

# TRIPLE JEOPARDY: Protecting At-Risk Refugee Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

## UNDERSTANDING AGING

### 1. AIM

The module seeks to provide a general understanding of the various definitions of older people, and the factors that contribute to discrimination against people perceived as elderly. It clarifies the difference between the temporal and social definitions of older people.

### 2. USE

This module may be used as part of a half-, one- or two-day training (see *Model Agendas*).

TIME	METHODOLOGY	MATERIALS
1 hour, 30 minutes	PowerPoint Brainstorming Discussion Group work	Flip chart Markers Understanding Aging PowerPoint Projector

### 3. GENERAL BACKGROUND

- According to UNHCR, older refugees make up some 3 percent of the overall population of concern to UNHCR. Most older displaced people are women.
- The definition of an older person as adopted by the World Health Organization is a person over 60 years old. In the modules ahead, we will be using a more flexible socio-cultural definition of older people which takes into consideration the application of cultural norms and life expectancy within the context of people’s circumstances and environment.
- During conflict and instability, networks of social support collapse, leaving many older displaced people on their own or as heads of households because of the loss of the middle generation to armed violence or HIV/AIDS.
- Existing bias among humanitarian actors toward women, children and the young adds another barrier to overcoming the invisibility experienced by older refugees.
- The invisibility, isolation or responsibilities of older refugees for dependents may contribute to exposure to SGBV.
- The social taboos around sexuality and older people contribute to the “culture of silence” that surrounds older refugees affected by SGBV.
- The Universal Declaration on Human Rights states in Article 1 that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This equality does not change with age: older men and women have the same rights as those who are younger. But older people are not recognized explicitly under any international human rights law instruments and, as a result, need extra attention.

### Resources

Triple Jeopardy Report, pp. 17-21.

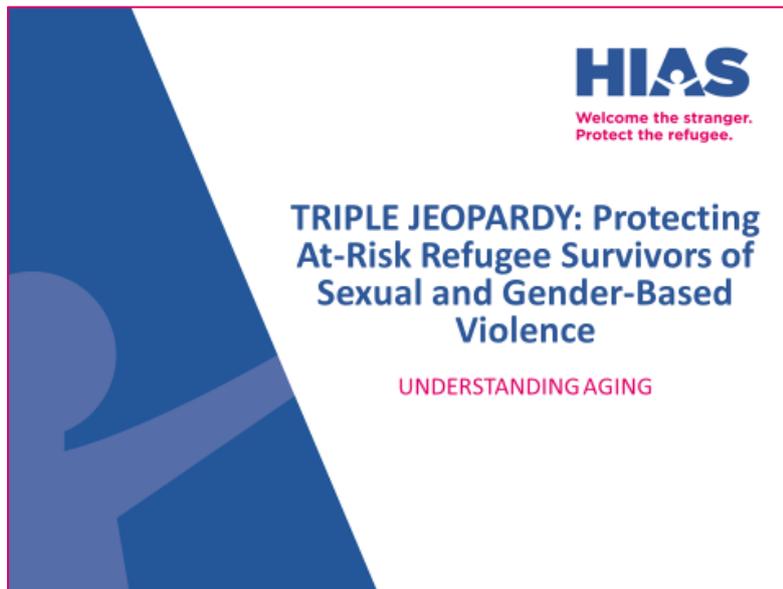
HelpAge International (2002) [Encouraging Agencies to Pay Attention to the Needs, Knowledge and Experience of Older People](#). HelpAge International (2010) [Strengthening Older People’s Rights: Towards a UN Convention](#). Macdonald, Flora (2002) [Legal Protection of the Vulnerable: The Case of](#)

[Older IDPs](#). Refugee Law Project (2016) [No Pride in Ageing: The Plight of Elderly Refugees in Uganda](#). UNICEF (2003) [Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced People](#). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2016) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015](#). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2013) [Working with Older People in Displacement](#). World Health Organization (2002) [Proposed Working Definition of an Older Person in Africa for the MDS Project](#).

#### 4. SLIDES

This section provides you background and resources, where appropriate, for each PowerPoint slide in the module. It also gives you instructions to facilitate group discussions and exercises.

##### SLIDE 1: COVER



## Objectives



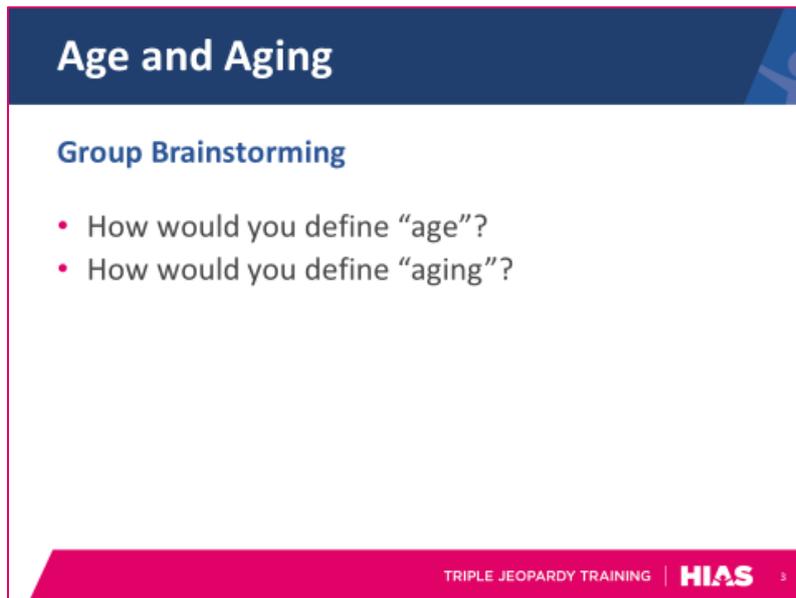
By the end of the session, participants will understand

