

AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE IN INDIA

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The article explores the phenomenon of age discrimination (ageism) in modern India, where traditional respect for elders comes into conflict with a youth-oriented corporate culture. Based on the analysis of HR practices and the socio-cultural context, systemic manifestations of ageism in hiring, promotion and in the organizational hierarchy are identified, which negatively affect both age groups. It is concluded that it is necessary to overcome stereotypes and move towards an inclusive personnel policy based on competencies.

Keywords: ageism, age discrimination, labor relations, corporate culture, HR policy, HR practices, age stereotypes.

ЭЙДЖИЗМ НА РАБОЧЕМ МЕСТЕ В ИНДИИ

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Статья исследует феномен возрастной дискриминации (эйджизма) в современной Индии, где традиционное уважение к старшим вступает в противоречие с молодежно-ориентированной корпоративной культурой. На основе анализа HR-практик и социокультурного контекста выявляются системные проявления эйджизма при найме, продвижении и в организационной иерархии, которые негативно воздействуют на обе возрастные группы. Делается вывод о необходимости преодоления стереотипов и перехода к инклюзивной кадровой политике, основанной на компетенциях.

Ключевые слова: эйджизм, возрастная дискриминация, трудовые отношения, корпоративная культура, кадровая политика, HR-практики, возрастные стереотипы.

Introduction.

Age discrimination (ageism), defined as bias and limitation of opportunities based on age [1], is a global socio-labor issue. In India, despite a deeply ingrained cultural paradigm of respecting elders and valuing life experience, ageism takes on specific, systemic, and institutionalized forms, while remaining under-researched and socially unacknowledged [2]. This paradox creates a unique research perspective for analysis. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the culturally conditioned contradictions and institutional manifestations of ageism in modern Indian organizations across various economic sectors.

Cultural paradox. Traditional hierarchical social model, which prescribes unconditional respect for elders in family, religious, and public life, comes into open conflict with the dominant values of the rapidly developing corporate sector. Modern business, especially in dynamic fields like IT, pharmaceuticals, finance, and retail in metropolises (Delhi,

Bangalore, Mumbai), associates youth with key competencies such as operational flexibility, technological innovativeness, high energy, and lower financial expectations [2, 3]. This creates a persistent systemic contradiction: a society that ritually honors age and wisdom at one social level, de facto discriminates against it at another, fostering a "youth-oriented" professional environment where age transforms from an asset into a stigma.

Systemic manifestations of ageism in HR practices. Age discrimination is not limited to everyday stereotypes but is deeply rooted in organizational processes, manifesting at all key stages of employment relations:

1. In hiring: explicit or implicit age restrictions in job postings (e.g., "up to 30/35 years old," "young dynamic team") are widespread, automatically and unjustifiably excluding qualified older professionals regardless of their experience and competencies. Young applicants, in turn, often face discrimination on another ground, being systematically rejected due to "lack of sufficient experience" even for entry-level positions [2, 4].

2. In promotion and career development: an unspoken yet widely accepted formula operates, equating biological age with professional experience, and youth with the energy required for leadership. This directly substitutes an objective assessment of actual performance and employee potential. Older employees are denied promotions for being perceived as insufficiently flexible, slow, or resistant to change, while their younger colleagues are denied opportunities due to ingrained stereotypes about immaturity, unreadiness for responsibility, and lack of authority [4].

3. In organizational culture and communication: the hierarchical structure of many Indian companies, replicating the traditional family model, leads to the systematic disregard or devaluation of ideas and initiatives from young employees until formally endorsed by senior colleagues or managers. This not only stifles innovation and demotivates young specialists but also perpetuates outdated work methods [2, 4].

The Dual Burden of Discrimination. Ageism in India has a pronounced bidirectional character, inflicting significant harm to the professional and psychological well-being of employees at both ends of the age spectrum [2, 4]. Young professionals (a clear example being in medicine or consulting) face chronic distrust from clients, patients, and sometimes colleagues; their authority and expertise are constantly questioned based solely on appearance. Concurrently, older employees (especially in technology-intensive sectors like IT) are systematically marginalized, portrayed as "slow learners," "lacking energy," or "technologically obsolete," while their accumulated experience and institutional memory are

devalued. This leads to similar negative consequences on both sides: loss of professional motivation and identity, development of burnout syndrome, decreased productivity, and ultimately, the premature and irrational exit of valuable talent from the labor market.

Gender and Sectoral Dimensions. The issue of ageism in India is structurally compounded for women, who face the cumulative effect of overlapping age and gender stereotypes (e.g., judgments based on appearance and age, automatic assumptions about the priority of family responsibilities over career), thereby creating an effect of "double" or even "triple discrimination" [4, 5]. From a sectoral specificity perspective, ageism manifests most acutely and explicitly in sectors associated with the fastest technological and methodological changes (IT, telecommunications, digital marketing, next-generation healthcare), where stereotypes about the inability of older employees to adapt quickly are cultivated particularly intensely and are often used to justify personnel decisions [5].

Conclusion. Ageism in Indian organizations is not merely a set of private prejudices or individual cognitive biases, but a profound systemic contradiction stemming from the clash of a traditional socio-cultural matrix and the demands of a globalized modern economy. It leads to significant direct and indirect economic costs, including the loss of talent and knowledge, reduced innovation and adaptation potential of companies, as well as serious social problems such as the deepening intergenerational divide and growing social tension. Overcoming this deeply ingrained and often "silent" form of discrimination requires a conscious and systemic transition from a management culture based on stereotypes and rigid hierarchy to a model focused on objective competencies, measurable results, and the deliberate creation of an inclusive, age-diverse, and psychologically safe work environment.

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