

Aging Exchange

News about the study of aging at Purdue University

Spring 2000

Videoconference on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

From 1980 to 1997, the number of children in the United States living in the homes of their grandparents rose from 2.3 million to 4 million. Whatever the reason and situation, whatever the rewards, grandparents raising grandchildren are likely to face major issues in multiple areas of their lives.

To address the needs of professionals who work with grandparent-headed families, the videoconference, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Implications for Professionals and Agencies* was broadcast on January 12, 1999. **Dena B. Targ**, Extension Specialist, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service and **Mary Brintnall-Peterson**, Extension Specialist in Aging, University of Wisconsin-Extension, were co-chairs of the national planning committee and co-lead specialists for the development of the videoconference.

The theoretical framework of the program was a resiliency model based on the interdependence of individuals, families, and communities. The content of the two-hour broadcast included background information, highlighted innovative projects through video segments and featured panel participants who introduced information and responded to questions from local sites. The full program included on-site activities before and after the program. Technology, in addition to the broadcast itself, was used to support the site facilitators through a website and for the evaluation which was web-based. The website continues to be available:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/gprg/gprg.html>

The program reached over 3500 participants at 234 sites in 41 states. Evaluations completed by 2651 participants indicated the impact of the program. For example, a majority (62%) of the participants planned to expand services or programs for these grandparents. Feedback since the program indicates that as a result of the program many new initiatives have begun in a number of states, at both state and local levels. National and state impact statements are available on the website. A follow-up evaluation is in process.

The videoconference was recognized by the American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC) with its 1999 Outstanding Educational Program Award. At the state level, the program received the University of Wisconsin-Extension 1999 Web

Innovation Award. In addition, Dena Targ received the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Specialist Association Special Award for her work in the area of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Based on the positive response to the videoconference, Dena and Mary are currently developing, in collaboration with AARP, a set of three self-contained resource packets. Each will contain videotape segments from the satellite program, as well as print materials, including a teaching outline, learning activities and a resource list. Further based on information in the initial evaluations, the possibility of developing a videoconference on legal issues is being explored.

Retirement Research Foundation Grants

The Retirement Research Foundation (RRF) funds research that will improve the quality of life of older persons in the U.S. The Foundation concentrates its resources on research, model and service projects, and education and training projects that engage the following objectives: projects that improve the availability and quality of community-based and institutional long term care by: increasing the availability and effectiveness of comprehensive community programs designed to maintain older persons in their own homes or in residential settings; improving the quality of nursing home care; and integrating the provision of acute and long-term care for older persons with chronic conditions by supporting efforts that provide continuity of care, prevention, early intervention and client education. The RRF also supports efforts to provide new and expanded opportunities for older adults to engage in meaningful roles in society such as employment and volunteerism that will strengthen the community. In addition, the RRF supports projects that seek to increase the number of professionals and paraprofessionals adequately prepared to serve the elderly population through support of selected education and training initiatives which enhance knowledge and skills of participants.

The deadlines for submission of proposals are May 1 and August 1. Visit the RRF website at <http://fdncenter.org/grantmaker/rrf/index.html> for more information.

Opportunities via CIC Traveling Scholar

A number of universities offer excellent summer courses in gerontology or related topics. Purdue University doctoral students should be aware of a

special program that enables them to enroll in gerontology courses for credit at other universities.

The Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) is a consortium of all Big Ten schools and the University of Chicago. The CIC Traveling Scholar Program permits doctoral-level students, enrolled at a CIC university, to take classes offered at another CIC university. Students pay only applicable tuition and fees at their home university while attending the host CIC school. No further tuition or fees are paid to the host university. Students have full access to the host university's health care services, recreational facilities, and libraries. University credit earned through the program automatically transfers to the student's home university. This program applies only to courses where credit is earned. (Summer programs that do not offer course credit do not apply.) Students are responsible for their own housing and food. Check with host institution for details about campus facilities. For admission procedures contact, <http://www.cic.uiuc.edu/programs/trvlscholar/travelbr.html>

Gerontological Society of America

Several gerontology faculty and graduate students attended the 52nd annual meeting of the Gerontological Society of American meeting held in San Francisco on November 19-23.

