LAW ENFORCEMENT KNOWLEDGE OF ELDER LAWS
AND BELIEFS ABOUT AGING

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

As agencies of last resort, police officers of today are often called upon to serve as both counselor and gatekeeper to an array of social services for older adults. Unfortunately, there is little to no training available to law enforcement as to what aging resources are available, how to access them, or the referral processes. Furthermore, the scarcity of research on the knowledge base of first responders or biases they may hold makes designing appropriate training curricula problematic. Utilizing a survey that included Palmore’s Facts on Aging Quiz, I examined Salt Lake area law enforcement officers’ attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of aging. By correlating these findings with demographic characteristics including experiences in law enforcement, I was able to show officers across all demographic variables have very little understanding of aging and the aging process. Overall, the sample of officers demonstrated age bias and low comprehension of laws specific to older persons. The knowledge base of officers was found to be similar to that of social workers, health-care providers, and college students. These findings suggest training protocols need to be augmented or instituted to both debunk many aging stereotypes and better prepare officers to respond to the needs of those they serve.
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Lastly, I would be remiss if my gratitude to Bruce Rigby went unexpressed. His mentorship was instrumental throughout my undergraduate studies and acceptance into graduate school. Over the years, our relationship has transcended that of teacher/student, and I am proud to call him my friend.
CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

The coming of age of the Baby Boomers as well as increased life expectancy will result in older adults comprising upwards of 20% of the U.S. population by the year 2030 (Administration on Aging, 2010). Thus, law enforcement personnel can expect a proportionate increase in calls for service concerning older adults. Despite the anticipated increase in the age of the overall U.S. population, little to no research has been conducted to evaluate how well prepared law enforcement personnel are to respond to the needs of the elderly, their comprehension of laws specific to the older population, or their knowledge and beliefs about the process of aging and subsequent outcomes (Connolly, 2008; Hawley, Garrity, & Cherry, 2005; Payne, Berg, & James, 2001).

Unfortunately, American society is rife with ageism (Hendricks, 2005). Law enforcement officers are a cross-section of the larger population they serve. Therefore, law enforcement officers are not exempt from ageism. While the level of mastery of the legal code can be attributed to educational opportunities afforded to law enforcement personnel upon being employed, personal beliefs about the aging process are developed throughout life and are subsequently carried along as these men and women perform their roles as police officers.

Unlike racism and sexism, everyone who lives long enough could potentially engage in ageism as well as find themselves subject to societal myths and stereotypes.
about aging (McGuire, Klein, & Chen, 2008). This “systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against older people because they are old” was first labeled “ageism” by Butler in 1969 (p. 496). These pervasive beliefs are harmful not only to the elderly but also to those who are beholden to them. Little is known to what degree ageist precepts permeate our police departments and to what degree, if any, they impact the delivery of service to the older population. Notwithstanding the demographic trend of increased proportions of elderly in this country, police officers are unlikely to shed established stereotypes and differential treatments. A comprehensive understanding of how well the law enforcement community is prepared to address these specific challenges and identifying potential obstacles is crucial.

While isolating a segment of the population based on chronological age and classifying them as a special group may seem ageist in itself,

It remains unequivocal that a variety of functional impairments that rise with age could make older people more vulnerable targets of crime, less able to defend themselves in the event of victimization, and consequently more likely to experience adverse health outcomes. (Lachs et al., 2004, p. 27)

While actual crime rates are lower for older Americans as a whole than young people, fear of crime is one of their primary concerns, and this fear is more detrimental to quality of life than the victimization of crime itself (Horn, 2008). Law enforcement agencies are tasked to not only deter crime but to reduce the fear of crime in the communities they serve.

In a general context, the American people are satisfied with the quality of their local police departments and the services they provide. This perception is crucial as maintaining public support is fundamentally linked to police effectiveness (Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003). Police cannot be everywhere at once and need public support
and cooperation to achieve any level of success. When the public needs the police, it
wants responding officers to be competent and able to resolve the issues at hand. The
symbiotic nexus between police and the public may become strained at times as desired
outcomes are not always feasible. Isolated instances of friction between the police and the
public can be mitigated by assuring competent and professional responses regardless of
the outcome.

More specific to the aging population, elderly interactions with law enforcement
personnel often originate outside the purview of criminal victimization. Over the past 16
years as a law enforcement officer, I recall many times being called to help locate a
missing elderly person who had wandered away from his or her home or a facility. Older
citizens themselves often called for help to get their garage doors open during power
outages or sought out help when no other government agency would answer the phone. In
the majority of these dealings, the older person was simply looking for guidance or
direction and did not know where else to turn. Demographic shifts will make these and
other interactions with older citizens all the more frequent.

