

# Youth and Elder Perceptions and Adaptations on Air Quality

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## Introduction

### Background:

The Chinatown International District (CID) community consists of mostly low-income elderly refugees and immigrants; over half do not speak English. The CID is bisected by Interstate 5, which carries the highest traffic volumes in the Pacific Northwest. Poor air quality contributes to more asthma, respiratory and cardiac-related hospital visits per capita than 99% of other Puget Sound neighborhoods (Puget Sound Clean Air Agency). The I-5 has the greatest impact on air quality within a corridor of 300-500 yards of the highway, where a large concentration of low-income senior housing is located. This study explores immigrant youth and elder perceptions of air quality and how they demonstrate resilience to change.

### Questions:

- How are immigrant populations adapted to living in Seattle / United States?
- How do immigrants perceive air quality, and the role of individuals, city government, or organizations in maintaining healthy air quality?

### Population:

1. Chinese elders (n=11)
2. Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese, Somali Youth (n=8)

## Methods

To gain an understanding about the perceived risks of poor air quality facing the community, this study focused on how place affects the way individuals understand air pollution. Utilizing a community based approach, a series of semi-structured in-depth interview questions were designed to explore how immigrant youth and elders perceived air quality in Seattle.

The eleven elders interviewed were all over 65 years old living in the CID. The eight youth interviewed were 14-15 year olds, half of whom immigrated within the last 3 years, while 3 others immigrated 5 years or younger and 1 was born in South Seattle.

### Interview Methods:

- Youth were trained to conduct interviews and assisted in data collection by interviewing elders when delivering air filter fans to their apartments.
- Youth were interviewed by each other with WILD staff taking notes following the semi-structured interview questions.



## Findings

### Elders

- Many indicated that those living next to the I-5 or other polluted sources had no choice and did not have mobility to move out.
- All the elders interviewed came from dense urban environments in China that have much higher pollution levels than that of Seattle, suggesting that immigrants who move to a less polluted area are less likely to see it as polluted.

### Youth

- Youth who had memories and experiences of living in another country with poorer air quality thought of South Seattle's air quality as relatively clean.
- Those with little to no memory of another country's environment felt that air quality where they lived in South Seattle was dirty.
- Youth identified educational awareness as a key component for individual action for air quality.
- Youth had more sense of agency and mobility for those living in polluted areas.

### Conservation

- During the interview, elders frequently expressed confusion over some of the phrases in the questions ask like "air quality", particularly the translation of it in Chinese.
- Trees and parks were related to better air quality.
- Air pollution for elders in the CID is not seen as a huge priority - most of them are more concerned about safety and housing.

## Conclusions

- Place and experience affects how both elders and youth view air quality, especially whether or not they find air quality where they live currently to be an issue.
- Educational awareness about air pollution from freeways is needed, particularly when it comes to situating this knowledge in immigrants' lived experiences.
- Next steps for those interested in examining community-based solutions for air quality in the CID through extensive interviewing of elders to find solutions to make concerns about air pollution relevant to them and figuring out how to translate words describing air quality and pollution.
- Air filter fan deliveries have been effective in starting intergenerational conversations about air quality between youth and elders and so it would be useful to continue this as a way to engage elders in education about air quality.

## Limitations

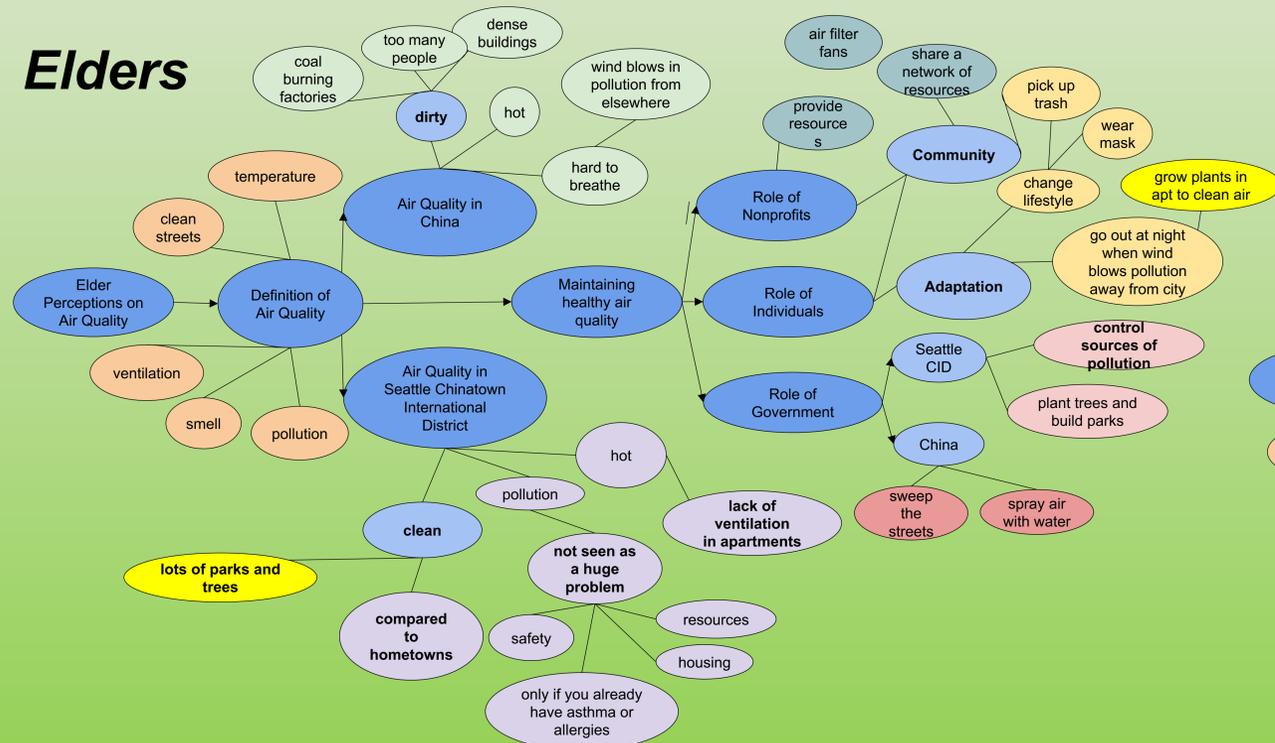
This was a qualitative study focused on self perceptions, and as such there was:

- No comparison or control group.
- A small sample size
- Air quality was the main goal of this study, but air quality was extremely difficult to translate and explain in another language.

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## Elders



## Youth

