

Press Release
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Workplace age discrimination alive & well, new report reveals

Being constantly referred to as the “f*cking geriatric” by workmates, is one of the stories to emerge from new research that reveals age discrimination is alive and well in the workplace.

While this case involving a 50-year-old labourer was blatant, age discrimination is more often covert and notoriously difficult to prove, writes the late Professor Sol Encel in his report, *The Elephant in the Room*, conducted for National Seniors Australia.

Releasing the report today, National Seniors chief executive, Michael O’Neill, said that while the 2004 federal age discrimination laws were meant to help older workers, in some ways they had made it more difficult.

“With the age discrimination laws in place, employers are now much more sophisticated in how they exclude older workers. For example they may use recruitment agencies to screen applicants, employ code terms such as “overqualified” or frame advertisements denoting youth”.

“And then, surprisingly in this day and age, there are still those employers who just come out and say ‘you’re too old’”.

“The costs to the nation are huge. In a human sense we’re creating an underclass more likely to experience social isolation, ill health and financial insecurity. In monetary terms, not employing these people who want to work translates into a \$10.8 billion annual loss to the economy”.

“Negative stereotypes of older workers have been around for decades. The world has moved on. It’s time for the people who judge a person’s ability by their age to realize they’re the ones out of date,” said O’Neill.

The report calls on policy makers to:

1. Examine the issue of ‘disguised discrimination’ and strengthen the relevant anti-discrimination legislation to reduce the likelihood of covert discrimination.
2. Ensure individuals can make their own work or retirement choices in the light of their own health, aspirations, financial status and family situations.
3. Promote greater awareness by employees of their rights to complain about age discrimination.

The report comes only ten days after Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s Sydney Institute speech in which she indicated possible cuts to the disability pension in the May budget.

Long term unemployment is a harsh reality for older workers.

Despite determination, it takes the over-50s three times longer to get back into the workforce. After years of trying, if they’re below 65 many will end up on a disability pension.

Key points over...

National Seniors CEO, Michael O’Neill, is available for interview on 0448 125 898

Media: Sarah Saunders 0409 055 156. A copy of the report is available on request.

With a quarter of a million members Australia-wide, National Seniors is the consumer lobby for the over-50s. It is the fourth largest organisation of its type in the world

Key Points

- Employment stereotypes based on age have existed since the 1950s
- Age discrimination occurs both in the workplace and when seeking employment
- Vulnerability to downsizing increases with age
- Skills and experience acquired at an earlier period perceived as less relevant to the new workplace
- BUT age discrimination, unlike other forms of discrimination, notoriously difficult to prove
- The human toll includes: painful realisation that age is against them; social exclusion; poverty; ill-health; isolation becoming more acute with age

Vocabulary of Exclusion

“We didn’t think you were right for the job”.

“We didn’t think you’d fit in”.

“Overqualified” - (code term for length of experience, which equates to age).

“Under-qualified” (too old to have obtained the current certificate or diploma qualification although experience may be of equal quality).

“Why don’t you go on the pension?”

“Qualifications and experience not up to date”.

“Would you be happy to work with a young team?”

“We want someone with a high energy level”.

“We doubt whether you could learn the required new skills in the available time”.

“Standing in the way of younger people”.

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