

# **Age Discrimination in the Labour Market:**

Experiences and Perceptions of  
Mature Age Australians

June 2013

**Productive  
Ageing Centre**

**National Seniors  
Australia**

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Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

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## Foreword

There are numerous social and economic benefits to mature age people remaining in employment for as long as they are willing to continue working. One persistent barrier to mature age employment is age discrimination. Despite the skills, experience and mentoring abilities that mature age people can bring to workplaces, age discrimination unfortunately remains an obstacle to many senior Australians being able to work. Age discrimination can be direct – such as a person being told they are too old for a job – or can present in far more subtle ways.

This National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre research report, *Age Discrimination in the Labour Market: Experiences and Perceptions of Mature Age Australians*, seeks to measure the prevalence of work-related age discrimination in Australia from a nationwide survey of people aged 45-74 years.

The report finds that more indirect forms of age discrimination are particularly prevalent. These include people experiencing various types of exclusions in the workplace or in the job search process that they attribute to age. Perceptions of age discrimination as an issue are high, with five-in-six mature age job seekers agreeing it is an issue while looking for a job in Australia. Worryingly, many mature age people report that employers thinking they are too old is a reason for them not looking for work. Also of concern is that people with fragile links to the workforce, such as those with health issues and the very long-term unemployed, have the highest experiences of age discrimination.

Barriers to mature age employment have been detailed previously in research conducted by the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre for the Australian Government's Consultative Forum on Mature Age Participation. Further research focusing on specific barriers will remain a priority in the future.

Dr Tim Adair  
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June 2013

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The 2011-12 Barriers to Employment for Mature Age Australians Survey data used in this report was collected as part of the research conducted by NSPAC for the Consultative Forum on Mature Age Participation. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) funded the survey and the research conducted by NSPAC for the Forum. NSPAC acknowledges DEEWR's permission to use the survey data for this report.

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## Executive Summary

Increasing mature age employment participation can have benefits for Australian workplaces, the Australian economy, and for mature age people themselves. However, discrimination against workers or job seekers on the basis of their age is a potential barrier to mature age people utilising their skills and experience in the workplace. This study explores the experiences and perceptions of age discrimination in the Australian labour market using findings from a nationally representative survey of people aged 45-74 years undertaken in 2011-12.

The results reveal that 16% of people in the labour market have been directly told they are too old for a job; most commonly by a family member or friend. However, it is the more subtle forms of age discrimination that are particularly prevalent. Discrimination in the form of exclusion during the job search process, which is attributed to age, has been experienced by 36% of job seekers. Further, age-attributed exclusion in the workplace has been experienced by 13% of people. These forms of age discrimination have adversely affected the desire of a significant number of people to work or work more hours.

Perceptions of age discrimination as a labour market issue were very common amongst mature age people. Five-in-six job seekers agreed that age discrimination was a problem during the job search process in Australia, while 67% of workers agreed it was a problem in the workplace. These negative perceptions also affected workforce participation; 31% of retired people cited that being considered too old by employers is an important reason for them being retired, and about half of discouraged workers said it is an important reason for them not looking for work. Certain population groups were more likely than others to experience or perceive age discrimination; namely those not employed but not retired, low income earners, people with an illness or injury and, for age-attributed job search exclusion, people aged 55-64 years. Age discrimination also interacts with other barriers such as health problems and very long-term unemployment.

This study has considered a range of measures of age discrimination, including the more subtle forms, from the perspective of mature age people. There are limitations to viewing age discrimination only from this perspective, and other evidence finds employers have positive sentiments towards mature age workers. However, the significant numbers of mature age people reporting that different forms of age discrimination affected their desire to work or work more hours, demonstrate that it is acting as a barrier to their employment participation.

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# Age Discrimination in the Labour Market: Experiences and Perceptions of Mature Age Australians

## Introduction

The major demographic change in Australia caused by the large cohort of 'baby boomers' reaching the traditional age of retirement has significant implications for the labour market. The greater labour market involvement of mature age Australians can enhance workplaces with additional skills, experiences and mentoring abilities, while also providing income support for individuals' standard of living and quality of life (AHRC, 2012). Further, increasing mature age employment participation can help the Australian economy by generating additional Government revenue and reducing the reliance of many older people on transfer payments such as the Age Pension.



A potential barrier to mature age employment is age discrimination, which is defined by the Australian Human Rights Commission as “when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation, because of their age” (AHRC, 2013). Age discrimination in the workplace and during the job search process can lead to mature age unemployment and early retirement, adversely affecting individuals and their families. This disadvantage extends to businesses and the economy which do not benefit from the skills and experience of discouraged older workers (Ranzijn, Carson, Winefield, & Price, 2006). Age discrimination stems from negative stereotypes towards older people in the broader community and has been acknowledged widely in Australia and internationally (Encel, 2000; Mountford, 2011; Wilkins, Warren, Hahn, & Hough, 2011). In recent years, there has been greater recognition of the importance of age discrimination, with the passing of the 2004 Age Discrimination Act which aimed to protect people from being unfairly treated because of their age in the workplace, during education or while accessing goods and services (AHRC, 2010).

A number of manifestations of age discrimination have been identified both in the workplace and during the recruitment process. Direct age discrimination can occur when an older person is told directly that they are too old for a job. However, indirect discrimination can be more common, such as when employers use language describing older workers and job applicants as being unable to fit into the current work team, being overqualified, lacking up-to-date skills, being slow or unwilling to learn, or having health or fitness concerns even though these are not the major requirements for carrying out the role (AHRC, 2013; CDAA, 2010).

In the workplace, age discrimination can affect mature age workers in a number of ways; for example, by being denied promotions, not being provided with education and training opportunities, given lesser responsibilities, denied flexible working conditions for their health/physical needs, or being forced to retire. In particular, lack of training opportunities can adversely affect mature age people, who may need to keep their skills up-to-date to continue working. However, evidence shows that mature age workers are less likely to receive assistance, such as training from their employers (EERA, 2006; McNair, Flynn, Owen, Humphreys & Woodfield, 2004; Wright, 2012).

During recruitment, language used such as ‘dynamic workers’, and references to ‘young industries’ can discourage qualified mature age people from applying for positions (Wood, Wilkinson & Harcourt, 2008). There is significant evidence of these practices in the information and communications technology, finance, insurance, and retailing industries (ACS, 2010; Gringart & Helmes, 2001; Metcalf & Meadows, 2010). During a Western Australian study, fictitious resumes were mailed to 452 companies in different industries and found that younger applicants received more positive reviews than older applicants (Gringart & Helmes, 2001). Other studies have found that recruitment agencies, which are increasingly used during the job search process, are reluctant to accept older workers as clients or recommend them to employers (Encel & Studencki, 2004; NSW MACA, 2009). Another Australian study also indicated that many recruitment providers had a poor understanding of the implications of population ageing for future labour supply growth (Ranzijn, Carson, & Winefield, 2002).

Past studies have used a range of methods to measure the prevalence of age discrimination. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey revealed that 4% of employees had experienced age-related workplace discrimination in the last 2 years (Wilkins et al., 2011). A survey of 500 workers revealed that the most common forms of age-related

discrimination were being made redundant or laid off before others, inflexibility because of health/physical needs and being verbally discriminated against (Wright, 2012). HILDA results also showed that of people aged 55+ who unsuccessfully applied for a job, age was the most common reason given for not being successful (6%); more so than ethnicity, religion or parenting responsibilities (Wilkins et al., 2011). Further, 22% of people aged 55+ reported any discrimination as a reason for being unsuccessful in applying for a job, compared with 10% or less for people aged 15-44 years. Other research found that more than half of older workers and job seekers have cited age as their major barrier to finding employment (Encel & Studencki, 2004).

