

Age stereotypes a problem for older employees

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Older employees may be prematurely exiting the workforce because they feel stereotyped on the basis of their age.

A study led by University of Queensland School of Psychology researcher Dr. Courtney von Hippel found that older employees who feel labelled at work are more likely to have a negative attitude about their job.

"Older employees who feel they are being stereotyped because of their age report lower job satisfaction and engagement, and poorer workplace wellbeing than their younger counterparts," she said.

Over five weeks, 280 employees aged 18 to 66 years were surveyed on experiences of age-based stereotyping in the workplace, as well as job satisfaction levels, job engagement, organisational commitment, workplace wellbeing, and intentions to quit.

"Negative age-related stereotypes exist for both younger and older workers: older employees are often characterised as technologically incompetent and resistant to change, while younger employees are often characterised as unreliable and inexperienced," Dr. von Hippel said.

"However, we found that feeling was not problematic for younger workers.

"Even though younger employees experienced age-based stereotyping as often as their older colleagues, only older employees showed negative job attitudes as a result of being typecast.

"It seems that younger people see being stereotyped as a challenge they need to overcome, while older employees spend more time dwelling on it."

Dr. von Hippel said the effects on older employees need to be considered given the ageing global population.

"Over the next few decades, the ageing population in industrialised nations will pose major challenges for maintaining the needed size of the workforce," Dr. von Hippel said.

"Government inducements to counteract the predicted labour shortage will be less effective if we neglect the impact of age-based stereotyping."

Dr. von Hippel's research was conducted in collaboration with UQ's Katri Haanterä, Dr. Elise Kalokerinos of the University of Newcastle, and Professor Hannes Zacher of Leipzig University in Germany.

The study is published in *Psychology and Aging*.

More information: Courtney von Hippel et al. Age-based stereotype threat and work outcomes: Stress appraisals and rumination as mediators., *Psychology and Aging* (2018). [DOI: 10.1037/pag0000308](https://doi.org/10.1037/pag0000308)

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