



POLICY BRIEF

Ageism: An Aggravated Challenge faced by Working Women



Aged population is increasing fastly in the present era globally. It is estimated that by 2030 the share older population (60 years and above) increases up to 1.4 billion from 1 billion in 2020 which indicated that in 2030, 1 out of 6 people will be aged (World Health Organization, 2021)ⁱ. This rapid increase in the elderly population because of the demographic changes creates the serious problem of age discrimination for these elderly people. This age discrimination is termed as “Ageism”. Robert Butler first used the term “Ageism” in 1969, to define the prejudice or discrimination against or in favour of particular age groupⁱⁱ. WHO defines ageism as:

*“Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards others or oneself based on age”.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Ageism is observed inside organisation, interpersonal interaction and sometime within ourselves. One out of every two older people are facing the age discrimination around the world and contrary to this in Europe, younger people are facing higher ageism than other age groups^{iv}. Ageism affects both younger and older people, as both age groups are generally considered as dependent member of the society instead of productive members of society (Angus and Reeve 2006)^v. Ageism against younger people manifests across many areas such as employment, health, housing mainly. Among elderly, ageism is linked to poor physical and mental health, increased social isolation and loneliness, increased financial insecurity, lower quality of life, and early death. In addition to that, Ageism is thought to be responsible for 6.3 million incidents of depression worldwide^{vi}.

Though Ageism can be positive or negative, but it usually has negative results since it creates self-fulfilling prophecies (Butler 1980)^{vii}. Furthermore, it has substantial and far-reaching impact on health and well-being of the people as older person received negative ageist messages in their lives which results in negative perception of themselves and others in their environment (Levy 2001; Levy and Banaji 2002)^{viii,ix}. Adding in that, Palmore in 2001 argued that everyone who gets older is going to face ageism at some point in their lives. This is very different from other types of discrimination, ^x. Hence, ageism has a tremendous scope and breadth (Ayalon, 2014)^{xi}. Recently, responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted its depth and prevalence (Ayalon et al., 2020). However, despite its widespread influence and severe consequences for individuals and society, ageism remains largely unnoticed. The reason may be as, age discrimination is prevalent, and age-related preconceptions are ingrained in our culture; as a result, we are often unaware of its existence and implications.

Ageism specifically in the workplace remains a global issue (McCann, & Giles, 2002).^{xii} Additionally, in the job market, ageism or age discrimination is a significant barrier in getting employment, getting training, earning positive performance reviews, and even holding or securing a job (de Paula Couto, & Rothermund, 2019)^{xiii}. This is because of the belief embedded in most of the societies that older workers have less productive capability; they are less efficient and less active (Davey, 2014 and Harris et al., 2018)^{xiv,xv}.

Although the older people has increased vulnerability towards physical and functional capacity ,within this segment older woman are the most targeted "Gender ageism" is a term used to describe the disparities in ageism experienced by men and women. The gendered nature of ageism is particularly linked with the appearance. In addition to this, media plays a significant role in exaggerating this concept of female physical attractiveness like youthful, thin, light-skinned, and toned. This is a criteria of attractiveness or appearance, which is neither representative of, nor attainable by the majority of women of any age especially by older women (Rodgers et al., 2019 and Cecil et al. 2021).^{xvi,xvii}

Gender ageism can occurs in a variety of ways throughout a woman's life, but the workplace is one area where it is most prevalent (Beaton, 2018)^{xviii}. Women's careers are affected by ageism at every stage, including hiring, promotion, and pay allocation, as women, especially older women, are paid less than their male counterparts (Barnum et al., 1995)^{xix}. These discriminations will lead older women towards job loss or unemployment (Rikleen,

(2016)^{xx}. According to a study, the unemployment rate for older women in the United States increased from 14% to 50% between 2007 and 2013^{xxi}.

Pakistan is not different from others and will have 40 million older population by 2050. Despite the fact that Pakistani society is still regarded as traditional, the status of older population has altered significantly in all aspects of life because of the gradual prevalence of modernisation. Young family members considered their elders as traditional and unproductive member so they try to shift their responsibility on the shoulder of the government. In addition to that, the result of this mind set leads to an increase in age-based prejudice and stereotyping of older individuals (Abrar et al., 2018)^{xxii}. The consequences of these stereotypes and age discrimination against older population are social isolation, stress depression and poor physical as well as mental health among the elderly people (Ahmed and Chaudhry 2015)^{xxiii}. Older women, like the rest of the globe, are the most vulnerable group in the context of ageism. As, gender inequality is already a problem for women in the developing countries like Pakistan, and gendered ageism is an additional obstacle for them. Working women faced gender discrimination in term of promotion and salary as usually, employer believe that being a woman they will not pay for equal treatment (Farooq et al., 2019)^{xxiv}.

Ageism has a substantial impact on mental health^{xxv} because financial burden of lost earnings as a result of job loss can lead to increased depressive symptoms and reduced life satisfaction (Shippee et al., 2019).^{xxvi,xxvii}

Governments from various countries have taken some important initiatives to address the significant challenge of ageism and gender ageism. In United Kingdom, the Equality Act 2010^{xxviii} was passed in order to ban direct as well as indirect age discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on person's age. Furthermore, the United States has the "Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)," which was enacted to protect senior employees (40 and above) from age discrimination in hiring, promotion, discharge, salary, or other terms, conditions, or privileges of employment^{xxix}.

Similarly, the constitution of Pakistan, promulgated in 1973, guarantees every citizen's fundamental right against exploitation, ensures equality for all Pakistani citizens by emphasising the establishment of special provisions for a non-discriminatory and protective environment for women in the workforce, and ensures full participation of women in all aspects of their life^{xxx}. In the instance of Pakistan, the government passed the "Protection against harassment of women at workplace bill 2010"^{xxxi} to ensure a safe and free of harassment atmosphere for the women at work place, however there is no specific law or bill against gendered ageism yet.

Ageism affects billions of people globally, posing a major and widespread human rights issue as well as a significant public health issue. Therefore, there is a need to look into age discrimination, particularly gendered ageism. Children in education and young adults in the workforce benefit from the expertise of older persons who can help them acquire life skills. Moreover, it is critical to acknowledge older women's contributions to society and to provide opportunities for older women to take them on leadership roles in order to create valuable change. Having a workforce that is diverse in age, benefits both businesses and the economy as a whole. This essential challenge of ageism, particularly gendered ageism, should be taken into account by policymakers and the government. Furthermore, the media can also play an important role by stopping stereotyping role of older women only as liability and cause of conflict in family and community and raising awareness about the negative effects of gender ageism. As discussed in early paragraphs need to work on discrimination or young ageism, which can have larger impacts on future active contributory population.

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