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**ATTITUDES TO AGE AND AGEING
IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND**



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Introduction

For a number of years ageing has been high on the policy agenda in Ireland, but also internationally at the European Union (EU) and the United Nations. In 2002 the United Nation's Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted. It is the first international agreement that specifically recognises the potential of older people to contribute to the development of their societies, and commits governments to include ageing in all social and economic development policies, and to halve old-age poverty by 2015, in line with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Essentially, the plan recommends that governments include older people in national development and social-policy processes (such as poverty-reduction strategies and national development plans). It covers growing areas of concern for older people and their families, including poverty, violence and abuse, access to health services and social protection. It also calls for effective collaboration and partnership between governments, civil society, international agencies and the private sector with older people and their organisations to achieve the Plan's objectives. However, the Plan does not commit governments or the international community to providing additional resources for implementation. This means that resources have to be made available within individual countries and a five year review of the implementation of the plan showed limited progress.

Within the EU, much of the focus has been on ageism and has been grounded in the equality agenda and on increasing the rate of labour market participation among older people. In many countries, including Ireland and the UK, ageism has also become a focus of debate. While the growing number of older people is a positive development reflecting social and economic progress, the portrayal of older people for much of the post war period as being needy and passive has helped reinforce negative myths and stereotypes. There has also been much talk, especially in the health and social care and pensions literature, of the resource implications of increased life expectancy. A number of authors have challenged the assumptions about the social and economic pressures created by a growing proportion of the population being older (Walker, 2006; Layte, 2005), pointing to improved health and well-being and the improved financial circumstances of many older people. There is some evidence that social policies have shifted from looking at older people as dependent and passive recipients of services to encouraging independence and participation.

Despite some positive actions at international and national levels to tackle ageism, many commentators agree that ageism and the implications of ageist attitudes and policies continue to present significant challenges. The Attitudes to Age in Britain study 2004-2008 (Abrams et al., 2009) concluded that *'Public preconceptions about age and ageing present significant obstacles to progress toward a society that meets the expectations and needs of people of all ages'*. Attitudes to age and ageing in both the north and south of Ireland were first surveyed by the ARK in 2003 in a project funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. Analysis of this data pointed to the increasing importance of age as a field of inquiry in Ireland, the UK and internationally as noted above, and this has indeed proven to be the case. The 2003 survey findings provided an important baseline of attitudes and perceptions. The repeat of the surveys in 2008/09 provides an opportunity to assess if, and how, attitudes have changed, taking into account policy and legislative changes and the potential impact of campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of the issues facing older people. This report is focused on the South of Ireland and provides a non-

technical summary of public attitudes to older people over the period 2003-2008 in the light of the economic and social context relevant to the areas being examined.

Full technical details for the 2003 and 2008 surveys can be found in the Appendix of this report. Tables of results for each question, as well as the questionnaires, can be found on the ARK website at www.ark.ac.uk/sol/



Socio economic and policy context

In the South of Ireland, the 2006 Census data established that older people accounted for 11% of the population (Central Statistics Office, 2007). Demographic trends are similar to other EU countries but Ireland has a younger population than many other EU countries. The social context of older people's lives has of course changed significantly in the post war decades and, in both parts of Ireland, older people are now less likely to live with their children or with other relatives and are likely to live alone or in a couple household. Fahey et al. (2007) use census data to show that there has been an 8 per cent increase in the number of over 65s living alone between 1981 and 2002 – from 20% to 28%, with 33% of over 70s living alone. It is predicted that by 2021 the number of over 70s living alone will double (National Council on Ageing and Older People, 2004). The participation and social inclusion of older people are explicit policy goals and legislation has been introduced to address some aspects of ageism including labour market discrimination. Attempts have also been made to encourage more positive images of ageing.

In 2002 the National Plan for Social Inclusion (Government of Ireland, 2002) set out a vision of older people living active and full lives in their own homes for as long as possible and having sufficient income to support an acceptable standard of living. Also in 2002, the Equality Authority published its report 'Implementing Equality for Older Persons' which contained 72 recommendations relating to policy making, work, income, age limits and health and social care. The government has recently consulted on what should be in the new National Positive Ageing Strategy (consultation period ended September 2009). This will set strategic framework for future policies, programmes and services for older people. The Minister has emphasised that the Strategy will have to be developed within 'the constraints posed by the present fiscal situation'.

Equality Legislation

In the South of Ireland, the Employment Equality Act, 1998 included measures relating to age and offered protection against certain types of workplace discrimination up to age 65. The subsequent Equality Act 2004 removed the upper age limit (Pierce, 2008). Legislative measures were also introduced to prohibit ageism with regard to the provision of goods, facilities and services.

Attitudes to age and ageing

What is an 'older' person?

When the first of our surveys were conducted in 2003 there was a tendency for policy makers and some researchers to define 'older' as over 50 years of age. To many this seemed rather young. Life expectancy, including healthy life expectancy has increased, there is pressure in many developed countries including the UK and Ireland to encourage later retirement for economic reasons, and there is much evidence to suggest that people in their fifties did not see themselves as older. Therefore in 2008 we decided to ask people themselves at what age they would consider someone to be 'older'. Very few people thought of anyone aged less than 60 as an older person, but over half of respondents started to think of someone who was in the 65-74 age group as being older. A quarter of respondents in the South of Ireland said they did not think of someone as older until they were over 75 and some refused to classify someone as an older person until they were well into their nineties.

Most of the questions that we have just asked about older people refer to people aged 50 and over, however some people have said that they don't really think of people in their fifties as 'older people'. At what age do you start to think of someone as an 'older person'?

| | % | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------|-----|
| | Aged under 65 | Aged 65+ | All |
| Under 40 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 40-49 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 50-59 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| 60-64 | 14 | 9 | 13 |
| 65-74 | 58 | 47 | 56 |
| 75+ | 21 | 41 | 25 |

Are older people respected and valued?

Overall there continues to be more positive attitude to ageing and to older people in the South of Ireland than in the North, but results also suggest a rather more mixed picture than was the case in 2003. There is some indication that those over 65 are now more negative about how older people are treated *vis à vis* the general population and the extent to which they are respected and valued. The big factors likely to impact on public attitudes to older people are the raising of awareness of issues relating to older people, the increasing visibility of older people's groups and hence a public more alert to the potential for ageism to occur. There may in addition be a particular reaction to recent debates in social policy – for example the proposal to take away automatic entitlement to medical cards for those over 70, and ongoing issues regarding the provision of social care services in the community. In the light of these factors how does the general public perceive the respect accorded as people grow older?

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As you get older, do people treat you with more or less respect?

| | % | | | | | |
|---------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| More respect | 36 | 38 | 36 | 30 | 31 | 30 |
| Less respect | 20 | 22 | 20 | 26 | 29 | 26 |
| The same | 41 | 39 | 41 | 40 | 37 | 40 |
| Don't know | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |

As was the case in 2003, most people in 2008 did not feel that respect diminished as they got older but that belief was perhaps held a little less firmly than it had been five years earlier. There was a rise in the number of people who feel that you are treated with less respect as you get older – up from 20% to 26%, and evident in both the under 65s and the older age groups. This may, in part at least, be a reaction to recent debates in social policy. Interestingly, when we look more closely at differences across age groups it is those aged under 45 and those aged over 75 who are much more likely to feel that older people are accorded more respect, with the 45-64 and 65-74 least likely to express this view.

Apart from issues of respect, do people feel that older people are actually treated worse than the general population because of their age? Again the picture in the South of Ireland is rather better than in the North, but there are changes in the South – this time among the older age group. Significantly more of the 65+ age group feel that they are treated worse than everyone else, up from 25% in 2003 to 35% in 2008. Whether this is because of a heightened awareness of the existence of ageism or because the treatment of older people in society has worsened is a point returned to later.

Thinking about older people in Ireland, that is people in their 50's and over...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?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Better | 16 | 35 | 19 | 19 | 26 | 20 |
| Worse | 38 | 25 | 36 | 36 | 35 | 36 |
| The same | 42 | 38 | 41 | 39 | 35 | 39 |
| Don't know | 4 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 6 |

General attitudes towards older people remain positive on the whole. The vast majority of people feel that *These days older people are much younger in their ways* and that *Society doesn't recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make*. Interestingly, people are now rather less likely to agree with the latter statement than they were in 2003 and it is quite possible that this is a reflection of the higher profile of older people's issues and the cumulative effect of a raising of awareness process. While substantial minorities are still prepared to say that *Older people are too set in their ways and ideas* and that *Older people are not willing to listen to young people's views* the numbers voicing these negative views have dropped quite significantly from five years earlier (17 percentage points and 9 percentage points respectively).

