ABSTRACT
          Although the oldest-old are the fastest growing
segment in the rural population, little is known about their social
and economic needs, their awareness of social programs, or their use
of social services. This study was conducted to assess the social,
economic, and health needs of the oldest-old (over the age of 85
years) as compared to those of the old-old (ages 75-84) and the
young-old (60-74) in rural upstate New York. A proportionate
stratified cluster sample of older adults (N=456) were interviewed.
Factors that might be predictive of program use, such as the
respondent's awareness of the program, involvement or participation
in groups, level of need, years of education, and control over one's
life were examined. Analysis of variance showed that, compared to
younger elderly respondents, the oldest-old respondents had the
greatest social and economic need and were least likely to actually
use programs. These findings have important implications for agencies
at all levels of government responsible for the delivery of services
and programs aimed at the well-being of the aged. (Author/NB)

The Rural Oldest-Old
and Their Program Needs

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Abstract

Although the oldest-old are the fastest growing segment in the rural population, little is known about their social and economic needs, their awareness of social programs or their use of social services. The purpose of this study is to assess the social, economic, and health needs of the oldest-old (over the age 85) as compared to the old-old (75-84) and the young-old (60-74) in rural upstate New York. In identifying the needs of the oldest-old, we look at an array of factors that might predict program usage, such as program awareness, involvement or participation in groups, level of need, years of education, control of his or her life. Analysis of variance shows that the oldest-old have the greatest social and economic need and that they are least likely-as compared to younger elderly-to actually use programs. These findings have important implications for agencies at all levels of government responsible for the delivery of services and programs aimed at the well-being of the aged.

Introduction

Although the oldest-old are the fastest growing segment of the population, few studies of them have been done. Those that have occurred clearly suggest that the oldest-old are a unique population, distinct from those who have recently entered elderly status—the 60 to 70 year olds. The oldest-old have a disproportionate sex ratio—there is a much greater ratio of females to males than with any other age category (Suzman and Riley, 1985). They are considerably more likely to be impoverished and to have lower educational attainment (Suzman and Riley, 1985). Although the young-old have experienced recent gains in income, this is not as apparent among the oldest-old (Moon and Sawhill, 1985). The differentiation among the elderly population has become so marked that it is no longer wise to treat everyone over the age of 60 as if they were a single aggregate, as has commonly been done (Suzman and Riley, 1985).

There have been a number of studies which have looked at the array of factors which predict program usage. However, no investigation has examined it from the perspective of the oldest-old. Variables predicting program use by the more general elderly population include program awareness, need level, and being involved in groups. Those with more education were somewhat less likely to use programs. Program use tends to be greater for the elderly who are unmarried, have more sick days, use their car less. Based on current data with regard to the oldest-old, we hypothesize that they will have the least amoung of program awareness and program usage while having the greatest economic and social needs.

Methods

A proportionate stratified cluster sample of older Americans in Allegany County, New York was utilized as the data base for this study. Interviewers were instructed to contact the households sampled from a list provided by the county Office for the Aging; they were then to alternate in selecting male and female respondents. 456 useable interviews were obtained. Of those contactecd and capable of being interviewed, 82 percent responded.

Findings

One way analysis of variance shows clearly that the oldest-old have the greatest extent of need when compared with their less old counterparts. The data also make it clear that the oldest-old are least aware of programs and use them the least of any among the elderly–despite their greater needs. The oldest-old are also the least educated, the least involved in groups, and have the lowest sense of control over their lives. Basic findings emerging from mutiple classification analysis about program awareness and use are as follows:

1. Those least aware of programs are the oldest-old, those without group ties, and those with a low level of education. Ironically, those with the most need are least aware of programs.

2. Those who use programs the most include those 75 to 84 years old, those with a number of group memberships, those with more need, those who are most aware of programs, and those with the least education.

While those who have needs are most-likely to use programs, they are also among those who have the least awareness of programs to begin with. Since awareness is an important factor leading to program utilization, this seems to filter out many who have real needs.