While it has not come as a surprise, America continues to age, and little is known
about law enforcement personnel’s beliefs about aging and knowledge of elder laws. The
paucity of relative research led the Utah Commission on Aging (UCOA) to initiate an
investigation in 2008 with the purpose of ferreting out the answers to these questions. A
survey of 41 questions was administered to 200 law enforcement officers employed in
Salt Lake County, Utah. This survey instrument queried the officers’ knowledge as to
laws specific to the elderly population and their experiences in applying them.

Additionally, the survey incorporated Palmore’s Facts on Aging Quiz (FAQ1)–Multiple-
Choice Version (Harris, Changas, & Palmore, 1996). I have analyzed the data captured in the survey previously conducted by the UCOA to describe law enforcement respondents’ knowledge and beliefs about aging and elder laws and to correlate these findings with demographic characteristics, including experience in law enforcement, age, gender, and education.

Specifically, the following research objectives were addressed:

1. To describe law enforcement respondents’ knowledge and beliefs about aging and their comprehension of the laws specific to the older population.
2. Correlate the previous findings with demographic characteristics, including experience in law enforcement, age, gender, and education.

The findings of this study build upon previous studies of different groups and organizations all aimed at helping us gain a better understanding of the interplay between service professionals and those in the elderly population. The findings could also be used to advise law enforcement agencies toward appropriate training and to offer resources by which to better equip their officers with the knowledge and tools necessary to improve interactions and outcomes with the elderly customers they serve.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a preamble to a comprehensive literature review relative to beliefs about aging, one must address the notion of older persons constituting a subset of the larger population. Senescence-related behavioral changes are often used by the larger population to base generalizations and stereotypes concerning older persons. These distinguishing characteristics and traits enable the automatic or primitive categorization mechanisms inherent in bias formations (Nelson, 2005). Furthermore, Levin’s (1988) assertion that aging stereotypes are unavoidably derived from kernels of truth may elucidate the inception of many beliefs, but not why they continue into the 21st century. One explanation for the persistence of discrimination and myths based on age is they have not received the same public condemnation as racism and sexism (Dennis & Thomas, 2007). Equally unique to aging is that ageist stereotypes are propagated not only by the young and middle-aged but by older adults themselves, often referred to as intragenerational ageism (Giles & Reid, 2005).

Rupp, Vodanovich, and Crede’s (2005) evaluation of published research found mixed results relative to the effect of age on attitudes about age and the aging process. Regardless of these conflicting findings, ageism is ingrained in American culture and continues to pose a major problem in society (Nelson, 2005). Persistence is paramount, because even after we gain a meaningful understanding of ageism and how it propagates
through populations, enacting change of such a deeply rooted notion could take
generations. Continued exploration into the presence and causes of ageist attitudes and
the subsequent ramifications for public service interactions is needed.

Literature on the measures of ageism and the findings of age-related studies is
rising. Research examining beliefs of aging among nurses (Mosher-Ashley & Ball, 1999;
Shoemaker, Bowman, & Lester, 1998), medical students (Cammer-Paris et al., 1997;
Duerson, Thomas, Chang, & Stevens, 1992), college students (Anguillo, Whitbourne, &
Powers, 1996; Hale & Hewitt, 1998; Payne & Berg, 2003), and social workers (Reed,
Beall, & Baumhover, 1992) was instrumental in initiating our understanding of the
phenomenon, yet disparate methodologies make wider comparisons difficult. According
to Rupp et al. (2005), one possible reason for this may be researchers have been
preoccupied with the issue of aging, rather than developing a tool by which to measure it.

This is not to say measures do not exist. Rosencranz and McNevin’s Aging
Semantic Differential and Fraboni, Saltstone, and Hughes’s Fraboni Scale of Ageism are
two tools that were developed to measure ageism multidimensionally (Rupp et al., 2005).
But neither of these has seen the widespread use of Palmore’s original FAQ1 developed
in 1977 or the subsequent versions (FAQ2 and FAQ1–Multiple-Choice Version). What
started as Palmore’s desire to spark student interest in aging at Duke University and to
weed out misconceptions resulted in his publishing the findings from the 25-item survey
that he administered on the first day of class. Ultimately, this andragogical tool became
the standard for measuring knowledge and misconceptions about aging (Palmore, 1988,
2005).
Use of Palmore’s original FAQ1 is a popular way to generate conversation, compare findings among different groups, evaluate bias among groups, and educate people as to the variety of aging myths. The tool generated great interest as a way to measure educational training by being administered before and after some type of course or workshop. Over 20 years ago, the Facts on Aging Quizzes had been administered in over 90 studies. Since then, quiz reliability has been improved and two new versions, including multiple choice, have been added to the original true–false version (Palmore, 2005).

