



**Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences**

**AN EXPLORATION IN EXPERIENCES OF AGEISM AMONG ELDERLY  
RESIDENTS IN RUMAH SERI KENANGAN KUCHING**

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**Bachelor of Nursing with Honours**

**(Final Year Project)**

**2023**

AN EXPLORATION IN EXPERIENCES OF AGEISM AMONG ELDERLY  
RESIDENTS IN RUMAH SERI KENANGAN KUCHING

This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Nursing with Honours (Final Year Project)

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences  
UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA SARAWAK

2023

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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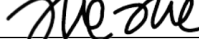
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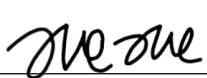
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Madam Dayang Zuraina binti Abang Haji Kashim for her invaluable guidance and support throughout my journey in completing this report. The insightful feedbacks that I received from my supervisor has contributed to designing this report. Besides, I would like to gratify my thankfulness to the Final Year Project Course Coordinators, Dr. Saraswathy A/P Thangarajoo and Mr. Dev Nath Kaushal for their expertise and contributions.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my sponsor, Tabung Baitulmal for their generosity in providing the financial support for conducting this research. Their funding has played the biggest role in conducting this research. My thanks also go to the Ethics Committee of Research Committee in Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of University Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak Social Welfare Department (JKMNS) and the staffs at Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching for assisting me throughout data collection.

And I would like to extend my appreciation to all the participants, among the elderly residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching, who generously sacrifice their time and willing to participate in this study. Their voluntary participation to share their experiences and meaningful insights have shed light on important aspects of this research questions. Lastly, I am profoundly grateful to my parents and all my wonderful friends especially Nur Shahrizaireen, Nur Izdihar, Emily Ethel, Irsalina Maisara and Pamela Laryam, who have been providing endless support in every step of my academic journey. Their unconditional love, prayers, constant encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic pursuits. Thank you, my backbones.

## **ABSTRACT**

Ageism was coined by Robert Neil Butler in 1969, to describe a set of social relation that includes stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice towards an individual based on their age basis (Lev et al., 2018). Butler posits that the incidence of ageism is mostly encountered by younger and older age groups, either they are being perceived as too young as well as too old (Bratt et al., 2018). Regardless of one's age, ageism was commonly experienced in the form of a lack of respect or incorrect assumptions. The incidence of ageism become more prominent since the society pointed the imminent threats of death, disability, impairment, and cognitive deterioration towards the elderly. However, it remains unclear as to what extent the elderly had experienced ageism towards their life stages, how they feel about it and what are the consequences they suffered. Therefore, this study adopts a descriptive interpretive qualitative approach to explore the older adults' lived experiences of ageism. The participants were recruited amongst the elderly residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching, by using a purposive sampling method and were interviewed physically. Thematic analysis was employed to identify the relevant themes and sub-themes within the interview data. The findings had discussed the older adults' self-perceptions of ageing, personal experiences of becoming older and the influences of age stereotypes. It is clear the elderly negatively influenced by age stereotypes, where it impacts their participation, health, and security. Despite the adversity experienced by the older adults, most of them implemented adaptive strategies in response to ageism. By amplifying the voices and experiences of the elderly population, this study intended to raise awareness of ageism, foster an age-friendly society, and promote healthy ageing.

