
AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN SERBIA

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Abstract: *Employment issues of persons over 55 years gaining in importance, given the aging of the population in Serbia, which will continue in the next few decades. It confirms the projection of the National Statistical Office, which estimated increasing the share of workers aged 55-64 in the workforce, from 13 per cent in 2010 to 14 per cent in 2040. This is corroborated by the fact that life expectancy has increased in recently life. Also, there have been significant changes in Serbia in the structure of unemployment in the last decade just to the detriment of these categories of workers. In fact, their employment from year to year decreases, i.e. in 2010 the number of employees in the age group 55-64 decreased by 2.3% over the previous year (or 29,000 persons), which makes this issue very current in terms of its resolution.*

The aim of this paper is through research conducted on a representative sample of 100 respondents in Belgrade and Nis, provides an answer to several questions asked whose answers should confirm or refute the hypotheses we tested. We explored labor force in this age group (both sexes), which most affected by job loss and searching for new employment with focus on female. Analysis among other things is showed that if it comes to employment after years of waiting, the job is usually paid less than the previous one and that women are waiting longer than men the same age cohort. Therefore, many experts call this phenomenon age discrimination in women employment. Taking into account this fact in mind, we tried to determine its causes and to propose the measures of employment policy and direct them towards resolving the issues of gender and age discrimination in Serbia.

Key words: *Unemployment, employment of women older than 55 years, employment programs, aging population, age discrimination, Serbia.*

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Introduction

Concerning unemployment age approach, analysis suggested that the age of fifty marked a turning point in Serbia. There are different reasons for and attitudes to unemployment after fifty. Some feel it is inevitable because of their age, but others keep on trying to get a job (Radović Marković, M. & Silver Kyaruzi, I. 2010).

The participation rates in employment for women over 55 have been decreasing since the privatization process started; In addition, women at this age group are more likely to be working part-time and on lower pay than older men, factors which contribute to low late-life incomes. The question about women over 55 and discrimination against them gets on most importance in Serbian society because their number is highly increased in the last ten years. In some parts in Serbia women 50+ are participating with more than 50% in total number of population (for example Crna Trava).This data is an argument more that we cannot marginalize so great segment of our population and find solution for them to be better integrated in society. The paper will therefore examine how age and gender interact for older women, and explore the barriers they face.

Theoretical background

The age discrimination in employment refers to the use of “crude proxies” in personnel decisions, relating to hiring, promotion, retraining, firing and mandatory retirement (MacNicol, J. 2006).The negative consequences of age discrimination in employment can include barriers to recruitment and hiring, diminished conditions of work and employment, limited career development and, in the absence of legislation, diminished employment protections and rights (Ghosheh, N.2008). Recent literature cites that age discrimination occurs when preferential decisions are based on age, rather than on an individual's merit, credentials or job performance (Guttek, Cohen, & Tsui, 1996; Ngo, Tang, & Au, 2002). Riger and Galligan (1980) pointed out noticeable socio-psychological and physiological differences within age discrimination. Age discrimination is also a moral issue as well as a personal one for everyone who expects more birthdays - but it's also a serious issue for businesses (Wilson,C 2006).Research suggests that employers' attitudes toward older workers are frequently related to misconceptions concerning older workers' abilities (American Association for Retired Persons, 1994). A frequent accusation against older applicants is that they are less mentally flexible and less physically active than their youthful competitors (Riach and Rich 2006).

Namely, employers judging older workers to be in poor health, resistant to change, uncreative, prone to accidents, disinterested in technological change, and hard to train (Guillemard & Walker, 1994). Further, employers' attitudes toward older workers vary significantly according to company size, employers' age, and employers' gender, with older, female employers from smaller companies displaying the most positive attitudes (Berger, 1999). Until recently, research into the redundancy and job search experiences of older workers focused primarily on the early retirement and exit of male workers and tended to neglect the experiences of older women (Duncan, 2003). Research also suggests that older women are frequently perceived as both less attractive and less competent than younger women (Itzin and Phillipson, 1993; Loretto, Duncan and White, 2000). The importance of appearance in seeking or maintaining employment, particularly for females, has been noted in the literature: "When women attain the symbolic meaning of 'physically unattractive' (to men) they may be pushed out of visible areas or forced into retirement regardless of their skills" (Reinharz, 1986). Women who have chosen clerical, secretarial or reception work may be especially liable to discrimination during the later part of their working lives as they work within female-dominated occupations where ageism and sexism frequently combine to create the 'double jeopardy' of 'gendered ageism' (Onyx, J.1998). In countries when unemployment is low, and fewer applicants are searching job, employers have less opportunity to discard applicants simply on the basis of some arbitrary characteristic such as gender and age (Riach and Rich, 2002).

