



'The Elephant in the (Interview) Room: Older jobseekers' experiences of discrimination

Research team: Simon Biggs, *University of Melbourne*; Dina Bowman, *Brotherhood of St Laurence*; Dr Helen Kimberley, *Brotherhood of St Laurence*; Michael McGann, *University of Melbourne* , Alan Duncan, *Curtin University*; Riyana Miranti, *NATSEM University of Canberra*



At Centrelink they don't talk about that [age discrimination]. You're not allowed bring the topic up ... It's like an elephant in the scenario ...

In my 40s ... I had no idea about this age discrimination thing. Then, 50, when you look at all the jobs you're applying for, getting knocked back: so you roll up for an interview and you think, "ah yeah, I'm doing well here" and then you, you know, they give you stupid feedback, or you seen their face drop when you walk in the room, I don't know.

(Diane, librarian, 55)

About the study

Two key elements

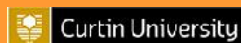
Study of lived experiences of 80 older men and women who:

- haven't been able to find a job or
- are under-employed



Statistical study of :

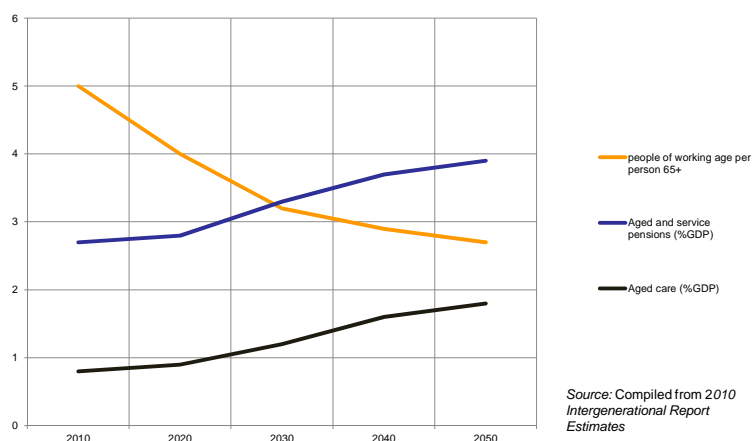
- factors shaping mature age un – and under-employment
- Impacts on financial and personal wellbeing



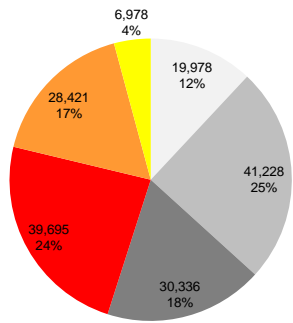
Key research questions

- What are the factors shaping under-employment and unemployment among older Australians? How do these differ between men and women of different ages?
- How does reduced labour force participation affect older men and women's wellbeing and expectations about growing older?
- How can existing employment services and programs better assist mature age jobseekers?

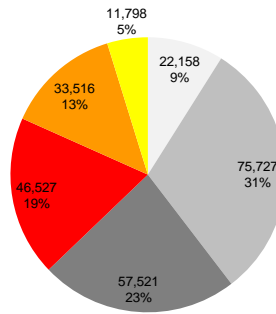
Why is this important?



Females on Newstart & YA recipients July 2014



Males on Newstart & YA recipients Jul 2014

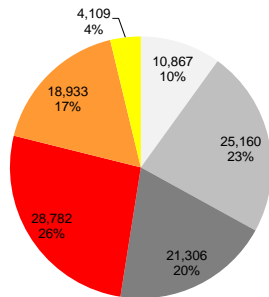


>20yrs
20-29yrs
30-39yrs
40-49yrs
50-59yrs
60+yrs

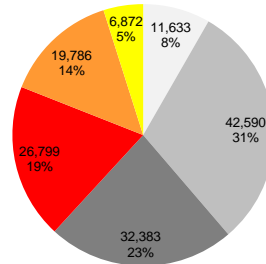
• In July 2014, almost 167,000 Newstart recipients were aged 40+ years

