

Older women's lived experiences of gendered ageism

HelpAge

International



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Key findings

- Research with 18 older women from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda finds that they have experienced gendered ageism in at least one aspect of their lives.
- Their experiences are often exacerbated by personal and contextual factors such as health, financial status, marital or civil status, place of residence, access to work, loss or absence of family members, and sociocultural norms.
- Cumulative disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities experienced by women across the life course mean that older women are more likely to experience gendered ageism than both older and younger men, and younger women.
- Older women in all three countries experienced gendered ageism as a barrier to accessing the healthcare services they need.
- Older women also expressed concerns about their income security, and found gendered ageism a barrier to accessing work.
- Older women are not being treated equally in all areas of their lives. They want their voices to be heard, and their contributions acknowledged.
- Older women want governments to introduce better laws and policies to guarantee them equal rights.

Introduction

Older women are an integral part of our communities and of wider society. Yet as women age, they often report feeling invisible, and can face widespread discrimination based on both their age and gender.

Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards others or oneself based on age.¹ Gendered ageism can occur across the life course and affects both older women and men. However, older women are negatively impacted by both their age and their gender with far-reaching consequences.²

Although older women face the cumulative effects of ageism and sexism in many aspects of their lives, there has been limited research on the impacts, particularly with older women in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The World Health Organization’s *Global report on ageism* calls for more research in this area, including on the lived experiences of ageism from the perspective of older women and men.³ Our research aims to fill some of this gap and to bring older women’s voices to the forefront so that policy makers understand the impacts of gendered ageism and can design better laws and policies to ensure that older women are treated equally.

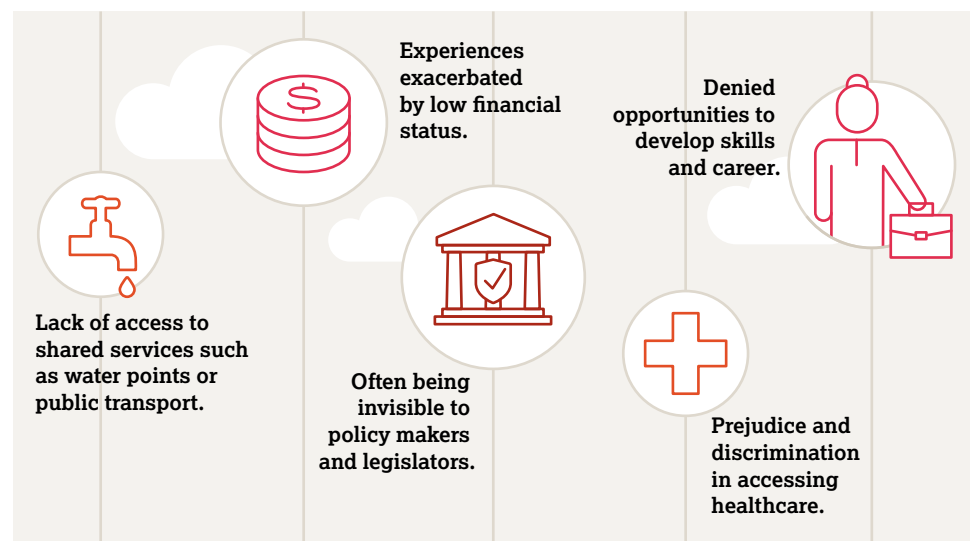
This brief presents the voices of 18 older women from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. It describes their lived experiences of gendered ageism and what changes they would like to see from those in positions of power – governments, UN agencies, civil society organisations, and donors – to take action to address gendered ageism.

Defining gendered ageism

Gendered ageism is the intersectionality of age and gender bias and discrimination. A recurring definition describes it as a double jeopardy, where two interacting power systems lead to an increased vulnerability.⁴ Although both men and women experience gendered ageism, evidence suggests that it has much worse consequences for older women in terms of their health and wellbeing.⁵ Yet prevailing attitudes and norms can render older women’s experiences of gendered ageism largely invisible.⁶

Older women report experiencing gendered ageism in many aspects of their lives and in many settings – in their relationships with family members (for example, around inheritance rights), and in their community (including when accessing shared services such as water points or public transport). It is even manifested in harmful social practices such as widow inheritance⁷ and witchcraft accusations. In the workplace, gendered ageism means that older women are denied opportunities to develop their skills and career. When accessing healthcare and other services, older women report experiencing prejudice and discrimination, resulting in their needs being neglected or ignored. At the national level, gendered ageism means that older women are often invisible to policy makers and legislators.

