

ANNALES

Anali za istrske in mediteranske študije
Annali di Studi istriani e mediterranee
Annals for Istrian and Mediterranean Studies
Series Historia et Sociologia, 34, 2024, 1





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Annals for Istrian and Mediterranean Studies

Series Historia et Sociologia, 34, 2024, 1

ISSN 1408-5348
e-ISSN 2591-1775

UDK 009

Letnik 34, leto 2024, številka 1

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Založništvo PADRE d.o.o.

Založnika/Editori/Published by:

Zgodovinsko društvo za južno Primorsko - Koper / *Società storica del Litorale - Capodistria*® / Inštitut IRRIS za raziskave, razvoj in strategije družbe, kulture in okolja / *Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and Environment* / *Istituto IRRIS di ricerca, sviluppo e strategie della società, cultura e ambiente*®

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e-mail: annaleszdjp@gmail.com, **internet:** https://zdjp.si

Redakcija te številke je bila zaključena 31. 03. 2024.

**Sofinancirajo/Supporto finanziario/
Financially supported by:**

Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS)

Annales - Series Historia et Sociologia izhaja štirikrat letno.

Maloprodajna cena tega zvezka je 11 EUR.

Naklada/Tiratura/Circulation: 300 izvodov/copie/copies

Revija Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia je vključena v naslednje podatkovne baze / *La rivista Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia è inserita nei seguenti data base* / *Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in:* Clarivate Analytics (USA): Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) in/and Current Contents / Arts & Humanities; IBZ, Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur (GER); Sociological Abstracts (USA); Referativnyi Zhurnal Viniti (RUS); European Reference Index for the Humanities and Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS); Elsevier B. V.: SCOPUS (NL); Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

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received: 2023-08-27

DOI 10.19233/ASHS.2024.04

AGEISM IN SLOVENIA: ASSESSING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 2008 AND 2022

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ABSTRACT

Ageism is one of the most widespread forms of discrimination in Europe and one of the mechanisms for generating social inequalities, which is why it is essential to monitor its prevalence. This paper compared the prevalence of ageism in Slovenia in 2008 and in 2022 based on data from round four of the European Social Survey (ESS 2008) and the ESS web panel survey Cronos-2 (2022). The comparison showed that attitudes towards older people remained relatively positive, that there was an increase in the proportion of people who reported perceiving ageism and that there was a slight increase in awareness of the magnitude of the problem. At the three focus points we observed, gender emerged as a key demographic variable with a statistically significant impact.

Keywords: ageism, European Social Survey (ESS), Cronos-2 cross-national web panel study, public opinion, comparative analysis

L'AGEISMO IN SLOVENIA: VALUTAZIONE DELLE DIFFERENZE TRA IL 2008 E IL 2022

SINTESI

L'ageismo è una delle forme di discriminazione più diffuse in Europa e uno dei meccanismi di creazione delle disuguaglianze sociali, per questo è importante monitorarne la diffusione. Il presente documento confronta la diffusione dell'ageismo in Slovenia nel 2008 e nel 2022, sulla base dei dati dell'Indagine sociale europea - Onda 4 nel 2008 e del panel online dell'ESS – Cronos-2 nel 2022. Il confronto mostra che gli atteggiamenti nei confronti degli anziani sono ancora relativamente positivi, che c'è stato un aumento della percentuale di persone che percepiscono l'ageismo e che c'è stato un leggero aumento della consapevolezza dell'entità del problema. Sui tre punti sostanziali che abbiamo esaminato, il genere è emerso come una variabile demografica chiave con un impatto statisticamente significativo.

Parole chiave: ageismo, Indagine sociale europea (European Social Survey – ESS), panel online Cronos-2, opinione pubblica, analisi comparativa

INTRODUCTION

Robert N. Butler defined ageism as “a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old” (Butler, 2002, 12). Ageism is based on stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination (Tornstam, 2006). Stereotypes are “relatively fixed fragments in cognitive structuring of external reality, operating within the constraints of a certain culture” (Mrkaić, 2020, 66), that enable the categorisation of people into age groups. The negative effects of stereotypes appear when people use them to make implicit inferences about people’s abilities, competences and skills (Vauclair et al., 2014), leading to prejudices and discriminatory behaviour (cf. Cuddy & Fiske, 2002).

Ageism occurs at both the individual level (Lev et al., 2018) and at the societal or structural level (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018b). It manifests in social interactions (Butler, 2006), influences the beliefs and expectations of older people through the mechanism of internalisation (Levy, 2009) and is embedded in the functioning of various sectors and institutions such as legal (Doron et al., 2018), care (World Health Organization, 2021), media (Gerdina, 2022; Loos & Ivan, 2018), workplace (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012), and health institutions (Wyman et al., 2018).