Source: Department of Social Services, Labour Market Payments and Related Data

Females long-term unemployed Jul 2014



Males long-term unemployed Jul 2014

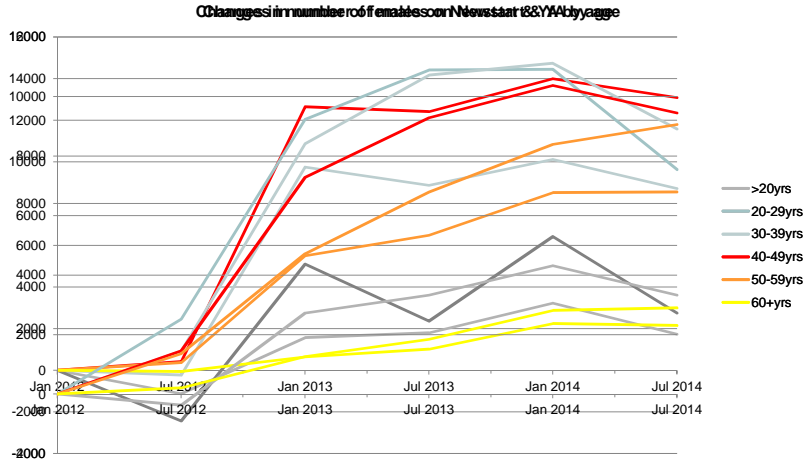


>20yrs
20-29yrs
30-39yrs
40-49yrs
50-59yrs
60+yrs

More than 105,000 (63%) Newstart recipients aged 40+ were long-term unemployed in July 2014

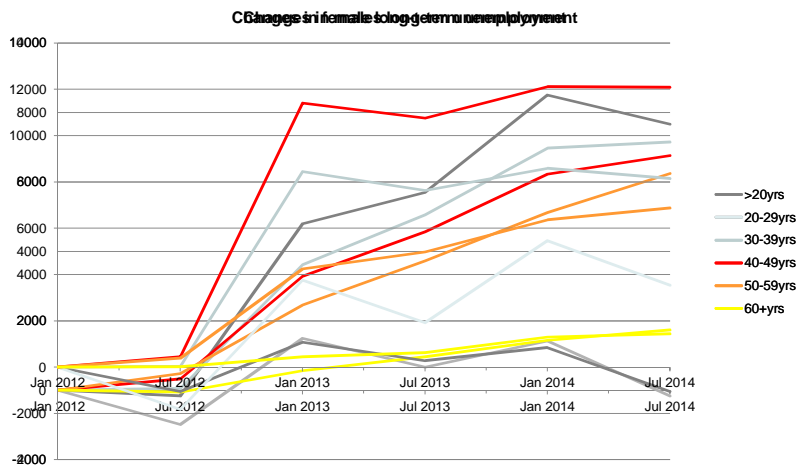
Source: Department of Social Services, Labour Market Payments and Related Data

Increasing number of older jobseekers



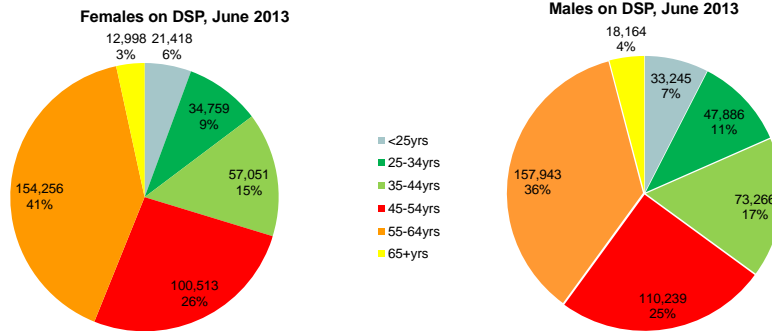
Source: Department of Social Services, Labour Market Payments and Related Data

