

# Age bias and employment discrimination

Authors: Jason Dobbs, Patrick Healey, Katherine Kane,  
Daniel Mak, Tay McNamara

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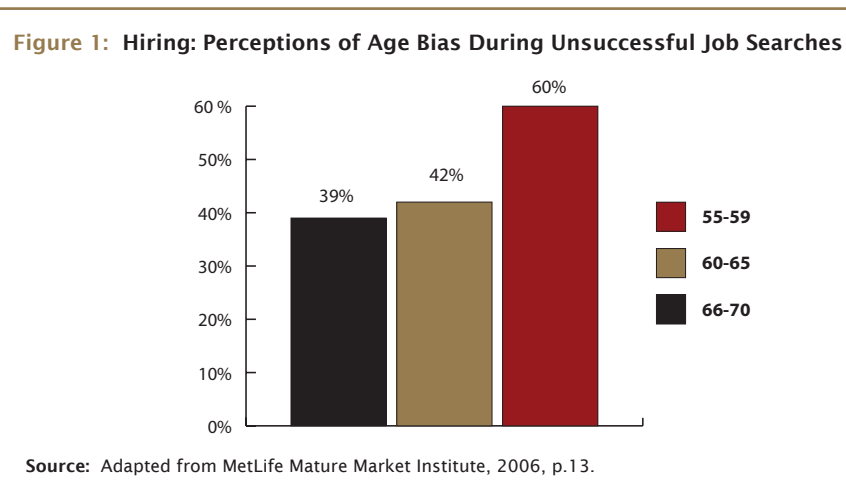
## AGE BIAS AND EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION

**Project Team:** Jason Dobbs, with Patrick Healey, Katherine Kane, Daniel Mak, & Tay McNamara

As the labor force ages, there is increased interest in the attitudes towards older workers. This fact sheet highlights information about the perceptions of age bias and employment discrimination against older workers when they are looking for employment and once they have been hired.

### Question 1: Is age bias a real concern for U.S. older workers (45 years and older)?

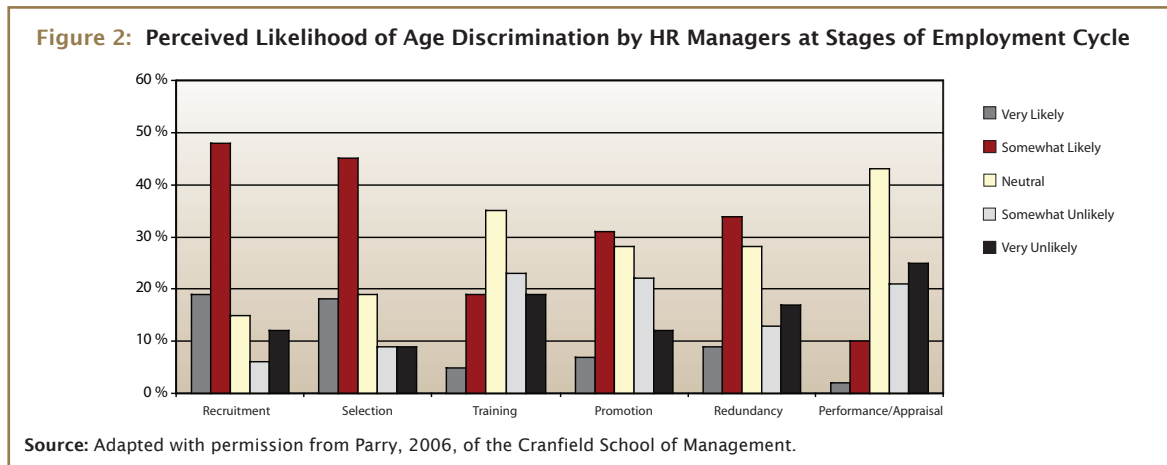
- Lahey (2005) recently conducted a job application experiment and found that older workers need to respond to more ads for job openings before they get an interview. She found that those under 50 were 42% more likely to be called for an interview than those 50 or older. (Lahey, 2005: 8).
- According to the findings of the survey, “A Work-Filled Retirement,” “Older workers [55 and older] are...believed to be treated unfairly relative to their younger peers during the hiring process (44% of all workers agree with this assessment), when salary increases are determined (32%), and when promotions are decided (25%).” (Reynolds, Ridley, & Van Horn, 2005: 12).
- 22.0% of all the discrimination claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 2005 were complaints related to age. This is compared to the 35.5% of the claims based on race, 30.6% based on sex, and 19.7% based on disabilities. (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2006).
- According to a 2006 Metlife National Survey of Aging Workers, “When asked about unsuccessful job searches, employees age 55-59 blamed age bias 39% of the time.” (Metlife Mature Market Institute, 2006: 13).



### Question 2: Is Age Bias Limited to the U.S.?

- A 2001-2002 study of the clients of Australian job network providers surveyed clients (ages 45 and older) who were unemployed or had experienced periods of unemployment. When asked about the most important obstacles to obtaining employment for workers 45 years and older, 55% of respondents stated age as the main barrier, followed secondly by lacking specialized skills [34%]. (Encel & Studencki, 2004: 34).

- A 2006 study conducted in New Zealand on the barriers that older workers encounter when trying to enter the workforce found that, “For medium demand (sales) positions, the resume of a 25+ year old worker was six to twelve times as likely to be short-listed as the equivalent resume of a 55+ worker.” (Wilson & Kan, 2006: 2).
- According to a 2006 Recruitment Confidence Index study conducted by the Cranfield School of Management, “Age discrimination was perceived as being most likely to occur in recruitment [19%] and selection [18%].” (Parry, 2006: 34).



### Question 3: Do employers prefer younger workers over older workers?

- The 2006 “Center for Retirement Research Survey of Employer Attitudes Towards Older Workers” reports that “two-thirds of the employers surveyed said an older employee or prospect is neither more nor less attractive than someone younger.” (Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, 2006: 4).
- “The oldest workers surveyed (age 66-70) were significantly more likely to identify their employers as ‘very loyal’ (53%) than their younger peers. In contrast, among aging Boomers (age 55-59), the percentage of workers characterizing their employer as ‘very loyal’ drops to 30%.” (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2006: 16).
- According to the 2006 National Study of Business Strategy and Workforce Development, 25.9% of employers stated they have increased training and cross-training efforts to ‘a great extent’ for early career [younger cohort employees] compared to 16.9% for later career [older cohort employees]. (Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, Kane & Smyer, 2006).

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