








AGEING AT WORK: IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES – A SCOPING REVIEW

 Sara Brás Alves¹,  Carlos Magalhães²,  Adília Fernandes²,  Josiana Vaz^{2,3,4},  Ana Pereira^{2,3},  Miguel Monteiro²,  Hélder Fernandes²

1- Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Escola Superior de Saúde de Bragança

2- Research Centre for Active Living and Wellbeing (LiveWell), Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

3- Centro de Investigação de Montanha (CIMO), Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

4- Laboratório Associado para a Sustentabilidade e Tecnologia em Regiões de Montanha (SusTEC), Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

Corresponding author:

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Ageism, characterised by discriminatory attitudes towards older individuals based on negative stereotypes, is present in various aspects of society, including workplaces, public spaces, and healthcare settings, influencing the psychological well-being of the ones affected. Particularly in the workplace, ageism poses significant challenges for older workers, affecting their productivity and job satisfaction. As the workforce continues to age globally, it's becoming increasingly important to address the consequences of ageism on psychological health. Methods: A scoping review to map the evidence concerning the impact of ageism on the psychological state and well-being of older workers. Following the JBI methodological recommendations, search was realized from March to April 2024, using PubMed, MedLine and CINAHL databases as well as grey literature to identify relevant articles. Studies in which the participants were older adults, focusing on the influence of aging on psychological well-being within occupational contexts. Were included studies published in English, Spanish and Portuguese developed in the last 10 years. From 38 citations initially retrieved, 8 articles met the inclusion criteria. Results: Articles highlight prevailing stereotypes that influence treatment in the workplace, resulting in discriminatory practices and behaviour towards older workers. Workplace ageism has significant psychological consequences, leading to negative perceptions of aging and increasing aging anxiety among older workers and harmful health behaviours, stress, depressive symptoms, and long-

term illness affecting job satisfaction and retirement intentions. Conclusion: Addressing ageism in occupational settings is crucial to promote well-being and productivity of older workers and create inclusive work environments favourable to successful aging.

Keywords: aging, stereotypes, occupational health

INTRODUCTION

The current demographic shift towards an increasingly older global population is unprecedented and substantial (Fernandes et al., 2023). This trend is a result of improved living standards, healthier lifestyles, better healthcare access, decreased mortality rates, and declining birth rates (Khavinson et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019). The aging population presents a significant challenge for the labour force, as the workforce ages while the number of younger individuals decreases. This shift is primarily attributed to the "Baby Boomers" generation, which constituted a significant portion of the working population from the 1960s to the early 2000s and is now approaching retirement age (Department of Labor, 2012; Fernandes et al., 2023; Macunovich, 2013). With a projected 34% increase in the population aged 60 and above by 2050, it is crucial to address the impact of aging on various sectors, including the economy, labour market, social aspects, and healthcare (United Nations, 2019, 2021). Interestingly, within the workplace, individuals as young as 40 or 45 may also face perceptions of being "old," despite being aged 65 or above traditionally

considered as "old" (Fatfouta & Ghoniem, 2022). This early onset of age-related perceptions can exacerbate the challenges faced by older workers, leading to decreased opportunities for advancement, training, and professional development (Poscia et al., 2016; Von Humboldt et al., 2022). This situation has the potential to lead to negative stereotypes, such as ageism (Voss et al., 2018), directed at older workers, which can impact their psychological well-being (Kang & Kim, 2022; Rasset et al., 2024; Weber et al., 2019).

Ageism, characterised by discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards older individuals based on negative stereotypes, is present in various aspects of society, including workplaces, public spaces, and healthcare settings (World Health Organization, 2021). The detrimental effects of ageism go beyond individual perceptions, influencing the psychological well-being of the ones affected (Cedefop, 2010; Patnaik, 2022; Ribeiro-Gonçalves et al., 2023). Particularly in the workplace, ageism poses significant challenges for older workers, affecting their productivity and job satisfaction (Härmä, 2015; Harris et al., 2018; Macdonald et al., 2016).

Often underestimated and unchallenged, ageism has consequences beyond personal perceptions (United Nations, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes in its global report on ageism that such stereotypes have a profound impact on the physical and mental well-being of individuals (World Health Organization, 2021). Recognition and proactive measures aimed at addressing these issues are critical to creating a more

inclusive and supportive environment for an aging workforce.

This article aims to explore the psychological challenges posed by an aging population in occupational settings. Understanding and addressing these psychological challenges can help organizations and societies leverage the valuable contributions of older individuals while promoting overall psychological well-being and inclusivity.

