



# Effects of a gerotranscendence educational program on gerotranscendence recognition, attitude towards aging and behavioral intention towards the elderly in long-term care facilities: A quasi-experimental study



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## SUMMARY

**Background:** Caregivers in long-term care (LTC) facilities have to uphold a positive attitude toward the elderly, so they will be more willing to provide the elderly with care of higher quality. Theory of Gerotranscendence is a theory which can assist the elderly in developing more mature and intellectual state of mind. It is hoped that the caregivers who receive gerotranscendence education may apply its concept to the care for the elderly.

**Objectives:** To evaluate the effects of the gerotranscendence educational program on caregivers' gerotranscendence recognition, attitude towards aging, and behavioral intention towards caring for the elderly.

**Design:** A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was conducted.

**Participants:** A total of 41 caregivers in LTC facilities participated and completed the study.

**Methods:** Participants were invited to participate in a 2-day gerotranscendence educational program, and measurement took place at baseline, the end of the program (post-test) and three months after the program (follow-up test). The research tools included Gerotranscendence Recognition Scale-Chinese version, Aging Attitude scale, and Caregivers' Behavioral Intention Scale. This study used GLM repeated measures to perform analysis.

**Results:** There was a statistically significant difference in three repeated measures of participants' gerotranscendence recognition and behavior intention toward caring for the elderly ( $p = .002, .002$ , respectively) but not in the aging attitude score ( $p = .21$ ). The post hoc comparison showed that the scores of these two outcomes in the post-test were significantly higher than those in the pre-test ( $p = .000; .024$ ). However, the scores in the follow-up test were almost the same as those in the pre-test.

**Conclusions:** The gerotranscendence educational program had timely effects on caregivers' gerotranscendence recognition and behavioral intention towards aging, and so caregivers working in LTC facilities may require on-going training in the gerotranscendence educational program to ensure that these positive effects remain strong.

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## Introduction

Population aging has become a common trend around the world in recent years due to various social changes, such as low birth rates, evolving social values, and rapidly developing economies. An increasing number of the elderly with disabilities who cannot take care of themselves reside in long-term care (LTC) institutions. Statistics show that the occupancy of LTC facilities in Taiwan increased from 2009 to 2012, from 72.9% to 74.2% (Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan, 2013) with the rate expected to rise further in the future.

In general, negative stereotypes toward older adults exist in society, and being old is usually viewed as having poor physical functions and facing health and social problems (Lin et al., 2005). Due to limited manpower and resources, most caregiving in LTC facilities in Taiwan are task-oriented, focusing primarily on providing older residents with physical care. There is thus little attention to psycho-social care, and even less concern has been placed on the spiritual needs of these older residents. However, older adults residing in LTC facilities not only face physiological decline, but also a sense of loss in terms of their social and psychological selves. Their health needs are likely to be both unique and complicated. It is thus important to undertake holistic care planning for this population (Tornstam, 2005).

Nurses, nurse aides, and social workers constitute professional and non-professional care providers in LTC facilities in Taiwan, and the

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care they provide will be affected by their geriatric knowledge and their attitudes toward aging and behavioral intentions toward the elderly (Hsieh et al., 2009a, 2009b; Lee, 2007; Wadensten and Carlsson, 2007a). Here, attitudes toward aging refers to how a person feels about getting old, while behavioral intentions toward the elderly refers to a caregiver's willingness to provide care to or have interactions with the elderly (Lin et al., 2005). Caregivers' positive attitudes toward aging have been correlated with whether they receive appropriate training or education concerning elderly care (Richardson et al., 2002). Ho (2009) conducted a cross-sectional descriptive study to investigate elderly care knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions among 320 registered nurses. The results showed that there was a significantly positive correlation between the registered nurses' elderly care knowledge and behavioral intentions toward aging, and also a significant positive correlation between attitudes toward aging and behavioral intentions. Another study by Lin et al. (2005) randomly selected 203 nursing students and 203 non-nursing students, and provided them with a 32-hour educational program on elder care. The results showed that after the intervention both groups of students developed positive attitudes toward the physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects of the elderly, as well as more positive behavioral intentions toward the elderly was also positive. These results demonstrate the importance of providing caregivers working in LTC facilities with holistic educational programs, as they can improve both the knowledge that such staff have, as well as their actual practices (Hsieh et al., 2009a, 2009b).

