

Impact of Ageism on the Social Wellbeing of Older Adults: Evidence from a Geriatric Home in Lagos, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the impact of ageism on social wellbeing of older adults. The main objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of ageism on the social wellbeing of older adults. These includes the impact of ageism on social connection, social support and on their social inclusion. Ageism is a very serious issue as it shown in terms of positive stereotypes or attitudes; it is most closely associated with negative stereotypes or attitudes. The study used mixed research method to analyse the opinion of participants. The data collected through structured questionnaire and interview guide were analysed with descriptive and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The study concluded that there is significant impact of ageism on social wellbeing of older person in the society as ageism affect their social connection, support and exclusion with younger generation. Furthermore, the result to a very negative stereotype in the social connection, support and exclusion older person faces in the society. Some of these discriminations are imposed by the younger generation who feel that older adults in the society are less important and difficult to relate with. Some attitude and perceptions portrays by younger generation against older persons are offensive and discriminative. The study recommended that public education, creating opportunities for older and younger people to interact advocate for stricter policies that protect older adults from age-based discrimination in all social settings, including workplaces and public services will help to reduce the discrimination that exist in the society.

Keywords-- Ageism, Social Wellbeing, Older Person, Younger Person, Society

I. INTRODUCTION

Ageism is a very serious issue. While it can theoretically be directed toward any age group, the vast majority of studies focus on older adults or late adolescents (Nelson, 2021). Although ageism can be shown in terms of positive stereotypes or attitudes, it is most closely associated with negative stereotypes or attitudes (Palmore, 2019). Ageism can manifest in two main ways: implicitly, through unconscious thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, or explicitly, through intentional actions or verbal expressions triggered by conscious awareness (Iversen et al., 2019). Furthermore, ageism is not restricted to directed toward others but can also be self-directed (Ayalon & Tesch-romer, 2017).

The process of aging can be viewed unfavourably by some people, who view it pessimistically, and this reduces the pleasure they may have gained from their own growth (Kang, 2020). Aging is often considered to be a challenging process, during which individuals lose their confidence and experience a loss of productivity (Schafer & Shippee, 2019). Significant declines in social and cultural status have been observed in older adults over the past century, (Nelson, 2019). There is effect of aging of the social activities of older adults, (Solem, 2019).

Exposure to ageism over time can result in the internalization of ageist attitudes and stereotypes, as described by Levy (2019) in stereotype embodiment theory. Many older adults tend to internalize the negative stereotypes of ageism that continue to be perpetuated throughout society today and tend to confine themselves to age-related stereotypes, becoming weak, unhealthy, and

even less able to accept new learning opportunities (Streb et al., 2018). Internalized age stereotypes may lead to low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence (Orth, 2019), and it may affect older adults' social wellbeing, (Emile et al., 2020). An individual who believes that they are too old may be more susceptible to the negative consequences of ageism, which may include decreased self-efficacy and increased negative emotions that affect their social wellbeing in general, (Eibach et al., 2020).

The converse may also be true, as positive perceptions and attitudes on aging may have beneficial effects on psychological well-being (Bryant et al., 2022). Older adults who have experienced discrimination based upon their chronological age may be more exposed to stressors and depression which harm their social well-being badly, (Snape & Redman, 2023).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ageism is increasingly recognized as a risk factor associated with increased stress, anxiety, depression, and lowered life satisfaction (Ayalon et al., 2019). However, articles on ageism generally take the form of conceptual or theoretical papers, and they tend to center on identifying the causes and consequences of ageism (Iversen et al., 2009). More empirical studies are needed to investigate the harm that ageism can cause to the psychological well-being of older adults. Our review examined this relationship by synthesizing the results of several studies identified in a thorough systematic search. Purpose of the Review This systematic review examines how the experience of ageism experience among older adults influences their psychological well-being. This study also seeks insight into successful aging by identifying factors that mediate or moderate the relationship of ageism to social wellbeing.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Ageism

Ageism, a form of discrimination based on a person's age, typically targets older adults but can also affect younger individuals. Coined by gerontologist Robert Butler in 1969, ageism encompasses stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination toward individuals or groups because of their age, (Westerhof et al., 2023). It manifests in various ways, including societal biases, discriminatory practices in employment, healthcare, media portrayals, and interpersonal interactions. Often subtle, ageism can be as damaging as other forms of discrimination, influencing self-esteem, social engagement, and overall well-being, (Bornet et al., 2021).

