

Attitudes towards Ageing

Research commissioned by the Office for Seniors



Office for Seniors
Te Tari Kaumātua

Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

Acknowledgement

The Office for Seniors would like to acknowledge its appreciation to all those involved in the development of this report, in particular, the survey team from Nielsen and survey participants.

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Presented to the House of Representatives pursuant to section 44(1) of the Public Finance Act 1989.

Published August 2016
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ISBN: 978-0-947513-33-7 (print)
ISBN: 978-0-947513-34-4 (online)

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Introduction

“Attitudes are a secret power working twenty-four hours a day, for good or bad.”

Irving Berlin

New Zealanders’ attitudes to ageing and older people have a major influence on our efforts to face the challenges and embrace the opportunities of our ageing population.

For this report the Office for Seniors commissioned Nielsen Ltd to undertake research to understand New Zealanders’ attitudes towards older people and to ageing. Until now, no all-ages research has been undertaken on this topic in New Zealand.

Overall the report shows New Zealanders have high levels of respect for seniors and acknowledge the value of their contribution to society. These findings complement a forecasted rapid growth in the economic contribution of seniors as consumers, workers, volunteers and taxpayers as highlighted by the Office for Seniors in 2015.

But there is room for improvement. A number of older people in the research report feeling lonely, socially isolated and/or invisible. In addition, our reported actions and behaviours point towards areas for improvement in our businesses, workplaces, communities and homes. With an almost doubling of the ageing population in the next 20 years, it is essential seniors are connected to their communities, feel valued and respected, and are able to contribute to society.

This research will be used to inform the next report on New Zealand’s Positive Ageing Strategy, due in 2017. The strategy outlines a vision for a society where people can age positively, where older people are highly valued, and where they are recognised as an integral part of families and communities.

The New Zealand Positive Ageing Strategy's 10 goals are designed to guide policies and programmes across central and local government that improve opportunities for older people to live fulfilling, meaningful and secure lives.

Positive attitudes to ageing and to seniors are vital to a society's levels of self-esteem and well-being. Attitudes that are positive help to transform people's expectations of ageing, their experience of ageing and their level of empowerment to embrace life's opportunities. Understanding New Zealanders' attitudes to ageing and older people will help central and local government, policy makers, businesses, and communities plan for a society where, in 20 years' time, one in four of us will be aged 65 and over.

We should celebrate seniors and the vital contribution they make to our economy, communities and families. In some areas we can do better to create the kinds of places where all New Zealanders, no matter their situation, can age positively. This research gives us a base to better understand and in some instances transform, our attitudes to ageing and older people.

Executive Summary

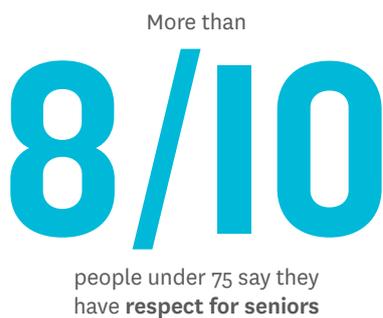
How we define age

- > On average, respondents indicated that they would stop describing someone as ‘young’ at 37 and start describing someone as ‘middle aged’ at 46, as ‘old’ at 67 and as ‘very old’ at 84. However, the concept of age shifts, as people themselves age, with a 20 year gap between what Millennials (aged 18-34) and the 75+ generation consider the age at which youth ends (29 and 49 respectively).

How We Value Age

- > The majority of respondents, regardless of generation, say they have great respect for older people, with 80 percent of Millennials (aged 18-34), 80 percent of Generation Xers (aged 35-49) and 89 percent of Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) agreeing they have great respect for older people.

- > The value respondents feel they add to society seems to peak within the Baby Boomer generation, with Baby Boomers being the most likely of any generation to say they feel they are making a valuable contribution in their life (75 percent). Close to a quarter (23 percent), however, also say they sometimes feel invisible because of their age.
- > More than half of respondents (54 percent) feel older people are more of an asset than a burden to society. The perception of older people as an asset peaks with the Baby Boomer generation (64 percent).
- > Positive stereotypes of older people are more widely held than negative stereotypes of older people.



