

Characteristics of Caregivers Among College Students

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INTRODUCTION

The population pyramid used to study population trends indicates that the elderly in developed countries are living longer (Kail & Cavanaugh 2004). According to the American Association of Retired People (AARP) a common trend experienced by developed countries is for people to live past their seventies (Mondale, 2003). The elderly are living longer because of various reasons, such as advancements in medicine, technology, improved health care services and healthier lifestyles. An increase in life expectancy has influenced the trend of longer periods of eldercare by family members. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to measure college students' attitudes toward providing long-term care to the elderly, which will help define whether college students are willing to assume the caregiver role. Identifying those who will become future caregivers can lead to proper preparation of those individuals who will assume that role.

Hypotheses

- Female college students will have more positive attitudes regarding long-term care for an elderly family member when compared to college males.
- Latino college students are more likely to have positive attitudes regarding long-term care for elderly family members when compared to non-Latino college students.

METHOD

Participants

The criterion for eligibility in the current study required the legal age of 18 or older, and current college enrollment. Ninety-nine participants of both genders and various ethnicities served as participants. All sixty-nine female participants and thirty of the male participants were conveniently sampled at a small, liberal arts university in Southern California. The age of participants ranged from 18-52 and the mean age was 21 years ($SD = 5.5$). The ethnic breakdown consisted of 44% Hispanic/ Latino, 29% Caucasian/ European American, 12% African American, 5% Bi or Multiracial, 5% "Other", 2% Asian American/ Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American. Family social economic status was also measured and resulted in 46% middle class, 24% working class, 23 % upper middle class, 3% poor, and 3% wealthy.

Materials and Measures

A demographic questionnaire and The Attitudes Toward the Provision of Long-Term Care survey (ATPLTC; Klein, 1992) were used in this study. The demographic section consisted of eight items regarding gender, age, ethnicity, questions pertaining to elderly family members and activities of daily living. Modifications were made to the scale by the researcher, which consisted of replacing the terms disabled relative, or retarded children with frail elderly family member, to measure attitudes of long-term care for elderly family members. The instrument contains twenty-six statements, which are measured on a five point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Scores range from 0 to 100, with lower scores indicating positive attitudes toward providing care and high scores indicating negative attitudes toward providing care. The Cronbach's alpha of the ATPLTC is .88 among caregivers attitudes toward long term care for elderly family members. An example of the questions include, "Nursing homes can provide better care for the frail elderly than families."

Procedure

The participants were informed of confidentiality; moreover, consent forms and surveys were distributed separately. Two consent forms, one for the researcher and one for the participant were distributed. Once the researcher's consent forms were returned the surveys were distributed to the participants. The consent form and survey were separated from each other and placed in different envelopes in a secure location. Participants took about 10 minutes to complete the measures. Candy was offered to students as an inducement for participation after submitting both their consent form and survey.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis proposed that female college students would have more positive attitudes regarding long-term care for elderly family members when compared to college males. In order to test this hypothesis, an independent *t*-test was conducted between gender on attitudes towards long-term care for elderly family members. This hypothesis was not supported, $t(97) = 1.13, p > .05$. Contrary to prediction, college females did not report significantly higher levels of positive attitudes towards long-term care for elderly family members than college males (See Figure 1).

The second hypothesis proposed that Latinos were more likely to have positive attitudes regarding long-term care for elderly family members when compared to non-Latinos. In order to test this hypothesis, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted among the different ethnic groups on their attitudes toward long-term care for elderly family members. Results showed significant differences, $F(2, 94) = 3.5, p < .05$, however, surprisingly post-hoc tests showed significant differences between Caucasian and Latinos attitudes towards long-term care for the elderly. Caucasians ($M = 69.79, SD = 11.76$) reported more positive attitudes towards long term care for elderly family members, when compared to Latinos ($M = 62.61, SD = 12.30$) and other ethnicities ($M = 62.33, SD = 13.08$).

DISCUSSION

Unfortunately this study did not support previous research on demographic characteristics of possible caregivers and attitudes toward care giving. Characteristics of caregivers included gender, ethnicity and social economic status. Female college students' attitudes towards long-term care for elderly family members were not different when compared to male college students. Contrary to previous studies of caregivers, Caucasian college students possessed more positive attitudes towards long-term care for elderly family members when compared to non-Caucasian college students. There were no observed differences among participants of higher social economic status and the role of caregiver. Future directions in this area of research should examine family and religious values that may help to explain differences in attitudes toward care for the elderly.

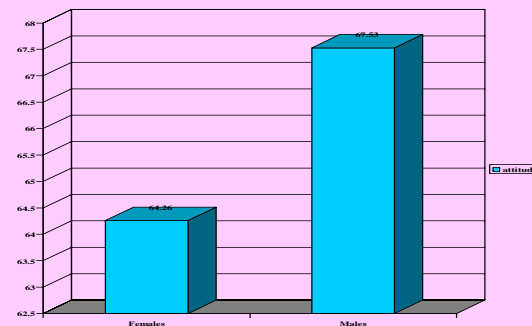


Figure 1. Mean attitude scores for long-term care of elderly family member