

# Ageism presents dilemmas for policymakers worldwide

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The negative consequences of age discrimination in many countries are more widespread than discrimination due to race or gender, yet differential treatment based on a person's age is often seen as more acceptable and even desirable, according to the newest edition of the [Public Policy & Aging Report](#) (*PP&AR*). This publication, which features cross-national perspectives, was jointly produced by [The Gerontological Society of America](#) (GSA) and [AGE UK](#).

The *PP&AR* explores how discriminatory behaviors manifest themselves, steps that are being taken to address those behaviors, and the challenges associated with asserting elders' individual rights while acknowledging vulnerabilities that are inevitably—although variably—associated with advanced chronological [age](#).

Five separate articles illuminate the issues and options that face policymakers as they seek to eliminate negative discriminatory behaviors. Yet, the authors wrestle as well with how to identify and preserve age-biased provisions and practices that bring legitimate and needed benefits to [older people](#). In particular, they ask if age discrimination is ever acceptable and whom might such discrimination advantage.

"We find that age-based discrimination raises a series of unique dilemmas for policymaking and service delivery," said GSA Executive Director James Appleby, RPh, MPH. "We're proud to partner with AGE UK to bring together the top minds from United States and the United

Kingdom to address them."

Authors Dominic Abrahms, PhD, and Hannah J. Swift point out that among the 28 countries assessed in the 2008-2009 European Social Survey, 24 percent of respondents reported that they had experienced prejudice because of their gender and 16 percent because of their race or ethnicity. However, 34 percent reported having experienced age prejudice in the last year, 37 percent said they had felt a lack of respect because of their age, and 28 percent said they had been treated badly because of their age. Overall, 46 percent of respondents said they had experienced at least one of these forms of age prejudice in the last year.

Tay K. McNamara, PhD, and John Williamson, PhD, provide data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which show that the percentage of the charges filed with the commission attributable to age has increased steadily over the past 15 years. In 2011, for example, almost one in four claims was related to age discrimination. Yet these authors go on to identify examples of possible acceptable treatment of people of different ages, including mandatory retirement in certain occupations (e.g., firefighting and law enforcement), senior citizen discounts, age-restricted communities, more frequent testing of older drivers, and lower positioning of older people on organ transplant waiting lists.

The new *PP&AR*, "Cross-National Perspectives on Age Discrimination," is available for purchase at [www.geron.org/bookstore](http://www.geron.org/bookstore). Reporters may request electronic review copies.

"This valuable research highlights that [age discrimination](#) is widespread on both sides of the Atlantic," said James Goodwin, PhD, the head of research at Age UK. "It explores some of the contradictions evident in both the UK and the USA—for example why older people continue to be portrayed as a burden to society, ignoring their economic

contribution. We need to look beyond someone's age at their individual strengths and strive for a society where older people are active, in better health, and accepted as individuals who are important to a community and capable of contributing to the economics of the country as consumers and as producers."

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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