

6-2017

# ASSESSING MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' INTEREST IN GERONTOLOGY

Shelly-Ann Rosemarie Whyte

California State University, [tessyann25@gmail.com](mailto:tessyann25@gmail.com)

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ASSESSING MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS' INTEREST IN  
GERONTOLOGY

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Shelly-Ann Rosemarie Whyte

June 2017

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June 2017

Approved by:

Dr. Herbert Shon, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Dr. Janet Chang, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess Masters of social Work students' interest in gerontology. Students' gerontological knowledge, attitude and experience with the aging population was examined to see if they have any influence on interest in working with older adults. The positivist worldview was used to identify students' behavior toward older adults while checking to see if correlates to interest in working with that population. Survey questionnaire was used to collect information on student's interest in working with older adults, their knowledge, attitude and experience. Modified versions of Palmore Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ) and Kogan's Attitude Toward Old People (KAOP) scales were used to collect information on students' knowledge and attitude toward older adults. Additional questions about demographic data was included along with direct question on interest in working with the older adults. The results from the use of the quantitative approach allowed further statistical analysis using SPSS to identify relationships between the variables. The study found relationships between knowledge of aging and interest in aging-related work. The study recommends that future research examine factors that influence attitude and implementing gerontological education and training in social work programs to improve student's interest in aging related work.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere gratitude to all the individuals who made this project possible. Thank you to my field supervisor who gave me the opportunity that birthed this project. Thank you, Dr. Shon, for guiding me and giving me the vote of confidence when I needed it the most. Thank you, Dr. Smith, for allowing me to survey the students in the School of Social Work. Thank you to all the students who participated in this project.

## DEDICATION

To God be the glory for all the things he has done. Thank you, Jesus, for guiding me through this journey and for giving me favor each step of the way. This project is dedicated to my loving family and friends who have loved and supported me in this journey. To my parents who has labored to give me the opportunity to be where I am today, thank you. To my husband, your love, support and strength have made it possible for me to pursue my goals. You have walked this path with me, and for that I thank you. To my children, my miracles, you are my inspiration for being persistent, dreaming big, taking bold steps and believing with God all things are possible. You have motivated me to step out of my comfort zone and pursue my dreams. To my baby in heaven, I dedicate this to you. Your birth inspired this calling and vision to pursue higher academic to help others. To my siblings, thank you for your love, support and encouragement. To my family members who have sacrificed their time to support and uplift me while I take on this challenge, thank you. To my friends who have offered support, listening ears, and guidance when I needed it the most, thank you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### ASSESSMENT

#### Introduction

The demand for social workers in the service field has increased significantly as the population ages. The U.S. Bureau of Census (1999) estimated that between 2010 and 2030 people age 65 and over will account for 20% of the total population, an increase from 13%. Social workers with specialization in gerontology are needed to understand the aging process and how to address problems faced by the elderly. Snyder, Wesley, Lin, and May (2008), found that social work programs are not adequately preparing students with gerontological knowledge and skills to work effectively with the aging population. The authors further conclude that infusing social work programs with a gerontology curriculum can positively influence students' knowledge of aging, reduce ageism and increase their interest in working with older adults (Snyder et al, 2008).

Chapter one details the research focus of this study, Assessing Masters of Social Work Students' Interest in gerontology by examining factors such as knowledge, attitude, and experience. The objective is to investigate whether knowledge of aging, ageist attitude, and previous experience have any relation to MSW students' interest in working with the aging population. The chapter details

focus of the problem, purpose of the study and concludes with implications for social work field of practice.

### Problem Statement

The aging population, comprised of people 65 years and older, is growing rapidly in the United States (Administration on Aging, 2003). The aging population often need assistance in healthcare and social service fields. Fuchs (2000), found that trained social workers are needed in the field of gerontology to respond to the increase in the aging population which resulted in more older adults utilizing a disproportionately large amount of healthcare and social services. Kaplan and Berkman (2011), share similar concern pertaining to not having adequate trained gerontological social workers and the consequences that can arise when social workers without knowledge of aging or specialization in gerontology practice in settings with older adults who have aging-related issues.

The presence of negative attitude or ageism can negatively impact students' interest in working with the elderly which can have grave implications on service delivery. Kaplan and Berkman (2011), notes "workforce limitations and the questionable capacity of social workers to handle issues of aging are even more alarming for practice involving individuals with dementia, where the challenges associated with advanced age are further magnified by progressive

intellectual and functional losses coupled with psychiatric and mood disorders” (p. 365).

### Purpose of the Study

The aging population faces many challenges especially when they are experiencing cognitive impairments and deteriorating health. Kaplan and Berkman (2011), reports social workers are vital in the “continuum of health, mental health and aging services programs in both community and institutional settings that provide formal care services” to the aging (p. 363). The challenges and needs of the aging population necessitate the need for research on the factors that influence social work student’ interest in working with them.

This study will build on previous research by assessing factors such as ageism, knowledge and experience to see if they are predictive of interest in working in the field of gerontology or other arenas that provide services to the elderly. The research hypothesized that gerontological knowledge, positive attitude toward aging and previous experience or contact predicts MSW students’ interest in working with older adults. The research seeks to answer the question, is there a difference in MSW students’ knowledge of aging, attitude, previous experience and their interest in working with older adults? The null hypothesis is there is no significant difference in MSW students’ knowledge of aging, attitude, prior contact, and their interest in geriatric social work.

