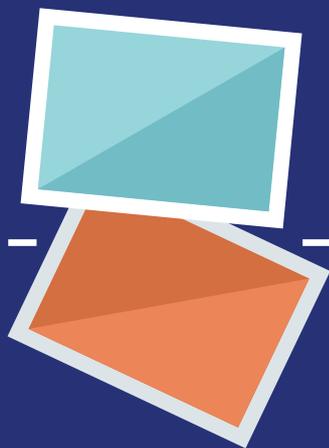


Making ageism old news

Reporting on older people guide



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Introduction

Responses to Covid-19 have exposed serious questions about the way we think and talk about older people and highlight the impact those attitudes can have. The consequences of ageism have never been more apparent than amid a global pandemic.

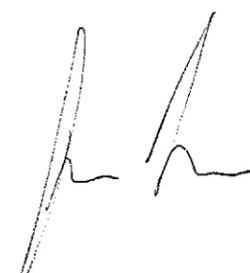
Ageist attitudes are rife in the workplace, in health and social care and in the media. Our recent Big Survey provided a voice for older people across Scotland and revealed that just 7% agreed that older people are represented positively in the media.

According to research by the Centre for Better Ageing, two-thirds of the news stories analysed portrayed older people in a negative way, painting a picture of older people as being in ill-health, victims, or a burden on society. The way that older people are portrayed in the media, adverts and in Parliament can have a direct impact on people's attitudes to ageing, the way older people are viewed by society, and the way that older people view themselves.

This guide aims to help stakeholders, including politicians and the media improve how they talk about older people by avoiding ageist and negative stereotypes in the messages and images they use.

In Scotland, by 2035 there will be more than 1.7 million people aged 60 and over. Our ageing population will, of course, present many challenges but also opportunities. We have been campaigning over the years to shift the negative narrative that exists around ageing and seek to tackle age discrimination in all its forms. Ageism fundamentally undermines older, and younger, people's participation in society and can lead to greater isolation and loneliness. We must work together to highlight the important contributions that older people make and ensure ageist stereotypes are removed from our public discourse altogether, now and in the future. Of course, we don't always get it right all of the time and seek to challenge ourselves when this is the case. I hope you will support our work in tackling ageism and find this guide useful and informative when reporting on issues facing older people.

Best wishes,



Brian Sloan
Chief Executive, Age Scotland





03

Terminology

Do you feel “over the hill” or “young at heart”? Whether it’s talking about an “old dinosaur” at work or the latest “anti-ageing” cosmetics, our attitudes towards ageing creep into our everyday language. Words are a powerful tool – they can build you up or put you down.

The media refers to older people using several terms. Tabloid newspapers are far more likely to refer to older people using colloquial and informal terminology such as “OAP” – an outdated term as the Old Age Pension now no longer exists.

Our 2021 Big Survey featured a series of words and phrases commonly used to describe older people. Respondents were asked which of these they preferred.

At Age Scotland we use “older people” as our standard phraseology and avoid the use of “elderly”. The Big Survey confirmed why we do this.

The preferred options were to do with “older” and “senior”. Two similar versions, “older adults” (21%) and “older people” (20%) when brought together were the most popular, with “senior citizens” at 36%.

“Elders” and “elderly people” were less popular, selected by only 7% of respondents.

Just 7% agreed that older people are represented positively in the media and open-ended feedback on media representation highlighted advertising as portraying people in later life as not intelligent and focused on funeral arrangements. At a time when the media is trying to be more inclusive, it should also reflect older people (i.e anyone aged 50+) in a way that doesn’t stereotype but instead emphasises their lives and positive contribution, for instance - still working, volunteering, providing care for grandchildren and older family members, with interests in a range of hobbies/subjects, and keen travellers.

The media is a key driver of societal attitudes and research shows that media narratives generally represent ageing and older age as a time of decline, a crisis or a societal burden.

Often, older people are depicted in the media as a drain on resources, a ‘bed blocker’ or a societal burden. The effort across the generations to reach out to those most vulnerable to Covid-19 has been heartening. But it has also highlighted a tendency to view older people as helpless victims and overlook the huge contribution they still make to society. Of course, there will be times where someone has been a victim of a crime or suffered in some way and referring to that is perfectly acceptable. The challenge is to avoid too much generalisation.

Age Scotland’s latest research paints a worrying picture of how many older people feel they are perceived.

