**Ageing: Ageism - WHO | World Health Organization**

The [working](https://www.zippia.com/advice/category/apply-for-jobs/) age in the United States is steadily growing, especially as many Baby Boomers opt to keep working even part-time as they move into retirement age. However, working at an older age can oftentimes bring a [negative stereotype](https://www.zippia.com/advice/avoid-age-discrimination/) to light for many older workers. For many, fighting for equal standing or an “old person” stereotype can be frustrating and disheartening. These individuals are victims of ageism.

In a survey of individuals 60 and older, almost 80% of respondents have said they experienced ageism. Ageism is the stereotyping, discrimination, or [bias](https://www.zippia.com/advice/unconscious-bias/) against specific individuals or groups based solely on their age. Coined in 1969 by Robert Neil Butler, the term ageism refers to any discrimination against seniors including any discriminatory practices or institutional practices and policies that help perpetuate negative stereotypes for older individuals.

Ageism doesn’t just affect people in the workplace. It can be a serious detriment to the mental health of older workers. Older patients are often viewed by many mental health professionals as if they are unable to change their behavior. Mental health problems often go untreated and undiagnosed in older individuals.

**What is Ageism?**

Much like racism or sexism, ageism is a reference to the stereotype and discrimination of people based on a single trait; their age. Ageism can include a variety of stereotypes and assumptions including disdain, avoiding contact, discrimination in housing, employment, and services. Ageism negatively impacts people on both sides of the coin. Research even suggests that those with a negative view on aging can experience poor health than those with positive views on aging.

Unlike many forms of discrimination, society doesn’t actively try to combat ageism. In fact, many accept ageism with little concern. For example, anti-aging products are widely available and acceptable on television and digital platforms. If you ran a similar ad for anti-feminine or anti-race products, the company and advertisement would be met with harsh criticism.

So, what does ageism look like?

* **Forgetfulness.** When you attribute forgetfulness to age, you are condoning ageism. When you misplace something as a young adult, it’s a minor inconvenience. However, when you have a memory lapse as an older individual, many people attribute it to an older age. However, there is plenty of research that states this isn’t true. Most of our perceptions of age-related memory loss are exacerbated.
* **Marketing demographics.** Did you know 90% of marketing dollars are typically targeted towards people under the age of 50, despite the fact that one-third of Americans are over 50?
* **Environment assumptions.** Some venues have a negative connotation associated with them by people who think the purpose is to serve an older generation. Senior centers are a great example of this. Other, younger individuals may not want to visit these places, as it’s a place for old people. These places are often spoken of negatively which seems to assume that the thought of being around older people is negative.
* **Disability or protective benefits.** Society often assigns disability as common among older individuals. While disability is certainly more common here, it’s not always the case. Based on improved medicine and individuals taking better care of their bodies, disability doesn’t actually impact the over 65 age group as prevalently. Additionally, many assume that older individuals are lonely or have been abandoned by their families. However, senior individuals often have very active social lives, and based on a recent study, only one out of eight older people reported feeling any kind of loneliness.
* **Healthcare crisis.** Research shows that there is a large divide between expert knowledge and public understanding of aging. Most of society assumes that aging is simply a loss of control and the body deteriorating. However, research suggests that the features of our communities and homes are key to maintaining our health and independence as we get older.

**How Does Ageism Affect Seniors?**

Ageist stereotypes are hurtful to older people, but research suggests it can even shorten their lifespans. Based on a report in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (Vol. 83, No. 2)*, those who are 50 or older who had more positive self-perception of aging, lived 7.5 years longer than those with negative self-perceptions.

Positive beliefs about aging towards the elderly can boost mental health. When older adults are exposed to positive stereotypes about aging, they have better memory and balance, whereas negative self-perceptions create more negative impacts like worse memory and feelings of worthlessness.

Age stereotypes are often internalized at a young age. Children as young as four have recognized ageist stereotypes that are likely reinforced over the course of their lives. The media doesn’t help these negative portrayals of seniors. Many programs or movies show older individuals as somewhat helpless or lonely, often not living full lives or being codependent on their younger families. This isn’t necessarily true for the majority of seniors living on their own.

**How Does Ageism Impact More Than Just Older Adults?**

Ageism has a lasting impact and not only on older adults. Research suggests that stereotypes about older individuals relate to how younger people expect them to behave. This can present itself in a few different ways.

* **Succession**. Younger individuals sometimes assume that their older counterparts or colleagues have “had their turn” at their [careers](https://www.zippia.com/advice/dont-include-on-resume/), experiences, and opportunities. There is an expectation that older people will make way for the younger generations to have their turn.
* **Consumption**. Some younger people feel that the limited [resources](https://www.zippia.com/advice/skills-based-resume/) they might have access to should be used for them and younger individuals, as opposed to older adults.
* **Identity.** Younger individuals often feel that those who are older should behave their age and not assume specific things that make up the identity of younger generations. This can include things like digital platforms, speech patterns, how they dress, among other things.

These types of harmful assumptions obviously impact older individuals or older groups, but can seriously impact younger individuals and how they view the world and their treatment of older individuals in their life. The AARP has reported that 1 in 5 workers in the United States if over the age of 55 and of that number, almost 65% of workers have experienced age-based discrimination from their younger colleagues. Not just that, but many have reported that the biases began closer to age 50.

Ageism should be treated similarly to sex, race, and disability discrimination. Public awareness is incredibly important to raise attention to the issues that ageism can have on older people. The generation of seniors is rapidly expanding and ageism is becoming increasingly concerning for those of a certain age. Finding ways to minimize ageism in your personal and professional life can help combat these negative perceptions of individuals over a certain age.

It’s not all bad, however. Progress has been made as it relates to ageism. Between the ’50s and ’90s, 80% of commercials continued to use negative age stereotypes, but more recently that number has dropped to 50%. Emerging research also suggests that in order to get rid of the negative perceptions, we should focus on getting rid of deliberate intergenerational activities.

It may not be as easy as taking younger people to nursing homes. In reality, visits to nursing homes only perpetuate the stereotypes of aging. Only 5% of seniors are in nursing homes and so, it’s not a good representation of the senior population. If younger individuals can have diverse exposure to older individuals, they’ll get a better idea of all the different ways one can age.