One of the most common forms of ageism occurs in the workplace, where older employees may face barriers in hiring, promotions, and training opportunities due to assumptions about their capabilities, adaptability, or familiarity with technology, (Levy et al., 2018). For instance, employers may favor younger candidates, believing they will bring more energy or innovative ideas, while unfairly discounting the experience and knowledge older workers bring. Such biases can create an unwelcoming or hostile environment, undermining productivity and job satisfaction.

The society perpetuates ageism through portrayals that stereotype older individuals as frail, forgetful, or resistant to change, creating a narrow and often negative image of aging, (Westerhof et al., 2023). These portrayals contribute to societal attitudes that reinforce ageist beliefs, impacting how individuals perceive their own aging process. For young people, societal-based ageism may lead to a fear of aging and an overvaluation of youth, fostering unrealistic standards of beauty and productivity, (Levy et al., 2018).

Impact Ageism on their Social Connection among Older Adults

People with more positive self-perceptions of aging are more likely to have better capacity to perform physical tasks and social engagement, (Levy et al., 2012). Studies indicated that positive self-perceptions of aging and wellbeing remain significant, (Levy et al., 2018). People with more positive self-perceptions of aging live more than seven years longer than those with negative views through basic social connectivity, (Levy et al., 2002). On the other hand, individuals with more negative self-perceptions of aging may be more likely to experience depressive symptoms which affect their social connection with people of younger age, (Freeman et al., 2016). The presence of negative self-perceptions of aging seems also to affect the social participation among the young and the older as the elderly persons are often relegated in social activities like politics, meetings, and parties. As demonstrated by studies that found negative beliefs about aging to be independently associated with lack of public association, (Levy & Bavishi, 2018).

Another way to examine the effects of self-perceptions of aging on social connection parameters is through the activation of schemas of aging. This type of study is commonly based on randomly assigning older adults to two groups that differ in the stimulus provided (i.e., positive or negative self-perceptions of aging). The unconscious (implicit) activation of negative self-perceptions of aging in older adults significantly decreases many memory performance tasks (e.g., immediate, learned, delayed recall) and worsens social engagement among older person, (Levy et al., 2018).

Differences in social participants' views of aging were noted after subconscious stimulation, with more positive perceptions reported by those who were primed with wisdom perspectives (Westerhof et al., 2023). A meta-analysis found that both implicit and explicit positive and negative age stereotypes might influence social behaviour of older adults (Meisner, 2012). However, negative stereotypes promote more changes in social behaviour toward a negative direction (memory decline) than positive stereotypes in the positive direction (Meisner, 2012).

Having a will to live is another example of positive mind-set that might act as a basis of the mind-set providing instruments against ageist attitudes. Will to live is a subjective parameter that refers to the commitment to life and desire to continue living (Bornet et al., 2021), which is associated with psychosocial parameters (e.g., tiredness of life and wish-to-die) (De Groote et al., 2024) and might predict the development of negative outcomes, including depressive symptomatology (Carmel et al., 2018) and shorter survival (Karppinen et al., 2012). It is influenced by many aspects according to people's characteristics (De Groote et al., 2024). For example, in apparently healthy older adults, social support by family, friends, and community, religiosity and spirituality, working as a volunteering, and financial security were mentioned as aspects that reinforced will to live (Zamir et al., 2020), whereas depressive symptoms, anxiety, shortness of breath, and sense of wellbeing affected this parameter in terminally ill patients (Zamir et al., 2020).