METHODS

The present study comprises a scoping review, as this methodology offers the possibility of collecting, synthesizing, assessing, and presenting findings on a specific topic, that is still unclear or understudied (Armstrong et al., 2011; Mak & Thomas, 2022; Munn et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2015). Given the importance of understanding how ageism impacts the psychological well-being of older workers, a scoping review provides an opportunity to comprehensively explore this theme. The updated JBI methodology for scoping reviews was followed, ensuring adherence to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021). Findings will be meticulously reported, following the PRISMA-ScR extension for scoping reviews (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Identifying the Research Question

The purpose of this review was to explore the impact of ageism on the psychological well-being and of older workers. Identifying research questions was necessary for directing the review and determining how the relevant studies will be identified and

selected. The research questions of this review are: (1) What are the psychological effects of ageism on older workers' well-being and job satisfaction, and how do these effects vary across different workplace contexts and demographic factors? (2) How does ageism alter the psychological health of older workers?

Identifying Relevant Studies

To develop a comprehensive search strategy and identifying relevant studies, an initial and limited search was conducted in CINAHL, via EBSCOhost. This preliminary search aimed to identify pertinent publications by using text words from titles and abstracts, as well as index terms for article descriptions. Subsequently, each database's search strategy was tailored, encompassing all identified keywords and index terms. Additionally, reference lists of all included sources were examined to uncover further relevant studies.

Key terms were selected to locate studies pertinent to the research questions outlined. The search terms used were as follows: ["ageism" OR "prejudice" OR Prejudice OR "discrimination, psychological" OR Discrimination"] for ageism, [Elderly employees OR older workers OR senior workers] for older workers and ["psychological well-being" OR Psychological well-being OR "mental health" OR "emotions OR (emotional AND functioning)] for psychological health. The search terms were entered into the databases with an "and" term between each of them.

The databases searched included MEDLINE (via EBSCOhost), PubMed, and CINAHL with

full text (via EBSCOhost). To capture unpublished studies and grey literature, platforms such as Google Scholar and RCAAP were also utilized.

Study Selection, Screening and Extraction

The study selection process started by identifying and compiling all records, which were then uploaded into Rayyan® (Qatar Computing Research Institute, Doha, Qatar), a research tool, where duplicate citations were systematically removed. The remaining records were then screened based on their titles and abstracts to exclude those that were irrelevant. Articles that appeared relevant or ambiguous were retrieved in full text for further evaluation. The full-text articles were assessed independently by two reviewers against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion or by consulting a third reviewer. The criteria for inclusion encompassed studies that examined the impact of workplace ageism on older workers' psychological health, provided empirical data, and were published in peer-reviewed journals. Studies were excluded if they were non-empirical, did not focus on workplace ageism, or did not assess psychological outcomes. The study selection process was conducted in accordance with established inclusion criteria, guided by the PCC mnemonic for scoping reviews, as per JBI manual (Aromataris & Munn, 2020). Participants in this review were restricted to older workers aged 55 years or older, and studies which focused on the psychological impact of ageism within the occupational context. Quantitative, qualitative, and

mixed methods approaches were considered for the review. To ensure methodological rigor and facilitate meaningful data extraction, we limited our literature search to studies published in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, published in the last 10 years.

Data Analyses: Collating, Summarizing and Reporting the Results

After the relevant data was extracted, a comprehensive analysis was conducted to organize the collected information and identify patterns and trends related to workplace ageism. The findings were summarized by synthesizing key information from the studies, highlighting significant factors, and providing a comprehensive overview of the literature (as seen in table 1). The first author performed the initial mapping, then discussed this with all authors until consensus was achieved.

