

Episode 105 - Dr. David Hodge and Dr. Fei Sun: Positive Aspects of Caregiving Among Alzheimer's Family Caregivers: The Roles of Ethnicity and Spirituality

[00:00:08] Welcome to living proof a podcast series of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. We're glad you could join us today. The series Living Proof examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Peter Sobota. Thanks for downloading more than 300000 of our podcasts. We'd love it if you took a minute to tell us what you like or don't like about them and what you'd like to see us do next. If you're an educator and you are using our podcasts in your courses please let us know how. I know some of you are as I've seen them on course syllabi. So let us know. Go to our Web site at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu forward slash podcast and click the Contact Us button. We'd be thrilled to hear from me. This is Adjoa Robinson and this is my last podcast as host for four years. I've been a part of a dedicated team that's brought to our listeners over 90 interviews and lectures with scholars making an impact in social work by promoting research to practice and practice to research. It's been stimulating and fun listening along with you about such diverse topics as aging trauma evidence based practice supervision and social welfare to name a few. So thank you and good bye for now. I leave you in good hands. Keep listening. I know I will. Alzheimer's is a disease that affects about 5 million Americans. That number is expected to grow as the population ages.

[00:02:02] Caring for a person with Alzheimer's can be challenging. Memory loss language problems and unpredictable behavior can affect family caregivers emotionally physically and financially. The stress of caregiving can often result in illness and premature death among caregivers. Less known are the positive aspects to caregiving. Some may even attenuate the effect of the negative consequences of caregiving. Today's guests discuss their research on spirituality and the positive aspects of caregiving among Latinos who are at increased risk for Alzheimer's disease. Dr. David Hodge is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. He is also a senior non-resident fellow with both the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University and the Program for Research on religion and urban civil society at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Hodge is known for his work on spirituality and religion. Dr. Fei Sun is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Arizona State University. Dr. Sun's research interests include mental health and ageing dementia family caregiving and Chinese American older adults. In this podcast Dr. Sun and Dr. Hodge discuss their study of the positive aspects of caregiving among Latino family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease and spirituality as a coping mechanism for the stresses of caregiving. Dr. Deborah Waldrop Professor and Associate Dean for Faculty Development at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work spoke with Dr. Hodge and Dr. Sun by telephone. This is Deborah Waldrop from the UB School of Social Work and it's my pleasure today to have the opportunity to interview Dr. David Hodge and Dr. Fei Sun from the Arizona State University School of Social Work.

[00:04:14] Thank you so much to each and both of you for being willing to participate in today's podcast. We're really looking forward to learning from your research. Like to start by asking Dr. Hodge to begin by telling us about your current research project. Well basically in a nutshell what we wanted to do was better understand the relationship between spirituality and pack for positive aspects of caregiving. We're just going to use the abbreviation pack amongst Latino family caregivers. So there has been relatively little research on this topic and almost none the focus is the level of detail found that caregivers really want to better understand what are or what should shift between spirituality and pack amongst us particularly vulnerable groups. OK Dr. Sun would you be willing to share a little bit about your current project. Well pretty much as Dr. Hodge has stated in your study the role of spirituality influencing positive feelings of caregiving among Latino family caregivers particularly highlighted two crucial aspects spirituality and the positive feelings of

caregiving in the specific cultural group. So that makes the study and might differ from other studies in this area. It's really very interesting. I think we know so little about caregiving among different subsets of the population that it's really cutting edge work to beginning to look at some of the subgroups. So I think that's really helpful. I'm wondering if Dr. Sun could start by just giving us a little bit of an idea of why it's important for practitioners researchers and policymakers to understand this issue. There are a number of reasons that made this topic crucial players seem to service delivery system. Number one increasing the elder Latino population. This country ingests less than 70 years.

[00:05:56] By 2019 Latinos will be the largest minority group the O'Dowd's. By the middle of the century which means by 2050 Latinos will comprise about 20 percent of all adults over age 60. Number two that increase risks for the teens to develop Alzheimer's disease relatively to non Hispanic whites Latinos about one point five times as likely to have all of them as disease. In addition to age of all time STDs symptom onset appears to occur early. For Latino groups and Alaska not the least breathing the heightened challenges for Latino family caregivers Latino family caregivers are more likely to report annual income of less than 50000 compared to azo Kodjo groups. Also as Latinos with no damage may live longer. As cultural groups after their diagnosis. So Latino family caregivers have extended time period to provide in-home care for this group. Not to mention Latinos may delay institutionalization of their loved ones among Gaudin Cudjoe groups. Those numbers are staggering and it just really underscores why this is such a vulnerable and needy population for this kind of work Dr. Hodge I'm wondering if you could address spirituality as a resource for coping in this situation. Yes there's a lot of general research that suggests that there's reality is particularly helpful in terms of helping individuals cope with stressful situations. And we know that caring for a relative with Alzheimer's is stressful. And so knowing spirituality is helpful. Get help practitioners provide better services to family members because then they could take into account spirituality and constructive interventions that might be better suited to do it engender or help cause Karl's help caregivers get the most out of the caregiving situation.

