The inevitable ageing of the population and the implications of prolonging employment for older adults

Monica Rose Cooper
Edith Cowan University

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The Inevitable Ageing of the Population and the Implications of Prolonging Employment for Older Adults

Monica Rose Cooper
Edith Cowan University

October, 2005
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Abstract

One of the proposed solutions to Australia’s ageing population (12% aged over 65 years in 1997 to 22% by 2031; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2000) and the perceived burden on the economy, is for older adults to remain in paid employment longer. The present study explored the perspectives of older adults concerning employment and working beyond the age of 65 years. A qualitative methodology was employed and data was collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 participants aged between 60-75 years of age. Thematic content analysis was performed in order to identify core issues and themes. Four underlying themes of opportunity continuum, continuity, contribution and social engagement demonstrated older adults’ need for flexibility in their work roles. Older adults’ perspectives of the factors that attract older workers or inhibit their participation in employment are also discussed. The findings indicate that older adults want to participate in meaningful roles, however many current work options are dissatisfying and may even impede healthy developmental processes. As well as adding the perspective of older adults to the knowledge base, these findings inform policy makers, identify areas for future research, and could identify a more positive approach to maintaining older workers in employment.

Key words: Adult Development; Older Workers; Flexibility; Australia; Qualitative Research.

Student: Monica Cooper
Supervisor: Dr. Eyal Gringart
October 31st, 2005
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. I also grant permission for the library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

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Rose Cooper

Date: 20 January 2006
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed to the writing of my thesis both directly and indirectly. Firstly, I would like to thank those people who generously invited me into their lives for the purposes of this study. I am grateful for their openness and willingness to participate, and thank them for their valuable contribution.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Eyal Gringart, whose unwavering commitment to helping me achieve my best, and uncanny knowledge of when to push and when to listen, was instrumental in getting me to the end. Thanks Eyal, for your sense of humour and coffee, that have been such a mainstay in our journey together.

A big thankyou also to Sharon Van Der Graaf, for your help and support throughout the research process. I am very appreciative of the time you gave, especially as you were very busy with your own research. I wish you good luck with your future study and adventures.

Thankyou to Ken Marsten for your help in getting my research started and ongoing support.

Thank you also to my many friends who supported me over the years including: Teresa, Wendy and Paul who shared with me the trials and tribulations of study and made the experience more bearable; To Katherine for her proof reading skills and for keeping me on track; To Peta for her companionship and typing skills; and to Jürgen and Helen for being there through the ups and downs.

Finally, I would like to thank my family: Thankyou to my parents who have been my inspiration and have always believed in me; Aunty Sha for the time spent proof reading and her thoughtful comments; Thankyou to Penni for knowing just how to help; Thankyou to Nana for all the late nights and support with the children; Finally, a special thankyou to my loving husband Steven, and children, Lachlan, Jarred and Brianna who made many sacrifices to help me through and who were always there to show their love.

Thankyou to each and every one of the above mentioned contributors and the many unnamed contributors such as the students who have gone before me, all the staff that helped along the way, and all the people who have made me who I am.
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The Inevitable Ageing of the Population and the Implications of Prolonging Employment for Older Adults

Monica Rose Cooper

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Community Studies, Education and Social Sciences Edith Cowan University

August 2005

Declaration

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

(i) material from published sources used without proper acknowledgement or
(ii) material copied from the work of other students

Si

Cooper
Abstract

In response to population ageing, policy makers have been exploring strategies aimed at prolonging the working life of older adults. Such strategies are premised on economic reasoning, including the need to increase the tax base and to enhance older adults' ability to be self-supporting, which may prove to be self-defeating by failing to consider the needs of older adults. The implications of current government strategies are considered by examining issues related to older workers including age-related physiological declines, cognitive changes, job performance, age discrimination, education and training. Arguably, while older adults may be capable of continuing in the workforce, their health and job performance is inexorably linked to their attitudes and intentions regarding retirement and employment. It is concluded that research identifying the attitudes and perspectives of older adults is necessary to inform policy makers and to identify strategies that entice and motivate older workers to remain in the workforce.

