

Ageism, Attitudes to Age and Dementia Friendly Environments

Dr. Hannah J Swift
@hanaswift



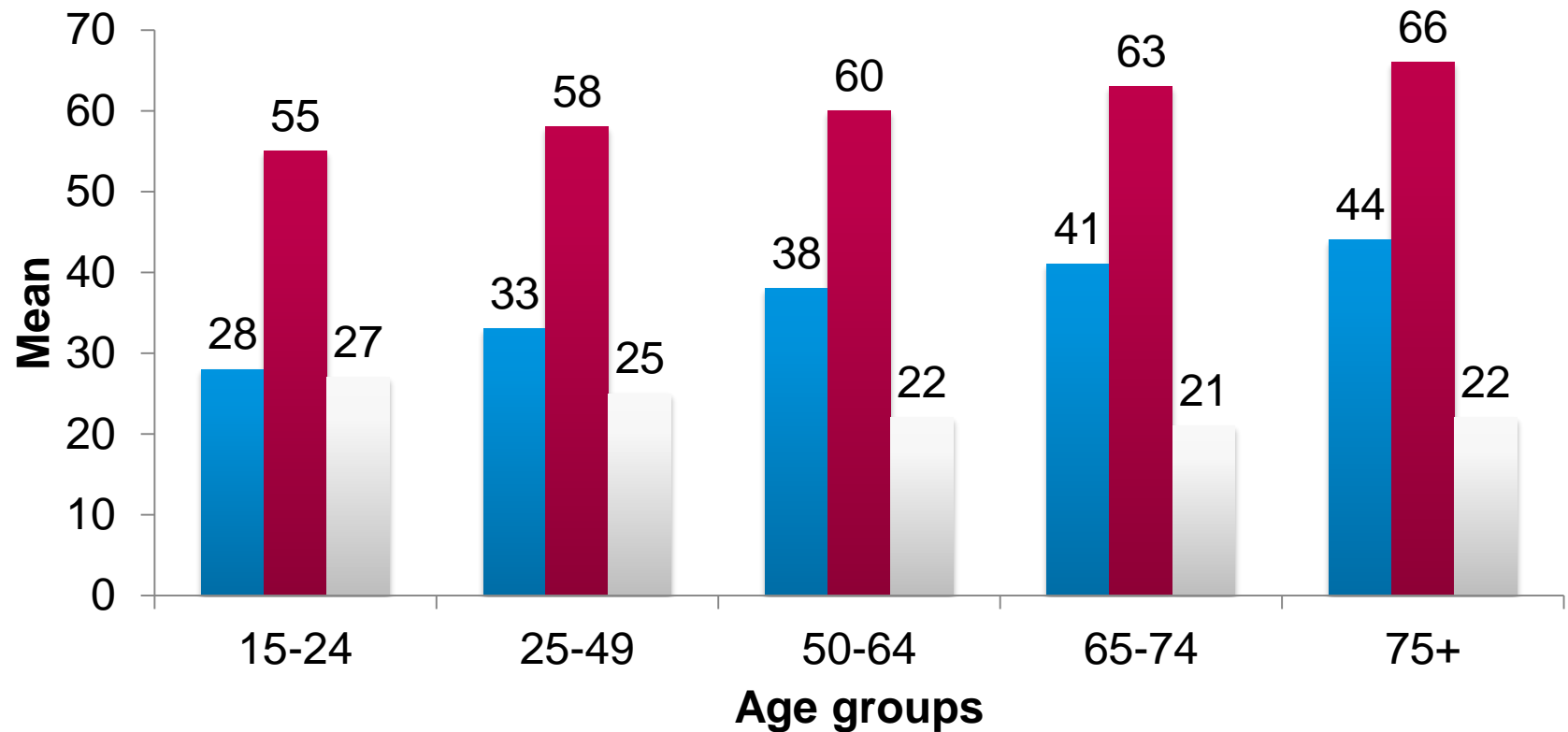
My Research Interests

- Attitudes to age in the UK but also across Europe
- Consequences of age stereotypes
- The development and experience of ageism
- Social exclusion and loneliness
- Age-friendly and Dementia friendly Environments

Who is young, who is old?