Older women experience gendered ageism in many parts of their lives





The 18 older women whose voices are presented in this brief are from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

In low- and middle-income countries, older women's experiences of gendered ageism may be compounded by poverty, social norms that constrain their participation in civic life, high rates of illiteracy, and lack of awareness about their rights.⁸ Evidence suggests that older women often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination throughout their lives, in access to land and property, work, pensions, healthcare and other public goods and services.⁹

As a result of the cumulative disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities that women experience across the life course, older women are more likely to experience discrimination in critical areas – from access to food and income security to inheritance rights, control of property and land, civic participation, political power, and social protection.¹⁰

Research methodology

HelpAge conducted in-depth interviews with 18 older women (aged 54–85 years) from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, from rural, peri-urban and urban areas (for details of the study sample, see Annex 1). We chose this approach so that we could hear directly from older women in detail about how gendered ageism manifests itself in their daily lives.

HelpAge network members (local civil society organisations) were selected to participate in this research based on their ability to conduct in-depth interviews and their experience of working on ageism and/or gender issues. Interviewers in each country were responsible for recruiting six participants (using non-probability sampling) and conducting the interviews. Partner organisations were trained in how to use the interview tools. Interviews lasted between one and three hours.

Responses were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis methods through a multi-stage process.¹¹ Themes within each broad category of interview questions were identified by an independent consultant. The findings are intended to capture the views of the older women interviewed, and are not intended to be representative of the population of older women in each location.

What older women tell us about their experiences of gendered ageism

Overall, the data revealed that all participants in our research had experienced gendered ageism in at least one aspect of their lives, and that their experiences were exacerbated by personal and contextual factors such as health, financial status, civil status, place of residence, loss or absence of family members, access to work, and sociocultural norms. All of the women interviewed reported declining health, which left them less able (or unable) to do physical work, and increased their dependence on others. Most women experienced poverty and lack of income security. When combined with family obligations such as providing for relatives and grandchildren, participants experienced a continuous strain on their limited resources. Some of the older women had been widowed, others had experienced family conflict, and most lacked the social and financial means to live comfortably in older age.

Many participants felt that their communities held negative perceptions about older women. This in turn determined how they viewed themselves in relation to their families and society (internalised ageism). Although some older women reported being treated with respect due to their age and gender (for example, being offered a seat on public transport), the negative experiences of gendered ageism far outweighed the positive examples.

Our analysis found that it was often difficult for older women to differentiate their experiences of ageism (directed towards all older people) from those of gendered ageism (directed towards older women). We have tried to distinguish between those experiences wherever possible.

The findings are presented here according to six main themes, reflecting how the older women interviewed have experienced gendered ageism in their daily lives:

- in health services;
- in work, financial resources and income security;
- in civic participation and access to justice;
- in the family and through access to land and property;
- as a driver of violence, abuse and neglect;
- and in access to public goods and services.



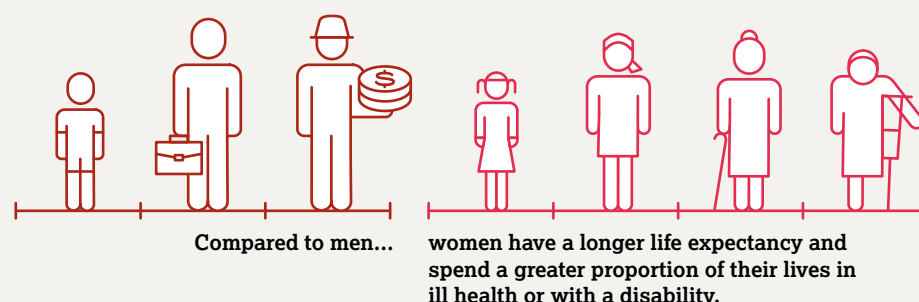
Steve Okumu/HelpAge International (Kenya)

