



Calling Time

Addressing ageism in alcohol policy, practice & research

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Ageism

- Ageism - systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old
- Direct age discrimination - when a difference in practice or policy based on age cannot be justified
- Indirect age discrimination - when people from different age groups are treated in the same way with the effect that older adults are disadvantaged
- Ageism is rarely meant to cause harm and often occurs subconsciously

Ageism and the Law

- In Great Britain, the 2010 Equality Act made unjustifiable age discrimination illegal
- Against the law to “provide inferior [health/social/alcohol] services or refuse to provide services purely because of a person’s age, unless there is good or sufficient reason”
- Services can be age-specific but it must be positive action that improves the situation of a group that is poorly served or discriminated against.

Accessibility and suitability of rehabs for older adults

- “Residential rehabilitation is a vital and potent component of the drug and alcohol treatment system.....anyone who needs it should have easy access to rehab” (NTA, 2012)
- Of the 118 services listed on PHE’s online directory of rehabs, excluding those specifically for young people, three quarters (75%) stated that they had an upper age limit of anywhere between 50-90 years
- By the time someone is over 65, more than half of the rehabs (55%) exclude them
- Ageism as blatant as this is rare, unlawful and unacceptable

Accessibility and suitability of rehabs for older adults

- Diversionary activities organised by the rehabs often based on physical activity such as mountain biking, caving, kayaking, football and hiking which some older adults find it difficult to participate in
- Some older adults feel unsafe in rehab and are bullied, intimidated and subjected to ageist language and attitudes

*“A guy from Liverpool [resident] said “it ain’t worth it, recovery at your age”. **(Derek, early- seventies)***

*“What they [workers in rehab] do say is “you’re looking too high, your goals are too high for your age group”.
(Bob, early-fifties)*

“There were three guys threatened to kill me.....I said “I tell you what, I’ll get a knife, I’m not sharpening it for you, and you can cut my throat”.....I called their bluff and they didn’t do it. They used to shove notes under my door and all this, put my glasses in a doggy bag somewhere....They shoved them [the glasses] somewhere, they hid them and I had to try and find them.” (Scott, early-seventies)

“I haven’t shared living accommodation with anyone except my wife and family for 40 years. I’ve come into shared accommodation and I was in a shared bedroom with a 26-year-old. The 26-year-old, it was like living with a chinchilla. They were everywhere, bounding around. They didn’t go to bed until two o’clock in the morning. I got up in the morning, I pottered around, they were still in bed. Literally on a number of occasions I turned the mattress so they’d get out of bed.” (Darren, mid-sixties)

“Sometimes it’s quite awkward and you try and fit in because you don’t want to be like isolated or ostracised or anything, trying to fit in...A load of the boys go hiking, they said “why don’t you come with us?” and I said, “I don’t think I could walk ten miles”, they said “you could try” and I said yes, not to look like I’m keeping away from everything, I said “I’ll try, if I can’t, I’ll have to turn back.” **(Anne, late-fifties)**

“I can’t kick the ball in the garden [play football with other residents], that’s me walking away and being a lonely person which I’m used to..... I don’t feel like I belong, I don’t belong to being with them, playing or joking and laughing.” **(Dan, mid-fifties)**

Accessibility and suitability of rehabs for older adults

- Some of the residents internalised ageism - they used ageist terms such as “old fart”, “miserable old bat” and “fuddy duddy” to talk about themselves or the way that they thought younger residents viewed them
- Older residents themselves had stereotypical ideas about older adults; “I think older people can be a bit grandiose”, “older people are a bit miserable”, “[older people are] stuck in their ways”, “if you just had a whole bunch of older people, the place would smell of wee and cabbage”.
- Some used ageist terms to refer to younger residents such as “childish”, “juvenile” and “babyish” and described younger adults as “intimidating”, “selfish”, “lazy” and “[requiring to be] almost looked after”.

Ageism in Practice

- Older adults not offered alcohol treatment because of their age
- Younger adults prioritised over older adults in terms of alcohol treatment
- Substance misuse services unable or unwilling to carry out home visit for older adults unable to attend the service premises
- Substance misuse service premises inaccessible to older adults with limited mobility
- Older adults “written off” as too old to change
- Assumption that alcohol problems predominantly affect young people



Ageism in Policy

- Northern Ireland's Adult Drinking Patterns Survey only includes people aged 18-75
- Until recently, alcohol treatment data in England only reported data on people up to the age of 75
- Older adults mentioned twice in cross-government alcohol strategy while young people and young adults mentioned 26 times
- Statistics on drinking only provided for people up to the age of 64 in cross-government strategy



Ageism in Research

- People aged 65 and over excluded from almost half (46%) of alcohol clinical trials
- Older adults excluded from many other alcohol research studies
- There is twice as much published research on alcohol and young people



Views of older adults with alcohol problems

[workers from the alcohol service] have more time for the younger generation than the older generation

They look at people of my age, “no point” they’re more likely to put the funding to someone who’s younger... I think they think you’re a bit of a ‘spent penny’ at a certain sort of age

I don’t know they’re going to bother so much with people who are over 50 anyway because we haven’t got much work left in us

A lot of people believe the older generation are far too set in their ways and can’t change whereas they possibly think they could make some change in the younger generation

There is more concern for the younger people and therefore the audience they’re targeting is the younger people

Conclusion

- Findings reveal extensive age discrimination towards older adults which is a significant barrier to reducing harm from alcohol, breaches equality legislation and is a serious injustice
- It means that opportunities to save and improve lives are being missed
- Tackling ageism is likely to offer a good return on investment because much can be done with little or no financial investment

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Report

https://drinkwiseagewell.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/DWAW_Yr3_Report-FOR-WEB4.pdf

http://alcoholresearchuk.org/downloads/finalReports/FinalReport_0145.pdf