As many scholars have pointed out (Gordon, 1996; Horn, 1994, 1998; Robertson, 1998; Roos and Gladwin, 2000), male-orientated ideologies often prevent adequate recognition of female contributions and, in some instances, do limit their participation. In some countries, women are subjected to negative stereotypes that in turn lead to them being deprived of resources (Hill and Macan, 1996) thus forcing them into the informal sector. The World Conference on Ageing held in Madrid in 2002 endorsed a life course approach to well-being in old age which is especially important for women "as they face obstacles throughout life with a cumulative effect on their social, economic, physical and psychological well-being in their later years" (Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002). Those older women who grew up when the male breadwinner and female carer model of gender relationships predominated may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of gendered ageism within the workplace. Such women were often socialised into leaving school with limited qualifications, entering traditionally female occupations and either withdrawing from the labour force or working part-time whilst their children were young (Handy, J. and Davy, D.2005).

However, the finding from more than 100 research investigations is that there is no significant difference between the job performance of men and women, older and younger workers (Warr, P.1994). In this context, some labour market economists are already beginning to re-examine their assumptions that the preference for younger workers is economically rational (Lazear, E. 1995).

Despite a lot of literature in the area of age discrimination, limited research has been conducted in the area of age discrimination in employment against older adults between the ages of 55 and 64. In addition, there has been little, if any, consideration of the quality of jobs and working conditions in policy discussions and the debate surrounding extending working life (Ghosheh, N. 2008).

Methodology

The first time experimental method was applied to investigate gender discrimination in employment during the 1980s by Riach and Rich. Although it originated almost forty years ago, there has been no application of their method to measuring the extent of age discrimination in employment. Many years later, Riach and Rich (2002) recommended that their technique should be adapted to the special case of older applicants; to accept that the *job experience* component of human capital does vary between different groups and have realistic candidates make applications, but to control for all other dimensions of human capital.

There is little qualitative research generated in a Serbian context that examines the views of older workers themselves. Because of that little is known about the subjective experiences of workers aged 55 to 64 who are searching for employment or re-employment. The research methodology in this paper uses qualitative method. This approach, involves carrying out depth interviews with respondents aged 55 and above in order to obtain detailed information about their experiences and beliefs in relation to ageism and employment. Respondents varied by gender, occupation, marital status, education and length of time unemployed. We interviewed an equal number of men and women in order to explore gender differences and identify age related barriers by gender.

Our research on attitudes about discrimination included ten questions as follow:

- Whether women older than 55 years are losing their jobs easier in comparison with younger age groups of women?
- Why are unemployed women over 55 years (when they lose their jobs) longer waiting for a new job than other age groups?
- Where you've noticed that women and men over 55 experienced some form of discrimination in job search?
- Are unemployed men the same age as women (55 -64), equally have difficulties to find a new job?
- Why are unemployed women older than 55 years in Serbia rarely choose to start up their own businesses and be self- employed than younger age groups of women?
- Does it necessary to devote more attention to the problem of employment workers in this age group (both sexes), taking into account the continuous trend of aging population?
- Does it necessary better networking among unemployed women, through various associations which should provide assistance and support to people over 55 easier to find job?
- Does it necessary special training and professional development plan for unemployed workers over 55 (women and men)?
- What role should the government undertake in supporting employment of unemployed persons over 55?
- Do you expect that in the next five years can be improved the position of women over 55 and overcome stereotypes in their employment?

The interview schedule involves two distinct stages, which can be summarized as follows:

- **General Views on Ageism and Employment**-This stage involves exploring general views of respondents as to whether older workers are disadvantaged in seeking and maintaining employment. Are there barriers to employment for older workers, including employer attitudes and does exist an age and especially gender-ageism in employment in Serbia?
- **Legislation and government role to tackle Ageism**-This explores respondents views of the potential effectiveness of the legislation in Serbia, further measures that might be needed to tackle gender-ageism in employment and how age discrimination can be reduced at all. In addition, this stage of research involves respondents' expectations in terms of overcoming age and gender stereotypes. What role should play the government in promoting employment workers 55+

