help address. Extensive review of existing literature, however, indicates a lack of comprehensive geriatric focused training in Ghana’s education system. Unfortunately, the scope of this training deficiency, potential impact on the geriatric workforce, as well as the health and wellbeing of the aging population on the national level have not been extensively examined. With the older adult population set to increase over the next few years, the need for geriatric-trained human service professionals in diverse disciplines, including medicine, nursing, psychology, social work and public health has become more pronounced. This paper is a review of the current state of gerontological education in higher institutions in Ghana. Specifically, authors examined (1) current geriatric-focused training programs available to students in all public/government owned institutions, (2) existing national level programs, and policies addressing training deficiencies, and (3) the implications of findings for future geriatric workforce as well as the health and wellbeing of older Ghanaians. The findings call attention to the need for a nationwide geriatric-focused training system and policies aimed at prioritizing specialized care for the older population. Culturally appropriate recommendations for integrating gerontological training and education in tertiary institutions are discussed. Guidelines and standards based on the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE) Competencies for Undergraduate and Graduate Education are proposed.

WHAT DO ISRAELI GERONTOLOGY STUDENTS THINK ABOUT MEDICAL MARIJUANA USE FOR ALZHEIMER’S AND PARKINSON’S DISEASE?
Offer Edelstein,1 Richard Isralowitz,2 Oren Wacht,1 Alexander Reznik,2 and Yaacov Bachner,3 1. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, HaDarom, Israel, 2. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva, HaDarom, Israel, 3. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be’er-Sheva, HaDarom, Israel

Aims: The aims of the current study were as follows: 1) to assess gerontology graduate students’ beliefs about medical marijuana’s (MMJ) effectiveness for two common age-related conditions - Alzheimer’s (AD) and Parkinson’s disease (PD); 2) to assess students’ beliefs and attitudes toward MMJ; 3) to explore associations linking background characteristics, MMJ-related attitudes and beliefs, and beliefs about the MMJ effectiveness for AD and PD. Method: A sample of 104 (84 women and 20 men) gerontology graduate students voluntarily participated in an anonymous online survey. Results: The vast majority (95%) of the participants indicated they had no formal education about MMJ and reported being unprepared to answer clients’ MMJ-related questions (84.6%). Most of the participants believed that MMJ is effective for use with AD (70.2%) and PD (80.8%) patients. Participants reported favorable beliefs about MMJ benefits, concerns about risks, the need for training, and positive attitudes toward recreational marijuana use legalization. Prior marijuana use (e.g., self-use, friends or family) was found to be associated with more positive beliefs about MMJ benefits, risks, and its legalization for recreational purposes. Prior marijuana use was the only factor associated with the belief that MMJ is an effective therapy for use with individuals diagnosed with AD or PD. Conclusions: The study findings stress the need for students’ MMJ education in order to provide future gerontology service providers with the necessary knowledge and ability to address clients’ questions about MMJ use. Efforts to develop curricula and training programs need to be promoted.

Session 3350 (Symposium)

POLICY SERIES: CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE
Chair: Brian Lindberg
This popular annual session will provide cutting-edge information on what the 117th Congress has and has not accomplished to date, and what may be left for end of the First Session. Speakers will discuss key issues such as pandemic relief, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act.

Session 3355 (Symposium)

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND COPING AMONG OLDER ADULTS: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND VIRTUAL REALITY PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT
Chair: Zhen Cong
This symposium included 4 studies that use national and regional data to examine older adults’ disaster preparedness and coping. The first study examined age differences in preparedness for the continuation of COVID-19 with a sample of 443 residents in Dallas, TX. The findings highlight older adults’ resilience and special needs for different types of support during the pandemic. The second study examined the association of having COVID-19 and intergenerational relationships using the COVID-19 module of the Health and Retirement Study with a sample of 3266 respondents. Using a national sample of 1,467 respondents from the 2017 U.S. National Household Survey, the third study examined age differences relationships among the type of disasters (i.e., disasters with different lead-time), response efficacy, and disaster preparedness. The findings highlighted older adults’ unique vulnerability and resilience in different types of disasters. The fourth study discussed a pilot virtual reality platform under development to assist older adults to develop tailored household emergency preparedness plans and practice those plans with simulated extreme weather conditions and warnings for older adults to practice disaster response and develop relevant knowledge and skills as well as test and revise their emergency preparedness plans. Overall, this symposium emphasizes the uniqueness of older adults’ needs, vulnerability, and resilience to disasters.

