

# Contemporary issues in aging - ageism research paper

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Discrimination on the basis of age is termed as ageism. Ageism has been prevalent for a long time in the western society as well as other societies; elderly are commonly being perceived as people of low value (Bowling, 2007). They are also considered to be a significant economic burden to the society; and is often perceived that any medical treatment would not bring much benefits to the elderly individual; and will be of a shorter duration; and that they have already had a 'fair innings' in life (Bowling, 2007).

The family, friends, care givers, society, and the policy makers need to become sensitive to the issue of age prejudice with an objective to enhance the quality of life of the older individuals. In most instances, one can come across ageism in employment. Therefore, we have largely discussed on ageism in the employment sector in this article. Policy makers can most importantly bring a change in the lives of the old.

Presently, America has 13% of graying population that constitutes people aged 65 years and older. By 2030, it is predicted that 19% of Americans will be senior citizens (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). Brewer and Lui, in their review, have stated that age-based social categorization is quick and automatic, also thoughtful and deliberate. A ready categorization of the elderly is done on the basis of their wrinkled skin, posture, gray hair, and their movements. According to the authors, ageism refers to behavior, attitude, belief, and feelings of people towards old age (Brewer & Liu, 1989). According to another review by Dennis (2007), a common misconception about working older employees is that they are less physically able to do a particular job as compared to their younger counterparts. Dennis has noticed that the society still believes in the myth that age is a good predictor of

performance and that performance declines with age (Dennis, 2007).

In developed societies like the US, the number of older citizens is growing rapidly (OECD, 2011). In terms of health and social service policies, ageing is seen as a potential problem for future services and a lack of resources. The ageing of the population will cause significant social changes as well, especially in regard to the financing of retirement schemes and the delivery and financing of care (OECD, 2011). Such issues create negative attitudes against the older age group and lead to discrimination against them. Overall, ageing affects all aspects of the society (Wait, 2005).

The term “ Ageism” was coined by Robert Butler. About approximately four decades ago, he stated “ We have shaped a society which is extremely harsh to live in when one is old. The tragedy of old age is not the fact that each of us must grow old and die but that the process of doing so has been made unnecessarily and at times excruciatingly painful, humiliating, debilitating and isolating through insensitivity, ignorance and poverty” (Butler, 1975). This shows the existence of discrimination to be age old and not a surprising phenomenon.

Old age is not a well - defined concept. The definition of the “ old” varies over time, between individuals, between categories of people, between countries, and between civilizations. It is also often related to life expectancy and social care arrangements (van den Heuvel, 2011). In a review, Bytheway et al showed ethnicity to be associated with age discrimination (Bytheway, 2007). Pascoe and Clarke’s studies, both published in 2009 showed age discrimination to occur in cases of poor health and dependency (Pascoe, 2009; Clarke, 2009). Jang et al study found an association between

perceived discrimination against the 45 – 74 year old age group and wellbeing. The study also explained that discrimination is an unpleasant experience and it reduces wellbeing of the concerned individual (Jang, 2008). Thus, in literature on ageism, there are reports on different aspects of culture, race, and ethnicity affecting ageism. One kind of culture may consider ‘ older’ in a different way than a society having a different culture altogether.

The Anti-Ageism Taskforce described four types of ageism in 2006. One was “ personal ageism,” which referred to an individual’s or for that matter a younger individual’s negative attitude towards an older person. The second type of ageism described was the “ institutional ageism” that one faces in the workplace that applies to policies and procedures such as mandatory retirement before the actual age of retirement (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 2006). The third type was the “ intentional ageism,” which are nothing but practices that are deliberately and knowingly biased against older individuals. The last and fourth type of ageism is the “ unintentional ageism” that occurs when the discriminator is unaware of his or her own bias (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 2006). The task force also found that bias in hiring is very common (Anti-Ageism Taskforce, 2006).