Impact Ageism on their Social Support among Older Adults

The moderate effects of time spent with older adults on ageist attitudes might be explained with their responses towards their relationship with people in the society, (Paluck et al., 2019). There is a partly challenge of older adult social support by the society. Aging promotes and inherent and constant withdrawal from social-life due to the depletion of personal resources to cope with different goal, (Zhang and Lin, 2021). This means that older adults are expected to prioritize other activities over social engagement. Adulthood may be responsible to decline in love-seeking and need for approval from other people in the social world. Older people believe that their involvement with younger people will lead to disrespectfulness and unbalanced number of people between the older and the younger are the younger are more in numbers as such, the expectancy for social support is not always guarantee. According to Helio et al. (2024), when considered in light of ageism, younger persons might lack of adequate (quality) time with older adults and this would be more attributed to the lack of support for older people.

However, the disengagement theory of aging has received considerable criticism and some authors have mentioned that it might be viewed as an ageist approach by not considering the homogeneity of the aging process, (Zhang and Lin, 2021). Ageist attitudes continue to exist during young and middle-aged adulthood come with the gap in social support expected by the aging population from the society. The lack of this social support is consequential to overall social wellbeing of the older person in the society. At this time, in addition to the experiences lived in the first years of life, many other aspects, such as cultural context (Makris et al., 2015) and occupational preferences (Koc et al., 2020), might impact the views about aging. Older adults are not immune to negative cultural views about the aging process. In fact, people in advanced age often report suffering from ageist attitudes in the society, (Harris et al., 2018). Moreover, older adults are frequently bombarded with ageist stereotypes by means of mass communication, (Diniz et al., 2020; Ng, 2021). For instance, a review of 1.1-billion-word media database comprising the British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English, which includes a variety of media types, indicated that negative descriptions of older adults were six times higher than positive views, (Ng, 2021). A major concern regarding aging stereotypes is the possibility that they might be unconsciously internalized across the lifespan, leading to the embodiment of ageist views, and consequently promoting changes on attitudes regarding life aspects (Levy, 2019).

Many attitude disposed by older person claimed that particular interest, numerous ageist views describe older adults as disable, sick, tired, and near to death as such promoting the attitude of lack of support for them, (Gilbert and Ricketts, 2018). As a consequence, the personification of these stereotypes might lead people to face health problems as an inherent condition of aging, resulting in reluctance to adopt healthy lifestyle habits and seek medical counselling. These observations indicate that individuals' views and attitudes about the aging process are continuously constructed throughout life, (Diniz et al., 2020). Early experiences with older adults and mental creations derived from parents' attitudes have a crucial role in the conception of ageist views, (Heilo, 2024). As people grow older, individuals are more susceptible to the influence of the cultural setting they are a part of, which plays a significant role in shaping their perceptions of aging. These stereotyping views of aging might be internalized and result in inadequate care of health aspects, (Ng, 2021).

Impact Ageism on their Social Exclusion among Older Adults

The search for strategies to counteract ageism has become a public health priority in the attempt to reduce its possible negative impact on people’s health. In the last years, an increasing number of experimental studies found interesting results regarding the effects of different types of therapeutic actions on ageism-related parameters, (Shimizu, 2021). Although most of these investigations are still at an initial stage, results are exciting and deserve to be better explored to ensure that the most appropriate and successful protocols are operationalized. Some authors have argued that interventions to counteract ageism still need to be reviewed because some important moderator aspects (e.g., subjective age) are not incorporated in operational methods (Shimizu, 2021). The importance of counteracting ageism is emphasized by the WHO, which initiated a global campaign to combat ageism in 2021 for social inclusion, (WHO, 2021).

This campaign was advertised through a report containing suggestions of how to develop and implement anti-ageism actions at regional and international levels (WHO, 2021). According to the WHO (WHO, 2021), five major themes should be contemplated to fight ageist views and attitudes: research, stimulate community engagement, plan strategically, implement key activities, and communicate effectively. Research is expected to support the educational process by providing the necessary information to indicate when, how, and what aspects of ageism should be measured, (Heilo, 2024). The campaign team should also continuously disseminate new findings from research activities through learning meetings.