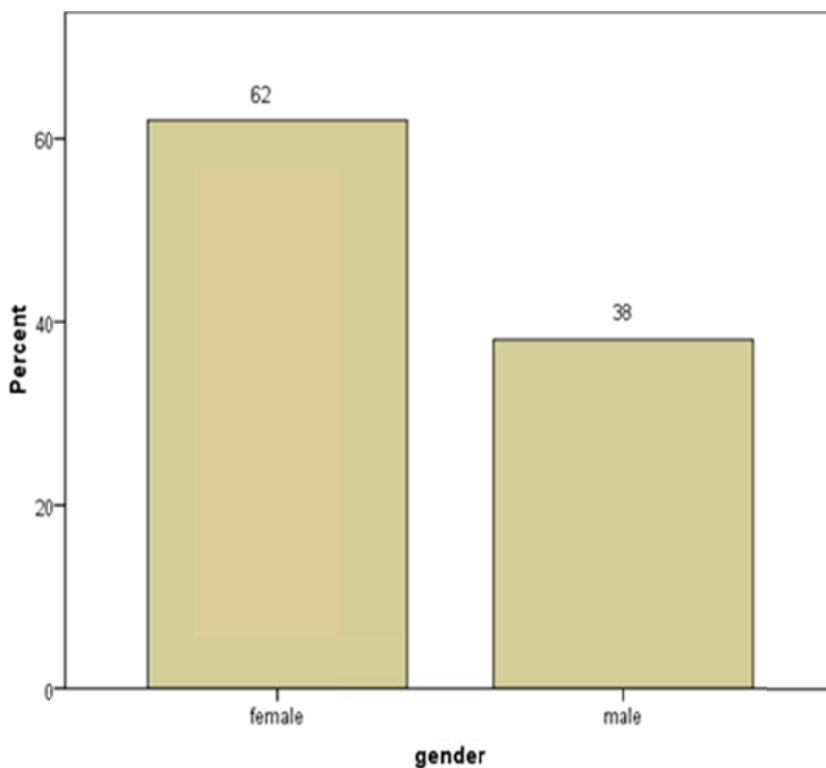
and whether it is necessary to organize special training programs for this age group?

Research outcomes

In this pilot study we analysed 100 participants aged 55-64 years. The average age of the examinees was 59.9 ± 2.9 years.

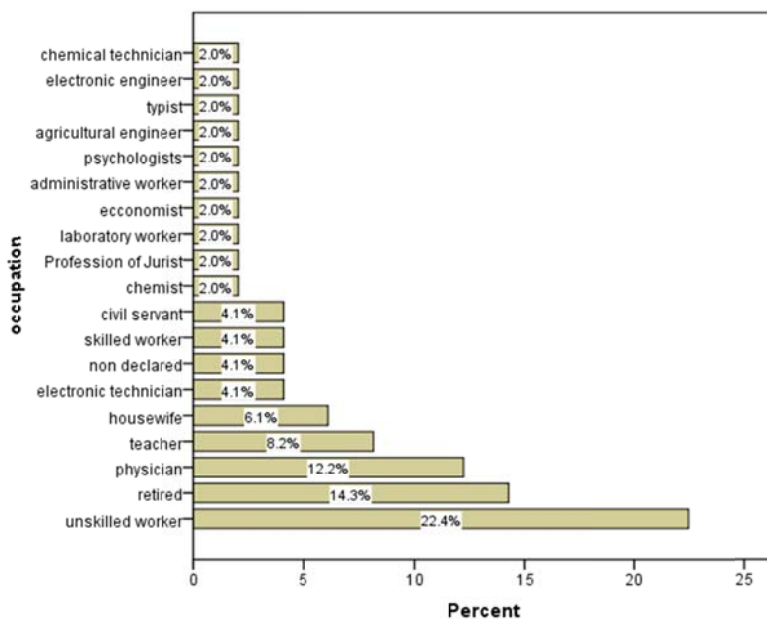
There were 62 female and 38 male examinees. The gender distribution is showed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Gender distribution of the examinees



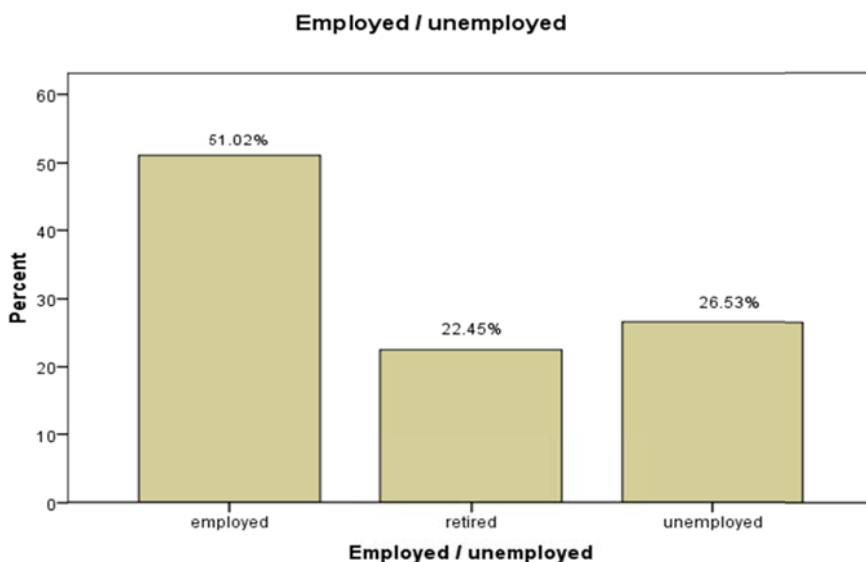
In view of the qualification structure of our respondents, unskilled workers prevailed in the sample with 22.4% (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Occupation of the examinees