## Significance of the Project for Social Work

Cummings, Alder, and DeCoster (2005), notes student's interest in gerontological education can be impeded by stereotypical beliefs and ageist attitude towards older adults. This study on factors influencing interest in gerontological social work is important for both micro and macro practice. Health care, social services and public welfare are few of the settings that social workers seek employment that provide services to aging population. MSW students' unwillingness to work with older adults can seriously impede or delay service delivery as they branch out into unrelated fields of practice (Cummings et al., 2005). Furthermore, ageist attitude and the challenges of working with older adults can influence students to make decision to work in practice settings that does not involve the aging population (Cummings et al., 2005).

Negative stereotypes and perceptions of older people can result in the portrayal of ageist behaviors in social systems. Saunders (2008), posits that challenges can arise in communities for the aging population such as not reporting abuse if negative attitudes persists. In addition, marginalizing older people and serving them the same way as others in the population can also increase the possibility of them not reporting cases where their rights were violated (Saunders, 2008). Golding, Allen, Yozwiak, Marsil, and Kinstle (2004), posits negative perceptions and stereotypes may hinder legislation and lead to skepticism about claims of elder abuse. The result of this study will be beneficial

for educators who can use it to generate and improve student's interest and training in gerontology an area that is concerned with the care of older adults.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted around student's interest in working with older adults. Recent studies have identified knowledge, attitude and experience as influencing factors. This chapter presents a review of the literature regarding MSW students' interest in gerontology. The literature review covers factors that may impact interest in aging-related work including ageism, knowledge of aging, societal and cultural influence on attitude, and prior contact with older adults. Theories guiding conceptualization provides information about theories relating to human interaction and perception and how it can influence behavior.

#### Gerontology

Cummings et al., (2005), describe gerontological social work as a field of practice that focus on addressing the needs of older adults in various settings. McInnis-Dittrich (2005), notes nursing homes and hospitals are the most common gerontological practice settings for social workers. The author further note additional practice settings include senior housing facilities, assisted-living facilities, home-healthcare agencies, hospices, nutrition programs, adult day-care centers, research centers, and social-service agencies (McInnis-Dittrich, 2005).

## Ageism, Ageist Attitude/Stereotypes

Doherty, Mitchell & O'Neill (2011), note Buttler (1975), coined the term ageism and defined it as “a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old” (p. 1). Stereotypes is often negative which result in older adults receiving unfair treatment and viewed as insignificant. Doherty et al. (2011), further notes workers in healthcare settings are in danger of developing negative attitude towards older adults due to a higher amount of interaction with them when they are ill. This can have serious implications on the level of care they receive. Ageism is sometimes overlooked despite its direct influence on the mortality of the elderly.

Levy (2001), state that “traditionally, “ageism” has been defined in terms of attitudes and actions directed toward older individuals by younger individuals who hold stereotypes about aging” (p. 579). Gilbert and Ricketts (2008), posit that cultural and family values and experiences help to formulate a person’s attitude. Ageism is perceived to have impacts on both attitude and personal behavior towards older persons. Levy (2001), postulate that “from a social cognitive perspective, ageism may also influence older persons’ implicit beliefs about their own competencies as well as self-stereotypes” (p. 578).

Social categorization such as gender and age can lead to stereotypical behavior towards older adults. Levy (2001), conclude that to “eradicate ageism we need to become aware of not only the blatant forms of ageism, but also its

subtler forms that operate within us all, regardless of age or explicit views about equality” (p. 579).

### Societal and Cultural Influence on Attitude

According to a report published by the National Centre for the Protection of Older People (2009), an international organization, “public perceptions of older people can frequently stem from the culture within which they are embedded” (p. 29). Gilbert and Ricketts (2008), conclude from their review of studies that children’s behavior toward older adults and aging derives from their cultural experience and the values learned in family systems. Numerous studies have concluded that one of the first form of socialization children receive is within their family, where they observe interaction with older adults. Children who are exposed to the stereotypical beliefs that older adults are slow and not valuable are at significant risk of developing ageist attitude than those who do not hold the similar beliefs.

Gilbert and Ricketts (2008), cite numerous studies which indicates that public perception of aging differs across cultures. The authors further conclude that “ageist stereotypes are prevalent in children and can be addressed through intergenerational interaction, increasing knowledge, and having a conversation that discusses images and opinions of aging” (Gilbert & Ricketts, p. 583).

North and Fiske (2008), conducted a meta-analysis of previous studies that compare cross-cultural attitudes toward older adults between people who

resides in Eastern cultures and those who resides in Western cultures. The authors review disclosed that people in Eastern cultures may exhibit greater negativity toward older adults than people in Western cultures (North & Fiske, 2008). The researchers conclude from the study that people in Eastern cultures hold their elderly in higher esteem than do people in Western cultures. Most of the literature reviewed supports the idea that ageism, a form of discrimination, is prevalent in modern society and has an adverse impact on the quality of life and health care provided to elderly patients.

#### Knowledge of Aging

Knowledge of aging is a major factor for professionals who intend to work in service sectors. Social worker often is a part of a multidisciplinary team that includes medical professionals such as nurses and doctors. Previous studies conducted on nurses' knowledge of aging reported similar outcomes to that of social workers. The key finding in a study by Mellor, Chew & Greenhill (2006), revealed that "even though nurses have positive attitudes towards elderly people, they have significant knowledge deficits in essential clinical practice issues, the socio-economics of ageing, and specialist care of older patients (p, 41).

Similarly, Liu, Norman, & While (2012), systemic findings suggest that "education in gerontological nursing together with positive clinical learning experiences can improve attitudes towards older people and increase the number of nurses expressing a preference to work with older people" (p. 1279).

