Youngism: Experimental Evidence

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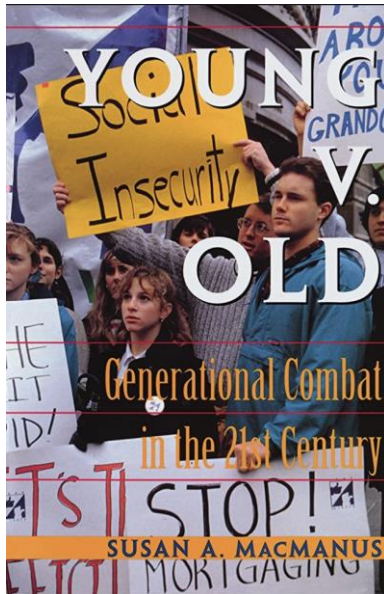2023 EEA Meeting

Barcelona, Spain

August 30, 2023

Opinion | Time to stop the generation wars. We need each other.

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Britain's generational divide has never been wider

The Economist

Young, gifted and held back

The world's young are an oppressed minority. Unleash them

The Economist

Motivation

Generations at "war"

- Policy outcomes often reflect preferences of older generations
  - Lack of policy action: climate change, education, youth unemployment, housing, pension systems
- Silvercracy / gerontocracy: due to population aging

Our focus: Youngism

- Bias in social preferences against young adults

This paper

1. Documenting **existence of „youngism"** in social preferences
   - Representative sample in the Czech Republic, whole adult age
   - Consequential money allocation tasks
   - Substantially lower allocations to individuals who are relatively younger, as compared to own or relatively older age groups
   - No such bias against relatively older individuals

2. Uncovering **one source of youngism** and a way to tackle it
   - Misperceptions about hardship faced by young adults in mental health domain
   - Randomized provision of information about mental health of the young

Related literature

Age-based discrimination and biases

- Discrimination of the old in the labor market (Neumark, Burn and Button 2020; Carlsson and Eriksson 2019; Riach and Rich 2010, Riach 2015)

- Intergenerational experiments focusing on social behavior scarce (Charness and Villeval 2009; Enke, Rodríguez-Padilla and Zimmermann 2022)

- Social psychology: unfavorable attitudes towards young adults in US in survey or thermometer questions (Farkas et al. 2007; Brown 2013; Francioli and North 2021).

Malleability of behavior towards discriminated groups

- Inter-group contact (Rao 2019; Burns, Corno, and La Ferrara 2018; Lowe 2021); education and mentoring interventions (Cappelen et al. 2016; Kosse et al. 2020)

- Provision of information about the disadvantages faced by immigrants (Alesina et al. 2018; Haaland and Roth 2023)
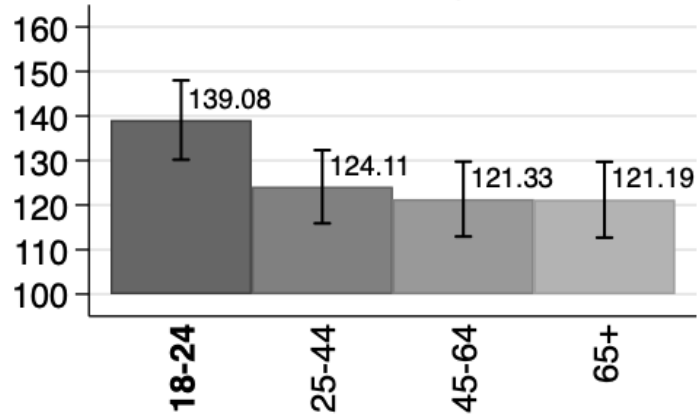
Documenting youngism: Design

- **Sample**: nationally-representative sample of adults, N=2,027.
  - By age, gender, education, employment status, municipality size and region.
  - Sizeable age groups: 18-24 (N=162), 25-44 (N=736), 45-64 (N=640), 65+ (N=489)

- Two waves: October 2020, three weeks later

- **Help-or-Harm task**: increase or decrease rewards to a set of people with different characteristics
  - Default allocation CZK 100 (USD 4)
  - Change to CZK 0-200
  - Prosocial behavior: increase reward
  - Anti-social behavior: decrease reward

