

Background

- Ageism and school-age children's negative attitudes toward aging are associated with a variety of negative effects on older adults including an increased risk for loneliness and social isolation
- Loneliness and social isolation among older adults are associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes
- Interventions which combine intergenerational activities with education about aging result in the largest positive effects on attitudes toward ageism
- A community-based organization providing intergenerational activities for older adults at risk for social isolation had an existing program, but no evaluation had been conducted

Purpose

- Evaluate the attitudes toward aging among youth participants prior to participating in intergenerational activities at a community organization
- Assess older adult participants' perspectives about their experience participating in intergenerational activities, including recommendations for improving programming

Theoretical Model

The Positive Education about Aging and Contact Experiences (PEACE) model for reducing ageism among younger people has been found to reduce ageism attitudes



Methods

Timeline

- The intergenerational programming occurred from November 2019 to March 2020

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Methods, contd.

Setting: A community-based organization serving older adults at risk of social isolation

Participants

- 150 elementary school students from two nearby private schools affiliated the community-based organization
- 40 older adults from the community and affiliated with the community-based organization

Describe the program

Program content		
Session	Group Activity	Small Group Discussion
1	Board games	Historic moment experienced
2	Bingo	Holiday traditions
3	Poster art project	Favorite summer activities
4	Board games	Hobbies
5	Mural art project	Meaning of community
6	Bingo	Favorite music

Measures

Children's attitudes towards aging:

- 12-item "Age Attitudes" survey developed by the community organization: 6 positive and 6 negative items about aging and older adults
- Individual items scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 4=strongly agree)
- Surveys scored (<8=very negative; 9-16=negative; 17-24=somewhat negative; 25-32=somewhat positive; 33-40=positive; 41-48=very positive)

Older adults' perceptions:

Open ended telephone interviews

- Favorite aspects of the intergenerational activities
- Perceived impact from participation in intergenerational activities
- Suggestions for future intergenerational programming

Procedures

- "Age Attitudes" surveys were distributed to school-aged participants prior to participating in the intergenerational activities. Of the 150 school-aged participants, 98 (65%) completed the surveys. Likert scale surveys were scored to determine summative Age Attitudes scores for the youth participants.
- Telephone interviews were conducted with 8 (20%) of the older adult participants after participating in the intergenerational activities. Qualitative data from telephone interviews with older adult participants was reviewed and themes identified.

Results

Youth Attitudes Toward Aging Scores (n=98)

	%
Very Negative	0
Negative	1
Somewhat Negative	3.1
Somewhat Positive	35.7
Positive	52
Very Positive	8.2

- 96% of children held positive attitudes toward older adults before participating in intergenerational activities

Results, contd.

Positive Statements

	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
"Most old people are interesting"	92	9
"Old people take the time to listen to younger people"	89	11
"I am comfortable around most old people"	83	17
"Most old people are interested in learning new things"	74	25
"Most old people are able to change if they need to"	72	27
"Most old people have no more faults than anybody else"	54	46

- The majority of children agreed or strongly agreed with the positive statements about older adults

Negative Statements

	Agree or Strongly Agree (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
"Most old people don't like young people"	7	93
"Most old people are grumpy or unpleasant"	9	91
"Most old people are pretty much the same"	14	86
"Most old people don't like to volunteer to help others"	15	84
"Most old people are sick or need a lot of help"	27	73
"Most old people are forgetful or confused"	35	66

- The majority of children disagreed or strongly disagreed with the negative statements about older adults

Limitations: Due to COVID-19, we were unable to access students to conduct post-surveys. The interviews with adults (n=8) were adapted to telephone calls which may have reduced response rate (20%)

Qualitative data from telephone surveys

Themes that emerged from telephone interviews with the older adults included:

- Mutual benefits
"[I feel useful because] the children asked questions, and I could answer."
- Appreciation for interacting with the youth
"[My favorite part is] listening to the children talk and interacting with one another. The children were all non-judgmental and respectful."
- Recommendations for future interactions
"I would like to go on field trips with the children or even help them with their schoolwork or projects."

Conclusions

- The children were found to be overwhelmingly positive about aging and older adults
- Older adults found the intergenerational activities to be beneficial
- Future intergenerational activities could include bringing older adults into school activities or settings