



Discrimination

emerging in new forms in the workplace



Many scientists reach their career peak relatively late in life, meaning that science has been one of the few areas to adapt well to an ageing workforce. Now scientists are also facing the difficulty of recruitment policies that lean toward younger workers.





Introduction

Science professionals are facing an increasingly difficult outlook as they deal with the challenges of an ageing workforce.

The worldwide science and technology industry has undergone extensive transformation in recent years as R&D budgets have come under pressure and governments outsource many areas of scientific research.

Now, there are signs that some of the most experienced and learned members of the science community might be facing the issue of discrimination in the workplace.

The findings are the result of an extensive global survey conducted by Kelly Services during the second half of 2006.

The Kelly Global Workforce Index sought the views of approximately 70,000 people in 28 countries covering Europe, Asia Pacific and North and South America.

The survey examined the views of employees across a range of industries including more than 3,000 working in science related fields worldwide.

The survey found that discrimination in the workplace is widespread across many countries, and age has become the biggest hurdle faced by workers trying to find a job. Where once gender and racial issues were the most cited reasons for workplace discrimination, age has become the newest source of prejudice.

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The survey approach

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their experience of discrimination both when applying for a job and while working in their job.

The aim was to identify what level of discrimination was experienced at two important stages – the recruitment process and the daily working life.

Each of these forms of discrimination can be harmful to both organizations and individuals, but they also tell us something about the way obstacles are placed in the way of two different sets of people – those who are entering the workforce or changing jobs, and those who are performing their daily work routine.

In each case, respondents were asked to identify the types of discrimination they had incurred. The choices were racial, gender, age, disability and 'other'. They were asked to identify instances of discrimination they had experienced in the last five years.

On the first question, each of the 28 countries in the survey was ranked according to the percentage of the sample that had experienced discrimination when applying for a job in the last five years.

Overall, the survey found that many employees experienced quite high rates of discrimination in many countries, even in some where very active steps have been taken to discourage institutionalized workplace discrimination.

Age based discrimination was the major source of discrimination experienced by almost every country in the survey, followed by gender and race. Age discrimination is now the predominant type of discrimination globally, and a major threat to achieving optimum workplace efficiency.

COUNTRY RANKING: Rates of discrimination when applying for a job





Scientists facing the challenge of older workers

Within the science sector worldwide, the survey found that 42% of all those surveyed said they had experienced discrimination when applying for a job in the last five years.

Compared with other industry sectors, job seekers in the science area are relatively well off – science is at the lowest end of the scale for workplace discrimination in relative terms.

However, the absolute rate of discrimination in science is still considerable when viewed in isolation.

The incidence of discrimination is most pronounced at both ends of the age spectrum. The youngest workers as well as those aged 45 and over each suffer the greatest prejudice when trying to find work. Unlike in some other industries, there were no marked differences between levels of discrimination suffered by men and women.

It is worth noting that the findings are based on a respondents' own perceptions about discrimination so, in effect, people were asked to 'self-assess' whether they had been discriminated against.

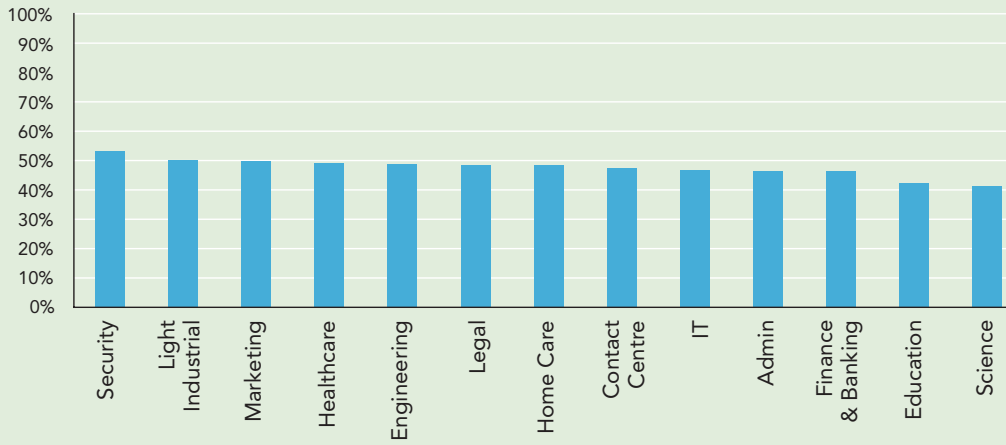
Clearly, some may simply suspect instances of discrimination where none exist. But the fact that many actually believe such events to be discriminatory, at the very least, says something about the way important information is communicated to job applicants and employees.