The majority of the respondents were employed (51.2%), whereas the unemployed made up 25.53% of the sample (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The employment status



As many as 90% respondents argue that women older than 55 are made redundant more frequently in comparison with the women younger in age (Annex. Figure 1). As many as 72% of respondents believe that the reason that women older than 55 are discharged from jobs more frequently is the discrimination of women of that and a similar ages, while 26% are of opinion that these women usually do not have the required knowledge, in spite of the fact that many of them are willing to acquire new knowledge required for the job (Annex. Figure 2). A very interesting response is the one to the question on where the respondents perceived the discrimination concerning the 55 old or older job seekers. Namely, the majority of respondents (82%) see discrimination in the vacancy advertisements of the companies that need new workers (Annex. Figure 3). The advertisements state that the companies employ workers from younger age groups. Similarly, around 10% respondents believe that employers are not ready to invest into an additional training of employees aged 55 and older; nevertheless, the same percentage of respondents (4%) see discrimination in the less favourable working conditions and lower pay, as well as in fewer opportunities for promotion this group of workers (Annex. Figure 4).

We started this research with the hypothesis that that this type of discrimination is more characteristic of women in Serbia in comparison with men; nearly all the respondents (96%) stated that it is equally present with both genders in the analysed group. Very significant also is the opinion of the respondents that this category of employees is not really ready to launch their own businesses once they lose their jobs, because they believe it is too late for a new beginning (42%), whereas a somewhat lower number of them say that the major reason is the lack of financial means and the starting capital to set up their own businesses and self-employment (36%).

Around 12% of respondents see the lack of adequate knowledge to start a business as a major obstacle, and 10% of respondents state that the reason is the insufficient support of their families and the lack of motivation (Annex. Figure 5). As regards an ageing trend in the population in Serbia (according to the data reported by the Institute of Social Sciences, Central Serbia and Vojvodina occupy the fourth position in the list of the oldest nations in the world, with a median age of 40.7 years) as well as the rise of the pension age limit, as many as 94% of respondents insisted that our society should pay more attention to the employment of elderly persons (Annex. Figure 6). Also, around 92% answers refer to the need for a more efficient networking of women that includes the support and expert aid in their employment (Annex.

Figure 7). Furthermore, the percentage of those who propose that an additional training geared to the needs of the elderly should be organized is also high.

The next section of the research discusses the role of the state and the measures it has to take as regards helping unemployed persons in this age group. The answers obtained mostly (48%) insist that solving the unemployment problem of persons between 55 and 64 years of age requires that a more comprehensive campaign be organized and a larger number of measures be taken (Annex. Figure 8). Primarily, a special fund should be established to finance the training of these persons, and then it is the task of the state to ensure more flexible work conditions (work from home, a more flexible working hours, etc.) and better ergonomic conditions that would have a favourable impact upon the employees' health (Annex. Figure 9). The respondents, however, are not so optimistic when it comes to the issues of discrimination in the employment of the workers (of both genders) in Serbia in the near future. This attitude is shared by as many as 72% of respondents stating that either there is a shortage of money or a lack of goodwill to approach this problem in a more serious manner (Annex. Figure 10). Finally, according to our research, discrimination is a real problem for elders (both women and men). Hence, our hypothesis that discrimination influences labour market participation seems to be confirmed.

The research résumé

- The research was conducted in Belgrade and Niš, from 15th January to 15th March, 2012.
- The research included 100 respondents aged between 55 and 64, the women prevailing by 62%.
- The majority of respondents were employed (51.2%), whereas the unemployed persons made up 25.5%.
- 72% of the respondents believe that women are subject to discrimination (55-64) in finding employment; however, they also claim that men are equally discriminated in comparison to women (96%).
- The largest number of respondents (82%) sees employment discrimination in the job advertisements published by companies.
- The largest number of respondents (42%) maintains that it is too late for a new beginning and setting up a new business in their age, whereas a smaller number of the respondents see the major reason for this situation in the lack of financial means and the start-up capital to launch their own business and be self-employed (36%).