Community engagement is essential to stimulate adherence to anti-ageist campaigns. The third step describes the strategical plan to align and combine the different components of the campaign (i.e., goals, objectives, messaging, activities, monitoring, and engagement). This organizational process should clarify the steps to be taken to reach the desired change of behaviour. The last two aspects refer to operational procedures. The fourth step involves the implementation of

key activities against ageism. These activities do not necessarily need to be formal but might involve the active participation of the audience through the performance of ludic actions (e.g., drama and arts workshops). The report also encourages the formation of groups with people from different age groups to stimulate the construction of an intergenerational environment. Finally, the last step refers to the effectiveness of the communication. An anti-ageism context is expected to be disseminated through simple, actionable, credible, evidence-based, positive, and sensitive messages. Benefits might also be reached by using templates and guidance for campaign partners and guidance on using and producing inclusive, balanced images of aging and older adults.

IV. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used mixed methods. The qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted to capture the context of the study. The study targeted the total population of older person in the Geriatric home in Nigeria. The sample size was categorized into two: 125 participants for the quantitative method and 9 participants for the qualitative method. Convenience sampling method was used for the quantitative method while the purposive sampling technique was used for the qualitative method. A structured questionnaire was used as data collection instrument while the interview guide was used for qualitative method. Collected data for quantitative method was analysed with frequency distribution while the data for qualitative method was analysed qualitatively. The contextual scope of this paper is limited to impact of ageism on the social wellbeing of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria. The periodic scope covers a period of two years from 2020 to 2024 covering post COVID-19 era.

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Quantitative Analysis

Table 1: Demographic positions of the participants

4.1 Demographic Analysis for Participants Gender Distributions of Participants		
Response Category	Frequency count	Percentage of Frequency (%)
Male	61	48.8
Female	63	50.4
Age Distributions of Participants		
50-60 years	38	30.4
61-70 years	27	21.6
71- 80 years	35	28.0
81 years and above	25	20.0
Marital Status Distributions of Participants		
Singles	20	16.0

Married/Cohabiting	85	52.0
Separated	14	11.2
Widow/widower	26	20.8
Occupational Distributions of Participants		
Trader	43	34.4
Civil Servant	31	24.8
Technician	16	12.8
Farmers	19	15.2
Others	16	12.8
Religious Background Distributions of Participants		
Christianity	74	59.2
Islam	30	24.0
African Tradition	21	16.8

Out from the 125 participants, 61 (48.8%) were male, 63 (50.4%) of the participants were female. This implies that they are more female that participate in the exercise. For age distribution, 38 (30.4%) of the participants were less than 50 to 60 years, 27 (21.6%) were between 61 to 70 years, 35 (28.0%) were between 71 to 80 and 25 (20.0%) were above 80 years. The cumulative age above 50 to 60 years is more. For marital status distribution, 20 (16.0%) of the participants were singles, 85 (52.0%) were married/cohabiting. 14 (11.2%) were

separated and 26 (20.8%) were widow/widower. For occupational distribution, 43 (34.4%) of the participants were traders, 31 (24.8%) were civil servants, 16 (12.8%) were technicians, 19 (15.2%) were farmers and 16 (12.8%) claimed other occupations. For religious background, 74 (59.2%) were of the Christians background, 30 (24.0%) were of the Muslim background and 21 (16.8%) were of African tradition. This implies that there are more Christians than other religious background. This is because; the region is dominantly a Christian region.

Table 2: Impact ageism on social connection of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria

Does ageism affect the ability of older adults to build and maintain social relationships		
Response Category	Frequency count	Percentage of Frequency (%)
Yes	96	76.8
No	29	23.2
Does ageist stereotypes or attitudes from society lead to isolation or loneliness among older adults		
Yes	65	52
No	60	48
Does discrimination based on age influence older adults' participation in community?		
Yes	99	79.2
No	26	20.8
Does discrimination based on age influence older adults' participation in social activities?		
Yes	114	91.2
No	11	8.8

Table 2 above showed the Impact ageism on social connection of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria. Given the frequency distribution indicating a simple percentage acceptance, the table showed that ageism affect the ability of older adults to build and maintain social relationships 96 (76.8%) while 29 (23.3%) disagreed. Participants that agreed that ageist stereotypes or attitudes from society lead to isolation or loneliness

among older adults were 65 (52%), while 60 (48%) disagreed. 99 (79.2%) of the respondents agreed that discrimination based on age influence older adults' participation in community while 26 (20.8%) of the participants rejected. 114 (91.2%) of the participants totally agreed that discrimination based on age influence older adults' participation in social activities while 11 (8.8%) of the participants disagreed.

