

## SESSION 760 (SYMPOSIUM)

### ESPO/ BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES SYMPOSIUM: THE UNDERSTUDIED CONTRIBUTIONS OF OLDER ADULTS

Chair: J.E. Stokes, *Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois*  
Discussant: D.C. Carr, *Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida*

The purpose of this symposium is twofold: (1) To present innovative research on the contributions that older adults make to society, and (2) To highlight new and emerging scholars in the Behavioral and Social Sciences (BSS) section of GSA. Three of the papers comprising this symposium concern volunteering. Han, Kim, and Burr use daily diary data to investigate whether volunteering buffers against physiological responses to daily stressors. Roman uses long-term longitudinal data to examine whether volunteering behaviors improve adults' psychological well-being, and whether this effect is mediated by adults' generativity and sense of purpose. Yang, in contrast, offers a trend analysis concerning the overall decline of volunteering among older adults, and finds variation in these trends by race and ethnicity. In the fourth paper, Shi explores a different aspect of older adults' contributions to society, examining ways in which having – and sharing – wisdom may improve older adults' life satisfaction. Taken together, these four papers underscore the value of volunteering and sharing wisdom in later life, including benefits for older adults themselves. This symposium also raises intriguing questions about the future of later life volunteering. As discussant, Carr will assess the various strengths and limitations of these papers, and consider the contributions these studies – and new scholars – can make to the field, to theory, and to future research on the contributions of older adults.

### STRESS-BUFFERING EFFECTS OF VOLUNTEERING ON SALIVARY CORTISOL: RESULTS FROM A DAILY DIARY STUDY

S. Han<sup>1</sup>, K. Kim, PhD<sup>2</sup>, J.A. Burr, PhD<sup>3</sup>, 1. *University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, United States*, 2. *University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA*, 3. *University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA, USA*

Based on the theoretical foundations of the caregiving system model, which holds that prosocial behavior can be conceptualized in relation to a neurobiological stress-buffering mechanism, we addressed the question of whether daily volunteering yields buffering effects in terms of suppressing a neuroendocrine response to daily stressors. Using daily diary data from the Midlife in the United States II study, we analyzed a sample of middle-aged and older volunteers (N=340) to test the buffering role of daily volunteer work for the same day stressors-salivary cortisol response relationship. Findings indicated that the relationship between daily stressors and cortisol output was attenuated on days when respondents volunteered compared to days when they did not volunteer. Our findings are suggestive of a unique neurobiological mechanism underlying the link between volunteering and better health. Volunteer programs designed to help others in need may be considered as an intervention strategy for individuals living under stressful conditions.

### CONNECTING VOLUNTEERING TO PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING THROUGH PERCEIVED GENERATIVITY

C. Roman, *Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, United States*

Volunteerism in later life has been viewed as a health promotion activity, with well-being benefits for both volunteers and those they serve. As evidence of the salubrious effects of such generative activity has accumulated, attention is increasingly directed to the mechanisms through which giving benefits the giver. One hypothesized mechanism is the enhanced self-perceptions of generativity which flow from contributory behavior. This potential pathway was investigated in a sample of adults initially age 25–74 from the national Study of Midlife in the U.S. Compared to never volunteers, psychological well-being was greater for those who volunteered for one (B=.86\*\*), two (B=1.10\*\*\*), and three (B=1.87\*\*\*) study waves over a 20-year period. Mediation analyses suggest that the greater well-being in those who volunteer more over time partially occurs through more positive self-perceptions of generativity. Giving may benefit the giver by enhancing perceptions of oneself as an important contributor in the lives of others.

### THE CONTINUOUS DECLINING OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: A TREND ANALYSIS OF FORMAL VOLUNTEERING AMONG OLDER AMERICANS

J. Yang<sup>1</sup>, K. Wang, PhD<sup>2</sup>, 1. *Boston College, Allston, Massachusetts, United States*, 2. *Texas State University, San Marcos, TX, USA*

Previous research on volunteering from 1974–2015 demonstrated that the volunteering rate among older Americans aged 65+ slightly dropped from 2005 to 2015. However, no clear trend was identified using each year's data in between. Following the procedure identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we adopted a regression-based trend analysis to examine the trend of volunteering among older Americans. Using the Current Population Survey data from 2008–2015, we identified a decreasing trend of volunteering among older Americans with fluctuations. Changes of volunteer rates vary by race and ethnicity. Volunteer rate among non-Hispanic Whites was in line with the whole sample's trend. Volunteer rate among non-Hispanic Blacks was declining. Volunteer rates among non-Hispanic Asians and Hispanics did not show obvious patterns of change overtime. This result is partially in line with the proposition of the continuous declining of social capital. Implications for enhancing volunteering among older adults is discussed.

### THE PATHWAYS OF WISDOM TOWARDS LATER LIFE SATISFACTION

W. Shi, *University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, United States*

The pathways of wise people toward satisfaction in later life are still unclear and need to be further explored. The study conducted an extreme case analysis and utilized an unpublished dataset, the Wisdom and Creativity Study, to unfold the potential pathways by comparing and contrasting wisdom nominees with the greatest and the