Findings from the literature search suggest that while acute nurses have slightly positive attitudes toward older people they lack knowledge of aging and the aging process. Knowledge deficits have grave consequences for the quality of service and care outcomes for the elderly.

#### Prior Contact or Experience

Cummings et al. (2005), posit past relationship and interaction with older adults personally or in practice settings can impact students' interest in gerontological studies. This conclusion was reached based on multiple studies that positively correlates students' interest in future gerontological practice with personal relationships and frequent interactions with older adults. In addition, Cummings et al., (2005), found that student's interest in aging related work can be positively influenced after gaining experience in practice settings during internship and from having personal interaction with older adults. The conclusion is that interaction with older adults in practice settings during internship can result in students placing greater value on them which can also increasing their interest in gerontological social work (Cummings et al., 2005). However, it is important to note that studies have also shown that close contact with older adults does not always indicate interest in working with them (Cummings et al., 2005).

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Curl, Simons, and Larkin (2005) posit that human interaction and experiences helps to shapes one's behavior. Herbert Blumer (1969), a scholar from University of Chicago, coined the term "symbolic interactionism". The basic premise of this theory is that human behavior is subjective and can be influenced by the interactions they have with others and the value they place on relationships Curl et al., (2005). In the context of this study, student's interaction both positive and negative with older adults can influence how they behaves towards them.

Symbolic interactionism theory views human life in symbolic domain where social processes and cultural interaction help to shape and influence the individual (Ferris & Stein, 2011). Symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical framework for individual, group and societal assessment which can result in the development of intervention plans to diminish stigmas and stereotypes of ageism to improve interest in gerontological practice. Symbolic Interactionism "focus on how micro-everyday interaction can build up and influence macro-institutional processes (rather than vice versa). According to symbolic interactionist Herbert Blumer (1969), "symbolic interactionism's three tenets are that we act toward things based on their meanings, that meanings are negotiated through interaction with others, and that meanings can change through interaction" (Ferris & Stein, 2011).

The use of symbolic interactionism as a framework to study students' attitude, knowledge and behavior is one way to assess whether it will be

predictive of their interest in gerontological work on both an individual and societal level. The understanding of students' ageist attitude, gerontological knowledge deficit as it relates to the meaning they assign to older adults can impact their effectiveness in both micro and macro work. They might not be as dedicated to the change process due to their preconceived notions of older adults and belief in negative stereotypes. This study is important to identify the role symbolic interactionism play, if any, in students' interest in working in the gerontological field.

### Summary

The literature discussed reveal that MSW students' attitude and personal behavior towards older adults could be influenced by ageism. Similarly, societal and cultural influences such as socialization within families can impact perceptions of older adults. Social work students' knowledge of aging is compared to be like that of nurses. Fostering positive clinical learning experience for both social workers and nurses can result in improved attitude towards older adults. Symbolic interaction theory provides a framework for understanding the factors that shape the thought processes of students in relation to older adults. Stereotypes and stigmas can develop from students' perceptions and interaction with older adults. These factors can in turn negatively impact their interest in gerontological work.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study was designed to assess social work students' interest in working with older adults. The sample of this study was composed of students enrolled in the masters' level social work program at California State University, San Bernardino. The method of data collection was collected through an online survey using the Qualtrics website. This section includes a discussion of how the data was analyzed and the purpose of doing so. A sample of the questionnaire used for the study is provided. Lastly, a discussion of the parameters of the subjects used for the study is included.

#### Study Design

This study employed a quantitative approach to assess social work students' interest in working with older adults. A descriptive design was used to address the correlational relationships between interest in aging-related work and gerontological knowledge, attitude toward aging and contact or experience with older adults. An online survey tool was used in this design to gather information pertaining to factors influencing students' interest in aging-related work.

This study utilized a positivist worldview which is "based on philosophical assumptions and theories about probability and sampling that call for gathering



data to address research questions in which the regulatory mechanisms of the human experience are measured and manipulated in the numerical form” (Morris, 2013, p. 9). This paradigm is preferable as it allows the use of hypothesis to make general assumptions of human experiences by identifying and measuring relationships numerically. The positivist view also allows construction of generalization to an entire population after selecting and measuring the behavior and characteristics of a representative sample. This design can be accomplished through minimal interaction with participants to ensure that the research is purely based on facts with an objective view (Morris, 2013).

The positivist method allows hypothesis testing by using surveys to collect information about factors influencing interest in working with older adults. This approach is best to address the research question as it will yield information about the variables in the study. The use of survey with the positivist paradigm allows for a sense of anonymity as the researcher is not near participants which can influence their response (Morris, 2013). In addition, this design allows the examination of multiple factors that affect social work students’ interest in the field of gerontology. The positivist perspective is preferable to conduct the study in a brief time span that is also inexpensive.

A quantitative research design was used which include Likert questionnaire to gather information about students’ attitude towards older adults. This approach was selected as it allowed a fast and convenient method of collecting data from students that are not in the same location. MSW students

were asked to participate in the survey which was voluntary and had no implication on their academic standing. Students were contacted through electronic mail by the school of Social Work to take part in the study and were told they could end participation at any time. The research included an introduction to the study as well as informed consent documentation and a debriefing statement at the end of the questionnaire.

### Sampling

The samples collected included students enrolled in Masters of Social Work program at California State University, San Bernardino. Students accessed the survey online via Qualtrics (<http://www.qualtrics.com/>). The sample comprised of seventy-three students (N=73) enrolled in Master of Social Work program fulltime, part-time and through distance learning. Students participating in the study were provided the researcher's e-mail address for any questions or follow up.

