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# **DWP Progress Report: Item Analysis from the ESS 2008 Age Module.**

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## **Background**

The present analyses are preparatory for developing a reliable limited set of indicators to measure attitudes to age in the UK. The analysis is based on UK data from the European Social Survey (ESS), collected between 1. September 2008 and 19. January 2009, with a sample size of 2,342 (response rate = 54%). Since we base our analysis on the UK data, we refer to the UK in ESS items that named a specific country.

## **1 Analysis**

The current work is the first of two data analyses of items from ESS' ageism module. The aim of this work is to recommend a core, and propose areas of development for a larger, set of items that can be used in a national indicator set on age attitudes. We have investigated how items assessing a specific construct compare in terms of response distributions (e.g. means and variance), we have looked at intercorrelations between items and how items assessing one construct relate to items assessing another construct. For instance, when evaluating items for experiences of age discrimination we compared distributions of responses on the various items and we analysed how these items related to the age of respondents. Another example is a comparison between reported attitudes (prejudice) towards age groups and reported contact across generations.

We originally opted to follow a standard statistical procedure for reducing the length of questionnaire scales (e.g. Stanton, Sinar, Balzer, & Smith, 2002). However, comparisons of ESS age module items with items from the core and other modules in the ESS indicated that we could not use the latter items for validity checks. For instance, we tested items in the age module against an item from the core ESS that asked about experiences of age discrimination. This revealed little consistency but we note that this is because of serious measurement problems with the core item. We also tested items from the ageism module against items on social welfare, uncovering only low correlations. This is an interesting finding in its own right, but we are not pursuing this finding in the current report.

Where appropriate we have also applied exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses to examine specific constructs (e.g. items on stereotypes). However, a structural equation based model fitting approach was not compatible with the item set because of insufficient or diversely measured indicators. Therefore we have pursued an approach based on more detailed item and inter-item analysis, informed by our earlier work on the ACE data (DWP report 599).

## **2 Suggested items for a new survey**

Table 4 at the end of this document gives an overview of the items used in the ESS age module and items we suggest should be included as likely central indicators in the new test

survey. To limit the size of the table, items are referred to by their labels from the data file, not the whole question as used in the survey. The suggested items include new items to be tested (set in italics) -- we recommend that the next stage should test whether a reduced indicator set may use these revised items as more reliable indices in place of certain specific items in the ESS ageism module.

In the following text we refer to constructs assessed in the age module of the ESS (following the same order as in Table 4), and we present our suggestions for items for the new test survey.

The table lists 18 items for the new survey. In addition to these items, we suggest that the test survey should include items and multi-item inventories that can be used for validity tests, to test both convergent and discriminant validity.

### **3 Perceived permeability of age categories and boundaries**

The age module in the ESS includes five items on perceived permeability of age categories and boundaries. We suggest to include three in the new test: (1) Generally, at which age do people stop being described as young, (2) at which age do people start being described as old and (3) how respondents describe people in their 20s and in their 70s (as one group, two separate groups, individuals).

These items define the perceived age boundaries and they will be valuable for longitudinal research investigating changes in perceived boundaries between these age categories. We plan to use later analyses to decide which of these items may be used in the reduced indicator set.

### **4 Perceived status of age categories**

The ESS ageism module includes three items that ask directly for perceived social status (for people in their 20s, for people in their 40s, and for people over 70). It also includes two items that ask respondents to indicate to what extent they believe most people would accept a suitably qualified person under 30 or a person over 70 as their boss. Given our aim to reduce the item set, we suggest either that the 3 status items should be reduced to two or that only the two questions on bosses might be used.

The data show that people in their 40s have the highest social status among the three target groups. Thus we can use this group as a reference category and ask respondents the following two questions:

- Compared to most 40-year olds, do you think people in their 20s have higher or lower status?
- Compared to most 40-year olds, do you think people above 70 have higher or lower status?

Both items can use an 11-point response scale, with the middle point labelled 0 and anchored as the same status as 40- (or perhaps 50-)year old people; responses suggesting higher status can be indicated by +1 to +5, lower status can be indicated by -1 to -5 on the scale.