Various versions of the instrument are still in widespread use today to measure basic knowledge of mental, physical, and other social facts about aging (Seufert & Carrozza, 2002). They see regular use in disciplines in which effective outcomes with the elderly require accurate knowledge about old age and the aging process, such as health-care and social services providers. For unknown reasons, the knowledge and beliefs held by police officers have largely gone unexamined (Hawley et al., 2005). An antiquated view of police officers as crime fighters rather than public servants combined with the assertion by Lachs et al. (2004) that the elderly who interact with law enforcement most frequently are less functionally impaired likely accounts for the inattention.

As first responders, law enforcement personnel often serve as informal gatekeepers to a network of social services available to the elderly population (Beaulaurier, Seff, Newman, & Dunlop, 2007; Burgess, Ramsey-Klawsnick, & Gregorian, 2008; Lachs et al., 2004). As agencies of last resort, police departments are often called upon when citizens do not know where else to turn for help. Family members, friends, or the elderly persons themselves call a phone number they know will
be answered 24 hours a day, 365 days a year looking for assistance, referral, or aid. Unfortunately, there is little to no training available to law enforcement as to what resources are available, how to access them, or the referral processes. Furthermore, the scarcity of research on the knowledge base of first responders makes designing appropriate training curricula problematic.

The police officers of today are now being called upon to perform services that have traditionally been provided by social workers, health-care providers, and clergy, yet they have not been adequately prepared to do so (Beaulaurier et al., 2007; Connolly, 2008; Lachs et al., 2004; Schafer et al., 2003). “For optimum service provisions, professionals who work with older adults need to be knowledgeable about all aspects of the aging process including cognitive, physical, and psychosocial changes” (Hawley et al., 2005, p. 1). The dearth of research assessing the beliefs of law enforcement officers and the level to which they may have succumbed to the various myths of aging beckons inquiry.

Despite the recent windfall of programs directed at a variety of other cultural sensitivities, in large part, specialized training relative to older persons has gone unaddressed (Lachs et al., 2004). While Lachs et al. conceded it may be ageist to assume a group of individuals should be labeled as having special needs based on chronological age, there is nothing in the literature to suggest sensitivity training and information on the services already in place for the elderly would be detrimental. Furthermore, McGuire et al. (2008) pointed out the frequency with which the police interact with the population may further perpetuate misinformation and myths about aging, assuming they exist among officers. Educating officers about existing programs, the referral process, and the
challenges unique to older persons would serve as a first step in improving services and eliminating bias.

Little is known about active law enforcement officers’ knowledge of aging and available resources, or the beliefs they hold. Making appropriate referrals is contingent upon being made aware of available programs and, to some degree, the level to which one may subscribe to societal myths about aging. Working with older adults will become more frequent as society ages, and police will be called upon to play an integral role in the network of programs and services. The first step in assessing what, if any, educational or intervention strategies are needed for law enforcement must begin by evaluating for bias and gaps in knowledge and then offering suggestions for the future.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Background

The UCOA Public Safety Subcommittee initiated a survey specifically designed for law enforcement officers in 2008. The survey sought to identify gaps in knowledge of local law enforcement officers relative to laws specific to the elderly, to assess how well officers are prepared to respond to the needs of the elderly, and to examine their beliefs about the process of aging and subsequent outcomes. Findings from this survey were intended to be the basis for proposed changes to training, investigations, and prosecutions in Utah. While the respondents were kept anonymous, the survey did capture basic demographics of participants to include age, gender, years in law enforcement, highest position held, and formal education.

The administered survey instrument consisted of four sections and encompassed 41 questions (Appendix). This first section presented questions relative to training and familiarity the officers had with laws specific to the elderly and vulnerable populations. Section 2 consisted of questions 7–10 and was not utilized in this analysis. These questions presented four case studies and officers were asked to complete the scenarios. As the results were beyond the purview of this study, we did not evaluate any portion of this section. Palmore’s FAQ1–Multiple-Choice Version, presented as questions 11–35,
made up the third section. The final section of the survey collected basic demographic data.

Surveys were disseminated to several midsized to large police agencies within Salt Lake County, Utah, in 2008. Agency heads were asked to administer the surveys and return them to the UCOA. Two hundred surveys were completed and returned to the UCOA. Although participants were told by the administrators the surveys were anonymous, and nowhere on the survey did it ask for them to identify themselves or their departments, some did write their names on the survey cover page. In these instances, the cover pages were removed and destroyed.

This is a secondary analysis of the survey data administered and collected by the UCOA. The data set was made available to the primary investigator for the purpose of this analysis. The data provided did not contain information that could identify respondents to the survey or the departments for whom they work.

