A Qualitative Study of Social Connectedness in Homebound Older Adults
Julie Lutz, PhD – T32 Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for the Study and Prevention of Suicide
Co-Investigators: Kimberly Van Orden, PhD & Emily Bower, PhD

**Background**
- Current pandemic & “social”/“physical distancing”
- Physical distancing (PD) -- physical separation for public health vs continued social connectedness
- Social connectedness (SC) = social activities, size of social networks, perceived support, subjective feelings of belongingness (vs. loneliness) (Holt-Lunstad, Robles, & Sbarra, 2017)
- Associated with functioning, physical & mental health, all-cause mortality, suicide
- Older adults at risk of becoming isolated during PD
- Limited research base on older adults’ needs and preferences for remote SC interventions in context of being homebound/PD
- Modest effectiveness + difficulties getting older adults engaged with interventions
- Community providers say (Sabir et al., 2009):
  - Need broader, more multi-component view of SC
  - Account for individual contexts
  - Need more attention to relevance and acceptability of interventions to older adults

**Objective/Aims**

**Objective:** Use mixed-methods study to guide development of strategy for assessing needs and preferences and selecting remote interventions for SC among older adults in context of PD

**Aim 1:** Describe older adults’ experiences of SC in the context of PD

**Aim 2:** Describe strategies older adults use or prefer for improving SC in the context of PD

**Aim 3:** Identify remote interventions that are feasible and acceptable to older adults.

**Proposed Method**
- Convergent, parallel mixed-methods design
- Grounded theory, inductive approach
- Sample: Age 65+, currently (or within the past year) engaged in PD, able to participate via phone/video-conferencing
  - Estimated N = 15-30
  - Purposive sampling of range of SC (i.e., reporting low and high levels of loneliness)
  - Recruitment until theoretical saturation
- Data analytic plan
  - Qualitative: Inductive thematic coding, examine variations in themes related to scores/responses on quantitative measures
  - Analyze frequencies of endorsement/average ratings of intervention modalities on TSSI and TAAS, and in context of scores on other quant measures

**Implications**
- Use study results to develop guidance for older adult services providers to use in making decisions or recommendations for remote interventions for SC
  - Suggesting domains to assess re: needs, values, preferences, individual contexts
  - Assist in translating contextual factors to selection of appropriate remote intervention strategies
- Findings applicable both in current pandemic AND more generally to any homebound older adults

**References**