## **ABSTRAK**

Ageisme telah diperkenalkan oleh Robert Neil Butler pada tahun 1969 untuk menggambarkan satu set hubungan sosial yang merangkumi stereotaip, diskriminasi, dan prasangka terhadap seseorang individu berdasarkan usia (Lev et al., 2018). Butler berpendapat bahawa ageisme biasanya dialami oleh generasi muda dan warga emas, kerana mereka sering kali dianggap sebagai terlalu muda atau terlalu tua (Bratt et al., 2018). Tanpa mengira usia seseorang, ageisme biasanya dialami dalam bentuk kurang diberi penghormatan atau sering mendapat anggapan yang salah. Keganasan ageisme semakin ketara apabila masyarakat telah menekankan ancaman kematian, kecacatan, kelemahan, dan kemerosotan kognitif yang dihadapi oleh warga tua. Namun, ianya masih tidak jelas sejauh mana orang tua telah mengalami ageisme sepanjang tahap kehidupan mereka, bagaimana perasaan mereka mengenainya, dan kesan yang dialami. Oleh itu, kajian ini mengambil pendekatan kualitatif interpretatif deskriptif untuk meneroka pengalaman hidup ageisme di kalangan warga emas. Penduduk warga tua di Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching telah dipilih sebagai subjek kajian, menggunakan kaedah persampelan bertujuan dan diwawancara secara fizikal. Analisis tematik digunakan untuk mengenal pasti tema dan sub-tema yang relevan dalam data temubual. Hasil kajian membincangkan persepsi diri orang tua tentang penuaan, pengalaman peribadi menjadi lebih tua, dan pengaruh stereotaip usia. Tuntasnya, warga tua telah dipengaruhi secara negatif oleh stereotaip usia, yang mempengaruhi penyertaan, kesihatan, dan keselamatan. Bahkan, kebanyakan dari mereka melaksanakan strategi adaptif sebagai respons terhadap ageisme. Dengan memperkuat suara dan pengalaman warga tua, kajian ini bertujuan meningkatkan kesedaran ageisme, menggalakkan masyarakat mesra usia, dan mendorong penuaan yang sihat.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OR SYMBOLS

UNIMAS	Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
RSKK	Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching
JKMNS	<i>Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Sarawak</i> or Sarawak Social Welfare Department
“Excerpt(s)”	Specific quotes or passages from the interviews or focus group discussion
...	A pause during participant story

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This study was conducted with the intention of exploring the experiences of ageism among elderly residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching. This chapter consists of eight sections. Section 1.1 delineates the background of the study, and Section 1.2 elaborates on the statement of problems. Subsequently, research questions have been listed in Section 1.3, research aim can be found under Section 1.4, and research objectives are clearly presented in Section 1.5. Besides, the significance of the study has been discussed in Section 1.6 and Section 1.7 presents the definition of terms utilized in this study, which comprises both operational definitions and conceptual definition. Last but not least, Section 1.8 summarizes this chapter.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

In 1969, ageism was coined by Robert Neil Butler, the first director of the National Institute on Aging in the United States to describe a set of social relation that includes stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice towards an individual based on their age basis (Lev et al., 2018). Butler posits that the incidence of ageism is mostly encountered by younger and older age groups (Butler, 1969), either they are being perceived as too young as well as too old (Bratt et al., 2018). It is common nowadays when the society gate keeping the elderly as this generation has been stereotyped as

grumpy, memory impaired, and dependent. The younger generation also experiencing the same cycle of life, whereby young adults ordinarily labelled as lack of experiences, incompetent and thoughtless and these assumptions indirectly made them not qualified to apply their career. Thus, it can be concluded that regardless of one's age, ageism was commonly experienced in the form of a lack of respect or incorrect assumptions.

As this age stereotypes and discrimination behaviours were embedded in our society, it is hard to identify the impact of ageism. It has been argued that the ageism could be either positive or negative, yet it is prone to carry the negative consequences by creating false assumptions (Butler, 1980). The society were putting the pressure of the imminent threats of death, disability, impairment, and cognitive deterioration towards the elderly. Moreover, the elderly has been labelled as outdated, and their working experiences are irrelevant nowadays since the advanced technologies are growing in the country. Most of the employers favoured the young adults from the middle-aged groups (30-50 years old) to be hired. This had brought the elderly to suffer other health problems such as depression, (O' Luanaigh et.al, 2012), loneliness (Fakoya et al., 2020), social isolation (Kydd et al., 2018) due to the negative perceptions, and causing job insecurities (Richardson et al., 2013). It clearly seen that the society disregard the older population, but it hardly to notice the consequences of their actions.