High levels of respect across the generations



Over half

of people of all ages feel seniors are an asset to society



- 54% think older people are an asset
- 38% are neutral
- 8% think older people are a burden

Our outlook as we age

- > Concerns about ageing appear to decrease with age. Millennials (aged 18-34) are more concerned about all aspects of ageing than their 75+ generation counterparts. This shift appears to happen around middle age, with people starting to become less concerned about things such as dying and loneliness around the age of 45.
- > The majority of respondents aged over 60 are living in their own home and 80 percent plan to stay there as they age.

Age related discrimination

- > 26 percent of those aged 75+ say they have experienced some form of discrimination/poor treatment as a result of their age. 'Being excluded or feeling isolated' is the leading type of poor treatment, with 11 percent saying they have been excluded or felt isolated as a result of their age.
- > Close to a third of respondents of all ages have been shown a lack of respect due to their age at least occasionally (31 percent), while 11 percent say they have been treated badly due to their age at least occasionally. When asked to indicate where they experience this treatment, the highest proportion of respondents who have experienced this say it has occurred in the work place. Millennials (people aged 18-34) are more likely than other generations to report this treatment.

Social isolation and exclusion

- > While being excluded or feeling isolated was the leading form of discrimination/poor treatment experienced by people aged 75+, their rate was lower than for other generations.
- > Respondents aged 75+ living independently in their own home or independently in a retirement community are less likely to agree they sometimes feel invisible because of their age (16 percent and 14 percent respectively), than those living in their own home with support from friends/family (25 percent) and those living in their own home with support from government or social services (30 percent).

New Zealand's preparedness for an older population

- > 62 percent of respondents are not confident New Zealand is prepared to handle the projected increase to the 65+ population (1 in 4 will be 65+ by 2036 up from 1 in 7).

How we define age

Views about ageing change with age

As people age, their concept of what is considered to be young, middle aged, old and very old shifts upwards. On average, Millennials (aged 18-34) stop describing someone as young at 29, while members of the 75+ generation stop describing someone as young 20 years later at the age of 49. Despite all four generations having very distinct perceptions of the end of youth, there is more convergence amongst the Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) and the 75+ generation on when they would start describing someone as middle aged, old and very old.

Intended age of retirement shifts with age

As people age, the age at which they plan to retire shifts upwards. Millennials (aged 18-34) say they are likely to retire at the age of 64, while Generation Xers (aged 35-49) say this is likely to happen at 66 and Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) say this is likely to happen at 69.

	END OF YOUTH	START OF MIDDLE AGE	START OF OLD AGE	START OF VERY OLD AGE
	MEAN AGE			
Total	37	46	67	84
Millennials (Aged 18-34)	29	40	60	79
Generation X (Aged 35-49)	35	45	66	83
Baby Boomers (Aged 50-74)	42	52	72	89
75+ Generation	49	52	75	89

Events that influence when people start to feel old

Respondents who personally consider themselves old or very old were asked to indicate when they started to feel this way. More than half said they started to feel old when they turned a specific age, while a third said it had something to do with their physical wellbeing (e.g. deterioration in health, eye sight, hearing).

Other events included the passing of a spouse or other family/friends, when other people started offering assistance to them, when they gave up driving or moved into a retirement village and becoming a grandparent or great-grandparent.

AGE-RELATED	OTHER
<p><i>When I turned 80. My mother and grandmother told me the 80's were ok but 90's tough. My local doctor when I went for driving medical, said all downhill after 85.</i> Male, 89 years</p> <p><i>Woke up on my 80th birthday and thought "Oh Hell", I suppose I am old now.</i> Male, 81 years</p>	<p><i>No longer able to get a job. Started to receive the pension. Grandchildren started to raise their voices to be heard.</i> Male, 74 years</p> <p><i>When my mother died. When I became invisible.</i> Female, 77 years</p> <p><i>In recent years caring for my wife who has dementia.</i> Male, 76 years</p> <p><i>When contemporaries began coming down with old-age related cancers</i> Male, 78 years</p>
PHYSICAL	
<p><i>When your body started to change into sagging skin, wrinkles, silver hair, and pains, and aches every parts of your body.</i> Female, 45 years</p>	<p><i>Sight diminishing, heart attack, strokes, unsteady on legs, hair thinning, memory not so good.</i> Female, 78 years</p>

How we value age

There are high levels of respect for older people

The majority (83 percent) of people aged under 75 agree they *have great respect for older people*. Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) had the highest levels with 89 percent agreeing with the statement *I have great respect for older people*.



