



## **A study of the Impacts of Ageism in the Society**

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### ***Abstract***

Ageism is a form of discrimination that targets individuals based on their age. This study examines the various forms of ageism, its causes, impacts, and measures to curtail it. Through personal experiences and observations, it discusses how ageism affects people of different ages and how it perpetuates stereotypes and biases in society. The study also explores the importance of challenging ageism, promoting inclusivity, and building intergenerational relationships to foster social cohesion and positive change.

**Keywords:** Discrimination, Age, Ageism, Culture, Prejudice, Gender, Institution

## **Introduction**

Ageism is a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals based on their age, especially older adults. It can manifest in various forms, including stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination in various aspects of life, such as the workplace, healthcare,

and social interactions. According to Nelson (2020), ageism is "a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender" (p. 3). Palmore further

highlights that ageism can be both explicit and implicit and that it can impact individuals' physical and psychological health. Another definition by Palmore (2015) defines ageism as "a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender" (p. 243). Butler also notes that ageism is based on negative attitudes and beliefs about aging, which can lead to social exclusion and discrimination against older adults.

One of the most significant effects of ageism is limiting opportunities for older individuals. Ageism in employment can lead to older workers being overlooked for promotions or opportunities, ultimately contributing to financial instability and poverty in later life (Nelson, 2020). Ageism perpetuates stereotypes and misconceptions about older individuals, such as the belief that they are all frail and incapable. These stereotypes can be particularly harmful, as they can affect how older individuals are treated and perceived by others. Ageist attitudes can also lead to intergenerational conflicts, as younger individuals may hold negative views of older people (Palmore, 2015). Ageism can lead to isolation and loneliness, which have been linked to negative health outcomes. Older individuals who feel devalued by society may withdraw from social interactions and become more isolated, which can contribute to depression and other mental health problems (Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Capitanio, & Cole, 2015).

### **Forms of Ageism**

The forms of ageism can be categorized into three main types: institutional ageism, cultural ageism, and interpersonal ageism (Levy et al., 2019).

1. Institutional ageism refers to practices and policies that are discriminatory toward individuals based on their age. This can include mandatory retirement, age-based restrictions on employment, and age-based denial of services. For instance, some employers may have policies that require employees to retire at a certain age, even if they are still competent and willing to work. Such policies can result in a loss of valuable experience and knowledge and have a significant impact on an individual's financial security. Age-based denial of services can also be seen in healthcare, where older individuals may not receive adequate treatment due to age-based assumptions about their health status.

2. Cultural ageism refers to societal attitudes and beliefs about aging that perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination. It can be seen in media representations of aging and the portrayal of older adults in popular culture. For example, the media may depict older adults as frail, forgetful, and technologically challenged, reinforcing negative stereotypes and ageist attitudes towards older adults.
3. Interpersonal ageism refers to the negative attitudes and behaviors towards individuals based on their age. It can include name-calling, exclusion, and social rejection. For instance, younger individuals may view older adults as out-of-touch and dismiss their opinions, leading to intergenerational conflicts and social isolation.

Ageism can manifest in various forms, from age-based stereotypes to outright discrimination in the workplace. Ageism is prevalent in our society, and its impact on individuals and society as a whole cannot be overstated. One of the most common forms of ageism is the stereotype that older individuals are not technologically savvy. This stereotype is perpetuated in advertisements and media, which often portray older adults as befuddled and confused by modern technology. This can have real-world consequences, as it can lead to discrimination in the workplace. For example, an employer might assume that an older worker is not as proficient with technology as a younger worker and, as a result, may overlook the older worker for promotions or opportunities (Nelson, 2020).

Another example of ageism in action is the practice of mandatory retirement. Some companies have policies that require employees to retire once they reach a certain age, regardless of their ability or desire to continue working. This policy can be detrimental to both the individual and the company, as it forces experienced and skilled workers out of the workforce, depriving the company of valuable expertise and knowledge. It can also be financially devastating for the individual, as retirement savings may not be enough to cover the cost of living expenses (Palmore, 2015).

Ageism can also be seen in healthcare. Older individuals may be overlooked or dismissed by healthcare providers, who may assume that their symptoms are simply a part of the aging process. This can lead to delayed diagnosis and

treatment, which can have serious consequences for the individual's health. For example, a study by the American Cancer Society found that older adults were less likely to receive recommended cancer screenings, leading to higher rates of late-stage cancer diagnoses and worse outcomes (ACS, 2021).