- 94% of the respondents think that it is necessary that the society should pay much more attention to employment of persons older than 55.
- 92% answers highlight the need for a more efficient networking of unemployed women which includes support and expert aid in their employment.
- 48% of respondents propose that a broad campaign should be launched and a larger number of measures should be taken in resolving the unemployment problem of the analysed age group of the unemployed persons.
- Around 72% of the respondents were not optimistic about the methods of solving the unemployment problems and discrimination of the unemployed persons (of both genders) in the period to come. The reason is the lack of financial means as well as a poor interest in this group that is marginalized in the society. Simultaneously, they stress the urgency of resolving this problem, on one hand, having in mind that the population of Serbia ranks among the oldest in the world and that the trend is to be continued, whereas on the other hand, it is more than obvious that the age limit for retiring will be significantly extended in the period to come.

Conclusion

The Anti-Discrimination Law was passed in 2009 and provides that “discrimination in the field of work, i.e., violating the equal opportunities for employment or exercising the same rights in the domain of labour, under the same circumstances, such as the right to work, the right to a free choice of profession, the right to be promoted, the right to receive training and the professional rehabilitation, the right to equal compensation for the equal jobs, to rightful and satisfactory working conditions, to holidays, to education and to membership in unions, as well as the right to the protection against unemployment“ (article 14), it is not really enforced in practice. This is further proven by the results of our research that prove that discrimination of 55-64 old women as regards their employment, reflected in the low demand for them on the labour market still exists. The research has, however, also shown that men in the same age group analysed are discriminated to an almost equal degree. The selection of workers belonging to this age group is biased, rather than objective. The elderly workers are primarily considered to be less productive, lacking the appropriate knowledge, are slower in adopting change and are unwilling to improve and adjust to the modern requirements of the job. Regardless of the fact that this category includes

mostly unskilled workers or workers with low qualifications, our research has shown that the workers are ready to improve and learn, but need an adequate support. It is important that this support come from both the state and the educational institutions, simultaneously. Besides, given the results of this research, we can conclude that the 55-64 year old unemployed persons' motivation for self-employment and starting up a new business is lacking. The reasons are primarily to be found in the lack of the training programmes geared to this age group, ones that would help them acquire entrepreneurial knowledge. This knowledge should meet individual needs and desires, but also the demand of the market. It should enable these people to make the decisions to enter the entrepreneurial waters more easily. For example, acquiring entrepreneurial knowledge not only helps learners identify with entrepreneurial activities, but also stimulates them to run their own businesses and be more adaptable to the fast changing entrepreneurial environment.

The fact is that these conditions hit hardest the persons (especially women) that wait for the job for a longest period after they have lost the previous one and that the employers following any form of discrimination have not been processed so far. Hence, no wonder that a large number of unemployed workers no longer search for jobs or that their expectations that the issue of unemployment of the people over the age 55 will be resolved timely decreased. This attitude is further corroborated by the statistical data that show a constant falling trend of the unemployment rate, from 41.4% to 33.1% in the 2004-2010 period for the working age persons (55 – 64 years of age), as well as the constant rise in their unemployment rate, from 7.8% in 2004 to 12.2 % in 2010 (Radović – Marković,2011).

We want to stress that the government must publicly denounce gender discrimination in the workplace and commit it to addressing women's and men's unemployment with equal vigour. Namely, despite the fact that the government has taken measures to stimulate the employment of the elderly people and subsidizes the employers that employ the unemployed persons from this age group, the desired results have so far not been achieved. The fear that they will never be achieved has become even stronger since the government decided to reduce the funds meant to subsidies employment in 2012 to a half (the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia, 2012).

It is our opinion that the problem would be diminished to a considerable degree by the enforcement of severe penalties for those employers who set age limits, as well as limits concerning gender, religious or ethnical orienta-

tion in advertising the vacancies. In this context, the government should enforce existing anti-discrimination legislation against public and private sector employers who discriminate on the basis of sex and age in employment decisions and establish penalties for employers who discriminate on the above mentioned basis.

Similarly, the employment of persons older than 55 would be considerably aided if a stricter control were conducted concerning the manner in which the employers use the subsidies granted by the state to employ women and men from this age group. On the other hand, granting loans meant for unemployed persons that would support the business ideas of the elderly and enhance the launching of their entrepreneurship business would help raise the rate of their working age activity, which has otherwise fell in the last five years from 44.9 per cent to 37.7 per cent in the working age population (55-64). The banks and financial institutions have generally granted loans to younger persons, setting the age limit, since age is often a limiting factor even in this regard. Hence, due to the lack of their own financial means and their ineligibility to be granted a loan, the elderly have not had an opportunity to become self-employed and active.