A recent report by the World Health Organization recognised ageism as a global problem (World Health Organization, 2021) responsible for the widening of social inequalities (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018a). It has detrimental effects on older people’s well-being, since it conveys to them that they are not valued members of the community (Stokes, 2019), and may lead to social isolation, since individuals who experience discriminatory behaviours are prone to restricting social interactions to avoid being discriminated against (Chen & Yang, 2014). Ageism is not only a problem affecting individual well-being but also a serious public health risk (World Health Organization, 2021). Several studies have shown that internalised negative beliefs about ageing and old age lead to a more pronounced risk of cardiovascular disease (Levy et al., 2002), increase the likelihood of the development of dementia (Levy et al., 2016) and reduce will to live (Levy et al., 2000).

One of the hallmarks of ageism is the tendency to perceive older people as a homogeneous group (Gerdina, 2022). However, substantial differences exist within this demographic, ranging from diverse life experiences (Ferraro, 2018) to sociodemographic variability in terms of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and more (Thompson, 2017). Given the multitude of categories within the older population, it is reasonable to anticipate variations

in experiences of and vulnerability to ageism. However, these variations are not universal, as a recent systematic review of the determinants of ageism against older people revealed. The study found mixed evidence regarding the effects of age, sex, education, cultural background, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religiosity, urban versus rural living and marital status on experiences of ageism (Marquez et al., 2020). These variations underscore the importance of considering the cultural, socioeconomic and political context when examining experiences of ageism. They also emphasise the need for further exploration of the correlates of ageism within specific social environments.

Social environments that are characterised by rapid population ageing, such as is the case in Europe, are especially important areas of observation. There is strong evidence that ageism is directed mainly towards older adults (Ayalon, 2014), meaning that an ageing population places more people at risk of ageism. Despite this, contemporary studies on the prevalence of ageism among the general population in Europe are rare, the last internationally comparable data on such prevalence in Europe being from the fourth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2008. According to the ESS, the highest levels of perceived ageism were found in East European countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine), while the lowest were in a mixture of countries (e.g. Portugal, Cyprus, Denmark, Norway and Switzerland) (Seddig et al., 2020). However, this might have changed in recent years, since according to some estimates, an increase in the proportion of older people in the population (especially when available economic resources do not increase to the same extent) portends negative attitudes towards the older people in that country (North & Fiske, 2015). The lack of more recent data is especially concerning in countries with the highest percentage of older people, many of which are located in Southern Europe—that is, according to the United Nations (2022), in each of Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Slovenia, over 21% of the population is older than 65 years.

This article presents data on the prevalence of ageism in one of these countries, Slovenia. The case of Slovenia is especially interesting because among the 11 European countries that participated in the World Values Survey (WVS), it had the second highest proportion of respondents (74.8%) who agreed that older people were not treated with respect in 2011 (Inglehart et al., 2014). This figure was only surpassed by Romania (85.3%), while countries such as Germany, Estonia and the Netherlands reported around 50% agreement (Inglehart et al., 2014).

Given that the proportion of people aged 65 and over increased by almost a quarter between 2011 and 2022 (from 16.6% to 21.3%; Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2023), it is necessary to reassess the prevalence of ageism in Slovenia and measure the general population's attitudes towards older people and age discrimination. This was carried out in 2022 by OPRO, the Institute for Applied Studies, in cooperation with the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre, through the ESS web panel study, Cronos2.

The aim of this paper is to present data on attitudes towards older people and ageism in Slovenia in 2022 and to compare the figures with data from 2008. The comparison is based on the remarkable opportunity offered by the replication of some of the questions from the European Social Survey. In addition to a comparison of summary data, the paper also expands the literature on ageism by presenting some structural differences at the level of specific subpopulations, particularly at measurement point 2 (in 2022), which represents the current situation.

METHOD

The baseline measurement was the 2008 ESS, which included a comprehensive set of questions entitled 'Expressions of ageism' as a separate module and was carried out in 30 European countries, including Slovenia¹ (n = 1286) (Kurdija et al., 2010). The survey included 55 questions on experiences and perceptions of age discrimination and attitudes towards intergenerational solidarity.

The European Social Survey (ESS ERIC) is a renowned cross-national social science survey emphasising empirical observations of social phenomena through systematic data collection and analysis. It aims to record attitudes, values and life practices among European societies, and its deductive approach involves formulating hypotheses based on existing theories and testing them using a quantitative data approach via questionnaires and specific thematic blocks selected by open European tenders. The final questionnaires were designed by eminent scientists from different disciplines (depending on the topics covered), the Core Scientific Team and the well-supported feedback from the national coordinators.

The ESS's research design relies on cross-sectional survey data collection from a representative sample of individuals across multiple European countries. This allows researchers to capture a snapshot of social attitudes, behaviours and values at

a specific point in time. The cross-national scope of the ESS enables the comparison of social trends and structures across different cultural and political contexts.

