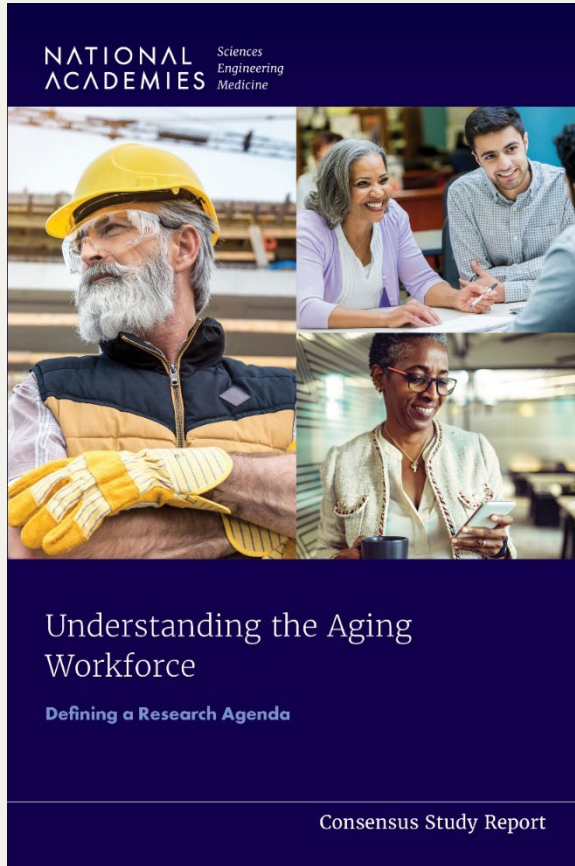


The Persistence of Ageism: Constraining Work Opportunities at Older Ages

The Committee on Understanding the Aging Workforce
and Employment at Older Ages

*The Committee on Population/The Committee on National Statistics
The Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education*



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Previous Events in the Webinar Series

The Future of Work: Implications for Older Workers

October 4: Recording available on project website

The Role of Social Policy in Shaping Work and Retirement Behaviors

October 12: Recording available on project website

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/understanding-the-aging-workforce-and-employment-at-older-ages#sectionPastEvents>

Economic Inequality and Extended Working Lives

- The U.S. population is aging and many are experiencing greater longevity, allowing many older adults to extend their working lives
- However, these trends have occurred ***alongside widening economic inequality*** in which many older adults face constraints on their working and retirement behaviors.
- These constraints fall along lines defined by social and economic inequalities such as gender, race-ethnicity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and geographic region
- Their effects ***cumulate over the life course***, affecting health and determining the resources and opportunities available for retiring or reducing employment in later life, and are further compounded by ***well-documented age discrimination***.
- An aging and diversifying workforce, mounting inequality, new technologies, and higher economic and job precarity mean ***work arrangements among older adults are in flux***.
- Age discrimination can constrain the options available to workers through its influence on work opportunities, work conditions, and workplace climate.

Today's Agenda

- **The Persistence of Ageism: Constraining Work Opportunities at Older Ages**
 - Ageism in the Workplace (Susan Fiske)
 - What is Age? Generation, Age, Tenure, and Experience (Michael North)
 - Age Discrimination in Hiring: Evidence from Audit and Correspondence Studies (David Neumark)
 - Age Discrimination in the Workplace and its Effects (Ernest Gonzales)
- **Audience Q&A**

Ageism in the Workplace

Susan T. Fiske

Princeton University

Age Bias: Attitudes and Preferences

- Explicit attitudes and preferences: **Overt biases**
 - Respondents report their views.
 - Possible influence of social desirability
 - Explicit attitudes toward older people are **moderately negative**
 - **But less negative** over time
- Implicit attitudes and preferences: **Covert biases**
 - In-group/out-group associations with positive and negative concepts
 - Implicit associations with “old” are **negative**
 - Implicit ageism **remains stable**
- Overt ageism decreasing, along with stable implicit biases, suggests changing norms

