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"Sorry, We Rejected Your Application": A Study on the Age Limit of Job Seekers in Indonesia from a Human Rights Perspective



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ABSTRACT: Age restrictions in the job recruitment process are an increasingly relevant issue in many countries, causing discrimination against job applicants who meet the qualifications but are considered unsuitable simply because of their age. This study examines the application of age restrictions in job applications from the perspective of human rights, as well as its impact on equal employment opportunities, social welfare, and economic productivity. Through literature studies, it was found that age discrimination, both against young and elderly age groups, is still rampant in Indonesia, even though it contradicts the principles of equality in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). While regulations such as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act in the U.S., the Employment Equality Directive in the European Union, and Law No. 13 of 2003 on Employment have been implemented, weaknesses in law enforcement and strong age stereotypes remain major obstacles. This study emphasizes that the age limit in job applications is a violation of the right to decent work and recommends the implementation of competency-based recruitment policies, strengthening anti-discrimination regulations, and raising awareness of the importance of creating an inclusive work environment. This step is important for building a fairer, more dynamic, and sustainable labor market in the era of industrial transformation.

KEYWORDS: Age Restrictions, Discrimination, Human Rights, Equal Work, Labor Policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of age restrictions in employment has become an increasingly relevant issue in various industrial sectors worldwide. Many companies implement age restrictions in their recruitment process, which ultimately leads to discrimination against applicants outside the desired age range. This practice indirectly closes opportunities for individuals who may have adequate experience, skills, and qualifications but are judged inappropriate simply because of their age.

This age discrimination often occurs, both against young age groups who are considered to have insufficient experience and against elderly workers who are considered less productive or too old to adapt to constantly changing technology and industry dynamics. In a study conducted by Mulders (2019), 54% of Dutch employers hired older workers beyond their normal retirement age, largely due to their unique knowledge and experience, but they see this as a limited phenomenon and not a solution to the labor shortage. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in various field reports and statistical data, which reveals how the practice of age restriction has been widely implemented in several sectors, both in developing and developed countries.

Along with changes in the structure of the global labor market, the issue of age restrictions in recruitment is increasingly relevant to be studied in depth. The increase in life expectancy and the increasingly delayed retirement trend have made more elderly workers active in the labor market. However, they often face great difficulty in obtaining a job because of the age limit set by the company. This may be relevant for jobs that require modern skills or abilities. As expressed by Sulistyanto (2021), modern industry-based competencies, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and human management, are needed to keep up with the labor market in Industry 4.0. This opinion is not entirely wrong, but it is not entirely true. This is because the work experience and skills that a person possesses are important assets for a company facing competition in the global market.

In another study, Loughlin et al. (2017) revealed that there are negative stereotypes about age restrictions. Loughlin revealed that age restrictions are necessary because older workers are often perceived as slower, less creative, less flexible, more

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resistant to change, less interested in training, and more prone to illnesses and accidents. On the other hand, young age groups who are not considered experienced are also often constrained in getting jobs, even though they have the potential and skills needed by the modern world of work. In this context, the issue of age restrictions not only impacts older individuals but also affects the balance in the labor market as a whole.

Age discrimination is a form of injustice that negatively affects many workers worldwide. This discrimination can occur in various forms, including recruitment, promotion, and termination. Both young and elderly workers face the challenge of discrimination. According to Stypinska and Turek (2017), age discrimination in the labor market can occur in two forms: hard (legally prohibited behaviors and decisions that affect career development) and soft (discrimination based on the interpersonal environment with negative consequences). Companies often argue that age limits are needed to maintain productivity and work efficiency, but on the other hand, they lead to structural injustices that perpetuate stereotypes based on age.

From an ethical and philosophical perspective, all of the above raises the question of whether this age limit is really necessary to maintain the productivity of the company or whether this practice is just a form of discrimination that ignores human potential that should be judged based on ability and qualifications.

To better understand this issue, researchers consider it necessary to examine it through the framework of human rights. The principles of non-discrimination and the right to decent work have been clearly regulated in various international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Every individual has the right to equal employment opportunities, regardless of age.

This principle should ensure that all people, regardless of whether they are in the young or elderly age group, have equal access to decent work, as long as they have the necessary qualifications and abilities. Kaya and Yilmazer (2019) revealed that the right to work is a basic human right. By ensuring that individuals have jobs and income, this will protect their dignity and allow for personal development and freedom. Thus, the application of age restrictions in the recruitment process can be considered a form of violation of human rights, especially when restrictions are applied without a clear and objective reason.