The ESS sampling strategy was designed and is implemented to procure comparable sampling procedures in all participating countries. It follows the following fundamental principles: 1. samples should be representative of individuals aged 15 years and older (without an upper age limit) residing in private households in the country, regardless of their ethnicity and citizenship; 2. the selection of individuals should adhere to strict principles of randomness and equal probability at each stage; 3. the sampling frame in each country should be derived from the best possible statistical sources, which consist of a list of individuals from the Central Register of Population (or households or addresses); and 4. all countries are expected to strive for the highest possible response rate. The use of quota sampling or the inclusion of reserves or replacements for selected individuals at any stage is strictly prohibited.

To address potential imbalances in the sample, post-stratification weighting is applied. This corrective measure adjusts the data to align with known population characteristics, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings to the entire population.

Standardised questionnaires are a key tool of the ESS data collection process. Questionnaires cover a wide range of topics, including social attitudes, political beliefs and demographic information. The survey employs face-to-face interviews and self-completion methods, adapting to cultural and linguistic differences across participating countries. Prior to data collection, every national team should provide extensive interviewer training. The ESS places a strong emphasis on ethical considerations. Informed consent is obtained from all participants, ensuring they are fully aware of the survey's purpose and how their data will be used. Anonymity and confidentiality are prioritised to protect the privacy of respondents. The survey complies with ethical standards and data protection regulations across European countries.

In summary, ESS is one of the most valid and reliable instruments for systematically monitoring attitudes and subjective perceptions in European countries. Its methodology has reached the highest level of standardisation in comparative social science research (Malnar & Kurdija, 2010), and the survey has been awarded the Descartes Prize, the

1 Since its launch in 2002, the ESS has also been implemented in Slovenia. The Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana is a partner in the project (members of the core scientific team: Dr. Brina Malnar and May Doušak) and the national coordinating team and the provider of the fieldwork (national coordinator: Dr. Slavko Kurdija).

highest European award in scientific research, for its achievements in ensuring consistency and the equivalence of methods cross-nationally.

The second measurement was the Cronos-2 survey, which was conducted via online self-completion by respondents who initially participated in the ESS round 10 survey in 2020. Cronos-2 is the first cross-national online panel based on probability sampling and following the sophisticated methodological principles of the ESS survey. Twelve countries, including Slovenia, participated in this centrally coordinated online survey. The content modules for the six waves of the Cronos-2 survey were selected through a public call for tenders, two of which – Wave 3 and Wave 6 – were nationally specific. This means that national teams could include content of their own choice. Thus, Wave 3 of the Slovenian version of the Cronos-2 online panel ($n = 564$) included a broader set of questions on perceptions of ageism in Slovenia, among which a typical part of the questions was replicated specifically from the ageism module in round 4 of the ESS in 2008.

There are three aspects of ageism, which we look at in more detail in this article. The first concerns attitudes towards older people and is based on question (A): “Using the scale below, please tell us how negative or positive are your personal feelings towards people over 70 in general. Please rate on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely negative and 10 is extremely positive”. The second concerns self-perceived discrimination and is derived from question (B): “Tell me how often in the last year it has happened to you that someone has been prejudiced against you or treated you in an unequal way because of your age” (0 = never, 4 = very often). The third aspect of ageism concerns the general perception of ageism as a pressing problem in Slovenia in the form of question (C): “How pressing, if at all, would you say discrimination against people over 70 is in Slovenia?” (1 = very pressing, 2 = quite pressing, 3 = not very pressing, 4 = not at all pressing). We began by analysing the three content items from a cross-temporal perspective and then examined how the structural characteristics of the population affected the expression of attitudes. For the structural variables, we used basic demographic variables: gender (two categories), age (four categories: up to 30, 31–45, 46–60 and 61 years and over), education (three categories: lower, middle and high, recoded from the seven values of the ISCED classification) and income (three categories, recoded from deciles of household income; 1–3 = low, 4–7 = middle and 8–10 = high) and two attitudinal control variables. The was subjective assessment of the material situation (two categories; based on question: ‘Feeling

about household’s income nowadays’, where the first answer (living comfortably on present income) represented the category ‘comfortably’ and the other answers (coping, difficult and very difficult) represented the category ‘non-comfortably’. The second control variable was subjective assessment of own age (five categories; based on question ‘Tell us which age group you belong to the most’, if you see yourself as very young, choose number 1, if you see yourself as very old, choose the last number 9, if you see yourself somewhere in between, choose one of the numbers in between. The five categories were derived from the following scale recoding: 1–3 = 1, 4 = 2, 5 = 3, 6 = 4, 7–9=5).

RESULTS

In the analysis, we wanted to explore respondents’ views on three issues: attitudes towards older people (A); perceptions of personal discrimination (B); and general perceptions of ageism (C). Since the three questions were measured with slightly different scales, we decided to standardise the results by showing the percentile values of the averages.