Table 1 Data extracted from full-text reviews

Full-text articles

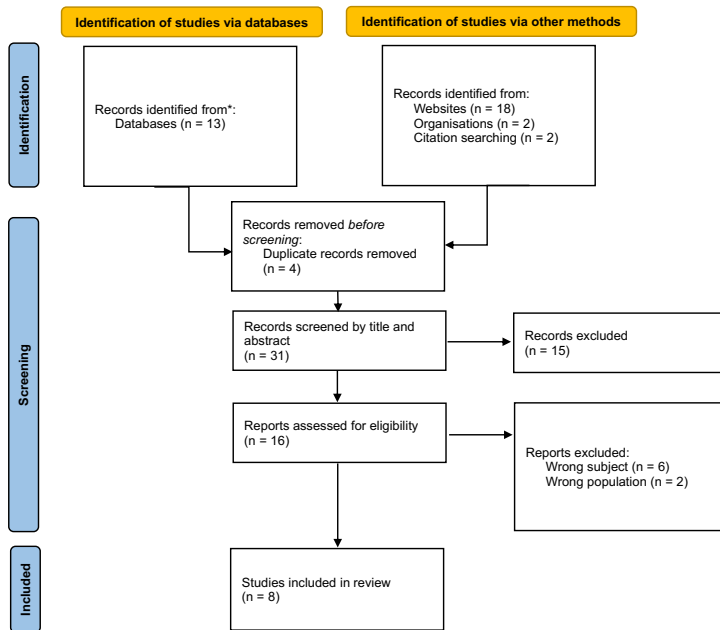
-
- Authors/Year
 - Local
 - Study Type
 - Participants
 - Aims
 - Main findings

RESULTS

The flow diagram of the scoping review is depicted in Fig. 1 and presents a comprehensive overview of the studies identified and included in the review process. A total of 13 studies were identified in databases, along with 22 unpublished studies/grey literature. Following the removal of duplicates, 31 studies remained. Subsequently, 15 records

were excluded as they did not align with the predefined inclusion criteria for this review. Consequently, 16 studies underwent a comprehensive evaluation for eligibility. Upon thorough evaluation, 8 studies were found to be non-compliant with the inclusion criteria and were consequently excluded. This rigorous selection process resulted in the incorporation of 8 studies into the review, ensuring that only the most relevant and pertinent research contributions were included.

Figure 1 Prisma Flowchart



The characteristics of the selected studies are succinctly summarized in Table 2, providing an overview of the diverse range of study types included in the review. These encompass a book chapter and commentary, 4 cross-sectional studies, 1 systematic review, and 1 online survey. The inclusion of varied study types enriches the breadth and depth of insights into the multifaceted nature of ageism in the workplace.

Furthermore, the geographic diversity of the study participants is notable, with representation from the USA, Germany, Canada, Portugal, and Japan. This broad demographic inclusion ensures a comprehensive exploration of ageism in the workplace across different cultural and organizational contexts, enriching the generalizability and applicability of the findings.

In this scoping review, the primary focus was on the impact and consequences of ageism on psychological well-being. However, the studies found also provided a comprehensive understanding of ageism as a pervasive issue with far-reaching consequences for both individuals and organizational structures.

Table 2 Overview of the characteristics of the studies included in the scoping review