People aged over 50 are more positive about the value of their contribution

People aged over 50 are even more likely than younger generations to agree that they *have made or are making a valuable contribution in their life* (82 percent and 72 percent respectively).

Nearly a quarter of baby boomers have felt invisible because of their age

While Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) are positive about the value of their contribution, they were the generation most likely to agree they sometimes feel invisible because of their age. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of Baby Boomers disclosed they sometimes feel invisible because of their age and 18 percent of the 75+ Generation reported the same.

Feeling invisible



of people aged 50+ have felt invisible because of their age

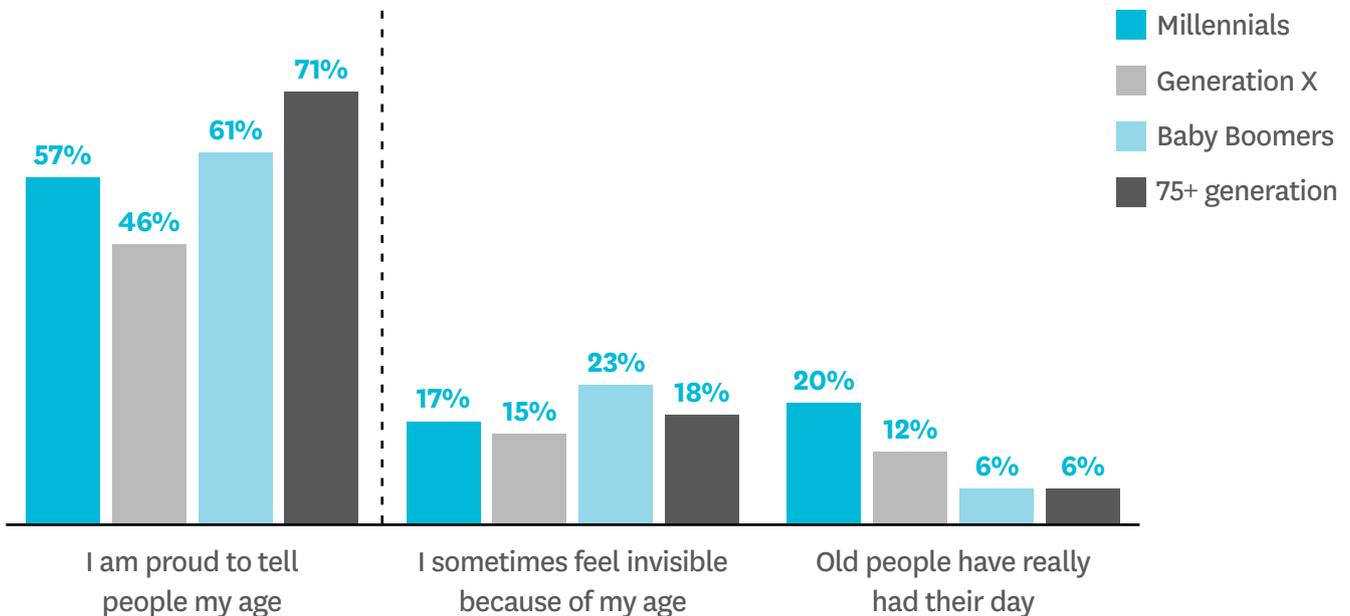
Attitudes to ageing become more positive with age

People’s attitudes to ageing and older people tend to become more positive with age. Millennials (aged 18-34) were more likely than other generations to agree that *old people have really had their day* (20 percent) and 16 percent agree they *don’t have the time or patience to work or socialise with older people*. This compares with 9 percent of Generation X and 8 percent of Baby Boomers. Around 70 percent of the 75+ generation are proud to tell people their age.

Seniors are viewed as an asset to society

More than half of those surveyed (54 percent) considered seniors brought benefits and were of value to society. A small group (8 percent) saw seniors as more of a burden and 38 percent saw them as neither an asset nor a burden.

The Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) had the highest regard for seniors being assets to society at 64 percent. This was followed by the 75+ generation on 59 percent. More than half (52 percent) of Generation X (aged 35-49) viewed older people as an asset. Millennials (aged 18-34) were more likely to be neutral at 46 percent, with only a very few seeing older people as a burden on society, at 8%.



