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*Ageism in Ireland*

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## Introduction

This report presents data on ageism from two sources. Firstly, a module of questions on this theme was included in the 2003 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. Secondly, a stand-alone survey was conducted in the Republic of Ireland at the same time as the work in the North was being undertaken. It can be noted that, whilst some small-scale qualitative work has been conducted in Northern Ireland in recent years (Evason and Whittington, 2003), this is the first attempt to address this topic via large-scale quantitative surveys with representative samples of adults from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. It therefore constitutes a significant addition to our understanding of what has become an increasingly important field of inquiry.

The problem of ageism has moved to the centre of debate at national and European Union (EU) level over the past ten years. It might be thought that this is simply a consequence of the growing number of older persons (whom we define as persons aged 50 years or over) in our society and the fact that they are represented by increasingly strong and articulate pressure groups. Whilst these have been significant elements in accounting for the growing attention paid to ageism, the discussion that has occurred, and is continuing, has a number of layers. Firstly, at EU and national level there has been focus on ageism, which has been grounded in the equality/human rights agenda. Here, the concern has been that across a wide range of areas - for example, health, employment, and access to financial services - older people may be treated less favourably simply because of their age. At EU level, an early, but significant, contribution, was made in the report *Age and Attitudes* (Commission of the European Communities, 1993). This indicated that significant minorities of older persons felt they had been treated less favourably because of their age by a variety of bodies and institutions. At United Kingdom level, ongoing work by, for example, Age Concern (2004) has documented the extent of ageism encountered by older people in the United Kingdom (UK) in many areas of life. With regard to the Republic of Ireland, the speed with which government moved to introduce the legislative change to which we refer below is an indicator of the importance the Dublin government attaches to addressing this issue.

In this first layer of the discussion, the focus has tended to be on persons over state retirement age. In the second layer of the debate, however, ageism has been a significant theme in a narrower - and less altruistic - discourse relating to declining economic activity rates amongst those between

the age of 50 years and state retirement age. With regard to the United Kingdom, the report *Winning the Generation Game* (Cabinet Office, 2000) highlighted the doubling over the previous 20 years in the number of persons in this age group who were not in employment. In all, these accounted for 2.8 million men and women - one third of those between 50 years and state retirement age - with the single most important cause of economic inactivity being sickness and disability. The cost to the state was estimated to be £3-5 billion in lost taxation and expenditure on benefits. Thus, tackling ageism is viewed as central to the strategy for moving people back into employment.

At EU level there have been ongoing discussions about increasing employment levels amongst older workers (see, for example, von Nordheim, 2004), and the European Employment Directive was a major development in this sphere. This Directive relates to the prohibition of discrimination in employment on a variety of grounds, including age. Thus, member states are required to have legislation outlawing ageism in employment in place by December 2006. In 2003, consultation documents on meeting this requirement in Britain (Department of Trade and Industry, 2003) and Northern Ireland (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2003) were published. It should be noted Northern Ireland is slightly ahead of the rest of the UK inasmuch as Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act required designated public authorities to promote equality of opportunity for a number of groups not covered at that point by discrimination legislation, and these include older persons. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom as a whole are, lagging far behind the Republic of Ireland which legislated to prohibit ageism with regard to employment and the provision of goods, facilities and services in 1998 and 2000 respectively.

Finally, in the UK in particular, ageism has also surfaced in a third area of discussion: pensions policy. Space does not permit analysis of the substantial difficulties that have developed over the past decade with regard to financial provision for retirement. Suffice it to say that the Green Paper (Department of Work and Pensions, 2002), which sought to address these difficulties placed heavy emphasis on people working up to - and beyond - state retirement age with policies to combat ageism being part of the package of measures proposed to encourage them to do so. As we note below, this is less of an issue in the Republic of Ireland which has eschewed the drastic changes in policy which have been put in place in the UK over the past two decades.

The survey data on attitudes towards ageing and ageism presented below connect with these different agendas at a number of points. It is evident, however, that there is some variation

between attitudes and opinions in Northern Ireland and the Republic. With regard to Northern Ireland, it is clear that ageism is a matter for concern and that there are significant levels of anxiety with regard to health care and pensions. Secondly, the responses of those within the 50-59 years age group are of particular interest. Their views and concerns stand out from other age groups in such a fashion that we have called them “the angry generation”. These findings are not entirely surprising. This is the generation that has lived through the transformations of the worlds of work, pensions and the welfare state that have occurred in the United Kingdom over the past quarter of a century. As others (Mooney and Statham, 2002) have noted, they are the pivot generation: under pressure to care for elderly parents; under pressure to provide child care and other assistance to their children; and under pressure to keep working themselves - perhaps coping with ageism as they do so - to provide for their retirement. Turning to the data for the Republic, the pattern to emerge is a more positive one: these respondents are less likely to feel, for example, that older people are treated with less respect because of their age. There is less concern about pensions and no evidence of an “angry generation”.

### **The treatment of older people**

The first two questions in the surveys asked respondents whether they thought older people were treated better, worse or about the same as the general population because of their age, and whether they thought that they themselves were treated with more or less respect as they became older. Table 1 indicates very sharp differences between the north and the Republic. In Northern Ireland nearly one half (48%) of respondents considered that older people are treated worse as a result of their age. The views of younger adults and the very elderly were somewhat more positive, and these variations may well be a consequence of more limited experience on the one hand and a frame of reference which reaches back to earlier experience of lower living standards and poorer social provision on the other. Of particular interest in the data for Northern Ireland is the strength of feeling amongst those in the 50-59 years age group: a clear majority (57%) took the view that older people are treated worse than the general population because of their age. Closer analysis indicated that this variation was the result of the strength of feeling on this issue amongst women. Thus, whilst 50% of males in this age group thought that older people were treated worse because of their age, 63% of women took this view. It is difficult to account for this, although women’s broader experience as carers may be relevant here.

By contrast, in the Republic attitudes were significantly more positive. Though still of concern, the proportion feeling that older people were treated worse than the general population was 36% - a significant improvement on the Northern position. The proportion considering that older people were treated better was higher at 19%. Persons aged 60 years or over were much more likely to consider that older people were treated better than their counterparts in the north. Most significantly, those aged 50-59 years did not diverge markedly in their views from other age groups.

