

Original Research

Positive Aging a Two-Way Street: Healthy Lifestyle and Attitudes of Others

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Abstract

Background: Previous research has indicated the attitudes that others have toward older adults play an important role in their well-being. The current study contributes to the literature because it evaluates attitudes toward older adults.

Methods: The participants included Caucasian and Indigenous people residing in Northern Ontario. All participants were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire and the Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KAOP).

Results: Results indicated that Indigenous participants had more positive attitudes toward older adults than Caucasian participants.

Conclusions: The implications of this research would indicate specific strategies must be implemented to ensure older adults are not marginalized but included in family and community events.

Keywords

Attitudes; Indigenous; Caucasians; elders; positive aging



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1. Introduction

The literature is replete with information which indicates that a number of factors are essential for positive aging [1]. Healthy lifestyle which includes genetics, diet, exercise, cognitive enrichment, and a stress-free environment appear to be the panacea. As well, the attitude which others have toward seniors also has an impact. The perception that others have toward seniors will enhance or have a detrimental effect on the social experience of the older person residing in the community. A 2016 study conducted by Alana Officer and her colleagues, members of the World Health Organization, showed that of the 83, 034 adults from 57 countries, 60% reported negative attitudes toward the elderly. What is most interesting is that high income countries had the lowest respect for older people. Officer et al (2016) [2] indicated that older people who perceive themselves in a negative manner because of stereotyping tend to have a greater risk of depression and a shorter life span by up to 7.5 years.

Research conducted by Mansfield-Green et al. (2015) [3] evaluated students' personality traits and attitudes toward older adults. The participants included male and female Caucasians between the ages of 20 and 22. Results indicated that students had positive attitudes toward older adults as noted on the Kogans Attitude Toward Old People Scale (KAOP). Furthermore, students who scored high on rule-consciousness of the Cattell 16 Personality Factor (16 PF) Questionnaire had better attitudes toward older adults than others. Evaluation of gender differences showed that females elevated on the 16PF scale warmth had more positive attitudes than males toward older adults. Other studies have indicated that the attitudes of medical professionals and health caregivers influences the treatment provided to older adults [4, 5]. Furthermore, a recent study by Luchesi (2016) [6] found a number of factors including, living in an urban setting, taking more medications, and having higher levels of perceived stress affected attitudes of care givers toward the elderly.

In 2017, Morrisseau, Caswell, Sinclair and Valliant [7] evaluated attitudes toward older adults in an Indigenous population. The results demonstrated that Indigenous people had positive attitudes toward older adults regardless of whether they resided on or off an Indigenous First Nation Territory. Personality traits found to be correlated with positive attitudes toward older adults included high reasoning and low rule-consciousness on the 16PF [7]. Personality traits found to be correlated with positive attitude toward older adults in the study conducted by Morrisseau et al. (2017) [7], included high reasoning and low rule-consciousness. These were different from those in the study conducted by Mansfield-Green et al. (2015) [3] which included high rule-consciousness, low tension and high emotional stability. The results imply that cultural differences are associated with positive attitudes toward older adults.

A number of differences have been noted between Indigenous and Caucasian perspectives of aging. In Indigenous culture, the terms Elder and older adult carries a different meaning: an Elder is considered to be a wise person who contributes significantly to their community [8]. A literary review conducted by Pace and Grenier (2016) [8], identified 4 traits of older Indigenous people which are thought to contribute to a successful aging model in their community. These include health and wellness, empowerment and resilience, engagement and behavior, and connectedness. In Indigenous perspectives, health and wellness appear to reflect a holistic sense of wellbeing which includes mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, and community aspects [8, 9]. Engagement in their community, passing on traditional knowledge, and being connected to maintenance of

traditional Indigenous values are considered important responsibilities of an Elder [8, 10, 11]. Resiliency and teaching traditional knowledge appear in the literature as being a pillar of success in Indigenous communities [11]. These components contribute significantly to creating positive aging role models for Indigenous youth which not only sets standards for successful aging, but contributes to positive attitudes toward older adults [8].