Gendered ageism in health services

BOX 1

Gender influences health inequalities

Globally, women have a longer life expectancy than men,¹² and spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health or with a disability. Due to unequal power relations, unequal distribution of care responsibilities, discrimination and exclusion on the grounds of gender across the life course, women are also more likely to face multidimensional poverty in older age.^{13, 14} This has profound effects on their health and wellbeing. Studies have also documented disparities in older women's access to preventive care and treatment.¹⁵



Older women in all three countries cited gendered ageism as a barrier to accessing health services that meet their needs. Common issues they noted included: lack of time and attention from health workers, and lack of person-centred care; disrespectful attitudes and behaviours of health workers; and structural/systemic issues that create barriers to accessing good-quality care. The combined impact of these shortcomings was that older women were denied their equal right to health, autonomy, choice, dignity and life.



Women reported that doctors often googled medicines that neither relieved nor cured their conditions.

The older women who took part in our research believed that doctors lacked adequate training to provide specialised care for older women; that they offered impersonalised treatments; and, due to lack of interest in treating older female patients, that they prescribed generic medicine (painkillers) regardless of one's health complaint. Participants also reported that doctors often googled treatments to prescribe medicines that neither relieved nor cured older women's health conditions. When asked for a referral, doctors reportedly refused to cooperate. Sometimes, doctors were perceived to diagnose an older female patient's illness without hearing the full details. Consequently, older women reported either receiving an incorrect diagnosis or being denied care altogether. Participants also indicated older women who were much older were experiencing even greater neglect within the healthcare system. Overall, older women reported being made to feel like they were a "waste" of medical resources.

"Sometimes when I go to the hospitals, they can't even see that I am [an] older woman who needs to be cared for, but I am used to that, I just take it as it is, I know that we are not respected because we [are] considered as just consumers without being productive."

Older woman, 75, rural area, Rwanda

"... when you go to the hospital, they say, 'this one is too old, we are wasting medicine, it's better she dies'. And if a younger woman goes, they know that she still has more years to live."

Older woman, 70, peri-urban area, Kenya

Older women's dissatisfactory healthcare experiences were exacerbated by the disrespectful attitudes and behaviours of some healthcare workers. Participants reported that doctors, especially male doctors, were often rude and authoritarian. They would often joke about older women, mock them, refuse to listen to them and to take their symptoms or complaints seriously, and make them wait unnecessarily by deliberately taking breaks (while attending to male patients). Consequently, participants felt that older women are "treated like dogs", that they are "left to die", and that they are "not anybody in front of doctors".

"Some of them are rude... very tough, they don't have mercy with us at hospital."

Older woman, 62, urban area, Uganda

"Older women are not recognised... as human beings. They are treated like second-hand [class] citizens. Nobody is bothered about them. You go [to a healthcare facility] and definitely you will be given an aspirin, not anything concerning your treatment [or] your sickness."

Older woman, 62, urban area, Uganda



Unpaid care and domestic work provided by women is a key factor in gender inequality.

Gendered ageism in work, financial resources, and income security

BOX 2

Gender inequality impacts older women's economic empowerment

Older women are an integral part of labour markets, both paid and unpaid, but gendered ageism can lead to unequal opportunities for work, impacting older women's economic empowerment and income security. Older women face greater economic insecurity than older men.¹⁶

A key contributing factor to gender inequality in old age, especially in terms of income, is the disproportionate amount of unpaid care and domestic work that women provide in their families and communities over the life course.¹⁷ Consequently, their contributions are undervalued, which undermines their economic empowerment and disadvantages them financially in later life through limited (or no) access to pensions and health insurance.

Although legal systems often promote equal employment opportunities, older women still experience gendered ageism at work,¹⁸ through discriminatory recruitment practices and not being considered for career opportunities.



