

# gender

gender discrimination and ageist perceptions  
newsletter

■ 2005 Issue 1 ■



## welcome...

...we thought you would like to learn more about the project and if you turn to page three you'll find details of the two focus groups which have been used to inform the research on voluntary sector and community groups. This newsletter also highlights findings from the pilot study for the employment and higher education strand of the project. Read the interview with a life-long volunteer (page two), as well as the other news, contacts and briefing notes sections on page four.



EUROPEAN UNION  
European Social Fund

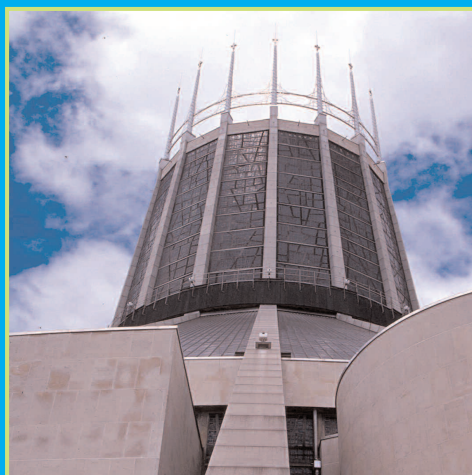
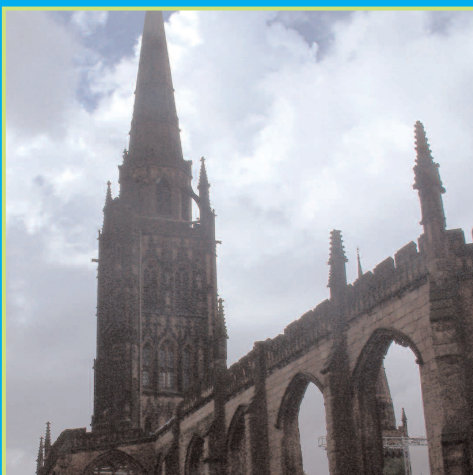
pilot study  
outline



Over the past two decades there has been a dramatic decline in the employment of people over 50. According to Age Concern more than two million people aged between 50 and 65 are out of work. Although the participation rates for women in this age group have risen in recent years, reaching 67 per cent in 2003, the majority of older women are employed in low paid, low status and part time work.

Ageism is widely recognised as the most common form of discrimination, but is age prejudice alone enough to explain the discrimination experienced by women over 50? The GDAP Pilot Study reports on the hidden aspects of ageism at work.

Read a summary of the findings on page two. Missed the first newsletter? Catch up by going to <http://cwis.livjm.ac.uk/olf/gdap>



## stop press...

**The geographical focus of the research has now widened from Liverpool and Coventry to include all areas within the UK.** Organisations within the private, public and voluntary or community sector and also higher education institutions are welcome to contribute to the research. In addition, if you are over the age of fifty we would like to hear from you about your work/life experiences whether positive or negative, and what your perceptions and beliefs are on employment, volunteering and accessing educational/training opportunities.



# pilot study findings

As part of a much larger research project funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), 12 women aged 50 and over were invited to share their experiences and perceptions of age-related matters in employment. We wanted to find out if the women had encountered age discrimination and if so, how their experiences had affected the availability of opportunity and choice at work.

Seven of the 12 women reported past discrimination based on their age, gender or a combination of both. Three women had experienced discrimination at a very young age, one as young as 35. Other women had confronted discrimination with respect to motherhood and the care of the family. It was felt that employers at that time thought women were only interested in work until they got married or started a family. As the women grew older, the time taken out of the labour market to have and raise their children had had a profound affect on the availability of opportunity and choice. Although most of the women went back to work, they started at a lower level and had less time to progress.

Many of the women had experienced ageism in both training and promotion. One woman had stopped applying for promotion because she felt she had little or no chance of success. Another woman had worked for the same company for over 20 years and had watched less experienced staff gain promotion into top management, while she had remained at the same level. Nearly all of the women referred to the under-representation of older women at a senior level.

Nine of the women experienced workplace banter about mental and physical decline. Four of the women had experienced

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a combination of gender-age stereotyping (i.e. 'mother hen'). Some of the women accepted this prejudice as a mild form of office humour, while other women were offended by such behaviour

On a more positive note, many of the participants wanted to remain in work until retirement age, and three said that they would like to switch to part time work and stay in work beyond retirement age. The women were also keen to emphasise the value of older employees in terms of their experience, maturity and commitment.

How do your experiences compare with the results of our pilot study? The GDAP team want to hear from you if you are over 50 and have experienced ageism in the workplace and/or in recruitment and selection, or if you have experienced positive treatment on the grounds of age. We also want to hear from men of this age-group to find out how your experiences compare with our pilot study.