## 5 Perceived threat of age categories

The age module in the ESS included seven items on perceived intergenerational threat. Four items assess perceived threat from people in their 20s and three items assess perceived threat from people over 70. We suggest that the reduced indicator might use only two items referring to economic threat because of its relevance to the growing need for pension provision as well as competition for part time work from older people.

Note on analyses: In some of the following analyses we focus separately on younger or older sections of the sample. This is because focal tests of anticipated relationships are directed at contrasting age groups. Indeed, the data sometimes show curvilinear relationships with age, confirming the need to pursue analyses of this type.

Table 1 presents correlations between items on perceived threat and the overall attitude towards the target group as well as its perceived social status. The economic threat item was a stronger predictor than the other items, which supports our view that the economic threat item is likely to be a good choice among the threat items.

Table 1 *Correlations between items referring to perceived threat and overall attitude and perceived social status of the target group.*

	People in their 20s as target group		People over 70 as target group	
	Overall Attitude	Social Status	Overall Attitude	Social Status
People in their 20s/over 70 contribution to the economy these days	.36***	.24***	.08**	.16***
People in their 20s/over 70 effect on customs and way of life	.04	.00	.12***	.00
How worried about level of crime committed by people in their 20s	-.10***	.07*	—	—
How worried that employers prefer people in 20s rather than 40 or older	-.03	.07*	—	—
People over 70 are a burden on UK's health service these days	—	—	-.15***	-.06*
	Responses from respondents over 40 (N = 1473)		Responses from respondents under 50 (N = 1265)	

## 6 Stereotype content associated with age categories

Eight items in ESS' age module assessed stereotype content associated with age categories using people in their 20s and people over 70 as target groups. We analysed these items extensively, both in terms of how they were related to each other and how they were related to other items in the module. We compared stereotype items with items on perceived social status and whether people would accept a person from the target group as their boss.

Moreover, we tested how stereotype items related to theoretically associated emotions (envy, admiration, pity, contempt).

Mean values for stereotype items were as expected (e.g. people over 70 scored substantially higher for having high moral standards and respect). However, factor analysis did not support a model assuming a clustering of apparently warmth-oriented items (friendly and having high moral standard) and a clustering of competence items (competent and viewed with respect).<sup>1</sup> Instead, factor analysis of the four stereotype-related items indicated that friendly and competent loaded on one factor, whereas high moral standards and viewed with respect loaded on a different factor. This model had good fit with the data when estimated with confirmatory factor analysis (with all stereotype items for people in their 20s and for people over 70 estimated in one model).<sup>2</sup>

The grouping of high moral standards and respect seems intuitively reasonable (people are likely to have respect for those whom they regard as having high moral standards). The clustering of these two items suggests that one of them might be dropped in the reduced indicator set. The clustering of friendly and competent, however, may not be intuitive. We suggest that both these items are included, even in the reduced item set. Consequently, we suggest that a reduced questionnaire focuses on three stereotype items: viewed as friendly, viewed as competent, and viewed as having high moral standards.

We suggest that the item “viewed with respect” could be dropped because it does not directly refer to a stereotype and our analyses support our assumption that viewing a particular age group with respect may be an effect both of perceived warmth and of perceived competence, making it difficult to distinguish the role of these two stereotypes.

When applied to each age category (20s and over 70) the three stereotype items selected were all statistically significant predictors of respondents’ overall attitude towards that age category ( $p < .001$ ). However regression weights were weak for single stereotype items (with standardised regression weights between 0.09 and 0.13). In contrast, a factor (latent variable) developed based on the three selected stereotype items was substantially associated with the overall attitude (for both target groups, the estimated factor correlated at 0.31 and 0.30 with the item assessing the overall attitude). This confirms that the 3 items will work together in the expected fashion, and that they can potentially also be combined into a reliable superordinate stereotype index.

