

Title: Getting on in hospitality: A New Zealand preview

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Abstract

Although ageism is an acknowledged form of discrimination in employment (Snape & Redman, 2003; Taylor & Walker, 1998), compared to other discriminatory behaviours such as racism and sexism, relatively little research has been undertaken in this area. However, age discrimination in employment is not uncommon. A report on ageism by Age Concern England revealed that more people (29%) had suffered from age discrimination, than any other form of discrimination (Tasiopoulou & Abrams, 2006). Age discrimination is also prevalent in New Zealand (McGregor, 2001; Wilson, Parker, & Kan, 2007), and increases with increased numbers of older workers in the labour force (Wilson et al.). While some business managers appear positive about older workers (Davey, 2008), the views of New Zealand hospitality managers on ageism are not yet known.

Older workers appear to be particularly disadvantaged in the labour force due to stereotypical views (Harris, 1990). Hospitality businesses are reliant on a young workforce (McNair, Flynn, & Dutton, 2007; Whiteford & Nolan, 2007) and much of the industry is style obsessed, particularly designer bars, boutique hotels and celebrity-chef restaurants. Aesthetic labour (work that values the way employees look) is a common feature of hospitality work (Nickson, Warhurst, Cullen, & Watt, 2003), and working hours are often long and unsociable. It therefore seems no surprise that the industry prefers young workers (McNair et al., 2007; Slonaker, Wendt, & Baker, 2007).

This study aims to identify attitudes to the employment of older people, defined as those aged 50 and over, in the British and New Zealand hospitality industry. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of the New Zealand interviews, summarising industry's views on employing older workers from both managers' and employees' perspectives. Early indications are that personality, team fit, and attitude are significantly greater influences on recruitment than age.

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