Ben Small/HelpAge International (Uganda)

Our research found that older women in all three countries were concerned about their income security. Although several participants had a history of working in the formal sector, most were currently working in the informal sector – but all had experienced income insecurity because of gendered ageism. Older women reported common experiences in relation to income insecurity, including: lack of access to work; poor treatment in the workplace; and financial stress due to unpaid care responsibilities.

Access to paid work was limited by two related factors: social norms and perceptions that consider older women unsuitable for employment; and age discrimination in job advertisements and recruitment processes. Social norms about the unemployability of older women sometimes led to perceptions that older women had “no right” or were “not allowed” to work. These norms also influenced older women’s own beliefs about their suitability for work opportunities in both formal and informal settings, sometimes preventing them looking for paid work.



Benj Bimks/HelpAge International (Kenya)

“... older women... are not allowed to work... There is no dignity in working as an old woman because nobody respects your age.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

“... they segregate older women when it comes to work... They claim that the older women are [too] weak to do anything productive, compared to the men.”

Older woman, 62, urban area, Uganda

“We don’t even try [to look for work] because no one could give me an opportunity to work at my age... I have no right to work.”

Older woman, 75, rural area, Rwanda

Although several participants tried to defy social norms and look for employment, they encountered age and/or gender discrimination when they applied (or wanted to apply) for work. This denied them their right to work, sometimes resulting in poverty.

“... because [I] am old and weak and a woman... I was refused work in a rice company...”

Older woman, 83, rural area, Uganda

“[At] my current age, it’s not easy... Wherever I apply, I can’t be even shortlisted... Generally they mention that one of the requirements is to be under 35... When I was younger, I never faced the same issue, which means all this is because of my age.”

Older woman, 54, urban area, Rwanda

“There was a time I went to town... I was 50 years by that time and looking for a hotel job. I asked them to give me any job, even the dishwashing job, but they refused. They said they need younger men and women.”

Older woman, 68, peri-urban area, Kenya



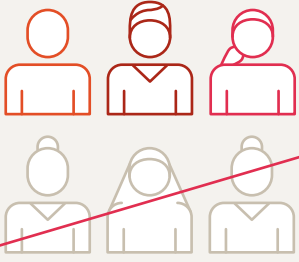
Another common concern shared by the older women we interviewed was the poor treatment of older women at work and denial of opportunities for career growth and development, highlighting the role of age and gender bias in employment. Sometimes, unfriendly work environments could compel older women to consider early retirement.

“[Older women are] treated badly by their bosses... they have no value, as if [you are] some dumped rubbish because you became old.”

Older woman, 77, urban area, Uganda

“... [when I had] three years [left] to retire, the staff proposed me to go [and learn how to use a] computer, [but] the headteacher said ‘no, no, you will waste these funds, she’s retiring’. So, I missed that chance.”

Older woman, 66, rural area, Kenya



Half the participants in Rwanda have been forced into early retirement or early termination of their work contract.

Older women in all three countries had experienced unfair treatment in the workplace. However, forced retirement seemed particularly prevalent in Rwanda, where half the participants reported having been coerced into early retirement or early termination of their work contract.

“I feel sad... I was working in a local government development programme with [the] ability to do it, but they fired me because of my age, though I performed very well.”

Older woman, 80, peri-urban area, Rwanda

“I worked as a human resources manager, and I was forced to leave because of my age before the retirement age... and that truly hurt me a lot... the owner of the company just told me to resign because they wanted someone who was physically fitter than me.”

Older woman, 54, urban area, Rwanda

To address the lack of work opportunities for older women, some of the women in our study had decided to set up their own business. However, they reported that older women often lack access to the capital required to set up a business, and financial institutions are often unwilling to provide business loans to older women.

“Financial institutions are very difficult. They don’t give older women a loan, even those who would want to work... to do business... they wouldn’t give you.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya



HelpAge International (Kenya)

As well as being ineligible for business loans, older women also reported being treated poorly at banks, where staff would make them stand in a queue and “chase” them from the premises if they have no money.

“... in the banks... they see you in the lines and can’t even give you space to sit... You have to stand.”