We surveyed more than 3,500 people, over 50 years of age, across Scotland as part of our Big Survey in early 2021. We were shocked to find that more than a third of respondents (36%) felt they were made to feel a burden to society, while almost as many (34%) said that life was getting worse for older people in Scotland. Overall, only one in five (21%) of all respondents felt valued by society.

Our survey also highlighted age discrimination in the workplace. 12% of all those surveyed said they had been discriminated against at work, while 6% had witnessed discrimination against older colleagues. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older so it’s clear we have some way to go with only 9% of respondents reporting that they felt very positive about the future.




36% of older people believe they are made to feel a burden to society


Only 9% of over 50s said they feel very positive about the future

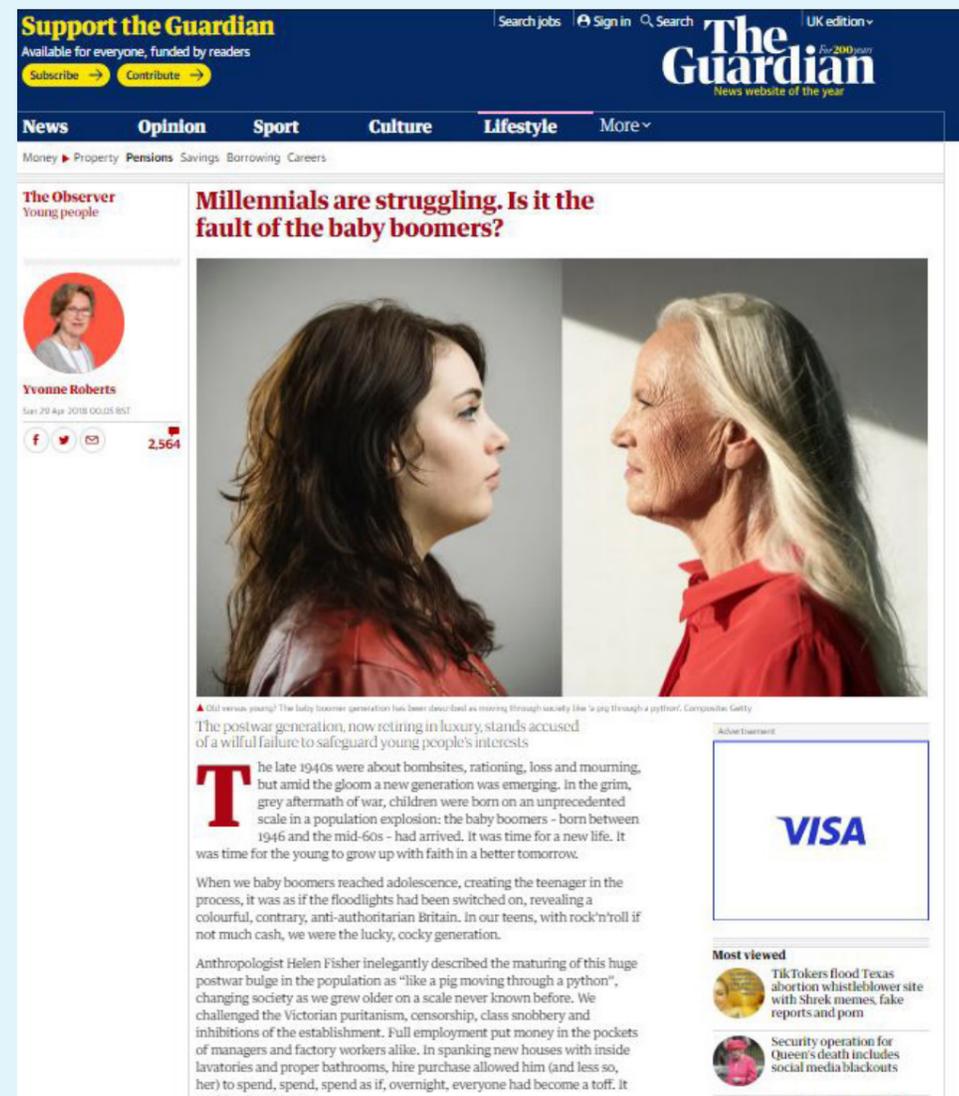

Only 7% of over 50s believe older people are represented positively in the media

Statistics: age.scot/BigSurvey

Baby boomers v millennials

“Baby boomers” and “millennials” seem at loggerheads in the media, one group dismissing the other as ‘snowflakes’ afraid of hard work, and in return the young blaming the old for Brexit, climate change and the housing crisis. Intergenerational conflict appears a common theme, with discussion often focusing on older people and perceived voting behaviours.

