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Ageism in Gauteng Public Service: the experiences of the older professional employees

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2022

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Ageism in Gauteng Public Service: The Experiences of the Older Professional Employees



A research report submitted to the Department of Social Work,

Faculty of Humanities at the

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg,

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Work in the field of Occupational Social Work.

By

Catherine Nompumelelo Ramphomane

April 2022

DECLARATION

I, Catherine Nompumelelo Ramphomane, declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Work in Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks go to my family for your sacrifices and endless support in making my dreams come true.

Thanks to the department for granting me permission to conduct the study.

And

to my research participants, your contribution in my research study has fuelled my passion and to Dr Nkala-Dlamini my supervisor for believing in me.

ABSTRACT

Ageism, like racism and sexism, is a form of discrimination prevalent in the workplace. Ageism manifests in attitudes, behaviour, institutional practices, and policies. This study focused on age discrimination of older professional employees in the South African public service. The aim of this qualitative research study, using thematic analysis methods, was to determine if there are age-differentiated practices and policies in the workplace, from the older professional employee's perspective. A total of ten participants between the ages of 50 and 65 years were selected from the workforce population of 2000 employees using purposive sampling. As part of the study, the expert sampling method was employed to recruit social workers to participate in a focus group session. The study was framed using Erikson's Development Theory with specific reference to the seventh stage of Generativity and Stagnation, and a systemicunderstanding of ageing by applying the Person-in-Environment contextual perspective. The main findings of the study indicated that the participant's self-regard was influenced by their perceived self-worth, level of integration in the workplace, and the value they place on their accumulated professional knowledge and experiences. The research results will contribute to social work knowledge about the older skilled professional person's experiences in the workplace and the support required to ensure appropriate accommodation.

Keywords: ageism, institutional ageism, occupational social work, older skilled professional employees, age discrimination

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ageism is a practice of stereotyping persons based on their age. Although the practice of ageism can be experienced by people at any age, this study was interested in the South African older professional (has a tertiary qualification) employees from the age group 50 years until 65 years of age.

Ageism in the workplace takes the form of overt and or covert discrimination (Chou & Choi, 2011; Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013). In this study, the pervasiveness of ageism in the South African workplace was studied, taking into cognisance the country's constitution, which recognises human rights as articulated in the Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).South Africa has specific legislation aimed at empowering older persons and protecting their rights. One such legislation is the Older Person Act 13 of 2006 which recognises the rights of older persons and establishes a framework for their safety and security in areas such as the workplace.

The prevalence of ageism is propelled by the increased number of older persons in the workplace (Jackson, 2014; Jin & Baumgartner, 2019; Schwab, 2015). This global trend of older employees choosing to remain economically active has also been observed in South Africa. According to Stats SA (2014), South Africa reported growth from 10.7 per cent in 1996 to 26.2 per cent in 2011 of older employees in the workplace. The choice to remain economically active is reported to be driven by several reasons, such as a need for personal growth, inadequate retirement provisions and family circumstances (Chou & Choi, 2011; Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013).

According to Villasio (2018), depression and anxiety amongst older persons who have experienced ageism are triggered by the fear of job loss and pronounced feelings of being devalued. In this study, the older professional employee is viewed within the context of the Erikson Social Development theory of Generativity versus Stagnation (Dixon & Stein, 2006).

As part of this study, the researcher explored participants experiences of employers' recognition and adherence to the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, which obligates South African employers to treat all employees equally regardless of race, age, or creed. This study explored ageism and its manifestation in South African public service workplaces.

The workplace is identified as providing a unique opportunity to explore ageism from the perspective of the older employee. Work contributes significantly to the lives of the employees and influence employee self-identity. This can be described in terms of ways in which employment contributes towards an individual's economic stability and personal fulfilment. According to Conye (2011), employment provides structure, productivity, and a platform for positive social interaction.

This study, therefore, explored ageism in the workplace from the older professional employees' experiences. Key areas of this enquiry included an understanding of whether the employer has modified employment policies and practices to accommodate the older employee, and whether the older professional employee has made adaptations to ensure integration and alignment with the workplace.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The South African workplace is a microcosm of the broader society and as such the intersection between diverse races, gender and age groups provides a fertile ground for exploration of ageism. Furthermore, the history of discriminatory practices in the South African workplace provides an opportunity to explore the accommodation of older employees in the workplace. According to North and Fiske (2013), ageism, primarily in the workplace, is more about the consumption of shared resources and provides a compelling context in which to study institutionalised ageism such as age-based stereotypes and accommodation of older workers, amongst others. In a South African workplace, this study may provide an opportunity for occupational social workers to understand ageism in the workplace and the nature of the support required by the older professional to thrive.

The conceptualisation of ageism and its complexity has been given global attention by various researchers such as Iversen, Larsen and Solem (2009), Chou (2012) and Jackson (2014), amongst others. In South Africa, the studies either focused on the meso or the macro impact of

social and economic policies geared towards promoting the quality-of-life post retirement (Atumah et al., 2019; Makiwane et al., 2012). Other studies have focused on the legal aspects of adherence to anti-discrimination laws in the workplace, focussing on labour relations and promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace While there have been enquiries conducted on the impact of workplace discrimination and ageism on older employees, there is limited focus on ageism in the South African workplace, from the older professional employee's perspective. Therefore, this study specifically explored the individual experiences of older professional workers. The study sought to explore the experiences of the 50-65-year-old cohort concerning reasonable accommodation, age discrimination and integration in the South African Public service workplace. Specifically the study is located within the Gauteng Economic Development Department one of the largest provincial departments with multiple subsidiaries across the province.

This study sought to explore the impact of discrimination on the older professional employee's mental health within the workplace. While the study focuses on the negative impact of ageism, it also solicits information related to positive ageism. Understanding how ageism impacts on the older person's developmental needs and mental health is key in the provision of occupational social work service. Hence, an investigation of the age stereotyping experiences from the older person's perspective is insightful. This view is strengthened by the 20 years longitudinal study by Luo et al. (2011)which reported that 63 percent of the respondents over the age of fifty-three (53) indicated that they experienced depression and anxiety due to feeling devalued and excluded at work. Shippee T, Wilkinson , Schafer ;Shippee . (2017) reported a similar trend in a study on the long-term impact of ageism amongst retired nurses.

The impact of ageism on job security has been studied by scholars such as Villosio (2008), Grover (2017). According to Villosio (2008), job insecurity is propelled by the fear of losing financial independence, the constant threat of job loss, and overt and covert discrimination. This current study sought to identify the characteristics of an older employee-friendly workplace and the type of accommodation required by the older employees to thrive. Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson and Garnett (2011) introduced the notion of "thriving" in a workplace as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and learning". 'Reasonable accommodation' is normally used to advocate for accommodating persons with disabilities in the workplace. Accommodations are considered "reasonable" if they do not create an undue hardship or a direct threat (Grover, 2017). This study was concerned with defining and describing the characterisation of 'reasonable accommodation' of the older

employee in the workplace. The notion of an older employee-friendly workplace was a concept that the I sought to study, not only from scholarly research but also from the perspective of the older professional employee (Armstrong & Stassen, 2008; Cahill et al., 2015). The information gathered will contribute to identifying and characterising an older-person-friendly workplace.

This research places particular emphasis on how the older professional employee navigates and engages their own aging process in a work context. In addition the research identifies what the older professional employees regard as essential interventions that organisations/employers must undertake to alleviate the adverse effects of aging. The findings will be compared with successful aging strategies described by Ebner, Freund and Baltes (2006).

The study provides insights that would contribute to the advancement of occupational social work tools and services. According to Jackson (2014), social workers have the skills and tools to counteract ageism such as providing counselling and teaching older people coping mechanisms and advocating on their behalf The unique responsibility of occupational social work in the accommodation of the older professional employee in the public service is an uncharted arena that this study is exploring. Personal problems of employees may affect their work life (Wahl & Weisman, 2003). The workplace is, therefore, acknowledged for its potential as an effective and successful place to explore ageism, and the potential role of specialised competence of occupational social workers in supporting and intervening on behalf of older employees (Mor-Barak, 2006; Wahl, 2006; Du Plessis, 2001).

In conclusion, documenting the experiences of the older professional worker will provide empirical information on how older employees deal with age-related challenges in the work environment.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

There is insufficient body of knowledge on ageism as experienced by older professional employee and how they adapt in the workplace.

The study is located within the Public Sector, which is one of the largest employers in South Africa and has employees from multi-cultural backgrounds and diverse professional disciplines. This environment was selected for its diversity and deemed conducive to collect data aligned to the research objectives,

This research study contributes to the body of knowledge and understanding of ageism, and the impact of age stereotyping in the workplace.

Secondly, the exploration of ageism was conducted against the backdrop of progressive laws promoting equality in the South African workplace. The study explored the concept of accommodation and creation of older worker-friendly workplaces. Thirdly, the study proposed broadening of the focus on prevention of discrimination in the workplace to include ageism which currently is not a focal area. Fourthly, this research study explored solutions on handling ageism and development of interventions to counter ageism in the workplace, from the older professional employee's perspective. Lastly, this study confirmed the importance of specialised social work services that supports and advocates for the creation of enabling work environments. In addition the study puts a spotlight on the provision of targeted social work interventions to ensure successful adaptation of aging employees in the workplace. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the knowledge and overall improvement of the treatment of older professional employees and giving them a voice to define what is an older employee friendly employment environment.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of the study are as follows:

1.4.1 PRIMARY AIM

To explore and document the experiences of the professional older employees working in the Gauteng Economic Development Department.

1.4.2 OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the perceptions of the skilled older professional employee about institutionalised ageism in the workplace.
2. To explore the practices and policies exercised by the employer to ensure reasonable accommodation and integration of the skilled older professional employee.
3. To determine the nature of care offered by the organisation to the skilled older professional employee.

4. To explore the perceptions and understanding of ageism by the social workers in Gauteng Economic Development Department.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The key questions explored in this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of the skilled older professional employees about the institutionalised ageism in the workplace?
2. What are the practices and policies exercised by the employer to ensure reasonable accommodation and integration of the skilled older employees?
3. What support is provided by the employer to the skilled older professional employees?
4. What are the perceptions and understanding of ageism of the generic social workers employed by the Gauteng Economic Development Department and its subsidiaries as part of the support provided by the employer?

1.6 DEFINING OF CONCEPTS

Table 1 Definition of Concepts

Concept	Explanation
Ageism	In this study , ageism in the workplace is defined as "the systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against older people within the workplace because of their age"(Dennis & Thomas, 2007, p.84).
Institutional Ageism	Institutional ageism is described as a prejudice against or in favour of actions inherent in the practice of establishment , such as the workplace (Wilkinson & Ferraro, 2004). Atumah(2016) defines institutionalised ageism as "*workplace where age-related discrimination is evidenced by the unfair treatment against employees of certain age*." (Atumah, 2016, p.20).
Older professional employee	The concept of the older professional worker or employee in this study refers to an economically active person between the ages of 50 – 65 years old. There remains no established chronological age at which to define an 'older worker' in the work environment. In the workplace, employment

	policies and statutory provisions in the pension funds tend to define the retirement age as an indicator of expiration of employment. Researchers such as Mc Carthy, Herath, Cross & Cleveland (2014) refer to the older person as a person whose age ranges from 50 years old to 65 years old.
Occupational Social Work (OSW)	According to Netting, Kettner, McMurtry & Thomas (2017), occupational social work involves assisting employees, their families and management with challenges that relate to social functioning and human relationships in the workplace. This study embraces Dugmore (2013, p. 23), definition of occupational social work being a unique type of social work practice employing universal social work ethics, knowledge, and methods of intervention, appropriate to the practice of social work in the workplace."
Discrimination	Discrimination is the act of making unfair and prejudicial distinctions between human beings based on the groups, class, and/or other factors such as age to which they are perceived to belong (Chou, 2012; Margo & Jackson, 2014). There are different types of workplace discrimination. However, it tends to take the form of covert or overt discrimination (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). In this study, the focus is on perceived age discrimination in the workplace.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, the research design used was exploratory with qualitative approach. The study sample was composed of ten participants and three employed social workers. Purposive sampling method was used to select ten older employees and expert sampling methodology was used to select the three social workers. The sample was drawn from employees between the ages of 50 and 65 years residing in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Interviews were conducted either face to face or using technology platforms when requested by the participants. The interviews with the older professional employees were facilitated using a semi-structured interview schedule and a focus group guide used to conduct the focus group. The data collection instrument was developed in accordance with the research objectives and reference to previous international and national literature. The use of a semi-structured data collection instrument allowed me to gain in-depth understanding of the participants lived experiences as older professional employees in the workplace. Thematic Analysis (TA) was utilised as the

systematic construct to analyse the data collected. The interviews and focus group session were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim before being subjected to an analysis.

In addition, the study conducted one focus group session with the three social workers employed within the Gauteng Economic Development Department and its subsidiaries. The focus group session explored the social workers' perspectives regarding the impact of ageism and the support provided to the older professional employee

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

This research report is divided into five chapters covering research overview, theoretical framework, literature review, presentation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter one covers an introduction which contextualises this topic and explains the nature of the problem; the objectives, research questions are noted and furthermore describes the research design and methodology.

Chapter two articulates the theoretical frameworks of Erikson human development model and that of Person-in-Environment theory are presented as part of the advancement of the stated research objectives. The second part of chapter two covers the literature review which explores the concept of ageism from a scholarly perspective and presents the ageism trends broadly and specifically in the South African public service workplace. In addition the literature review provides a foundation for exploring and explaining the findings of the research as well as the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter three presents the research methodology, sampling procedures, research instrumentation, methods of , data collection and analysis. In addition the chapter records ethe study ‘s ethical considerations including , the strengths and limitations of the research design.

Chapter four outlines the participant reported experiences and the findings are gathered ,analysed and presented through graphs, figures, and includes the participation quotations.

Lastly, chapter five, articulates the main findings ,conclusions and recommendations including possible future research.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two sections namely the adopted theoretical frameworks and the literature review conducted as part of the research assignment. Theoretical framework in this study describes the most appropriate theory that underpins the concepts explored in this study.

The literature review provided the platform to explore, explore the concept of ageism both locally and internationally. Secondly the literature review allowed for comparison and framing of the current data collected within scholarly views on ageism in the workplace. Lastly, literature review afforded the researcher insights required to locate the current study within existing frameworks (Boote & Beile, 2005).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

The study used two theoretical frameworks. The first framework is Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory (Graves & Larkin, 2006). The second framework is the Person-in-environment guide as advocated by Wahl and Weisman (2003).

Adopting the two frameworks provided a complete view and understanding of the older professional employee.

2.2.1 ERIKSON STAGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Erikson's (1968) model provides the basis to explore the adult person in the workplace. It enables an understanding of older people and their developmental needs. Erikson's psychosocial development theory is premised on the notion that the realisation of each developmental stage is key to progression to the next level. A lack of alignment between individuals and society leads to the development of disorders (Sokol, 2009).

According to Dixon and Stein (2006), Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory advances eight stages of development. The initial stage is trust versus mistrust, which stresses that trusting in the first year of life shapes one's view of later life. The second stage is identified

as autonomy. The third stage is initiative versus guilt; it is a period of widening one's social world. The fourth stage is described as industry versus inferiority, and it is about mastering knowledge at a preschool level. The fifth stage is identity versus identity confusion in the adolescent years. The sixth developmental phase is intimacy versus isolation, which occurs during early adulthood. This study focused on the seventh stage, the generativity versus stagnation developmental stage during middle adulthood. The last stage is integrity versus despair; it is during late adulthood where introspection and reflections on the past occur.

