

Discouraging Ageism in Workplace: Key to Global Organizational Efficiency

Article by Sam Bodunrin
MBA, Texila American University, Nigeria
E-mail: bodunrinbs12@yahoo.com

Abstract

According to Dictionary.com, it define human aging as “discrimination against persons of a certain age group.”

Within the above contest, one can begin to ask a rhetorical question that who will not get old? Why older persons are discriminated or age restrictions to some of the vital things we do in the society? The science of gerontology is vast and could only be treated positively when its impact is well understood. The impact of age discrimination is retrogressively demeaning to the victims especially the baby boomers who were veterans and had sacrificed for the so called freedom we enjoyed today.

In establishing the impact of gerontology and ageism, I dedicated my study to carry out a research that on age discrimination and was able to establish some facts about ageism and its effect in our society. The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of age discrimination on the aged emotions and capability. In ascertain this study, we deployed questionnaires to the aged old in Lagos Nigeria (sample population) where we got feedback from veterans and other retired fellows staying in old people’s home. About 95% of our sample population confirmed that they felt cheated and undignified after they were discriminated at in various aspects of their lives, even after retirement, while 3.8% disagreed not to have experienced age discrimination and 1% prefer not to comment on it. Details of the survey shall be given in the body of this article.

In this article, the first and second paragraph introduced the timing and age bracket that falls victims of ageism -especially the aged ones. When it is likely to start experiencing age discrimination which sometimes is not limited to aged but also the under-aged who are rated as incompetent to carry out or participate in an aged rated activities. The third paragraph underscored how ageism affect the baby boomers and Gen x irrespective of their fitness and how millennial also face age discrimination in recruitment and political eligibility.

Further to this, work of Robert Butler – the first researcher on ageism was mentioned with our team research at Regina Mundi Ages Home in Lagos and other field survey that were carried out in paragraph seven and eight. The article pointed out different countries acts that protect age discrimination in paragraph nine while the general effect of ageism in our society with our recommendation on how to stop ageism were cited in paragraph ten and eleven respectively.

Introduction

The prejudice of ageism has been in existence since time immemorial in our society. Some believe that if a man attains the age of 60 years and above, s/he is seen as weaker vessel than those younger in age. They even perceive their agility and sense of reasoning to have transformed back to that of a child again –thus they are treated as infants.

One of the key areas our society is experiencing this discrimination is at workplace. In our workplace today, this category of people lacks eligibility to apply for a job or not considered for equal opportunity as others. Ageism in recent times cut across both youngster and old persons. For example – persons below 16 years are seen as Child and are restricted from a paid job likewise those above 65 years of age are expected to proceed on retirement. For example, some Corporations and Banks have their entry level candidates not to be above 24 years while the average graduating age of University Graduates in Africa and Asia is beyond 25 years relative to unending strikes in our educational system. Another striking point is the case of a young

brilliant chap called **Nancy Frank** (a close neighbour) who at the age of 9 had finished elementary school but was denied admission into high school due to age policy guiding high schools entry level from 10 years. Nancy had to forcefully repeat elementary school studying what she knew well in past years in boredom while her enthusiasm to know something new was denied by the standing entry rigid policy of high schools in Nigeria extra one year.

In modern day practice, discrimination against age is irrelevant and it is just a mere stereotype – a prejudice affected mostly by Baby-Boomers and Gen X. Some of Baby-Boomers had shown that they could still perform better on their jobs they were professional on after years of retirement. E.g. Lecturers and Professors in the Academic sector. In addendum, our past leaders in early 50s to 80s were below 35 years with excellent performance in their tract record, same is the case in the Biblical and Quranic history or the past rulers who some at very young age became mighty ruler in their empires. Regrettably! Today, most of our Millennial and Gen-Y could not even get near the corridor of power due to obnoxious policies that peg ceiling on age they can vie for any political position embedded in the Constitution. What a tragedy!

Study objective

The article on discouraging ageism in workplace has the following primary objectives.