Research with Indigenous culture has found that Indigenous people tend to support their extended families and other older adults in their communities more than people in Caucasian cultures [8, 12]. Older Indigenous people are distinguished in their roles in society and are closely connected to their community [8, 13]. They are also more likely to reside with family members in their old age as opposed to dedicated housing for older adults [8, 13]. These factors are considered to promote positive aging, help with coping and maintenance of good mental and physical health, and maintains connectedness between older adults and younger generations [8].

Research which compared Caucasian and Indigenous populations indicated that Indigenous youth have more respect for older adults in general than Caucasian youth [14]. In consideration of the differences between Indigenous and Caucasian cultures, as well as the previous studies, the current study compared Caucasian and Indigenous samples regarding attitudes toward older adults in an attempt to better understand differences in attitudes toward older adults. It was hypothesized that Indigenous participants would exhibit better attitudes toward older adults than Caucasian participants.

2. Materials and Methods

A total of 303 participants were recruited for the present study. All participants were either Caucasian (n=172) or Indigenous (n=131). The average age of the samples was 35.51 ± 12.26 years for Caucasians and 35.98 ± 11.55 years for Indigenous. The Indigenous and Caucasian data were collected in Northern Ontario. Indigenous participants resided on First Nations Territory or Within Northern Ontarian towns or cities. Similarly, Caucasian participants resided either in Northern Ontarian towns or cities. All participants completed a short demographic questionnaire and the Kogan's Attitudes Toward Old People Scale (KAOP). For the demographic questionnaire, participants provided information regarding their age, gender, and ethnicity. Participants also responded to questions regarding involvement with their grandparents and/or the elderly in general. Ethics approval for this research was obtained by the Laurentian University Research Ethics board. Flyers which outlined the research and included contact information were posted in community centers.

The KAOP consists of 34 items with statements of negative valence paired with opposing statements of positive valence. All questions are answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). All negative valence items are reverse scored; therefore, higher total KAOP scores indicate more positive attitudes toward the elderly [15]. Scores on the KAOP can range from 0 to 175, and all scores above 120 are indicative of positive attitudes [16].

2.1 Analysis

Participants were grouped according to Caucasian or Indigenous ethnicity and descriptive statistics computed. All KAOP variables were assessed for normal distributions according to Shapiro-Wilk tests and visual methods (i.e., histogram and Q-Q plot). For comparison between

groups, total KAOP scores were log transformed (log base 10) in order to reduce overall variance to better accommodate parametric testing. Independent t-test was employed for between-group comparisons. For further comparison of KAOP scores, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was also performed using a general linear model (GLM) in order to discern any potential contribution of participant age and gender. Subsequent models were investigated both with and without adjustment for age, gender, and ethnicity. This procedure is equivalent to linear regression analysis with dummy coded nominal variables. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS v20 software and statistical significance was considered for $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

After log transformation of total KAOP scores, independent t-test was performed to compare mean values between ethnicity groups, for which the assumption of equality of variance was satisfied ($p > 0.05$). A statistically significant difference was observed between groups ($t_{(300)} = 6.38$, $p < 0.01$) for which the Indigenous sample demonstrated relatively higher average KAOP scores (\log_{10} mean 2.17 ± 0.05) compared to that of the Caucasian sample (\log_{10} mean 2.14 ± 0.05), as shown in Figure 1. Further analysis of KAOP differences was conducted with GLM. After adjusting for participant age and gender through ANCOVA, the significant difference of total KAOP between ethnicity remained statistically significant ($F_{(1, 297)} = 40.27$, $p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.12$). Within the adjusted GLM, there was no significant difference between genders ($p > 0.05$) and no relationship with age ($p > 0.05$), nor was an interaction between gender and ethnicity observed ($p > 0.05$), Table 1.