Positive stereotypes outstrip negative

Respondents were asked to write down three words to describe a typical older person in New Zealand. Many of the words they chose are descriptive of their life situation (e.g. retired, grandparent) or appearance (grey-haired, wrinkled). Overall, positive words are used to describe older people across generations more often than negative words (e.g. wise, life experienced, kind, knowledgeable, energetic). The most widely mentioned negative stereotypes are slowing down, wrinkled, health issues, frail.

Our outlook as we age

People look forward to having the freedom to do as much or little as they want

Freedom to do as much or as little as they want (64 percent) and more time, either doing the things they want to do (61 percent) or with friends and family (56 percent) are the aspects of ageing most looked forward to/appreciated.

Younger people are more likely to worry about what life will be like when they reach old age

Over half (56 percent) of Millennials (aged 18-34) agree they *worry about what life will be like when they reach old age*. This drops off with each successive generation, with 45 percent of Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) agreeing with this statement.

Ill health and not having enough money are the main concerns about ageing

As people age, they become less concerned about things related to the ageing process. This shift appears to happen around middle age, with people starting to become less concerned about things such as loneliness and dying around the age of 45.

Physical and mental illness/dementia are the most likely to be of concern (for 58 percent and 56 percent respectively), followed by *not having enough money* (46 percent) and *becoming dependent on others or losing control of their life* (45 percent and 43 percent respectively).

About a third (34 percent) are concerned about *being a burden on family and loneliness or isolation* (32 percent), and 28 percent are concerned about *feeling unsafe or vulnerable* and 25 percent are concerned about *being taken advantage of financially*.

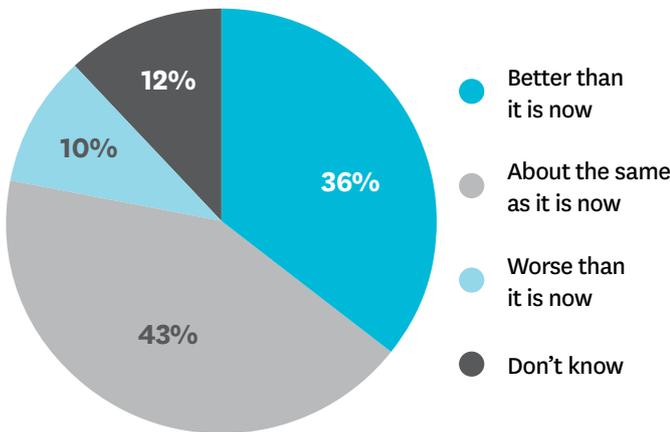
Respondents are more likely to be concerned about *friends/family dying before them* (35 percent) than of *dying themselves* (24 percent).

Concerns about ageing tend to decrease with age

Concerns about ageing tend to decrease with age, particularly around not having enough money (from 56 percent of Millennials to 22 percent of the 75+ Generation) and loneliness or isolation (from 43 percent to 11 percent respectively). The concerns which are least likely to decrease with age are not being able to contribute/feeling like a burden on society (from 28 percent to 19 percent) and becoming mentally ill or getting dementia (from 59 percent to 49 percent).

People are mostly optimistic about their future

More than a third of respondents felt their life would be better than it is now when asked whether they thought it would be better, worse or about the same in five years' time. Forty three percent thought it would be about the same and 10 percent thought it would be worse.



Millennials and Generation Xers were more likely to say they thought their life would be better than it is now (54 percent and 44 percent, respectively). Baby Boomers and members of the 75+ generation were more likely to say they thought their life would be about the same as it is now (57 percent and 53 percent, respectively) or worse (13 percent and 22 percent, respectively).

Those who have never married or are married/living with a partner were more likely to say they thought their life would be better than it is now (45 percent and 35 percent, respectively) than those who were divorced/separated (23 percent) or widowed (14 percent).

Most older people intend to remain in their own home

The majority of participants aged over 60 are living in their own home, either independently (68 percent) or with support from either government or social services (7 percent), family, friends or the community (5 percent), while 5 percent live independently in a retirement community. Most (80 percent) of those over 60, who are currently living in their own home, plan to stay there. 7 percent said they planned to move into a retirement village or rest home and 9 percent didn't know their future living plans.