**Table 1: Do you think that older people are, on the whole, treated better or worse than people in the general population in this country because of their age?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Better                     | 18    | 11    | 8     | 6     | 11    | 9     | 21  | 11  |
| Worse                      | 35    | 51    | 48    | 57    | 52    | 45    | 36  | 48  |
| The same                   | 40    | 34    | 42    | 36    | 36    | 43    | 41  | 38  |
| Don't know                 | 7/4   | 3/5   | 2/6   | 1     | 2     | 3     | 2   | 3   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Better                     | 13    | 14    | 17    | 22    | 26    | 30    | 44  | 19  |
| Worse                      | 33    | 42    | 32    | 37    | 35    | 29    | 17  | 36  |
| The same                   | 50    | 39    | 45    | 40    | 37    | 39    | 36  | 41  |
| Don't know                 | 4     | 5     | 6     | 1     | 2     | 3     | 3   | 4   |

Table 2 shows similar trends. Whereas less than one quarter (24%) of respondents in Northern Ireland thought that they themselves were treated with less respect as they got older, the corresponding figure for the Republic was 36%. Across the age groups, Northern respondents were much more likely than those in the Republic to say they received less respect. North and south, more positive attitudes are expressed by the youngest and oldest adults though, within this, younger and older people in the Republic are more positive. Once again, respondents in the 50-59 years age group in Northern Ireland stand out with 44% of men and 45% of women considering that they were treated with less respect as they got older. The comparable figures for the Republic were 23% and 26%. Again it is difficult to account for this and further research is clearly needed, but the experience of ageism in the workplace, which we discuss below, may be a relevant factor here.

**Table 2: As you get older, do you find that people treat you with more respect or less respect?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| More respect               | 36    | 22    | 29    | 15    | 16    | 21    | 34  | 24  |
| Less respect               | 25    | 36    | 35    | 44    | 42    | 39    | 33  | 36  |
| Same                       | 31    | 40    | 36    | 39    | 42    | 38    | 32  | 38  |
| Don't know                 | 9     | 2     | 1     | 2     | 0     | 2     | 1   | 3   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| More respect               | 65    | 31    | 28    | 26    | 23    | 31    | 49  | 36  |
| Less respect               | 8     | 22    | 20    | 25    | 27    | 23    | 20  | 20  |
| Same                       | 20    | 43    | 52    | 48    | 50    | 45    | 30  | 41  |
| Don't know                 | 7     | 4     | 1     | 1     |       | 2     | 1   | 3   |

### **Adequacy of provision for older people**

Table 3 presents data on respondents' perception with regard to the adequacy of provision for older people. The more positive responses of those aged 65 years or over in the Republic of Ireland should be noted. By contrast, across all age groups in the North, and amongst younger people in the Republic, clear majorities of respondents considered that the state does not do enough to support and assist older persons. Additionally, it can be seen from the table that those expressing most dissatisfaction consisted of respondents in the 50-59 years age group in Northern Ireland. To a large extent this was a consequence of the strength of feeling amongst women in this age group, with 81% taking the view that authorities do not do enough for older persons. By contrast, in the Republic, 68% of men and an identical percentage of women within the 50-59 years age group took this view.

**Table 3: Do you think that the authorities in Northern Ireland/ the Republic of Ireland do all they should for older people, do too much, or do not do enough?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Do all they should         | 15    | 17    | 21    | 20    | 23    | 25    | 41  | 20  |
| Do too much                | 2     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 1   | 1   |
| Do not do enough           | 63    | 74    | 72    | 77    | 74    | 71    | 53  | 71  |
| Don't know                 | 20    | 9     | 8     | 3     | 3     | 4     | 5   | 8   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Do all they should         | 20    | 19    | 23    | 29    | 30    | 46    | 51  | 26  |
| Do too much                | 0     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0   | 1   |
| Do not do enough           | 70    | 77    | 72    | 68    | 65    | 52    | 48  | 69  |
| Don't know                 | 10    | 4     | 5     | 3     | 4     | 2     | 2   | 5   |

Those who responded negatively to this question were asked in what way the authorities did not do enough. Table 4 shows that better pensions and financial benefits were the most frequently mentioned issues by respondents in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, although level of concern was somewhat lower among respondents from the latter. There would appear to be slightly more concern about health and community care provision in the Republic than in Northern Ireland. What stands out most clearly from the table is the level of concern in Northern Ireland about crime against older people and the need to provide better protection for this group. It should be noted that other research in Northern Ireland (Evason and Whittington, 2003) found a similar level of disquiet.

**Table 4: What improvements could be made in state provision?**

|   | % of respondents identifying each issue |                     |
|---|---|---------------------|
|   | Northern Ireland                        | Republic of Ireland |
| Increase pensions/not enough money  | 43                                      | 34                  |
| Crime and security issues   | 27                                      | 6                   |
| Healthcare  | 19                                      | 26                  |
| Relief for carers, homehelp, meals on wheels, visits by nurses, not left on their own so much | 19                                      | 24                  |
| Social, more organised trips somewhere to go, loneliness                                      | 3                                       | 6                   |
| Transport   | 3                                       | 4                   |
| Employment  | 2                                       | 1                   |
| Money for fuel/electricity  | 3                                       | 6                   |
| Other benefits, like T.V. licence, Bus pass   | 9                                       | 3                   |
| Other answer  |   | 10                  |
| Access/information about entitlements   |   | 3                   |
| Housing   |   | 3                   |

Typical comments were:

*“Benefits are not high enough and health and auxiliary care needs improved”*

*“Access to health care is not good enough ... benefits in general could be improved.”*

*“Better benefits and access to better protection from criminals.”*

### **Views on pensions and allied provisions**

It should be noted that pensions policies in the UK and Republic are very different. In the UK the strategy pursued has been one of reducing the role of the state, encouraging private provision and relying on means-tested assistance to help those already retired. In consequence, the basic state pension (currently £79.60 for a single person) represents a declining percentage of average earnings and is now much below the threshold (currently £105.45) for means-tested help. In contrast, the Republic has retained the Beveridge principle of giving clear advantage to those who have paid contributions, and the basic pension is rather more generous. At the time of the interviews the basic state pension in the Republic was £105 compared with £77.45 in the UK.

