

Supporting Mental Health in Older Adults through Faith Communities

Bronwyn Keefe, MSW, MPH, Ph.D.

Director and Assistant Dean
CADER, Boston University School of Social Work

Annalee Wilson, MPH, CPH

Evaluation and Workforce Training Manager
CADER, Boston University School of Social Work

May 6, 2024



Agenda

1. CADER Overview

2. Background

3. Methods and Demographics

4. Results

5. Partnerships Between Senior Centers and Faith Communities

6. Conclusion

Center for Aging and Disability Education and Research (CADER) Overview



- Located at the Boston University School of Social Work
- Dedicated to strengthening the workforce that provides health and long-term supports and services to older adults and people with disabilities
- Offers a wide range of online training courses and certificate programs for learners at all levels of experience
- Competency-focused approach
- Enhance the skills of practitioners in the field

Background



- 122 million Americans live in geographic areas facing a shortage of mental health care professionals (HRSA, 2024)
- Non-Hispanic White adults are more likely to have received mental health treatment than other racial and ethnic groups (Terlizzi & Norris, 2021)
- Older adults attend religious services more frequently than members of other age groups (Pew Research Center, n.d.)
- Older adults often turn to clergy for help instead of formal mental health services (Pickard & Tang, 2009)

Methods

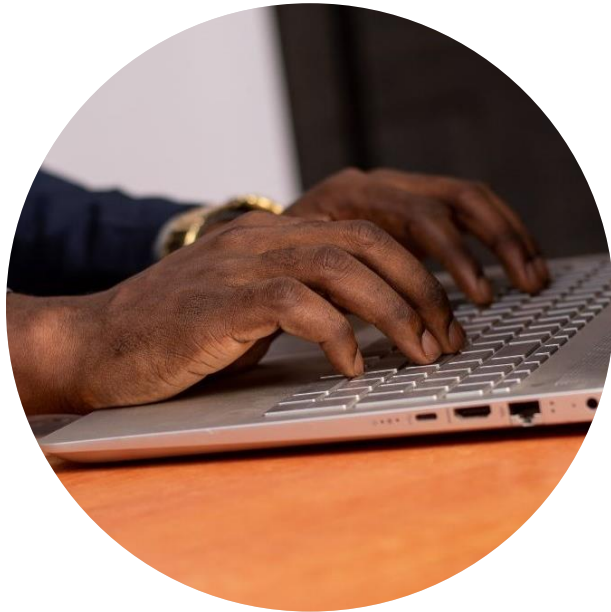


CADER partnered with the E4 Center for Excellence to offer CADER's online course, *Mental Health and Aging for Faith Leaders*, to faith leaders in Chicago

- **37** faith leaders completed the course between June 13, 2023 to July 31, 2023
- Faith leaders were recruited by a trusted Chicago-based pastor
- CADER provided weekly learner progress reports and technical support and conducted all evaluations for this program

Mental Health and Aging for Faith Leaders

Course Overview



Course Details:

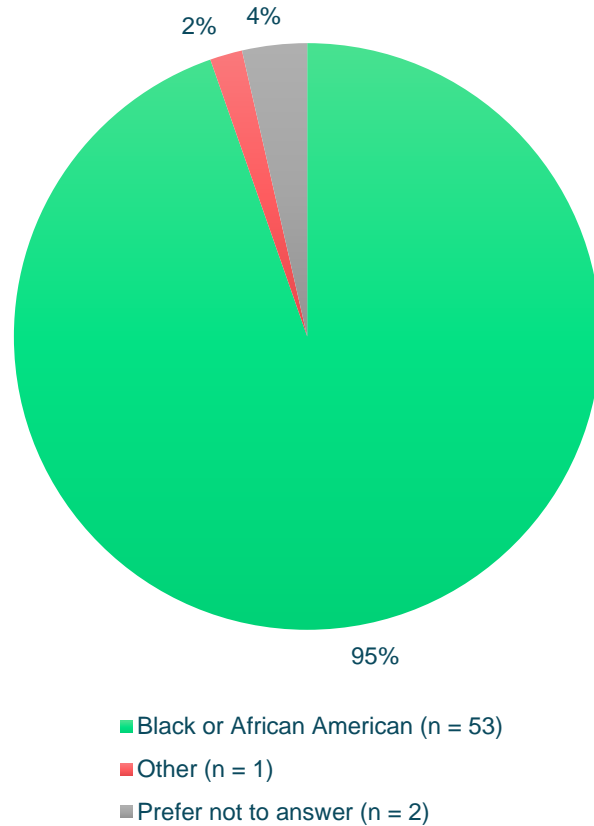
- Online, self-paced course
- Takes approximately 3-4 hours to complete

Course Objectives:

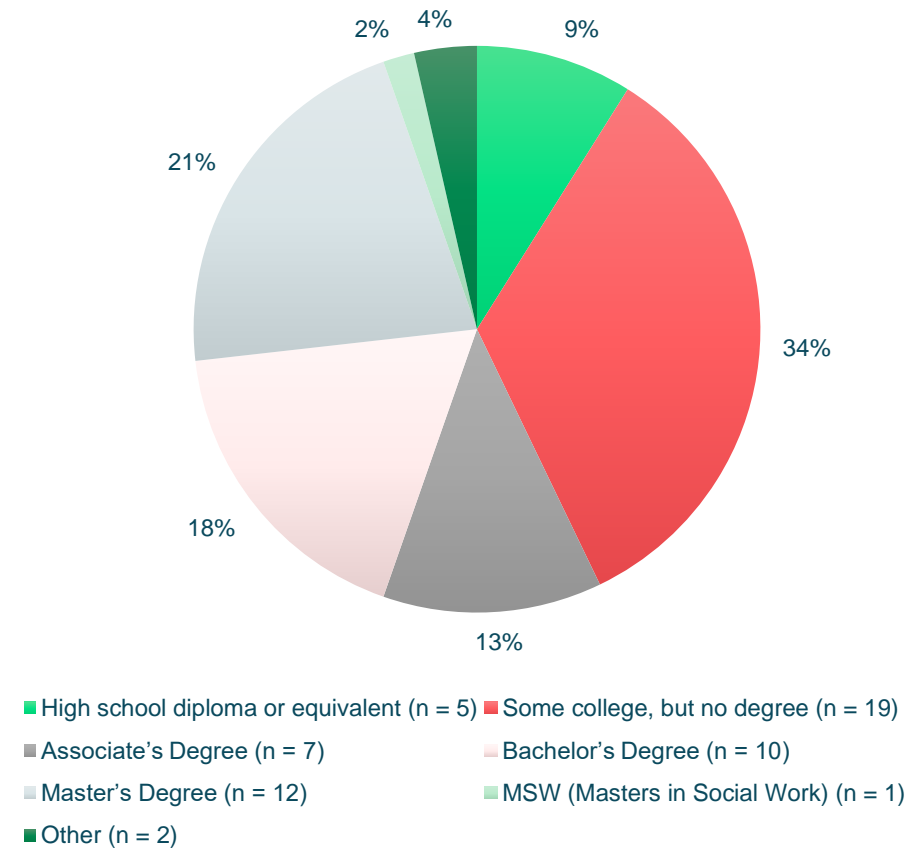
1. Identify the major mental health conditions that affect older adults.
2. Explain why mental health concerns among older adults are often underdiagnosed and undertreated.
3. Describe the barriers to mental health intervention for older adults.
4. Identify the role of faith leaders and spirituality in coping with mental health concerns.
5. Identify resources and services available for treating mental health conditions in older adults.