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Supervisor: Dr. Eyal Gringart
Submitted on August 22, 2005
The Inevitable Ageing of the Population and the Implications of Prolonging Employment for Older Adults

As a result of population ageing and predicted labour shortages, older workers have increasingly become the focus of policy makers and economic planners. A significant increase in the proportion of the population in retirement is expected to lead to increases in the social expenditure on health services, accommodation services and income support (ABS, 2000a). At the same time, fewer entrants are expected to join the workforce, resulting in an increasingly limited tax base to support a growing number of older adults. One of the proposed solutions to this unsustainable situation is the extension of working life for older adults (Judy & D'Amico, 1997; OECD, 1998; Treasury, 2003).

The ability to retain and motivate older workers in the workforce is central to this matter, yet the majority of information on older workers has come from a “top down” approach, resulting in a limited understanding of the older workers’ perspective. Several studies have investigated ways of maintaining and increasing the productivity of older workers (Hopsu, Leppanen, & Klemola, 2003; Louhevaara, Leppanen, & Klemola, 2003; Tuomi, Huuhtanen, Nykyri, & Ilmarinen, 2001), yet very little is known about older workers’ perspective and their attraction to employment.

Over the last decade there has been an increasing trend in the number of men taking early retirement, with almost half retiring due to ill health (ABS, 1994). Parallel to the increase in early retirement has been an increase in the number of men receiving a disability pension. While the factors influencing the number of men in early retirement include labour market conditions such as company downsizing and restructuring, which are known to target older workers (OECD, 1999), it is unclear
whether increases in the number of men receiving a disability pension are due to labour market conditions or whether they represent an increase in health risks for this population. Therefore, an understanding of older workers’ needs and capabilities is necessary in order to understand and predict the social ramifications and possible consequences of extending the working life of older adults.

This review will provide a summary of demographic trends in order to provide context and to identify the importance of increasing our awareness of older workers’ issues. The biological consequences of ageing will be reviewed in order to examine the impact ageing has on job performance, and how these issues may be addressed. Age discrimination in access to employment and training, as well as other issues influencing older workers’ employment prospects will also be discussed. The primary purpose of this review is to present a summary of relevant literature on work related issues for older workers. It is concluded that whilst various issues have been investigated, there is a dearth of information on the attitudes and perspectives of older adults themselves and that there is a need to address this omission in the knowledge base in order to inform policy makers.

**Definition of Older Workers**

In order to portray older workers it is necessary to first acknowledge the difficulty in defining older workers (Encel, 2001). Chronological age is not necessarily the best way to group older workers. Work habits and lifestyle, including regular exercise and a healthy diet can result in enormous differences between the physical capacity of older and younger workers, with a physically active 65 year old person being able to outperform a less active 45 year old colleague (Ilmarinen, 2001). Various studies have identified specific age ranges in order to investigate older workers including age ranges of people older than 45 years (Louhevaara, Penttinen, &
Tuomi, 1999); 50-64 years of age (Choi, 2003); 50 years and over (Gray & McGregor, 2003); and older than 60 years (Dooley, 2001). Adults aged 45 years and older are less likely than younger workers to be successful in gaining employment (ABS, 2004; Encel, 2001), demonstrating that age related differences in the employment opportunities for older workers may begin at 45 years of age. Therefore, for the purpose of this review older workers will be defined as workers over the age of 45, in order to include the existing literature on older workers and to encompass all workers who are likely to experience work related difficulties resulting from advancing age.

