

Perceived Ageism among Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

A growing concern is perceived ageism, which affects the psychological wellbeing, sense of dignity, and sense of inclusion among older individuals. Although ageism is something that is on the radar, there is a dearth of knowledge about how older people experience and interpret ageism in their daily lives. While this qualitative study investigates perceived ageism among older adults, it is acknowledged that older men and women may have differing self-perceptions of ageism, and experiences with social inclusion or exclusion. This study explores the participants' self-perceptions of being treated differently as they have aged and how such experiences of aging affect their sense of worth, dignity, and recognition in social, family, and community settings, by using semi-structured interviews. Participants are allowed to reflect about how they see themselves socially including or marginalized, how much participants feel their opinions are valued, and to what degree they felt involved in decision-making. As data collection continues, reflections from participants will uncover nuanced perspectives about how older adults are referencing or internalizing societal attitudes and whether they are experiencing subtle or direct age-based differentiation. The implications of internalized attitudes about aging will also be discussed as it relates to participants' concept of identity and how they represent themselves in interactions with younger generations. The aim of this study is to highlight the lived experience of perceived ageism and how this experience connects to social inclusion and self-perceived worth in later life by amplifying the voices of older persons. The outputs from the study are anticipated to broaden our understanding of the management of aging as a socially constructed identity that is shaped by respect, recognition and the desire to continue to be valued citizens and biological process.

Keywords: *Perceived Ageism, older Adults, Social Inclusion, Self-Perception of Ageing*

Although aging is a common and natural process, society often correlates aging with dependency, decline, and lower productivity. Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2018) describe ageism as prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes against individuals based on their age. These negative beliefs about aging are the basis for ageism. Ageism is pervasive in societal, institutional, and interpersonal settings, and it continues to be one of the most socially accepted forms of prejudice (Brinkhof et al., 2022). Ageism has implications for older adults' sense of dignity and their ability to remain engaged in society. It may be expressed in subtle terms in patronizing dialogue or in overt terms in workplace discrimination

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and medical neglect. Analysis identified four primary themes reflecting the participants' lived experiences related to aging. The first theme, Emotional and Physical Adaptation to Ageing, looks at how people deal with health limitations while striving for satisfaction and a sense of active living, and how they are quietly accepting the reality of the passage of time and the inevitability of aging. Respect and Intergenerational Relationships, the second theme, examines the modifying dynamics between generations, including experiences of the erosion or conditional aspects of respect, warmth and affection demonstrated by young people, differences in lifestyles between generations, and the interdependence of respect, moral guidance, and support each provide to one another. The third theme, Social Perception, Value, and Belonging, looks at how the aging adults navigated cultural shifts, subtle disrespect, and social adaptability while observing their social worth hearing them, respect afforded, or possibly unequally welcome. The fourth theme, Enriching Ageing and Societal Wellbeing, communicates the value of sustaining health and wellbeing through lifestyle, nurturing relationships, and a knowledge of social support systems or government or welfare programs that contributed to acceptance and freedom from regret in old age.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Trică et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to investigate the connection between successful ageing (SA) and resilience in adults 60 years of age and older. The authors discovered a moderately positive relationship between psychological resilience and SA based on 21 studies that satisfied the Cochrane and PRISMA criteria. This suggests that resilient people are more likely to have higher levels of autonomy, emotional well-being, and life satisfaction as they age. The results indicated that resilience plays a universal role in supporting favourable ageing outcomes, with no discernible variations across geographical areas or living environments. In addition to highlighting the significance of resilience-building interventions to improve quality of life and promote adaptive, successful ageing, the study shows that resilience serves as a protective factor against psychological and physical challenges.

Brinkhof et al. (2023) explored how resilience factors buffer the negative effects of perceived ageism on older adults' mental health and well-being. Higher levels of perceived negative ageism (PNA) were associated with worse mental health, worse quality of life, and higher rates of loneliness and depression in a large sample of 2,000 participants, ages 55 to 93. There was, however, less of a correlation between PNA and these adverse effects in those who employed behavioural coping mechanisms and upheld a positive appraisal style. These results imply that resilience mitigates the psychological effects of ageism, with adaptive coping having the greatest positive effects on younger older adults. In order to lessen the negative effects of ageism on mental health and to encourage resilient, successful aging, the study highlights the importance of encouraging active coping and positive cognitive framing.