Authors and titles of presentations were:

- **Dr. Victor Cicirelli, Peter MacLean** (Psychological Sciences) and Lisa Cox, "Hastening death: Attitudes toward two of end-of-life decision options";
- **Dr. Sharon DeVaney** (Consumer Sciences and Retailing) and Yi-Wen Chien, "Participation in formal retirement plans: Self-employed versus wage workers";
- **Dr. Kenneth Ferraro** (Sociology) co-chaired "Attrition and missing data in longitudinal research";
- **Dr. Kenneth Ferraro and Jessica Kelley-Moore** (Sociology), "Self-rated health, terminal drop, and mortality";
- **Dr. Kenneth Ferraro and Ya-ping Su** (Sociology), "A twenty-year illness trajectory of hypertensive patients: Hospitalization among the US Black and White adults";
- M. Britnall-Peterson and **Dr. Dena Targ** (Child Development and Family Studies), "Evaluation data from the 280 sites participating in the National Video Conference on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren";
- **Dr. Paula Usita** (Child Development and Family Studies), "Social ecological influences on perceived mother-daughter closeness";
- **Dawn Cooley, D. Hayden and Dr. David Waters** (Veterinary Clinical Sciences), "Host AGE influences the histologic spectrum and biological

behavior of spontaneous neoplasms in pet dogs";

- **Dr. Janet Wilmoth and Pei-Chun Chen** (Sociology), "Depression, living arrangements, and immigrant status";
- **Jody Wilkinson and Dr. Janet Wilmoth** (Sociology), "The pattern and level of financial transfers from parents to their adult children."

Achievements

Brian Tyrrell, Cary Countryman, **Dr. Gong-Soog Hong** (Consumer Sciences and Retailing), and Dr. Liping Cai won the Best Paper Award at the Fifth Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism held at the University of Houston on January 6-8. The title of their paper was "Japanese pleasure travelers: How do they differ by their travel destinations?"

Dr. Dorothy Morr , Foods and Nutrition, G. Lenaz, and D.J. Morr  coauthored an article entitled "Surface oxidase and oxidative stress propagation in aging" which will be published in the *Journal of Experimental Biology*.

Recent Grants

Dr. Carol Baird, Nursing, from American Nurse's Foundation, October 1, 1999 through October 1, 2000, "Measurement of self-caring: Women with osteoarthritis."

Dr. Shelley MacDermid, Child Development and Family Studies, from Abbott Laboratories, Baxter International Inc., Eli Lilly and Company, Parkview Memorial Hospital, and Roche Diagnostics, January 1, 1999 through December 31, 1999, "Midwestern work-family association."

Richard Mattes and **Dr. Randall Gretebeck**, Foods and Nutrition, from University of Georgia, May 1, 1999 through April 30, 2000, "Effects of peanut consumption on hunger, ingestive behavior, energy expenditures and coronary heart disease risk."

Dr. Joseph O'Leary, Forestry and Natural Resources, from Indiana Department of Commerce, July 1, 1998 through June 30, 2001, "Travel Market Analysis-Specific Segments Area D."

Dr. Joseph O'Leary, Forestry and Natural Resources, from Indiana Department of Commerce, August 1, 1999 through June 30, 2000, "Outdoor recreation and the NSRE: An examination of involvement patterns."

Dr. Walter Weirich, Veterinary Clinical Sciences, from Association of Veterinary Medical Data Base, Inc., September 1, 1999 through August 31, 2000, "VMDB - Veterinary Medical Data Base."

Time Slips - A Multi-Media Play

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee will present *Time Slips* on May 12-20, 2000. This multi-media poetic play was inspired by stories told by

people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. For more information, visit <http://www.timelips.org> or call (414) 229-4141.

Stereotypes Weigh Heavily on Seniors

Subconsciously feeding healthy elderly people positive images of aging--words like "wise" and "astute" instead of downers like "senile" or "diseased"--was all it took to pick up their walking pace, says a study that suggests stereotypes about getting old significantly affect how people function.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, suggests the mind may play a powerful role, and bleak expectations of aging may unduly influence even healthy people to walk slowly and wobbly. "The effects are pretty profound," said lead researcher Jeffrey Hausdorff, a gerontologist at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center who invented thin, electronic shoe soles that precisely measure gait.

"It means we need to think about trying to reduce the stereotypes of aging. We concentrate a lot on physical function and things related to that. This shows other aspects of aging are also important."

Harvard University graduate student Becca Levy conducted experiments that found negative stereotypes of aging worsened people's memory and self-confidence, while positive stereotypes improved them. But, she wondered, would those stereotypes also affect physical function?

Walking is a good test. Walking speed declines with age, and the elderly often shuffle because of poor balance. So Levy and Hausdorff tested 47 men and women, ages 63 to 83, who walked without a cane or walker.

First, participants walked a hallway almost the length of a football field as researchers recorded their speed and "swing time," the time a foot spends off the ground.

Then they played a brief computer game. On half the computers, positive words--such as "wise," "astute" or "accomplished"--flashed on the screens just long enough to register subconsciously. Negative words--such as "senile," "dependent" and "diseased"--flashed to the other half.

