



Nursing Research Publications on Older Adults

Older adults account for 60% of all ambulatory visits, 80% of home care visits 48% of all hospital patients, and 85% of all nursing home residents (Rosenfeld, Bottrell, Fulmer, & Mezey, 1999). Older adults consume 25% of all prescription drugs (National Institute on Aging, 1991). There is little published nursing research about older adults in nursing journals. We cite barriers to nursing research publications on older adults and encourage nurse researchers to consider these barriers when constructing and reporting their research.

Federal funding for research influences the number of articles. In 1998, the 'National Institutes of Health (NIH) implemented a new policy requiring that all NIH-supported research must include children (i.e., individuals under the age of 21). Children may be excluded only if there are scientific or ethical reasons for doing so. Yet, there are no such requirements for including older adults. In the absence of regulations, nurse researchers need to voluntarily include older adults in their studies.

Some researchers hold a bias that findings about all adults apply equally well to older adults. This bias serves to limit research on older adults. Data supports that older adults are different. They have more comorbidities, respond differently to anesthetics and pharmaceuticals, and require different nursing and other interventions. More older adults than the general population have altered decision-making capacity that affects consent for participation in research and for treatment. Thus, evaluating the impact of a research protocol on older adults as distinct from younger adults is critical.

Other researchers acknowledge differences between younger and older adults and then cite these differences as a rationale for excluding older adults from studies. Older adults are seen as confounding research findings. The following precursor has become all too familiar: "Those patients 65 and over were excluded from the sample because there is some evidence age may impact on..." When older adults are barred from participation, researchers exclude an important population that may be likely to benefit from the intervention in practice.

In other situations, researchers study older adults exclusively and then inappropriately report these findings as generalizable to all adults. For example, the Health Care Financing Administration has an extensive database on all Medicare recipients (a small minority of whom are not older adults). Data on Medicare recipients is valuable to researchers seeking a large nationally representative sample. Conversely, researchers should be cautioned not to generalize findings from such studies to all adults.

Lastly, nurse researchers who study older adults need to publish more of their findings in nursing journals. One reason they may not publish in nursing journals is the numerous opportunities for publication of geriatric nursing research in non-nursing journals. It may be seen as more prestigious in some academic circles to publish in non-nursing journals. Gerontology is interdisciplinary and nurse researchers publish widely in geriatric journals. However, because of the lack of publication

in nursing journals, nurses who read nursing journals may not be aware of the existing nursing research on older adults. Nurse researchers should seek more opportunities to conduct nursing research on clinical issues affecting older adults and publish their findings in nursing journals where nurses can read and use the research in their practice.

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