1. The differences between the temporal, biological and sociocultural definitions of aging
2. How discrimination affects older people

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 2

### Background

- Read through the objectives.
- Explain that the module will focus on two main issues: (1) the complexity of the socio-cultural construct that defines people as “older” and how older people may be identified by different attributes in varying cultural contexts, and; (2) the origins of discrimination against and exclusion of older people.



**Age and Aging**

**Group Brainstorming**

- How would you define “age”?
- How would you define “aging”?

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 3

**Materials**

Flip chart and markers

**Group Activity (10 minutes)**

- Ask participants how they would define “age.”
- Encourage diverse participants to respond.
- Record answers on the flip chart.
- Sum up by developing a short definition of “age,” drawn from the answers provided.
- Write the definition on the flip chart.
- Do the same for “aging.”
- Post the definitions of age and aging on the wall for later reference.

#### SLIDE 4: AGE

**Age**

- **Temporal** – Based on time and not a biological state
- **Progressive** – We are all heading there at a similar pace
- **Irreversible** – Age is progressive; one-way

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS

#### Background

- Compare participants' definition of age with the one presented on the slide.
- Age is a temporal reference relating to time passed since birth and not a biological state. When a person says "I am 34," the person is indicating that 34 years have passed since that person's time of birth. One can make various assumptions as to the person's biological state of aging at 34, but these biological traits are also dependent on genetics, nutrition, health, and so on.
- Since age relates to time, it is progressive and cannot be turned back.

## SLIDE 5: AGING

### Aging

- **Physical** – Aging is biological and affects different people in different ways
- **Progressive** – Its pace also differs from one person to another
- **Irreversible** – Aging can't be stopped even with cosmetics, plastic surgery or hormone treatment

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 5

### Background

- Compare participants' definition of aging with the one presented on the slide.
- Aging relates to the impact of a wide variety of molecular and cellular damage over time, which leads to a gradual decrease in physical and mental capacity, a growing risk of disease and, ultimately, death.
- Aging is a biological process that relates to time but affects each one of us differently.
- Each of us may experience aging at a different pace, determined by our genetic disposition and our environment (nutrition, diseases, stress, etc.).
- Some aging symptoms like wrinkles and other skin-related phenomena may be concealed through cosmetic intervention, but the process of aging is irreversible.
- People fear aging because it symbolizes the end of our existence, and is associated with diminished power and beauty. We try to cope with it as best we can.

### Resources

World Health Organization (2015) [Ageing and Health](#).

## Definitions of Older People

- United Nations – A person over 60 years old
- Sociocultural – Old age is a social construct that differs from one society to another based on social perceptions of temporal age, physical aging, social roles and age-related power hierarchies, including:
  - Family status (e.g., grandparents or widows)
  - Physical appearance (e.g., gray hair and wrinkles)
  - Age-related health conditions (e.g., physical deterioration due to a chronic disease)

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 6

### Background

- Ask participants how older people are defined in their daily professional dealings and how that definition fits with the socio-cultural reality in their community.
- Ask volunteer participants to read the two definitions of older people presented on the slide, and discuss.
- In certain cultures and societies, people are described as older because of their social status (widows, grandparents, etc.).
  - Ask participants for some examples.
- In some cases, older age is attributed to certain physical features like gray hair, wrinkles or certain health conditions related to aging, but these characteristics may also appear due to genetic and other circumstances in people in their twenties and thirties.
- Health, nutrition, poverty and access to medical services may determine life expectancy.
- In countries like Swaziland, Lesotho or the Central African Republic, the average life expectancy is 49 years, much lower than the UN definition of an older person. In such circumstances, people may be described as older when they are at a much younger temporal age.

### Resources

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015) [United Nations World Population Prospects: 2015 Revision](#).

## SLIDE 7: AGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION OR “AGEISM”

The slide features a dark blue header with the title "Age-Based Discrimination or 'Ageism'" in white. The main content area is white with a red border, containing a bulleted list. At the bottom, there is a red footer with the text "TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 7".

