

**LegCo Panel on Manpower
(Meeting to be held on 18 April 2002)**

**Opinion Survey on the Public's Views on
Age Discrimination in Recruitment**

Purpose

— This paper informs Members of the findings of the Opinion Survey on the Public's Views on Age Discrimination in Recruitment (a copy of the survey report is at *Annex I*) and outlines the actions that will be taken by the Administration to tackle age discrimination in recruitment.

Background

2. The Education and Manpower Bureau commissioned a consultant to conduct a survey in December 2001 on the public's views on age discrimination in recruitment. The survey consisted of three parts, a household survey, an employer survey and a study of local recruitment advertisements. The objectives of the household and employer surveys were to find out :

- (a) the awareness and understanding of age discrimination in recruitment among the general public and employers;
- (b) actual experience of age discrimination practices and perception on the extent of the problem of age discrimination in recruitment;
- (c) opinion on the Government's public education measures; and
- (d) opinion on other anti-age discrimination measures.

The local recruitment advertisement study was conducted to assess the extent of age discrimination from recruitment advertisements appearing in major local newspapers and magazines.

Key Findings of the Household Survey

Attitudes towards the relationship between work performance and age

3. Attempts had been made to gauge the public's views on the relationship between work performance and age. The findings showed that the majority of household respondents held a preconceived view, either positive or negative, on the performance of older and young workers (Chart 2.1 and Chart 2.3). Most of them considered that older workers were likely to be more stable and more concentrated in their work. However, a high proportion of the respondents also considered that older workers were more difficult to be trained or retrained and had difficulties in adapting to new working environments. As for younger workers, the majority considered them more able to learn new skills; nevertheless, over half of the respondents considered that younger workers were relatively less patient in their work.

Experience and perception of age discrimination in recruitment

4. The findings revealed that 13% of the respondents considered that their failure in job application amounted to age discrimination. Nonetheless, amongst these 13% of respondents, 5% indicated that their failure in job application was also due to reasons such as the lack of necessary educational qualifications or skills and working experience.

5. For the 13% respondents who claimed to have experienced age discrimination, the three main types of job positions involved were sales and service (30%), jobs for manual or general work (26%) and clerical or secretarial jobs (about 25%) (Chart 2.7).

6. When asked about whether age discrimination existed in recruitment, 82% of all respondents considered that age discrimination in recruitment existed in Hong Kong. Out of those who considered that the problem existed, 65% were of the view that the problem was serious.

7. However, when asked about reasons for age discrimination, nearly two-thirds of the respondents (64%) attributed the cause of age discrimination in recruitment to the belief that some industries had a **genuine need** to recruit employees in certain age groups. About 35% were of the view that there was insufficient Government publicity on anti-age discrimination, while 34% considered that the importance of equal employment opportunities was not sufficiently promoted through basic education.

8. In fact, 79% of the respondents considered it **acceptable** for certain industries with a genuine need to recruit employees of certain age groups. Such industries/jobs included retail and sales (about 13%), jobs requiring physical labour (about 12%) and personal services (about 10%). Out of the 82% of respondents who considered that age discrimination existed in recruitment in Hong Kong, 80% of them also considered it acceptable for certain industries with a genuine need to recruit employees of specific age groups.

9. As compared with the perceived situation of age discrimination in recruitment two years ago, 39% of the respondents considered that the situation had not changed, while 17% of them considered that it had improved and 25% considered that the situation had worsened (Chart 2.12).

Publicity measures

10. Over 85% of respondents were aware of the Government's publicity programmes against age discrimination in recruitment. On the effectiveness of the various publicity programmes, 56% of all respondents considered the Announcements of Public Interest (API) on TV effective, followed by MTR and buses advertisements (43%) and radio API (38%) (Chart 2.14).

11. The households' views were also sought on the effectiveness of various alternative measures to deal with age discrimination. 72% of the respondents considered promoting equal opportunities in recruitment through basic education effective. 64% considered it effective to enhance the employability of employees of different age groups through training, 56% considered introducing anti-age discrimination policy in company effective, and 54% of the respondents considered it effective to introduce legislation against age discrimination. However, divergent views were found in the latter two measures where a relatively high proportion of respondents believed legislation (37%) and the introduction of company policy (35%) ineffective (Chart 2.16).

12. A table comparing the key findings of this survey with the one carried out in 1999 is at *Annex II*.

Key Findings of the Employer Survey

13. To gauge the effect of government publicity and education measures on employers, three groups were interviewed. The general group represents views of a cross-section of all employers in Hong Kong. The target group represents employers in receipt of publicity and reference materials on anti-age

discrimination in recruitment from the Labour Department (LD) while the Human Resource Managers (HRM) group represents employers who have more access to various promotional activities and publicity materials relating to anti-age discrimination in recruitment.

