

# Examination of Ageism and Its Manifestation among The Youth (GEN-Z) in The Church, Kenya

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## Abstract

Ageism is commonly associated with discrimination against older adults; however, recent scholarship shows that younger populations also experience age-based exclusion in institutional settings. This study examines the manifestations of ageism among Generation Z youth within the Catholic Church in Kenya. Guided by the Relative Deprivation Theory, the study explores how perceived inequalities in decision-making power and leadership opportunities influence youth participation in church activities. A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 180 Catholic youth and semi-structured interviews with clergy and church leaders in the Catholic Diocese of Kakamega. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to capture youth perceptions of exclusion and participation. The findings reveal that many Generation Z members receive limited involvement in church leadership and decision-making processes. Age-based stereotypes, hierarchical leadership structures, and restricted mentorship opportunities were identified as key factors contributing to youth marginalization. The study concludes that ageism within church institutions can undermine youth engagement and long-term leadership development. It recommends greater inclusion of young people (Gen Z) in leadership structures, intergenerational dialogue, and institutional reforms that promote equitable participation in church governance.

**Keywords:** Ageism; Generation Z; Youth participation; Catholic Church; Kenya.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the study

Ageism, broadly understood as stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination against individuals based on their age, has increasingly become a significant social concern globally. The concept of ageism was first articulated by Butler (1969), who described it as a systematic form of discrimination embedded in social institutions and cultural attitudes that marginalize individuals based on their age. Although early scholarship focused primarily on discrimination against older persons, later studies have demonstrated that age-based prejudice can also affect younger individuals who may be perceived as inexperienced, immature, or incapable of leadership (Palmore, 2002; North & Fiske, 2012).

International organizations have increasingly recognized the widespread consequences of age-based discrimination across societies. The World Health Organization identifies ageism as a pervasive global problem that affects individuals across the life course and limits opportunities for participation in social, economic, and political life (WHO, 2021). Similarly, the United Nations has emphasized that age discrimination undermines equality and social inclusion, calling for coordinated global action to combat ageism and promote intergenerational solidarity (UN, 2023). These global perspectives highlight the need to examine how age-based inequalities manifest within different institutional settings.

Despite growing international recognition of ageism, young people across the world continue to face structural barriers that limit their participation in leadership and governance processes. Youth are frequently stereotyped as irresponsible, impulsive, or inexperienced, which may lead to their exclusion from decision-making processes within political, economic, and social institutions (North & Fiske, 2012; Checkoway, 2011). Such perceptions reinforce generational inequalities that restrict youth participation even in contexts where they constitute a significant portion of the population.

Globally, young people represent an important social resource capable of contributing to innovation, social transformation, and leadership development. According to Erdman Palmore (2002), youth between the ages of 15 and 30 possess considerable potential to shape the future of societies through creativity, energy, and civic engagement. Scholars of youth participation similarly emphasize that empowering young people strengthens democratic institutions and enhances social development (Checkoway, 2011; Honwana, 2012). However,

despite this recognition, youth in many societies continue to experience structural marginalization that limits their access to decision-making platforms.

These generational inequalities are particularly evident in many African societies where social relations are shaped by cultural norms that emphasize respect for elders and hierarchical authority structures. While such cultural values play an important role in maintaining social cohesion, they may also create generational power imbalances when younger individuals are excluded from positions of leadership and influence (Honwana, 2012). Consequently, young people often participate actively in community activities but rarely occupy decision-making roles within institutional governance structures.

In Kenya, youth constitute a large proportion of the population and play an important role in social, economic, and political life. Although the Kenyan government has implemented several youth empowerment initiatives, such as 'Kazi kwa Vijana' aimed at addressing unemployment and promoting youth development, many young people continue to experience barriers to meaningful participation in governance and leadership structures (Savala, 2020). These barriers are not limited to political and economic institutions but are also evident within social institutions such as religious organizations and churches (Savala, 2020).

Religious institutions play a significant role in shaping social values, leadership development, and community engagement in Kenyan society. Churches in particular serve as important platforms for spiritual formation, mentorship, and social interaction. However, despite the large number of young people within church congregations, their participation in institutional leadership and decision-making processes often remains limited. Scholars observe that young people are frequently involved in church activities such as youth fellowships, worship teams, and evangelism programs, yet they are rarely integrated into governance structures where key decisions are made (Savala, 2020).

The emergence of Generation Z has further transformed generational dynamics within contemporary institutions. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has grown up in a digital environment. Studies suggest that this generation tends to value inclusivity, transparency, and participatory leadership models more strongly than previous generations (Twenge, 2017). Consequently, members of Generation Z increasingly expect institutions to provide opportunities for dialogue, participation, and accountability.

Recent developments in Kenya illustrate the growing civic consciousness of Generation Z and their demand for greater participation in decision-making processes. In June 2024, Kenya witnessed large-scale youth-led demonstrations in response to the proposed Finance Bill 2024, which introduced new taxes on essential goods and services. These demonstrations, widely referred to as the Gen-Z protests, were largely organized by young people through social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram (Madowo, 2024; Cheeseman, Lynch, & Willis, 2024).

The protests quickly spread across major urban centres, including Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and Nakuru, attracting thousands of young participants who demanded government accountability, economic justice, and improved governance (Cheeseman et al., 2024). Scholars analysing the protests observe that they represented a significant moment in Kenya's civic activism because they demonstrated the growing political awareness and mobilizing capacity of digitally connected youth (Madowo, 2024). The protests ultimately forced the government to withdraw the controversial Finance Bill, highlighting the potential influence of youth-driven civic engagement in contemporary Kenyan politics (Cheeseman et al., 2024).