### Data Collection and Instruments

The researcher gathered data quantitatively using anonymous survey questionnaires. The surveys included questions about demographic information of each respondent, such as age, gender, ethnicity and experience in providing care to older adults. Additional questions include gerontological education and interest in ageing-related work (See Appendix C).

The study further utilized a modified version of Palmore (1998) Facts on Aging Quiz I (FAQI), a 17-item true/false instrument used to measure students' knowledge about aging (Palmore, p.58). The possible score ranges from 0-17 points, with 1 point assigned to each correct answer and 0 points allocated to incorrect answers. Higher scores will indicate knowledge of aging, while low scores points to a deficit in knowledge on aging-related topics (See Appendix D). Additional questions will be taken from Kogan's Attitude Toward Old People (KAOP) scale. The KAOP scale is designed to gather data on attitudes towards aging. The answers will be measured on a 6-point Likert scale with 17 items, half of which state adverse reactions while the rest state positive attitudes about older adults. There will be some questions on experiences with the elderly and interest in aging-related work (See Appendix E). These methods are preferable to gather pertinent information to make inferences about student's interest in gerontological work in the future.

### Procedures

Permission to contact study participants was obtained by contacting Dr. Smith, Director of School of Social Work, before data collection. A copy of the proposed study was provided along with Institutional Review Board (IRB) letter of approval (See Appendix A). Survey questionnaire was created online using Qualtrics. The link to the survey was provided to students' email with a request for participation. Students accessed the survey questionnaire anywhere there

was internet connection at their convenience. The data was stored in a password protected computer where only the researcher had access. Data was transferred into IBM SPSS, a statistical analysis software, where it was analyzed.

### Protection of Human Subjects

Participants were provided information on informed consent which summarized the study purpose and a statement that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without any consequences or penalties during the survey. Identifying individual data was not recorded in this study, which ensured anonymity. Refer to Appendix A for informed consent statement.

### Data Analysis

This research study used a quantitative data analysis method to assess MSW students' interest in working with older adults. The data collected was coded using IBM SPSS for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe characteristics of the participants in the sample. These will also be included to test predictors of interest in working with older adults. In addition to frequency distributions, analysis was conducted by a comparison of mean scores on both the knowledge instrument and the attitude scale, and by employing t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The eta correlation coefficient was

calculated. The level of significance considered appropriate for this study was a value for P of  $\leq .05$ .

The dependent variables, knowledge of aging, attitude towards older adults and interest in working with older people, was compared with the independent variables, students' sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, and ethnicity), experience providing care, previous contact with older adults and completion of aging-related courses. The independent variables will be tested to see if there are any effect on interest in gerontological social work.

### Summary

This chapter included information pertaining to the study design, sampling method, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis for the study. This study utilized a quantitative strategy to analyze the data collected through surveys. Data analysis will attempt to show correlational relationships between the variables through testing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the results of the current study. SPSS was used to analyze the data and the results will be described below. The degree of missing data was minimal which permits the use without deletion. The purpose of this study was to assess MSW students' interest in working with older adults by examining factors such as knowledge of aging, attitude toward aging and contact or experience with older adults. Further analysis was conducted to determine if there are any differences based on students' sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and gerontological courses taken.

Table 1. Participants Characteristics

Characteristics	N	%
Age Range		
18-29	34	46.6
30-49	34	46.6
50-64	5	6.8
Total	73	100.0
Gender		
Males	11	15.1
Females	62	84.9
Total	73	100.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African American	9	12.3
Hispanic	29	39.7
White	28	38.4
Missing	7	9.6

Total	73	100.0
Experience Providing Care		
Yes	29	39.7
No	44	60.3
Total	73	100.0
Aging related courses		
Yes	45	61.6
No	28	38.4
Total	73	100.0
Previous Internship		
Yes	17	23.3
No	56	76.7
Total	73	100.0
Interest in other population		
Very interested	42	57.5
Somewhat interested	19	26.0
Neutral	12	16.4
Total	73	100.0
Interest in aging-related work		
Yes	35	47.9
Neutral	24	32.9
No	14	19.2
Total	73	100.0
Aging-related courses taken		
0	31	42.5
1	18	24.7
2 or more	14	19.2
Total	63	86.3
Missing	10	13.7
Total	73	100.0

### Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 details the demographics of the participants in the study. The total number of participants that were recruited for the study was seventy-three (n=73). The participants willingly volunteered to participate in the study.

#### Sociodemographic Characteristics

The study comprised of sixty-two (84.9%) female and eleven (15.1%) male students. Their ages ranged from 18 to 64. Thirty-four (47%) of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 29. Similarly, thirty-four (47%) of the participants were between the ages of 30-49. The remaining five (6%) participants were between the ages of 50-64. The ethnicity of the participants was comprised of the following Ethnic groups: Hispanic 29 (39.7%); White 28 (38.4%); Black/African American 9 (12.3%); two American Indian (2.7%); American Indian/Alaskan Native 2 (2.7%); two or more races non-Hispanic 2 (2.7%); and unknown ethnicity 2 (2.7%).

#### Experience Providing Care

Twenty-nine (39.7%) of the study participants have experience in providing care to older adults. The remaining 44 (60.3%) participants have no experience in providing care to older adults.

#### Aging-Related Courses

Forty-five (61.6%) of the participants have taken aging related courses. The remaining twenty-eight (38.4%) have not taken aging related courses.