Older woman, 69, rural area, Uganda

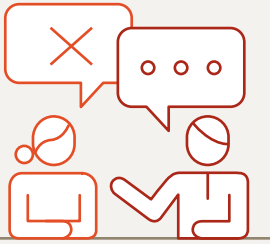
“... they segregate us due to our old age. There [are] places we can’t just go [to], like the bank, due to lack of money, they chase us from there.”

Older woman, 83, rural area, Uganda

Although pensions and social protection support in the three countries varies, participants agreed that governments must do more to support older women’s income security and wellbeing. Some of the older women in our study suggested that one way to help would be for governments to ensure that older women have access to appropriate work opportunities that would allow them to continue to be a part of their communities and not a “burden to society”.



Ben Small/HelpAge International (Uganda)



Older women are often not allowed to speak at meetings, they are treated unequally, especially by older men.

Gendered ageism as a barrier to civic participation and access to justice

BOX 3

Older women's access to decision-making spaces

Ageist stereotypes, gendered social and cultural norms can prevent older women from participating fully in their family, their community, and in civic or political arenas. Women are often under-represented or excluded from political and decision-making processes, despite a lifetime of accumulated knowledge and experience of the issues facing their community.¹⁹ For older women, gendered ageism is another barrier to having their voices heard – a barrier to their empowerment.

Older women tell us they want to have more power in decision-making and want their voices to be heard and responded to.

“What I would like from the government is to educate older women to know their rights and for older women to tell the government to give them power in decision-making so that we all age together with men. And that can only come when we have a voice recognised by the government.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

The older women who took part in our research reported being treated unequally in village or community meetings due to their age and gender. They were often not allowed to speak at these meetings, especially by older men. Older women's knowledge of the issue being discussed was also wilfully ignored. And older women were denied leadership positions in their community because they were assumed to be less capable than older men.

“Gender discrimination is very often in the rural areas whereby when you go to barazas [community meetings chaired by the chief] they wouldn't let a woman speak. The men are the ones that speak... Some of them are even less educated than you are, but they won't give you that chance because you are a woman... Even if you are in a position... you are given lesser powers than a man.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

“I wanted to stand for a position in my community [as] a secretary for our savings group and the men refused, saying I am so old I won't understand the figures... It hurt me... I can still count money.”

Older woman, 72, peri-urban area, Uganda



Fernand Mugisha/NSINDAGIZA (Rwanda)

Older women also described the suppression of their voices.

“... we are being mistreated. We don’t have a voice. You don’t get to talk because you are a woman, you are a widow, you know? We get it rough in the community.”

Older woman, 68, peri-urban area, Kenya

Gendered ageism was also apparent in older women’s access to justice and law enforcement. Participants explained that when an older woman approaches their village chief or the police for help, they are asked to be represented by a son for a detailed conversation. In the event that the woman does not have a son or cannot be represented by one, she may be made to wait for hours before somebody listens to what she has to say. And if an older woman’s account of an incident contradicts what a younger person says happened, the authorities would generally believe the younger person.

“Even the chiefs... they say, ‘Mama, what have you come for?’ Before you even tell him what you want, [he says] ‘go and tell your son to come and see me’. You tell him you don’t have a son. He tells you, ‘Sit there’ and you will sit in that office the whole afternoon.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

“... I was abused, and no one bothered. When you go to the police or chief, the chief would support the younger person and the old person will be told, ‘why don’t you go home, why are you bringing problems to the younger people?’”

Older woman, 70, peri-urban area, Kenya

The older women in our research reported that they were generally viewed unfavourably in their communities, which sometimes led to them being denied timely help and justice. They also shared that, often, older men in positions of power were more receptive to contributions from younger, educated women than from women their own age. As such, men (of any age) and younger women were reported to be held in higher esteem than older women.