These developments illustrate the increasing expectations among young people for greater participation in institutional governance and decision-making processes. As digital natives exposed to global debates on democracy, accountability, and human rights, members of Generation Z often expect institutions to demonstrate greater transparency and inclusivity. When such expectations are not met, young people may express dissatisfaction through alternative forms of civic engagement, including social media activism and public protest (Twenge, 2017; Cheeseman et al., 2024).

Within religious institutions such as the church, similar tensions arise when younger members perceive that their voices are marginalized or excluded from leadership and decision-making processes. Churches remain influential institutions in Kenyan society, shaping moral values, leadership formation, and community engagement. However, when generational hierarchies limit youth participation in church governance, young people may experience forms of age-based exclusion that discourage their active involvement in institutional leadership. Understanding how such age-based dynamics manifest within church contexts is therefore critical for addressing generational inequalities and promoting more inclusive leadership structures that recognize the contributions of Generation Z youth in contemporary Kenyan Christianity.

## 1.2. Statement of the problem

From the ongoing introduction, it's clear that the issue of ageism is a topic of concern. Organizations such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations, which advocate for the rights of human beings, recognize the existence of this issue too. The United Nations has recognized ageism as a form of discrimination and has called for actions to combat it. Youth are the majority group that faces significant challenges arising from globalization. Moreover, a serious participation gap exists; young people are often excluded from formal decision-making processes and likewise the opportunity to effectively influence and shape their own culture. The church and government, being the main institutions championing the empowerment of youths, seem to have ignored their existence. This exclusion is often fueled by stereotypes of young people as agents of violence and extremism. Is it therefore the church and government that are making it difficult for the youths? It is against this backdrop that this paper examines ageism and its manifestation among the youth (Gen Z) in the church.

## 1.3. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine ageism and its manifestation among the youth (Gen-Z) in the church in Kenya

## 1.4. Theoretical framework

This study utilized James Collins Davies' relative deprivation theory. According to Davies (1959), people's perception of their own circumstances is not solely based on their objective situation, but also on what they see around them. It posits that people compare their situation to others they see around, and when they perceive an unfair discrepancy or a gap between their situation and that of others, they experience a sense of relative deprivation. This sense of relative deprivation can result in feelings of anxiety, frustration, and resentment towards those who have more than they do, and can lead these individuals to take action to reduce the gap. This deprivation is predominantly negative, and the said group suffers negative effects which in the long results to an imbalanced society.

This inequality in the form of ageism against the youth, and because it is widely encouraged either as passed down or societal standards, proves to be more difficult to eradicate. The principles of this theory are that individuals evaluate their circumstances and well-being by comparing themselves to others. This comparison often focuses on individuals or groups perceived as similar or relevant for the specific context. Secondly, instead of an absolute standard of well-being, people tend to use a relative standard, which means they assess their situation relative to what they perceive as fair or appropriate based on the circumstances of others (Davies, 1959). Additionally, if individuals perceive that they are worse off than those they compare themselves to, they may experience feelings of relative deprivation.

This can lead to dissatisfaction, frustration, and a sense of injustice.

This theory is relevant to the current study as it is helpful in understanding how the youth express their grievances stemming from manifest societal discrimination and their demand for social change.

## **1.5. Literature review**

### **1.5.1. Conceptualizing ageism in social and institutional contexts**

Ageism refers to stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination directed toward individuals based on their age. The concept was first articulated by Robert N. Butler, who described ageism as a systematic form of discrimination embedded within social institutions and cultural practices (Butler, 1969). Butler argued that age-based discrimination often shapes how individuals are perceived in terms of competence, authority, and social value.

Subsequent scholarship has expanded this understanding by demonstrating that ageism operates not only at the interpersonal level but also within institutional structures. According to Erdman Palmore, ageism can manifest through institutional norms and practices that privilege certain age groups while marginalizing others from positions of authority and decision-making (Palmore, 1999). Such dynamics may influence how organizations allocate leadership roles and responsibilities.

Although much of the early literature focused on discrimination against older adults, recent studies indicate that younger individuals may also experience forms of age-based marginalization. North and Fiske (2012) argue that generational stereotypes frequently influence perceptions of competence and authority, reinforcing hierarchical structures that privilege older individuals in leadership roles. Within institutional environments where experience and seniority are highly valued, younger members may therefore encounter barriers to meaningful participation. Religious institutions are not immune to these dynamics. Churches often operate within cultural frameworks that associate leadership with age, experience, and spiritual maturity. Consequently, younger members may find themselves excluded from leadership positions or decision-making processes despite being active participants in church life.

### **1.5.2. Youth participation in church institutions**

Youth participation is widely recognized as an essential element in the sustainability and vitality of religious institutions. Churches play an important role in shaping the spiritual development, identity formation, and moral orientation of young people. However, research suggests that many church institutions struggle to integrate youth meaningfully into leadership and governance structures.

