Extended Abstract

Ageism or Discrimination against Older Adults in Work Life

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Abstract
The variable structure of unemployment in the labor market also brings critical changes with it. The increasing number of workers over 50 in the labor force and the rapid aging of the labor force support this fact. In this context, unless countries resolve the issue of unemployment, it may become a global concern. An increase in unemployment rates has already generally been observed over the years. Unemployment in the older age group lasts longer and more intensely compared to youths. Thus, increasing the participation rates of older people in the labor market and preventing discrimination against them while searching for work, as well as in business life, is important. Several policies are required to address the problems older workers face in the labor market. This study investigates the issues that the aging face in the labor market and the dimensions of discrimination against older adults discrimination in their work lives. The purpose of the study is to emphasize that aging has become a reason for discrimination in work life and to recommend social policies for resolving this issue.

Keywords
Older adults • Employee • Labor force • Discrimination • Labor market

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Citation: Topgül, S. (2016). Ageism or discrimination against older adults in work life. Turkish Journal of Sociology, 36, 385–391.
Ageism and discrimination against older adults are common terms generally used synonymously, but they do have conceptual differences. Most studies that have focused on ageism include people over fifty-five, which clearly signifies that this term is generally used for discrimination towards older adults. On the other hand, ageism also can happen to people in their twenties. As a matter of fact, other individuals can have a negative attitude towards youths because of their inadequate experience and skills. As in one’s social life, perspectives and situations at work also underline this matter. Given that maturity and experience are gained with age, people are in a probationary process until their thirties. In most cases it is one’s first period of employment. According to Super (Keser, 2015, p. 57), this period of life corresponds to a testing phase that includes establishing one’s occupational personality during the work development phase. Hence, discussions on ageism also cover discrimination against younger adults.

When considering studies in this area, one can observe that what is understood from the term is discrimination against older adults for the most part. In this regard, while ageism and discrimination against older adults have been used synonymously, the intent is in fact discrimination against older adults. The reason behind this is the rapid exclusion from work life of older people who have to put bread on the table, in spite of countries’ populations getting older day by day. The study will focus on eliminating this contradiction of terms, as well as determining the level of discrimination against older adults in the labor market. In this regard, a general framework will be established for the term “older adults” and its historical perspective with emphasis on its importance in terms of family and society. Following this, the issues of the rapid increase in the population of older adults and the types of discrimination against them at work will be discussed.

Age is an important factor in Turkish society. Each demographic indicator shows its own interactive importance within the culture. Age, as an indicator, is a sociologically dominant issue (Roscigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007, p. 313). Old age may be understood differently from society to society, culture to culture, and even person to person. The definition of old age that changes from society to society or culture to culture is known as social old-age. This change may stem from climate, nutrition, previous work, and even factors like gender. It is therefore hard to make a complete definition of old age (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 313). Old age is biologically defined in the physiology of aging. Biological old age is “the physiological, functional changes occurring due to the passage of time, regardless of disease” (Güler, 1998, p.
105). Old age is also defined chronologically, physiologically, and functionally. A person’s age measured in years is their chronological age. The corresponding term for chronological old age in society is “age.” A person’s changing personal and behavioral characteristics throughout the years is defined as physiological old age. Functional old age, on the other hand, is the significant degradation of a person’s specific characteristics such as physical appearance, mobility, durability, or intellectual capacity compared to other people of the same age (Güler, 1998, p. 105). On the other hand, it is possible to sociologically define old age personally and communally. With aging over time, the loss of one’s role and status is a sociological examination of one’s micro-environmental aging. At the same time, aging transforms the norms and values that society attributes to an individual (Görgün-Baran, 2004, pp. 38–43). One can say that aging is a bound concept in terms of both personal and social relations, as well as rights and responsibilities (Görgün-Baran, 2007, p. 150). According to Görgün-Baran (2011, p. 140), sociological aging is the “judgments and evaluations in the context of norms and values developed in relation to age by society within the framework of the individual’s status and loss of role.” In addition to the sociological examination of aging at the micro and macro levels, both approaches are combined and evaluated from a third perspective. In addition to the micro-scale approach, which explains a person’s aging through one’s own experience, and the macro scale approach, where aging is assessed through one’s social appearance and experience, there is a third mid-scale approach that combines the other two approaches. In the mid-scale approach, society’s demographic, cultural, and economic transformations are examined through the increasing number of older adults in society (Victor, 2005, pp. 4–5). In this sense, a mid-scale approach has been adopted in which the attitudes towards older adults are evaluated in the context of this study.