Less is known about socio-economic differences in age discrimination within Australia. A study of people aged 50 years and over found that those earning less than AU\$80,000 per annum, in particular those in middle income brackets, were over twice as likely to report experiencing age-related discrimination as those earning more than AU\$80,000 (Wright, 2012). For gender, a US study found no differences in experiencing age discrimination between males and females (Bendick, Jackson, & Romero, 2008). However, HILDA data has shown that female employees reported having experienced some form of discrimination more than males, especially during the course of employment (Wilkins et al., 2011). The same data also found higher reporting of discrimination amongst people with lower education and people from a non-english speaking background.

Although there are a number of studies that have examined age discrimination in Australia, there is a need for nationwide evidence of its prevalence, and identification of which population groups are most at risk of being adversely affected. Using a range of measures of age discrimination, this report seeks to understand people aged between 45 and 74 years regarding their experiences and perceptions of age discrimination both in the workplace and while looking for a job in Australia, in order to identify those who are most at risk of age discrimination.

The remaining sections of the report are: data and methodology, results, and discussion. Appendix tables are available at [productiveageing.com.au](http://productiveageing.com.au).

## Data and Methods

### Barriers to Employment for Mature Age Australians Survey

This report uses data from the 2011-12 Barriers to Employment for Mature Age Australians Survey to investigate experiences and perceptions of age discrimination in the workplace and during job search in Australia. This survey was commissioned by the Consultative Forum on Mature Age Participation, which comprised seniors' organisations, business, training and trade union representatives (NSPAC, 2011). The Forum was tasked by the Treasurer, the Hon Wayne Swan MP, and the Hon Kate Ellis MP, the Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare, to provide advice to the Australian Government on practical solutions to address the barriers to labour force participation of older Australians (NSPAC, 2011). Detailed findings from the survey are presented elsewhere (NSPAC, 2012).

The 2011-12 Barriers to Employment survey was conducted by ORC International on behalf of the National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre. The primary focus of the survey was to collect information on the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of the barriers to employment of Australians aged between 45 and 74 years. In particular, it gathered information on employment discrimination related to age, as well as participants' employment status, and their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. A total of 3,007 respondents were interviewed between November 2011 and January 2012.

The sample was stratified based on place of residence (i.e. capital city and rest of state). The number of interviews conducted within each stratum was determined approximately according to that stratum's share of the population aged 45-74 in Australia. An equal number of males and females were interviewed within each stratum. Data were weighted to be representative of the Australian estimated resident population (ERP) as at June 2011, according to age, sex and strata (ABS, 2011). Weighting was applied to the data to correct for possible sampling bias resulting from sample source and/or set quotas.

### How is age discrimination measured?

Age discrimination is difficult to measure. The most obvious form of age discrimination is when people are told they are too old for a job. However, as the literature review revealed, more indirect forms of age discrimination exist. Further, people's perceptions of age discrimination are also important, because it may affect their willingness to work.

This survey used a range of indicators to measure the experiences and perceptions of mature age people of age discrimination:

1. *Directly told you are too old for a job:* Whether directly told you are too old for a job by an employer, a colleague, a potential employer, an Australian Government service provider, a private recruitment agency, or a family member or friend.
2. *Exclusion in the workplace or during job search that was attributed to age:* Any exclusion experienced by respondents in the workplace or while looking for work in the previous five years, that they attributed to age. Exclusions in the workplace included being unfairly excluded from work-related training or education opportunities, being denied a job promotion and being given lesser responsibilities. Job search exclusions<sup>1</sup> included being passed over for a job interview when you were qualified for that job, being told you were "too qualified" for that job, and being asked your age in the job application process.

<sup>1</sup> The term "job search exclusion" refers to any exclusion that is experienced in the process of looking for a job.

For both workplace and job search, if a person reported having experienced at least one exclusion, they were asked whether they attributed that exclusion to age (as well as race, gender, health/disability or something else). Respondents were also asked if their workplace or job search exclusion influenced their desire to work or to work more hours. This approach was adapted from the Australian Work Ability Survey, which asked respondents to identify any exclusions they had experienced at work (Taylor, 2011). An advantage of this approach is that it allows for more subtle forms of age discrimination to be identified, and allows for more understanding of how age discrimination is operationalised in the labour market. However, these responses were based on participants' perceptions of whether the exclusion was due to their age, and so may be subject to some bias.

3. *Perceptions of age discrimination as an issue:* Respondents stated their agreement as to whether age discrimination is an issue in Australia in (a) the workplace or (b) in looking for employment.
4. *Number of discriminations experienced or perceived:* A summary measure of the number and types of age discriminations experienced or perceived was also developed. This measures how many of the following three indicators a respondent answered: (1) either experienced exclusion in the workplace or during job searches in the last five years that was attributed to age, (2) experienced being told directly or indirectly they were too old for a job in the last five years, (3) agreed that discrimination is an issue in Australia in the workplace or whilst looking for a job.

The prevalence of the measures of age discrimination and differences in the indicators according to socio-economic, demographic or other characteristics (e.g. occupation) were analysed. Multivariate analyses, including binary and multinomial logistic regression, assess the significant predictors of the indicators amongst these characteristics. In many of the figures, the prevalence of the indicator is presented as a percentage, and the regression results are presented as the significance of that category in predicting the indicator compared with the reference category. Full regression results are shown in the Appendix. The findings of some multivariate analyses are presented as predicted probabilities, which shows the likelihood of a person with a given set of characteristics, of experiencing a particular indicator of age discrimination. Interactions between the number of age discriminations and illness or injury and very long-term unemployment are also shown in order to examine whether people experience age discrimination in conjunction with other barriers to employment.

## Results

### Directly being told you are “too old” for a job

#### What is the prevalence and who is the most likely source?

Direct age discrimination, in the form of being told by someone that you are too old for a job, was reported by 16% of people who had worked or looked for a job in the last five years (Table 1). Interestingly, the most common source of direct age discrimination was by a family member or a friend (9%). Other common sources included private recruitment agencies (9% of users of agencies), a potential employer (7% of job seekers) and a work colleague (6% of paid workers). Directly being told you are too old for a job was less likely to come from an employer (3% of paid workers).

**Table 1:** Proportion (%) of respondents who reported being directly told they are too old for a job in the last 5 years

Been told by:	%	95% CI
Employer (% of people who have worked in the last 5 years & not self-employed)	3.0	2.0 - 3.9
Work colleague (% of people who have worked in the last 5 years)	6.4	5.2 - 7.6
Potential employer (% of people who have looked for a job in the last 5 years)	7.3	5.1 - 9.4
Australian Government service provider (% of people who have worked or looked for a job in the last 5 years)	1.7	1.1 - 2.4
Private recruitment agency (% of people who have used an agency)	8.8	4.6 - 12.9
Family member or friend (% of people who have worked or looked for a job in the last 5 years)	9.3	7.9 - 10.6
<b>Directly (% of people who have worked or looked for a job in the last 5 years)</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>14.1 - 17.6</b>

Note: 95% CI is the 95% confidence interval.

#### In which industries and occupations are people most likely to experience being directly told they are too old?

People who work as a machinery operator/driver or a labourer are most likely to have been told directly by an employer (7%), colleague (10%) or potential employer (15%) that they are too old for a job (Table 2). The proportions for this occupation group were significantly higher than for manager/ professional and clerical/ administration/ sales worker positions. There were no significant differences across various industries.