Savala (2020) argues that churches serve as important social and spiritual spaces where young people develop values, leadership skills, and community identity. Nevertheless, Savala observes that youth participation in many church contexts remains largely programmatic rather than structural. Young people may actively engage in church activities such as worship, evangelism, and youth fellowships, yet they often remain excluded from institutional decision-making processes. Similar observations are made by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, who argue that many young people perceive church institutions as environments where their voices are not sufficiently valued (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2011). Their research indicates that younger generations frequently disengage from church communities when they feel that institutional structures limit their participation and influence.

Theological scholarship further highlights how institutional arrangements within churches may inadvertently marginalize youth. According to Kenda Creasy Dean, youth are often confined to specialized ministries rather than integrated into broader leadership structures (Dean, 2010). While youth ministries are designed to nurture spiritual growth, they may unintentionally reinforce generational separation when young people remain excluded from church governance and leadership. These findings suggest that youth disengagement from church institutions is not merely a result of declining religiosity but may also reflect institutional practices that limit youth participation in meaningful ways.

### **1.5.3. Intergenerational leadership dynamics in churches**

Leadership within religious institutions is frequently structured around hierarchical systems that emphasize experience, seniority, and institutional continuity. While such structures can provide organizational stability, they may also reinforce generational inequalities when leadership roles are predominantly occupied by older individuals.

Studies of African Christianity indicate that church leadership structures often reflect broader cultural norms that emphasize respect for elders and senior authority. According to Damaris Parsitau, the development of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in Kenya has occurred within social contexts where authority and legitimacy are closely associated with age and experience (Parsitau, 2007). These cultural expectations may shape how leadership roles are distributed within church institutions.

Similarly, Paul Gifford observes that leadership in many African churches tends to remain concentrated among senior figures who possess spiritual authority and institutional experience (Gifford, 2004). Although youth often constitute a significant proportion of church congregations, they may have limited influence over institutional governance.

At the same time, broader social changes are reshaping the expectations of younger generations regarding leadership and participation. Contemporary youth are increasingly exposed to participatory models of governance through education, digital communication, and global cultural exchange. As a result, younger church members may seek greater inclusion in decision-making processes within religious institutions.

These evolving expectations highlight the need to examine how generational dynamics influence youth participation and empowerment within church leadership structures.

#### 1.5.4. Youth empowerment and leadership inclusion

Youth empowerment in church contexts involves providing young people with opportunities to develop leadership skills, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to the direction of religious institutions. Scholars emphasize that empowering youth is essential for ensuring the long-term sustainability and relevance of churches.

Savala (2020) stresses that youth empowerment requires more than symbolic participation in church activities. Instead, churches must create institutional spaces where young people can actively contribute to leadership and governance. When youth are denied such opportunities, they may perceive themselves as peripheral members rather than integral participants in church life.

Research on youth ministry also highlights the importance of mentorship and leadership development in fostering youth engagement. Root (2007) argues that mentorship relationships between experienced church leaders and younger members can facilitate the transfer of leadership skills and institutional knowledge. Such intergenerational collaboration can strengthen relationships within church communities while creating pathways for youth leadership.

Nevertheless, many churches continue to maintain leadership structures that limit youth authority within institutional governance. As noted by Kenda Creasy Dean, youth participation often occurs within narrowly defined roles that do not allow young people to influence strategic decisions or institutional policies (Dean, 2010). This distinction between participation and empowerment underscores the importance of examining how institutional practices may reinforce generational inequalities within church leadership.

#### 1.5.5. Empirical perspectives on youth engagement in African churches

Empirical studies on youth engagement in African churches highlight the central role that religious institutions play in shaping youth spirituality, social networks, and community participation. Churches often provide spaces where young people develop leadership skills through activities such as worship teams, evangelism programs, and youth ministries.

According to Paul Gifford, Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Africa have been particularly successful in attracting young people through dynamic worship practices and youth-centered ministries (Gifford, 2004). These churches frequently incorporate music, media, and contemporary cultural forms that resonate with younger generations.

However, despite this active engagement, research indicates that youth rarely occupy influential leadership positions within church governance structures. Parsitau (2007) notes that while young people play a significant role in the growth of contemporary Christianity in Africa, institutional leadership often remains concentrated among older members.

This imbalance suggests that although youth participation in church activities may be widespread, opportunities for meaningful leadership involvement remain limited.

#### 1.5.6. Research gap

Existing literature provides valuable insights into youth participation, church leadership, and generational dynamics within religious institutions. However, relatively little research has examined the specific manifestations of ageism directed toward youth within church leadership structures, particularly within African contexts.

Most studies focus on youth religiosity, youth ministry practices, or generational disengagement in Western societies (Smith & Denton, 2005; Dean, 2010). Meanwhile, research on African Christianity often emphasizes church growth, Pentecostal movements, or theological developments rather than generational inequalities within church governance (Parsitau, 2007; Gifford, 2004).

Furthermore, although Savala (2020) highlights the importance of youth inclusion in church life, limited empirical research has examined how age-based perceptions and institutional structures may influence youth empowerment within church leadership.

This study, therefore, addresses this gap by examining ageism and its manifestations among Generation Z youth in church institutions in Kenya, to contribute to broader discussions on intergenerational inclusion, youth participation, and leadership within contemporary religious communities.

## 2. Ageism in Society

### 2.1. Understanding ageism in society

Understanding the phenomenon examined in this study requires clarification of several key concepts that guide the analysis. These include ageism, youth empowerment, and intergenerational authority structures. Clarifying these concepts helps to establish the theoretical basis for examining how age-based discrimination may influence youth participation within institutional contexts such as the church.