- To understand who might be vulnerable to age discrimination we have to understand how people define age groups
- In the 2008/9 ESS we asked over 54,000 respondents to estimate the age at which people stop being described as 'young' and the age at which people start being described as 'old'
- On average, over 2000 respondents in the UK perceived youth ended 35 years and old age begins at 59

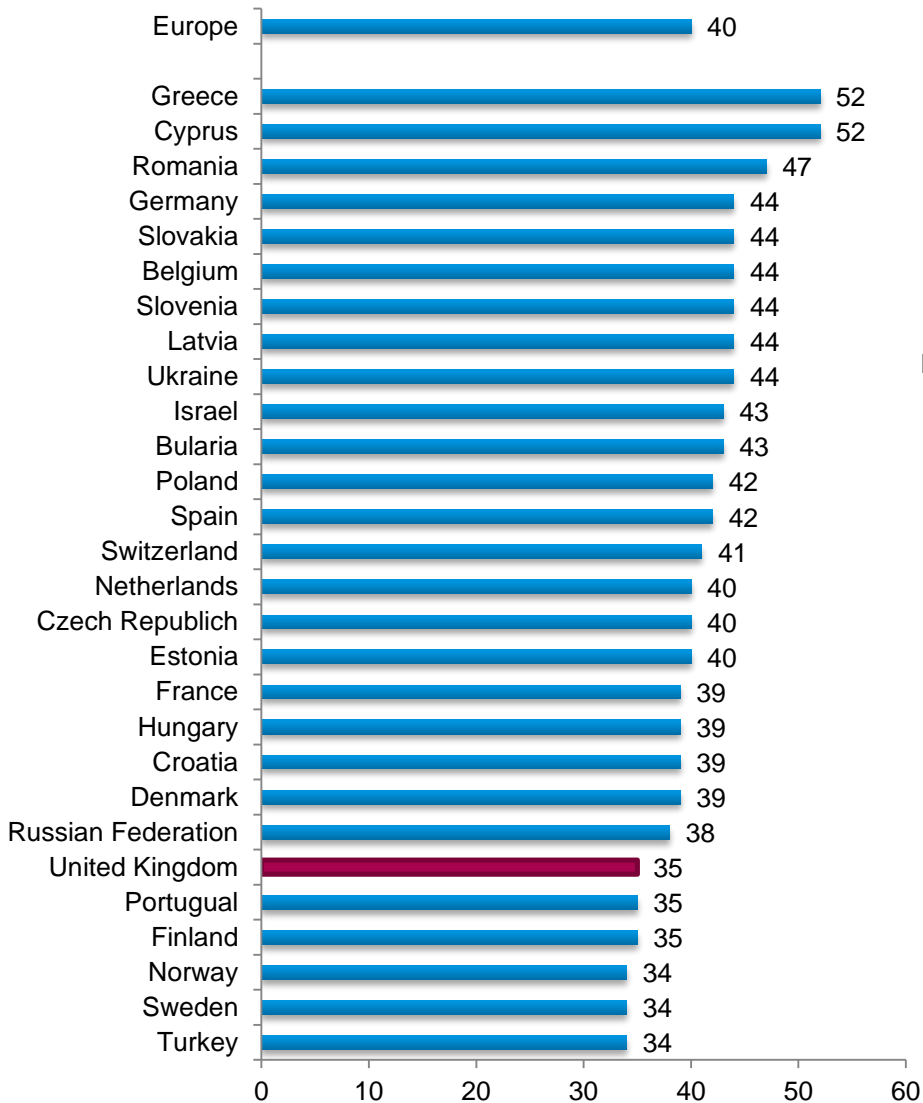
Perceptions of age boundaries change with age