We expect that this research can trigger further empirical and research investigations and better inform policy makers towards reducing gender and age inequalities in the labour market. It should also make an impact on individuals (55-64) and their need to take responsibility themselves for maintaining and enhancing their work ability and employability throughout their entire working life. The expected implications can be related to government institutions and an institutional support, particularly in the field of life-long learning and career development.

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Annex

Figure 1: Whether women older than 55 years lose their jobs easier in comparison with younger age groups of women?

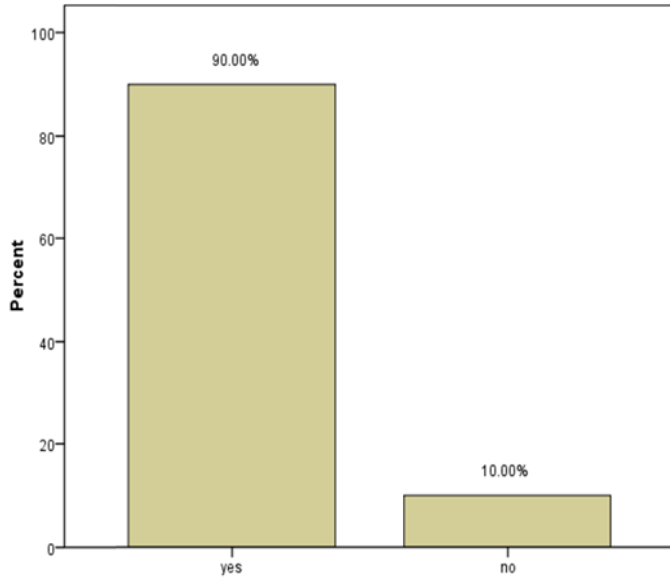


Figure 2: Why do elder women longer wait for a new job?

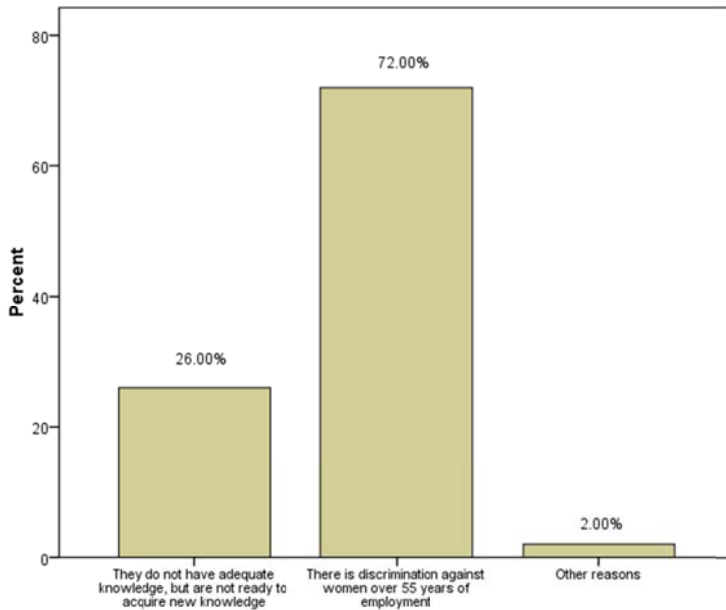


Figure 3: Where you've noticed discrimination in job search for workers over 55?

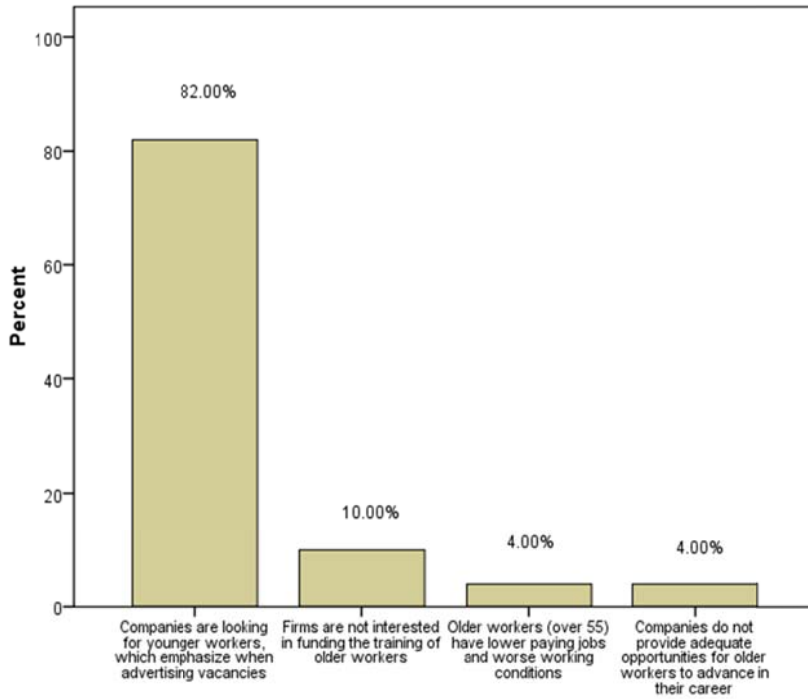


Figure 4: Are unemployed men over 55 equally having difficulties to find a new job as women?