- **Manipulating age of recipient**: 18-24, 25-44, 45-64, 65+
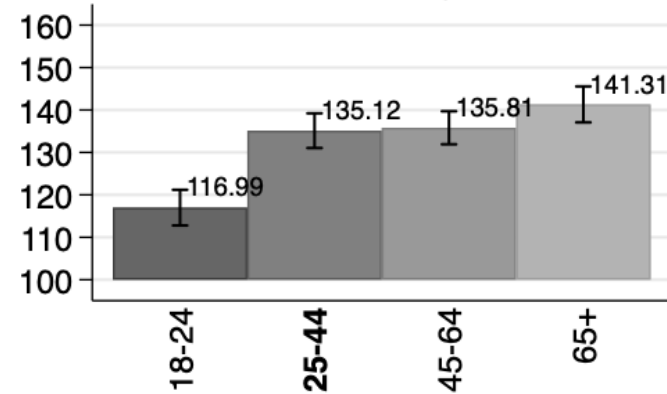
Documenting youngism: Results
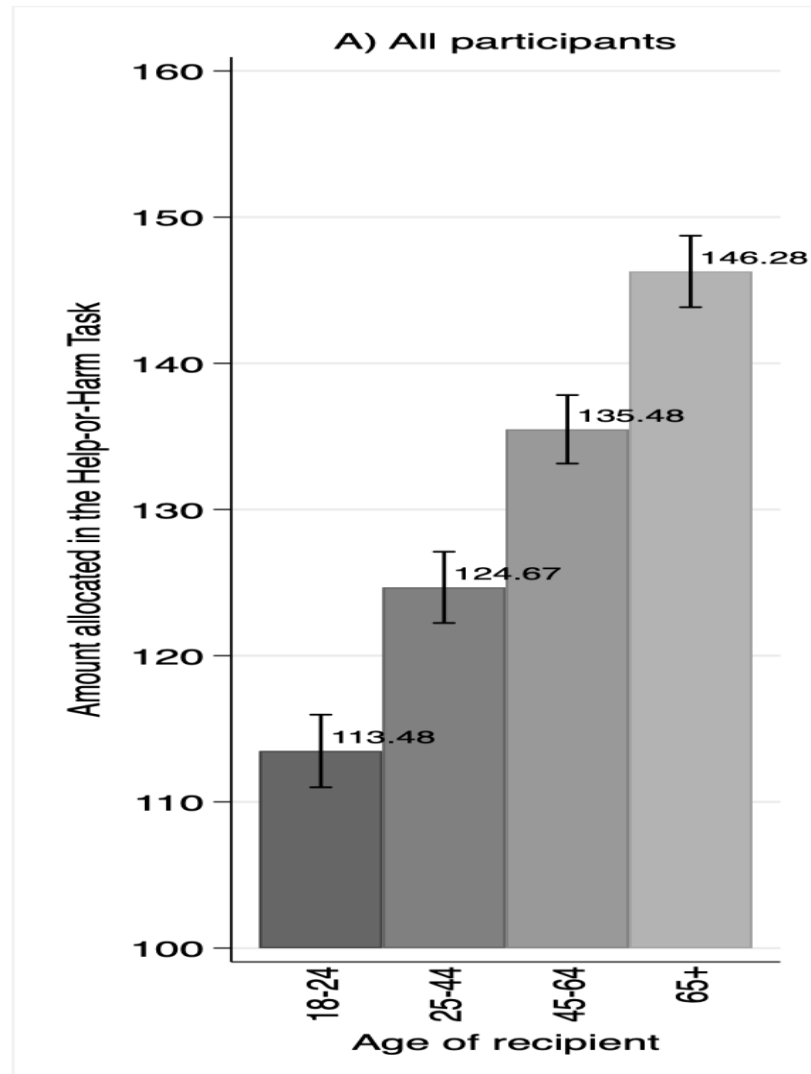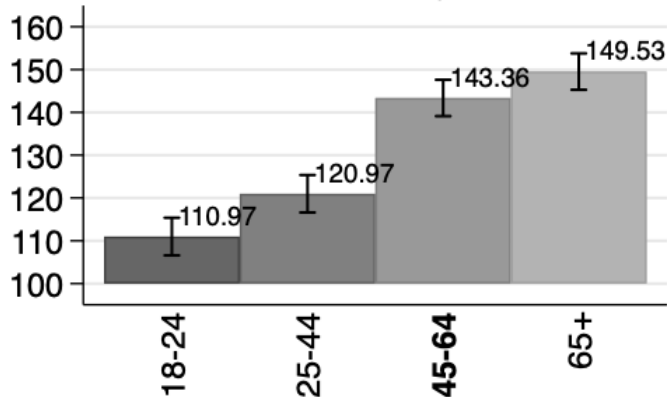
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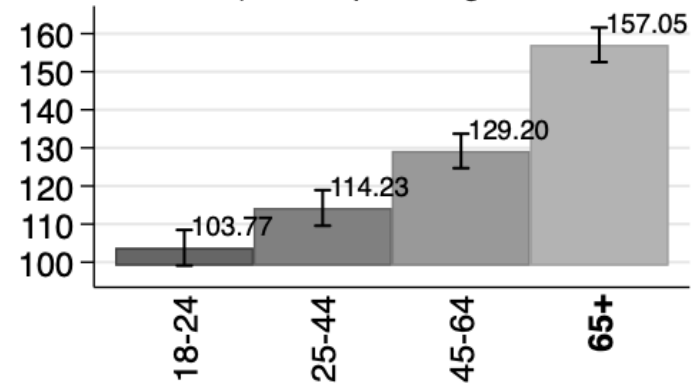
Documenting youngism: Results

