Lessoning Ageism In North America: The Education System About Aging And Positive Interaction

Ageism is a kind of stereotyping, inequity and preconception against people based on their ages (WHO, 2019). Ageism can be divided into two types of negative behavior towards older adults in different age ranges (WHO, 2019). One is the wrong consumption and attitude about older people who are still working as a result of the social age construction. For instance, people may think the senior employee would not work efficiently. Another is the misconception of the real needs of the older people whose ages are over 70. They need more accompany and care rather than stereotype and discrimination that they move and think slowly. The negative impact that has been brought on by ageism has become a controversial issue and an international concern. A study that focused on reducing ageism by education and contacts indicated that “ageism is persuasive in the United States, making it on an urgent social issue.” (Lytle & Levy, 2017). In America, over 70% of older people thought they had been treated unequally and insulted (Robbins, 2019). Ageism is described as insidious and ubiquitous behavior. (Sugar, Haslem, Skaar, Brancamp & Harris, 2017) A study proposed a model called Positive Education about Aging and Contact Experiences (PEACE), which this research focused on examining whether education will reduce ageism in North American society (Levy, 2016). Ageism in society will be reduced by the education system in terms of raising the awareness of old people’s abilities, providing knowledge about the aging process, encouraging to positively interact with different generations and combining both (knowledge and interaction) to break down stereotypes.

Education on Aging

Recently, there has been nearly no education on ageism, which means students will not be told the negative impact brought by ageism. In North America, it is not able for researchers to distinguish people who have received education on ageism compared to people who have not, due to lack of education on ageism in North America (Levy, 2016). As a consequence, the lack of formal schooling about aging makes it become one of the key factors that increase the ageism. (Levy, 2016) A special kind of education system was constructed by a study, focusing on an aging course with service-learning project (Sugar et al., 2016). Three groups of students were involved in an experiment. Students from the first group would take both aging courses and service-learning project, in comparison with students who received education on aging without the service-learning project (Sugar et al., 2016). The third group would not attend any courses and projects with an additional group of older adults who were involved in the service-learning project (Sugar et al., 2016). The results showed that service-learning project, an intergenerational interaction, was successful in educating ageism to students. It had also been proved that service learning is an appropriate way to educate people on ageism to encourage social change in North American community.

Service Learning (Positive Interact)

Additionally, service-learning project is similar to the Positive Contact in PEACE (Positive Education about Aging and Contact Experiences) Model (Lytle et al., 2017). The author Levy

first tested PEACE model and created an experiment with 505 community participants which the majority (76.7%) of them who were from North America in order to examine the key factors on reducing ageism. Extended contact means having a positive relationship with older relatives. A study found that people have more extended contact illustrated more positive thoughts about older people (Drury, Hutchison & Abrams, 2016). The results of Levy's experiment on PEACE Model showed that ageism would be reduced by extended interaction in a positive intergeneration way, as well as in-person contact with older adults positively (Drury et al., 2016), showing that extended contact can be the beginning of improving attitude to older people.

Combine Education and Positive Interaction

Combining education and positive contact is more likely to be a more effective method to reduce ageism (Levy, 2016). Levy's further experiment based on PEACE Model (Lytle et al., 2017) showed that the combined method did not behavior a more effective way than either education only or contact only. Nevertheless, although it didn't show a better advantage in lessoning ageism, education on ageism and service learning (extended contact) should be separated into two completely different methods since it works differently, and the effects are various. The combined method would not more effective, but it is comprehensive in reducing ageism. Although combining education and social service learning will not be more effective than each of them, it shows that learning the knowledge about aging and apply them into practical social activities will make the process of lessoning ageism more comprehensive (Sugar et al., 2016).

Discussion & Implication

Ageism is one of the common, serious and worldwide societal problems which lacks public concern and formal schooling about aging. Education is one of the key factors to reduce ageism since it provided knowledge about aging. Social service learning is another effective method to lesson ageism because it is practical for people to positively interact with older people and easily break down the aging stereotype. Additionally, combining education and interaction method is the most comprehensive reduction towards ageism. Ageism is not merely a problem of North America. Raising the awareness of the public about reducing ageism among the world is the first priority, and the government should be aware of this kind of societal problem immediately.