Figure 1 below, illustrates Erikson's eight stages of human development.



Figure 1 Erikson's Eight Stages of Human Development (Thompson, 2007)

2.2.1.1 Generativity and stagnation

This stage is characterised by the individual seeking to leave a legacy whilst nurturing others. Erikson observed that those who had the opportunity to nurture others felt valued and tended to have a positive outlook on life. In contrast, those who were isolated and felt devalued displayed feelings of stagnation and despair (Graves & Larkin, 2006).

Generativity and stagnation stage is characterised by generation of new beings, new products, and innovative ideas, as well as self-generation concerned with further identity development. Generativity refers to "making your mark" on the world by developing and nurturing others. (Graves & Larkin, 2006).

Key characteristics of generativity include:

(a) Developing relationships with family and community

(b) Mentoring and Coaching others(Graves & Larkin, 2006).

Stagnation refers to inability to connect with others and feeling devalued. Stagnant individuals may feel disconnected or uninvolved and excluded within their community. Those who fail to attain the generativity feel unproductive in and uninvolved with the world (Cherry, 2022).

Characteristics of stagnation include:

(a) Being self-centred

(b) Isolation

(c) Lack of motivation

(d) Lack of self-care and self-improvement ((Graves & Larkin, 2006).

Successful adaptation to age-associated changes and positive accommodation in the workplace are important consideration when engineering an older person-friendly workplace. Applying the Erikson model will provide valuable insights in the crafting flexible age-related changes by employees and employers in the workplace (Abraham & Hansson, 1995; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Sokol, 2009).The Erikson model provides occupational social workers with a platform to assess and develop targeted interventions to address and create awareness about this vulnerable group in the workplace.

2.2.2 PERSON-IN-ENVIRONMENT (PIE) AS IT RELATES TO THE OLDER PERSON

The person-in-environment (PIE) perspective in social work is a practice-guiding principle that highlights the importance of understanding an individual and their behaviour, considering the environmental contexts in which they live and act (Kondrat, 2011). In this study, the focus was on how the workplace (its policies and practices) may impact positively or negatively on the individual older professional worker. The contextual aspects such as intrinsic (for example, family influences, financial influences, sense of self) and extrinsic forces (for example, feeling valued and needed by colleagues) were taken into consideration when studying the experiences of the older professional worker (Warburton, Moore, Clune & Hodgkin, 2014).

The person-in-environment framework emphasises the impact of the environment on enhancing or inhibiting the older person's functioning (Wahl, Hans-Weiner 2006). This theory emphasises understanding the individual within their environmental context. The PIE framework acknowledges the interplay between environmental forces and human conditions (Pardeck, 1988). In this regard, the person-in-environment perspective on ageing, frequently coined as environmental gerontology, is premised on the view that old age is a period of adult development significantly swayed and predisposed by the environment (Wahl & Weisman, 2003).In other words, this theoretical framework views contextual factors as crucial determinants of everyday behaviour and well-being in later life. The person-in-environment theory is characterised by acknowledging the environment as complex and consisting of continuous, interlocking processes of relationships,(Allen-Mears & Lane, 1987*).* Person-in-environment is anchored on systems theory and the ecological perspective.

A study of ageism should consider both micro psycho-social aspects as well as the macro social, cultural, and economic factors that influence the ageing process (Binstock,2006; Makiwane & Kwizera, 2006). In this regard, this study is premised on the view that the older professional employee navigates personal, professional (at work) and physical or physiological challenges during their ageing journey. This multiplicity of factors that influence the older worker is defined in the person-in-environment theoretical framework as central to understanding ageism, ageing and adaptations employed by this cohort.

The study has considered social work provision as part of the promotion of older employee friendly workplaces. Hence the inclusion of social workers in the study. The review and assessment of the department social work service is done utilising the South African occupational social work model advocated by Kruger and Van Breda (2001).

Kruger and Van Breda (2001) adopt person-in-environment to advance the South African occupational social work model. The PIE allows for a multi-dimensional view of the older professional employee experiencing both internal workplace, and external drivers and influencers. In addition, the Kruger, and Van Breda (2001) model allows for different social work interventions depending on the challenges faced by the older employee.

Using these theoretical frameworks enabled the researcher to view the older professional employee holistically and appreciate the complicated dynamics that influence their perception of self and their experiences in the workplace. Adopting the two frameworks provided a complete view and understanding of the older professional employee.

2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.3.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature search on ageism in the workplace confirms how this topic has been studied across the globe and within South Africa. In this study, the literature review focuses on the definitions of ageism, its impact on the workplace, and the benefits of accommodating and integrating the older person in the workplace. The literature review also considers occupational social work models and advances the relevance and applicability of the South African occupational social work model created by Kruger and Van Breda (2001). The model articulated by Kruger and Van Breda (2001) acknowledges the workplace as part of the broader community and provides an integrated social work service delivery approach (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009).

2.3.2 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF AGEISM

The conceptualisation of ageism has been a subject of debate since Butler, in 1969, defined ageism "as a process of systemic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old" (Butler, 1969 as cited in Iverson et al., 2009, p.6). Iverson et al.,(2009) expanded the definition to include the social and psychological impact of ageism, the prejudicial behaviours that demonstrate ageism, such as age categorisation, and its pervasiveness across micro, meso, and macro levels. Iversen et al., (2009) proposed that ageism be defined as negative or positive categorisation or bias towards older people based on their age. This discrimination is based on the perception that being old or elderly justifies a particular negative/positive treatment. Furthermore, ageism is reported to be either overt and/or subtle and covert (Powel, 2010).

There is alignment between Iversen et al., (2009) and the views of contemporary scholars, such as Jin and Baumgartner (2019), on the definition and the constitution of ageism. According to Jin and Baumgartner (2019, p.4), ageism includes three aspects, namely:

(a) Negative and harmful opinions of older people;
(b) Biased and unfair practices against older people, especially in the workplace; and
(c) Established and entrenched policies and practices that normalise the negative and prejudicial opinions against older people.

The multiplicity and complexity of ageism is demonstrated by various studies, in the quest to understand its manifestation and impact. Iverson et al., (2009) clarify and define the different types of ageism by suggesting three types, which are: the **cognitive component** (which describes the beliefs and age stereotypes); the **affective ageism** (which is about the prejudicial attitudes); the **behavioural ageism** (discriminatory practice which includes both direct and indirect form of ageism). In the workplace, legislation and policies may establish a positive platform to decry discrimination formally and structurally, however, the affective and behavioural related ageism may persist (Brownell, 2014).

Entrenched discrimination results in decreased opportunities for personal growth and the productive existence of the older person (Newsom & Vogt, 2016). The authors conclude that ageism is a social problem that disproportionately affects older persons and should be treated as a human rights concern.

2.3.3 AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Atumah and Hassan (2019) note that ageism in the workplace is characterised by reducing opportunities, underutilisation of older persons, and unequal and negative treatment of older persons due to their age. Ageism results in older persons feeling undervalued and having underutilised experiences and knowledge. The impact of under-valuing the older person is reported to be long-lasting, and often results in an employee's low self-esteem and withdrawal from the labour market (Chou & Choi, 2011; Lam, Leibbrandt & Ranchod, 2006; Shippee et al., 2017).

2.3.4 TYPES OF AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Jin and Baumgartner (2019) identify two types of ageism practices in the workplace. The first is the social aspect of discrimination, whose basis is that older persons lack motivation and are unproductive, resulting in being overlooked for opportunities and undervalued. This type of ageism is highlighted by various scholars, including Chou and Choi (2011) and Iverson et al. (2009), who describe workplace abuse as any overt or covert mistreatment. Overt forms of discrimination include openly expressing prejudices toward certain groups (Truxillo, Finkelstein, Pytlovany & Jenkins, 2016*),* while covert or subtle forms of discrimination include

micro-aggressions, among other forms of discrimination (Malinen & Johnston, 2013; Truxillo et al., 2016).

The second type of ageism in the workplace arises from age-biased employment policies. Jin and Baumgartner (2019) assert that age discriminating policies and practices entrench and institutionalise ageism. Research conducted by scholars such as Atumah and Abdulazees (2019) report on employment advertisement placing age as one of the criteria for employment. Similar institutionalised discriminatory employment practices have been observed in Ghana and Kenya (Nhongo, 2006). Therefore, employment practices and policies normalise and embed ageism within the workplace Taneva (2016).

2.3.5 AGEISM IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The ageism phenomenon within the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) workplace context is described as different from the Western experience due to the social and cultural context. Kamoche (2011) suggests that SSA workplaces are characterised by a dual and sometimes contradictory social and cultural context. An example of duality is whereby at work an employee may have a junior position whilst in their community they have a significant role. In addition, within their communities, older people are respected and valued whilst within the workplace they may be treated negatively and disregarded (Kamoche, 2011). According to Kamoche (2011) , African employees "often behave as though they inhabit two parallel worlds, the world of work and a broader society" (Kamoche 2011, p.20). These dualities make the African context a configuration of "exogenous and endogenous stimuli" that interactively influence management of corporates (Zoogah, 2015, p33).

The notion of external and internal persuasion influencing how the older employees is treated in the workplace was explored by Rego (2020), in a study conducted at a company in Mozambique. The study found that African managers, whilst acknowledging the value of the older employees , they tended to employ younger employees at the expense of the older worker who may be qualified.

2.3.6 THE SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

It is reported that this cohort of over fifty (50) would have experienced first-hand restrictions of movement, limited career choices and other apartheid system-imposed restrictions (Lam,

Leibrandt & Ranchhod, 2006). The social and work environment they find themselves in is influenced by the past (political system and apartheid system) and the present (social and economic) system. This generation can be viewed as the transitional generation influenced by the history of the country and need to adapt to new challenges due to economic and social change. South Africa's older workers are confronted with a constricted labour market, resulting in high unemployment and dwindling prospects for employment, especially for those with poor education and training (Stats SA Census Report, 2017). The Census report (2017) confirms a huge difference in the levels of education across racial lines, where older white South Africans have attained higher education than any other race group. In addition, the report indicates not only a racial slant on the education levels, but also highlights a bias toward white males (Stats SA Census Report, 2017). The focus on older professional employees is motivated, amongst others, by the historical socio-political factors and the need to understand how the educated older workers experience the workplace.

2.3.6.1 The Public Service as a South African Workplace

The Public Service accounts for 80 per cent of the public sector employment. The total number of public sector employment increased from 2.16 million in 2008 to 2.69 million at the end of 2014. The growth was driven by employment in national, provincial as well as local government. Africans make up 77 per cent of public sector employment compared to 66 per cent in the private sector. Females comprise 52 per cent of the public sector workforce compared to 44 per cent in the private sector (Stats SA, 2014).

2.3.6.2 Democratisation of the South African workplace labour laws

In South Africa, racially constructed work and social policies have prevailed; the older worker would have experienced prolonged levels of discrimination – prior to democracy, as a young professional person (Murray, 2006). Post democracy, policy makers have introduced modern employment laws promoting equality for example the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998; Labour Relations Amendment Act 6 of 2014 (LRA) , amongst others. Both these Acts promote equal rights and provide platform to handle disputes relating to issues such as discrimination, harassment etc. The Employment Equity Act (EEA) specifically provides remedies for reported discrimination in the workplace. For example in section 10 of the EEA, an employee complaining unfair discrimination in any employment policy or practice, can refer the dispute to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA') for investigation. The labour relations act advances social justice and advances modern

structures for dispute resolution whilst upholding employee rights. The promulgated laws promote equality and advance human rights across the board and explicitly denounce age discrimination (Walt, 2002).

In addition to promulgation of laws, there has been considerable research undertaken to investigate the level of compliance with the new labour laws and transformation within South Africa. Most of the studies focused on racial and gender inclusion. Ageism, as a discriminatory practice, tends not to be given the same prominence. There are limited studies on institutionalised ageism and age discriminatory practices in the South African workplace (Smallwood & Haupt, 2007).

According to Brownell (2014), most countries in Europe and Northern America have progressive legislation to curb discrimination, however, the harassment of the older worker in the workplace has prevailed. Despite these legislative improvements, negative images continue to depict older adults as a burden, a liability and incapable of keeping up with the changing demands of the workplace (Brownell, 2014). Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of ageism in the South African workplace.

2.3.7 AGEISM AND SEXISM

Scholars have reported an intersectionality between ageism and sexism across various industries. Edstrom(2018) refer to this intersectionality as gendered ageism which specifically identifies age and gender stereotypes only faced by female employees. The authors identify the double jeopardy of being older and female in the workplace as a key factor that contributes to poor female upward mobility. In a South African context, the prejudice is amplified by the race factor. Hence, it is reported that a Black older female employee would experience multiple negative stereotyping, from a race , gender, and age-related discrimination perspective Marcus,(2021).

The South African women face gender inequalities at the workplace where there is unequal pay for equal work, sexual harassment, and ageism, amongst others. In a study conducted by Stats SA (2011) and a study by Women Economic Empowerment, a DTI(department of trade and industry) report (2011), the findings showed that women were less represented in the professional and technical categories whereas most men, who were economically active, tended to be in professional and in technical related positions. The under representation could be one of the reasons for the prevalence of gender stereotype.

2.3.8 THE IMPACT OF AGEISM

Ageism affects the older person within the workplace and influences how they relate to colleagues and perform. Ageism is reported to result in a negative sense of self, and loss of stability because of the perceived threat of job loss and constant fear of losing one's social and economic status (Villosio et al., 2008).

Clendon and Walker (2016) found a positive correlation between job insecurity and an increased level of anxiety. It is reported that this correlation is significant amongst older people. This observation is also recorded in a longitudinal study by Shippee (2017), who established that older employee who have experienced discrimination due to their age reported a lack of desire to pursue personal development, and older persons isolating themselves from the broader team due to self-doubt and experiencing feelings of being persecuted (Clendon & Walker, 2016). In explaining this behavioural pattern, Jin and Baumgartner (2019) coined the term **decreased affective commitment,** where older persons reported diminished commitment to work due to workplace age discrimination. The increased anxiety due to increased job insecurity precipitated by age discrimination must be assessed against the backdrop of an increased number of older people remaining economically active.

2.3.9 OLDER WORKER FRIENDLY ORGANISATIONS

The increase in the aging population and the significant presence of the economically active older workers has necessitated a reflection on how to create older worker-friendly workplaces. According to Veth ((2011), businesses are focusing on combating negative stereotypes (and meta stereotypes) and discrimination against older workers. This is driven by skills shortage and a need to retain the skilled older worker. This focus is underpinned by business and profit motives, hence the designing of policies to promote positive aging and older worker friendly workplaces (Barnes, 2009). In a study by Boehm, Kunze and Bruch (2014) on current modern human resource practices, participants highlighted the importance of "age inclusive practices and promotion of an age-diverse tolerant climate among employees of all ages as essential for business success."

Scholars such as Wang.(2012), and Boehm et al., (2014) describe older worker-friendly workplaces as environments whose policies and practices enable all employees to thrive,

regardless of age. Some of the age-friendly human resources practices may include reduced working hours, flexible work options, adjusting job roles, refresher training and extra annual leave; encouraging older workers to undertake new projects, tasks, and job roles, learn new skills, and mentoring/coaching others on the job are regarded as part of the accommodation and integration of the older worker (Boehm et al., 2014).