## 7 Intergroup emotions towards age groups

Eight items in the ageism module in the ESS assessed emotions that people believe are associated with the stereotypes described above. Specifically, respondents indicated to what extent they believed that “most people” maintain envy, admiration, pity, contempt towards people in their 20s and people above 70. We inspected correlations, multivariate associations between stereotype and emotions, and also potential two- and three-way interactions between

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<sup>1</sup> Attempts to model all eight stereotype items and the hypothesised factors with confirmatory factor analysis failed. Estimations resulted in non-positive definite covariance matrices, a not admissible solution. Moreover, RMSEA was relatively high (.08) with this model. Factor loadings were also lower with this model than the alternative model developed based on the data.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. RMSEA = .048 for a model with all eight items, using four factors. In this model, factor loadings were high (standardised over .70) for all items referring to people in their 20s. Items referring to people in their 70s had factor loadings varying between .56 (high moral standards) and .73 (respected); factor loadings for items friendly and competent were strong (.66 and .68).

stereotypes as predictors of the four emotions. Perhaps disappointingly, our conclusion is that a reduced questionnaire could omit questions that ask people for their perception of most people's emotions towards age groups, in part because the emotion items had weak associations with stereotype content associated with age categories. However, we recommend that it would be sensible to test direct emotions (i.e. "to what extent do you feel the following emotions about..") in the next phase of item development because it may well be that direct emotions are an important bridge between perceived social stereotypes on the one hand and direct attitudes and perceptions of threat on the other. We would aim to identify just two emotions (probably envy and pity) that would serve well.

## 8 Prejudice towards age groups

One item in the ageism module assesses the respondent's overall attitude (positive-negative) towards people in their 20s, another item assesses the respondent's overall attitude towards people over 70. We suggest keeping both items for the reduced item set, in part because they are important reference variables against which other items can be tested. In addition, these items are easily understood unambiguous measures that can be repeated over time.

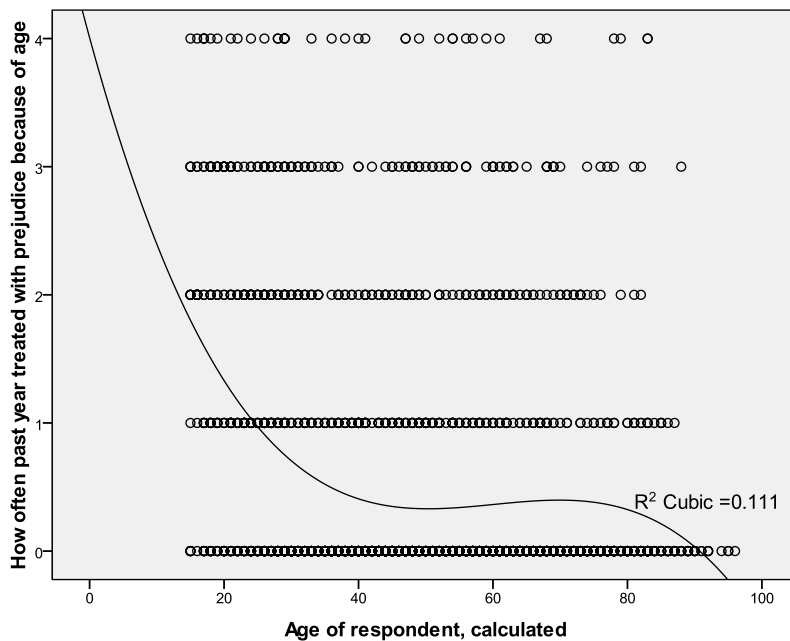
## 9 Experienced discrimination

The age module in the ESS uses three items on perceived age-based discrimination:

- How often, in the past year, has anyone shown prejudice against you or treated you unfairly because of your age?
- How often, if at all, in the past year have you felt that someone showed you a lack of respect because of your age, for instance by ignoring or patronising you?
- How often in the past year has someone treated you badly because of your age, for example by insulting you, abusing you or refusing you services?

