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**Mature job-seeking in New Zealand:
A political economy perspective**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of PhD in Communication and Journalism at
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ABSTRACT

Job-seeking research has been implicitly an examination of the job-seeking activities of youth. Even at the broader level of the labour market there continues an underlying association of youth with employment while the experiences of mature workers have been largely minimised, especially in New Zealand. This study examines the job-seeking activities and experiences of mature job-seekers in the New Zealand labour market from a political economy perspective.

Issues surrounding mature workers have lacked a theoretical and disciplinary “base” with the issues of retirement and health consistently overwhelming any discussion about mature people and employment. The political economy theory of aging does provide a useful explanatory framework given the struggle for recognition and resources of mature workers. The persistent exclusion of mature workers from any discussion about the labour market in New Zealand is a common theme throughout the present study.

As mature workers become increasingly “problematised” by economists as a threat to future economic productivity; issues surrounding mature employment need to be better understood because there will be greater proportions of mature workers and mature job-seekers. Through a sample of 947 mature jobs-seekers collected by MESA offices throughout New Zealand, issues surrounding mature job-seekers in particular were examined.

The results highlight both the different and similar experiences of men and women in the New Zealand labour market. Women respondents were more likely to present themselves as younger than men, and to be returning to the labour market after family responsibilities with lesser confidence in their job-seeking skills and occupational abilities. Men by contrast presented themselves at MESA as older and more likely to have been made redundant; they also appeared to have more confidence in their job-seeking and occupational skills. Gender, however, did little to explain the primarily formal job-seeking methods used and the effort expended job-seeking.

There is little to suggest that job-seeking efforts diminish significantly with age. Only with the final cohort of age 61 years and over, was mean job-search effort significantly less than for other age-cohorts. By contrast the variable time out of work explained much of the variance with job-search peaking at six months out of work. Subsequent analysis strongly supports the suggestion that any policy intervention will have the greatest impact within the first four to six months of unemployment.

There is also some evidence to suggest that the reason for becoming a mature job-seeker and the attributions these mature job-seekers make for their unemployment is associated with their job-search efforts. In the present study those mature job-seekers made compulsorily redundant, regardless of age or gender, clearly tried harder than other job-seekers. By contrast those job-seekers who indicated they had been dismissed gave less effort to their job-search.

The primary barrier identified by mature job-seekers is silence, silence from employers or employment agencies about why they have not been considered or rejected for work. As a consequence many mature job-seekers interpreted this silence as age discrimination. Understandably mature job-seekers are reluctant to see their lack of skills or experience as contributing to their circumstance and feel disappointed that their skills are not appreciated: a point well highlighted by the qualitative analysis “Trajectory of emotion” that captures the voice of participants in the present study.

Finally, paid employment does matter to mature people and future research and policy would do well to examine the full picture of the labour market and give attention to where real needs exist. Mature job-seekers in the present study did not necessarily seek “special” treatment but rather the same opportunities as their chronologically younger colleagues to make a contribution to New Zealand society through paid work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Accident Compensation Corporation
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BHPS	British Household Panel Survey
BLS	Bureau of Labour Statistics
CED	Committee for Economic Development
DWI	Department of Work and Income
EEO Trust	Equal Employment Opportunities Trust
EPMU	Engineering Printing and Manufacturers Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HLFS	Household Labour Force Survey
HRC	Human Rights Commission
HRINZ	Human Resource Institute of New Zealand
ILO	International Labour Organization
LTU	Long-Term Unemployment
MESA	Mature Employment Support Agency
MES	Mature Employment Service
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
MWP	Mature Workers Program
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NHES	National Household Education Survey
NZBRT	New Zealand Business Roundtable
NZEF	New Zealand Employers Federation
NZES	New Zealand Employment Service
NZIER	New Zealand Institute of Economic Research
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEP	Project Employment Programme
PGSF	Public Good Science Fund
RCSA	Recruitment and Consulting Services Association
STU	Short-Term Unemployment
TOPS	Training Opportunity Programme
WINZ	Work and Income New Zealand

