

AGEISM AND STEREOTYPES OF AGING

EDADISMO Y ESTEREOTIPOS DEL ENVEJECIMIENTO

AGEISMO E ESTEREÓTIPOS DO ENVELHECIMENTO

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mail: thallyta9191@gmail.com**Submission:** 27-02-2024**Approval:** 19-12-2023**ABSTRACT**

Objective: to identify perceptions and beliefs about ageism experienced by elderly people. **Methodology:** qualitative study, carried out through a focus group, carried out in an Elderly Community Center, located in the interior of Pernambuco. Elderly people living in the municipality who attended the institution with preserved cognitive domain, assessed through the Mini Mental State Examination, were included. The focus group was conducted by the following guiding question: “Have you ever felt sad about being elderly?” To capture the audio legibly, two MP3 players were used. The study followed human research standards and was approved by the ethics committee. **Results:** It was observed that ageism was experienced in everyday situations, such as queues, service rooms and public places. Although participants reported that old age is not a problem, they highlighted limitations regarding elderly people in the community, with prejudice and stereotypes about aging. With the analysis of the statements, it was possible to identify pejorative and prejudiced terms associated with aging, such as: “old”, “gagá” and “broca”, which are associated with low self-esteem and negative self-image reported during the focus group. **Conclusion:** it was possible to identify information and particularities experienced by elderly people regarding ageism, which provides support for the development of health interventions to combat and disseminate information on the topic.

Keywords: Aged; Ageism; Social Control, Formal.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar percepciones y creencias sobre el edadismo experimentado por personas mayores. **Metodología:** estudio cualitativo, realizado a través de un grupo focal, realizado en un Centro Comunitario de Personas Mayores, ubicado en el interior de Pernambuco. Se incluyeron ancianos residentes en el municipio que asistieron a la institución con dominio cognitivo preservado, evaluado mediante el Mini Examen del Estado Mental. El grupo focal se llevó a cabo con la siguiente pregunta guía: “¿. Alguna vez te has sentido triste por ser anciano?” Para capturar el audio de forma legible se utilizaron dos reproductores MP3. El estudio siguió los estándares de investigación en humanos y fue aprobado por el comité de ética. **Resultados:** Se observó que la discriminación por edad se experimenta en situaciones cotidianas, como colas, salas de servicio y lugares públicos. Aunque los participantes informaron que la vejez no es un problema, resaltaron limitaciones respecto de las personas mayores en la comunidad, con prejuicios y estereotipos sobre el envejecimiento. Con el análisis de las declaraciones fue posible identificar términos peyorativos y prejuiciosos asociados al envejecimiento, tales como: “viejo”, “gagá” y “broca”, los cuales se asocian con la baja autoestima y la autoimagen negativa reportada durante el grupo focal. **Conclusión:** fue posible identificar informaciones y particularidades vividas por las personas mayores en relación al edadismo, lo que brinda apoyo para el desarrollo de intervenciones en salud para combatir y difundir información sobre el tema.

Palabras clave: Anciano; Discriminación por Edad; Controles Informales de la Sociedad.

RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar percepções e crenças acerca do ageísmo vivenciado pela pessoa idosa. **Metodologia:** estudo qualitativo, elaborado por meio de grupo focal, realizado em Centro de Convivência da Pessoa Idosa, localizado no interior de Pernambuco. Foram incluídas pessoas idosas residentes do município que frequentava a instituição com domínio cognitivo preservado, avaliado por meio do Miniexame do Estado Mental. O grupo focal foi conduzido pela seguinte pergunta norteadora: “Você já se sentiu triste por ser idoso?”. Para captação legível do áudio utilizou-se dois aparelhos de MP3. O estudo seguiu as normas de pesquisa com seres humanos e foi aprovado pelo comitê de ética. **Resultados:** observou-se que o ageísmo era vivenciado em situações do cotidiano, como filas, salas de atendimento e locais públicos. Embora os participantes relataram que a velhice não é um problema, eles pontuaram limitações acerca da pessoa idosa na comunidade, com o preconceito e estereótipos do envelhecimento. Com a análise das falas, foi possível identificar termos pejorativos e preconceituosos associados ao envelhecimento, como: “velho”, “gagá” e “brôca”, que associa-se a baixa autoestima e autoimagem negativa relatado durante o grupo focal. **Conclusão:** foi possível identificar informações e particularidades vivenciadas pela pessoa idosa acerca do ageísmo, no qual fornece subsídios para desenvolvimento de intervenções em saúde para o enfrentamento e disseminação de informações sobre a temática.