Wangler & Jansky (2023) investigated how societal media representations of old age impact attitudes toward ageing and older adults' self-perceptions. They used a mixed method approach, conducting 36 in-depth interviews in 2022 after conducting a quasi-experimental survey with 910 participants who were 60 years of age or older in 2020. Three categories of age-related media frames negative, neutral, and positive were presented to the participants. The results showed that while positive portrayals improved the public image, they decreased participants' self-image because many felt they couldn't live up to the ideals of "modern ageing." Negative portrayals improved participants' self-image but worsened their public image of ageing. In order to encourage a more positive view of ageing, the study found that both excessively positive and negative portrayals can cause social comparison and self-

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evaluative tension. This highlights the importance of realistic and balanced media representations.

Allen et al. (2022) used data from the 2019 National Poll on Healthy Ageing to investigate the prevalence and health impacts of everyday ageism among U.S. adults between the ages of 50 and 80. 93.4% of participants in a sample of 2,035 said they had encountered ageism in the form of internalized beliefs, ageist messaging, and interpersonal discrimination in their daily lives. Higher ageism scores significantly correlated with depressive symptoms, more chronic conditions, and worse physical and mental health. Internalized ageism showed the strongest correlation with negative outcomes. The study points out that it requires interventions and public awareness to combat negative age-related stereotypes and promote healthier, more positive attitudes towards ageing. It also shows that subtle, everyday forms of ageism, in addition to overt discrimination, can negatively impact the well-being of older adults.

Objectives

1. To comprehend how elderly people emotionally adjust to aging and evolving physical capabilities.
2. To investigate how older adults view intergenerational relationships, respect, and inclusion in families and communities.
3. To explore the experiences of perceived ageism in social and institutional.
4. To determine how older adults view their participation in daily life, social value, and opportunities.
5. To showcase the viewpoints of older adults on fostering better intergenerational understanding and elevating the quality of aging.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The qualitative data acquired from the participants underwent thematic analysis. This method was selected for versatility and appropriateness, to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data, it is minimally organizing and it describes your data set in rich detail. Braun and Clarke (2006) the data were transcribed, familiarized with the data, coded, and organized into themes representing the participants lived experience of perceiving ageism, per Braun and Clarke's framework (2006), during the research's six phase. It was determined this process provided a rich and detail exploration of this psychological and social impact of ageism as experienced by ageing adults.

Sample

20 male and female participants, all 60 years of age or older, participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used to choose participants, guaranteeing that they had sufficient life experience and communication skills to consider the phenomenon.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. Based on the goals of the study and important topics like emotional reactions, social inclusion, respect, and self-worth, an interview guide was created. Either at the homes of the participants or in a welcoming public area, interviews were done in a calm environment. Consent was obtained to record the interviews on audio, which were then verbatim transcribed. Ten fundamental interview questions were prepared beforehand to help steer the discussion. However, the sequence of questions was changed in response to participant feedback, and additional questions were

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posed for clarification or further information. This adaptable format made it easier to record deep and significant stories.

Procedure

All participants gave their informed consent, and confidentiality were guaranteed. The semi structured interview questions were refined through pilot research, leading to a final set of 10. 20 participant's 60 years of age and the above were recruited using purposeful sampling; those with diagnosed mental health disorder were not included. Prior to 15 to 20 minutes in person interviews, rapport was built. With permission, audio recordings of the interview were made, transcribe and anonymized. The six step in thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke was used to safely stored and evaluate the data. Codes were created, organized into smaller topics, and then expanded into larger subjects.

Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

The six-phase thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse the data:

1. Familiarization: To become fully immersed in the data, all transcripts were read several times.
2. Creating Initial Codes: Ageism-related words, phrases, and patterns were coded.
3. Looking for Themes: Based on patterns and resemblances, codes were grouped to create preliminary subthemes and themes.
4. Examining Themes: Themes were examined to make sure they were relevant to the research questions, coherent, and internally consistent.
5. Define and Name Themes: To accurately reflect the data, each theme and subtheme was precisely defined and given a name.
6. Writing the Report: Quotations, interpretations, and discussions that were in line with the goals of the research were included in the final analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theme 1 - Emotional and Physical Adaptation to Ageing

Code	Subtheme	Verbatim Quotes
EPA-01	Peaceful Acceptance of Ageing	"It's difficult, not difficult." / "No other worries." / "That's how it is when you get old."
EPA-02	Age-Related Physical Challenges	"Because of leg pain." / "Diseases come with age, so it's difficult." / "Trouble breathing, difficulty walking."
EPA-03	Inner Strength & Positivity	"I still exercise and take a bath in fresh water." / "We should live happily." / "Older people should support each other."
EPA-04	Contentment & Emotional Stability	"Everyone is good friends with each other." / "No big problem in life now." / "I haven't thought about it that way."
EPA-05	Health Limitations	"Problem with my legs." / "Feel dizzy, difficulty walking."
EPA-06	Maintaining Routine & Active Living	"I still drive a car." / "I do my own basic things, bathe, and all this on my own."

