

RESEARCH BRIEF

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Caregiving Essentials Course for Informal Caregivers of Older Adults in Ontario and its Online Delivery

What is the topic of this research?

- Informal caregiving is a growing phenomenon
- Many individuals are **unequipped with the necessary knowledge** and skills needed to manage the demands of caregiving
- Informal caregivers often have limited time due to their responsibilities, which are combined with paid work and/or parenting young dependents
- This population often experiences **high levels of burden** and are vulnerable to developing negative psychological health outcomes
- **Effective, easily accessible and flexible knowledge interventions** are needed for this group

Research Question

The goal of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the online *Caregiving Essentials* course, which was offered as a pilot in both the Fall of 2018 and the Winter of 2019. The objectives of the course are to increase the following in terms of the caregiver experience:

- 1) Knowledge, ability, skills, confidence, and self-efficacy in caregiving
- 2) Self-reported sense of personal well-being
- 3) Perceptions of health and well-being of older adults in their care
- 4) Understanding and access of the health and social service system

The evaluation study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the course based on whether these four main objectives were met, and to what extent. Additionally, the study explored the ways in which the online delivery of the course contributed to its overall effectiveness, and specifically, whether aspects of the web-based modality enhanced or hindered participants' learning experience.

How was the study done?

- The total number of participants who filled out the **pre-course survey** was 111 and the total number of people who filled out the **post-course survey** was 39
- A total of 26 telephone **interviews** were conducted with participants from both the Fall 2018 and the Winter 2019 course offerings
- Six key stakeholders of the project were also interviewed via telephone to collect data on their insights regarding the online delivery of the course
- A **virtual focus group** was also conducted with a group of five nursing students from a Northern Ontario college to gather feedback regarding their in-course experience as discussion board moderators and technical support providers

Key Research Findings

- The **objectives #1 and #4** were met by most of the participants (increased knowledge, confidence, understanding and access)



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Key Research Findings Continued...

- **Objectives #2 and #3** were met by fewer participants because external factors outside of the course had a stronger influence on health and well-being
- Since most participants reported positive course feedback, *Caregiving Essentials* was determined to be effective
- The **online delivery enabled greater accessibility** for participants by allowing them to work through the modules at their own pace, wherever and whenever
- The discussion boards were identified as a major strength because of the opportunity for social interaction and the sense of community
- Barriers to participation were noted and some improvements to the course were suggested
- Most participants agreed that the **online delivery enhanced their learning experience** and contributed to the overall effectiveness of the course

Where do we go from here?

- Participant feedback have been extremely valuable in making enhancements to the course
- Several of the recommendations on potential ways to improve the course and its online delivery have been applied to the newer course offerings of *Caregiving Essentials*

- More interactive features have been added to the course, such as videos that showcase real caregivers' stories and an optional virtual book club for "The Unexpected Journey of Caregiving" by Donna Thompson and Zachary White
- The hope is that these new changes will provide informal caregivers with a more engaging learning experience so that they can gain the information and support that they need
- The findings from this evaluation may also inform other research interventions for informal caregivers with similar objectives
- This work may provide contributions to policy decisions surrounding informal caregiving in Ontario, Canada

Who are the researchers?

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For more information about the course:

<https://www.mcmastercce.ca/caregiving-essentials>