Various countries have attempted to address the problem of age discrimination in employment through legal regulations and policies. The right to work is a fundamental human right recognized in the UDHR (Article 23), in ICESCR (Article 6), and in several regional human rights instruments, including the ACHPR (Article 15), the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Field of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Article 6), and the European Social Charter (Part II, Article 1).

In the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) prohibits age discrimination against workers aged 40 years or older, and the European Union also has similar regulations that prohibit age discrimination in various aspects of employment. Nevertheless, despite the existence of these laws, effective implementation remains a major challenge. Many workers still face age discrimination, especially when it comes to recruitment and promotion, despite the laws protecting them.

In Indonesia, regulations regarding age discrimination are not sufficiently clear or comprehensive. Indonesia's Constitutional Court recently rejected an application for judicial review related to the removal of the working-age limit in job vacancies. In its ruling, the court affirmed that age restrictions in employee recruitment are still necessary as part of the company's policy to ensure a match between the positions offered and the required qualifications. In addition, the court held that age restrictions are part of reasonable considerations in various types of work, especially those that require certain physical strength and endurance. However, the Court also reminded that this policy must be implemented proportionately and non-discriminatory in accordance with the principles of human rights protection and equal employment opportunities.

Age restrictions in job applications also have a significant social and economic impact. Unemployment caused by age discrimination for both young and elderly workers creates a serious social problem. Individuals who experience age discrimination often experience a loss of confidence, stress, and, in some cases, depression.

This psychological impact not only affects their personal lives but also reduces their productivity and participation in the labor market. From an economic perspective, age discrimination leads to the loss of valuable workforce potential, especially in older age groups with deep experience and skills. As a result, age discrimination not only has a negative impact on the individuals who experience it, but also on the economy as a whole, as the experienced and productive workforce becomes marginalized.

This is reinforced by the results of a study by Roscigno et al. (2022), which stated that age discrimination in the workplace has a clear socio-psychological cost that affects job insecurity, job-specific stress, and overall self-reported mental health for workers aged 40 years and older.

Looking at the various problems described above, the urgency of this research becomes even clearer. Age discrimination in job applications is an issue that has not received enough attention, both in academic research and policy formulation. There are

still many gaps in the research on the long-term impact of age restrictions on employment, especially in the context of human rights.

This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting an in-depth literature review of age limits in job applications from a human rights perspective. In addition, this research also aims to provide more inclusive and equitable policy recommendations to create equal employment opportunities for all age groups.

The formulation of the problem in this study includes several important aspects related to the application of age restrictions in job applications. First, the implementation of the age limit in various countries is the main focus of understanding the differences in policies implemented globally. Second, it is important to explore human rights perspectives in assessing these age limits, especially whether they are in line with the principles of justice and equality. Thus, the formulation of this problem will provide a basis for an in-depth analysis of the issue of age restrictions and their relationship with human rights in the world.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Discrimination in Employment

Discrimination in employment includes various forms of unfair treatment experienced by workers based on characteristics that are irrelevant to their employability, including age. Age discrimination is a form of discrimination that is increasingly gaining attention in the world of work. According to recent research, age discrimination in employee recruitment or promotion not only limits individual opportunities but also harms the economy as a whole by reducing the participation of experienced workers (Sargeant, 2013).

In many countries, age discrimination remains a significant problem, especially in sectors that demand new physical skills or technologies. A study by van Dalen and Henkens (2017) showed that companies often prefer young workers because of stereotypes that associate old age with decreased productivity and adaptability to technological change.

B. Regulations and Laws on Age Discrimination

Many countries have adopted laws prohibiting age discrimination in employment through both local regulations and international legal frameworks. For example, in the European Union, age discrimination is prohibited under the EU Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC, which ensures that no age limit can be imposed without objective justification (European Commission, 2019).

In Indonesia, although there are no specific regulations that address age discrimination, employment-related regulations such as Law No. 13 of 2003 on manpower regulate workers' rights without considering age as the main factor. A study by Fredman (2016) also emphasized that the application of anti-discrimination laws needs to be balanced with broader affirmative measures to prevent systemic age discrimination.

C. Human Rights and Employment

The human rights perspective places freedom from discrimination as the fundamental right of every individual. The International Labor Organization (ILO) emphasizes that the right to work without discrimination is part of the human rights that must be protected by the state. The violation of these rights can result in social injustice and widen the gap in access to decent work.