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Theme 2 - Respect and Intergenerational Relationships

Code	Subtheme	Verbatim Quotes
RIR-01	Decline in Respect	"People don't behave like they used to." / "There is a difference in the way people behave now."
RIR-02	Conditional Respect	"If people like that are educated or have jobs, there is respect." / "Some people do, some don't."
RIR-03	Warmth & Affection from Youth	"They treat me with love." / "People close to us behave well." / "Young people respect me in a good way."
RIR-04	Generational Lifestyle Gaps	"There is a big difference between past and present." / "Today's behavior is very progressive."
RIR-05	Mutual Support and Reciprocity	"I tell young people not to drink." / "I take advice, the rest do as they please."
RIR-06	Limited Interaction / Withdrawal	"No opportunity... can't really walk." / "I don't go out much."
RIR-07	Moral Guidance for Youth	"Be good, respect elders." / "You should behave well and say good words." / "I always tell them everything I know."
RIR-08	Desire for Harmony & Unity	"We should move forward with love." / "Everyone cooperates well."

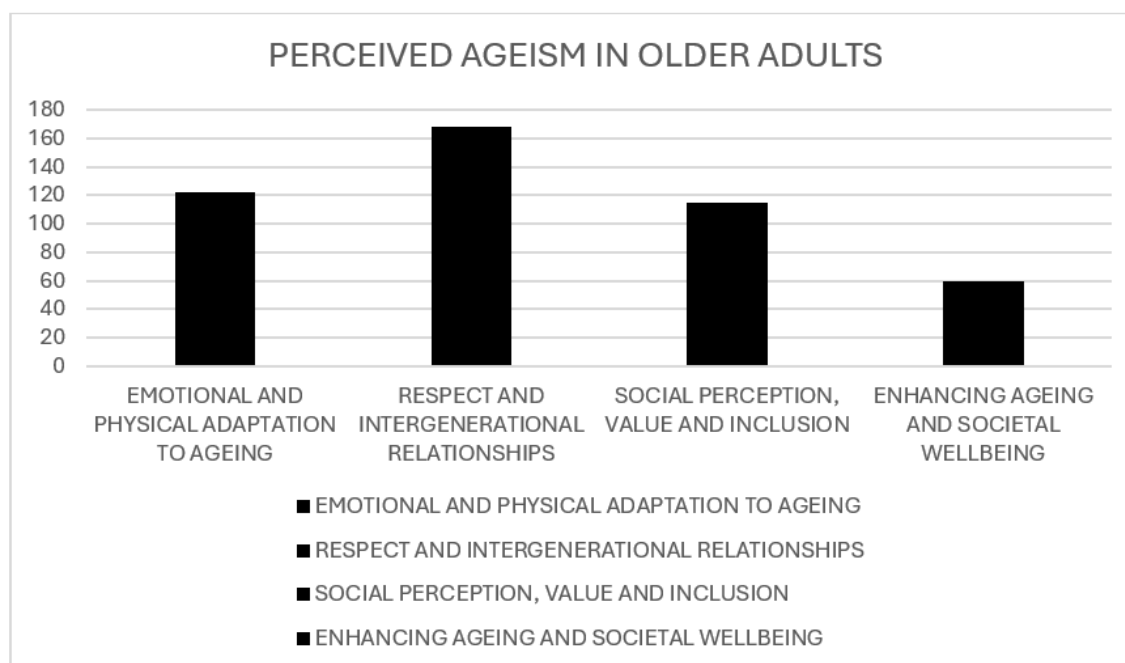
Theme 3 - Social Perception, Value, and Inclusion

Code	Subtheme	Verbatim Quotes
SVI-01	Being Heard and Respected	"Everyone takes you seriously." / "People around absorb my opinions and advice."
SVI-02	Partial or Unequal Acceptance	"People don't like what I say." / "Sometimes there is no point in saying it."
SVI-03	Fair Social Treatment / No Ageism	"I haven't felt that way yet." / "I don't think so."
SVI-04	Changing Social Behaviour	"Life wasn't like this in the past." / "There is a difference in the way people behave now."
SVI-05	Cultural and Moral Decline	"Old values are missing." / "No love or respect like before."
SVI-06	Subtle Disrespect	"Sometimes I feel like it's because I'm older."
SVI-07	Adaptation to Social Change	"That's how it is." / "We are growing up with the situation."