### Age-Based Discrimination or “Ageism”

- Limits a person’s ability to participate equally in society due to his/her perceived age
- Applies to
  - Older people
  - Children
  - Youth

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 7

### Background

- Before presenting the slide, ask participants how age categories (older and younger) demarcate people’s rights and abilities to participate in social, legal and economic spheres.
- Present the slide and discuss.
- Older people, children and underage youth are often assigned different legal, social and political spaces that relate to consent, independence and mental maturity/ability. These categorizations are significant in questioning the independence of older people and their mental and intellectual abilities, making it possible that older people will need representation by others.
- Ageism is the stereotyping of, prejudice against, or discrimination against people because of their age. Age discrimination occurs when people are treated differently because of their age.
- Ageism and age discrimination can result in violations of many rights of older men and women, such as the right to education, right to personal security, right of free movement, right to be free of discrimination by medical service providers.

### Resources

HelpAge International (2010) [Strengthening Older People’s Rights: Towards a UN Convention](#).  
United Nations (1948) [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

## Intersectionality

- Older people may face additional discrimination if they are
  - Women
  - People with disabilities
  - Religious minorities
  - Sexual minorities (LGBTI)
  - Refugees

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 8

### Background

- Explain that older people may face additional challenges when they are also part of another social category that leads to further discrimination.
- **Intersectionality** is a term that describes the interconnected nature of social categories, including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age and disability, as they apply to a given individual or group, and which creates overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
- For example, an older person who is Christian in a majority Muslim country may face greater challenges accessing health services than one who is Muslim.
- Ask participants if they can think of ways that older women or older people with disabilities may face more social barriers than older men or older people without disabilities.

## Older People: Myth or Fact?

- Do older people have more needs or fewer needs than younger people?
- As people age, do they have more social responsibilities or fewer?
- Do older people have a lower or higher social ranking than middle-aged or younger people?
- Do humanitarian agencies focus on the needs of older people or not?
- Are older women at greater risk of having their protection needs overlooked than older men?

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | **HIAS** 9

### Background

- Ask participants the questions presented on the slide. There is no right or wrong answer.
- Develop a discussion of 3 minutes per question, drawing upon the background information.
- The increase or decrease in needs of an older person is individual and may depend on medical, mental and economic resources and the availability of a social network of support.
- In some cultures, older people gain distinctive leading roles in society as guardians of knowledge. In other societies, especially those following a more neoliberal economic value system, older people may lose many of their social responsibilities once retired and no longer working, and as a result may lose their social status in society and the community.
- Due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the ravages of armed conflict, many older women find themselves heading households comprised of their own grandchildren whose parents have passed away. These women are at greater risk of SGBV as they struggle to make ends meet and may be exposed to risky behavior and situations making them more vulnerable to SGBV.
- In situations of displacement, older men who are heads of households have lost most of their possessions and resources. Unable to fulfill gender roles by providing for their families, they are, at times, exposed to SGBV from spouses or family members or become involved in situations of domestic violence due to rising tensions surrounding gender role expectations.

### Resources

Triple Jeopardy Report, pp. 17-22.

HelpAge International (2002) [Encouraging Agencies to Pay Attention to the Needs, Knowledge and Experience of Older People](#). Macdonald, Flora (2002) [Legal Protection of the Vulnerable: The Case of Older IDPs](#).

## SLIDE 10: OLDER REFUGEES IN DISPLACEMENT

### Older Refugees in Displacement

*'I felt dead, very dead and was asking myself why it happened to me. When I went to the government with a referral letter from the shelter, they just screamed, "We don't like these kinds of things! (SGBV)" Those people are careless, heartless; they don't even care when old people are asking for help. You just have to struggle by yourself because they don't care. It's like you're not a human being when they see you there.'*

Older Refugee Woman, Johannesburg, South Africa, 8 March 2014.

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 10

#### Background

- Ask a volunteer to read the quote.
- Ask participants why they think this older refugee woman in Johannesburg feels so alienated.

## SLIDE 11: IMPACT OF PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT

### Impact of Protracted Displacement

- Protracted situations of displacement lead to social deterioration
- Young people search for opportunities beyond camps
- Older people are left to fend for themselves in a community with little support
- Service providers may adopt a similar bias, neglecting the needs of older people

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 11

#### Background

- In protracted situations of displacement, social support networks and hierarchies disintegrate as older peoples' knowledge and leadership are considered irrelevant to the new surroundings, while young refugees leave the camps to look for better opportunities.
- In such protracted situations, older people may find themselves more isolated.
- Service providers may adopt a similar bias, attempting to secure the future of the community by investing more in the young and neglecting older people.

## Resources

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2000) [UNHCR's Policy on Older Refugees](#).

### SLIDE 12: SUMMARY

A presentation slide with a dark blue header containing the word 'Summary' in white. The main content area is white with a pink border and contains a bulleted list. At the bottom, there is a pink footer with the text 'TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 12'.

## Summary

- Use a sociocultural definition of age
  - It may prove more flexible and accommodating to your context due to social, cultural, economic, physical and health-related factors
- Discrimination against older people
  - Limiting a person's ability to participate equally in society due to his/her perceived old age
- Intersectionality
  - Older women, religious or sexual minorities, people with disabilities may face even greater barriers
- Displacement isolates older people

TRIPLE JEOPARDY TRAINING | HIAS 12

## Background

- Present the summary points.
- Ask participants for any questions or requests for clarification.