Focusing on question A, the 2008 ESS showed an average percentile of 79.3%, while the Cronos-2 study gave a slightly lower average, of 78.0%. These average values were derived from an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (extremely negative attitudes) to 10 (extremely positive attitudes). This meant that respondents generally showed positive attitudes towards older people. The difference between the two measures was insignificant, amounting to only 1.3%. This shows that attitudes towards older people remained relatively stable over 15 years, and only minimal changes were observed.

Comparing the results measured at both time points for question B, we could see that a relatively low value was measured at both time points. However, the perceptions of personal discrimination increased from 16% in 2008 to 28.7% in 2022. In this case, the range of the percentile value was taken to mean that at 0%, the respondent had never been discriminated against based on age, and at 100%, they had been discriminated against very often. Because of the slightly less sensitive scale, we also presented this question (B2) as a bi-nominal type variable (0 = never experienced such discrimination and 1 = all other responses) and compared only the proportions of responses with a value of 0. We could see that the proportion of respondents who had never experienced ageism was 64.2% in 2008 and decreased to 40.7% in 2022. This negative difference of 23.5% showed a noticeable decrease in the proportion of individuals who had not experienced any form of ageism.

Table 1: Comparison of selected variables in a cross-temporal perspective (Source: the authors).

Question	ESS 2008	C2 2022	The Difference
	100 th		
(A) Attitudes towards older people	79.3	78.0	-1.3
(B1) Perception of personal discrimination	16.3	28.7	+12.5
	% of respondents: <i>never</i> (%)		
(B2) Perception of personal discrimination	64.2	40.7	-23.5
	Sum of answers: <i>pressing</i> + <i>very pressing</i> (%)		
(C) General perception of ageism	38.8	42.7	+3.9

For question C, we presented the data at the level of the sum of the responses ‘pressing’ and ‘very pressing’. It should be noted, however, that the two questions were slightly different. The 2008 question included discrimination against people under 20 years of age², while the 2022 question explicitly asked about discrimination against older people. We could see that the 2008 figure was 38.8% and the 2022 figure was 42.7%. Although not directly comparable, these significantly different figures indicated a tendency towards increased sensitivity to discrimination based on age.

We were also interested in differences in attitudes according to the typical subpopulations in the 2022 study. In question (A) attitudes towards the older people we could see significant differences. First, in terms of gender, women were more likely than men to express positive attitudes towards older people. The difference in means was 7.51 for men and 8.09 for women (overall mean: 7.80; sig.: .000). Second, age also had a significant impact on these attitudes. A comparison of the averages showed a linear increase in the averages according to age group (up to 30 years = 7.14, 31–45 years = 7.70, 46–60 years = 8.15, 61 and over = 8.23; overall average 7.80; sig.: .000), meaning that positive attitudes towards older people increased with age. Similarly significant gender and age differences were also found in the 2008 ESS data. In the case of education, the differences were also significant, but slightly less so than for gender and age (sig.: .020). In particular, the category of less educated stood

out with a significantly lower average (i.e. a less pronounced positive attitude towards older people). At the same time, income and household material status did not show statistically significant differences. In combination with the selected explanatory variables, the strength of gender and age as stronger predictors of attitudes toward older people was also clearly confirmed by a simple regression analysis⁴ model.

For question (B1) perception of personal discrimination, the picture of the structural analysis was very similar to question A, with the difference being that there was a slightly more significant difference in age than in gender. Women perceived personal discrimination to a greater extent than men at the average level (women 1.26, men 1.04; overall average 1.15; sig.: .000). The averages on a scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often) for the age categories were 1.74, 1.06, 1.00 and 0.85 for up to 30 years, 31–45 years, 46–60 years and 61 years and over, respectively (overall average 1.15; sig.: .000). What is interesting here is that more self-reported age discrimination was found in the category of up to 30 years. The same pattern was also found in the 2008 ESS data. For question B1, education also showed a certain degree of significant differentiation (lower = 1.29, middle = 1.24, high = 0.98; overall average 1.14; sig.: .020), where we could see in particular that a higher proportion of discrimination was experienced by those with lower and middle education. The regression model confirmed the same; for question B1, the most significant differences were

2 The question from the ESS 2008 reads: “What would you say is the extent to which discrimination against people on the grounds of their age – whether they are old or young – is a pressing problem in Slovenia, if at all?”

3 To analyse statistical differences in means between groups, an ANOVA test in the ‘Compare Means’ analysis was employed using SPSS. This also applies to the analyses below.

4 The regression analysis was carried out using SPSS. A tabular output of the regression coefficients is included in the Appendix. This also applies to the analyses below.

generated by age, followed by education and, to a lesser extent (but still significant), gender. Income and household material status again dropped out of the model as variables with no significant explanatory power⁵.

