



Identifying Reasons for Ageism in the Context of Aging

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Abstract. Discrimination against the elderly is a widespread social phenomenon, which contains misunderstanding and misjudgment of the elderly group. Compared with racial discrimination, gender discrimination and other discrimination issues, discrimination against the elderly has its own characteristics, such as universality, concealment, interference, which determines that discrimination against the elderly is extremely “subtle”. This paper focuses on the reasons of ageism. At the same time, this paper lays the groundwork to analyze reasons of ageism systematically, which have an important role of subsequent research on finding the resolution of ageism. This paper analyzes 10 articles selected from Google Scholar and CNKI. This paper finds that the reasons mainly come from three aspects: individual level, inter-group level, and institutional level.

Keywords: Ageism · Determinants · Reasons · Aging

1 Introduction

Aging is a global phenomenon, with census groups predicting that by 2050 there will be about twice as many people aged 60 and over as there were before. In the face of these demographic trends, championing an appropriate level of well-being and health for older persons is critical [1]. Age discrimination against older persons has been widely recognized as a major threat to active aging and an important public health problem.

Nowadays, due to the increasing direct or indirect burden of population aging on the society, the disappearance of demographic dividend and severe pension problem, compared to the twin product of population aging, discrimination against the elderly is “irrelevant”. In fact, discrimination against the elderly has been a widespread social phenomenon for a long time. It is particularly important for the development of the elderly group and the region to correctly understand the development of the elderly and effectively explore their social value.

Up to now, many literatures have analyzed the factors affecting ageism from different perspectives. For example, other-oriented age discrimination factors, self-oriented age discrimination factors [1]. But so far, analysis of causes of old-age discrimination in literature was not systematically combed all determinants. The literature on ageism lacks a complete sorting out of the factors affecting ageism. In addition, no article analyze reasoning of ageism from different aspects (such as past literature will only

from the perspective of a personal factors analysis, no articles covering both individuals and groups).

This paper makes up for the shortcomings of previous studies that have not been systematically combed the reasoning of ageism and aims to systematically sorting out the determinants of ageism and categorizing these influencing factors clearly.

Nowadays, age discrimination is a common phenomenon and poses a major threat to the material and spiritual life (happiness index) of the elderly. Therefore, it is important to analyze the causes of ageism. This paper has played an important role in the formulation of policies aimed at safeguarding the rights and interests of the elderly.

This paper will discuss the origin and influencing factors of age discrimination through individual determinants, interpersonal or group determinants and cultural or institutional determinants these three aspects.

The literatures (materials) included in this paper has the following characteristics: First, the paper focuses on the study of age discrimination against the elderly; Second, the paper aims to explore the determinants of age discrimination; Third, age discrimination measurement is used as a dependent variable. As for the methodology of this literature review, the paper is based on the keywords “Ageism” and “Aging Discrimination” through searching articles from 2011 to present on Google Scholar and CNKI respectively. After screening, a total of 10 articles were included in the analysis scope of this paper.

2 Reasons of Ageism

This paper analyzes the causes of ageism from the following three perspectives. For detailed framework and ideas, please refer to Table 1.

2.1 Individual Determinants

Table 1 shows that individual determinants include age, sex, years of education, cultural background, ethnicity, study area, better physical and mental health condition, socio-economic status, living in urban or rural area and marital status.

As for the determinants of age discrimination at the individual level, through reviewing past literature, this paper concludes that individual conditions of the elderly have a great impact on the degree of discrimination they suffer [2]. In addition, older people’s own psychological factors also determine the degree of discrimination [3]. Eight of the nine papers found that anxiety about aging as a psychological factor increased the degree of ageism experienced by older individuals, and seven of the nine papers also found a positive correlation between fear of death and the severity of ageism. The age and gender of respondents are the two most frequently discussed individual-level determinants. Personal factors such as years of education, cultural background, race, socioeconomic status, religious belief, living in urban and rural areas, and marital status also influence age discrimination [4].

These personal factors will lead to the inferiority of the elderly from the inside out, so that the outside world to further deepen their discrimination. For example, the elderly with a lower level of cultural background are more likely to be ignored by the society,

Table 1. Determinants of ageism

No. of specific determinants	Individual level	Interpersonal level	Institutional and cultural level
1	Age (older)	Frequency of contact with elderly	Available economic resources
2	Sex (being a male)	Target's age (older)	Percentage of elderly population in the country
3	Years of education	Target's sex (being a woman)	Cultural dimensions
4	Cultural background	Quality of contact with elderly	
5	Ethnicity	Frequency of contact with elderly relatives	
6	Study area: aging and care	Voluntary and paid experience with older people	
7	Better physical and mental health condition		
8	Socio-economic status		
9	Living in Urban vs. Rural		
10	Marital status (being married)		

while the elderly with a higher level of cultural background are more likely to be vigilant by others.