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Agreement with statements related to older people

| | % who agree with statement | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| These days older people are much younger in their ways | 82 | 93 | 83 | 86 | 94 | 87 |
| Society doesn't recognise the contribution that many older people are still able to make | 86 | 89 | 87 | 75 | 84 | 77 |
| Older people are admired and respected by young people | 51 | 59 | 52 | 52 | 56 | 52 |
| Older people are too set in their ways and ideas | 57 | 53 | 56 | 39 | 37 | 39 |
| Older people are not willing to listen to young people's views | 42 | 45 | 43 | 35 | 28 | 34 |

Overall, these findings on issues relating to respect and recognition suggest that attitudes are becoming more positive towards older people but there is a growing sense among the public that things are not really that great for older people. All of this would be consistent with a public becoming more aware of the problems facing older people and an increasing awareness of the dangers of ageism in terms of attitudes. As useful background, it is important to bear in mind that both attitudes towards older people, and the sense of how good or bad things are in reality for older people, are much more positive in the South of Ireland than in the North. It is hard to say why this is the case but it may be due to different cultural perceptions of age, or to supportive family/friendship networks, a feeling in the Republic that the state values older people through financial and other support or a stronger sense of well-being in society more generally. Interestingly, comparative studies of life satisfaction and of children's well-being show that Irish people are a content population by international standards and in such international comparisons Ireland has been consistently ranked higher than the UK. Of the most recent, a league table of young people's wellbeing published by the UK Child Poverty Action Group, 2009 (using 2006 data) ranked Ireland ninth with the UK 24th. The second European Quality of Life Survey placed Ireland ahead of the EU average in terms of life satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2009).

Issues for research and policy

Given that the data continue to show significant differences between the north and south of Ireland in relation to views on how older people are perceived and treated, it would be useful to have more understanding of the factors influencing these differences. Qualitative research exploring the issues with across a range of age groups is likely to shed more light on this.

The overwhelming view in both the North and the South of Ireland is that the contribution of older people to society is not recognised, and the strong consensus about this across the age groups, should be of concern to policy makers. This is important in two respects; firstly, the fact that significant contributions to the labour

market, to families and to communities are apparently not been recognised and, secondly, do policies themselves continue to perpetuate negative ideas about older people? An example of the latter point is the recent criticism directed at the UK government for its portrayal of older people in its Green Paper on the future of social care - specifically, the statement ruling out the possibility of social care being paid for out of taxation on the grounds that it would place a burden on the working age population.



Public perceptions of state provision for older people

For much of the post war period old age has been defined as over the state pension age. In the South of Ireland the qualifying age for the state pension is 66. The growing imbalance between older and younger people so evident in many developed countries is not currently of such concern in the Republic of Ireland. There has therefore, until recently, been less pressure on the state to raise the pension qualifying age. While the state pension can be favourably compared with the UK with the basic pension being rather more generous, pensions policy in the south has also been criticised for the growing level of responsibility being placed on individuals and for being redistributive towards the better off (Stratton, 2004; Stewart, 2005). In March 2010 the key elements of a new National Pensions Framework were announced. These include proposals to increase the age at which people will qualify for a state pension to 66 years in 2014, 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. The measures also include the introduction of a new auto enrolment system for a supplementary pension scheme for all employees aged over 22 (unless they are already a member of an occupational scheme).

In the South of Ireland there are also a number of visible welfare entitlements – free travel on public transport, free TV licences, electricity and gas allowances and until 2009 automatic entitlement to a medical card for the over 70s. Acheson and Harvey (2008) argue that this created the *'image of a country that was progressive and enlightened in its treatment of older people'* – but that in reality the financial value was quite small. Older people have continued to be one of the groups most vulnerable to poverty with continuing high rates of poverty among older people even during the years of economic growth.

The survey results highlight stark differences in opinion in public attitudes in the North and South of Ireland when it comes to state pension provision, with participants in Northern Ireland much more likely to feel that pensioners were getting a 'poor deal'. Sixty per cent of respondents in the South felt that the pension rate was a 'poor deal' and while this is still the majority it is noticeable that the sense that the pension rate is too low has diminished in the five years since 2003 (dropping from 71% to 60%). Quite possibly, perceptions have been influenced by the context of the recession in latter times. The age group most likely to consider the pension to be a reasonable deal is the over 75 age group – at 21% in North and 37% in the South.

In general, do you think that a pension of [current state pension] per week for someone with a full contribution record is a good deal, a reasonable deal or a poor deal?

| | % | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| A good deal | 2 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 7 |
| A reasonable deal | 22 | 29 | 23 | 26 | 33 | 28 |
| A poor deal | 73 | 61 | 71 | 60 | 57 | 60 |
| (Other – write in) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Don't know | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 5 |

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In terms of financial provision by the state more generally (taking account of other benefits provided for pensioners) the picture was slightly different. A clear majority, 60% of participants, thought that provision was inadequate – as was the case in 2003. However while the under 65s are again slightly less likely to see provision as inadequate in 2008, those over 65 are increasingly feeling that there is a problem here. Possibly the removal of the automatic entitlement to medical cards is a factor in this increasing discontent among the older age group.

And, taking account of other benefits provided for pensioners, do you think that the financial provision made by the state is...

| | % | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Adequate/very adequate | 30 | 47 | 33 | 31 | 38 | 32 |
| Inadequate/very inadequate | 64 | 50 | 62 | 61 | 60 | 60 |
| (Other – write in) | <1 | <1 | - | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know | 5 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 8 |

Pensions and financial provision have undoubtedly been high profile and contentious areas of social policy. In both the North and South of Ireland the gross income of pensioner families has increased in real terms but overall gains mask a diversity of circumstances. There are strong differences in the incomes and assets within the older person population. Occupational pensions have increased the financial position of many older people but significant numbers depend solely on state support for their income – often a combination on basic pension and means tested benefits. Women are over represented in the latter group as they are less likely than men to have an occupational or private pension.

Studies in the South of Ireland show that the risk of poverty for older people rose sharply in the 1990s with those living alone and reliant on the state pension as their source of income as most vulnerable (Whelan et al., 2005). For older people on low incomes the impact may be ameliorated by additional provision as outlined above plus access to free health care. However, the findings from the surveys also suggest the wider population is becoming less willing to see older people subsidised for services such as gas and electricity with the number in favour declining from 93% in 2003 to 84% in 2008.

All older people should be given reduced prices for things like gas, electricity, telephone and transport

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Agree | 92 | 98 | 93 | 82 | 91 | 84 |
| Disagree | 7 | 2 | 6 | 15 | 8 | 13 |
| Don't know | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 |

In 2007, Prunty calculated a poverty rate for older people of 27% and there was some evidence (pre recession) that older people's risk of falling into poverty was reducing. The impact of the economic downturn has not been

fully assessed but is likely to be considerable, particularly in terms of pensions and the provision of and access to public services. The impact of the recession may be evident in some of the findings outlined in this paper – such as the higher proportion of respondents seeing state provision as adequate, the reduction in the support for subsidies and, as will be seen later, the perhaps surprising number of people who feel that access to health care for those over 70 should be means tested. The findings discussed here are in keeping with international studies which demonstrate public concern about the socio-economic status of older people and the quality of services such as health and social care but also anxiety about how such provision can be funded. A Eurobarometer survey on intergenerational solidarity published in 2009 indicates that 49% of Europeans believe governments should make more money available for pensions and care for the elderly. However over half (58%), do not believe this will actually happen because governments will no longer be able to pay for pensions and care for older people in coming decades. Yet, studies have shown that the well being of older people to be strongly related to socio-economic status (Matthews et al., 2006; Bowling and Gabriel, 2007).

Issues for research and policy

As research has shown, advancing age is not in itself a strong predictor of financial hardship. Poorer people have less life expectancy and those in higher socio-economic groups live longer. But, while the overall financial wellbeing of older people has improved, strong differences in the economic circumstances among the older population mean that for many older people their ability to age well is inhibited by low income. This is likely to become even more acute in the future given the widening of income inequality in the UK and Ireland more generally. Attempts to improve the finances of older people in the future are unlikely to be successful unless the causes of this inequality are acknowledged and addressed.

