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Images of Aging in America 2004

Executive Summary

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Images of Aging in America 2004 Executive Summary

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Link to Summary of Selected Findings and Full Final Report:
<http://www.aarp.org/images2004>



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Images of Aging in America 2004

Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings from a telephone survey conducted in 2004 by AARP and the University of Southern California in order to understand Americans' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes about aging and older people. Comparisons are also made to findings from a similar study conducted in 1994.

Key Findings:

- Many Americans still have misconceptions about aging and older people. For example, views of older persons as asexual, miserable, or “pretty much alike,” are common among Americans.
- Some demographic subgroups differ in knowledge about aging and older people. For example, misconceptions about aging and older people are more common among those who have not yet reached middle age (35-64).
- Less knowledge about aging is associated with greater anxiety about the aging process.
- The frequency of problems experienced in life is associated with higher levels of anxiety about aging.
- Americans project many more problems onto older people than older people themselves say they actually experience.
- More positively, one problem that is seen as less prevalent today than in 1994 is “fear of crime.”
- Americans are aware of changes for the better in the health and economic status of older people in recent decades.
- Americans generally feel that “retired older Americans” have either *too little* or the *right amount* of influence “in this country today.”
- Americans generally feel that older people receive either less than their fair share or about their fair share of local government benefits.
- Intergenerational conflict is not a major problem in America today.
- Americans of all ages tend to be satisfied with their lives. Anxieties and misconceptions about aging aside, nearly nine-in-ten Americans are at least “somewhat satisfied” with their lives “as a whole.”
- Americans are fairly knowledgeable about aging. 2004 results are similar to those from 1994.

Implications:

Some misconceptions and anxieties about aging continue to offer a challenge to those who are in a position to influence the way Americans perceive aging and older people. Despite increased media and public attention to aging, and the aging of America in general, the level of understanding of the aging process has not changed much over the last ten years, and misconceptions remain.

There is room for politicians, journalists, educators, medical researchers, and people in many other roles to help Americans to learn more and reduce anxiety about the aging process.

Americans with lower socio-economic status and/or experiencing serious problems in their lives stand to benefit the most from efforts to put the aging process and older people into proper perspective.

The relationships between knowledge, problems experienced in life, and anxiety about the aging process underscore the need for careful, sensitive treatment of news, medical research findings, and policies dealing with older people.

The failure of intergenerational conflict to emerge despite its prediction by pundits provides a positive social foundation as America begins to address the demographic shift toward an aging population.

AARP
Knowledge Management
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