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Preliminary analysis of the psychometric properties of the Portuguese Perceived Ageism Questionnaire (PAQ)

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Perceived ageism is a relevant variable for understanding adults' mental health across different ages. The Perceived Ageism Questionnaire (PAQ) assesses how adults perceive ageism directed towards themselves—both negative and positive ageism—through dimensions of stereotype, prejudice and discrimination. The aim of this study was to (a) analyze the psychometric properties of the Portuguese version of the PAQ and (b) analyze the associations between PAQ, mental health, and age.

Method: Across two different samples, 1,941 participants between 18 and 91 years completed the PAQ. In addition to perceived ageism, depression, anxiety, stress, and satisfaction with life were assessed. An exploratory (sample 1; $n = 970$) and confirmatory (sample 2; $n = 971$) factor analysis of the PAQ was performed. The PAQ's reliability, relationship with other assessed variables, and age distribution were evaluated.

Results: The Portuguese PAQ demonstrated good internal consistency in both samples. Factor analyses supported a bidimensional structure: perceived negative and positive ageism showed distinct patterns. Higher perceived negative ageism was significantly correlated with worse mental health. Negative ageism exhibited a U-shaped distribution across age, with younger and older adults reporting higher levels than middle-aged adults.

Conclusion: The Portuguese version of the PAQ shows good psychometric properties, supporting its use in Portuguese-speaking populations.

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KEYWORDS

Aging; mental health; perceived ageism; psychometrics

Introduction

Ageism is characterized by stereotypes (cognitive perceptions), prejudice (emotional responses), and discrimination (behaviours) directed towards individuals or oneself based on age (WHO, 2021). Given how widespread it is and the negative impact it has, ageism is a worldwide crisis (e.g. Levy et al., 2022). It is estimated that half of the global population shows ageist attitudes against older adults (WHO, 2021). And in a sample of over 2000 Americans aged 50-80, 93.4% reported experiencing ageism in their daily lives (Allen et al., 2022).

Most ageism studies focus on older adults (e.g. Levy et al., 2022; WHO, 2021). But some studies have shown that younger individuals report experiencing more age discrimination than other age groups (e.g. Bratt et al., 2020; Fiorini Bincoletto et al., 2023; Garstka et al., 2004). Bringing these two perspectives together, it appears ageism is experienced in a U-shape, being high in young people, low in middle age, and high again in older people (Bratt et al., 2018). This U-shaped distribution of perceived ageism mirrors the U-shaped distribution of identifying with one's age group, with younger and older age groups showing stronger identification with their respective age groups (e.g. Abrams et al., 2011; Marques et al., 2014).

The recognition of one's age may be particularly significant for both younger and older individuals because these groups are experiencing notable life transitions that contribute to age categorization (e.g. parenthood or retirement). After age categorization has taken place, stereotypes linked to the age category may be inaccurately attributed to the individual. This could

lead to discrimination and make individuals apprehensive about being negatively evaluated based on their age, ('stereotype threat'; Lamont et al., 2015). As a reaction to this, Swift et al. (2018) proposed that these groups might be more driven to uphold a positive self-image, thereby becoming more prone to harbouring ageist views against other groups. Consequently, individuals in older and younger age groups might be more susceptible to both perceiving and experiencing age discrimination from others.

By contrary, studies reveal a lack of consensus regarding gender differences in perceived ageism. Tahmaseb-McConatha et al. (2023) highlight that older women report higher levels of ageism than men due to intersecting biases, particularly in workplace settings. Conversely, Rippon et al. (2014) found that older men perceive more age discrimination than women in contexts shaped by socioeconomic factors, such as employment opportunities. McGann et al. (2016) explain that societal norms associating aging with diminished productivity and adaptability may lead older men to report heightened ageism in specific environments, despite generally experiencing less discrimination than women. These findings suggest that stereotypes about aging interact with gender roles and societal expectations, resulting in variations in perceived ageism across different settings.

Specifying the negative effects of age discrimination, previous studies have found a consistent association between higher perceived ageism and lower well-being in both older and younger adults (e.g. Fiorini Bincoletto et al., 2023). For example,