A New View of Successful Aging: The Role of Adaptation and Transcendence in Fostering a Holistic View of Successful Aging

What is Successful Aging?
- absence of disease and disability
- independent physical and cognitive function
- active and productive engagement in life

"Identify the factors that put one octogenarian on cross-country skis and another in a wheelchair."

Limitations
- Focus on disease, not health (Fadem & Minkler, 2002)
- Success - an outcome, or a process? (Van Park, et al., 2001)
- No consensus on what is ‘success’ (Thiara, et al., 2008)
- Misses elders’ criteria for success (Brown & Bell, 1999; Bowling & Iliffe, 2006)
- Behavioral determinants of health (Schulz and Northridge, 2004)
- Does not consider racial, cultural, or SES disadvantages (Bowling and Iliffe, 2006)

New Theory
- Holistic view of health even in the presence of chronic disease
- Developmental process changing across the lifespan
- Merge biomedical and psychosocial viewpoints
- Include spiritual or existential criteria
- Add social and environmental determinants
- Extend the potential for successful aging to vulnerable populations
Holistic View of Successful Aging

- "An individual's perceived favorable outcome in adapting to the cumulative physiologic and functional changes associated with the passage of time, while experiencing spiritual connectedness and a sense of meaning or purpose in life." (Flood, 2005, p. 35)
- Predicted by adaptation and transcendence

Mid-range Nursing Theory of Successful Aging (Flood, 2005)

Adaptation:
- Functional coping
- Spiritual coping
- Intrapsychic coping

Three cross-sectional studies

- **Pilot study (N= 20)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Convenience sample
  - Moderate-income CCRC
- **Initial study (N= 123)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Random sample
  - Low-income CCRC
- **Follow-up study (N= 152)**
  - Cross-sectional survey design
  - Convenience sample
  - Upper-income CCRC (n= 52), Moderate-income (n= 51) and Low-income (n= 49) Community-dwelling at Senior Centers
Main Research Questions

1. To what degree do adaptation and transcendence predict successful aging, controlling for age, income, health and function?
2. What are the relative contributions of each predictor?

Conceptual Definitions

Adaptation
- Adaptation was defined for the study as proactive coping, i.e., positive, future-oriented coping strategies used to adjust to the challenges and opportunities of aging.
- People cope proactively not only in response to stressors but also by building up financial or social resources in anticipation of future stressors (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2002).

Transcendence
- Self-transcendence is a developmental potential involving a shift to a broader perspective on life, expanding the way older adults perceive themselves, their relationships with others and dimensions greater than the self.
- Both psychological factors (relating to others and self) and spiritual factors (having a sense of meaning, acceptance, and living fully in the present) are reflected in self-transcendence (Reed, 2009).

Model of Study Variables

Results

All three studies found statistically significant models regressing successful aging on proactive coping and self-transcendence, controlling for age, income, health & function

- Results study #1 Adj. R² = .365, p < .000
- Results study #2 Adj. R² = .454, p < .000
- Results study #3 Adj. R² = .494, p < .001

All three studies found effect sizes were significantly greater for self-transcendence than for proactive coping.

- Results study #1 STS β = .502 > PCI β = .285
- Results study #2 STS β = .523 > PCI β = .199
- Results study #3 STS β = .459 > PCI β = .232

Conclusions

- The findings of these studies indicate Flood’s mid-range nursing Theory of Successful Aging merits further investigation (2005).
- Findings also suggest transcendence – a factor in the spiritual or existential domain identified by older adults as important to successful aging – and may be an important new contributor which has been missing from successful aging research to date (Crowther, 2002; Sadler & Biggs, 2007)

References