Unlike the previous two questions, third question (C, assessment of the general perception of ageism as a pressing social problem), significantly differentiated only in terms of gender and, interestingly, household material status. The regression model also confirmed both these variables as significant. A comparison of averages by subpopulation showed that women perceived ageism as a pressing problem significantly more. On a scale of 1 (very pressing) to 4 (not at all pressing), the averages were 2.71 for men and 2.48 for women, with an overall average of 2.60 (sig.: .000). In the subjective assessment of the household's material situation, measured in two categories (getting by without problems and getting by with difficulty), we could see that ageism was perceived as a pressing problem to a significantly greater extent by those who were getting by with difficulty (mean: 2.37) than by those who were getting by without problems (mean: 2.72; overall mean: 2.59; sig.: .000).

DISCUSSION

Data from the Cronos-2 ESS web panel showed that public opinion was still relatively favourable towards older people in 2022, despite a sharp increase in the proportion of older people in the population, contrary to the assumption that a higher proportion of older people in the population predicts negative attitudes towards older people (North & Fiske, 2015). One possible interpretation of the (almost) unchanged attitudes towards older people is that when the proportion of older people increases, more negative attitudes towards older people only occur when social resources are (perceived to be) scarce, which is in line with the classical realist theory of intergroup conflict (Sherif, 1966), according to which competition for scarce resources can be the cause of the emergence of negative intergroup attitudes. The Cronos-2 web panel was implemented during post-Covid-19 pandemic mitigation measures, when EU member states, including Slovenia, were encouraged to provide subsidies and public investment and able to obtain additional funding (e.g. from 28/7/2021 onwards, under the Recovery and Resilience Plan), which put large amounts of money into circulation and reduced the sense

of scarcity of societal resources. The coronavirus pandemic could also have had a qualitative impact on attitudes towards old age. Coronavirus has had a disproportionate impact on the health and well-being of older people (Oostlander et al., 2022). Early epidemiological data showed that the virus poses a major threat, especially to older people (Bergström & Edström, 2022). In the absence of public opinion data on attitudes towards old age during the pandemic, media coverage can be used as an indicator of public opinion. Representations of old age in the media are important because they indicate what the dominant social representations of old age are in a given period (Gerdina, 2022). Since media coverage of tragic events, of which the coronavirus pandemic was undoubtedly one, usually includes judgements about the social value of the victims of tragedies (in this case, mostly older people) and influences perceptions of social distance and social differences, it is possible that the coronavirus pandemic (at least temporarily) reinforced positive attitudes towards older people. Indeed, research on traditional media coverage as well as representations of old age on social networking sites during the pandemic has shown that older people were represented in the media as a social group deserving community support (Morgan et al., 2021) and as a vulnerable and socially disadvantaged group in need of state support and protection (Døssing & Craciun, 2022).

In relation to perceptions of personal discrimination, we found that in 2022, more than half of respondents (58.5%) had experienced prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of age at least once in the previous year, which is in line with the finding that ageism is the most prevalent form of discrimination in Europe (Abrams et al., 2009; Abrams et al., 2011; Swift et al., 2018) and emphasises that researchers should devote more research attention to it (Ayalon, 2014). The proportion of respondents perceiving age discrimination in Slovenia increased significantly compared to 2008, which may have been due to the increased sensitivity to discrimination experienced by different age groups as a result of age-based measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus⁶. However, it should be noted that an increase in actual discrimination cannot be completely ruled out. The increased sensitivity to all forms of discrimination in 2022 compared to 2008 could also have been influenced by 'woke' movements such as #MeToo or the establishment of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality in Slovenia, which has

5 As well as subjective age, which does not emerge as a significant predictor in any of the analyses. In all cases, it is better replaced by age categories of actual age.

6 For example, in Slovenia, the initial distribution of vaccines was limited to certain age and occupational groups, and older people faced restrictions on shopping at certain times.

since 2016 been raising public awareness about different forms of discrimination based on personal circumstances, including age (Advocate of the Principle of Equality, 2016). Regardless of the reasons for the increase in the perception and reporting of personal age discrimination, the fact that in 2022, more than half of respondents had experienced prejudice or discrimination based on age at least once in the previous year is a testimony to the urgency of taking measures to reduce age discrimination in Slovenia. Ageism has a negative impact on quality of life and has been correlated with lower levels of happiness (Jung & Kim, 2023), a reduced will to live (Levy et al., 2000) and a range of detrimental effects on the health of older people (Levy et al., 2020).

Our results regarding perceived ageism highlight that policies, programmes and strategies are needed to reduce ageism. For example, to reduce ageism among older people, Nelson (2016) suggested that old age and ageing should be transformed into a time of positive activity, growth and optimism for the future; that positive intergenerational contact within families should be strengthened by promoting stable and positive family relationships; and that psychologists and health professionals should be educated about ageism so that ageist stereotypes and prejudices do not take root among those who work directly with older people. In 2022, about two out of five respondents identified ageism as a pressing social problem, indicating a relatively broad awareness of the issue and suggesting that the abovementioned strategies to reduce ageism in Slovenia would enjoy relatively broad public support.