Author(s)	Title	Local	Study type	Participants	Aim(s)	Main conclusions
M. C. de Paula Gudo and K. Rothemann (2019)	Ageism and Age Discrimination at the Workplace – a Psychological Perspective	Germany	Book chapter		To explore ageism and age perceptions such as older workers being less productive and discrimination within occupational environments and flexibility to learn new things like using digital technologies applying their origins, colleagues and managers, who would then not offer training and development opportunities to them. On the other hand, the demographic shifts in the workforce's age composition affects the beliefs and behaviors of older workers, as members of the stereotyped group, through processes known as age and the challenge of stereotype internalization [49, 77] or stereotype embodiment [52].	Age-related unequal treatment at work is typically attributed to specific stereotypes of older workers, which include social perceptions such as older workers being less productive and efficient, less trainable, resistant to change, or lacking motivation. Additionally, to comprehend the implications of these stereotypes on older workers, it is essential to explore the origins, effects, and implications of these stereotypes affect the way older workers are treated by colleagues and managers, who would then not offer training and development opportunities to them. On the other hand, the demographic shifts in the workforce's age composition affects the beliefs and behaviors of older workers, as members of the stereotyped group, through processes known as age and the challenge of stereotype internalization [49, 77] or stereotype embodiment [52].
Gretchen A. Preney and James W. Groch (2022)	Broadening the View of Workplace Ageism	USA	Commentary		we offer evidence of the harm workplace ageism inflicts on older workers internalize the belief that they profit less from training and development opportunities, they will manifest less interest in learning/development than their younger colleagues do.	Perceiving workplace ageism also exacts a toll on workers' physical and psychological health and well-being, through increased risky health behaviors, stress and cardiovascular reactivity, mental and organizational stress and depressive symptoms, and long-term illness and decisions beyond personnel decisions.
Martine Lapadula, Lise Van de Brecq, and Michael G. Colella (2022)	Building an Intergenerational Climate to Counter Ageism in the Workplace? A Cross-Organizational Study	Canada	cross-sectional	415 workers	to reflect on factors that may counteract ageism in the workplace as experienced by older workers and, in turn, increase their feelings of satisfaction and successful aging within the work environment.	The expectation of decline and losses as one ages may translate into attitudes and behaviors that inadvertently reinforce the decline and losses' stereotype: an older person's cognitive performance may indeed decrease as a result of the decline and losses' stereotype, which is having internalized the stereotype of "declining cognitive abilities as one ages" transmitted through public discourse.
M. Tabei and K. Katagiri (2022)	Effects of workplace ageism on negative perception of aging and subjective well-being of older adults according to gender and employment status	Japan	online survey	600 individuals	This study examined whether the experience of workplace ageism, mediated by negative perceptions of aging, leads to a decline in subjective well-being according to gender, longest employment status and current employment status.	Workplace ageism exacerbates older adults' self-perception of aging and decreases their subjective well-being. Women working part-time might quit their jobs when their subjective well-being worsens due to workplace ageism.
Inesarets, Wilmar, Peter Angerer, Andreas Müller	Individual consequences of age stereotypes on older workers	Germany	Systematic review	25 studies	To summarize research evidence on individual consequences of age stereotypes on older workers.	Most studies found significant associations between negative age stereotypes and decreased self-efficacy, job satisfaction, performance as well as learning, development or increased retirement intentions of older employees.
Sofia von Humboldt, Isabel Milguel, Joaquin P. Jimenez, Andrea Conde, Gill Low & Isabel Laal (2023)	Is age an issue? Psychosocial differences in perceived older workers' work (un)adaptability, effectiveness, and workplace age discrimination	Portugal	Cross-sectional	453 workers	to explore how perceptions about older workers' work (un)adaptability, work effectiveness, and workplace age discrimination vary according to participants' psychosocial factors, such as age group, gender, education level, and work sector.	Participants with lower levels of education tend to perceive higher levels of workplace age discrimination, when compared to participants with high school and higher education. Conclusions: Generational perceptions in the workplace are perceived by workers differently.

Lisa A. Martocchio, Ernest Gonzalez, and Larry J. Williams (2019)	Trajectories of Perceived Workplace Age Discrimination and Long-Term Associations With Mental, Self-Rated, and Occupational Health	USA	Cross-sectional	3,957 participants	To older employees, trajectories of perceived workplace age discrimination and the long-term associations among retirement age in the expected directions. Over time, perceived age discrimination predicts lower job satisfaction and self-rated and self-rated health, job satisfaction, and likelihood of working past retirement age.
Vincent J. Roscigno, Hui Zheng, and Martha Crowley (2022)	Workplace Age Discrimination and Social-psychological Well-being	USA	Cross-sectional	4000 Full-time Workers 40 to 70 Years	To analyse possible social psychological and mental health implications of age discrimination on older workers and to understand mental health, and (3) dimensions of status and workplace social relational processes magnify discrimination's corrosive effects.

DISCUSSION

Ageism and age discrimination in the workplace have been the subject of extensive research and have been found to have significant implications for the psychological well-being of older workers. Couto and Rothermund, in their work "Ageism and Age Discrimination at the Workplace—a Psychological Perspective," have highlighted the detrimental effects of ageism on older workers. Their analysis identifies several key consequences of ageism, including lower well-being, eroded self-esteem, increased stress and strain, and the potential for early retirement as a result of discriminatory treatment (Clara et al., 2023). However, it's important to also consider the positive aspects of aging in the workplace, as Mori et al. research suggest, older workers often exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment due to various factors related to their extensive experience and wisdom, such as professional identity, stability, work values, mentorship, and leadership roles (Mori et al., 2024). Being unfairly treated or stereotyped based on age can profoundly impact an individual's sense of self-worth and happiness. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, depression, and overall psychological strain, as highlighted by Petery & Grosch (2022). The negative impact of ageism extends to individuals' self-perceptions and internalization of age