Then they walked that long hallway again. This time, the positively influenced people walked 9 percent faster--improvement similar to some exercise. "Swing time" also increased, meaning they shuffled a little less.

Maybe positive stereotypes "change their mood or self-confidence and that impacts their behavior," theorized Levy, now an assistant professor at Yale University. Lauran Neergaard, The Associated Press, *Journal and Courier*, November 2, 1999.

Melatonin Stays Same in Older People

If you're getting old, the TV ads suggest, you need to pop some melatonin pills. Now a study funded by the National Institute of Health suggests the dogma is wrong--healthy older people produce just as much of the sleep hormone as young people.

"We never anticipated the result we found," said Dr. Charles Czeisler of Harvard Medical School, lead researcher of the study published in the *American Journal of Medicine*. "The conventional wisdom was that melatonin levels decline with age--some referred to it as the 'aging clock.'"

The new study, Czeisler said, means older Americans shouldn't believe those ads that urge popping over-the-counter melatonin supplements starting at age 40. "There's no point in replacing something that's not missing," he said.

Melatonin is a natural hormone produced by the pineal gland deep in the brain. It is produced at high levels during a person's normal sleeping hours, and as the body starts to wake up, the melatonin levels drop. It's all part of the body's sleep-wake clock.

This study addressed whether just getting older means you have less melatonin, a serious question because so many older Americans have sleeping problems--and many take melatonin supplements, said Dr. Andrew Monjan of the NIH's National Institute on Aging.

"We have the culture now of self-medication based upon what may be pseudo- or quasi-scientific claims," Monjan cautioned. This study "clearly shows sleep problems in older people cannot be explained primarily on the basis of melatonin decreases with age."

The study compared 34 healthy older men and women, 65 to 81, with 98 men 18 to 30. Unlike many previous studies, this one controlled for anything that could artificially lower melatonin levels:

- Exposure to light, such as when people get up in the middle of the night and switch on the bathroom light, lowers melatonin.
- Varying sleep-wake times can make melatonin fluctuate.
- Drugs commonly used by seniors, including beta blockers that treat high blood pressure and even aspirin, can lower melatonin.

Then the researchers brought the study volunteers into a sleep lab and carefully measured melatonin with their sleep-wake cycles--and found no difference between the young and old.

The finding is important because no one knows how safe the chronic use of melatonin supplements truly is, Monjan said.

Lauran Neergaard, The Associated Press, *The Indianapolis Star*, November 6, 1999.

Graduate Courses in Gerontology at Purdue, Fall, 2000**Primary Content**

CSR	530	Economics of Aging (3 cr.), Prof. DeVaney	MWF 11:30
HPER	590M	Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Aging (3 cr.), Prof. Corrigan	MW 4:30-5:45
PSY	536	Psychology of Aging and the Aged (3 cr.), Prof. Cicirelli	TTh 3:00-4:15

Related but not primary content

AUS	540	Augment. & Alter. Com. (3 cr.), Prof. L. Lloyd (EDPS 562)	TTh 4:30-5:45
BIOL	503	Introduction to Neurobiology (3 cr)	MWF 12:30
BIOL	559	Endocrinology (3 cr.), Prof. Anderson	TTh 1:30-2:45
CDFS	434	Aging and the Family (3 cr.), Prof. Usita	MWF 11:30
CDFS	502	Survey of Human Development (3 cr.), Prof. Offenbach (PSY 502)	T 6:30-9:20
CSR	631	Consumer Behavior Theories (3 cr.), Prof. Christiansen (PSY 585)	W 8:30-11:20
EDPS	562	Augment. & Alter. Com. (3 cr.) (AUS 540)	TTh 4:30-5:45
PSY	502	Survey of Human Development (3 cr.), Prof. Offenbach	T 6:30-9:20
PSY	585	Psychological Foundations of Consumer Behavior (3 cr.) (CSR 631)	W 8:30-11:20
SOC	681	Selected Prob. of Social Res.: Longitudinal Data Anal. (3 cr.), Prof. Ferraro	TTh 12:00-1:15

Forty is the old age of youth; fifty is the youth of old age.

The *Aging Exchange* is developed by Ken Ferraro and Marilyn McCammack of the Gerontology Program. We welcome your suggestions for enhancing the *Aging Exchange* to better serve you. Please submit news items to Marilyn McCammack, Gerontology Program, Stone Hall [E-mail: gero@cfs.purdue.edu]. Visit Purdue's gerontology home page [<http://omni.cc.purdue.edu/~geron/>]

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Victor M. Hugo