Interestingly, the proportion of respondents who considered ageism to be a pressing social problem in 2022 was comparable to that found in 2008. It should be noted, however, that the 2008 question covered attitudes towards ageism across the age spectrum, including discrimination against people under 20, whereas the 2022 question specifically focused on discrimination against those aged 70 years or older. Given the narrower focus of the 2022 question compared to the 2008 question, it can be assumed that if both questions were worded similarly, the proportion of respondents considering ageism to be a pressing social problem in Slovenia would show a stronger increase.

Regarding structural differences at the level of specific subpopulations, we found gender to be the only demographic variable with a statistically significant impact across all three variables. This clearly shows that society has an influence on the formation of gender roles and expectations, which may be reflected in different attitudes towards old age. Even though Slovenia has been characterised

by there being a high proportion of women in full-time employment since the 1960s (Jogan, 2004) and highly educated women since at least the 1980s (Renner & Kralj, 2015), neither the full-time employment of both genders nor the relatively small gender wage gap at the population level have significantly changed the position of women in the private sphere, since the ideology that polarises social ideals of masculinity and femininity has proven to be very persistent (Renner et al., 2008). Men fulfil (their own and society's) expectations 'outside the home', where there are also benchmarks of success and social recognition, while women fulfil their expectations 'inside the home' by performing duties related to household care, motherhood and family life (Oakley, 2000). The latter could lead women to be more concerned about older people. On the other hand, men are more often associated with the role of protector or as individuals who are less involved in providing care to others, which could lead to them having less empathy towards older people. In Slovenia, women are the primary caregivers for older family members (Hrženjak, 2010) and are more active in maintaining intergenerational kinship ties (Stratton & Moore, 2007), making them more likely than men to have frequent contact with older people. This frequent interaction could contribute to a better understanding of older people's experiences, and consequently, to greater concern about ageism. Indeed, several authors have found that a higher number of positive interactions with older people has a positive effect on attitudes towards older people (Peacock & Talley, 1982; Nelson, 2019), which may also explain why older respondents had more positive attitudes towards older people than did younger respondents – that is, social attitudes are characterised by relatively strong and stable levels of age homophily (Smith et al., 2014). The fact that older respondents had more positive attitudes towards older people is also in line with the social identity theory, which posits that people are inclined to value their in-group and derogate out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Regarding age differences in perceptions of personal discrimination, the Cronos-2 survey confirmed that young people perceived the highest levels of age discrimination (Kessler et al., 1999). This shows that young people are often overlooked victims of ageism (Ayalon, 2013), which is reflected among the scientific community itself, which has mainly focused on ageism among older people (Chasteen et al., 2021) and assumes that age becomes a more powerful factor in shaping social judgements after middle age, when there is also a greater likelihood of being exposed to ageism (North & Fiske, 2012). The increased research and policy attention to ageism among older people

is to some extent understandable when the consequences of ageism for older and young people are considered. As Garstka et al. (2004) noted, young people's perceptions of ageism do not have a negative impact on quality of life. For example, if young people are ridiculed because of their age when they form a political party or run for a high-status position, this is less likely to have a long-lasting negative impact on their well-being, since they are aware that their situation is temporary because they will eventually leave their group and enter middle age, which represents the most advantageous position on the age continuum (Jowell, 2009; Swift et al., 2018). Conversely, older people cannot leave their age category, so ageism has a potentially more negative impact on their quality of life (Garstka et al., 2004). The latter mirrors findings from other studies using the fourth wave ESS data that show that experiencing ageism has a negative effect on physical and mental well-being in old age (Kim & Jung, 2021).

However, the data on perceptions of personal discrimination can also be read in another way. It may be that older people experience the same, if not higher, levels of age discrimination as young people but do not perceive them as such, at least not to the same extent as young people. Social norms and values change over time and generations (Leijen et al., 2022), and it seems that negative attitudes towards discrimination in general, and consequently, higher sensibility towards perceiving any type of discrimination, are more characteristic of the younger generation. Using the fourth wave of ESS data, Ayalon (2014), for example, found that younger respondents perceived not only more age discrimination but also more discrimination based on sex and ethnicity. It may be that younger generations have easier access to information on discrimination and have experienced a greater emphasis on social justice in the education system. For instance, in Slovenia, an ethics and society class that tackles the issue of discrimination was introduced in primary education in 1999 (Šimenc et al., 2012).

Another explanation is that young and older people experience different forms of ageism (Iversen et al., 2009). In line with the content model of stereotypes, social groups are assessed on the dimensions of warmth and competence (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002), where competence refers to independence, skill, self-confidence and ability and warmth refers to good nature, trustworthiness, honesty and kindness. The stereotype content model suggests that a social group is likely to be stereotyped as cold if it is perceived to be a rival and as warm if it is perceived to be an ally (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). Phalet and Poppe (1997), in a study of European national stereotypes, found that older people were judged to be

intellectually incompetent, less ambitious and less responsible than young people but, in contrast, also perceived to be friendlier and warmer. The biases revealed in the study by Fiske et al. (1999) further show that older people receive patronising attitudes characterised by pity and sympathy, which may be difficult to perceive as a form of discrimination.