Older adults are dominantly to be the target of ageism, whereas the older people commonly have been the focus of attraction in most ageism research (Meisner, 2012; North & Fiske, 2012). In the previous year of 2022, data collected from World Value Survey revealed that 60% of the respondents had reported that older people do not receive the respect they deserved (Haerper et al., 2022). Similarly, a survey conducted by University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging, in 2019 has provided a statistical figure of 82% of their respondents at range of age between 50- to 80-year-old had experiencing at least one of the aspects of ageism in their daily life (Ober et al., 2020). In that regard, aging thus is viewed with disdain, creating a tendency among youth to dissociate themselves from the elderly. Indeed, this significantly shows that ageism is more prevalent among the elderly compared to the younger generation.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The most recent statistic on the ageing population were reported by Department of Statistics Malaysia (Abdul Razak, 2022) and United Nations (2022). As of 2022, the percentage of elderly (starting from age 65 and above) in Malaysia has been progressively increasing and following the ageing population trends as 7.0% had increased to 7.3%. According to Abdul Razak (2022), this current trend in global population of ageing is now considering as a driving factor that promote an increase in ageism prevalence over the next decades.



The perceptions and behaviours towards an individual were significantly influenced by knowing an individual's age. People tend to mistreat, judging and disrespect elderly as the society normalized the age stereotypes among the elderly. Although books and other source of knowledge define ageing process as a normal process that involve modification of the genetic factors, hormonal changes, and biological changes, it does not eliminate the occurrence of ageism among the elderly (Kydd et al., 2018). A rich number of research paper has demonstrated that the incidence of ageism in the health care institutions is widely recognized as a major threat to their quality of care, especially among the elderly and was more evident during Covid-19 Pandemic (Officer & de la Fuente- Núñez, 2018; Howell et al., 2020). The elderly has reported the nurses and physician were less friendly and not really engaged while providing nursing care and even noticed that they act differently when treating other younger patients.

On the other side, there also few studies that discover the positive attitudes of adults towards the elderly as this was influenced by positive age stereotypes. A study conducted by Nadia et al., (2022) had similar findings with other studies in Malaysia which found that the adult community in Malaysia (Ali & Aziz, 2018; Singh et al., 2018) had showed positive attitudes towards elderly. The adults treat the elderly with full of respect because they are being comfortable talking to the older adults and agreed that the elderly are far-sighted individuals in all aspects of life. Besides, the study also reflects a good social interaction between these two generations as adults keen to listen to the advice given by the older adults.

In short, there are still minimal number of research paper that had discussed the incidence of ageism in Malaysia, especially among the older adults. Moreover, there is a need to deeply discover the positive or negative experience of age stereotyping among the elderly, within context of Malaysia as the occurrence of the ageism might be differ or similar with the other countries. Indeed, Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching, one of the institutions that serves as a home for the elderly in Sarawak was chosen as a platform to conduct this research. Hence, this study would discuss on the difficulties and listen to the voices of older adults in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching regarding their personal experiences of ageism. It should be noted that the answers provided by the elderly has no relation to the experiences of being lived in the residential institution.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The following are research questions that guided this study:

1. What are older adults' self-perceptions of ageing?
2. What are older adults' personal experiences of becoming older?
3. What are the ramifications or impact of age-stereotypes among older adults?

### **1.4 Research Aim**

The purpose of this study is mainly to explore experiences in ageism among elderly residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching.

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore older adults' self-perceptions of ageing.
2. To explore older adults' personal experiences of becoming older.
3. To discuss the ramifications or impact of age-stereotypes among older adults.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

### **1.6.1 Towards Elderly**

The data obtained from this research were including more than words as the emotions, feelings, facial expressions, and behaviours have also been described. Hence, this will provide a clear description of the elderly worldviews in this study as these aspects help to elucidate the individual experiences of the older adults regarding ageism. Indeed, the elder's rights as a human being were able to be maintained and protected, as this research could foster public education and other interventions in combating ageism.

### **1.6.2 Contribution to nursing research**

This study also helps to call attention of the nursing researchers out there, especially for gerontology nursing experts to conduct more study on the topic of ageism. There is a list of research paper that conduct a quantitative study on the prevalence of ageism, the co-relations between ageism and self-perceptions of ageing and the attitudes of young adults towards the elderly. However, there are still minimal exposure of the qualitative findings that explore the experiences of ageism among elderly. Thus, this study helps to generate ideas and serves as a guidance for future research in Malaysia.