We are all ageing and we all need each other. We all lose out when we don’t value each other’s skills and experience. Tackling ageism requires a new understanding of ageing by all generations. The best way to combat ageism is to bring together younger and older generations and not create or promote division.



Dementia reporting

Currently more than 55 million people live with dementia worldwide. There are an estimated 90,000 people with dementia in Scotland and this is expected to increase to 120,000 in the next decade. As the number of people affected by dementia continues to rise, barely a day goes by without it being talked about in the media in some form. The words we use can strongly influence how others treat or view people living with dementia. It’s important to remember when reporting that life doesn’t stop with a diagnosis of dementia. While it is a debilitating condition, many aspects of life can still be enjoyed and people with dementia are defined by who they are not by their diagnosis.

We owe it to the rising number of people living with dementia to report accurately and uphold their dignity and rights. When the media generates outdated stereotypes and ideas, it contributes to the fear and stigma surrounding the condition and impacts people living with dementia and their families and carers. Here are some guidelines on reporting well on dementia.

Reporting on dementia tips

- 1 Avoid the phrase ‘sufferers’ or ‘victims’ about people living with dementia. Research among people living with dementia shows they don’t want to be defined by their condition. Many are able to live happy and active lives with dementia and the word ‘suffering’ doesn’t resonate with them. Terms like these can undermine efforts to carry on living as normally as possible.
- 2 Words to use are a person or people ‘with dementia’, ‘living with dementia’, ‘living well with dementia’ and ‘affected by dementia’.
- 3 Sensationalism can be a source of great frustration for those living with dementia, especially headlines that offer false hope for a new wonder-cure. While this may make appealing media, inaccurate or exaggerated suggestions in this area are potentially harmful for people affected by dementia.
- 4 It’s helpful to include useful points of contact to help people with queries about dementia. Including details of national organisations, such as Age Scotland’s helpline 0800 12 44 222, will enable people to locate further information or support after their experience with the coverage.
- 5 Very often the media images used to portray someone living with dementia show an older person with grey hair looking totally bewildered and isolated. However, it’s important to remember people who are middle-aged experience dementia too and that people can be diagnosed with dementia at any age. Although most people living with dementia will be older, many people with younger onset dementia feel alienated by images portraying it as a condition that exclusively affects older people.



Imagery

Government to raise National Insurance to fund social care reform plans, reports say

HEALTH | POLITICS | SOCIAL CARE | SAJID JAVID | Friday 3 September 2021, 8:17am



The social care reform plans could reportedly be revealed as soon as next week.
Credit: PA



CORONAVIRUS

Elderly face specialist care delay as hospital pressures hit winter levels



Frail elderly patients could be stuck on acute wards for a week, a leading doctor says
GETTY IMAGES



A picture paints a thousand words

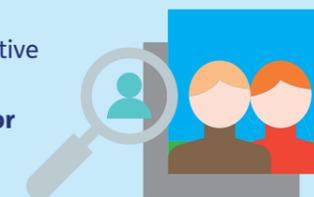
Images, like the words we use, shape the way we view older people and ageing. Given so many more of us are living longer, it's time we all started using more positive and diverse imagery in our work to reflect ageing. It's important to depict a diverse range of older people in images to ensure an accurate representation of the general population, including - gender, race and ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation.

Photos used alongside stories about older people often portray later life as a time of frailty and vulnerability. For example, images of frail older people with grey hair and wrinkly hands clasped together feature in newspapers on a daily occurrence. Try to avoid photos that negatively stereotype or caricature later life. There will be occasions, for example when conveying loneliness, that negative images must be used to illustrate the story effectively but avoid defaulting to these types of images for stories about older people in general.

Case studies are a great way of bringing stories to life, raising awareness of key issues and portraying real people's experiences.



The Centre for Better Ageing launched a first free library of over 400 positive and realistic images of older people in a bid to see an end to the use of images that reinforce stereotypes of later life. To access it **visit Centre for Better Ageing image library ResourceSpace.**



Reporting on older people guidance

- 1 Avoid using colloquial language like 'OAPs' and adopt favoured terms like 'older people' or 'senior citizens.'
- 2 Avoid derogatory terms like 'dementia sufferers or victims' and refer instead to 'people living with dementia'
- 3 Avoid photos that negatively stereotype or caricature later life - for example, images of wrinkly hands clasped together feature heavily in media articles.
- 4 Depict a diverse range of older people from all backgrounds to ensure an accurate representation of the older demographic, including - gender, race and ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, geography and more.
- 5 It's important to use images that reflect the true diversity of later life - such as communities, work, healthy ageing, housing, travel and settings where people from multiple generations socialise.
- 6 Bring together younger and older generations and avoid sensationalising tension or division between baby boomers and millennials.