#### Previous Internship

A small number (17 or 23.3%) of the study participants had previous internship focus on providing care to older adults. The remaining 56 (76.7%) participants previous internship did not focus on working with older adults.

#### Interest in Gerontology



Of the 73 subjects who participated in the study 20.5% (n=15) were very interested in aging related work, 27.4% (n=20) were somewhat interested, 32.9% (n=24) were neutral, 11.0% (n=8) were not very interested, and 8.2%(n=6) were not at all interested. Students' interest in working with other population was reported as 57.5% (n=42) as very interested, 26.0% (n=19) as somewhat interested and 16.4% (n=12) participants were neutral on the subject.

Table 2. Facts on Aging Quiz Results

Group Statistics			
FACTS on Aging Quiz	N	Mean	St. Deviation
Gender: Male	11	8.2727	2.00454
Female	60	9.4667	1.56732
Experience providing care:			
Yes	28	9.5714	1.31736
No	43	9.0930	1.87482
Aging-related courses:			
Yes	44	9.2727	1.66166
No	27	9.2963	1.75005
Previous internship:			
Yes	16	9.0625	1.94829
No	55	9.3455	1.61266

Note \*Sample sizes are different due to missing data.

Table 3. Facts on Aging Results-Independent Samples Test

	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)

Gender	69	-2.222	.030
Experience providing care	69	1.173	.245
Aging related courses	69	-.057	.955
Previous internship	69	-.589	.558

Note\* Sample size different due to missing values.

### Knowledge of Aging – Facts on Aging Quiz

Knowledge of aging was measured by a modified version of the Palmore Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ). The scale was administered to the 73 MSW students in the study. A total of 69 students responded with complete answers. This was a True/False quiz which included common myths of aging. Possible scores ranges from 0 to 17. Table 2 depicts the average FAQ score for males (n=11) was 8.27 (SD=2.00) and female (n=60) was 9.45 (SD=1.57). An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine if a difference existed between the mean FAQ scores of males and females MSW students. Table 3 depicts that there was significant differences between the mean FAQ confidence scores of males and females [t(69)=-2.22, p=.03]. The results further indicate that females were more knowledgeable about aging issues than males.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in knowledge of aging issues (FAQ scale) between students who had provided care for older adults and students who had not cared for older adults. Students who cared for older adults scored higher on the FAQ scale (M=9.57, SD=1.32, n=28) than students who had not cared for older adults (M=9.09, SD=1.87, n=43) depicted in table 2. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [t(69)=1.17, p=.25]. See table 3.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in knowledge of aging issues (FAQ scale) between students who had taken aging related courses and those who had not taken aging related courses. Students who had taken aging related courses scored lower on the FAQ scale (M=9.27, SD=1.66, n=44) than students who had not taken aging related courses (M=9.29, SD=1.75, n=27) depicted in table 2. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(69)=-.06$ ,  $p=.96$ ] depicted in table 3.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in knowledge of aging issues (FAQ scale) between students who had previous aging internship and those who had not have previous aging internship. Students who had previous aging internship scored lower on the FAQ scale (M=9.06, SD=1.95, n=16) than students who had not have previous aging internship (M=9.35, SD=1.61, n=55) depicted in table 2. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(69)=-.59$ ,  $p=.56$ ] depicted in table 3.

Table 4. Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale Results

Group Statistics			
KOGAN'S NEGATIVES	N	Mean	St. Deviation
Gender: Male	11	14.4545	1.86353
Female	56	13.8750	1.40211
Experience providing care:			
Yes	26	14.1538	1.37673
No	41	13.8537	1.55822
Aging-related courses:			
Yes	40	14.2500	1.46322
No	27	13.5556	1.45002
Previous internship:			

Yes	15	14.6667	1.17514
No	52	13.7692	1.151613
KOGAN'S POSITIVES			
	N	Mean	St. Deviation
Gender: Male	11	15.3636	1.62928
Female	58	14.7931	1.49571
Experience providing care:			
Yes	28	14.9286	1.30323
No	41	14.8537	1.66675
Aging-related courses:			
Yes	42	14.7619	1.58975
No	27	15.0741	1.41220
Previous internship:			
Yes	16	14.4375	2.03204
No	53	15.0189	1.32274

Note \*Sample sizes are different due to missing data.

Table 5. Kogan's Negative and Positive Attitude – Independent Samples Test

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)
Gender	65	1.185	.240
Experience providing care	65	.803	.425
Aging related courses	65	1.912	.060
Previous internship	65	2.113	.038
POSITIVE ATTITUDE			
Gender	67	1.144	.257
Experience providing care	67	.200	.842
Aging related courses	67	-.831	.409
Previous internship	67	1.349	.182

Note\* Sample size different due to missing values.

Kogan's Attitude Toward Old People Scale (KAOP)

Attitudinal data was gathered using Kogan's Attitude Toward Old People (KAOP) scale. The scale was administered to 73 MSW students in the study of which 67 responded with complete answers. The answers were measured on a 6-point Likert scale with 17 items, half of which state adverse reactions while the rest state positive attitudes towards older adults. The range of possible scores on the instrument was 17-102, with higher scores on the positive scales indicating more positive attitude toward older adults and lower scores on the negative scales also represent positive attitude (negative statement was reverse coded).

An independent sample t-test was used to compare KAOP mean attitude scores between males (N=11) and females (N=56). The scores were separated by positive and negative subscales. Table 4 reflects mean scores on the KAOP scale for males with negative attitude 14.45 (SD=1.86), female student with negative attitude had mean score of 13.88 (SD=1.40). Table 5 depicts that there was no significant differences between the mean attitude scores for males and females [ $t(65)=1.19, p=.24$ ].