Table 3: Impact ageism on their social support of older adults in geriatric home in Nigeria

Does ageism affect the willingness of family members and friends to provide social support to older adults?		
Response Category	Frequency count	Percentage of Frequency (%)
Yes	63	50.4
No	62	49.6
Ageist attitudes influence the availability and quality of healthcare and social services accessible to older individuals?		
Yes	95	76
No	30	24
Does internalized ageism impact older adults' likelihood of seeking or accepting social support?		
Yes	44	35.2
No	81	64.8
Does ageism play in shaping societal perceptions of caregiving and the value of providing support to the elderly?		
Yes	81	64.8
No	44	35.2

Table 3 above showed the impact ageism on their social support of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria. Given the frequency distribution indicating a simple percentage acceptance, 63 (50.4%) of the participants ageism affect the willingness of family members and friends to provide social support to older adults while 62 (49.6%) of the participants disagreed. 95 (76%) of the respondents agreed ageist attitudes influence the

availability and quality of healthcare and social services accessible to older individuals while 30 (24%) disagreed. 44 (35%) of the respondents claimed internalized ageism impact older adults' likelihood of seeking or accepting social support while 81 (64.8%) disagreed. 81 (64.8%) of the respondents agreed that ageism play in shaping societal perceptions of caregiving and the value of providing support to the elderly while 44 (35.2%) do not.

Table 4: Impact ageism on their social inclusion of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria

Do ageist attitudes affect the willingness of older adults to engage in social networks and form new relationships		
Response Category	Frequency count	Percentage of Frequency (%)
Yes	86	68.8
No	39	31.2
Do ageist attitudes affect the self-esteem of older adults to engage in social networks and form new relationships		
Yes	58	46.4
No	67	53.6
Does ageism impact the access of older adults to resources, and programs designed to promote social inclusion		
Yes	90	72
No	35	28
Does ageism impact the access of older adults to public services, designed to promote social inclusion		
Yes	87	69.6
No	38	30

Table 4 above showed the impact ageism on their social inclusion of older person in geriatric home in Nigeria. Given the frequency distribution indicating a simple percentage acceptance, 86 (60.8%) of the participants claimed that ageist attitudes affect the willingness of older adults to engage in social networks and form new relationships while 39 (31.2%) disagreed. 58 (46.4%) of the participants claimed ageist attitudes affect the self-esteem of older adults to engage in social networks

and form new relationships while 67 (53.6%) disagreed. 90 (72%) of the participants claimed that does ageism impact the access of older adults to resources, and programs designed to promote social inclusion while 35 (28%) disagreed. 87 (69.6%) of the participants claimed that ageism impact the access of older adults to public services, designed to promote social inclusion while 38 (30%) of the participants disagreed.

VI. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Impact Ageism on their Social Connection among Older Adults

Participant A share that she values long-standing friendship with per who understand her perspective and share her life experience. This is crucial in providing emotional support and combating isolation, particularly as ageism creates barriers in new social spaces. On his part, **Participant D**, highlighted that he participate in a local gardening club, which provides him with both physical activity and a social outlet as he finds solidarity and understanding with other older adults who have faced similar ageist stereotype. **Participant E**, acknowledged that her effort to build relationship with younger generations comes with voluntary mentorship in youth programmes and this reduce generational gaps between the aged and the young. Both **Participant G & H** mentioned the strong role that religious communities play in maintaining social support networks. They described their involvement in local church groups, which offer a consistent sense of connection and support.

