Original Article

Intergenerational Meetings between Adolescent and Older Persons as Participatory Action towards a Society without Ageism

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ABSTRACT

This study describes a process of reflection, action, and intervention through Participatory Action Research (PAR). The main objective was to build a collective vision of ageism from the perspective of Adolescent Persons (AP) and Older Persons (OP) residing in the district of Villarrica, by jointly determining the factors that contribute to the appearance of ageism and the actions necessary to eradicate it. The PAR process was carried out through 10 intergenerational meetings including both age groups, where the following stages were followed: Assessment of the issue, problematization, characterization, creative feedback, and planning. The main factors that the participants identified as contributors to ageism were: the educational system, legislative power, cultural values, technologies, labor market, individual factors, and socioeconomic conditions. Additionally, the AP and OP identified the following necessary actions to reduce ageism: changes in the role of the family, raising institutional awareness, educating about OP, capturing the attention of society, and increasing the opportunities for communication. Using participatory methodologies in community interventions and creating opportunities for different generations to meet are regional challenges that allow a collaborative production of knowledge and actions with, by, and between historically excluded groups such as AP and OP.

Keywords:
Ageism; Intergenerational relations; Aged people; Adolescent; Participatory Action Research

Encontros intergeracionais entre adolescentes e idosos como ação participativa para uma sociedade sem idadismo

RESUMO

Este estudo descreve um processo de reflexão, ação e atuação por meio da Pesquisa-Ação Participativa (PAR). O objetivo principal é construir uma visão coletiva sobre o idadismo entre os Adolescentes (PA) e os Idosos (PM) pertencentes à comuna de Villarrica através da determinação dos fatores que emergem como contribuintes para o idadismo e as ações necessárias para erradicá-lo, na perspectiva dos participantes. O processo do IAP supôs que ambas faixas etárias fossem inter-relacionadas através de 10 encontros intergeracionais onde foram desenvolvidas as etapas de: avaliação do problema, problematização, caracterização, feedback criativo e programação. Os principais fatores emergentes de idadismo identificados pelos participantes foram: sistema educacional, poder legislativo, valores culturais, tecnologias, mercado de trabalho, fatores individuais e condições socioeconômicas. Por sua vez, os PA e PM identificaram como ações a serem realizadas para reduzir o idadismo: mudanças no papel da família, sensibilização das instituições, educação sobre o MP, captação da atenção da sociedade, aumento das instâncias de comunicação. O desenvolvimento de metodologias participativas em intervenções comunitárias, juntamente com a oportunidade de ter espaços de encontro entre diferentes gerações, são um desafio para a região, que permitem a coprodução de conhecimentos e ações com, por e entre grupos historicamente excluídos como os PA e PM.

Palavras-chave:
Idadismo; Relações intergeracionais; Idosos; Adolescentes; Pesquisa-Ação participante

Encuentros Intergeneracionales entre Personas Adolescentes y Personas Mayores como acción participativa hacia una sociedad sin edadismo

RESUMEN

En este estudio se describe un proceso de reflexión, acción y actuación mediante la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP). El objetivo principal consistió en construir una visión colectiva sobre el edadismo entre Personas Adolescentes (PA) y Personas Mayores (PM) pertenecientes a la comuna de Villarrica. Por medio de la determinación de factores que emergen como contribuyentes de edadismo y las acciones necesarias para erradicarlo, desde la perspectiva de los y las participantes. El proceso de IAP supuso que ambos grupos etarios se interrelacionaran a través de 10 encuentros intergeneracionales donde se desarrollaron las etapas de: Evaluación de la problemática, problematización, caracterización, devolución creativa y programación. Los principales factores emergentes de edadismo identificados por los y las participantes fueron: sistema educativo, poder legislativo, valores culturales, tecnologías, mercado de trabajo, factores individuales, y condiciones socioeconómicas. A su vez, las PA y PM identificaron como acciones a realizar para disminuir el edadismo: cambios en el rol familiar, concientizar instituciones, educar sobre las PM, captar la atención de la sociedad, aumentar instancias de comunicación. El desarrollo de metodologías participativas en intervenciones comunitarias, junto a la oportunidad de contar con espacios de encuentro entre distintas generaciones son un desafío para la región, que permiten la co-producción de conocimientos y acciones con, por y entre grupos históricamente excluidos como los son las PA y PM.

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INTRODUCTION

The demographic transition in Latin America and the Caribbean follows a global tendency towards aging. The Chilean population has the highest life expectancy in Latin America and the Caribbean (83 years), in addition to being one of the countries with the highest life expectancy at age 60 (23-26 years more) (ECLAC, 2022). This raises considerable challenges for society, such as improving the coexistence between generations (Cheng, 2009; Tabuchi et al., 2015). However, these changes have not gone hand in hand with modifications to the hegemonic concepts and power dynamics regarding old age, which has caused other generations, and older persons (OP) themselves, to show negative attitudes and sustain stereotypes about aging (Jorquera, 2010).

