Ageism in Australia: Prevalence & causes

Dr Ruth Williams

Ruth.Williams@unimelb.edu.au
@_ruthwillo
Acknowledgments

Centre for Workplace Leadership

Hallmark Ageing Research Initiative
Australia’s population 1950-2100

Source: http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Graphs/DemographicProfiles/
Our Government is getting worried

% of 60-64 year olds in paid employment

Overview

• Ageing workforce & expectations of longer working lives
• Evidence of persistent age-based discrimination (i.e. AHRC)
• Ageist attitudes as a potential driver of discrimination
• Our study provides new evidence on extent & correlates of ageism, & different ways in which ageism occurs
Policy responses to date....

• Encourage extended attachment to the paid workforce
  - Raise Age Pension eligibility age; GFC also contributed
• Incentives for employers to hire older workers
  - E.g. “Restart” program for 50+; derided for low take-up
• Compulsory superannuation – but few fully SFRs
• Skilled migration – but migrants also age
• Fertility – e.g., Baby Bonus – but costly, and slow
We are already working (a bit) longer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LF participation rate (%)</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-24 years</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-54 years</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years and over</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59 years</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64 years</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years and over</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems with working longer

• Not what older workers want? Physical, technical & discriminatory barriers

• Not what employers want?
  - Older workers are seen as slower, inflexible, less competent
  - AHRC: 1/10 firms have an age-hiring limit; average=50yrs

• Not what younger workers want? Career paths ‘blocked’
  - Perception that career paths ‘blocked’ by older workers
  - Jen Rayner’s (2016) book, Generation Less
Ageism

- ‘More pervasive than sexism or racism’ (WHO, 2015)
- Evidence of age discrimination but limited understanding of underlying attitudes
- In some descriptions, ageism can have both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ expressions
- Need for pop. rep. - literature dominated by small, convenience samples
- New conceptions of intergenerational (in-)equity
- Our focus is ageism as manifest in negative attitudes toward older adults
  - We did not define at what age someone becomes ‘older’
- A process leading from ageist stereotypes (attitudes) to age-based discrimination (behaviours)

Attitudes ➔ Intentions ➔ Behaviours
What we did

- Survey of community attitudes to ageing
- 1000 participants
- Aged 18-70 years
- From across Australia
- Two ageism scales & demographics
How we did it

- Fieldwork by Wallis Market and Social Research
- Data collected from May to July 2016
- Contact initiated by Wallis via random digit dialling
- Quotas imposed for population representativeness
  - e.g., older respondents proved easier to access
- Completion either by phone (55%) or online (45%)
- Approx. 15 minutes per respondent to complete
Measuring ageism (1/2)

Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA)
(Fraboni et al., 1990; updated by Rupp et al., 2005)
• Captures both cognitive and affective forms of ageism
• 3 sub-dimensions:
  1. Stereotypes – ‘Many old people just live in the past.’
  2. Separation – ‘Old people should find friends their own age.’
  3. Affective attitude – ‘It is sad to hear about the plight of the old in our society these days.’ (reverse scored)
Measuring ageism (2/2)

Succession, Identity & Consumption scale
(North & Fiske 2013)

• Normative views; what older people should be or do

• 3 sub-dimensions:

1. Succession – ‘Most older people don’t know when to make way for younger people.’

2. Identity – ‘Older people shouldn’t even try to act cool.’

3. Consumption – ‘Older people are too big a burden on the health care system.’
Research questions

• How prevalent are ageist attitudes in Australia?
• Which forms of ageism are most widespread?
  – Is it that people dislike and shun the elderly?
  – Or is more subtle? Older people as burdensome, obstructive
• How do attitudes differ across population groups?
  – Older vs younger respondents
  – Men vs women
• Results can inform policies on ageing and ageism
Results & conclusion

• Few Australians (<10%) hold resolutely ageist views
• Even fewer (<3%) actively shun or avoid older people
• Higher if: male, younger, NES background, not employed, lower educational attainment
• Far more (~20%) hold *succession-based* ageist views

• Some evidence of intergenerational tension in Australia
• Perception that older Australians not relinquishing control of ‘enviable resources & societal positions’ quickly enough
• Closely tied to labour market (and housing?) opportunities


The University of Melbourne Faculty of Business and Economics funded the creation of a 7 minute feature film.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzYhjxcnQ5k
Thank you

Questions?

Dr Ruth Williams
Ruth.Williams@unimelb.edu.au