The three items were strongly correlated (with correlations at 0.56 or higher). A reduced item set may reasonably use only one of these items. We believe that the first item -- How often, in the past year, has anyone shown prejudice against you or treated you unfairly because of your age -- is a reasonable choice among the three. Figure 1 shows how the respondents' age was related to answers to this item. The graphical presentation includes a so-called cubic regression line to estimate the relationship between the two items (the  $R^2$  of 0.111 means that 11% of the variance in perceived prejudice because of age was explained by respondents' age). Analyses of the two other items on perceived discrimination (felt lack of respect, treated badly) resulted in a very similar regression line, however with lower explained variance in perceived prejudice (i.e. lower  $R^2$  for perceived prejudice).

Figure 1. Regression line (non-linear) for the association between age and experienced prejudice, based on the item “How often, in the past year, has anyone shown prejudice against you or treated you unfairly because of your age”



The association between respondents’ age and their experiences of age discrimination can also be described by splitting the sample into two sub-samples based on age -- up to 40 and older than 40. For people up to 40, the analysis uncovered a substantial negative correlation between age and experiences of age prejudice because of age ( $r = -0.38, p < .001, n = 847$ ). The younger people were, the more likely they were to experience prejudice because of age. In contrast, the analysis of answers from respondents over 40 uncovered no association between age and perceived prejudice ( $r = -0.04, n = 1476$ ). Analyses of the two other items referring to age-based discrimination gave similar results, although with weaker associations between reported discrimination and age among those below 40 ( $r = -0.30$  and  $r = -0.27, ps < .001$ ).

We recommend using the first item although we note that there is more variability in the item tapping respect. These items are best viewed as threshold items, which is to say, it is of greater interest whether a person experienced any age prejudice than how much they experienced. This is justified because people will probably reliably recall the most recent or most vivid instances and are less likely to make very accurate frequency estimates.

We want to highlight an important measurement effect on experiences of discrimination. In the core section of the ESS, very few respondents indicated that they had been discriminated against because of age – only 2.7%. As shown in Table 2, responses to this item were not consistent with the comparable prejudice item from the age module. (Similar results were obtained for the two other age module items on experienced prejudice). Nearly one third (27.3%) of those who indicated they had not experienced age discrimination in the core section of the ESS indicated that they had experienced prejudice because of age when answering the age module questions. Moreover, nearly one half (44.4%) of those who said they had experienced discrimination because of age in the core, said they had not experienced age-related prejudice in the age module.

Table 2. *Cross tabulation of the item on age discrimination in the core section of the ESS and our selected item on experienced prejudice from the age module. (Percentages for responses the item from the age module)*

		ESS core item on discrimination because of age	
		Not marked	Marked
Item from the age module:	Never	72.7	44.4
How often past year treated with prejudice because of age	1	12.9	14.3
	2	8.1	22.2
	3	4.9	11.1
	Very often	1.4	7.9
Total		100.0	100.0

It appears that the very low numbers who said they experienced age prejudice in response to the core item are attributable to measurement problems associated with that item. The item asks whether respondents belong to a group that has experienced prejudice. However, it is likely that respondents interpreted this as meaning a physical group of people not a social category. The item in the age module asks whether prejudice was experienced because of their age. It is plausible that this provides a much more accurate estimates of experiences of ageism. Indeed, we can be sure from the DWP Report 559 evidence that the estimates from this measure are consistent with previous estimates when the item is presented, and the estimates are meaningfully related to other variables (e.g. age). There are other limitations associated with the item in the ESS core. One is that it is integrated in a long list of possible sources of discrimination. It is highly likely that this list format also contributed to underreported discrimination because of cognitive overload on respondents. In addition, the core item is dichotomous (i.e. yes or no), which also produces measurement error.

## 10 Contact with different age categories

The age module in the ESS includes several items on contact across age groups. Pleasant intergroup contact, such as cross-group friendship is known to be able to reduce prejudice, although generally with moderate effect (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). We note that age attitudes may differ from other forms of group prejudice by potentially being more affected by contact within families than between friends. People tend to seek friends who are of similar age (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), whereas families provide an opportunity for contact over age differences (only rarely between ethnic groups).