1. To provide insight into the existence of age discrimination in our society and how it affects just like other prejudice like gender discrimination, racism etc.,
2. To give data on the affected persons using our sample as a mini yardstick.
3. To preview how other countries see ageism and what they are doing to either support or combat it.
4. To proffer solution to ageism other countries most especially in Asia and Africa on how to avert ageism in our society via positive orientation to the people.

Sample and survey method

Simple random sampling was introduced on our sample population of 80 aged persons in and aged home in Lagos Nigeria (researcher's base). This cut across male and female from different regions of the country and they are all old and retired from active work. Aside the sampling style, direct interview was also done to some of the respondents to get more feedback from them.

Questionnaires

Our questionnaire was concise and simple with only 5 key questions directed to get basic information about ageism. We decided to use an offline (hardcopy) questionnaire on our sample population due to inadequate internet facility the persons and some of them might not be well vast with modern technology even though they were educated or semi-educated.

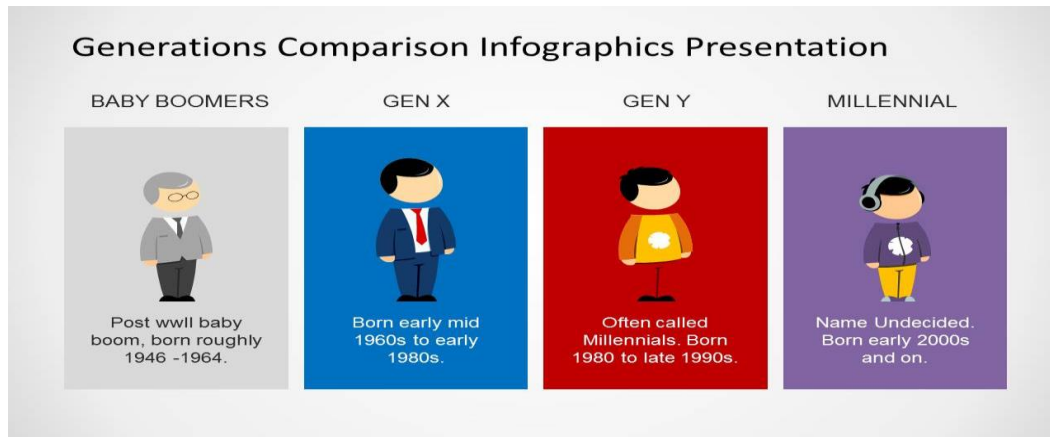
What is Ageism?

Ageism is a discrimination or stereotype against set of persons based on their age bracket they belong. It is a social discrimination against senior citizen in our society. This could also be classified under similar discrimination such as sexism, racism etc. In his quest to support the irrational bias against aged persons, Robert Butler 1969 linked ageism to these elements:

1. **Prejudice reaction to old persons**
2. **Ageing process and real discrimination against person's age group**
3. **Policies that institutionalized the stereotype against certain persons.**

Ageism in today's parlance cut across all phases of human lives. For example In political sector, Some Countries have age limit (*Universal Adult Suffrage*) to be able to contest for President, Senators, Congressmen etc.,

Ageism is not only restricted to the baby boomer, but also to Millennial



Source: <https://slidemodel.com/templates/generations-comparison-powerpoint-template>

The society prejudice which is discouraging the elderly others who feels discriminated because of age feel that they are being disrespected and unwelcomed by the society – a function of caste generalization to those class of persons.

Ageism in workplace

Age segregation in workplace has a lot of impact on productivity and Employee Engagement. Young people are more eulogized. They are perceived to have more strength to execute their jobs better than older persons- while sometimes, older persons suffer retrenchment and compulsory retirement mostly during economic recession or financial meltdown. One of the effect of this prejudice was mentioned in a research done by the *Society for Human Resource Management* that Ageism will lead to the tsunamic exit of the Baby Boomers and Gen X from our workplaces which in turn will lead to gigantic brain drain, lack of skill and experience replication, drop in quality etc., because all the Baby Boomers and Gen X would have taken away the experience they are endowed with.

