

Master Class – Ageism (Negative Attitudes and Discrimination on the Basis of Age)

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Analysis by WHO shows that negative or ageist attitudes towards older people are widespread. They also negatively affect older people's physical and mental health. 60% of respondents in the World Values Survey that was analyzed by WHO reported that older people are not respected. More than 83,000 people in 57 countries took part in the survey which assessed attitudes to older people across all age groups. The lowest levels of respect were reported in high-income countries.

This analysis confirms that ageism is extremely common. Yet most people are completely unaware of the subconscious stereotypes they hold about older people. Like sexism and racism, changing social norms is possible. It is time to stop defining people by their age. It will result in more prosperous, equitable and healthier societies.

Negative attitudes about ageing and older people also have significant consequences for the physical and mental health of older adults. Older people who feel they are a burden perceive their lives to be less valuable, putting them at risk of depression and social isolation. Research by Levy et al shows that older people who hold negative views about their own ageing, do not recover as well from disability and live on average 7.5 years less than people with positive attitudes¹. By 2025 the number of people aged 60 and over will double, and by 2050 will reach 2 billion globally, with the vast majority of older people living in low and middle income countries.

Ageism takes many forms, including depicting older people as frail, dependent, and out of touch in the media, or through discriminatory practices such as health-care rationing by age, or institutional policies such as mandatory retirement at a certain age. Age limits applied to policies such as retirement age for example, do not recognize the range of capacities of the older person – and assume that all older persons are the same. This deeply entrenched institutionalized ageism may be used to discriminate against older adults when allocating health resources or when collecting data that influence health policies.

Master Class Objectives - The session will be highly interactive and draw on the best available evidence. It will involve case studies, group discussion, and other activities aimed:

- to examine the concept of ageism and its impact on older people;
- to learn about the existing evidence on what works and what doesn't in tackling ageism as well as what is needed to fill the research gaps.
- to generate ideas about how you can apply existing evidence and resources on ageism for better policy and practice.
- to learn about a new global movement to combat ageism and how you can get involved

1 Levy BR et al. Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2002 83(2):261-270

Presenter Biography



Alana Officer, Senior Health Adviser, Department of Ageing and Life Course, World Health Organization

Alana's academic background spans Podiatric Medicine, Applied Science (Exercise and Sports Science) and Public Health. Prior to joining WHO in July 2006, Alana held a number of clinical, technical and managerial positions working on health, disability, rehabilitation and development in West and Central Africa, Europe, South Asia, the Middle East and the Western Pacific.

From 2007 to 2014, Alana was the Coordinator for WHO's Disability and Rehabilitation Team where she led the development of such landmark resources as the WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: Better health for all people with disability (2014), the World report on disability (2011) and the Guidelines on community-based rehabilitation (2010) amongst many others. She has earned a number of awards for her contribution to disability and rehabilitation and is a member of several editorial boards for scientific journals.

Alana joined the Department of Ageing and Life course in July 2014 to lead the development of the *World Report on Ageing and Health*, which was published in October 2015. She currently oversees the Organization's work on age-friendly environments including the Global Network on Age-friendly Cities and Communities as well as the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism.

To register for this Master Class, click [here](#).