According to Frey and MacNaughton (2016), age restrictions in job openings are often incompatible with human rights principles because they exclude certain groups from equal opportunities to work, which is contrary to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Protection against age discrimination is relevant to maintaining the principles of justice and equality in the world of work.

D. Philosophical Perspectives on Age in the World of Work

Age in the world of work is not only a legal or policy issue but can also be seen through a philosophical perspective. For example, the concept of distributive justice emphasizes that economic resources, including jobs, must be distributed equitably among all age groups.

According to Bae and Choi (2022), age should not be a discriminatory factor from participation in the world of work, because each individual, regardless of age, has different potentials to contribute to society. Roscigno et al. (2022), Negative age stereotypes often create unnecessary social barriers and can reduce the intrinsic value of older workers. In this view, age discrimination is considered a form of moral injustice that is detrimental to human values.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The methodology used in this study is a literature review that aims to comprehensively analyze various studies, legal documents, and scientific publications relevant to age restrictions in job applications from a human rights perspective. The data collection process was carried out through a search for literature sourced from academic journals, books, reports of international organizations, and related legal regulations from various countries.

The inclusion criteria in the selection of literature were based on the relevance of the topic, geographical coverage, and credibility of the source. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative method, identifying and grouping the main themes related to age restrictions, discrimination, and human rights principles. With this approach, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the implications of age restrictions in job applications from the perspective of human rights in various countries.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Age Restrictions in Job Applications in Different Countries

Policies regarding age restrictions in work requirements vary in different countries and are influenced by the legal, social, and economic factors of each country. Each country has a different approach to addressing age discrimination in the workplace for both young and older workers. According to Lahey (2010), the United States has implemented the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) since 1967. This law aims to protect older workers from negative stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace, especially regarding hiring, termination, and other working conditions. Changes to the law, such as the removal of the mandatory retirement age limit, have increased protection for older workers but have also decreased hiring opportunities for them.

In contrast, in Europe, the age discrimination policy only began to be applied more widely after the introduction of Framework Directive 2000/78/EC by the European Union. This policy provides guidance for member states to set their own anti-discrimination laws, including bans on discrimination based on age. However, as revealed by Adnett and Hardy (2007), many European countries have chosen to provide more exemptions and lighter enforcement than the United States, so the impact of these laws on the employment of older workers varies.

According to research conducted by Steinau-Steinrück and Vernuft (2009), in Germany, laws on age discrimination tend to be less stringent when it comes to hiring, but are more focused on the protection of older workers who are already employed. This is different from the approach in France; in his research, Sands et al. (2009) revealed that where the law not only prohibits age discrimination in job advertisements, but also provides harsher penalties for violators.

In addition, according to Radoccia (2009), although age discrimination laws were implemented earlier in countries such as Italy and Spain, their implementation is often weak due to a lack of law enforcement and public awareness. This has led to age discrimination remaining common in certain sectors despite regulations prohibiting it.

Policies in Australia have also advanced in terms of protection against age discrimination. According to Duncan (2018), the Age Discrimination Act of 2004 expanded the scope of protection for workers from various sectors, including public and private.

Similar discrimination was also found in Japan, where Zvedelikova (2024) noted that although the law prohibits age discrimination, about 24% of job ads explicitly include a maximum age limit of 35 years, specifically in mid-career job ads. This age restriction is often used by companies to screen applicants who do not meet the desired age criteria.

Meanwhile, Nimanandh et al. (2018) examined a slightly different context in Thailand, where young managers in multinational companies often experience discrimination based on their age. In Asian cultures, which traditionally prioritize seniority, age is often used as a benchmark for managerial legitimacy. Young managers strive to negotiate their identities to be accepted in a work environment that places great importance on seniority.

Meanwhile, in Asia, a different case occurred. According to Awaliyah (2016), age discrimination in the recruitment process is still rampant in Indonesia, even though Law No. 13 of 2003 prohibits such discrimination. This law guarantees equal opportunities for jobseekers regardless of age. However, practice on the ground shows that the maximum age limit, usually between 24 and 35 years, is often set in job advertisements, especially those disseminated at job fairs, print media, and the Internet. The following are the age limits for several professions in Indonesia that researchers have obtained from various sources.

