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PREVENTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES IN OLDER ADULTS: SKILL DEVELOPMENT AMONG CLERGY MEMBERS

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Goals for Today



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Education and Research
Boston University School of Social Work

- ▶ Review the study aims and significance of topic
- ▶ Describe the methods
- ▶ Provide an overview of the results
- ▶ Discuss implications of the project and next steps
- ▶ Questions/discussion

Mission Statement



Center for Aging and Disability
Education and Research
Boston University School of Social Work

The Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER) is dedicated to strengthening the workforce that provides health and long-term supports and services to older adults and people with disabilities.

CADER Overview



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Boston University School of Social Work

- A national leader in workforce development since 2002
- A robust catalog of online courses that focus on the knowledge, skills, and values needed for effective practice with older adults and people with disabilities
- Trained over 20,000 workers in the last 15 years
- Worked with more than 450 agencies and organizations around the country
- Partners with 20 statewide training programs including AAAs, ILCs, ADRCs

Introduction/Background



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- ▶ During episodes of stress, grief, and depression, older adults are more likely to turn to clergy than to mental health professionals.
- ▶ Unrecognized and untreated mental health issues are costly and even lethal.
- ▶ Clergy report that while their ministries include heavy demands to provide mental health services to their congregants, many feel overwhelmed and ill equipped to help.
- ▶ Research indicates that clergy members often have had little or no training in gerontology while in the seminary or in continuing education.
- ▶ One of the greatest barriers to the provision of mental health services is the lack of a trained workforce.

Introduction/Background

- ▶ Given the importance of workforce training in aging and behavioral health, CADER developed an online Certificate in Behavioral Health and Aging
- ▶ This 19-hour, five-course certificate program includes the following courses:
 1. Mental Health and Aging Issues
 2. Suicide Prevention among Older Adults
 3. Mental Wellness and Resilience Among Older Immigrants and Refugees
 4. Substance Use among Older Adults
 5. Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias

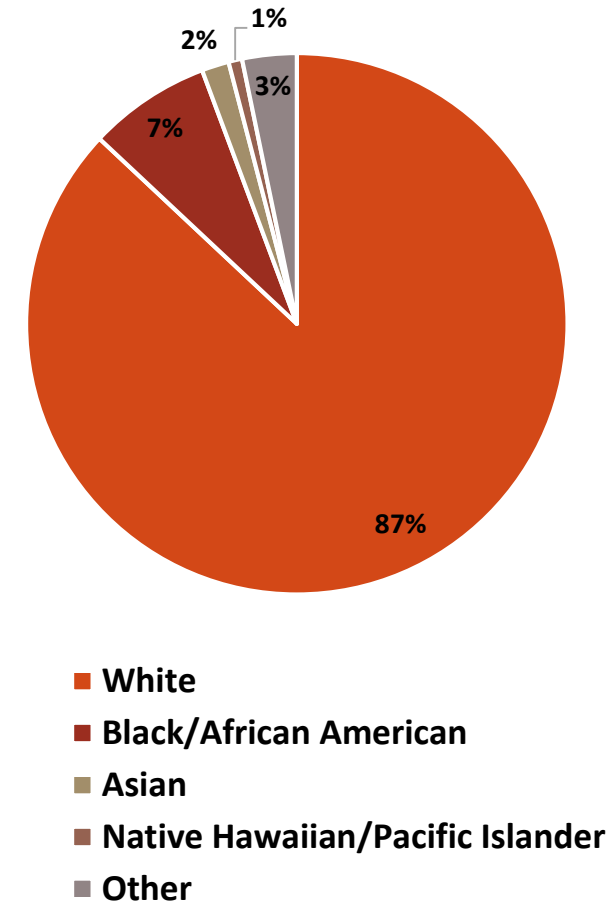
Methods

- ▶ Invited a small group of MA clergy (n=13) to join our Clergy Stakeholder Advisory Group (CSAG) to pilot BU CADER's existing online Behavioral Health and Aging Certificate
- ▶ Created and distributed a survey to clergy across the country to better understand their needs in working with older adults who have behavioral health concerns
- ▶ Invited second round of MA clergy learners to take the certificate (n=38)
- ▶ Measured pre and post-training competencies and collected course feedback

