

Shelley Rottenberg's Thesis Abstract

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

Informal caregiving is a growing phenomenon, but many family members and friends fall into the role unequipped with the necessary knowledge and skills. Informal caregivers often experience high levels of burden and are vulnerable to developing negative health outcomes. Effective and easily accessible interventions are needed for this group. This research evaluates the effectiveness of the Caregiving Essentials pilot course offerings and their online delivery. 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 health and well-being, 3) Perceptions of health and well-being of older adults in their care, and 4) Understanding and access of the health and social service system. The evaluation study determines whether these four objectives were met, and to what extent. Additionally, the research explores the ways in which the online delivery of the course contributes to its overall effectiveness, and specifically, whether aspects of the web-based modality enhance or hinder participants' learning experience. The methodology includes pre/post-course surveys (n=111/n=39), participant interviews (n=26), stakeholder interviews (n=6), and a focus group (n=5). Caregiving Essentials met many of the proposed research objectives. Increasing knowledge, understanding, and confidence was a stronger outcome than increasing the health and well-being of the caregivers and their care recipients. Overall, most of the participants reported positive experiences with the course, including a perceived positive future impact. Furthermore, the online delivery of the course enabled greater accessibility for participants and the discussion boards provided the opportunity for social interaction and a sense of community. The findings from this evaluation have been applied to future course offerings and may also inform other interventions for informal caregivers with similar objectives. In addition, this work provides contributions to policy decisions surrounding informal caregiving in Ontario, Canada.