**Table 2:** Proportion (%) of respondents that reported being directly told they are too old by an employer, colleague or potential employer, by occupation and industry<sup>2</sup>

	Employer	Colleague	Potential employer
<i>Occupation</i>			
Machinery operator etc. (Ref.)	7.1	9.5	15.4
Technician/trades, community etc.	4.4	9.4	8.5
Manager/ professional	1.4**	5.1*	4.9**
Clerical/ admin./ sales worker	2.5*	4.4**	6.2*
Student/ Other	4.4	2.9*	11.4
<i>Industry</i>			
Construction, Manuf., Mining (Ref)	4.2	7.2	7.3
Agric., Forestry & Fishing etc.	2.1	6.6	9.9
Government, Education etc.	2.8	5.8	7.7
Wholesale/ retail trade etc.	2.4	4.7	6.7
Cultural/ recr./ personal etc.	2.6	8.5	3.9
Other	5.1	6.6	13.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>

\*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*  $p < 0.10$  Denominators same as in Table 1.

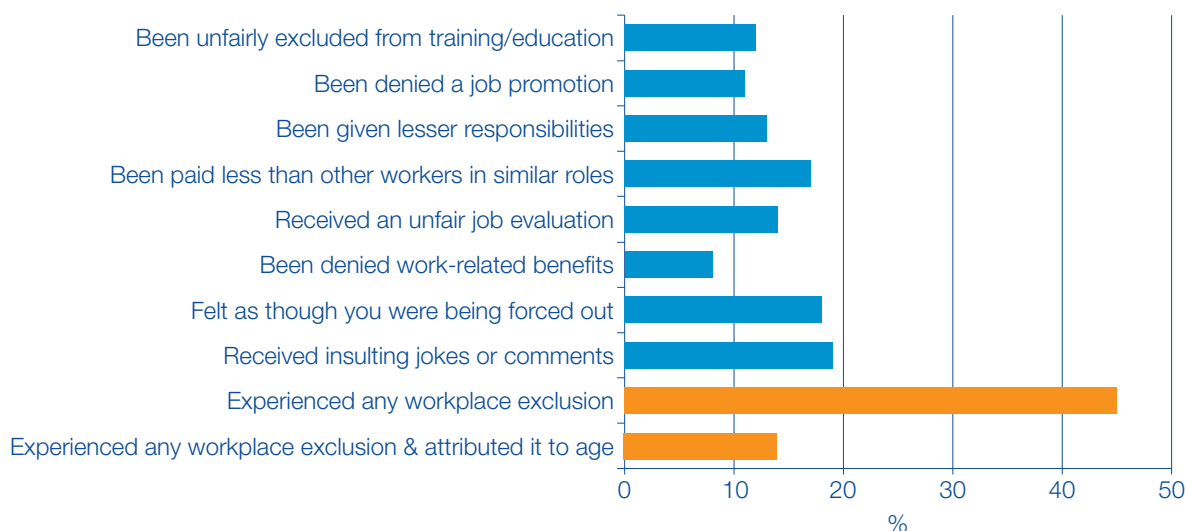
<sup>2</sup> For all relevant figures: Machinery operator etc.: Machinery operator/driver, labourer. Technician/trades, community etc.: Technician/trades, community/personal services worker. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing etc.: Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Transport and Storage, Electricity/ Gas/ Water Supply. Government, Education etc.: Government, Education, Communication, Finance and Insurance Services. Wholesale/ retail trade etc.: Wholesale/ retail trade, Hospitality/ Tourism/ Accommodation, Property and business services. Cultural/ recreational/ personal etc.: Cultural/ recreational/ personal/ health and community services.

## Age discrimination in the form of exclusion – workplace

### How prevalent is it?

Thirteen per cent of people who had worked in the past five years reported they experienced some form of workplace exclusion and attributed it to age (Figure 1). The most common forms of workplace exclusion were ‘insulting jokes or comments’ (19%) and ‘having felt as though you were being forced out, forced to retire or targeted in restructures’ (18%).

**Figure 1:** Leading types of reported workplace exclusion in the last 5 years, and if any workplace exclusion was attributed to age (%)



Note: % of people who have worked in the last 5 years but who are not self-employed. Been unfairly excluded from training/ education - Been unfairly excluded from work-related training or education opportunities, Felt as though you were forced out - Felt as though you were being either forced out, forced to retire or targeted in restructures.

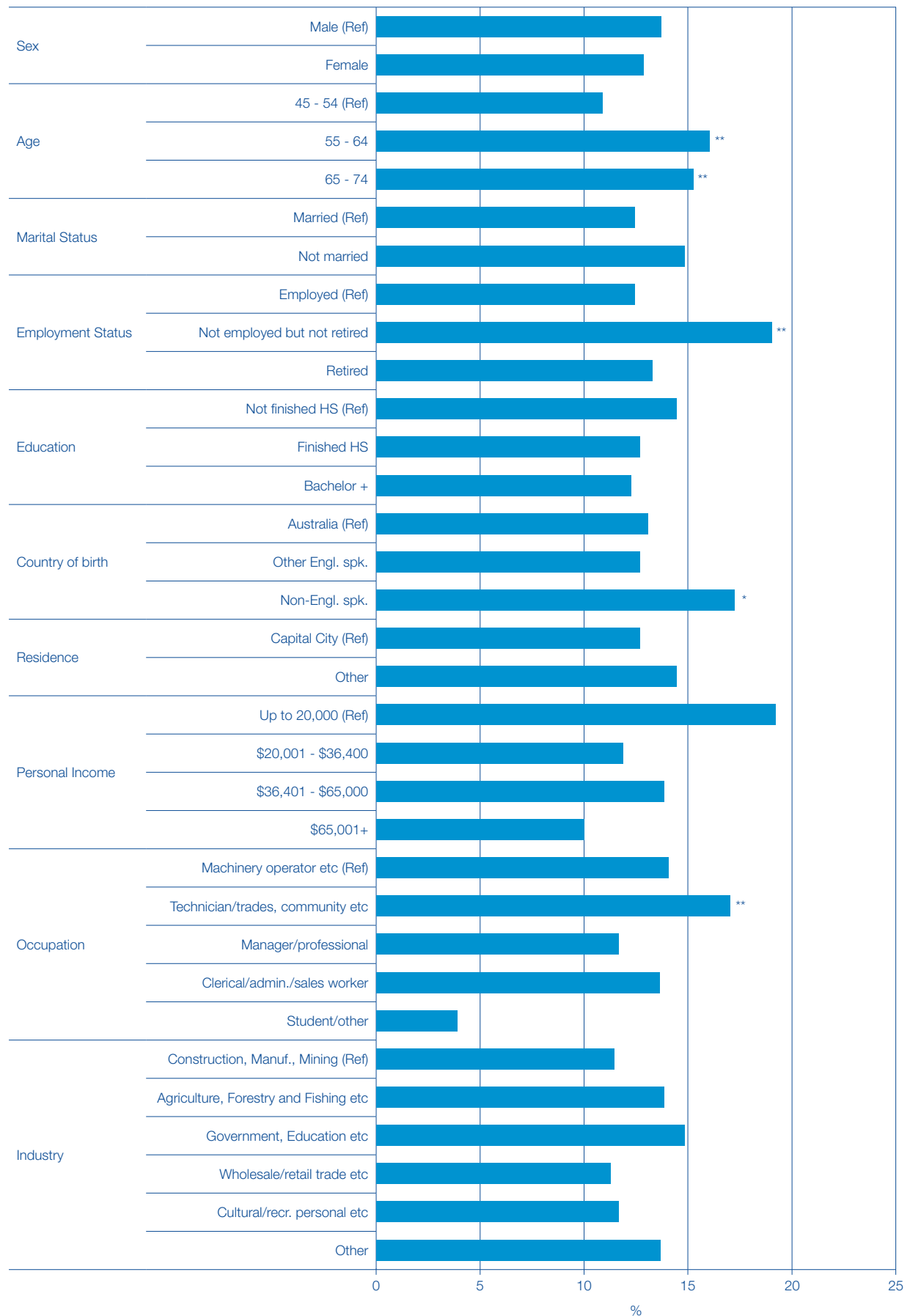
### Who is most likely to experience age-attributed workplace exclusion?