This adverse cultural imaginary favors the appearance of age-based discrimination against OP, a significant issue in the country (*Ministerio de Salud*, 2021). For this reason, the ratification of the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons in Chile sets a precedent that will allow the implementation of changes in the traditional social, political, and cultural structures, to create more inclusive ones that are based on respect for - and dignity of - OP as subjects of law (OAS, 2015).

Changes at the policy level are not enough to ensure that people have real participation in society; it is necessary to enhance these changes with actions that maximize the social participation of OP. This is in line with the purpose of intergenerational programs, which have proven to be a deeply appropriate resource for challenging age-related stereotypes and stimulating attitude changes. These programs bring together older people and participants from different age groups, allowing them to build common perspectives, knowledge, actions, and forces that mobilize conceptual and attitude changes (Mercon, 2022).

The leading role that adolescent persons (AP) play in these programs can be described as a teaching and learning strategy since it implies a significant community activity that serves as a way to connect with real-world experiences and increase their understanding of the society they live in. This is especially relevant when considering that all generations are on a path toward aging, which means that, at some point in life, anyone could be susceptible to this type of discrimination, if actions are not taken to dismantle ageism.

It is due to the above that intergenerational work is proposed, based on Participatory Action Research (PAR). This is an

emancipatory and participatory approach (Truman et al., 2000) that situates collective reflection and action at the center, with the aim to connect their aspirations, desires, and knowledge as a unified phenomenon that can generate spaces for empowerment and mutual learning (Huenchuan, 2020), with the contribution of participatory tools (Vilsmaier et al., 2015).

Adolescent Persons (PA) and Older Persons (PM)

Statistically, "youth" refers to the part of the population whose age ranges between 15 and 24 years. Due to the process of demographic transition, the percentage this group represents in Chile has decreased over the years, from 18.2% in 1992 to 13.9% in 2020, with a projected percentage of 10.3% in 2050 (INE, 2018). Concerning participation, it is observed that 46.4% of young people participate in social organizations, especially sports or recreational clubs (17.8%). Regarding volunteer work or community aid, 6% have participated in activities that involve providing care or assistance to OP (INJUV, 2019).

On the other hand, "older persons" is used - in Chile – to describe people aged 60 and over. According to the 2017 census, the population of OP in Chile amounts to 2,003,256, representing 11.4% of the total population. Chile is among the countries in an advanced stage of aging, alongside Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and the Bahamas (CEPAL, 2022).

Age is a multidimensional concept that includes chronological age, physiological age, and social age (Huenchuan, 2022). Being labeled as an older person, based on any of these definitions, creates a series of obstacles caused by society's negative view of old age, where those who experience it are placed in a position of subordination (Goosey, 2021; Huenchuan, 2022). The predominant perspective is that it is a stage of economic (low income), physical (limited autonomy), and social (lack of social roles) deprivation. This has resulted in discrimination against people for the mere fact of reaching old age (CEPAL, 2021).

The Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons defines aging as a gradual process that develops during the course of life and that entails biological, physiological, psychosocial, and functional changes with various consequences, that are linked to permanent and dynamic interactions between the subject and their environment (OAS, 2015). This new definition contradicts the previous perspective of the situation and position of older persons in society, outgrowing the vision of OP as a family problem, and of aging as an obstacle to development (United Nations, 2014). However, the effects of the pandemic have once again highlighted the wide structural gaps that affect OP, especially regarding inequality, informal labor, lack of social

security, poverty, and vulnerability (ECLAC, 2022). This heightens the risk of experiencing isolation, decreased social participation, and a decline in health conditions (WHO, 2015).

Ageism and Age-Based Discrimination

Robert Butler proposed the term *ageism* in 1968 to characterize the systematic stereotyping that is used as a form of discrimination against people due to old age, just as racism and sexism discriminate based on skin color and gender (Butler, 1982). Ageism is a multifaceted social phenomenon comprised of three dimensions: stereotypes (thoughts), prejudices (feelings), and discrimination (actions or behaviors); three levels of manifestation: institutional, interpersonal, and self-inflicted; and two forms of expression: explicit (conscious) and implicit (unconscious) (PAHO, 2021).

Although it may affect people of any age, ageism has a greater impact on OP (Ayalon et al., 2019). Discrimination has a negative effect on individual well-being (Van den Heuvel & Van Santvoort, 2011), as it can become a chronic stressor (Luo et al., 2012; Thoits, 2010); discriminatory beliefs and attitudes impair the cognitive and functional performance of OP, affect their mental health, and increase morbidity (Burnes, 2019; Levy, et al., 2012). Ageism is also linked to shorter life expectancy, feelings of anguish and loneliness, marginalization, and the exclusion of OP from significant social roles (Hernández, et al., 2021; Levy, et al. 2020). Furthermore, it obstructs their access to opportunities in education, employment, housing, transportation, medical care, social services, and legislation (D`cruz & Banerjee, 2020; Morrow et al., 2020).