Future generations will have higher expectations and within the current older population there are differences in expectations between age cohorts of older people. A key challenge for social policy is to manage these expectations and assess how they can be met. Governments in the UK and Ireland have indicated the expectation that younger people need to be prepared to contribute more to their pensions and long term social care and to begin to do so earlier. But getting people to do so will not be easy; younger people now have more debt than before, are operating in increasingly precarious labour markets and have had their trust in financial institutions shaken. Do we know enough about younger people's views on, and ability to, make provision for the future? What measures do people feel are necessary to ensure that financial institutions are trustworthy and reliable and are viewed as so?

There is still insufficient acknowledgement of the way in which policies on future pension provision link to other social policies on the care of children and other dependents. This also continues to disproportionately affect women. Policies to increase the labour market participation of older people may result in fewer grandparents being able to look after grandchildren which may in turn have a negative impact on women's ability to take on paid work, especially given problems with the accessibility and affordability of childcare. The reliance on unpaid carers for the care of adults is problematic when the expectation is clearly on participation in paid work. There needs to be more research into the impact of the current recession, not just on the current population of older people but on future provision and the attitude and ability of younger people to prepare for their own old age.

Discrimination against older people

One of the key aims of the surveys was to examine perceptions of discrimination against older people and measure to what extent this changed between 2003 and 2005. It is clear from the findings that perceptions of discrimination in the areas of employment, healthcare and provision of financial services have all increased over the period. Of course greater reporting of discrimination may not necessarily mean that more discrimination is occurring. It is possible that the policy focus on 'equality' issues generally since 2003 has increased awareness and resulted in people being more sensitive to ageism. Incidents which would not have been defined as ageism in years gone by may now be interpreted as such. Certainly many of the survey respondents reported that they had been aware of media campaigns relating to older people (see below). Nonetheless whatever is driving this finding, the changes in perceived discrimination between 2003 and 2008 are marked, both in the North and the South of Ireland.

Employment

The labour market is one of the main areas of social exclusion for older people. Participation rates for men in the 60-64 age group declined steadily from the 1960s due to a number of factors, including the growth of early retirement from the 1970s. Attitudes to older workers also meant that people retiring in their fifties often never re-entered the labour market.

The EU Lisbon strategy set a target of 50% of older workers being in the workforce. Ireland and the UK have already exceeded this in regard to male employment rates. In fact Ireland is exceptional in a European context for the late age at which people leave the workforce. In 2007 the average age of retirement was 64 years (Acheson and Harvey, 2008). In 2006 the employment rate of people aged over 65 in the Republic of Ireland was twice the EU average and labour force participation was much higher than in Northern Ireland (Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI), 2010).

While there has undoubtedly been a culture of early retirement governments are indicating that this is not set to continue with many, including the UK and Ireland, as outlined above, increasing the age at which people can receive the state pension. In a number of countries older workers are being encouraged to stay in employment by dual measures – the raising of the pension entitlement age but also incentives – such as supplementary increases to an individual's pension for every additional year worked (Hartlapp and Schmid, 2008).

There is evidence that some individuals want the opportunity to continue in the paid labour market. The Eurobarometer survey found that 66% of Europeans support the view that governments should make it easier for older people to continue working beyond the normal retirement age, if they so wish (Eurobarometer, 2009) but the challenges in achieving this are evidenced by another Eurobarometer finding in 2008. In that survey 42% of respondents reported age discrimination to be widespread, with respondents aged 40 and over being more likely to be of this opinion.

Some commentators have also disputed the likelihood of more older people being able to stay in or re-enter

the labour market citing the potential impact of other labour market policies in respect of those on Incapacity Benefit and lone parents which will create more competition for jobs. Hill (2009) argues that labour market demand cannot be assumed, and, in such a situation, decreased labour market participation by older people may be seen as positive. The economic recession has had an impact on the employment rates of older people in both parts of Ireland but in both places the biggest decline in employment has been among younger workers. Analysis conducted by CARDI (2010, p. 42-43) also shows that the decline in employment in the Republic of Ireland in every age group has been less marked for women than men.

The results from the survey suggest that there is no great appetite among the population for older people giving up work to make way for younger workers. We do not know what respondents thought in 2003 and whether views may have changed as a result of economic developments and debates about pensions. However, most people regardless of their age disagree that people in their 60s should give up work for younger people.

People in their 60s should give up work to make way for younger people

| | % | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-----|
| | Under 65 | Aged 65+ | All |
| Agree | 27 | 22 | 26 |
| Disagree | 68 | 73 | 69 |
| Don't know | 5 | 5 | 5 |

However turning this around, the question is also whether people themselves would actually prefer to work part-time in the run-up to retirement and indeed whether they would like to extend their working life beyond retirement age. Again the context of the recession and the worry about financing retirement may play a part in views expressed here. The proportion of people who would prefer to work part-time up to retirement age has dropped slightly since 2003 while the number of people who would like to work part-time after retirement has increased.

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?

| | % | |
|---|------|------|
| | 2003 | 2008 |
| Yes – part-time up to retirement age | 20 | 16 |
| Yes – part-time after retirement age | 25 | 32 |
| Yes- both | 37 | 31 |
| No | 12 | 15 |
| Don't know | 7 | 6 |

It is of course not the case that all people wish to extend their working lives, nor would this be desirable or

positive for all. Differences in views may also be linked to the nature of the occupation and how physical demanding it is, to the health of the individual (taking into account significant and well established differences in healthy life expectancy between socio-economic groups) and to job satisfaction. Hartlapp and Schmid (2008) look at why, and under what conditions, older workers are attracted to continuing or re-entering employment. They identify important 'pull' factors including labour demand – in terms of appropriately located jobs of the kind of work that suit older people most (that is, they point to the incompatibility of hard physical work); education – evidence shows that among highly skilled groups EU employment goals have been surpassed – but also the degree of investment by the state in further education throughout an individual's working life; job satisfaction and the tackling of age related job discrimination.

The evidence suggests that if older workers are to be encouraged to stay in the labour market in the future a range of possibilities need to be looked at. This includes less demanding work, commitment to training/retraining and measures to address discrimination in employment. But findings from the surveys carried out in 2003 and 2008 indicate a growing perception of discrimination by employers against older people. This is the case in both the South and the North of Ireland.

Although the number of people who felt that they themselves had been discriminated against by an employer is quite low, it had nonetheless nearly trebled since 2003 (from 4% to 11%). When respondents were asked whether they had ever felt that a friend or family member had been discriminated against because of their age the numbers had doubled in both the North and the South of Ireland since 2003. The under 65s are more likely than the older age group to have perceived this and defined it as discrimination but it is nonetheless on the increase across both age groups.



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Have you ever felt that you were not treated as well as you might have been by an employer because of your age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | 50-64 | 65+ | All | 50-64 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 5 | 4 | 4 | 13 | 7 | 11 |
| No | 90 | 89 | 90 | 81 | 84 | 83 |
| Don't know | 5 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 7 |

Have you ever felt that a friend or family member was not treated as well as they might have been by an employer because of their age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 10 | 3 | 9 | 20 | 9 | 18 |
| No | 82 | 91 | 83 | 72 | 83 | 74 |
| Don't know | 9 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 8 |

When respondents are asked in general terms about whether they think that there is discrimination in particular areas of employment the results show that while high percentages of people perceived discrimination – contrary to the previous set of results – there is no increase in this perception since 2003. The majority of people in our samples see discrimination in recruitment, promotion, and training, but these majorities have not increased since 2003. And while just under 50% of respondents also see discrimination against older people in terms of status within their organisation, this also shows no increase since 2003. There appears to be a distinct difference in the trend of results for general attitudes versus perceived behaviour. That is, many people may have always had a general sense that older people were probably discriminated against in many ways with regard to employment - and that sense has continued. However, with heightened awareness of these issues, individuals are now beginning to classify actual instances of behaviour as ageism where they themselves or their family or friends have faced some of these issues in their working lives.

Let's talk about older people who are working. Do you think that older workers are discriminated against with regard to...

| | % saying yes | | | | | |
|---|--------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | <65 | 65 + | All | <65 | 65+ | All |
| Job recruitment | 75 | 64 | 74 | 70 | 67 | 69 |
| Job promotion | 61 | 60 | 61 | 59 | 59 | 59 |
| Job training | 64 | 56 | 63 | 60 | 56 | 59 |
| Status or position in their organisation | 46 | 49 | 46 | 47 | 46 | 47 |

Issues for research and policy

Encouraging older people to remain in the labour market is a goal shared by UK and Irish governments and by the European Union, yet the prospects for longer working lives may be less good than is sometimes assumed. What evidence is there that labour markets will expand sufficiently to need older workers to the extent being assumed by policy-makers? The ability and desire of people longer will be affected by factors such as health and disability, which are linked to socio-economic provision. So, while our and other research findings suggest that financial reasons are an important factor in people wanting to be allowed to work beyond the default retirement age, those who are in the greatest financial need are likely to be those less able to continue working.