Age Related Discrimination

Age discrimination is not considered as serious as other forms of discrimination

Ethnicity discrimination was considered by all generations to be the most serious form of discrimination against people in New Zealand, followed by sexual orientation and gender discrimination. There are generational differences in views of the seriousness of age discrimination, with Generation Xers (aged 35-49) and Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) more likely to feel that age discrimination is a serious problem than Millennials (aged 18-34) and the 75+ generation. The different generations rated age discrimination as a serious as follows:

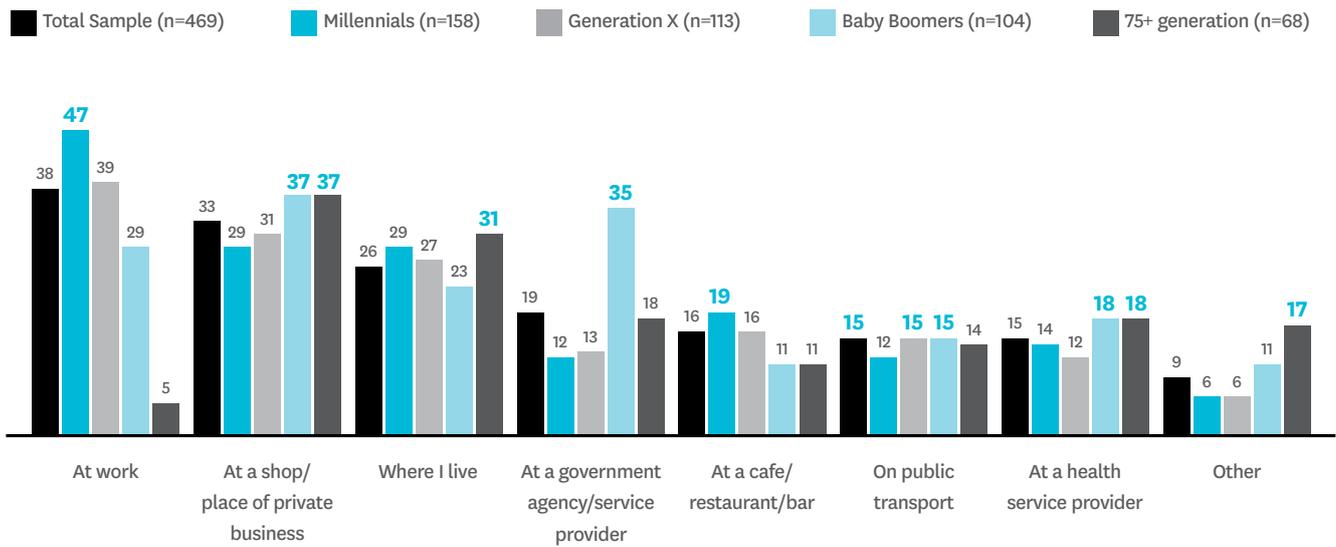
- > 30 percent of Millennials (aged 18-34)
- > 39 percent Generation X (aged 35-49)
- > 38 percent Baby Boomers (aged 50-74)
- > 17 percent 75+ generation (aged over 75).