2.3.10 BENEFITS OF ACCOMMODATION OF THE OLDER PERSON

The benefit of engaging the older person in the workplace has been documented across sectors by scholars (Chou & Choi, 2010; Powell, 2010; Smallwood & Haupt, 2007). In a study conducted by Smallwood and Haupt (2007) in the South African construction industry, it is reported that while the work was physically demanding, older workers were adding value and were less prone to accidents.

The benefit of accommodating the older professional employee is reported to be positive not only for the individual but also for society. Older employee labour participation improves health and well-being and may contribute to skills and knowledge generation within the workplace. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Golden Age Index Report (2018), older persons have accumulated experience and skills developed over a lengthy period of employment and using these experienced resources would benefit the workplace and the younger employees (Mitchell & Meacheam, 2011; Newsom & Vogt, 2016).

The workplace of the future should promote diversity and nurture a multi-generational workforce. The multi-generations in the workplace provide a melting point of ideas and an increased potential for innovation (Powell, 2010; Mitchell & Meacheam, 2011). Kirton (2014) suggests that the workplace of the future should effectively engage and promote multi-generational workforce. Modern employers recognise the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the diverse workplace and leverage each generation's talents and strengths to benefit their organisation's bottom lines. The presence of all these generations in the workplace, with different values and priorities, provide a melting point of ideas and potential for innovation. Organisations that lack an effective strategy to address intergenerational challenges and focus on generation-specific needs may find themselves at a competitive disadvantage, mired in conflict and missing valuable opportunities (Kirton, 2014).

2.3.11 OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK IN THE WORKPLACE

Work plays a significant role in most adults' lives. Its importance for self-actualisation, social identity and self-worth is recognised by occupational social workers (Mor-Barack, 2000).
The workplace is regarded as an environment where social bonds are formed and is an environment that provides financial security. Hughes (2007) reports that while the workplace is an important facet in an adult's life, for the older worker, the workplace may not only be an institution that ensures financial stability but also a place for self-affirmation and social support. While work may have a positive impact on the older person, it may also be a source of stress and mental illness.

Occupational social work services are anchored in the systems and ecological theory, which views an employee as a complex being with multiple roles. The services provided by occupational social work are at the micro, meso and macro levels. According to Netting, Kettner, McMurtry and Thomas (1998),occupational social work is preoccupied with providing support to individuals, their families, and the employer. The service provided aims to address psychosocial challenges and promote healthy human relationships in the workplace. Occupational social work is, therefore, systemic in how it approaches its interventions and focuses on the whole person including their environment.

There are various Occupational Social Work Practice Models (OSWPM) that have been touted in the literature. However, for this study, the Kruger, and Van Breda (2001) approach is regarded as an integrated model that would be the most appropriate occupational social work in a South African workplace setting.

This integrative model moves away from the traditional evolution-based approach and acknowledges the person-in-environment. Kruger and Van Breda coin the phrase "position" which puts emphasis on the flexibility and fluidity in the use of the different social work practice methods rather than a consecutive progression" from one stage to another, (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001).

This model offers "four practice positions from which the occupational social worker may intervene in any situation, depending on the nature of the client's problem or need" (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009, p.322). The occupational social work delivery model articulated by Kruger and Van Breda (2001) has four intervention pillars discussed below.

Restorative: Restorative position assumes that the person has rights that must be protected and upheld. This is inherent in the traditional social work humanistic model. The focus is on the "personal needs or problems of clients" outside the work environment , conceptualised as 'employee-as-person. This position aims to restore employees problem-solving and coping competence (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009, p.324). The role of the occupational social worker is identified as an activist , facilitator, community worker, counsellor , and provider of solutions (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001).

Promotive: The emphasis is on enriching the employee and improving their status as older persons. The focus is on supporting or advocating for the enhancement of the "social functioning and well-being of clients. The emphasis is on "prevention, education and the development" of employees in their "non-work-related needs" (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009, p.293). The occupational social worker's role includes being a teacher, facilitator, an enabler, and coach (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001, p.949).

Work-in-person: The focus is on the person (older employee) within the workplace and the role they occupy. This position addresses the "person-as-employee" and their work roles (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009, p.325). Furthermore, the spotlight is on the interaction between people ,systems, and the work environment .The occupational social worker adopts the following roles of being a mediator, arbitrator, and facilitator (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001).

Workplace interventions: Focuses on the workplace itself as an area which must change to uplift and uphold the rights of older persons. This last position focuses on the organisation or workplace and aims to create an enabling environment specifically advocating for change in the procedures , and policies (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001).The role of the occupational social worker is that of an organisational development consultant, change agent policymaker, (Kruger & Van Breda, 2001).

The integrative model, advanced above, provides the platform for a comprehensive service that includes traditional social work service, and preventative and promotive services. The Kruger and Van Breda model (2001) presents an opportunity for the occupational social worker to provide an integrated and holistic service that locates the older person within an eco-system.

2.4 CONCLUSION

The literature review chapter provided the theoretical foundation of ageism by exploring the different definitions and the manifestation of ageism in the workplace. In addition, the chapter highlighted the impact of ageism in the workplace and its impact on the individual employees, referencing the South African context. Lastly, the chapter introduced the occupational social work delivery model for providing support to the older professional employee in the workplace. The next chapter of the research report explains the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in the study. The research questions, aim and objectives underpinning this study are provided to explain the rationale for conducting this research study. A qualitative research design was adopted, influencing the sampling methods, choice of research instrumentation, data collection and the selection of thematic analysis. The sampling methods that were used to select participants, the research instruments and pretesting procedure, data collection, and data analysis method and approach are specified. The strengths and limitations of the research design are explained. Lastly, in this chapter, the researcher defends how trustworthiness was ensured, as well as the ethical considerations and procedures that were followed in the research study.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The qualitative research approach was recognised as the most suitable research approach for this study In this study, the qualitative approach allowed for an understanding of the older professional employee in the workplace and an exploration of their perception of their environment. Kothari (2004) asserts that qualitative research is concerned with the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behaviours, as well as the function of the researcher's insights and impressions.

The study was exploratory in nature. This approach explores how individuals or groups make meaning of a social or human problem (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014). The qualitative research was used to assist the researcher to answer questions about the complicated nature of ageism in the workplace, as well as to describe and understand the phenomena from the participant's perspective and lived experience (Creswell, 2009). Exploratory research generally use an inductive approach as its objective is to gather a deeper meaning of the subject (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Qualitative research suggests an emphasis on the qualities of entities, and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally assessed or graded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Weinreich (2009) argues that qualitative research provides the researcher with the

perspective and experiences of a specific group through immersion in a situation and direct interaction with the people under study. The purpose of qualitative research is to promote better self-understanding and increase awareness into the human condition (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014). The suitability of the qualitative research approach is premised on the approach being devoted to exploring and understanding meaning of the phenomena.

The qualitative exploratory research method was considered suitable for this research study due to the paucity of research on the definition and conceptualisation of ageism in the workplace An "emphasis on exploration, discovery and description" was employed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008 p.8). The intent of the researcher was to extract and interpret the meanings of the lived experience of participants through their description of actual phenomena in their "natural settings" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p.309).

The researcher selected the qualitative research as a suitable and relevant paradigm due to its flexibility and applicability in studying the subjective experiences of the older professional employees in relation to ageism in the workplace De Vos et al.(2011) maintain that qualitative research elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience, and perception.

The qualitative research was therefore found to be valuable and appropriate for this research study and facilitated the realisation of the research aims and objectives. The qualitative research assisted the researcher to explore and appreciate the complex nature of ageism and ageing in the workplace, as well as to describe and understand the phenomena from the participant's perspective and lived experience (Creswell, 2009).

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design was selected d by the researcher, shaped (rather than dictated) by the research aims and objectives responsive to the context and the targeted audience or respondents. The qualitative research design focus was to explore and gather insights about ageism as a phenomenon.

In this study, the researcher employed individual interviews and focus group session to collect data aligned to the research objectives. The individual interviews were designed to gather and explore information on the participant experiences as older employees and the focus group session aimed to investigate the social work services provided

Qualitative researchers are interested in the significance and implication, i.e., how the participants interact and derive meaning within their environment (Creswell, 2002;). In this regard, the study focussed on the older employees cohort and the environment they operate in which included the policies and practices in the workplace .

Research design focus on the research plan, i.e. how the data will be collected, the type of analysis to be performed. (Chetty, 2011:31). Ultimately the focus is on the end product and all the critical steps to achieve the desired research outcomes. The research design best suited for this study is exploratory as the researcher is interested in the experiences of the older professional worker in the workplace. In this regard, the researcher planned and used selected semi structured interviews as a method to collect data from the older professional workers in their work environment and conducted focus group session with the social workers who are currently delivering traditional social work service within the selected work environment. As part of the research design , open ended questions were crafted in line with the objectives and the focus group questions were developed to prompt and direct the discussions.

The plan to collect data from the two groups of participants was to ensure that firstly the objective of understanding and exploring the experiences of the older professional employee is attained and secondly the currently employer sponsored social work services are explored. The focus group session enabled the researcher to immerse oneself in the social worker environment.

In this sense, a research design was deemed as the well-designed blueprint in which selected research methods and procedures are connected to obtain a trustworthy and valid data for analyses, conclusions. The research design thus gives the researcher a practical research framework; solid basis for interpretation. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006:71) define research design as *"... operations to be performed, in order to test a specific hypothesis under a given condition*".

3.4 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLING STRATEGYAND SAMPLE

3.4.1. RESEARCH POPULATION

According to Majid,(2018), the term "population" refers to the full set of individuals or phenomenon that the researcher wants to study. In this study, the population from which the sample is drawn was sourced from the Gauteng Economic Development Department.

The Gauteng Economic Development employs over 2000 (two thousand) employees including those in the subsidiaries across the country (GED Annual report, 2021). The aim of the Gauteng Department of Economic Development (DED) is to lead and facilitate the development of the economic agenda of the Gauteng province. In its annual report it is stated *the objective of the Gauteng Department of Economic Development is to lead, facilitate and manage sustainable job creation and inclusive economic growth and development in the Gauteng city region.* Its subsidiaries including Cradle of Humankind World Heritage site; Gauteng Enterprise Propeller; Gauteng Gambling Board; Gauteng Growth and Development Agency (Innovation Hub, Automotive Industry Hub) Gauteng Liquor Board and Gauteng Tourism Authority. The department employs multi-disciplinary teams with offices located across the province (GED Annual report, 2021)

In this research, the study population was all employees between the ages of 50 and 65 years within the Gauteng Economic Development Department and its subsidiaries, and the resident

3.4.2 SAMPLING STRATEGY, SAMPLE, AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Sampling refers to selecting a subset of persons or things from a larger population, also known as a sampling frame (Scott & Morrison, 2007), to represent a particular population. Neuman (2011, p.20) defines a sample as "a portion selected from a population for a specific study."

In this study, two sampling procedures were employed. Firstly, the purposive sampling with regards to the selection of older professional workers participants and secondly, the expert sampling with regards to the selection of generic social workers.

3.4.2.1 Purposive Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling method as it provided the opportunity to gather specific data from a targeted cohort with the same typology (Regoli, 2015). Purposive sampling is defined as a way of sampling that the researcher determines according to the characteristics required from a targeted group for the study (Punch, 2014).

A homogeneous sample is selected to address a specific research question from a unit with specific characteristics (Creswell, 2007). A homogeneous purposive sample is chosen for

having a similar attribute or set of distinct characteristics (Regoli, 2015), in this instance, age, being economically active and being employed in the same workplace.

In this regard, the inclusion criteria were

- Aged from 50 to 65 years of age
- The person must have at least one tertiary qualification (post-matric qualification) and be employed in a technical and/or managerial position. This is because the research focuses on the professional skilled older person.

3.4.2.2 Expert Sampling

The second sampling method is called the expert sampling approach (for resident social workers). Expert sampling is used to capture knowledge rooted in a particular form of expertise (Creswell, 2002), in this instance, social work service. The social workers are registered practitioners employed by the Department of Gauteng Economic Services. The social workers provided specific expert information about the subject in question (Regoli, 2015).

The inclusion criteria for the social workers sample included:

Employed as a Social Worker or Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) Counsellor.

- Providing traditional (generic) social work or EAP services to the employees within the Gauteng Economic Department and its subsidiaries.

3.4.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

With the employer's permission, the researcher attended the staff meetings to explain the objectives of the research study. In addition, the researcher left a summary of the research objectives with her contact details on the notice board for those who matched the criteria and were willing to participate, to contact me. Employees who responded and matched the inclusion criteria were contacted and invited individually to participate in the study.

The researcher received consent forms from ten employees who were willing to participate in the research study and met the inclusion criteria. Paton (2002) asserts that there are no rules regarding sample size in qualitative research. The sample size is based on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of inquiry, what will be useful and credible, as well as what can be done with the available time and resources.

Furthermore, all the four departmental social workers were individually invited to participate in the focus group, voluntarily. After the research objectives of study was explained, only three agreed to participate in the focus group session. Once the invitation to participate was accepted, a date for the focus group was confirmed.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTATION

The term research instrument refers to any tool that the researcher employs to collect or obtain, measure, and analyse data relevant to the subject of specific research (De Vos et al., 2002). In addition, the tools are aligned with the research method selected. In this instance, the research method used is qualitative research.

The research instrument used to collect the data in this study was firstly, the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix D) and secondly, the focus group guide (Appendix G).

Semi-structured interview, according to De Vos et al. (2011), is the chief method of data collection in qualitative research and aims to attain a detailed understanding of the participant's perceptions or experiences.

A focus group was used to engage the professional social workers within the department and its subsidiaries. The focus group interview schedule explored the nature of the service and support provided by the resident social workers, and their understanding of the older employee's needs and challenges they faced. The session was allocated the duration of forty minutes.

3.6 PRE-TESTING THE RESEARCH TOOLS

The ultimate objective of the pre-testing was to evaluate the reliability and validity of the research instrument before distribution (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Only the interview guide was pre-tested as part of the rigour to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected. The focus group schedule was not pretested.

The practice of pre-testing is regarded as an effective technique for improving validity in qualitative data collection procedures. Supported by the very nature of qualitative research as an iterative process, the pre-test interaction to self-correct between design and implementation

ensures the best opportunity for attaining reliability and rigour in qualitative inquiry and analysis (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002).

Pre-testing the research instrument is important to identify problem areas such as the ambiguity of the questions. The inclusion criterion for the pre-testing participants was the same as the criterion used for the participants in the actual research study. Two participants were invited to participate in the pre-testing phase as part of strengthening the research design. The pre-testing process involved administering the interview to the participants to replicate how the data collection session was introduced and conducted with the actual research participants (Morse et al., 2002). The data collected during the pretesting was not incorporated in the actual research results. The pre-test outcome offered the researcher data which resulted in the revision some of the questions in the interview schedule.

3.7 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data collection methods include data analysis, respondent observation, and open-ended unstructured interviewing. These methods are designed to assist researchers to explore the meanings people assign to social phenomena. Worthen and Sanders (1987, p.50) characterise qualitative inquiry as a research method that is studied in natural environment, "utilising the researcher as the chief instrument in both data gathering and analysis". The strength of qualitative inquiry is its focus on unearthing authentic data which highlights everyday trends and configurations of tasks and meaning from the participant's view Maxwell (2005). This view underlines the centrality of the participants views and opinions and researcher obtaining first-hand data regarding the participants experiences on a particular subject.