Our field survey

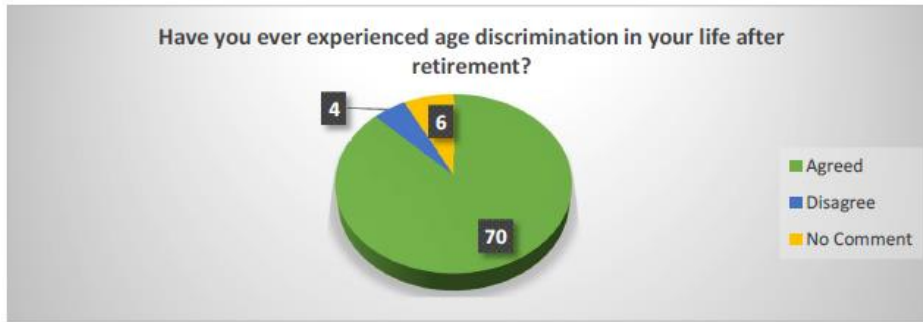
During my field survey to Regina Mundi Aged Home in Lagos Nigeria, we discovered that some of the aged persons most especially the veterans still indulge in some sporting activities while few others are under intensive care. We found out that these persons feel cheated, undignified and abused from the quality of life they envisioned and should be entitled to equal opportunities as others.

In our field survey, 80 aged persons were given questionnaires to fill and give their opinion about age discrimination including their past experiences on it. Below is the result of the questionnaire result.

QUESTIONS	AGREED	DISAGREE	NO COMMENT
Have you ever experienced age discrimination in your life after retirement?	70	4	6
Do you feel cheated and undignified during the discrimination?	76	3	1
Do you believe you can still render the service you retired on for another 2-5 years if given the opportunity?	55	20	5
Do you indulge in body exercise, yoga, or aerobics?	72	1	7
Are you 70 years old and above?	50	28	2

Source: Field survey.

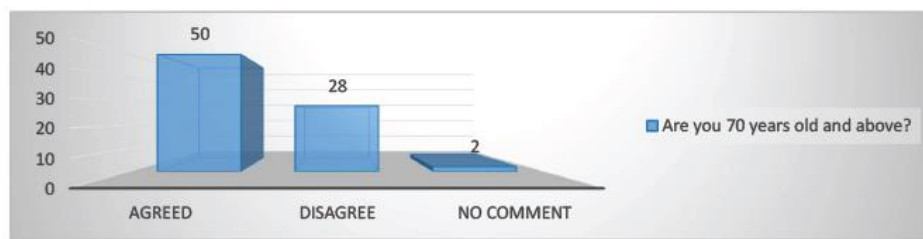
1. Analyzing the above Q1. 70 aged persons to have experienced age discrimination after retirement. ($\frac{70}{80} \times 100 = 87.5\%$ agreed, $\frac{4}{80} \times 100 = 5\%$ disagree and $\frac{6}{80} \times 100 = 7.5\%$ prefer not to comment).



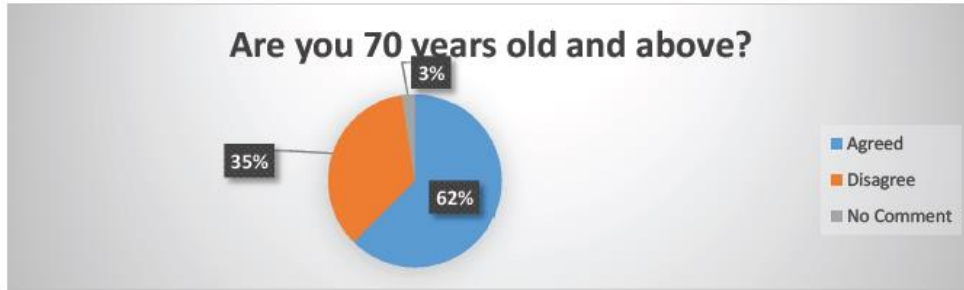
2. Analyzing the above Q2. 76 aged persons felt cheated and undignified during the discrimination ($\frac{76}{80} \times 100 = 95\%$ agreed, $\frac{3}{80} \times 100 = 3.8\%$ disagree and $\frac{1}{80} \times 100 = 1.25\%$ prefer not to comment).



