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KYN STUDY REPORT

70 UP

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Managing Director of KYN

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FOREWORD

Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director of KYN

Ageing is often seen through a lens of decline – frailty, dependency and loneliness. Yet our 70 Up study boldly challenges that narrative.

It sheds light on an age group that defies stereotypes and turns societal taboos on their head. Far from the clichés of ageing, the findings in this report reveal a vibrant, nuanced picture of life at 70 and beyond, filled with confidence, passion and wisdom. A life that all of us at KYN recognise well from our interactions with our fascinating and inspiring residents.

In a society that is often fixated on youth, this study provides a refreshing perspective, examining topics we rarely associate with older adults: confidence, body image, sex, and the harmful effects of infantilising language. What emerges is a portrait of septuagenarians, and above, who are not only thriving but also reshaping our understanding of what it means to age.

Through the voices of 600 individuals aged 70 and above living across the UK in 2023, along with over 1000 younger

participants, this report paints a vivid and, at times, surprising picture. It not only highlights the disconnect between how older people see themselves and how they are perceived by others, but also calls into question the outdated perceptions of what growing older really means.

It's a call to reframe how we view age, break down taboos and celebrate the richness and complexity of life beyond 70. This report invites us to listen, learn, and perhaps most importantly, recognise the dignity, autonomy and pleasure that comes with ageing.

We hope that as you explore these findings, you may discover that the best years of life aren't always behind us. For many, they begin at 70.

Caroline Naidoo



ABOUT THE STUDY

“Give me a child until he is seven
and I will give you the man.”

~ Jesuit motto.

In 1964, a documentary series was created following the lives of 14 seven-year-olds. The children spanned Britain’s socio-economic landscape and captured the country at a moment in time. It was called 7 Up.

For the next 56 years, every seven years, the documentary team revisited the participants to see the world through their eyes once again. It warmed hearts, just as it broke them, and shone a light on class, family, work and education in England.

The series ended in 2016, when the participants were 63. Seven years on, we picked up the baton by creating 70 Up – our own study of life in Britain, through the lens of what it is like to be a 70-year-old today.

In our study, we spoke to 600 people aged 70 and over to explore the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of – and about – older people. We also surveyed more than 1,000 people aged 18 to 69, to understand how the perception of older age changes with time.

It gathers insights, broken down into five key topics: stereotypes; body confidence; sex and relationships; infantilising language; and ageism.

Most nationally representative surveys only go as far as 65. Our hope is that this study will give voice to a demographic that too often goes unheard.



ABOUT KYN

“For our mothers, for our fathers, for our KYN.”

At KYN, our homes are designed with our own family - our kin - in mind. Each day invites independence, friendship and comfort supporting residents to live their best lives no matter their age. A care home we'd be proud to choose for our own.

At KYN, we believe later life can - and should - be full of joy and curiosity. Our homes are places where people find new opportunities, and can continue to do the things they love every day surrounded by friends and family.





HIGHLIGHTS

70 Up Report Participants Feel:

- Significantly less worried that they won't be happy in later life compared to under 70s (9% v 81%)
- Not worried about ageing (87%)
- Inclined to exercise at least three times a week (62%)
- Believe sex shouldn't have to stop as you get older (85%)
- Still young (50%)



AGE OLD STEREOTYPES

“Ageing is an extraordinary process where you become the person you always should have been.”

~ David Bowie

It's little surprise that there is a gap between how people over 70 perceive themselves and how they are perceived by younger people. But our study revealed just how large that gap truly is.

30% of the under 70s surveyed associated old age with being past your prime, and a staggering 81% worry that they won't be happy in their later life.

Contrast this with how the over 70s view themselves. Only 9% of over 70s have the same fears about being unhappy as they age and 32% are looking forward to more life experiences in the years ahead.

Older adults are more optimistic about later life: 33% of those aged 70+ feel positive, compared to just 19% of those aged 18 to 69.

The words younger demographic most associated with later life were 'vulnerable' and 'tired'. While over 70s described themselves as 'knowledgeable' and 'interesting.'

When asked about the impact of being negatively stereotyped, 16% of the under 70s surveyed said, it makes them feel as though people don't see them as their own person. Interestingly, women were significantly more likely to report being stereotyped as an older person compared to men (64% vs 55%).

“I never really thought about [ageing] because I was always busy doing something and being positive – it always seemed too far away. I always thought that things would be the same and maybe new things would present themselves – which they have! I couldn’t wait to finish work as there were always so many things I wanted to do that I never had time to do before.”

~ Michele, 70





“People’s past experiences, current interests and future wishes are still as relevant in later life as they ever have been. We need to challenge the status quo in attitudes towards later life and consider the detrimental impact of stereotyping someone by their age.”

~ Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director of KYN.

BODY CONFIDENCE

“There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.”

~ Sophia Loren, born 1934

One of the most positive findings of our study was around body confidence. While the media might assume it's only the young who are happy with their looks, our study revealed quite the opposite to be true.

