

## DISCRIMINATION IN DIGITAL RECRUITMENT AGAINST VULNERABLE GROUPS: A CASE STUDY IN MEDAN

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**Abstract.** Digital recruitment offers ease of access and efficiency in job searching but still poses challenges, particularly the risk of discrimination that negatively impacts vulnerable groups, such as women and older individuals. This study focuses on the impact of discrimination in digital recruitment on vulnerable groups in Medan. Using a qualitative method with in-depth interviews involving 15 job seekers, the findings reveal that discrimination in the form of age limits, gender preferences, and physical requirements significantly affects their psychological and economic well-being. Psychological impacts include diminished self-confidence, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness, frequently experienced by job seekers from these groups. Economically, such discrimination narrows employment opportunities, prolongs unemployment periods, and hinders financial stability. Additionally, the lack of transparency and feedback from companies exacerbates these effects, creating frustration and mistrust in the recruitment system. This research underscores the importance of reforming digital recruitment policies to ensure a more inclusive, fair process based on applicants' skills and experience.

**Keywords:** Digital recruitment, Discrimination, Vulnerable Groups, Psychological Impact, Policy Reform

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Digital recruitment has found its way into human resource management in many places. Thus, the new way of working involves highly digital approaches and technologies that can even support the recruitment, hiring, orientation and training processes that employees go through remotely. Digital human resource recruitment is undergoing a significant change due to the paradigm shift in terms of increasing the portion of human resource investment where the concept of sustainable development has a completely different resonance. By using social media, companies in addition to job seekers reach people who are latently willing to change.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies two main types of discrimination in the world of work: direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination occurs when there is explicit unfair treatment, such as a job advertisement that specifies a particular gender as a requirement. Indirect discrimination, meanwhile, arises from policies that appear neutral but have a negative impact on a particular group, such as physical requirements that favor one gender. Vulnerable groups, such as women and individuals over the age of 35, are particularly affected by both types of discrimination. Women, for example, face stereotypes that cast doubt on their competence in male-dominated sectors, while older individuals are often seen as less adaptable to technology or changes in the work environment. As a result, these vulnerable groups have lower access to employment and are at risk of being trapped in informal employment or unemployment, which exacerbates social inequality.

Discrimination against vulnerable groups, such as women and individuals over the age of 35, is often exacerbated by algorithmic systems. This is because algorithms tend to replicate the biases inherent in their training data, especially if that data is inaccurate, biased, or unrepresentative (Kim, 2016; Barocas & Selbst, 2016; Suresh & Guttag, 2019). As a result, these vulnerable groups are often at a disadvantage,

both in terms of employment opportunities and access to strategic positions.

In multicultural societies, prejudiced views can create entrenched social hierarchies, where certain groups tend to be more socially accepted than others (Berry, 2006; Hagendoorn, 1993, 1995). In digital recruitment, women often face gender bias, such as stereotypes that they are less competent for certain jobs, while individuals over the age of 35 often face age biases that assume they are less adaptable to technology or less productive than younger workers.

This injustice further exacerbates social and economic inequality. Despite having equal qualifications, this group tends to receive fewer benefits from their background (education, work experience) compared to more socially advantaged groups (Andersone et al., 2006).

In Medan City, the phenomenon of gender, age, and race-based discrimination in digital recruitment is increasingly felt. This reflects the major challenges in creating a fair and inclusive work environment. Deputy Mayor of Medan, Aulia Rachman, said, "I have an analysis, Medan in the next 20 years if we do not create a new breakthrough, will be dominated by non-indigenous people to become Mayor of Medan, we can see, this is what I analyzed." The statement shows concerns about the dominance of certain groups in government and strategic positions in the city, which also has the potential to worsen social inequality and discrimination in various sectors, including in the world of work.

The Medan Deputy Mayor's statement of concern about the dominance of non-indigenous people in leadership positions, while perhaps intended to warn of the need for more inclusive development policies, also reflects concerns about greater social and economic inequality. This phenomenon exacerbates the challenges faced by job applicants from certain racial or demographic groups. Discrimination based on race, gender, and age in the recruitment process can be further exacerbated by the reliance on algorithms and technologies that may not be sensitive enough to local social and cultural contexts.