From an HR perspective, it is disturbing that there is a consistent pattern of high levels of discrimination being experienced by people applying for work.

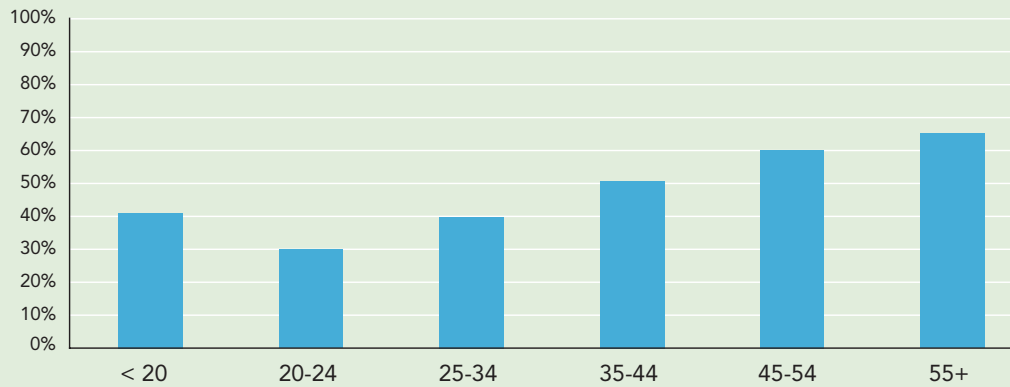
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Rates of discrimination when applying for a job: KEY INDUSTRY SECTORS WORLDWIDE



Rates of discrimination in Science sector worldwide when applying for a job: AGE





A Changing Pattern of Discrimination

One of the most interesting aspects of the survey is the way discrimination is evolving.

Where once it was gender and racial factors that would have been the biggest cause of prejudice against workers, it is clear that ageism is the newest source of discrimination complaints.

The findings are consistent across the vast majority of countries in the survey and particularly in developed countries.

Overall, gender discrimination is around half the level of age discrimination worldwide and racial discrimination follows a narrow third.

It seems that while governments and employers in many countries have taken steps to address gender and racial discrimination in the workforce, not as much focus has been placed on the issue of ageism.

Likewise racial discrimination has all but disappeared as a significant influence in employment policies in many countries under the weight of racial discrimination laws and programs to promote equality.

In many countries rates of discrimination amongst workers in the 50+ age bracket of 70% and more are not uncommon, pointing to the real difficulty that some of the most experienced workers face in finding jobs.

Science in particular prides itself on the accumulated knowledge of its practitioners and the esteem in which senior members are held. It is a welcome fact that the overall level of discrimination in science is comparatively low but disturbing that science tolerates a phenomenon, which is contrary to logic and understanding.

There is abundant evidence that many scientists reach their career peak at a later stage of life. Intellectual capacity, unlike physical ability, is not generally diminished with age.

Many scientists would feel frustrated that on top of cutbacks to research budgets, they now have to deal with prejudicial attitudes from some employers and HR departments.

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The cultural clash facing older workers

Some employers fear that older workers are not sufficiently flexible or that they lack the necessary skills to compete in a rapidly changing environment or with new technologies. It has been claimed that while younger workers can often be molded in the culture of an organization, older workers are more likely to be locked into set operating patterns.

It may be that older workers, particularly those that have been out of the workforce for some time, may need training to provide new skills.

It's also possible that some older employees who believe that their skills and experience are valuable, price themselves out of the market with unrealistic pay expectations.

Science has typically placed value on the role of the experienced practitioner who may have undertaken valuable research in a specialist field and mentored teams of upcoming scientists.

In many instances, older employees have extensive skills and experience that can be harnessed. They are a valuable source of corporate knowledge and can bring new perspectives to dealing with staff and customers. Older workers may have run their own businesses. They may be returning to work after children have left school. They are often adept managers who have juggled family, work and community responsibilities.