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in attitude towards older adults between students who had provided care and students who had not provided care for older adults. Students who had cared for older had negative attitude towards older adults (M=14.15, SD=1.38, n=26) than students who had not cared for older adults (M=13.85, SD=1.56, n=41) depicted in table 4. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(65)=.80, p=.43$ ] depicted in table 5.

### Negative attitude

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in negative attitude towards older adults between students who had taken aging related courses and those who had not. Students who had taken aging related courses had negative attitude towards older adults ( $M=14.25$ ,  $SD=1.46$ ,  $n=40$ ) than students who had not taken aging related courses ( $M=13.56$ ,  $SD=1.45$ ,  $n=27$ ) depicted in table 4. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(65)=1.91$ ,  $p=.06$ ] depicted in table 5.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in negative attitude between students who had previous aging internship and those who had not. Students who had previous aging internship had more negative attitude ( $M=14.67$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ,  $n=15$ ) than students who had not have previous aging internship ( $M=13.77$ ,  $SD=1.52$ ,  $n=52$ ) depicted in table 4. The analysis showed that this difference was statistically significant [ $t(65)=2.13$ ,  $p=.04$ ] depicted in table 5.

### Positive attitude

Table 4 reflects mean score for males with positive attitude as 15.36 ( $SD=1.63$ ), female with positive attitude had mean score of 14.79 ( $SD=1.50$ ). Table 5 depicts that there was no significant differences between the mean positive attitude scores for males and females [ $t(67)=1.14$ ,  $p=.26$ ]. The results further indicate that males had more positive attitude towards older adults than female students.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in positive attitude towards older adults between students who had provided care and those who had not. Students who cared for older had positive attitude towards older adults (M=14.93, SD=1.30, n=28) than students who had not cared for older adults (M=14.85, SD=1.66, n=41) depicted in table 4. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(67)=-.20$ ,  $p=.84$ ] depicted in table 5.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in positive attitude towards older adults between students who had taken aging related courses and those who had not. Students who had not taken aging related courses had positive attitude towards older adults (M=14.76, SD=1.59, n=42) than students who had taken aging related courses (M=15.07, SD=1.41, n=27) depicted in table 4. However, the analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(67)=-.83$ ,  $p=.41$ ] depicted in table 5.

A two-tailed t-test was completed to assess the difference in positive attitude between students who had previous aging internship and those who had not. Students who did not have previous aging internship had positive attitude (M=15.02, SD=1.32, n=52) than students who had have previous aging internship (M=14.44, SD=2.03, n=16) depicted in table 4. The analysis showed that this difference was not statistically significant [ $t(67)=-1.08$ ,  $p=.30$ ] depicted in table 5.

Table 6. One-way Descriptive Facts on Aging Scale

	N	M	St. Deviation
Age Range			
18-29	33	9.1515	2.01744
30-49	33	9.5152	1.34910
50-64	5	8.6000	1.14018
Race/Ethnicity			
Black-African American	9	9.7778	.97183
Hispanic	28	9.0000	1.65552
White	27	9.8519	1.53682
Number of aging courses			
0	30	9.1667	1.72374
1	18	9.2222	1.83289
2 or More	14	9.3571	1.57766
Interest-Aging Related Work			
Yes			
Neutral	33	9.3939	1.98336
No	24	9.0833	1.34864
	14	9.3571	1.49908

Table 7. One-way ANOVA Facts on Aging Scale

	df	F	Sig.
Age Range	2	.822	.444
Race/Ethnicity	2	2.341	.105
Number of aging courses	2	.007	.993
Interest-Aging Related Work	2	.249	.781

Table 8. One-way ANOVA Kogan's Attitude Scale

Negatives	df	F	Sig.
Age Range	2	.056	.946
Race/Ethnicity	2	.398	.673
Number of aging courses	2	2.021	.142
Interest-Aging Related Work	2	3.789	.028
Positives			
Age Range	2	.383	.683



Race/Ethnicity	2	.747	.478
Number of aging courses	2	1.048	.357
Interest-Aging Related Work	2	.209	.812

### One-Way Analysis of Variance

A one-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore differences in attitudes between the groups. The result revealed that there was no significant difference in students' attitude depicted in table 8.

Descriptive characteristics of the age range of students using one-way revealed between ages 18-29,  $M=9.15$ ,  $SD=2.02$ ,  $n=33$ , between ages 30-49,  $M=9.52$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ,  $n=33$ , between ages 50-64,  $M=8.60$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ,  $n=5$ . See table 6. A one way analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant result among the means of age ranges on the Facts on Aging Scale [ $F(2, 70)=.82$ ,  $p=.44$ ]. See table 7.

The ethnicity of the students who took the Facts on aging quiz revealed Black/African American  $M=9.78$ ,  $SD=.97$ ,  $n=9$ ; Hispanic/Latino  $M=9.00$ ,  $SD=1.66$ ,  $n=28$ ; White  $M=9.85$ ,  $SD=1.54$ ,  $n=27$ . A one way analysis of variance revealed no significant difference among the means of the ethnicity [ $F(2, 63)=2.34$ ,  $p=.11$ ]. See table 7.