Figure 2 presents the prevalence of age-attributed workplace exclusion. The figure also shows which variables were statistically significant in predicting age-attributed workplace exclusion, based on results from the binary logistic regression (full regression results shown in Table A.1 in the Appendix).

Four variables were statistically significant predictors of age-attributed workplace exclusion, controlling for all other variables. In other words, age-attributed workplace exclusion is highest amongst people aged 55-74 years (compared with 45-54 year olds), those not employed but not retired (compared with the employed), people coming from a non-english speaking background (compared with those born in Australia), and people who work in the technician/ trades sector (compared with machinery operators).

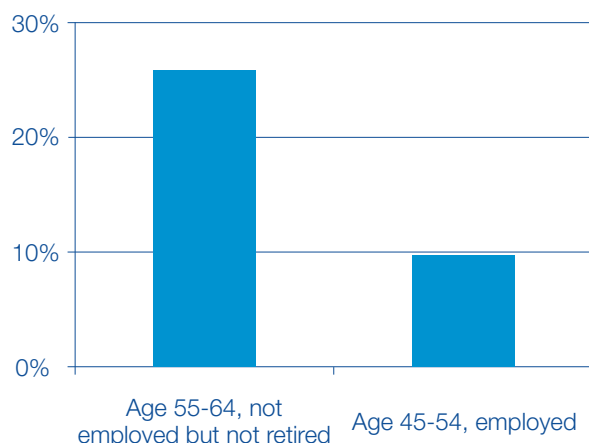
It is informative to assess how likely people with a different set of characteristics are to experience age discrimination in the form of exclusion. Predicted probabilities from the regression show that 26% of people aged 55-64 years who are not employed but not retired are predicted to report age-attributed workplace exclusion (Figure 3). This is over 2.5 times higher than the predicted 10% of people aged 45-54 years who are employed.

**Figure 2: Age-attributed workplace exclusion in the past 5 years by socio-economic and demographic characteristics (%)**



Note: % of people who have worked in the last 5 years but who are not self-employed. \*\* p<0.05 \* p<0.10, based on logistic regression of experience of age-attributed exclusion (i.e. controlling for all other listed variables). Regression results shown in Table A.1.

**Figure 3:** Predicted probability of reported experience of age-attributed workplace exclusion (%)

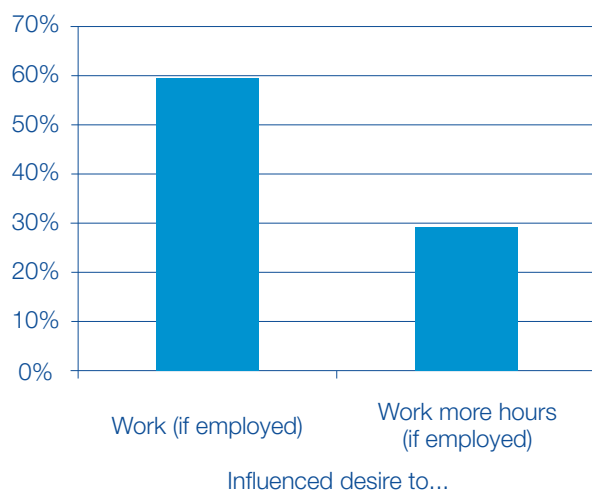


Note: % of people who have worked in the last 5 years but who are not self-employed. Regression results shown in Table A.1.

### What is the impact on the desire to work?

A significant proportion of people who reported age-attributed workplace exclusion stated that it influenced their desire to work (60% of the non-employed) and work more hours (29% of currently employed people) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Impact of reported experience of age-attributed workplace exclusion on desire to work or work more hours (%)



Note: % of people who reported experiencing age-attributed workplace exclusion

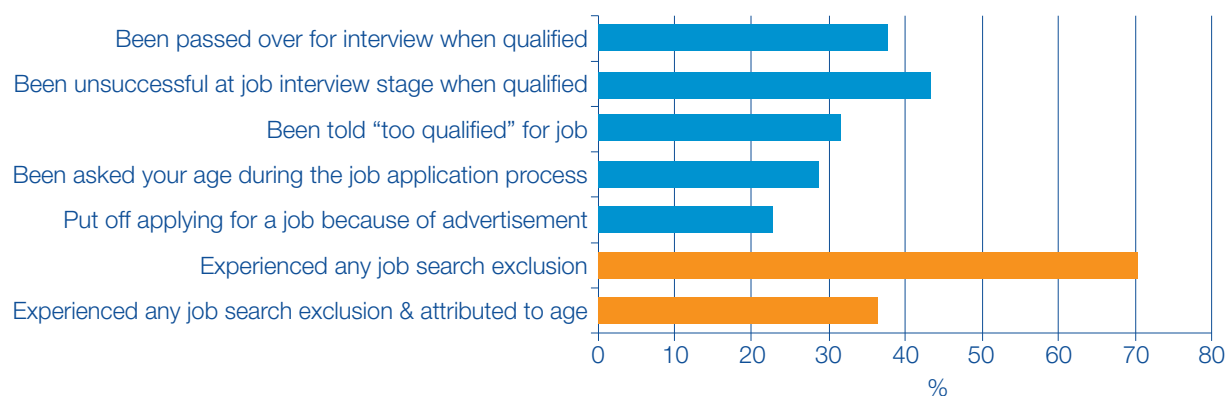


## Age discrimination in the form of exclusion – job search

### How prevalent is it?

Just over one-third of people (36%) who have looked for a job in the past 5 years reported experiencing some form of exclusion during the job search process, and attributed it to age (Figure 5). This is almost three times the proportion reported for workplace exclusion. The most common types of job search exclusion reported were ‘been unsuccessful at the job interview stage when qualified for that job’ and ‘been passed over for a job interview when qualified for that job’.

**Figure 5:** Leading types of reported job search exclusion in the last 5 years, and if any job search exclusion was attributed to age (%)