Gendered ageism in the family and in access to land and property

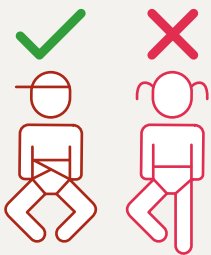
The older women in our research reported experiencing prejudice and discrimination within their family and local community. They reported a lack of support from, and misunderstandings with, family members. Due to sociocultural perceptions of older women as “useless” and unproductive members of society, participants felt that they were only valued if they made financial contributions to the family, failing which they could be perceived as a “burden”. The transactional nature of intragenerational relationships, along with a deficit of intergenerational solidarity and reciprocity, left many of the older women who were interviewed feeling alone, isolated and unworthy.

*“... if you do not assist the family, the family will not like you...
If you do not send them money, they have no business with you.”*

Older woman, 68, peri-urban area, Kenya

Prejudice and discrimination against older women manifests in two main ways: discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes; and discriminatory practices around inheritance rights and property ownership.

Discriminatory attitudes within the family and community were influenced by sociocultural norms and values, particularly around childbearing. Participants explained that older women who did not have children, especially sons, were devalued within their family and community, and were considered to have made a “mistake” in life. Consequently, they felt that they did not get the same respect as women with children, and particularly women with sons.



Older women who did not have children, especially sons, were devalued in their family and community.

“There are some older women who never had sons, they are also harassed in the community, the ones who never had sons, those who never had children... People see it like you made a mistake...”

Older woman, 66, rural area, Kenya

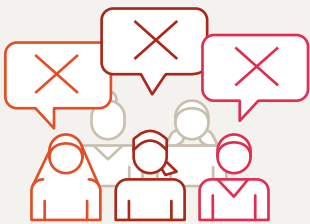
Sometimes, older women’s marital or civil and reproductive status was used against them, to deprive them of their rightful inheritance. Some older women reported that they were considered unworthy of an inheritance if they did not have a husband or son.

“What I can say is that at my age, we are really hated because of not having a husband or not being married. I will go to claim land from my father... even if it is your brother, they hate you because you will go demanding a piece of land to cultivate. I am not blessed with money to buy land.”

Older woman, 68, peri-urban area, Kenya



Ben Small/HelpAge International (Uganda)



Three out of five older women who reported discriminatory experiences felt that they had “no voice” in matters of property dispute.

Although paternal property disputes were usually confined within the family, older women explained that marital property disputes often spilled over into the community, against older women’s wishes, leading to collective coercion for women to give up their property rights. Older women in Kenya and Uganda reported property-grabbing.

“... the older women have no voice in my community... When my husband died, he left me with a big shamba [farm]... but to date they [community members] say, ‘this woman cannot have this’. I am already old, I don’t have a child, so they say, ‘this woman is finished. Let us take the shamba’. And they are taking the shamba by force. So, old women... we don’t have a voice.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

“Older women are neglected and our property is grabbed so there should be policies to help us protect our property. I bought my land when I was young... Now they want to take it without helping me to put it on lease.”

Older woman, 66, urban area, Uganda

Older women also reported that they are not considered as capable owners and title-holders of land, reflecting deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that deprive older women of economic freedom and security.

“... you cannot ask for things like land. Even when you try to buy land, it’s not easy in many families for a woman to be accepted to have a title deed... You are not allowed to own. Land is for the men...”

Older woman, 61, rural area, Kenya

Notably, three of the five older women who reported discriminatory experiences felt that they had “no voice” in matters of property disputes. This illustrates how sociocultural norms deprive older women of agency, power, and the freedom to manage their lives independently.

Gendered ageism as a driver of violence, abuse and neglect

BOX 4

Violence, abuse and neglect against older women

Gender-based violence can occur across the life course and may be exacerbated in older age.²⁰ The prevalence of ageism and sexism means older women can be subject to new and distinct forms of violence and abuse.²¹

Older women experience all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, yet they remain invisible in datasets and are routinely excluded from policy and programmes to prevent and address violence against women and girls.²² A reason for this could be that violence is often seen to be experienced by younger women.

Ageist and sexist beliefs and practices are pervasive and may lead to older women being subjected to violence, abuse and neglect, at home, in the community, and from institutions.²³

Although we did not ask direct questions about older women's experiences of violence, abuse and neglect, some women did talk about what they had experienced and seen.