It is not therefore surprising that, whilst there is a good deal of dissatisfaction with pensions and other benefits for pensioners in Northern Ireland and the Republic, feelings are stronger in the north than in the south. Eighty five per cent of respondents in Northern Ireland thought that the basic state pension was a poor deal for those with a full contribution record. Only 12% thought it was a good or reasonable deal. The comparable figures for the Republic were 71% and 26%. When asked to take into account the other benefits provided for pensioners, the overwhelming majority of Northern Ireland respondents still considered that financial provision made by the state for pensioners was inadequate (46%) or very inadequate (33%). Respondents from the Republic were more positive, with one third taking the view that provision was very adequate or adequate; 45% thought provision was inadequate but only 17% thought provision was very inadequate.

### **The main problems facing elderly persons**

Table 5 is of interest inasmuch as, despite the more positive responses from the Republic's respondents noted above, very high levels of concern about older people surfaced amongst these respondents when they were asked what they thought were the main problems faced by older people and were provided with a list of possible options. No restriction was placed on the number of items that could be selected. Crime against older persons was clearly a matter of concern for the



majority of adults in Northern Ireland and the Republic, with the next most commonly chosen items were loneliness and making ends meet. There would appear to be some variation at the edges in the north according to age but this is less apparent for the Republic. A further feature of the data relates to the number of items selected by respondents. Interviewees could select as many items as they wished as being problematic. The average number of items identified by respondents in Northern Ireland was 4.06 but this rose to 4.48 for those in the 50-59 years age group. Here again, this group seems particularly concerned and anxious. The comparable figures for the Republic were 3.96 for all respondents, and 4.09 for those within the 50-59 years age group.

**Table 5: What do you think are the main problems facing older people in Northern Ireland today? (% identifying each problem)**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Making ends meet           | 46    | 70    | 57    | 71    | 64    | 56    | 55  | 63  |
| Fear of crime              | 82    | 90    | 91    | 91    | 84    | 89    | 81  | 88  |
| Loneliness                 | 52    | 68    | 70    | 74    | 69    | 63    | 63  | 66  |
| Transport                  | 28    | 31    | 24    | 33    | 25    | 24    | 24  | 29  |
| Lack of respect            | 34    | 44    | 34    | 40    | 31    | 32    | 32  | 38  |
| Keeping warm in winter     | 43    | 51    | 48    | 58    | 51    | 43    | 29  | 49  |
| Getting employment         | 25    | 31    | 20    | 30    | 22    | 17    | 19  | 26  |
| Access to healthcare       | 48    | 51    | 49    | 51    | 48    | 46    | 35  | 48  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Making ends meet           | 46    | 61    | 62    | 56    | 46    | 53    | 51  | 56  |
| Fear of crime              | 83    | 84    | 83    | 83    | 86    | 83    | 79  | 83  |
| Loneliness                 | 75    | 79    | 81    | 83    | 74    | 65    | 71  | 77  |
| Transport                  | 31    | 31    | 32    | 28    | 25    | 24    | 24  | 29  |
| Lack of respect            | 28    | 29    | 29    | 30    | 23    | 20    | 26  | 27  |
| Keeping warm in winter     | 40    | 54    | 48    | 49    | 53    | 46    | 42  | 49  |
| Getting employment         | 34    | 27    | 25    | 24    | 14    | 17    | 17  | 25  |
| Access to healthcare       | 47    | 48    | 58    | 57    | 53    | 47    | 36  | 50  |

### Attitudes towards older people

Questions on attitudes always pose some difficulty inasmuch as respondents may give what they perceive to be the socially acceptable or politically correct answer. This may, in part, account for the consensus around many of the items in Table 6, with clear majorities agreeing with the propositions that society does not recognise the contribution of older people, older and younger people should mix together more often socially, older people should stand up more for their rights, all older people should be given reduced prices, and that older people are much younger in their ways these days. The view of older persons in a positive light is not evident across the board, however. There was a good deal of support - from younger people in particular- for the views that older people are too set in their ways and not willing to listen to younger people. One of the most

interesting aspects of the table relates to the first statement. Across all age groups, respondents from the Republic were much more likely to consider that older people are admired and respected by young people. In all, 52% took this view compared with 28% of respondents from Northern Ireland. Finally, it is of interest that there was very little support for the notion of older workers leaving employment to make way for young people.

**Table 6: Attitudes towards older people (% agreeing with each statement)**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
| 1.Older people are admired and respected by young people  | 35    | 22    | 31    | 24    | 21    | 34    | 34  | 28  |
| 2.People in their 50s should give up work to make way for younger people                                    | 13    | 7     | 8     | 16    | 16    | 18    | 16  | 12  |
| 3.Older people are too set in their ways and ideas  | 67    | 55    | 54    | 51    | 46    | 59    | 56  | 56  |
| 4.Older people are not willing to listen to young people's views  | 49    | 44    | 46    | 34    | 31    | 38    | 38  | 42  |
| 5.Older people should stand up more actively for their own rights   | 82    | 89    | 87    | 95    | 93    | 97    | 90  | 91  |
| 6.Older people and young people should mix together more often socially                                     | 70    | 84    | 84    | 88    | 88    | 84    | 78  | 83  |
| 7.All older people should be given reduced prices for things like gas, electricity, telephone and transport | 86    | 91    | 91    | 93    | 94    | 94    | 92  | 91  |
| 8.These days older people are much younger in their ways  | 67    | 85    | 96    | 94    | 97    | 94    | 90  | 88  |
| 9.Society doesn't recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make                  | 72    | 85    | 88    | 91    | 91    | 93    | 84  | 86  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| 1.Older people are admired and respected by young people  | 57    | 48    | 53    | 51    | 49    | 57    | 63  | 52  |
| 2.People in their 50s should give up work to make way for younger people                                    | 9     | 9     | 10    | 15    | 17    | 10    | 15  | 11  |
| 3.Older people are too set in their ways and ideas  | 65    | 52    | 62    | 58    | 54    | 52    | 53  | 56  |
| 4.Older people are not willing to listen to young people's views  | 48    | 38    | 44    | 46    | 39    | 45    | 44  | 42  |
| 5.Older people should stand up more actively for their own rights   | 77    | 86    | 88    | 94    | 95    | 94    | 90  | 87  |
| 6.Older people and young people should mix together more often socially                                     | 78    | 87    | 90    | 88    | 88    | 84    | 78  | 85  |
| 7.All older people should be given reduced prices for things like gas, electricity, telephone and transport | 90    | 92    | 94    | 91    | 92    | 98    | 99  | 93  |
| 8.These days older people are much younger in their ways  | 65    | 81    | 91    | 92    | 95    | 96    | 88  | 83  |
| 9.Society doesn't recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make                  | 81    | 86    | 91    | 90    | 85    | 89    | 86  | 86  |