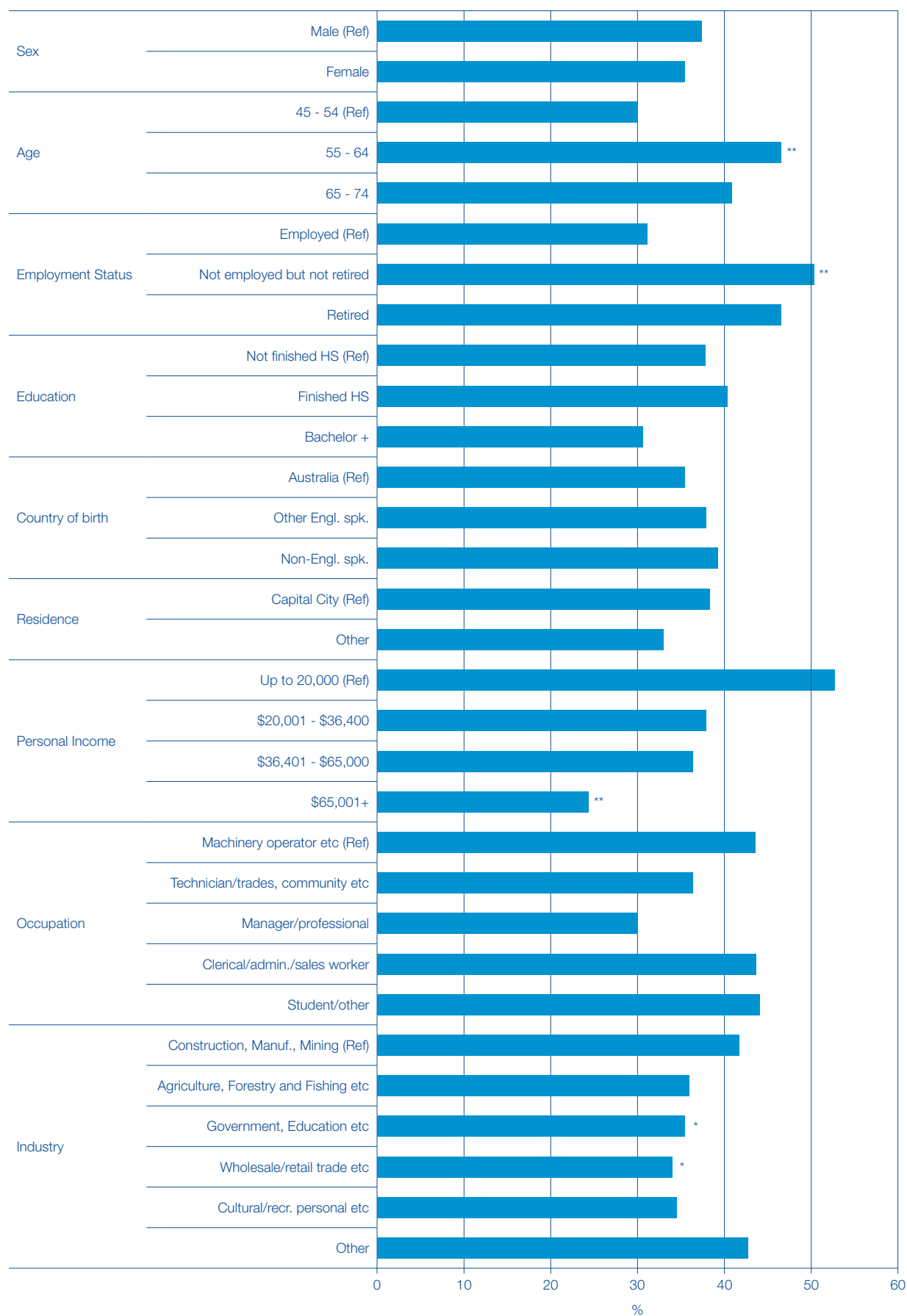
Note: % of people who have looked for a job in the last 5 years. Put off applying for a job because of advertisement - Put off applying for a job because advertisement asked for “dynamic worker” or used similar language.

### Who is most likely to experience age-attributed job search exclusion?

Reported job search exclusion attributed to age is highest for low income earners (53% of people earning less than \$20,000, compared to 24% of people earning more than \$65,000), those not employed but not retired (51% compared with 31% for the employed) and people aged 55-64 years (46% compared with 30% for people aged 45-54 years) (Figure 6). This age-attributed job search exclusion was also higher for those with backgrounds in the construction, manufacturing and mining industries compared with the government/ education and wholesale/ retail trade sectors.

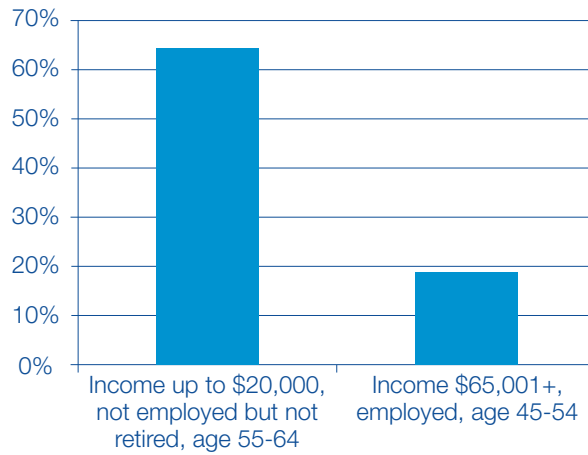
Predicted probabilities reveal stark differences in age-attributed job search exclusion for different combinations of characteristics. Almost two-thirds (65%) of people with an income of up to \$20,000, who are not employed but not retired, and who are aged 55-64 years are likely to report experiencing job search exclusion related to age (Figure 7). This is over three times the predicted probability for employed people with an income greater than \$65,000 and aged 45-54 years (19%).

Figure 6: Age-attributed job search exclusion in the last 5 years by socio-economic and demographic characteristics (%)



Note: % of people who have looked for a job in the last 5 years, \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*  $p < 0.10$ , based on logistic regression of experience of age-attributed exclusion (i.e. controlling for all other listed variables). Regression results shown in Table A.2.

**Figure 7:** Predicted probability of reporting experiences of age-attributed job search exclusion

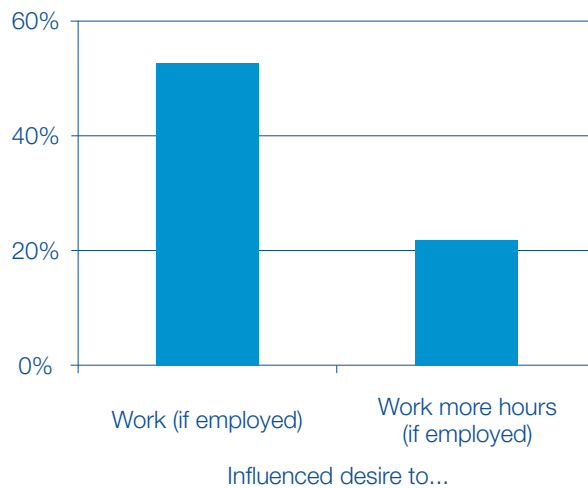


Note: % of people who have searched for a job in the past five years. Regression results shown in Table A.2.

**What is the impact of age-attributed job search exclusion on the desire to work?**

Just over half (53%) of non-employed people reported that age-attributed job search exclusion influenced their desire to work (Figure 8). Also, over one-fifth (22%) of employed people who reported experiencing age-attributed job search exclusion said that it influenced their desire to work more hours.

**Figure 8:** Impact of reported experience of age-attributed job search exclusion on desire to work or work more hours



Note: % of people who experienced age-attributed job search exclusion

## What are the perceptions of age discrimination as an issue in Australia?

A high proportion of people aged 45-74 years believed age discrimination is an issue in Australia. Two-thirds (67%) of people who have worked in the past 5 years agree or strongly agree that age discrimination is an issue in the workplace in Australia (Figure 9). Perceptions of age discrimination during job search were even higher (83% of people who have looked for a job in the past 5 years agree or strongly agree).