Data collection is a systematic process of gathering and considering specific data to offer solutions to identified questions and then appraise the findings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Primary data collection is the process of collecting the original data by a researcher to achieve a specific research study purpose (Booth, Coulomb & Williams, 2008).

In this qualitative study the importance of quality data necessitated the researcher to rely on her interviewing, moderating, and counselling skills. The primary concern of qualitative researcher is to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of experiences and phenomena under investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) In this study, semi-structured interviews allowed

the researcher and the participant to engage in a conversation in real time. Semi-structured interview provided an opportunity for original and unexpected issues to be unearthed , which the researcher could investigate in more detail with probing questions.

3.7.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The semi-structured interview schedule was selected because of its simplicity allowing probing and provided a platform to explore emergent themes during the interviews. Such a method allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants and contributed to the researcher being saturated or fully immersed in the subject being studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

In this study, data were collected using in-person interviews with exception of three participants where virtual interviews were held at the request of the older professional employees. Those sessions held in person were conducted in a ventilated room and all Covid protocols adhered to.
Each semi structured interviews lasted on average for an hour

The researcher constantly monitored the interview process and checked with the participant if they were still comfortable to answer and proceed with the interview. None of the participant indicated discomfort or reluctance to complete the interview. In all the sessions participants were thanked for their time and insights.

3.7.1.1 Face-to-face Interview Schedule

The tool included the following areas, aligned with the research objectives:

(a) Biographical data (age, length of service, qualifications).
(b) Older professional employee's perspective and experience of employment policies and practices within the workplace.
(c) Older professional employee's perception and experience of ageism.
(d) Older professional employee's personal and professional challenges in the workplace.
(e) Level of accommodation and support provided (or not) to the older professional employee.

3.7.2 FOCUS GROUP

In this study the primary objective was to gather information from experts in this instance the social workers employed in the same department The focus group session was a structured process with predetermined questions to avoid possible internal group dynamics that may distort the information. For the social workers, a single focus group session was held with the resident social workers.
The participants were made aware prior to volunteering to participate of the lack of anonymity and the purpose and objective of the research.

The focus group session lasted for about an hour and thirty minutes with the researcher playing a moderator role. The researcher assumed the role of a moderator ,ensuring that all participants were afforded opportunity to contribute to the session. Where it was necessary probing and summarising was done to get clarity and also used as a technique to illicit more engagement
The participants were familiar with each other and hence the conversation was more free flowing, and participants were free to support each other.

The session was held in a ventilated auditorium as selected chosen by the resident social workers.

3.7.2.1 Focus Group Guide

This tool covered the following themes:
(a) Bibliographical data (age, length of service, qualifications).
(b) Social work services provided in the workplace and specific services provided to the older professional employee
(c) Social worker perception of the older professional employees age related challenges and level of accommodation by the employer.

Using two different data collection methods enabled the researcher to collect information on the same subject from a distinct perspective, thus increasing the study's trustworthiness level (Morse, 2015). Where the option to conduct face-to-face interviews and a focus group was chosen, a strict adherence to the COVID-19 prevention protocols was implemented. In this regard, social distancing and wearing of masks were part of the data collection preparation and process. The researcher minimised the physical exchange of documents by sending invitations and consent forms electronically. Furthermore, engagements were conducted in properly

ventilated and spacious rooms to ensure social distancing and good hygiene habits were practised.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

This research study employed thematic analysis which is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a method to identify , assess ,consider , and document emergent themes. Thematic Analysis (TA) is complementary to the qualitative research paradigm and was used to construct and analyse the sourced data.

De Vos (2011) explains that qualitative data analysis is, primarily, a process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorising which strays from structured, mechanical, and technical procedures, to make conclusions from empirical data of social life. According to Patton (2002), the qualitative analysis process involves transforming data into findings. This involves reducing the volume of raw data information, shifting significance from details, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals.

The researcher has adopted the thematic analysis as advanced Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79), who defines “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Using thematic analysis method, the researcher focused on the prevailing commonality of the lived experiences of the targeted group. Accordingly, interpretive design allows for documentation of the experience from the individual's perspective; hence data is collected through inductive, qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The data collected from the focus group data was analysed similarly using the thematic analysis methodology. In this instance the unit for analysis is the group not the individual and the related emergent focus group themes are considered

The thematic analysis technique by Braun and Clarke (2006) has six steps: (a) Familiarisation with the data, (b) Development of tentative codes, (c) Explanation of themes, (d) Review of major themes, (e) Delineation of themes and (f) Production of the written report.

The researcher followed the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) which provides a structural format for discussion and analysis of the results:

- **Transcribing:** The first step in data analysis was to copy audio-recorded interviews into written transcripts.

- **Analysing the interviews:** Similar thoughts are grouped together and given labels. These labels are then reviewed and organised into condensed categories as summaries make data more manageable yet precise and the original data is not lost (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). An analysis of data was conducted to elucidate/clarify the emerging themes.
- **Identification of emergent themes:** The researcher sought to identify emergent themes as part of data interrogation. Groups of categories were headed under singular themes which mirror the research objectives. The categorisation of the dominant themes (recurring themes) was based on the research objectives and their relationship was examined. In addition, as part of the analysis, the researcher identified convergent and divergent themes from each participant. This was done to determine the commonality and differences across the ten participants. At this stage, the researcher was looking for connections between emerging themes, grouping them together according to conceptual similarities, and providing each cluster with a descriptive label such as Social Support and Integration, etc.(Pietkiewicz & Smith 2014).
- **Direct quotes** were used when presenting the data and illustrate the categories and themes. According to Smith, (2011), extracts are selected to give an indication of convergence and divergence, representativeness, and variability. This way, the reader gets to appreciate the breadth and depth of the theme.
- **The final stage was to compare the findings with themes in the literature and similar studies** to inform an in-depth analysis of the participants' lived experiences. In addition, the researcher contextualised the findings using the two chosen theoretical frameworks, namely, the Erikson Social Development Stages and the Person in Environment. The comparison with the literature was performed including referencing the Kruger and Van Breda OSW model, as part of the theoretical framework.

3.8.1 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS

The strengths of thematic analysis include the fact that it can be applied to data in different ways and can be used to develop a detailed descriptive account of a phenomenon. Additionally,

it is flexible in terms of theoretical framework, research questions, methods of data collection and sample size, as well as the fact that it is easy, and quick to understand and to conduct, compared to other more labour-intensive qualitative analysis methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The limitation of thematic analysis is that it lacks in providing analytical narratives. It provides collections of extracts within the data and is, therefore, detailed, theoretical, and technical, in comparison to other data analysis approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND RIGOUR OF THE STUDY

A qualitative study research design was used in this research study and the construct of trustworthiness was used to determine the quality of the research study. Galdas (2017)The standard for evaluating a qualitative research paradigm is advocated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who coined the term "trustworthiness". Trustworthiness includes research integrity and rigour exercised during the research inquiry .Trustworthiness is often seen as an alternative to the quantitative constructs such as reliability, validity, and objectivity Galdas(2017).).Qualitative research integrity is achieved by establishing the following: trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba cited in Elo et al., 2014).

3.9.1 CREDIBILITY

Credibility is the basis to determine the truth value, i.e., the internal validity of the qualitative research. Credibility in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the results , and data collection methods (in this case, the semi-structured interviews, and the focus group) provide adequate account of the subject being studied to produce findings that can be trusted (Rossouw, 2003).

The objective is to demonstrate the accuracy and congruency of the data collected (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Credibility is achieved when the outcomes are presented with a comprehensive description of context and content. The researcher defended the credibility of the outcomes through practices such as reflexivity (ability to reflect on the researcher influence of the research outcome), triangulation (interviewing the older person and conducting a focus

group with social workers) and using verbatim quotations to illustrate a point and identifiable patterns (Sandelowski, 1986).

3.9.2 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings (Sandelowski, 1986; Streubert, 2007). It is about the objectivity of the research procedures used for data collection and data analysis. Dependability is achieved if the research findings are repeatable and consistent with the raw data collected. Dependability was sought by ensuring that the sampling procedure was aligned with the study objectives, the raw data collected was correctly recorded and analysed, and data was sourced from multiple sources to ensure its authenticity.

3.9.3 CONFIRMABILITY (OBJECTIVITY)

Confirmability is the degree to which other researchers can confirm the outcomes of the research study. This criterion addresses the level of confidence that the research findings are based on the participants' information rather than the researcher's perspectives. As part of this study, the researcher kept a reflexive journal, and provided a detailed explanation of research-related decisions and the process used to collect, analyse, and interpret data(Creswell, 2007).

3.9.4 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability relies on the reasoning that findings can be generalised or transferred to other settings or groups and there is potential for extrapolation. Sampling strategies are key to ensuring that data gathered can be generalised; hence, the selected purposive sampling methods with homogenous and expert sampling approaches are adopted for this study (Creswell, 2007; Hammerberg et al., 2016). Purposive sampling allows for specificity in studying a particular phenomenon, such as older professional employees within the public service. In this regard, data can be generalised within the specifically identified population. According to Lavrakas (2008), the objective of purposive sampling is creating a sample that can be reasonably presumed/expected to be representative of the targeted audience.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Lindorff (2020), four values must be considered; justice, confidentiality, beneficence, and respect. Applying the four principles is key to ensuring that participants' rights

are protected and promoted (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Ethical issues relating to protecting participants, as enshrined in the ethical code of non-maleficence, are important in any research study.

The following precautions were implemented to ensure the protection and upholding of the participants rights:

- Participants were assured that participation is voluntary and at any point they could withdraw from the study.
- The research objectives and how the information would be used and stored were communicated to the participants and consent forms were circulated prior to the commencement of the data collection
- The formal consent forms were received from all the participants prior to the commencement of the study (focus group session. and individual interviews)
- Recoding of the proceedings was only done with the participants written and verbal consent
- During the session, the participants were reminded of their rights and the social workers who participated in the focus group were informed of the researcher's inability to guarantee anonymity. The session proceeded only after verbal confirmation was received.
- During an interview (face-to-face or using technology platform), the researcher restated what is in the Participant Information Statement (PIS) statement (without reading it) and reminded the participant of the availability of the counselling service should they require it.
- The in-person interviews were held in a ventilated room with social distancing being practiced ensuring that COVID-19 protocols are adhered to.

3.10.1 JUSTICE

The principle of justice is not just about protecting participants from harm. It is about ensuring the participant's welfare (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher was mindful of the potential vulnerability of the mature employee; hence the researcher ensured that no information that may lead to the identification of the employee, including the directorate or subsidiary name, was included. No personal information was disclosed, including which employees volunteered

to participate. Justice is about ensuring that the benefits outweigh the risk in a researcher's conduct of the research (Creswell, 2007).

3.10.2 CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality refers to the formal agreement between the researcher and the participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to protect the participants' privacy, by ensuring that their identifiable confidential information is not disclosed (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In this regard, the researcher ensured that no personal information was disclosed during and after the research has been concluded. In the focus group, participants were informed of the potential risk and were allowed to opt-out if they so wished.

3.10.3 BENEFICENCE

Beneficence refers to the researcher's responsibility in ensuring that the participants experience no harm because of the research outcome or process (Lindorff, 2020). The topic of age bias in the workplace may have already resulted in the mature employee feeling devalued; hence, the research language and sampling process were sensitive to ensure that the study participants experienced no additional negative or hurtful conjecture or nuance. According to Levine (1986), it is the researcher's obligation to assess, anticipate and confront any potential harm that may negatively impact on the participant, and offer support or refer them to a professional for counselling. Therefore, in this study, a practising social worker was made available for free counselling, with her contact details provided in the participant information sheet (Appendix A).

3.10.4 RESPECT

This study adhered to the principle of respect for participants. Respect, as a principle, is anchored on individuals having rights, such as freedom to act, privacy and self-determination (Creswell,2007). Respect includes due regard for the participants' beliefs, welfare, and customs, both individually and collectively. Assurance of confidentiality and promotion of informed consent demonstrate respect and promotion of self-determination ((Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Lindorff, 2020).The participants were provided with information about the

study, its benefits, application, and implication (Appendix A & Appendix C).The Participant Information Statement form states that there will be no negative consequences should participants choose to withdraw from the study at any stage.

3.10.5 ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was only conducted after the research proposal was completed, reviewed, submitted, and approved by the University committee (Appendix H).

3.10.6 PERMISSION

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Director of Corporate Governance within the Department of Economic Development and its subsidiaries (Appendix G). Only then could the researcher initiate the research study.

3.11 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

3.11.1 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH APPROACH

In considering the strengths and limitations of the qualitative research approach, the researcher found qualitative research easy to adapt to as it required establishing rapport with the participants and this skill well developed due to the researcher's social work background. The researcher is also skilled at empathising which resulted in participants feeling comfortable enough to openly share their experiences and introspections (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The researcher acknowledges that the qualitative research approach was also challenging due to its time-consuming and demanding nature. It required the researcher to attend all the interviews, actively listen and critically reflect throughout the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.11.2 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The researcher is aware of the limitations of thematic analysis as it is fundamentally a subjective tool and replication of the studies may not be fully realised (Tuffour, 2017). However, thematic analysis provided the researcher with an opportunity to obtain an in-depth understanding of the individual experiences of the older professional employees. This study focuses on the participants' subjective experiences and there is limited opportunity to

verify the results objectively against the scenarios stated by the participants (Barbour, 2000; Chetty, 2016).

The simplicity and complementarity with the qualitative research design and approach made the thematic analysis methodology attractive to the researcher. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).This method enabled an explanation and unravelling of the participants' lived experiences rather than reducing them to just numbers (as in positivist research).The participants' full experiences are described and studied to extrapolate the substance of those experiences while eliminating the subjective influence of the researcher.(Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

The limitation of the TA, like the qualitative research paradigm, is the replicability of the study as it consists of small samples and the phenomenon is based on the participants' experiences in a particular context. The researcher acknowledges this limitation and achieves trustworthiness by using multiple sources for data collection, and accurate recording and analysis to ensure the credibility of the research outcome.

3.11.3 RESEARCHER BIAS

The predisposition of the researcher may influence how the participants respond. According to Rietchie and Lewis (2003), the researcher must identify their own bias that may promote or hinder the research outcomes (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004). Reflexivity is an essential component of a qualitative study as it enables the researcher to assess their impact on the inquiry (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Rietchie & Lewis, 2003). According to Galdas (2017), researcher bias cannot be completely eradicated, however, it can be managed appropriately. The researcher, firstly, acknowledges the influence of one's value as an integral part of the research product. Secondly, the researcher exercised care during the research process and procedure to ensure a credible and valid outcome. Furthermore, the construction of questions was aligned to the study objectives, data from multiple sources was used (triangulation) and supervision was the additional avenue to ensure quality assurance.

3.12 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the rationale and selection of the qualitative research design and methodology, including the thematic analysis process were explained. The aims and research questions

underpinning the study were provided, leading to the details regarding the sampling methods, research instruments, pretesting procedure, data collection and data analysis procedure. In addition, ethical considerations and how trustworthiness was ensured, were explained. Lastly, the limitations and delimitations of the study as well as researcher bias were highlighted. The next chapter focus on the research findings.