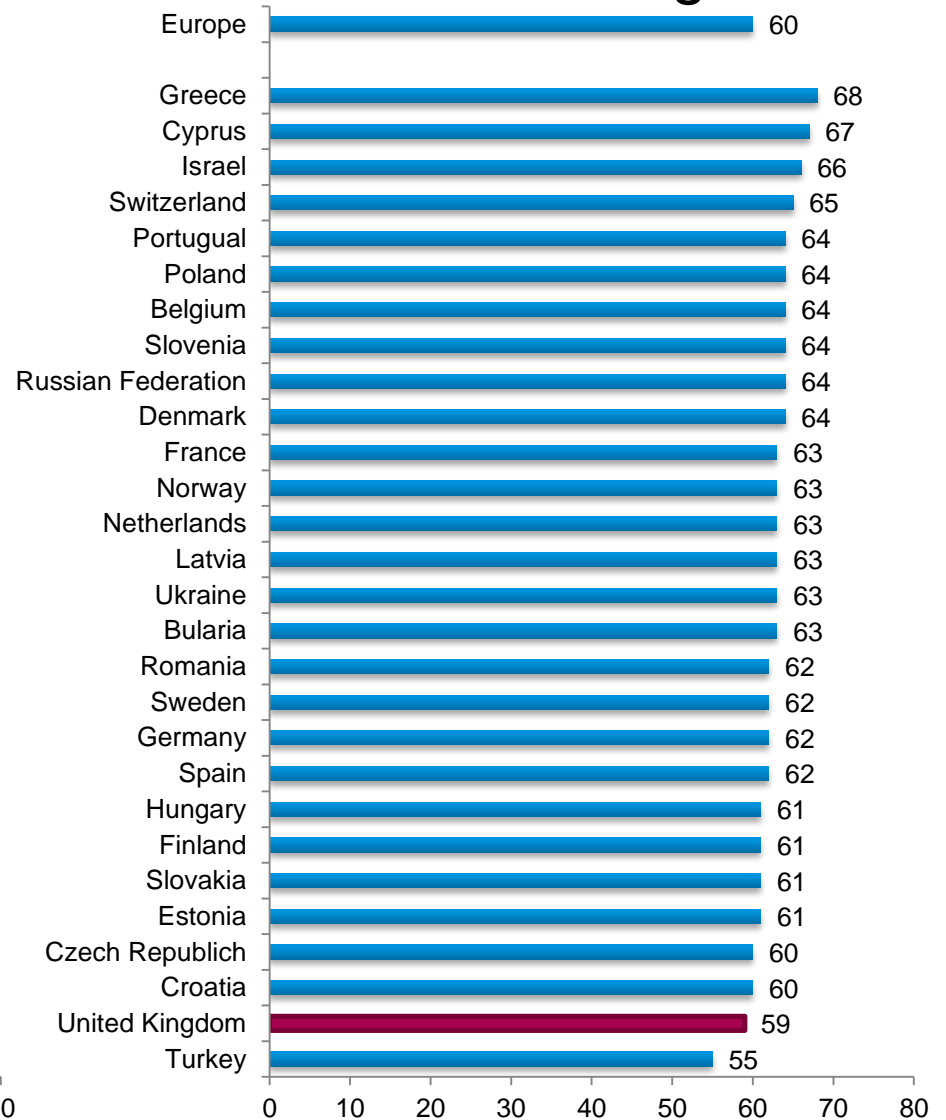
■ Perceived end of youth ■ Perceived start of old age ■ Duration of 'middle age'

Vary depending on where you live

End of Youth



Start of Old Age



Age Stereotypes

- Perceptions of older people are mixed:
 - Declining health, status, competence and contribution to society
 - Increasing wisdom, experience, morality and warmth
- Mixed perceptions of warmth – friendliness, but low competence result in pity.
- Ageism is benevolent, paternalistic form of prejudice characterised by pity, lack of power and voice



Consequences of age stereotypes

- Attitudes to age influence health and wellbeing
- People with more negative perceptions of ageing tend to:
 - Engage less in preventative health behaviours, such as eating a balanced diet, exercising and abstaining from use of substances such as alcohol and tobacco (Levy & Myers, 2004),
 - Have worse functional health in later years (Levy, Slade, & Kasl, 2002; Robertson, Savva, King-Kallimanis, & Kenny, 2015),
 - Are slower to recover from myocardial infarction (Levy, Slade, May, & Caracciolo, 2006)
 - Ultimately have reduced longevity (Maier & Smith, 1999; Sargent-Cox, Anstey, & Luszcz, 2014).

