

Age discrimination – fact or fiction

Is Age Just A Number?

The Centre for Better Ageing claim a recent report in the medical journal The Lancet, claims that a quarter of people over the age of 50 believe they have been unfairly treated in stores, restaurants and hospitals because they are older people.

Ageism is defined by as being:



The impact of believing that getting older makes us feel less valuable, knowledgeable, alert, attractive etc. has a direct effect on our health, particularly in terms of memory loss and heart strain. *The Lancet* (2019)

“systematic stereotyping of, and discrimination against, people because they are old” (R. Butler American Sociologist and Academic in a report on ageism in 1969).

He states that the civil rights period in the Southern States of America during the 1960's highlighted that racism towards African Americans was a reality.

In Britain discrimination by social class was highlighted by the well-known comedy sketch with John Cleese and the two Ronnies.

The tall John Cleese, representing the upper class, says he looks down on the two Ronnies, who



represent the middle and working classes. where Ronnie Barker says: "I look up to him (Cleese) because he is upper class and look down on him (Corbett) because he is lower class." The tiny Corbett just says: "I know my place."

But what about ageism is it real?

The Centre for Better Ageing stated it is real, that you only have to look at the way older people are portrayed on the TV, magazines & newspapers. Overall, older people are highlighted as being a "problem" to something or somebody. Whether they are shown as a dependent relative or someone with dementia or someone who is lonely and feels they are on the scrap heap.

The active, supportive, attractive intelligent older person, doesn't exist, according to the media. Holly Holder, senior executive at Centre for Ageing Better calls this, "The dodderly, but dear Stereotype"

Additionally, how many times do you hear people say an older person didn't get the job they applied for because they were too old?

So where do these attitudes leave us? For many, being faced with the negativity surrounding ageing and older people today, how could we not help but start to believe these attitudes ourselves?

How many of us put up with comments or attitudes from others that in our younger days, we would have quickly dealt with and put to bed without hesitation?

These attitudes can lead us to putting everyone and everything before ourselves, because we become brainwashed in to thinking others know better, can do better are better.

What wasn't understood until recently that this can lead to us not taking proper care of our own minds and bodies, and this recent Lancet report highlights this.

The information gathered was based on a long term study of older people in England and they found that **the impact of believing that getting older makes us feel less valuable, knowledgeable, alert, attractive etc. has a direct effect on our health, particularly in terms of memory loss and heart strain.**

The study reported contacted 7731 older people who were surveyed several times over a period of 6 years. The result showed that 25% of those people interviewed believed they had been discriminated against because of their age.

FORM OF DISCRIMINATION	HOW MANY PEOPLE
Lack of respect or curtsey	72%
Treated as Old and Dim?	45%
Poorer treatment medical settings	41%
Poorer service in Shops & Stores	35%
Reported feeling threatened or harassed	18%

Of those who said they felt discriminated against on the grounds of their age it was shown that they were at greater risk of suffering from poor health than those who did not experience discrimination. The

areas of health most likely to be affected were having coronary heart disease, chronic lung disease, arthritis, limiting long-standing illness and depression.

But how do you take better care of your mental and physical health when you face discrimination every day in one form or another? One older person said they would love to go to a gym regularly and do some gentle exercises but said that would not go because they would feel stupid. They said they thought that people would laugh and snigger at them, because they are old and that they would probably be thinking I shouldn't be there, that gyms are for younger people.

We all have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. New advances in medicine and technology have added years to our lives, and those years should be filled with happiness, good health, good network of social connections and be financially secure.

At Active Wales we aim to campaign against age discrimination in every form to make this happen for all retired people.