Increasing long-term unemployment



Source: Department of Social Services, Labour Market Payments and Related Data

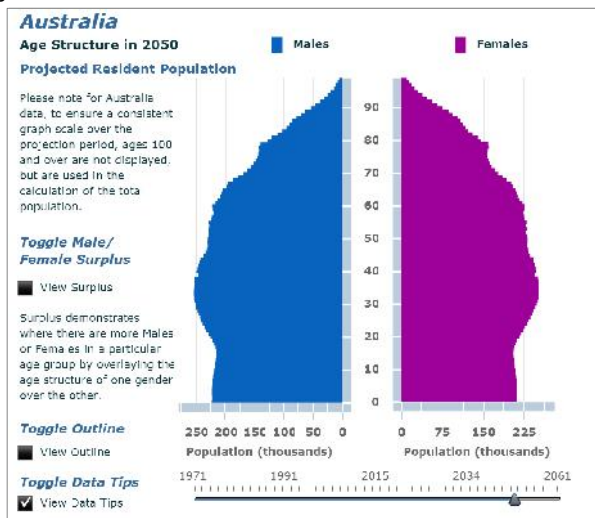
Older Australians on DSP



Source: Department of Social Services, Characteristics of Disability Support Pension Recipients, June 2013

Future growth in older Australians on DSP or Newstart?

- Rising pension age from 2017
- Population ageing



Source: ABS

Probably to be an age right now, I'd like to be about 40 because you still are not going to be old in the workforce
(Sarah, administrative worker, 58)

AGEISM

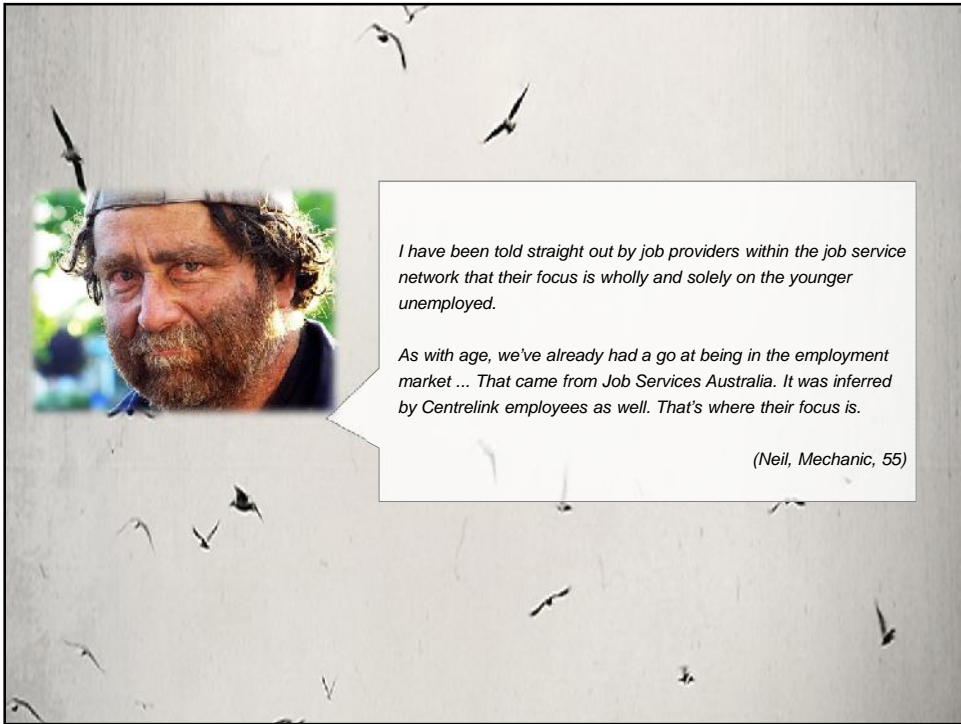
- more than 1 in 3 job seekers aged 45+ report being discriminated against because of their age during the job search process (National Seniors Australia 2013)
- most common of all reasons for discrimination given by Australians who report labour market discrimination (Melbourne Institute Study 2013)

I applied online for a position in [name of call centre] ... My daughter had applied for the same position, but she'd applied before me and she said to me, there's still jobs going...