Discussion

Looking at the findings somewhat differently, the frail elderly with the greatest needs are not being reached effectively. Since awareness of programs is one important factor leading to actual program utilization, the process of disengagement associated with greater age seems to screen out many with real needs. Key policy implications seem to follow from our analysis. First, citizens' awareness of programs' existence must be raised–especially among the oldest-old and those with greater needs. Also, we found that those involved in groups are more aware of programs and use them more frequently. This suggests that efforts to get more of the "at-risk" population involved in groups might be profitable.

This set of tactics could produce a better correspondence between the oldest-old and programs to meet their needs. As we have seen, the oldest-old have the most needs. the least group involvement, the lowest sense of control over their lives, the least education. Consequently, they are also least aware of programs and use programs the least. Since one of the groups specified for targeting by area agencies on aging is the oldest-old, our suggestons are aimed at an important issue.

References

Moon, M. & Sawhill, I.V. (1983). Family incomes: Gainers and losers.
In: J.C. Palmer and I.V. Sawhill (eds.), The Reagan Record.
Cambridge: Ballinger.

Suzman, R. & Riley, M.W. (1935). Introducing the 'oldest-old' Millbank
Memorial Fund Quarterly, 63, 177-186.

Table 1. Older Citizens and Programs, N=456.

	Awareness		Use		Satisfaction	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Office for the Aging nutrition program	381	84%	60	13%	53	88%
Mobile meals	412	90	24	5	15	63
Friendly Visitors	201	44	4	1	3	75
Telephone Reassurance	207	45	5	1	3	60
Household Assistant	304	67	17	4	15	88
Homemaker	310	68	11	2	8	73
Home Health Aides	287	63	16	4	14	88
Public Health Nurses	404	89	39	9	34	87
Houghton Van	130	29	10	2	10	100
Community Express	207	45	16	4	14	88
Housing Action Corp.	198	43	22	5	16	73
Green Thumb	329	72	16	4	12	75
Legal Services	256	56	4	1	4	100
Hope and Cope	28	6	0	0	--	--
Medical Transportation	285	63	11	2	10	91
Elderhostel	117	26	3	1	3	100
Tax Assistance	281	62	21	5	20	95
Dollar Stretcher	301	66	115	25	101	88
Cooking Classes	191	42	2	0	2	100
Employment Program	223	49	1	0	--	--
Share-A-House	253	56	2	0	2	100
Cheese Distribution	419	92	230	50	220	96
Senior Citizens Club	408	90	141	31	132	94
Blind Association	315	69	10	2	9	90
American Cancer Society	428	94	52	11	45	87
Human Service Satellite	90	20	0	0	--	--
Information/Referral	154	34	14	3	12	86
Recreation	244	54	18	4	15	83

Table 2. Oneway Analysis of Variance: Life Conditions
By Age, N=456.

	Mean				1-tail
	60-74	75-84	85+	F	P
Education	11.6	10.8	10.3	5.9	.002
Mobility	2.7	2.6	2.3	6.3	.001
Group memberships	1.9	2.0	1.6	3.2	.023
Bradburn Index of Positive Affect	3.2	2.9	2.3	8.8	.000
Bradburn Index of Negative Affect	1.3	1.2	1.4	0.7	.242
Life Satisfaction*	0.7	0.9	0.8	2.7	.036
Number of physical infirmities	0.2	0.5	1.3	49.7	.000
Poor nutrition	0.2	0.2	0.5	2.2	.057
Number of personal disabilities	0.9	1.6	3.5	34.8	.000
Income**	17.9	14.6	12.2	5.1	.004
Memory problems***	1.5	1.4	1.3	2.9	.027
Need level	1.4	1.5	2.5	2.2	.057
Internal locus of control	5.5	4.8	4.0	14.4	.000
Number of programs aware of	17.5	15.9	10.0	31.4	.000
Number of programs used	1.8	2.2	1.6	2.7	.035