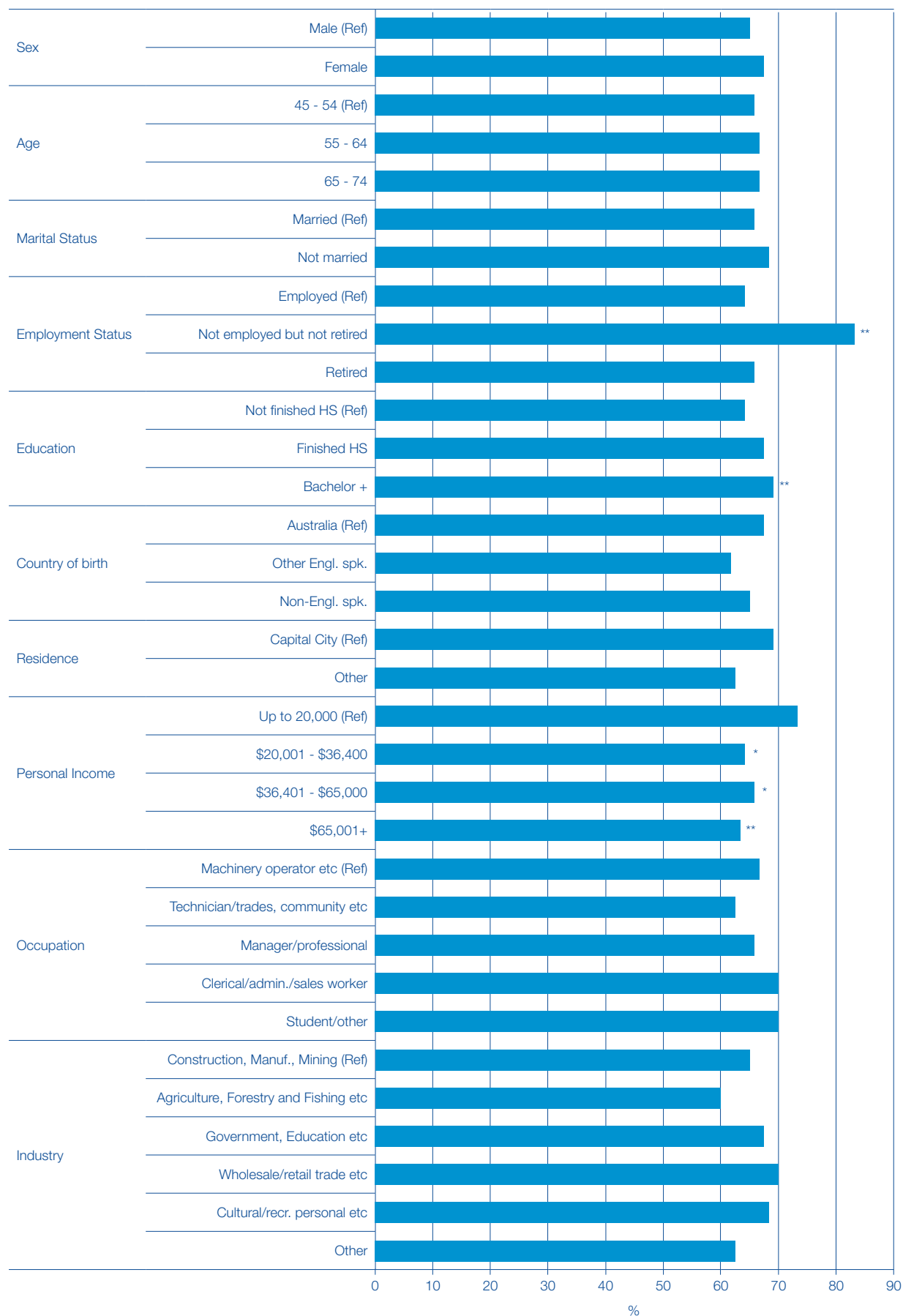
Perceptions of age discrimination as an issue are consistently strong across a range of characteristics. In the workplace, it was perceived the highest amongst people not employed but not retired (83% agree or strongly agree compared with 64% of the employed), who earn less than \$20,000 (73% compared with 63% for those earning over \$65,000) and people with a bachelor degree or higher (69% compared with 64% who have not finished high school) (Figure 10). During job search, age discrimination was perceived mostly by those who are not employed but not retired (91% compared with 81% for the employed) and earning less than \$20,000 (88% compared with 77% of those earning over \$65,000) (Figure 11). Interestingly, there are no clear differences in the perceptions of age discrimination as an issue across different ages.

**Figure 9:** Proportion (%) of respondents who strongly agree or agree that age discrimination is an issue in the workplace and while looking for a job in Australia



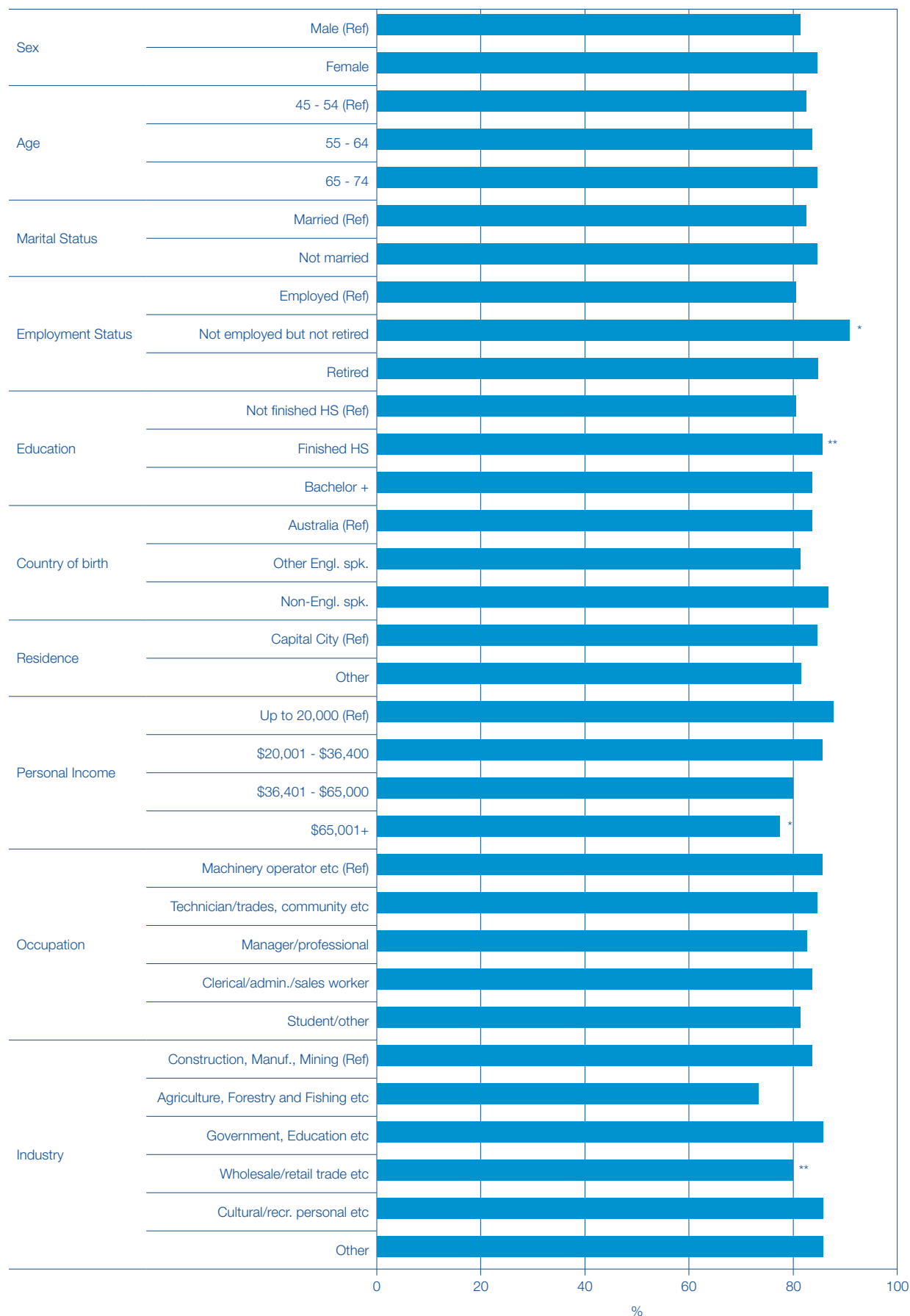
Note: % of people who have worked in the last 5 years, and % who looked for a job in the last 5 years

**Figure 10:** Age discrimination is an issue in the workplace in Australia by socio-economic and demographic characteristics (% strongly agree or agree)



Note: % of people who have worked in the last 5 years. \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*  $p < 0.10$ , based on logistic regression of perceptions of age discrimination being an issue in the workplace (i.e. controlling for all other listed variables) Regression results in Table A.3.