The social experience of OP is affected by stereotypes and prejudices associated with aging, which means that these will negatively influence how the social environment interacts with the person (Huenchuan, 2022). Films, TV, literature, jokes, cartoons, greeting cards, and songs tend to portray older people as senile or decrepit (Palmore, et al., 2005). Additionally, in our everyday use of language, we tend to equate old age with "senility" (associated with physiological age), "senior" and "golden age" (associated with social age), "the elderly" or "old" (associated with chronological age) (Nations United, 2011). Ageism is so deeply ingrained in society that most people are not aware of it (Montes, 2013; Palmore, 2015). It is crucial to make these aspects visible, since prejudices and stereotypes are the symbolic fuel of discrimination (Solís, 2017), generating discriminatory practices based on attitudes and behaviors (Rodríguez, 2005). In other words, ageism itself leads to age-based discrimination (Huenchuan, 2022).

Goosey (2021) states that the term *ageism* is not synonymous with age-based discrimination, since discrimination would also include neutral actions that put people of a certain age at a disadvantage (Altman, 2020; FRA-European Union, 2019; Huenchuan, 2022; Soldevila, 2019). The Convention defines age-based discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on age that has the purpose or effect of invalidating or restricting the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, or any other sphere of public and private life (OAS, 2015).

Since age-based discrimination and ageism occur daily to many OP (Palmore et al., 2009; Rippon et. al, 2013), it is essential to investigate these phenomena in depth to understand the mechanisms through which they impact individuals and society (FRA-European Union, 2019), as they will affect a progressively higher proportion of older individuals, increasing the relevance of this issue at the public policy level (IPPDH, 2016). Understanding age-based discrimination and ageism is vital, as well as advocating for older people. The latter would involve helping them increase their ability to organize and reclaim their rights, raising the challenge of both improving their participation and developing and enforcing appropriate policies (Rippon et al., 2013; Walker, 2015).

Participation and Intergenerationality

Participation consists of promoting the organization of individuals and creating the conditions necessary for the community to defend them, advocate for them, connect them to other networks, and develop public policy (Licha, 2000). Three types of participation are described: collective participation, social participation, and political participation (Bukov et al., 2002). Currently, the agenda for increasing the participation of OP has been planned following the redistribution policies of Europe (Amadasi, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to understand that, although social participation is seen as an influential factor in the perception of quality of life in old age (Aldwin & Gilmer, 2006; Fernández Ballesteros, 2011), it needs to be established as a key political action for the access to rights, recognition, and social justice (IPPDH, 2016).

According to the Chilean National Socioeconomic Characterization Survey (CASEN, 2017), 35.5% of OP in Chile participate in social organizations, of which 33% do so in neighborhood associations or other territorial organizations, 24.1% in religious organizations or churches, 20.6% in older people affinity groups, and the remaining 22.3% in other types of organizations, such as sports clubs and cultural identity groups, among others.

The social participation of OP can also involve intergenerational events (Burr et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Christian, 2014). Intergenerational spaces have proven to be effective in reducing age-based discrimination, thus improving the quality of life of OP (Burnes, et.al, 2019; Canedo, et.al, 2021; Hernández, et.al, 2020; Martínez, et .al, 2020). Moreover, these spaces are part of the recommendations aimed at reducing ageism, alongside regulatory changes and educational interventions (PAHO, 2021; Stephan & Stephan, 2001).

However, it is not enough for people from different cohorts to coexist in the same space; joint actions are necessary so that people can critically reflect on their reality and share experiences in which there is consensus, cooperation, and conflict, and where both generations are involved (Burr et al., 2005; Freire, 1993; Newman & Sánchez, 2007). In other words, intergenerationality should involve valuing both the relevance of each generation by itself and the contribution of their interrelation to individuals, the community, and society (Aplan & Larkin, 2004; Belgrave, 2011; Gutiérrez & Herráis, 2009; Karasik & Wallingford, 2007; PAHO, 2021).

Intergenerational meetings, by using participatory methodologies, provide a proper environment for symmetrical dialogue and shared knowledge. Participatory Action Research, with its ethical appeal and political stance, offers the opportunity to transform power asymmetries and include the voices of those who are least heard (Mercon, 2022). The construction of common perspectives is directly linked to building knowledge, actions, and collective forces that aim at socio-environmental change (Alatorre-Frenk, 2021). These knowledge, actions, and forces include different forms and levels of impact, one of them being conceptual and attitudinal changes that lead to a reduction in ageism and age-based discrimination (Mercon, 2022; Kalisch et al., 2013; Penick et al., 2014).

About this Proposal

This manuscript systematizes my experience with the implementation of a PAR methodology that allowed a democratic dialogue to unfold between OP and AP. This opportunity was offered to build a collective vision of age-based discrimination by identifying factors that contribute to the emergence of ageism, as well as establishing actions to fight it.

