

Preface

Ageism is a term defined by Dr. Robert Butler and others, who have examined this phenomenon as a factor limiting options for older adults in society. It was coined by Dr. Robert Butler in 1968 to describe the systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against older people because they are old. The purpose of this book is to promote an understanding of ageism in the workplace as a social problem that merits attention by researchers, policy makers, and practitioners.

The impact of ageism has been examined in relation to family and societal abuse and exclusion; however, it has not been examined in any depth in relation to employment and civic engagement. This is in spite of the promotion by governments and civil society of older adults as viable contributors to society as workers and volunteers in work settings.

An Aging Population

Although the authors in this edited volume primarily address ageism in the workplace in the United States and Canada, it is by no means a problem specific to North America. Older adults now make up a larger proportion of the world's population than ever before. The twentieth century experienced a revolution in longevity, and, according to the United Nations (UN) Population Division, this remarkable demographic transition will result in the old and young representing an equal share of the world's population by 2050. This population dynamic has been recognized by international organizations, such as the UN, as well as by national non-governmental organizations such as AARP (formerly the American Association for Retired Persons).

However, the professional literature has until recently said little about how this "age-quake" or "silver tsunami" will transform society and the global workforce. The editors of this book believe that workers, workforce managers, work environments, and organizational cultures have not yet accommodated to these transformative socio-demographic changes. As a result, intentional and unintentional ageist

practices pervade the contemporary workforce. The aging of the workforce has generated a growing body of policy responses and these require a new understanding of the roles of older adults in the workforce. Employers and managers will also have to devise new remedies to change ageist values and prevent mistreatment of older workers. This book provides the necessary policy and practice knowledge to assist employers, managers, researchers, policy makers, and other professionals from multi-disciplinary perspectives to understand the implications of an older workforce within a human rights context.

Securing a Place in the Workforce for Older Workers

Older adults, particularly in developed western countries like the United States and Canada, are living not only longer, but healthier lives, and many seek to remain productive in the workplace, through both paid employment and volunteer work. Their doing so necessitates an agenda that calls for greater older adult participation in political, legislative, and social policy spheres. Along with this will come empowerment of older adults and their full integration into the workplace, so they might share in its benefits.

These trends are not confined to North America. A comprehensive international aging agenda and plan of action for its implementation is included in the International Plan of Action and Political Declaration adopted in Madrid, Spain, in 2002. This international aging agenda, signed onto by most of the 193 member nations of the UN, emphasizes the importance of older people and the vital role they play in society, including the workplace.

Despite these developments, images of aging continue to be perpetuated that portray older adults as burdens, a drain on society, and incapable of keeping up with the demands of the modern workplace. These images are common in contemporary workplaces. As a result, many workplace environments remain inhospitable to older adult workers. This places older adults at risk of discrimination and mistreatment in the workplace. Barriers to promotion of economic, health, and social well-being of older adults exist through discriminatory workplace policies and practices targeting older adult workers who may be the focus of ageist stereotypes and assumptions held by administrators and co-workers. Discriminatory policies affecting mandatory retirement based on age still exist in workplace settings ranging from academia to the UN. Other workplace policies and practices are more subtle, but nonetheless discriminatory and harmful to older adults in the workplace.

Employee mistreatment in the workforce has been a topic of interest in Europe, Australia, and Canada in the last 10 years, and in gender studies in the United States. However, to date there has been little discussion, research, or policy development to ensure protection and well-being of older adult workers in a workforce that has recently been challenged by recession, global financial instability, and technological change. This book seeks to remedy these knowledge gaps.

Overview of the Book

Ageism and Mistreatment of Older Workers: Current Reality, Future Solutions is designed for gerontologists, researchers, policy makers, and practitioners who are committed to improve the quality of life of older people. The goal is to allow older people to live with vitality, dignity, and rights, as active and productive members of society. The editors, an emerita professor of social work and international expert in elder abuse, and a business school president and prominent gerontologist, have teamed up to compile a comprehensive book on research, policy, and practice issues in workplace ageism and mistreatment of older adults. This book also proposes remedies to address these problems, as well as directions for future research, policy, and practice.

This book brings together chapters that explore the challenges and opportunities of an aging workforce as seen by experts in the fields of human rights, gerontology, social work, counseling, law, human resources, and vocational psychology. Although there have been several recent books on aging and work, ageism, workforce bullying, and elder mistreatment, none has combined all these issues within a human rights framework and focused on research, policy, and practice issues specific to ageism and older adult mistreatment in the workplace.

The book's ten chapters identify problems older adults face in the workplace due to discrimination, ageism, and mistreatment. These are phenomena—widely studied among women and minorities—that researchers have shown lead to post-traumatic stress, poor health and mental health outcomes, and premature disengagement from work and civic roles such as volunteerism.

The chapters are grouped into three sections: A Human Rights Perspective and Conceptual Framework (Chaps. 1 and 2); Current Reality (Chaps. 3, 4, and 5), and Future Solutions (Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10).