Governments have to confront the not inconsiderable challenge of tackling discriminatory attitudes and practices against older people in the workplace and the need for greater flexibility on the part of employers. It is perhaps those who are trying to re-enter the labour market who face the greatest difficulties. Research shows that the ability of older people to remain in or re-enter the labour market requires significant and planned investment in lifelong learning and training so that older people can acquire relevant knowledge and skills. This links to tackling age discrimination with regard to training opportunities, including age for apprenticeships etc.



Healthcare

The dignity and respect accorded to older people when they use health services and the choices made about their care has been subject to debate and scrutiny for some years. Results from the surveys show that, as is the case with employment issues, there has also been an increase in personal reporting of discrimination by health and social care staff. Respondents aged 50 or over were asked if they themselves had been treated with less dignity by health and social care staff because of their age.

Have you ever felt that you were treated with less dignity and respect by people in the health and social care professions because of your age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | 50-64 | 65+ | All | 50-64 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 9 | 6 | 8 | 12 | 16 | 13 |
| No | 89 | 93 | 91 | 86 | 84 | 85 |
| Don't know | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |

While the numbers sensing such discrimination are small, again there is an increase on the 2003 rates. This is particularly true for those aged 65 and over where the proportion of people reporting such treatment has risen from 6% to 16%. The figures are also quite low in terms of perceived discrimination in actual medical treatment. Only 10% of respondents in 2008 who were aged 50 or over felt that they had not been offered medical treatment that might have helped them, but this was still an increase on the 3% who reported this in 2003.

And have you ever felt that you were not offered medical treatment that might have helped you because of your age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | 50-64 | 65+ | All | 50-64 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 3 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| No | 95 | 95 | 95 | 91 | 88 | 89 |
| Don't know | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

Similar patterns emerge when respondents are asked about perceived discrimination against family and friends. Here it is particularly the 65 and over age group who are noticing these incidences. Only 9% of respondents in that age group would have answered yes to this question in 2003, but that figure has now doubled to 19%. Nearly a fifth of people in the 65+ age range feel that a friend or family member was treated with less dignity and respect by people in the health and social care professions because of their age. Similarly, the proportion of people in the 65+ age range who feel that a friend or family member was not offered medical treatment because of their age has quadrupled from 4% to 16%. Again these figures are not extraordinarily high but it is the change since 2003 that must be remarked upon.

ATTITUDES TO AGE AND AGEING IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND

Have you ever felt that a friend or family member was treated with less dignity and respect by people in the health and social care professions because of their age?

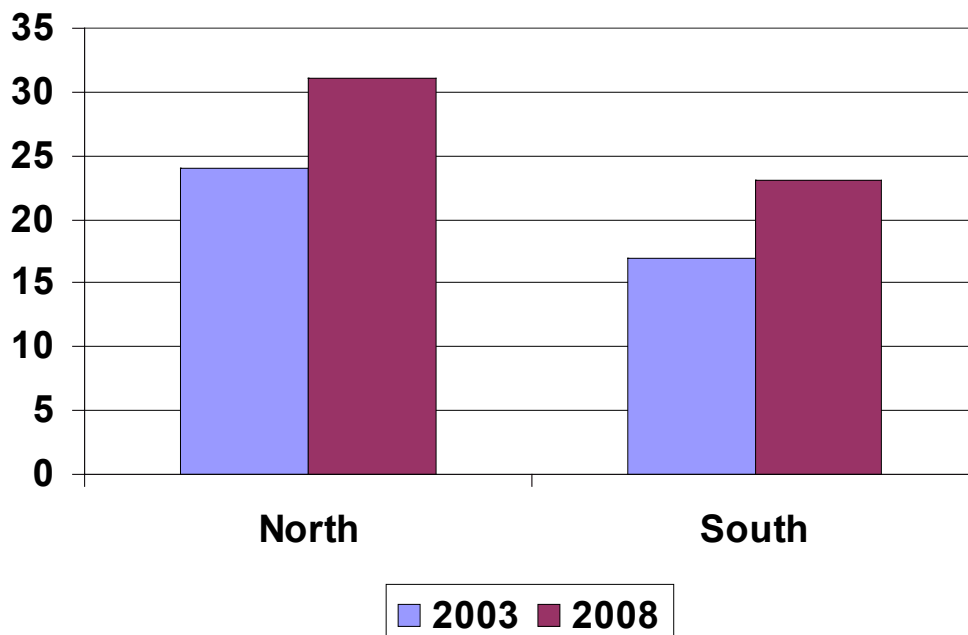
| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|------|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65 + | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 19 | 9 | 17 | 24 | 19 | 23 |
| No | 77 | 90 | 79 | 72 | 78 | 73 |
| Don't know | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |

And have you ever felt that a friend or family member was not offered medical treatment that might have helped them because of their age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 10 | 4 | 9 | 19 | 16 | 19 |
| No | 86 | 94 | 87 | 76 | 81 | 77 |
| Don't know | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 |

The proportions perceiving discrimination against family or friends is more marked in the North than in the South, but the same pattern of increase is apparent as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Have you ever felt that a friend or relative was treated with less dignity or respect by people in the health and social care professions because of their age? (% saying 'yes')



ATTITUDES TO AGE AND AGEING IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND

When respondents are asked in general terms about whether they think that there is discrimination in particular aspects of healthcare the results show that quite high percentages of people believe that there is discrimination but there is no increase in this perception since 2003. Respondents aged under 65 tend to believe in this discriminatory environment more than do older respondents but for both groups these attitudes are stable over time. Again there is a contrast between these generally expressed attitudes and respondents' own experiences. Many people believed that there was age discrimination in healthcare in 2003 and this sense continues to 2008. Fewer people actually report personal experience of this, but personal experiences and a sense that family and friends have been treated less well is on the increase.

Do you think that health and social care workers treat older people differently with regard to...

| | % saying yes | | | | | |
|---|--------------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | <65 | 65+ | All | <65 | 65+ | All |
| ...their attitudes to them? | 42 | 30 | 40 | 39 | 34 | 38 |
| ...the treatment of their illnesses? | 42 | 30 | 40 | 39 | 22 | 38 |
| ...when placing them on waiting lists for tests and operations | 43 | 38 | 43 | 40 | 36 | 39 |

Developments in the South of Ireland relating to the withdrawal of free entitlement to health services may play some part in explaining the greater perception of discrimination in the over 65 age group. In July 2001 everyone aged over 70 became eligible for a medical card which carries entitlement to all public health services, including prescriptions and nursing home services, free of charge. However, in its 2008 October budget, the government announced plans to end the automatic entitlement of over 70s to a medical card with effect from January 2009. As a result of strong opposition, including from older people themselves, it was forced to reconsider the initial proposal that over 70s with an income of more than €240 a week would be ineligible for a card. While the threshold was raised to €700 a week automatic entitlement was abolished which ends universal access for this group and possibly pave the way for future reduction in entitlement. However there is no clear sense from the data that the over 65 age group are more annoyed than everybody else about the removal of the automatic entitlement. If anything there is something of a pragmatic view from most respondents.

Everyone over 70 should automatically be entitled to a medical card

| | % saying yes | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----|-----|
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Agree | 76 | 81 | 77 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 8 | 9 | 8 |
| Disagree | 14 | 10 | 13 |
| Don't know | 3 | 1 | 3 |

Clearly the right of automatic entitlement is cherished by the vast majority of the population and not just the over 65 age group. More than three quarters of the under 65s felt that this entitlement should remain.

However when respondents were asked about means-testing, less than 50% of both age groups were prepared to definitely rule it out. Forty eight per cent of those under 65 and 47 per cent of the older group disagreed with the statement *It is fair enough that people over 70 should be means-tested in order to get a medical card*. This is not to say that there was majority support for this action but opinion was split and there was clearly ambivalence among some respondents while a pragmatic view was taken by others.

