

Understanding ageism prolongs your life

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Perceptions about ageism makes people think of older people and is a form of discrimination. This according to Fredrik Snellman at Umeå University who believes that the concept needs to be redefined to mirror all people's practical experiences of ageing. The results have been published in the journal Nordic Psychology.

"We are using age in many ways to organise our own and other people's lives and to make our social world understandable. The usage can sometimes be prejudiced and have undesirable consequences to us all. It is often hidden and the ways it is noticeable in everyday life can seem trivial. That is why it is of importance to make visible the everyday use of ageism and find new terms for them," says Fredrik Snellman.

In the article, Snellman criticises previous scientific findings and a suggested definition of the term of attitude and the phenomenon 'ageism'. According to Snellman, the concept of ageism needs to be redefined to mirror all people's practical experiences of the chronological, social, biological and psychological parts of ageing. Ageism should be portrayed as significant for people of all ages rather than only the older population.

Furthermore, Snellman's study draws parallels to another study that has shown that negative ageism – or [negative attitudes](#) about older people and ageing – stands in connection with an increased mortality among the population. The study shows that individuals with a higher level of negative attitudes (confirmed at the age of 50 or earlier) live on average 7.5 years shorter in comparison to those who have a more positive

attitude towards ageing. That is proof of why an increased awareness is needed and should in all likelihood arouse people's interest in their own attitudes.

Snellman is critical towards ageism being portrayed as difficulty only for older people despite researchers in the previous study to have express ambition to eliminate the same. Regardless of the strive within science to avoid differentiating between 'us and them – old and young' which often forms the basis of the hidden and rarely questioned way of creating inequality – science upholds the difference.

"Awareness and a lively debate about the complex problem of [ageism](#) is needed, in particular about how age enables and limits our lives throughout the course of life. A better understanding of how 'older people' besides distinguishing a group of the population also is an intergenerational phenomenon is necessary. Age-related indifference does not suddenly appear when we grow old. It appears gradually and in different ways at all ages," says Snellman.

More information: Fredrik Snellman. Whose ageism? The reinvigoration and definitions of an elusive concept, *Nordic Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1080/19012276.2015.1125301](https://doi.org/10.1080/19012276.2015.1125301)

Provided by Umea University

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