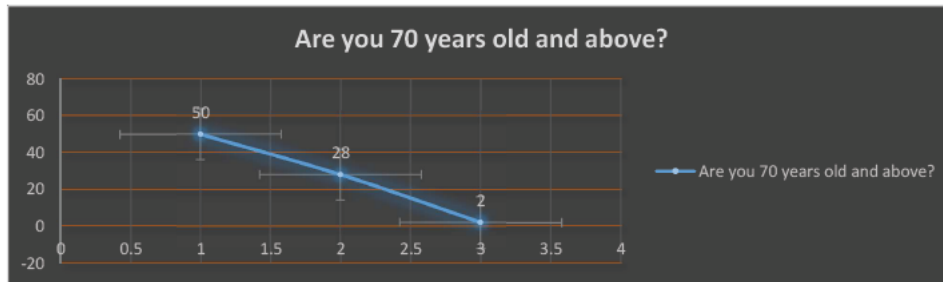
3. Analyzing the above Q3. 55 aged persons agreed that could still work better 2-5 years more even after retirement ($\frac{55}{80} \times 100 = 69\%$ agreed, $\frac{20}{80} \times 100 = 25\%$ disagree and $\frac{5}{80} \times 100 = 6\%$ prefer not to comment).



4. Analyzing the above Q4. 72 aged persons agreed that could still work better 2-5 years more even after retirement ($\frac{72}{80} \times 100 = 90\%$ agreed, $\frac{2}{80} \times 100 = 2.5\%$ disagree and $\frac{7}{80} \times 100 = 8.75\%$ prefer not to comment).

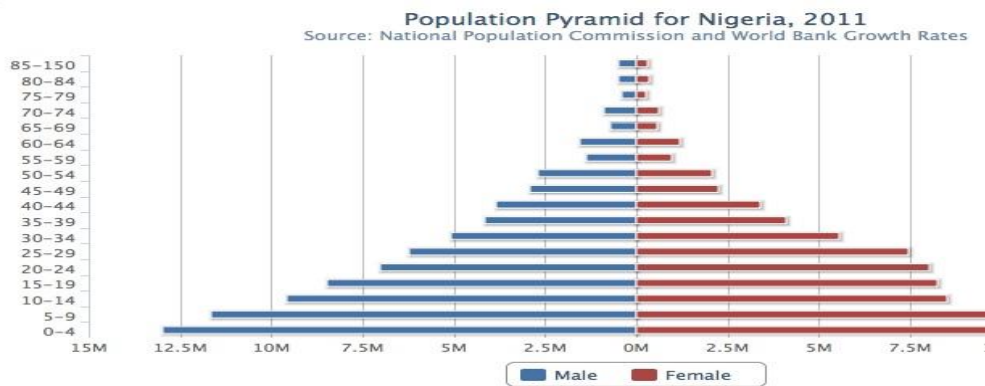


5. Analyzing the above Q5. 72 aged persons agreed that could still work better 2-5 years more even after retirement ($\frac{50}{80} \times 100 = 62.5\%$ agreed, $\frac{28}{80} \times 100 = 35\%$ disagree and $\frac{2}{80} \times 100 = 2.5\%$ prefer not to comment).



Further to this result, in Erdman Palmre PhD of Duke University noted in his research that 58% of his sample population agreed to have heard jokes poked at old people, 30% said they were ignored, or not taken very seriously due to their age (Gerontologist Vol 41, no5).

In May 2012, President Jonathan having realized that Professors could still perform on their jobs after retirement at age 65, signed into law an amended bill (Miscellaneous Provision Act no11) that extended lecturers age from 65 year to 70 years of age. This is one of few steps in keeping the aged active in Employment and retain their wealth of experience within the sector of authority.



