

Age-related discrimination or ageism, a growing global scourge!

Press release of the French National Academy of Medicine¹

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Published on March 18, 2021, as part of the "Decade of Healthy Ageing", the report by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations and a number of international organizations, calls for an urgent action to combat segregation of older people and, more broadly, age-related discriminations, known as ageism, in order to better appreciate them and report on what they are: "an insidious scourge from which society suffers".

Ageism occurs when age becomes a criterion to categorize and divide people, resulting in prejudices, disadvantages and injustices. It can result in prejudicial behaviors, discriminatory actions and institutional policies or practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs. A survey of 8,034 people in 57 countries found that one in two people had moderately or strongly ageist attitudes. These prejudices and discriminations are reflected in the public debate and are disseminated through social media. This overlaps with other forms of categorization, such as gender, ethnicity or disability, with negative consequences for people's health and well-being.

In older people, ageism is associated with greater social isolation and loneliness. It is estimated that 6.3 million cases of depression worldwide are due to ageism. For young adults, they face discrimination in areas such as employment, health, housing and politics, where they often have no word in the matter. In 2020, a review showed that in 85% of 149 selected studies, age was used to determine who were eligible to certain medical procedures or treatments.

¹ Press release of the Academy's Rapid Communication Platform validated by the members of the Board of Directors on June 1, 2021.

As Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, "Ageism harms everyone, the elderly as well as young adults. But it is often so pervasive and trivialized - in our attitudes as well as in our policies, laws and institutions - that we do not realize the impact it has on our dignity and our rights. She added, "We must fight head-on against ageism, a human rights violation that is now deeply entrenched. "

To support the Decade of Healthy Ageing agenda, all countries and stakeholders are encouraged to use evidence-based strategies, improve data collection and research, and work together to create a movement to change the way we think, feel and act with regard to age and ageing.

The French National Academy of Medicine believes that it is important to fight against ageism, which affects not only older people, but also, and we often ignore it, young adults. The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed how frequent such discrimination is, and how it categorizes not only the elderly but also young adults. This pandemic has increased this situation.

Among the concrete actions that can be considered, we can mention : modulating how is fixed the retirement age to take into account the physical and intellectual conditions as well as the wishes of individuals; or changing the practice of clinical trials, from which older people are often excluded, thus creating an obstacle to accessing new treatments.

The French National Academy of Medicine supports the strategies proposed by WHO to combat ageism, which is rampant in France and in all countries of the world:

- 1- Legislation and policies tackling age discrimination and inequalities based on age;
- 2- Education, at all levels, correcting misconceptions, providing accurate information and fighting stereotypes;
- 3- Intergenerational meetings as a key strategy to reduce ageism;
- 4- Funding and improving data and research to better understand ageism and how to combat it.

<https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on->

ageism<https://www.who.int/fr/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un>