Ageism and its prominence in modern society

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**Introduction**

These days more and more “-isms” appear, reflecting the shortcomings of the interaction of people in society. One of the new terms is ageism, introduced in 1969 by Robert Butler to describe age discrimination. Now, the questions are: why is ageism present in modern more tolerant than ever society, how can it be reduced?

In "World Values Survey" analysed by WHO, 60% of respondents reported that older people are not respected (Officer, Schneiders, Wu, Nash, Thiyagarajan, & Beard, 2016). According to professors from the University of York, only 27 of 509 Trusts and health authorities in the UK consulted kids on services for chronically ill or disabled children. This is statistics from developed countries, where human rights are more protected, and a person has greater freedom. Now imagine the situation in developing nations?

This sad situation, deep-rooted stereotypes regarding kids and seniors prompted to think about the causes of ageism and ways to reduce it. Secondary research revealed that people continue to believe in old stereotypes: children and elderlies were not useful in the Middle Ages due to physical weakness. This motivates to make research to understand the issue better and show people their mistake of judging different age groups. Older and younger people are discriminated as legally incompetent and weak but abusers do not understand that this judgement hurts; therefore the awareness of the community should be raised.

Partial bias could be visible in this research because few years ago the discrimination was shown by parents, who tend to teach children, even if they knew the topic of arguing better than parents did. Although this issue is no longer present, the problems of ageism’s victims still can be taken personally.

This project and its results could inform and influence people to behave properly, so it is beneficial for children and seniors. For example, surrounding people would talk with their 5-12 year children as with adults, would not treat 90 years grandparents as kids. Another way to use research is to give lessons on proper behaviour with different-aged people as part of social practice.

**Context**

According to PhD S.Lishaev, the fast rate of modernization and industrialization leads to a decline in respect for elders, giving way to fear of old age. The development of knowledge, skills, technologies and lifestyles depreciated the experience and knowledge of older people (Lishaev, 2007). Another reason for discrimination of seniors is fear of weakness, as said Applewhite A. So the fact that the majority of illnesses, such as dementia, Alzheimer's disease, manifest themselves in the senior age makes elders disgusting (Applewhite, 2017). However, this is only one side of the issue. It is believed that children and teenagers do not have enough intelligence or experience to manage their lives and solve adult affairs. Young people often do not share their opinion on a particular question but if they do, people usually ignore them (Young-Bruehl, 2012).

This problem is very common across the world as more and more Western elderlies join the anti-ageism movement. There are a lot of new organisations against ageism: Old School, The Age of No Retirement, Gray Partners, etc. However, all these organisations seem to appear in European and American countries because this issue is not well-spread in Asia. From the cultural point of view, eastern countries are fewer ageists than western because Asian values dictate that seniors should be held in higher esteem (Nelson, 2009). This is supported by Schwartz in his Theory of cultural value orientations: Explication and applications (2006), eastern cultures also are more interdependent and collectivistic‐oriented. Therefore, higher importance should be placed on relational harmony; and taking care of older people is an obligation. On the other hand, Western cultures place a relatively higher value on personal control, independence and innovation that is less compatible with older people who represent stability and tradition (Nelson, 2009). This is also true for discrimination against children; the birth rate of Western countries fell so adults become estranged from children, while in Eastern cultures lots of traditions are connected to children, birth and upbringing (Nelson, 2009).

Because of the absence of reliable sources or researches about the ageism in Kazakhstan, this issue should be considered as unknown here. Despite, some journalists published works related to ageism in, for example, sputniknews.kz, they did not get widespread and only a few people read t.

Several problems in different spheres arise from ageism, especially from an economic perspective. The most common is discrimination in the workplace. The unemployment rate among youngsters in the USA is relatively high – 12.9% of 16-19 years old and 6.5% of 20-24 years old compared to a mere 3% of people over 25 (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2019). In the UK in 2009, both the unemployment rate and economic activity of 16-24 years old increased by 6.3% which is the largest among all age groups, while the employment fell by 7.2% that also is the highest figure (Office for National Statistics, 2019). Companies that allow ageism will lose highly experienced specialist older workers, as well as younger people who are fast learners full of potential (Smith, 2019). Independent research by Glassdoor found that over 50% of UK employees have experience of discrimination at work, with 39% witnessing or experiencing ageism - including this against younger workers.