In assessing the number of aging courses taken by student who took the Facts on Aging quiz it was revealed that thirty students did not take any aging related courses ( $M=9.17$ ,  $SD=1.72$ ,  $N=30$ ), eighteen students took one aging related course ( $M=9.22$ ,  $SD=1.83$ ,  $N=18$ ), and fourteen students took two or

more aging related courses ( $M=9.21$ ,  $SD=1.58$ ,  $N=14$ ). See table 6. A one way analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant difference among the means of students who took one aging related course or multiple aging related courses [ $F(2, 61)=.007$ ,  $p=.99$ ]. See table 7.

In assessing student's knowledge of aging based on the Facts on Aging Quiz results and their interest in aging related work it was revealed that thirty-three students answered positively to working with older adults ( $M=9.39$ ,  $SD=1.98$ ,  $N=33$ ), twenty-four students held neutral position ( $M=9.08$ ,  $SD=1.35$ ,  $N=24$ ), and fourteen students answered negatively ( $M=9.36$ ,  $SD=1.50$ ,  $N=14$ ). See table 6. A one way analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant difference among the means of students are interested in aging related work and those who are not [ $F(2, 70)=.249$ ,  $p=.78$ ]. See table 7.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

Chapter five presents an analysis of the research outcomes described in the previous chapter. The first section contains a summary of the study and an overview of the purpose. Limitations of this study will be addressed. Finally, implications for social work practice and recommendations for future research will be identified.

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess master of social work students' interest in working with older adults. Knowledge of aging, positive attitude towards older adults and previous contact or experience with older adults were thought more likely to predict interest in working in gerontology. This was supported by previous research which found that students are more interested in working with the elderly if they receive gerontological knowledge and effort was made to reduce ageist attitude (Synder, Wesley, Lin & May, 2008). This suggests that MSW students interest in working with older adults is positively related to practice-related knowledge concerning older adults and positive attitude towards aging.

The results of the study indicate that more than half of the participants had previously taken an aging related course. However, the results indicate that only seventeen participants had previous aging internship. This could be attributed to factors such as interest in working with other population or insufficient resources for internship. Most of the study participants lacked experience in providing care to older adults. However, there is no evidence that inexperience correlates to some of the students (19%) not having interest and others choosing to remain neutral (33%).

The Facts on Aging scale results indicate that most students were knowledgeable about aging issues, however the result also proved that some students still lacked knowledge, which may be reflected of those who had not taken any aging-related course. The study further reveals that there was not much difference in participant's knowledge of aging issues whether they were experienced in providing care to older adults or not.

In assessing student's knowledge of aging and interest in working with the aging population, most participants indicated that they were interest in aging related work. These findings were consistent with previous research conducted, which expressed that infusing aging content in structured educational settings can positively influenced student's interest in the field of gerontology (Gutheil, Heyman & Chernesky, 2009).

The results from Kogan's Attitude Towards Old People scale indicate that participants generally held positive attitude towards older people, which is

consistent with previous studies. This study did not detect significant differences in attitude scores measured by KAOP across gender, experience providing care, aging-related courses. In contrast this study did detect a significant difference in students who had negative attitude to older adults as it relates to previous aging internship and interest in aging related work. This finding agrees with previous research that students who have more positive attitude towards older adult were more interested in working with them.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of exposing social work students to relevant coursework on gerontology aging curricula to reduce the influence of misconceptions and stereotypes regarding aging that could negatively impact interest in the field.

#### Limitations

There are some limitations reflected in this study. One of the main limitation pertain to the sample size. To get a more reliable understanding of student's interest in gerontology, a larger sample size is needed. Another limitation was focusing on only graduate social work students and not including students in undergraduate social work program. This would have given insight into students' knowledge and attitude to make assessment and plans to implement change before graduate level education. The third significant limitation of this study is not assessing in depth whether cultural interaction influence student's interest in gerontology. The school's population is reflective of the

diverse ethnicity that exist in the Inland Empire. This region includes African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern and other Islanders. Assessing to see their perspective on working with older adults would give insight into whether gerontology modules need to be customized to include specific cultural perspectives to prepare students to best serve older adults in a diverse population.

#### Recommendation for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

It is an ongoing challenge to increase social work student's interest in the field of gerontology. Findings from this study suggest two important considerations that should be made to improve interest. First, students may be more interested in working with older adults if they are exposed to aging related curricula early into their program. I recommend social work programs implement more gerontology content in both elective and core courses that challenge common stereotypes of aging and emphasize positive attitude towards older adults. This effort will assist in ensuring that social work programs prepare students to work with older clients (Kropf, 2002).

Second, further research should be conducted to investigate the contributing factors to students' attitude to develop strategies for improvement. This study utilized a correlational design which does not allow conclusions of casual relationship between knowledge and attitude and interest. Conducting a

study on causal relationship will help to identify factors positively influence interest in aging-related work.

### Conclusion

The study examined Master of social work students' interest in gerontology based on knowledge of aging, attitude and experience working with older adults. Previous research has shown that there are not enough geriatric-trained social workers to meet the needs as the population of aging adults increase rapidly. The study recommends gerontological training such as infusing gerontological knowledge into social work programs to counter ageism, stereotypes. The study indicated that students' interest in working with the aging population is influenced by being knowledgeable about aging issues. The study did not reveal significant correlation between students experience in providing care and their interest in aging-related work or their attitude towards older adults and their interest in working with them. However, students interest in working with older adults positively correlates to being knowledgeable about aging. The study is helpful for program coordinators and educators to ensure that they are offering appropriate training to future students to prepare them adequately for gerontological work in any setting.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences School of Social Work

### INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to assess the factors that influence graduate students' interest in working with older adults. The study is being conducted by Shelly-Ann Whyte under the supervision of Dr. Herb Shon, Assistant Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the study is to examine if there is any relationship between knowledge of aging, social and culture factors and MSW student's attitude towards the elderly.

