

Faculty Profile



Bob G. Knight, Ph.D.

Merle H. Bensinger Professor of Gerontology

Professor of Psychology Editor, Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences

Research

Age differences in effect of emotion on cognition; cultural differences in stress and coping models for distress among dementia caregivers; wisdom and aging.

Overview

Bob G. Knight, Ph.D., is the Merle H. Bensinger Professor of Gerontology and Professor of Psychology at the USC Davis School of Gerontology/Andrus Gerontology Center. In addition to that position, he also serves as director of the Tingstad Older Adult Counseling Center.

He has published extensively in mental health and aging, including *Psychotherapy with older adults* (Sage, 3rd ed. 2004, available in French, Dutch, Japanese and Chinese translations). He is working with Nancy Pachana, Ph.D. (University of Queensland) on Psychological assessment and therapy with older adults, under contract with Oxford University Press.

His writing on psychotherapy with older adults includes development of the Contextual Adult Life Span Theory for Adapting Psychotherapy (CALTAP), which applies life span developmental principles to therapy with older adults.

Dr. Knight's work has been recognized by multiple national awards, including:

- Distinguished Clinical Mentorship Award, Clinical Geropsychology Section (Section II of Division 12), American Psychological Association, 2005
- Retirement Research Foundation M. Powell Lawton Distinguished Contribution Award in Applied Gerontology, 2007 (Awarded by Division 20 of American Psychological Association)
- American Psychological Association's Committee on Aging Award for the Advancement of Psychology and Aging, 2009
- M. Powell Lawton Award for Distinguished Contributions to Clinical Geropsychology, Society of Clinical Geropsychology, 2012

Dr. Knight has been active in various professional organizations relating to psychology and aging. He served as the President of Section II, Division 12 (Clinical Geropsychology) of the American Psychological Association in 1997; President of APA Division of Adult Development and Aging, 2003-04; Chair of the APA Committee in Aging, 2001. In 2006, he co-chaired (with Michele Karel) the National Conference on Training Models in Clinical Geropsychology. In 2007-08, he helped to organize and was the founding Chair of the Council of Professional Geropsychology Training Programs.

Current research interests include cultural difference in stress and coping models used to understand family caregiving as well as age differences in the effects of emotion on cognition. Dr. Knight and his collaborators have developed and are refining a sociocultural stress and coping model for understanding physical and mental health effects of stress related to caring for a family member with dementia.

The work to date has suggested a common core model that links behavioral problems of the person with dementia to perceived burden to avoidant coping strategies to emotional distress and subjective physical health outcomes. This common model is elaborated in different ways across cultural groups studied to date, which have included African Americans, Latinos and Korean Americans as well as cross-national comparisons with caregivers in Korea and in Spain. The work has also suggested that the group specific differences are found more in differential coping styles and in social support rather than in cultural values.

There is also some evidence for biological markers of stress showing effects of caregiving in minority groups that are not self-reporting poor health. Future aims for this line of research include further refinement of the sociocultural stress and coping model with special attention the discrepancy between biomarkers indicators of stress and self-reported effects, the development of measures of group-specific cultural values related to caregiving and the development of an intervention for caregivers rooted in the sociocultural stress and coping model.

The work on age differences on the effects of emotion on cognition has used mood induction experimental research to replicate the mood congruence effect for depression and the selective attention to threat effect for anxiety in older adult populations. The mood congruence effect for recall of sad memories in sad mood seems to affect more cognitive tasks in older adults than in younger adults and to impede recall of positive memories in older adults. Future work on this line of research will be focused on better understanding the processes leading to age differences in the effects of emotion on cognition, examining these effects in clinical populations of older adults with depression and anxiety, and exploring whether these differences suggest modifications are needed in cognitive behavior therapy (which is theoretically connected in part with these emotion-cognition relationships) when practiced with older adults.

Dr. Knight received his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. His professional experience in working with older adults began while working at the Urban League of Madison County (IN) where he organized and served as first president of the Madison County Council on Aging in 1973.

Publications

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