Help-or-Harm transfer to younger vs. same age group

	"same age group" mean
Gender	
Male	-30.36 (p<0.001) — 138.84
Female	-29.83 (p<0.001) — 147.97
Education	
No university	-30.63 (p<0.001) — 147.03
University	-27.78 (p<0.001) — 129.40
Income	
Below median	-34.60 (p<0.001) — 150.76
Above median	-24.84 (p<0.001) — 135.77
Mental health	
Symptoms of DA	-38.66 (p<0.001) — 150.19
Not symptoms of DA	-27.51 (p<0.001) — 141.28
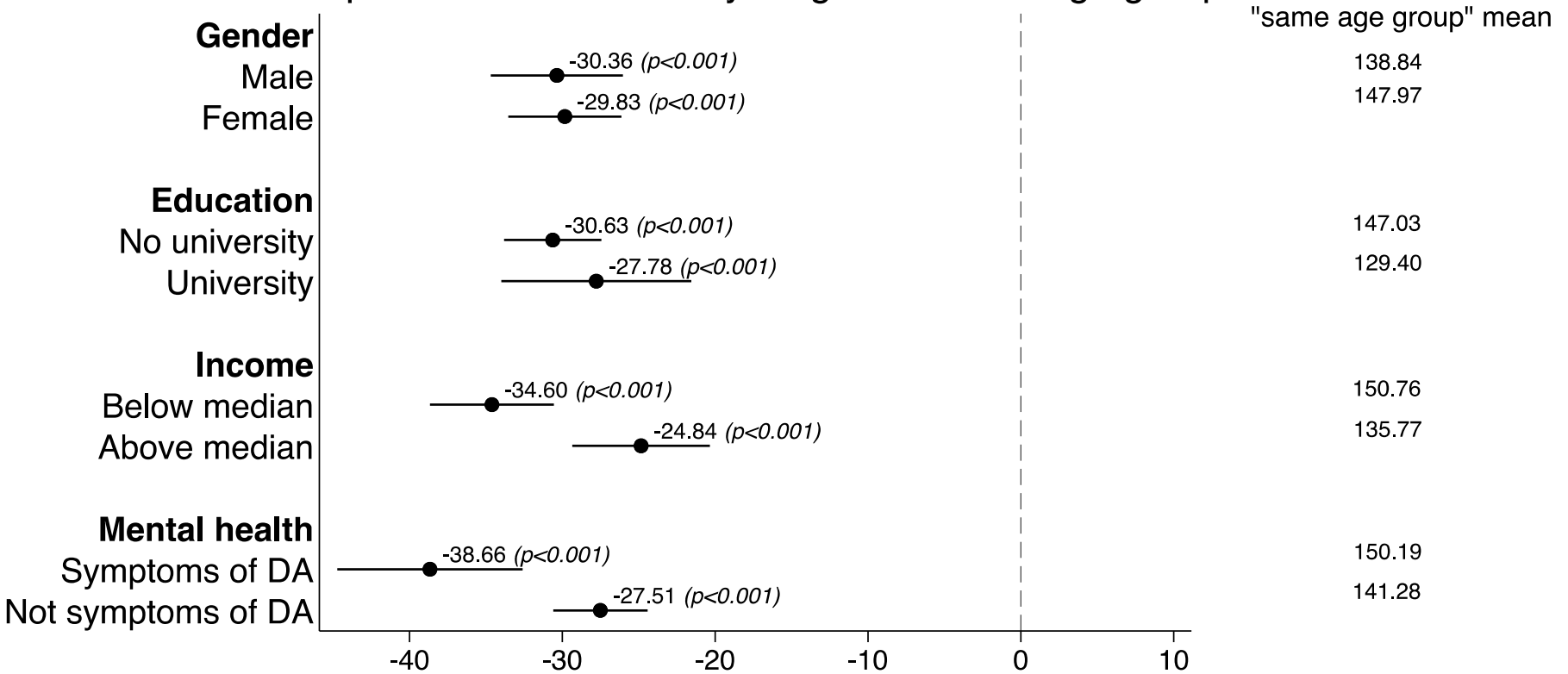
Misperceptions about young: Design

- Different sample: broadly nationally-representative sample of adults, N=2,167.