[00:07:50] Absolutely I think assessing all parts of the ways people cope especially looking at spirituality is a really important piece of the assessment process for practitioners. I'm wondering. People often ask researchers are often curious about what sparked your interest in any particular topic that we study. I'm wondering Dr. Hodge if you can share with us a little bit about what really did spark your interest in this research topic. Yes spirituality amongst Latinos and African-Americans the elderly and other disenfranchised populations tend to be higher than what you find in the general population. And so in theory there would be a relationship perhaps between spirituality and coping with the stress of caring for relatives with Alzheimer's disease. So we thought this would be a particularly important area to address the monks Latino population. Tucker Stein has suggested the larger population of Latino family caregivers is projected to increase substantially since people have not looked at this particular topic before we thought this would be a good topic to explore. I totally agree. I'm wondering what sparked your interest in this Dr. Sun. Joan Tomczyk social scholar grew up in China a different show. I'm always interesting stunning and it came in diverse cultural groups. And particularly as all of them were the most prevalent mental illness affecting millions of older adults around the world. I'm interested to identify the strands and can give us some specific cultural groups and develop interventions on these strands to help the specific cause of group caregivers.

[00:09:23] I think that you bring such a really interesting international perspective to this problem that as you've said is really growing into an epidemic proportion Dr. Hodge I'm wondering if you could address what the research questions are in their study or more specifically we want to look at the relationship between spirituality and pack or positive aspects of caregiving. And we want to know if spirituality has a direct effect on Pak or whether it is sort of mediates the stress and some people hypothesize that spirituality may have a direct effect. And so of words people bring spiritual

resources to any situation in life and that includes caring for a relative with Alzheimer's disease. The other possibility was that there may mediate the stress. And so in other words people have encountered stressful situations such as caring for a relative with Alzheimer's that activates spiritual resources that allows them to marshal spiritual resources and coping abilities that they then apply to the situation and that produces higher levels of pack. So we want to explore those two theoretical options based on your previous literature. We thought that there would probably be a relationship between spirituality and a higher level of spirituality and higher levels of pack or positive aspects of caregiving. And we thought that it probably worked through one of those two mechanisms mediating or direct effects. And so our study sought to answer your question. Thank you very much. Dr. Stan I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that theoretical framework that informed your inquiry. We actually use the purling stress process Monteux to conceptualize relationship between two variables to study in PUCA. Tests later suggest potens model fits the Kalgan experience across racial and ethnic groups.

[00:11:10] Simply put it to these moderates suggest the objectivity is subjective stresses affect people's perception of caregiving outcomes projective stress typically include the needs and demands of the care Tippins such as physical disabilities Kokanee to have deficits and the subjective stresses of the first two distress perceived by the caregivers such as the perceived caregiving burden. In addition to the influence of stressors caregiver outcomes are also influenced by mediators such as caregiver resources. In this case we highlight the role of spirituality in the same time also come to commonly mediate social support. That's really helpful it sounds like this model is really going to bring depth to our understanding of this process. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about where the data came from and where you got your sample. After some two test hypotheses though to answer the least those questions we can get second in data analysis using that baseline data from that resource for enhancing all of them can give us house to study so it reaches that age. One of the few multisided KONIEC with ties that implement and evaluate magic components psychosocial interventions with caregivers from different cultural and racial backgrounds and Latino participants was selected from the dataset and they come from three sites many Palo Alto California Philadelphia and Miami Florida. Great thank you for that Dr. Hodge. Could you tell us a little bit about your major findings. Are they different in any way from what you were hoping to discover. Our findings were consistent with what we expected in terms of there was a positive relationship between higher levels of spirituality higher levels of practice. So we were a little bit surprised to voters that there was a very small mediation effect. And so you were a little bit surprised.

[00:13:05] We thought that perhaps there would be a stronger mediation aspect. In other words we thought that the stress of coping might activate spiritual resources in a more dramatic fashion. There was a small mediation effect but not a large one. The most positive relationship was appeared to be a direct effect. In other words that spirituality was that a positive resource that people brought to the coping situation and that that positive resource would be available. If you are caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease or if you are in Calgary and others possible situation. It's also significant that our model as Dr. Sun just described control for social support. And so these direct effects incorporates any sort of effect that people would obtain through their social support networks. So spirituality was Exhibit A positive effect on pack over and above the effects that would be engendered or caused by having strong good social support networks. But with that was pretty interesting as well. It really is so interesting. I just think it it just informs us about how people make meaning of these kinds of experiences in their lives that can be seen as so terrible. But their spirituality and lot of social support really helps I guess reframe that for people. I'm wondering Dr. Houge if you could talk a little bit about some of the practical implications that we can draw from these findings in particular is there anything that social workers can apply in their field practice with this population. Yes definitely.

