

NEWSLETTER



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AGEISM

In today's rapidly evolving society it is crucial to address and challenge deep-rooted biases/stereotypes surrounding age. Ageism (discrimination or prejudice based on a person's age) affects individuals of all generations and can have detrimental effects on their overall well-being and quality of life.

THE TERM "AGEISM" REFERS TO:

- A socially constructed way of thinking about older persons based on negative attitudes.
- Stereotypes about aging and a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young, thereby failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of older persons.



CREATIVITY

NEVER

GETS OLD.



KEY INFORMATION:

- Ageism can be found within institutions, in interactions between people and within ourselves
- 2020: Systematic review reported that age determined who received certain medical procedures/treatments (source: World Health Organization)
- An estimated 6.3 million cases of depression globally are estimated to be attributable to ageism (source: World Health Organization)
- People with a positive beliefs on aging live 7.5 years longer than those with negative beliefs (source: Levy, Becca; *Breaking the Age Code*; Harper Collins; 2022)



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TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHALENJ:

- What is Agesim
- Negative Consequences of Ageism
- Why is Ageism Now a Concern
- Societal Effects of Ageism
- Where Does Ageism Start
- Is Being Old Something to Avoid



WHAT IS AGEISM?

Ageism is prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping based on a person's age.

The term "ageism" refers to two concepts: a socially constructed way of thinking about older persons based on negative attitudes and stereotypes about aging and a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young, thereby failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of older persons.



WHY IS AGEISM NOW A CONCERN?

According to a comprehensive review of 50 years of research on ageism, the broad effects of ageism include:

- Our health
- Our workplace performance
- Our economy
- Barriers to recruitment for work
- Career advancement
- Training opportunities
- Retirement decisions
- Our financial security
- Our perceptions of ourselves and our future goals

Some of the negative perceptions about aging include:

- Slowing bodies
- Decreased work ability
- Increased health problems
- Low skills
- Decreased ability to learn new things
- May be deemed overqualified for a job
- May be labeled as young or old in the workplace thus affecting our self-perception
- Hearing difficulties

WHERE DOES AGEISM START?

Negative beliefs about aging and ageism stereotypes are more prevalent in North America and some parts of Europe. In some countries (for example Japan and China) older adults are well respected for their knowledge, skills, life experiences and wisdom.

- Children learn our cultural stereotypes around ages 3- 4 years
- They internalize stereotypes and it guides their feelings and behaviours towards all different age groups
- Cultural stereotypes also affect how they feel about themselves
- Ageism is everywhere- in our institutions and in relationships
- Ageism exists in our government and business policies and in health care
- Ageism informs patronizing attitudes
- Ageism becomes internalized and informs our thoughts and behaviours of what we can accomplish and do
- According to the WHO "ageism is the most widespread and socially accepted prejudice today" (Levy, pg.16)



SO HOW ARE THESE IDEAS SPREAD?

- Structural Ageism is found in:
- Entertainment, films and TV (often by excluding older adults or showing them in a demeaning role)
- Anti-aging cosmetic advertising (depicting aging in a negative light)
- Social media (excluding older adults from seeing certain ads in housing, credit offers and job listings)
- Workplace (managers less likely to hire and offer training opportunities to older workers and also more likely to fire older workers)

NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES TO AGEISM

Negative consequences are wide reaching, affecting many areas of daily life including:

- Erodes relationships between generations
- Devalues or limits our abilities to benefit from all generations
- Can impact on health, longevity and well being
- Associated with earlier death (life shortened by 7.5 years) (Becca Levy, *Breaking the Age Code*)
- Poorer physical and mental health
- Slower recovery from disability in older age
- Increases risky behaviour such as eating unhealthy food, drinking excessively, smoking, all reducing the quality of life
- Promotes elder speak (addressing older people in demeaning manner, high pitch voice, slow speech, calling them dear or sweetheart)

AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Some examples of ageism in the workplace include:

- Refusing to hire people over or under a certain age
- Asking for someone's age at a job interview when it is not relevant to the work
- Enacting policies that unfairly privilege one age group over another
- Viewing older people as out of touch, less productive, or stuck in their ways
- Viewing younger people as unskilled, irresponsible, or untrustworthy
- Bullying or harassment