### **Ageism and health care.**

There has been considerable concern in recent years that older people may be treated less favourably by health care systems. (For a fuller discussion see Evason and Whittington, 2003). As shown in Table 7, approximately two fifths of respondents in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland thought that age impacted on the care offered in terms of the attitudes of providers, the treatment offered and access to waiting lists for tests and operations. It can be noted that in Northern Ireland that feelings were particularly strong among respondents in the 45-64 years age group, while views more evenly spread in the Republic. Respondents from Northern Ireland were also slightly more likely to report being directly and adversely affected in consequence of their age than interviewees from the Republic. Eleven per cent of interviewees from Northern Ireland aged 50 years and over reported feeling that they had been treated “with less dignity and respect” by health and social care professionals because of their age. The figure for the Republic was 8%. Respondents in the Republic of Ireland were asked to specify the way in which they were treated with less dignity. The most frequently mentioned issues were “lack of resources” and “personal treatment from staff and bedside manner”. Eight per cent of Northern Ireland interviewees thought that they had not been offered treatment that might have helped them because of their age, while only 3% of interviewees from the Republic expressed this view. In the Republic of Ireland, the most cited issue was “waiting time”. Moreover, 24% of respondents in Northern Ireland felt that a friend or relative had been treated with less dignity and respect as a result of their age, and 18% thought a friend or relative had not been offered treatment which might have helped them because of their age. The comparable figures for the Republic were 17% and 9%. Respondents from the Republic were again asked to outline specific examples relating to these questions. In terms of a friend or family member being treated with less dignity and respect, 18% of respondents cited “lack of resources and cutbacks”. The “ageist attitude of medical/social welfare staff” was identified by 17% of respondents, and a similar proportion identified “lack of information/communication between medical staff, patients and families”. Other issues included “personal treatment from staff/beside manner” and “error in diagnosis/treatment/tests”.

Note: open ended questions related to q10 – friend/family member not offered medical treatment have no value labels, so I don't know what they are!

**Table 7: Do you think that health and social care workers treat older people differently with regard to...( % saying ‘yes’)**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|  | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|  | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| ...their attitudes to them?                                    | 35    | 44    | 52    | 45    | 48    | 40    | 28  | 42  |
| ...the treatment of their illnesses?                           | 39    | 42    | 52    | 47    | 44    | 37    | 24  | 42  |
| ...when placing them on waiting lists for tests and operations | 35    | 46    | 54    | 52    | 54    | 45    | 37  | 46  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>                                     |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| ...their attitudes to them?                                    | 39    | 43    | 41    | 43    | 40    | 31    | 29  | 40  |
| ...the treatment of their illnesses?                           | 47    | 42    | 36    | 41    | 38    | 33    | 25  | 40  |
| ...when placing them on waiting lists for tests and operations | 41    | 44    | 41    | 46    | 48    | 42    | 31  | 43  |

### **Ageism and employment**

Life and Times data indicate that 38% of males and 54% of females in the 50-59 years age group were not in employment. Among Republic of Ireland respondents, the relevant figures were 30% for males, and 55% for females. The extent to which combating ageism in the workplace will alter this position is unclear but, as we noted in the introduction, dealing with such discrimination is central to current policies in the UK to encourage people to remain in employment up to - and beyond - state retirement age. It is therefore of interest that, as Table 8 indicates, the majority of adults - in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland - considered that older people in their 50s and 60s are treated less favourably by employers when seeking work. In the Republic those in the younger age groups expressed most concern, whereas it was those in the 50-59 years age group in Northern Ireland who were most likely to consider that employers treated people in their fifties and sixties less favourably.

**Table 8: Do you think that people in their 50s and 60s who are looking for work are generally treated better or worse than younger people by prospective employers?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Better                     | 6     | 3     | 4     | 3     | 4     | 3     | 4   | 4   |
| Worse                      | 57    | 69    | 68    | 72    | 59    | 65    | 54  | 66  |
| Same                       | 14    | 20    | 21    | 19    | 24    | 13    | 20  | 18  |
| Don't know                 | 23    | 9     | 7     | 7     | 13    | 19    | 23  | 12  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Better                     | 5     | 4     | 3     | 6     | 2     | 3     | 4   | 4   |
| Worse                      | 68    | 75    | 68    | 67    | 66    | 62    | 56  | 69  |
| Same                       | 19    | 12    | 24    | 19    | 20    | 16    | 18  | 17  |
| Don't know                 | 8     | 9     | 5     | 9     | 13    | 19    | 22  | 10  |

Table 9 shows that there was a widespread perception, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, that older workers are discriminated against when it comes to recruitment, promotion and training. Among respondents in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, support was lower among the youngest and oldest age groups. In Northern Ireland, those with the strongest views were men in the 40-49 age group of whom, for example, 76% thought that older workers were treated less favourably with regard to promotion. The comparable figure for the Republic was 61%.