Needless to say that ageism has a strong impact on the social life of discriminated people. The co-founder of Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement, Adam Fletcher states that at work, in a hospital or school professional language obstructs younger people to easily understand the subject of conversation. Decisions connected to students, including activities, teaching methods, punishments, learning topics and budgeting are routinely made without students. There are double-standards in treatment, including the belief that when teachers yell at students, they are controlling classrooms; when students yell at teachers, they are creating unsafe learning environments (Fletcher, 2019). In families teens are not allowed to argue with their parents. Media bias against youth that portrays them as apathetic dangerous people who are stuck on computers or gang members. Discrimination against children has a political side. Underage persons are virtual non-citizens without the right to vote or any real political representation and minimal power (Fletcher, 2019).

Turning to seniors, they are ignored by own children, who make decisions about medical treatment, employers, who conclude whether they are too old for a job etc. without asking elderlies. "Older people are an increasingly large proportion of the population, and we need to be more aware of the problem of ageism. Treating people of any age with respect and courtesy is good for society, and will help increase the wellbeing of senior citizens," said Jessica Watson from the International Longevity Centre (Weston, 2013).

Probably, there are even more problems that arise from ageism and, if they make people’s lives more difficult, society should at least think of some possible solutions. “For now, discriminated people should control themselves; no matter how pointed the ageism might seem, they have to stay calm and try not to take it personally” mentioned workers of Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement (2019).

**Aims**

The main purpose of this research is to discover people’s attitude towards ageism and how it affects their daily lives. To achieve this aim, the following questions should be answered:

• What is people’s level of awareness and attitude towards ageism?

• What are the reasons for ageism?

• What issues arise from ageism?

• What is the best way of fighting with age stereotypes in Kazakhstan?

The research will raise the awareness of people about ageism, or help in the fight against ageism at the local level. The results could be used in lessons in NIS/primary school to raise awareness and educate students on appropriate behaviour with different-aged people. Also, the results can be published on the Internet; the statistical data could be used to describe the social situation in Ust-Kamenogorsk/Kazakhstan. The lessons and further research will help to reduce the negative impact of ageism on children’s and seniors’ lives, leading to the creation of a safe and equal society.

**Methods**

During the research, the survey will be conducted because many people from different regions can be asked in a short period to know their level of awareness and attitude towards ageism. This is effective because the information from various regions can be compared, so the results will be considered from global, national and local perspectives.

The survey will answer several research questions, providing quantitative data (a great number of answers without explanation):

* What is people’s level of awareness and attitude towards ageism?
* How spread is ageism around the globe?

A population of this survey will be people of different age and possibly from various countries. The reason for this is that ageism affects kids, adults and seniors, as the main victims are children and elderlies, who are discriminated by middle-aged people. The sample should be wide to make the research global. However, since it is time-consuming and there is no opportunity to ask people from every country, the sample group will be at least 100 people of different age from Kazakhstan, Russia, Spain, etc. (some found potential respondents live in these countries).

Some people tend to lie in the surveys even if they do not realise it. Also, the survey cannot give the reasons for the respondents’ answers, so it would be substantiated by interview, where people can explain their opinion. It is better to use semi-structured interview since supplementary questions can be asked as appropriate for the better understanding of the respondents’ opinion. For instance, the examples for ageism’s impact or respondents’ feelings can be asked to know the effect of ageism on the person’s well-being. Therefore, following research questions would be answered:

* What is people’s attitude towards ageism?
* What are the reasons for ageism?
* What issues arise from ageism?
* What is the best way of fighting ageist stereotypes?

Since the population is people of every age, three people will be asked: teenager, senior and middle-aged person. The first two people are those who are the main target of ageists, so they are able to say what effect ageism has on their lives. The reasons for ageism can be determined through an interview with an adult. Also, adults sometimes experience ageism; therefore people of every age should be asked to find out all the consequences of the issue. To get qualitative data sample group will consist of only three people.

This method will be verified by observation because three interviewees cannot represent the whole population of the research. Sometimes interviewee’s point of view is the opinion of a minority. He/she still can answer this question: “What issues arise from ageism?” but will never answer for “What is people’s attitude towards ageism?” as majority would answer. His/her opinion could differ radically, therefore it seems wrong to be generalised. During the observation, the real behaviour of people in different situations will be considered that will support or contradict survey and interview, reflecting people’s true attitude towards ageism and to what extent they are ageists. If the sample group does not know that they are observed, they behave as they usually do, they do not act/lie to show their better side; therefore non-participant observation will be used.

