

Helping behaviour and human rights



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction It is generally conceded that elderly populations (65 years and over) are increasing rapidly on across the industrialized world. It is expected that by the year 2025, people over the age of 65 will make up 20% of the population of the USA; and that by the year 2000; almost a half of the elderly in the United Kingdom will be over the age of 75 (Soderhamn, Lindencrona & Gustavsson, 2001). However, it appears that socio-cultural norms are not keeping pace with this demographic change, and that the elderly tend to be neglected with regard particularly to health care services.

Critical factors affecting helping professionals appear to be their attitudes, feelings, knowledge and readiness to act. In a study of social science students, they were reported to have strong "just world" beliefs, and that these values were directly impacting on their motivations to help elderly persons with socio-economic and health care needs (Maclean & Chown, 1988). A cross-cultural study using British and Canadian participants, it was found that they tended to dismiss the needs and expectations of elderly clients as a way to better service the greater need of the community.

The proposed study aims to provide a qualitative perspective of helping professional attitudes among undergraduate psychology students in the UK. Using a focus group, the primary investigator aims to extend current understandings of the beliefs, values and attitudes of helping profession students who will be interacting with the elderly in their future careers.

Method

Participants

Eight undergraduate psychology students from the University of will be recruited using snowball sampling (i. e., by word of mouth). The sample will be stratified across gender and ethnicity to reflect the diversity present in

the wider population of psychology students. Informed consent will be obtained to enable participation. No incentives will be given for participation.

Materials

A tape recorder, with spare batteries and notepaper and pens will be required by the primary researcher to make notes during the focus group session. Refreshments will be provided for the participants (e. g., tea, coffee, biscuits and finger food).

Design

The proposed study is an exploratory study using a qualitative design. A 'field' assessment with a focus group will be used to gain richer and more in-depth understanding of psychology student perceptions of elderly people (Mason, 1997). There are many ways to define a focus group, but features like organized discussion; collective activity, social events and interaction identify the contribution that focus groups make to social research. Focus groups rely on interaction within the group based on topics that are supplied by the researcher (Mason, 1997). Overall the goal of the focus group is to engage the respondent's to share their attitudes, feelings and experiences in a phenomenological way.

Analyses

Statistical thematic analyses of the raw data will be undertaken with NUD*ST v. 4.

Procedure

Participants will arrive together at a lab set up for this purpose. The investigator will make notes of the attitudes and opinions to prompt questions (e. g., what do you think of elderly potentially working with elderly

clients). It is expected that the discussion will continue for up to two hours.

Conclusion

The belief system amongst those in the helping profession can adversely and dramatically affect the social services delivery to elderly people. This study will extend knowledge in this area and contribute to psychology student training.

References

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