Age Bias: Stereotypes about Older Adults

- Stereotype content: explicit descriptive beliefs based on group membership
- **Ambivalent** stereotypes of older adults: well-intentioned but inept or incompetent
 - **Hard to detect** because of positive-negative mix
 - Link to ambivalent treatment, e.g. COVID vaccine priority, but also resent healthcare costs
- Stereotypes of older workers
 - Older workers seen as trustworthy, but incompetent and unhealthy
 - Older workers seen as less willing to train and develop, resistant to change, less trusting, less healthy, more vulnerable to work-family interference
 - But also reliable and good organizational citizens

Prescriptive Ageism: Controlling Elders

- Stereotypes include expectations about behaviors
- **Prescriptive ageism**: Requires elders' compliance with stereotypes
 - Succession of power (eg retire)
 - Identity boundaries (eg don't claim tech expertise)
 - Consumption limits (eg give up healthcare)
- **Intergenerational tensions over resources**
 - **Resent** older adults who refuse to comply, “step aside”
 - **Reward** older adults who agree to “be a dear”

Assessing the Accuracy of Ageist Stereotypes: Cognitive Capacity

- Declines in healthy aging have been exaggerated.
 - Even if **declines**, few if any effects on performance
 - **Compensated** by workarounds, training, or accommodations
 - **Rarely irreparably detrimental** to performance
- Wide variability across individuals and types
 - **Fluid intelligence** (information processing, working memory, and speed) tend to decline
 - **Crystallized intelligence** (knowledge acquired over time, vocabulary, experience) remains stable
- Cognitive tests do not assess many **job-dependent cognitive skills**
 - Job domain knowledge
 - Critical thinking
 - Reading and writing skills
 - Engagement

Assessing the Accuracy of Ageist Stereotypes: The Measurement of Productivity

- **Productivity** is hard to measure, causally ambiguous, sensitive to level of aggregation, and distinct by job type
- Biases undermine assessments of older workers' contributions
 - **Mixed evidence**, dependent on measures used to assess productivity
 - Most measures omit older workers' advantages, such as **organizational citizenship**
- Need deeper estimates of worker productivity, and the value of **retaining older workers**.

Emotional Prejudice: The Missing Link in the Chain?

- Prejudices are **affective responses** to stereotype-based expectations
 - May include complex emotions such as **pity, disgust, or pride**
- Emotional prejudices reliably **predict discriminatory behavior**
- **Ambivalent stereotypes invoke ambivalent emotions**
 - “Doddering but dear” evokes pity: active help for warmth, but neglect due to incompetence
 - “Greedy geezer” evokes envy: grudging respect but also resentment
- Distinct emotional prejudices predict **differentiated discrimination**

What is Age?: Generation, Age, Tenure, and Experience

Michael North

New York University

What do we mean by “Age”?

- Age is closely related to a cluster of individual and work-related characteristics that are often associated with stereotypes that are used to justify age discrimination [GATE]
 - Generation: Assumptions about characteristics associated with being born during the same historical period
 - Age/Life stage: Assumptions about place in the lifespan, shaped by age, health factors, family considerations, and so on
 - Tenure: The amount of time an individual has worked for their current employer
 - Experience: The total amount of time an individual has spent in the labor force

Generation of Birth

- Individuals who were born in the same period are assumed to experience similar historical, social, political, and economic events and contexts throughout their lifetimes
- These events and contexts are often assumed to be formative and cause individuals from the same generation to share distinct attitudes and values; however, research has largely rejected this
- When employees identify with the idea that generations are associated with shared characteristics and values, this can add tension to workplace interactions and exchanges across age groups

Chronological Age & Life Stage

- Age is continuous but it can be categorized in many ways
- The meaning assigned to chronological age is contextual, as is what ages constitute the category “old”
 - Age discrimination legislation focuses on adults ages 40 and over
 - “Retirement age” is usually defined based on retirement-policy-related eligibility cutoffs (e.g., the age at which an individual becomes eligible for Medicare—age 65)
 - In a new industry in which most employees are in their 20s, workers who are ages 30 and over may be considered “old”
- Age categories is useful as an indicator of changes across the lifespan, but it is an imprecise measure
 - A new parent may be in their late-teens or early-40s.
 - A 50-year-old may be celebrating 30 years with the same firm, beginning a new career, or graduating from college
 - A college student may be 18 years old, a veteran returning to school, or an older adult seeking a new career
 - Health considerations heavily factor in