Experience of a lack of respect and being treated badly due to age

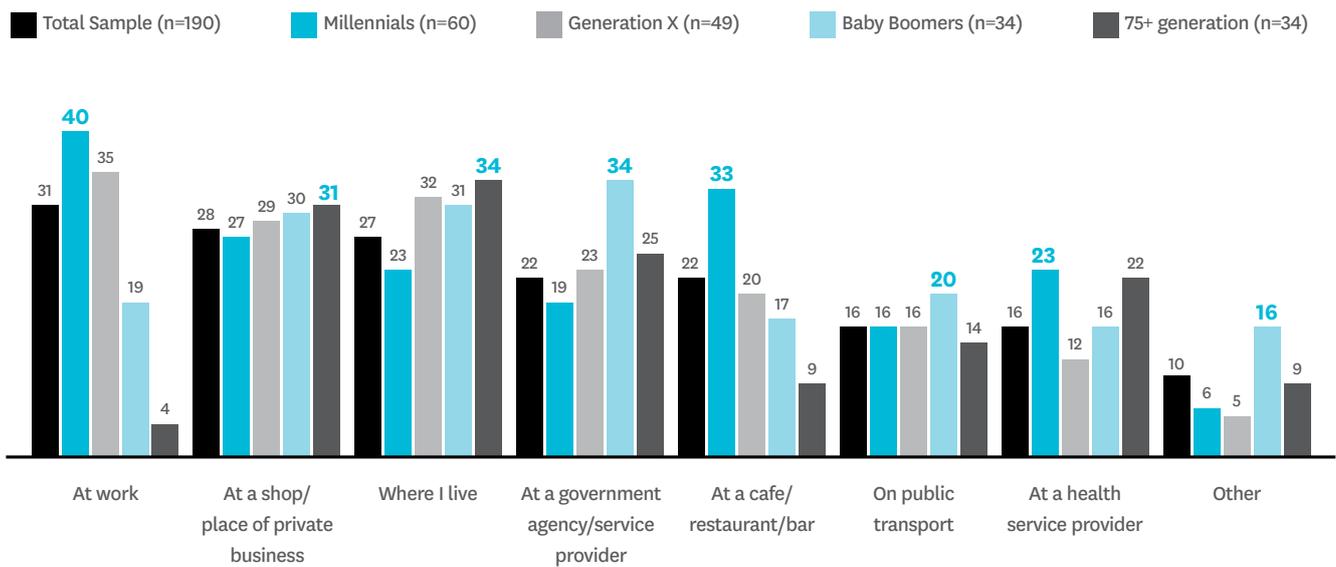
While few have experienced a lack of respect or been poorly treated due to their age in the last year, 6 percent say they experience a lack of respect regularly and one percent experience it all the time. The frequency of experiencing a lack of respect or being treated badly due to age decreases across the generations, with Millennials (aged 18-34) experiencing both more frequently than older generations.

Respondents have most commonly experienced a lack of respect or been treated badly at work, at a shop/place of private business or at home. Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) are more likely to have been shown a lack of respect at a government agency/service provider than other generations.

Where lack of respect due to age occurred (%)



Where being treated badly due to age occurred (%)



26 Percent of people aged 75+ have experienced discrimination and poor treatment as a result of their age in the last 12 months

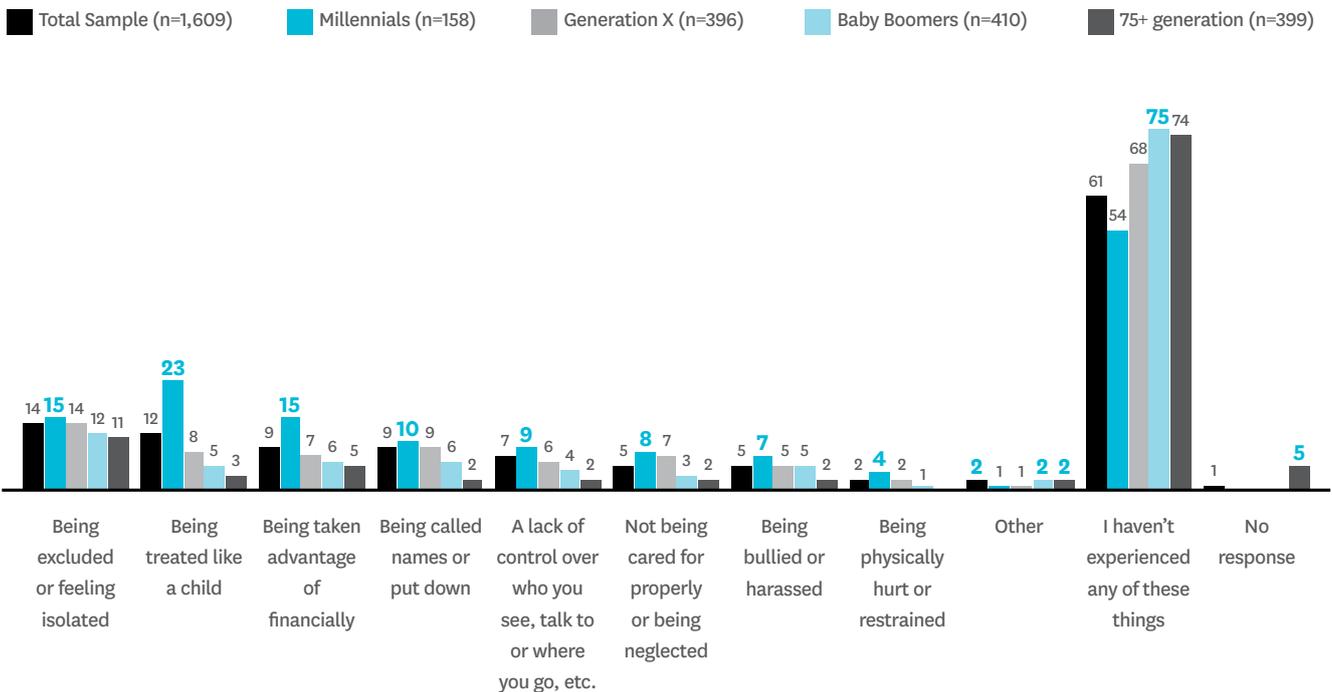
About a quarter (26 percent) of those aged 75+ say they have experienced some form of discrimination/poor treatment as a result of their age in the last year. Of the types of discrimination experienced by people aged 75+, ‘being excluded or feeling isolated’ is the leading form of poor treatment. Around one in ten (11 percent) respondents aged 75+ say they have been excluded or felt isolated as a result of their age. The rates are similar for Baby Boomers (aged 50-74).