METHODOLOGY

Participatory Action Research is a methodology that makes change possible, promotes the participation and self-determination of the people who use it, and emphasizes the dialectical relationship between knowledge and action. The stages, techniques, and procedures that comprise the methodology are shown below (Table 1), as is a description of each meeting. Several techniques were included as catalysts for participation, making it possible to gather information both from the collective and the actors representing the community, while helping to raise awareness about the role that the subjects and the collective play in this issue (CIMAS, 2009).

Ten intergenerational meetings were held between AP and OP, between the months of April and October, each one of them lasting approximately 90 minutes. Eight older people and eight adolescents participated in total, all Chilean nationals residing in Villarrica. The OP in the group were part of the *Club de Adulto Mayor* (Older Adults Club) of Villarrica, described themselves as in good health, and signed an informed consent to participate. The AP attended *Colegio de Humanidades* (School of Humanities) in Villarrica, were authorized to participate by their guardians, and also signed an informed consent. The project was endorsed and approved by the Ethics Committee of *Universidad de la Frontera.*

Table 1. Stages, techniques, and procedures used for the process of PAR between AP and OP in the district of Villarrica.

Stage	Techniques and Procedures
(1) Self-reflection and self-criticism. Assessment of the issue	Convening and self-reflection
	Creation of core group
	Sociodrama
	Work schedule
	Project dissemination
(2) Problematization and characterization	Initial mapping
	Community Garden
	Sociogram
	Interviews
	Analysis meetings
	Analysis and writing
(3) Creative feedback	Fishbowl
	Solution tree
	Prioritization workshop
	Foundations for a comprehensive action plan
(4) Planning	Monitoring final conversation
	Final activity
	Writing final report

Source: CIMAS, 2009.

First Stage: Self-Reflection and Self-Criticism, Assessment of the Issue

To reach out to the community, we visited the older adults clubs in the area, as well as *Colegio de Humanidades* in Villarrica, where we made an open call to participate. Two initial meetings were held with the participants who expressed interest. The objective of the first meeting was for the interested parties to meet, provide information about PAR, and agree on the times and locations where the activities would take place. Additionally, a SWOT analysis was carried out to understand the needs of each group. Finally, the participants were invited to join a core group, and the consent and assent were provided and explained for them to sign.

Subsequently, the core group was formed, with the objective of monitoring and critically discussing the research process daily, touching the social foundations of the community, and performing a contextualization and critical analysis of the present discourses. The core group consisted of two third-year students from *Colegio de Humanidades* and one OP from Villarrica. Meetings were held weekly after the workshops, to prepare activities for the next session, define roles, and coordinate and analyze the information collected from discussions and plenary sessions. The analysis had a descriptive perspective, in which the agreements were linked to citations to support them, and an interpretative perspective, based on content analysis that was part of the PAR process.

Finally, the first intergenerational meeting was held, using the sociodrama technique. This technique allows problematizing and searching for circumstances in which both groups share a particular situation, which, in this case, was discrimination. Eight OP, eight AP, and the researcher participated in this activity, where the participants were divided into two mixed groups and provided with supplies (clothing, accessories, glasses, scarves, and hats, among others). Each group chose a topic to represent ("discrimination in public transport" and "discrimination in the emergency room"); they talked about how they experience and understand age-based discrimination, created a story, and assigned roles. Following their presentations, a plenary session was held to discuss the issues that were raised.

Second Stage: Problematization and Characterization

The sociogram technique was used for the second meeting. In this workshop, seven OP and eight AP participated, as well as the researcher. The sociogram allowed visualizing the actors and social groups of the territory, knowing their position in relation to the problem (affinity) and their degree of influence (power). The participants were divided into two groups and provided with

supplies (cards, markers, scissors, glue). Time was allocated for collective analysis and creation. Subsequently, a plenary session was held where the groups presented their reflections and there was space for further discussion.

During the third meeting, a technique called "community garden" (*jardín comunitario*) was used. Seven OP and eight AP, plus the researcher, participated in this workshop. This technique allowed analyzing scenarios from the perspective of the subjects. The participants identified strong and weak points that need to be confronted, symbolized by Flowers (positive and internal), Weeds (negative and internal), Other Gardeners (positive and external), and Inclement Weather (negative and external) (Carrasco, 2010). Supplies (cardboard, scissors, magazines, colored paper, glue) were provided. The attendants were divided into 2 mixed groups, and time was allocated for collective analysis and creation. Finally, a plenary session was held where each group presented and debated what was done.

Third Stage: Creative Feedback

The purpose of the participatory process is to mirror back and restate the information to the community so that actions can be explored in depth, prioritized, and planned. To this end, the agreements, disagreements, and contradictions found in the diagnostic process were exposed, and a path was projected that would converge in a common project for all the participants.