Key facts and figures on older people in Scotland

Older age is defined as starting at 50



Call for action

Ageism is often viewed as less serious than other forms of prejudice or discrimination, with older people frequently the butt of jokes or “affectionate” teasing. The language we all use matters because it can influence public opinion, which can in turn influence policy choices and decisions. Changing our language and the images we choose are all important steps in moving away from the negative discourse of later life, towards one that recognises the fantastic opportunities as well as the challenges and diversity of ageing.

Outside work, those in later life still make a huge contribution to society, whether through volunteering or caring for grandchildren or other relatives. In many ways, this has been thrown into sharp focus during the pandemic. Tens of thousands of Scots in their 50s, 60s, and 70s continued to carry out essential work, including frontline NHS workers, carers, delivery drivers and supermarket workers. Far from being victims, many older people, including the late Sir Captain Tom, led efforts to help and raise money for those most at risk. It’s extremely disappointing that our research has found too many of them do not feel valued. Older people have contributed in countless ways throughout their lives, and no one should spend their later years feeling they are a burden on others.

As we look towards a recovery, it’s vital that everyone, no matter their age, feels valued and can play a full part in society. Tackling ageism is a key part of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow older.

We would love for you to take away the following three key pieces of information from our report:

Terminology

1 Please think hard before using certain terminology about older people and adopt their preferred terms. At Age Scotland we use “older people” as our standard phraseology and our Big Survey confirmed the preferred options are “older people”, “older adults” and “senior citizens.” Similarly, when reporting on dementia avoid the often-offensive terms “sufferers” or “victims” about people living with dementia. Research among people living with dementia shows they don’t want to be defined by their condition and prefer the following wording- “person or people with dementia”, “living with dementia”, “living well with dementia” and “affected by dementia.”

Imagery

2 According to the United Nations (UN), by 2050 for the first time in the history of humanity, there will be more people over 60 years of age globally than there are children. It’s therefore important that the images we use accurately represent this broad age group which spans from 50 years of age to 100+. Consider updating stock imagery to reflect the true diversity of later life and show older people from all backgrounds to ensure an accurate representation of the older demographic. Avoid defaulting to images of wrinkly hands or frail individuals with a walking stick for general stories about the older population.

Intergenerational representation

3 Older people are often described as a burden and drain on resources instead of an asset. We are all ageing, and we all need to fight ageism together. Intergenerational bonding is good for everyone and has many benefits from enhancing social cohesion, strengthening each other’s skill sets to tackling loneliness and isolation. Try to reflect this in coverage and bring together younger and older generations instead of promoting rivalry or division.

Thanks for reading our guide. We hope it is helpful and if you would like to support or discuss anything within it, please get in touch by calling 0333 323 2400 or emailing communications@agescotland.org.uk

National Union of Journalists (NUJ) endorsement

Age Scotland is to be congratulated for producing much-needed guidance that is of major relevance to a large section of the population.

All members of the National Union of Journalists are expected to abide by our Code of Conduct available at <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/rules-and-guidance/code-of-conduct.html>

Clause 9 requires that a journalist: Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.

The public is now acutely aware of the importance of avoiding discrimination in relation to most of those characteristics. And yet, hate speech directed at older people seems to be the last bastion of discrimination within our society.

To take one example: any comedian who makes racist jokes would be publicly pilloried, and rightly so. But jokes about older people seem to be more permissible.

It is a measure of the NUJ’s seriousness about this issue that we established a 60+ Council several years ago.

The 60+ Council is elected every two years from the NUJ’s 60+ membership, and I would urge our members in that age group to become involved.

Tackling ageism is a major part of the 60+ Council’s remit. In November 2021 the Council relaunched its newsletter, and its cover story is largely about ageism. It refers to a Wales survey showing that over two-thirds of the news stories analysed portrayed older people as being in ill-health, victims, or a burden on society. It is precisely such news stories that Age Scotland is challenging. And the NUJ’s 60+ Council is challenging them, too.

I am pleased that Age Scotland chose to seek the NUJ’s endorsement of its guidance, and equally pleased that we can endorse it wholeheartedly.

And when Age Scotland reviews progress at some point, I am sure that we will see an improvement in the reporting of older people.

John Toner
NUJ national organiser, Scotland



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