

Marian Liu respects (and researches) her elders

Growing up in an inter-generational household in Taiwan, School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences (SBOS) student Marian Liu developed respect and admiration for the elderly. Now a doctoral student at CGU, Liu is taking this passion and applying it to her research.

Liu aims to unravel the emotional development that comes with age and use that information to help the elderly and those that support them make better and more informed health-care and financial decisions.

Her master's thesis—which won the American Society on Aging Graduate Student Research Award last May—revealed that unlike their younger counterparts, who prefer a multitude of options, seniors prefer fewer options for Medicare prescription-drug plans and other important choices in life. With this information, people that work with the elderly and policy makers can refine how information is presented to older citizens in a way that makes options more clear and tailored to their unique circumstances.

Liu decided to focus her research on the elderly after being inspired while volunteering at an elderly day-care center in Taiwan. Despite many of the patients having degenerative diseases, she found that they still possessed great emotional fortitude. “Some researchers in the field just look at cognitive decline. I want to take a new spin on that and see the positive changes associated with aging,” Liu said.

She plans to take what she discovered about emotional development and decision making and find a way to intervene in the growing problem of elder financial abuse in American society. Liu hypothesizes that with age, emotional regulation grows more stable, despite the often-seen decline in cognitive abilities, such as memory and numeracy. Emotional abilities such as wisdom, hope, empathy, and optimism are all assets that can protect a person from scams and fraud, giving a vulnerable population an edge when it comes to avoiding financial abuse.



Marian Liu (left) accepting the Graduate Student Research Award from Tobi Abramson, a member of the American Society on Aging Board of Directors, at the 2011 Aging in America Conference in San Francisco.

Although some research has been conducted that looks at the correlation between those that have experienced elder abuse and their life experiences, Liu and graduate faculty member Stacey Wood are currently developing a more nuanced approach that will highlight predictors of financial elder abuse before it takes place. With these tools in hand, which include a highly detailed questionnaire that reveals the amount of security and vulnerability of an individual's finances, professionals such as nurses and social workers can be alerted to and prepared for a potential financial elder abuse situation.

Aside from helping older adults make informed decisions, Liu also hopes her research will enlighten young people to the emotional capacities that increase with age. According to Liu, we could all learn a lot from our elders.

“I hope to see more intergenerational interaction, as the relationships would be mutually beneficial. Older people can get the tools to avoid fraud situations, and younger people can glean some of the wisdom that our grandparents have to offer.”

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