



Ageism and youngism trigger different kinds of age discrimination

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Background

Robert Butler coined ageism as “..prejudice by one age group toward other age groups” (Butler 1969 p.243), but in the same article stated that: “Age-ism reflects a deep seated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle aged – a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old...” (Butler 1969, p.243).

A few years later he revised his definition of ageism accordingly: “... a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old...” (Butler 1975, p.12).

Recently, discrimination of younger persons is again included in the concept of ageism (Bratt et al. 2020, De la Fuente-Núñez 2021, WHO 2021).

Studies based on the European Social Survey found, in the majority of the 28 countries included, higher prevalence of being discriminated against because of age among younger than among older age groups (Ayalon 2014, Bratt et al. 2018).

The aim of this paper is to discuss if discrimination against older and younger persons is different enough to deserve distinct concepts; ageism resulting in age discrimination of older groups and for instance youngism resulting in age discrimination of younger groups (Francioli & North 2021).

Method

Data consist of complaints on age discrimination sent to the Norwegian Discrimination Board in the period 2018-2023. The intention is to get some impression of how age discrimination may affect younger and older age groups differently. Complaints on age discrimination are not to be taken as evidence for the prevalence of age discrimination against younger and older citizens. A vast majority of those exposed to age discrimination, do not complain to the Board, and about two thirds of the complaints to the Board are dismissed of formal reasons or because the Board consider the complaint to be obviously unfounded.

Data for this study are the complaints where the Board has concluded with either ‘approved’ or ‘disapproved’, amounting to 109 complaints on age discrimination, 49 in working life and 60 in other areas. The Board publish their line of reasoning for each decisions at <https://www.diskrimineringsnemnda.no/klagesaker-og-statistikk>

Results

The 109 complaints about age discrimination mainly came from persons younger than 25 years (52 complaints: 48 %) and from persons older than 50 years of age (39 complaints: 36 %). Older complainers mainly complain about discrimination in working life (34 complaints) (particularly recruitment discrimination). Only 5 complaints from people 50+ are about age discrimination outside working life. The young complainers (< 25 years) most often complain about age discrimination outside working life (49 complaints) (particularly on being denied access to bars and nightclubs with age restrictions), and only 3 complaints are on age discrimination in working life.

Thus, there is a very sharp difference between the types of age discrimination complained about from younger and older persons.

In addition, there is a distinct difference in the Board’s reactions to the complaints. The complaints from older complainers are more often disapproved (34) than approved (7). For younger complainers the reactions are opposite; 10 disapproved and 50 approved complaints.