Demographic Trends and Policy Implications

Population ageing is the result of four interrelated factors including the number of births, the numbers of deaths, the level of immigration and the rate of emigration (Jackson, 1999). Population ageing may also be the result of either structural ageing or numerical ageing (Jackson, 1999). Structural ageing refers to the changing proportions of younger and older people, with an increasing proportion of the population found in the older age groups (ABS, 1999). Numerical ageing on the other hand refers only to the growth in the number of people in older age groups (Jackson, 1999). Current population statistics demonstrate that Australia is experiencing both structural and numerical ageing. Similar trends are also observed in other developed and developing countries (Kinsella & Velkoff, 2001), demonstrating that population ageing is a global phenomenon.

Jackson (1999) highlights the importance of separating and understanding the distinction between numerical and structural ageing, as both imply different policy needs and directions. Numerical ageing will result in an increased demand for resources such as pensions, accommodation and medical requirements, particularly as
a result of the increase in the number of older adults aged over 85 years who represent the highest cost per head of population (Costello, 2002). Structural ageing on the other hand will result in less demand for resources that currently target younger populations such as family payments and education, but will also result in a smaller potential tax base.

The proportion of people aged 65 and over is expected to double, from 12% in 1997, to around 24% by 2051 (ABS, 1999), demonstrating the predicted level of structural ageing. Furthermore, the total fertility rate (the number of babies that a woman could be expected to have given the fertility patterns prevailing at the time, ABS, 1997, p. 1.) is expected to fall from a peak of 3.6 during the “baby boom” to 1.75 births per woman in 2006, and remain constant until 2051. In 1925 children accounted for 36% of the population. This decreased to 26% by 1995 as a result of decreasing birth rates and an increase in the proportion of people within older age groups due to longevity, contributing to structural ageing. These trends are expected to continue with the proportion of children expected to fall to 21% of the population by 2025 (ABS, 1997). In regard to numerical ageing, the number of Australians over the age of 65 was 2,383,000 in 2000, and is expected to reach 4,953,000 by 2030 (Kinsella & Velkoff, 2001).

These demographic changes profoundly affect the dependency ratio. The dependency ratio represents the number of people not of working age (under 15 or older than 65) compared with the number of people of working age (15 – 64 years old) and this ratio (expressed as the number of dependents per 100 people of working age) is expected to increase from 18 in 1993 to 36 by 2041 (ABS, 2000a, 2001a), resulting in fewer workers supporting an increasing number of older people (AIHW, 2002; Costello, 2002). Furthermore, it is likely that these predictions are conservative
given that most adolescents continue in secondary and tertiary education beyond the age of 15 and that most people aged 60 years and older have withdrawn from the labour force (Ilmarinen, 2001, 2003). The Australian Government's recent commitment to increasing the educational attainment of adolescents and young adults (DEST, 2005), including a proposal to extend the school leaving age to 17, indicates that young workers are less likely to participate fully in the labour force at the age of 15 years.

While increasing migration has also been raised as a solution to the situation, Jackson (1999) makes the point that the numbers required would be very large, 280,000 per year compared to 90,000 at present (Costello, 2002), and would result in a higher population increase that may further exacerbate numerical ageing. Therefore, the most popular strategy proposed to maintain current living standards is to increase the tax base and raise labour utilisation rates by maintaining older workers in employment (Treasury, 2003). This strategy is expected to alleviate the issues associated with population ageing by broadening the tax base and by increasing the probability that individuals will be able to support themselves for longer periods. However, given the current trend of early retirement in men, it is important to understand the ability of older workers to meet this new demand.

Historically for men in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Countries, working beyond the age of 65 was the norm (OECD, 1999), suggesting that older workers have the capacity to continue working longer than the current average age of 58 years for women and 60 years for men (ABS, 2005). Indeed, the current retirement age of 65 was proposed by Prince Otto Von Bismark in the late 19th century, when the average life expectancy was less than 50 years and most people continued working throughout their life (Radford, 1987).
Currently, the effects on the economy that result from the increase in the number of men retiring before the age of 65 have been somewhat mediated by a coinciding increase of the number of women in the paid workforce (ABS, 2000a). However, labour shortages have been predicted even after considering increases in the participation rates of women, demonstrating the need to understand the reasons for early retirement.

