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Introduction

• Ageist myths and stereotypical misconceptions deem older adults as asexual.

• However, seniors between 57-64 (73%), 65-75 (53%), and 75-85 (26%) report being sexually active (Lindau et al., 2007). For 45 and older men (89%) and women (61%), sex is important to quality of life (Fisher, 2010).

• Adults 50 and older is the fastest growing demographic among some online dating websites, with membership increasing as much as 89% for one site (Goehner, 2010).

• Sexually transmitted diseases are increasing among the older population (Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

• However, older adults often lack understanding of the body’s sexual changes, and symptoms that relate to infections may be attributed to normal signs of aging (Boskey, 2015).
Social Work Relevance

• The older adult population is steadily increasing and expected to swell to approx. 98 million by 2060 (Administration on Aging, 2015). Social workers need to be aware of the unique challenges facing this demographic.

• As outlined in the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), Social workers should promote social justice and social change on behalf of clients; this is necessary to address stereotypes and ageist myths that prevail concerning the target population, and that contribute to sexual healthcare disparities for that demographic.

• It is also important to ensure the dignity and worth of the person. This can be a significant factor in determining how older adults respond to preventative interventions, and must be considered when working with diverse groups such as racial/ethnic minorities and LBGT older adults.
Cross-Cultural Relevance

• One in 10 Americans use online dating sites and older adults are becoming the fastest growing demographic using the service for romantic connections (Goehner, 2010).

• Ageist myths and stereotypes suggest sex is not important to this demographic, resulting in limited efforts to provide STI awareness and education for this growing population (La Vail, 2010).

• Sexual health care disparities among older adults intensify for sub-groups within that population who are outside the heteronormative expectation, and identify as LGBT (Foglia & Fredricksen-Goldsen, 2014).

• LGBT older adults engage in risky sexual behaviors that they practiced in their younger years (Chaya & Bernert, 2014).
Methods

• The target population will be sexually active older adults in Southern California who engage in online dating and are at risk of contracting STIs.

• Funding sources were identified through use of Web browsers such as Google, Yahoo and Bing; foundations, local state and federal government agencies; grant writing databases, and the Long Beach Non Profit Library.

• Archstone Foundation was selected based on its funding priorities, funding duration, areas of interest, geographic focus, alignment to the host agency’s mission, and its commitment to address issues challenging older adults.

• This private grant making organization was formed in 1985 with a name change to Archstone Foundation in 1996. Archstone recognizes the need to prepare for America’s aging population and focuses on concerns related to aging and building partnerships with grantees. They are a leader in areas of aging and philanthropy and has awarded over 900 grants totaling almost $90 million.
Methods Cont’d

• Sources for the needs assessment included an extensive literature review of scholarly journals, information from relevant websites, statistics from the Administration on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control, and the U.S. Census Bureau, reviews of social service agencies targeting older adults, experiences at internship, and discussions with older adults.

• Projected budget is $101,750. This will cover costs for an LCSW Program Coordinator/Facilitator PTE @ $50,000; 2 MSW interns PTE @ $17,600; Webpage Developer @ $11,600; Live video spokesperson creator @ $500; Office Supplies @ $2,000; Marketing and printing @ $3,000; Transportation and mileage @ $4,000; 2 computers @ $2,800; Miscellaneous costs @ $1,000; and Overheads @ $9,250.
Grant Proposal

• The proposed program is an online sexual health education program.

• It will consist of a culturally sensitive webpage that hosts online group sexual health education sessions with an LCSW.

• The webpage will also contain information on STIs, signs & symptoms, safer sex practices, sexuality and aging, proper condom use, information on free testing sites, how to engage PCPs in sexual health discussions, how to initiate discussions about condom use with sexual partners, etc.

• An older adult live video spokesperson will welcome visitors to the page and provide directions on navigation and use of its features.

• The target population is sexually active older adults in Southern California who engage in online dating and are at risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The population served will be adults 50 and over.
Grant Proposal Cont’d

• The proposed program will be sustained by grant funding in its initial year, then it is expected to be sponsored by the host agency. If necessary, it will seek the maximum 3 year continuation funding from the initial funding agency, or source new grants. Other potential sources include fundraising, volunteer staffing, in-kind supports, etc.

• Program objectives: (1) Develop a sexual health education webpage for target population, (2) Create awareness of the program webpage among the target population, (3) Recruit 12 group participants per online education session, (4) Increase program participants’ knowledge of STIs, and safer sex practices.

• Program evaluation included: Pre and post education session surveys, webpage “Test Your Knowledge” quizzes, feedback and suggestion forms, logs that track number of visitors to the webpage and which topics they access, registration forms that record participant demographics.
Lessons Learned/Implications for Social Work

- Older adults do not fit into a tidy, stereotypical box. They are living longer and many are sexually active and technologically savvy. They use the internet to establish romantic connections.

- Myths, ageism and misconceptions together with lack of knowledge and other issues contribute to the sexual healthcare disparities experienced by many older adults.

- With the older adult population set to increase exponentially over the next several years, social workers must understand the unique challenges they face and prepare to address their needs, including those relate to sexual health. They must also consider the lived experiences of this demographic and understand how they play a role in their sexuality and their approach to treatment.

- With STIs increasing among seniors, this is not just an older adult issue, it is also a public health issue and social workers must address these challenges.
References