Palavras-chaves: Idoso; Etarismo; Controles Informais da Sociedade.

INTRODUCTION

Ageism, also called etarism or idadism, refers to discrimination or prejudice generally directed at older people, based on their age. The term includes prejudice, the application of stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior aimed at older people¹.

In terms of origin, ageism can occur on three levels: the micro-structural, which emerges from the subjects themselves and their thoughts, emotions, and actions; the meso-structural, which arises from groups, organizations, and other social entities; and the macro-structural, which can be developed from cultural or social values as a whole. Regardless of its origin, ageism can be subtle, hardly noticed, or explicit and well-known. It shapes older people's perceptions of their own abilities and needs, as well as the views of those around them².

The aging process occurs in contexts of heterogeneous life trajectories and is sometimes marked by conflicting situations. Multiple barriers can be faced which act negatively to reduce participation in the social sphere, which can lead to feelings of loneliness, devaluation, and even social isolation³.

These barriers can be produced by ageism, which produces preconceptions about the abilities of older people, entrenches myths, generates discrimination that promotes stereotyped images, increases the reduction of social participation in the most diverse dimensions of life in the family and in society, and hinders the understanding of aging as an opportunity and achievement of modernity³.

It is clear that the biggest obstacle is the need for cultural changes in the community, which requires the joint efforts of society, public authorities, and public and private higher education institutions, in order to promote a real change in the population's mentality in relation to political decisions on ageing⁴.

This work emerges from the Gerontological Nursing Studies and Research Group (GNSRG) of the Federal Institute of Pernambuco and consists of the first stage in the development of educational technology. The aim of the study was to identify perceptions and beliefs about ageism experienced by the elderly.

METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive study with a qualitative approach, which followed the criteria proposed in the COREQ reference (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research)⁵. The study was carried out in Pesqueira, located in the interior of Pernambuco, at the *Centro de Convivência da Pessoa Idosa* (CCPI), a public institution funded by the municipality's secretariat, which offers assistance, educational and recreational activities for the elderly, in order to develop services aimed at promoting healthy aging, autonomy, independence, socialization and strengthening family and social ties.

Participants were residents of the municipality who attended the institution, with preserved cognitive capacity according to the Mini-Mental State Examination⁶. For data collection, focus groups were used, which is a

research technique that collects data from group interactions and discussions of certain topics. It is a resource used to understand social perceptions, representations, and attitudes⁷⁻⁸. The sample was established by convenience and complied with the recommendations regarding the number of participants - six to ten participants per focus group^{5,8}.

Two focus groups were held, with two sessions taking place in September 2022, in the institution's hall, which was properly organized, with good lighting and temperature for the application of the instrument and the execution of the focus group. Initially, the participants were introduced to the research and signed the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT). The focus group was then conducted with the help of three trained researchers. Expressions and behavior were observed, and the audio was captured legibly using two MP3 players. The focus groups were timed and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. As a result, the debate started with the following guiding question: "Have you ever felt sad about being elderly?".

The data was analyzed through detailed observation of the group's perceptions, feelings, opinions, and values about ageism, through the researchers' observation during the focus group and transcription of the statements, which were then processed in the R interface software for multidimensional analyses of texts and questionnaires (IRAMUTEQ), a tool that assists in the methodological procedures of textual analysis⁹. The words were summarized using the

platform, followed by descending hierarchical classification.

To carry out the study, we followed the guidelines of the National Health Council on the ethical and legal aspects of research involving human beings, named by resolution 466/1210, with approval by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Belo Jardim Educational Autarchy, approved on September 9, 2022, under the Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAAE): 63327322.0.0000.5189 and opinion number: 5.712.693.