Activity theory has been widely adopted as a conceptual framework to plan elderly care in the Western world (Wadensten and Carlsson, 2001). However an alternative aging theory, known as the theory of gerotranscendence, has attracted particular attention in northern Europe. Tornstam (2005) pointed out that human development is a lifelong, continuing process, and that if carried out appropriately it can lead to the development of new perspectives on life. Consequently, he proposed the theory of gerotranscendence, which focuses on the inner growth of the elderly, particularly from a spiritual perspective (Tornstam, 2005). Although older adults have an opportunity to develop and achieve the stage known as gerotranscendence, they may need external assistance to facilitate the process. For example, recently Melin-Johansson et al. (2014) applied the gerotranscendence concept as a conversation model to facilitate a group of institutionalized elders adjusting their life. Findings of this study demonstrated that these elders had better knowledge about themselves, were less focus on body and appearance change, more enjoy with life and less care for social norm or material possessions. According to Melin-Johansson et al. (2014), gerotranscendence can be a communication mean between caregivers and elders in long-term care facilities. Therefore, through training, it is believed that caregivers can become more knowledgeable of gerotranscendence, and that this can then improve the care they provide. Older adults may also be able to achieve gerotranscendence, and so transcend their physiological limitations by adopting a more psychological and spiritual perspective on the aging process, allowing them to increase their satisfaction with life (Tornstam, 2005). Therefore, an educational program applying the concept of gerotranscendence may be beneficial to the cultivation of positive aging knowledge and attitudes among LTC caregivers.

To date, few research studies have reported the effects of interventions applying the concept of gerotranscendence for older adults. Wadensten (2005) conducted a qualitative focus group to enable six female nursing home residents aged 68–80 to understand the concept of gerotranscendence, and to observe the changes in their aging process. The results showed that participants actively shared details of their own aging processes in the group, and that the concept of gerotranscendence made them more positive toward aging and enabled them to feel more at peace with their pasts. Another pilot study (Wadensten and Hagglund, 2006) integrated the concept of gerotranscendence in a reminiscence group, with eight older adults aged 74–85 participating in the study. After the group intervention, the participants stated that

they were satisfied with the reminiscence group, and that they enjoyed talking about their childhoods and other earlier experiences. In addition, Wadensten and Hagglund (2006) reported that a gerotranscendence intervention for LTC residents resulted in a positive change in their overall living situations. At present, the only gerotranscendence study of older adults carried out in an Asian context was conducted by Wang et al. (2011) in Taiwan. Seventy-six residents of LTC facilities were randomly assigned into either a gerotranscendence-intervention support group or control group. The results showed that residents in the support group were able to develop an attitude of gerotranscendence, and that their levels of life satisfaction significantly improved compared to those of the control group.

Although the concept of gerotranscendence has been used in interventions with older adults, as reported in these earlier works, it has only been applied in the educational training that caregivers receive in a few European countries. Tornstam (1996) first introduced the concept of gerotranscendence to 90 caregivers working in LTC facilities through a discussion group. Using a mail survey, a six-month follow-up showed that nearly a half of the participants came to an understanding of gerotranscendence specific care strategies, and one-third showed changes in attitudes toward caring. However, it was not until 2007 that Wadensten and Carlsson (2007a) developed clinical guidelines based on the theory of gerotranscendence for caregivers in LTC facilities. Using these guidelines, caregivers identify and recognize signs of gerotranscendence in the elderly, refocus concerns over their physiological needs, and allow the elderly to re-define their understanding of time, talk about death and their future growth. Caregivers can use these guidelines to create and introduce new kinds of activities, and they encourage the provision of tranquil spaces and times for the elderly in an institutional environment.

Wadensten and Carlsson (2007b) conducted a pilot study in a Swedish LTC facility introducing the concept of gerotranscendence and care guidelines to 12 nurses. After participating in the gerotranscendence educational group, the nurses' attitudes toward gerotranscendence changed, and they reported respect and more positive attitudes toward the elderly. Another study by Wadensten (2010) in a Swedish LTC facility focused on teaching gerotranscendence theory and guidelines to staff carrying out elderly care. The results showed that after this intervention the residents felt that staff respected them more, and some became more interested in reviewing their lives and being more reflective and thoughtful in this regard. After several weeks some residents began discussing their ambitions and plans together nearly every day. Another change was that some residents began to eat meals alone in their rooms, rather than with others in a common area, which could help them to have a private time to reflect their lives.

Although GT was originally constructed in western culture, in its developing process, Tornstam formed a new meta-theoretical paradigm which integrated the worldview of eastern philosophy, Zen Buddhism's and western psychology, Jung's doctrine (Tornstam, 2005) where Buddhism is one of the dominant doctrine in Taiwanese society. In addition, given that Taiwanese culture is rooted in Confucianism, which stated that transcendence is a process that occurs in the stages, moving from self-transcendence, to obedience and the universe which is similar to the three constructs of gerotranscendence (self, society, and universe) (Li, 2005). Therefore, we had explored the cultural perspective of gerotranscendence through two qualitative focus-groups with 16 older adults. Three themes related to the perspective of gerotranscendence were extracted: Fearless to aging and death, aware of self and respect others and new perspective to life (Lin et al., 2010). These findings were similar to the construct of gerotranscendence. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether gerotranscendence recognition, attitude towards aging, and behavioral intention towards care for the elderly changed over time for caregivers of LTC facilities in an Asian context after a gerotranscendence educational program.

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