**Procedures**

**Survey Design**

The sections used in this study were those relating to officers’ training and familiarity with laws specific to older persons, the FAQ, and the demographics of respondents.

UCOA data were imported into PASW (PASW Statistics GradPack 18), formally called SPSS Statistical Base, for analysis and review outlined in the following steps. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample as well as responses to individual questionnaire items (Aim 1). Correlational statistics (correlations, t tests,
analysis of variance [ANOVA], and chi-square) were used to determine to what extent demographic characteristics were associated with survey responses (Aim 2).

Specifically, the analytic strategy proceeded in the following stepwise fashion:

1. Individual demographics. Age, gender, experience, highest positions held, and training received were used to describe the study population.

2. Responses to questions about the aging process were analyzed to identify trends or a consensus among officers.

3. Responses to questions concerning the individual’s knowledge of the laws specific to the elderly population and his or her experiences in applying them were cross-tabulated with individual demographics to include age, experience, gender, and highest position served.

4. Analysis was directed toward determining those characteristics or experiences that correlated with knowledge base, attitudes, and beliefs.

Training and Familiarity with Elder Laws

This first section of the survey was comprised of six questions relative to training and familiarity the officers had with laws specific to the elderly and vulnerable populations. The questions were presented in a multiple-choice format. For the purpose of this study, we recoded and collapsed fields in three of the questions as this study was primarily intended to assess the officers’ experiences and proficiencies.

Question 1 asked officers if they had received training regarding abuse, neglect, or exploitation of vulnerable adults. The choices included both “yes” and “no” options, each followed by “further training was ‘desired’ or ‘not wanted.’” These data points were recoded and condensed down to “yes” and “no” responses.
Question 4 asked about the officer’s familiarity with Utah Criminal Code relative to abuse, neglect, and exploitation of a vulnerable adult. The choices included “no,” “somewhat familiar,” “yes, but have not applied it during arrests,” and “yes, and applied during arrests.” This question was recoded and simplified to “yes” and “no” responses.

Question 6 asked officers to define *vulnerable adult* relative to the definition in the legal code by circling all the applicable answers provided. Six multiple-choice options followed to include “provide personal protection”; “provide necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, or medical or other health care”; “obtain services necessary for health, safety, or welfare”; “carry out activities of daily living (ADL)”; “manage the adult’s own resources”; and “comprehend the nature and consequences of remaining in a situation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.” As each of these is clearly spelled out in Utah Criminal Code, the question was recoded to only identify correct answers in cases in which all were selected (Utah Safety Council, 2009).

**Facts on Aging Quiz**

In Section 3, Palmore’s FAQ1–Multiple-Choice Version was presented as questions 11–35 (Palmore, 2005). The aim of this section was to evaluate for potential age bias, positive or negative, and to describe the overall level of knowledge about age and the aging process of this sample of law enforcement officers.

Various versions of the FAQ are still in widespread use today to “measure basic knowledge of physical, mental, and social facts about old age and aging” (Seufert & Car rozza, 2002, p. 279). They see regular use in disciplines in which effective outcomes with the elderly require accurate knowledge about old age and the aging process, such as health-care and social services providers. What originally began as a true–false quiz now
includes new versions, including multiple choice (Palmore, 2005). Psychometric examinations of this version indicate that it “can be used to identify more specific misconceptions, misunderstandings, and factual errors than would be possible with the true–false formats [of the FAQ1]” (Gellis, Sherman, & Lawrance, 2003, p. 7). However, according to Palmore, the purpose of the quiz is not psychometric but rather edumetric. Rather than yielding results of individual officers’ level of knowledge about age and aging, “it is designed to yield measurements that are directly interpretable in terms of specified performance standards” (Klemmack, as cited in Gellis et al., 2003, p. 7). The edumetric properties of the FAQ1 make this tool particularly useful in measuring within-individual growth (test–retest).

Mean FAQ scores for this sample were computed by assessing 1 point for each of the 25 multiple-choice questions that was correctly answered. Age bias scores subsequently were calculated by subtracting the mean percent of the 18 questions indicating negative bias from the mean percentage of 12 items identifying positive bias, as described elsewhere (Harris et al., 1996).