### **1.6.3 To the society**

This study aid in providing insight of ageism experienced by the older adults. The results and findings from the study will be beneficial for the younger generation to have a better understanding of the phenomenon itself as it was generated from the older adults' views. Moreover, the society would have a better view on understanding the normal process of ageing which indirectly reduce the negative stereotypes and attitudes towards graying population.

## **1.7 Definition of terms**

### **1.7.1 Experiences**

According to Merriam Webster (2022), an experience was defined as a direct observation or participation in an event as a basis of knowledge. In this study, experience was described by the researcher as it refers to the social event or a phenomenon that encountered by the participants (elderly residents in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching).

### **1.7.2 Ageism**

Based on Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism, written by Liat Ayalon and Clemens Tesch-Römer (2018), the term ageism was defined by Robert Neil Butler as prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping behaviours by one age group against another age group. However, in this study, ageism was referring to the problem or difficulties that have been faced by the participants due to their chronological age.

### **1.7.3 Elderly Resident**

United Nation (2022) has defined elderly resident as individuals who ranged from age 60 and above, that residing or living in a place for some length of time (Merriam Webster, 2022). In this study, elderly resident is best described as a group of older adults that aged between 60 to 85 years old that lived in Rumah Seri Kenangan Kuching which have been selected as participants of the study.

## **1.8 Summary**

Ageism is a broad topic that should capture the eyes of the society since it has a detrimental effect towards every generation. The society even did not realize that ageism is slowly been normalized within the culture. A wealth of research paper had mentioned the incidence of loneliness, poor health status and elder neglect that significantly were influenced by the age-stereotypes. However, there only few numbers of research paper discuss the experiences of ageism and its impact towards the senior citizen in Malaysia. Thus, this study would be a great start to spread awareness of this issue and help to reverse the consequences in the future. By reducing this social gap, the quality of health and well-being among senior citizen will be improved at the same time. Hence, the literature review related to the interest of this study has further discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The phenomenon of ageism does not initially develop from one root, but the factors that influenced this phenomenon are widely diverse in term of settings, situations, and behaviours (Liat Ayalon & Clemens Tesch-Römer, 2018). Ageism arises at many different stages, such as individual level, structural level, and the interaction between the society also perpetuates its occurrence. With corresponding to these factors, the negative vibes will slowly be haunting the elderly, which in return they start to manifest the consequences of ageism. Hence, there is a need to explore the experiences and consequences of ageism among the elderly to further understand this phenomenon, particularly within the context of Malaysia.

Within this chapter, literature that relevant to the interest of this study were discussed. This literature review attempts to focus on discussing the experiences of ageism towards the older adults and the aftermath of the ageism. All these literatures have been searched up using the electronic database of PubMed, Google Scholar, National Library of Medicine, Wiley Online Library, and Sage University. The literature has been filtered by using keywords ‘age-stereotype,’ ‘discrimination,’ ‘experiences of ageism,’ ‘older adults,’ ‘elderly’ and ‘impact of ageism.’ The reason behind this action is to narrow down the scope of searching and choosing the literature.

Additionally, as one of the strategies in reviewing the literature, there were several literatures that have been screened based on the inclusion criteria, which were identified as below:

- (i) Studies that focus on ageism among older adults
- (ii) Quantitative or/and qualitative studies, articles, journals
- (iii) Research paper that published from 2016 onwards or found to be pertinent to the study.
- (iv) Full text is available in English or Malay.

## **2.1 Experiences of ageism towards older adults**

### **2.1.1 Internalized Ageism**

Stereotypes related to ageing process, most commonly towards the older adults as a target population, had become internalized across the lifespan. According to Levy (2009), internalized stereotypes unconsciously embodied in an individual since childhood and gradually develop throughout adulthood. As proposed by Social Embodiment Theory (SET), a long-time exposure of the negative attitudes will eventually exert their influence on physiological, behavioural, and psychological aspects. To support this statement, a mixed-method study done by Mc Darby et al. (2022) in United States, recruiting older adults aged 65 and above as participants, stated that most of the older adults are conscious with their age throughout Covid-19 pandemic. Mc Darby et al. (2022) further reported that the older adults acknowledge