The core team and the researcher systematized the information by gathering, selecting, and organizing the material that was produced during the diagnostic stage, aiming toward feedback.

The fourth meeting consisted in delving into the causes, consequences, and solutions, through the "Fishbowl" technique. This technique aims to analyze the internal and external causes and consequences of a given problem. Five OP and eight AP participated alongside the researcher. Paper fish were used, where we wrote different quotes extracted from the systematization process. Mixed groups of two to three people sat around a circle on the floor, the paper fish were placed inside, and each person was given a fishing line with a hook. Subsequently, the groups placed each fish in the category they considered appropriate (internal causes, external causes, and consequences), justifying their decision and discussing if it was adequate with the group. After this activity, a plenary session was held to share each group's agreements and explore the interrelations between the different causes and consequences.

In the fifth and sixth meetings, the problem-solution tree technique was used. This participatory technique helps identify the symptoms of the main issue and relate them to immediate and deep causes. Five OP, eight AP, and the researcher participated. The topics placed on the tree were extracted from the phrases collected in the previous meeting (fishbowl). The intention was to identify a central problem (related to the process) and to display the symptoms that make said problem evident in the community, as well as its most immediate and deepest causes (CIMAS, 2009). Subsequently, the "Problem Tree" was transformed into positive statements through the representation of a "Solution Tree", with the purpose to set objectives, find a first approach to possible solutions, and visualize the impact that these actions would have if the objectives were met. These workshops allowed the community to reflect on the axes that would sustain future work.

The seventh encounter consisted of a brief presentation by the core group to synthesize the experience (objectives, process, stages, and development). Seven OP and eight AP attended this meeting alongside the researcher. Audiovisual material gathered during the assessment, problematization, characterization, and creative feedback stages were used – videos, slides, maps, panels, photographs, and charts – and the core group provided a document with a summary of the analysis, confirming the agreements. To end the workshop, the participants were presented with the challenge to discuss with their communities (family, friends, and neighbors) what had been reflected in the meetings, and they were asked to bring ideas for the following workshops, of possible actions to eradicate ageism at the community level.

Fourth Stage: Planning Process; Comprehensive Action Plan

The eighth meeting consisted of Proposals and Planning workshops. A matrix of proposals and an analysis of factors were created to develop specific action proposals. Four OP and eight AP participated in this meeting. The action proposals were extracted from the main points of the Solution Tree. The planning workshop consisted in prioritizing the proposals, determining which one was more relevant, best met the objective, and was most feasible to carry out. The participants agreed on one action, which was then scheduled (date, place, participants, roles, etc.).

During the ninth meeting, the results of the process were shared for the first time. The final dissemination workshop was carried out with the participants, and in it, we gave an account of the process, the different moments of participation, agreements and disagreements, and proposed actions. Five OP and eight AP participated in this meeting alongside the researcher. A copy of the information was delivered to each participant, who had the opportunity to confirm their participation and commitment to specific roles for the final activity.

The tenth meeting consisted of socializing with the community. In this final activity, organized by the participants of the PAR and coordinated and led by the members of the core team, the group publicly shared the process, results, and conclusions. All eight OP and eight AP participated, alongside the researcher.

RESULTS

The results are presented in 2 sections. The first part provides information about the creation of knowledge by the community, which was obtained from the systematization of the workshops during the stages "Assessment of the issue", "Problematization and characterization" and "Creative feedback". Here, the factors that influence the emergence of ageism are established: labor market, individual factors, educational system, legislative power, cultural values, socioeconomic conditions, and technologies.

In the second part of the results, I describe the actions carried out by the community to eradicate ageism, proposed during the stages of "Creative feedback" and "Planning". These actions are: raising institutional awareness, changes in the role of the family, and changes at the social level. The latter is what constitutes the work plan developed by the AP and OP within their community.

Emerging Factors Involved in Ageism

The OP and AP who participated in this process determined that the factors that need to be considered when analyzing ageism are: technologies, the labor market, social networks, individual factors, the educational system, legislative power, cultural values, and socioeconomic conditions.

Technologies and social networks were mentioned as factors that impact the social image of OP, in particular, and the lifestyle of the population in general. These factors are considered to have significant power over the community and are seen as a double-edged tool, because, on the one hand, they distort reality (for example, by showing adolescents as "rebels" and OP as "sickly and abandoned") while at the same time having the potential to change this paradigm.

> "It shows older adults as inactive, defenseless beings who are practically a waste of space in society, which is not the case. And young people are stereotyped as people who are spoiling the country with their actions." PAR, quote 1, Sociogram, group 2.

> "Because technology keeps advancing, advancing, advancing, and each time we are left behind, alone, alone. In other words,

alienated, not totally, because we can be with our family, but our family is indifferent, everyone is on their phone, or I myself am on the computer, or listening to music on the cell phone, and my brother is playing with his toys, and also on his phone. My mom is the same, it's like this is developing little by little." PAR, quote 3, interview participant.