[00:14:33] So what this research suggests is that for at least some of our Latino clients and I think it's fair to extrapolate on that is that spirituality is often very helpful in terms of as you suggested helping people construct meaning and meaning that can be helpful meaning that can carry people through the challenges and the difficulties that they experience in caring for a relative with Alzheimer's. And so it would be helpful in most situations to conduct a spiritual assessment just to take the crap out or better understand what the spiritual resources are in play for caregivers. Now this is not to say that every single caregiver or every single caregiver is going to have spiritual resources. Some people don't. But for some the people that do it's often extremely helpful and helping them cope with the difficult situation. If practitioners can do a spiritual assessment to understand what those resources are and they're better situated to provide services to their client I completely agree with you. I think that's such an important part of our assessment in the field especially with caregivers is really assessing all the strengths and all the resources they have available. How about you Dr. Sun. I'm wondering what you'd like to add if there's anything you'd like to add about the practical implications of these findings from your perspective. Well pretty much as Dr. Hodge has said so I just want to add that findings of this study suggests practitioners can develop culturally specific strains based interventions for family caregivers for the Latino cultural group rather than handing down them knowledge from experts from other cultural groups. We expect to your knowledge from the caregivers themselves and to create interventions modules that can help with this particular group by identifying particular strands in this particular group. Absolutely.

[00:16:22] I totally hear what you're saying about going from the ground up speaking to the people who are living and to really learn what best would be the practical application. Thank you for that. Dr. Hodge I'm wondering if you could address what some of the policy implications are. I think in general and then perhaps for social workers in this field as well. Ideally what I would like to see is policies that actually require or mandate practitioners including Fourche work practitioners to conduct spiritual assessments. Again this is just that spirituality is relevant variables in every client's life. But for many people in particular most Filipinos African-Americans the elderly spirituality is often a very relevant factor. And so if it was required then that would help people conduct assessments. Otherwise if there's no policy there then people are busy have lots of things they've got to accomplish and so sometimes doing a spiritual assessment just kind of falls through the cracks. And so if it was a requirement that would be helpful also if our educational system too would have pulled out more content to cures Rowdy's spiritual diversity. I think that would be helpful as well. If practitioners have some sort of a working framework of different expressions of spirituality that can help them conduct spiritual sustenance maybe they can suggest possible resources to clients and clients can go oh yeah that's right. Like right I should be doing her that would be helpful to talk to my mom or pastor or priest or rabbi. Absolutely I think without the politics it goes by the wayside and that way you raise it to a level of expectation and raise people's awareness of spirituality as a really important factor.

[00:17:58] That's really helpful to hear about your doctors than any other policy implications that you'd like to and I would like to speak from a more broad level like from the federal policy level and that seems to 2000 the National Center caregiver support program under the old America Act has been providing essential services for family caregivers including dementia family caregivers the kinds of services provided under that Act including tax social educational service psychotherapy counseling service and supportive groups. I just recommend two service programs can be turned over to the needs of Latino groups and not. I went to minging last to you. President Obama signed a national Ramblas project launching a national fight against damage. Longo that initiated to provide access to all of them with severe inflammation to support caregivers to actually around the new website called www.alzheimers.gov which is the gateway to provide a reliable and comprehensive information that the caregivers can't access in terms of federal state and local resources for Alzheimer's related services. When I checked the Web site doesn't seem to support any mature

language like pamphlets or brochures on their website. So I would recommend like that could be included in these changes provided language information. That's really interesting again bringing the national perspective. Is just such a need for awareness of what people need to cope with and manage caregiving Alzheimer's disease yet those are all really good suggestions. So I think it's always an interesting question to ask what's next. I'm wondering if you could just share with us what your future research plans are Dr Hodge. Yes certainly.

[00:19:41] But as Dr. Sun alluded to earlier in our conversation the number of Alzheimer's caregivers is projected to increase dramatically over the next couple of decades and most of that increase is going to come from minority populations Latinos and African-Americans in particular. So what we're interested in doing is taking a look at this relationship between spirituality and pack and see this relationship very offer three different groups but Latinos African-American and European Americans. Is there a difference in how spirituality functions and worship impact across these three groups. That's our next immediate project and that's really interesting. I'm looking forward to hearing the results of that one. My hunch is that you will find differences across these groups and that will be so informative to the world of gerontologists and health care practitioners. So good luck with that. How about your doctor and other thoughts about future research plans. Pretty much as Dr. Hodge just mentioned we are looking at pack across three ethnic groups and by highlighting the issue of spirituality. I had another separate progenitor come hard to John in these eyes conduct a study on Chinese American dementia caregivers. They expanded it to look at how spirituality and impact in Chinese American dementia caregivers continues footy's project. That's really interesting. So you're going to be having a real view on spirituality across the board a number of different ethnic and cultural groups and that will be really again it's really very informative I think to the growing knowledge about this. This has really been wonderful I really appreciate the chance to learn from you. Thanks so much to both of you. I look forward to talking with you soon. OK thank you.

[00:21:20] Thanks again you've been listening to Dr. David Hodge and Fei Sun discuss their research on spirituality and the positive aspects of caregiving among Latino family caregivers. Thanks for listening and join us again next time for more lectures and conversations on social work practice and research. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean at the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. For more information about who we are our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our website at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu. At UB we are living proof that socialist makes a difference in people's lives.