RESULTS

The focus group consisted of 10 female participants. This provided subjective and particularized information about the age prejudice experienced by the elderly in the northeastern context. The speeches reported by the women highlighted situations of prejudice in places such as the family environment, queues, places, and public transport.

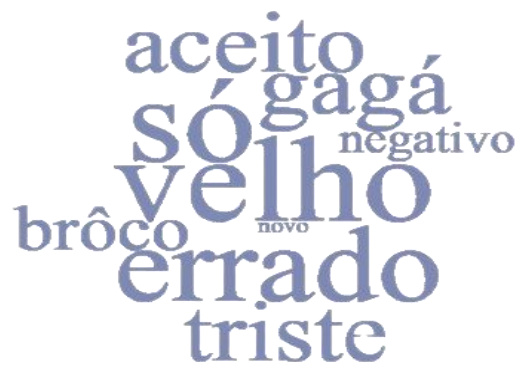
When answering the guiding question "Have you ever felt sad about being elderly?", 100% (n=10) answered "no", expressing that aging is a phase of rediscovery and freedom. However, although for the participants old age is not a problem, they pointed out the limitations it imposes on the elderly, such as slowness and difficulty in handling technology, cognitive deficits, negative feelings of loneliness, and age prejudice.

After summarizing the focus group speeches using the IRAMUTEQ software, a word cloud was created, containing the main

pejorative and disrespectful terms experienced by the elderly in their daily lives, as shown in Figure 1. The most common terms and stereotypes reported by the group were "old

man", "gagá" and "brôco", which refer to elderly people in a pejorative, disrespectful, and prejudiced way.

Figure 1 - Word cloud with adjectives from the focus group recordings processed using IRAMUTEQ, Pesqueira-PE, Brazil, 2023.



Own authorship

Chart 1 shows some excerpts from the participants' speeches about their perceptions and feelings related to ageism and stereotypes in the aging process. These statements highlight the

lack of respect within social and family life, culminating in the distortion of self-image and self-esteem, thus compromising the individual's health and well-being.

Chrt 1 - Distribution of speeches from the focus group regarding ageism experienced in everyday life, Brazil, 2023.

Participant	Excerpts from speeches
p1	<p>"I'm 72 on my ID card, but I'm actually 73, but I don't think I'm old, nor do I like being called old"</p> <p>"These people are very funny, just because they're old they have the nerve to get ahead of us"</p> <p>"My younger sister calls me "brôca" " crazy" "gagá"</p> <p>"I have bad feelings, I don't think it should be like this"</p>

p2	<p>"I felt discriminated against as a person like that: 'gagá' who is old, no longer intelligent"</p> <p>"True, sometimes we hear a lot of jokes"</p> <p>"Gagá"</p> <p>"[...] there are many young people who are indiscreet and show it"</p> <p>"[...] but there are times when I look in the mirror and think I'm old [...]"</p>
p3	<p>"I don't even ride the bus, we have the card and they don't accept it"</p> <p>"Some people don't give us the respect we deserve"</p> <p>"I'm sad because of my limitations"</p> <p>"I'm proud to be 84, I want to reach 90 to say that I've reached 90 and I'm walking, I'm safe and my head is more or less"</p> <p>"I myself am happy and satisfied with being 82, there are people who haven't even reached the halfway mark"</p> <p>"Gagá is one of them, that's what they say the most. The main one"</p>
p4	<p>"But you're so old!"</p> <p>"Not sad about my age, on the contrary"</p>
p5	<p>"Brôco."</p> <p>"I started living after 60 and now I'm living"</p>

Own authorship

DISCUSSION

The focus group was predominantly made up of women. The process of feminization of the population is due to the fact that there are more women than men in Brazil. Although women make up the majority of the population, the aging process is experienced in a particular way and is also surrounded by events of gender and age discrimination, especially in a society that overvalues youth and stigmatizes aging as a situation of decline and loss¹¹⁻¹².

It was noted in the group participants' speeches that ageism is especially present in the family environment and in the use of public transport, which contributes to increased disrespect for the elderly and compromises their health and well-being. In view of this,

understanding that aging is physiological and inherent to every human being, valuing the elderly should be based on everything they represent in society and not reduced to their age¹³⁻¹⁴.

