



OÉ Gaillimh  
NUI Galway

# Social Patterns of Age Discrimination

Discrimination experiences of older Austrians in the field of financial, health and transport services

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# The social patterns of age discrimination

## Expert and stakeholder perspectives

- *Research Topic*: Experiences of older adults in Austria and Ireland with age discrimination in accessing financial, health and transport services and how different legal and policy situations shape these experiences.
- *Research Question*: How do experts and stakeholders in Austria and Ireland interpret and understand age discrimination against the background of different legal and policy contexts?
- *Rationale & Relevance*:
  - Age discrimination & ageism are ambiguous concepts (Snellman 2016).
  - Various different approaches to tackle age discrimination and ageism are pursued (Burnes et al. 2019).
  - Experts and stakeholders can put “their own interpretations into practice” (Bogner, Littig and Menz 2009:7).

# Aim of today's presentation

1. Broadening the understanding of age discrimination by:
  - Differentiating between various interpretations of age discrimination
  - Carving out different “objects” of age discrimination

# Data

## Expert Interviews:

- 12 interviews (seven in Austria, five in Ireland)
- Between June and November 2019
- Areas of expertise e.g.
  - Human Rights law
  - Anti-discrimination law and practice
  - National ageing policies

Two focus groups, each with 6 representatives of older persons advocacy and interest organisation

- Conducted between November and December 2019

# Social interpretation pattern

- Definition

Social interpretation patterns are somewhat *time-stable* and *stereotypical* views that underlie and consolidate certain general or group specific behaviours routines, mentalities, opinions, ideologies, norms and values. As "*tacit*" societal or *group-specific knowledge* interpretation patterns offer definitions of situations, relationships or one's own identity and thereby *orientate* the everyday acting, understanding, thinking and judging (cf. Arnold 1983, 894; authors translation)

- Characteristics of social interpretation pattern

1. Specific form of *socially shared knowledge*
2. Constitute *collective meanings* and not subjective interpretations
3. Have normative *validity* and *stability*

# Methodology

Interpretation pattern analysis acc. to Carsten G. Ullrich (1999, 2019)

3-step-contrasting analytical procedure

1. Broad thematic coding of central interview passages
2. Contrasting & comparing coded passages → Identifying differences and similarities
  - 2.1 Reconstruction of *IPs* along four empirically determined common ***structural elements***:
    - ***Object*** of the pattern
    - ***Form*** of discrimination the pattern is focused upon
    - The ***social level and fields*** are addressed
    - The ***normative orientation*** that underlies the pattern
3. Abstraction and formulation of a typology of interpretation pattern

# Findings: Four interpretation patterns of age discrimination

Age discrimination  
as the denial of  
dignity

Age discrimination  
as the denial of  
social esteem

Age discrimination  
as the denial of  
participation

Age discrimination as  
the lack of need  
consideration

# Age discrimination as the denial of social esteem

“One of the biggest challenges we have is to try and have *their contribution* to society recognised, because *older people* are not seen as economic actors [...] we have to try and *put a dollar value* on what *older people contribute to society* [...] they contribute 15 million a year to the Irish hotel industry or they save a billion euro in caring costs or they contribute 150 million in volunteering [...] *it’s a terrible way to frame things*, but [...], we are all *part of that narrative*.” (Focus Group, IE)

Object of discrimination

Normative Orientation

Object & Social level

Normative Orientation



# Age discrimination as the denial of social esteem

“We should also be able to *convince society* of this,  
or, or, I don't know how to put it, but it's not as if  
*pensioners in general* are virtually dropping out of  
economic life altogether. Just when you consider how  
many services pensioners provide [...] for their  
children, for their grandchildren and so on, [...]. *What,  
what is done here, what is achieved here, that is  
not recognised by society*, if you take your children  
today, your grandchildren today to school or to  
kindergarten or whatever. In other words, here we are  
again right at the point: *there is simply a lack of  
appreciation and recognition.*” (Focus Group, AT)

Social Level

Object of discrimination

Form of discrimination

Form of discrimination

# Summary: Age discrimination as denial of social esteem

## Summary

Interpretation pattern	Object of discrimination	Forms of discrimination	Social level or fields addressed	Normative orientation
<b>Denial of social esteem</b>	Older persons as valuable members of society	Normative devaluation or non-recognition of contributions	Macro-level: societal discourse, societal status of older persons	Hegemonic status of labour contributions/critique of capitalism

# Age discrimination as the denial of participation

“In the service sector, [...] where a lot of things are closed up [for older persons] and thus, so to speak, this *financial participation* is no longer guaranteed, i.e. when you can no longer have these resources or cannot exploit them anymore, you are automatically a *big step away from society*. For example, *if you can no longer take out a loan at the age of 65 or 70*, perhaps to rebuild your bathroom, etc., you are of course dependent on whether someone in your family is still looking after you, i.e. you are no longer self-determined per se, or if you *can no longer lease a car*, you would be restricted to public transport, [...] and that means that if you live in a rural rather than an urban area, *you can no longer take part in certain activities*, or perhaps *you cannot even go to the doctor's or a shopping centre.*” (AntiDis, AT)

Social field

Field & form of  
discrimination

Field & form of  
discrimination

# Age discrimination as the denial of participation

*“Wherever you find age limits, it’s an issue and [...] age limits are always a signal of discrimination. Why a certain age limit? People aren’t defined by their age. [...] Age limits point to age as the determining factor, which it never is.”* (Law, IE)

*“Not every reference to age is suspect. The fact that you retire at 65 is not problematic at all. That is not problematic at all, but it is reference to age. [...] retirement age is completely free from objection under equality law* (Law, AT)

# Summary: Age discrimination as denial of participation

## Summary

Interpretation pattern	Object of discrimination	Forms of discrimination	Social level or fields addressed	Normative orientation
<b>Denial of participation</b>	Older age itself	Formal or informal age-limits, refusal of medical treatment, increased premiums or prices	Meso-level: Access to certain areas of society (labour market, services and goods, e.g. financial services).	Formal Equality

# Conclusion: Age discrimination as denial of recognition & participation

## Aims

- Broadening our understanding of age discrimination
- Deepening understanding of how laws and policies can be directed towards this

## Legal & Policy Implications

- “Subtyping” age discrimination and ageism (North & Fiske, 2013)
  - Age discrimination as the denial of social esteem → challenging hegemonic status of monetary contributions → strengthening the *social recognition*
  - Age discrimination as the denial of participation → extending equality law beyond the employment domain → strengthening the *legal recognition*

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