Some of the factors that have been found to influence retirement decisions include financial incentives for early retirement such as redundancy packages, disincentives to work embedded in pension and superannuation schemes, and access to other non-employment benefits such as disability pensions (OECD, 1999). These findings suggest that governments can play a major role in influencing the age of retirement, and thereby extending the working life of older adults, through welfare reforms that limit access to alternative income streams.

The importance of factors, other than those introduced by the government, that influence the retirement decision including the attitudes and work-leisure preferences of older adults, the availability of employment options, and the functional ability of older adults, appear to be getting less attention. While governments are being urged to implement pension reforms with the OECD reporting that “Reforms are underway in all G7 countries, but sometimes the measures are too timid or they are being phased-in very slowly (OECD, 1998)” it seems timely to consider the abilities of older adults and the potential consequences of such reforms.

**Physiological Change with Ageing**

While it is acknowledged that there are many different theories of ageing (Bengtson & Schaie, 1999), these theories can be classified into two groups: stochastic theories, which propose that changes are due to accumulated exposure to
disease and damage from environmental causes; and genetic theories that argue ageing is a pre-programmed biological phenomenon (Goedhard, 2003). It is beyond the scope of this review to distinguish between theories, or to identify the cause of changes associated with ageing, but rather the aim is to identify physiological changes that may lead to work-related difficulties for older adults. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1993) provides a comprehensive outline of physiological changes occurring with age and some of the key changes are considered here. The most relevant changes identified include changes in musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and respiratory functions as well as changes in the sensory organs.

Musculoskeletal changes. Decreases in muscle strength and endurance result from a decrease in lean body mass (total body fat as a proportion of body composition doubles between the ages of 25 and 70). A decrease in bone mass also occurs and is accelerated in women during the postmenopausal period. Ilmarinen (2001) reports on findings of the FinnAge research project that looked at the muscular strength of ageing employees over an 11-year period and asserts that pronounced changes in musculoskeletal capacity can occur by the age of 45-50 years. Measures of movement and strength of male workers with a mean age of 51 years, decreased by 40-50% over a 10-year period with similar declines observed for both blue and white collar workers. These findings suggest that the physical workloads of older adults should be reduced with advancing age in order to minimise work strain and injury (Ilmarinen, Tuomi et al., 1991). Alternatively, these findings demonstrate the need to identify tools and procedures that may ameliorate any physical differences between younger and older workers and highlight the role technology can play in adapting the workplace for older workers. For example, ergonomic practices that enhance the working capacity of older workers include a reduced physical workload (through job
allocation or ergonomic tools), flexibility in working hours, and the ability to self-regulate work-rest periods (Griffiths, 2003). Therefore, changes in strength and endurance can be accommodated by the introduction and maintenance of ergonomic tools and procedures, and do not necessarily limit older adults from participating in employment.

**Cardiovascular changes.** Substantial cardiovascular changes that lead to a reduction in physical capacity include a 50% decline in cardiac volume between the ages of 20 and 80 (WHO, 1993). Blood vessel walls become less compliant and the electrical activities of the heart become slower. The relaxation time (the time between the closing of the aortic valve and the opening of the mitral valve) increases with age and the maximum heart rate for older adults decreases (WHO, 1993). These changes suggest an overall decline in physical fitness as a function of age due to hindered blood supply and cardiac function. These changes may be mediated by regular physical exercise (Ilmarinen, Louhevaara et al., 1991), however, it is important to acknowledge that many older adults in fulltime employment may find it difficult to find the time for exercise.

As a result of cardiovascular changes older adults may be more vulnerable to work-related stress than their younger counterparts (Griffiths, 2003). Further research is needed to investigate the relationship between age and work-related stress and to identify factors that mediate stress for older workers. Nevertheless, large individual differences in age-related declines and work capacity are observed for older workers and age, as such, is not a good indicator of older workers’ ability to work.

