

Occupational Therapy Going Green: An Exploration into the Accessibility of Boston Metro Community Gardens for Community-Dwelling Older Adults

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Introduction

Project Aim: Explore accessibility of community gardens for community-dwelling older adults age 60+ in the Boston Metro Area

- Objective 1: Collect data via an online survey of **community-dwelling older adults age 60+** in Boston Metro Area
 - Factors impacting accessibility & occupational performance
- Objective 2: Collect data via semi-structured interviews with **community garden organizers** in Boston Metro Area to understand;
 - Current initiatives/strategies for improving access & participation
 - Factors observed that impact participation of this population

Constructs

Community-Dwelling: Individuals living outside of residential or institutional settings (nursing/assisted living facilities, etc.)¹

Community Garden: Garden that is community-led and managed, community members work together to make decisions, may include gardens with individual plots or gardens with larger community-managed plots²

Accessibility: Facilities/spaces/programs designed to be used by individuals of all abilities, including those with disabilities³

Background And Need Identified

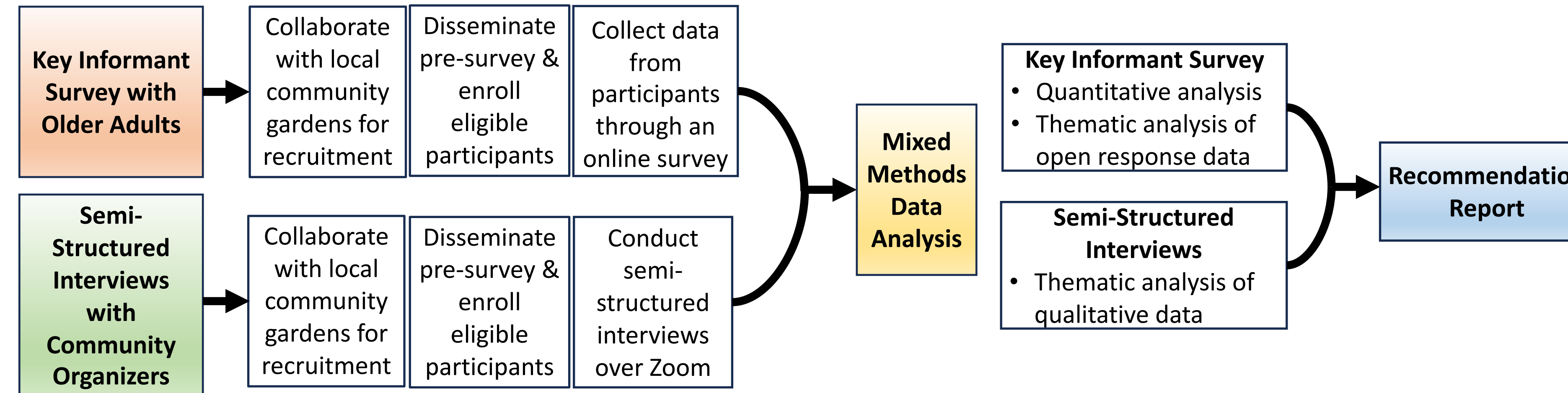
Benefits of Gardening for this Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correlation between gardening activities & improved health/wellness outcomes for adults⁴ Participation in gardening can lead to psychological & physiological benefits for older adults^{5,6}
Potential Barriers to Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Older adults may experience increased barriers to nature-based activities⁷ Diminished ability to walk on uneven surfaces, difficulties engaging in strenuous activity, & keeping pace with a group⁷
Role of Community Gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community gardens-place for individuals of all ages to participate in gardening & nature-based activities Important in urban environments (Boston), where individuals may not have access to private gardening⁵
Gap/Need Identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is necessary to hear from local stakeholders to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve accessibility of community gardens Create programming to improve occupational performance of older adults Create meaningful & applicable recommendations

Participants

Key Informant Survey with Older Adults	Semi-Structured Interviews with Community Organizers
<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age 60 or older Community-dwelling Residing in Boston Metro Area Interested in or participating in community gardening English Speaking 	<p>Eligibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals in an organizer, managerial, or leadership role for a Boston Metro community garden English Speaking