Chapters 1 and 2 provide conceptual frameworks for understanding and responding to ageism and older adult mistreatment in the workplace. In Chapter 1, Denise Gosselin Caldera provides a human rights framework for the book. She focuses on one particular international aging agenda that has been endorsed by most countries of the world under the auspices of the UN: the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) 2002. In particular, Caldera focuses on MIPAA Priority Areas 1: *Older Persons and Development*; and 3: *Promoting Enabling Environments*. This chapter sets the stage for subsequent chapters as relevant to the 2012 ten-year review of MIPAA, along with the history of emerging policies on mainstreaming older adults in society, with particular relevance to North America. Caldera ends her chapter with a brief discussion of the international movement toward a UN Convention for the Human Rights of Older Persons and its implications for protecting the rights of older workers.

A theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding ageism and older adult mistreatment in the workplace is presented in Chap. 2. Authors Patricia Brownell and Mebane Powell argue for the inclusion of older adults in an expanded definition and framework to be used by researchers, policy makers, and practitioners

in the study of worker mistreatment. Brownell and Powell suggest that gerontologists need to embrace workplace *ageism* and *abuse* as co-occurring, rather than separate, issues. Only by doing so, will employers and managers implement effective policies to combat mistreatment of older workers. At the same time, elder abuse researchers and practitioners need to move beyond narrow conceptualizations of abuse and mistreatment of vulnerable older adults to include mistreatment of older workers who are targeted because of their age.

Chapters 3 through 5 examine workplace realities as they affect older adult workers in both the workplace and retirement. In Chap. 3, Amy Blackstone reviews research findings on older adult mistreatment in the workplace, focusing on harassment as a form of mistreatment from the perspective of older adult workers themselves. There have been few empirical studies on harassment and abuse of older adults in the workplace. Blackstone reviews and summarizes research on this topic to date, with a special focus on a recent study funded by the National Science Foundation on harassment of older adults in the workplace. Both qualitative and quantitative measures are presented and discussed, providing a foundation for the subsequent chapters. Blackstone also highlights results from her recent study of harassment of older workers, arguing that the power older people hold at work, at home, and in their communities shapes their workplace harassment experiences. Based on the findings of this study and a review of the literature, Blackstone concludes that workplace isolation is one of the most common harassment experiences among older workers. She also posits that gender differences are less prominent than anticipated, and that many older workers remain silent about their harassment experiences. She concludes by considering what these findings suggest about improving older people's workplace experiences.

In Chap. 4, Mebane Powell presents the results of a qualitative study of United States newspaper articles about older workers and retirement, undertaken as a means of gauging public perceptions of older workers, as well as ageism and abuse in the workplace. The recent economic crisis in the United States has led to an increase in media coverage of older workers who are laid off, or forced to retire or work past their planned retirement age. Embedded in the reports are the undertones of ageism and abuse of older workers in the workplace. Powell identifies trends in perceptions of older workers as portrayed in newspapers and highlights the lack of resources for supporting older adults who seek work or struggle to remain in the workforce. She concludes that ageism and mistreatment of older people in the workplace serve as ways to deny basic human rights to older individuals through the use of negative stereotypes and economic oppression. On a more optimistic note, Powell also discusses newspapers' role in promoting positive images of older adult workers and focusing attention on the successful efforts of some businesses to develop and maintain age-friendly work environments.

Chapter 5 presents Lynn McDonald's historical examination of ageist attitudes and beliefs embedded in employment and retirement policies and practices relevant to older persons. Repeal of mandatory retirement laws and new policies to attract and retain older workers raise questions that McDonald explores in this chapter: Will older people be forced to toil longer to stay financially healthy? Will they

change careers later in life to explore new interests? How will working longer affect their health? How much will older workers affect the ambitions and working styles of younger colleagues? Will companies have to change their health and benefit plans to accommodate older people? McDonald discusses implications for both individuals and companies of employing workers beyond the mandatory retirement age. These include issues such as unequal power relationships between older workers and their younger colleagues and managers. She also addresses issues related to international political economy.

Chapters 6 through 10 identify solutions to ageism and mistreatment of older adults from organizational, counseling, and legal perspectives. In Chap. 6, Elizabeth Ciampa and Roslyn Chernesky discuss ageism in the workplace from an organizational perspective. They review the literature on older people and the workforce, and discuss ways in which workplace environments perpetuate or mitigate ageist workplace practices. Ciampa and Chernesky argue that administrators and managers in non-profit and for-profit service and business workplace environments seek to ensure the best services for clients, patients, and customers. However, the growing number of older people in the workforce challenges ageist workforce assumptions and has the potential for creating conflict and tension in the workplace. Gender, racial, and ethnic diversity compound the challenges for administrators and workers alike. In light of these challenges, Ciampa and Chernesky discuss practice strategies for administrators and managers to maintain age-friendly and abuse-free work environments.