**Changes in respiratory function.** The cardiovascular changes noted above limit the ability to sustain a high level of oxygen transport, which then contribute to a reduced capacity for aerobic tasks (Shepherd, 1999). This capacity is further reduced
by a progressive decline in oxygen consumption due to changes in respiratory
function that are a result of factors limiting the surface area of the lung and decreased
lung elasticity (WHO, 1993).

A reduction in oxygen consumption was found to be strongly dependent on the
level of aerobic exercise during preceding years, with a lack of regular activity
resulting in a decrease of up to 25% in men and women over the age of 45 (Ilmarinen,
2001; Karpansalo et al., 2003). Importantly, a longitudinal study also found gains of
the same amount (up to 25%) related to increased levels of aerobic exercise
(Ilmarinen, 2001). These findings emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle that
encourages increases in the level of aerobic activity. On the other hand, Shephard
(1999) points out that athletes, who have maintained their training schedules, also
experience similar losses in their aerobic capacity as those observed in more sedentary
individuals. This suggests that while increased exercise can contribute to better
aerobic capacity, it does not eliminate the observed age-related declines in respiratory
function. However, current working environments where physical demands are low
are unlikely to challenge the respiratory resources of older adults to the extent that
work performance is reduced, or that they are incapable of working.

Sensory Organs. Changes in the nervous system also occur as people age, with
a slowing of information processing due to changes in the peripheral nervous system
and sensory organs. Changes in the eye result in a decreased ability to adapt to
moving from a light environment to a dark environment, a diminished ability to
discriminate the details of a moving target, difficulty recognizing targets near a source
of glare, and a greater need for contrast in order to recognise a target in dim light
(WHO, 1993). These changes may become particularly hazardous when a task
requires navigating around heights or objects of uncertain stability that require the
Older Adults' Perspectives on Employment

ability to discriminate distances and peripheral objects (Berkowitz, 1988). Therefore, some age-related declines are observed in relation to the sense of sight and spatial processing that indicate a need to attend to the environmental conditions of older workers, such as ensuring adequate lighting and by diminishing glare.

Auditory changes result in a loss of pitch discrimination at very high and low frequencies and a hearing loss for pure tones that contribute to a decrease in older adults' ability to comprehend speech (WHO, 1993). Thus, while the person can hear someone speaking, they may find it difficult to hear and interpret what is being said. Older adults also demonstrate auditory declines through an increasing inability to discern or follow conversation in a room with a noisy background. The implications of these auditory declines include difficulty following verbal instructions, speech that is inappropriately loud or soft, and inappropriate responses (Lewis, 2002). However, the communication difficulties arising from auditory declines may be compensated for through the use of hearing aids, other amplification devices, and by managing ambient noise levels. Therefore, while auditory changes do occur, they are unlikely to significantly tax the work performance of older adults.

Cognitive changes

The abovementioned sensory changes also contribute to a slowing of information processing, with an increase in the time and effort needed to encode information. However, while older adults are slower to process complex cognitive tasks, they are more likely to respond correctly (WHO, 1993). Cognitive declines can occur from the age of 50 years (Schaie, 1996). However, on average adults maintain full cognitive ability until their mid 70's, with considerable individual differences observed (Schaie, 1996). Whilst some measures of performance decline, it is not until 80 years of age that older adults performance falls below the midrange level of
performance of younger adults (Schaie, 1996). The findings of the Seattle Longitudinal Study (SLS, Schaie, 1996) demonstrate that the risk of cognitive decline is lower for people who experience intellectually stimulating environments. The SLS study also provides evidence that performance gains may be achieved through training. This suggests that older adults who participate in repetitive, non-stimulating work environments would benefit from increased stimulation. Given the current rate of technological advancement and the need to retrain and upgrade workers' skills, investment in appropriate training activities is likely to lead to better outcomes for individuals and their employers. Thus, lifelong learning is paramount to the maintenance of cognitive capacity in older adults and can make a significant contribution to their work performance.