Attitudes towards the relationship between work performance and age

14. Most employers in the general group were of the view that the performance of workers in such aspects as work attitude, spirit of cooperation, manner to customers, absenteeism and efficiency were not related to age (Chart 3.1). However, a relatively higher proportion of them were of the view that the older workers performed better in such aspects as loyalty and crisis management (Chart 3.2); but less well in aspects like acceptance of new responsibilities and learning of new skills (Chart 3.3). As for younger workers, while majority of employers considered that they performed less well in areas such as loyalty and crisis management (Chart 3.13), a high proportion of them were also more positive about younger workers in such areas as acceptance of new responsibilities and learning new skills (Chart 3.14).

15. Comparing employers of different groups, the proportion of employers who considered performance of both older and younger workers not related to age was higher for those of the target and HRM groups.

Experience and perception of age discrimination in recruitment

16. Responses from the three groups of employers were similar in respect of experience and perception of age discrimination in recruitment. About 8.4% of all the employers reported that there were incidents where an applicant considered that he/she was not hired because of his/her age but 7.9% of the employers pointed out that there were actually other reasons for the rejection.

17. 73% of employers were of the opinion that age discrimination in recruitment existed in Hong Kong. Out of which 51% considered the problem **not** serious.

18. Most of the employers (81%) who considered that age discrimination in recruitment existed attributed the reason to the **genuine need** of certain industries to recruit employees of a specific age range. 32% opined that the importance of equal opportunity in employment was not sufficiently promoted through basic education and 24% were of the view that publicity on anti-age discrimination was not sufficient.

19. 87% of employers considered that it was **acceptable** for employers of certain industries to recruit employees of specified age groups. They cited as examples jobs requiring physical labour (22%), retail (24%) and personal services (20%).

20. About one-third of the employers considered age discrimination in recruitment situation has not changed as compared to that of 2 years ago, while 24% of them considered the situation to have improved and 12% considered the situation to have worsened (Chart 3.19).

Company practices against age discrimination in recruitment

21. Around 80% of employers did not have any stated guidelines in their companies to safeguard against age discrimination in recruitment (Chart. 3.22). However, comparing the three employer groups, a much higher proportion of those from the HRM and target groups had stated guidelines on age discrimination in recruitment (Chart 3.23).

22. 21% of the employer in the general group indicated that they had anti-age discrimination measures. As for the HRM group and target group employers, the percentage of employers with such measures were 56% and 42% respectively (Chart 3.27).

Publicity Measures

23. Over 90% of employers were aware of Government's publicity programmes against age discrimination in recruitment. On the effectiveness of the various publicity programmes, more respondents considered API on television effective (as opined by 69% of the employers of the general group), followed by advertisements on MTR and buses (49%) and API on radio (48%) (Chart 3.29).

24. In comparing the survey results on different groups of employers, it is noted that the proportion of employers who were aware of government's anti-age discrimination measures and considered such measures effective was in general higher for those of the HRM and target groups.

25. For alternative measures in tackling age discrimination in recruitment, 75% of the employers considered that promoting equal opportunities in recruitment in basic education would be effective to deal with the problem of age discrimination. 73% of them considered that enhancing employability of employees in different age groups through training is effective. The proportion of employers who considered legislation effective

and not effective was both 42%. As for introduction of anti-age discrimination policy in company, 48% of employers considered it not effective while 36% regarded it effective (Chart 3.31).

Findings of the Study of Local Recruitment Advertisements

26. 8.3% of the recruitment advertisements studied were found to have either an age range preference or a stated age restriction. The percentage is higher for positions in the wholesale and retail (12.5%) import and export (10.1%), hotel, tourism and catering (9.8%) and community, social and personal services sectors (9.5%).

Analysis

27. The survey revealed that a sizeable gap existed between people's perception on the extent of age discrimination and actual experience. Whilst 82% of household respondents considered that age discrimination in recruitment existed in Hong Kong and 65% considered it serious, only 13% claimed to have experienced age discrimination in recruitment. Out of which only 8% attributed their failure in job application solely to age. This discrepancy also existed in the employer survey where only 8.4% of employers reported that their companies had incidents where an applicant considered that he/she was not hired because of his/her age, even though 73% of them opined that there was age discrimination in recruitment in Hong Kong. As for recruitment advertisement, again only around 8% had any age restriction.

28. The survey also showed that the majority of respondents from both the household and employers surveys considered that the reason for age discrimination was because there was a genuine need for employers of certain trades to recruit employees of a specified age range. They also considered it acceptable for employers of those trades to do so.

29. With regard to alternative measures that were deemed to be effective to deal with age discrimination in recruitment, the great majority of household respondents and employers suggested the promotion of equal employment opportunity through basic education, followed by enhancing employability through training and re-training. Although slightly more than half of household respondents considered legislation and the introduction of company policy effective, a relatively high proportion of them were also of the view that these measures were ineffective.

30. As for the effectiveness of publicity, an overwhelming majority of respondents were aware of government's public education programmes.