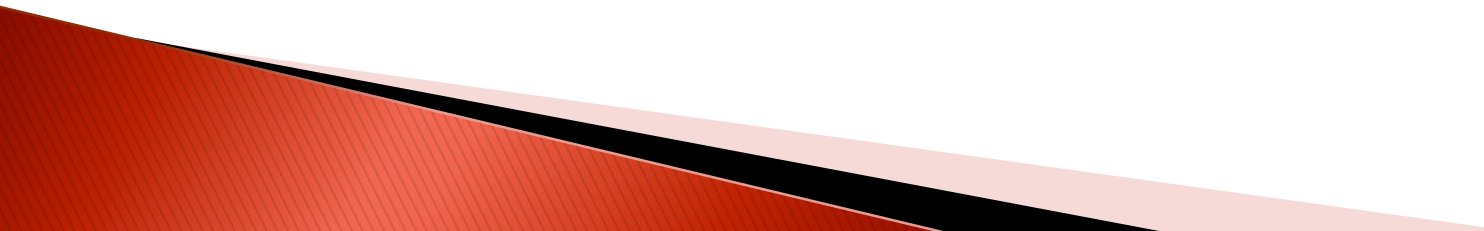
Results: Survey

- 150 respondents
- 54% female; 46% male
- Majority of respondents are 50 years or older
- Some religious denominations represented include:
 - Protestant
 - Jewish
 - Roman Catholic
 - Other (Baptist, Unitarian Universalist, Interdenominational)

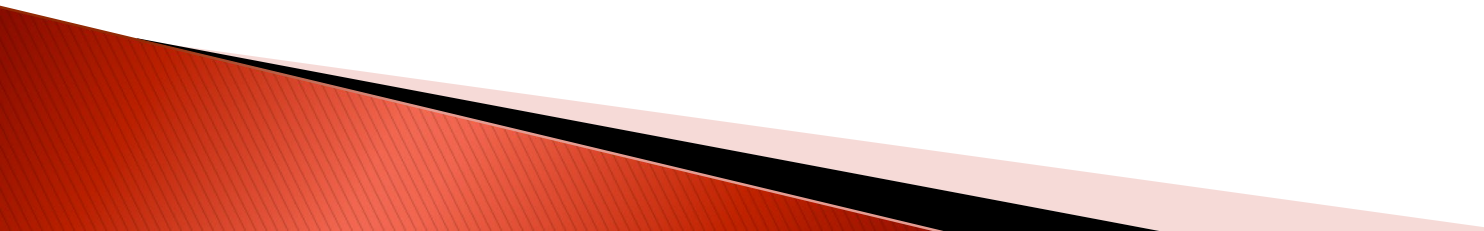
Chart 2: Self-Identified Race of Survey Respondents



Results: Survey

- Clergy reported that over 60% of older adults often, or sometimes come to them with concerns about depression or anxiety, while fewer (15%) come to them with concerns about substance use.
 - Just over 60% of clergy reported that older adults often or sometimes discuss issues related to dementia, while the majority (90%) would seldom or never discuss issues related to suicide.
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Results: Survey

- Almost all clergy (94%) reported that they have referred a congregant to a mental health professional before.
 - The majority of the same clergy (81%) though, also said they would be interested in completing a training program about behavioral health among older adults.
 - Clergy are facing these behavioral health concerns in their congregants and would like training in the areas of mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention among older adults.
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Results: Survey