So, I applied and I got an email back saying they didn't think I had enough experience. But, in that online application, even though I didn't have an option not to tick a box that's age related, and the box I had to pick, was I think, 50 to 60 or something anyway...

You know they say they don't discriminate with age ... but to get an email back saying I didn't have much experience... considering I was in a Centerlink call center for five years and was actually a coach and a trainer, so how they thought I didn't have enough experience than my 23 year old daughter [who] has got a job.

(Rita, 57)

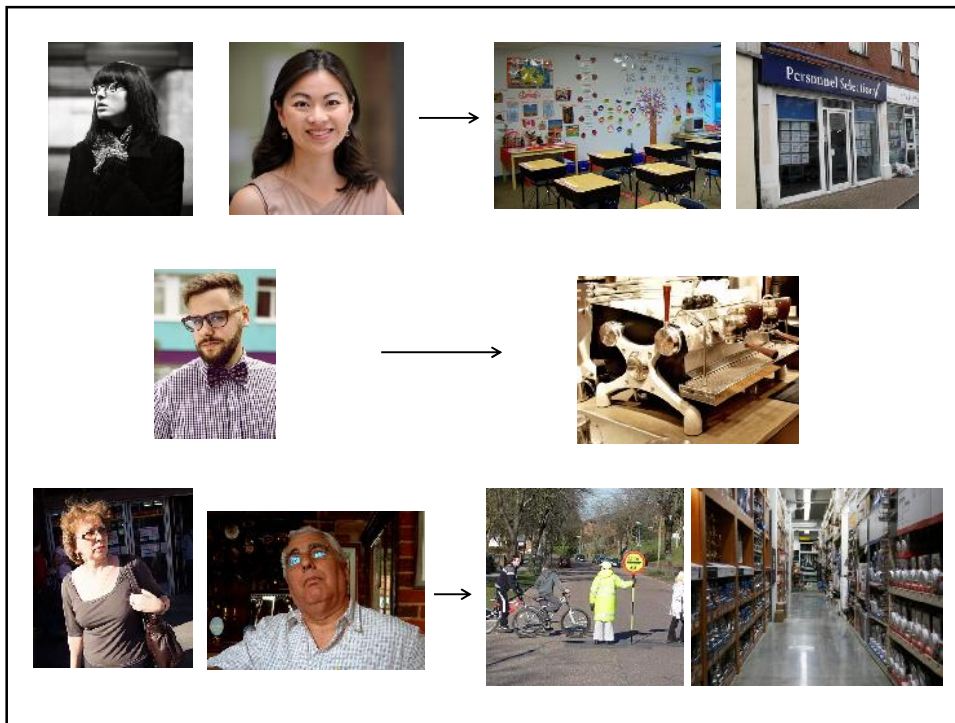


I have been told straight out by job providers within the job service network that their focus is wholly and solely on the younger unemployed.

As with age, we've already had a go at being in the employment market ... That came from Job Services Australia. It was inferred by Centrelink employees as well. That's where their focus is.

(Neil, Mechanic, 55)

A.	B.	Traffic warden	Recruitment consultant
C.	Primary school teacher		
D.	E.	Brunswick cafe	Hardware store



Women often seen as 'old' sooner than men:

- women more likely to be stereotyped as 'older workers' than their same-aged male colleagues (Duncan & Loretto 2004)
- In another study, managers saw women's careers peaking at 35 10 years earlier than men's (Itzin & Phillipson 1995)