Discrepancies exist in the type of cognitive activities that are subject to decline, with greater declines observed for fluid intelligence than for crystallized intelligence (Salthouse, 1999). Fluid intelligence describes the effectiveness and efficiency of processing information and is often measured through mental ability tasks including inductive reasoning, spatial orientation, and memory tasks. Crystallized intelligence refers to knowledge accumulated over time and is usually measured by tests of general or acquired knowledge. This suggests that age differences measured through laboratory tasks may reflect the greater propensity of older adults to rely on their increased knowledge and experience to solve problems, whereas younger people must rely on fresh reasoning to resolve problems (Salthouse & Maurer, 1996). Therefore, experience is an important factor related to job performance (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Salthouse & Maurer, 1996) and whilst some cognitive declines are observed, they are unlikely to present barriers to employment for older adults.
The physiological and cognitive changes reviewed above do not represent an exhaustive list of age-related declines, but rather provide an indication of some of the factors that may influence the work performance of older workers. As the workforce continues to age it will be necessary to accommodate for age-related declines in order to optimise the productivity of older workers and to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of meaningful roles for them. The following section of this review examines the literature related to the job performance of older workers in order to establish whether the above mentioned physiological changes impact significantly on the actual job performance of older workers.

*Functional Ability and Job Performance*

Prior to 1980, the empirical evidence on the relationship between chronological age and job performance was limited and demonstrated mixed results (Rhodes, 1983). In order to clarify the relationship between age and job performance, Waldman and Avolio (1986) performed a meta-analysis that incorporated data from 40 different samples and found that chronological age is not a good indicator of job performance. Similar results were observed by McEvoy and Cascio (1989) further refuting the idea that job performance declines with age. Indeed, an increase in productivity with age was observed for professional and non-professional workers when an objective measure of performance, such as the number of units produced over a period of time, was used (Waldman & Avolio, 1986). Conversely, supervisor ratings showed a decrease in job performance, with a considerable difference between professionals and non-professionals. The subjective nature of these reports suggests that supervisors may have been influenced by preconceptions of age-related performance, particularly for non-professional roles.
Job performance is susceptible to an evaluation bias (Ali & Davies, 2003) and these findings suggest that the attitudes of employers, peers, and older workers themselves may influence the perceived productivity of older workers. This may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy or have important implications for the job satisfaction of older workers and their access to promotions or earnings based on employer satisfaction. Further investigation is recommended to provide clarification of the thoughts, attitudes and perceptions of older workers in order to identify how they impact on job performance and satisfaction.

Limitations of the above meta-analyses include the use of very general categories for professional and non-professional groups (Ali & Davies, 2003; Avolio, Waldman, & McDaniel, 1990; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989). Whilst the mixed findings observed for individual studies (Rhodes, 1983) may have represented age-related performance differences particular to some roles, the findings of the above meta-analyses suggest that these are not to be generalised. A further limitation is the failure to account for selection factors that may influence the sample (Ali & Davies, 2003). For instance, workers who do not perform may be dismissed or transferred to other positions resulting in a pool of more able workers. Conversely, high performing individuals are more likely to be selected for more senior, supervisory positions resulting in a sample of less productive workers.

It stands to reason that physiological declines are more likely to impact on job performance in roles that are more physically demanding, whereas age may lead to increases in performance in professional roles where knowledge and experience are central (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Rhodes, 1983). Avolio et. al. (1990) investigated the effects of age and experience on job performance in non-managerial roles based on job descriptions that included five broad categories: craft I, craft II, clerical I,
clerical II and service roles. Age and experience was related to increases in performance for jobs requiring a higher level of mastery and complexity, with a declining trend observed for older adults in lower level clerical jobs (Avolio et al., 1990). These findings also suggest that motivation may be an important factor in promoting job performance amongst older workers. Jobs that are interesting and challenging for older workers may increase motivation, whereas the plateau effect or decline in performance observed for less stimulating jobs (Avolio et al., 1990) may be due to lower levels of motivation.