Ageism can also manifest in the form of negative attitudes and stereotypes towards older individuals. This can lead to intergenerational conflicts and social isolation. Younger individuals may hold negative views of older people, leading to a lack of respect and understanding between the two groups. This can create social barriers and perpetuate ageism, as individuals of different age groups may feel uncomfortable interacting with each other (Cacioppo et al., 2015).

Ageism is a pervasive problem in society, and its effects can be seen in numerous areas of life. Whether it's in the workplace, healthcare, or social interactions, ageism can limit opportunities, perpetuate stereotypes, and create conflicts between different age groups. To combat ageism, it's essential to recognize and challenge these stereotypes and negative attitudes towards older individuals, creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

### **Causes of Ageism**

There are various causes of ageism that contribute to negative attitudes and stereotypes towards older adults. One of the primary causes of ageism is the way that society views aging. Ageism is a reflection of deeply entrenched cultural beliefs that associate aging with decline and frailty, and older adults are often viewed as a burden on society (Nelson, 2019). This cultural view of aging can result in negative attitudes and stereotypes towards older adults, which can lead to discrimination and marginalization.

Another factor that contributes to ageism is economic factors. Older adults are often viewed as less productive than younger workers and are therefore discriminated against in the workplace. For example, employers may be less likely to hire or promote older workers because of age-based assumptions about their ability to learn new skills or keep up with technological advancements (Nelson, 2019).

Social factors also play a role in ageism. For instance, intergenerational conflicts between younger and older adults can lead to ageism. Younger adults may view older adults as being out of touch with current trends or technologies,

leading to negative attitudes and stereotypes towards them. The lack of contact between different age groups can perpetuate ageist beliefs, as people tend to develop negative stereotypes about groups they have limited interaction with (Levy, 2016).

Media representation of aging also contributes to ageism. The media often portrays older adults as being frail, dependent, and in need of care. Such negative portrayals can reinforce ageist beliefs and attitudes towards older adults (Nelson, 2019).

### **Impacts of Ageism**

#### **Social Impact:**

Ageism can have significant social impacts on individuals and society as a whole (Levy, 2016). One of the most significant social impacts of ageism is social exclusion and marginalization of older adults. Ageist attitudes and beliefs can result in the exclusion of older adults from society, including social activities, employment, and access to healthcare (Levy, 2016). This exclusion can lead to feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and reduced social support, which can negatively impact the physical and mental health of older adults. Moreover, the marginalization of older adults can lead to intergenerational conflict, which can result in a lack of understanding between different age groups and increased division in society. Another social impact of ageism is the reinforcement of negative stereotypes about aging. Ageist beliefs and attitudes can lead to age-based stereotyping, where younger individuals may assume that older adults are incapable of learning new things or keeping up with technological advancements. This can lead to reduced opportunities for personal growth and development for older adults, which can further reinforce ageist beliefs (Levy et al., 2019).

Ageism can also result in reduced political power and representation for older adults. Older adults are often underrepresented in political decision-making processes, leading to reduced influence on policies that affect them (Nelson, 2019). This can result in reduced access to resources, including healthcare, social security, and other benefits, which can further reinforce social exclusion and marginalization of older adults.

Ageism has significant social impacts on individuals and society as a whole. Addressing ageism requires challenging negative stereotypes and promoting age diversity and inclusion in all aspects of society. By creating a more inclusive society that values and supports individuals of all ages, we can reduce the social impacts of ageism and create a more equitable and just society for all.

### **Psychological Impact:**

Ageism can have a significant impact on the psychological well-being of older adults. One of the most significant psychological impacts of ageism is internalized ageism, where older adults start to believe the negative stereotypes and view themselves as a burden on society (Levy et al., 2019). This can lead to reduced self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, the internalized ageism can lead to reduced engagement in social activities and a lack of interest in personal growth and development, which can further exacerbate psychological distress.

Ageism can also lead to reduced cognitive performance in older adults. Negative stereotypes about aging can lead to age-based stereotyping, where younger individuals assume that older adults are incapable of learning new things or keeping up with technological advancements (Levy, 2016). This can result in reduced opportunities for personal growth and development for older adults, which can lead to reduced cognitive performance and memory. Moreover, the fear of aging and the negative stereotypes associated with aging can lead to increased stress, which can also negatively impact cognitive performance.