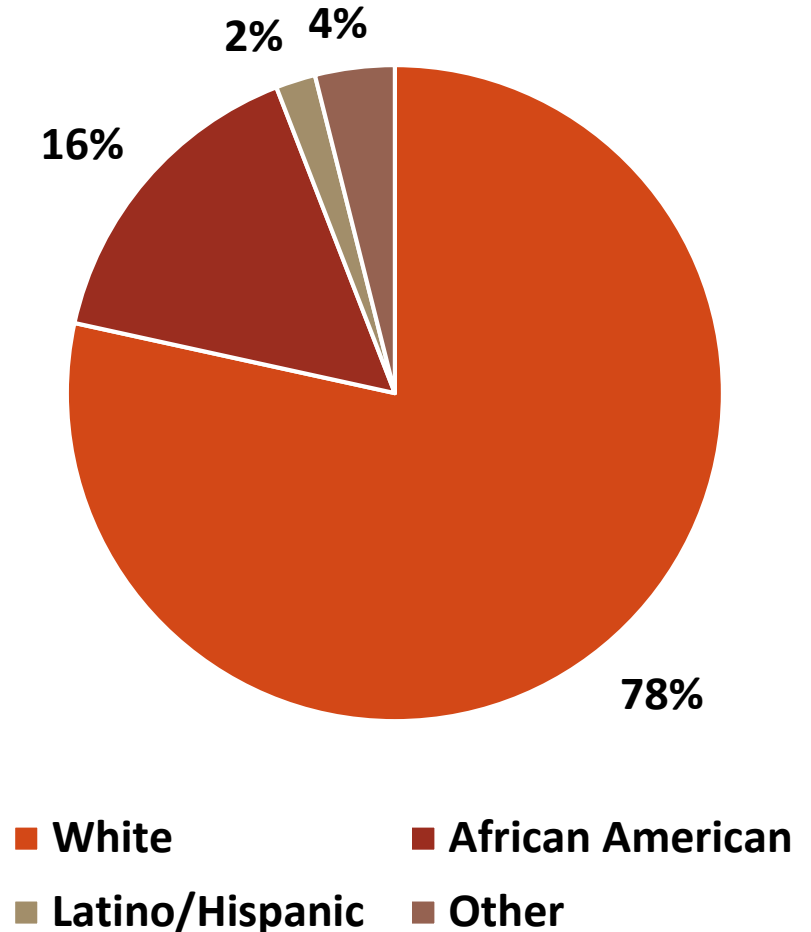
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Learner Profile: Training Program

- 51 learners total
- 36 (71%) completed the program
- 73% female; 27% male
- Average learner age: 53 years old
- Average Education Level: Bachelor's Degree or higher

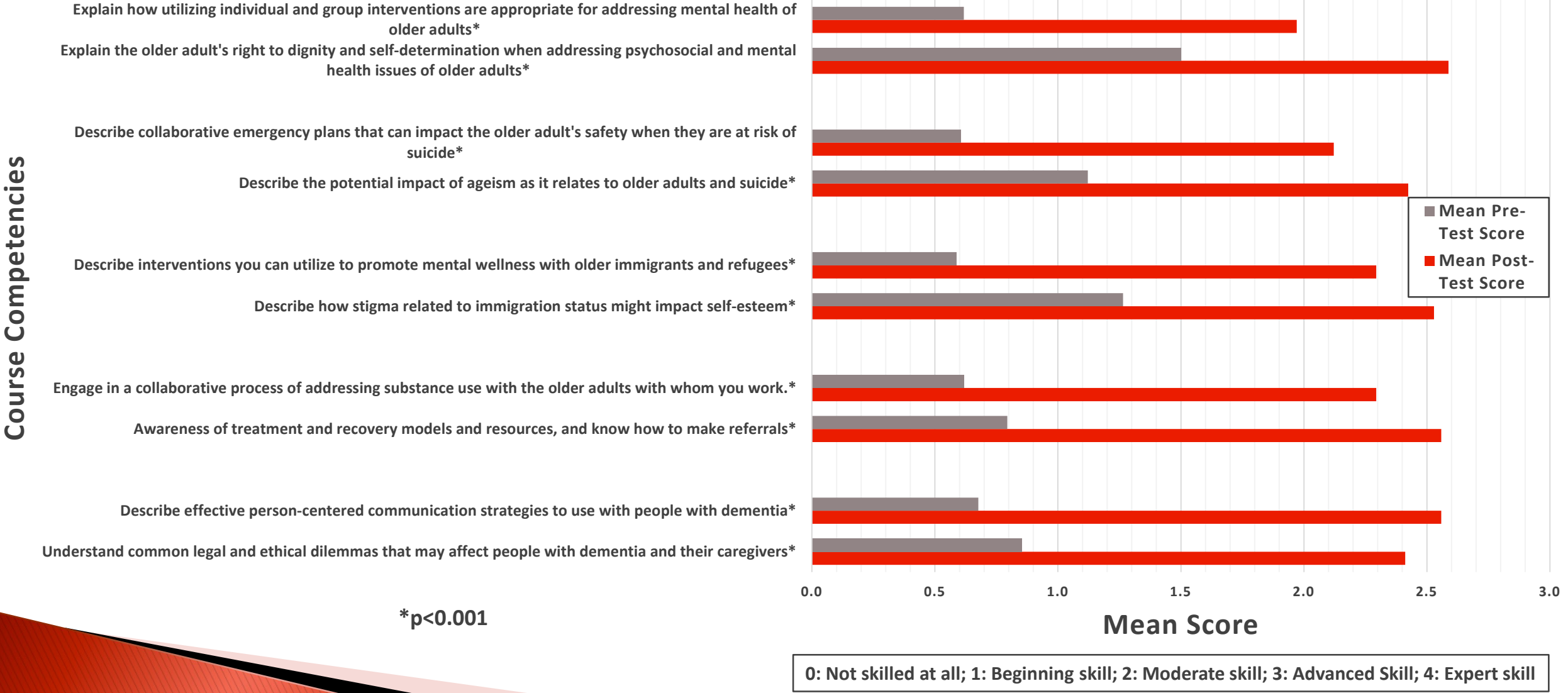
Chart 1. Self-Identified Race of Enrolled Learners



