



Prejudice and Discrimination against Older People

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Abstract

Not only in India, but in other countries of the world as well such as Ireland, United States of America, European countries and so forth, there has been prevalence of prejudice and discriminatory treatment against the older individuals. Older individuals sometimes are not completely normal and develop a mental disorder, when they develop this kind of a behavioral trait; they are looked upon as a burden by their family and community members. This research paper focuses upon the understanding of prejudice and discrimination against the older people. The main areas that have been underscored are: understanding ageism, age discrimination and ways to deal with it, crime against the elderly individuals, the causes and consequences of stigma against older people with mental disorders, age discrimination employment act and old age prejudice. This area can mainly prove to be interested to people, especially who have chosen their field to be adult education, aging services management or gerontology; within the society, how older individuals are prejudiced or are being discriminated against should be known by the other individuals and if they actually experience this kind of a situation, they should follow the procedures and rules to implement a kind and a considerate treatment towards the older people.

Keywords: Ageism; Prejudice; Discrimination; Crime; Elderly Individuals; Stigma

Understanding ageism

Ageing is a more comprehensive concept than age discrimination. It refers to deeply rooted negative beliefs about older people and the ageing process, which in turn may lead to age discrimination. Such beliefs are socially created and strengthened, as if they are part of the functions, organizations, institutions, rules and everyday social life. The discriminatory practices that have been initiated against the elderly individuals have not been completely understood and have been implied without taking into consideration any kinds of beliefs. Ageism is a process of methodical stereotyping, detrimental approaches and direct or indirect discrimination against people because they are old. There have been many theories that have proposed the occurrence of ageism at the individual, societal and organizational levels: [1].

1. In accordance with Butler (1969) and Lewis (1987), ageism develops the thinking of the younger generation in such a manner that they see older people as different from themselves and thereby lessen their own apprehension and anxiety of aging.
2. In western culture, there has been prevalence of youth culture. The media places an emphasis on youth, physical attractiveness, and sexuality. On the other hand, senior citizens and older adults are mainly disregarded or described in a negative manner.
3. Emphasis laid upon development, enhancement and productivity contributes to ageism, where productivity is narrowly defined in terms of the economic potential.
4. The fourth factor that contributes to ageism is the manner in which this concept was initially researched. Research was conducted upon unwell and institutionalized older individuals; those who were not in a good health, hence this research led to ageism [1].

Age discrimination and ways to deal with it

Age discrimination is when someone is treated in a different manner with an unreasonable or a disproportionate impact mainly because of their age; age discrimination can be direct, for example, denying older people access to healthcare because they are old or indirect such as not collecting data on HIV infection in men and women who are above 49 years of age. This failure to collect the data deprives the older people from HIV and AIDS prevention programs and therefore, discriminates against them. In some of the jurisdictions, it is unlawful to discriminate against anybody on the basis of their age, in the same manner harassment, violence, threats, intimidation, or offensive treatment against anybody on the basis of their age is considered illegal. It is vital to disseminate the information of discrimination against the elderly individuals and effective ways should be implemented in order to deal with it [2].

1. As individuals, one must confront ageist outlooks and conduct wherever they take place and implement solutions in order to eradicate the discriminatory treatment.
2. Discrimination in old age should be prohibited in national legislation and the present laws and policies; prevention of discrimination against the elderly should be made in a documentary form.
3. Universal prohibition of discrimination in old age in a human rights instrument would provide an ultimate, worldwide situation that age discrimination is ethically and officially objectionable [2].

Crime against the elderly individuals

In India, almost 30% of the elderly are subject to some form of abuse or neglect by their families. Financial exploitation occurs when the offender steals, withholds, or otherwise misuses their elderly victim's money, property or valuables for personal advantage or profit, to the disadvantage of the elderly. Their methods can include: 1) simply taking money, valuables etc, 2) borrowing and not paying back, 3) denying services or medical care to conserve funds, 4) giving away or selling possessions without permission, 5) misusing ATM/credit cards, 6) signing or cashing pension without permission and 7) forcing the elderly to part with resources or sign over property [3].

One of the reasons of crime against elderly is their lack of information. Physical weakness, social isolation, lack of care from children, and dependency on hired domestic help has made them more

vulnerable to violent crimes. NGOs can play a very significant role in providing the necessary information and support. They make provision of invaluable service by providing them facilities at their doorstep. Assessment of the victims is an important contribution made by the NGOs, another contribution is reducing the isolation of the elderly through welfare checks, and in-person outreach efforts can help to ensure that the elders are aware of available resources that they can turn to in time of need. Adopt-a-senior, or adopt-an-area are also effective programs. Criminal justice functionaries identify areas of greater vulnerability like colonies near slum areas, increase patrolling of colonies where residents are mostly elderly persons; visiting homes of elderly to ensure safety precautions, elderly can report their abuse and exploitation also due to home visiting. They help the elderly to coordinate in getting justice in an easier and faster manner [3].