Ageism can also lead to reduced physical health outcomes. Negative stereotypes about aging can lead to reduced self-efficacy and self-care behaviors, which can lead to increased morbidity and mortality rates among older adults (Levy et al., 2019). Moreover, ageist attitudes and beliefs can result in reduced access to healthcare and other services, leading to increased healthcare costs and reduced quality of life for older adults.

Ageism has significant psychological impacts on individuals, including reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and cognitive performance. Addressing ageism requires challenging negative stereotypes and promoting age diversity and inclusion in all aspects of society. By creating a more inclusive society that

values and supports individuals of all ages, we can reduce the psychological impacts of ageism and promote better health outcomes for older adults.

### **Economic Impact:**

Ageism, or discrimination based on age, can have significant economic impacts on both individuals and society as a whole. Older workers may face barriers to employment, advancement, and fair wages, leading to financial insecurity and a reduced quality of life. Ageism can also lead to increased healthcare costs and decreased productivity in the workplace. One study found that age discrimination in the workplace can result in lost wages and benefits for older workers, as well as decreased retirement savings and social security benefits (Neumark et al., 2016). Additionally, ageism can limit the ability of older workers to contribute to the economy and society, leading to a loss of valuable skills and experience.

Ageism can also have broader economic impacts. In countries with aging populations, discrimination against older workers can exacerbate labor shortages and reduce overall economic growth (OECD, 2018). On the other hand, promoting intergenerational cooperation and valuing the contributions of workers of all ages can lead to economic benefits, including increased innovation and productivity (European Commission, 2012). Ageism can have significant economic impacts on both individuals and society as a whole. Addressing ageism is important for promoting fairness, equality, and economic growth (Nelson, 2019).

### **The Case of Mrs. Adewale and Ageism**

Mrs. Adewale had been working at the same manufacturing company at Lagos State, Nigeria for over 25 years. She had always been a dedicated employee, arriving early and leaving late, and taking on extra responsibilities whenever they were needed. However, as she got older, Mrs. Adewale began to notice subtle changes in the way her colleagues and managers treated her.

She started to feel like her ideas and contributions were being dismissed or overlooked, and that younger colleagues were being given more opportunities for advancement. She also noticed that her workload was increasing, while her younger colleagues seemed to be getting more support and assistance. One day,

during a meeting with her boss, Mrs. Adewale suggested a new approach to a problem the company was facing. Her boss responded by saying, "That's an interesting idea, Mrs. Adewale, but we really need fresh perspectives on this issue." Mrs. Adewale felt hurt and frustrated, realizing that her age had become a factor in how her ideas were perceived.

Over time, Mrs. Adewale began to feel isolated and undervalued at work. She felt like she was being pushed out of the company and that her years of service and experience were no longer valued. Eventually, Mrs. Adewale decided to retire early, feeling that there was no longer a place for her at the company. She left feeling disappointed and resentful, realizing that ageism had played a significant role in her decision to leave.

### **Measures of Combatting Ageism in the Society**

Ageism is a significant issue in society, with negative impacts on older adults' mental and physical health, employment prospects, and overall quality of life. To combat ageism, there are various measures that individuals, organizations, and governments can take. Some of these measures include:

1. **Education and awareness:** Education is a critical tool for reducing ageism. Individuals and organizations should be educated on the effects of ageism and the importance of treating older adults with dignity and respect. Raising awareness about the negative consequences of ageism can help to reduce the prevalence of this issue in society.
2. **Legislation:** Governments can pass legislation that prohibits age discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas. For example, in the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) protects individuals over the age of 40 from employment discrimination based on age.
3. **Intergenerational programs:** Intergenerational programs bring together individuals from different age groups to interact and learn from each other. These programs can help to break down stereotypes and promote positive attitudes towards aging.
4. **Media representation:** The media has a significant impact on how aging is perceived in society. Media outlets should strive to represent older adults in a positive light and avoid perpetuating negative stereotypes.



5. Advocacy: Advocacy groups can work to promote the rights and well-being of older adults. These groups can lobby for policy changes, provide education and support, and raise awareness about ageism.

## **Conclusion**

Ageism is a pervasive and harmful form of discrimination that affects people of all ages. The causes of ageism are complex and often rooted in societal biases and stereotypes that perpetuate negative attitudes towards aging and older adults. The impacts of ageism are significant and can lead to social exclusion, reduced opportunities, and a loss of dignity and self-esteem. To combat ageism, it is essential to promote intergenerational dialogue and collaboration, challenge stereotypes and biases, and support policies that promote inclusivity and diversity. By working together, we can create a more just and equitable society that values and respects people of all ages.

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