With the rapid development of technology, it is important to ensure that digital recruitment policies are not only efficient but also fair. Otherwise, inequality and discrimination will become more entrenched, which will be detrimental to the social and economic development of Medan City in the future. This requires special attention from the government and companies to ensure that technology does not become a tool that worsens inequality, but instead, can be used to create equal opportunities for all levels of society.

In Indonesia, discrimination in the workplace is regulated by various laws and regulations. One relevant legal basis is Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which regulates workers' rights and prohibits discrimination in the recruitment and employment process. Article 5 of the law expressly prohibits discrimination in terms of employment opportunities, fair treatment, and wages, whether based on gender, ethnicity, religion, race, or class (SARA).

In addition, Law Number 40 of 2008 concerning the Elimination of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination also regulates the prohibition of all forms of discrimination, including in the world of work. Article 4 of this law states that everyone has the right not to be discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, and culture. If discriminatory practices occur in recruitment, either directly or through the use of biased algorithms, then it could violate the principles regulated by the law.

In addition, Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Information and Electronic Transactions (ITE) also provides protection for the use of technology and digital platforms. Although the ITE Law focuses more on the misuse of technology, including defamation and fraud, the use of technology in digital recruitment must comply with the principle of justice and must not harm any party in a discriminatory manner.

Table 1.1 Population table in Medan City

Category	Indonesia	Medan
Total Population	284.3 million people	2.4 million people
Female Population	141.5 million people (49.8%)	1.2 million people
Population Aged > 35 Years	127 million people (45%)	1 million people
Unemployment Rate	4.82% (national)	8.67% (about 176,000 people)

The Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) in Medan City was recorded at 8.89% at the end of 2024, according to the local Manpower Office. Although it shows a decline compared to previous years, this figure is still above the national average, which was around 4.82% in the same period. This indicates a significant challenge in creating inclusive employment opportunities in this region.

In Medan City, unemployment is one of the main problems, with the open unemployment rate reaching 8.67% of the total population in 2024. This means that around 176,000 people out of a total population of 1.9 million are unemployed. Unemployment in Medan is higher than the national average, especially in urban areas, where the figure is more significant than in rural areas.

Vulnerable groups, such as women and those over 35, face particular challenges. Data shows that women have lower employment opportunities than men, especially in the formal sector, even though women's labor force participation rates continue to increase. For those over 35, barriers often stem from age discrimination, which makes it difficult for them to regain employment if they have been unemployed.

With all the challenges that exist, discrimination in digital recruitment in Medan City reflects the need for serious attention to the principle of justice in the world of work.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Discrimination in digital recruitment occurs due to bias in algorithms or automated systems used in the selection process. AI recruitment tools have worrying aspects that cannot be ignored, highlighting the need to address these challenges through technical or managerial means (Raub, 2018). Growing evidence suggests that AI is more impartial than commonly believed; however, algorithms and AI can result in unfair employment opportunities and potential discrimination without accountability (Chen, 2023).

The application of direct requirements in recruitment, such as age limits, has become a controversial issue in modern employment practices. In this case, the company discriminates in terms of age, where in its qualifications the applicant must be 17-25 years old and not more than that. Here, job seekers who may be aged 30-40 years and above no longer have the same opportunities as other job seekers (Raissa, 2019)

This prevents them from getting equal opportunities in the world of work. Discrimination in the workplace is illegal, but discriminatory practices remain a persistent global problem. On the other hand, the implementation of such conditions directly contributes to the marginalization of vulnerable groups, widening the gap in access to the labor market (Raghavan et al., 2020), especially in the digital transformation of big cities like Medan.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis to explore discrimination in the recruitment process through digital platforms, especially in Medan City. Qualitative research, according to Sugiyono (2011:56), is used to understand the meaning of events in a particular context with researchers as key instruments. The location of the study was in Medan City as an economic center, with

subjects being active job seekers on digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Jobstreet and Instagram. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, which, according to Turner (2020), targets individuals with specific characteristics, then continued with snowball sampling, as explained by Sugiyono (2017), to expand the number of informants through recommendations.