The age module in the ESS asks about contact with friends other than family members, whether it is possible to discuss personal issues with any of these friends, whether the respondent has younger or older family members, and whether it is possible to discuss personal issues with any of these family members. The questionnaire also asks for work experience with people in their 20s and with people over 70.

Table 3 presents results from a multivariate regression analysis of contact items and the overall attitude towards the target group. The analysis of attitudes towards people in their 20s



used the sub-sample of respondents older than 40 years; analyses of attitudes to people over 70 years used the sub-sample of respondents up to 50 years old.

Attitude to people in their 20s was associated with the opportunity to talk with children or grandchildren aged 15 to 30 and work experience with colleagues in their 20s. Having children or grandchildren did not itself predict the overall attitude towards people in their 20s, instead the ability to discuss personal issues (i.e. actual contact) seemed important. Friendship (including the opportunity to discuss personal issues) had no association with the overall attitude towards people in their 20s.

Table 3 *Contact variables as predictors of overall attitude*

	Target group	
	People in their 20s <sup>a</sup>	People over 70 <sup>b</sup>
Having friends in the target group (family members excluded)	.02	.09***
Can discuss personal issues with friend(s) in the target group	.00	.03
Having family members in the target group	.02	.13*
Can discuss personal issues with family members in the target group	.16***	.04
Time working with colleagues from the target group	.11**	.07

a Responses from respondents older than 40 ( $n = 1476$ )

b Responses from respondents up to 50 ( $n = 1266$ )

A subsequent analysis of answers from respondents older than 70 years ( $n = 354$ ) uncovered that the possibility of discussing personal issues with family members of the target group was a moderate predictor ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ) of attitudes towards people in their 20s. Time working with colleagues from the target group was a stronger predictor ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ), the other contact predictors did not explain attitudes towards people in their 20s.

An analysis restricted to respondents up to 50 and using people over 70 as the target group (see Table 3) supported the assumption that having older family members positively affects attitudes towards elderly people. Having friends who were over 70 had a minor association with improved attitudes towards people over 70. A similar analysis restricted to people below 30 ( $n = 416$ ) or below 40 ( $n = 814$ ) uncovered no significant associations between contact items and the overall attitude towards people older than 70.

Based on our analyses of contact items, we suggest developing and testing two new items in the test survey for the reduced indicator set. We suggest two items that both combine four of the items used in the ageism model of the ESS (friends, family members, opportunity to discuss personal issues with friends or with family members from the target group). The suggested items are:

- Do you have a friend or family member below 30 with whom you can discuss personal issues such as feelings, beliefs or experiences?
- Do you friend or family member above 70 with whom you can discuss personal issues such as feelings, beliefs or experiences?

A decision may be required as to whether we want to retain a separate item about contact through work. In the ESS data, 14% of respondents under 30 years reported to have worked