Table 1. Maximum Age Limits for Job Applicants in Indonesia

No	Profession	Maximum Age Limit When Applying for a Job
1	State Civil Apparatus	35 Years (PNS) and 40 Years (Certain Positions in PPPK)
2	SOE Employees	25 Years (High School), 27 Years (D3), 30 Years (S1/D4), 35 Years (S2)
3	TNI	22 Years (Enlisted), 22 – 26 Years (Non-commissioned Officer), 26 Years (Officer)
4	Doctors (Civil Servants and Private)	35 years for general positions, 40 years for specialists
5	Teachers and Lecturers (ASN and PPPK)	35 years old (general), 40-45 years old for certain positions
6	Private Employees	Varies (Generally from 25 – 35 years old depending on job level)

Source: Data Processed by Researchers

B. Factors Driving the Implementation of Age Restrictions

Research has identified various factors that drive the implementation of age restrictions during the hiring process. According to Heyma et al. (2014), one of the main reasons for this is the uncertainty regarding the productivity level of older workers. Companies tend to prefer younger applicants because their productivity is considered more certain than that of older workers, especially after the age of 58 years.

Another significant factor is the increase in labor costs as workers age, while productivity levels tend to stabilize or decrease. In addition, companies with older managers or workforces are more likely to hire older workers, which suggests that demographic factors in the workforce also play a role in determining the age limit for hiring.

Zvedelikova (2024) also found that in Japan, despite laws prohibiting age discrimination, companies often set explicit age limits in job advertisements, usually under 35 years old. Smaller companies, domestic companies, and those located in urban centers tend to apply this age restriction more frequently. In addition, companies that take advantage of the probationary period for new employees are more likely to set an age limit.

Furthermore, Van Borm and Baert (2021) found that one of the main reasons older candidates tend to be discriminated against in the hiring process is the perception that they have lower tech skills, are less flexible, and are less trainable compared to younger candidates. This perception explains approximately 41% of the effects of age on the chances of being invited to a job interview.

Wu and Sun (2021) showed that age discrimination in the Chinese labor market is greatly influenced by the complexity of work. This study found that the higher the complexity of the job, the less impact it has on the lower age limit, whereas the upper age limit tends to converge across various jobs. This reduces the effective job-search period for high-skilled talent.

Burn et al. (2022) identified that language related to age stereotypes in job advertisements can reduce older workers' interest in applying for jobs. Even if the language used does not explicitly indicate age bias, implicit messages related to such stereotypes can significantly lower the number of older applicants

Based on a comparison of policies in different countries, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of the age restriction policy in work requirements is highly dependent on law enforcement, exemptions given, and public awareness of the law. While countries such as the United States have stronger enforcement and a more visible impact, countries in Europe tend to be more flexible in their implementation, which in turn affects the opportunities of older workers in the job market.

C. Age Discrimination in Human Rights Perspectives

Age discrimination in employment is a form of unfair treatment of a person based on age. Although not explicitly mentioned in some major human rights instruments, the concept is covered by the broader principle of non-discrimination. ILO Convention

No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Position) of 1958 does not explicitly mention age, but prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national descent, or social origin.

Some countries have interpreted this as including age discrimination. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights: Articles 6 and 7 guarantee the right to fair and favorable work and working conditions for all people. Although age discrimination is not always explicitly mentioned, modern interpretations of these instruments tend to include age as one of the bases for prohibited discrimination in the context of work.

However, according to Spiro (2014), age discrimination in job search is often not taken seriously by courts and human rights courts, despite the clear legal protections in the statute. Courts and stands tend to downplay age discrimination claims, and applicants rarely win in such cases. Spiro suggested a stricter approach to enforce a fair evaluation of job applicants based on individual ability, not age.

D. Principles of Non-Discrimination and Equality in Employment

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms everyone is right to work without discrimination. Although age was not explicitly mentioned, the spirit of DUHAM is clearly opposed to any form of unfair treatment. Age discrimination in the workplace can take the form of stereotypes against older workers who are considered less adaptive or prejudice against young workers who are seen as less experienced. These practices not only harm individuals but also inhibit the potential for diversity in organizations.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has long fought discrimination through Convention No. 111. Although it did not initially specifically mention age, many countries are now expanding their interpretations to include age discrimination. In line with this, the UN Principles for Older Persons and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging emphasize the importance of the active participation of senior workers in society.

Addressing age discrimination requires a holistic approach. Governments must enforce anti-discrimination laws, whereas companies must create an inclusive work environment. Cross-generational mentoring programs and HR policies that support lifelong career development are concrete steps that should be taken. Trade unions and civil society organizations also play an important role in advocacy and education. They can help shape inclusive policies and practices in the workplace.

