

Age discrimination

Age discrimination is when someone is treated differently to another age group, with an unreasonable or disproportionate impact, simply because of their age. Age discrimination can be direct, for example, denying older people access to healthcare or to employment simply because they are old, or indirect, such as not collecting data on HIV infection in women and men over 49.

Ageism is the stereotyping and prejudice against people on the basis of their age and can lead to age discrimination. Age discrimination is often based on several negative stereotypes. Older people tend to be stereotyped as a homogenous group characterised by passivity, failing physical and mental health, and dependency ([King's Fund, 2000](#)).

One example is discrimination in health. Older people experience discrimination in health care, both in developed and developing countries. A [report](#) by the UN General Assembly on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2011 states that "Older persons suffer discrimination in health care and tend to be overlooked in health policies, programmes and resource allocation. There are few comprehensive health policies which include prevention, rehabilitation and care of the terminally ill".

Older people are often kept waiting a long time, have to fill in complicated registration forms or are spoken to in a patronising way, making them reluctant to use services even when available ([HelpAge International, 2009](#)). In Zambia, older people reported that they were told by health staff that they had lived their time and should not finish the medicine that the young can use ([HelpAge International, 2011](#)). This is a particularly clear example of age discrimination.

Older people also often experience multiple discrimination. This means the discrimination is not just because of older age but it is also based on different factors such as gender, ethnic origin, disability, poverty, HIV status etc. Older people are likely to experience age discrimination but are much more likely to experience it if they are poor, disabled, HIV positive, or women. As well as this, discrimination experienced in old age can be a product of discriminations experienced throughout life. Women, for example, frequently suffer gender discrimination and, as a consequence, older women may have little education, little or no

experience in the formal labour market and no access to a pension. An example of extreme discrimination against older women is witchcraft allegations in several countries in Africa.

Age discrimination is often not clearly prohibited in national legislation and international human rights law and, as a result, it is sometimes justified under some circumstances. Furthermore, no international convention on the rights of older people right exists in spite of the recognised lack of protection of older people from age discrimination.

Find out more on age discrimination on the HelpAge International [website](#)