Managing Workforce Ageism

OUR IMPACT: Ageism perpetuates powerful and pervasive stereotypes that demean the individual and impact quality of life. However, aging services professionals are in a unique position to positively influence perceptions about aging. The LTSS Center took steps in 2019 to disrupt ageism by evaluating the effectiveness of a training program designed to help staff of aging services organizations recognize and change their ageist attitudes.

In 2018, researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, VA, used a grant from LeadingAge to develop a video-based workforce training program focusing on ageism. During 2019, researchers from the LTSS Center and VCU worked together to evaluate whether that training program had any effect on workers’ self-reported attitudes about aging, and their behaviors, job satisfaction, and intent to leave the job. The evaluation study was funded by the Retirement Research Foundation.

The ageism intervention is a 1-hour in-service training for people working with older adults in a variety of settings. At the heart of the training is a 10-minute video that participants view and then discuss with the help of a facilitator. The training curriculum is designed to help participants recognize ageism, understand how ageism is communicated and transmitted, and view examples of how to disrupt ageism in personal, professional, and organizational practice. Researchers presented video training sessions to direct care workers and supervisory staff at 15 intervention sites. Participants completed written surveys immediately before, immediately after, and three months after the intervention.

Survey findings showed that the video training program helped to improve participants’ knowledge about ageism’s harmful impact on health and longevity. After the training, participants reported decreases in their ageist behaviors and in their anxiety about their own aging. They also reported making concrete plans to change their ageist behaviors.

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