*   The higher the score, the lower the satisfaction

**   17.9=$8000 per year; 14.6=$7200 per year; 12.2=$5300 per year

*** The lower the score, the more the memory problems

Grand Mean=16.18

Variable	Category	N	Unadjusted Deviation	Eta	Adjusted Deviation	Beta	1-tail P
Age	60-74	255	1.29		0.99		
	75-84	145	-0.14		0.02		
	85+	50	-6.16	0.35	-5.13	0.29	.000
Group Memberships	0 or 1	159	-2.63		-1.82		
	2	137	0.70		0.64		
	3	154	2.09	0.31	1.31	0.21	.000
Education	0-8 years	68	-3.85		-2.36		
	Some High School	141	-1.31		-1.05		
	High School Diploma	101	0.60		0.33		
	Post High School	140	2.75	0.35	1.97	0.24	.000
Need level*	0 Needs	125	1.86		0.36		
	1 Need	113	0.31		-0.13		
	2 Needs	88	-0.42		0.31		
	3 Needs or more	124	-1.85	0.22	-0.47	0.05	.337
Internal Locus of control	Low	160	-1.48		-0.50		
	Medium	171	-0.05		0.02		
	High	119	2.07	0.21	0.65	0.07	.156

Multiple R   .526
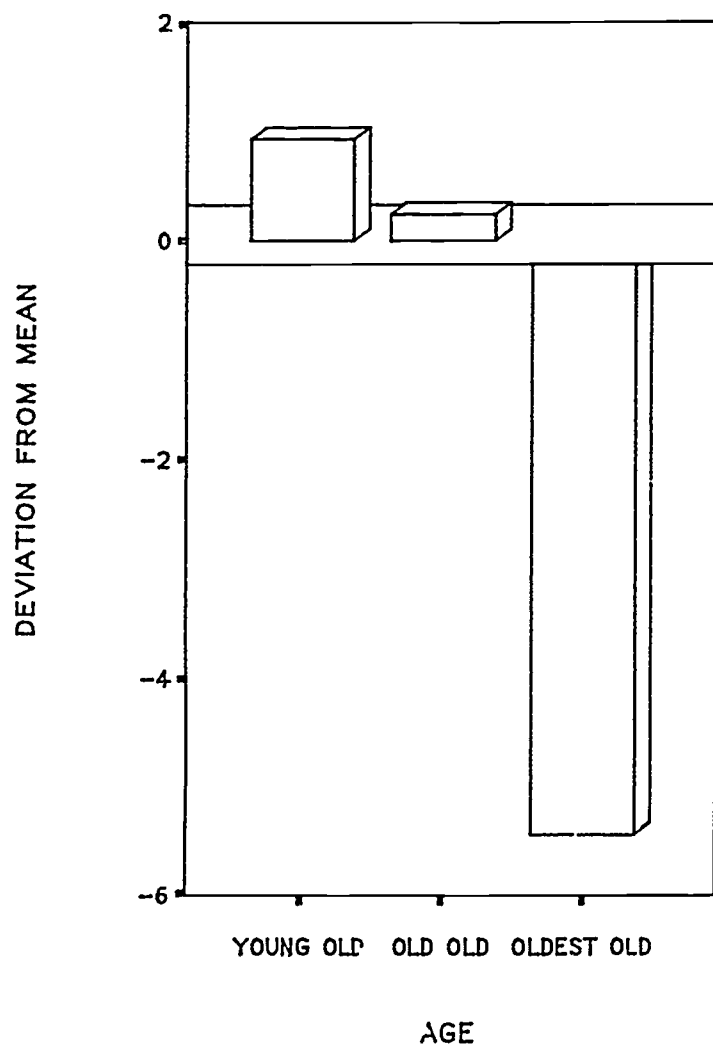Multiple R^2 .277

* The categories indicate how many areas of need (nutrition, loneliness, activities of daily life, health, transportation, social activities, legal, finances, housing) a person reports having.

