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Barriers to employment for marginalised mature age workers

Sociological PhD Research
Supervisor: Dr Roger Wilkinson
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Outline: Topics for discussion

• Developments in labour market trends impacts on mature age (or older) workers

• Barriers to employment (marginalised) mature age jobseekers

My research: including personal challenges faced by mature age workers participating in interview based research regional Queensland centre - Toowoomba
Age Discrimination in Employment

Appears to be a key issue of our times

→ Recessions, economic downturns
→ Reform, restructuring, downsizing
  1970s, 1980s & 1990s
  *Redundancies targeted older workers*

*However a long history exists*

  over a century  eg. USA (Segrave)
Early Redundancies based on:

*Distorted/inaccurate* perceptions by employers of older workers as:

- slower & therefore less productive
- more prone to accidents & illness
- less trainable
- less flexible
- leave jobs sooner *(closer to retirement)*
Despite contrary productivity data

• National & international research shows that productivity among mature age workers compares favourably to younger counterparts

  - Higher levels of accuracy *(less error)*
  - Less time off (sick)
  - Lower (staff) turnover
  - Loyalty & commitment: “work ethic”
  - etc…
Employments Prospects:

- **Gaining & maintaining**
  - sufficient & secure employment
  - suitable / quality employment
- **Access to training & development**
- **Opportunity: advancement & promotion**

Mature age workers have been over-represented in unemployment statistics along with youth both are regarded as being non-prime age.
Decade of change & growth

• Strong jobs growth
  Large drop in (official) unemployment rate

• Mature age workers no longer feature as a problem group in unemployment statistics

Considerable progress in combating ageism!
- anti-discrim laws, education & awareness promotion…
- changing Human Resource Mgt practices, tax incentives
Mature age more vulnerable to:

- **Hidden unemployment**
  - *Underemployment:* casualisation of labour
    - temp & contract labour
  - those ineligible to register unemployed welfare

- **Long-term unemployment**

  Marginalisation is contingent
  (many are far from being marginalised)
Major Research Theme

Problematic Transitions

• Difficulty re-entering work & gaining comparable work - once displaced

• Many leave secure work due to stress/ful environments (eg. subjected to bullying)

• **Shock**: never had difficulty getting work
  Some - regret leaving

• **Find their ‘profile’ is not an ‘easy’ fit**
Confirmatory evidence from literature

- **Phenomenon:** *scarring* of profile (ABS)
  eg. downsizing: city dairy factory workers
  **Profile:** limited experience & education

- **Pitfalls/dangers**
  ➔ **Phenomenon:** *churning* (ABS)
  ➔ **Cumulative disadvantage:** *scarring very long-term unemploy/separation*
Common Financial Stressors Identified:

- Children dependant longer (mid-20’s)
- Divorce: depletion of wealth (eg. house)
- Child rearing later in life (eg. 2\textsuperscript{nd} marriages)
- Disrupted work: to care for ageing parents
- Financial setbacks (business failure)
- Growing need self-fund extended retirement
some personal costs

- Subsistence/frugal living: no coffee shops!
- Poverty: use of assistance from charities
- Depriving children
  eg. fashion, McDonald’s, sport, music ...
- Loss of confidence (parents & children)
- Loss of “sense of purpose” despair
- Isolation (cut-off), alienation, depression
Some findings of interest:

- Pressures to be a “compliant worker”
- Age & Resumes (*shaving off the years*)
- The “financially secure” vs “the poor”

- Beneficial Coping Strategies
  - Realising importance: to manage stress, motivation, etc …
  - Taking on meaningful activity eg. exercise
  - Ability to appreciate positive aspects of life
Some Key Aims

• Explore ‘traits’ among participants
  Identify useful & unhelpful coping strategies

• Phase 2: Participatory Action Research
  → Work collaboratively ‘select’ participants to help develop higher levels of awareness about their life situation and
  → Assist them to plan & act more strategically in coping with their circumstances: reflective
Theories on stereotyping

**Ideal Types** Schutz (1970) Lakoff (1987)

*Ease* by which things are *brought to mind*

Typical-ness

- A Bird
- A “Policeman” **

→ A “Male” Nurse
→ A “Female” Doctor
Dominant Deficit Model

Exaggerates decline

To construct dominant social understanding as:
- less than “normal”
- less than “full” = “substandard”
  - “incomplete”
  - “deficient”

Linguistically marked: “older” worker
Biased Mental Models

- **Distort:** ‘because there are valid grounds for supposing some workers..’ (Harris 1991)

- **Resist contradictory data:** easier to accommodate contradictory data, than to revise established thinking structures

- **Self-fulfilling & Perpetuate:** restricts opportunities for learning & development
  → effectively out-dating one’s skill set
Health & Life Span Research supports:

“Biology places limits on life-span but the social world also…”

“imposes limits on what is biologically possible…
- In other words, society determines how long and in what manner the individual organism shall live”

(Berger & Luckmann 1966:202)