AGE DIFFERENCES IN PREPAREDNESS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF COVID-19: IMPORTANT ROLES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT
Zhirui Chen,1 Zhen Cong,1 Daan Liang,2 and Guofeng Cao,3 1. University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, United States, 2. University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, United States, 3. University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, Colorado, United States
This study examined the association between age and preparedness for the continuation of COVID-19. The moderation effects of three types of social support, namely, emotional, financial, and instrumental assistance were also
tested. Using a sample of 443 adults in Dallas county which has the most confirmed cases in Texas, results of multiple linear regressions showed that compared to those aged between 18 and 64, older adults aged 65 and reported better preparedness for the continuation of COVID-19. Receiving emotional, financial, and instrumental assistance were respectively more important for older people to get better prepared than for younger adults, which is consistent with the socioemotional selectivity theory. Our findings directed attention to the strengths and resilience of older adults during COVID-19 from a life course perspective and highlighted the importance of social support and social relationship in their post-disaster recovery and ongoing preparedness.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT: RESULTS BASED ON THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY COVID-19 MODULE
Guanggang Feng,1 and Zhen Cong,2 1. University of Texas at Arlington, School of Social Work, Texas, United States, 2. University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, United States

This study examined relationships between COVID-19 exposure and intergenerational support patterns. The data was from the 2020 Health and Retirement Study (HRS) COVID-19 Module (N=3266). The latent class analysis (LCA) was used to identify the types of intergenerational support based on respondents' reports on whether they provided and received financial and instrumental support from either coresident children or non-coresident children. Two classes were identified, namely, the high interaction group and the low interaction group. Logistic regression showed that respondents who had COVID-19 and had increased spending as a result of COVID-19 were more likely to be in the high interaction group. Other types of COVID-19 exposure, i.e., knowing someone being diagnosed or knowing someone who died from COVID-19 were not significant.

RESPONSE EFFICACY AND ACTION TO PREPARE FOR DISASTERS WITH DIFFERENT LEAD TIME: AGE DIFFERENCES
Zhirui Chen, and Zhen Cong, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, United States

This study investigated how disaster types, namely those with short and longer warning lead time, contextualized individuals' preparatory action, especially as associated with their response efficacy and age. The working sample included 1,467 respondents from the 2017 U.S. National Household Survey. Logistic regressions showed that individuals with higher levels of response efficacy were more likely to prepare after learning information about how to prepare. Respondents in areas prone to short lead-time disasters were less likely to prepare than those in longer lead-time disasters areas. Response efficacy was more important for action taking for short lead-time disasters, which was observed only among older adults when older and younger adults were examined separately. These findings revealed the impacts of disaster types and response efficacy on disaster preparedness and older adults' unique vulnerability and resilience, which could guide policymaking and interventions to promote national disaster preparedness tailored to regional peculiarities.

DEVELOPMENT OF A VIRTUAL REALITY PLATFORM TO PROMOTE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AMONG OLDER ADULTS
Zhen Cong, Chen Kan, Aaron Hagedorn, Sam Thomas, and Reid Yeager, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, United States

This project develops a tailored and adaptive virtual reality platform to innovatively promote older adults’ disaster preparation in a socially engaging environment. The platform serves the following purposes: 1) assist older adults to develop tailored household emergency preparedness plans, 2) simulate extreme weather conditions and warnings for older adults to practice disaster response and develop relevant knowledge and skills as well as test and revise their emergency preparedness plans, 3) use the process as a social engagement tool to reduce social isolation and promote a sense of community. The virtual environments are designed in Unity to simulate extreme weather conditions/natural disasters and older adults are guided to use the HTC VR headset and experience the selected disaster scenario. The pilot VR platform will be tested among community-dwelling older adults in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area.

Session 3360 (Symposium)

DISRUPTING OTHERING: A CONTINUUM OF AGE-INTEGRATED STRATEGIES FOR GERONTOLOGY EDUCATION
Chair: Lisa Borrero
Co-Chair: Lisa Borrero

Given the extensive negative impacts of ageism, it is incumbent upon institutions of higher education to lead the charge in promoting age inclusivity and dismantling ageism, particularly in the classroom. Traditional teaching approaches are insufficient to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student population or our aging post-COVID society. Gerontology classrooms require new, innovative, and purposeful ways of engaging students in course content. This symposium brings together faculty who intentionally promote age inclusivity by immersing students in age-integrated experiences to varying degrees and in different ways. These approaches fundamentally reject the idea of older adults as “other” by promoting an age-inclusive reality in which individuals of all ages are equally valued. Dr. Lyn Holley will describe a new course which requires projection of a future, older self and two systematic life interviews – one of a real US elder and one of an imagined counterpart in a different country; comparative analysis reveals how aging is shaped by society. Dr. Skye Leedahl will discuss challenging ageism by examining existing age-focused policies and programs and having students engage in six intergenerational discussions and reflective writing. Dr. Tina Newsham will describe a newly revised practicum in which immersive, real-world experiences with older adults are incorporated, along with meaningful reflection and the development of an e-portfolio. Finally, Drs. Laura Donorfio and Lisa Borrero will explain the ways “othering” is disrupted when students imagine themselves as older adults, and use creative approaches that demonstrate how to negotiate key aspects of the aging process. 