James Woolever's Chap. 7 builds on the discussion in Chap. 6 by examining in depth the influence of human resource departments in addressing ageism, discrimination, and harassment of older workers. Businesses, health and mental health institutions, and social service agencies all include older adult employees and managers. Especially during economic downturns, when there is pressure on management to cut costs by downsizing, older workers may be targets for dismissal: they may earn higher salaries due to longevity in the job and be perceived as risks for higher health care costs. Woolever highlights insidious and destructive strategies sometimes advised by attorneys as means for terminating older workers. One such strategy is an abrupt termination based on a "reorganization" in which older workers are laid-off and told they are ineligible to apply for any position in the newly reorganized organization. Another termination strategy is a type of authorized bullying. In this strategy, employers arrange for co-workers to complain about the targeted worker, advise the older worker his performance is slipping, write up so-called infractions, and issue a series of warnings to the worker, culminating in dismissal. These strategies can result in unnecessary and long-lasting emotional and physical trauma to the older person, and they serve to perpetuate an ageist workplace environment.

Counter-balancing these trends, anti-discrimination laws prevent some targeting based on age alone, but leave much discretion to employers as to circumstances under which it is permissible to terminate older workers. In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO)—a tripartite UN organization with government, employer, and worker representation intended to promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labor rights—has promoted age-friendly policies

such as buy-outs, phase-out packages, and other incentivized self-selected layoff strategies.

Counseling interventions for older workers who are victims of discrimination and mistreatment in the workplace are discussed by Margo A. Jackson in Chap. 8. Jackson argues that internalized ageism, depression, and uncertainty about competency may make older victims of workplace mistreatment reluctant to protect themselves from unfair treatment, co-worker harassment, and bullying. Thus, they may fail to file complaints or pursue justified legal recourse. Although Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) may be available, older adult victims of workplace discrimination and abuse may be fearful of utilizing them. Often, psychologists, counselors, psychiatric nurses, and social workers who practice with victims of abuse, including workplace abuse, are not knowledgeable about the specific issues that confront older workplace abuse victims. In this chapter, Jackson provides theoretical and practical information to practitioners with older clients who suffer workplace mistreatment.

In Chap. 9, Charmaine Spencer describes current and pending legislation to protect older workers from discrimination and workplace abuse primarily but not exclusively in North America and Europe. In her review of anti-age discrimination legislation in North America, she concludes that US legislation at the federal level offers limited protections for older workers. Much the same can be said for Canadian laws at the federal and provincial level. Even so, Spencer notes that available remedies currently are being tested in US courts at an accelerated rate due to the current economic downturn. Spencer places these laws in the broader context of how anti-bullying and ageism in the workplace are being framed, and the intersection of ageism with other types of discrimination, as well as older workers' ability to access and make use of legal remedies. Until progress is made in these three areas, Spencer argues, older workers' situations will continue to be precarious.

In recent years, there has been a movement in the United States to pass state laws to prevent workplace bullying and mistreatment, resulting in a number of pending 'healthy workplace' bills in almost all states. In Canada, although older workers' precarious position is sometimes recognized, the need for additional protections in the workplace has received little, if any, attention to date. In contrast, the European Union has passed into law stringent anti-bullying workplace policies according to the International Labour Organization that—in combination with anti-age discrimination laws—offer more protection to older workers than legislation passed in North America to date.

Israel Doron, Bethany Brown, and Susan Somers devote Chap. 10 to a discussion of ageism in the workplace and the movement toward a UN Convention for the Human Rights of Older People. When the UN Declaration of Human Rights was passed in 1948, it included few references to older adults as a distinct category of people in need of protection. In this chapter, Doron, Brown, and Somers review a recent effort to correct this omission: the international movement toward a Convention for the Human Rights of Older People. The Madrid 2002 International Plan of Action in Ageing addresses discrimination against older adults as part of the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in Madrid, Spain, in April 2002. The

authors conclude that a UN Convention for the Human Rights of Older People would raise the issue of ageism generally, and in the workplace specifically, as a human rights issue.

Doron, Brown, and Somers place ageism and abuse in the workplace within the current movement to extend human rights protections to older adults. This movement emphasizes social inclusion and the right of older adults to remain productive and active in the workplace with dignity and freedom from abuse. In this chapter, the authors give gerontologists, lawyers, and other interested practitioners in North America a better understanding of the global picture of ageism in the workplace as it relates to international and regional human rights agreements. The legal landscape regarding age discrimination is very different around the world. In many undeveloped countries age discrimination is unrecognized under local laws. Even in many developed countries, age-based employment policies, such as mandatory retirement, a maximum age limit for recruitment, and age-based workforce layoffs are common and legal practices.

Currently, the legal field of human rights for older persons is in a state of flux. New laws, court rulings, and international instruments and policies are being established. In 2011, an ongoing working group under the auspices of the UN began to examine older people's human rights in nations around the world. The purpose of the UN working group is to better understand gaps in social protection of older adults under current national and international law, and determine if stronger international human rights instruments are warranted.

This book provides a comprehensive view of ageism in the workplace and how it leads to, and reflects, various forms of older worker mistreatment. It proposes a human rights framework for understanding, and for intervening, to alleviate the workplace mistreatment of older adults. The editors of this collection of chapters hope that the knowledge assembled here will be used by gerontologists, researchers, policy makers, helping professionals, employers, managers, and others to create just working conditions and secure environments for older workers. The ultimate beneficiary will be society at-large.

New York, New York
Atherton, California

Patricia Brownell
James J. Kelly

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