
Ageism is no Joke: The Health Implications of Ageism: Ageism is Strange, When You're a Stranger

Daniel J. Van Dussen MA, PhD

DePizzo Endowed Chair of Gerontology

Youngstown State University



Overview

- Health Implications of Ageism
- Health Impact of Ageist Assumptions in Service Delivery
- The Role of Anti-Aging

The Health Impacts of Ageism

- *World Health Organization: Global Report on Ageism*
- “Ageism harms everyone – old and young. But often, it is so widespread and accepted – in our attitudes and in policies, laws and institutions – that we do not even recognize its detrimental effect on our dignity and rights said Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. “We need to fight ageism head-on, as a deep-rooted human rights violation.”



Strategies to Combat Ageism

1. Policy and Law
2. Educational Interventions
3. Intergenerational Contact



World Health Organization Recommendations for Action

1. Invest in evidence-based strategies to prevent and tackle ageism
2. Improve data and research to gain a better understanding of ageism and how to reduce it
3. Build a movement to change the narrative around age and ageing



Ageism Impact on Costs and Health

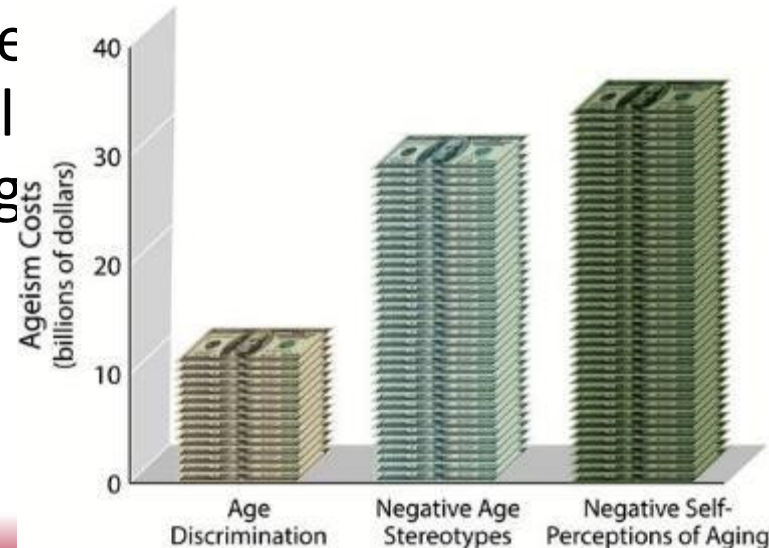
- What is the cost of ageism on health conditions for persons over the age of 60?
- Study shows: \$63 billion spent on health care for the eight most-expensive health conditions
 - Cardiovascular Disease
 - Chronic Respiratory Disease
 - Injuries
 - Diabetes Mellitus
 - Mental Disorders
 - Non-communicable Disease
 - Treatment of Smoking



Ageism Predictors

- There are three discrete ageism predictors:

- Age discrimination: defined as detrimental treatment of older persons.
- Negative age stereotypes: defined as the negative beliefs of older persons about older people in general.
- Negative self-perceptions of aging: defined as the negative beliefs of older persons about their own aging.



(Levy, Slade, Chang, Kanno, & Wang,

2018)



Ageism Continued..

- Research identifies the economic cost that ageism imposes on health.
- The results suggest that a reduction of ageism would not have a monetary benefit for society, but also have a health benefit for older adults.

Levy, B. R., Slade, M. D., Chang, E.-S., Kanno, S., & Wang, S.-Y. (2018). Ageism Amplifies Cost and Prevalence of Health Conditions. *The Gerontological Society of America*, 174-181.



- Health Impact of Ageist Assumptions in Service Delivery

- Statements such as “you’re 75 years old, what do you expect?” When presenting physical symptoms
- Speaking over the older adult and only addressing their caregiver
- Assumptions of frailty



Anti-Aging Medicine

- At this point “we cannot reverse, slow, or stop the aging process
- The marketing at its core is ageist
- Age is not a condition that needs to be cured



Recommendations

- Anti-Ageism Training for Service Providers
- Examination of policies dealing with older adults
- Avoidance of ageist or ablest language in our materials
- Understand that Aging and Ageism are examples of social determinants of health



Conclusion

- Research
- Does ageism impact the choice of working with older adults?



Sources

- World Health Organization. (2021) Global report on ageism.
- Levy, B. R., Slade, M. D., Chang, E.-S., Kanno, S., & Wang, S.-Y. (2018). Ageism Amplifies Cost and Prevalence of Health Conditions. *The Gerontological Society of America*, 174-181