Ageism refers to prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination directed toward individuals based on their age. The term was first introduced by Butler (1969) to describe discrimination against older adults. However, subsequent scholarship has expanded the concept to include discrimination experienced by younger populations when they are perceived as inexperienced, immature, or incapable of meaningful participation in social institutions (Palmore, 2005; Kimball, 2017). In this broader sense, ageism encompasses attitudes, institutional practices, and social structures that assign competence and authority according to age rather than individual ability. Within the context of this study, ageism refers to attitudes and practices that marginalize young people by limiting their participation in leadership and decision-making processes.

Closely related to this concept is youth empowerment. Youth empowerment refers to processes through which young people gain the confidence, skills, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives and communities (Jennings et al., 2006). Empowerment involves recognizing young people as capable contributors to social and institutional development rather than viewing them merely as passive recipients of adult guidance. In institutional settings, youth empowerment is reflected in the extent to which young people are given opportunities to express their perspectives, participate in leadership roles, and influence organizational decision-making processes.

Another important concept is intergenerational authority structures. These refer to patterns of leadership and decision-making in which authority is predominantly concentrated among older members of a community or institution, while younger members are expected to occupy subordinate roles (Woodman, 2016). Such structures are often shaped by cultural norms that associate age with wisdom, authority, and leadership. While these norms may promote respect for elders, they may also unintentionally limit opportunities for younger individuals to participate actively in institutional governance.

These concepts are closely interconnected in understanding the experiences of young people within institutions. Ageism may manifest through intergenerational authority structures that prioritize the voices and leadership of older members while limiting opportunities for youth participation. In such contexts, youth empowerment becomes an important framework for examining how institutions can create more inclusive spaces where young people are recognized as valuable contributors to decision-making processes. This conceptual understanding provides the basis for examining how age-based attitudes and institutional practices may influence the participation of Generation Z within church settings.

Scholars increasingly emphasize that ageism operates not only through individual attitudes but also through broader social systems. Krieger (2017) notes that ageism manifests through stereotypes and discriminatory practices that shape how individuals from different age groups are perceived and treated within society. Similarly, Arnett (2000) argues that age-based discrimination often emerges through social expectations, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that restrict opportunities for certain age groups. In this sense, ageism becomes embedded in everyday interactions as well as in organizational structures. Palmore (2005) further observes that such practices reinforce divisions between generations by perpetuating assumptions about the competence, maturity, or authority of particular age groups.

Within society, ageism can take several forms. According to Arnett (2000), it comprises of Personal ageism, which refers to the stereotypes and prejudices individuals hold toward others based on age. Institutional ageism occurs when policies and organizational practices systematically disadvantage certain age groups. Intergenerational ageism reflects tensions and stereotypes between younger and older generations, often arising from differences in values, experiences, or expectations. Ageism may also become internalized when individuals adopt negative beliefs about their own age group and begin to question their capabilities. In addition, structural ageism refers to inequalities embedded within social systems that limit access to opportunities, resources, and participation for certain age groups. These different forms illustrate that ageism is not merely a matter of personal bias but a broader social phenomenon that influences power relations and participation within society.

## 2.2. Manifestations of ageism against youth

While ageism has often been discussed in relation to older adults, recent studies highlight how young people also experience age-based marginalization. Lesko (2001) argues that youth are frequently constructed in society as incomplete or immature individuals who require supervision and control from adults. This social construction influences how young people are treated within institutions such as schools, workplaces, communities, and religious organizations.

One of the most common manifestations of ageism against youth is the persistence of negative stereotypes. Young people are often portrayed as irresponsible, rebellious, or incapable of making sound decisions. Such stereotypes shape societal attitudes and influence the extent to which young people are trusted with responsibility or leadership. Kimball (2017) notes that these assumptions often marginalize young people by dismissing their perspectives and undervaluing their contributions to society.

Ageism also manifests through structural barriers that limit youth participation in social and institutional processes. Lavender (2012) observes that young people are frequently excluded from leadership roles and decision-making structures because they are perceived as lacking the experience necessary for such responsibilities. These assumptions may persist even when young individuals possess the knowledge and skills required to contribute meaningfully to institutional development.

In addition to structural barriers, ageism can be reinforced through everyday interpersonal interactions. Adults may treat young people dismissively or disregard their opinions due to assumptions about their maturity and competence. Such attitudes contribute to a culture in which youth voices are marginalized, and their participation in decision-making processes is limited.

Media representations also play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of youth. Cultural portrayals that depict young people as rebellious, problematic, or socially disruptive reinforce negative stereotypes and influence public attitudes. These representations contribute to broader societal narratives that question the credibility and responsibility of young people.

Ageism can further influence young people's experiences within educational environments. Teachers and administrators may hold assumptions about the abilities and behavior of students based on their age, which can affect expectations, disciplinary practices, and opportunities for leadership within schools. Similarly, legal and policy frameworks may reflect ageist assumptions by restricting youth autonomy or limiting their participation in public affairs.

The labor market provides another context in which ageism may affect young people. Employers often associate competence and reliability with older workers, which can create barriers for youth seeking employment. As a result, young people may encounter difficulties entering the job market or accessing fair employment opportunities (Lavender, 2012).