CHAPTER 4
PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

4 .1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group from ten (10) participants and three (3) social workers who were selected using purposive and expert sampling methods, respectively. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, which employs an inductive and deductive approach to generate emergent themes and sub-themes in line with the main research objectives. The chapter begins by providing an overview of the demographic profile of the participants. The subsequent chapters are presented according to the research objectives and emergent themes. The results and key findings are demonstrated using tables, graphs, and verbatim quotations to shed light on the participants' experiences explored in the study.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Below is a presentation of the demographic information in a tabular format and outlines the profile of the participants in both the semi structured interviews and the focus group sessions.

Table 2 The Demographic Profile of Participants (N=10)

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR	SUB-CATEGORY	NO.
Race	Black	**9**
	White	**1**
	Coloured	**0**
	Indian	**0**
	Other	**0**
Age	50-54 years	**4**
	55- 60 years	**3**
	61- 65 years	**4**
	Other	**0**

Gender	Female	**2**
	Male	**8**
Period in the current job	1- 5 years	**1**
	6-10 years	**2**
	11 - 15 years	**3**
	16- 20 years	**4**
Type of Employment	Permanent	**6**
	Fixed Term contract	**4**
	Other	**1**
		0
Type of Qualification	Diploma	**1**
	Single Degree	**3**
	Honours	**1**
	Masters	**2**
	Doctoral Degree	**3**
	No qualification	**0**
No of years practicing or in the profession	5 -7 years	**0**
	7 -10 years	**2**
	11- 14 years	**2**
	15 -20 years	**6**

Table 3 The Demographics Profile of the Focus Group Participants (N=3)

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR	SUB-CATEGORY	N0
Gender	Female	**3**
	Male	**0**
Race	Black	**3**
	White	**0**
Age		
	26-35 years	**0**
	36-44 years	**0**
	45-50 years	**2**
	51-56 years	**1**
NO of years practicing		
	1-5 Years	**0**
	6- 10 years	**2**
	10 – 15 years	**1**
	Other	
Number of years in the workplace		
	1-5 years	**1**
	6-10 years	**2**
	11 years plus	**7**

4.2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (IP)

Seven participants identified themselves as Black males, whilst two participants classified themselves as Black females and one as a White male. This sample reflects the Public Service employment landscape, with the white population being in the minority and an increase in the employment of the people of colour with more than 70 per cent representation (Statistics SA, 2020).

The age profile of the participants is evenly spread, the youngest being 51 years old and the eldest participant being 65 years old, as illustrated in figure 2 below:

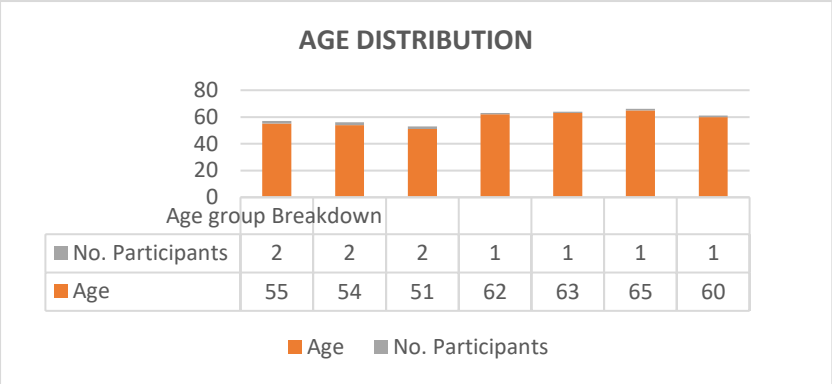

Figure 2 Participant Age Distribution

The age profile of the participants in this study correlates with similar studies undertaken on ageism experienced by older employees in the workplace, such as Mac Carthy (2014).

All participants have completed tertiary education, with three having doctoral degrees, two with Master's degrees and five with either a Bachelor's degree or a diploma. Four participants have technical qualifications (Engineering, Science or Accounting related fields) and six have qualifications in the humanities or social science fields. Of the ten participants, four are employed in managerial positions, one in a supervisory role and the remaining five occupy specialist roles in their respective fields. Seven participants reported to have studied at South African universities while three participants received their tertiary degrees outside of the country.

Figure 3 below, shows the number of years the participants have been practising their professions. Most of the participants reported to have more than ten years of experience.

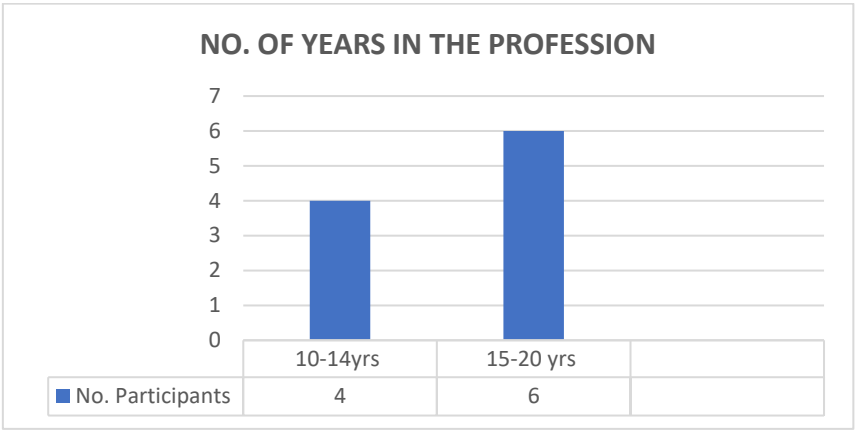

Figure 3 Number of Years in the Profession

On average, participants have been with the current employer for more than five years and have worked more than ten years in their respective fields, as indicated in figure 3 above. Three participants worked in the private sector prior to joining the current employer.

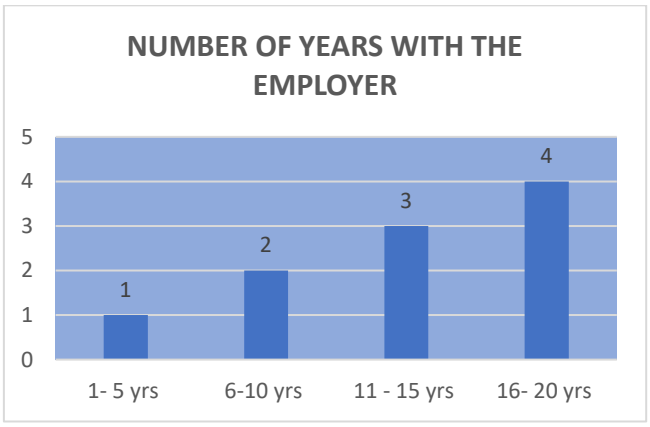

Figure 4: Length of Service with Current Employer

The findings indicated an even split between full time employment and fixed-term contract employment amongst the participants. Typically, the fixed-term contracts would be renewed after five years. The participants who were on fixed-term contracts reported to have already had their contracts renewed at least twice, and that they have been recruited due to the specialised knowledge and experience they possess. This is in line with an observation by Hassen and Altman (2010) and subsequently confirmed in the study commissioned by Office of the Public Service Commission, on the extent and nature of contract appointments in the public service. The Public Service Commission report of 2019 found that the Gauteng province

reported more fixed-term contracts than any other province and showed an increase in the appointment of specialised skills such as Economists and Engineers, etc. over the last ten years.

4.2.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF SOCIAL WORKERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

The participants were between the ages of 45 and 55 years, and all three participants have been with the department for less than ten years. Two of the participants had been previously employed in the non-governmental organisations and one was from another government department. The three participants are employed in a division named Employee Well-being Service and their job title is Social Worker.

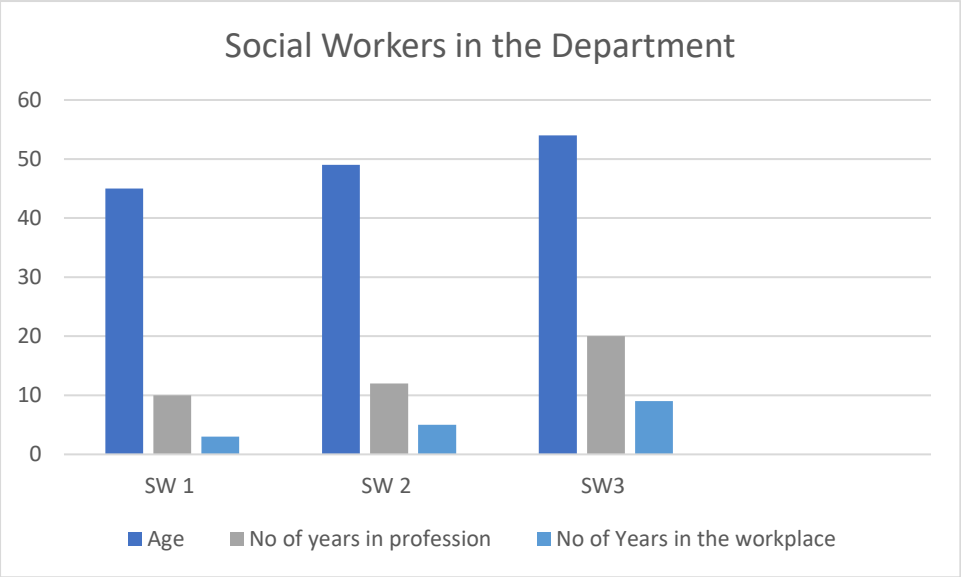

Figure 5: Social Workers Demographics

All participants reported to have a formal social work qualification and registered with the **South African Council for Social Service Professions (**SACSSP). One of the participants has an additional qualification , she attended an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) twelve-months course from the University of South Africa (UNISA) but does not participate in any of the formal activities of the South African EAP forum.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Data relevant to the research study were obtained through the questions that sought information about older professional employees' perceptions of self in relation to their work-life (self-identification), perceived age-related challenges, and how they have adapted and responded to work challenges (proactively or reactively). The emerging themes are linked with the four key objectives of the study are presented in table 2 below.

Table 4 Alignment of the Research Objectives and the Emerging Themes

Research Objectives	Themes
1. **To explore the perceptions of the skilled older professional person about institutionalised ageism in the workplace.**	• Prevalence of ageism and experiences of the older employees (Theme) ○ Workplace age stereotypes (subtheme)
2. **To explore the practices and policies exercised by the employer to ensure reasonable accommodation and integration of the skilled older employee.**	• Older employee friendly workplace (accommodation of older workers)

3. **To determine the type of support provided by the employer to the skilled older professional employee.**	• Thriving in the workplace includes sub themes are
	  ○ Coping and adapting to the work environment as an older professional employee (sub theme)
	  ○ Self-Identification (sub theme)
	  ○ Motivation to remain economically active (sub theme)

4. **To explore Gauteng Economic Development Department social worker's perceptions and understanding of ageism**	• Type of employer support

4.3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1: TO EXPLORE THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SKILLED OLDER PROFESSIONAL PERSON ABOUT INSTITUTIONALISED AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

The section reports on whether the participants believed they had experienced and or witnessed ageism in the workplace and the nature of such a practice. Key focus was on the policies and practices within the department as experienced and perceived by the research participants.

(a) Prevalence of age-related discrimination in the workplace

Prevalence of age-related discriminatory practices is reported below, as experienced by the older employee who is skilled and employed in the professional category, either as a manager or a specialist in their field. The discussion on the prevalence of ageism includes the following areas: the experienced form of age motivated discrimination, the frequency of age-related treatment and the manifestation of age discrimination (positive, negative, covert contrasted with overt).

(i) Age-related stereotypes in the workplace

The workplace stereotypes were explored as part of understanding workplace institutionalised ageism. The focus was on how third-party assumptions about the older professional worker manifest and is experienced. Age stereotypes identify what is routinely attributed to a particular group and in this instance the older professional employee.

The participants reported that they have experienced stereotypical behaviour such as untested views on their abilities to comprehend new concepts or assimilate new knowledge. The participants reported that they believed these negative stereotypes have resulted in their exclusion from job opportunities.

This is confirmed by comments from *Interview Participant (9):* "We are *informed the over 50 aren't promotable, aren't worth investing in, don't have the mental capacity or physical stamina to compete - despite evidence to the contrary,"*

This correlates with findings from similar studies conducted by Mc Carthy (2014) that ageism can be practised at a conscious (openly) and unconscious (indirectly, discreetly) level and can be expressed at three distinct levels: micro-level (individual), meso-level (social networks) and macro-level (institutional and cultural).

The tendency to discriminate against the older professional is frequent and the participants reported to have observed age discrimination across the department. The participants reported that age-related discrimination is practiced by younger employees, older workers against each other and by management. Furthermore, divisions such as human resources are reported not to be aware or sensitive to age-related differential behaviour. Documented comment from *Interview Participant (5)* is that: *"they have never made any reference to age discrimination here; human resource people encourage us to take early retirement and they never intervene against negative age stereotyping during recruitment."*

The participants reflected that there is little or lack of appreciation or understanding of ageism as a form of discrimination. The most common types of discrimination are race and gender related. At least, a third of the participants reported that they themselves never heard of the concept of ageism. They reported to have noticed that as they get older, they have been treated differently not only in the workplace but also in the broader society. As an example, how they are addressed has changed from " *Sisi"(young woman)* to "*Mam, Sir"(denoting an older person).*

(ii) Gendered Ageism

The two female participants reported to have experienced multiple forms of discrimination in the workplace. They cited age and gender discrimination practised by males of all ages in the workplace. They reported that their knowledge and skills were disregarded, and they have been excluded even though they have comparable or better experience than their male counterparts. For these women; attitudinal, cultural, and structural factors in the workplace have disadvantaged them more than their male counterparts. Below are the comments received from one of the female participants. *"The men meet outside work and discuss work matters, you are excluded, there used to be a white boys club now there is a Black boys club." Interview*

Participant (1) Another one commented that: *"They call me magogo (old woman) it makes me feel ancient and irrelevant, they are dismissive of my thinking and yet I am highly qualified. "Interview Participant (5)* .This observation correlates with studies conducted by Barnet (2005) where respondents identified discrimination, as women and older employees, negatively impacting on their self-identity.

(iii) Types of ageist behaviour

The participants reported both negative (e.g., unproductive, and forgetful) and positive (e.g., wise, and generative) forms of age influenced behaviours in the workplace. However, most participants recorded more negative than positive forms of discrimination. The participants reported that the overt type of behaviour was typically directed at them from their superiors. Examples of overt discrimination cited by participants include an exclusion from job opportunities, being side-lined from key assignments or not invited to key discussions due to their age.

Subtle forms of age-related exclusion were reported to be practiced by both managers and team members. The respondents used terms like "b*eing patronised, overlooked"* to describe the overt form of discrimination.

Five respondents reported that there were instances where they experienced micro aggression (micro aggression is described as unintended and covert negative behaviour towards others) from both management and from other older employees. Micro aggressions were confirmed based on the following comment by *Interview Participant (5):* "You are tech savvy for an old person." Another comment from *Interview Participant (1):* "You are sure you can handle this project; it will be too demanding for an oldie like you". *Interview Participant (3)* commented that "You are excluded from the evening session we thought you would want to go to bed early."