The lower perception of personal discrimination among older people may also be a consequence of the normalisation of age discrimination. Due to the pervasiveness of ageism and the fact that older people have been exposed to it for the longest time, it is possible that older people are more likely to accept unequal treatment in old age as unproblematic. Jung and Kim (2023), for example, argued that victims of age discrimination may find a degree of comfort in the fact that they are not the only ones experiencing discrimination or that they assess their own situation in comparison to that of others and normalise it. Future research will need to explore the differences in awareness of age discrimination between young and old people and to look more closely at the forms of ageism experienced by young and old people.

The survey also showed some statistically significant differences in attitudes towards older people and perceptions of personal discrimination depending on the respondent's education. In contrast to studies that examined the relationship between education and perceived ethnic discrimination, which have shown that being racially conscious is associated with higher levels of perceived discrimination (Gary, 1995), in our study, the less and middle educated perceived more age discrimination, suggesting that education may act as a buffer against the experience of ageism. Inglehart and Baker (2000) found that improvements in education reinforce social norms that oppose general discrimination. The least educated also have slightly less positive attitudes towards older people, raising the possibility that education may act not only as a protective but also as a deterrent to age discrimination.

The assessment of household material status in relation to attitudes towards the older people and perceptions of personal discrimination was not statistically significant in our study, and therefore contradicts theories of social stratification according to which members of social groups with low social status are more likely to experience discrimination (Fiske, 2010). The absence of an association between low social status and personal perceptions of discrimination could be explained by potential strategies used by members of stigmatised groups to minimise the extent to which they personally feel discriminated against, as Crocker and Major (1989) pointed out. However, we cannot confirm

this with the available data. Other differences in attitudes with respect to typical subpopulations were not large and suggest that there were no significant differences in attitudes between subpopulations. This could indicate that there is a broadly accepted consensus on attitudes towards ageism.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to know the extent to which the rise in the reporting of ageism is a consequence of the greater prevalence of ageism or awareness of ageism as a social problem that has increased in recent years. With the data we have from 2008 and 2022, it is not possible to predict how perceptions of age discrimination have been affected by events that occurred in Slovenia during the period under review, such as the global financial crisis of 2008, the creation of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality in 2016, different social movements and the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Regardless, the data from 2022 clearly show that ageism is widespread in Slovenia, leading to a range of probable negative impacts on people's quality of life, well-being and health. Legislative changes adopted in recent years to protect against age discrimination, such as the Act of 21 April 2016 on protection against discrimination (The Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 2016), have clearly not been sufficiently effective in preventing age discrimination. More efforts are needed in policies and programmes to reduce ageism, such as initiatives aimed at more positive media coverage of older and younger generations; educational programmes on old-age and ageing specifically targeted at the least educated; interventions to promote stable and positive family relationships and social support, especially among men; and interventions to train and educate about age prejudice and discrimination on both sides of the age spectrum. Such policies and programmes need to be informed by high-quality and nationally representative data on ageism, while more detailed comparative research is needed to assess the level of age discrimination

and more accurately understand social changes in this domain. In addition, we should aim to repeat the entire ageism module from the ESS 2008 every few years, with a few additional content upgrades and, of course, within the same level of methodological accuracy as the ESS survey. As Applewhite (2017) said, ageing is inevitable, but living in an ageist society is not.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Regarding limitations, it is worth mentioning that the two measurements were carried out using different data collection methods and that the sample size and completeness were, of course, not identical. The first measurement, in 2008, was conducted using a face-to-face survey method, with a sample response rate of approximately 60% among 1286 respondents. The second one, which was conducted by online self-completion and included individuals who agreed to being a panel of respondents for a year and a half (six survey waves), had (in wave 3, where ageism questions were included) 564 respondents and a response rate of around 30% – regarding the ESS 2020 mother survey gross sample. The expected higher dropout in the second measurement and possible discrepancies in the sample structure of the web panel were mitigated using combined weights. These were designed for the Cronos-2 project for all countries at a high level of complexity because they included various (demographic and attitudinal) dimensions to correct possible discrepancies in the sample structure either because of the data collection approach or the lower response rate of the web panel measurement. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that we have data of sufficient quality and reliability to allow for both situational analysis and cross-temporal comparisons, especially since a broader methodological and cross-national analysis of the sample, both in the mother survey (ESS round 4) and in the web panel (Cronos-2), shows that Slovenia is one of the most prosperous among ESS participating countries.