## 2.3. Effects and indicators of ageism

Ageism has significant social, psychological, and economic consequences for young people. Kimball (2017) argues that age-based discrimination marginalizes youth by devaluing their experiences, ideas, and potential contributions. When young people perceive that their opinions are ignored or undervalued, they may feel excluded from meaningful participation in social and institutional life. This marginalization can also affect young people's confidence and sense of agency. Persistent stereotypes that portray youth as immature or incapable may lead individuals to internalize these perceptions, thereby reducing their willingness to pursue leadership opportunities or participate in decision-making processes. In this way, ageism not only shapes how others treat young people but also influences how young people perceive their own capabilities.

Ageism also has economic implications. Many employers prefer older workers whom they perceive as more experienced or reliable, which may limit employment opportunities for young individuals. Such biases can delay economic independence and restrict access to professional development opportunities.

Although ageism can sometimes be subtle, certain indicators may reveal the presence of age-based discrimination. Woodman (2016) explains that ageism may manifest through behaviors such as age-related jokes or derogatory remarks, exclusion from meetings or social activities, denial of opportunities for advancement, and hiring bias that favors particular age groups. Another indicator is infantilization, where young people are treated as incapable of making independent decisions despite possessing the necessary skills and knowledge.

These indicators demonstrate that ageism operates not only through overt discrimination but also through subtle social practices that reinforce hierarchical relationships between generations.

## 2.4. Conclusion

Ageism is a complex social phenomenon that shapes interactions and power relations between different age groups. Although the concept was initially associated with discrimination against older adults, contemporary scholarship highlights how young people also experience age-based marginalization. Ageism manifests through stereotypes, institutional barriers, interpersonal attitudes, and cultural representations that limit youth participation in various social contexts.

These forms of discrimination can have significant consequences for young people, including reduced confidence, limited employment opportunities, and restricted participation in decision-making processes. Addressing ageism, therefore, requires increased awareness of age-based inequalities as well as institutional efforts to promote intergenerational collaboration and inclusion. Recognizing the potential contributions of individuals across all age groups is essential for fostering more equitable and participatory societies.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the manifestations of ageism among Generation-Z youth within church institutions in Kenya. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to capture participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding age-based discrimination within church structures. The design also allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The study was conducted within selected church congregations in Kenya, where youth participation forms a central component of church activities. Churches serve as important social institutions that influence community participation, leadership development, and intergenerational interaction. However, despite the strong presence of youth within congregations, their participation in leadership and decision-making processes often remains limited. The selected churches, therefore, provided an appropriate context for examining the dynamics of age-based discrimination and youth participation within religious institutions.

The target population for the study consisted of Generation-Z youth (aged approximately 18–27 years) who actively participate in church activities. This category of youth represents a significant demographic group within contemporary church congregations but frequently encounters structural barriers to leadership and decision-making participation. The study also included selected church leaders and youth coordinators in order to obtain broader perspectives on intergenerational relations and youth participation within church governance structures.

A total sample of 180 participants was targeted for the study. The sample comprised youth participants drawn from selected church congregations as well as a small number of church leaders involved in youth ministry and leadership structures.

Participants were selected using a combination of purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify church leaders and youth coordinators who possessed relevant knowledge regarding youth participation within church institutions. Simple random sampling was then employed to select youth participants from church youth fellowship groups to ensure that each eligible youth member had an equal chance of participating in the study. This sampling approach allowed the researcher to obtain both representative youth perspectives and informed institutional insights regarding the manifestation of ageism within church structures.

Data were collected using two primary instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was administered to youth participants in order to capture quantitative information regarding their perceptions of age-based discrimination, participation in leadership roles, and experiences within church institutions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected church leaders and youth coordinators to obtain deeper qualitative insights into the institutional dynamics influencing youth participation and intergenerational relations within church leadership structures. The combination of questionnaires and interviews enabled the researcher to triangulate data and enhance the reliability of the findings.

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages. These statistical measures were used to summarize respondents' perceptions regarding ageism, leadership inclusion, and youth participation within church institutions.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview responses were carefully examined and categorized into recurring themes related to youth exclusion, intergenerational authority dynamics, and institutional participation. The themes were then interpreted in relation to the study objectives and the guiding theoretical framework of Relative Deprivation Theory.

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose of the research before data collection. Respondents were assured that the information they provided would be treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews. Participants were also assured that their identities would remain anonymous in the presentation and publication of the research findings.

## 4. Results and Analysis

### 4.1. Introduction

The data collected in this study were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the manifestations of ageism among Generation Z in church settings. The analysis was guided by the objectives of the study, which examined perceptions of ageism, identified its manifestations, and explored its effects on youth participation in church leadership and decision-making processes.

### 4.2. Background information

The researcher had two categories of respondents, and the response rate was 100% of the questionnaires issued to the youth. After the collection of questionnaires, they were coded and analyzed, and then the data were presented using graphs, pie charts, tables, and percentages.

### 4.2.1. Age

From the questionnaire, the respondents were required to state their age. The age bracket of the youth was categorized into the following: 18-20 years, 21-23 years, and 24-25 years.

**Table 1.1:** Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	23	13%
21-23	77	43%
24-25	80	44%
Total	180	100%

Table 1 shows the age distribution of respondents. The majority of participants fall within the core Generation Z age range, indicating that the sample adequately represents the target population of the study.

### 4.2.2. Gender

On the other part of the questionnaire, respondents were to state their gender. The gender of the respondents was categorized into either male or female.