Although the perception of age discrimination had not changed amongst household respondents as compared with two years' ago, it is worth noting that there had been a **marked improvement** in recruitment advertisements where only 8.3% advertisements had age restrictions, whilst previously the number was 23.4%.

31. The survey also showed that for companies that have been exposed to more publicity material, e.g. companies from the target group or HRM group, they were less inclined to link age with work performance and more inclined to have anti-age discrimination guidelines in recruitment. The results suggested that public education might be effective in combating age discrimination among employers.

Way Forward

32. In line with the general view of respondents, we will continue to promote equal employment opportunity through basic education. Through moral and civic education in schools, we will promote the importance of equal opportunities in various aspects, including employment. Moral and civic education is accorded high priority under the curriculum reform currently undertaken by the Education Department. Furthermore, respect for each other, including treating each other as equal regardless of age and sex is one of the core values to be promoted in the curriculum reform. It will help nurture the culture of respect and equality in students and in the long run help combat discrimination.

33. We will also carry on with our efforts in training and re-training to enhance the employability of workers of all ages. We have earmarked \$5 billion to subsidize adults wishing to pursue continuing education to upgrade themselves. We are also setting up a Manpower Development Committee to review the provision of vocational training and retraining so as to ensure the training opportunities offered would meet the requirement of jobs available in the market.

34. As for the introduction of legislation, given the divergent views amongst the public and employers on the need and effectiveness of legislation, we do not consider that there is consensus in the community on the issue. We remain doubtful that there is genuine need at this stage for the introduction of legislation on age discrimination.

35. We will, however, continue with our efforts to publicise the message of anti-age discrimination in recruitment. Given the public's awareness of APIs and their support for the continuation of such measures, slots have

already been secured to continue airing the TV API and radio APIs to promote the message. The LD will continue to promote anti-age discrimination measures through the Human Resources Managers Club, industry-based tripartite committees, and other regular promotional activities such as exhibitions.

36. In the coming year, the LD will also implement the following new measures to promote the elimination of age discrimination in employment:

- (a) produce laminated posters concerning the elimination of age discrimination. The posters are to be displayed at job centres of LD;
- (b) message on eliminating age discrimination in recruitment to be built in the Interactive Employment Service (iES) website;
- (c) appeal letters to major recruitment newspapers/websites to encourage them to advise their customers not to place recruitment advertisements with unreasonable age requirements;
- (d) place advertisements on major recruitment newspaper/websites to enhance the awareness of eliminating age discrimination in recruitment;
- (e) make use of the LD's publication "Labour Focus" to highlight some of the successful experiences of employing workers of different ages, thus creating a win-win situation for both employers and employees; and
- (f) encourage employers and HR practitioners to incorporate anti-age discrimination measures in their companies' policies and promote good practices in recruitment to prevent age discrimination.

Advice Sought

37. Members are invited to note and comment on the content of this paper.

Comparison on results of the two surveys on age discrimination in recruitment held in 1999 and 2002

1. Household Survey	<u>1999 Survey</u>	<u>2002 Survey</u>
Age discrimination in recruitment exists in Hong Kong	82% (Among them, 65% considered the problem serious)	82% (Among them, 65% considered the problem serious)
Present situation of age discrimination in recruitment as compared to that of a certain period of time (18 / 24 months) ago	<u>As compared to 18 months ago</u> 49% - No change 29% - Worsen 14% - Improved 8% -No opinion	<u>As compared to 24 months ago</u> 39% - No change 25% - Worsen 17% - Improved 19% - No opinion
Awareness of existing government measures <i>(Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple answers were allowed)</i>	71% - TV API 33% - LD's services 25% - Practical guidelines	71% - TV API 38% - Radio API 24% - Bus/MTR advertisement
Alternative measures to combat age discrimination in recruitment (open-ended question)	45% - No suggestion 18% - Legislation 14% - More publicity	69% - No suggestion 10% - Legislation 6% - Publicity

	(other options are not listed)	(other options are not listed)
Suggestions for combating age discrimination in recruitment <i>(Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple answers were allowed)</i>	57% - Legislation 47% - Enhance publicity through media 47% - Enhance LD's conciliation and advisory service	72% - Promote equal opportunities in recruitment in basic education 64% - Enhance employability of employees in different age group through training 56% - Encourage employers to implement anti-age discrimination charter in their companies 54% - Legislation
2. Local Recruitment Advertisements Study	<u>1999 Survey</u>	<u>2002 Survey</u>
Jobs identified as having age restrictions	<u>23.4 %</u> (4 333 out of 18 495 jobs)	<u>8.3 %</u> (1 695 out of 20 573 jobs)
Analysis (By occupation)	36% - clerical 28% - service or sales workers	45.7% - service or sales workers 28.7% - secretary / office clerks
Analysis (By industry)	55% - Industry not specified 18% - Community, personal and social service sectors	26% - Community, personal and social service sectors 16.3% - Wholesale or retail 15.5% - Banking, insurance, real estate and business services