Theme 4 - Enhancing Ageing and Societal Well-being

Code	Subtheme	Verbatim Quotes
ESW-01	Healthy Lifestyle & Peaceful Relations	"Health and peaceful relations... live with love." / "We should live in peace."
ESW-02	Awareness of Support Systems	"It would be good if we could get a service from the government." / "With new schemes, growing old will be more comfortable."
ESW-03	Government & Welfare Support	"They said they would give us Rs 5000, but they refused." / "Government schemes are good if elders get support."
ESW-04	Contentment and Acceptance	"Now there is no such problem." / "It's natural law."

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Theme 1 – Emotional and Physical Adaptation to Ageing Participants consistently described ageing as a natural and inevitable life process, accompanied by physical changes such as leg pain, breathlessness, and difficulty in walking. Although these age-related physical challenges were recognised as limiting, older adults expressed a peaceful acceptance of these changes, attributing them to the natural course of ageing. This reflects a sense of inner strength and a positive perspective, wherein difficulties are acknowledged but not viewed as burdensome or discouraging.

Many participants expressed contentment and emotional stability, as highlighted by harmonious social relationships and the absence of major life concerns. Furthermore, they continued to engage actively in daily routines, maintaining independence through self-care activities, exercising, driving, and managing personal responsibilities. These findings signify older adults' efforts to preserve their dignity, autonomy, and psychological well-being even in later life.

These findings closely align with meta-analytic evidence showing that resilience plays a key role in successful ageing, helping older adults sustain emotional balance despite physical limitations (Trică et al., 2024). Similarly, Brinkhof et al. (2023) reported that resilience mitigates the psychological effects of ageism; with adaptive coping having the greatest positive effects on younger older adults, supporting the current observation that resilience and adaptive views contribute to emotional stability and quality of life, even in the presence of visible physical challenges.

Theme 2 - Respect and Intergenerational Relationships

Participants often shared positive experiences of warmth and affection from younger generations, implying that intergenerational relationships still have emotional implications. However, not all participants indicated levels of respect they had experienced in earlier times that respect is increasingly based on social status, appropriateness, and usefulness. This signals not only participants' insights into evolving social norms, but also shifting lifestyles between generations. Some older adults identified that while they remain in the villages,

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younger people live more progressive lives at a quicker pace today, which may diminish their interactions with future generations and create distance. Limited mobility and health issues also restricted opportunities for meaningful engagement for older adults, at times leading to self-understanding and disengagement.

Nevertheless, a significant number of participants indicated an interest in being a moral guide to younger people instilling values of kindness, respect, and cooperation. This desire for intergenerational unity and harmony demonstrates the cultural attributes of family and community connection, with older adults reflecting the role of stewards of moral wisdom that extends to their social constructs.

These results are consistent with Brinkhof et al. (2023), who illustrated that negative ageism, such as stereotyping or belittling the value of an individual because of their age, has a harmful effect on mental health and emotional well-being. The participants' accounts of conditional respect and weakened social recognition are representative of these subtle, yet impactful forms of ageism. Similarly, Allen et al. (2022) established that instances of everyday ageism is widespread and often accepted, thereby leading to a sense of marginalization. While participants in the present study did not discuss instances of direct or overt discrimination, their reference to the changes in behaviours of others and the changing social norms align with the subtle and insidious cases of everyday ageism that are illustrated in the previous literature. In general, this theme demonstrates that intergenerational relationships are created and moulded by social change, physical limitations, and shifting social norms and culture, as well as subtle forms of age stereotyping that may negatively affect older adults' sense of respect, belonging, and social identity.

Theme 3 – social perception, value and inclusion

Several participants stated that they had been heard, respected, and taken seriously in their social spheres, highlighting their belief that their thoughts and suggestions were respected, and that, on the whole, they had been treated fairly socially. However, in contrast to these generally positive experiences, some participants expressed concern regarding cultural and moral decline, observing that forms of respect and emotional warmth have changed over time. Some described having experienced nuanced forms of partial or unequal acceptance, referring, for example, to being dismissed, or noting that sometimes they felt that there was "no point" to speaking because whatever they said would not be considered valid. Such experiences were sometimes interpreted as simply reflecting their older age, and possibly, were moments of subtle disrespect, or social invisibility. Furthermore, they referred to changed social behaviour and interpersonal rules or norms across generations as a larger social change. Despite these feelings, many of the older adults we spoke with reflected a practical acceptance of these social changes as they move on and manage to live comfortably, peacefully in their "new" and changing social space.