According to special Euro barometer Report of the European Commission, a couple of years ago, the main reason for discrimination was ethnicity, but now it seems that discrimination based on age is increasing (Eurobarometer, 2009). According to van den Heuvel (2011), many organisations put a great deal of efforts in formulating rights for the elderly, but holding rights does not give any guarantee to being protected against discrimination (van den

Heuvel, 2011). According to Lahey (2010), what has a much stronger effect on discrimination against ageing is not anti-discrimination legislation, but pension, disability, and social security (Lahey, 2010).

The “ Age Discrimination in Employment Act” (ADEA) is a federal law in the US that protects workers of age 40 and above from age-based discrimination in hiring and several other aspects of employment like firing, layoffs, benefits, pay, promotions, demotions, or performance reviews etc (AARP, 2011). According to the ADEA, various job listings or advertisements by the recruiters cannot mention in their ads that a certain age group is preferred. They cannot have age limits for training programmes (AARP, 2011). Also, employers cannot retaliate against employees/workers who file charges of age discrimination against the employer or who help the government in investigating age discrimination charges. Employers cannot also force their workers to retire before the retirement age, except for few narrow exceptions. The act is applicable to employers with 20 or more workers under them, including local and state governments (AARP, 2011). Since the ADEA does not apply to employers with less than 20 employees, Wong in his paper makes an inference that age seems to be a decision-making criterion in smaller workplaces of less than 20 employees; and there are millions of such workplaces (Wong, 2005).

The original ADEA that was passed approximately 40 years ago prohibited discrimination on the basis of age for those aged 40 to 65 years.

Amendments were done later that raised the upper age limit to 70 and then eliminating it altogether and ending in mandatory retirement (Neumark, 2008).

The Older Workers Benefit Protection Act of 1990 (OWBPA) revised the ADEA to specifically prohibit employers from denying benefits to older employees. According to congress, the cost of providing certain benefits to older workers is greater than the cost of providing those same benefits to younger workers, and that those greater costs might create a disincentive to hire older workers. Therefore, in limited circumstances, an employer may be permitted to reduce benefits based on age, as long as the cost of providing the reduced benefits to older workers is no less than the cost of providing benefits to younger workers. Employers are permitted to coordinate retiree health benefit plans with eligibility for Medicare or a comparable state-sponsored health benefit (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n. d.).

According to a review by David Neumark (2008), the aging of the population in the US will pose significant public policy challenges over the next few decades. Aging population should signify changing public policy for employment of older individuals, because continued employment implies lower dependency ratios, greater income, more tax revenues, and decreased public expenditures on health insurance, retirement benefits, and income support (depending on the age of the individual and their economic circumstances) (Neumark, 2008). Neumark states that there seems to be a need to encourage the continued employment of older Americans who want to continue work, or discourage discriminatory behavior that could reduce employment of these workers (Neumark, 2008).

One important implication of an aging population for age discrimination policy is the efforts to reduce age discrimination contrast with other policy responses to an aging population in a significant manner (Neumark, 2008).

Particularly, policies that reduce incentives for retirement, increase the retirement age and reduce the value of private and public pensions, especially after some retirement-related decisions have been made, likely resulting in reduced economic well-being for older individuals. In contrast, to the extent that age discrimination acts to deter employment of older individuals, if there are efforts to reduce its influence, (assuming they do not impose undue costs) it can increase the welfare of those individuals who wish to keep working and are enabled to do so can (Neumark, 2008). At the same time, this can help achieve the broader goal of keeping Americans at work for a longer time and protecting the civil rights of older individuals (Neumark, 2008). Moreover, the ability of older individuals to respond to policy changes intended to increase incentives for employment will be enhanced if discrimination that otherwise deters this employment can be reduced. This implies that more effective efforts against age discrimination may enable policymakers to meet the challenges of an aging population with less drastic changes in retirement policies and incentives (Neumark, 2008). In ADEA cases, it is seen that hiring of the aged, in general, is much less common than discharge or layoffs (Neumark, 2008). The paucity of hiring relative to discharge or layoff cases could reflect the actual nature of the types of discrimination being experienced by the older individuals, but it may also reflect consequences of the legal structure. Hiring cases are more difficult to prove, because it is more difficult to identify a class of affected workers, but discharge or layoff cases typically consist of a group of workers previously employed at a firm (Neumark, 2008). Besides, damages may be considerably higher in discharge or layoff cases, since workers lose jobs, and