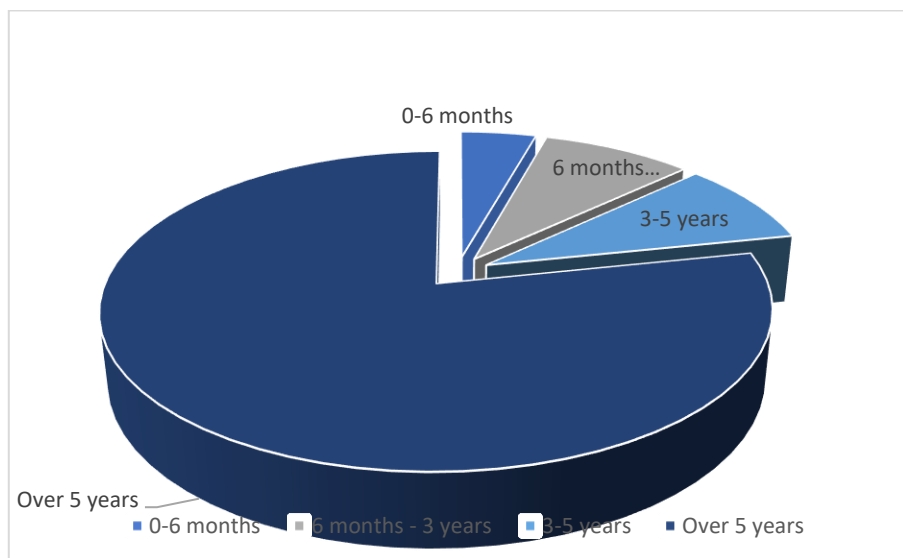
**Table 1.2:** Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	77	43%
Female	103	57%
Total	180	100%

57% of the youth who participated in the study were female. On the other hand, 43% of them were male. This shows that there is a slightly even distribution of youth in the church based on gender. However, females are more in churches than their male counterparts.

### 4.3. Length of active involvement in the church

The youth were asked to indicate the length of their active involvement in the church. The options given included 0-6 months, 6 months - 3 years, 3-5 years, and over 5 years. The response provided is summarized in Figure 1.1



**Fig. 1: 1** Distribution of the Length of Involvement of the Respondents.

As shown by the figure, 78% of the youth indicated that they have been actively involved in the church for over 5 years, while 9% indicated 3-5 years, another 9% indicated 6 months to 3 years, and only 4% indicated 0-6 months.

When further asked if they think every member of the church is involved in the church activities, only 30% agreed, while the majority, 70%, disagreed.

Further, it is evident from the findings in Church that the youths are not fully involved in the church activities like marriage encounter, charismatic renewal group, and the Catholic Men's Association. This is due to some youths being discouraged because of their young age in joining the older members, and they are not readily willing to engage themselves in such groups. This research finding expresses the work of Leonard BURGESS in his book *Dynamics of Youth Engagement*, who says that one of the significant components of church growth and development is having a functioning youth and young adult ministry founded on the Gospel and managed by individuals who understand youth participation in the church. Unfortunately for the black church and many others, the grim reality is that they have been suffering from the same inactive youth and young adult ministry problem for quite some time. Local churches have recently witnessed a steady decline in youth attendance due to neighborhood irregularities, parental responsibilities, and youth activities. Evangelism, Church leadership, Praise and worship are the main activities of the year Church. The involvement of youth in church activities results in the significant growth of the church, whereas the disengagement of the youth in church activities results in its dwindling. The participation of Youth contributes a big role in the best evolution of the church. The beliefs, underestimates, ignoring, and non-consideration of the youth in the church cause long-term bad effects on the church.

#### 4.4. Youth involvement in different groups

From the questionnaire, in what ways were the youths involved in the Catholic Church?

The youth were asked to indicate the groups that they were members of. The groups available included CMA, CWA, Youth Serving Christ (YSC), Young Catholic Adults (YCA), Missionary Youth Movement (MYM), choir, Marriage Encounter, Charismatic Renewal Group, small Christian community (Jumuiya), and Altar Servers.

None of the respondents were involved in CMA, CWA, YCA, Marriage Encounter, or Charismatic Renewal Group. 74% were involved in the MYM, which had the most involvement, 26% were in the Jumuiyas, 13% were in the YSC, and both the choir and the Altar Servers had 9% involvement each.

This data resonates with Nelson Musonda in his book, *Youth Involvement and Participation in church groups*, which states that getting young people involved in ministry is essential for the church's future. By building relationships, providing opportunities, empowering them, using technology, and being relevant, we can engage young people and prepare them for future leadership roles in the church. The data also relates to further evidence from our study on the youth participation in the church in where it was found that none of the youth was involved in Marriage Encounter, CMA, CWA and the Jumuiya but most were involved in YSC, YCA, Choir, and M.Y.M hence, it is evident that the youth are engage in some specific church groups and excluded from others

#### 4.5. Rate of inclusion in the church groups

From the questionnaire, "Rate the inclusion of youths in different activities.

