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No fair go for older workers

LAURA SPERANZA *The Sunday Telegraph* March 02, 2013 2:12PM

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HUNDREDS of thousands of older Australians say they want to work and are actively looking for a job but are not being given a fair go by employers.

Mature-age applicants say companies and recruitment agencies are secretly implementing age limits on new employees and ignoring decades of work experience in favour of younger job seekers with university qualifications.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has been forced to intervene in 84 reported cases of age discrimination, with research revealing one third of workers aged 55-plus had been silent victims.

An ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research report found there were approximately 320,000 unemployed Australians aged 55 and over who wanted a job but had been discouraged from applying by poor experiences during the application process.

The centre's senior research fellow Rafal Chomik said age discrimination by employers was a significant barrier to the retention and new employment of mature-age workers - and the economy was missing out on the benefits.

An increase in mature-age participation rates by just 5 per cent would contribute about \$30 billion to the economy every year, his study found.

"The barriers that lead to their inactivity come at a high cost of foregone potential," Mr Chomik said.

"This is despite the value of older workers, their mature judgment, their reliability and loyalty and the fact that business can benefit from workers that resemble their client demographic."

A survey by the Financial Services Council showed one in three older workers had experienced discrimination in the workplace at a time when they were finding it hard to build the superannuation they needed for retirement.

The council's chief executive John Brogden said attitudes towards older workers needed to change.

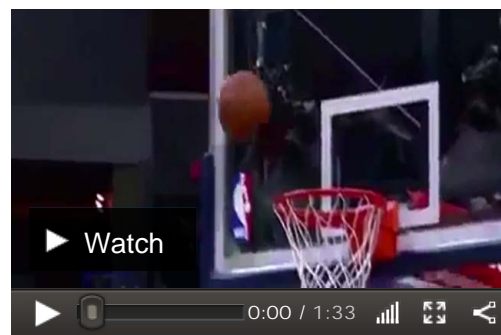
"We need to end the concept of full-time work followed by full-time retirement," Mr Brogden said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman's most recent figures show there were 1040 discrimination complaints, including 84 relating to age discrimination, in the 2011-12 financial year.

The cases were deemed so serious they were escalated to a full investigation by Fair Work inspectors after an initial assessment.

Out-of-work plumber Paul Green, 62, said he had discovered two large companies had a no-recruitment policy for people aged over 30 and 40 respectively during his two-year search for a

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"The government should name and shame the companies who blatantly ignore the age discrimination laws," Mr Green said. "I was kidding myself into thinking with my experience and qualifications I would secure another job." Australian Bureau of Statistics report into unemployment numbers found one in four people aged 55 to 59 had faced difficulty applying for jobs but still had hopes of finding stable employment.

The figure rose to 46 per cent for people aged 60-64.

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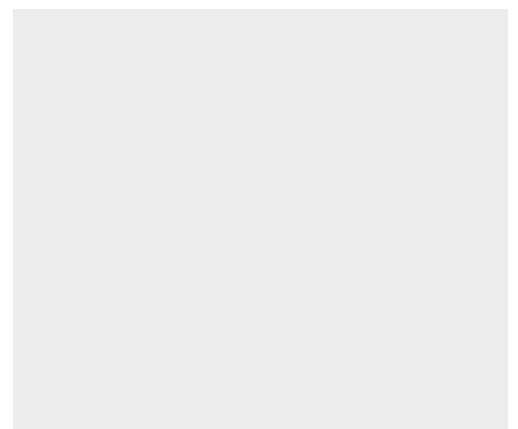
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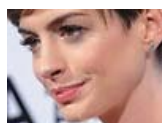
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