This method will provide answers to these questions:

* What is people’s level of awareness and attitude towards ageism?
* How spread is ageism?
* What issues arise from ageism?
* What are the reasons for ageism?

The sample group is seniors, parents and children that are walking in public places (schools, public transport, shopping centres, etc.). By observing these people and their interactions with others, the presence or absence of ageism would be seen. For instance, if people tend to give place to elderlies and parents with a small child, society is tolerant of older and younger people. If a parent instead of explaining something to their kid says “You’ll understand when you grow up”, they’re partially discriminating the child. However, it is impossible to take wider sample group and observe interactions in other cities/countries; therefore this group could represent only citizens of Kazakhstan, as most people of one country have the same attitude. However, their behaviour at home and in public differs significantly, but observation in houses is impossible due to ethical issues.

**Results**

During primary research, the survey and interview were fully completed.

At first, the survey respondents were divided into categories according to their age and location.

The overwhelming majority (38%) of respondents is 12-18 years old, 34% is 30-49 years old, and 77% is from Kazakhstan.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Respondents’ ages |  | Up to this point, did you know what ageism is? |  | Respondents’ location |
|  | Yes | No | Yes | No |  |
| 12-18 | 48% | 52% | 37% | 63% | Kazakhstan |
| 19-29 | 52% | 48% | 31% | 69% | Russia |
| 30-49 | 16% | 84% | 33% | 67% | Europe |
| 50-65 | 22% | 78% | 33% | 67% | Asia |

According to the survey, people’s overall level of ageism awareness is significantly low – only 37%. The table illustrates that half of younger respondents are familiar with this term, which is much greater than the same index among older ones. Distribution of acquainted people in different countries is almost equal.

Figure 3 shows that most youngsters are discriminated against by older people; therefore society is biased towards youth. 89% of older respondents have never experienced ageism, which shows respect of society towards seniors. Also, ageism by younger people is almost absent as only 9% of 30-49 old people experienced it.

The following table shows the respondents’ answers to survey questions divided by age.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Respondents’ ages |  | Do you think that all elderlies are less familiar with new technologies? | If you were an employer that is looking for workers, would you hire a senior that probably is slower than younger employees but has a great experience in this sphere? | If you were an employer that is looking for workers, would you hire a graduate without any experience but with high qualification? |
|  | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| 12-18 | 15% | 85% | 75% | 25% | 82% | 18% |
| 19-29 | 14% | 86% | 90% | 10% | 95% | 5% |
| 30-49 | 12% | 88% | 82% | 18% | 91% | 9% |
| 50-65 | 33% | 67% | 89% | 11% | 100% | 0% |

The figure shows that people consider elderlies being neither less familiar with technologies nor worse workers than younger ones. Also, respondents do not think that young employees work less hard. Surprisingly, younger respondents are more biased towards both age groups as the percentage of those who would not hire senior (25%) and graduate (18%) is relatively high than it is among other age groups.

The average point of value of older people’s advice is 4 out of 5 (where 5 is for “I always ask them for advice” and 1 ­­- “I do not listen to them”), which indicates that older people are respected in modern Kazakhstani (as the majority of the respondent was from this country) society.

Figure 4 illustrates that if a younger person had criticized their work, respondents were more likely to make changes in the work, and percentage of these answers is bigger among older respondents than younger, showing the greater bias of youngsters. Percentage of those who would not accept critique is almost the same in all age groups.

During the interview, only three people of different ages (14, 45 and 59 years old) were asked. Two of them did not know what ageism is, showing a low level of awareness and confirming the survey’s results. The adult thinks that it is a live issue because there are many examples of ageism in everyday life: children cannot yell at an older person but an older person can, adult children often do not respect their parents considering them as silly disabled people. The same interviewee said that she experienced ageism in childhood and supported it with the same examples. Senior claimed that he had never been discriminated against, which supports the survey’s results; however, the same answer from a teen is quite surprising, according to the survey.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Interviewees’ ages |  | What are the reasons for ageism? |
|  | Regarding youngsters | Both | Regarding elderlies |
| 14 years | Children’s dependence on adults so that adults can discriminate or even threaten kids | Country’s culture | Fear of death, society’s obsession with appearance (considering wrinkles, grey hair and loose skin as something ugly) |
| 45 years | Copying of previous generations’ behaviour (even interviewee yelled at children as her parents did) | Religion | The belief that elderlies are weaker and disabled |
| 59 years |  | Religion | Fear of death and illnesses |