Impact ageism on their social support among older adults

Participant F mentioned that social support from her family has been generally positive, but she notices a shift in her social interaction. She shared that younger family members sometimes overlook her opinion in family decisions, which makes her feel less valued. For **participant C**, thereis level of involvement in community volunteer work, which allows her to remain active and feel supported. However, she shared that even within these volunteer circles, younger participants often exclude older members from leadership roles.

Impact Ageism on their Social Inclusion among Older Adults

Participant I,revealed that he had noticed that most times, he is no longer invited to certain family gathering or community events like before age catch up with him. On her part, **Participant A** claimed that in some meetings or gathering that she participated, there is exclusion of her opinion in the discussion as younger people are always talking and taking final discussion. **Participant B** expressed a sense of exclusion from community activities that he used to participant in actively. He noted that this exclusion may stem from societal assumptions that older people are less capable or less interesting in social engagement.

VII. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As regards to research objective, the result of the finding indicated that there is significant level of impact of ageism on the social connection among older adults in the society. Majority of the respondents agreed that ageism

impact the way the older adults are connected to the society. The result agreed with existing studies as some studies noted that individuals with more negative self-perceptions of aging may be more likely to experience depressive symptoms which affect their social connection with people of younger age, (Freeman et al., 2016). The presence of negative self-perceptions of aging seems also to affect the social participation among the young and the older as the elderly persons are often relegated in social activities like politics, meetings, and parties. As demonstrated by studies that found negative beliefs about aging to be independently associated with lack of public association, (Levy & Bavishi, 2018).

Given to the result of research question two, the findings revealed that there is significant level of impact of ageism on the social support among older persons in the society. Majority of the respondents agreed that ageism impact of the way the older persons are connected to the society. There is relationship with existing studies as the moderate effects of time spent with older adults on ageist attitudes might be explained with their responses towards their relationship with people in the society, (Paluck et al., 2019). There is a partly challenge of older adult social support by the society. Aging promotes and inherent and constant withdrawal from social-life due to the depletion of personal resources to cope with different goal, (Zhang and Lin, 2021).

Finally, the result for research question three highlighted that there is significant level of impact of ageism on the social exclusion among older persons in the society. Majority of the respondents from the qualitative and quantitative method agreed that ageism impact of the way the older persons are connected to the society. This campaign was advertised through a report containing suggestions of how to develop and implement anti-ageism actions at regional and international levels (WHO, 2021). According to the WHO (WHO, 2021), five major themes should be contemplated to fight ageist views and attitudes: research, stimulate community engagement, plan strategically, implement key activities, and communicate effectively. Research is expected to support the educational process by providing the necessary information to indicate when, how, and what aspects of ageism should be measured, (Heilo, 2024).

Conclusion

From the study, ageism is a very serious issue as it shown in terms of positive stereotypes or attitudes; it is most closely associated with negative stereotypes or attitudes. The key take home is that ageism has significant impact of the social wellbeing of older persons in the society. These results to a very negative stereotype in the social connection, support and exclusion older person face in the society. Some of these discriminations are imposed by the younger generation who feel that older persons in

the society are less important and difficult to relate with. Some attitude and perceptions portrays by younger generation against older persons are offensive and discriminative.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need to implement educational programs that challenge ageist stereotypes, highlighting the valuable contributions of older adults. Schools, workplaces, and community centers should promote intergenerational understanding to dismantle myths about aging and build respect across age groups.

There is need to create more opportunities for younger and older generations to interact, such as mentorship programs, community events, and volunteer activities. These initiatives can reduce biases and foster mutual respect by showcasing shared interests and values.

There is need to advocate for stricter policies that protect older adults from age-based discrimination in all social settings, including workplaces and public services. Governments and organizations should also implement regular training on respectful communication to prevent ageist behaviours.

Acknowledgement & Ethical Statement:

We also affirm that this paper is original and is not currently under consideration by any other publication. This study does not contain any studies with animal subjects performed by any of the authors.

Conflicts of Interest:

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Data Availability Statement:

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

Disclaimer (Artificial Intelligence): Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

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