

Psychologists offer advice on being inclusive across the age range

International Day of Older Persons is observed on Tuesday 01 October and, with this year's theme being *The Journey to Age Equality*, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) is aiming to draw attention to the necessity in society of being inclusive of all ages.

In 2013, *The National Positive Ageing Strategy* was published by the Department of Health as part of the Healthy Ireland initiative. In this Strategy, the National Goal 1 was to “Remove barriers to participation and provide more opportunities for the continued involvement of people as they age in all aspects of cultural, economic and social life in their communities according to their needs, preferences and capacities”. Reports from the Department of Health in 2016 and 2018 outline several key indicators that are being tracked to measure implementation of the Positive Ageing Strategy, including “enabling people to age with confidence [...] and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible”. It is evident from these reports that Ireland is doing well, but that there is still room for more improvements.

While noting the role that the Positive Aging Strategy will play going forward, it is clear that as a society, we have come to embrace ageist terminology such as ‘millennials’, ‘baby boomers’, and ‘snowflakes’. However, since the elderly population is the most rapidly growing of age groups (United Nations, 2019), it is important to address the implications that ageist attitudes and terminology may have on society, especially in the “Third age”.

Dr Nick Kidd, Clinical Psychologist and Chartered Member of the PSI, states: “On this, the International Day of Older Persons, we must try to better understand the impact of ageism on self-respect, significance, dignity, and quality of life. It is, therefore, necessary for our society to appreciate and validate contributions across the age range which must, of course, include the older members of our communities. Addressing negative age-related commentary, most of which may be unconscious, would be a vital step in increasing inclusivity for all ages. We have come a long way in addressing racial, gender and sexual inequality. It is now time to turn our attentions to the inequities of age.”

Some examples of negative age-related commentary might include:

- The use of terms such as “silver surfers”;
- Describing a moment when we are momentarily confused as a “senior moment”;
- Assuming all older persons need assistance and are “dodderly” or “grumpy”;
- The assertion that one would rather “die than live with dementia”;

- The so-called “grey tsunami” and anticipated impact on the economy and healthcare systems;
- The association of ageing with physical decline.

How older people contribute to our society:

- The guardians of our history;
- Grandparenting and childcare;
- Financial support;
- Experience and advice;
- Volunteers;
- Carers;
- Socialisers and singers;
- Continue to promote “fading” skills;
- Social cohesiveness.

It is clear that older people play a vital role in all communities. How societies treat them now lays the groundwork for how the older person will be perceived in the future. As Nelson Mandela said, “a society that does not value its older people denies its roots and endangers its future.” We ask the younger people in our communities to consider how they would like to be viewed by society when they reach the Third Age.

ENDS.

For media queries, or to arrange an interview with a PSI spokesperson, please contact:

Lisa Stafford

Head of Communications

087 945 2801 or lisastafford@psychologicalsociety.ie

To note:

- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) is the learned and professional body for psychology in the Republic of Ireland. Established in 1970, the Society currently has almost 3,000 members;
- The PSI is committed to maintaining high standards of practice in psychology and also to exploring new and innovative ways of furthering psychology as an applied science.