



#EverydayAgeism Campaign: Useful Facts and Figures

Ageism Defined

Ageism, defined in 1969 by Robert Neil Butler, is 'the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age'.¹

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is illegal to discriminate against a person because of their age. However, ageism persists in many forms throughout society.

Ageism may be casual or systemic and is associated with negative stereotypes of older people and ageing. Ageism leads to older people being treated unfairly and their rights not being respected or upheld and can have serious consequence for older people's health and wellbeing.

It can also negatively influence the decisions made by society, meaning that the services, support, facilities and opportunities that people need to help them to age well can be inadequate.

Ageism and Social Attitudes

Although other forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism, are rightly met with moral outrage, ageism elicits less strong and less negative responses.²

In Wales:

- Almost **1 in 8** older people (12% of people aged 60+ in Wales) feel they have been discriminated against because of their age.³
- **24%** older people think ageism against older people is prevalent in Wales.⁴

Ageist Stereotypes

Stereotypes about ageing and older people, though not always overtly negative, impact upon how older people are treated in society, what is and isn't expected of them, and can perpetuate ageist attitudes and thinking.

- Though older people are often stereotyped in a positive way as warm⁵ and wise⁶, they are often negatively stereotyped as less physically active and less competent than younger people.⁷ Though not all openly hostile, these

stereotypes can lead to older people being treated differently than younger people, patronised or even pitied.

- However, ageist stereotypes and attitudes are not uniform across countries and cultures as cultural and ethnic backgrounds shape the perceptions of older people and rates and prevalence of ageism. Ageist attitudes are found to be more strongly held in Europe than in North America.^{8,9} In the UK, attitudes to ageing and older people are more positive among individuals from a black ethnic background than other ethnic groups.¹⁰

‘Everyday’ Ageism and Ageism in the Media

Ageist attitudes and stereotypes are perpetuated in everyday language and conversations.

- Phrases such as ‘Past it’, ‘Drive like an old woman’, ‘Senile’, ‘Out of touch’, ‘You can’t teach an old dog new tricks’, all convey and reinforce ageist attitudes and stereotypes. Seemingly positive phrases, such as “you look good for your age” reinforce preconceptions about what it means to age and be an older person.¹¹

Ageist attitudes and stereotypes are also spread and reinforced in the media, often perpetuating the stereotypes that older people are frail, ill and dependent.

- Analysis of UK newspapers shows that older people are most often represented as consumers of finite health-care resources, with the words ‘health’, ‘care’, ‘elderly’ and ‘ageing’ often associated in newspaper coverage.¹² This reinforces the ageist view that older people are the main consumers of health and care resources. However, analysis of health and social care spending in Wales shows that while 75% of the people who received social care from local authorities in Wales in 2017/18 were aged 65 or over, they received just under a third (32%) of the spend, challenging this dominant narrative.¹³
- Some brands and advertisers are attempting to tackle ageist representations, with B & Q, L’Oreal, Barclays and Dove all highlighted for their work in this area.¹⁴

Ageism and Health & Care

Ageist attitudes can impact an older person’s beliefs about their own ageing, acting as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ where negative attitudes lead to negative experiences of ageing, damaging physical and mental health, and reducing quality of life and even life-expectancy. As well as directly impacting older people’s health and wellbeing, health and care professionals can exhibit age discrimination in their treatment of older people and in their decisions regarding older people’s care.

- Older people with more positive self-perceptions of ageing live on average 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of ageing.¹⁵
- Perceived age discrimination increases the risk of serious health problems, including: coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, chronic lung disease, limiting long-standing illness, and symptoms of depression.¹⁶
- Negative perceptions of ageing earlier in life can lead to a steeper decline of 'hippocampal volume' (the area of the brain associated with memory) and increase the amount of 'neurofibrillary tangles and amyloid plaques' associated with Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of Dementia, compared to those with positive beliefs about ageing.¹⁷
- Perceived age discrimination increases the likelihood of people rating their health poorly and can also act as a barrier to a healthy lifestyle, for example by leading people to engage in coping behaviours, such as drinking or smoking, to alleviate the negative psychological effects of discrimination.¹⁸
- Diagnoses and treatment plans can be (subconsciously) shaped by clinicians' attitudes to ageing, with older people more likely to be diagnosed with dementia or a physical illness, and younger people more likely to be diagnosed with depression and anxiety when they present identical symptoms.¹⁹
- Older people's interactions with health professionals can also be impacted by ageist attitudes, ranging from the patronising use by health professionals of unnecessarily loud and basic form of language branded 'elderspeak' to more serious issues such as clinicians not discussing with or fully informing older people of clinical and treatment decisions.²⁰

Ageism: Intergenerational Problem, Intergenerational Solution

Ageism does not only affect older people. Both older and younger people feel they are impacted by ageism.²¹ However, in surveys, younger people are more likely to report experiencing ageism than older people.