The participants commented that positive discrimination was normally done with good intentions but in some instances with negative outcomes. An example cited by two participants was the decision that older workers should stay at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. They reported that whilst the decision was taken to protect them, there was inadequate consultation, and this resulted in negative impact on their daily lives, for instance, they reported that they had to spend money on connectivity, they had no system support and felt isolated from their colleagues. Comments such as *"They don't ask what we want and check with us, I know they mean well but they should ask "Interview Participant (9)* were noted. Another comment from

Interview Participant (3) was that *"My worst experience is during the strategic session when the younger employees would suggest I need to sleep early as I am old, I need a long rest. It is the careless comments about my age veiled as a demonstration of caring and being patronised that irritate me."*

Most participants admitted to being resigned to the negative stereotyping and have accepted the stereotyping to avoid conflict. Clarke and Korotchenko (2016, p.1759) report that ageism is often "deeply internalised" as individuals accept age-related stereotypes. This internalisation, the authors argue, may be one of the reasons for older workers not reporting age-related ageism. Comments received from *Interview Participant (1)* confirm this internalisation of ageism: *"Who cares we just need to keep quiet and work."*

4.3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2: TO EXPLORE THE PRACTICES AND POLICIES EXERCISED BY THE EMPLOYER TO ENSURE REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION AND INTEGRATION OF THE SKILLED OLDER EMPLOYEE.

(a) Age-related differences in relation to employment practices and policies

The participants indicated that the public sector labour laws are modernised and promote equality across the board, however, the challenges are the practices and behaviours within the workplace. The workplace culture was indicated as the catalyst for ageism. The participants reported experiencing both covert and overt age-related discrimination in the workplace. Reported overt age discrimination includes age differentiated recruitment practices, negative performance appraisals for older employees, lack of opportunities to develop and lack of career progression. *Interview Participant (10)* reported being distressed about the humiliation received: *"I've watched it happen to others , I just didn't think it would happen to me, you get yelled at as if you are a child. "Interview Participant (5)*

Another participant reported ageist comments during interviews: "*panellist made comments like 'this candidate has experience it is a pity they are old." Usually the person who says these comments is the same age as the applicant, go figure!" Interview Participant (4).*

Four participants reported that they did not get positive performance reviews in comparison to their younger counterparts. The participants reported that younger employees were given more favourable reviews. The female participants reported that younger women got more favourable performance reviews and job opportunities even though the participants had more experience. Comments received included that "*I cannot compete with younger women; I am not attractive, and my experience is not enough" Interview Participant (5)*

(i) Mandatory retirement

With regards to mandatory retirement, three participants reported that they were not against mandatory retirement policy, however, they were not supportive of being coerced or encouraged to accept early retirement. Two participants reported that as mature age workers, they were being encouraged to take early retirement by saying, *Interview participant (2)*"*We are told to take the option of early retirement; there will be no penalties;"* another comment by *Interview Participant (6)* was *"Take early retirement it will give you time to rest."*

Only a minority of workers supported the rules on mandatory retirement. They raised concerns about the mandatory retirement age and indicated that termination of employment should be based on the state of their physical and cognition abilities. A comment from a participant was: *"It is best to let workers determine when they want to stop working "Interview participant (1)*

Age discrimination was identified in working-life in three areas, namely:

(1) during recruitment and appointments (six participants)

(2) during performance appraisals and allocation of rewards such as bonuses (five participants); and

(3) in work practices where micro aggression, inappropriate use of demeaning and humiliating language, being marginalised and excluded was experienced. Nine respondents reported this type of age discrimination. Comments received included: *"It was almost like my seniority and experience was a negative to my boss, so he stopped including me in meetings about the agency's future strategy." Interview Participant (8*

Overall, participants reported that most of the policies were not the agents of institutionalised age discrimination, however, the practices and culture were identified as enablers of ageism.

4.3.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3: TO DETERMINE THE TYPE OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE EMPLOYER TO THE SKILLED OLDER PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEE

To determine the type of aid and care supplied by the organisation, questions that were asked to the participants were:

- 'What does the term old or mature person mean to you?'
- 'How, if at all, have you adjusted the way you do your work as you have gotten older?'

The themes that were apparent were: self-identification as an older person, age-related challenges (physical, personal, and professional) and reasons for being economically active.

(a) Perception of self /self-identification and self-worth (Older employee s perception of self in the workplace)

During the interviews, the participants commonly used the words "experienced" and "matured" to define themselves. The participants had different perspectives on the concept of being matured and words such as "*experienced," "worldly," "been through a lot"* and *"emotionally fully developed"* were used to describe themselves.

Participants used the descriptors "experienced" and "matured" interchangeably. When prompted further, the participants would differentiate between the two in the following manner: maturity was about how they dealt with challenges of a personal nature in the workplace (this is more about their personal attributes). *Interview Participant (1)* shared that "*I do not get upset easily, I look for the positive and I don't respond to petty remarks. I can collaborate with hostile team members and managers*."

"Maturity" in the workplace was reported to include ability to work in demanding situations, handle conflict, work with ambiguity and work within multiple generational teams . *Interview Participant (5)* commented as follows: "*My boss is younger than me, in fact he is as old as my son, but I don't mind taking instructions"; Another comment was Interview Participant (3) "I have the ability to focus on work regardless of the workplace politics."*

"Experienced" was used to describe the participants' accumulated knowledge and application of that knowledge in different scenarios. Comments from *Interview Participant (5)* were as

follows: "*I have been working for long; I have both theoretical and practical application experience; I have been doing this for an awfully long time*".

Experience was not only reported from a perspective of the number of years in the current employment but also career journeys, number of positions held and different careers they have assumed. As articulated by *Interview Participant (3), "I have worked for private and public sector; I have seen it all."*

The participants correlated knowledge and accumulated experience with self-worth. Knowledge and experience were linked to older employees' sense of confidence, this was evident in the following comments:
Interview Participant (7):"*I have knowledge and experience, , I am calm and can handle difficult situations"*
Interview Participant (3):"I am technically better than the younger recruits and can add so much value; I have knowledge to share, and I have organisational memory."

The prevailing theme of accumulated knowledge and experience defines and differentiates the older professional worker from the younger employees. *Interview Participant (2)* commented that " *I have both theoretical and practical experience, my knowledge is based on testing and implementing across sectors."*

With regards to the importance of work and social identity, the participants reported that the work environment is key to creating social cohesion which made them feel valued. Work plays a significant role in how adults interact with the broader society and how they self-identify. As an example, *Interview Participant (4)* commented that "*my friends are here, and work gives meaning to my life"*

Professional or "work identity" plays an integral part in how the individual successfully transition into an older professional employee. The participants reported that the workplace is fundamental to their self-actualisation and remains a key source of financial security, self-esteem, and an environment where social bonds are formed. This feedback correlates with a view that the workplace environment can be a catalyst for successful transitioning from an individual contributor to a mentor of others (Mannheim, Baruch & Tal, 1997; Slay & Smith, 2011).

(b) Ageing challenges and coping strategies

In this study, the types of challenges identified varied and could be broadly categorised into three areas, namely:(1) Personal challenges related to issues outside the workplace,(2) Physiological challenges and (3) Professional challenges (workplace related).

(i) Personal challenges and coping strategies

Most participants reported that they have experienced personal challenges that have impacted on their work lives. Participants reported that they experienced personal challenges such as divorce, diminished physical abilities and illness due to Covid-19. Of those who reported to have experienced life changing personal challenges, most reported not to have disclosed or sought in-house professional assistance. They reported fear of being stigmatised and shunned by colleagues (for example, if they disclose to have Covid-19 related illness, diminished physical abilities).

The participants had a variety of strategies employed to cope with the personal challenges. Most relied on spiritual/church or family/personal friends for support as a way of coping.

(ii) Professional challenges and coping strategies

The participants indicated that work was their escape from personal challenges and in some instances, the personal challenges such as lack of financial stability motivated them to stay at work.

Participants highlighted the impact of Covid-19 related workplace changes as one of the challenges they have had to address with minimum employer support. These challenges included lack of technology support when working from home and feelings of isolation during compulsory lockdown. *Interview Participant (1)* reported that *"Being at home was nice for a short time then it was so quiet with no one to talk to, I did not like it."*

In a study conducted by Hopf et al. (2021) on the impact of Covid-19 regulations and workplace policies on the older worker, they found that participants encountered specific discriminatory practices which included stigmatisation, paternalism, and scapegoating.

The coping strategies reported included sharing challenges with another person in the same age group, request for opportunity to be upskilled and to a lesser extent, seeking psycho-social

assistance. In addition, participants reported reliance on their own family members and sympathetic colleagues in the workplace for support and reassurance.

(iii) Physical challenges and coping strategies

Participants acknowledged that ageing has come with physical deficits and a need to change their lifestyles. The four participants, in their sixties, reported diminished concentration and poor vision as some of the aging manifestation they are navigating. One of the participants reported that during load shedding, they must use stairs to go to their office, " *this is a struggle and I resort to sitting in a coffee shop as I am too old to walk up the stairs*." *Interview Participant (7)*

Participants reported that they use external agencies and practitioners when requiring medical assistance. Participants also shared that the employer provides favourable medical aid benefits. There was an overall reluctance to utilise in-house social work services for the personal related challenges. *Interview Participant (10)* reported that *"I would hesitate to show any kind of frailty. I need to be fitter than the next person, I need to be bright-eyed, and bushy tailed, seen to be absolutely coping 100%, even though I may be in pain"*

The participants indicated a preference to use external support resources such as private psychosocial services and pay through their medical aid schemes.

(c) Reasons for being economically active

The participants indicated that even though the public sector, as an employer, has a negative public image, they chose to remain with the employer as the benefits outweigh the negatives. The benefits identified include opportunities to study for free, pension and medical aid benefits post retirement.

The participants indicated that the major drivers for remaining at work are both economic and an opportunity to use the knowledge and experience accumulated over the years. *Interview Participant (4)* commented, *"I can feed my family and apply my knowledge for good."*

There was a gender difference in what was regarded as the primary reason to remain at work. Male participants reported both economic and career advancement reasons whilst females reported economic reasons as the primary driver to prolong their working period.

Participants further reported that the motivation to work for the public sector ranged from altruistic reasons such as needing to give back to the country and contribute to economic

revival, to more personal reasons such as a need to make sure that they have enough provision for their retirement. This pattern is confirmed by research conducted by Loi and Shultz (2007), where they observed that older employees choose to remain economically active for a variety of reasons which may include financial, personal, and social reasons.

Societal trends that influence older employees to remain at work include increased life expectancy and economic challenges (Perry, 2010; Purcell, 2009). In South Africa, additional reasons for older employees to remain economically active include older workers being the heads of households and raising grandchildren, and inadequate provision for retirement(Stats SA, 2014).

The female participants indicated that their primary driver to remain in the workplace was due to economic reasons as they are heads of their multi-generational households. They reported that their parents and grandchildren form part of their responsibilities. The increase in the number of households led by women over the age of 50 has been observed by Makiwane, Schneider and Gopane (2004) and has been confirmed in the report generated by Stats SA (2014). The complex gender specific ageism experience is not within the purview of this study but may need to be explored in future studies.

(d) Accommodation and thriving as an older professional

The research study sought to understand the two concepts as outlined in the rationale of the study. Accommodation is explored through the discussion on the employer polices and the practices or implementation and adherence to the policies. The notion of thriving is explored from the older employees' views on how the work environment is enabling or inhibiting their development.

(i) Older employee-friendly workplace

The key questions that participants were asked to respond to was "What factors contribute to the older employee thriving in the workplace, how would they characterise an older worker-friendly workplace?"

The participants reported that the employer did not have a formal approach or interventions to create an enabling environment. In the absence of a formalised intervention, individual managers tend to be the drivers of positive engagement with the older employees. There were

no sanctions or incentives for managers to create a positive environment and nurture old professional employees.

The following comments were recorded: *Interview Participant (1)"Do they even know what ageism is about, they don't know how to treat people with experience. Maybe we are a threat.*" Another participant commented that "*Manager in department X treats me with respect and values my views, to others it's a problem." Interview Participant (6)*

There was correlation between participants who felt valued and those who reported to be fully engaged. The participants who reported to be fully engaged and valued in the workplace also reported to be involved in important and interesting assignments. Some of the comments received were from *Interview Participant (4),* "*I feel good about myself when I am given meaningful assignments." Interview Participant (8)* indicated that *"I am included, and my knowledge is valued"*

(ii) Thriving in the workplace (Successful ageing)

There were diverse perspectives on what thriving means. The participants' descriptions of thriving in the workplace included references to "*personal development, growth, on-going upgrading, job enrichment, learning new things, achieving goals, impacting positively on others, excitement (learning new things), enthusiasm and positive life attitude*." These descriptors were used to explain the current and the ideal working environment.

The participants were divided in their view of the current workplace being an enabling environment for successful ageing. There were those who reported that, currently, there are positive elements such as progressive policies. However, the majority (seven participants) reported poor accommodation of the older professional employee. Poor accommodation was related to lack of focus on ageism and sexism (reported by women participants) to create an inclusive workplace culture.

According to Porath et al. (2011), desirable and ideal characteristics of an older person enabling environment include focus on nurturing of career aspirations, flexible employment practices such as flexitime and diversity training (multigenerational teams management) and creating an opportunity to impart knowledge and mentor others.

As part of the discussion on thriving and successful transitioning, it was common for participants to express social and generativity motives, demonstrated by their identified need

to transfer knowledge and skills to the younger employees, and contribute to the organisational goals.

Furthermore, the participants reported that they had undertaken formal or informal mentor roles, helping younger workers to learn on their jobs and/or transferred knowledge to colleagues through succession planning initiatives. Older professional employees reported that they often volunteered to mentor and guide younger professionals and interns when approached. An opportunity to mentor and transfer knowledge was reported as a catalyst to self-actualisation and positive image. *Interview Participant (4) " I have knowledge and skills that I enjoy sharing with younger employees" Interview Participant (10) "I can coach and mentor if I was given the chance"*

Interview Participant (1): I am ready to share both my life and work experiences" I am always willing to share my knowledge when approached by fellow colleagues"

4.3.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4: TO EXPLORE SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS AND UNDERSTANDING OF AGEISM AND DETERMINE THE SOCIAL WORKERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACTORS THAT MAY ENHANCE OR INHIBIT THEIR ABILITY TO INTERVENE ON BEHALF OF THE SKILLED OLDER EMPLOYEE.

The workplace as a community where employees could thrive depends on the type of support received (Porath et al., 2011). The social work services were explored as part of the assessment of the employer driven support intervention.

All three social workers reported that they provided individual counselling, referrals to external service providers, and to a lesser extent, meso (group work) interventions and macro level (where the focus is on education, advocacy, and creation of awareness). The participants reported that their focus was on the psychosocial services and less on changing of the workplace or influencing policy. Comments from *FGD Participant* (2) "*We provide first line assessment and make referrals. We tend to be more reactive."* Another comment *FGD Participant (1)" I do think we are fully utilised and maybe we too focused on promotive as opposed to preventive,*
FGD Participant (2) We are in the awareness and education more than on a wholistic mental health space "

FGD Participant (3) The majority of the referrals and the individual counselling is mostly of the younger employees including the employees who are on internships, the problems usually relate to adjusting to working environment , marital problems, absenteeism, alcohol abuse or insubordination.