Tenure at Organization

- Tenure refers to the amount of time that an individual has worked for an organization
- Conceptually, the effects of tenure can be ambivalent because it includes both negative and positive associations
- Positive associations:
 - Allows an individual to accumulate extensive knowledge of their responsibilities, as well as of organizational cultures and histories and workplace policies and practices
 - Can make these individuals valuable sources of information and potentially more productive and better able to navigate organizational barriers
- Negative associations:
 - May be (viewed as) resistant to changes in procedures or workplace culture
 - Skills less valuable outside of the organization
 - Refusal to “step aside”

Work Experience

- Age is a proxy for accumulated skill set
- The total amount of time an individual has spent in the labor force is strongly correlated with age; however, due to differences in educational attainment, family formation, career paths, and access to employment, this relationship is weaker for many groups
 - Women who leave the labor force to raise children
 - Those who join the military in early adulthood
 - Racial and ethnic minorities who face greater job market instability
- Relevant work experience can also vary as individuals change jobs and career paths due to changes in labor market opportunities or further education or training

Ageist Stereotypes Can Incorporate These Factors

- Age is related to generation, organizational tenure, and work experience; therefore, ageist stereotypes often incorporate assumptions based on these characteristics
 - Shared generational beliefs (e.g., Baby Boomers or Millennials have specific expectations about work hours or arrangements)
 - Knowledge of and comfort with workplace cultures or practices
 - Resistance to change and lack of familiarity with new technologies
- But workers reach their current positions through a wide variety of pathways that limit the utility of age as a measure of these factors
- Such intersections within age may explain many of the null findings and/or conflicting findings within the still small literature on aging and work
- Ideally, supervisors would make a clear and evidence-based assessment of an individual's ability, skills, experience, motivations, and knowledge and how that particular employee adds value to teams and the overall performance of the organization, rather than rely on generic assumptions based on age or other characteristics

Direct Evidence of Age Discrimination: Audit and Correspondence Studies

David Neumark

University of California, Irvine

The Role of Age Discrimination in Hiring

- Age discrimination in hiring reduces the demand for older workers in the labor market
- It is directly related to older adults' ability to transition to new jobs because it can prevent them from:
 - moving to a new employer
 - acquiring a part-time or less-demanding job that provides them with a bridge to retirement
 - unretiring and returning to the labor force
- Research suggests that most discrimination occurs at the selection-for-interview stage
- Multiple forms of discrimination:
 - Taste discrimination: occurs because of having animus against, or a distaste for, the group in question
 - Statistical discrimination: uses actual or perceived group differences—such as stereotypes—to make inferences about an individual from the group and hence treat that individual differently
- Employers who engage in discriminatory hiring practices may be more likely to also engage in other forms of workplace age discrimination

Evidence of Age Discrimination

- In observational studies, age discrimination can only be inferred from the evidence; it is not directly measured and other factors could contribute to observed differences in outcomes.
- Audit and correspondence studies are the gold standard for directly measuring discrimination, because characteristics of participants can be directly manipulated by researchers in ways that provide direct evidence that any observed differences are due to age discrimination.
- These studies, by their nature, are limited to studying hiring discrimination.

Audit and Correspondence Studies

- Focus on discrimination in the hiring process
- Both kinds of studies use artificial applicants who have resumés indicating equal qualifications who differ on specific characteristics that are unrelated to job performance (such as gender, age, or race-ethnicity)
- **Audit Studies:** Use actual job applicants who are coached on how to dress and act
 - Uses differences in job-offer rates as measure of discrimination
 - Requires more time to conduct because job applicants are interviewed, which results in smaller sample size
 - Risk experimenter expectancy effects because the actors can easily infer the hypotheses and inadvertently behave accordingly
- **Correspondence Studies:** Create fake applicants (on paper or electronically)
 - Uses callbacks for job interviews as measure of discrimination
 - Applicants are “paper people,” so samples can be larger, and easier to introduce other study features to obtain additional evidence