**Officer Demographics**

The final section of the survey was labeled Law Enforcement Profile. Anonymously administered and returned to the UCOA devoid of any personal or departmental identifiers, the survey sought to gather basic demographic information. This study utilized data from the following five items: the participants’ years of law enforcement experience, the highest position in which they have served, age, gender, and highest level of formal education.
The question asking officers to indicate the highest position served in law enforcement was presented in an open-ended format. As the primary author has served as a police officer in a full-time capacity for the past 16 years, the responses were recoded subsequent to his background and familiarity with the lexicon into one of four categories: administration, which includes all officers of lieutenant grade or higher; sergeant; detective; or line officers. As an example of this recoding, all responses including deputy sheriff, patrol officer, and line officer was coded as “line officer.”
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Sample Characteristics

Two hundred questionnaires were completed and returned for analysis. Key demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1. As shown in the table, the sample was predominantly male (74%) with at least some college education (83.5%). The mean age of the sample was 39.7 ($SD = 8.0$), with a range of 25 to 65 years of age. Respondents indicated an average of 13.6 ($SD = 7.7$) years of experience in law enforcement, with the majority ($n = 119$; 59.5%) having served solely as line officers. Not surprisingly, a significant correlation (Pearson $r = .827$; $p < 0.05$) between age and years of service was found.

Training and Familiarity with Elder Laws

This first section was comprised of questions relative to training and familiarity the officers had with laws specific to the elderly and vulnerable populations. The majority (56.5%) reported having never received any related training. Of those who had received such training, 85% ($n = 87$) indicated the training had taken place at least a year prior. As seen in Table 2, participants were asked about their familiarity with the legal definition of a vulnerable adult and the relevant criminal code. Only 29% of all participants conveyed comprehension of the legal definition of a vulnerable adult.
While nearly three fourths of respondents (71.5%) expressed familiarity with the specific legal code, only 42.5% were able to accurately identify its various components. The data also suggested the participants were innately aware of these deficits as an overwhelming number ($n = 144; 72\%$) expressed a desire for training on the subject.

**Facts on Aging Quiz**

**Mean FAQ Scores**

In Section 3, Palmore’s FAQ1–Multiple-Choice Version was presented as questions 11–35 (Palmore, 2005). The mean score for this sample was 11.22, ± 2.67 (48.9%; range 0–19). Mean FAQ scores were not associated with respondent gender, age, or years of experience in law enforcement. Likewise, education level and rank did not significantly impact mean FAQ scores. The effects of training officers may have received and their familiarity with legal codes relevant to the older person were also evaluated relative to these scores. Conducting independent-sample $t$ tests, overall test scores were compared with the level of training officers reported having received, their familiarity with the applicable criminal code, and their understanding of the legal definition of *vulnerable adults*. There was no statistical significance found among these variables (data not shown).

**Age Bias**

Age bias totals for this sample of law enforcement officers were $−4.17, ± 3.37$; range $−2$ to $6$. Previous research utilizing this research tool among college students found net age bias of $−7$ (Harris et al., 1996).
Similar to our analysis of FAQ 1 scores, our analytic strategy was to evaluate for age bias, be it positive or negative, relative to demographic variables. ANOVA found no statistical significance between age bias scores and rank or education. Correlation coefficients were computed for age and years of experience, while a series of $t$ tests were conducted to evaluate the effects of gender, prior training, and familiarity with applicable legal codes and definitions on age bias. Statistical significance was not present among these variables, $p < .05$ (data not shown), suggesting that in this sample age, bias was not influenced by age, experience in law enforcement, or familiarity with legal codes.

Missing Data

Of the 200 surveys returned for analysis, 12 (6%) contained missing data for the FAQ1. The questions relative to the demographics of the respondents were omitted from 19 (15%) of the surveys.
Table 1. Sample Characteristics (n = 200)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>74.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest position held</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detective</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line officer</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of formal education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial college (at least 1 year) or specialized training</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard college or university graduation</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate professional training (graduate degree)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>25–65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in law enforcement</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1–35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Totals may not add up to *N* = 200 due to nonresponses.
Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Training and Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you received training regarding the abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult?</td>
<td>87 (43.5%)</td>
<td>113 (56.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered “yes” to the prior question, please approximate when the training took place.

- Within the last 6 months: 3 (3.4%)
- Six months to 1 year ago: 10 (11.5%)
- One to 2 years ago: 23 (26.4%)
- Two to 3 years ago: 27 (31.0%)
- Over 3 years ago: 24 (27.6%)

Are you familiar with the legal definition of a vulnerable adult?

- Yes: 58 (29.0%)
- No: 59 (29.5%)
- Uncertain: 83 (41.5%)

Are you familiar with Utah Criminal Code 76-5-111, Abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult?

