2014 Gero-Ed Track Kick-Off
Panel:
Aging Your Way: Advancing Social Work Education and Practice

October 24, 2014
Self-Determination Among Older Adults With Chronic Conditions: Challenges and Opportunities for Social Workers and Social Work Education

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Context of Chronic Conditions in Later Life

- People are living longer but are likely to be living with chronic illnesses and disabilities later in life.
- Many older adults have co-occurring conditions.
- Chronic care often involves increased use of health and support services.
Self-Determination

- A concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives.

- A philosophy within larger service systems that promotes service recipients as being active in the planning and management of their services.¹

- Can be facilitated by family members and providers by encouraging older adults to be active participants in the planning and decision-making for their daily and chronic care needs.²
Threats to Older Adults’ Self-Determination

Sources of Ethical Dilemmas for Social Workers
Societal Beliefs and Myths

- Myth: Older adults are not able to make decisions about their lives and health/supportive needs.

  *Fact: Even older adults with cognitive decline can make consistent choices about their preferences.*

- Myth: Older adults find decision-making to be overly burdensome.

  *Fact: Older adults want control over at least part of their lives and services, if not all.*

- Myth: Older adults make poor decisions about their lives/services.

  *Fact: Older adults may evaluate different information or values when making decisions.*
Family Members and Caregivers May:

- Misperceive and disagree with older adults’ care values.\(^6\)-\(^7\)
- Assess care recipients as being more disabled than the older adult’s self-perception of disability might be.\(^8\)
- Be gatekeepers to information regarding available services to older adults.\(^9\)
- Have emotional or financial interests that manifest as over-protectiveness toward a loved one or as different goals and objectives for care provision.\(^10\)
Health and Support Providers

- Age-based stereotypes are often used when formulating long-term care policies and goals.\(^{11-12}\)

- Providers may view self-determination as offering a set of prescriptive choices based on professional opinion.\(^{13}\)

- Providers may trivialize and be dismissive about older adults’ complaints due to ageism.\(^{14-15}\)
Opportunities for Social Work Education

- *Infusing Themes of Self-Determination Into Practice Courses and Field Practicum*
Moving Away from the Medical Model

- Expanding social workers’ understanding of how to approach self-determination.
- Emphasis on older adults as expert collaborators.
- Recognizing cognitive capacity as being on a continuum.
- Valuing people and experience over illnesses and disabilities.
Toward a Person-Centered Model

- Client as Person
- Biopsychosocial Perspective
- Disease & Illness Experience
- Whole Person
- Common Ground
- Client-Provider Relationship
- Sharing Power & Responsibility
- Therapeutic Alliance

Hudon et al., 2011
Practice Within the Family Context

- Helping older adults navigate family decision-making.
- Creating opportunities where the older adult’s voice can be heard and incorporated into decision making.
- Education and creative problem solving to meet older adults’ and caregivers’ self-interests.
Opportunities for Social Work Education

Infusing Themes of Self-Determination Into Macro/Policy Courses
References

Aging-Friendly Community Initiatives: Challenges and Opportunities for Gerontological Social Work Research and Education

Amanda Lehning, PhD
University of Maryland School of Social Work
Acknowledgements

- Andy Scharlach
- Richard Smith
- Kyeongmo Kim
What is an Aging-Friendly Community (AFC)?

- City, town, or neighborhood where older adults are actively involved, valued, and supported in a way that reflects their unique needs and priorities.
Developmental Needs and Priorities

- Continuity
- Compensation
- Control
- Connection
- Contribution
- Challenge
Social Infrastructure

Social Cohesion/Social Capital

Social Support

Community Engagement

Safety
Physical Infrastructure

Affordable and Accessible Housing

Walkable Neighborhoods

Transportation Options

Proximity to Stores, Services, and Amenities
Why Are Communities Becoming More Aging-Friendly?

- Aging of the Baby Boomers
- Decline in family and social support systems
- Inadequate long-term care policies and services
- Decrease in relocation and increase in aging in place
- Mismatch between older adults and community infrastructure
Aging-Friendly Community Approach

- Top-down
- Community-wide needs assessment and strategic planning
- Requires involvement of a variety of stakeholders including local government
- More emphasis on physical infrastructure
- Funded through a combination of foundation, local government, and state government sources
WHO’s Global Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Project

Age-Friendly Portland

Partnership between city of Portland and the Institute on Aging at Portland State University

- Older adults as key information sources and critical stakeholders to set priorities, propose solutions, and monitor progress

2013 Action Plan

- Age-Friendly Business Certification Program
- Accessible housing measures included in city’s Comprehensive and Consolidated Plan
- Education on transportation options
- Directory of age-friendly activities

Challenges

- Fuzzy conceptualization and definitions
- Lack of methodologically rigorous evaluations
- Concerns about allocating financial and human resources in a time of fiscal constraint
- Concerns about equity and the potential to exacerbate disparities
- Ensuring the meaningful participation of older adults
Opportunities for Social Work Practice and Research

- Call attention to the needs and contributions of the most economically, socially, and/or physically vulnerable elders
  - E.g., “stuck in place” vs. “aging in place”

- Encourage the participation of all stakeholders

- Interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration
Examples of incorporating/infusing AFC content in:
- Foundation courses
- Macro practice courses
- Aging specialization courses

Interdisciplinary and interprofessional education

Increasing content on the importance of the physical environment for older adults and other marginalized populations
## Resources


Beyond Updating and Toward Innovating: NORC Programs, Villages, and Social Work Education

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STORY OF NORC PROGRAMS


STORY OF VILLAGES

Community Aging Initiatives

- Deliberate and distinct efforts across stakeholders from multiple sectors within a defined and typically local geographic area to make social and physical environments more conducive to older adults’ health, well-being, and ability to age in place/community.

Three Primary “Flavors”

- Community planning approaches
- Support-focused approaches
- Cross-sector partnership approaches
Key Questions

- What are they?
- Where are they?
- What is their relevance for social work education?
- How to learn more?
# What Are They?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Activities and Services</th>
<th>Initial Outcomes</th>
<th>Intermediate Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Goal</th>
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<td>Internal (e.g., staff, volunteers) and external (e.g., community partners)</td>
<td>Services to enhance access to resources</td>
<td>Reduced unmet needs</td>
<td>Levels of Benefits - Individual - Organizational - Community</td>
<td>Aging in Place</td>
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<td>Civic engagement activities</td>
<td>Greater efficacy and sense of community</td>
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<td>Social relationship activities</td>
<td>Greater social support and reduced isolation</td>
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Key Differences

- Type of organization
- Personnel
- Benefits
- Participants

Where Are They?

A Good Place to Grow Old: New York’s Model for NORC Supportive Service Programs

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<tr>
<th>Communities A-C</th>
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Curricular Updates

- Advanced curriculum
  - Community practice
  - Aging services
  - Direct practice with older adults
Opportunities for Innovation in Foundation Content

- Practice: Program processes and core social work values
- Research: Complexities around evaluation
- Diversity and Oppression: Which communities benefit?
- Human Behavior: Program outcomes and adult development
- Policy: Role of government at local, state, and federal levels
Teaching Resources

- Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID97w-O7Lhs


Questions?