Appendix – A Tabular Output of the Regression Coefficients**A (w3siq41)**

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	6,2659	0,5579		11,2303	0,0000		
	Gender	0,5212	0,1598	0,1422	3,2626	0,0012	0,9571	1,0448
	Age (4)	0,4140	0,0948	0,2259	4,3685	0,0000	0,6794	1,4720
	S. Age (5)	-0,0997	0,0811	-0,0639	-1,2295	0,2195	0,6727	1,4866
	Education (3)	0,1866	0,1122	0,0757	1,6631	0,0969	0,8759	1,1417
	Income (3)	-0,1395	0,1279	-0,0533	-1,0902	0,2761	0,7601	1,3156
	S. Material Status (2)	-0,0586	0,1827	-0,0154	-0,3207	0,7486	0,7897	1,2662

- a Dependent Variable: (A) Using the scale below, please tell us how negative or positive are your personal feelings towards people over 70 in general.

B1 (w3siq42)

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1,3212	0,3516		3,7576	0,0002		
	Gender	0,2136	0,1007	0,0921	2,1217	0,0343	0,9571	1,0448
	Age (4)	-0,3228	0,0597	-0,2784	-5,4051	0,0000	0,6794	1,4720
	S. Age (5)	0,1039	0,0511	0,1053	2,0340	0,0425	0,6727	1,4866
	Education (3)	-0,1791	0,0707	-0,1149	-2,5337	0,0116	0,8759	1,1417
	Income (3)	0,0885	0,0806	0,0534	1,0975	0,2729	0,7601	1,3156
	S. Material Status (2)	0,1650	0,1151	0,0684	1,4330	0,1525	0,7897	1,2662

- a Dependent Variable: (B) Tell me how often in the last year it has happened to you that someone has been prejudiced against you or treated you in an unequal way because of your age.

C (w3siq43)

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstd. Coeff.		Std. Coeff.	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	3,3269	0,2235		14,8852	0,0000		
	Gender	-0,2228	0,0639	-0,1522	-3,4872	0,0005	0,9581	1,0437
	Age (4)	0,0324	0,0378	0,0445	0,8591	0,3907	0,6802	1,4703
	S. Age (5)	-0,0097	0,0325	-0,0156	-0,2998	0,7644	0,6735	1,4847
	Education (3)	0,0388	0,0448	0,0394	0,8653	0,3873	0,8790	1,1376
	Income (3)	-0,0219	0,0510	-0,0210	-0,4288	0,6683	0,7603	1,3153
	S. Material Status (2)	-0,3516	0,0731	-0,2311	-4,8086	0,0000	0,7903	1,2654

- a Dependent Variable: (C) How pressing, if at all, would you say discrimination against people over 70 is in Slovenia?

STARIZEM V SLOVENIJI: OCENJEVANJE RAZLIK MED LETOMA 2008 IN 2022

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POVZETEK

Starizem je ena najbolj razširjenih oblik diskriminacije v Evropi in pomeni enega od mehanizmov za ustvarjanje družbenih neenakosti, zato je pomembno spremljati njegovo razširjenost. V prispevku primerjamo razširjenost starizma v Sloveniji leta 2008 in leta 2022 na podlagi podatkov Evropske družboslovne raziskave (2008) in spletnega panela ESS – Cronos-2 (2022). Podatki, pridobljeni s spletnim panelom Cronos-2, so pokazali, da je bilo javno mnenje starih ljudi leta 2022 še vedno razmeroma naklonjeno, kar je v nasprotju s predpostavko, da večji delež starih ljudi napoveduje negativen odnos do starih ljudi. Delež respondentov, ki zaznavajo starizem, se je v primerjavi z letom 2008 povečal, kar je lahko posledica večje občutljivosti za diskriminacijo v zadnjih petnajstih letih. Glede strukturnih razlik na ravni specifičnih podpopulacij smo ugotovili, da je spol edina demografska spremenljivka, ki ima statistično značilen vpliv na treh opazovanih vsebinskih točkah (odnos do starih ljudi, zaznavanje osebne diskriminacije zaradi starosti, splošno dojemanje starizma). To kaže, da ima družba vpliv na oblikovanje spolnih vlog in pričakovanj, kar se lahko odraža v različnem odnosu do starosti. V obeh letih so največ starizma zaznavali mladi, kar kaže, da so mladi pogosto spregledana žrtev tovrstne diskriminacije. Manj in srednje izobraženi so zaznavali več starizma, kar nakazuje na varovalno funkcijo izobrazbe. Ocena materialnega stanja gospodinjstva pri odnosu do starih ljudi in zaznavi starizma v naši raziskavi ni bila statistično značilna in je torej v nasprotju s teorijami socialne stratifikacije, ki pravijo, da bodo družbene skupine z nižjim socialnim statusom verjetneje izkusile diskriminacijo. Stopnja strinjanja, da je starizem v Sloveniji pereč problem, je visoka, kar nakazuje, da bi strategije in ukrepi za zmanjšanje starizma uživali razmeroma široko javnomnenjsko podporo.

Ključne besede: starizem, Evropska družboslovna raziskava (European Social Survey – ESS), spletni panel Cronos-2, javno mnenje, primerjalna analiza

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