Findings from Audit and Correspondence Studies

- Methods have improved over time, but findings are consistent in showing that older workers, particularly older women, face age discrimination in hiring
- Example of large-scale correspondence study (Neumark, Burn, & Button, 2019):
 - Positions identified from advertisements for jobs in occupations that hire low-skilled workers from all adult age groups, such as administrative assistants and secretaries (female applicants' resumés), janitors and security guards (male applicants), and retail sales (both genders).
 - Resumés for differed only by age of the applicant: three age groups: young (ages 29 to 31), middle-aged (ages 49 to 51), and older (ages 64 to 66).
 - Apply for each of more than 13,000 open positions located in 12 cities within 11 states
 - Results:
 - Call-backs were higher for younger applicants
 - Effects were larger for older applicants nearing retirement age
 - Women experienced more age discrimination than men

Age Discrimination in Job Advertisements

- Employers who are predisposed to discriminate could signal their preference for younger workers by using job-description language that conveys positive young-person stereotypes.
- This might then discourage older workers from applying in the first place, concealing any age bias in the hiring process.
- A large-scale correspondence study of age discrimination (Burn et al., 2020) addressed whether employers who use more age-related stereotypes in their job ads—especially negative stereotypes about older workers—are more likely to discriminate against older workers in hiring
 - Stereotypic language includes references to youthful personality traits, robust health, and cutting-edge skills
- Job ads' age stereotypic language related to fewer call-backs for older applicants—across both jobs and genders

Age Discrimination in the Workplace and Its Effects

Ernest Gonzales

New York University

Measuring Workplace Age Discrimination

- Most evidence of workplace age discrimination comes from workers' reports of experiences of discrimination
- Multiple scales have been developed to measure perceived age discrimination
 - The Nordic Age Discrimination Scale (NADS; Furunes & Mykletun, 2010)
 - The Workplace Age Discrimination Scale (WADS; Marchiondo, Gonzales, & Ran, 2016)
 - The Work-related Age-based Stereotypes Scale (WAS; Marcus et al. 2016)
 - Workplace Intergenerational Climate Scale (WICS; King & Bryant, 2016)
- Supervisor evaluations of older workers' performance tend to show older workers are rated lower than younger workers despite having similar objective measures of performance

Evidence of Age Discrimination: The role of organizational culture and practices

- The Office of Personnel Management describes organizational inclusion as a collective commitment to connection, collaboration, flexibility, fairness, diversity, and opportunity.
- Two general practices:
 - 1) ensure the same treatment across employees, while
 - 2) simultaneously acknowledging employees' individual differences
- Age discrimination can operate through organizational culture and practices; however, we know little about this process because we need **better conceptual and operational definitions of organizational culture**

Evidence of Age Discrimination: The Missing Link of Discriminatory Behavior within Workplaces

- Current research suggests that **older workers experience age discrimination** in hiring, promotion, performance evaluation, and workplace opportunity and climate; however, the quality of evidence varies
 - The strongest evidence of age discrimination comes from **audit studies of hiring discrimination**
 - Most on-the-job measures rely on **either self-reported attitudes or stereotypical beliefs** about older workers or **perceived discrimination reported by the target**
 - More subtle forms of bias, as well as discrimination that is unseen by the target, are not captured
- The **causal chain of evidence is incomplete** because it lacks evidence of coworkers' and managers' reported and observed discriminatory behavior toward older people

The Impact of Age Discrimination

- Although **reports of discrimination** have been linked to **lower job satisfaction** and retention and to **negative health outcomes**, the causal link has yet to be established
 - Both overt and covert forms of age-based discrimination are correlated with health as well as with labor force attachment and perceived age discrimination has been associated with mental health, stress, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and retirement intentions
 - Discrimination in the labor force may cause spillover effects at home
 - May not be causal; other factors, such as health or personality traits could mediate this relationship
- An age-discrimination climate within an organization collectively **undermines affective commitment** (attachment, belonging) and damages the organization's performance
- Age discrimination can **constrain opportunities** for work at older ages and force an individual to enter retirement when they would prefer to work
 - After a break in employment, older workers longer periods of unemployment and larger declines in wages when rehired

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA)

