



UN Global report

Yes to ageing no to ageism

18 March 2021

The report presents the latest evidence on a topic that has only gained greater relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Ageism refers to how we think (stereotypes), feel (prejudice) and act (discrimination) towards others or ourselves based on age.
- Ageism against older and younger people is highly prevalent worldwide.
- Ageism exists in our institutions, our relationships and ourselves, and affects us from childhood into older age.
- Ageism has an impact on all aspects of people's health and costs individuals and society billions of dollars.
- Ageism can be combatted.

Ageism leads to poorer health, social isolation, earlier deaths and cost economies billions: report calls for swift action to implement effective anti-ageism strategies

Every second person in the world is believed to hold ageist attitudes – leading to poorer physical and mental health and reduced quality of life for older persons, costing societies billions of dollars each year, according to a new UN report on ageism. The report by WHO, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), calls for urgent action to combat ageism and better measurement and reporting to expose ageism for what it is – an insidious scourge on society.

The response to control the COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled just how widespread ageism is – older and younger people have been stereotyped in public discourse and on social media. In some contexts, age has been used as the sole criterion for access to medical care, lifesaving therapies and for physical isolation.

Ageism seeps into many institutions and sectors of society including those providing health and social care, in the workplace, media and the legal system. Healthcare rationing based solely on age is widespread. A systematic review in 2020 showed that in 85 per cent of 149 studies, age determined who received certain medical procedures or treatments.

Both older and younger adults are often disadvantaged in the workplace and access to specialized training and education decline significantly with age. Ageism against younger people manifests across many areas such as employment, health, housing and politics where younger people's voices are often denied or dismissed.

Ageism has serious and wide-ranging consequences for people's health and well-being. Among older people, ageism is associated with poorer physical and mental health, increased social isolation and loneliness, greater financial insecurity, decreased quality of life and premature death. An estimated 6.3 million cases of depression globally are estimated to be attributable to ageism. It intersects and exacerbates other

forms of bias and disadvantage including those related to sex, race and disability leading to a negative impact on people's health and well-being.

The report notes that policies and laws that address ageism, educational activities that enhance empathy and dispel misconceptions, and intergenerational activities that reduce prejudice all help decrease ageism.

The Global report on ageism compiles the best evidence on the scale, the impact and the determinants of ageism, effective strategies to tackle the problem and recommendations for action to create a world fit for all ages. The report is directed at policymakers, practitioners, researchers, development agencies and members of the private sector and civil society.

- Ageism arises when age is used to categorise and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage, and injustice. It can take many forms including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory acts, and institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.
- Excess costs of health care: Ageism influences health through three pathways: psychological, behavioural and physiological. Psychologically, negative age stereotypes can exacerbate stress; behaviourally, negative self-perceptions of ageing predict worse health behaviour, such as noncompliance with prescribed medications; physiologically, negative age stereotypes predict detrimental brain changes decades later, including the accumulation of plaques and tangles and reduction in the size of the hippocampus.

The UN has an important role in the subject. There are several aspects that go hand in hand, gender, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation and that need to be actively worked on at the state level in every country around the world. All countries more or less, consciously or unconsciously, discriminate the older individuals especially dependent and frail.

One of the most powerful tools UN Member States have at their disposal is creating a UN convention on the rights of older people. This would help reframe the narrative on ageing, create the greater legal certainty necessary for addressing systemic ageism and provide guidance to Governments and all actors. Most importantly, it would be universal for all older people everywhere. The CWU should assist in starting the draft of such a convention.

Old School Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse: <https://oldschool.info/>

Brilliant subtitled ageism presentation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLVuOzRU4UM

World Health Organisation

1. www.who.int/home
2. www.who.int/publications/m/item/global-campaign-to-combat-ageism-toolkit
3. [PowerPoint Presentation \(who.int\)](#)

Office of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights:

www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Pages/UDHRIndex.aspx

Sourced: UN press release, campaign launch and website 18 March 2021.