Information on older adults’ attitudes and beliefs about work is important for understanding and identifying factors that motivate them to participate in the workforce (Wallace, 2005). Developmental literature (Erikson, 1968; Tornstam, 1999) postulates that older adults experience a qualitatively different stage of life, suggesting that older adults may be motivated by different factors, such as the desire to feel needed and to pass on knowledge (Mor-Barak, 1995), than their younger counterparts. Furthermore, life satisfaction and affective well-being were found to be related to an individual’s participation in their preferred role (Warr, Butcher, Robertson, & Callinan, 2004), suggesting that choice in relation to work or retirement may have important consequences for health and well-being. This indicates that there are many factors that contribute to the job performance of older adults including their beliefs, attitudes and motivation to work as well as their perceived choice in determining their employment status.

Therefore, the relationship between age and job performance is complex and warrants further research. The current findings, however, indicate that age is a poor predictor of job performance and accounts for only a small portion of the variance in work performance (Czaja, 2001). These findings demonstrate that older adults are
capable of continuing in employment and challenge the widely held belief that job performance declines with age. This is inconsistent with the reducing number of older adults remaining in the workforce. Thus, other factors limiting the contribution of older workers, such as the work preferences of older adults and access to work opportunities are likely to be important contributors to the length of working life for older adults. The following section looks at beliefs held about older workers and the role of age discrimination in limiting work opportunities for older adults.

Age Discrimination

Evidence of discriminatory attitudes and practices that target older workers have been demonstrated through numerous studies and surveys (Borus, Parnes, Sandell, & Seidman, 1988; Gringart, 2003; Gringart & Helmes, 2001; Pickersgill, Briggs, Kitay, O'keefe, & Gillezeau, 1996; Steinberg, Walley, Tyman, & Donald, 1998). The most pervasive negative stereotypes of older workers include: deteriorating physical and mental abilities; being unreceptive to new technology; more resistant to organisational change; lack the ability, or are difficult to train; and that they lack the drive, energy, ambition and creativity found in younger colleagues (Borus et al., 1988; Encel, 2001; Pickersgill et al., 1996). These perceptions are not supported empirically, as demonstrated by the lack of evidence of a relationship between age and job performance, yet these perceptions appear to override employers' acknowledgement that older workers are reliable, loyal, possess a strong work ethic and are more stable in their jobs than their younger counterparts (Encel, 2001; Gringart, 2003; Steinberg et al., 1998).

The need to address discriminatory practices is important because it has been demonstrated to lead to detrimental outcomes for individuals as well as contribute to the social and economic costs involved with unemployment (Encel, 2004; Pickersgill
et al., 1996; Sandell & Rosenblum, 1996). Age discrimination is associated with lower job satisfaction (McMullin and Marshall, 2001); low worker morale (Agnew, Gee, Laflamme, McDonnell, & Curbow, 2003); financial loss and personal distress (Pickersgill et al., 1996; Sandell & Rosenblum, 1996); and lower well-being (Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004; Warr et al., 2004).

The Australian Government is attempting to address age discrimination through state and national legislation as evidenced by the introduction of the Age Discrimination Act in 2004. However, legal obligations are unlikely to influence the more insidious and hidden forms of age discrimination (Patterson, 2004). Moreover, there is usually a lag between policy implementation and changing the attitudes and behaviour of people (Encel, 2004). This suggests that public awareness campaigns and information that specifically targets managers may play an important role in addressing existing beliefs and discriminatory practices by informing on the abilities of older workers and the benefits of hiring them. It is important to recognise that older workers themselves are not impervious to discriminatory practices and that many older workers may hold similar stereotypes about older workers and themselves (Bird & Fisher, 1986). Future research identifying the attitudes of older workers toward remaining in the workforce, and the perceived barriers to participation, will provide an important contribution to the knowledge base.