The participants reported that at a macro level, they collaborated with other divisions within the department, and their focus was on awareness and educational programmes such as the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) awareness, gender mainstreaming and retirement planning, amongst others. The services offered are not differentiated according to target groups, however, there are services such as retirement planning educational intervention and healthy lifestyle programmes that benefit the older professional employee. The services tend to be short-term and referral to outside agencies is preferred. The services offered are paid for by the department as part of the incentive to encourage employees to use the service and to promote healthy lifestyle. *FGD Participant (1) We are geared to provide awareness and educational programmes, there is a lot of push for a more comprehensive mental health promotion service but we not there currently*

The reported approach is contrary to best practice. Du Plessis (2001) for example, argues that occupational social work must be preoccupied with the provision of support to the individuals, their families, and the employer. The service provided should address psychosocial challenges and promote healthy human relationships in the workplace.

The participants reported that beyond the financial and retirement planning, none had developed any intervention geared for the older employee nor had they advocated for broader employment policy or culture change within the department. The participants also reflected on the need to upskill themselves on areas of change management and policy review and culture change. FGD Participant (2) "*We would need to have the skills and knowledge to be able to engage management on policy issues".* FGD Participant (3) "*The only time we have looked at the policy was on the HIV and AID policy which was good but on other areas Human Resource people take the lead".* FGD Participant (1) *"Change management as a skill would be so useful here".*

All three participants acknowledged that they had never considered ageism as a focal area, nor did they consider it as a form of discrimination. The participant reported to have worked on awareness programmes that focus on gender and race equality, and none had made any input in policy change or advocated specifically on behalf of the older employees. The focus is

primarily curative with limited promotional interventions. FGD Participant (2) *"I am aware of race discrimination and gender discrimination, but the term ageism is new."* Another comment noted was *"individual counselling is contracted to external service providers, and we partner with national office on national awareness programmes, and these are well received"* FGD Participant (3).

The participants confirmed the reluctance of the older professional and skilled employees to use their service. They reported that the tendency was to seek assistance on behalf of their subordinates and not for themselves. The three social workers postulated that this pattern could be driven by the need to maintain privacy and an indictment on the credibility of the service provided. They reported that there is a belief that the current social services serve management and confidentiality is compromised. Hence, the preference to use external service providers. "*Most of the professionals don't want to come and use* our services for their issues" FGD Participant (1). Another comment received was that *"Older employees tend to use outside resources if they have challenges, they view asking for help in a negative light,* FGD Participant (3).

The social workers reported not to be formally exposed to the occupational social work practice models. Only one participant attended the Employee Well-being twelve months course, but none has received formal occupational social work training.

The participants also reported a desire to broaden their services and provide a more comprehensive service. They reported that financial constraints and reliance on the external service providers may, in the short-term, influence the nature of the service they provide.
Comments from the focus group session included that *"We are doing our best considering that there are not enough resources allocated to us." "We rely on externally contracted services to provide more targeted services"* FGD Participant (2).
"We need to be exposed to new ways and modern approaches to help employees." FGD Participant (3).

The current social workers are registered and qualified to deliver the psychosocial services. The current service is financially constrained, and their focus is more on the individual and less about changing the policy. Lastly, they have no specific interventions to advocate for the older employee in the workplace.

4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the results and discussion of findings of the research study. The presentation of the results was aligned with the study aims and objectives. . The results of the study provide insights on institutional ageism in the workplace, experiences of ageism by older professional employees and characterisation of an older employee-friendly workplace.

The next chapter of this research report will elaborate on the key findings of the study and present recommendations based on the research study outcome.

CHAPTER 5
MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter five presents the summary of the main findings of the research study. In addition, this chapter provides recommendations and conclusions based on the research study results. Finally, this chapter makes proposals for further research in the ageism in the workplace.

5.2 MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The core aim of the research study was to explore the experiences of older professional employees in relation to institutionalised ageism in the workplace. The findings and discussions are informed by the research objectives, the theoretical framework of Erikson Human Development, (Kotre, 1984) and Person -in Environment (Wahl, 2000). Lastly, the review of the social work service provision is explored using the Kruger and Van Breda's (2001) Occupational Social Work Practice model.

5.2.1 KEY FINDINGS

5.2.1.1 Research Objective One: To explore the perceptions of the skilled older professional employee about institutionalised ageism in the workplace.

The exploration of institutionalised ageism took the form of recording the participants' experiences of the current employer policies and practices.

In this study, the participants reported existence of progressive policies aligned with the modernised labour laws such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) of 1998. However, the prevalence of ageism was reported despite progressive South African laws such as Employment Equity Act (1998), and employment policies. Institutionalised ageism is reported to have negative predisposition towards the older professional employee. The participants identified prevailing practices that confirm the existence of age discrimination such as exclusion of older applicants during recruitment, older employees not given equal opportunities for development.

The study findings confirm the observation of authors such as Brownell, (2014), who reported that progressive labour laws do not curb the prevalence of ageism in the workplace. The authors have observed that despite these legislative improvements, negative images continue to depict older adults as a burden, a liability and incapable of keeping up with the changing demands of the workplace. In South Africa, the employment equity explicitly abhors employee discrimination based on their race, age, gender, or creed and provides remedial interventions for employees such as the establishment of the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) However, the prevalence of discrimination persists in the workplace persist (Zondo,2021).

The prevalence of age discrimination and the existence of age-related stereotypes are fuelled by social, economic, political, and cultural practices within a society and manifest in the workplace (Abrams, Swift, & Drury, (2016). There has been numerous studies over the last decade that have been commissioned by agencies such as World Economic Forum(2020), Nedlac Report (2019 March) , Harvard University (2012); and consulting firms such as PWC Golden Age Index (2020) amongst others. All have reported that global ageing is a reality and there is consensus that policy makers need to review their policies and practices in the workplace and protect the older worker as they have a positive contribution to make in the workplace (Bronwell, 2014; Wahl Hans-Weiner 2006; Kogovsek & Kogvsek, 2013 in Newsome & Vogt 2016; Powell, 2010).

Gendered Ageism

The study highlighted how males and females experienced institutionalised ageism. The female participants reported compounded discrimination; as females and as older professional employees. Authors such as Beaton,(2019),discuss gendered ageism and highlight the compounded discrimination experienced by older female employees in the workplace. These studies confirm the participants experiences of being discriminated not only as ageing employees but also as aging economically active women. In addition, the unique experiences of males and females with regards to discrimination as older employees emphasise a need for differentiated solutions in curbing age related discrimination (Marcus, 2021).

5.2.1.2 Research Objective Two: To explore the practices and policies exercised by the employer to ensure reasonable accommodation and integration of the skilled older employee

The study explored how the older employee perceived themselves in the workplace including their reason for remaining economically active.

Maturity, knowledge, and experience are the three aspects that the participants used repeatedly to self-identify. The participants defined themselves as matured and regarded their reported accumulated experience as an indicator of their self-worth. Knowledge and experience were linked to older employees' sense of confidence and differentiated them from the younger employees. All participants regarded age as equivalent to being matured, having accumulated work and life experiences. The difference is that those who felt that their accumulated knowledge and experience are valued, tended to have a positive regard of self, and were motivated to assist the younger generation. Whilst those who defined themselves as mature and felt that their knowledge and experience were not positively (albeit in the minority) regarded by the colleagues and the employer tended to have a negative attitude towards work. This observation validates the Erikson model of human development stage eight where he highlights the importance of generativity, positive self-perception as key to thriving as an aging person.

Truxillo et al.(2016) reported that older persons who have a negative regard of self tend to describe themselves in deficits such as inability to collaborate with younger employees and inability to learn new technology. In this study, participants who had a negative view of self-reported that the reason to remain economically active was driven by financial needs (survival) only whilst those with a positive outlook stated that the reason for staying was, firstly, economic needs, and a desire to help and mentor the next generation.

The motivation or driver for this cohort to stay economically active can be divided into two categories. Firstly, self-actualisation and altruistic reasons (wanting to serve others) and secondly, economic reason (they need the money to provide for their retirement or family). These two drivers are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, those that put more emphasis on self-actualisation and altruistic motives had a more positive regard for their accumulated knowledge, and positive experience of the workplace. Those in the minority, who had survival and economic reasons for working, were more negative about their work experience and self-worth.

The older employees' perception of self in this study is influenced by the challenges they have faced, both at a personal level and at work. The participants' self-identity is linked to the value they place on their experience and knowledge. The more engaged the participants were at work, the more they perceived their knowledge and experience as valuable and worth sharing.

As part of the exploration of ageism in the workplace, the study examined how the ageing journey is experienced by the older employee (how they define themselves), the challenges and coping mechanism they have adopted at both personal and professional level. The reported views are aligned with the literature survey on thriving and successful aging .The concept of "successful aging" suggests an individual in good health, and in the context of this study, it is the older employee's capacity to thrive and adapt to life challenges .Porath et al. (2011) introduces the construct of "thriving" in the workplace as "the psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and learning" (Porath et al., 2011, p. 250). Hence, in this study thriving implied a positive older skilled professional employee's positive orientation towards growth and successful adaptation. This view is aligned to the Erickson developmental stages as advocated by Kotre (1984) which defines this stage as generativity and the opposite to stagnation. Generativity, is described as creating value, creating a platform for the next generation, coaching, and sharing and making the world a better place Cherry,(2022).

The study used the Erikson developmental stages as advocated by Kotre (1984) which defines this stage as generativity and the opposite to stagnation to understand the older professional employee. Erikson (1982) stage eight describes two opposite milestones one being stagnation (despair, depression, lack of movement) and the opposite being generativity (thriving).

5.2.1.3 Research Objective 3: To determine the type of support provided by the employer to the skilled older professional employee.

The focus was on the formal or informal support provided by the employer to ensure integration of the older employee in the workplace. In addition, the study sought to understand the older employee's coping strategies and tools.

The findings indicated that there were no formal or department wide interventions or recognition of ageism as an area requiring intervention. Ageism is not recognised in the same level as racism and sexism (Powel,2010). The study found that there was no formalised support or interventions to ensure integration and assimilation of the older worker in the workplace.

Both groups (Interview participants and Focus Group participants) reported that there was no formal sanction to discourage those who practice age discrimination, even though the organisation has policies that promote equality. The focus group participant indicated a focus on race , gender, and promotion of accommodation of persons with disability and no attention or focus on ageism as a form of discrimination. This pattern is observed in global studies conducted by authors such as Powel,(2010); Atumah et al(2019) where it is reported that ageism is not viewed as a social taboo both in the broader society and specifically in the workplace.

Older professional employees reported a desire to be engaged in exploring solutions to ensure their integration in the workplace. The participants suggested that the employer should focus on mental health promotion, upskilling, and provision of tools to navigate the changing workplace. These findings are comparable to the identified characters of older employee friendly organisation as defined by Boehme al (2014). Worker friendly environment are described as those workplaces with accommodating and progressive policies and practices that enable employees regardless of age to thrive Wang, (2012). The fact that ageism is not regarded as a form of discrimination may be one of the reasons there is little or limited consideration of interventions to alleviate or curb ageism in the workplace.

In this study, the participants highlighted multiple challenges they must navigate from social, physical, and economical challenges. A unilateral perspective of the older employee in the workplace may hinder the ability to respond comprehensively to the ageism challenge. The study employed the person-in-environment framework to understand the older employee within their ecosystem. This systemic view of the worker is supported by the Person-in-Environment (PIE) approach, which acknowledges the complexity and the multi-layered systems in which the older professional traverses (Wahl, 2006). Authors such as Wahl (2006) apply the ecological perspective of the client and identify a unique view of the elderly within the PIE. They advance a concept of "environmental gerontology." Environmental gerontology puts emphasis on the physical and spatial context of ageing whilst acknowledging the importance of the social and cultural environment that impact on the older adult as a worker. The study is advancing an argument for a wholistic and ecological approach to the provision of interventions to curb ageism in the workplace. Such an intervention would achieve traction if older professional employees are involved in crafting appropriate solutions to curb age discrimination in the workplace.

5.2.1.4 Research Objective 4: To explore Gauteng Economic Development Department social worker's perceptions and understanding of ageism.

The type of social work services described by the social workers(focus group participants) confirm the older professional employees' report that there are no targeted services aimed at promoting and ensuring their accommodation in the department. The participants reported that, currently, the service provided focuses on the individual and less on changing workplace policy or advocating on behalf of older employees.

Social workers reported an appreciation of the challenges faced by older employees, however, ageism as a practice was not an area they had been exposed to. This assertion is in line with the older employees report that the employer and the social work services did not consider ageism as a form of discrimination.

The participants reported a desire to broaden their services and deliver an integrated social work service that regards an employee holistically.

The social workers in this study reported that they were providing the traditional social work services within the workplace. The reported social work services were not aligned with the occupational social work models advanced by social work scholars such as Du Plessis (2001), Kruger and Van Breda (2001) locally and internationally such as Kurzman,(2008)amongst others The Kruger and Van Breda model (depicted in figure 6 below) offers "four practice positions" from which the intervention can be engineered informed by outcome of the diagnosis conducted by the occupational social worker (Du Plessis & Van Breda, 2009, p. 322).

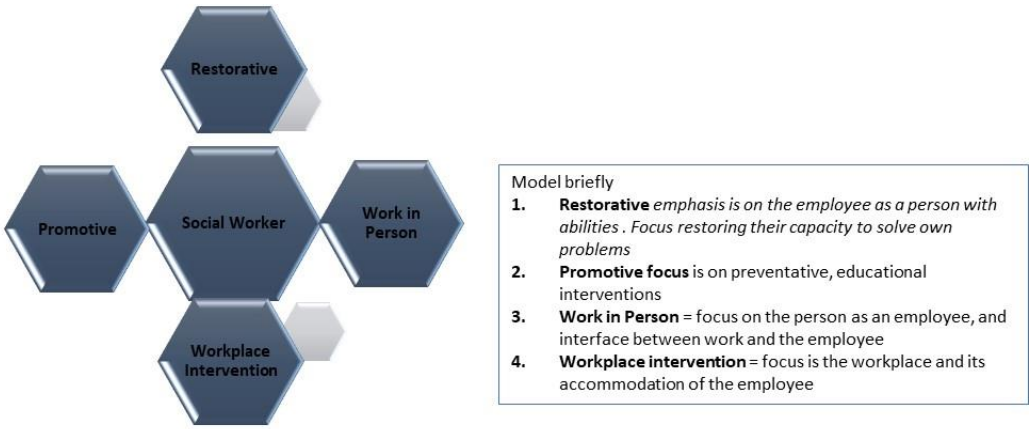

Figure 6 OCSW Model Four Positions (Kruger & Van Breda, 2009)

The study highlights a gap in the service orientation and delivery; it points to a lack of a systemic view of the employee and understanding of the multi-drivers that influence the older professional employee. This is in contradiction with the occupational social work approach which advocates for a person-in-environment approach in both the crafting of the social work diagnosis and intervention. This ecological and systems approach to delivery of occupational social work services is advocated by Du Plessis, Kruger and van Breda (2011), Ajala (2013), Mor-Barak and Bargal (2000).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were presented from the findings:

5.3.1 Development of a comprehensive approach towards combating discrimination in the workplace. Social workers and the employer need to regard ageism and abuse in the workplace as two issues that coincide rather than as two independent behaviours, and effectively implement practices and policies that address both. Such an approach must define what is covert and overt ageism and have implementable sanctions to discourage ageism and abuse in the workplace.