The following possible effects of ageism were mentioned:

* Low self-esteem, the development of complexes;
* Childhood trauma, when children grow old they can consider such treatment as right and repeat the same actions towards own children;
* Children may become dependent on parents or aggressive towards peers;
* The person who cannot get a job because of age will have financial problems.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Interviewees’ ages |  | Should society pay more attention to ageism? |
|  | No | Yes |
| 14 years | Even though some examples seem harmful, they’re part of normal behaviour and it is impossible to reduce ageism. |  |
| 45 years |  | It is an urgent problem, examples of which are everywhere and it affects people’s lives detrimental |
| 59 years | People tend to exaggerate problems. Because of the freedom of speech, people invent issues that are not as urgent as e.g. starvation. They should pay attention to more serious problems. |  |

This shows the different attitude towards ageism but both elderly and teenager mentioned that their opinion can be influenced by society.

It was not reasonable to ask the teen and elderly about the possible ways of fighting age stereotypes as they do not consider it as a live issue. The adult named several solutions:

* Raise the society’s awareness through social polls and experiments;
* Use media sources as a distribution tool;
* Psychologists can talk to students and workers to teach them about proper behaviour.

**Conclusion**

The hypothesis of the research was: ageism is a problem that only starts spreading but even now has a detrimental impact on society. The results do not fully support it. The number of people who experienced ageism is greater among youth, according to the survey, so this issue was noticed recently and older generations do not consider their behaviour as ageist. Therefore, the answers to “What is people’s level of awareness and attitude towards ageism?” are ageism awareness is low; people do not consider it as a live issue because most interviewees claimed that it is normal behaviour, if it is not too violent, but due to the narrow location range of sample it cannot be generalised for the whole world. The interviewees’ answers also question the motivation of research – daily discrimination as it reveals another side of the issue.

Another question was “What are the reasons and effects for ageism?” that was answered during the interview: the reasons are culture, religion, children’s dependence on adults, copying of parents’ behaviour, fear of death, illnesses, weakness, society’s obsession with appearance; the consequences – low self-esteem, complexes, childhood trauma, dependence on parents, aggressive behaviour, financial problems. This supports the information of the secondary research given by Applewhite and complements other reasons mentioned by Lishaev and Young-Bruehl – elderlies’ depreciation and youngsters’ lack of experience.

The last question was “What is the best way of fighting with age stereotypes in Kazakhstan?” The adult answered that society’s awareness should be raised through social polls, experiments, media sources; psychologists can talk to people to teach them about proper behaviour.

According to the questions with set different situations, despite younger respondents unexpectedly showed a greater bias towards youth and seniors, the majority showed their tolerance towards different age groups, impugning ageism’s urgency. The unanticipated answers show that ageism is present in all age groups and can be passed on to the next generations. According to PhD Nelson’s Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, Asian countries are fewer ageists and, as most survey respondents are from Kazakhstan, the culture can affect people’s choice.

The full conclusion cannot be drawn since the observation wasn’t completed. However, the results show that people think more serious forms of ageism are harmful but it is not a common issue in Kazakhstan.

**Evaluation**

The quality of the primary research is not high since it was not implemented fully. Because of the current situation connected to COVID-19, the observation was not made. Therefore, appropriate conclusions cannot be done and the research might be incomplete.

During the survey, 120 answers were collected. However, there was an error in the app used to collect responses, because of which only 100 answers are visible and can be analysed. To avoid this mistake in future another platform can be used to conduct a survey. Although the overwhelming majority of participants are from Kazakhstan and this data cannot, therefore, be generalised to a larger area, it does provide an idea about national perspective because the Kazakhs’ answers can be compared to Russian, European and Asian. To avoid such mistakes in the future, the survey can be published on foreign websites and the time limit should be expanded. Moreover, some questions should be specified since some of the respondents had misunderstandings about imaginary situations. For instance, they think that the retirement age should be determined according to the job position, therefore the question connected to it cannot be answered properly; also, they would hire an elderly as a white-collar worker not blue, and this question should be specified. Therefore, some of the answers were biased since every person thought from various perspectives and a proper conclusion cannot be drawn.