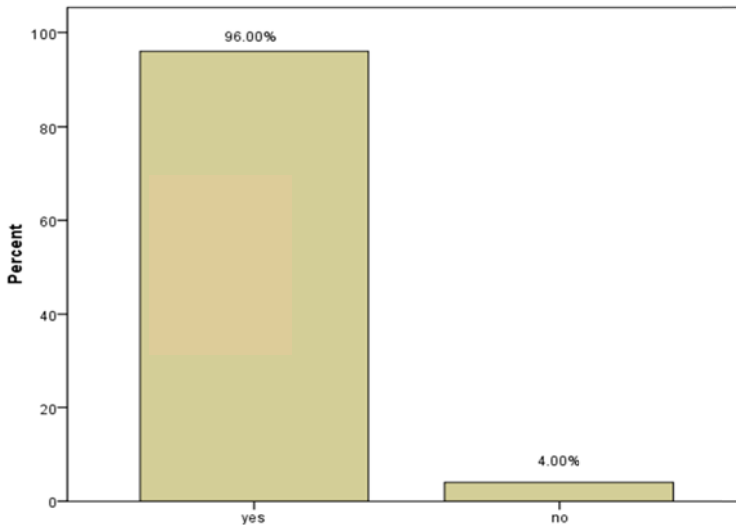


Figure 5: Why are unemployed women older than 55 years in Serbia rarely choose to start up their own businesses and be self-employed than younger age groups of women?

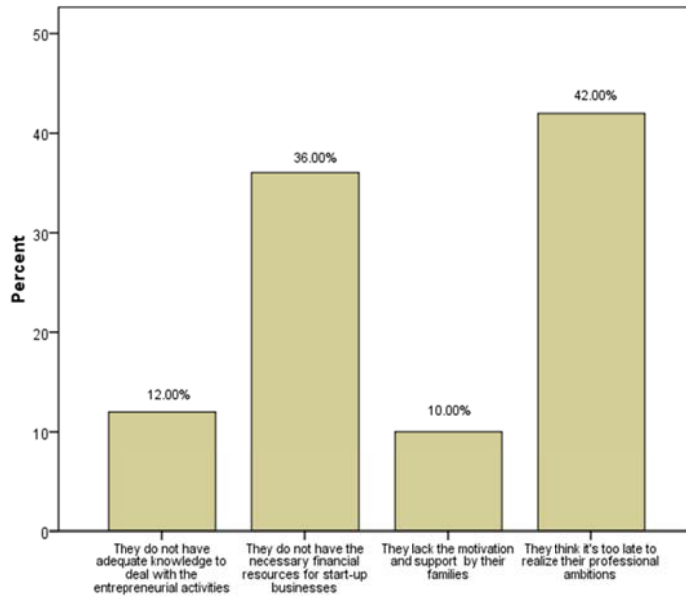


Figure 6: Is it necessary to devote more attention to unemployed women over 55 years?

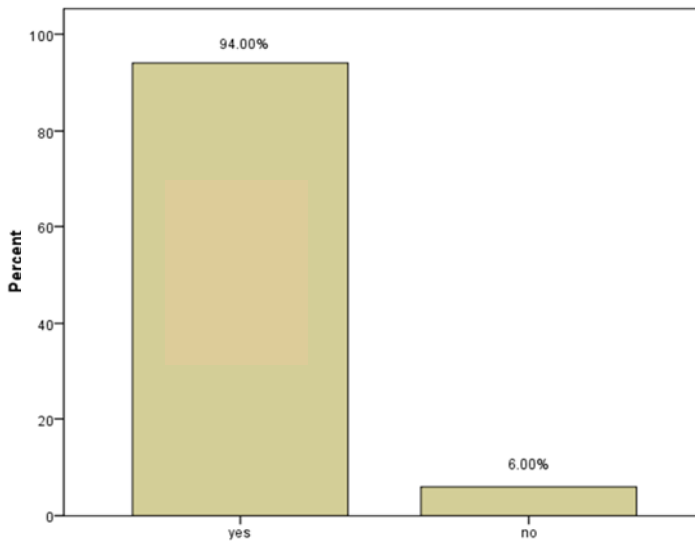


Figure 7: Is it necessary better networking among unemployed women over 55?