The causes and consequences of stigma against older people with mental disorders

Stigma has both behavioral and cognitive constituents, both of which need to be addressed by any actions designed to counter it. There have been causes listed as follows: [4].

- **Ignorance/Misconceptions:** These occur in concern with the facts regarding the nature of old age and of mental disorders and their treatment.
- **Fear:** This is regarding grievance, corruption, burden of care and of one's own ageing.
- **Drive for social conformity and security:** Older people are mainly constrained towards implementation of the traditional and conventional values and safety and the consequent control of deviance.
- **Internalization of stigmatizing ideas:** This is referred to as self-stigma by those that are affected by it such as the sufferers, families, and professionals.
- Stigma against older people with mental disorder is strengthened by cultural factors, social and economic unsteadiness and predicament circumstances and genuine or distinguished nonexistence or insufficiency of precautionary strategies and conducts for mental disorders.
- There have been lack of information systems to educate both the professionals and the general public, amongst older people; gender discrimination is there to a high extent and remunerations for those who stigmatize such as financial, contradiction of dilemmas, improved self-esteem and improved social status.

The consequences of stigma in older people with mental disorders are listed as follows: [4].

- **Prejudice:** The common sense attitudes are possessed by other people that older individuals with mental disorders are precarious, feeble, irresponsible, infected, unwell, uncreative, inefficient, unusual etc.
- The conception of misleading popular stereotypes of both older people and the mentally ill, are often maintained and strengthened by the public media.
- Those individuals who are stigmatized, their self-beliefs get damaged, for instance there is emergence of feelings of dishonor, low self-worth, and disinclination to access services or converse quandaries.
- Negative professional attitudes begin to develop towards older people with mental disorders, they are regarded as a burden towards the society, and negative attitudes also began to develop amongst those professionals, agencies or organizations that provide care for older individuals with mental disorders.
- Other consequences are inequity in reimbursement for treatment, victimization, abuse and neglect and unnecessary institutionalization, the older individuals lead a poor quality of life as a result of these negative consequences.
- The older people face certain negative effects such as adverse economic effects, discriminatory legislation, material and financial inequity e.g. excess to basic resources, insurances and mortgages and neglect on the part of the Government and lack of legislative protections.

Age discrimination employment act

The Age Discrimination Employment Act (ADEA), was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1967, with the purpose of making age based employment discrimination illegal. The ADEA was acting in response to engrained policies that reproduced old-age stereotypes, older workers were supposed to possess moderate mental competency and physical ability, that led to discrimination of older workers. Prior to ADEA, many organizations had obligatory retirement ages that pushed older workers into unemployment regardless of their ability to continue doing their jobs, even if the worker is capable to work, if his age permits him to leave the job, than he becomes obliged to leave the job, irrespective of his performance and abilities. These displaced older workers or who have forced to leave their jobs before time could spend years in unemployment, creating a class of discouraged workers with eroding skills; one of the reasons may be that companies and organizations are looking

for younger workers who are more capable, energetic and efficient as compared to the older workers. Also, people were living longer and healthier lives and thus were able to be productive past the arbitrary retirement ages of their employers. Although the ADEA has achieved successes, including eradicating obligatory retirement ages, there is plethora of substantiation and verification that age-based discrimination in the workplace still endures [5].

Older workers who are compelled to leave their jobs, even when they are willing to work, plunge them into a vicious circle, they develop feelings of depression, become unenthusiastic and even lose their social network. At the workplace, a person meets ones colleagues, employers, subordinates, interacts and communicates with them and creates a social network; after being in an employment setting for a long period of time, when a person leaves his job and has to sit around the house, he certainly feels in a discomfited position as well as an uncomfortable state of mind; therefore, this is also one of the ways of discriminating against older people by compelling them to retire, just by creating ones mindset that older people are feeble, weak or lack the capabilities to work. Harassment of the older workers at the workplace still persists and in some cases, they are asked to take on more responsibilities or take up the job duties that younger employees are not asked to do.

