



COVERT AGE DISCRIMINATION: THE PHENOMENON OF AGEISM AGAINST YOUNG WORKERS IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze in depth the phenomenon of ageism experienced by young workers in the industrial sector. This issue is rarely discussed, as previous studies have tended to focus on age discrimination experienced by older people. Using a qualitative approach and case study design, this study examines experiences of ageism among workers aged between 25 and 35 years. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and research from written sources to strengthen the existing theoretical framework. Findings from this study indicate that ageism against young workers manifests in the form of discrimination during the recruitment process, negative stereotypes about their abilities and character, and seniority practices that make age an indication of authority and competence. Structural factors such as traditional work hierarchies and cultural norms regarding the age of marriage also reinforce these age discrimination practices. In terms of theory, this study contributes to expanding the understanding of ageism by emphasizing that age discrimination can occur not only against older workers but also against young workers, thus necessitating a more inclusive analytical framework. Empirically, the results of this study underscore the importance of policy interventions and improvements in work culture in order to create a more inclusive industrial environment that is free from age discrimination.

Keywords: Ageism, Industry Sector, Young workers, Age Discrimination.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the industrial sector plays an important role in driving economic growth and creating jobs. The industrial sector plays an important role in contributing to economic growth in Indonesia. This sector is the largest contributor to the country's annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the first quarter of 2024, namely manufacturing, trade, construction, and mining. However, the availability of

jobs remains an issue, especially when linked to the demographic bonus. (*BPS, 2024*).

The labor force in February 2024 reached 149.38 million people out of a working-age population of 214.00 million. However, 7.20 million people, or 4.82 percent of the total labor force, were unemployed (*BPS Februari, 2024*). The Central Statistics Agency states that unemployment in the Not Employment, Education, or Training (NETT) category, which stands at around 9.89 million, is filled by Gen Z (currently aged 15 to 27 years old) (*BPS, 2023*). The high number of workers is not in line with the availability of jobs, resulting in a relatively high unemployment rate. Unreasonable job application requirements are one of the reasons behind the high unemployment rate.

In the industrial context, there is still a social issue that workers are vulnerable to, namely ageism. Ageism refers to prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination directed at individuals based on their age, usually when they are considered too old or too young to take on a certain role. Ageism is a form of stereotyping that can be felt directly, either positively or negatively (Aprilatutini et al., 2025). It is commonly perceived that ageism has a negative impact on older workers. This has been proven by previous relevant studies. The results of research conducted by Setyowati and Sumardjijati show that ageism is ingrained in the daily lives of Indonesian society. In the 2017 film *Ziarah*, the main character, an elderly woman, rebels against all forms of ageism attached to her because she is no longer young (Setyowati & Sumardjijati, 2021).

Ageism, or discrimination based on age, is a scourge that haunts workers, including young people. Studies on ageism tend to focus on discrimination against older people, assuming that today's society prefers young people over older people, but at the same time, ageism against younger people also occurs (Christian, 2018). This leads to the assumption that old age is unpleasant because of the loss of social roles and income, which will always be the worst thing at the end of one's life (Fitria & Mawarni, 2021). In the world of industry and labor, ageism, which they may have experienced when applying for jobs, has caused them to feel alienated from the world of work and forced them to endure this discomfort (Parawansa & Malik, 2024) because humans are essentially social creatures whose lives require interaction with one another (Rianti, 2019).

The phenomenon of age discrimination against young workers in the industrial sector is important to study because this practice often occurs covertly and is not

recognized as a form of structural injustice. Previous studies have focused more on older age groups as the main victims of ageism, so that the experiences of discrimination faced by young workers have received less attention, both empirically and conceptually. In fact, there are stereotypes about immaturity, lack of experience, and assumptions that young workers are easily replaceable, which can affect the quality of work, careers, and psychosocial well-being of the productive generation. There is a lack of research describing how ageism operates in various dimensions through recruitment, hierarchical culture, and social norms especially in industries in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the various forms of ageism experienced by young workers and identify the structural and cultural factors that support its existence. This study is expected to broaden the readers' knowledge and contribute to the field of industrial sociology, as well as provide additional information for future research.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This research is qualitative research using a case study approach. A case study is a method used to study phenomena in depth and detail (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). The case study approach was used to understand the experiences of ageism among workers in the industrial sector who are still relatively young. This is important in order to understand how they interpret and make sense of their experiences of ageism, as well as the forms of ageism they encounter. The case study method was chosen because it allows researchers to delve deeper into the personal experiences of young workers and understand the social and cultural contexts that shape ageism practices in the industrial sector. Data collection methods were carried out through interviews with workers aged 25-35. Data was also collected by searching for and reading existing written sources such as scientific journals, articles, and so on. The aim was to obtain information and theories relevant to the research topic.

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of social research. This primarily involved maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and protecting informants. Prior to the interviews, each participant received an explanation of the research objectives, the type of participation required, and the

potential risks and benefits. Consent was obtained voluntarily, without coercion. To maintain confidentiality and avoid negative consequences in the workplace, the identities of informants were disguised using initials. The data collected was stored securely and used only for academic research purposes. The researchers also ensured that the interviews were conducted in a manner that respected the comfort of the informants, including giving them the opportunity to not answer any questions they did not want to answer or to stop the interview at any time. This ethical approach is particularly important because the issue of ageism relates to sensitive experiences that can affect the informants' job positions and mental health.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Discrimination in the job recruitment process

Manifestations of ageism in the industrial sector can be found in several areas, one of which is unfair recruitment processes. Very young workers or fresh graduates aged 20-25 are still relatively likely to receive job interview invitations. However, they are also often ignored or rejected in the recruitment process because they are considered inexperienced or lacking the necessary skills. This is a matter of serious concern, given that if ageism continues to be practiced, it is not impossible that symptoms of disorganization or social disintegration will occur in the community seeking employment in the industrial world (Badaruddin et al., 2025).

