

The International Mobility in Aging Study

Research has shown that some harmful exposures either before birth or in the early years shape health for the remainder of one's lifetime. There is less understanding of the interaction between experiences throughout life and health. From what we do know, it seems that the genes one is born with act as a set of possibilities that can be switched on or off by all of life's experiences, both good and bad. For example, the stress of being in constant danger as a child may work its way into the body and grumble along. Years later, this childhood stress may predispose to poorer adult health.

The Queen's Family Health Team's (QFHT's) Dr. Susan Phillips and a group of researchers are looking at how conforming to traditional roles as men or women, exposure to violence, feeling connected to a community, or a number of other factors alter the chances of developing chronic disease or mobility disability among 1,600 Canadian, Colombian and Brazilian seniors. Hundreds of QFHT patients have volunteered to participate in the study.

Over five years, participants will be interviewed three times and have testing for mobility, memory, chronic illnesses such as diabetes or heart disease, and a number of other conditions. Thanks to funding from the Canadian government and the enthusiasm of the seniors taking part in the study, the researchers will be able to identify personal and environmental factors that reinforce healthy aging and possible ways to lessen the harmful effects of some life experiences.

Over the next five years, the research team will report and discuss findings to the QFHT and Kingston communities.