

The underlying substance of the view held by groups alleging age discrimination was neatly summed up by a representative of the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired in Edmonton: "Older workers are finding their chances of keeping a job and, after unemployment, of finding a job, are greatly diminished because of age discrimination. 'You are too old' is the sentence they hear most, and I use that word 'sentence' in its judicial sense"(17:50). According to a number of academics who informed the Committee of relevant research findings, this statement of direct experience is widely supported by research on employer attitudes and behaviour.

2. The Labour Market Competitiveness Emphasis

A somewhat different approach to employment problems of the older worker was taken by witnesses who viewed the problem from the perspective of labour market economics. Such witnesses, without exception, affirmed that direct discrimination against older workers on the basis of age is a pervasive phenomenon. They placed relatively greater emphasis, however, on certain characteristics, ascribed at least to those older workers encountering severe labour market difficulties, which may by themselves provide an immediate explanation of special difficulties encountered by individuals. These characteristics, which reduce the labour market competitiveness of certain categories of older workers, include relatively low levels of formal education, obsolescent skills, wage expectations which may have risen during years of antecedent employment or which may be assumed by employers to be higher than those of younger workers, potentially higher benefit costs, relatively low levels of geographical mobility, or the presence of health-related problems or conditions. While no witness associated these characteristics with all, or even many, older workers, and all stressed that appropriate governmental and private-sector initiatives can provide effective remedies, a number of witnesses focussed on labour market uncompetitiveness as the immediate cause of special employment difficulties encountered by many older workers.

Reflective of the labour market economics focus was the testimony of representatives of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, who argued that in that city continuing high unemployment for those over 45 reflects the persistence of a skill mismatch between labour supply and labour demand, particularly severe in the case of older workers. Technological change and corporate restructuring in some industries, they claimed, tends to produce shifts in labour demand from some occupational areas to others, opening up disproportionate numbers of entry-level positions sometimes in