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Experiential learning in the form of “Virtual Living Lab” in a geriatric mental healthcare setting: A qualitative study on learners’ and preceptors’ experiences**Sayani Paul***Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, Canada*

Statement of the problem: With the rapidly aging population worldwide and the increasing number of age-related chronic, degenerative diseases, there is a greater need for trained healthcare professionals to address the changing needs of the aging population. However, there remains a drastic shortage of healthcare professionals in geriatric care. Ageist attitudes, complexity of geriatric care and incompetency among healthcare professionals are just some barriers in attracting new recruits to a career in geriatrics. To this end, experiential learning—a didactic learning process where learners learn by doing and reflecting upon those experiences—may lead to better applied knowledge, skills, competence and interest in caring for older adults. This study examines experiential learning in the form of a ‘Living Lab’ course, a field-based placement education model. Specifically, learners’ knowledge and attitudes about geriatric inpatients in a specialized psychiatric hospital in Canada are captured.

Methodology: Using qualitative narrative inquiry, focus group interviews were conducted with 14 learners and three staff who mentored learners during the Living Lab component, to explore the impact of Living Lab component that was conducted virtually. Data analysis and interpretation was informed by Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle.

Conclusion: The study highlighted the feasibility and efficacy of experiential learning in a virtual setting. Learners and staff iterated that this experiential learning model was beneficial to advance knowledge and skills of future professionals in geriatric care, reshape learners’ attitudes and instill an interest in working with older adults.

Biography

Sayani Paul holds a PhD in Social Work with extensive research experience of working with diverse populations such as young adults living with serious mental health conditions, people living with intellectual disabilities, older adults and individuals experiencing homelessness and mental health and addiction issues. One of her expertise lies in designing and implementing research studies using mixed methods design, involving multiple stakeholders’ perspectives.