It is fair enough that people over 70 should be means-tested in order to get a medical card (2008)

| | % | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Agree | 37 | 44 | 39 |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 10 | 8 | 10 |
| Disagree | 48 | 47 | 48 |
| Don't know | 5 | 1 | 4 |

It should be noted that these questions had a healthcare focus. It is very likely that, had we asked specifically about attitudes to social care provision, responses would have been more negative. There has been ongoing debate in the UK and Ireland about community care services for older people, about how long term should be funded and the quality of care provided in residential settings and in people's own homes.

The system of social care in the Republic of Ireland has been described as under-resourced, inequitable, fragmented and ineffective and impacting '*... on quality of life to the extent that it denies many individuals their basic human rights*' (Brennan, 2008, p.140). There is evidence in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland that older people and their families bear the cost of care, often in an inequitable way. Debates about the funding of long term care and the choices available to older people and their carers reflect the degree of discontent often felt about existing provision. In the UK, an individual's entitlement to free social care varies across the devolved regions, with Scotland providing all social care free of charge. Currently in Northern Ireland individuals are charged for personal care. In England this funding of continuing care has attracted considerable policy focus. It is very likely that had we asked separately and more specifically about social care issues we would have elicited strong views and this is certainly an area where more research on general attitudes and on the views of users would be useful.

Issues for research and policy

Concerns about discrimination of older people in healthcare have received increasing attention and have elicited policy responses from government but our findings show that there is concern about how older people are treated in relation to health care. Future research could usefully include: more research with older people (including different age cohorts) about their own experience of healthcare, including the positive experiences they have had could help inform future policy and practice; assessment of the curriculum across a range of professional and vocational courses and the extent to which it covers working with older people – especially

focus on attitudes, the promotion of dignity, the human rights of older people and promoting autonomy.

The surveys reported here focused predominantly on health care but there is a need to understand more about older people's views of and perception of social care services, including those using residential and nursing care services. Consideration should also be given to the focus on personalisation of social care and how older people themselves view this and the initiatives linked to it- such as individualised budgets.



Financial services

Exactly the same pattern emerges in relation to financial services as was the case for healthcare and employment issues. Public perception of discrimination as measured by general attitudes is quite high, but stable between 2003 and 2008. Personal experience of discrimination is lower, but has risen significantly in the five years since 2003.

The majority of respondents in the South of Ireland believe that people in their 50s and up to retirement age are generally treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age (60% in 2003 and 59% in 2008).

Financial services play an important part in all our lives – credit, hire purchase, loans, mortgages, insurance and so on. Thinking first of people in their fifties and up to retirement age, which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?

| | % | | | | | |
|--|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | <65 | 65+ | All | <65 | 65+ | All |
| Older people get as good a deal from this sector as anyone else | 23 | 26 | 23 | 22 | 27 | 23 |
| Older people are treated less favourably by the financial sector because of their age | 62 | 52 | 60 | 59 | 57 | 59 |
| Don't know | 15 | 22 | 16 | 19 | 16 | 19 |

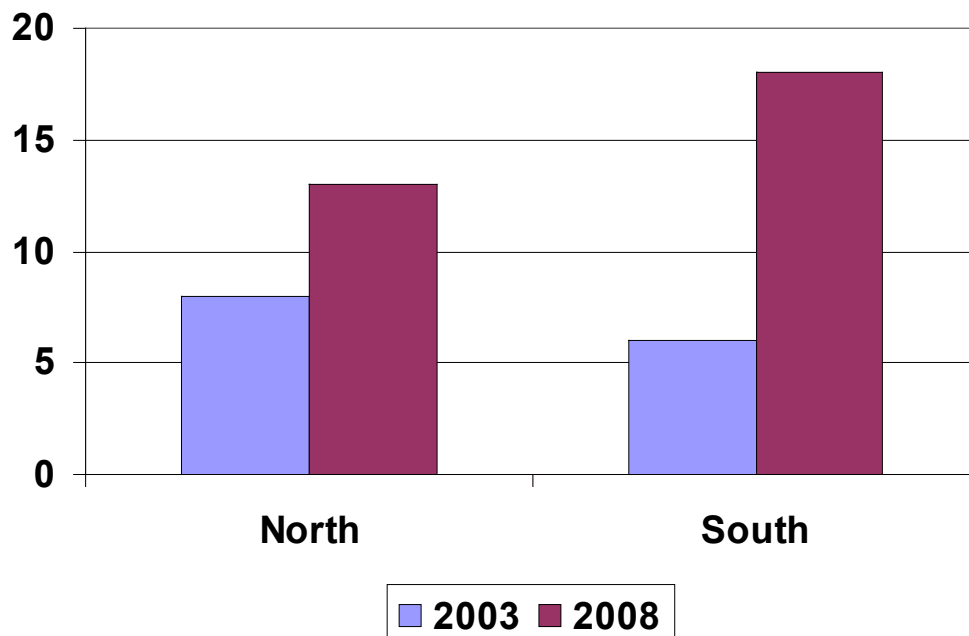
In contrast, the number of people saying that they themselves had been discriminated against by the financial sector in 2008 was only 18%. However this had tripled since 2003. A further 22% of respondents said that a friend or family member had been discriminated against in 2008 and again this had more than doubled since 2003. For the over 65 age group, that figure rose dramatically from 7% in 2003 to 20% in 2008.

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Have you ever felt that you were not treated as well as you might have been by people in the financial sector because of your age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 6 | 7 | 6 | 17 | 20 | 18 |
| No | 92 | 88 | 90 | 80 | 77 | 79 |
| Don't know | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

Figure 2: Have you ever felt that you were not treated as well as you might have been by people in the financial sector because of your age? (asked of respondents over 50) (% saying 'yes')

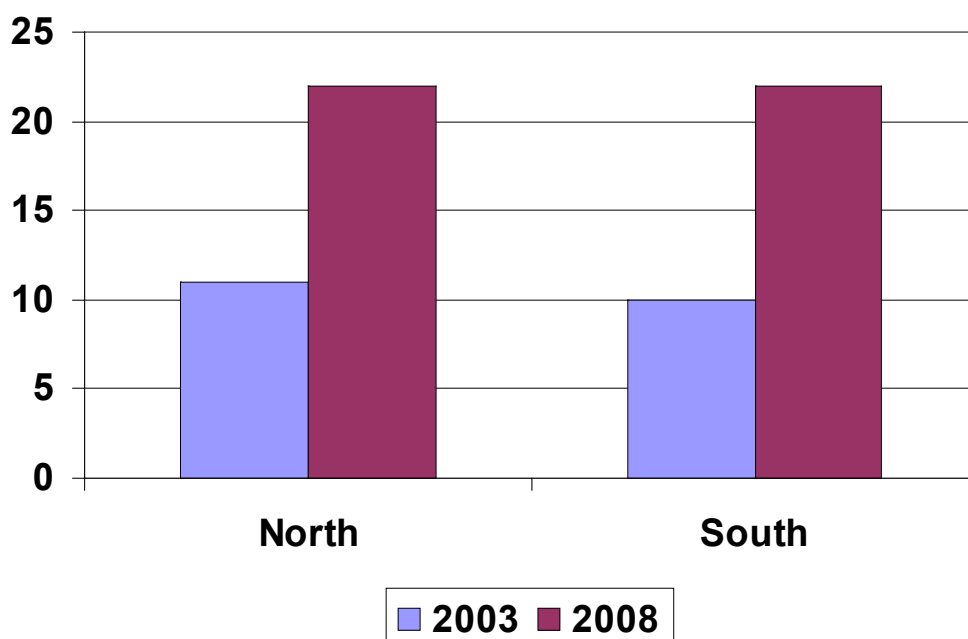


ATTITUDES TO AGE AND AGEING IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND

Have you ever felt that a friend or family member was not treated as well as they might have been by people in the financial sector because of their age?

| | % | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Yes | 12 | 2 | 10 | 23 | 20 | 22 |
| No | 78 | 91 | 80 | 68 | 74 | 69 |
| Don't know | 11 | 7 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 9 |

Figure 3: Have you ever felt a friend or family member was not treated as well as they might have been by people in the financial sector because of their age? (% saying 'yes')



It is possible that the 'credit crunch', and the debate about the culpability of financial institutions for the recession have influenced attitudes to some extent. Individuals, or their friends or family, may have been affected by developments relating to banks such as Northern Rock, the Anglo Irish Bank or the Presbyterian Mutual Society. At the very least the extensive media coverage may have resulted in greater anxiety or concern. These findings do however add weight to calls for financial (and other) services to be covered by equality legislation and for that to be effectively implemented.