To make the interview answers more reliable more people can be asked including psychologists, sociologists and ageism experts. These people can give deeper answers considering the true situation in a society based on their experience, experts’ opinion and statistics. Since the interviewees were ordinary people, the validity of their answers is questionable; however, their opinion represents the attitude of society towards ageism, which is one of the research questions. Because there were only three interviewees, the generalisation level is low. Therefore, time limits should be changed so that more people can be asked.

Turning to strengths, all the research questions were logically answered using only two methods. However, they cannot be verified by observation that had to show people’s true attitude and behaviour. It is hard to make triangulation of the research because of that. Both methods showed that ageism is not as significant in Kazakhstan as it thought to be, it is present among all age groups and ageist behaviour can be passed on to the next generation. The uncommonness of ageism in Kazakhstan supports Nelson’s theory that eastern countries are fewer ageists that successfully connects primary and secondary researches.

To make the research more relevant an observation has to be changed into focus group discussion among people of various professions so that the sample group is wide enough to be generalised at least for Kazakhstan.

**Further Research**

It is clear that ageism only starts to be considered as a problem, although the research questions have been answered, the reasons for people’s answers, especially unexpected ones, are still unclear.

The unexpected things – people do not consider ageism as a live issue and youngsters are more biased than people of other ages. The personal perspective has been changed considerably as it is clear that ageism is not a common issue in Kazakhstan and even its presence is questionable because of the interviewees’ answers. Therefore, the importance of ageism in Kazakhstan, the reasons why youth is so biased and people have this particular attitude should be researched in further investigation. To know the importance of ageism the interview with psychologists and ageism experts should be made. This will give a deeper understanding of the issue and will show the reasons for people’s answers; also, the psychologist or sociologist from Kazakhstan can present some actual statistics and real situation connected to this issue.

To find the reasons for youth’s bias a focus group discussion among teens of different age and from different cities should be made so that the sample is wide enough to be generalised. The main topic would be “Your attitude towards ageism”; therefore participants can share and defend their point of view, giving arguments and examples.

To find out why people have this particular attitude instead of the observation the focus group discussion can be held as well. The topic of this focus group discussion should be “Should society pay more attention to ageism?” since the interviewees gave different opinions on this question. To provide valid results there should be at least two ageism experts/psychologists/social workers so that they can provide true arguments for their opinion from various spheres of life. Also, there should be some ordinary citizens with different job positions to consider the issue from other perspectives.

Since the sample of the survey was too narrow to be generalised, another survey should be conducted with relevant changes in the questions that have been considered in the evaluation section. The sample should be larger and time limits expanded as well.

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**Appendix**

The survey questions were:

1. What is your age?
* Under 12
* 12-18
* 19-29
* 30-49
* 50-65
* Over 65
1. Where are you from?
* Kazakhstan
* Russia
* Ukraine
* Europe
* Asia
* South America
* North America
* Africa
* Australia and Oceania
1. Up to this point, did you know what ageism is?
* Yes
* No
1. Have you ever experienced ageism?
* Yes, I was discriminated by people older than me.
* Yes, I was discriminated by people younger than me.
* No, I have never experienced it.
1. To what extent do you value older people’s advice?

Rate: from “don’t listen to them” to “always ask them for advice”

1. Do you think that all elderlies are less familiar with new technologies?
* Yes
* No
1. Do you think that 59 years is a suitable retirement age?
* Yes
* No, the suitable age is… (write it)
1. If you were an employer that is looking for workers, would you hire a senior that probably is slower than younger employees but has a great experience in this sphere?
* Yes
* No
1. If you were an employer that is looking for workers, would you hire a graduate without any experience but with high qualification?
* Yes
* No
1. If a younger person had criticized your work, you would…
* Not accept their opinion
* Accept their opinion but won’t make any changes
* Make some changes

The link for survey answers: <https://ru.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-D9TMT92N7/> (some of the answers were accidentally deleted)

The link for 3 answers from Asians: https://ru.surveymonkey.com/results/SM-MTJTM92N7/

The interview questions included:

* Do you know what ageism is?
* If your child keeps asking you something that is difficult to explain (e.g. what is the sun?), what would you do?
* Would you send your parents into nursing house, if you don’t have time to look after them?
* Have you ever experienced or witnessed it?
* Do you think it is a live issue?
* What are the possible causes and consequences of ageism?
* Should the society pay more attention to it?
* What are the possible ways of fighting with ageism?