IRB: Exempt Determination

Methods

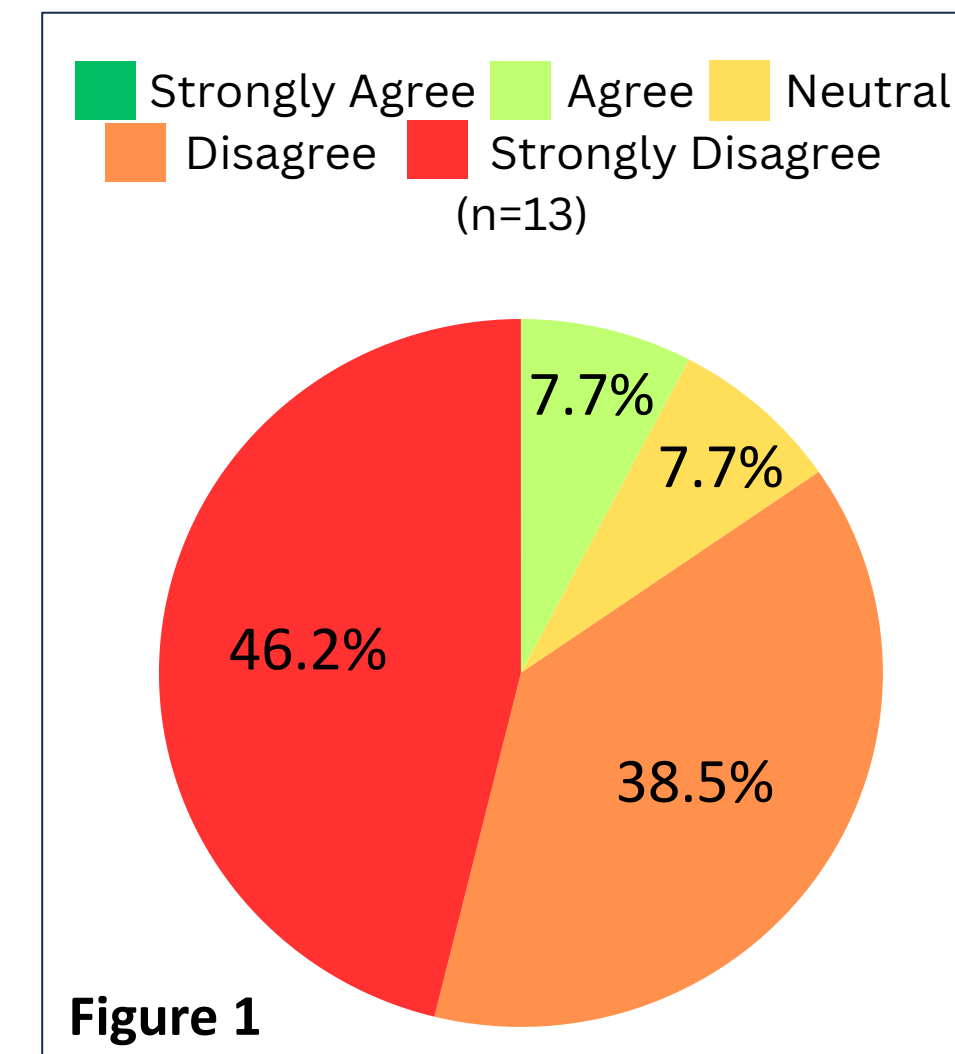


Results

Key Informant Survey with Older Adults: A Sample of Key Findings

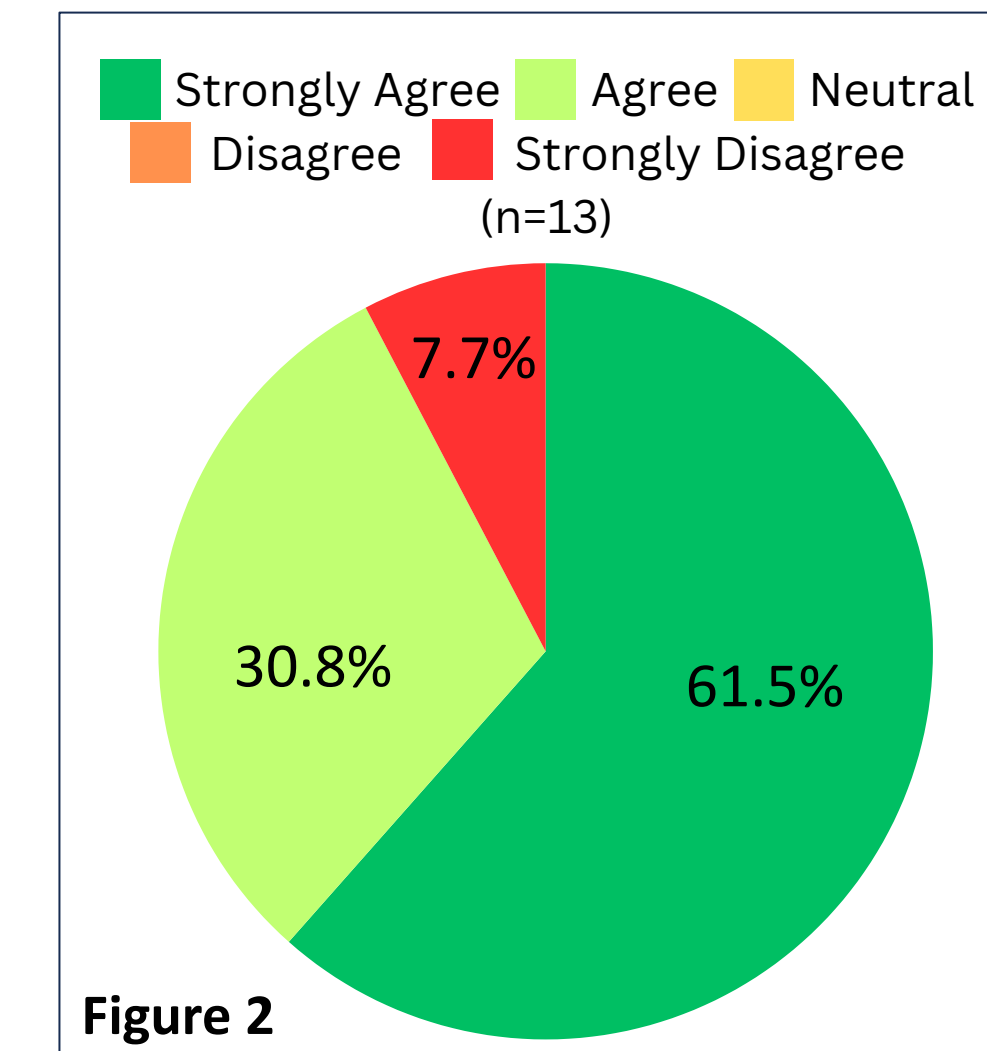
Disclaimer: Chart percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Figure 1: Likert Scale- Local community garden spaces