E. Analysis from the Perspective of Human Rights on Age Restrictions in Job Applications

When we apply the concept of Human Rights to the context of the world of work, especially in relation to the treatment of workers of various age groups, we find ourselves confronted with complex moral and practical dilemmas. According to Taufik (2013), the principle of justice, as outlined by philosophers such as John Rawls, demands that every individual should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and well-being. Thus, access to job opportunities and career development should not be limited by factors beyond the control of the individual, including age. However, reality is often far from this ideal.

Age restrictions in job searches, both explicitly and implicitly, reflect the biases and stereotypes deeply ingrained in society. Basically, every individual should have the freedom to develop and use their abilities throughout their lives. Age restrictions on employment are directly contrary to this principle, limiting an individual's potential to contribute and develop based on arbitrary numbers.

From a utilitarian perspective, Taufik (2013) corroborates the opinion of John Stuart Mill, who revealed that age discrimination in employment is detrimental to not only individuals but also society as a whole. By excluding certain age groups from the labor market, we are missing out on the wealth of experience, skills, and perspectives that can contribute to collective productivity and innovation.

Age restrictions in job searches also raise questions about the nature of human values and dignity. The philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that every human being has an intrinsic value that does not depend on utility or productivity. Excluding a person from employment opportunities solely based on their age could be considered a violation of this Kantian principle, reducing individuals to mere numbers and ignoring their unique potential. By limiting employment opportunities based on age, we are not only limiting economic access but also shaping social narratives that can influence how individuals see themselves and their potential.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study comprehensively examines the application of age restrictions in the recruitment and employment process from a human rights perspective, as well as its implications for equal employment opportunities, productivity, and social welfare. Based on the analysis of the literature and regulations that exist in various countries, it is found that the age limit in employment is still widely applied even though it is contrary to the basic principles of equality stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as well as various other human rights instruments. This practice not only harms individuals from young and elderly age groups but also creates structural injustices that can hinder economic and social growth in the long run.

From a legal and policy perspective, regulations prohibiting age discrimination are often not implemented effectively, especially in developing countries, including Indonesia, where legal loopholes allow the implementation of age restrictions in job vacancies. On the other hand, although developed countries such as the United States and the European Union have stricter regulations, negative age stereotypes are still a major obstacle for workers to obtain fair employment opportunities. This study highlights that differences in law enforcement, policy implementation, and public awareness of age discrimination contribute to the variation in the impact of age restrictions across different geographic and cultural contexts.

This study confirms that age restrictions in employment need to be seen as a form of violation of the right to work and the right to human dignity, where every individual, regardless of age, must be judged based on his or her abilities, qualifications, and potential contributions. Rejecting job candidates based solely on age is a practice that not only violates the principle of distributive justice but also limits access to economic resources that should be distributed equally to all groups. In this context, negative stereotypes about the productivity and adaptability of older workers or the assumption that younger workers are less experienced need to be deconstructed, considering that the contribution that can be made by all age groups is very important in facing the dynamics of accelerating industrial change, especially in the digital era and Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Practically, this study recommends a competency-based recruitment policy that emphasizes individual abilities and qualifications, regardless of age. The implementation of this policy included changes in the design of job advertisements, cross-generational training, and inclusive career development policies. Additionally, companies need to build a work culture that encourages intergenerational collaboration, where workers of different age groups can learn from each other and contribute to achieving organizational goals. Cross-generational mentoring programs, where senior workers can mentor younger workers, as well as tech skills training for older workers, are concrete steps that can be taken to create a more equitable and inclusive work environment.

From a public policy perspective, the government should strengthen regulations that prohibit age discrimination in the workplace through more effective enforcement mechanisms. This includes strict oversight of job ads that list age restrictions, as well as the provision of legal aid for victims of age discrimination. Affirmative policies that support career development for all age groups, both through modern skills training and re-skilling and up-skilling programs, need to be implemented to ensure that every worker can adapt to technological changes and industry demands without being hampered by age-based stereotypes.

Overall, the elimination of age restrictions in job applications and the creation of an inclusive work environment is not only an important step towards social justice but also contributes to the optimization of the overall potential of the workforce. This transformation will provide long-term benefits for the economy and social stability, as well as create a more adaptive, dynamic, and sustainable labor market. By ensuring that every individual, both young and old, has equal access to decent work, we not only respect human rights but also strengthen the resilience of the workforce in the future.

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