- Yes: 143 (71.5%)
- No: 56 (28.0%)
Table 2 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Vulnerable Adult&quot; means an elder (65+) or an adult 18 years of age or older who has a mental or physical impairment which substantially affects the person’s ability to: (Select all answers which apply)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide personal protection</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, or medical or other health care</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain services necessary for health, safety, or welfare</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out activities of daily living (ADL)</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage the adult’s own resources</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehend the nature and consequences of remaining in a situation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All correct</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

Results from this study suggest law enforcement officers share beliefs about aging with other groups. FAQ1 and age bias scores were similar to those found in previous research, suggesting police officers are no more knowledgeable about aging than college students, social workers, or health-care providers (Anguillo et al., 1996; Cammer-Paris et al., 1997; Duerson et al., 1992; Hale & Hewitt, 1998; Mosher-Ashley & Ball, 1999; Payne & Berg, 2003; Reed et al., 1992; Shoemaker et al., 1998). Regardless of training, education, experience, age, gender, or rank, officers who were surveyed seem to know little about the aging process or laws specific to older persons. While it is arguable everyone should be better informed about aging, police officers in particular are in the position of being informal gatekeepers to a network of services. Having better informed law enforcement personnel is crucial if officers are to provide informed and comprehensive responses and referrals.

It is worth noting in the years leading up to this study, area police departments had vigorously implemented Crisis Intervention Training. Course content focused on appropriate strategies for dealing with the mentally ill or others in crisis. Interestingly, there was instruction on dealing with the elderly suffering from dementia. However, the elderly were presented as a subpopulation of the mentally ill, which may account for
much of the reported training and why the training had no effect on overall knowledge base.

The edumetric nature of the FAQ1 aside, with such little research on this topic, this study was designed to gain insight and yield results to guide future research. Notwithstanding, in large part, the outcomes mirrored those of previous research in most regards. In contrast to 3 decades of research using the FAQ1, which has seen use in over 90 studies (Palmore, 2005), education had little impact on either the overall FAQ scores or age bias of our sample of police officers. Possible explanations for these disparate findings include police socialization and subculture along with the deficiencies in relevant education. Survival mechanisms constantly reinforce strong in-group versus out-group categorization (Chappell & Lanza-Kaduce, 2009). The influence of this ongoing socialization within police departments overshadows anything learned in distant classrooms to the degree only minor improvements are detected at the graduate-degree level. And there are few classrooms on American college campuses that are presenting curricula on aging or the aging process.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in these findings. The surveys were disseminated by distributing copies to police administrators and requesting they facilitate cooperation and completion among their rank-and-file police officers. It is unknown how many surveys were actually administered to individual officers, so this made for a difficult assessment in terms of actual response rate. In addition, it is not known what role self-selection may have played in the surveys that were submitted. One large department mandated all officers complete the survey as part of an ongoing assessment and education
process; this is not an unusual practice. A range of missing data was detected in both the FAQ1 and demographic profile sections of the survey—6% and 15%, respectively. The degree to which these respondents differed from those who answered all the questions is unknown and may have influenced the findings.

The lack of knowledge relative to the jurisdictions the survey respondents were from further limits the ability to generalize these findings. While administered anonymously, the setting where the surveys were completed may have influenced responses. Like all self-reporting surveys, the data gathered are subject to response bias and subsequent error. The effect of these methodologies on observed outcomes is unknown.

The race of individual officers and the makeup of the communities they serve appear to be highly homogeneous. While the survey did not delve into the matter of officers’ race, the geographical area from which the sample was drawn is 90.8% White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Caution must be used in generalizing these findings to communities with more diverse racial and cultural compositions.

Suggestions for Future Research

Palmore’s (2005) FAQ has seen widespread use among an array of different groups. Overall, it is clear the majority of Americans know little about aging or the aging process. While this research evaluated another group of professionals who regularly interact with the elderly, a more in-depth study of law enforcement is still needed. Replicating this study in departments of different geographical and racial compositions would aid in generalizing findings. Gerontologists should also seek insight into if and how law enforcement goes about referring individuals to social services and to the extent
they are aware of available services and programs. Also, further research on police officers should be conducted to evaluate whether knowledge deficits and age bias impact services and to what extent.

The validation of an instrument by which to measure between-individual differences among future subjects would be indispensible. Breaking from the edumetric nature of the FAQ1 will allow researchers to isolate personality traits, aptitudes, and individual differences that may influence knowledge and bias.

**Implications for Law Enforcement**

Increasingly, law enforcement professionals will be called upon to serve as social workers, counselors, and referral resources within a given community. This will necessitate comprehensive education of those public servants who will be interacting with the public. Fortuitously, enhanced professional interactions inherently reciprocate increased public support for the overall mission of public safety.

Although formal education failed to yield higher scores from this sample, the type of training and the manner in which information has traditionally been presented may be to blame. Seufert and Carrozza (2002) contended learning about aging and the aging process might best be accomplished via forums outside formal educational institutions. Given the subculture surrounding law enforcement and the demonstrated biases, in addition to providing education about aging, these organizations must institute ongoing attitudinal and behavioral modification training (Nusbaum, Mistretta, & Wegner, 2007). Police agencies need targeted training as reliance on colleges, universities, and police academies are failing to achieve adequate outcomes. These traditional educational
institutions cannot furnish the necessary interactions or forums where stereotypes can be eliminated and officers can be prepared to provide effective and informed responses.