According to the older women in our research, some older women (especially widows) are at risk of physical, emotional, financial and sexual violence, and neglect, as they were commonly perceived to be alone and powerless. Within the family and community context, older women reported experiencing physical, psychological and financial abuse. The participants below highlighted theft of property, sexual harassment and living with the threat of violence.

“Violence and land grabbing... the men and children beat their older women and the children also steal our property... I have seen... my own daughter stealing my land and selling it without my permission.”

Older woman, 83, rural area, Uganda

“There is a pastor across here, the first time I went to him, he prayed for me [for a cure for my disease]. The second and the third time, he told me to go at six in the morning for him to pray for me. He thought that when I go at six in the morning, we would have sex... he knows I am an old woman. It is not right.”

Older woman, 70, peri-urban, Kenya

“When he [my son] is hungry... he comes home very angry. I lock the house, keep quiet and sleep. Because he... [has mental health issues], he can kill you any time.”

Older woman, 68, peri-urban, Kenya

In most cases, older women had no choice but to continue living with those who had perpetrated violence, abuse or neglect. None of the women interviewed reported receiving help, assistance or even a fair hearing when they complained about issues to the police or village chief. Rather, as reported in the previous section, they faced barriers to accessing justice, including being dismissed or not having their complaint heard because they are an older woman. The older women interviewed held out little hope for any change in this respect.

Gendered ageism in access to public goods and services

Older women reported facing prejudice and discrimination when they access public resources, especially when fetching water from collection points and using public transport. They felt victimised due to their health status and reduced ability to move fast, climb stairs, or stand for long periods of time. Of the 18 older women interviewed, 15 reported experiencing at least some difficulty while walking or climbing stairs.



Older women reported facing prejudice when fetching water from collection points and using public transport.

“If you go into a transport, it is chaotic. When the bus is moving, they push you... [saying] ‘old woman, get in faster’... Transport and infrastructure [is] very poor for older people and older women.”

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

“When we go to fetch water... you can see how they despise you. They will move your jerrycan and when you complain, they start insults, which are not good for older people.”

Older woman, 70, peri-urban area, Kenya

“When you go to the borehole to get water, the youth can’t give you space until they’re done, so the older woman has to wait.”

Older woman, 69, rural area, Uganda

The older women interviewed believed that society should be more aware of and more sensitive to older women’s needs, and do more to support older people with physical impairments.

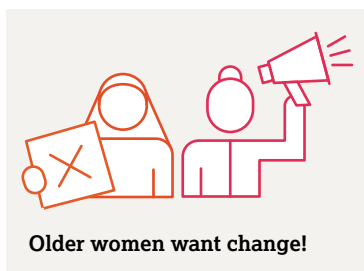


Ben Small/HelpAge International (Uganda)

Changes older women would like to see

Participants were asked how they thought gendered ageism could be addressed. What changes would they like to see? And what could governments do to tackle the issue?

Older women said they wanted:



1. Better laws and policies to protect all older people but particularly to protect older women's rights.

"There should be policies to guarantee the rights of older women."

Older woman, 61, rural area, Kenya

"There is only one way of preventing gendered ageism – the government should come up with laws."

Older woman, 70, peri-urban area, Kenya

"I want government to fight for the rights of women."

Older woman, 66, urban area, Uganda

"The government should put in place strategies to combat gendered ageism."

Older woman, 72, urban area, Rwanda

2. Governments to educate older women about their rights and gendered ageism.

"Gendered ageism is something that is hurting... The moment you are denied all your rights, you remain unknown to the public... The government should... train women and advocate for them to know their rights so that they become equal to men."

Older woman, 85, urban area, Kenya

3. Healthcare facilities closer to where they live, with staff who have specialist knowledge of common age-related risks and conditions. They also want medicines to be available free of charge and health insurance for all older people.

"The government should put more efforts in creating more possibilities concerning healthcare by giving health insurance to older people, which can work in all hospitals in the country for better health to older people like me."

