



“I used to be a farmer. I owned 25 acres in my village. I planted rice across all the land. As my husband and I have no children, we lived together with our nephew and nieces. One day, they told me that we are old, that we should not work on the farm and we should give away all the land we own. After my nieces and nephew took all our property, we left our village to stay at the [care home]. Now, I have no property. Nothing. I am full of regret about my life.”

Daw Khin Aye

Ageism in Myanmar

When Daw Khin Aye was forced to give all her property away because her family believed she was “too old” to possess it, she was denied her right to autonomy, her right to make decisions without being controlled by anyone else. This is ageism.

What is ageism?

Ageism is stereotyping, prejudicing and discriminating against a person based on their age. It leaves older people excluded, considered different, restricted in what they can do or simply treated like they do not exist. It prevents age equality, denies older people their human rights, and can have a serious impact on health and wellbeing.

Ageism is based on oversimplified assumptions about older people and older age. Older age is diverse in Myanmar. Yet ageism characterises it as time of frailty, dependency, or mental and physical decline. But this is not a universal reality and it ignores individual experiences of growing older.

Older people are affected by ageism in many ways:

- **Employment:** assumptions that older people are incapable of work can make it difficult to find a job or forces them to retire.
- **Healthcare:** health workers may treat older people poorly or deny them treatment, prioritising others and saying their illness is just down to “old age”.
- **Financial:** banks may deny older people credit on the expectation they will not pay it back.
- **Attitudes:** older people may be told they are “too old” to wear certain clothes, to take part in sports or community activities, or to learn new skills. They may receive a worse quality service in restaurants, shops or when accessing public services due to negative views towards older age, which can lead to individuals being made to wait or staff being rude or impatient.

The media, particularly through television, films and advertising, reinforces these ideas about older people by emphasising youth and beauty while depicting older people as stereotypically frail, dependent and senile. This exacerbates ageism within society, and is a significant barrier in overcoming these negative views.

Ageism is widespread in Myanmar and around the world. It is normalised and very rarely challenged. For older people experiencing ageism, it can be subtle and they may not realise the way they are being treated is due to their age. There needs to be a growing recognition of ageism across Myanmar to show how it impacts older people. Ageism must always be challenged, and raising awareness is a key first step.

HelpAge

International

Stories of ageism in Myanmar



“I worked at a public parking space. I collected parking fees for all the cars, motorbikes and bicycles. After I worked for eight years as a cash collector, senior staff were not willing to hire me anymore. They said I am too slow, and I could not make as much money as before. They even accused me of making many financial mistakes. I felt depressed so I quit. I could not stand the pressure at work anymore, although I still believe that I am capable of that job. Now I have no income. We older people should have a chance to work in a suitable role.”

Daw Than Htay

“In my city, when the Ocean supermarket opened, older people loved to go there. You can find all the shops in one place. But families say older people don’t belong in there. We, older people are supposed to go to the monastery and religious places. Society thinks it is not appropriate for us to go anywhere except religious places.”

U Shein Win



“I wanted to use Facebook because it is very popular in our country. Although I am familiar with my mobile phone, I still have no idea about Facebook. I asked my sons to create an account for me. They wouldn’t let me use it and told me it is a waste of money [due to the cost of data] and told me only to watch movies. Even my granddaughter told me that using Facebook costs at least 2,000 kyats (US\$1.30) a day and I should not use it at my age.”

Daw Khin San Win

“After I retired from the military, I worked in a livestock factory where I looked after pigs. Suddenly, I suffered a stroke and the factory manager fired me. He told me to find another job. I didn’t get any pension, compensation or benefits. They just fire me although I worked for many years in the factory. I felt terrible about that. Since I was having serious health issues, I could not find another job to make money. Since then I have been struggling with financial problems. Now I can’t even take care of myself.”

U Kyi Htwe



If you want to tell us about your experience of ageism or to get involved in campaigning against ageism, please get in touch with ben.small@helpage.org.

Photos by Ben Small/HelpAge International



@HelpAge_Myanmar



HelpAge International Myanmar

Copyright © HelpAge International 2019

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Any parts of this publication may be reproduced without permission for non-profit and educational purposes. Please credit HelpAge International clearly and send us a copy or a link.