Some, who have been out of the marketplace for a period, may be willing to work for a lower salary simply to get a foot back in the jobs market.

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Age also a barrier in daily working life

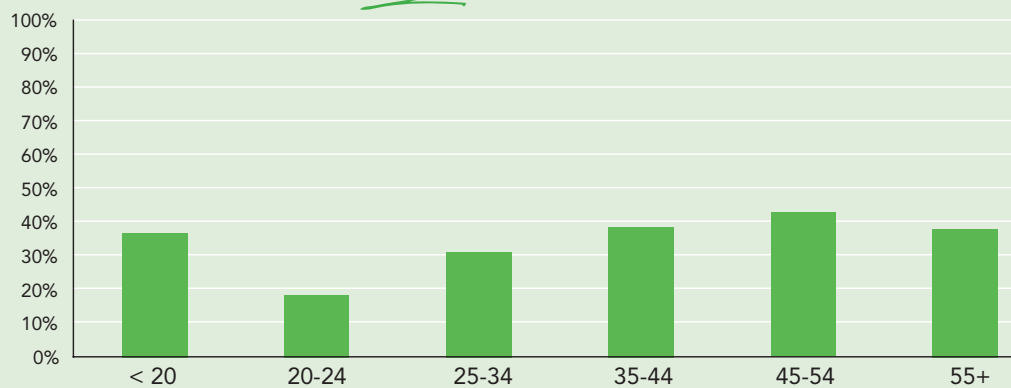
In addition to the question of discrimination when applying for a job, the survey also canvassed the views of those in the science sector about the type of discrimination they faced day-to-day in their working life.

The survey found that the overall level of discrimination faced day-to-day in the workplace was less than that suffered by job applicants.

While the rates of discrimination in a day-to-day work environment are less than those incurred by job applicants, a similar pattern of prejudice against older scientists applies.

Responses to discrimination are universally lethargic. For a number of possible reasons, most do not follow up with any formal action. The vast majority of those who had experienced discrimination did not bother to lodge any type of written or verbal complaint. Even those that did were largely unsatisfied with the outcome and had simply put it in the background.

Rates of discrimination in Science sector worldwide when working: AGE





Differences by country

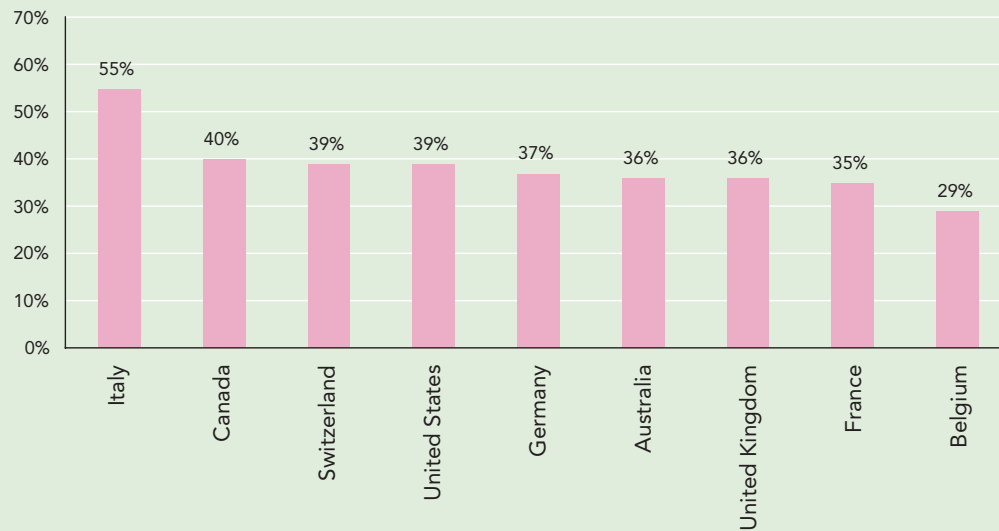
The data also provided the chance to look more closely at the Science industry and see how levels of discrimination differed within the industry across countries.

Discrimination in the Science industry when applying for work was most pronounced in Italy, which stood out above all other countries. The lowest rate was in Belgium.