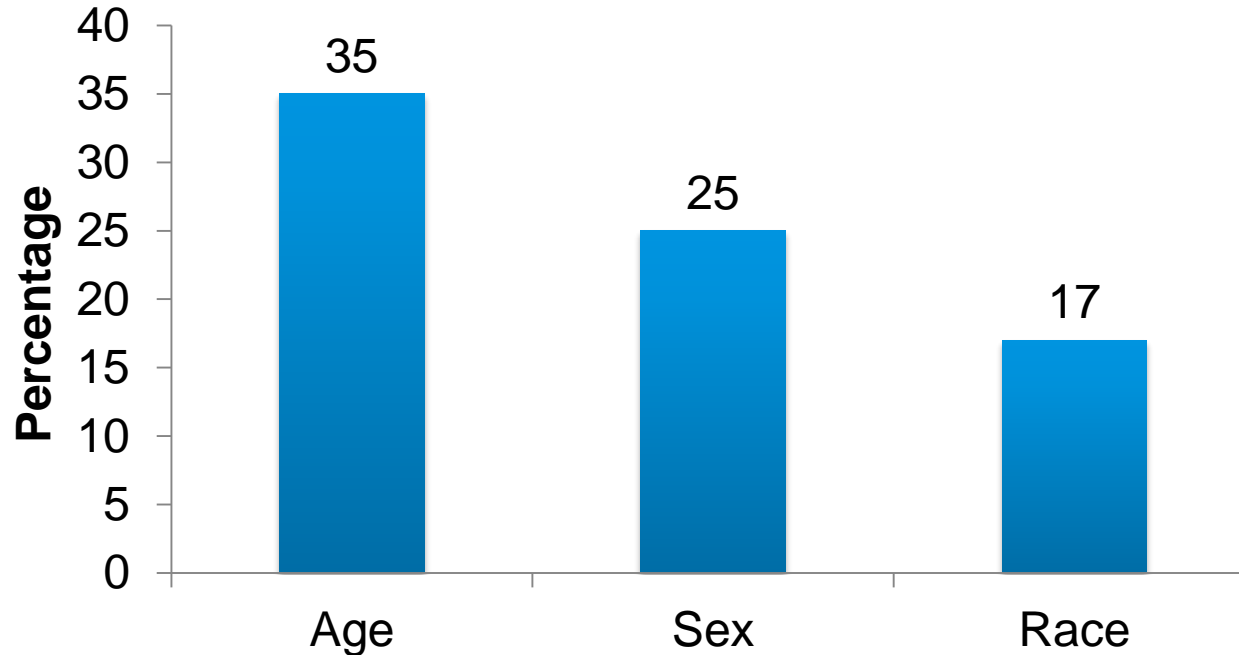
Consequences of age stereotypes



Consequences of age stereotypes

- Age stereotypes influence decisions we make and task performance
 - Triggering negative old age stereotypes in adults (mean age 70), even outside of conscious awareness, can be sufficient to reduce their motivation for a longer life, known as will-to-live (Marques, Lima, Abrams, & Swift, 2014).
 - A review and meta-analysis of 32 academic papers on older peoples cognitive and physical performance revealed that highlighting age led to lower memory and cognitive test scores (Lamont, Swift, & Abrams, 2015)

Prevalence of Ageism



- Experiencing discrimination has a significant negative effect on both psychological well-being and physical health (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).
- Perceived everyday discrimination among 6377 older adults has been associated with depressive symptoms, worse self-rated health, functional limitations and chronic illness over a period of two years (Luo, Xu, Granberg & Wentworth, 2012)

The Everyday Ageism Project

- <http://everydayageism.blogspot.co.uk/>
- Explores ageism based on being perceived to be too young as well as too old.

Lack of
suitable
transport

We're are
interested in
fashion to!

35 is too
young for
politics

Younger staff
seen as
more
dynamic

*The Everyday
Ageism Project*

Age and Dementia Friendly Environments



- £1.3million to transform outside spaces of 30 care settings across the UK
- Training staff and providing them with activities that can done outdoors
- Regular access to outdoors benefits health, wellbeing and quality of life
- Outdoor settings are unsuitable, unsafe, ugly, and underused!



BIG
LOTTERY
FUND

Dementia friendly Design features

- High fences can be restrictive and make people want to escape!



Dementia friendly Design features

- Random planting can be confusing, block colour planting is easier to see



Dementia friendly Design features

- Pathways should be clearly defined and should not present a trip-hazard



www.alamy.com - BCPN3M



Age UK Herne Bay



Policy publications

Attitudes to age in Britain 2004-08

by Dominic Abrams, Tiina Eilola
and Hannah Swift

DWP, 2009

Predictors of attitudes to age across Europe

by Dominic Abrams, Christin-Melanie Vauclair and
Hannah Swift

DWP, 2011

EU briefing and policy recommendations



Age UK, 2011

A Snapshot of Ageism in the UK and across Europe



Age UK, 2011



HIDDEN CITIZENS

HOW CAN WE IDENTIFY THE
MOST LONELY OLDER ADULTS?

The Campaign to End
Loneliness, 2015

**The barriers to and enablers
of positive attitudes to ageing
and older people, at the
societal and individual level**

Foresight, 2015

THE UK'S EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY



www.kent.ac.uk

University of
Kent