Data collection was carried out through three methods: observation, documentation, and interviews. Observation, according to Sukmadinata (2009:220), allows researchers to observe patterns of discrimination in recruitment criteria on digital platforms. Documentation is used to support data through analysis of interview transcripts and photos, as explained by Sugiyono (2018), as a way to obtain data in written, archived, or image form. Semi-structured interviews, as defined by Moleong (2012), provide flexibility to explore applicants' experiences and perceptions of age-, gender-, or ethnic-based discrimination during the digital recruitment process.

Through this approach, this study aims to understand the impact of digital platform algorithms and policies on job accessibility. The collected data is analyzed to identify patterns of discrimination, such as unconscious bias which, according to Herdiansyah (2013), can be detected through observation and interviews. The results of this study are expected to provide in-depth insights to develop fairer and more inclusive recruitment solutions in the digital era, thus supporting the principles of justice and equality as stipulated in the Manpower Law No. 13 of 2003 Article 5.

This study uses a case study by collecting primary data in Medan City, focusing on vulnerable groups seeking employment through digital platforms. The research locations include strategic areas such as business centers, educational institutions, and areas with high population density, which were selected due to the intense job search activity in the area. For example, business centers are the main recruitment locations, while universities produce new graduates who are actively seeking employment opportunities. This case study aims to explore in depth the discrimination situations experienced by vulnerable groups in the digital recruitment process in Medan City, thereby providing a richer understanding of this phenomenon.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to explore the discrimination and challenges faced by job applicants in the digital recruitment process. The findings highlight the various barriers faced by applicants, both in discriminatory recruitment criteria and in the ambiguity of selection outcomes. Interviews with respondents revealed how current recruitment policies and practices often ignore applicants' skills and experience, creating significant inequalities.

##### *4.1 Forms of Discrimination in Digital Recruitment*

The results of this study reveal various forms of discrimination that occur in the digital recruitment process. Age-based discrimination is one of the main findings, where many companies set age limits that are not relevant to job qualifications. This discrimination often not only limits job opportunities but also affects applicants' self-confidence. A 38-year-old male respondent stated:

*"Many job vacancies explicitly state a maximum age of 35. In fact, I have more than 20 years of experience in the field they require."*

Age discrimination in recruitment often occurs because companies prefer younger candidates, even though their work experience and competencies are actually more relevant. Research shows that these age restrictions reduce the diversity of experiences in organizations, which can actually hurt companies in the long run.

Gender preferences are also a significant barrier. One 35-year-old female respondent said,

*"Some positions always list a preference for men, even though the job can*

*actually be done by anyone.”*

Gender preferences in hiring create additional barriers for women, especially in positions that are considered more “masculine.” Additionally, research by Harvard DCE found that unconscious bias is often at the root of the problem, where incorrect assumptions about women’s abilities limit their opportunities to advance in the workplace.

In addition, irrelevant physical requirements, such as minimum height or a certain appearance, are obstacles for some applicants. A 25-year-old man said,

*“I was once rejected because I didn’t meet the minimum height criteria, even though the job didn’t require significant physical skills.”*

Discrimination based on height or certain physical appearances often creates barriers, even though they are not directly related to job requirements or performance. These biases reflect decisions that are based more on stereotypes than on objective consideration of job duties. As a result, these practices not only reduce fairness in hiring, but also potentially reduce opportunities for candidates who are actually qualified.

This phenomenon highlights the need to re-evaluate selection criteria to better reflect fairness and inclusion. It also highlights that discrimination in digital recruitment is often based on unfounded stereotypes and assumptions, thereby reducing fairness in the recruitment process.

#### 4.2. Loss of Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is one of the important aspects that affect a person's ability to apply for a job. However, discrimination experienced by job applicants from vulnerable groups often erodes their self-confidence. One 35-year-old female respondent stated,

*“Every time I look for a job, I feel like my age is a barrier. Even though I have 18 years of experience working, no company will give me a chance because of the minimum age limit.”*

In line with that, a 26 years old man also shared his experience.

