Critical Perspectives on the Transition from Work to Retirement: ‘Extended’ or ‘Precarious’ Working Lives?

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AREAS FOR DISCUSSION

• Changes to work-ending

• Changing debates on work & retirement

• Key research & policy questions

• Transforming work and retirement
Major changes to the end of (paid) working life

Changes to work-ending:

- extended working lives
- fuller working lives
- active ageing
- gradual retirement
- flexible retirement
- partial retirement
- working retirement
- retirement career
- unretirement
Changing debates on work and retirement


• **Late-1990s onwards**: Compression of retirement - extension of working life driven by welfare state retrenchment, debates around inter-generational equity; longevity (‘The 100-Year Life’, Gratton & Scott, 2016)
Table 1: Labour Force Participation among men 55-64: Selected Countries (1965-2017) (%)

- Sweden (83.3%)
- Germany (77.9%)
- Australia (72.8%)
- UK (72.7%)
- Canada (71%)
- France (56.8%)

Source: OECD Economic Outlook.
Table 2: Labour Force Participation among women aged 55-64: Selected countries (1983-2017) (%)

- Sweden: 77.9%
- Germany: 67.5%
- Canada: 61.1%
- UK: 60.4%
- Australia: 60.1%
- France: 53.1%

Source: OECD Economic Outlook.
Figure 1: Last year in employment: all adults aged 50-64 (%) (Salford, Manchester & England)

KEY RESEARCH AND POLICY QUESTIONS

• Is the debate about an ‘extended working life’ beyond 60s into 70s? (quantitative)?

• Is the debate about a ‘fuller worker life’ (focus on retention, recruitment and re-retraining) (qualitative)?

• Is the debate about managing ‘insecure’ & ‘precarious’ working lives? (existential)
Academic and policy response

• **Growth in research literature** around EWL, gender & working, retirement decision-making, health issues (*but lack of theory*)

• **EWL now mainstream** (and often *unquestioned*) in IGOs/NGOs

• Issue of whether retirement is ‘*lost*’ (McDonald & Donahue, 2011) or simply ‘*evolving*’ in new ways
CHALLENGES TO AN EXTENDED & FULLER WORKING LIFE

- RETIREMENT AGE PREFERENCES
- DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES
- WORK ISSUES
- TRAINING ISSUES
- INEQUALITY ISSUES
Table 3: Mean desired retirement ages (men & women) selected European countries: 45-plus (economically active)

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European Social Survey (Hofäcker 2015)
Demographic variations

- **Germany**: population projected to **decline** by 19% over the period 2015-2060 (Berg et al., 2015)
- **Swedish** population projected to **grow** by 30% over 2015-2060 (Statistics Sweden, 2015)
- **Inter-country variations** in size and composition of baby boom cohorts – from highly **compressed** (Finland), ‘**two peaks**’ (UK), to ‘**sustained**’ (Australia, USA)
- Importance of **global migration** – Europe as the ‘prime source of destination’ (Porter, 2015) for populations forced to move through climate change, civil war, lack of opportunities
‘PRECARIOUS’ LATE WORKING LIVES?

• Rise of ‘non-standard working’ amongst older workers in Europe and North America (casual, temporary forms of employment) (Standing, 2011; Kalleberg, 2018)

• **19% of 50 plus** in UK self-employed (2/3rds of self-employed adults in UK not contributing to a pension (Resolution Foundation)

• Long-term impact of automation (Frey & Osborne, 2014; Haldane, 2015; ONS, 2019)

• Limited labour market prospects for women faced with **increase in SPA** (Beach & Bedell, 2019)
Figure 2. Percentage of people who participated in training in 2010 and 2017, by age group

Source: Social Mobility Commission, 2019
INEQUALITY ISSUES

Will EWL **accentuate** processes of cumulative advantage & disadvantage?

