

COMPARISON OF HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG OLDER VERSUS YOUNGER ADULT THAI INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS

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Abstract. International travel is becoming more common among older adults who may have different health problems than younger adults. In this study we aimed to compare health problems among older versus younger adult Thai international travelers in order to inform pre-travel consultations. Inclusion criteria for older study subjects were aged ≥ 60 years, for younger study subjects were aged 18-45 years; both groups had traveled abroad for ≤ 31 days. Those with medical tourism purposes were excluded. The minimum numbers of study subjects calculated to be needed for the study were 185 travelers in each group. The study was conducted prospectively in Thai travelers with international destinations during March-December 2019 at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases, Queen Saovabha Memorial Institute, Don Mueang International Airport and Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok, Thailand. The study groups (older and younger subjects) were matched by travel destinations. Each subject was interviewed twice following a standardized questionnaire: once before travel and once after travel. The questionnaire asked about demographic characteristics, travel itinerary, pre-travel preparation, health problems during travel, medication used, management and impact on the planned activities. A total of 500 subjects were included in the study: 250 older subjects (aged ≥ 60 years) (30.4% male) and 250 younger subjects (aged 18-45 years) (30% male) ($p=0.922$ for sex differences between groups). The number of overall health problem episodes among older subjects (2,171 episodes per 1,000 person-months) and younger subjects (2,222 episodes per 1,000 person-months) were not significantly different from each other (95% CI: 1,851-2,491; $p=0.830$). However, the proportion of older subjects who experienced musculoskeletal health problems (37.6%) was significantly higher ($p=0.037$) than younger subjects (28.8%) and the proportion of older subjects who experienced respiratory problems (13.2%) was significantly lower ($p=0.031$) than younger subjects (20.4%). There was no significant difference ($p=0.540$) in the proportion of older subjects with gastrointestinal problems (14.8%) than younger subjects (16.8%). Older subjects with underlying health problems or bringing travel health kits were significantly more likely to experience health problems during travel (adjusted odds ratio (OR)

= 2.87; 95% CI: 1.03-8.01; $p=0.045$), (adjusted OR = 2.18; 95% CI: 1.10-4.33; $p=0.026$), respectively. Older subjects were more likely to experience health problems if they traveled to Africa, Central and South America than if they traveled to Southeast Asia (adjusted OR = 5.57; 95% CI: 1.09-28.52; $p=0.039$). Overall, we found similar health problems among younger and older subjects, except musculoskeletal problems were higher among the older group. Subjects traveling to Africa, Central and South America should be counseled about their greater risk as well as older travelers with underlying health problems. Further studies are needed to determine what interventions are effective for reducing health problems among higher risk travelers or higher risk locations.

Keywords: health problems, Thai international travelers, old adult travelers, young adult travelers.

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