With regard to feelings and perceptions about aging, the participants reported that they did not feel bad about being elderly, despite the prejudice and limitations they experienced on a daily basis. The aging process is associated with various negative stigmas, especially for family members, professionals, and younger people. However, although there are some limitations in old age, the majority of elderly people have a positive perception of aging, which they see as a time of greater tranquillity and freedom¹⁵.

Related to stereotypes of aging are cognitive representations, including beliefs about the physical and mental states and social skills of older people. Most of the time, stereotypes lead to a common perception of people of a certain age as incompetent, outdated, and dependent¹⁶.

Stereotypes are often formed and reinforced through social messages, media representations, and cultural norms. These stereotypes can lead to the perpetuation of negative attitudes and discriminatory behavior toward the elderly. This is because communication plays a role in the construction of meaning and the media participates in the formation of subjectivity by expressing a set of values, knowledge, and social practices that shape social identity¹⁷.

During the focus group, it was observed that elderly people experience disrespect in their social and family lives. Ageism can damage mental health and have a negative impact on the well-being and health of older people. It is also related to increased social isolation and feelings of loneliness¹⁸⁻¹⁹. Thus, knowing and identifying ageism is fundamental for institutions and individuals to understand and change their perception of older people

The concept of ageism consists of three dimensions: cognitive, which relates to negative stereotypes of aging; affective, linked to prejudice; and behavioral, associated with discrimination. In addition, ageism manifests itself both consciously and unconsciously and can be expressed individually, socially, institutionally, and culturally. It is considered

that in order to successfully combat ageism, it must be a priority for managers, politicians and the community, as well as taking into account the factors that cover the different levels and domain²⁰.

The Elderly Person's Statute was regulated by Law No. 10.741, of October 1, 2003, and guarantees the rights afforded to people aged 60 or over²¹. Even though this statute exists, elderly people do not enjoy these rights effectively, since there are barriers to accessing available services such as queues preferential checkouts, and public transport, which contributes to compromised quality of life. It is therefore essential to recognize, publicize, and effectively implement the rights established by this Statute, in order to make the role of the elderly person more effective in the social and family context²².

Intergenerational contact stands out as a strategy for preventing and combating prejudice against the age of the elderly. It also highlights the importance of creating public policies and implementing laws that are already in force, together with educational actions in this fight. Ageism brings with it consequences such as the segregation of different age groups, which results in a compromised quality of life for the elderly. In this sense, the exchange of experiences between different ages makes it possible to reduce, perhaps extinguish, this form of prejudice, which is ageism. Furthermore, with public policies in place, it is essential to publicize and implement the Statute of the Elderly, which guarantees essential rights to the

elderly and allows them to exercise their socio-familial role in society²³.

A limitation of this study is that it was conducted with a small group of elderly people with characteristics inherent only to the northeastern region of Brazil in a city in the interior of Pernambuco, which calls for other focus groups to be held in other states of the country in order to compare the different realities in which ageism is present and how the aging process is experienced. In addition, situations of ageism are not reported in other contexts, such as health services, situations of illness, the occupational sphere, as well as in long-term care institutions.

The study contributes to identifying the perception of ageism experienced by community-dwelling elderly people in the interior of northeastern Brazil, which can help create strategies and tools to raise awareness and combat age discrimination. It is recommended that research be carried out in other demographic, social, and cultural contexts, in order to understand and specify the issue in different national and international scenarios.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was observed that the participants experienced ageism in everyday situations, such as in the family environment and when using public transport. Although the elderly reported that old age is not a problem, limitations of the aging process within the community were pointed out, such as ageism and stereotypes.

The linguistic analysis identified derogatory and prejudiced terms associated with the aging process, such as "old", "brôca" and "gagá", which negatively influence self-esteem and personal image. It was observed that these terms are linked to physical, cognitive, and stereotypical characteristics related to aging.

This study made it possible to identify the specificities faced by elderly people in relation to ageism, which could provide support for the development of health interventions aimed at combating ageism and stereotypes of aging and disseminating relevant information.

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