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Doctoral Dissertation - abstract

„Age discrimination in the labour market - socio-legal analysis”

The age, next to gender, is one of the most significant social and individual characteristics of a person, and serves for a basic identity determinant in the contemporary world. Similarly to gender, the age can serve as ground for discrimination in fields such as employment, social services, education, training, access to social and cultural life. As far as sexism and racism have already for long time been socially disapproved and legally prohibited, ageism continues to go unacknowledged in contemporary societies.

Researchers on ageism agree on the fact that ageist attitudes permeate modern western societies. Much research has been carried out to prove this in the US, Germany or UK. However, the problem of ageism is still of secondary importance in relatively young democracies, such as Poland, especially in the face of the still developing economy praising the novelty and youth as its primary resources.

The year 2000 brought legal solution to the problem of age discrimination in the labor market with the European Commission Directive 2000/78/EC, which prohibits discrimination in the field of employment on basis, *i.e.* of age. This Directive came into force in Poland in 2004 with the accession to the EU and set up an entirely new scenario for the development of legal and social analysis of the problem of ageism and age discrimination.

The major research focus in the dissertation is directed at the question of the scope of age discrimination experienced by older adults in the labour market in Poland, as well as to the problem of different types of age discrimination and ageism present in work milieus. The two concepts – age discrimination and ageism are not to be employed synonymously. Age discrimination is understood as any type of unjustified behavior that is of detrimental effect to the individual. Ageism, on the other hand, is understood more broadly, as an ideology (beliefs) that is based on negative stereotypes and prejudice (Mcmullin & Marshall, 2001). This distinction – between behavioral and attitudinal dimension of age discrimination and ageism, is also crucial from the legal perspective, where it is the discrimination on grounds of age that is prohibited, and not the ageist attitudes alone. Moreover, age discrimination can occur without prejudice, and prejudice can exist with no form of behavioral discrimination.

The scope of the problem of age discrimination is of major importance to the research since there seems to be quite a divergence of opinions as to the actual size of the issue. Different statistical analysis, such as Eurobarometer of European Social Survey, present data where age discrimination reports vary from 6% (Eurobarometer, 2009) of the population to as much as 35 % (ESS data). Other data,

on national level, suggest that age discrimination might be even more widespread. The methodological approach to measuring age discrimination is to be held responsible for the vast discrepancies, and therefore there is a need for development of a reliable and accurate tool to measure the extent of age discrimination in the labour market. The tool used in this research was based on the original instrument of Palmore *Ageism Survey* (Palmore, 2001), but was adapted to the needs and research aims of this study.

Next to the abovementioned problem, it was essential to establish the factors, which determine the possibility of becoming a victim of age discrimination in employment. Two sets of factors were taken into consideration: the socio-demographic, such as age, gender, education level; and professional factors, among which are, *i.e.* the sector of employment, belonging to a certain professional group, size of the enterprise.

The last analytical pillar of the research scheme was to determine the level of knowledge about the anti-discrimination law, as well as the influence of this law on the behaviours and professional decisions of the employers and employees. For, the efficiency of any legal provisions is highly reliant on the knowledge about the law, as well as opinions and attitudes towards it.

Methodology

The research project (financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education) used the triangulation approach, namely the triangulation of research methods, data sources and researchers. The study included qualitative method (in-depth interviews with 30 employers and 6 experts), and was carried out in 2010 and 2011 by a team of 3 researchers. The data gathered was transcribed verbatim and analyzed in MAXQDA software program.

The quantitative method used was the survey on sample of 1000 inhabitants of Małopolska (purposeful sampling) region in the age of 45-65 and economically active. It was carried out in the period of June – July 2010 by a specialized research agency. The data was analyzed with the use of SPSS software. Additionally, secondary data analysis was completed on the data from European Social Survey of 2008, the 4th Round of the survey, which included the supplementary set of 50 questions regarding aging of the population and ageism.