are a difficult environment for me to physically access



- Older adult key informants generally found community gardens to be accessible (physical environment)

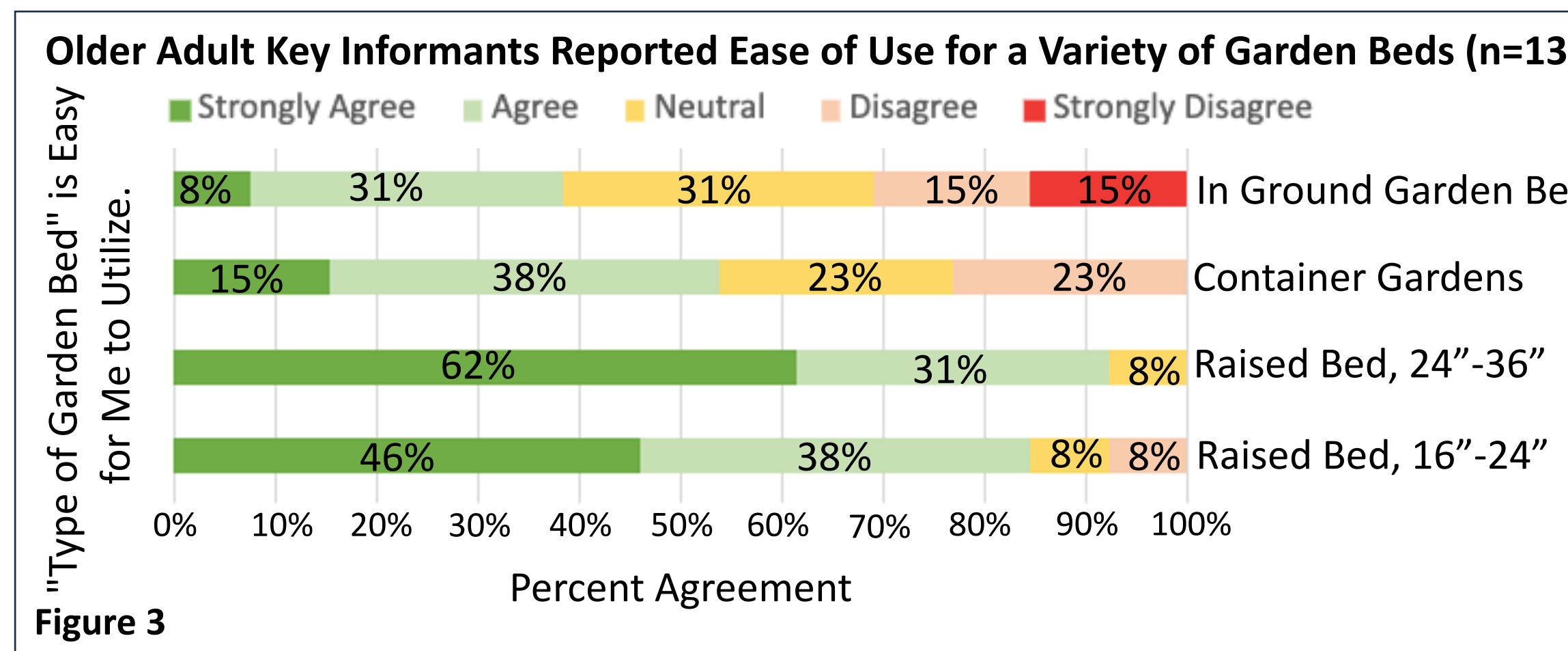
Figure 2: Likert Scale- Access to seating options improves my ability to participate in community garden spaces



