

How old is old in ageing research?

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Why the question?

- ▶ Wide age ranges in different studies
 - Downward drift
 - 55+ AHURI study of older peoples' use of housing
 - 50+ in study of recruitment of older adults for research
 - Wide variations in populations studied
 - Age not fully or consistently reported

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Baby Boomers – 14 studies

Age range	No.	Data base
Correct	3	Sample surveys
• Age range – 45-64 in 2006	4	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA)
• Inclusive – 3/4 5 yr age groups	2	National Health Survey (NHS)
• Exclusive – only 1 age group outside range	1	Survey (AARP) 30-65
Too young	2	Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health Cohorts 47-52, 53-58 + 65-70
• Lower age well below 45	1	Focus groups, 41-70
• Not inclusive - limited age range	1	NSW Population Health Survey, 45+
Too old	1	
• Open ended upper age	1	

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Definitions

- ▶ **Chronological**
 - date of birth, current age
- ▶ **Biological**
 - age-related changes e.g. menopause
- ▶ **Social**
 - Generations
 - ▶ Depression Generation
 - ▶ Baby Boomers – later and longer in Australia than in US, – first BBs reach 65 in 2011
 - Life transitions and age-based relationships
 - ▶ Increasingly wide chronological age ranges
 - ▶ e.g. retirees, grandparents.

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Definitions

- ▶ **Formal**
 - ABS definition of mature workers - 45 and over
 - Age of eligibility for Age Pension - changing
 - Service planning
 - Residential aged care 70+, and 50-70 Indigenous
 - But not a criterion for admission

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Methods

- ▶ Review of 40 papers in AJA, published 2008-10
- ▶ Analysis of
 - age-based inclusion criteria
 - reporting of summary statistics and age distributions
 - range of research designs

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Inclusion criteria

Lower age bound	No. of studies	
45+	1	Actual youngest 45
50+	3	
55+	5	
60+	7	
65+	6	
70+	4	Open-ended upper bounds
Other e.g. RACH post menopausal,	14	Actual oldest 103 58 year range

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Reporting of age of subjects

Statistics	No. of studies
Mean (SD)	12
Mean (SD), Range, Distribution, Group %	9
Distribution only	9
Mean or Range or Group %	5
Narrow cohort only	1
Not reported	4

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Study designs

Design	No.	Focus
RCT	2	Both Mean 70, range 60–100
Clinical/Experimental	14	Older ages: RACH residents, inpatients
Survey – Population/Random	6	Wider age ranges
– Purposeful	7	Internet users > Online
– Convenience/other	4	Varied age ranges
Analysis of large databases	5	ALSWH, HILDA, Census, NSW OPHS, RACH MDS
Focus groups	2	Young and old groups

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Why does age matter?

1. Interpreting relationships

- ▶ **Ageing effects**
 - related to growing older – biological
- ▶ **Cohort effects**
 - experience of particular group at a particular time – Veterans
- ▶ **Generation or period effects**
 - experiences that have lasting effects that are different to those who have come before and after.
 - social change
 - Divorce Law Reform, universal access to health care

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Why does age matter?

2. Imbalance in attention

	Younger	Older
Healthy	Ageing well	?
Frail/ill	?	RACH residents Clients/patients

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Why does age matter?

3. Technical issues

- ▶ **Poor reporting**
 - inclusion criteria not specified
 - averages can disguise critical age-related differences
 - over-generalisation of findings based on average age
 - outliers in convenience samples
- ▶ **ABS/AIHW**
 - publish 65+, but need at least 65–69, 70+

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Why does age matter? 4. Theoretical frameworks

- ▶ Australian research is “rampantly empiricist”
- ▶ Lack of explanatory theory
 - Over-emphasis on micro-level analysis, agency and the individual
 - Lack of awareness of macro-level phenomena and structural contexts of ageing.
 - Some examples:
 - Retirees' expectations / Impact of the Super Guarantee
 - Consumer directed care / Long term care insurance

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Conclusions

As researchers in ageing, we should:

- ▶ recognise **age per se** as one of the main dimensions of diversity among older people
- ▶ do more thorough aged-based analyses
 - especially in research that covers a wide age range
 - e.g. separate identification of
 - people ageing with disability,
 - early onset age related conditions,
 - disability associated with ageing
- ▶ rebalance our attention from baby boomers to the old-old - no-one else is looking at them.

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