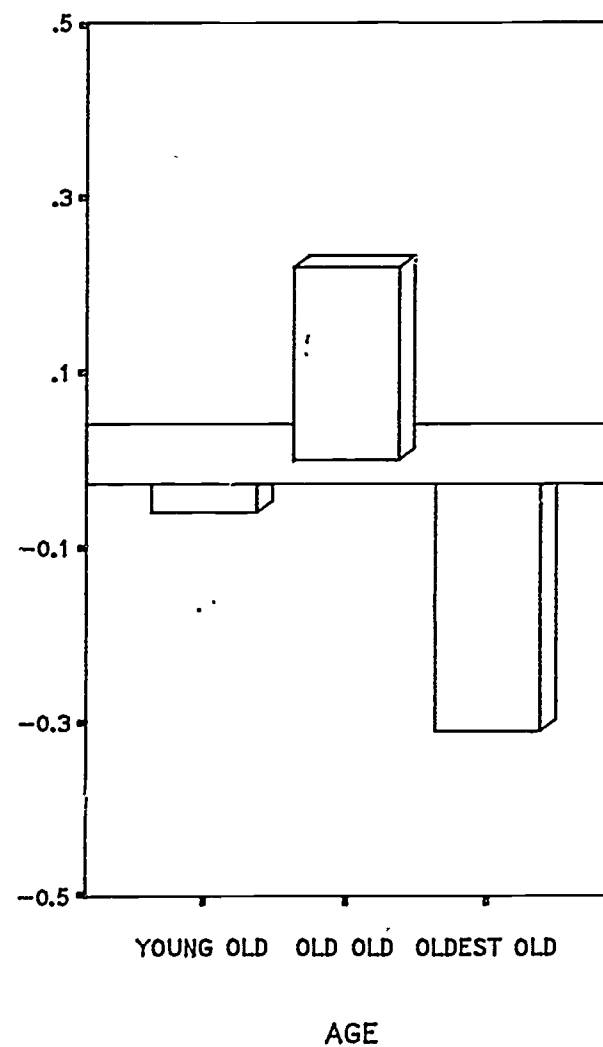## Table 4. Multiple Classification Analysis: Predicting Program Usage, N=450.

Grand Mean=1.90

Variable	Category	N	Unadjusted Deviation	Eta	Adjusted Deviation	Beta	1-tail P
Age	60-74	255	-0.11		-0.06		
	75-84	145	0.30		0.22		
	85+	50	-0.28	0.12	-0.31	0.09	.061
Group Memberships	0 or 1	159	-0.53		-0.56		
	2	137	0.16		-0.25		
	3	154	0.70	0.29	0.80	0.32	.000
Education	0-8 years	68	0.07	:	0.24		
	Some High School	141	0.13		0.18		
	High School Diploma	101	-0.17		-0.08		
	Post High School	140	-0.05	0.06	-0.24	0.11	.091
Number of programs aware of	0-13	142	-0.36		-0.37		
	14-19	154	0.13		0.10		
	20 +	154	0.20	0.13	0.24	0.14	.008
Need level	0 Needs	125	-0.37		-0.52		
	1 Need	113	-0.31		-0.36		
	2 Needs	88	0.14		0.21		
	3 Needs or more	124	0.55	0.21	0.71	0.28	.000
Internal Locus of control	Low	160	0.09		0.02		
	Medium	171	0.01		-0.01		
	High	119	-0.13	0.05	0.00	0.01	.493

Multiple R $\quad$ .430
Multiple R^2 $\quad$ .185

PROGRAM AWARENESS

PROGRAM USAGE

DEVIATION FROM MEAN

YOUNG OLD   OLD OLD   OLDEST OLD

AGE

YOUNG OLD   OLD OLD   OLDEST OLD

AGE

FIGURES ARE ADJUSTED FOR: GROUP MEMBERSHIP, EDUCATION, NEED LEVEL,
NUMBER OF PROGRAMS AWARE OF, INTERNAL LOCUS OF CONTROL

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