AGEISM AND SWEDISH MEDIA

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BACKGROUND
Ageism can be seen as a “social disease”, a casual or systematic prejudice, stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of their age. This is an area of growing concern, particularly the role of mainstream media in relationship to ageism. A valuable and important step is to understand the presence of ageing and older age how different types of online news media.

AIM
The main objective of this pilot work is to test, collate and produce evidence from Swedish news media representations of older ages and ageing.

METHOD(S)
Two pilot studies/experiments;
(1) first names and their frequencies of the carriers' age according to Statistics Sweden (SCB) and their presence in online news.
(2) using general pattern matching techniques with regular expressions and applying them to 13 issues (1994, 2001-13) of Göteborgs-Posten (Swedish news corpora).

Definition: Older persons ≥ 60 years. (25 % of the population in Sweden is over 60 years).

Our pilot studies confirm the introspective view of underrepresentation of old age and older people in trends can be revealed within a larger time span and synchronic media sources. More studies are required and in the near future we plan to improve, scale and apply our methodology on both synchronic and diachronic data using e.g. available text corpora and try to get a solid perspective on whether any differences or trends can be revealed within a larger time span.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS
• Clear and consistent differences of how various age spans are represented in the news.
• 20-50 year olds is highly over represented compared with the Swedish population, while 0-24 and people over 54 are underrepresented, especially women.
• Pattern matching exhibits similar characteristics with the exception of obituaries where the elderly mentions are much more frequent.

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Take home message
Very clear patterns that strengthen the assumption that ageism is perpetuated in contemporary Swedish print and online news media. It also confirm gendered ageism in the media.

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