The labor market was mentioned as a factor since there are few work opportunities for OP. However, its level of power was considered to be low and unrelated to age-based discrimination because, according to the participants, it cannot be influenced.

> "The issues of retirement pensions or the few job opportunities have a great influence on how much they can achieve financially, so there are many restrictions." PAR, quote 11, core group participant.

Additionally, the participants mention employability as an aspect that influences the perception of OP.

> "They don't want to retire, they don't want to stop working, because they know, and quoting, 'I'm going to be useless.'" PAR, quote 28, interview participant.

Another determining factor is access to community networks (schools, neighborhood councils, and clubs for older adults). For example, the clubs for older adults are mentioned as an affinity space that holds medium power.

> "Different clubs, they show lots of motivation. They have problems, as all groups do, but they motivate each other, they have support groups, and take trips, and people may say 'right, a trip for old folks', but in reality, these are spaces in which they can share, learn, and enjoy." PAR, quote 5, interview participant.

Individual factors were also included. The community mentioned that age-related changes are overestimated, and result in a misperception of decreased functionality, generalizing an idea of inevitable health deterioration upon reaching the age of 60.

> "An older adult is not 'elderly', we are older, slower in all activities, sometimes even slower when thinking, but being a bit slower does not mean we have an impairment, it's just slowness. We are also slower to express ourselves, to... well, due to the physical conditions related to age, there can be hearing or sight loss, that makes us slower, but that doesn't make us incapable." PAR, quote 22, interview participant.

> "Some people, when getting to that age, going from 59 to 60 they're like 'oh, I'm an older adult now', and it's only a year

more, but the concept itself is seen as a bad thing." PAR, quote 22, interview participant.

Another element is the educational system, which has changed its role from creating values to generating a competitive and individualistic environment. Despite this, it is considered a relevant actor, that is, it is highly valued as an agent of change, with a high level of power.

"If society has come to think that older people are useless, it is because at some point in education, the idea that you must produce to be useful was instilled." PAR, quote 12, interview participant.

Participants also mentioned the legislative power and the role of the state. The laws were considered relevant and of medium power, because it is possible to create laws that protect OP, such as the anti-discrimination or anti-abuse law for older persons. The state is mentioned as a related factor with medium power, mainly because it is seen as an actor that, although concerned about OP, does not offer effective actions to generate change in the model.

"The state should somehow support the people more (...) but regarding the people who live in precarious conditions, the state should offer benefits." PAR, quote 15, Sociogram participant.

Cultural and social values are regarded as factors that contribute to ageism. The participants refer that the values that make us a society have changed, leaving the family – and its members – out.

"And on the other hand, society stigmatizes them, because there is such a materialistic vision of the issue, if you do not produce you are useless; older people have stopped working, so they are not productive for the government, they are not productive for society, hence, you become the useless part of society." PAR, quote 18, interview participant.

The OP and AP in the group state that socioeconomic conditions are affected by ageism. For example, the pension fund administration system (AFP) provides retirement payments that are insufficient and therefore hinder the possibility to enjoy social activities such as going out, visiting relatives or friends, traveling, or comprehensively improving living conditions.

"At this moment, I think we are living day-to-day, not only because of the quality of our physical health, but because of our financial situation; this impacts what we can do. Pensions are very low; we spend 90, 60, 70% on medicines, and the rest, well, on basic expenses, firewood, gas, and such". PAR, quote 20. IAP, Sociogram participant.

On the other hand, the participants mention that the forced isolation resulting from financial restriction contributes to the misconstrued social image of OP, thus strengthening ageism.

"There is some discrimination due to the vulnerability of people. Because if you see a financially vulnerable person, or socially, or physically, you will unconsciously discriminate against them, because you believe they are of no use to you." PAR, quote 21, interview participant.

Actions Identified by AP and OP to Reduce Ageism

The problematic situations and their causes-consequences were analyzed at different levels, and the group outlined several courses of action meant to reduce ageism. The actions proposed by the participants were:

Raising institutional awareness: The participants report that changes have not been able to keep up with the demand, since the government does not give a proper level of priority to this issue. It is necessary for institutions to prioritize OP and for them to be valued as citizens with knowledge, power, and experience, not just recipients of benefits. Furthermore, it is fundamental that the participation of OP in this matter grows, as they have not yet organized with sufficient force to demand these changes.

"The health policies that have been implemented aim towards that goal, but we must take them even more seriously, we are working against time." PAR, quote 33, problem tree workshop participant.

"This is why we would have to see a radical policy change, we would have to participate in current policies. Because otherwise, we're not going to achieve anything, we have to participate, there are so many of us." PAR, quote 34, problem tree workshop participant.

"Better care in public services, especially hospitals, in health, older adults should have priority." PAR, quote, problem tree participant.

Changes in the role of the family: the community suggests that it is essential that families once again become the main educators, teaching values that allow for creating space for older people and responsibility for their care.