- Mental health measures
    - Depression and anxiety: six questions from PHQ-8 and GAD-7 (Kroenke and Spitzer 2002; Spitzer et al. 2006)
    - E.g. problems with sleeping, eating, feeling tired,…
    - Dummy variable: symptoms of moderate/severe depression or anxiety
    - Data from 6 waves (March-June 2020)

- Beliefs about mental health
    - Beliefs about the prevalence of mental health problems in March 2020 for four groups: whole population, young (18-24), middle-aged (25-64), seniors (65+)

Prevalence of mental health problems
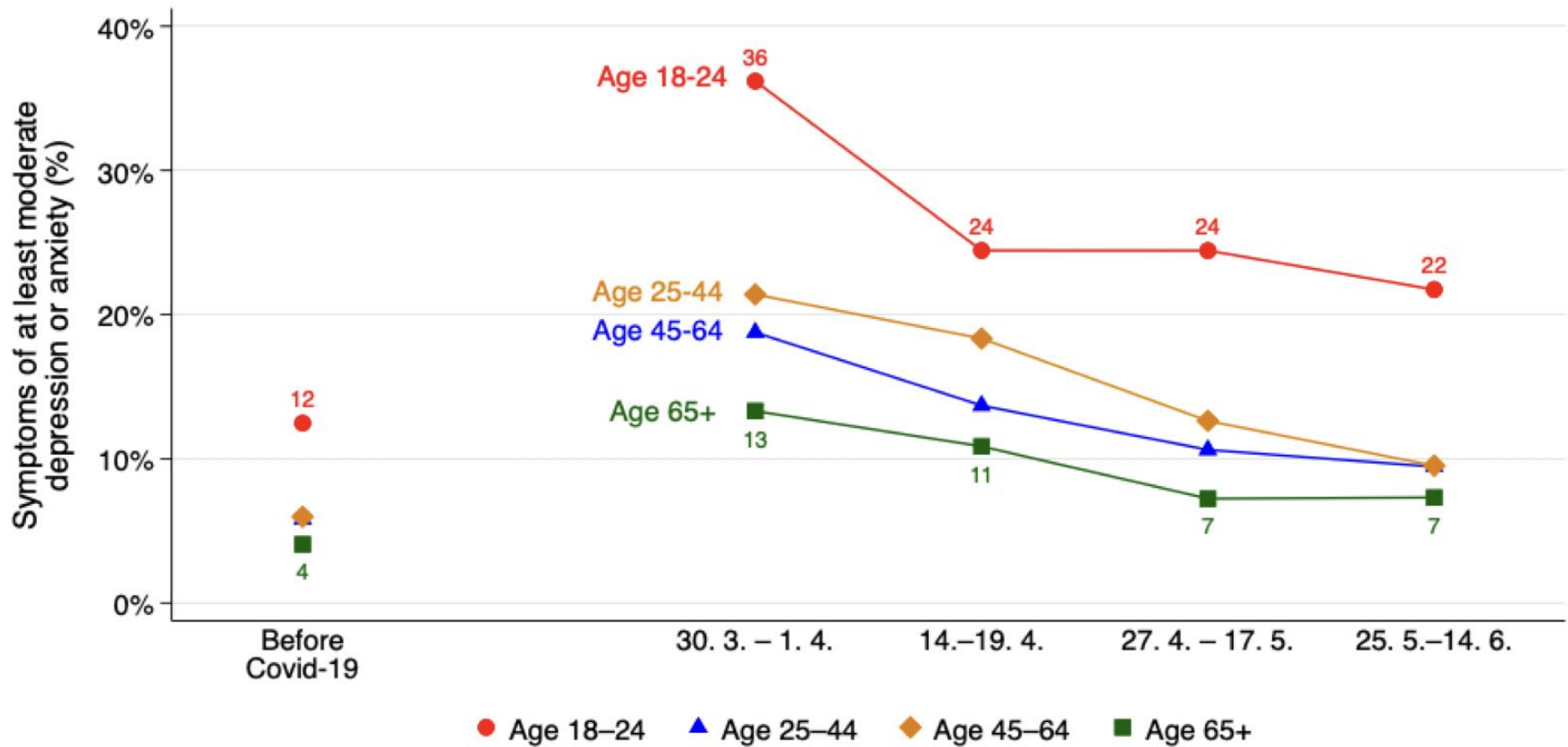
Misperceptions about young: Results