5.3.2 Initiation of diversity programmes to promote awareness and ensure shared understanding of the impact of ageism on older employees in the workplace.

5.3.3 Review of the current social work service and adoption of an integrated social work service that focuses on the individual, the interest groups such as older employees and the community, where the focus is on the broader work environment.

5.3.4 Upskill the internal social workers in the areas of change management , policy advocacy and importantly on the broad aspect of discrimination including ageism in the workplace

5.3.5 Recommendation for future research

The following areas are recommended for further research on ageism in the workplace;

- Research on the older worker as a high-risk group and the role of occupational social workers in defining South African older employee friendly workplaces.
- Broader study on ageism and age-related stereotypes as a form of discrimination, and its impact on the 50-year-olds and above, in the public service.
- Gendered ageism in the South African workplace.
- Typology of the social work services in the South African public service and comparison with occupational social work models.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study highlights that in the South African workplace, gender, race, and disability tend to receive more focus whilst ageism is often overlooked. The workplace may have changed the labour legislation and employment policies; however, age-related stereotypes and ageist behaviour still prevail. Whilst policies and legislation are a good platform for an inclusive community, it is the implementation of such policies that need to be addressed. An inclusive workplace is the key for increased productivity and positive mental health for all employees.

The accommodation and integration of the older employee in the workplace must be addressed by policy makers and occupational social workers. A lasting solution must also be sought, with the older professional employee being part of the discourse. An understanding of how older employees adapt and engage the work environment is crucial for workplace policy and practice change. This knowledge can be used to develop multi-generational teams that thrive in the workplace.

The prevalence of ageism in the workplace and its impact on the older employee need to be further studied in the South African workplace. As an outcome of such a study, the most appropriate interventions to counter the negative impact of age discrimination can be determined.

Furthermore, the study reflected on the lack of occupational social work knowledge and delivery of an integrated occupational social work service as defined by Kruger and Van Breda (2001).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET OLDER EMPLOYEES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

TITLE: AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE
THE EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL OLDER EMPLOYEES

Good day,

My name is Nompumelelo Catherine Ramphomane and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my course I must conduct a research project under the guidance of my supervisor Dr Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini.

I am interested in understanding the experiences of mature employees in the workplace. The primary aim of this study is to determine if there are age differentiated practices and policies in the workplace from the skilled professional older worker. Perspective. The age group for my studies is from 50 years up to 65 years.

I would appreciate it if you would participate in the interview session which will not to take longer than 45 minutes.
With your permission the session will be recorded for analytical purposes using a digital device. The recordings will be kept secured in a password protected computer for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.

If you agree to take part, I will arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your names or any identifying information. The information given to me will be held securely

and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report.

The interview session is confidential and only aggregate information will be in the research report. As a practicing social worker and a student at the University I am obligated ethically not to divulge any confidential information discussed in the research interview.

Participation is entirely voluntary, hence choosing to proceed does not compel you to complete the interview session. Should you at any point during the interview want to opt out and terminate the session the interview will be stopped immediately.

If as a result of the interview session you indicate that you require individual counselling, a registered social worker from the University of Witwatersrand masters class Mrs Nomthandazo Toko (074 1746198) has volunteered to avail herself.

No personal data such as your contact details will be divulged in the study analysis and report. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

The results of the research may also be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, and conference proceedings) and a summary of findings will be made to available to study participants on request.

Please contact me on my cell 0834118538 or email 8333089@students.wits.ac.za or my supervisor, Dr Francine Masson at Francine Masson @wits.ac.za you have any questions regarding my study. We shall answer them to the best of our ability. If you have any concerns and complaints about the study, please contact Human Research Ethics Committee Contact Details: Tel 011 717 1408. hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours Sincerely,

Nompumelelo Catherine Ramphomane

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICPATION IN THE STUDY INTERVIEW



Title of project: Ageism in the workplace: the experiences of professional older employees

Name of researcher: Ms Catherine Nompumelelo Ramphomane.

I, …… agree to participate in this research project. The research purpose has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous **……**

YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his/her research report **…….**

YES NO

I agree that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw from the study without being disadvantaged. **……**

YES NO

I agree that the researcher may record the interview proceedings ……**YESNO**

I agree that there are no foreseeable benefits associated with participation in this study.

…….. **YES NO**

I agree that the information I provided may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics, clearance being obtained **YES NO**

I agree that a copy of the proceedings will be stored permanently in a password protected computer and may be used for future research. **YES NO**

Signature ……

Name of Participant …….

Date:

…….

Signature ……

Name of Person seeking consent

…….

Date:

…….

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH TOOL. OLDER EMPLOYEES

Title

QUESTIONS

Demographic Information

1. **Age**

Age	
50 – 54	
55- 59	
60 and above	

2. **Race**

Black	
White	
Coloured	
Indian	
Other	

3. **Formal Qualification**

Type of Qualification	
Diploma	
Degree	
Masters	
Doctorate	
Other	

4. **Position Title**

Position Title	**Explanation**	
Senior Manager	*Senior Manager is responsible for more than one function and has several employees below them.*	

Manager	*Is responsible for a team and allocates work and tasks. Reports to a senior manager.*	
Specialist	*Technical specialist who is a functional expert and reports to a manager*	

5. How long have you been with your current employer?

How long have been with the current employer	

6. Mature Person Work Outlook

---

a) How, if at all, have you adjusted the way you do your work as you have got older?"

---

b) How, if at all, has your capacity to do your work changed as you have got older?

---

c) What, if anything, helps you feel motivated to continue to be economically active?

---

d) What unique qualities if any do you bring to the workplace as mature employee?

---

e) What support is available to you as an older employee to succeed and thrive in your work? ----------
--

f) What support do believe you need as an older employee to be able to effectively engage within the workplace ----------
--

g) What can the younger employees learn from you and how have you imparted(or not) the knowledge and experience ----------

h) How would you like to be acknowledged/recognised as an experienced, mature, and skilled professional within the organisation?
i) What are the key challenges you are facing as a mature person in the workplace?
j) What does the term old or mature person mean to you? ……..

7. Workplace Practices

a) Have you experienced a situation where you were verbally abused, yelled at, or felt being put down and this attributed to your age (Verbal Abused)?
b) Have you experienced physical harm or a threat of physical harm (this can include a threat sexual harassment) ?
c) Have you felt you are being bullied? i.e. an unwelcome pressure to act and fear of being ostracised and humiliated ?
d) Have you experienced where you are overlooked for promotion or performance related reward due to your age?
e) Have you felt ignored when you make contributions and jokes made about your age?
f) Have you felt a need to lie about your age to be considered for an opportunity or to be accepted within the working teams at work?
g) Have you been approached, or management express a concern about your health simply due to your age?
h) Being encouraged to take early retirement even though they did not want to

8. Employment Policies

a) What age-related discrimination have you experienced at work in relation to the employment practices and policies).
b) What policies and practices within the workplace need to be changed to accommodate you as the mature employee?----------
-
c) Does your employer utilise your knowledge and skills, is so please indicate how your skills and knowledge has been used or engaged? ----------
----
d) What has been done to accommodate you as a mature employee especially during the current corona virus pandemic?

e) What practices in this organisation make you believe that ageism is practiced or not within the department?

9. Support for the Older Employee

a) Do you believe the social work services provided caters for your needs of as a mature employee? ----------

-

What services would you want the social worker to provide as part of the mature employee support ----------

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOCUS GROUP

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

THE EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL OLDER EMPLOYEES

Good day,

My name is Nompumelelo Catherine Ramphomane and I am a postgraduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my course, I must conduct a research project under the guidance of my supervisor Dr Busisiwe Nkala-Dlamini

I am interested in understanding the experiences of mature employee in the workplace. The primary aim of this study is to determine if there are age differentiated practices and policies in the workplace from the skilled professional older worker perspective.

The age group for my studies is 50 – 65 years. I would want to understand from your knowledge and insights as a social worker the impact of ageism on the older professional employee.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. The engagement will be held in a focus group setting where you and the other selected group members will participate in an open discussion. This group session will be for an hour.

In the focus group session all participants' views will be known and documented for research purposes. The researcher cannot therefore guarantee confidentiality, however, the data collected will be presented in an anonymous manner. None of your personal information will be disclosed. The research report will make no reference to your personal information.

If you accept my invitation, your participation would be entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. During the focus group session you have a right to refuse to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with. There will be no disadvantages or penalties should you decide not to participate.

There are no consequences or personal benefits of participating in this study. If you agree to take part, I will arrange the focus group session and will provide you with the date and time suitable to all participants.

With your permission the session will be recorded for analytical purposes using a digital device. The recordings will be kept secured for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.

The results of the research may also be used for academic purposes (including books, journals, and conference proceedings) and a summary of findings will be made to available to study participants on request.

Please contact me on my cell 0834118538 or email 8333089@students.wits.ac.za or my supervisor, Dr Francine Masson at Francine Masson @wits.ac.za if you have any questions regarding my study. We shall answer them to the best of our ability. If you have any concerns and complaints about the study, please contact Human Research Ethics Committee Contact Details: Tel 011 717 1408 hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely,

Nompumelelo Catherine Ramphomane

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY. FOCUS GROUP

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL WORK

Title of project: Ageism in the workplace: the experiences of professional older employees

Name of researcher: Ms Catherine Nompumelelo Ramphomane.

I, agree to participate in this research project. The research purpose has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the following ;

(Please circle the relevant options below)

I agree that in a focus group discussion my confidentiality and anonymity is not guaranteed. However, in the final research report anonymity can be guaranteed through the utilisation of pseudonyms**.** **YES NO**

I agree that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw from the study without being disadvantaged. **YES NO**

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his/her researcher

report **YES NO**

I agree that the researcher may record the focus group proceedings **YES NO**

I agree that there are no foreseeable benefits associated with participation in this

study. **YES NO**

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained. **YES NO**

I agree that a copy of the proceedings will be stored permanently in a password protected computer and may be used for future research. **YES NO**

Signature ……

Name of Participant …….

Date:

…….

Signature ……

Name of researcher seeking consent ……

Date:

…….

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH TOOL: FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Target Currently Employed Social Workers

Duration: 60 minutes

1. Demographic Information

1.1 Age

Please complete	

1.2 Formal Qualification

Type of Qualification	
Diploma	
Degree	
Masters	
Doctorate	
Other	

1.3 Position Title :

Position Title	**Explanation of responsibilities**

1.4 How long have you been with your current employer?

1.5 What is the nature of the service provided (outsourced, in sourced etc.) by yourselves?

Service Provided: Please indicate the service provided by yourselves
•
•
•
•
•

1.6 Share about your previous social work experience/background?

2. Focus Group Discussion

2.1 What are the prevalent challenges faced by mature employees within the workplace?

2.2 What if any are specialised intervention currently underway or planned to address the challenges faced by mature employees?

2.3 What knowledge and tools in your disposal assist or can assist in the future in supporting the mature employee?

2.4 How have you handled incidence of age discrimination or workplace bullying if any within the organisation? What tools and knowledge would assist you in promoting the individual needs of the older employee?

2.5 What employment related policies do you believe promote or discourage ageism within the workplace and what tools would assist you in advocating for the older employee

2.6 Is there any other information related to mature person accommodation and engagement in the workplace you would like the group to note?

Thank you for participation

APPENDICES G: PERMISSION LETTER

GAUTENG PROVINCE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

15th September 2021

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

I, Sibusiso Dlangalala Director Corporate Governance at the Gauteng Economic Development Department grant permission to Ms. Catherine Nompumelelo Ramphomane to collect data and conduct interviews at this site for the Masters in Occupation Social Work research entitled **Ageism in the workplace. The experiences of professional older employees.**

I grant this permission being the person authorised to do so in the company and I am aware of the following:

- The nature of the study and give permission for the researcher to conduct interviews with 15 older employees, and the four employed social workers.
- The results of the study will be pooled for the thesis.
- That no cost will be incurred by the research participants and the organisation
- That participants confidentiality will be respected and upheld
- That as an organisation we will retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- That none of our employees are compelled to participate and only participate voluntarily
- The GDED will require general feedback on the study.

I wish you the best and success in your research.

Regards;



Mr Sbusiso Dlangalala

Director: Corporate Governance

Gauteng Department of Economic Development

Tel: 011 355 8248

Email: Sibusiso.Dlangalala@gauteng.gov.za

APPENDIX H: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

DEPARTMENTAL HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SOCIAL WORK)
CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Protocol number: SW21/11/01

Project title: Ageism in Gauteng Public Service. The experience of the older professional employees.

Researcher/s: C N Ramphomane, student number: 8333089

School/department: SHCD Social Work

Date considered: 12 November 2021

Decision of the committee: Approved (Low risk).

Date ratified: 26 November 2021

Expiry date: 30 November 2024

Date: 01 December 2021 **Chairperson:** Prof E. Pretorius

Cc: Supervisor: Dr Francine Masson

Declaration of researcher(s)

To be completed in **DUPLICATE** and **ONE COPY** returned to the Administrative Assistant, Room 8, Department of Social Work, Umthombo Building Basement or e-mailed to Fezile.Ndebele@wits.ac.za

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorised to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the committee. **For Masters and PhD an annual progress report is required.**

---------- --------/--------/----

SIGNATURE DATE

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

School of Human and Community Development: Social Work
Private Bag 3, WITS, 2050, South Africa
T +27 11 717 4472 | **E** socialwork.SHCD@wits.a.c.za | www.wits.ac.za/shcd/social-work/social-work-as-a-profession/

APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT Receipt

turnitin

Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author:	Catherine Ramphomane
Assignment title:	Final submission (all, regardless of course/programme)
Submission title:	Turnit in seven -1.docx
File name:	Turnit_in_seven_.docx
File size:	378.66K
Page count:	69
Word count:	20,961
Character count:	120,749
Submission date:	27-Apr-2022 04:15PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	1821880341



CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ageism is a practice of stereotyping persons based on their age. Although the practice of ageism can be experienced by people at any age , this study was interested in the South African older professional (has a tertiary qualification) employees from the age group 50 years until 65 years of age.

Ageism in the workplace takes the form of overt and or covert discrimination (Chou & Choi, 2011; Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013). In this study, the pervasiveness of ageism in the South African workplace was studied, taking into cognisance the country's constitution, which recognises human rights as articulated in the Bill of Rights (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). South Africa has specific legislation aimed at empowering older persons and protecting their rights. One such legislation is the Older Person Act 13 of 2006 which recognises the rights of older persons and establishes a framework for their safety and security in areas such as the workplace.

The prevalence of ageism is propelled by the increased number of older persons in the workplace (Jackson, 2014; Jin & Baumgartner, 2019; Schwab, 2015). This global trend of older employees choosing to remain economically active has also been observed in South Africa. According to Stats SA (2014), South Africa reported growth from 10.7 per cent in 1996 to 26.2 per cent in 2011 of older employees in the workplace. The choice to remain economically active is reported to be driven by several reasons, such as a need for personal growth, inadequate retirement provisions and family circumstances (Chou & Choi, 2011; Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013).

According to Villasio (2018), depression and anxiety amongst older persons who have experienced ageism are triggered by the fear of job loss and pronounced feelings of being devalued. In this study, the older professional employee is viewed within the context of the Erikson Social Development theory of Generativity versus Stagnation (Dixon & Stein, 2006).

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