These findings correspond with Wangler and Jansky (2023), who highlighted how media and cultural narratives surrounding ageing shape both self-perception and social recognition. When ageing is portrayed in idealized or negatively stereotyped ways, it influences how older adults feel valued in society. The participants' perception of changing cultural norms and fluctuating respect aligns with the notion that public representations of ageing contribute to feelings of either inclusion or marginalization. Additionally, Allen et al. (2022) found that everyday ageism is subtle and normalized, often emerging through dismissive attitudes and reduced social acknowledgment, rather than overt discrimination. This supports the current

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observation that while participants generally felt respected, occasional subtle disregard or diminished influence reflects broader patterns of everyday age-based stereotyping.

Theme 4 – enhancing ageing and societal well being

Participants often spoke about wanting to stay healthy, live peacefully, and have a supportive environment around them. They also mentioned the importance of knowing what help is available and having government schemes that genuinely reach older people. Their reflections show that ageing is not something they navigate alone it is deeply influenced by the social support and systems surrounding them.

This connects with the findings of Trică et al. (2024), who explain that resilience in older age is strengthened through supportive communities, meaningful relationships, and emotional coping skills. The participants' focus on cooperation, maintaining calm, and finding happiness in daily life reflects this form of resilience. Likewise, Allen et al. (2022) demonstrate that everyday ageism can affect well-being, and they call for strong community and policy-level efforts to support older adults. This is closely linked to what the participants expressed—many felt that better government welfare services and clearer awareness of available support could improve their everyday lives.

Taken together, the findings suggest that ageing well is not just about personal strength or attitude. It is also shaped by how society treats older people and the support systems it provides. When social structures and policies actively support older adults, the experience of ageing becomes more dignified, secure, and fulfilling.

Participants expressed a strong desire to maintain good health, supportive relationships, and stable living environments as they age. Many also emphasized the value of being informed about available resources and highlighted the importance of government initiatives that could make later life more secure particularly when such support is consistently provided and accessible. These perspectives suggest that ageing is not experienced in isolation; rather, it is shaped by the broader social and structural conditions within which individuals live.

This understanding is supported by Trică et al. (2024), who argue that resilience in later life is strengthened through meaningful community engagement, supportive social networks, and the development of psychological coping resources. The participants' emphasis on cooperation, emotional balance, and peaceful coexistence reflects these resilience-based pathways to ageing well. Additionally, Allen et al. (2022) underscores the need for coordinated social and policy level interventions to reduce everyday ageism and enhance the well-being of older adults. This directly resonates with participants' calls for improved welfare schemes, better awareness of available services, and greater institutional support.

Taken together, these findings highlight that healthy and dignified ageing is not solely an individual responsibility. Instead, it is deeply shaped by the presence of supportive social environments and public systems that recognize, value, and respond to the needs of older adults.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that ageing is experienced as a dynamic process shaped by both personal adaptation and social context. Older adults demonstrated a strong sense of acceptance toward physical changes, drawing upon resilience, emotional balance, and continued engagement in daily activities to sustain their independence and dignity. Alongside this

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personal adjustment, the quality of intergenerational relationships and social recognition played an important role in influencing their emotional well-being. While many participants described warmth and connection with younger generations, subtle shifts in respect, visibility, and social value were also noted, reflecting broader cultural and societal changes.

A key insight from this study is that ageing cannot be understood solely as a biological process. It is deeply tied to how society views and includes older adults. Experiences of conditional respect, reduced influence, and everyday forms of age-based stereotyping illustrate how social perceptions can shape an individual's sense of belonging and identity in later life. At the same time, participants expressed a continued desire to serve as moral guides and contributors within their communities, underscoring the importance of recognising older adults not only as recipients of care but also as holders of wisdom and social experience.

The findings also indicate that ageing well is supported by more than personal resilience; it is reinforced through accessible welfare systems, community support, and meaningful opportunities for participation. When social environments acknowledge and value older adults, the ageing experience becomes more secure, connected, and dignified.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for strengthening community-based support networks, promoting inclusive intergenerational engagement, and addressing subtle forms of ageism that may otherwise limit older adults' social involvement. By fostering environments that uphold respect, cooperation, and emotional inclusion, society can contribute to a more positive and fulfilling experience of ageing.

Implications

1. It is necessary to raise public awareness of ageism and its effects on the social and psychological well-being of older adults.
2. Age-ready policies and practices, along with evidence-based care that treats older people with dignity, should be implemented by institutions and service providers.
3. Seniors can address the emotional impacts of age discrimination by having access to mental health resources.
4. An environment where senior citizens participate in cultural, community, and decision-making activities must be established.
5. Efforts to foster respect and communication among generations can help to strengthen social integration and reduce ageism.

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Conflict of Interest

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