Almost a third of over 70s say they feel better about their bodies now than they did in their 20s. Just 13% say they are concerned about the signs of ageing, compared to 30% for adults aged under 40. And only 1% would consider action such as Botox or surgery, compared to more than 11% of under 40s.

Younger people are more likely to worry about ageing: 30% vs 13%.

And far from being tired and frail, the majority (62%) of the over 70s surveyed are exercising at least three times a week. In fact, one in 10 even believe themselves to be more physically active than they've ever been.

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

“I think it’s about how if you still have passion and if you haven’t become cynical and you’ve remained open to life, then no matter how old you are chronologically, you’re still young. Aging is relative.

~ Jane Fonda, born 1937

The over 70s surveyed turned 18 in the era of ‘sex, drugs, and rock and roll’. But when it comes to sex, little seems to have changed for them today.

A third of over 70s said their desire and libido has not gone away with age – 6% even said their libido is greater now than it was 10 years ago. And nearly a half (48%) are more confident about what they want from a relationship now than when they were younger.

Another study ¹, conducted by the University of Manchester echoed our results and revealed that for some of those still having sex in their later years, it’s the best sex of their lives.

85% of over 70s believe sex shouldn’t have to stop as you get older unless you want it to.

While finding love is never easy, no matter what the age, our study revealed that it’s harder to find love in your 40s than your 70s. 51% of midlifers say low confidence is holding them back, compared to only 28% of over 70s saying the same. Even health problems are more of a problem for those in their 40s than for the over 70s, with 49% of midlifers saying health is a barrier for finding love, compared to only 34% of the eldest cohort.

Passion, it seems, has no age limit. And yet, sex among older people is still perceived as a taboo subject by half of all age-groups. Something that 71% believe should be tackled. Because if society was more willing to talk about sex and intimacy around ageing, older people could be made to feel less ignored.

¹ Love and intimacy in later life: Study reveals active sex lives of over-70s. University of Manchester.



“I’ve always loved sex. It’s a way of getting closer to a partner apart from anything else. I enjoy the close contact sort of thing and it’s very important in a lasting relationship.”

~ Martin, 70



“There is often a perception that residents shouldn’t have relationships or romantic feelings in care homes, but I believe relationships, whether friendships or romantic, give people a sense of purpose.

The KYN life-enrichment team supports residents and their partners by coordinating events and dates to help build connections between them. For example, a date night in the private cinema, with canapés and drinks together”

~ Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director, KYN.

INFANTILISATION

Agesplain (Verb) : the act of knowingly altering tone, speed, volume or words when speaking to an older person that assumes they don't understand.

You may well have heard the term “mansplaining”. It was inspired by an essay written by US writer, historian and activist Rebecca Solnit in 2008 and in 2014 was named one of the New York Times “Words of the Year”.

Our study revealed that many younger people believe they could be ‘agesplaining’.

We found that over half (56%) of younger people knowingly alter their tone, speed or volume of words when talking to the over 70s, assuming the person won't understand them otherwise. Something that over 70s obviously don't feel that happy about.

55% said there is nothing more depressing than someone slowing their words when speaking to them.

The good news is that older people are determined not to be spoken down to, and the overwhelming majority (60%) report that they do not let this affect their confidence. Some reported instances of when they stood up to this treatment.

While society is slowly waking up to gender inequality, the way in which we talk to those over a certain age must also change.

“Don’t assume we’re deaf and stupid and don’t know what’s going on.”

~ Robert, 70

“Anyone that spends real time with our residents will see any preconceptions about how sharp or with it they are evaporated.

They’re some of the most intelligent, knowledgeable people I’ve had the pleasure of talking with. And they’ve taught me more than I ever expected.”

~ Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director KYN



AGEISM

“You’re only as old as you feel.”

~ Anon

It's more than just a saying. Science backs up the idea that age is subjective. A recent US study² into ageing shows that perceived age (how old we feel) is always younger than chronological age. And the younger a person feels, the better health and wellbeing they experience.