However, Millennials (aged 18-34) are the generation that reported the highest levels of discrimination and poor treatment as a result of their age, with nearly half (46 percent) experiencing some form of discrimination/poor treatment due to their age in the last year. Being treated like a child is the leading form of poor treatment for this group, with 23 percent saying they have experienced this.

1/4

people aged 50+ have experienced **poor treatment** as a result of their age in the last 12 months

Experience of pool treatment in the last 12 months



Social Isolation and Exclusion

Being excluded or feeling isolated is the leading form of poor treatment

Of the types of discrimination/poor treatment experienced by those aged 75+, being excluded or feeling isolated is the leading form of poor treatment experienced, with 11 percent saying they have been excluded or isolated because of their age. Baby Boomers (aged 50-74) revealed similar rates of being excluded or feeling isolated, at 12 percent. However, the Millennials (aged 18-34) and Generation Xers (aged 35-49) reported the highest levels of being excluded or feeling isolated, at 15 percent and 14 percent respectively.

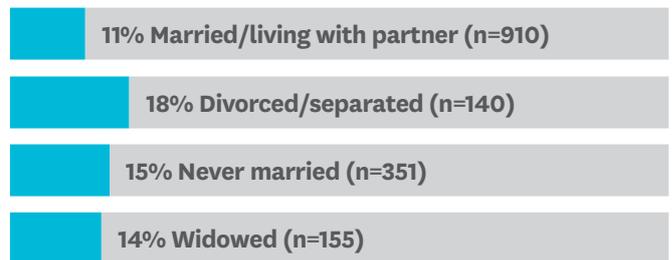
People living in provincial cities and towns are less likely to experience social isolation

Respondents living in major centres such as Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin (15 percent) or in rural areas (15 percent) are more likely than those in provincial cities or towns (both 10 percent) to say they have been excluded or felt isolated.

People who are divorced or separated reported higher rates of social isolation

When looking at marital status, divorced or separated respondents experience the highest rates of being excluded or feeling isolated due to their age (18 percent). Whereas people who are married or living with their partner are less likely to say they have been excluded or felt isolated due to their age (11 percent).

% who have experienced being excluded or feeling isolated



People living independently are less likely to feel invisible because of their age

Those participants aged 75+ living independently either in their own home or in a retirement community are significantly less likely to agree they sometimes feel invisible because of their age, with 16 percent and 13 percent (respectively) agreeing with this statement. Whereas 25 percent of people living at home with support from friends and family, and 30 percent of people living at home with support from government or social services reported sometimes feeling invisible because of their age. Nineteen percent of people in assisted living in a retirement community (e.g. a rest home) agreed they sometimes feel invisible.