**Figure 11:** Age discrimination is an issue while looking for a job in Australia, by socio-economic and demographic characteristics (% strongly agree or agree)

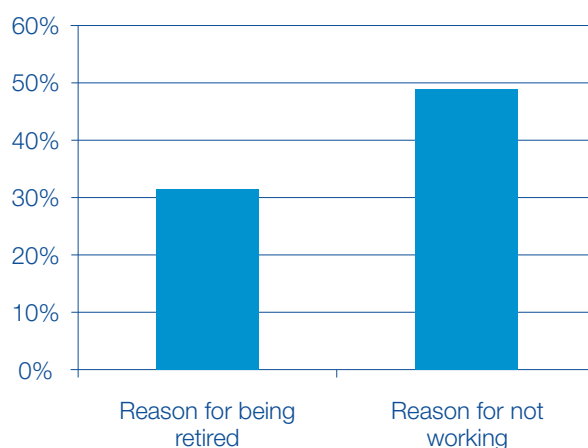


Note: % of people who looked for a job in the last 5 years. \*\*  $p < 0.05$  \*  $p < 0.10$ , based on logistic regression of perception of age discrimination being an issue while looking for a job (i.e. controlling for all other listed variables) Regression results in Table A.3

## Do perceptions of age discrimination discourage workforce participation?

Perceptions of age discrimination are also shown to have affected people's desire to work. Almost one-third (31%) of retired people cited that being considered too old by employers was either a somewhat or very important reason for them being retired (Figure 12). Also, approximately half of discouraged workers (i.e. who are not employed but not retired, who want to work but are not looking) stated that being considered too old by employers was either a somewhat or very important reason for them not looking for work.

**Figure 12:** Proportion of respondents reporting that employers thinking they are too old as a reason for being retired or not working (%)



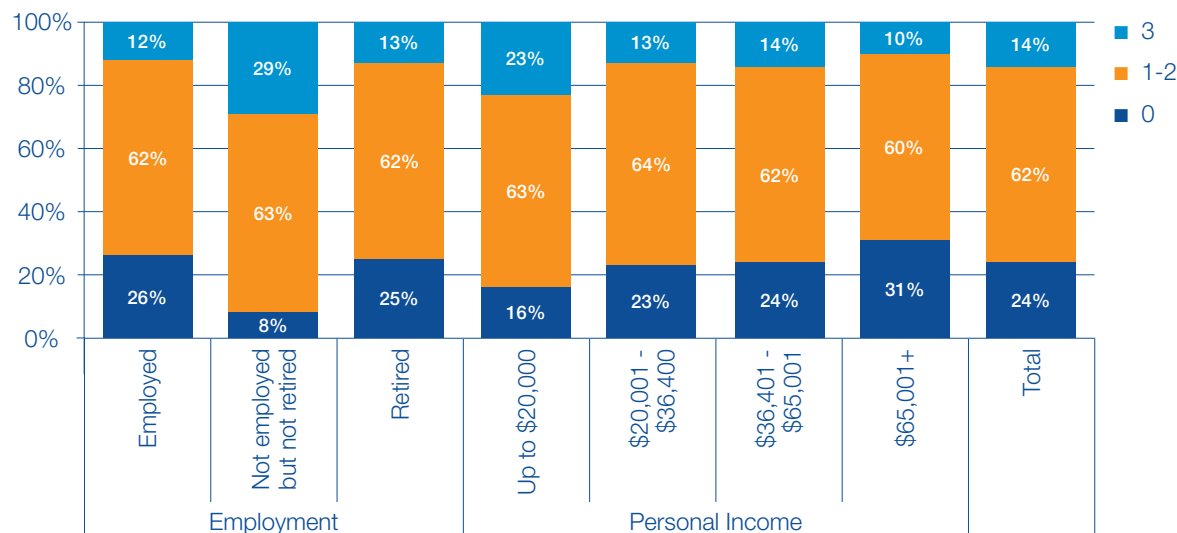
Note: % of retired, and % of discouraged workers

## Number of age discriminations experienced or perceived

Given the range of measures of age discrimination, it is helpful to assess the presence of it in the Australian labour market through applying an overall measure of mature age people's reported experiences and perceptions of age discrimination.

Fourteen per cent of those who have worked or looked for a job in the last five years, reported three discriminations, while almost one-quarter (24%) reported none (Figure 13).

**Figure 13:** Number of age discriminations reported to have been experienced or perceived by employment status and personal income (%)



Note: % of people who had worked in the last 5 years (excluding the self-employed) or looked for a job in the last 5 years.

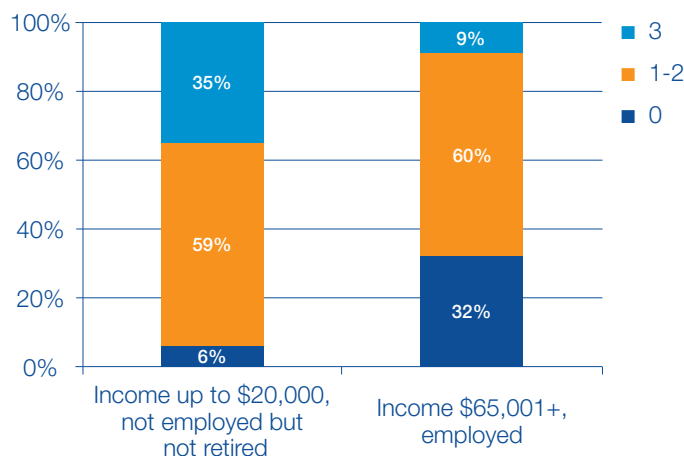
### How does the number of reported age discriminations vary across different population groups?

The total number of age discriminations reported varied primarily by employment status and income. Those most likely to report they experienced or perceived all three discriminations were those not employed but not retired (29% compared with 12% for the employed) and who earn up to \$20,000 (23% compared with 10% for those earning over \$65,000) (Figure 13).

Multinomial logistic regression was utilised to model the dependent variable of the number of discriminations (results are presented in Table A.4). The findings from this modelling confirmed these results, but also showed that experiencing or perceiving three compared with zero discriminations is more likely for males compared with females, people living in a capital city compared with not living in a capital city, and people with a bachelor's degree compared with people who had not finished high school.

The predicted probabilities again reveal stark differences across various combinations of personal characteristics (Figure 14). Over one-third (35%) of people with an income of up to \$20,000 and who are not employed but not retired are predicted to report three discriminations, and only 6% reporting no discriminations. In sharp contrast, it is predicted that only 9% of employed people with an income greater than \$65,000 will report three discriminations, while almost one-third (32%) will report no discriminations.