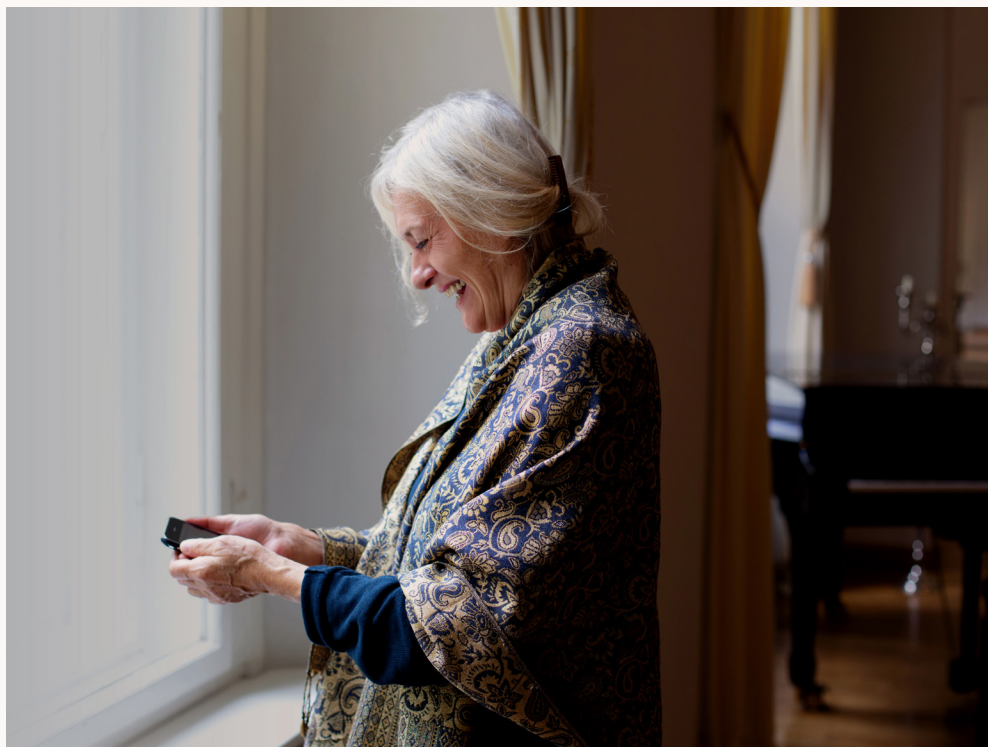
Our study came to the same conclusion. With 45% of men and 55% of women over 70 saying they feel young, even if by society's standards they are considered old.

A heartening 59% say they have never personally experienced ageism. However, they believe that society as a whole, and the media in particular, is ageist in subtle, subconscious ways.

One of the respondents to the survey noted society is set up for younger people with few services targeted to older people and their needs. Almost a quarter of over 70s felt unfairly represented by the media. With women over 70 more likely to report being made to feel conscious about their age thanks to advertising by the beauty industry than their male counterparts (17% vs 7%).

Women are more likely to have experienced ageism: 31% of women vs 24% of men.

² Why you may truly be only as old as you feel. Psychology Today.



“Ageism is something we at KYN feel passionate about changing. We do everything we can to ensure residents feel heard, seen and respected regardless of age.”

~ Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director, KYN

This perceived institutional ageism makes the vast majority (70%) of the older people surveyed feel irrelevant and that they are not listened to in society. Interestingly, younger people agree with them, with 71% saying older people are not listened to.

The Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the independent body that regulates most of the UK's newspapers and magazines, has yet to add age to Clause 12 of their Editors' Code of Practice which deals with discrimination. Although we are hopeful that this will change.

“Sometimes I feel like I am ignored. Or things that I say are not important, or just wrong. I never had this when I was younger. I was treated as an equal. It makes me feel sad and not wanted, like I don’t matter.”

~ Emelda, 82





HOW KYN IS CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

The findings of this research were both revealing and illuminating, offering a clear and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by older individuals today. KYN has not only identified actionable steps that can be taken to drive meaningful change but has also begun implementing some of these initiatives to benefit its residents.

SEEING THE WHOLE PERSON

At KYN, we work to tackle stereotypes by spending time with our residents to get to know them as the fascinating, fully-rounded individuals they are. Only then do we create a bespoke care plan and pair each resident with carers who share their interests and can take care of them like family, supporting as and when required or just being on hand to anticipate their needs before they arise.

KEEPING ACTIVE

Our wellness programme offers our residents the opportunity to keep physically active by exploring different types of dance, alongside slow, strengthening exercise classes such as Pilates, Yoga, or Tai Chi. And the team continue to work with residents to see if any new classes could be added to the offering.



REAL TALK

To help tackle the issue of infantilisation, KYN has considered how the team interacts with residents and the words they use. Staff are trained in the art of meaningful conversation which places value on the rich life experienced by each resident. This includes actively promoting the use of positive, non-infantilising language and regularly monitoring for its use in documentation and general discussions. KYN has also created, and widely disseminated, a guide to support more conscious language. This reflects KYN's approach to nurturing autonomy and independence in its homes, respecting each resident for who they are and have been at every stage of their life.

AGEISM

KYN ensures all team members receive training to tackle bias around ageing. We hope that this debunks stereotypes and leads to more people living in care homes being given greater independence and choice when it comes to forging and maintaining relationships.



CLOSING COMMENTS

Caroline Naidoo, Managing Director of KYN

“This study revealed what KYN has always believed: that life after 70 is full of joy, confidence and curiosity. The voices of those over 70 have given us a rich understanding of later life, one marked by optimism, resilience and a deep sense of purpose.

At KYN, we are committed to breaking down barriers, celebrating individuality and fostering environments where older people can thrive. By addressing ageism,

promoting autonomy and encouraging open dialogue about ageing, we can all contribute to a society where getting older is embraced positively and honoured.

We hope this report sparks meaningful conversations and, most importantly, inspires actionable change. Together, we can reshape the narrative and celebrate the richness of life at every age.”

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