
EMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS OF WORKERS BETWEEN THE AGES OF THIRTY-FIVE AND FIFTY-FIVE

JAMES E. KUNTZ and REX E. GILBREATH, University of Tulsa, Tulsa

ABSTRACT

Since 1900 there has been a gradual increase in the average age of the working population. As of May 1950, the age group of from 35 to 55 accounted for 40.5 per cent of the working population.

During the depression of the 1930's and just prior to World War II, it was apparent that the worker over 35 experienced difficulty finding a new job once he became unemployed. At the present time the state of Massachusetts has legislation directed at the prevention of discrimination against older workers.

In an attempt to determine whether there is a tendency for employers to have policies that prohibit the hiring of people over 35, questionnaires were sent to 312 manufacturing companies and 115 petroleum companies. Replies were received from 51 petroleum concerns and 150 manufacturing concerns.

Of the 185 companies reporting usable information, 56 or 30.3 per cent reported that they did have policies concerning a maximum age for hiring. The maximum age limits as reported ranged from 25 to 50 with the average maximum age appearing to be about 40.

The principal reasons in order of importance for not having age limits were (1) production just as high for older workers, (2) older workers more stable, (3) older workers possess necessary skills which comes from years of training, and (4) less turnover in the older group.

The principal reasons in order of importance for having age limits were: (1) possibility of greater tenure with the company, (2) younger workers were easier to train, (3) younger workers fit better into the organization, (4) older employees are physically unable to do the work, (5) pension costs (no comparison of number having age limits and number having pensions), (6) insurance costs, and (7) safety.

The data would indicate that there is a tendency for companies to establish age limits when hiring new employees; however, there were no indications that this is a growing tendency.