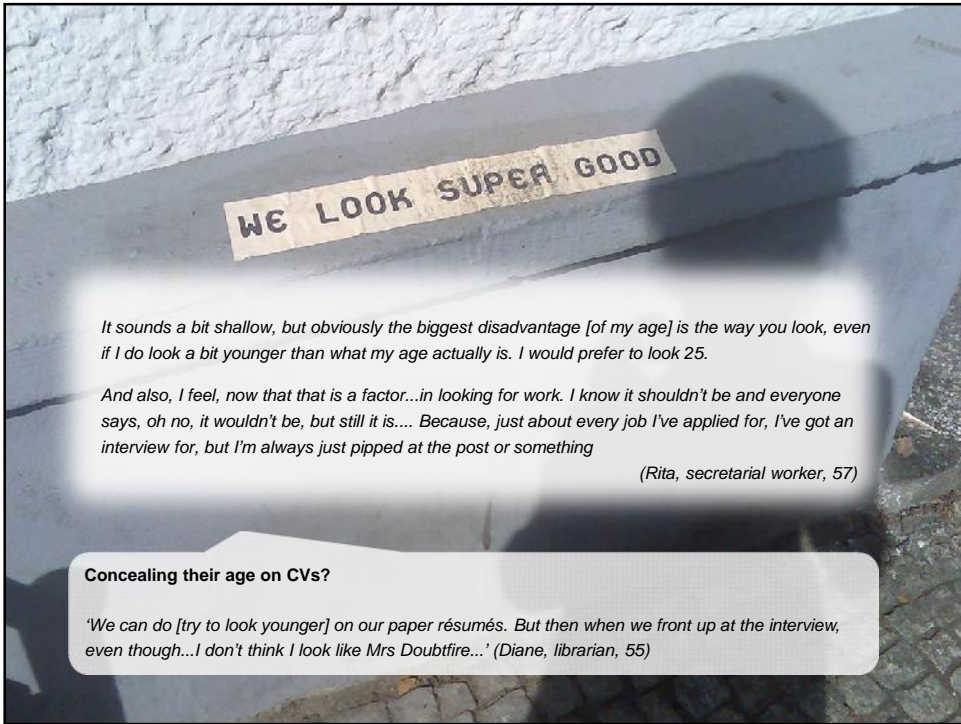


[How old would you like to be?] Oh, probably 30... you wouldn't look too old to work but you have enough experience to compete
 (Veronica, office administration, 60)

It [my age] seems to be a problem if you have to go for an interview—they take one look at my grey hair, and just completely dismiss you.

(Eileen, labourer, 57)

(Eileen, labourer, 57)



Age mismatches with recruiters & managers



I think for some of the positions where I'm [considered] over qualified, then I may be running into younger hiring managers and people who don't want to be hiring somebody who's potentially older and maybe even more experienced kind of thing

(Dan, lab technician, 53)

Age diverse workplaces?



You get asked the stupidest questions in interviews. You know, "how do you think you'll get on with younger people". Well, I've got four kids who are adults...I'm not alienated...

You know, you go to an interview and, you know, you're going really well, you think, answering the questions and, you know, you get feedback like, "you're not a cultural fit". That's just code...

(John, financial services, 57)

Employment services staff

I could see all those consultants, they look so young ... They look at you like they're going to be kind of hesitant to tell you something, or whatever...

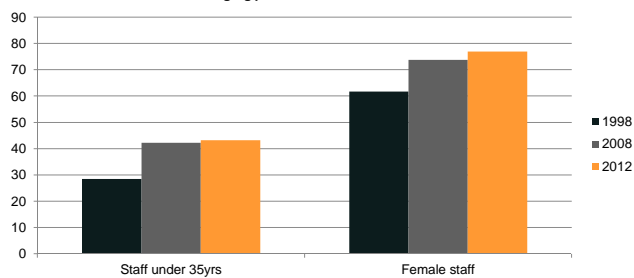
I would imagine that at least 80 per cent of their ages are between 25 to 35 at the most, or even younger. (Veronica, clerical worker, 60)

I feel actually quite stressed out when I have to go see them, because they're so incompetent. I saw how they printed out my CV one day, and it was a nightmare. It's not something I ever would've sent in ...

Maybe they're competing with other agencies that just have more professional people but I did feel like the people I've dealt with there have not been very professional. Either that, or they're very, very young (Miriam, project officer, 55)

Effects of outsourcing

Changing profile of frontline services staff



Source: extracted from Considine & Lewis (2010); Considine et al. (2013)

Strong agree or agree that:	1998 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)
'Our computer system tells me what steps to take with jobseekers and when to take them.'	17.4	47.4	50.4
'When it comes to day-to-day work I am free to decide for myself what I will do with each jobseeker'	84.6	62.5	60.2

Source: extracted from Considine, Lewis & O'Sullivan (2011); Considine et al. (2013)



The processes now in place have taken away maybe the ability to just deal with people a little bit ...

