Evaluation of the Association Between Self-perceptions of Aging and Care Deferrals Among US Adults Aged ≥50 Years During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

- Self-perceptions of aging (SPA) or subjective attitudes towards aging have been shown to influence healthcare-seeking behaviors among middle-aged and older adults.
- In addition to the systemic healthcare disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, negative SPA may exacerbate healthcare deferrals in this population.
- Current literature exploring the role of SPA in care deferrals during the COVID-19 pandemic among middle-aged and older adults is limited.

Objective

- To evaluate the association between SPA and care deferrals among community-dwelling adults aged ≥50 years in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic.

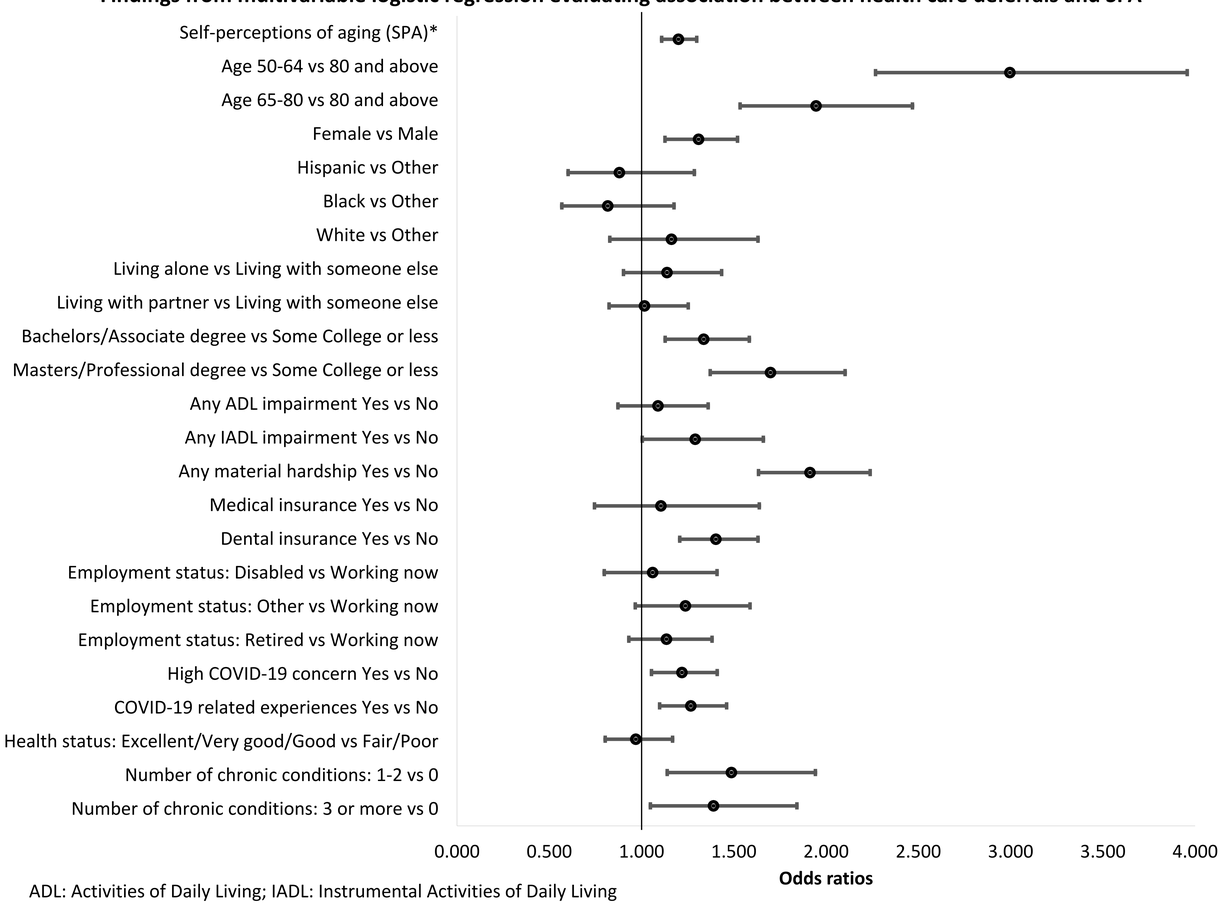
Methods

- **Data**: 2020 wave of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS)
- **Study design**: Cross-sectional study
- **Study sample**: Community-dwelling adults aged ≥50 years who were in-sample for the 2020 HRS data wave and completed the HRS Psychosocial Wellbeing module
- **Focal predictor – SPA**: Eight-item instrument derived from the Attitudes Toward Own Aging subscale of the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale and Berlin Aging Study with higher scores indicating negative SPA
- **Outcome – Care deferrals**: *'Since March 2020, was there any time when you needed medical or dental care, but delayed getting it, or did not get it at all?'*
- **Covariates**: Selection of variables was informed by Anderson's Behavioral Model of Healthcare Utilization.
- The association between SPA and care deferrals was assessed using multivariable logistic regression.
- All analyses were conducted using the unweighted study sample because the 2020 HRS sampling weights were not available at the time.

Results

Among community dwelling adults aged ≥50 years, negative aging attitudes were associated with significantly higher odds of care deferrals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from multivariable logistic regression evaluating association between health care deferrals and SPA



ADL: Activities of Daily Living; IADL: Instrumental Activities of Daily Living

* Higher SPA scores indicate negative aging attitudes.

Results

- The final unweighted sample consisted of 4,153 community-dwelling adults aged ≥50 years. 30% of the respondents reported care deferrals during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Among respondents who deferred care, the majority were aged 50-64 years (46.6%), female (65.4%), and White (64.5%).
- Most commonly reported care deferrals were dental appointments (74.5%) and physician visits (56.5%).
- Care deferrals were mainly due to clinic/office rescheduling or cancelling appointments (57.5%), respondent deciding the care could wait (33.8%), and COVID-19 fear (21.8%).
- The eight-item SPA instrument was found to have adequate internal reliability in our sample (Cronbach's alpha: 0.81).
- Respondents reporting care deferrals had higher mean SPA scores, indicating negative aging attitudes, compared those who did not defer care (Mean (SD): 3.24 (1.02) vs. 3.05 (1.01), $p<0.001$).
- After accounting for covariates, higher SPA scores were associated with significantly higher odds of care deferrals (adjusted odds ratio: 1.20, 95% CI: 1.11 – 1.30, $p<0.001$).

Conclusions

- Negative aging attitudes were found to be significantly associated with healthcare deferrals during the COVID-19 pandemic among community-dwelling adults aged ≥50 years in the US.
- As healthcare delivery rebounds to pre-pandemic levels, the role of subjective aging attitudes in healthcare-seeking behaviors needs to be recognized.
- Health promotion efforts may target positive aging attitudes to encourage timely and proactive use of healthcare, and promote healthy aging.

References

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