and churches could continue to reach the older members of their congregations. These community-driven solutions would result in minimal costs to the organization. Generous members, such as Gerald, Frank, or Nellie, could support other senior center participants in need of transportation. Members who do not have access to their own transportation, such as Eileen, could remain engaged in the community over the weekend.

Conclusion

In this study, senior center regulars who live alone were socially active and did not consider their weekends to be bad. Senior center regulars did not spend the weekend alone; they spent time with their friends, neighbors, congregation, fellow senior center attendees, and/or family. However, lack of transportation, bad weather, and illness can negatively impact the quality of their weekend. Senior centers and community organizations, such as churches, can focus on ameliorating the effects of these factors by facilitating friendships that extend to fill gaps over the weekend. Senior center regulars were all congregate meal participants, and they did not typically cook meals for themselves over the weekend. This finding is concerning, since older adults who live alone may be at risk for nutritional problems. Policymakers may want to consider expanding their services to the weekends. Overall, senior center regulars who live alone had a positive weekend experience with their peers.
References


Older Americans Act, 42 U.S.C. § 3001.

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Appendix A: First Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Can you tell me about your first visit to the senior center?
- Why did you first decide to come to the senior center?
- Was there anyone who encouraged you to start coming?
- Can you describe your first visit at the senior center? What made you decide to come back?

Can you tell me about what the senior center means to you?
- What keeps you coming back each day?
- What activities are you involved with?
- What is your favorite part about coming here?
- What do you think your week would be like if you didn’t come to the senior center?
- Can you tell me about any friendships that you’ve made at the senior center?

Can you tell me what a typical weekend is like?
- What is a typical Saturday like?
- What is a typical Sunday like?

Can you tell me about what a good weekend is like?
- What would you do over a good weekend?
- Who would you interact with, if anyone?
- What prevents you from having a good weekend?
- How often would you say that you experience this?
- Can you tell me about a recent time when you had a good weekend?
- What would turn a good weekend into a bad weekend?

Can you tell me about what a bad weekend is like?
- What would you do over a bad weekend?
- Who would you interact with, if anyone?
- What prevents you from having a bad weekend?
- How often would you say that you experience this?
- Can you tell me about a recent time when you had a bad weekend?
- How do you think that you could turn a bad weekend into a good weekend?
Appendix B: Weekend Log

Weekend Activity Log

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Appendix C: Second Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Can you tell me about this past weekend?
  • How did you feel over the course of the weekend?
  • Is there anything from your journal that you’d like to share?
  • How does this reflect a typical weekend for you?
  • Was there anything out of the ordinary over the course of this weekend?
  • Was there anything that surprised you?
  • You mentioned ______ how did that feel?
  • Would you say that you felt lonely over the weekend?
  • (If they stayed at home) What was it like being at home during the weekend?
  • (If there were interactions) Can you tell me more about your social interactions? How did they make you feel? What relation was x to you?
  • (If the weekend was pleasant) what do you think made the weekend so pleasant?
  • (If the weekend was unpleasant) what do you think made the weekend so unpleasant?
Appendix D: Demographics and General Questions

What is your age?
- 60-64
- 65-69
- 70-74
- 75-79
- 80-84
- 85-89
- 90-94
- 95-99

Please specify your ethnicity.
- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Native American or American Indian
- Asian / Pacific Islander
- Other

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
- Less than high school
- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college, no degree
- Trade/technical/vocational training
- Associate degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate degree

What is your marital status?
- Single, never married
- Married or domestic partnership
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated

Do you drive?
- Yes
- No

Do you have access to a reliable vehicle?
- Yes
- No