**Restriction of early exit pathways an issues** for those with low or limited skills, disabilities

**Raising pension ages** can be seen as **cross-subsidy** from poor to middle-income/wealthy groups given variations in life expectancy
Figure 2: Employment rate by main long-term health condition (all aged 50-60/65)

Source: Labour Force Survey 3 quarter average 2013Q2-Q4
Right to retire/Right to work

‘The key issue that has emerged in recent years and remains unresolved is: how we can reconcile.. the **right to retirement** for those who wish to retire and need to retire when aged in their sixties (e.g., those with poor health, those with caring responsibilities [...]) with, on the other hand, the **right to work** later in life for those who wish to do so and need to do so... **Neoliberalism shows no interest in resolving this dilemma humanely: instead, its only concern is to flood the labour market with [older] job seekers’.

(Macnicol, 2015)
Changes to employment

• Recognise that EWL will almost certainly contribute to the expansion of ‘precarious’ forms of working but importance of matching this with corresponding rights for vulnerable groups (minority groups, women), through, for example, ensuring access to trade unions, living wage, guaranteed hours, and regular training

• EWL may itself be seen from an economic perspective as underpinning the increase in ‘precarious working’
Interventions in the workplace

• Occupational Health

• Training

• Management of ‘work-ending’
Occupational health provision

• Importance of **occupational health services**, but:
  - no **legal requirement** for mandatory provision by state or employer
  - only **13% of UK workers** can access an occ.phys.
  - **SMEs** especially affected
  - shortage of doctors and nurses specialising in **occupational medicine** (Carry, 2019; Raynal, 2015; APPGOSH, 2015)

• **36% of people** with depression/nerves believed condition caused by work; **35% of those with disabilities or problems with back or neck** (Young & Bhaumik, 2011)
Training interventions

- Further training as a **legal entitlement** for those changing careers or moving into ‘bridging’ forms of employment
- More imaginative use of e-learning/**distance learning** to assist those working from home & those juggling work & caregiving responsibilities
- Specific obligations placed upon employers to expand training and learning as a **precondition** for creating part-time and related forms of employment
- Encouraging a more prominent role for **universities and colleges** in workforce development (UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, 2019)
Universities and older learners

• Expand with employer organisations courses aimed at supporting older workers
• Establish partnerships with NGOs working with older people
• Research needed on new approaches to training older workers

Management of ‘work-ending’

- Collapse of ‘pre-retirement education’ (Phillipson, 1981)

- Invention of the ‘mid-life’ M-o-T (Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness, 2019)

- Retreat by line managers from managing retirement because of concern that it would lay them open to charge of ageism/discrimination (Phillipson et al., 2018)

- Shift from retirement as collective/corporate to individual responsibility.
• WILL THE MOVE TO EXTEND WORKING LIFE LEAD TO A MORE UNEQUAL SOCIETY?
• Raising pension ages may reinforce health inequalities (Increasing number experiencing ‘job lock’ – forced to stay at work despite health and other problems) (Benjamin et al., 2008)

• Raising pension ages may reinforce social & economic inequalities (those with least financial need most able to remain in the labour market) (Platt et al., 2019)

• Raising pension ages may highlight care inequalities: 1 in 4 women & around 1 in 7 men (50-69) provide care (ONS, 2018)
Public policy solutions

• ‘...it is critical to create differentiated paths to labour-force exits depending upon health (which in turn depends on economic and social experiences earlier in life)…This may mean the implementation of both a general retirement age that is indexed in some way to life expectancy and an early-retirement option based on the ability to work.

• For older workers in poor health, it is obviously better for their health and well-being not to have to work. This may mean that certain groups within the population may need the option to take an early path to retirement’. (Berkman et al., 2015; Beach & Bedell, 2019; Phillipson, 2019)
CONCLUSIONS

• Linking debates on EWL/FWL with technological developments and changes affecting the workplace

• Examine the impact of transitions from work to retirement in generating new inequalities (Platts et al. 2019)

• Develop new approaches to training and continuing education (Social Mobility Commission, 2019)
Conclusion

• Re-think the idea of the ‘older worker’ – is it still a meaningful sociological label?

• Does it help the management of ‘work-ending’?

• Do we need a more ‘socially inclusive’ model/concept which better understands experiences of women & minority groups?
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References


Standing, G (2011) The Precariat Bloomsbury