

## Summary on a Page: October 2009

### Attitudes to Age in Britain: DWP Research Report 599

#### What is it?

The DWP has newly published this report summarising the findings of research into attitudes to age in Britain, 2004 – 2008. The various research projects carried out looked at perceptions of age and how 'young' and 'old' are determined, experiences of discrimination and prejudice, stereotypes that exist relating to age and concerns about economic impacts of ageing, and strength of community feeling between older and younger people.

#### What does it say?

Most respondents stopped considering themselves as young by their mid-30s and started categorising themselves as old by their mid 70s. These perceptions varied according to age and gender – for example women, people from white ethnic backgrounds and certain social classes considered youth to continue longer than others.

A huge majority of respondents felt that people over 70 experienced age related prejudice, with 48% feeling that age discrimination is a serious issue. 26% of respondents reported experiencing prejudice which suggests it is experienced more commonly than any other form of prejudice. This doesn't make it more important than other forms of discrimination, but it does have the potential to affect all people and so must be taken seriously.

In general respondents thought that people under 30 and people over 70 have little in common, and fewer than a third of respondents in each of these two groups had friends in the other group. Stereotypes were found to exist that older people are friendlier and more moral than young people, and in some situations more legitimate sources of authority, but young people are more competent. A significant number of people, particularly younger people consider that people over 70 take out more from the economy than they have contributed. These beliefs can be a foundation for intergenerational conflict, as well as affecting assumptions made in employment and care services.

#### Any implications?

The findings show that ageism is experienced widely and is complex. There are stereotypes, misperceptions and lack of mutual awareness which are potentially damaging for both young and older people. There is a tension over the economic and material demands and contributions to society by different age groups, which may increase as an ageing population increases demands for pensions, health and social care and work opportunities. The report suggests that awareness of the issues and a dialogue about age including people from all age groups is crucial to create public policy that will work.

#### Key links:

-  [Full report: Attitudes to Age in Britain \(DWP\)](#)
-  [Building a Society for all ages website](#)
-  [Ageism page on the BBC website](#)