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College Students' Knowledge, Attitudes, & Beliefs about Older Adults

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BACKGROUND

- As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age, the number of older adults requiring healthcare and other aging-related services will increase.
- In the future, six of every 10 older adults are expected to have one or more chronic diseases.
- To maintain an adequate ratio of workers for this population, an estimated additional 3.5 million healthcare employees will need to enter the workforce (Stone, 2010).

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this study is to examine college students' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about older adults (ages 65 and up).

METHODS

- Cross-sectional exploratory design.
- Non-random sample of 119 Georgia State University undergraduate students.
- Students recruited on campus via word-of-mouth and flyers.
- Standard survey questionnaires with one open-ended question were self-administered.

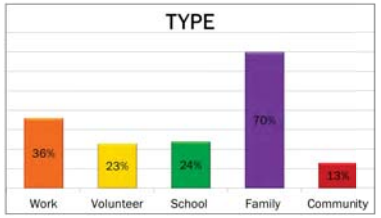
INSTRUMENTS

- Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz (higher scores indicate greater knowledge). *a* = .60
- Kogan's Attitudes about Old People Scale (higher scores indicate a more positive view of older adults). *a* = .87
- Investigator-developed survey used to assess students':
  - type, frequency and quality of interaction with older adults (higher scores indicate higher frequency and quality)
  - interest in working with older adults
  - interest in taking a course dedicated to care of older adults

DEMOGRAPHICS

(*N*=119)	*n* (%)
Sex	
Female	95 (80)
Male	24 (20)
Race	
Caucasian/White	56 (47)
African American/Black	41 (35)
Asian	11 (9)
Other	7 (6)
Classification	
Freshman	6 (5)
Sophomore	15 (13)
Junior	31 (26)
Senior	67 (56)
Major	
Nursing	28 (24)
Respiratory Therapy	24 (20)
Nutrition	25 (21)
Social Work	19 (16)
Non Healthcare	23 (19)
	M (SD)
Age (Range 18-55)	25 (6.3)

INTERACTION WITH OLDER ADULTS



FREQUENCY	M (SD)	QUALITY	M (SD)
Nursing	2.2 (.86)	Nursing	4.4 (.62)
Respiratory	2.3 (.75)	Respiratory	4.0 (.62)
Nutrition	1.9 (.98)	Nutrition	4.1 (.60)
Social Work	2.0 (.88)	Social Work	4.4 (.61)
Non Healthcare	1.5 (.79)	Non Healthcare	4.0 (.74)
Potential Range	0.0 - 3.0		1.0 - 5.0

- Means highlighted in yellow are significantly different ($p < .01$) from means highlighted in pink.

- The mean frequency score for respiratory therapy students was significantly different than non healthcare students, however, no other significant differences between groups were found $F(4, 114) = 2.80$, $p < 0.05$).
- Female students ($M = 2.1 \pm .85$) reported more frequent interaction with older adults compared to male students ($M = 1.7 \pm .96$; $t(117) = 2.1$, $p < .05$).
- There were no significant differences in the perceived quality of interactions with older adults by major or gender.

INTEREST

- 50% of students reported an interest in working with older adults in the future.
- 56% were interested in taking a course dedicated to the care of older adults.

Interest Working with Older Adults: Reasons

YES	*n* (%)
Appreciate life experiences	15 (27)
Previous positive experiences	11 (20)
Desire to help	11 (20)
Related to career interest	8 (14)
Necessity in healthcare	6 (11)
Ambivalent	5 (9)
NO	***n* (%)**
Interested in other populations	17 (39)
Personal discomfort	15 (32)
Simply not interested	10 (21)
Ambivalent	5 (11)

KNOWLEDGE & ATTITUDES

MAJOR	KNOWLEDGE* M (SD)	ATTITUDES** M (SD)
Nursing	19.1 (2.1)	142.9 (14.7)
Respiratory	16.4 (2.3)	125.3 (12.4)
Nutrition	17.2 (3.3)	134.2 (11.3)
Social Work	18.4 (2.5)	144.8 (20.3)
Non Healthcare	16.3 (2.8)	133.4 (13.7)
TOTAL	17.5 (2.8)	135.9 (15.9)
Possible Range	0 – 27	33 – 198
Actual Range	10 – 24	88 – 179

- Means highlighted in yellow are significantly different ($p < .01$) from means highlighted in pink.

* $F(4, 114) = 5.52$, $p<.001$; ** $F(4, 114) = 6.88$, $p<.001$

- Most students (52-68%) were less knowledgeable about older adults' abilities, moods, income levels, and changes in memory associated with the aging process.
- About 50-60% of students had less positive attitudes about whether older adults:
  - should live in residential units with younger people.
  - tend to complain about the behavior of the younger generation.
  - need no more love and reassurance than anyone else.
  - tend to keep to themselves and give advice only when asked.

OTHER RESULTS

- Increased age of students was associated with more frequent interaction with older adults ($r = 0.30$, $p = 0.001$) but not with interaction quality, knowledge or attitudes.
- Greater knowledge ($r = 0.34$, $p < .01$) and higher perceived quality of interaction ($r = 0.31$, $p < .01$) were associated with more positive attitudes regarding older adults.
- Students not interested in working with older adults did not differ by major or attitudes towards older adults, but on average were 2.8 years ($\pm$1.5) younger ($p < .05$), reported less frequent and less positive interactions ($p < .05$) with older adults and had slightly lower knowledge scores (M=16.9 $\pm$ 2.9) compared to those who were interested (M=18.0 $\pm$ 2.5; $t(113) = 2.0$, $p < .05$).
- Caucasian/White students had more positive attitudes ($M = 140.3 \pm 14.8$) towards older adults compared to minority students ($M = 132.2 \pm 15.9$; $p < .05$), but there were no differences in their interaction, interest, or knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

- Most students had limited interaction with older adults other than family members.
- In general, students reported positive interactions with older adults.
- Interaction frequency was not associated with other factors.
- Students' knowledge and attitudes towards older adults were slightly above the midpoint.
- Mean knowledge scores for nursing students were significantly higher compared to respiratory therapy and non healthcare students.
- Mean attitude scores for nursing and social work students were significantly higher compared to respiratory therapy students.
- About half the students are interested in working with older adults in the future and/or would be interested in taking a course dedicated to the care of older adults.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategies for increasing college students' interests in working with older adults may include targeting younger students, exploring discomforts associated with working with older adults, creating more meaningful opportunities for students to engage with older adults in a variety of settings, and improving students' knowledge of older adults.
- Areas for improvement in knowledge include content related to older adults abilities, moods, mindset, needs, resources, and memory changes.
- Integrate geriatric considerations into program curricula and create an interdisciplinary course designed to address the gaps in students' knowledge about older adults for healthcare and non-healthcare students.
- More research is needed to understand racial differences in college students' attitudes towards older adults.