## diane hodges...

...is Area Administration Support Manager for the British Red Cross in Coventry. She has been a paid employee at the organisation for the last 27 years, but amazingly, has been an active volunteer since she was 10 years old and continues to volunteer to this day.

Now 61, Diane left school with no formal qualifications but has worked her way through the ranks to her present position. When asked what she enjoyed about her job, Diane replied, "working with people and the staff here is very rewarding. Money doesn't come into it when you work for a charity."

Diane believes that older people have something more to offer in the voluntary sector, due to their age, which is often overlooked. "Experience of life," she says, "is sometimes more important than qualifications."



Diana Hodges (centre) pictured with her two assistants Tracey MacKenzie and Bhavna Kavia

## research strand II:

# the voluntary sector

The second strand of the GDAP project focuses on voluntary sector organisations and community groups. Our research will establish organisations' attitudes towards older workers and identify whether this sector takes a positive or negative approach to involving older adults as staff and volunteers.

The study will investigate the work and life history of paid staff and volunteers over 50. We will also look at their current life situation and activities in order to determine whether these have had an effect on their participation in the voluntary sector:

Two initial focus groups have been conducted with both paid staff and volunteers of a large charity. All participants were over 50 years of age. The focus groups were organised so that everyone taking part had the opportunity to be involved in the decisions on what the research should cover. This also enabled the research team to get a better understanding of what issues and topics were of importance to these groups. Both focus group discussions were extremely successful and will be used to shape the questionnaire design and thematic focus of later interviews.

Clear themes emerging from the focus groups centred around the participants not viewing themselves as 'old'. They believe they have great skills and experience to offer and are completely capable of undertaking work activities. The voluntary sector seems to be perceived as more 'age' friendly than the private and public sectors. Participants identified that they are given responsibility and control, which other sectors may withhold from their older workers. The participants also felt that the sector's approach to flexible working and staff development were also a great incentive for their age group. However, they believed that remuneration within the voluntary sector was not sufficient to support a family nor did it offer good career progression prospects.

While age discrimination had been experienced by several of the participants in previous employment, none had experienced any barriers accessing their current roles. When they had experienced age discrimination in the past, they felt it had negatively affected their confidence and morale.

Issues regarding retirement age and age as an indicator of ability were also aired during the sessions.

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We are now seeking to make contact with people over the age of 50 who work for a voluntary organisation or community group. You may be in either paid or unpaid work, or you may manage a voluntary organisation with staff and/or volunteers over 50.

**If you fit any of the above criteria and are interested in taking part in the research, please contact Natasha Butler, contact details on page 4.**



# news and feedback

As many readers will know, the GDAP research project has produced a 2005 calendar, highlighting positive images of older people in our communities. We would like to thank all the community groups who kindly supplied the photographs. Your help is really appreciated.

We hope to produce another calendar next year and, if you know of a community group who can promote a positive view of age and gender, we would love to hear about them. See below for our contact details.

The GDAP research project has been in the news. *The Coventry Evening Telegraph* (27 November 2004) and

the *Liverpool Echo* (30 October 2004) both had articles explaining the aims and objectives of the project.

Channel Four presenter Rosie Boycott recently interviewed Dr Diane Grant for the '30 Minutes' programme, broadcast in February 2005. The programme highlighted how older women still face discrimination in many spheres of life, partly due to the ageing process and physical appearance. Broadcaster Rosie Boycott believes that older men do not face this kind of discrimination in the same way as women and interviewed various experts as research for the programme.

Thanks for the comments about the Autumn issue of *Agender* - the vast majority were very positive. In response to your comments we have increased the font size.

Dr Diane Grant



## contacts

### The primary contact for the overall research project is:

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Email all the above on: [gdap@livjm.ac.uk](mailto:gdap@livjm.ac.uk)

The timetable for the 2006 age regulations has slipped again. The draft regulations and the following consultation period are now expected next summer, a year later than planned. However they will still come into effect on 1 October 2006 according to Patricia Hewitt – Secretary of State at the Department of Trade and Industry.

13 December 2004

*Women MPs endure 'shocking' levels of sexist abuse at the hands of their male counterparts, a new study shows. Male MPs pretended to juggle imaginary breasts and jeered 'melons' as women made Commons speeches, researchers from Birkbeck, University of London were told.*

7 December 2004

One person in three believes age discrimination is worse now than it was five years ago, a survey by Age Concern suggests. Three-quarters of those questioned did not think age discrimination would improve over the

## briefing notes

next five years and 28% thought it would get worse.

1 November 2004

Patricia Hewitt, the Trade and Industry Secretary, told delegates at a gender and productivity seminar organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission that "Career sexism limits opportunities for women of all ages and prevents them from achieving their full potential."

26 October 2004