Panel A: Share of people with symptoms of depression and anxiety (DA) among…

	Real	Perceived
… whole population	19.8	22.2
… age 18-24	36.2	10.7
… age 25-64	20.1	19.9
… age 65+	13.3	28.2

Information intervention: Design

- CONTROL condition (N=992): regular survey

- HARDSHIP condition (N=1,035): regular survey + information about the prevalence of symptoms for different age groups
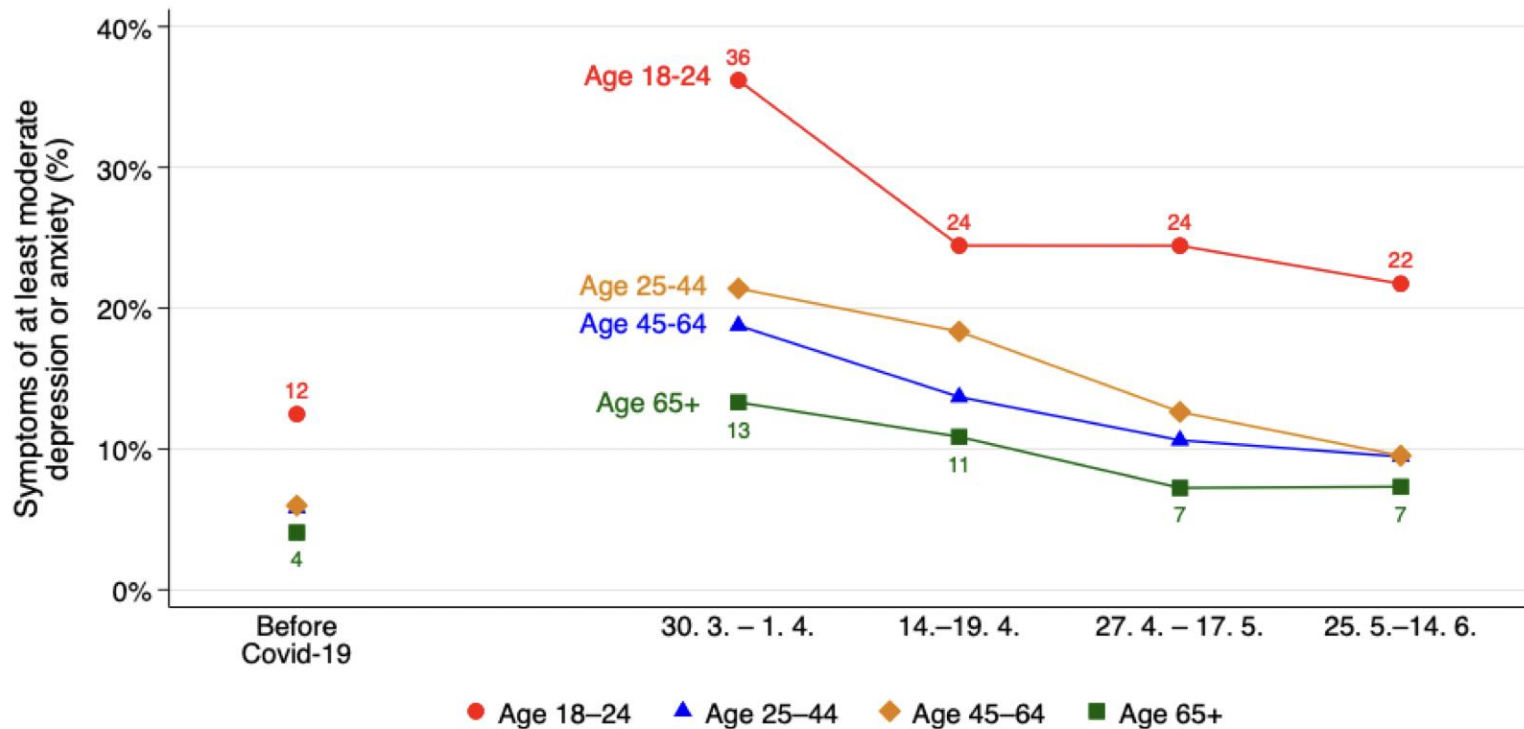
Information intervention: Outcomes

- Help-or-Harm task allocations

- Support for governmental policies
  - Focusing on young (18-24), middle-aged (25-64), seniors (65+)
  - Mental health specific: phone crisis hotlines, availability of specialists
  - General: financial support