I think now there are so many, there is only so much leeway you've got now, there are so many rules involved that you really, it's become a much more administrative task I think now, almost like a process rather than an individual

(employment consultant quoted in Considine et al. 2011)

[T]hese fast-track university students who are predominantly female [and under-30] ... They are very naïve in the ways of life, love, work. They're reading rote stuff, which is American-based, which doesn't sit well with many of us in my age group ...

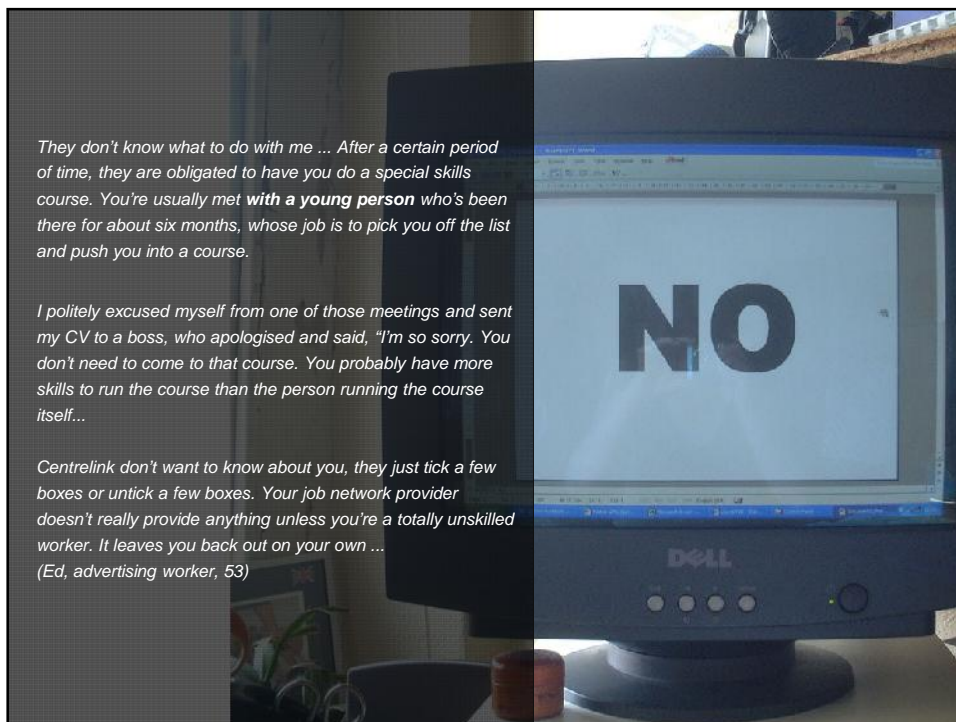
I'd go and apply for a job, they would try and send me off to become a traffic controller, or something like that... [I had] heated discussions with them. I said, "A job like that will bore me senseless"...

"That's an age-appropriate job," they've said that to me on several occasions, when they've tried to put me in those traffic controllers. If it wasn't a traffic controller, I'd become a taxi driver. Or become a courier driver...

You go off to the next person, or employer, or job service provider, and they want to do exactly the same thing, but slightly different. You say I've done all that sort of stuff ...

(Neil, mechanic, 55)





Potential strategies to consider

Employment services staff (internal issues)

- Matching older jobseekers with more experienced consultants
- Ageism awareness workshops for employment services staff

Minimising discrimination during job search and recruitment

- Consider age profile of managers and workplaces when targeting older jobseekers to jobs
- Issues around jobseekers appearance and dress style

Convincing businesses and employers

- Business case for hiring older workers
- Restart and other incentives available to employers

For more information

www.workinglonger.wordpress.com

Image and other references on request
Michael McGann mmgann@unimelb.edu.au