stereotypes, leading to negative health consequences as individuals age. This includes impaired cognitive functioning, physical health issues, mental health challenges, and decreased longevity (Petery & Grosch, 2022). Internalized age stereotypes can have a significant impact on older employees' sense of belonging in the workplace. When older employees internalize negative stereotypes about aging, such as beliefs about cognitive decline or decreased productivity, it can lead to feelings of insecurity and reduced confidence in their abilities. This internalization may make older employees feel like they do not fit in or belong in the workplace, contributing to a sense of alienation and isolation (Rahn et al., 2021). Moreover, ageism can erode self-esteem, particularly when individuals are consistently exposed to negative stereotypes or discriminatory behaviour (Petery & Grosch, 2022). This erosion of self-esteem can lead to a decline in confidence and belief in one's abilities, as well as heightened levels of stress and anxiety. The stress and strain of facing discrimination can contribute to health problems and increase the risk of mental health issues, further exacerbating the negative impact of ageism on older workers' psychological well-being. Moreover, age-related challenges such as functional limitations, financial strain, and withdrawals from the workforce can contribute to declines in self-esteem (Shaw et al., 2010). Age discrimination not only has a psychological impact, but it can also significantly influence the decisions of older workers when it comes to exiting the workforce (Petery & Grosch, 2022). The

apprehension of being unfairly judged based on negative age stereotypes can prompt individuals to contemplate leaving their careers prematurely in order to evade discriminatory treatment. Those who perceive themselves as being treated unjustly or encountering age-related biases in the workplace may feel compelled to depart early to avoid further discrimination or negative treatment (Topa et al., 2017). However, individual differences, can influence how ageism is perceived and experienced, indicating that the impact of ageism is not uniform across all older workers. As reported by Couto at al research, on a cultural comparison study, participants from different cultural contexts reported varying levels of perceived experiences of age discrimination. Specifically, participants from Eastern cultures (Hong Kong and Taiwan) reported experiencing age discrimination more frequently compared to participants from Western cultures (Czech Republic, Germany, and the USA) (Clara et al., 2023).

The impact of ageism on older workers' psychological well-being is further compounded by the phenomenon known as stereotype threat, as identified by Couto and Rothermund. The fear of conforming to negative age stereotypes can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, leading to a decline in performance and behavior. This perpetuates the cycle of ageism and its detrimental impact on the psychological well-being of older workers in the workplace.

The study on Workplace Ageism, Subjective Well-being, and Self-perception of Aging in Japan sheds light on the impact of

workplace ageism on older adults' perceptions of aging and well-being, with a specific focus on gender differences. The findings of the study reveal that workplace ageism has different implications for men and women, suggesting that the impact on psychological well-being may vary based on gender (Takeuhi & Katagiri, 2024). The research conducted an online survey of 600 participants aged 60-74 and found that a staggering 75% of them experienced ageism (Takeuhi & Katagiri, 2024), which highlights the widespread nature of ageism. The study also revealed that workplace ageism was associated with a negative self-perception of aging and poor subjective well-being for both men and women in full-time employment. However, the effect was found to be stronger among men who were currently employed, indicating that men may be more strongly affected by workplace ageism. On the other hand, for women working part-time, the impact of workplace ageism on subjective well-being was stronger among those who were currently unemployed (Takeuhi & Katagiri, 2024). The findings suggest that the impact of workplace ageism on psychological health may vary depending on gender and employment status. According to the stereotype embodiment theory proposed by Petery & Grosch (2022), men and women in full-time employment who have experienced workplace ageism tend to have more negative self-perceptions of aging and lower subjective well-being. This implies that workplace ageism can contribute to a more negative self-perception of aging, ultimately reducing subjective well-being. Furthermore, the study revealed that

the effect of workplace ageism on subjective well-being is particularly pronounced among men, with a direct impact observed only in this group. These results underscore the significant intersection of gender and ageism in work environments, as highlighted in the study "The Gendered Face of Ageism in the Workplace". Overall, the research indicates that addressing workplace ageism is crucial for promoting positive self-perceptions of aging and enhancing subjective well-being, especially among men in the workforce. Older female workers are found to be disproportionately affected by age discrimination compared to their male counterparts, indicating a gender-specific vulnerability to ageism. Female participants reported a higher incidence of workplace discrimination, emphasizing the gendered nature of ageism in professional settings. Qualitative analysis revealed key themes such as threats to competence, feelings of self-doubt and helplessness, experiences of "momism," isolation, and gradual disengagement from work, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by older female workers in the context of ageism. Moreover, the study suggests that the intersection of age and gender discrimination, along with other biases, not only impacts individual well-being but also contributes to creating a toxic workplace culture. This underscores the broader implications of gendered ageism on the overall work environment, beyond individual experiences (McConatha et al., 2023). In addition to the study on Workplace Ageism, Subjective Well-being, and Self-perception of Aging, other research has also provided insights into the