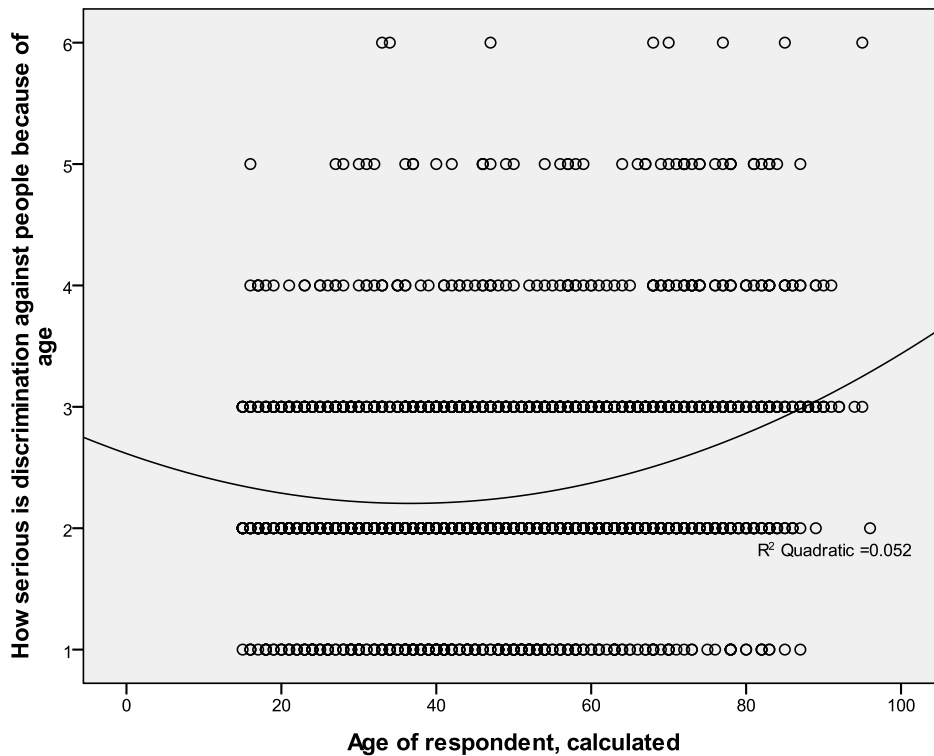
with people over 70. Among people over 70, 31% reported working with people under 30 years. These results suggest that there is already substantial intergenerational contact at work places, a form of contact that may increase in the future. This topic might require a separate investigation, involving comparison of employer statistics as well as probing of the contexts in which work contact happens (e.g. it might be voluntary work among older people and care work among younger people). This is an issue for further discussion.

## 11 Motivation to control prejudice

The ageism model in the ESS includes three items on motivation to control prejudice towards other age groups. These items ask for (1) the importance of being unprejudiced, (2) importance of being seen as unprejudiced and (3) how serious discrimination against people because of age is.

We believe that the last item -- How serious is discrimination against people because of their age -- constitutes the most interesting item for a reduced questionnaire, but we may wish to revise the response format to expand from the current 6-point response format to at least a seven-point format (from 0 to 6) in order to increase variance in responses). In its current format, this item is moderately non-linearly associated with age, with its peak among elder people and a moderate increase among younger people (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Regression line (non-linear) for the association between age and reported seriousness of age-based discrimination.



## 12 Conclusions and next steps

The resulting recommended items are summarised in Table 3. The preceding analyses point to some fairly clear decisions about prospective items in a reduced indicator set but they also point to several areas where we need to develop and test new items, either to provide convergent validity for the indicator items, or to improve or consolidate those items. We propose that, following further discussions with DWP and the Kent team, we should now move onto this second phase. During this time we may also check BSAS, ESS and ELSA for additional items relating to pensions, health and mutual dependency between generations (e.g. at what age to most people stop depending on their parents, and at what age do most older people need to draw on help from their younger relatives). We will also communicate with the ESS Welfare team and the ESS age module team in Lisbon.

## 13 References

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Table 4. *Items in the ESS ageism module and suggested items for phase 2 development of the reduced indicator set*

Construct	Item in the ageism model of ESS (shortened description, as in data file)	Proposed items for testing (Items in <i>italics</i> are new or rephrased, we suggest testing these items against the original items)
I. Perceived permeability of age categories and boundaries	Age people stop being described as young	1. Age people stop being described as young
	Age people start being described as old	2. Age people start being described as old
	Which age group belonging to Strong or weak sense of belonging to age group How see people in their 20s and over 70	3. How see people in their 20s and over 70 [categories]
II. Perceived status of age categories	How most people view status of people in their 20s	4. How most people view status of people in their 20s
	How most people view status of people in their 40s	5. How most people view status of people in their 40s
	How most people view status of people over 70	6. How most people view status of people over 70 7. <i>What in your view is the social status your age group compared to people in their 40s?</i>
III. Social distance	How acceptable for most people if qualified 30 year old appointed as their boss	8. How acceptable is it for most people if a qualified 30 year old is appointed as their boss
	How acceptable for most people if qualified 70 year old appointed as their boss	9. How acceptable is it for most people if a qualified 70 year old is appointed as their boss
IV. Perceived threat of age categories	How worried about level of crime committed by people in their 20s	
	How worried that employers prefer people in 20s rather than 40 or older	
	People in their 20s effect on customs and way of life People in their 20s contribution to the economy these days People over 70 a burden on health service these days People over 70 effect on customs and way of life	5. People in their 20s contribution to the economy these days 6. People over 70 contribution to the economy these days
V. Stereotype content associated with age	Most people view those in their 20s as friendly	7. Most people view those in their 20s as friendly
	Most people view those in their 20s as competent	8. Most people view those in their 20s as competent

