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VUSNAPS WAVE 2 UPDATE

COMMUNITY RESEARCH SUMMARY



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PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
VUSNAPS

Thank You Participants!

Dear VUSNAPS Community,

Thank you for trusting us with your information, experiences, and opinions. We are thrilled to let you know that Wave 2 was successfully completed at the end of September 2022!

We have had an incredible year generating and presenting research based on the first wave of data we collected last year. As you will read in this update, we have led important new work on cognition, sleep quality, bodily aging, and health care access for LGBTQ people that identify key areas where we need to improve, like in everyday experiences of discrimination and harassment, and highlight protective factors, like having an LGBTQ-affirming physician.

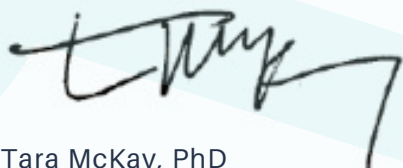
Of particular note, VUSNAPS was featured in the PBS series, *Ageing Matters*, in an episode called "Ageing with Pride." This series was produced by the phenomenal Megan Grisolano at Nashville Public Television who interviewed several members of our community in Nashville for the episode. Megan also created a short 2:30 min clip specifically on VUSNAPS and our findings related to sleep quality and receipt of preventative health screenings, like a colonoscopy. You can read more about these projects in this update!

Many of you may have opted to participate in the VUSNAPS BioAge study where we collected cheek swab samples. These have all made it to the lab –finally!—and we'll be starting analyses on biological aging this fall! We also ran a small pilot study collecting blood samples from about 150 VUSNAPS participants. Thank you to those who participated! These have been processed by the lab, and we'll be reporting back soon on major findings. Don't worry if you hear about the blood sample collection yet. We're in the process of applying for additional funding to expand this to all of you who might like to participate.

In the meantime, please send us any updates at vusnaps@vanderbilt.edu. We love hearing from you. If something seems not right, please let us know that, too.

Thank you again for being a part of the VUSNAPS community. We look forward to finding out how you've been in Wave 3 soon.

Warmly,



Tara McKay, PhD
Vanderbilt University

About VUSNAPS



The Vanderbilt University Social Networks, Aging, and Policy Study (VUSNAPS) is a longitudinal study of health, aging, and social networks among older LGBTQ+ adults who are 50 to 76 years old and reside in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The study includes three waves over four years. VUSNAPS is funded by the National Institute on Aging and led by Dr. Tara McKay at Vanderbilt University.

The VUSNAPS survey collects a variety of self-reported measures of health and aging, including self-rated health, chronic disease diagnoses, activity and mobility limitations, mental health, recent hospitalizations, sleep quality, and health risk behaviors (i.e. smoking). Researchers hope to link these outcomes to social network characteristics and change over time to better identify sources of stress and resilience for LGBTQ+ populations. Unlike some other studies, VUSNAPS is comprised entirely of LGBTQ+ people to better understand our own communities and more fully represent differences in experience, health, and aging trajectories across our many identities and life trajectories.

What to Expect in Wave 3



We will be releasing the third survey for VUSNAPS participants on a timed schedule based on when you completed your first and second interview beginning March 15, 2023. Please be on the look out for a VUSNAPS email to update your contact information! For Wave 3, we'll be asking many of the same questions to see what kinds of things change for participants over time. And we'll have some new questions about how you feel about aging, medical care and health, and experiences that create joy for you. You can learn more about how researchers are using this information in the "New Studies" section on page 4.

2022 Updates

VUSNAPS Featured by PBS



This year VUSNAPS was featured in the PBS documentary series *Aging Matters*. The documentary features Dr. Tara McKay, who describes how negative life experiences such as discrimination, harassment, and violence can affect aging at the DNA level and impact long-term health. This creates an aging disparity between cisgender, heterosexual people and LGBTQ+ people who generally deal with these negative experiences more often in their lifetimes and thus have worse health outcomes. Dr. McKay also discusses the importance of having an LGBTQ+-affirming provider in improving access to and utilization of preventative care among LGBTQ+ individuals.

Watch episode 23 “Aging with Pride” and the special feature “How Discrimination Can Physically Age You” for more!

Welcome Nik!



We are excited to announce a new member of the VUSNAPS team, Dr. Nik Lampe! Nik (they/them) recently graduated with a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of South Carolina and is now working with Dr. Tara McKay as a postdoctoral researcher for VUSNAPS at the Vanderbilt University LGBTQ+ Policy Lab. As an aging researcher and a bisexual, transgender, and intersex person who manages multiple chronic health conditions, Nik’s work focuses on health equity issues in the experience and management of health conditions as LGBTQ+ people age. Nik will extend the work of VUSNAPS by assessing how VUSNAPS participants’ acute and chronic health conditions affect their personal and social lives.

New VUSNAPS Studies



We are thrilled to tell you about several new studies associated with VUSNAPS!

Over the last three years, VUSNAPS has been looking for ways to expand access to the most cutting-edge research in health and aging. We have researchers actively putting together data from the second survey to study a range of different outcomes. VUSNAPS researchers are investigating the long-term health effects of having an LGBTQ+ affirming provider, how victimization affects political polarization, how discrimination and stressful life events affect aging, U=U awareness and understanding, the effects of workplace stress on cognitive health, how political polarization affects LGBTQ+ individuals' social networks, and the effects of discrimination on sleep.

Read more about these studies in the following pages.

LGBTQ+ Affirming Providers and Health



The health benefits for LGBTQ+ people who have access to affirming providers are not well understood. VUSNAPS researchers asked respondents whether they had a usual health care provider they visit and whether they thought of this provider as LGBTQ+ affirming. Researchers also asked about a range of preventative screenings, vaccinations, and chronic disease outcomes to detect differences between those with and those without access to an LGBTQ+ affirming provider.

