

help address. Extensive review of existing literature, however, indicates a lack of comprehensive geriatric focused training in Ghana's education system. Unfortunately, the scope of this training deficiency, potential impact on the geriatric workforce, as well as the health and wellbeing of the aging population on the national level have not been extensively examined. With the older adult population set to increase over the next few years, the need for geriatric-trained human service professionals in diverse disciplines, including medicine, nursing, psychology, social work and public health has become more pronounced. This paper is a review of the current state of gerontological education in higher institutions in Ghana. Specifically, authors examined (1) current geriatric-focused training programs available to students in all public/government owned institutions, (2) existing national level programs, and policies addressing training deficiencies, and (3) the implications of findings for future geriatric workforce as well as the health and wellbeing of older Ghanaians. The findings call attention to the need for a nationwide geriatric-focused training system and policies aimed at prioritizing specialized care for the older population. Culturally appropriate recommendations for integrating gerontological training and education in tertiary institutions are discussed. Guidelines and standards based on the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) Competencies for Undergraduate and Graduate Education are proposed.

#### WHAT DO ISRAELI GERONTOLOGY STUDENTS THINK ABOUT MEDICAL MARIJUANA USE FOR ALZHEIMER'S AND PARKINSON'S DISEASE?

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**Aims:** The aims of the current study were as follows: 1) to assess gerontology graduate students' beliefs about medical marijuana's (MMJ) effectiveness for two common age-related conditions - Alzheimer's (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD); 2) to assess students' beliefs and attitudes toward MMJ; 3) to explore associations linking background characteristics, MMJ-related attitudes and beliefs, and beliefs about the MMJ effectiveness for AD and PD. **Method:** A sample of 104 (84 women and 20 men) gerontology graduate students voluntarily participated in an anonymous online survey. **Results:** The vast majority (95%) of the participants indicated they had no formal education about MMJ and reported being unprepared to answer clients' MMJ-related questions (84.6%). Most of the participants believed that MMJ is effective for use with AD (70.2%) and PD (80.8%) patients. Participants reported favorable beliefs about MMJ benefits, concerns about risks, the need for training, and positive attitudes toward recreational marijuana use legalization. Prior marijuana use (e.g., self-use, friends or family) was found to be associated with more positive beliefs about MMJ benefits, risks, and its legalization for recreational purposes. Prior marijuana use was the only factor associated with the belief that MMJ is an effective therapy for use with individuals diagnosed with AD or PD. **Conclusions:** The study findings stress the need for students' MMJ education in order to provide

future gerontology service providers with the necessary knowledge and ability to address clients' questions about MMJ use. Efforts to develop curricula and training programs need to be promoted.

#### Session 3350 (Symposium)

##### POLICY SERIES: CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

Chair: Brian Lindberg

This popular annual session will provide cutting-edge information on what the 117th Congress has and has not accomplished to date, and what may be left for end of the First Session. Speakers will discuss key issues such as pandemic relief, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act.

#### Session 3355 (Symposium)

##### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND COPING AMONG OLDER ADULTS: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND VIRTUAL REALITY PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT

Chair: Zhen Cong

This symposium included 4 studies that use national and regional data to examine older adults' disaster preparedness and coping. The first study examined age differences in preparedness for the continuation of COVID-19 with a sample of 443 residents in Dallas, TX. The findings highlight older adults' resilience and special needs for different types of support during the pandemic. The second study examined the association of having COVID-19 and intergenerational relationships using the COVID-19 module of the Health and Retirement Study with a sample of 3266 respondents. Using a national sample of 1,467 respondents from the 2017 U.S. National Household Survey, the third study examined age differences relationships among the type of disasters (i.e., disasters with different lead-time), response efficacy, and disaster preparedness. The findings highlighted older adults' unique vulnerability and resilience in different types of disasters. The fourth study discussed a pilot virtual reality platform under development to assist older adults to develop tailored household emergency preparedness plans and practice those plans with simulated extreme weather conditions and warnings for older adults to practice disaster response and develop relevant knowledge and skills as well as test and revise their emergency preparedness plans. Overall, this symposium emphasizes the uniqueness of older adults' needs, vulnerability, and resilience to disasters.

##### AGE DIFFERENCES IN PREPAREDNESS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF COVID-19: IMPORTANT ROLES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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This study examined the association between age and preparedness for the continuation of COVID-19. The moderation effects of three types of social support, namely, emotional, financial, and instrumental assistance were also