Public perceptions of the problems facing older people

The surveys reveal a complicated, but largely positive picture of attitudes towards older people reflected through the economic and social circumstances prevailing in 2008. But in practical terms what do people feel are the real problems facing older people today? Is increasing respect for older people and a heightened sensitivity to ageism accompanied by an awareness of the practical problems that everyone will eventually face as we grow older? Respondents were asked what they thought were the main problems facing older people in Ireland today.

What do you think are the main problems facing older people in Ireland today? (2008)

| | % | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Fear of crime | 56 | 67 | 58 |
| Isolation | 76 | 67 | 74 |
| Loneliness | 56 | 58 | 56 |
| Making ends meet | 42 | 49 | 44 |
| Keeping warm in winter | 43 | 49 | 44 |
| Access to healthcare | 32 | 40 | 33 |
| Transport | 30 | 33 | 31 |
| Lack of respect | 25 | 25 | 25 |
| Access to suitable housing | 19 | 24 | 19 |
| Getting employment | 21 | 20 | 21 |
| Elder abuse | 20 | 15 | 19 |
| Boredom | 34 | 3 | 33 |
| All of these | 28 | 18 | 27 |

Issues to do with vulnerability top the list for the over 65s with *Fear of crime*, *Isolation* and *Loneliness* named by the majority of this group. The next raft of issues are rather more to do with financial pressures including *Making ends meet*, *Keeping warm in winter* and *Access to healthcare*. While the last is perhaps equally concerned with fair treatment by health and social care professionals it is also undoubtedly a reflection of the medical card issue and the financial pressure resulting from its removal as discussed above. The younger group of respondents identify a broadly similar set of issues as the most commonly perceived problems, though there are some differences in perceptions here. Younger respondents underestimate the extent to which *Fear of crime* is an issue for those in the older group; they overestimate the problems of *Isolation* and *Boredom* and they consistently underestimate all the financial pressures.

The proportion of respondents in Northern Ireland identifying *keeping warm in winter* and *Making ends meet* as important issues is unsurprising given the dissatisfaction with the financial support provided by government and the increasing cost of fuel. The significantly fewer respondents in the South of Ireland identifying these issues perhaps reflect greater satisfaction with the benefits and additional provision older people are entitled to. What is rather striking is the very high proportion of respondents in the South of Ireland (74%) who identify isolation as an issue for older people, almost double the figure in the North. The concern about isolation is shared by those under and over 65 with 76% of under 65s and 67% of over 65s saying it was an issue for older people. Only 30% of over 65s in Northern Ireland did so. Perhaps related to the isolation issue is the higher number of respondents in the South identifying transport as an issue (31% compared to 19% in Northern Ireland).

The contribution of older people, participation and representation

The survey results reported so far have focused mostly on the problems and the potential injustices facing older people and this inevitably leads towards an image of older people as vulnerable and needy, yet the attitudes expressed by respondents to the surveys were positive in the sense of appreciation and respect as well as in awareness of vulnerability. Mapping the continuum of ‘needy’ to ‘empowered’ and the mosaic of different images and stereotyping of older people was beyond the scope of the surveys but there are a number of areas of questioning which reveal some information about the contribution that older people are making to society and the economy.

As the table below shows, the greatest participation in volunteering work in the South of Ireland is among the 50-75 year age groups. Just under a fifth of 65 to 74 year olds had been involved in raising or handling money during the previous 12 months and almost a quarter had helped organise or run an event. With the exception of a few activities (such as committee membership, driving, gardening/shopping or working with young people) it is people in this age group who appear to be most willing to give of their time in this capacity.

The next question in this section is about time given freely and without pay to any activity which has the aim of benefiting people (outside your immediate family), the community or a particular cause.

*Please could you tell me if you have done any of these kinds of **unpaid** work during the last 12 months? Please exclude giving money and anything that was a requirement of your job.*

| | % who volunteer activity | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------|-------|-----|
| | Age group | | | |
| | <50 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| Raising or handling money | 13 | 14 | 19 | 9 |
| Leading the group/member of a committee/trustees | 6 | 12 | 7 | 11 |
| Organising or helping to run an activity or event | 16 | 21 | 24 | 12 |
| Visiting people | 25 | 35 | 47 | 22 |
| Befriending or mentoring people | 9 | 16 | 17 | 13 |
| Coaching | 0 | < | 0 | 0 |
| Giving advice/information/counselling | 7 | 10 | 10 | 4 |
| Secretarial, administration or clerical work | 6 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| Providing transport/driving | 15 | 19 | 13 | 7 |
| Representing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Promotion | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Campaigning | 5 | 6 | 7 | 4 |
| Other practical help eg shopping, gardening, building, meals on wheels | 14 | 16 | 10 | 5 |
| Helping in church or religious organisation | 7 | 18 | 21 | 15 |
| Collecting/making things to be sold for charity | 9 | 13 | 11 | 8 |
| Teaching or training | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Selling tickets | 20 | 22 | 24 | 13 |
| Working with young people | 13 | 12 | 4 | 3 |
| Working in a charity shop | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 |

In Northern Ireland it is interesting that volunteering seems to be concentrated in the under 50 and 50-64 age group. Although analysis by the Northern Ireland Volunteer Development Agency (2007) suggests that, even though the over 50 age group as a whole is the least likely group to volunteer, they are the most likely group to volunteer on a consistently regular basis. The over 65 age group is the most likely group to provide between 21-40 hours per month to formal volunteering. Volunteering and older people's active involvement in community groups has been linked with increased life satisfaction, better engagement with community life and a positive contribution to health and well being (Walshe and O'Shea, 2008; Surr et al., 2005). As Walshe and O'Shea identify, there has been a growth in the number of community groups actively involving older people and there are initiatives aimed at increasing the potential for older people to be actively involved in a volunteering capacity (Volunteer Development Agency, 2009). However, work by the Institute for Public Policy Research in Britain cites some of the barriers to older people's participation in volunteering. These included the fact that one fifth of organisations place upper age limits on volunteering opportunities.

Informal care is another area where the contribution of older people has been clearly identified. Irish Census data for 2006 estimates that there are 160,917 informal carers in Ireland (although many organisations believe this to be a significant under-estimate), with over 18,000 of these being more than 65 years old. The monetary value of informal care has been estimated at €2.5 billion (Care Alliance Ireland, 2009). The survey results here suggest that again it is people in the 50-74 age group who are most likely to be caring for someone else, either in the home or for someone not living with them. The contribution made by older people in terms of volunteering and informal care is substantial. Seventeen percent of those in the 50-64 group were caring for someone outside the home on a regular basis.

*Some people have extra family responsibilities because they look after someone who is sick disabled or elderly. May I check, is there anyone **living with you** who is sick, disabled or elderly whom you look after or give special help to (for example, a sick, disabled or elderly relative, wife, husband, partner, child, friend)?*

*What about people **not living with you**, do you provide some regular service or help for any sick, disabled or elderly relative, friend or neighbour **not living with you**?*

| | % | | | |
|--|-----------|-------|-------|-----|
| | Age group | | | |
| | <50 | 50-64 | 65-74 | 75+ |
| Care for someone in the home | 4 | 8 | 12 | 4 |
| Care for someone outside the home | 12 | 17 | 13 | 5 |

McGee and O'Neill (2008) argue that insufficient attention has been given to the care provided by older people. Based on their analysis of community samples in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland they discuss the evidence that older people are the providers as well as the recipients of care with the average age of carer in their sample being 73. As in Northern Ireland, care is channelled by the older to the younger generation in a range of ways including financial, emotional and childcare support. Timonen et al. (2009) report on the key role played by grandparents in divorced and separated families and Fine –Davies (2007) shows how grandparents are often drafted in to provide childcare.

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The importance of participation to older people's quality of life has been highlighted in many studies with authors pointing to the significance of gender, age and ethnicity in enhancing or limiting the extent of social participation. Participation can be looked at in a number of ways and at a number of levels. Acheson and Harvey (2008) provide a comprehensive analysis of ageing and voluntary action in the north and south of Ireland. They show that in both jurisdictions there are large numbers of very small organisations working with older people. A significant development in Northern Ireland has been the setting up of the Age Sector Reference Group which has enabled the development of a more structured link to government and provides a community/ voluntary sector perspective on the views of older people. The Ageing Well Network in the South has brought together key government, academic, voluntary sector and service providers in a think-tank to contribute to the National Positive Ageing Strategy and address key challenges within a cross-sectoral framework.