When and why a person is considered old-aged is related to how that person accommodates one’s self to circumstances, incidents, or changing times. The more one’s ability to adapt deteriorates, the more that person is considered old-aged (Büken & Büken, 2003, p. 76). Discrimination is mainly defined as unfair attitudes towards other people based on age, gender, race, or other characteristics. Perceived discrimination is the reflection of people’s attitudes with regard to age, gender, race or other characteristics on their unfair behavior towards the people around them. Perceived discrimination is commonly related to employment (Gee, Pavalko, & Long, 2007, pp. 266–267). Perceived discrimination is an important area because it also forms the basis for structural inequalities within society (Marshall, 2007, p. 257).
There have been debates on whether ageism is a type of discrimination (Ayalon & Gum, 2011, p. 587). Ageism increases with age. The first questions are: What is age, and do social issues relate to age? In this context, the kind of discrimination people experience becomes important. Are they less respected in their social life due to age? Have they been fired or become unemployed because of their age (Yuan, 2007, p. 291)? Gee, Pavalko, and Long (2007, p. 276) revealed in one of their studies on the perception of ageism at the work place that people in their twenties often encounter ageism; it decreases in their thirties but is most often encountered while in one’s fifties. They also reported that ageism hits its peak for those who are 55 then starts to decrease. While the reason for youths’ encounter with ageism is their lack of experience, it is negative thinking towards older adults that causes discrimination against them. While discrimination towards older adults restricts their economic conditions more, its effects also show up in wage inequalities and restrictions in job availability. Job loss increases among older workers. The economic impact of job loss is felt deeper by older workers. Losing a job for an older employee negatively affects their chances of finding a new job in the future, both in regards to the quantity and continuity of work. Employment for those 55 or older who have lost their job generally shows a 4-year break. Namely, they almost never start a new job for at least four years. Furthermore, there is a 20% decrease in their rate of employment (Chan & Stevens, 2001, p. 521).

Labor-force participation rates for different countries are observed to have increased over the period between 2000 and 2014. The highest increase in participation in the labor force among 55-64 year olds happened in Germany with an increase of 26.2%. Slovakia and Hungary took second and third place with 25.8% and 22% increases, respectively. In 2000, the participation rate of 55-64 year olds was highest in the order of Sweden, Norway, Japan, Switzerland, and Denmark. For 2014, people between 55 and 64 were observed to have higher rates in the labor force in Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Japan, and Germany. Regarding the situation in Turkey, the participation rate of 55-64 year-old workers in the labor market, which was 37.2% in 2000, declined to 28.3% in 2007. In 2014 this rate was measured as 33.4%. When examining the employment rates of 55-64 year olds, the highest rates belonged to Norway (67.1%), Sweden (65.1%), and Switzerland (63.3%) in 2000. Japan and USA came after them, respectively. Sweden, Norway, and Switzerland had an employment rate of around 70% for 55-64 year olds in 2014. Considering unemployment rates in different countries, the unemployment rate of 55-64 year olds has had a tendency to increase.
The countries with the highest increases in unemployment rates from 2000-2014 are Greece, Spain, and Portugal. In these countries, where the rates of unemployment began to climb up after 2008, older workers’ unemployment rates also increased rapidly. Greece with an increase of 13.3%, Spain with a 10.6% increase, and Portugal with an increase of 10.3% became the countries with the highest rates of older worker unemployment. On the other hand, only a 1.8% increase was experienced in the US throughout these 14 years. Generally, the unemployment rates of older workers in the US are low. Turkey’s tendencies toward older worker unemployment have increased over the years. The unemployment rate of older workers, which had been 2.1% percent in 2000, climbed up to 6% in 2014.

Ageism is an apparent fact in the work place. Societies usually consider young workers to be more active, adaptable, and easily-taught compared to older people. This commonly assumed opinion shows that discrimination is apparent during the employment process. Roscigno et al. (2007) tested anticipations to ageism in the work place. They reviewed more than 12,000 incidents related to ageism in the employment phase in the Ohio Civil Rights Commission from 1988 until 2003. Of the incidents they selected, 112 underwent detailed qualitative evaluations. The results showed that those over 50 faced discrimination in the workplace. In the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the most common case was revealed to be related to getting dismissed from work. Older workers had experienced discrimination in 66% of dismissal cases. This discrimination occurs as exclusion in around 10% of employment incidents (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 314; Santora & Seaton, 2008, p. 104). Another idea reports that older workers experience discrimination not in being dismissed but throughout the actual employment process. Age limits are in fact limited by unwritten rules during employment. Thus it would not be wrong to say that the resources of the experienced older labor force are being wasted.

Kaynakça/References