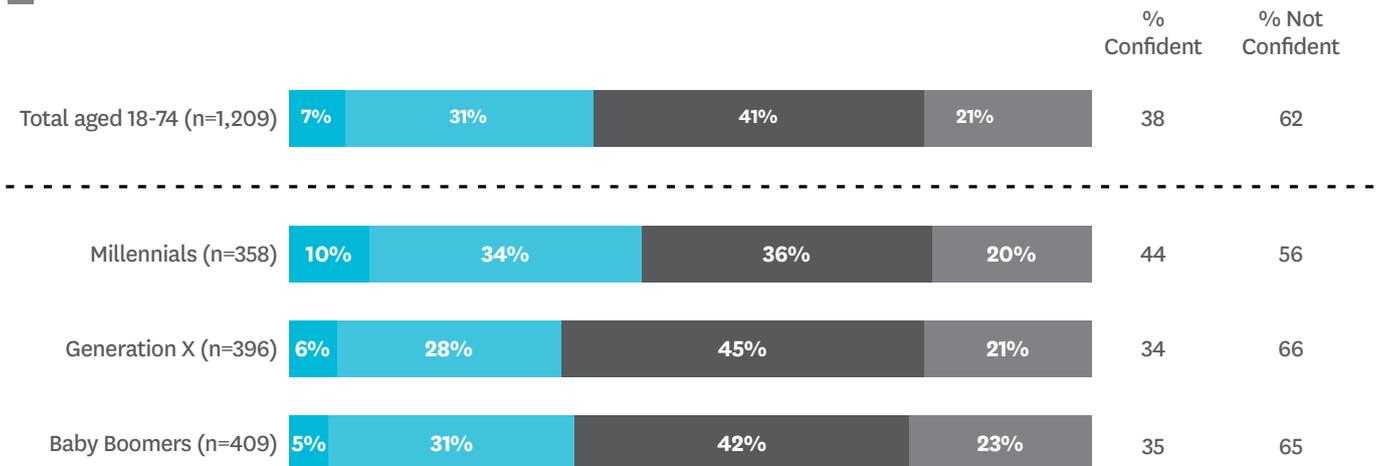
New Zealand’s Preparedness for an Older Population

Awareness of New Zealand’s increasing number of people aged over 65 was relatively low amongst respondents. More than a third of respondents did not feel capable of even choosing a range for the number of people in New Zealand who are 65 and over.

By generation, Millennials (aged 18-34) are the most likely to feel confident (44 percent) in New Zealand’s preparedness for its older population.

After respondents were told there are currently more than 675,000 people aged 65+ in New Zealand and in about 20 years that number will almost double, 62 percent of people indicated they did not feel confident New Zealand will be prepared to cater for this change in the make-up of its population.

- I am very confident New Zealand will be well prepared for this
- I am reasonably confident New Zealand will be well prepared for this
- I am not very confident New Zealand will be well prepared for this
- I am not at all confident New Zealand will be well prepared for this



More respect for older people

Participants were asked to highlight one thing that would make New Zealand a place where people can age positively, where older people are highly valued and where they are recognised as integral to families and communities. The recommendation most commonly made is for more respect/changing attitudes towards older people (7 percent), followed by better healthcare (6 percent). Other recommendations include opportunities to be involved within communities (5 percent) and increasing interaction/involvement with younger people (5 percent) as well as more financial support (5 percent).

Methodology

The sample was structured to ensure sufficient numbers of respondents were achieved in each generation so the results could be reliably analysed within each generation.

In total, 1609 respondents completed the survey. The sample broke down as follows across the generations:

- > Older Generation Z and Millennials (18-34) n= 402
- > Generation X (35-49) n=396
- > Baby Boomers (50-74) n=412
- > 75+ generation (75 years and over) n=399 (including 18 who didn't give a specific age).

Within this sample, quotas were set by generation, gender and region. Additionally, minimums for specific ethnicities were set to ensure their views were represented within this study. In total, interviews were achieved amongst each ethnicity demographic:

- > Maori: 285
- > Pacific: 117
- > Asian: 187

For respondents under the age of 74, the survey was completed online and the sample was provided by Survey Sampling International (SSI).

For respondents over the age of 75, a hard copy survey was provided and respondents were asked to fill it out and return it in a prepaid envelope. When sampling an age ceiling of 90 was set to ensure we were able to achieve 400 completes out of a sample of 1800. Within this age bracket (75-90), the sample was randomly selected from the electoral roll in equal proportion to the gender and regional breakdowns within the New Zealand population.

To account for variations within the sample, the data was weighted by age, gender and region in proportion to the New Zealand population. As equal quotas had been set for each generation to ensure meaningful comparisons could be made within generations, this meant certain generations had lower/higher weight factors applied. For example, as the 75+ generation makes up only about 8 percent of the New Zealand population, but accounted for 25 percent of our sample, these results were weighted down at this stage.

The margin of error on the sample of 1609 is +/- 2.4 percent. For each of the different generations, the margin of error is +/- 4.8 percent for the Baby Boomers and +/- 4.9 percent for the other generations.



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