The respondents were asked to rate the inclusion of youths in the various church groups. The results are summarized in Figure 1.2

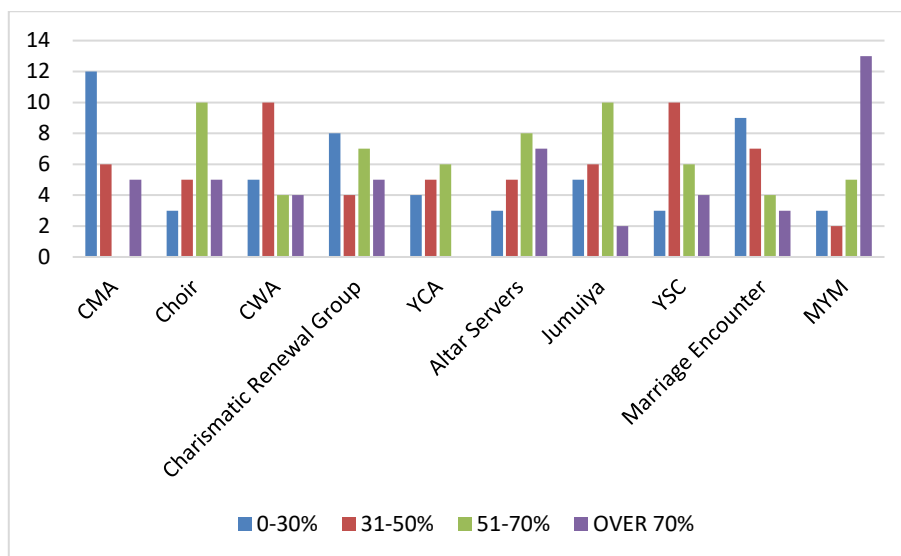


Fig. 1.2: Distribution of the Rate of Inclusion of Youths in Various Church Groups.

MYM was recorded to have the highest number of youths, while CMA was recorded to have the lowest.

The Catholic Church has provided a platform in which youths participate in different church programs such as Altar services, Jumuiya services, Choir, CWA, YCS, MYM, and many others, topped the list as one of the most participated programs with over 70%, followed closely by CMA and choir with 50% and 60% respectively. These findings resonate with Thomas Groome, who explained that youths are powerful weapons for gear development. He argued that young people should be empowered and engaged in different activities or church programs. He as well emphasized the importance of dialogue and listening in fostering relationships with young people. This is a good indicator as youths are taking up roles in different areas in the church.

#### 4.6. Exclusion of youth from certain church activities

From the questionnaire, 'Have you ever felt discouraged or excluded from participating in certain activities because of age?'

The response was that 43% responded yes, but a majority 57% responded no. When further asked if they had ever experienced any form of age-based discrimination in the Church in the past year, a vast majority, 91%, responded no, while 9% responded yes.

Additionally, they were further asked whether older members were treated differently from younger members.

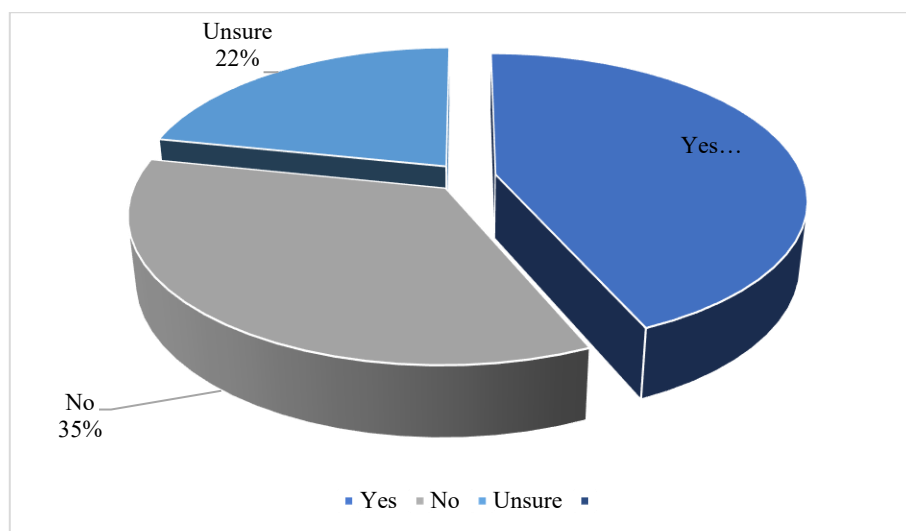


Fig. 1.3: Distribution of If They Felt Older Members Were Different from Younger Members.

From the above figure, 43% indicated that older members were treated differently from younger members, 35% did not agree that older members are treated differently from younger members and 22% were unsure.

Furthermore, 57% of the youths strongly agreed that they participate in different church activities such as Choir, CWA, YCS, MYM, in the list above. Choir topped as the most participated activity, with 53% with MYM as the least participated activity. In a separate analysis, key issues were isolated that centered on youths' participation in leadership roles and decision-making forums; two of these items registered 35% and 37%, respectively. The two items that are decision-making and leadership roles paved the way for how youths' exclusion will be looked at.

As observed, a renowned scholar by the name Kimball stated that young people are often stereotyped as being self-centered, lazy, or disinterested in social issues. Kimball issued a concerned that the youth's exclusion will pose a risk to their well-being. In line with Kimball's argument, there is agreement with these findings that youths are not included in key decision forums and leadership selection panels. In light of Kimball's projections, youths have been exposed to exclusion, something that has suppressed their contributions to the aforementioned church activities that will empower and give them room for participation.

### 3.7. Valued for their opinions and voice

From the questionnaire, "Do you feel that your voice and opinions are heard and valued by older members of the church community?"

Also having been questioned as to how they are involved in the church concerns and whether they felt heard, none [0%] of the youths' record feeling like they are never heard or valued in terms of opinion and general inclusion, the majority [68%] state that they are sometimes involved in matter of opinion and voice, a few [22%] however noted they are rarely heard in terms of opinion giving, the remaining [10%] say they are more than often heard.