**DESCRIPTION:** You have been selected in the study because you are currently a graduate student in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. You will be asked to answer few questions pertaining to your social and cultural background, knowledge of aging and your attitude toward the elderly.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is completely voluntary, you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY:** Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be coded in numerical format. No identifying information will be asked. All data will be destroyed after the study has been complete, around June 2017.

**DURATION:** The survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

909.537.5501 909.537.7029

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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The California State University. Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay. Fresno • Fullerton Humboldt' Long Beach • Los Angeles Maritime Academy Monterey Bay Northridge Pomona Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego San Francisco • San Jose San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma Stanislaus



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SAN BERNARDINO

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College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Social Work

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits to the participants. Your participation may result in implementing strategies to improve negative attitudes towards the elderly.

CONTACT: If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Herb Shon at [herb.shon@csusb.edu](mailto:herb.shon@csusb.edu).

RESULTS: The results of the study will be available after June 2017 at the John M. Pfau Library ScholarWorks database at California State University, San Bernardino.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

---

Place an X mark here

---

Date

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Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt' Long Beach • Los Angeles Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay •  
Northridge Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose San Luis Obispo  
• San Marcos • Sonoma Stanislaus

APPENDIX B  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The survey questionnaire you have just completed was designed to assess factors such as knowledge, attitude and experience which can negatively influence interest in working with older adults. The identification of these factors allow this study to and offer possible suggestions on ways to preventing or improving negative attitude which can delay or impede service delivery. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study.

Thank you for participating. If you have any questions please feel free to contact Dr. Herb Shon at [herb.shon@csusb.edu](mailto:herb.shon@csusb.edu). If you would like to obtain a copy of the results of this study, please contact John M. Pfau Library at California State University, San Bernardino after June 2017.

APPENDIX C  
QUESTIONNAIRE

### Demographics characteristics

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
3. What race or ethnicity do you consider yourself to be?
  - a. White
  - b. African American
  - c. American Indian/Alaskan Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaii/Pacific Islander
  - f. Two or more races: Non-Hispanic
  - g. Hispanic
  - h. Unknown
4. Have you provided care/is currently providing care to an older adult (age 60 or older)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

### Gerontological Education

1. Have you taken any aging-related undergraduate and graduate courses?  
If so, how many?
  - a. Yes \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is your current or previous internship focused on providing services to older adults?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

### Interest in Aging-Related Work

5=Very interested, 4=Somewhat interested, 3=Neutral, 2=Not very interested, 1=Not at all interested

1. How interested are you in working with older adults?
2. Rank your interest in working with:
  - a. Children \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Adolescent \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Adults (nonelderly) \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Older Adults \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D  
FACTS ON AGING SCALE

## Facts on Aging Quiz

Select "T" for true or "F" for false to answer each statement

1. A person's height tends to decline with old age \_\_\_\_
2. More older person (over 65) have chronic illnesses that limit their activity than younger persons \_\_\_\_
3. Older persons have more acute (short-term) illness that persons under 65 \_\_\_\_
4. Older persons have more injuries in the home than persons under 65 \_\_\_\_
5. The life expectancy of blacks at age 65 is about the same as whites \_\_\_\_
6. The life expectancy of men at 65 is about the same as women \_\_\_\_
7. Social Security benefits automatically increase with inflation \_\_\_\_
8. Supplemental Security income guarantees a minimum income for the needy aged \_\_\_\_
9. The aged have higher rates of criminal victimization that person under 65 \_\_\_\_.
10. There are 2 more widows for each widower among the aged \_\_\_\_
11. There are proportionately more older persons in public office than in the total population \_\_\_\_
12. The proportion of blacks among the aged is growing \_\_\_\_



13. The majority of aged live alone \_\_\_\_\_
14. A smaller percentage of the elderly live below the poverty line than do those younger than 65 \_\_\_\_\_
15. The rate of poverty among aged blacks is about 3 times as high as among aged whites \_\_\_\_\_
16. Older persons who reduce their activity tend to be happier than those who remain active \_\_\_\_\_
17. The proportion widowed is decreasing among the aged \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E

KOGAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD OLD PEOPLE SCALE

Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KAOP)

Use the following key to rate responses to questions relating to attitude.

Key	Strongly Disagree A	Slightly Disagree B	Disagree C	Agree D	Slightly Agree E	Strongly Agree F
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1. It would probably be better if most old people lived in residential units with people their own age.
2. It would probably be better if most people lived in residential units with younger people.
3. Most old people get set in their ways and are unable to change.
4. Most old people would prefer to continue working just as long as they possibly can rather than be dependent on anybody.
5. Most old people can generally be counted on to maintain a clean, attractive home.
6. People grow wiser with the coming of old age.
7. Old people should have power in business and politics.
8. Most old people make one feel ill at ease.
9. Most old people bore others by their insistence on talking "about the good old days."
10. Most old people tend to keep to themselves and give advice only when asked.
11. When you think about it, old people have the same faults as anybody else.

12. In order to maintain a nice residential neighborhood, it would be best if too many old people did not live in it.
13. There are a few exceptions, but in general most old people are pretty much alike.
14. Most old people seem quite clean and neat in their personal appearance.
15. Most old people are irritable, grouchy, and unpleasant.
16. Most old people are constantly complaining about the behavior of the younger generation.
17. Most old people need no more love and reassurance than anyone else.

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