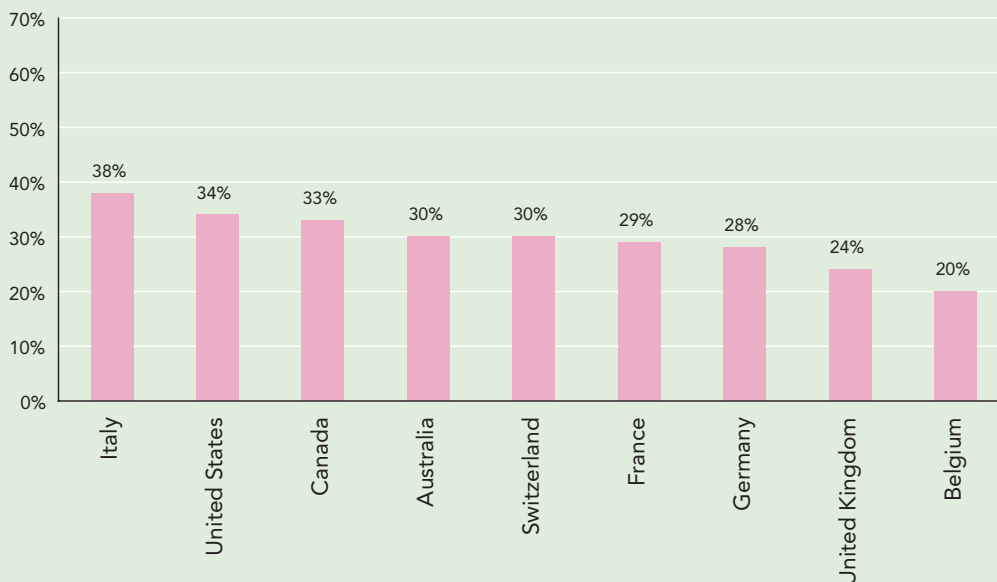
Because of differences in sample sizes, not all 28 countries were subject to analysis.

Discrimination within the industry while working (as opposed to applying) shows that Italy again had the highest rate of discrimination. Similarly high rates were seen in the US and Canada, while Belgium had the lowest.

When applying for a job in the last five years, have you experienced discrimination? Science industry by country (%)



When working over the last five years, have you experienced discrimination? Science industry by country (%)





Costs for business

Discrimination has a cost for both individuals and organizations. For individuals who believe they have been discriminated against, it can impact on their motivation and self esteem.

For organizations, it can have a range of direct and indirect costs. At a basic level, it does not make good business or economic sense to eschew a group of people for no other reason than they do not meet a certain stereotype.

Discrimination can take many forms. It may include discrimination on the grounds of colour, sex, religion, race, political opinion, age, medical record, sexual preference, trade union activity, marital status, nationality, disability (physical, intellectual or psychiatric), or impairment (including HIV/AIDS status).

Organizations that don't address discrimination can experience many issues including high staff turnover, absenteeism, poor morale, low productivity, poor reputation, and also the possibility of civil claims and penalties arising from breach of anti discrimination laws.

Managers should ensure that employees fully understand their rights, and that managers faced with workplace discrimination take immediate steps to remedy the situation.

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There should be an organisational policy on discrimination that is made available to all employees.

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Conclusion

Workplace discrimination persists in many workplaces and in many forms. Latest evidence suggests that while some earlier types of discrimination such as gender and racial bias may be in decline, newer forms such as ageism are on the rise.

Both younger and older workers are victims of this new strain of discrimination yet it appears that older workers are the most affected.

From an industry perspective, these are also the workers who possess the greatest skill and experience. Locking these workers out of job opportunities closes off an important source of expertise, knowledge and diversity and can be counterproductive.

It appears that the greatest incidence of discrimination is taking place before most workers even get inside the front gate. The recruitment process itself has become the primary filter where a range of subtle and emotive criteria have the potential to influence employee selection.

Organisations that don't address discrimination in the workplace can suffer a range of costs, both financial and civil.

Many economies are facing skill shortages associated with labour conditions and ageing populations which places greater importance on sourcing recruits from the widest possible pool of talent.

Discrimination in the recruitment process and in the workplace itself diminishes that pool and inflicts unnecessary damage on all parties involved.

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60 years of doing it right