Our results indicate that LGBTQ+ people who have access to affirming providers are more likely to be up to date with recommended preventative screening and vaccinations, and they feel better about their chronic health condition compared to those who do not have access to an LGBTQ+ affirming provider. Therefore, implementing and expanding access to LGBTQ+ affirming care may improve the health of middle-age and older LGBTQ+ populations.

Victimization and Political Participation



This project examines the effect of past victimization experiences (physical violence, verbal harassment) due to one's LGBTQ+ identity on current political participation for American LGBTQ+ individuals. Political Science literature has established that events with extreme psychological and emotional effects (such as becoming a widow or getting married) can have concrete effects on political participation. However, there remains a lack of literature into understanding how victimization acts, and specifically victimization related to being LGBTQ+, affects political participation within American politics. This paper will contribute to understanding how victimization and LGBTQ+ identity affects political participation. VUSNAPS collected unique data on a wide variety of victimization experiences over the lifetime of LGBTQ+ individuals to see how their experiences can be mobilizing or demobilizing.

Discrimination and Sleep



Sleep is important for our mental, physical, and emotional health. When people do not get the right amount of sleep (either too much or too little) they are at higher risk for diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and worse memory and day-to-day decision making. Scientists think that the stress that LGBTQ+ people experience, such as being called rude names in public or hearing about friends being harassed, can disrupt how much and how well they sleep.

We're using data from three different studies, including VUSNAPS, to see how true this pattern is. First, we find that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other queer-identified adults report either too much or too little more often than straight adults. We then used data from California, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama to look at experiences of LGBTQ+ discrimination and sleep. The more people reported recently experiencing or witnessing LGBTQ+ discrimination, the more trouble they had falling and staying asleep. Participants also reported fewer mornings that they woke up feeling rested. These findings suggest that there are differences in how well LGBTQ people sleep compared to others and that experiences of discrimination may drive some of those differences.

U=U Awareness and Understanding



VUSNAPS researchers assessed "Undetectable equals Untransmittable" (U=U) awareness, belief, understanding, and impact on risk perception among middle-aged and older gay and bisexual men in the US south. The U=U message says that people living with HIV who are being treated and have an undetectable amount of HIV in the blood cannot sexually transmit the virus to others.

Our results found that having an LGBTQ+ affirming provider increased the likelihood that HIV-negative men had heard of, believe in, and understand U=U. They were also more likely to correctly apply U=U to a hypothetical situation. This is important, as knowledge of U=U helps individuals better assess their risk and decide when to get tested for HIV.

Workplace Stress and Cognitive Decline



How do supportive work environments affect LGBTQ+ adults' health and aging? Researchers working on the VUSNAPS project are studying this question by investigating connections between people's workplace experiences and their cognitive health. Our study found that experiencing major problems in the workplace, including having insufficient work hours, being overworked, and having contentious relationships with coworkers was associated with more cognitive impairments among LGBTQ+ adults.

Our results also demonstrated the importance of working in a job where people's sexual and gender identities are supported by coworkers. Among LGBTQ+ adults who reported major problems at work, those who had an LGBTQ+ supportive workplace reported a nearly 55% lower rate of cognitive impairments than respondents who did not have an LGBTQ+ supportive workplace. These results underscore how positive work environments, especially ones that support LGBTQ+ employees, can facilitate better health outcomes in later life.

Political Polarization and Social Networks



A previous version of VUSNAPS, called the UC Berkeley Social Networks Study, or UCNets, collected data from 2015 to 2018 in the San Francisco Bay Area from 660 randomly sampled older adults and an additional 310 LGBTQ+ older adults. Interestingly, the timing of the UCNets study allows researchers to see how people's social networks changed before and after the 2016 Presidential Election.

Researchers are especially interested in whether people continued to talk to and spend time with people who didn't share their political views during this polarizing election.

They find that nonkin who hold different political views are more likely to not appear in people's networks after the 2016 election. We also found that LGBTQ+ older adults are more likely to no longer have social ties to people who don't share their political views after the election.

DNA and Blood Collection



People's chronological age increases by one year with the passing of each birthday, but their biological age—or how fast their bodies age at a molecular level—may move at a different pace.

Researchers have demonstrated how physical and social environments affect people's biological aging, but this work has mostly focused on cisgender and heterosexual populations. LGBTQ+ adults face stressful life events that could accelerate their biological aging and lead to negative health outcomes. Using other datasets, VUSNAPS researchers have shown that adults in same-sex couples experience accelerated aging compared to different-sex couples. Unfortunately, this research only analyzes couples and has not examined individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.

The VUSNAPS project is addressing this gap by collecting DNA samples from a subgroup of respondents. This innovation will provide the largest sample of biological aging data among LGBTQ+ adults and allow us to better understand how LGBTQ+ people's life experiences affect their biological aging.

About half of VUSNAPS participants have chosen to participate in the BioAge study! Thank you to those who have chosen to participate.

Tasso Biomarker Pilot Study

During Wave 2, we provided a subset of VUSNAPS participants with additional information about our Tasso Biomarker Pilot Study.

This was an exciting opportunity to get involved in cutting-edge research to test the acceptability of a new, one-time, **needle-free**, self-administered blood sample using a device called a "Tasso button." The Tasso button passively collects a blood sample over about 15 minutes pain-free.

After wearing the Tasso button on their arm for 15 minutes, participants who chose to be part of the Tasso Biomarker Pilot Study returned the samples in the pre-paid mailer including the sample collection kit. The sample collection kit included instructions for how to use the Tasso button as well as return mailing materials.

These samples have been sent to the lab. We are looking forward to getting the results!