- Two waves

Information intervention: Results

Treatment effects on Help-or-Harm allocations
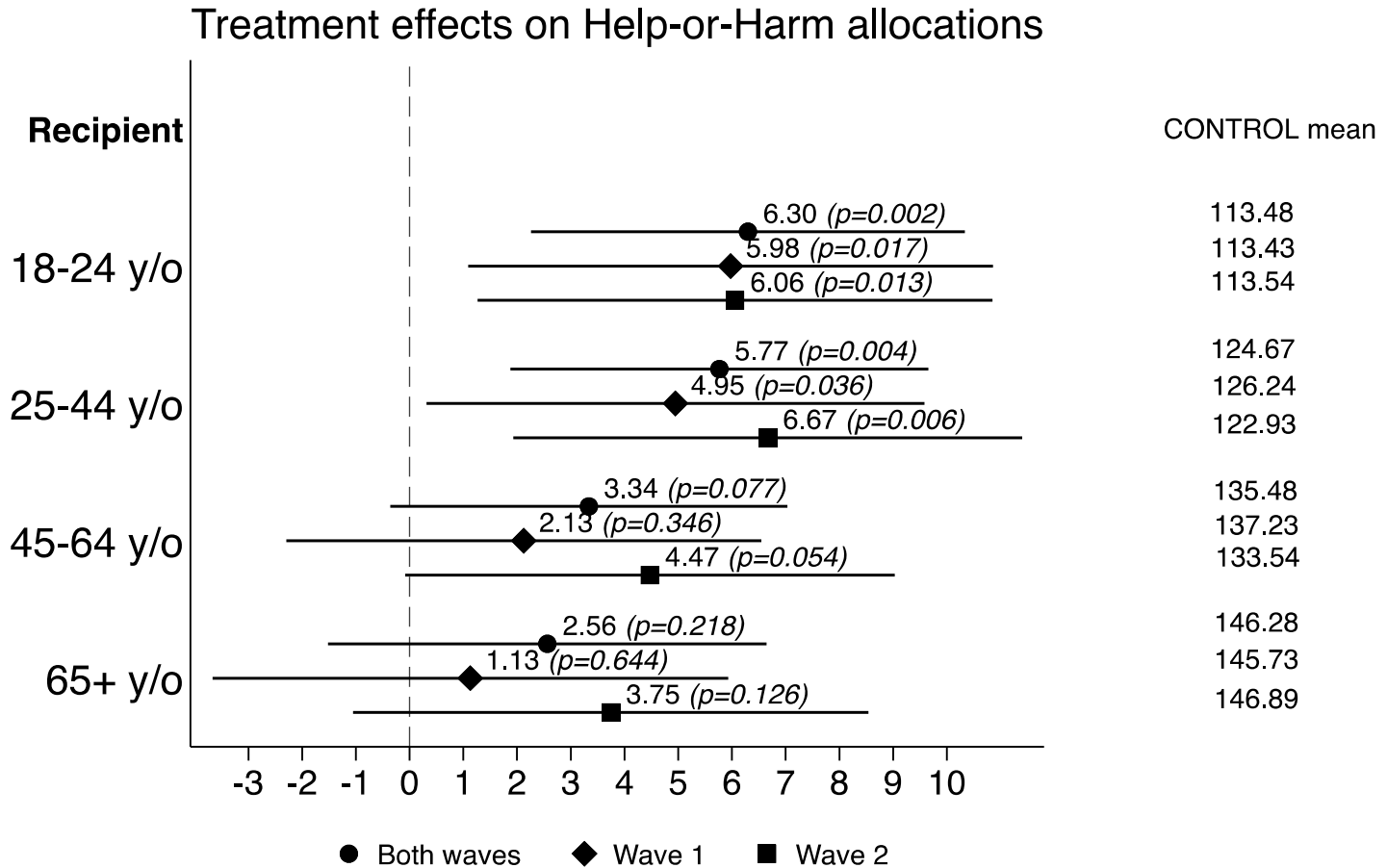
Information intervention: Results

Dependent variable	Support for policy focusing on:					
	The young (18-24)		Middle generation (25-64)		The old (65+)	
	mental health	financial situation	mental health	financial situation	mental health	financial situation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
HARDSHIP	2.74***	2.24**	0.87	1.63	-0.87	0.54
	(1.03)	(1.09)	(0.95)	(1.01)	(0.91)	(1.03)
Control mean	61.05	56.28	67.31	69.25	78.24	73.06
Observations	3,864	3,864	3,864	3,864	3,864	3,864
Panel B: Immediate effect						
HARDSHIP	4.98***	3.38***	0.25	2.20*	-1.73	1.43
	(1.20)	(1.29)	(1.14)	(1.18)	(1.10)	(1.20)
Panel C: Three-weeks effect						
HARDSHIP	0.43	0.84	1.58	1.02	0.05	-0.46
	(1.29)	(1.36)	(1.21)	(1.26)	(1.15)	(1.25)