In terms of equity and opportunities, slightly more than [71%] of the youths believe that they are given equal opportunities to participate in leadership roles and decision making processes within the church, stating that they are indulged in church development activities, the minority [19%] are unsure of their take on this as of being having participated in the church for less than three months.

### 3.8. Manifestations of ageism

From the questionnaire, "How is ageism manifested in the Catholic church?"

The respondents noted that ageism is manifested in their church environment, majority of the participants of this survey [86%] stated that younger members are typically excluded from decision making as it was assumed that they lacked experience and knowledge, 13% specified that the older members have dismissive attitudes towards the younger members while the least group of people [1%] specified that they did not feel as they were actively involved.

This resonates with Gayle Kimball's argument that most ageist people view young people as weak, inexperienced, and incompetent, a form of stereotyping that prevents young people from engaging in activities that should be equitably offered to them. Hence, it is evident that most youth (Gen-Z) feel they are being denied their involvement based on a stereotypical mindset.

### 3.9. Challenges faced by young Catholics in Kenya

The respondents were to answer the questionnaire, "What are the biggest challenges faced by young Catholics? Options were given as:

- Lack of relevant and engaging youth programs
- Feeling disconnected from the wider church community
- Difficulty finding mentors or role models.
- Stereotypes about young people being less committed or faithful
- Teenage pregnancy.
- LGBTQ
- Drug and substance abuse
- Family conflicts
- Lack of interest.

In the response, 5% of the youth state that they lack relevant and engaging youth programs. This group states there are few to no engaging activities, and the ones existing are not engaging. 0% record feeling disconnected from the wider church community.

Kinnaman and Hawkins (2016) one of the main scholarly voices, in their work titled “Why young Christians are leaving church and re-thinking faith” state that challenges faced by the youth in church are valid and highlight some of them as being feelings of disconnect and lack of opportunities to be involved and considered, these then become some of the challenges that even later on drive them away from church.

55% of the youths say they have difficulty finding mentors and or role models who can relate to their individual positions, and a little over 35% of the youths say that they encounter a lot of stereotypes around the youths who are less willing to help out the youth.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusion

This study examined the manifestations of ageism among Generation Z within church communities in Kenya. The findings indicate that age-based stereotypes and hierarchical leadership structures often limit opportunities for youth participation in decision-making processes. These patterns reflect broader intergenerational dynamics within institutional settings where authority is frequently associated with older members. Addressing these challenges requires intentional efforts by church leadership to promote youth inclusion through mentorship programs, leadership training, and greater participation of young members in institutional governance. Such initiatives can enhance youth empowerment while strengthening the sustainability of religious institutions. This sheds light on the pervasive nature of ageism in society, impacting various facets of individuals' lives across different age groups.

From the analysis of this study, several conclusions are made. In terms of ageism, the youth, and their participation, it is concluded that there are indeed several issues that are limiting the participation of youth at Church. The key issues include a lack of relevant and engaging youth programs, feeling disconnected from the wider church community, and a lack of interest. Ageism and lack of inclusivity for young members remain pervasive issues. Young individuals (Gen-Z) are facing discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization due to their age. The findings of this study are interpreted through the lens of the Relative Deprivation Theory (Davies, 1959). According to this perspective, individuals experience dissatisfaction when they perceive a gap between their expectations and the opportunities available to them. In the context of this study, many young church members perceive that leadership and decision-making roles are predominantly reserved for older members. This perceived disparity contributes to feelings of exclusion and reinforces perceptions of age-based inequality within church institutions.

The study also concludes that there is a statistically significant association between youth participation in church and peer influence. The type of friends that the youth associate with influences their participation both positively and negatively, and if not addressed, the church may end up losing more youth (Gen-Z) who are negatively influenced by their peers.

It has also been deduced that there is a statistically significant correlation between youth (Gen-Z) participation in church and church leadership. This suggests that the church's leadership has a substantial impact on youth engagement in church activities and programs. The key areas where the leaders are failing include the lack of conducting follow-ups and mobilization of youth in the church. This has led to many of them having no interest or motivation to be part of the youth programs in the church. When young members perceive that they are being denied opportunities, resources, or respect compared to older generations, they feel a sense of relative deprivation. This leads to feelings of frustration, resentment, and a diminished sense of self-worth not only in the church but also in most governance entities. This paper authoritatively observes that the nationwide call for strikes by the youth (Gen-Z), mostly on Tuesdays, is out of feelings of exclusion and let-downs by the Government. The climax of these (Gen-Z) frustrations was realized through the occupation of parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

### 5.2. Recommendations of the study

- a) Church to offer a variety of activities, including traditional religious teachings, community service projects, and social events, through which these youths (Gen-Z) will feel empowered.
- b) Church should create mentorship programs, provide opportunities for leadership roles, organize events tailored to their interests, and foster open dialogue with Gen-Z to understand their perspectives and their concerns.
- c) Organize events and activities tailored to the interests and needs of young people (Gen-Z), such as youth groups, retreats, and social gatherings.

### 5.3. Recommendations for further studies

- a) Future research could examine ageism and youth participation across different religious denominations and cultural contexts.
- b) Comparative studies across African countries would also provide valuable insights into how generational dynamics influence youth engagement in religious institutions.

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