Old age prejudice

Research conducted upon old age prejudice has tended to focus on understanding the factors that led the perceiver to develop prejudiced attitudes against older adults. This follows from the commonsensical conception that if prejudice is a dilemma that initiates in the perceiver, then endeavors to understand it and to find a way to diminish or eradicate that prejudice ought to center on the perceiver. However, moderately slight attention has been devoted to understanding how the objectives of prejudice are affected by their stereotyped position [6]. Misfortune is stated to be a distinctive reaction to people who, through no fault of their own, face hard or reduced life situations. And indeed, the misfortune and compassion that a person may feel toward the elderly recognizes difficulties such as declining health factors and loss of opportunities that plague elderly people but that are not viewed as accountable for. In addition to being sympathized for, older people in common also prompt appreciation in perceivers. The main question, for which one seeks answers, is what are the attitudes and feelings that prompt misfortune and what are attitudes that prompt admi-

ration? the admiration of older people predominantly when we distinguish that they have lived life on their own terms and accomplished a sort of longitudinal form of success—having done something with their lives. Old people also prompt a range of negative feelings in others, and the principal amongst those is anxiety. Researchers have found that anxiety is a common response towards older people amongst the young, and the main reasons seem to be that old people remind us what may, or likely will happen to all of us ultimately. The elderly remind the youth and beauty will grow fainter; that health problems and disability, along with the social isolation they can cause, are expected; and that death is a certainty for everyone [5].

Discussion and Conclusion

Old age manifests greater diversity than any other age group. Aging can be understood through the interpretation of the individual psychological state of mind, physical health, viable and prospective economic conditions, retaining status, level of activity and importance of place within the social environment. The term “aging” is meant to denote determinate patterns of late changes, it is not merely older but old. Old age is characterized by gradual changes in appearances such as graying of hair, loss of hair, teeth, elongation of nose, ear, sagging skins, wrinkles, impairment of sensory functions such as vision, audition, smelling, tactility, feeling etc. Aging leads to diminishing capacity of physical work and sexual arousal is becoming more and more prominent. During old age, sometimes individuals also develop mental health problems and began to depict certain kinds of behavioral traits that are not considered to be normal, for example, talking meaningless things, repeatedly asking for food etc. When individuals depict these kinds of attitudes and behavioral traits, the older people are normally considered to be a major responsibility and are discriminated against. They might be treated with care and courtesy, but are regarded as a workload.

There have been certain causes and consequences of prejudice and discrimination against the older individuals such as their physical appearance, their lack of abilities and strengths to get engaged in physical work or to take up any major responsibilities, their illnesses, health problems and disabilities make them even more dependable on caretakers, family and community members; longing to attain property and finances by the family members make them even more susceptible to crime and illegal acts. In some of the organizations, an age has been defined for retirement

of the older individuals; they are compelled to leave their jobs, even if they possess the capabilities to work even more, this is a major discriminatory factor; laying off older individuals and recruiting younger individuals. In India, older individuals are of traditional viewpoints, therefore, the younger generations do not always agree with what they suggest, hence there is emergence of disagreements and prejudice against the older people. The physical appearance of the older people and their health problems remind the youngsters that they will reach the same age one day and will have to face the problems that are experienced by the older individuals, for this reason too they develop the feelings of prejudice and discriminate against the older people.

Mental health is not only related to the aging of the brain but also socio-economic factors such as helplessness, lack of self-confidence and solitude. In India, aging is considered to be negative aging, where elderly adopt a pessimistic attitude towards life. The absence of social support network, indifferent attitude of the caretakers, increased dependency, physical illness, unhappiness, loss of activities from life, and many more are responsible for the poor self-rated mental health and life satisfaction. Loneliness is a chronic and a distressful mental state; older persons often feel neglected, marginalized, alienated and helpless. These feelings make the elderly individuals isolated and they lack the interest of getting engaged with the outside world. Social support has a significant role in making the elderly feel wanted and supported; interaction and communication with the other people regarding their concerns and matters make them feel relieved. Social support constitutes not just family members but also friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

One of the reasons of prejudice and discrimination against elderly is their lack of information. Physical weakness, social isolation, lack of care from children, and dependency on hired domestic help has made them more vulnerable to violent crimes. NGOs can play a very significant role in providing the necessary information and support. They make provision of invaluable service by providing them facilities at their doorstep. Assessment of the victims is an important contribution made by the NGOs, another contribution is reducing the isolation of the elderly through welfare checks, and in-person outreach efforts can help to ensure that the elders are aware of available resources that they can turn to in time of need. Adopt-a-senior, or adopt-an-area are also effective programs. Criminal justice functionaries identify areas of greater vulnerabil-

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