"Teaching them to live more as a family, with family values." PAR, quote 35, solution tree.

"That is why the family, the children, should also take responsibility for their older adults." PAR, quote 36, Fishbowl, group 2.

Changes at the social level: This area was chosen as the framework to carry out the plan in the community because the participants believe that actions framed by social change are more likely to be completed in the short term. Furthermore, they cover a greater proportion of the objectives included in the Solution Tree (Figure 1): capturing the attention of society; increasing opportunities for communication; educating about OP; adjusting the role of families.
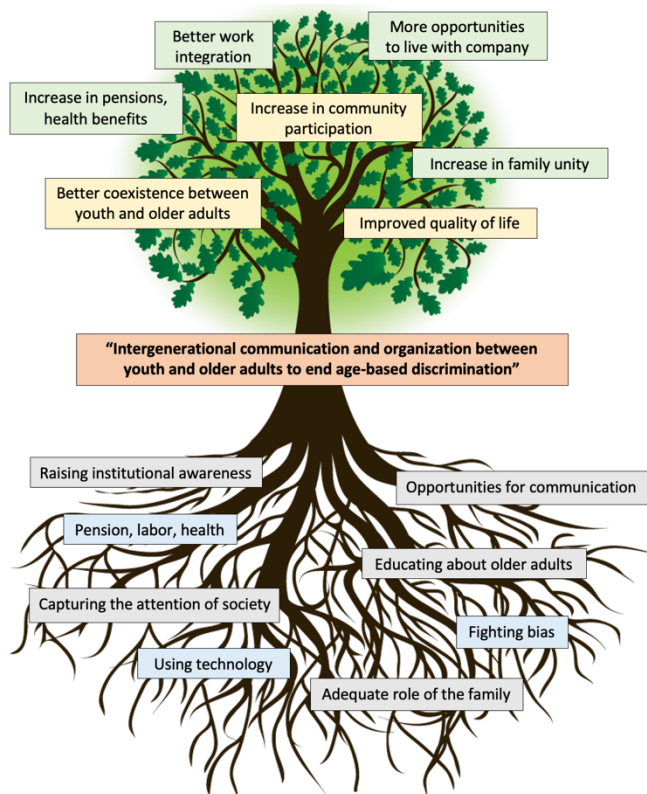
Figure 1. Solution tree developed during the stage "Problematization and characterization". The actions that the participants deem possible to carry out in the community are shown in the lower right area of the figure.

After choosing this area, actions were proposed to define the ideal scenario. The participants agreed that the need was to "share the experience of the activities done between adolescents and older people in the district of Villarrica." This activity was carried out at the municipal health fair, where several health workers, community workers, older people, local authorities (mayor and councilors), as well as general public of different ages attended. The attendants were pleasantly surprised and showed interest in the achievements and experiences of the participants, who agreed to organize more activities of this kind, where AP and OP can

meet. Additionally, they suggested the possibility of holding meetings with people from other age groups. The remaining task is to present this process to the mayor and councilors of the township and thus fulfill its social purpose, which is intertwined with the actions to create friendlier cities for older adults.

DISCUSSION

In order to address the challenges of building a common perspective of ageism, it is vital to reflect on the following issues: factors and actions associated with ageism, the concept of participation, PAR and its methodologies, and the questioning process occurring in academia and research.

Firstly, we need to reflect on the knowledge created by the participants regarding ageism, based both on their own experiences and knowledge and on the community reflections and agreements resulting from the meetings. It was vital to have a horizontal dialogue, democratize the process and make it participatory. The openness, empowerment, and reflective capacity of the AP and OP participating in the PAR are also noteworthy. During the construction of knowledge, the AP and OP expressed receiving daily explicit and implicit messages about aging (Montes, V. 2013) that have influenced their perception. Consequently, the group identified key factors to the establishment of ageism, such as individual factors, the impact of technologies and mass media, socioeconomic conditions, cultural values, and the role of the state. Some of these represent structural determinants and are similar to the suggestions of the 2015 Convention on the rights of OP concerning the eradication of age-based discrimination, and to the 2021 Global Report on Ageism by PAHO.

The relevance given to age-related changes and the decrease in functionality stands out, which is described by the participants as exaggerated. The collective representation of aging is strongly negative (Arnold, 2021) and associated with a biological vision of impairment, which results in a reductive view of the broader and more complex identity of OP (Iacub & Arias, 2010). Acknowledging the members of these marginalized groups as subjects of rights implies fighting to advance toward inclusive and democratic societies that conceive differences as part of the complexity of humankind and not as reasons for segregation.