Summary

- Evidence of youngism: systematic and sizeable bias in social preferences against young adults
    - Lower allocations in Help-or-Harm task
    - Driven both by less pro-social and more anti-social behavior
    - The most prevalent among seniors

- Partly due to misperceptions about the young (hardship in mental health domain)

- A low-cost information intervention reduces youngism

Conclusions

- Political economy
  - Low priority among voters and politicians on tackling policy issues concerning young generation
  - Preference-based underpinnings, besides population aging and short-term time horizon of politicians

- Better knowledge of well-being across generations may attenuate inter-generational animosity.
  - Avoid social isolation of seniors, more intensive inter-generational contact

- Further focus on youngism
  - So far, focus on biases against minorities, migrants, elderly, etc.
  - Potential implications of youngism for labor market outcomes, political economy, inter-generational solidarity and preferences for redistribution.

Thank you for your attention!

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Sample mean	CONTROL	HARDSHIP	(2) vs. (3) p-value	Czech population	diff. (1) vs. (5)
Female	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.584	0.51	-0.01
Age	48.16	47.99	48.32	0.568		
Age category				0.952		
age cat 18-24	0.08	0.08	0.08		0.08	0.00
age cat 25-34	0.16	0.17	0.15		0.16	0.00
age cat 35-44	0.21	0.21	0.21		0.2	0.00
age cat 45-54	0.17	0.17	0.17		0.17	0.00
age cat 55-64	0.15	0.14	0.15		0.15	0.00
age cat 65+	0.24	0.24	0.24		0.24	0.00
Region				0.275		
	…					
Municipality size				0.530		
Below 999	0.17	0.17	0.16		0.17	0.00
1,000-1,999	0.10	0.10	0.11		0.1	0.00
2,000-4,999	0.12	0.12	0.13		0.11	0.01
5,000-1,9999	0.18	0.19	0.18		0.18	0.00
2,0000-4,9999	0.12	0.11	0.13		0.12	0.00
5,0000-9,9999	0.08	0.08	0.07		0.1	-0.02
Above 100,000	0.23	0.23	0.24		0.22	0.01
Education				0.545		
primary	0.12	0.11	0.13		0.11	0.01
lower secondary	0.33	0.34	0.33		0.34	-0.01
upper secondary	0.35	0.35	0.36		0.35	0.00
university	0.20	0.20	0.19		0.2	0.00
Economic status				0.704		
Employee	0.46	0.47	0.46		0.48	-0.02
Entrepreneur	0.07	0.07	0.07		0.10	-0.03
Unemployed	0.05	0.05	0.05		0.03	0.02
Retired	0.30	0.29	0.30		0.30	0.00
Student	0.06	0.06	0.07		0.06	0.00
Parental leave or other	0.06	0.07	0.06		0.05	0.01
Household size	2.59	2.57	2.62	0.202		
Number of children	0.48	0.45	0.50	0.063		
Household income				0.402		
	…					
Observations	2027	992	1035			

Differences in allocation in the HHT task to recipients of different age

Dependent variable	Amount allocated in the Help-or-Harm task					
Sample	All	All	18-24 years old	25-44 years old	45-64 years old	65+ years old
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Recipient 25-44 years old	11.19***	11.19***	-14.97***	18.14***	10.00***	10.46***
	(1.18)	(1.35)	(5.42)	(2.16)	(1.65)	(2.23)
Recipient 45-64 years old	22.00***	22.00***	-17.74***	18.82***	32.39***	25.42***
	(1.42)	(1.64)	(5.39)	(2.19)	(2.56)	(2.78)
Recipient 65+ years old	32.80***	32.80***	-17.89***	24.32***	38.55***	53.28***
	(1.79)	(2.05)	(6.46)	(2.70)	(3.07)	(3.65)
Control variables	baseline	individual x wave FE	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline
Mean recipient 18-24 years old	113.48	113.48	139.08	116.99	110.97	103.77
Observations	7,528	7,528	564	2,728	2,380	1,856

Differences in allocation in the HHT task to recipients of different age

Dependent variable	Pro-social behavior (amount allocated in the Help-or-Harm task > 100)			Anti-social behavior (amount allocated in the Help-or-Harm task < 100)		
Observations	Wave 1 and Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1 and Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Recipient younger	-0.25***	-0.23***	-0.27***	0.11***	0.10***	0.12***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Recipient older	-0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Control variables	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline	baseline
Mean if recipient from the same age group	.62	0.61	0.63	0.07	0.08	0.06
Observations	7,528	3,968	3,560	7,528	3,968	3,560