It is worth noting that, unlike inter-group and institutional level determinants, most individual level determinants do not show strong associations with ageism. Through collation, this paper finds that the age and gender of respondents are the two most frequently discussed individual-level determinants in previous papers. However, most studies did not find an age or gender effect. Evidence is inconclusive on the effect of other social-demographic characteristics, including years of education, cultural background, race, socioeconomic status, religious belief, living in urban and rural areas, and marital status. The influence of these personal factors on ageism is less than that of psychological factors and health conditions of the elderly [5]. A 70-year-old, for example, is not treated significantly differently from a 60-year-old. The only exceptions, however, are the two individual factors of mental and physical health. In the process of literature review, this paper found that these two factors are related to a lower level of self-directed ageism and directly affect the degree of ageism [6].

2.2 Interpersonal & Inter-group Determinants

Table 1 shows that interpersonal and inter-group determinants include frequency of contact with elderly group, target's age, target's sex, quality of contact with elderly group, frequency of contact with grandparents and other relatives and voluntary and paid experience with older people.

Previous research has been inconclusive on whether how often of contact between young and old people reduces ageism. However, eight out of 10 papers found that the quality of this exposure did reduce the prevalence of ageism. Therefore, the paper can conclude that the quality of contact with the elderly is one of the determinants of ageism. When asked about people's contact with grandparents, the results followed a similar pattern: seven out of 10 papers showed that the quality of contact with grandparents was strongly associated with age discrimination, but there was no significant contrast in the effect of the amount of contact with grandparents. In addition, previous research has found that stereotypes are more likely to occur if the target is older. Moreover, the framing of older individuals seemed highly relevant: all papers that presented older goals in a positive way found that this positive presentation reduced ageism, while the negative presentation amplified ageism. There were different findings about activities -- including respondents' experiences caring for or working with older adults -- (four out of eight papers). Of the 14 papers that presented goals in a negative way, 13 found that this presentation amplified ageism. Regarding the factor of activities with older persons, the study showed that respondents' experiences caring for or working with older persons amplified ageism when presented in a negative way.

2.3 Institutional and Cultural Determinants

Table 1 shows that institutional determinants include three components which are available economic resources, the percentage of older people in the country, and different cultural dimensions.

Only a few of the 10 studies examined the determinants of age discrimination at this level. At this level, three strong determinants are identified and included: the socio-economic resources available, the percentage of the elderly in the country, and the cultural dimensions.

With the growth of social and economic resources, more and more intelligent tools are being further promoted, which has resulted in social discrimination against the elderly [7]. Because older people are generally not used to using smart tools, this creates a generation gap between them and the younger generation. In addition, with the increase of the size of the elderly population and the proportion of the elderly population, the overall characteristics of the elderly group is more prominent, inter-generational conflicts of interest, ageism and other related problems are more prominent than before.

As for the determinant of cultural dimensions, the countries exist stereotypes among elderly group as a national level due to their culture [8]. The cultural dimensions of specific countries are divided into power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance [9]. Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect unequal distribution of power. Individualism refers to the extent to which individuals should take care of themselves

or remain integrated into groups, usually around the family. Masculinity refers to the strong male society and the gentle female society. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which a culture plans its members to feel uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Older people are discriminated against in countries with these cultural beliefs precisely because they do not have recognized rights, a “tough image” and strong health uncertainties [10].

3 Conclusion

This paper analyzes the causes of ageism from three perspectives, which include individual level, inter-group level, and institutional level. At the individual level, the main factors that cause ageism are basic personal information, including age, sex, education level, cultural background, race, health level and economic condition. At the interpersonal level, the reasons for ageism include the frequency and quality of contact between young people and the elderly, and the positive and negative descriptions of the elderly. At the level of culture and institutional, the main determinants are social-economic conditions, the number of elderly population and the cultural ideas of the society.

At the individual level, the most powerful factor was the individual’s anxiety about aging and fear of death. The paper also found that specific personality traits (e.g., conscientiousness and agreeableness) and individual psychological factors (e.g., individual collectivism tendencies) contribute to mitigating ageism against older people.

At the interpersonal and inter-group levels, contact with older persons is the most important determinant of other factors leading to ageism. This paper found that contact with older adults itself reduced ageism, and there were more than twice as many studies on the effects of frequency of exposure as on the quality of exposure. This paper also points out the importance of contact quality to frequency and how to present the elderly.

At the institutional and cultural level, the availability of social resources, the percentage of older people in a country, and cultural attitudes are directly and closely related to ageism. With the increase of resource scarcity, especially in the face of the increase in the number of elderly people, the tension over resource allocation is often triggered, which leads to a higher rate of age discrimination.

Solving the problem of age discrimination should be the priority of future research. According to the research results of this paper, different levels of factors need to be considered to solve the problem of ageism. At the same time, this paper also hopes that the analysis contained in this paper can attract more research and improve the pension system.

In terms of future research on ageism, this paper hopes that researchers can conduct more specific analysis on the causes of ageism analyzed in this paper in the future so as to provide targeted solutions.

At the same time, there are some defects in this paper, which also need to be improved in future research. The ageism investigated in this paper is mainly concentrated in English-speaking countries, and there is not much literature collection about Asian countries. In addition, this paper is limited to quantitative research and does not pay attention to qualitative research. Therefore, this paper hopes that future research can consider the analysis of ageism from a qualitative perspective, because qualitative research provides rich and in-depth details.

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