impact of ageism in the workplace on older employees' well-being. Marchiondo et al (2019) conducted a study that included data from a total of 3,957 employed participants from the HRS dataset. The results of the study revealed that age discrimination increases over time, indicating that older workers tend to experience gradual increases in perceived age discrimination as they age. This worsening perception of age discrimination over time has implications for older employees' depressive symptoms, job satisfaction, and overall self-rated health (Marchiondo et al., 2019). Furthermore, research by Weber et al has shown that ageism and negative age stereotypes can also affect other aspects of psychological well-being in older workers. Negative age stereotypes have been associated with decreased self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and performance. These negative beliefs about older workers can create a hostile work environment, leading to feelings of inadequacy, reduced motivation, and lower job engagement (Weber et al., 2019). This can have implications for both the individual's financial security and the organization's talent retention and succession planning. Legacé et al also perceives ageism in the workplace as negatively linked to feelings of satisfaction and successful aging at work among older workers. Ageist attitudes and practices can undermine older employees' job satisfaction and overall well-being. The study also highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing and donating practices in countering ageism. Encouraging knowledge sharing behaviors among employees can contribute to lower levels of

perceived ageism and enhance older workers' satisfaction at work. Negative stereotypes based on age can lead to feelings of devaluation, marginalization, and exclusion among older workers, affecting their self-esteem and sense of worth in the workplace. Additionally, experiencing ageism in the form of discriminatory practices or attitudes can contribute to increased stress and anxiety among older workers, resulting in feelings of insecurity, frustration, and emotional distress (Lagacé et al., 2019).

Humboldt et al (2023) also states the existence of other psychosocial factors which play a crucial role in shaping perceptions and behaviors related to age discrimination. The findings highlight the importance of considering age group, educational background, and gender differences in understanding the multifaceted nature of age discrimination in the workplace (von Humboldt et al., 2023). Specifically, it's said that middle-aged and older individuals tend to see older workers as more adaptable in comparison to their younger counterparts, indicating a psychological difference in adaptability perceptions based on age. Notably, on their research, it was apparent that the oldest participants perceived older workers as more effective, highlighting a psychological distinction in the evaluation of older workers' effectiveness across age groups. The research findings also revealed a correlation between individuals' educational attainment and their perceptions of age discrimination in the professional setting. Participants with lower levels of education reported experiencing higher levels of age

discrimination when compared to their counterparts with a high school education or higher. These results indicate that one's educational achievement significantly influences their outlook on age discrimination within the workplace (von Humboldt et al., 2023). However, individual differences, can influence how ageism is perceived and experienced, indicating that the impact of ageism is not uniform across all older workers. As reported by Couto et al research, on a cultural comparison study, participants from different cultural contexts reported varying levels of perceived experiences of age discrimination. Specifically, participants from Eastern cultures (Hong Kong and Taiwan) reported experiencing age discrimination more frequently compared to participants from Western cultures (Czech Republic, Germany, and the USA) (Clara et al., 2023).

In addition to age and sex, Roscigno et al (2022) understands that racial and ethnic background also play a role in the experience of ageism in the workplace. In workplaces where age discrimination is prevalent, individuals from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds experience significantly higher job-specific stress compared to their white counterparts, despite generally reporting lower overall job-related stress. This disparity highlights the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and age discrimination in the workplace, and underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the unique challenges faced by minority employees in these environments (Roscigno et al., 2022). As so, age discrimination, particularly when coupled with poor supervision, has a

compounding impact on job-related stress and mental health. Age discrimination undermines job security and intensifies job-related stress and poor mental health, with consistent effects across gender, race/ethnicity, and occupational status (Roscigno et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Age discrimination has been shown to affect well-being, self-esteem, and overall physical and mental health, compounded by the internalization of negative age stereotypes. By addressing key areas such as well-being, self-esteem, physical and mental health, job satisfaction, engagement levels, career development opportunities, interpersonal relationships, organizational culture, retirement decisions, gender differences, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and psychosocial factors related to age discrimination, these studies offer valuable contributions to advancing knowledge in this area. To combat workplace ageism effectively, organizations must implement comprehensive, age-inclusive policies and practices that challenge ageist beliefs, promote intergenerational collaboration, and ensure equitable access to training and development opportunities for workers of all ages. Additionally, future research should focus on investigating the long-term impacts of interventions and exploring the intersectionality of ageism with other forms of discrimination.

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