Most countries have started realizing this challenge and have promulgated laws to protecting this prejudice against these class of persons. Some of the laws include;

Age Discrimination in Employment Act 1967: The act forbids discrimination in Employment against the aged who is above 40 years old in the USA. The area that law forbids include, hiring, setting wages, promotion, career development and opportunities, and or termination of employment. The law forbids recruiter to set age limit to job advertised to public domain or denial or aged persons benefits.

Equity Act (United Kingdom): This is another act that protects people from discrimination on basis of age, race, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, pregnancy, civil partnership or marriage etc. The act breakdown discrimination into four phase;

1. Direct Discrimination: e.g Access denial into a local pub because of age.
2. Indirect Discrimination: e.g. Disallowing aged person to participate in a marathon race.
3. Harassment: For example; making offensive jokes about age of somebody.
4. Victimization: e.g. punishing Employee for whistle blowing any discriminatory policy including ageism.

Equity act also protects against age discrimination in employment, this include recruitment, employment terms and conditions, promotion, transfer, training or dismissal.

While the first two discrimination is easy to defend by Employer, the last two (Harassment and victimization are not easy to defend in Court).



Effect of ageism

1. Ageism hurts emotionally: Victims of ageism are never same in terms of emotional balance. Psychologists confirm that discrimination against age is hurtful and brings about negative stereotype in our society.

2. Ageism shorten old people lives: From a research done by Becca Levy PhD from Yale University- 660 person of 50 years above were surveyed. Those with positive ageism perception lived 7.5years more than the counterpart who had a negative perception-(Journal of personality &Social Psychology Vol 83, no2).

3. Ageism create rejection in the society: Most of the aged persons are portrayed as being weak, helpless, dependent and unproductive. This is a prejudice against the old person as some of them are with full of strength, self-sufficient, talented and more resourceful than the Youths.

How to fight agesim

Legal means: Like western Countries, America is one of the leading countries that has enough laws protecting her aged citizens from discrimination. The role of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in ensuring all categories of Employees or applicants are treated equally cannot be over-emphasized. This kind of system enhance legal action against discriminators and protection for victims of Ageism including other forms of discrimination.

Society rejection/ ethical consciousness: Our society need to be re-educated about the senior persons' population and their value to our society, the impact will surely reduce ageism and other discrimination alongside.

Celebrating the aged persons: We should start celebrating the aged person. Employers must also celebrate long term serving staff and older ones by giving awards and other incentives to motivate and encourage the old generation while young ones will know the value of the aged, what it means and how they have contributed to our workplace and society at large.

Conclusion

Ageism just like any of the other discrimination e.g., Racism, Sexism, etc., has not established any good perception and positive result to our society, but iota of bitterness, caste and segregation. It is high time the global leaders advocated more awareness on how to kick this prejudice out of our global system.

Some Countries like USA and UK have regulations in place like Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) and Equity Act to protect their citizen from being discriminated. Howbeit, other world leaders and countries should not be left behind in the fight against this prejudice. We must all say No to Ageism in this 21st century!

References

- [1]. Brian J. Worsfold 2011 *Acculturating Age: Approaches to Cultural Gerontology*, by University of Lleida press.
- [2]. Malcome Sargent 2011: *Age discrimination: Ageism in Employment and Service Provision*. Gower Publisher UK
- [3]. Susan M. Hiller, Georgia N. Barrow 2011. *Aging, the Individual, and Society*. Published by Cengage Learning Stamford CT 06902 USA.
- [4]. Toni M. Calasanti, Kathleen F. Slevin 2001 *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging* published by Altamira press Oxford England.
- [5]. Ursula A. Falk, Gerhard Falk 1997 *Ageism, the aged, and aging in America: on being old in an alienated society* by Thomas Publisher
- [6]. <http://www.onenigeriablog.com/2016/09/older-men-and-women-stand-up-against.html>
- [7]. <http://www.agediscrimination.info/international-age-discrimination/nigeria>
- [8]. <https://nigerianobservernews.com/2016/10/taking-a-stand-against-ageism/#.WJiPgvrLIU>
- [9]. www.dictionary.com
- [10]. <http://www.population.gov.ng>