- At the federal level, age discrimination is covered by the **Age Discrimination in Employment Act** (ADEA)
 - Restricted to firms of 20+ employees, but excludes occupations with a “bona fide occupational qualification” that is related to age and high-salaried policy-making positions
- Limits the compensation a complainant can be awarded
 - Cannot receive punitive damages as in other civil rights cases
 - Cases are less lucrative and are more likely to be brought by those in high-paying occupations, which historically has meant that White men were the plaintiff in most cases
- Does not recognize discrimination that is based on age in conjunction with another protected characteristic (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) and systematic work examining the effects of discrimination on those at the intersection of multiple disadvantages is needed
- Many states have age discrimination legislation that applies to smaller firms and/or allow greater damages
- Research suggests ADEA and other age discrimination laws have improved labor force outcomes for older workers, but effects may be limited to older White men

Conclusion



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Two Overarching Conclusions of the Report

CONCLUSION I:

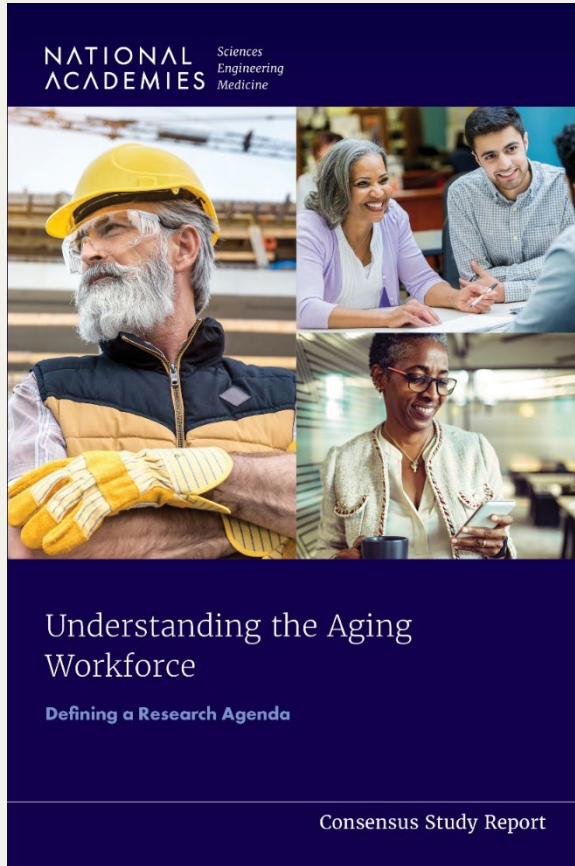
Older workers' preferences for work and specific work arrangements, their expectations about available work opportunities and financial stability, and the constraints on their work opportunities and behaviors ***all reflect the impact of both age bias and social and economic inequalities*** that structure economic opportunity throughout the life course and lead to ***wide disparities in employment and retirement pathways*** at older ages.

CONCLUSION II:

The experiences of ***vulnerable older populations***, including women; racial and ethnic minorities; immigrants; those with less education, low income, or limited savings and wealth; those living in rural or economically disadvantaged areas; and those with multiple intersecting vulnerabilities ***remain understudied*** within the current literature. This limits our understanding of the ways in which inequality in retirement and work opportunities and outcomes contributes to broader social and economic inequality that affects the well-being of older adults.

Future Research

- More research is needed that addresses how societal expectations about aging workers (e.g., stereotypes) affect employers and managers' preferences (e.g., attitudes) and how these in turn constrain older workers' options (e.g., discrimination), despite scant evidence of age-related performance issues
- Our evaluation of the literature points to several areas in which more research is needed. These include:
 - The development of new measurement techniques to assess ageist attitudes and beliefs and experiences with discrimination, particularly methods that take into account their ambivalence
 - The relationship between implicit and more explicit workplace attitudes and behaviors
 - The link between employers', supervisors', and co-workers' self-reported age-related preferences (attitudes, prejudices) and expectations (stereotypes) and their behaviors (discrimination) that constrain outcomes for older workers
 - Improved research designs that can establish the causal link between age discrimination and other outcomes, such as health and retirement decisions
 - The development of broader measures of productivity and performance that can capture the social citizenship and mentoring contributions of workers



Thank you

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