Heterogeneity of the treatment effect

Treatment effects on HHT allocation to recipient 18-24 years old
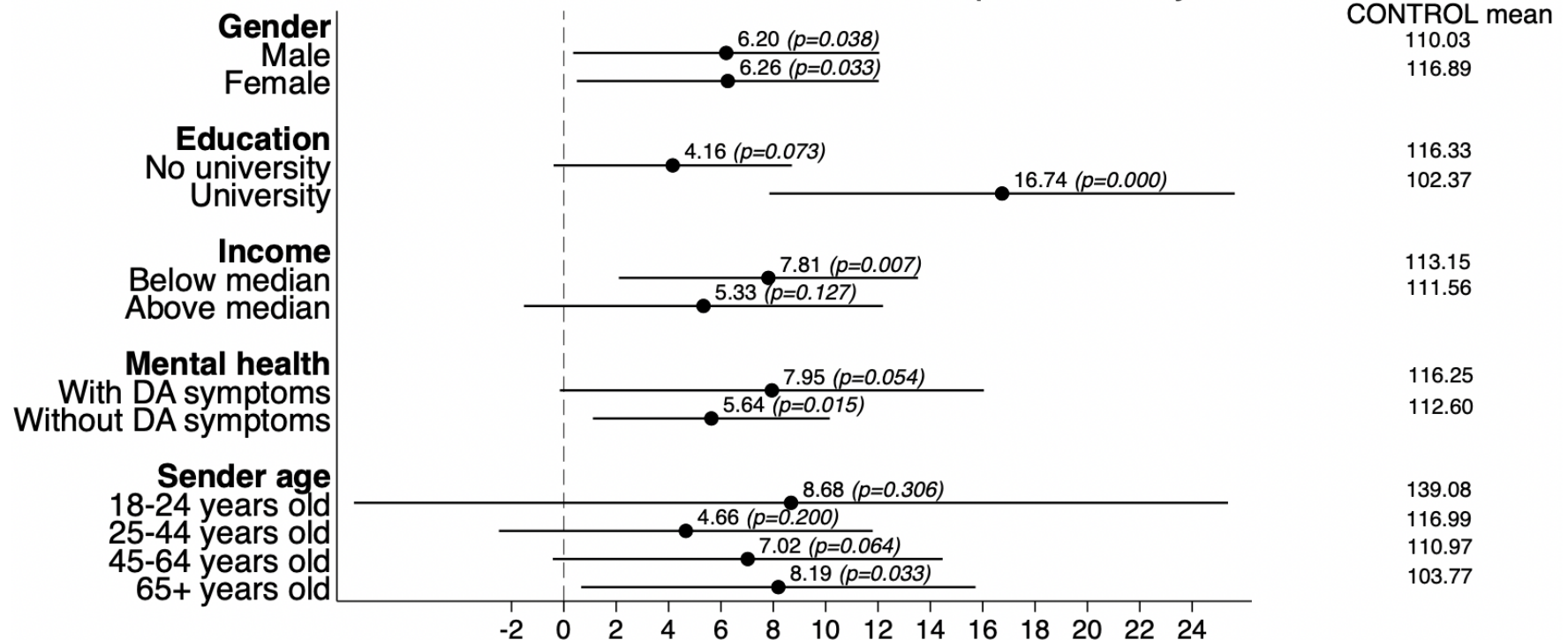
Measuring mental health problems

▶ Please indicate how often the following problems have bothered you during the past two weeks *[Not at all/Some days/More than half the days/Almost every day]*
  - ▶ Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, or sleeping too much
  - ▶ Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge
  - ▶ Poor appetite or overeating
  - ▶ Feeling tired or having little energy
  - ▶ Little interest or pleasure in doing things
  - ▶ Becoming easily annoyed or irritable

Perceptions of the share of people with symptoms of depression and anxiety

	(1)	All (2)	Sample 18-24 years old (3)	25-44 years old (4)	45-64 years old (5)	65+ years old (6)
Panel A: Share of people with symptoms of depression and anxiety (DA) among…						
	Real	**Perceived**				
… whole population	19.8	22.2	27.1	22.4	22.6	20.5
… age 18-24	36.2	10.7	17.9	12.1	10.4	8.5
… age 25-64	20.1	19.9	24.7	20.3	20.9	17.6
… age 65+	13.3	28.2	29.4	27.2	28.8	28.1
Panel B: Misperceptions about prevalence of people with symptoms of DA among …						
… whole population		2.4	7.3	2.6	2.8	0.7
… age 18-24		-25.5	-18.3	-24.1	-25.8	-27.7
… age 25-64		-0.1	4.6	0.2	0.8	-2.5
… age 65+		14.9	16.1	13.8	15.5	14.8
Observations		2167	114	623	792	638