Construct	Item in the ageism model of ESS (shortened description, as in data file)	Proposed items for testing (Items in <i>italics</i> are new or rephrased, we suggest testing these items against the original items)
categories	<p>Most people view those in their 20s as having high moral standards</p> <p>Most people view those in their 20s with respect</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 as friendly</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 as competent</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 as having high moral standards</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 with respect</p>	<p>9. Most people view those in their 20s as having high moral standards</p> <p>10. Most people view those over 70 as friendly</p> <p>11. Most people view those over 70 as competent</p> <p>12. Most people view those over 70 as having high moral standards</p>
VI. Perceived intergroup emotions towards age groups	<p>Most people view those in their 20s with envy</p> <p>Most people view those in their 20s with pity</p> <p>Most people view those in their 20s with admiration</p> <p>Most people view those in their 20s with contempt</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 with envy</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 with pity</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 with admiration</p> <p>Most people view those over 70 with contempt</p>	<p>(Given the limitations in a short questionnaire, we suggest dropping these items..However, we propose testing personal emotions perhaps using a different response scale such as “How many x would you say you sometimes feel envious of: None, a few, about half, most, all”)</p>
VII. Direct prejudice towards age groups	<p>Overall how negative or positive feel towards people in their 20s</p> <p>Overall how negative or positive feel towards people over 70</p>	<p>13. Overall how negative or positive feel towards people in their 20s</p> <p>14. Overall how negative or positive feel towards people over 70</p>
VIII. Experienced discrimination	<p>How often past year treated with prejudice because of age</p> <p>How often past year treated with prejudice because of sex</p> <p>How often past year treated with prejudice because of ethnic background</p> <p>How often past year felt lack of respect because of age</p> <p>How often past year treated badly because of age</p>	<p>15. How often past year treated with prejudice because of age</p>
IX. Contact with different age categories	<p>How many friends other than family younger than 30</p> <p>Can discuss personal issues with friends younger than 30</p> <p>How many friends other than family aged over 70</p> <p>Can discuss personal issues with friends aged over 70</p> <p>Respondents age, younger or older than 30</p>	<p>16. Do you have a friend or a family member below 30 with whom you can discuss personal issues such as feelings, beliefs or experiences?<sup>a</sup> (The response format may use similar categories as the ageism scale in the ESS [5 values on an ordinal scale], but it might also be extended somewhat)</p>

Construct	Item in the ageism model of ESS (shortened description, as in data file)	Proposed items for testing (Items in <i>italics</i> are new or rephrased, we suggest testing these items against the original items)
	Any children or grandchildren between age 15 and 30 Can discuss personal issues with children or grandchildren age 15 to 30 Any members of family aged over 70 Can discuss personal issues with members of family aged over 70 Done paid or voluntary work last month Time spent working with colleagues in their 20s last month Time spent working with colleagues aged over 70 last month	17. Do you a friend or a family member above 70 with whom you can discuss personal issues such as feelings, beliefs or experiences? <sup>a</sup>
X. Motivation to control prejudice	How important to be unprejudiced against other age groups How important to be seen as being unprejudiced against other age groups How serious is discrimination against people because of age	18. How serious is discrimination against people because of age

NOTE: The table does *not* presuppose a sequence for questioning. This is something that could be tested subsequently. At present we will assume the order will follow the sequences in the ESS survey.

a The item is hybrid based on a set of related items