Results: Training Program

- Competencies increased significantly ($p < 0.05$) as measured pre-post for each competency across all 5 courses
- Over 80% of those who completed an evaluation strongly agreed or agreed that the training:
 - expanded their knowledge and understanding of the topic area
 - will help them apply practice skills in the topic area
 - will help them in their work with older adults or people with disabilities

Greatest Competency Increases by Course



Course Feedback

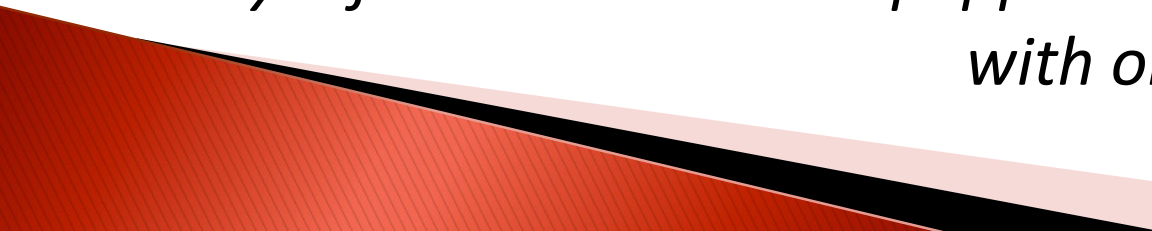


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“Upon beginning this course I had little knowledge of signs, symptoms and ability to identify a possible mental health disorder and even less knowledge of screenings, therapies and the law. With the information and resources I gained in this first course, I feel more confident that I can be of help to my parishioners. Better able to understand signs, symptoms. Better able to listen, encourage and truly support.”

“I found the material presented in this course to be very informative, relatively easy to understand, and very practical.”

“Very informative. I was equipped and now this course will enhance my skills with older adults.”

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Discussion/Implications

- ▶ One of the most important reasons for educating providers about mental health and mental disorders is that it can lead to early recognition and intervention.
- ▶ It is critical for aging providers to learn more about how spirituality impacts the lives of older adults and for clergy to understand how best to identify and refer older adults to the most appropriate services.

Next Steps



- ▶ Focus group with 10-15 faith-based leaders and providers who completed the CADER training
- ▶ Clergy and providers come together to discuss critical issues related to behavioral health to foster collaborations and enhance referrals
- ▶ Provide cross training to promote collaboration between clergy and aging and mental health providers
- ▶ Create an anti-stigma campaign for providers and clergy to disseminate across their community

I have no commercial relationships to disclose.



Contact Information



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