**Table 9: Do you think that older workers are discriminated against with regard to ...**

| <b>Northern Ireland (% saying yes)</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
| Job recruitment                           | 53    | 68    | 78    | 69    | 72    | 67    | 56  | 66  |
| Job promotion                             | 47    | 65    | 75    | 65    | 69    | 62    | 58  | 63  |
| Job training                              | 49    | 59    | 69    | 61    | 57    | 56    | 56  | 58  |
| Status or position in their organisation  | 33    | 53    | 58    | 52    | 54    | 47    | 48  | 49  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland (% saying yes)</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Job recruitment                           | 74    | 77    | 75    | 76    | 72    | 68    | 56  | 74  |
| Job promotion                             | 52    | 61    | 65    | 67    | 70    | 66    | 52  | 61  |
| Job training                              | 59    | 63    | 67    | 69    | 65    | 59    | 51  | 63  |
| Status or position in their organisation  | 38    | 43    | 56    | 53    | 53    | 54    | 41  | 46  |

In all, whilst only 6% of persons aged 50 years or over in Northern Ireland reported that they themselves had experienced age discrimination in employment, the figure rose to 11% for men in the 50-59 years age group. Among respondents within the Republic of Ireland, 4% of those aged 50 years and over reported direct experience of age discrimination in employment. The group most at risk was females aged 50-69 years, of whom 6% felt they had been discriminated against by employers. The types of less favourable treatment most frequently reported by Northern Ireland respondents related to being passed over for promotion, the employer preferring younger workers and the employer having a poor attitude to older people. A similar pattern was evident for respondents from the Republic of Ireland, although the employer preference for younger workers was less important.

**Table 10. Forms of employment discrimination reported**

|  | %                |                     |
|--|------------------|---------------------|
|  | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
| Didn't get promotion                         | 24               | 25                  |
| Employer preferred younger workers           | 23               | 6                   |
| Employer has a poor attitude to older people | 17               | 25                  |
| Refused a job                                | 9                | 14                  |
| Forced to retire/made redundant              | 9                | 15                  |
| Didn't get training                          | 6                | 3                   |
| Other  | 13               | 12                  |

Typical answers were:

*"I tried for a job and was told I was too old."*

*"I was made redundant because of my age. It wasn't put that way but I know it was the reason."*

*"I was told I would not get promotion when I came to 50."*

More broadly, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, 9% of all respondents reported that a friend or family member had been subjected to employment ageism. Of all instances of discrimination reported by respondents in Northern Ireland, 31% related to promotion, 16% to redundancy/enforced retirement and 15% to recruitment (see Table 11). For respondents in the Republic of Ireland, these figures were 22%, 19% and 20% respectively.

**Table 11: Reported forms of employment discrimination against friends/family members**

|  | %                |                     |
|--|------------------|---------------------|
|  | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
| Didn't get promotion                         | 31               | 22                  |
| Forced to retire/made redundant              | 16               | 19                  |
| Refused a job                                | 15               | 20                  |
| Employer has a poor attitude to older people | 12               | 15                  |
| Employer preferred younger workers           | 2                | 1                   |
| Didn't get training                          | 5                | 3                   |
| Other  | 13               | 19                  |

Typical answers were:

*"My dad was forced into retirement."*

*"My mother is treated very poorly by her employer and from what she tells me it has a lot to do with her age."*

*"Because he was over fifty – they didn't want to know."*

In our introduction we noted the intention in the UK to outlaw age discrimination in employment in 2006 and the fact that action on this has already been taken in the Republic. Table 12 is therefore of interest inasmuch as the majority (60%) of respondents in the Republic knew that age discrimination in recruitment was illegal. In Northern Ireland, a majority of respondents aged 25-64 years considered that such action was covered by discrimination legislation even though this is not yet the case. On this basis, Table 13 is of particular interest as it indicates a slightly higher level of support for such legislation in the Northern Ireland and a small but distinct group of people in the Republic who are actually against such legislation

**Table 12: As far as you know, is it against the law, or not, for an employer to refuse to take on a person simply because they are older – say in their fifties?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Yes, illegal               | 49    | 56    | 57    | 59    | 55    | 44    | 32  | 53  |
| No                         | 18    | 22    | 18    | 21    | 19    | 21    | 23  | 21  |
| Don't know                 | 31    | 22    | 25    | 20    | 26    | 35    | 45  | 27  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Yes, illegal               | 64    | 62    | 69    | 55    | 67    | 52    | 36  | 60  |
| No                         | 14    | 15    | 16    | 21    | 9     | 16    | 20  | 16  |
| (It depends)*              | 3     | 4     | 2     | 6     | 4     | 6     | 8   | 4   |
| Don't know                 | 19    | 19    | 14    | 19    | 20    | 26    | 37  | 20  |

\* 'It depends' was not an option available in the questionnaire for Northern Ireland

**Table 13: Are you in favour of or against laws making it illegal to refuse to employ someone simply because of their age?**

|                               | %                |                     |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                               | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
| Strongly in favour            | 37               | 44                  |
| In favour                     | 37               | 25                  |
| Neither in favour nor against | 8                | 7                   |
| Against                       | 9                | 14                  |
| Strongly against              | 2                | 6                   |
| (Don't know)                  | 6                | 4                   |

## Ageism and financial services

It can be argued that a major weakness of the proposed legislation on ageism - for Britain and Northern Ireland - is that it is confined to employment and does not cover goods, facilities and services. Table 14 indicates that, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, with some divergence amongst the youngest and oldest interviewees, there was a widespread view that older people - especially those over retirement age - are treated less favourably by the financial services industry.

**Table 14: Views about financial services for people in their fifties and up to retirement age – and for people over retirement age (% agreeing with each statement)**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>   |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|   | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Older people (in their fifties and up to retirement age) are treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age | 44    | 57    | 58    | 51    | 53    | 51    | 33  | 52  |
| Older people (over retirement age) are treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age                       | 53    | 69    | 71    | 67    | 66    | 61    | 48  | 64  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Older people (in their fifties and up to retirement age) are treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age | 55    | 66    | 66    | 59    | 56    | 53    | 50  | 60  |
| Older people (over retirement age) are treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age                       | 62    | 73    | 83    | 68    | 63    | 62    | 59  | 69  |

In all, in Northern Ireland 8% of those aged 50 years or over reported that they had been treated less favourably by this sector, with the proportion rising to 11% for those aged 65-74 years. The position was slightly better in the Republic with the comparable figures being 6% and 6% respectively. Being refused a loan or credit was mentioned most frequently (by 59% of respondents in the Republic of Ireland and 25% of Northern Ireland respondents). Being refused insurance was an issue for 21% of Northern Ireland respondents, but only for 3% of Republic of Ireland respondents. There was also some reference to difficulties with loans, credit and mortgages as well as other or more general responses such as “ They don’t have time for you”, “ They talk down to you.” and “They write you off.” Respondents in the Republic of Ireland highlighted that they do not get the same concessions or good deals as younger people, and so pay too much, as well as the poor attitude of staff.

