

Experiences of Aging in Society Project

July 2023 Report

We've come a long way, thanks to you!



The Experiences of Aging in Society (EOA) project is investigating how societal beliefs about aging and older adults may affect health. Ageism is believed to increase risk for many health problems commonly thought to be a natural consequence of getting older. Ageism refers to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination related to old age, aging, and older adults. On the other hand, many older adults also identify benefits associated with aging that may protect their health.

**Aging is a fact of life.
Having health problems during later life is not.**

Since 2021, our team has been collecting information from a diverse group of adults ages 50+ about their feelings, expectations, and experiences with growing older. Thanks to your help, we have been able to research how positive and negative experiences of aging may affect people's health, both immediately and in the future. We are also studying similarities and differences across several US racial and ethnic groups. Project results will inform programs, policies, and research that promote the health and wellbeing of older adults.



Ageism

One project goal was to study everyday ageism. Everyday ageism is "routine types of age-based discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping that older adults encounter in their day-to-day lives" (Allen, 2022). The Everyday Ageism Scale assesses how much everyday ageism older adults experience, with scores ranging from 0 (none) to 30 (a lot).

Experiences of Aging in Society (2021-2023)

National Averages (2019)

12.1

12.1

10.4

9.2

Non-Hispanic
White

Non-Hispanic
Black

Non-Hispanic
White

Non-Hispanic
Black

EOA participants reported more everyday ageism than a nationally representative sample did in 2019 (prior to COVID pandemic)

EOA Black & White older adults reported similar amounts of everyday ageism, in contrast to the national study in which Black adults reported less than White adults

Ageism & Health

EOA participants reporting greater exposure to everyday ageism had more short- and long-term health issues.

Ageism was associated with:

Heightened fight or flight stress responses
(rapid heart rate & breathing, feeling nervous or scared)

Having more chronic health conditions
(chronic pain, migraines, depression, dementia/Alzheimer's)

COPING WITH AGEISM

When faced with negative experiences related to aging & ageism, common coping strategies were:



Talking to close friends & family
(81%)



Using electronics-TV, internet, social media
(80%)



Prayer (67%)



Exercise/physical activity (62%)



Distraction
(60%)



Meditation
(58%)



Avoiding people/places with bad experiences (44%)



Eating junk food (39%)

Positive Experiences of Aging

Some societal attitudes and practices linked to old age are positive. We asked EOA participants about 23 benefits and advantages associated with growing older. Positive experiences of aging are believed to buffer against stress and promote health and wellbeing.

Most commonly reported:

Being a good example to younger people (89%)

Many pleasant things about growing older (86%)

Treated with respect by others (96%) & family (86%)

More comfortable being self (89%)

Socially acceptable to not work full-time (86%)

Opinions & choices matter (89%)

Adults reporting more positive experiences of aging had:

- better health & less chronic conditions
- fewer experiences with ageism

% responding often/sometimes or agree/strongly agree

So What's Next?

How we* can promote older adult health:

1

Increase awareness of ageism & its harms

2

Change ageist language, behavior, practices, & policies

3

Combat stereotypes & reframe aging as about growth, adaptation, & opportunities

4

Foster positive experiences of aging

*Change requires working together, so "we" includes researchers, service providers, politicians, older adults, & broader society

Data Source & Methods

EOA reports information shared with us by a racially/ethnically diverse stratified sample of US adults ages 50+. Data in this report were collected from Non-Hispanic Black & White adults (n=132) between July 2021-May 2023. The study was conducted by the Stress & Health Disparities Lab at the University of Oklahoma & supported by the Vice President for Research and Partnerships of the University of Oklahoma (2021 & 2023 JFF), the Michigan Integrative Well-Being and Inequality Program (R25-AT010664), the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (5P30 AG015281), & ResearchMatch.

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Suggested citation:

Allen, J.O., White, C.J., Moïse, V., Mahato, S., Kiefer, M, Sikora, N., Onishi, S., Greenwood, J.C., & Cunyningham, K. (2023, July). Experiences of Aging in Society Project, July 2023 Report. University of Oklahoma Stress and Health Disparities Lab: Norman, OK. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11244/338894>.

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