for older workers the job may have been relatively high paying and there is evidence of difficulties finding new jobs. To add to this, there can be substantial lost pension wealth accruals. However, if someone is not hired by an employer, the damages in such a hiring case may be quite small, because an individual not hired by one employer may soon be hired subsequently by another employer (Neumark, 2008). Finally, injunctive relief in hiring cases - hiring the worker who filed the claim - is unlikely to be attractive to a plaintiff (Bloch, 1994).

These barriers to pursuing claims of hiring discrimination are potentially quite important in light of the evidence noted earlier that workers aged 65 and over, often working in jobs subsequent to a long-term career, are an increasing source of potential employment growth. If the distribution of cases under the ADEA reflects "structural" problems in combating age discrimination in hiring relative to discharges or layoffs, then the ADEA may become a less useful tool in the future than it has been in the past, when the bulge of protected workers was in the age range in which they were likely to be employed in - and perhaps fired from - their career jobs (Neumark, 2008). If age discrimination persists in U. S. labor markets, then continued vigilance with regarding to enforcing the ADEA is likely to prove helpful in meeting the challenges of population ageing - especially if coupled with creativity in thinking about how the law and its enforcement might be modified to better meet these challenges (Neumark, 2008).

President Obama recently released his FY 2014 budget with a focus on providing the older Americans with the financial stability that they need in order to live healthier and happier lives. This was highlighted in a White



House issue brief, which discussed topics such as Medicare and Social Security (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.).

The brief stated that, to strengthen the economy for seniors, the 2014 Budget will improve Medicare's sustainability by encouraging high-quality, efficient care. The budget proposes to align Medicare payments for drugs with Medicaid rebate policies for low-income beneficiaries. It will incentivize skilled nursing homes to prevent hospital readmissions (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.). It proposes to lower the drug costs for Medicare beneficiaries and maintains access to physician care. The budget proposes to close the donut hole in the Part D benefit by 2015, rather than 2020 by increasing the discounts offered by the pharmaceutical industry. In addition, the budget proposes to replace the sustainable growth rate mechanism with a system that encourages high quality, efficient care, and provides stability for Medicare beneficiaries and physicians (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.). Also, the budget proposes to implement a streamlined, single beneficiary appeals process for managed care plans that integrate Medicare and Medicaid payment and services and serve Medicare-Medicaid enrollees to address the sometimes conflicting requirements in each program (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.).

The budget will allow the Social Security Administration (SSA) to process a record level of retirement claims, serving all 5.4 million people who are projected to apply for old-age and survivors insurance (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.). It will support research at NIH that aims to improve our understanding of the nature of ageing and to

extend the healthy, active years of life. The budget will provide \$3 billion for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help seniors and others who struggle with residential heating and cooling expenses. It will also request a total of \$816 million for nutrition services to ensure that millions of older adults have access to the nutritious food they need to stay healthy (Office of management and budget. White House, n. d.).

Hopefully, the 2014 budget brings about a change in the lives of elderly by strengthening the economy of older individuals in US.

Ageism has been going on for many years now even in developed nations like the America. It can prove to be extremely harmful to the older individual as well as to the society; and affect the overall wellbeing of the individual. The worst part is that ageism is viewed as culturally acceptable and normal. One step in decreasing age discrimination is to increase public awareness about this issue and change people's attitudes towards the old. Campaigns can be initiated to increase awareness, educate people, and eradicate the issue completely. It can be a difficult task to fight; but it is essential that, as a first step, one tries to recognize and combat ageism in self and then discuss the issue with others. It is for the society to understand how institutionalized ageism can be handled to promote respect to the elderly.

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