More broadly, 11% of respondents in Northern Ireland and 10% of those in the Republic reported that a friend or relative had been treated less favourably by the financial services sector because of their age. Again, Table 15 shows that being refused a loan or credit was the most common item



reported (49% in the Republic of Ireland and 29% in Northern Ireland). Problems getting a loan or a mortgage were mentioned by a further 13% of Northern Ireland respondents and 11% of Republic of Ireland respondents. Being refused insurance was not mentioned at all to the same extent as it was in relation to personal experience of discrimination – the bigger complaint was that friends and relatives didn't get as good a deal as someone younger would have received. The poor attitudes of staff were mentioned by 13% of respondents from Northern Ireland, and 5% from the Republic. Interestingly, three respondents from the Republic of Ireland highlighted the issue of being too young.

**Table 15: Reported forms of less favourable treatment of friends and relatives by financial services industry**

|   | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|---|------------------|---------------------|
| Refused loan/mortgage/credit  | 29               | 49                  |
| Do not get same concessions as others/do not get as good a deal/paying too much | 24               | 19                  |
| Problems getting loans/mortgages/credit   | 13               | 11                  |
| Bad attitude of staff   | 13               | 5                   |
| Problems getting insurance  | 3                | 3                   |
| Not given enough advice/help with forms   | 3                | 1                   |
| Refused travel/car/home/life insurance  | 2                | 3                   |
| Other   | 13               | 8                   |

In a later part of the interview, respondents were asked about their knowledge of - and views on - legislation relating to goods and services and older people. Tables 16 and 17 show some confusion. 51% of Republic of Ireland respondents were aware that such discrimination is illegal in the Republic, whilst 42% of Northern Ireland respondents believed such discrimination to be illegal even though it is not. Here again, support for such legislation appears marginally stronger in Northern Ireland than the Republic with more substantial opposition in the Republic

**Table 16: As far as you know, is it against the law, or not, for someone providing goods and services to refuse someone access to those goods or services simply because they are older?**

|                     | %                |                     |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                     | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
| Against the law     | 42               | 51                  |
| Not against the law | 21               | 17                  |
| Depends             | 7                | 4                   |
| (Don't know)        | 30               | 27                  |

**Table 17: Are you in favour of or against laws making it illegal to refuse someone access to goods and services because they are older?**

|                               | %                |                     |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|                               | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
| Strongly in favour            | 33               | 40                  |
| In favour                     | 38               | 26                  |
| Neither in favour nor against | 10               | 9                   |
| Against                       | 9                | 14                  |
| Strongly against              | 2                | 6                   |
| (Don't know)                  | 8                | 6                   |

### **Older people and retirement**

Encouraging later retirement is now a central element in UK policies relating to enabling future generations of pensioners to secure an adequate income. However, there is an extensive literature (for a fuller discussion see Phillipson, 2004) which suggests that, whereas in the past retirement was viewed as a short phase - an adjunct to the end of working life - it is now viewed as distinct period to be looked forward to with a preference for leaving employment before state retirement age. Our data relate to these themes and suggest a lack of enthusiasm on the part of Northern Ireland respondents for core aspects of current policy.

Table 18 indicates that in Northern Ireland only one third of interviewees favoured active encouragement of older workers to remain in employment after retirement age with those under 45 years - perhaps with an eye to their own employment prospects - being least likely to support this option. Those aged 60-64 years were most likely to consider that working past retirement age should be discouraged. However, the option which enjoyed most support is a neutral stance leaving the matter to the individual. In contrast, in the Republic across all age groups, people were more in favour of encouraging older workers to continue past retirement age with strong support for such as approach coming from respondents aged 65 years or over.

**Table 18: Do you think that people over the state retirement age should be encouraged to stay in paid employment, discouraged from staying in paid employment, or neither?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Encouraged                 | 23    | 29    | 41    | 40    | 30    | 44    | 39  | 34  |
| Discouraged                | 22    | 16    | 16    | 17    | 26    | 22    | 18  | 19  |
| Neither                    | 43    | 50    | 39    | 41    | 42    | 34    | 36  | 43  |
| Don't know                 | 12    | 4     | 4     | 3     | 3     | 1     | 7   | 5   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Encouraged                 | 37    | 41    | 41    | 45    | 37    | 52    | 57  | 43  |
| Discouraged                | 21    | 17    | 18    | 26    | 22    | 20    | 17  | 20  |
| Neither                    | 40    | 39    | 40    | 25    | 35    | 24    | 20  | 35  |
| Don't know                 | 2     | 3     | 1     | 4     | 6     | 5     | 6   | 3   |

As part of this total debate there has been discussion as to whether it should be illegal for employers to have fixed retirement ages. Table 19 indicates a slight variation between north and south on this issue. In Northern Ireland a bare majority (51%) of respondents opposed a fixed retirement age and thought that older people should have the right to work on if they wished to do so. In the Republic the proportion of persons taking this view was higher at 56%, with those aged under 45 years being particularly likely to support this perspective.

**Table 19: Thinking now about retirement. Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>  |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|  | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|  | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| A fixed retirement age is unfair to older workers who may wish to keep working past retirement age and have the right to do so | 43    | 55    | 55    | 50    | 51    | 52    | 46  | 51  |
| It's better to have a set age for everyone so people know where they are and can plan  | 45    | 41    | 42    | 44    | 45    | 42    | 47  | 43  |
| Other  | 2     | 2     | 2     | 4     | 3     | 2     | 4   | 3   |
| Don't know   | 10    | 3     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 4     | 4   | 3   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>   |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| A fixed retirement age is unfair to older workers who may wish to keep working past retirement age and have the right to do so | 61    | 59    | 54    | 49    | 52    | 53    | 58  | 56  |
| It's better to have a set age for everyone so people know where they are and can plan  | 32    | 31    | 36    | 45    | 41    | 41    | 34  | 35  |
| Other  | 3     | 7     | 9     | 3     | 4     | 3     | 2   | 5   |
| Don't know   | 5     | 3     | 2     | 3     | 3     | 2     | 6   | 3   |

It has emerged in other research (Evason and Whittington, 2003) that people's views on, for example, whether or not older workers should be encouraged to work past retirement are an imperfect guide to what they want for themselves. Table 20 indicates limited enthusiasm for working past retirement age with those in the north and those in the younger age groups being most reluctant to do so. Amongst those under the age of 50 years, the preferred option – for Northern Ireland interviewees in particular - is early retirement. This is problematic for policy-makers in the UK as these are precisely the people whom government hopes will work on. Beyond these two options opinions were fairly evenly divided between those who wished to cease working at retirement age and those who thought it would depend on their circumstances at the time.