Demographics

Learners by Race

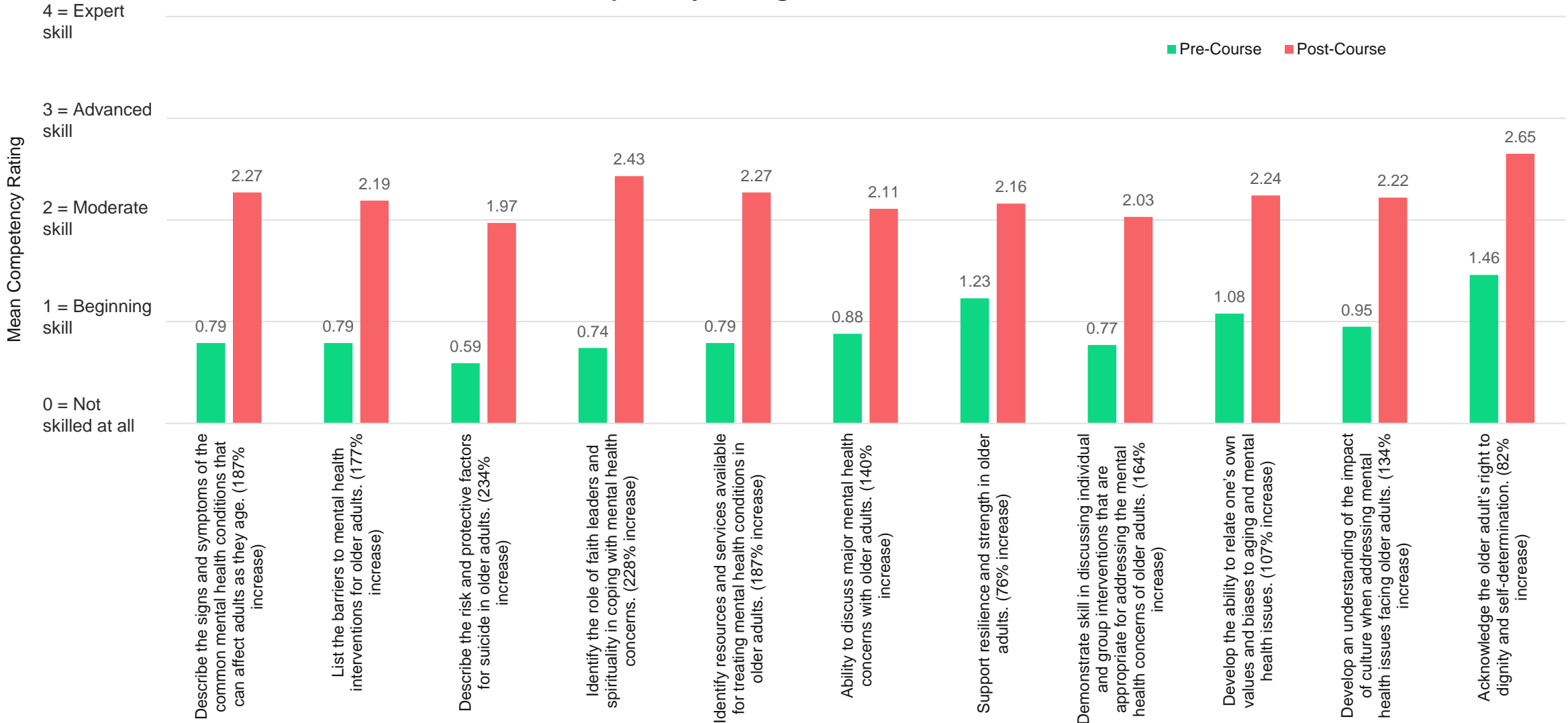


Learners by Education



Competency Results

Mean Competency Ratings Pre-Course and Post-Course





“It provided an awareness to topics that are very important and too often over-looked and not discussed enough.”

“I plan to listen more and be more observant. I also want to be more interactive with the older generation.”

“The changes I see myself making is finding more ways to get involved by having more resources available if necessary and asking if support groups can be formed where I live and go to church services.”

Partnerships Between Senior Centers and Faith Communities

Faith Leader Perspective

97% of faith leaders believe that a partnership between their faith community and a senior center would be beneficial to older congregants.

When asked to list the most important mental health challenges their older congregants face, faith leaders said:

- Memory loss
- Depression
- Social Isolation
- Grief (loss of family and friends)
- Loss of independence and mobility

When asked what services senior centers should provide to support older congregants, faith leaders said:

- Social activities/companionship
- Transportation services
- Recreation and exercise classes
- Wellness workshops
- Food assistance
- Mental health services and supports

Partnerships Between Senior Centers and Faith Communities

Senior Center Perspective

Current Situation

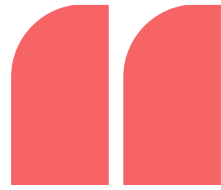


- Few existing partnerships between senior centers and faith communities
- Senior centers are open to these partnerships and to boosting attendance
- Mental health and social isolation are programming priority areas for senior centers

Building Partnerships

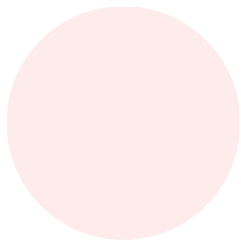


- Boost awareness of the services that senior centers offer
 - Awareness fairs
 - Senior center representatives connecting with faith leaders
- Leading by example: faith leaders should attend senior center programming



Does your senior center partner with faith communities?

How can you establish these partnerships and boost awareness of the services that your senior center offers?



Conclusion



- Faith leaders who completed the *Mental Health and Aging for Faith Leaders* course gained essential knowledge and skills
- This training will benefit older congregants facing mental health challenges who often look towards their faith communities for support
- Faith communities and senior centers are open to partnerships
 - More effort is needed to build these partnerships and to increase awareness of the services that senior centers offer

Contact

Bronwyn Keefe, MSW, MPH, Ph.D.

bronwyn@bu.edu

Funding Acknowledgement:

The *Mental Health and Aging for Faith Leaders* course was developed with funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Annalee Wilson, MPH, CPH

annaleew@bu.edu

Contact CADER

cader@bu.edu

<https://thenetwork.bu.edu/cader/>

References

1. Health Resources and Services Administration. (2024, April 7). Health Workforce Shortage Areas. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>
2. Pew Research Center. (n.d.). Religious Landscape Study: Age Distribution. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/age-distribution/#attendance-at-religious-services>
3. Pickard, J. G. & Fengyan Tang. (2009). Older Adults Seeking Mental Health Counseling in a NORC. *Research on Aging*, 31(6), 638–660. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027509343539>
4. Terlizzi, E. P., & Norris, T. (2021). Mental Health Treatment Among Adults: United States, 2020. *NCHS Data Brief*, 419, 1–8. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db419.pdf>



Like what you heard? Share it!



Tweet using #AgeAction



Rate the session on the mobile app

