

Beyond Assisted Living Facilities: What Factors Predict Consumer Planning?

A gap exists in the literature related to assisted living facilities, and prompts research questions addressing the role of kin in placement, financial management assumed during marriage, locus of control, and attitudes toward long-term care.

Aimee D. Prawitz, Northern Illinois University¹
 Sharon DeVaney, Purdue University²
 Susan Bowers, Northern Illinois University¹

By the year 2050, the number of adults aged 85 years and older is expected to equal the number of adults aged 65-69 years. With this prediction comes the concern about the declining health and independence of elderly Americans. Better education, health care, and nutrition as well as a healthier lifestyle help decrease the number of chronic disabilities in the elderly population. There is an increasing demand for options that help individuals maintain independence.

Considering the importance of maintaining independence during the progression through the aging process, many older adults are choosing to live in assisted living facilities. Such communities are designed for those who cannot function in an independent living environment, but do not need nursing care on a daily basis. The assisted living facility offers a special combination of housing, supportive services, personalized assistance and health care designed to respond to the needs of those who need help with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living. Such facilities aim to promote dignity and independence for each resident. But what contributes to effective planning for changing health care needs beyond the move into an assisted living facility? The critical question with this population is not so much how they arrived at the decision to enter the facility, but whether individuals and families have planned beyond the current level of care needed. This gap in literature prompts the following research questions: **1) Is the quality of the relationship with kin (spouse, adult children, siblings, etc.) an important factor in the prediction of inclination to plan for changes in the need for health care?** While having living relatives reduces the chance of nursing home admission, it is also known that absence of kin nearby is predictive of moves into retirement communities and group housing. How influential are relatives in the decision to move into an assisted living facility? **2) Does the financial management role the elderly person assumed during the marriage help to predict the inclination to plan?** In earlier times, women were socialized to be dependent, and hence, plan less for future needs. Given that women outlive men, many elderly individuals choosing assisted living facilities likely are widows. Does the financial management role assumed during the marriage affect planning for health care needs? **3) Can locus of control help predict the extent of an individual's planning decisions?** McKenna and Nickols (1988) found that perceived internal locus of control contributed to the inclination toward retirement planning. Does locus of control also affect the inclination to plan for changes in health care needs? **4) Do attitudes toward long-term care affect planning decisions?** Gibler, Lumpkin, and Moschis (1997) found that retirement community residents perceived nursing homes less negatively than did older adults still living in traditional housing. Do attitudes toward nursing homes become more positive as a result of the assisted living experience?

In the focus group stage of the research, we will explore issues related to planning for changes in health care needs both prior to and following the move into the assisted living facility. Results of the analysis of the focus group data will guide the larger data collection effort. The information generated by the research will assist us in developing guidelines for consumer educators and health care planners.

References

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- McKenna, J. S., & Nickols, S. Y. (1988). Planning for retirement security: What helps or hinders women in the middle years. *Home Economics Research Journal*, 17(2), 153-164.

Endnotes

1. Assistant Professor, School of Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Sciences
2. Assistant Professor, Consumer Sciences and Retailing