*“I felt like I was being judged only by my appearance. As soon as I entered the room, his (the interviewer's) face immediately felt uncomfortable, and his questions were also just so-so.”*

This phenomenon shows the impact of discrimination that leads to overthinking, feelings of worthlessness, and decreased motivation to continue the job search. This loss of self-confidence is in line with previous research findings showing that age- based discrimination can create negative self-perceptions, especially when applicants are not given clear feedback (Wang et al., 2018). This ambiguity leads to overthinking and feelings of worthlessness, which in turn affect their motivation to continue the job search. This phenomenon can also be linked to social psychology theory, where experiences of discrimination can reduce a person's self-efficacy in achieving certain goals. Therefore, the loss of self-confidence not only affects individual applicants but also has the potential to reduce the competitiveness of vulnerable groups in the labor market.

#### 4.3. Economic Impact: Financial Instability

Discrimination in digital recruitment also has a significant impact on the economic stability of applicants. The inability to get a job that matches their qualifications causes many applicants from vulnerable groups to be trapped in financial instability. A 27-year-old woman said,

*“I have not had a job for more than a year, and my savings are running low, with daily needs that also have to be met.”*

Meanwhile, a 29-year-old man added,

*“I was eventually forced to take a job below my qualifications just to make ends*

*meet, because it was difficult to find a company that would accept applicants like me."*

According to research conducted by Smith et al. (2020), discrimination that prolongs periods of unemployment can have a domino effect, including financial insecurity and a reduced quality of life. This is exacerbated by the fact that lower-qualified jobs often offer wages that are not commensurate with the cost of living, creating a cycle of economic instability that is difficult to break. This condition further shows how discrimination not only affects individuals but also their families, creating widespread economic stress.

#### 4.4. Frustration Due to Lack of Transparency

Lack of transparency and feedback from employers is another challenge that exacerbates experiences of discrimination. Digital recruitment systems often do not provide adequate information about the reasons behind applicant rejections, creating uncertainty that hinders learning and self-improvement. One respondent, a 38-year-old woman, said, "I often don't get information about why my application was rejected. It feels like there is no fairness in the process." Another respondent complained, "The digital recruitment system doesn't seem to give us the space to improve or learn from previous mistakes."

This ambiguity creates frustration and distrust in the recruitment system. Previous research by Tran et al. (2019) showed that job applicants who do not receive feedback tend to feel alienated from the selection process, which then reduces their trust in the company and the recruitment platform itself. This suggests the need for more transparent policies to create fairness and encourage applicants to remain optimistic. Greater transparency not only benefits applicants but can also improve a company's reputation as an inclusive and fair workplace. because it illustrates how to do research, how to test hypotheses, or explain the relevance of theory to the research problems. Therefore, this section is the most dominant part or the longer page. It is recommended that the sections of this chapter are separated into several sub-chapters, each of which has different problems. The main goal is that readers easily understand it. Likewise, the explanation of each material or object is done using paragraphs. In addition, if necessary, images, schemes or matrices may be included as supporting research explanations.

Address the research questions and objectives, explain whether/ how the results of the analysis answer the problem statement. Discuss the relationship of the results of the analysis with previous studies or/and the relationship between the results of the analysis with the theories used in the study. Present arguments that you can convey based on the results of the analysis/ findings and discussion. Explain the implications of the results of the analysis/ findings on existing theory and/ or practice. Explain the importance of the results of the analysis/research findings, how the results of the analysis/ findings contribute to the relevant research area.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that discrimination in digital recruitment in Medan City has a serious impact on the psychological and economic well-being of vulnerable groups, especially women and individuals over the age of 35. Discriminatory practices such as age restrictions, gender preferences, and physical requirements that are not relevant to job needs have been shown to exacerbate social inequality. This not only reduces applicants' self-confidence but also creates significant financial stress. In addition, the lack of transparency in the selection process further increases frustration and erodes trust in the digital recruitment system.

This study emphasizes the need for digital recruitment policy reform to create a more inclusive, fair, and competency-based selection process. Efforts to address discrimination through increased transparency and the elimination of irrelevant

selection criteria will enable digital recruitment to become a more effective means of opening up access to employment for all levels of society.

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