Technologies and/or media are also mentioned by the community and by authors such as Appel & Weber (2017) and Ylänne (2015), as influential elements for a collective perception of OP. We are aware today that how people are represented in the media is

decisive (Fraser et al., 2020), since it influences our perceptions and daily interactions, including how we relate to OP and our self-image as we grow older (Loos & Ivan, 2018). This is an opinion shared among the OP who participated in this process, who mention that mass media generally show a lack of representation of OP and, when they do represent them, negative traits prevail over positive ones (Arnold, et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the participants report that the current socioeconomic conditions result in inequalities, restricting the access of OP to essential goods, basic services, and social security (ECLAC, 2021). Furthermore, they have to endure progressive social devaluation for not fulfilling active/productive roles and not having a clear place within society, losing social value for "not contributing financially." This relates to what various authors mention regarding the social valuation of people according to their economic utility (Deutscher, 2019; Harvey, 2014; Sandel, 2021). The participants perceive this fact and refer that capitalist values have contributed to ageism by creating a society that is more individualistic, more focused on production, and that has set the family (and its members) aside, thus perpetuating the exclusion of OP from multiple spheres, including the economic, political, and cultural, among others (Arnold, 2021). However, the evolution of social values (together with economic and social changes) can cause stereotypes to change over time (Fayehun et al., 2014).

Additionally, the group determined that the state is a central actor and should assume strategic management of the issue, with a long-term approach (United Nations, 2014; ECLAC 2021). Some of the steps that are suggested are eradicating ageism from institutions, work, legislation, and the state itself, since this bias reduces opportunities and systematically harms OP based on their age (ECLAC 2022; Lloyd-Sherlock et al. al., 2016). The community appreciates certain changes that have been made to state policies and have materialized in the implementation of regulatory and administrative mechanisms, such as the approval in Chile of the Inter-American Convention. However, these have not resulted in significant programmatic actions (Aranda, et al, 2022). The first step would be to achieve a formal recognition of equal rights and an understanding of age-based discrimination; nonetheless, this is not enough to change the situation of disadvantage that OP face in a practical manner, because the dominant structures and ideologies hinder the possibilities of exercising their citizenship fully (D'cruz & Banerjee 2020).

It is critical to reflect on the participation of OP, which should be regarded as a principle, a right, and a duty, and requires the positive support of the state and its institutions to guarantee the integration of this group. However, participating implies more than the act of voting, belonging to a political party, or joining a religious, sports, or social group. Participation implies being actively and consciously involved in eliminating the gaps that produce inequality, and being part of the social challenge that the aging process entails. This task requires institutional, personal, and professional willingness and it implies breaking with traditionally welfare-oriented approaches, as well as advocating for human rights (ECLAC, 2012).

Participatory Action Research, as well as the different tools used in this work, allows for building a symmetric relationship between subjects, mediated by a much more egalitarian, democratic, and participatory communication process (Oliveira, 2015). This study managed to apply a principle of horizontality, not only in the interaction between the researcher and participants but also between the different generations. The dialogue and disposition of the participants in all the stages of the process (assessment, problematization, characterization, feedback, and planning) stand out; both the OP and AP had open discussions, without reservations and allowing both agreement and disagreement to arise. This resulted in an increased sense of trust between the participants, who reported feeling very comfortable and enjoying their collaboration and their search for solutions to a common problem (even when the emphasis was mainly on how ageism affects OP). This allowed them to see themselves as active agents in their environments, capable of generating change and questioning normalized practices and expressions that are a constant source of discrimination. Moreover, they were able to carry out actions in their community that, although limited to a particular moment (municipal health fair), served to strengthen the participatory and bridging role of the encounters, and to place them as community references for intergenerational action. That is, OP reclaimed adequate participation, from the perspective of being subjects of law (Alatorre-Frenk, 2021).

On a personal level, this researcher gained significant knowledge, built from the experiences of the intergenerational meetings and theoretical-methodological proposals. Carrying out research through PAR is not an easy decision, not to mention working with groups that face negative social representations (Montes, 2013). Nevertheless, our stance as researchers can open the door to questioning and reflecting on society. Our representations of OP have been created based on stereotypes and prejudices, and have been installed throughout life in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, media, and in our training as researchers (Burnes et al., 2019), which influences the topics we study and the methodologies we use. For this reason, to create knowledge that promotes a critical vision and opens the space for dialogue, it is

necessary to have researchers and contexts that work from a rights approach and actively advocate for the participation of OP (Montes, 2013). This constitutes an ethical, political, and epistemic duty that should be incorporated into our training, and that calls us to rethink the principles, methods, and purposes of scientific work (FLACSO, 2016; Mercon, 2022).

There is still a long way to go regarding the cognitive and social representations of old age. Research continues to be under the monopoly of the market (Mercon, 2022) and Latin America continues to prioritize interests created by first-world countries, with most references about ageism originating in the English-speaking world; this has prevented us from becoming referents in this area (Mercon, 2022; Oliveira, 2015; Santos, 2011). Lastly, we must understand that it is not old age that hinders the exercise of human rights, it is the conception of old age (which is accentuated by research) that denies older persons the enjoyment of those rights (Megret, 2011).

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