**Table 20: And what about you personally, would you prefer to work beyond the current retirement age, to retire at the current retirement age, or to retire early?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>                                 |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | All |
|   | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   |
| Prefer to work <u>beyond</u> the current retirement age | 15    | 16    | 24    | 20    | 30    | 18  |
| Prefer to retire <u>at</u> the current retirement age   | 17    | 15    | 14    | 21    | 14    | 17  |
| Prefer to retire <u>early</u>                           | 34    | 40    | 38    | 28    | 29    | 36  |
| (It depends)  | 20    | 23    | 16    | 16    | 5     | 19  |
| (Already retired)                                       | 0     | -     | 1     | 3     | 18    | 2   |
| (Not working for other reasons)                         | 5     | 5     | 7     | 11    | 5     | 7   |
| (Don't know)  | 9     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 2   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>                              |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| Prefer to work <u>beyond</u> the current retirement age | 19    | 18    | 25    | 26    | 27    | 21  |
| Prefer to retire <u>at</u> the current retirement age   | 15    | 16    | 20    | 20    | 28    | 18  |
| Prefer to retire <u>early</u>                           | 33    | 36    | 30    | 24    | 10    | 31  |
| (It depends)  | 26    | 23    | 30    | 12    | 16    | 21  |
| (Already retired)                                       | 1     | 0     | 0     | 5     | 13    | 2   |
| (Not working for other reasons)                         | 2     | 5     | 4     | 12    | 7     | 6   |
| (Don't know)  | 4     | 2     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 2   |

Perhaps more comfort for policy-makers is provided by Table 21. This shows considerable interest across the age groups in part-time work before and after state retirement age - although again it has to be said the level of enthusiasm is lower in Northern Ireland than in the Republic. There is a need for caution here. Flexible employment, incorporating part-time work, self-employment and other forms of employment, has been seen as a win-win solution for both government and older persons. For government there is the prospect of reduced benefit expenditure - with those still working continuing to make provision for their retirement. For the individual, there is an alternative to the stark choices currently facing many of full-time employment or full-time retirement. It can be noted that the Eurobarometer survey of 2001 (Kohl, 2002) showed strong support for policies allowing older persons to withdraw gradually from employment. As Platman (2004) notes,

however, much depends on exactly what is on offer to older workers. Part-time work that is interesting, secure, reasonably remunerated and does not involve any loss of employment rights may prove attractive to many. Low paid, insecure work which lacks status and employment rights may not. Further research is needed to determine the thinking behind responses to this section of the questionnaire.

**Table 21: Some people say they would prefer to retire gradually, either working part-time up to retirement or part-time after retirement. Would you yourself be interested in either or both of these options?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>                     |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | All |
|   | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   |
| Yes - part-time <u>up to</u> retirement age | 22    | 21    | 28    | 23    | 13    | 22  |
| Yes – part-time after retirement age        | 18    | 18    | 20    | 22    | 24    | 19  |
| Yes - both                                  | 21    | 32    | 22    | 29    | 29    | 28  |
| No  | 18    | 19    | 24    | 18    | 33    | 20  |
| (Don't know)                                | 21    | 9     | 6     | 8     | 2     | 10  |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>                  |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| Yes - part-time <u>up to</u> retirement age | 19    | 21    | 16    | 23    | 26    | 20  |
| Yes – part-time after retirement age        | 24    | 22    | 26    | 30    | 36    | 25  |
| Yes - both                                  | 35    | 40    | 40    | 28    | 31    | 37  |
| No  | 10    | 11    | 14    | 14    | 13    | 12  |
| (Don't know)                                | 12    | 6     | 5     | 6     | 4     | 7   |

### **Views and preferences**

In the closing stages of the interview, respondents were presented with three situations and asked how they would deal with or respond to them. The first scenario concerned two women both equally qualified to apply for a position as a secretary. Both were married, with one being 52 years, and the other aged 24 years. Respondents were asked to whom they would offer the job - and why - if they were the employer. Table 22 shows that - particularly in the Republic - a significant minority opted for “it depends”. In addition, there was a strong vote amongst the youngest respondents for the candidate in their age group. Apart from these, the most common view was that they would offer the position to the older woman.

**Table 22: Suppose two people who are both equally well qualified apply for a job as a secretary. One is a 52 year old married woman and the other is a married woman of 24. If you were the employer would you want to offer the job to the older woman or to the younger woman?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>                 |       |       |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|   | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 |
|   | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     |
| Would want to offer it to older woman   | 22    | 41    | 47    | 49    | 41    |
| Would want to offer it to younger woman | 46    | 26    | 14    | 23    | 25    |
| (It depends)                            | 20    | 27    | 30    | 24    | 24    |
| (Other)                                 | 2     | 2     | 4     | 1     | 5     |
| Don't know                              | 11    | 5     | 5     | 4     | 5     |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b>              |       |       |       |       |       |
| Would want to offer it to older woman   | 32    | 40    | 36    | 28    | 28    |
| Would want to offer it to younger woman | 16    | 22    | 25    | 26    | 26    |
| (It depends)                            | 44    | 47    | 35    | 35    | 42    |
| (Other)                                 | <1    | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0     |
| Don't know                              | 3     | 4     | 2     | 3     | 4     |

Reasons for choosing the older women revolved round a very limited number of themes. The most common response in Northern Ireland related to the greater experience the older woman would bring to the job. In the Republic of Ireland, the most commonly identified reason was that the older woman was more likely to be settled and stay in the job. A substantial number of respondents also emphasised that the older woman was likely to be more reliable and mature. Less positively for other parts of the equality agenda, many respondents focussed on the fact that the older woman would have less family commitments, she would not require maternity leave and would probably have her children reared by this stage.