Pedagogical research has demonstrated that educational approaches to changing established perceptions and knowledge deficits must do more than relay information in traditional lecture formats (Fisk, 2002; Silverstein & Parrott, 1997). Departmental training must provide officers with accurate information to both dispel myths and prepare officers to address the unique needs of older persons. Bias reduction can best be achieved by including training that incorporates extensive interactions with older persons. Role playing, team projects in which each member shares equal status and responsibility, and establishing common goals are all methods by which myth debunking can occur (Fisk, 2002; Silverstein & Parrott, 1997).

As first responders, police agencies need to work toward a better understanding of the needs of older citizens and prepare officers with the knowledge and tools to meet those needs. While segmenting a portion of society may pose a risk of further stereotyping, departments need to understand the challenges particular to older persons and have officers specially trained to do so. Gerontologists can play a pivotal role in this preparation by speaking with officers and spelling out the significance of their interactions and referrals. As has been done with domestic violence and crimes against children, police agencies need to team up with prosecutors, victim advocates, and social services personnel with the aim of providing for the needs of those they serve.

Institutional changes of this breadth cannot be affected by line officers and will require inception and reinforcement by upper administrators. Established biases coupled with low comprehension of age-related issues necessitate implementing mandatory
educational courses and workshops. The ongoing nature of such educational interventions will serve to both better equip officers to address age-related calls for service and demonstrate the institutional commitment to older citizens. The inception of training focusing on a subpopulation of the community poses the risk of further marginalization. This can largely be mitigated by reiterating that the acceptance of older adults and understanding the issues facing them illustrates our moral maturity, not theirs.
APPENDIX

We would like to begin by asking you some specific questions that relate to elder abuse/neglect/exploitation of older adults in the state of Utah. Please select the one response that you think is the best answer.

1. Have you received training regarding the abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult?
   a. yes, no further training on this topic is needed
   b. yes, and would like further training on this topic
   c. no, not interested in training on this topic
   d. no, but would like training on this topic

2. If you answered “Yes” to the prior question, please approximate when the training took place.
   a. within last six months
   b. six months to one year ago
   c. one to two years ago
   d. two to three years ago
   e. over three years ago

3. Are you familiar with the legal definition of a vulnerable adult?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I think so, but am not certain

4. Are you familiar with Utah Criminal Code 76-5-111, Abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult?
   a. no
   b. somewhat familiar
   c. yes, but have not applied it during arrests
   d. yes, have applied it during arrests

5. If you have applied 76-5-111 in an arrest, in which location(s) did the arrest take place?
Please indicate which answers below best complete the legal definition of “vulnerable adult” as defined in U.C.C. 76-5-111. Circle all answers that apply.

6. “Vulnerable Adult” means an elder adult (65+) or an adult 18 years of age and older who has a mental and physical impairment which substantially affects the person’s ability to:
   a. Provide personal protection
   b. Provide necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, or medical or other health care
   c. Obtain services necessary for health, safety, or welfare
   d. Carry out the activities of daily living (ADL)
   e. Manage the adult’s own resources
   f. Comprehend the nature and consequences of remaining in a situation of abuse, neglect, or exploitation

Next, we will ask you to complete four case studies.

7. James is a 79-year-old male who is blind. He sends his neighbor Sue to the store with his credit card to buy his cigarettes. Family members discovered $1,500 charged to his card at Walmart for gas, fast food, and a television. James says he never gave anyone permission to use his card to buy anything other than his cigarettes. James and his family report this to the proper authorities for investigation. What should the responding officer do?

8. Eric is a 45-year-old, who functions on a 12-year-old level. He lives with his older brother, Frank. Eric and Frank got into an argument and Frank punched Eric in the face with a closed fist. Eric develops a black eye from the punch. The injury is called in to property authorities when observed at Eric’s day program. What should the responding officer do?

9. Mary is a 58-year-old who has severe MS and is bed-bound but she is mentally alert and she often talks to friends on the phone. A home-health agency cares for Mary, but she got angry at an aide and fired the agency. The agency was providing all her needs including food, medications, and toileting. After three days without care, Mary calls 911 and reports that the agency is committing criminal neglect. What should the responding officer do?
10. Ethyl is an 83-year-old grandmother who lives with her granddaughter, Megan. A Meals-on-Wheels driver recognized Ethyl walking down the block from her home on a busy street and pulled up next to her. Megan arrived shortly after the driver found Ethyl and said, “You better not be fucking leaving the house or I will put you in a nursing home.” She yelled and swore at Ethyl for five minutes, while Ethyl cried and shook. When Adult Protective Services (APS) interviewed Ethyl, she said she was humiliated. APS contacted law enforcement. What should the responding officer do?