Although historically older people have been viewed as politically passive, in more recent years in both the UK and Ireland there has been more mobilisation of older people around key policy issues. Whether this leads to greater political engagement of older people is a moot point. But, the growth of advocacy organisations and initiatives targeted at increasing the social and – to an extent – political participation of older people has certainly provided greater opportunity and higher visibility for older people. We may see older people becoming more politically active due to disillusionment and disappointment with the way in which older people's interests are represented by authorities and politicians. Looking at survey results for the 65+ age group there is a clear sense of an emerging discontent with representation and a desire for empowerment as shown in the tables below. The sense that the authorities do not do enough for older people has risen dramatically from 50% to 66% between 2003 and 2008. Less than a third of the 65+ group feel that politicians adequately represent older people, a massive 81% feel that the government does not consult older people adequately about issues that affect them, and at 80% there is overwhelming support for an independent body outside government that champions their needs and rights.

Do you think that the authorities in Ireland do all they should for older people, do too much, or do not do enough?

| | % | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----|----------|-----|-----|
| | 2003 | | | 2008 | | |
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| Do all they should | 22 | 48 | 26 | 19 | 28 | 20 |
| Do too much | 1 | <1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Do not do enough | 73 | 50 | 69 | 70 | 66 | 69 |
| (Don't know) | 5 | 2 | 5 | 10 | 5 | 9 |

Agreement of statements on older people's representation

| | % who agree | | |
|---|-------------|-----|-----|
| | Under 65 | 65+ | All |
| On the whole older people are adequately represented by politicians in Ireland | 27 | 31 | |
| The government does not consult older people adequately about issues that affect them | 66 | 81 | 69 |
| What older people need is an independent body outside government that champions their needs and rights | 73 | 80 | 74 |
| There are good national organisations in Ireland that represent older people | 39 | 48 | 41 |
| Older people need to organize <u>themselves</u> to campaign and change issues which matter to them | 64 | 77 | 66 |
| Older people should stand up more actively for their own rights | 80 | 86 | 81 |

This pessimistic view of political representation is echoed in the North of Ireland is perhaps particularly interesting where devolved government is still relatively new. But it is a salient message for politicians throughout Ireland as the over 60s are the group which is most likely to vote (ARK, 2008).

In the South of Ireland the National Council on Ageing and Older People was established in 1997, emerging out of the National Council for the Aged established in 1981. Its main functions were to conduct research into issues affecting older people and to advise the Department. This was an appointed Council with members drawn from across health and social care professions and a range of community and voluntary organisations. Criticisms of this body focused on its limited influence – especially in terms of the number of its recommendations which have been implemented. The decision to dissolve the Council with effect from 1 September 2009 was argued by government to be an outcome of the decision to rationalise a number of health agencies and integrate some into the Department of Health and Children, including the National Council on Ageing and Older People. As the Council was abolished after the fieldwork was conducted we have no sense of public attitudes to this decision. Forty one percent of respondents in the Republic of Ireland said that there were good national organisations that represent older people, and the National Council may have been included in their assessment.

Perhaps the most interesting results here are those which reflect the support for the empowerment of older people themselves beyond the discontent with perceived inadequate representation. There was widely expressed agreement that older people needed to organise themselves and stand up more actively for their own rights. Seventy seven per cent of those aged 65+ agreed with this statement while a full 86% agreed that older people needed to stand up more actively for their own rights. It is noteworthy that this last question was also asked in the 2003 survey and the agreement figure at that point in time was higher at 93%. Although both figures still represent overwhelming support it is possible that, over time, some respondents now feel that older people standing up for their rights is something that is indeed now happening. And certainly in the South of Ireland there is considerable awareness of media campaigns on behalf of older people. Thirty five per cent of all

respondents and 41% of those aged 65-74 in the South of Ireland had been generally aware of such campaigns during the previous twelve months. However in terms of specific campaigns, only a very small proportion of respondents (8%) for example were able to say that they had heard of the *Older and Bolder* initiative.

Issues for research and policy

The perceptions of what authorities and politicians are doing for older people should be monitored. Since these surveys were conducted the economic situation has deteriorated and governments in the UK and Ireland have introduced public expenditure cuts and indicated further savings will have to be made. In Northern Ireland, where devolution is relatively new, there was a particularly negative view of politicians and it will be interesting to see how this may or may not change. There would seem to be evidence that older people themselves feel they need to be more assertive and active in their lobbying and campaigning and that there are more groups advocating for older people. This process and the impact of it should be monitored and assessed.



Summary and discussion

Attitudes towards older people have remained extremely positive during the 2003 to 2008 period and it is noticeable that the number of people voicing negative views has dropped significantly from five years earlier. Overall there continues to be a more positive attitude to ageing and to older people in the South of Ireland than in the North. Against this positive background it is evident that those over 65 are now more negative about how older people are treated in comparison with the general population and the extent to which they are respected and valued. The number of people who feel that you are treated with less respect as you get older is certainly rising. Significantly more of the 65+ age group feel that they are treated worse than everyone else, up from 25% in 2003 to 35% in 2008. Again the picture in the South of Ireland is rather better than in the North, but there are changes in the South as the above figure shows. So while attitudes are becoming more positive towards older people - there is a growing sense among the public that things are not really that great for older people. All of this would be consistent with a public becoming more aware of the problems facing older people and an increasing awareness of the dangers of ageism in terms of attitudes.

Perceived discrimination rates against older people in the employment, healthcare and financial sectors has increased significantly over the five year period and this perception is shared by both younger and older respondents. While there is always the possibility that there are suddenly more discriminatory processes at work across all these sectors (and in the neighbouring jurisdiction - this finding is apparent in the North of Ireland as well), it seems likely that biggest factors at work here are the raising of awareness of issues relating to older people, the increasing visibility of older people's groups and hence a public more alert to the potential for ageism to occur. It is telling that there are few differences over time in terms of general attitudes towards discrimination against older people – that is many people always felt that older people would be treated less well in these sectors and the number of people who share this belief five years on remains more or less the same. What has changed is the number of people willing to report that *they themselves* or a *friend or family member* has actually experienced some form of discrimination. With heightened awareness of these issues, individuals may now be beginning to classify actual instances of behaviour as ageism where they themselves or their family or friends have faced particular situations in their own lives. Although the number of people aged 50 or over who felt that they themselves had been discriminated against by an employer is quite low, it had nonetheless nearly trebled since 2003 (from 4% to 11%). Similarly only 10% of respondents in 2008 who were aged 50 or over felt that they had not been offered medical treatment that might have helped them, but this was still a large increase on the 3% who reported this in 2003. For those aged 65 and over, only 6% in 2003 felt that they had been treated with less dignity and respect by people in the medical profession because of their age – but this had risen to 16% five years on. The number of people aged over 65 saying that they themselves had been discriminated against by the financial sector had risen from 7% in 2003 to 20% in 2008.

Apart from discrimination, there is a clear sense from the surveys of the day to day problems facing older people. Issues to do with vulnerability top the list for the over 65s with *Fear of crime*, *Isolation* and *Loneliness* named by the majority of this group. The next raft of issues are rather more to do with financial pressures including *Making ends meet*, *Keeping warm in winter* and *Access to healthcare*. While the last is perhaps equally concerned with fair treatment by health and social care professionals it is also likely to be a reflection of the medical card issue

and the financial pressure resulting from its removal.

The financial problems facing older people have to be seen in the context of the background of the recession and evidence of this as an underlying issue comes across in much of the survey results, particularly an increasing reluctance among the under 65s to accord more financial benefits to older people. When questioned about the level of the state pension, 60% of felt that the pension rate was a 'poor deal', and while this is still the majority, it is noticeable that the sense that the pension rate is too low has diminished in the five years since 2003 (dropping from 71% to 60%). In the recessionary context it is particularly the under 65s who are increasingly reluctant to label the state pension as a poor deal. In terms of financial provision by the state more generally (taking account of other benefits provided for pensioners) the picture was slightly different. Again a clear majority, 60% of participants, thought that provision was inadequate – as was the case in 2003. However while the under 65s are again slightly less likely to see provision as inadequate in 2008, those over 65 are increasingly feeling that there is a problem here. Possibly the removal of the automatic entitlement to medical cards is a factor in this increasing discontent among the older age group. The findings from the surveys also suggest that the wider population is becoming slightly less willing to see older people subsidised for services such as gas and electricity with the number in favour declining from 93% in 2003 to 84% in 2008. Still an emphatic majority but diminished since 2003. However if it is recessionary pressures that are at play here, they do not appear to extend so far as to raise actual resentment towards older people - there is for example no great appetite among the population for older people giving up work to make way for younger workers. For older people themselves worries about financing retirement may also be apparent in the results. The proportion of people who would prefer to work part-time up to retirement age has dropped slightly since 2003 while the number of people who would like to work part-time after retirement has increased.