AGEISM IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Some examples of ageism in personal relationships include:

- Treating family members as though they are invisible, unintelligent, or expendable based on their age
- Making ageist jokes that imply someone is less valuable or less worthy of respect, based on their age
- Making offensive generalizations about a specific generation, e.g., that millennials are entitled
- Disregarding someone's concerns or wishes due to their age
- taking advantage of someone's age for personal gain, such as to make money
- Using someone's age as justification to undermine, deceive, or control them



EXAMPLES OF AGEISM IN HEALTH CARE

Infantilizing patients

Ageism manifests in healthcare as over use of baby talk, using the oversimplified language, terms of endearment, or tone of voice a person might use for a child. This can be viewed as patronizing and can result in perceived unequal power between caregivers and people in their care.

Inaccurate perception of aging

A lack of knowledge about aging as one of the reasons ageism exists in healthcare. For example, older studies have found that doctors are less likely to refer older people exhibiting suicidal thoughts for mental health treatment on the idea that this is a "logical" experience in older age. Consequences could be dire. Inaccurate ideas about aging can also lead to inappropriate medical care. For example, unnecessary use of diapers or confinement to bedrest.

Less care, attention, and treatment

Attitudes towards aging can contribute to healthcare staff spending less time with older patients. For example, research has found that ageism was associated with shorter, less effective, and more superficial communication from nurses. Doctors were found to be less patient, less respectful and less involved with older patients compared to younger patients .

Lower levels of health

When a person absorbs these ageist beliefs it can be called self-ageism. In Becca Levy's book, [Breaking the Age Code](#), the author outlines numerous studies that indicate a person's negative beliefs about aging can affect their physical (higher rates of some diseases such as cardiovascular, memory impairment and lower will to live) and mental health as they age. The more positive their beliefs the healthier and more resilient the person and even extending their life span by 7.5 years.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

Do you see ageism as a problem? What has lead you to your response?

Take a moment to reflect on the way older adults are portrayed in the media and in advertising. What are some of the problematic depictions you have noticed?

Have you experienced ageism in the workplace, in relationships and/or in health care? If so, in what way was it evident?



SOCIETAL EFFECTS OF AGEISM

Ageism does not only affect individuals, it has far-reaching consequences including:

- Higher rates of illness: Ageism reduces people's physical and mental health, increasing their care needs and reducing quality of life as they get older. It is also associated with risk-taking behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, and an unhealthy diet.
- Higher healthcare spending: According to the WHO, the United States spends billions of dollars per year treating health conditions due to ageism.
- Poverty: Higher healthcare costs, as well as a lack of health insurance, increases the effects of poverty. This can be especially difficult for people who are retired, who have lost their partner or spouse, or who cannot work due to disability or illness.
- Lower life expectancy: Ageism is associated with earlier death, causing a decrease of 7.5 years on average.

The number of older adults in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Japan is growing, making ageism an increasingly important issue.

“Fear ageism,
not aging...”

**Margaret
Morganroth
Gullette**

“The problem is we
don't value old age.”

“As we age, we
are seen as less
human.”

IS BEING OLD SOMETHING TO AVOID?

The truth is:

The attitudes that underlie age bias are often based on false information.

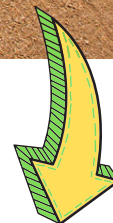
Most older adults maintain quite good health and cognitive function, for example:

- Cognitive abilities remain robust and can even improve!
- We become better at orienting attention and ignoring distractions
- We become more agreeable and more conscientious
- We become better at regulating emotions
- We become more socially mature
- We pay better attention to health
- We engage in fewer risky situations
- We report greater happiness and life satisfaction
- Our mental health can also improve across the life span
- We continue contributing to the economy (paid work, volunteering, and caregiving)



Learn more about
Ageism!

**Additional information at
the links below:**



Government of Canada: [Discussion Guide on Ageism in Canada](#)

Book: Breaking the Age Code - How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and Well You Live

World Health Organization: Ageing and Ageism

What is ageism, and how does it affect health? - Medical News Today

The Role of Structural Ageism in Age Beliefs and Health of Older Persons - Jama Network