**Figure 14:** Predicted probabilities of number of age discriminations reported to have been experienced or perceived (%)



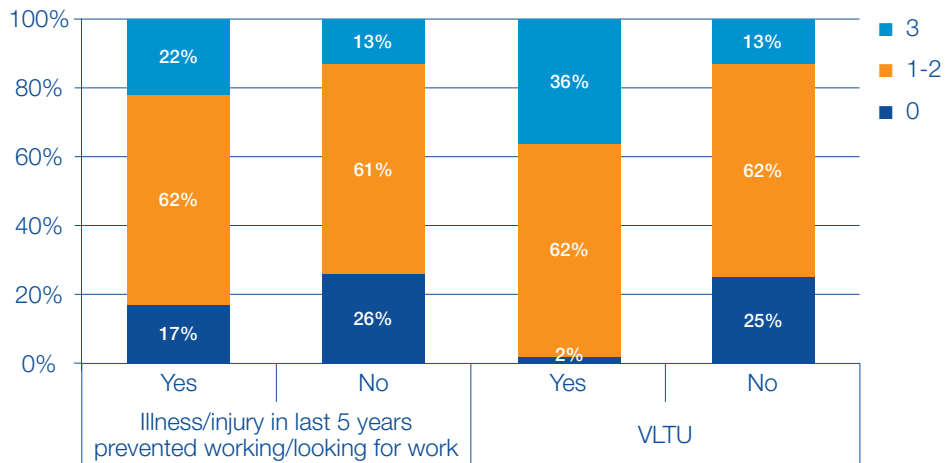
Note: % of people who had worked in the last 5 years (excluding the self-employed), or looked for a job in the last 5 years. Regression results shown in Table A.4.



### How does age discrimination interact with health and long-term unemployment?

The number of discriminations experienced or perceived was higher amongst people with poor health (Figure 15). Over one-fifth (22%) of people who had an illness or injury<sup>3</sup> in the past five years which prevented them from working or looking for work, stated they experienced or perceived three types of discrimination, compared with 13% who were not ill or injured. Amongst the very long-term unemployed<sup>4</sup>, 36% experienced or perceived three types of discrimination, compared to 13% of those who are not part of the very long-term unemployed.

**Figure 15:** Number of age discriminations reported to have been experienced or perceived by those with an illness/injury and by the very-long-term unemployed (VLTU) (%)



Note: % of people who had worked in the last 5 years (excluding self-employed) or looked for a job in the last 5 years.

<sup>3</sup> Illness/ injury defined as having been experienced in the last 5 years and that prevented them from working/looking for work

<sup>4</sup> Defined as having not worked for 24 months but who have worked before and have looked for work in the last 5 years.

## Discussion

This report has utilised the survey findings from mature age people aged 45-74 years regarding their experiences and perceptions of age discrimination within the Australian labour market. Results show that direct age discrimination in the form of being told you are too old has been experienced by one in six workers or job seekers, which is comparatively higher than the HILDA data revealed (Wilkins et al., 2011). Interestingly, family and friends were the most common source of direct age discrimination; showing that this is a society-wide issue, rather than being limited to the labour market.

More subtle forms of age discrimination, in terms of experiencing exclusion during job search (36%) or in the workplace (13%) that was attributed to age, were also found to be present. The most commonly reported job search exclusion was that job applicants were unsuccessful in obtaining a position, despite being qualified for that role; this is consistent with the findings of Gringart and Helmes (2001). The most common forms of workplace exclusion were receiving insulting jokes or comments, feeling as though they were being forced out, and being paid less than those in similar roles. Importantly, significant proportions of people experiencing age-attributed job search or workplace exclusion reported being discouraged from seeking work or working more hours.

The findings show a perception amongst the majority of mature age people that age discrimination is an important issue in the labour market. Additionally, many people believe they are considered too old by employers, which also affected the desire of significant proportions of both retired and discouraged workers to find employment. It should be kept in mind that people's perceptions of age discrimination may be influenced by a range of information sources, including friends, family, colleagues and mass media.

Overall, about three-quarters of mature age people in the Australian labour market reported either having experienced age discrimination or agreed that it is an issue. Age discrimination is most likely experienced and perceived by people with fragile links to the workplace and with lower economic resources. That is, people who are ill, injured or living with a disability, on a low income, those not employed or not retired, the very long-term unemployed, and those aged 55 years and older. The results also show that age discrimination is often more common amongst those in physically demanding manual occupations and industries.

This report has presented findings generated from a survey of the experiences and perceptions of mature age people themselves. However, for a more complete picture of age discrimination in the Australian labour market, it is necessary to also consider the perspectives of Australian employers. The 2010 DEEWR Survey of Employers provided such information; detailed findings from the survey were reported by Adair and Temple (2012) (TNS Social Research, 2012). This study found that the overall perceptions of employers were positive; most reported no challenges with employing mature age workers. The minority who did report some challenges indicated that mature age workers 'may lack skills/qualifications', are 'less productive/slower/may require help', and 'not suited to the type of work we do'. Despite the majority of employers' positive attitudes to mature age workers, this should not be interpreted that age discrimination is not present in these workplaces. However, a clear finding is that employers with a written mature age policy are far better placed to retain their mature age workers. Strategies to retain mature age workers that are reported in the survey include reducing or changing workload or responsibilities, changing work arrangements and offering training or mentoring roles. Such strategies can provide mature age workers with responsibilities and tasks where their skills and experiences can best be employed, and create an environment where age discrimination is less likely to be present.

There are some limitations to the survey of barriers that need to be considered. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the survey instrument only included information from the perspectives of mature age people. The accurate measurement of incidences of age discrimination is very difficult; this survey's responses represent people's perceptions and experiences only. It also focussed on people aged 45-74 years, while additional perspectives could be gained by comparisons with younger people, who may also face age discrimination. Additionally, the survey was a one-off cross-sectional study, and so changes which occur over time among different age groups cannot be measured.

However, despite these drawbacks, this survey has provided nationally representative data with a large sample size, using a number of different measures of age discrimination and a wide array of socio-economic and demographic variables. The measurement of age discrimination using reported exclusions in the workplace or during job search allowed for more indirect forms of age discrimination to be examined, and provided greater understanding of how age discrimination operates.

Although there is a range of ways to measure age discrimination, it is a major issue to be considered when assessing participation of mature age people in the Australian labour market. Further, many people who reported experiencing age discrimination stated it has adversely affected their desire to work. Age discrimination also interacts strongly with other barriers to mature age employment, such as health issues and very long-term unemployment. Strategies to overcome these issues, including having workplaces that are more accommodating to people with health issues, would aid in addressing age discrimination. Acknowledging and taking steps to overcome the barriers to mature age employment will assist Australian workplaces to benefit from the skills, experiences and mentoring abilities that mature age workers offer, as well as providing a myriad of broader advantages for individuals and their families, government and wider society.

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## Appendix

Appendix tables are available at [productiveageing.com.au](http://productiveageing.com.au).

Table A.1: Logistic regression results for reported experiencing any workplace exclusion in the last 5 years and attributed it to age

Table A.2: Logistic regression results for reported experiencing any job search exclusion in the last 5 years and attributed it to age

Table A.3: Logistic regression results for agreement (stated strongly agree or agree) that age discrimination is an issue in the workplace in Australia or whilst looking for a job in Australia

Table A.4: Multinomial logistic regression results for number of age discriminations

## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL SENIORS PRODUCTIVE AGEING CENTRE**

The National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre is an initiative of National Seniors Australia and the Department of Health and Ageing to advance research into issues of productive ageing. The Centre's aim is to advance knowledge and understanding of all aspects of productive ageing to improve the quality of life of people aged 50 and over.

The Centre's key objectives are to:

- Support quality consumer oriented research informed by the experience of people aged 50 and over;
- Inform Government, business and the community on productive ageing across the life course;
- Raise awareness of research findings which are useful for older people; and
- Be a leading centre for research, education and information on productive ageing in Australia.

For more information visit [www.productiveageing.com.au](http://www.productiveageing.com.au) or call 03 9650 6144.



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