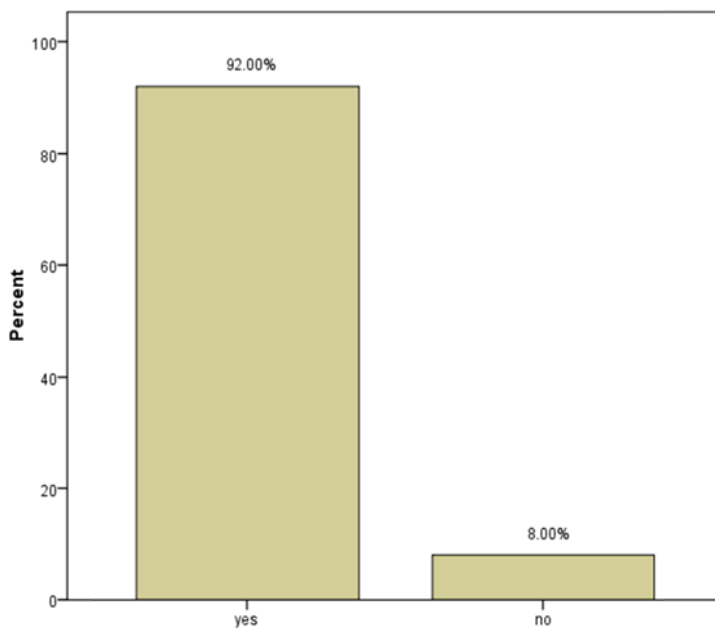


Figure 8: Is it needed a special training for unemployed workers over 55?

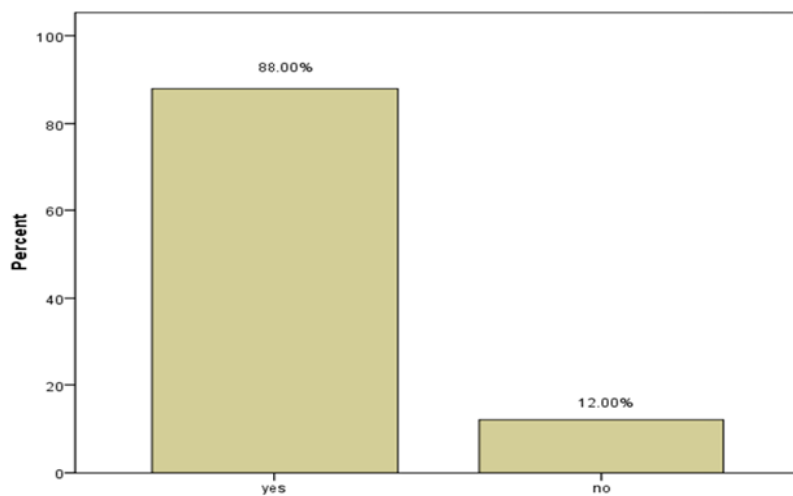


Figure 9: What is a government role in supporting employment of unemployed elder workers?

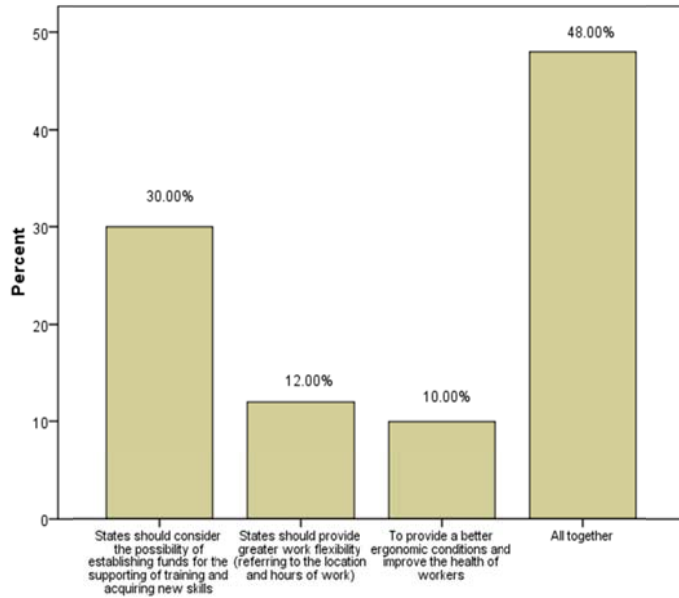


Figure 10: What expectations are of changes the positions of women over 55 in the next five years?