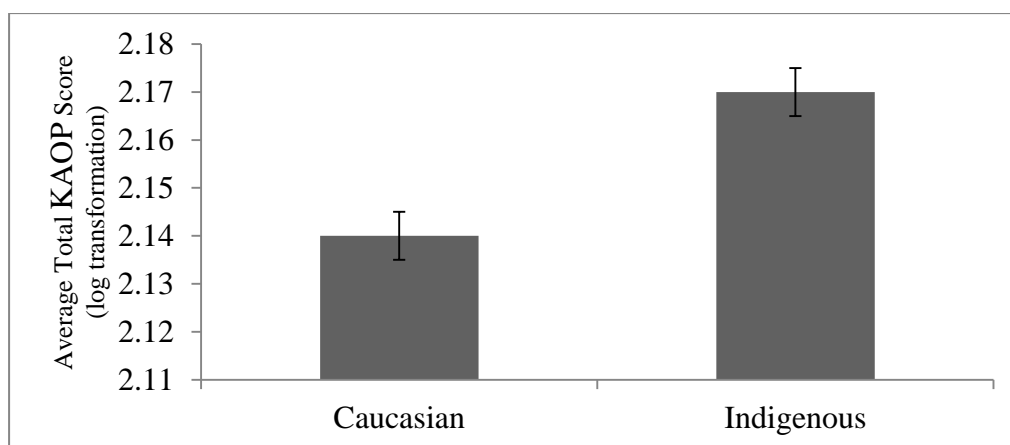


Figure 1 Mean values of total KAOP scores after log10 transformation for Caucasian and Indigenous samples; error bars indicate standard error of the mean (SEM)

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for each ethnicity by gender grouping; values are mean (standard deviation) and KAOP values shown are prior to log transformation

Variable	Caucasian Females (listwise valid n = 99)	Caucasian Males (listwise valid n = 70)	Indigenous Females (listwise valid n = 86)	Indigenous Males (listwise valid n = 31)
KAOP total	137.97 (15.07)	136.67 (15.52)	148.71 (17.06)	152.94 (19.88)

4. Discussion

The present study examined differences in attitudes toward older adults between Caucasian and Indigenous samples. A previous study by Morrisseau et al. (2017) [7] had shown no differences in attitudes toward elders between Indigenous populations who resided on versus those who resided off an Indigenous reservation. A study which evaluated Caucasian students' attitudes toward the elderly showed male and female differences were associated with positive attitudes [3]. The current study was unique in that it compared Indigenous and Caucasian samples. The results demonstrated that the Indigenous participants had higher overall KAOP scores than the Caucasian sample.

These results imply that Indigenous participants had positive attitudes toward older adults. This likely resulted from cultural traditions which are consistent with Indigenous culture. In many Indigenous traditions, positive aging is reflected by achieving Eldership in their respective community [13]. Although each community may consider different qualities, some of the defining qualities of an Elder are; emotional *well-being*, community involvement, physical and cognitive health, and spirituality [8, 13]. Elders are valued and closely involved in their communities as caregivers to grandchildren and teachers of traditional knowledge [8]. By establishing goals of positive aging which promote health and community involvement, elderly individuals are not only socially supported but also act as role models in their community. Furthermore, the teachings of traditional lifestyle espoused by the Anishnaabe/Midewin teachings assist Indigenous communities in learning the ethics of proper behaviour and conduct [17]. Such traditions value the position of Elders as role models to youth and are consultants in important community matters [8]. These traditions may help explain the Indigenous population's positive attitudes toward older adults.

5. Conclusions

The results of this study highlight the role of cultural differences in attitudes toward the elderly. Elders have distinguished roles in Indigenous communities which may account for the positive attitudes which prevail in these communities. The findings of this study provide evidence that traditional values in the Indigenous community are of importance as mechanisms for enhancing the well-being of the elderly. This particular finding merits further research with Caucasian populations who don't appear to have positive attitudes toward the elderly. Schwartz and Simmons (2010) [18] indicate the quality of contact between younger and older people may enhance the formation of positive attitudes between these generations.

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Author Contributions

Paul M. Valliant initiated this research some years ago and received funding from various organizations. He has continued with this research and has recruited graduate and undergraduate

students to partake in this research. Charlotte A. Aelick has recently become involved in the project and is currently engaged in active data collection. Amber Sinclair became involved in this project when we were investigating the Attitudes Toward the Elderly and has pursued this research for her Masters Thesis. Joseph M. Caswell has been involved with the statistical analysis of the data to provide research findings.

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Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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