Listed below are general questions about aging and older adults. Please select the one response you think is the best answer.

11. The proportion of people over 65 who are senile (have impaired memory, disorientation, or dementia) is:
   a. about 1 in 100
   b. about 1 in 10
   c. about 1 in 2
   d. the majority

12. The senses that tend to weaken in old age are:
   a. sight and hearing
   b. taste and smell
   c. sight, hearing, and touch
   d. all five senses

13. The majority of old couples:
   a. have little or no interest in sex
   b. are not able to have sexual relations
   c. continue to enjoy sexual relations
   d. think sex is only for the young

14. Lung vital capacity in old age:
   a. tends to decline
   b. stays about the same among nonsmokers
   c. tends to increase among healthy old people
   d. is unrelated to age

15. Happiness among old people is:
   a. rare
   b. less common than among younger people
c. about as common as among younger people
d. more common than among younger people

16. Physical strength:
   a. tends to decline with age
   b. tends to remain the same among healthy old people
   c. tends to increase among healthy old people
   d. is unrelated to age

17. The percentage of people over 65 in long-stay institutions (such as nursing homes, mental hospitals, and homes for the aged) is about:
   a. 5%
   b. 10%
   c. 25%
   d. 50%

18. The accident rate per driver over age 65 is:
   a. higher than for those under 65
   b. about the same as for those under 65
   c. lower than for those under 65
   d. unknown

19. Most workers over 65:
   a. work less effectively than younger workers
   b. work as effectively as younger workers
   c. work more effectively than younger workers
   d. are preferred by most employers

20. The proportion of people over 65 who are able to do their normal activities is about:
   a. one tenth
   b. one quarter
   c. one half
   d. three fourths

21. Adaptability to change among people over 65 is:
   a. rare
   b. present among about half
   c. present among most
   d. more common than among younger people
22. As for old people learning new things:
   a. most are unable to learn at any speed
   b. most are able to learn, but at a slower speed
   c. most are able to learn as fast as younger people
   d. learning speed is unrelated to age

23. Depression is more frequent among:
   a. people over 65
   b. adults under 65
   c. young people
   d. children

24. Old people tend to react:
   a. slower than younger people
   b. at about the same speed as younger people
   c. faster than younger people
   d. slower or faster than younger people, depending on the type of test

25. Old people tend to be:
   a. more alike than younger people
   b. the same as younger people in terms of alikeness
   c. less alike than younger people
   d. more alike in some respects and less alike in others

26. Most old people say:
   a. they are seldom bored
   b. they are sometimes bored
   c. they are often bored
   d. life is monotonous

27. The proportion of old people who are socially isolated is:
   a. almost all
   b. about half
   c. less than a fourth
   d. almost none

28. The accident rate among workers over 65 tends to be:
   a. higher than among younger workers
   b. about the same as among younger workers
c. lower than among younger workers
d. unknown because there are so few workers over 65

29. The proportion of the U.S. population now age 65 or over is:
   a. 3%
   b. 13%
   c. 23%
   d. 33%

30. Medical practitioners tend to give older patients:
   a. lower priority than younger patients
   b. the same priority as younger patients
   c. higher priority than younger patients
   d. higher priority if they have Medicaid

31. The poverty rate (as defined by the federal government) among old people is:
   a. higher than among children under age 18
   b. higher than among all persons under 65
   c. about the same as among persons under 65
   d. lower than among persons under 65

32. Most old people are:
   a. employed
   b. employed or would like to be employed
   c. employed, do housework or volunteer work, or would like to do some kind of work
   d. not interested in any work

33. Religiosity tends to:
   a. increase in old age
   b. decrease in old age
   c. be greater in the older generation than in the younger generations
   d. be unrelated to age

34. Most old people:
   a. are seldom angry
   b. are often angry
   c. are often grouchy
   d. often lose their tempers
35. The health and economic status of old people (compared to younger people) in the year 2010 will:

   a. be higher than now
   b. be about the same as now
   c. be lower than now
   d. show no consistent trend

Law Enforcement Profile

1. Years in Law Enforcement:___________

2. Highest position served: ________________________________

3. Locations where served: ________________________________

4. What is your age? __________

5. Gender? _________ Male ___________ Female

6. What is the highest level of your education? (please circle your response)

   a. High School Graduate
   b. Partial College (at least one year) or specialized training
   c. Standard College or University graduation
   d. Graduate professional training (Graduate degree)
REFERENCES


