

The effect of ageism on law enforcement response to elder mistreatment

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The University of Utah, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2014. 3681009.

This study focused on how law enforcement officers' incorrect knowledge and ageist beliefs about older adults affected their response to scenarios of elder mistreatment. Regression analyses was conducted using data from a survey of 200 law enforcement officers from the intermountain west area. The Utah Commission on Aging created the survey in response to low usage of Utah's Vulnerable Adult Statute. The survey incorporated the Palmore's Facts on Aging Quiz 1 (FAQ1) and two scenarios of elder mistreatment. This analysis assumed that accurate knowledge of aging and of older adults, as measured by the FAQ1, was an adequate proxy for ageism. The factors of gender, years in law enforcement, education, and rank were included as controls.

The examination found that officers' correct knowledge as measured by their FAQ1 Knowledge scores was positively correlated with the scenario response scores (an index reflecting the number of protective measures respondents described). The regression furthermore indicated a negative correlation to the scenarios when officers held incorrect, but positive views of older persons. Training specific to the Utah Vulnerable Adult Statute was also examined to determine if such training would increase appropriate responses by law enforcement officers to the scenarios. It was found that statute specific training did increase officers' use of the Vulnerable Adult Statute, but did not increase the overall effective response of officers toward vulnerable older persons.