- In Wales 29% (more than 1 in 4) of people aged 18-59 feel they have been discriminated against because of their age²², compared to only 12% of people aged 60+.
- Younger people highlight issues of 'structural' ageism e.g. minimum wage age discrimination and the voting age barrier. Younger people also highlight issues such as the rise of unpaid internships or underpaid work, and (in a similar vein to older people) the prevalence of patronising comments, particularly in the workplace.²³

Though younger adults are more likely to report experiencing ageism, they are also more likely to have negative attitudes to ageing and older people.²⁴ However,

intergenerational contact is shown to reduce younger people's negative perceptions of older people and ageing.²⁵

The Cost of Ageism

Ageism does not only hurt older people, it costs society as a whole, with the economic impact of ageism felt in multiple sectors.

- There are an estimated 1 million people aged 50-64 in the UK who are economically inactive but who left work involuntarily.²⁶
- Unemployed individuals over the age of 50 are more likely to be long-term unemployed than younger unemployed people. Currently, 38% of unemployed individuals in the UK aged 50 and over (116,000 people) have been unemployed for over 12 months, compared with 29% of 25-49 year olds and 19% of 18-24 year olds.²⁷

The impact of older people's long-term unemployment is felt economically, in the loss of tax contributions and the payment of unemployment benefits. The lack of meaningful and secure work has also been shown to exacerbate mental and physical health conditions.²⁸

We can therefore see how the impact of ageist attitudes and practices in the labour market can be translated to rising costs in the health and social care sector, costs associated with provision for older people whose exclusion from meaningful and secure work may have exacerbated ill-health.

¹ Butler, R. N. 1969. 'Age-ism: Another Form of Bigotry', *The Gerontologist*, 9(4): 243–46. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/9.4_Part_1.243 [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]

² Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. That Age Old Question. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]

³ 62 ICM Unlimited. 2019. Older People in Wales Survey, data collected on behalf of the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 14-19 March 2019, 500 respondents aged 60+ living in Wales

⁴ 62 ICM Unlimited. 2019. Older People in Wales Survey, data collected on behalf of the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 14-19 March 2019, 500 respondents aged 60+ living in Wales

⁵ Cuddy, A.J.C., Norton, M.I. and Fiske, S.T. 2005. 'This old stereotype: The pervasiveness and persistence of the elderly stereotype', *Journal of Social Issues* 61(2): 265—283

⁶ Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. That Age Old Question. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]

⁷ Cuddy, A.J.C., Norton, M.I. and Fiske, S.T. 2005. 'This old stereotype: The pervasiveness and persistence of the elderly stereotype', *Journal of Social Issues* 61(2): 265—283

⁸ Lamont, R. A., Swift, H. J., & Abrams, D. 2015. A review and meta-analysis of age-based stereotype threat: Negative stereotypes, not facts, do the damage. *Psychology and Aging*, 30(1), 180-193

⁹ Levy, B.R., Ashman, O. and Slade, M.D. 2009. 'Age Attributions and Aging Health: Contrast Between the United States and Japan', *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 64B(3): 335–338, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbp002>

¹⁰ Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. That Age Old Question. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]

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- ¹¹ Sunlife. 2019. *Ageist Britain?*. Available at: <https://www.sunlife.co.uk/siteassets/documents/ageist-report-2019.pdf> [Date Accessed: 15/10/2019]
- ¹² Swift, H., Abrams, D., Drury, L. and Lamont, R. 2016. 'The perception of ageing and age discrimination'. [Briefing paper] in '*Growing Older in the UK*', British Medical Association.
- ¹³ Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2019. State of the Nation 2019. Available at: http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/State_of_the_Nation_e_-_online.sflb.ashx [Date Accessed: 15/10/2019]
- ¹⁴ Sunlife. 2019. *Ageist Britain?*. Available at: <https://www.sunlife.co.uk/siteassets/documents/ageist-report-2019.pdf> [Date Accessed: 15/10/2019]
- ¹⁵ Levy, B.R., Slade, D.M., Kunkel, S.R. and Kasl, S.V. 2002. 'Longevity Increased by Positive Self Perceptions of Aging', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83(2): 261–270
- ¹⁶ Jackson, S.E., Hackett, R.A. and Steptoe, A. 2019. 'Associations between age discrimination and health and wellbeing: cross-sectional and prospective analysis of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing', *The Lancet Public Health* 4(4): 200-08. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(19\)30035-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(19)30035-0/fulltext) [Date Accessed: 05/08/2019]
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- ²¹ Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. *That Age Old Question*. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]
- ²² ICM Unlimited. 2019. *18-59s in Wales Survey*, collected on behalf of the Older People's Commissioner for Wales, 28 May-10 June 2019, 664 respondents aged 18-59 living in Wales
- ²³ Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. *That Age Old Question*. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]
- ²⁴ Royal Society for Public Health. 2018. *That Age Old Question*. Available at: <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/a01e3aa7-9356-40bc-99c81b14dd904a41.pdf> [Date Accessed: 20/08/2019]
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