

Featured Faculty Profile: Tetyana Shippee

If you want to measure quality of life, ask the residents. Not just the residence.



Each issue of *Old News* will focus on a member of the Center on Aging faculty and his/her particular area of expertise. This month, we feature Tetyana Shippee, Ph.D.

Tetyana Shippee, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Health Policy and Management at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Shippee has a Ph.D. in sociology and gerontology from Purdue University. Her research includes a qualitative study of resident transitions in care (Shippee 2009) and a comparative study of two facilities (Shippee 2011), and she is currently studying quality of life in long-term care settings. Her published work also includes research on social aspects of aging (Schafer and Shippee 2009, 2010) and racial disparities in health care utilization (Ferraro and Shippee 2008; Shippee et al. 2011).

Such is the insight of social gerontologist Tetyana Shippee, an assistant professor of Health Policy and Management and a Center on Aging faculty affiliate. Shippee is also the 2011-12 Fesler Lampert Chair in Aging Studies and her research is focused on analyzing resident-reported measures of quality of life (QOL).

“Most long-term care studies focus on quality of care, based on the perspectives of physicians and staff,” Shippee said. “We want to examine what the residents themselves have to say about their quality of life.”

Research Rooted in Resident Reporting

According to Shippee, Minnesota is one of the few states that collects resident-reported data. Over the past five years, interviewers have administered questions to a random sample of residents in all nursing homes in the state of Minnesota, based on measures developed under the direction of Rosalie Kane, Center on Aging affiliate and a professor in Health Policy and Management. These measures explore 11 different areas related to quality of life.

Resident-Reported Measures of QOL

- Autonomy
- Comfort
- Dignity
- Food enjoyment
- Functional competence
- Individuality
- Meaningful Activity
- Privacy
- Relationships
- Security
- Spiritual well-being

Source: Kane et al (2003); *Quality of life measures for nursing home residents. Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences, 58A (3), 240-248.*

In conjunction with analyzing the resident-reported QOL data, Shippee will examine changes in facility characteristics, such as age, size, funding sources and staff turnover levels, as well as its programs, initiatives and other quality improvement efforts. She will correlate facility predictors with an analysis of changes in resident-reported QOL, while accounting for resident characteristics (such as age, gender, race, cognitive status and health status) over the same 5-year timeframe.

“We’ll look at predictors of quality of life, based on facility characteristics and resident

characteristics,” Shippee explained. “We want to determine what factors contribute to changes in resident-reported QOL over time.”

Understanding the Social Aspects of Aging

Shippee recognizes that her research has implications for long-term care facilities in Minnesota and beyond. It may also contribute to recommendations at the policy level, as it relates to the ways that society perceives and treats older people.

“Although we live in an aging society, there is a great deal of discrimination against the aged,” Shippee said. “As the demand for services for the elderly continues to rise, we need to increase understanding and training for those who work with this population.”

Shippee’s own interest in the societal issues of aging grew during the two years she spent living in a retirement home, while pursuing her Ph.D. in sociology and gerontology at Purdue University.

Now, as part of her work with the U of M, Shippee wants to provide a vehicle for students in a variety of disciplines to better understand the unique issues of an aging population, including their social and relational needs.

Next spring, she will teach the course, *Social Aspects of Aging*, for students who are seeking a Certificate in Aging Studies or the Gerontology Minor through the Center on Aging. The course will address ageism, aging in American society and other cultures, the role of families and social institutions, and the implications on long-term care policy.

“The key is to examine the psycho-social aspects of aging within a societal context,” Shippee said.

No doubt, the course will include the wise perspectives of the elderly themselves.