Age and Aging

When you are writing, you need to <u>follow general principles</u> to ensure that your language is free of bias. Here we provide guidelines for talking about age with inclusivity and respect. Age should be reported as part of the description of participants in the paper's Method section. Be specific in providing age ranges, means, and medians. Avoid open-ended definitions such as "under 18 years" or "over 65 years," unless referring, for instance, to broad research study eligibility criteria.

Age is covered in Section 5.3 of the <u>APA Publication Manual, Seventh Edition</u>

This guidance has been **expanded** from the 6th edition.

Terms for different age groups

Different terms are used for individuals of different ages, and these terms are often <u>gendered</u>. Use the terms individuals use to self-describe, whether these are binary gender categories of boy–girl or man–woman or descriptive and possibly nonbinary categories of transgender, genderqueer, agender, or gender-fluid.

- For an individual of any age, appropriate terms are "person," "individual," and so on. In general, avoid using "males" and "females" as nouns; instead use "men" and "women" or other age- and <u>gender-</u>appropriate words. "Males" and "females" are appropriate when groups include individuals with a broad age range (e.g., "males" to describe a group that includes both boys and men).
- For an individual aged 12 years and younger, appropriate terms are "infant" (for a very young child), "child," "girl," "boy," "transgender girl," "transgender boy," "gender-fluid child," and so on.
- For an individual aged 13 to 17 years, appropriate terms are "adolescent," "young person," "youth," "young woman," "young man," "female adolescent," "male adolescent," "agender adolescent," and so on.
- For an individual aged 18 years and older, appropriate terms are "adult," "woman," "man," "transgender man," "trans man," "transgender woman," "trans woman," "genderqueer adult," "cisgender adult," and so on.

Terms for older adults

Older adults are a subgroup of adults, and the age groups of older adults may be described with adjectives. On first reference to a group of older people, be as specific as possible by including the age range, average age, and median age, when available. Terms such as "older persons," "older people," "older adults," "older patients," "older individuals," "persons 65 years and older," and "the older population" are preferred. Avoid using terms such as "seniors," "elderly," "the aged," "aging dependents," and similar "othering" terms because they connote a stereotype and suggest that members of the group are not part of society but rather a group apart (see Lundebjerg et al., 2017; Sweetland et al., 2017). Do not use these stigmatizing terms in your research even if your participants use them to refer to themselves (also see guidance regarding disability). Likewise, avoid negativistic and fatalistic attitudes toward aging, such as age as being an obstacle to overcome (Lindland et al., 2015). Do not use "senile"; it is an outdated term with no agreed-upon meaning. Use "dementia" instead of "senility"; specify the type of dementia when known (e.g., dementia due to Alzheimer's disease). Be sure your language conveys that aging is a normal part of the human experience and is separate from disease and disorder.

Gerontologists may use combination terms for older age groups (e.g., "young-old," "old-old," "oldest old"); provide the specific ages of these groups when introducing them in your paper, and use the group names only as adjectives, not as nouns (i.e., refer to "young-old individuals," not to "the young-old"). When contrasting older adults with adults of other ages, describe that other age group specifically (e.g., young adults vs. older adults, middle-aged adults vs. older adults). You can use decade-specific descriptors if desired (e.g., octogenarian, centenarian). Generational descriptors such as "baby boomers," "Gen X," "millennials," "centennials," "Gen Z," and so on should be used only when discussing studies related to the topic of generations. For more information on writing about age, see "Guidelines for the Evaluation of Dementia and Age-Related Cognitive Change" (APA, 2012c) and "Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Older Adults" (APA, 2014).

Examples of bias-free language

The following are examples of bias-free language for age. Both problematic and preferred examples are presented with explanatory comments.

1. Terms for older adults

Problematic:
the elderly
elders
elderly people
the aged
aging dependents
seniors
senior citizens
Preferred:
older adults
older people
persons 65 years and older
the older population

Comment: The problematic terms perpetuate stereotypes. "Seniors" and "senior citizens" are not uniformly recognized age groups. Be specific about the age groups when possible.

2. Specifying ages for older adults

Problematic:
old men
Preferred:
older men
men between the ages of 65 and 75
octogenarians
Comment: Use precise language, provide information about age range, mean, and median. This recognizes that older adults are diverse and not a monolithic group.

3. Discussion of social security and Medicare

Problematic:
social security recipients
social security beneficiaries
Medicare recipients (unless study about Medicare specifically)
Medicare beneficiaries (unless study about Medicare specifically)
Preferred:
people who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits and are over the age of 62 (or another age that was included in the study)
people who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits due to a disability
Comment: Social security and Medicare recipients or beneficiaries are not a specific age group because social security can begin at different ages and individuals with certain disabilities may receive social security and/or Medicare benefits.

4. Discussion of dementia

Problematic:
senility
senile
Preferred:
dementia
person living with dementia
person living with dementia due to Alzheimer's disease
Comment: Do not use language that implies that all older adults are experiencing perceptual or cognitive decline or have health problems, or that all older adults are frail. "Senile" is an outdated term with no agreed-upon meaning.

5. Discussion of older adult living communities

Problematic:
nursing home
nursing facility
Preferred:
long-term care community

References

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