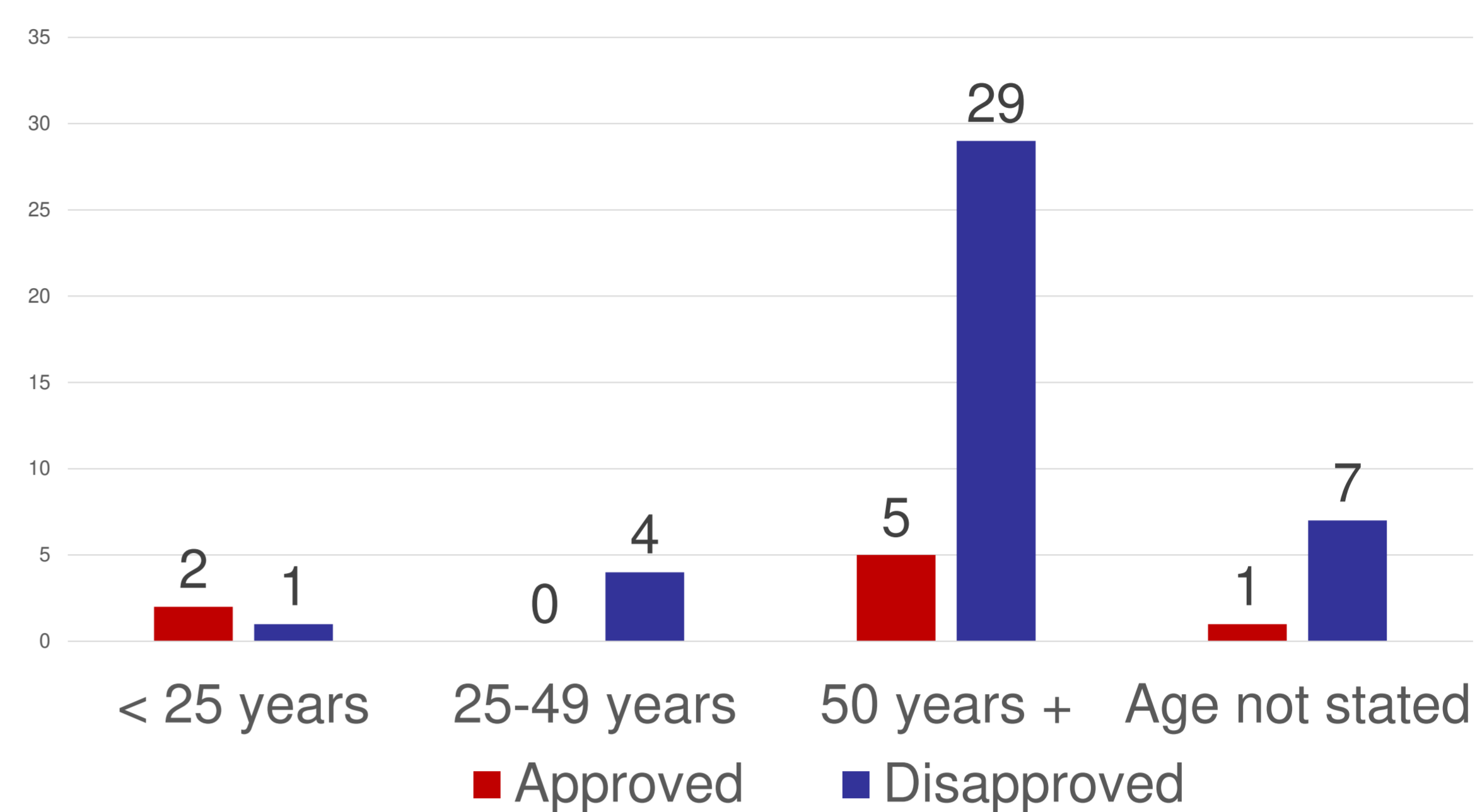


Figure 1. Number of complaints on age discrimination *in working life*, approved and disapproved, by age of the complainer. 2018-2023. (N=49)

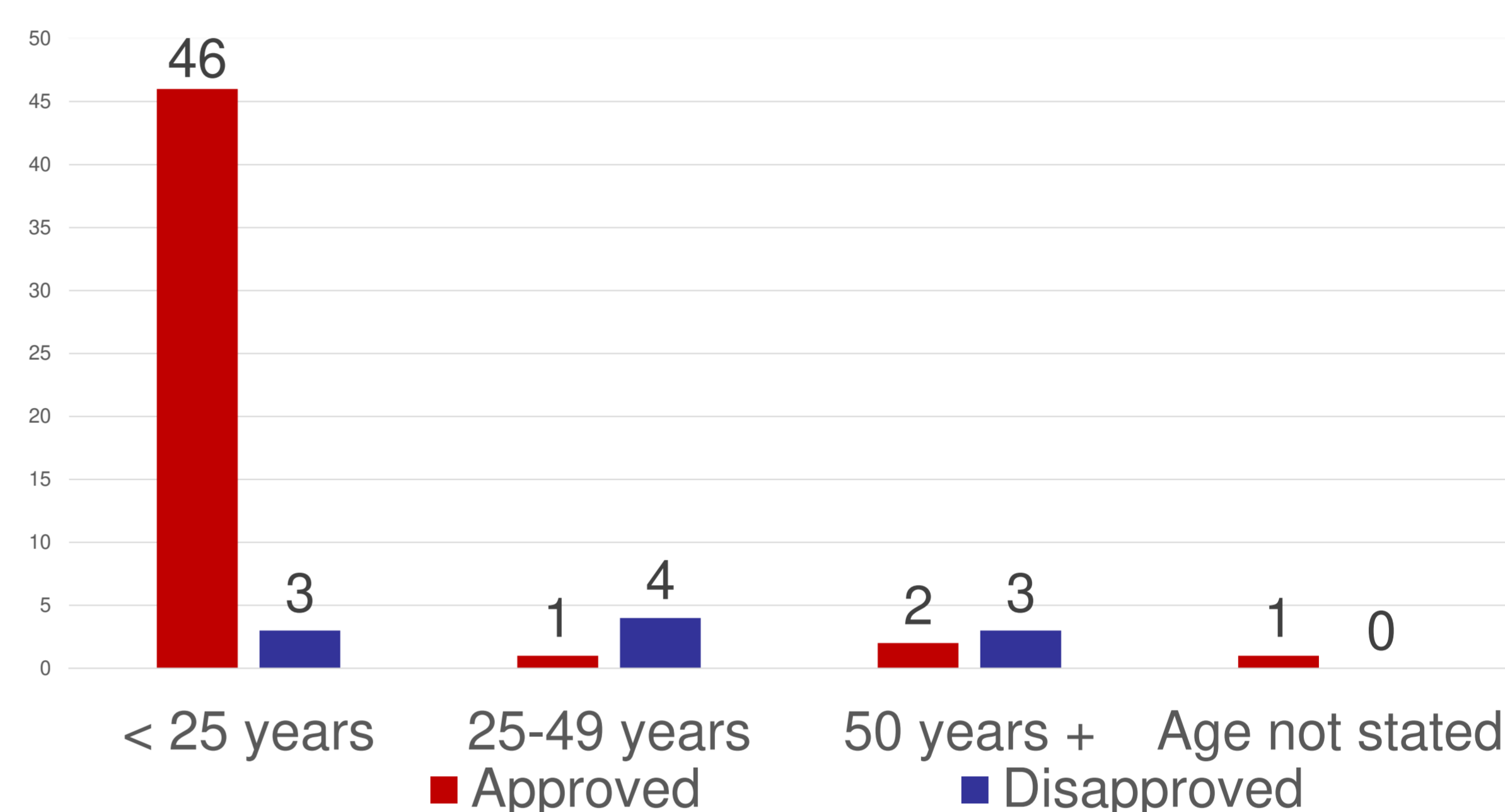


Figure 2. Number of complaints on age discrimination *outside working life*, approved and disapproved, by age of the complainer. 2018-2023. (N=60)

The difference between the Board’s reactions to the age groups is not necessarily a direct effect of the complainers age, but the results nevertheless indicate that the experience of age discrimination may differ considerably between the below 25 years old and the above 50 years.

The dynamics behind age discrimination adds to the difference because “a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old...” (Butler 1969, p.243) cannot explain age discrimination of young people.

Conclusion

Both the study of discrimination against older persons and the equally important study of discrimination against younger persons would be best served by conceptual distinction, reserving the concept of ageism for stereotypes and prejudices resulting in discrimination against older persons.

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