Turning to those who would have offered the job to the younger woman, the most cited reason in Northern Ireland was that she would have longer years service ahead, whilst in the Republic of Ireland, the most common reason was that the younger woman would need the job more. Other major reasons are that the younger woman would have more up-to-date skills, and would have more energy, enthusiasm and health.

The second scenario concerned a married man with three children and an older man of 70 years. Both had been on waiting lists for the same length of time and were equally in need of a heart by-pass operation. Respondents were asked whom they would treat first if they were the surgeon in this situation. As Table 23 indicates, there was a clear majority in favour of treating the younger man first, although interviewees in the Republic were more likely to opt for “it depends” and less likely to express a preference for the option chosen by the majority.

**Table 23: Suppose a young man with three children and an older man of 70 are both on the waiting list for a heart by-pass operation. They are both equally in need and have been on the waiting list for exactly the same time. If you were the surgeon and had a choice, which man would you prefer to treat first?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Younger man                | 78    | 75    | 76    | 71    | 69    | 73    | 77  | 74  |
| Older man                  | 8     | 6     | 4     | 8     | 6     | 5     | 4   | 6   |
| (It depends)               | 9     | 12    | 13    | 15    | 18    | 15    | 13  | 13  |
| (Other)                    | 1     | 2     | 3     | 2     | 3     | 2     | 2   | 2   |
| Don't know                 | 5     | 5     | 3     | 5     | 3     | 5     | 4   | 5   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Younger man                | 57    | 60    | 64    | 67    | 70    | 70    | 60  | 63  |
| Older man                  | 13    | 6     | 7     | 8     | 6     | 8     | 14  | 8   |
| (It depends)               | 20    | 22    | 22    | 15    | 16    | 13    | 14  | 19  |
| (Other)                    | 2     | 1     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 1     | 1   | 1   |
| Don't know                 | 8     | 11    | 6     | 9     | 8     | 8     | 12  | 9   |

Finally, respondents were asked how they thought most people in Northern Ireland/the Republic of Ireland would react if a close female relative in her twenties wished to marry a man in his fifties and how they themselves would feel. It would appear from Table 24 that the majority of respondents considered that most respondents in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would mind a lot or a little. . With regard to their own reactions, Table 25 shows that approximately one half of younger respondents said that they would not be concerned. Respondents aged 45 years and over found the prospect more worrying, but their attitudes were more muted than those they attributed to the general populations in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

**Table 24: Do you think that most people in Northern Ireland would mind or not mind if a close relative in her twenties wanted to marry a man in his fifties?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Would mind a lot           | 42    | 44    | 49    | 48    | 41    | 38    | 27  | 43  |
| Would mind a little        | 30    | 33    | 30    | 30    | 35    | 27    | 33  | 31  |
| Would not mind             | 16    | 19    | 19    | 18    | 22    | 27    | 25  | 20  |
| Don't know                 | 11    | 5     | 2     | 4     | 2     | 9     | 14  | 6   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Would mind a lot           | 47    | 41    | 36    | 34    | 38    | 35    | 25  | 39  |
| Would mind a little        | 28    | 31    | 40    | 33    | 24    | 26    | 24  | 30  |
| Would not mind             | 20    | 23    | 22    | 23    | 26    | 29    | 40  | 24  |
| Don't know                 | 5     | 6     | 2     | 10    | 12    | 10    | 11  | 7   |

**Table 25: And you personally? Would you mind or not mind?**

| <b>Northern Ireland</b>    |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|
|                            | 18-24 | 25-44 | 45-49 | 50-59 | 60-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | All |
|                            | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %     | %   | %   |
| Would mind a lot           | 26    | 26    | 37    | 35    | 35    | 28    | 26  | 30  |
| Would mind a little        | 20    | 27    | 27    | 27    | 26    | 25    | 26  | 26  |
| Would not mind             | 49    | 46    | 34    | 36    | 39    | 43    | 44  | 42  |
| Don't know                 | 5     | 1     | 2     | 2     | 0     | 4     | 4   | 2   |
| <b>Republic of Ireland</b> |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |     |
| Would mind a lot           | 27    | 25    | 35    | 38    | 38    | 36    | 32  | 30  |
| Would mind a little        | 23    | 24    | 20    | 24    | 22    | 18    | 23  | 23  |
| Would not mind             | 47    | 48    | 42    | 36    | 38    | 39    | 39  | 44  |
| Don't know                 | 4     | 4     | 2     | 3     | 3     | 7     | 7   | 4   |

## Conclusion

To sum up, a number of themes emerge from the data. Among respondents in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, there is a widespread perception that older people are treated less favourably generally in our society because of their age. There was a strong view that the state does not do enough for older people, and there was a particular concern about their need for protection against crime. Significant minorities of those interviewed report that they or a friend or family member have been treated less favourably on grounds of age by the health care system. Valid or not, the extent of the perception that this is occurring is worrying. Similarly, there were concerns about ageism in employment and there was strong support for legislation making such discrimination illegal. The data on financial services are suggestive of a need to extend the legislation proposed for the UK to goods, facilities and services. There was some support for outlawing mandatory retirement but the limited enthusiasm for working past state retirement age raises concerns in relation to aspects of current pensions policy in the UK.

Despite the extent of common ground between respondents in Northern Ireland and the Republic, there are some clear differences in attitudes and perceptions. Respondents from the Republic were more positive at many points. They were more likely to consider that older people are treated with respect. There was less dissatisfaction in the Republic with pensions and allied provisions for older people. Attitudes towards older people remaining in employment also seemed more positive. Moreover, whilst those approaching retirement age in the north appeared to be particularly dissatisfied and anxious at a number of points, the same phenomenon was not evident in the Republic. Overall, the data suggest a need for, and support for, policies which give combating ageism a central position in broader strategies addressing discrimination. In addition, in Northern Ireland and the UK generally, such strategies must include addressing policies and broader developments which have had particularly adverse effects on older people.



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