"I decided to shift careers at the age of 25 for a couple of reasons. Well, never mind looking for a job, even finding an internship program for my portfolio was incredibly difficult. What could we do? The average age requirement was 24 years old at most." (R, 26 years old)

The same applies to workers over the age of 25 who do not meet the age requirements for applying for a job because they are considered "expired."

"I am now 27 years old, and I don't know whether my contract will be renewed or not. I have tried to look for job vacancies, but it is very difficult to find one because of the age limit. To be honest, I am not a lazy person. My data entry, computer operation, and time management skills are quite good, but the

requirement for applying for a job is a maximum age limit. (A, 27 years old).

Similar to A (27 years old), K (31 years old) also experienced anxiety and unpleasant ageism. He was discriminated against several times because of his age, regardless of his skills. According to him, the government also plays a role in perpetuating ageism and contributing to the high unemployment rate in Indonesia.

“Back when I had just graduated from college and was applying for jobs, many companies called me, but as time went by, it became more difficult as I got older. Especially working in banking, as you can see, even civil service jobs are limited to a maximum age of 35, so how can unemployment not increase? As time goes by, I am getting older, but it is more difficult to find work because of my age. We're still talking about age here, not my skills.” (K, 31 years old).

The young age requirement for job applicants has been set by companies in order to hire employees who can be paid less and have the same experience as employees who have been working for many years.

“When I was young, I was a victim of contract employment several times. After several years of contract work, I was forced to move from company to company due to unreasonable reasons. They wanted new employees who could be paid low wages and manipulated”. (K, 31 years old).

Discrimination in the recruitment process is an unfair practice because workers are treated differently based on their age. This practice is certainly detrimental to the individuals who are victims, and hinders diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Stereotypes and Prejudices

Based on interviews with informants, the stereotypes and prejudices they have experienced or encountered from their coworkers can be summarized as follows:

- a) Age stereotypes and prejudices held by superiors, coworkers, and clients.
Young workers face ageism when they are judged based on their age, often

considered less capable or less experienced because of their youth. This can lead to lower expectations and limited opportunities for career growth.

- b) Rudeness. Young workers are often portrayed as rude and lacking in good character. The outspoken attitude of workers under the age of 35 is considered insubordination by their superiors.
- c) Poor performance. Some people believe that young workers perform poorly, are less capable or less experienced because of their young age.
- d) Special treatment some superiors believe that young workers expect special treatment or benefits without making a commensurate effort. Young workers are sometimes considered spoiled because they are given too much attention and support, which can lead to a lack of resilience and adaptability.

Factors Contributing to Ageism

- a) Traditional workplace hierarchy. Traditional seniority-based structures in the workplace can perpetuate ageism against younger workers. Older employees often occupy top positions, and younger workers are expected to climb the ladder slowly over time. This can create a perpetual cycle in which younger workers feel neglected. In addition, Indonesian society still views age as an indicator of seniority, giving rise to the assumption that older people must be respected and young people must be obedient. Interviews with informants revealed that some older supervisors feel they already know everything, so recommendations from younger workers tend to be ignored out of pride. On the other hand, when superiors are younger, they feel uncomfortable "telling" their subordinates what to do because their subordinates are older.
- b) The culture of early marriage. Early marriage has become a culture in Indonesia, and it is considered culturally unacceptable to marry after the age of 35 and to refuse to marry at a young age. This also affects the assessment of employers. When companies find job applicants who are 25 years of age or older, they will think twice about hiring them. Job applicants over the age of 25 are assumed to be getting married in the near future and will need a lot of time off, which is considered to have an impact on the company's performance.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that ageism against young workers in industry is a complex social phenomenon. It occurs in various ways, including discrimination during recruitment and negative perceptions of their abilities and character. Deep-rooted seniority practices, rigid work cultures, and societal expectations of young adulthood further reinforce ageist prejudices against workers aged 25 to 35. The results of this study make a significant contribution to theory by expanding the understanding of age discrimination, which usually focuses more on the problems faced by older adults. This study emphasizes that age discrimination can also occur against the younger generation, requiring a broader conceptual framework to understand power relations, stereotypes, and age dynamics in the current work context. Practically, this research shows the real impact of age discrimination on career development, social-emotional stability, and employment opportunities for the productive generation, which ultimately affects the efficiency of a country's industry and workforce resilience.

This study emphasizes the importance of improving employment policies that clearly prohibit unreasonable age restrictions in the recruitment process. In addition, it recommends that companies use selection practices that focus on competence rather than age alone. Policies on anti-bias training for managers and supervisors should be adopted institutionally to reduce age stereotypes in decision-making processes. For future research, comparative studies across various industrial sectors and quantitative analyses of the economic impact of ageism on company productivity are needed. Conducting longitudinal research is also crucial to understand how experiences of age discrimination can affect the long-term career trajectories of young workers.

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