
The authors examine twenty-four publications to test their theory that nurses and other health care workers use patronizing patterns of speech and modified language when communicating with older people. They find their hypothesis strongly supported in the studies examined. Specifically, research supports the speech accommodation theory, which suggests that people adapt their speech in response to their evaluation of another person. Often health care professionals use ‘baby talk’ sounding high pitched or ‘comfort talk’ spoken slower, louder and sing-song like when speaking to older adults. Care givers who had low expectations of older adults used this language more frequently. This form of communication causes older adults to feel patronized, irritated, angry, inferior and demoralized. Care givers also use this language as a subtle and useful way to exercise power and control over people, especially in the care giver/patient relationships. A later article by Ian Stuart-Hamilton and Berenice Mahoney, cited below, shows that the attitudes towards older adults remains fundamentally unchanged for most individuals even after attending aging awareness training sessions.