Older woman, 74, rural area, Rwanda

Conclusions

Our research shows that gendered ageism is a barrier to older women realising their human rights. Yet there is a scarcity of evidence on the drivers and manifestations of gendered ageism in low- and middle-income countries, and how older people's social identities (including race, class, civil status, disability status) might intersect to increase their disadvantage.

Our research has made more visible the daily experiences of gendered ageism of 18 older women in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. In doing so, we hope that their voices, ideas and solutions encourage policy makers and governments to do much more to address gendered ageism and deliver equal rights for older women everywhere.

Recommendations

When we asked older women how we can create equality in older age, one older woman from Uganda replied:

“All people should be treated the same and not segregated but also, we need to work together to fight such issues.”

While older women and men and their families and communities can clearly do a great deal to tackle gendered ageism, other changes need to be driven by governments, UN agencies and civil society organisations.

Based on our research with these 18 older women and on other recent research conducted by HelpAge, we propose nine recommendations that would deliver the changes older women want to see.

Governments and UN agencies should:

- 1.** Use evidence-based strategies outlined in the *Global report on ageism* (policy and laws, educational and intergenerational interventions)²⁴ and use a gender lens to tackle gendered ageism.²⁵
- 2.** Prioritise awareness-raising campaigns that target harmful gender stereotypes and ageist and discriminatory attitudes towards older women in particular.
- 3.** Support and adopt a UN convention that establishes the rights to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of age, and obliges Member States to be proactive in tackling gendered ageism and identifying and removing barriers to equal participation for all women in all areas of life.
- 4.** Adopt, enforce and implement comprehensive laws that prohibit all forms of discrimination (including multiple and intersectional discrimination) on the basis of age, gender, and other social identities, and create obligations to advance equality for older women.

Civil society organisations should:

- 5.** Promote understanding and knowledge on how to respect, protect and fulfil the full rights of older women.
- 6.** Advocate for governments to combat gendered ageism.
- 7.** Raise awareness and build understanding within communities about what gendered ageism is and why it is vital that everyone works together to challenge it.
- 8.** Engage older women and ensure that their voices are heard in decision-making spaces at all levels.
- 9.** Work with governments and other actors responsible for providing goods, facilities and services to older people, to raise awareness about how gendered ageism prevents older women realising their rights, and how practices and attitudes can be changed to address gendered ageism.

Annex 1

Country	Age	Residence	Education	Civil status	Living arrangement
Kenya	85	Urban	College	Widowed	Alone
Kenya	66	Rural	High school	Widowed	Grandchildren
Kenya	61	Rural	College	Married	Husband + children
Kenya	70	Peri-urban	Form 4	Widowed	Son + grandchildren
Kenya	68	Peri-urban	Form 7	Widowed	Children
Kenya	68	Peri-urban	College	Widowed	Children
Rwanda	72	Urban	High school	Widowed	Grandchildren
Rwanda	54	Urban	Postgraduate	Married	Husband + children
Rwanda	74	Rural	No school	Single	Twin sister
Rwanda	80	Rural	No school	Married	Grandchildren
Rwanda	77	Urban	High school	Married	Children
Rwanda	75	Rural	No school	Married	Grandchildren
Uganda	62	Urban	High school	Single	Children + grandchildren
Uganda	66	Urban	High school	Single	Children + grandchildren
Uganda	77	Urban	High school	Widowed	Children + grandchildren
Uganda	72	Peri-urban	High school	Widowed	Children + grandchildren
Uganda	83	Rural	No school	Divorced	Grandchildren
Uganda	69	Rural	High school	Widowed	Grandchildren

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HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.

Acknowledgements

This analysis was produced by HelpAge, with support from AARP. All views expressed in the report may not necessarily reflect the views of AARP.



HelpAge International would like to thank all the older women for giving their time and contributing their experiences and views to enrich this data.

We would also like to thank the following for their support in conducting the interviews: Ageing Concern Foundation (Kenya), Uganda Reach the Aged (Uganda), and NSINDAGIZA (Rwanda).

Thanks to all those within HelpAge International and beyond who reviewed the brief and gave useful inputs.

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Published by HelpAge International in support of the
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