- Seating:** Improves participation of older adults in community gardening
- Important factor to consider that was identified through this study

Figure 3: Likert Scale- Older adult informant's perspectives on their ease of use for different garden beds/plots

- Reflected preference for raised beds, particularly taller raised beds (24"-36" in height).
- Raised bed's importance further exemplified in open response analysis: 40% (n=12) stated access to raised beds facilitated participation in community gardens



Semi-Structured Interviews with Community Organizers: A Sample of Themes (n=5)

Organizers perspectives on engagement of community-dwelling older adults	Strategies or initiatives in place to improve accessibility/participation	Barriers to participation	Factors that facilitate participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not difficult to engage community-dwelling older adults in community garden spaces (100%). Older adults make up a significant portion of community garden members (100%). Many community garden members are long-term members & in some cases, have been involved for decades (80%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion of raised beds (80%) Assigning gardeners specific plots (80%) Accessible pathways (40%) Modification of activities facilitated by organizers (40%) Informal systems to ask for assistance (40%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties ambulating to garden plots (60%) Physically demanding activities/tasks (40%) Online registration & communication (40%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture of community support (60%) Older adults in leadership positions (40%) Intergenerational members (40%)

Discussion

Older adult key informants generally found community garden spaces accessible

- Despite positive finding, many factors identified that;
 - Improve accessibility of community garden space
 - Improve occupational performance of older adults

Two Key Takeaways Were Identified From this Exploration

Spaces that are accessible for members with disabilities benefit older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessible pathways Access to seating Access to shade Information delivery Adequate lighting 	Improves accessibility & occupational performance for older adults in Boston Metro community gardens
Flexible programming improves occupational performance of older adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varied options for participation Varied garden beds/gardening equipment 	

Project Limitations to Consider

Language	Sample Size	Online Delivery	Past Participation
Only English-speaking participants	Survey n=13, two partial responses Interviews n=5	Possible barrier to Key Informant Survey response	100% of older adults key informants had participated in community gardening

Outcome

Recommendation Report

- Title: *Improving Occupational Performance and Accessibility in Boston Metro Community Gardens for Community-Dwelling Older Adults (Age 60+)*
 - Includes OT models & rationale
 - Includes two additional supplemental resources
 - Accessible gardening tools & equipment
 - Raised garden beds
- Shared with community stakeholders/organizations

Potential Future Research Directions

- Leadership & organizer roles in community gardens
 - What do these roles entail? What support is provided? What support is needed?
- Continuation of a past role through community gardening
- How to engage a wider sample of community-dwelling older adults with an interest in community gardening in research

Recommendation Report & References

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