Should Hairstylists' Skills Include Mental Health Support?

June 11, 2010

Ever overhear customers at the beauty parlor telling their troubles to hairstylists? Well, it's called "salon therapy," and researchers are taking a serious look at how hairstylists may be able to use these chat sessions to help elderly people with certain mental health issues, according to Ohio State University (OSU) study findings reported in the *Journal of Applied Gerontology*.

For the study, researchers surveyed 40 Columbus, Ohio-area stylists about their relationships with elderly clients. Findings revealed that about 85 percent of hairstylists classified their relationships with older clients as "close" or "very close."

In addition, about 72 percent of hairstylists said their older customers viewed them as relatives and discussed their health and family problems with them.

"This is one reason why I think hairstylists are especially suited to seeing problems in their customers," said Keith Anderson, an assistant professor of social work at OSU and the study's coauthor.

But the big problem is that more than half (52 percent) of the hairstylists were too unfamiliar with community services for the elderly to be of any help to these customers, Anderson said.

Although the hairstylists had no special training to spot whether elderly customers were suffering from mental health issues such as depression, dementia or self-neglect, all the stylists surveyed believed they could. (On an ability-to-spot-mental-health issues scale of 1 to 10, with 10 the highest, stylists rated themselves between 7.6 and 7.8.)

"It seems like a perfect setup—stylists have access to older adults who may need someone to point them to the help they need," Anderson said.

But the study findings also showed that only 45 percent of the stylists polled said they'd be open to getting mental health training.

Anderson believes the trick is how to get hairstylists more involved in helping their older

customers.

“We can’t expect them to do everything,” he said, “but our results suggest that most stylists care about their clients and would be willing to help them.”

Read this to hear how depression can increase elderly people’s risk of stroke.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/stylists-mental-health-18552-3021