Attitudes to the right to a medical card are revealing. Clearly the right of automatic entitlement is cherished by the vast majority of the population and not just the over 65 age group. More than three quarters of the under 65s felt that this entitlement should remain. However when respondents were asked about means-testing, less than 50% of both age groups were definitely prepared to rule it out. Forty eight per cent of those under 65 and 47 per cent of the older group disagreed with the statement *It is fair enough that people over 70 should be means-tested in order to get a medical card*. This is not to say that there was majority support for this action but opinion was split and there was clearly ambivalence among some respondents while a pragmatic view was taken by others.

As noted at the outset, much of the debate about age and ageing is based on assumptions about the cost of ageing and the dependency of older people. However, as Hill (2009) has argued, even in money terms the flow of resources is not necessarily from the young to the old. He points to the movement of assets, such as housing, from the old to the young, the amount of care work for older being carried out by those who are less old, the care of grandchildren and other non-costed voluntary contributions to society. The contribution made by older people in terms of volunteering and informal care is substantial. Just under a fifth of 65 to 74 year olds had been involved in raising or handling money during the previous 12 months and almost a quarter had helped organise or run an event. Seventeen percent of those in the 50-64 group were caring for someone outside the home on a regular basis. The greatest participation in volunteering work in the South of Ireland is among the 50-75 year age

groups and with the exception of a few activities (such as committee membership, driving, gardening/shopping or working with young people) it is people in this age group who appear to be most willing to give of their time in this capacity.

While it may be overstating the case to claim that older people are beginning to mobilise in terms of representation, there is a clear sense of an emerging discontent among the 65+ age group with representation and an accompanying desire for empowerment. The sense that the authorities do not do enough for older people has risen dramatically from 50% to 66% between 2003 and 2008. Less than a third of the 65+ group feel that politicians adequately represent older people and 77% believe that older people needed to organise themselves and stand up more actively for their own rights. A massive 81% feel that the government does not consult older people adequately about issues that affect them, and at 80% there is overwhelming support for an independent body outside government that champions their needs and rights. Once again it seems likely that whatever else has occurred in the preceding five years in terms of the recession and the accompanying financial pressures, there has been a distinct raising of awareness of issues relating to older people. It is no surprise that the survey reveals that 35% of all respondents and 41% of those aged 65-74 in the South of Ireland said that they had been generally aware of media campaigns on behalf of older people. Higher levels of awareness of media campaigns in the South of Ireland could be linked to the earlier introduction of equality legislation and resultant public debate and media reporting of the issues.

A number of writers have looked at the power of the myths around ageing and the associated stereotypes, mostly related to progressive decline and the idea of older people as an economic and social burden (Thornton, 2002; Pickering, 2001). Angus and Reeve (2006) argue that many of the initiatives developed to combat ageism have, at their basis, the assumption that ageism is mainly the result of ignorance of the facts. This, they argue, means that such strategies have little impact on attitudes because they ignore the interests that are served by the underlying tacit agreements and vested interest that perpetuate ageist attitudes. This presents a challenge in terms of our need to understand more about what shapes attitudes and how negative attitudes and stereotypes can be addressed. Julia Neuberger (2008, p. 1744) questions *'if the facts about ageing, and an expanding older population, have made us behave like frightened rabbits, caught in the glare of a car's headlights. We can see it but cannot react effectively'*. She goes on to challenge the limited perception of discrimination as mostly relating to aspects of healthcare and access to services arguing for a 'fierce grey power movement' and the need to challenge the fear we have of a society of growing old which 'makes us both unimaginative and unkind...'

While an individual's attitude to ageing may be in part the result of individual outlook we also know that the experience of ageing and quality of life of older people is affected by factors such as income, social class, ethnicity and the degree of influence which coming from a professional or managerial background with a higher income can bring. Walker points to the considerable evidence that quality of life in old age *'...is the product of the interrelationship between structure and agency over the life course'* (Walker, 2006, p. 450).

Until recently age discrimination has not received the same sustained attention as race, gender and in Northern Ireland, religious discrimination. There may be increasing pressure for this to change as older people, as is suggested by some of these findings, mobilise and be more active in their campaigning and lobbying. In the context of the factors about factors impacting on quality of life outlined above, it could be argued that strategies

to address ageism in both parts of Ireland do not adequately acknowledge or respond to the links between the issues they propose to tackle and the relationship to factors such as gender, class and race which are the focus of other government strategies.

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Appendix 1: Technical note on surveys

Ireland South 2003

The 2003 survey was carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of ARK.

The population frame used for sample selection was the national Register of Electors. The ESRI has developed its own computerised random sample selection system – known as RANSAM – which is based on the Register. The RANSAM system is based on a two-staged clustered sampling approach. The Electoral Register is built up in terms of what are called ‘Polling Books’. These do not conform to any administrative or geographical unit. At the first stage of sample selection the Register is re-structured into meaningful geographical or spatial units known as District Electoral Divisions (DEDs). There is a total of 3,200 such units throughout the Republic of Ireland. These DEDs are then aggregated into Primary Sampling Units. At first stage of the sample selection (the Primary Sampling Unit stage) in the Ageism Survey a minimum cluster size criterion of 1,000 persons was used. A total of 141 clusters (PSUs) were selected at this first stage. Once the PSUs were selected a systematic sample of addresses was selected within each PSU using a random start. This yielded a constant number (in this case 20) of addresses in each PSU. This provides a random sample of addresses. These were then allocated to an interviewer for personal interview. When the interviewer called at the address he/she asked to interview the person with the next birthday in the household. This is used as a simple randomisation rule for within household selection of the actual respondent. The target person is the household member with the next birthday when the interviewer makes first contact with the household – no substitution is allowed. This procedure, which uses the Electoral Register to produce a random sample of addresses and then implements a within household randomisation rule to select the target respondent, yields a statistical random sample of individuals. All households received an initial visit from the interviewer plus a minimum of 4 call-backs before a definitive non-contact code was assigned to the address. The interview was carried out face to face using a paper questionnaire. From the table one can see that the response rate was **69%** when excluding ineligible addresses.

Table A1: Response rates for the 2003 survey

| Response rates | Number | % of contacts |
|---|--------|---------------|
| Completed and usable | 1880 | 69 |
| Completed but not usable | 67 | 2 |
| Refused (household or target person) | 318 | 12 |
| Target person not available throughout fieldwork period | 175 | 6 |
| Other | 69 | 3 |
| Non-contact/No-one ever at home despite call backs | 202 | 7 |
| Ineligible | 109 | - |
| | 2820 | 100 |

Re-weighting the data

The data were reweighted to allow for the different probabilities of any individual being selected for interview due to household size.

Ireland South 2008

The 2008 survey was carried out by Amárach Field Research on behalf of ARK.

A unique sample was selected from the Geo-directory using the Economic and Social Research Institute's random sampling system RANSAM and comprised a purposive selection of 84 wards / District Electoral Divisions nationally representative. Twenty five addresses were selected from each ward. It was anticipated that this design would yield approx 15 complete interviews per cluster. Each group of addresses (or clusters) were allocated to one interviewer. On some occasions interviewers received a second cluster. In total 59 interviewers worked on the 2003 survey. Fieldwork in general commenced on December the 10th and ended on March the 15th. Interviewers called at each of the pre-selected addresses and used the '*Next Birthday Rule*' to identify the respondent. Interviewer attempted to achieve the interview on the first occasion, but frequently due to the '*The Next Birthday Rule*' the interviewer had make an appointment to return when the correct person was available. The interview was carried out face to face using a paper questionnaire.

Table A2: Response rates for the 2008 survey

| Response rates | Number | % of contacts |
|---|--------|---------------|
| Completed and usable | 1234 | 64 |
| Refusal | 177 | 9 |
| Target person not available throughout fieldwork period | 10 | 1 |
| Other | 50 | 3 |
| Non-contact/No-one ever at home despite call backs | 452 | 24 |
| Ineligible | 177 | - |
| | 2100 | 100 |

Re-weighting the data

The data were reweighted to allow for the different probabilities of any individual being selected for interview due to household size.

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