Gringart (2003) has demonstrated that employer discriminatory hiring practices may be altered through an intervention combining information-based and cognitive-dissonance-based manipulations. This approach was successful in producing significant positive shifts in employers' overall attitudes and behavioural intentions towards older workers and their hiring (Gringart, 2003). A similar intervention may be a useful way to address attitude change in older workers in order
to increase labour market attachment. However, first it is necessary to identify older workers’ attitudes towards prolonging working life. This further acknowledges the need to investigate older workers’ perspectives in order to understand how these influence their work behaviour and retirement decisions.

**Education and Training**

Negative perceptions of older workers have led to the belief that older workers are not as capable or interested in learning as younger colleagues (Cully, VandenHeuvel, Curtain, & Wooden, 2000; Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003). Older workers are also believed to be a poor training investment due to them being more difficult, hence more expensive to train, and due to the likelihood that they will retire before the company fully benefits from the training. Participation in education and training is important for skill maintenance and enhances employment potential (Cully et al., 2000). Research shows that older workers are less likely to have access to or participate in training opportunities, placing them at a relative disadvantage (ABS, 2000b). As a result of population ageing, and the need for organisations to respond to an ageing workforce in order to maintain and enhance productivity, it is important to investigate age-related declines in training performance.

Maurer et al. (2003), highlight the role of individual factors such as learning anxiety, perceived intelligence, and perceived mental decline, in influencing older workers’ motivation and participation in training. Another significant predictor of training participation was a prior history of training participation (Maurer et al., 2003). These findings identify the need to explore older workers’ attitudes to training and underscore the benefits of lifelong learning practices.
Government Strategies and Social Ramifications

Current government strategies aimed at increasing labour participation in older populations include a progressive increase in the preservation age (restricting access to superannuation savings until the preservation or minimum age has been reached, compelling workers to maintain employment); bonuses paid for each year the employee remains in the workforce beyond retirement age; and policy amendments to allow greater flexibility in relation to part-time employment (Costello, 2002; Treasury, 2003). Overall, these strategies project a coercive approach that may limit the options available to older workers and pressure them into maintaining employment through punitive economic reforms. Identifying the needs of older workers, and the factors that influence the attraction of employment, or inhibit full participation in the workforce, may lead to the adoption of more positive strategies by policy makers and employers that aim to entice older workers to remain in the workforce.

Older workers are reported to be more vulnerable to psychological health issues including stress, depression and anxiety (Cox, 2003; Griffiths, 2003) than younger colleagues. Stress is also increasingly being reported by all ages as an impediment to working (Choi, 2003; Cox, 2003). Therefore maintaining older workers in employment without an understanding of their perspective may lead to further increases in the incidence and severity of psychosocial injuries including anxiety and depression, as well as other stress-related health outcomes such as heart disease. It is likely that these issues would be exacerbated within individuals who felt coerced or forced into employment and result in more problems such as a strain on medical resources, as well as difficulties for employers who must manage while their staff are on extended sick leave. Research identifying strategies that are grounded in
the perspectives of older adults and that are designed to encourage positive working environments for older workers requires urgent attention.

A greater number of workers are retiring earlier than ever before and many current workers intend to retire before reaching the qualifying age for the Age Pension (AIHW, 2002). The expectations that older workers hold for themselves are also important, as many may have been working for many years and expect to enjoy time off in later life. Furthermore, some individuals may have contributed to their superannuation anticipating access to it prior to reaching a preservation age, thus feeling punished by the above policy changes.

Those most impacted by the above strategies will be those who have fewer earnings and must rely on the government for income. These individuals tend to participate in more physically demanding or monotonous work and are therefore more likely to want to retire but have less choice in the age at which they do retire (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). There is also evidence suggesting that these workers are more likely to exit the workforce as a result of disability (Tuomi et al., 1991; Tuomi, Ilmarinen, Martikainen, Aalto, & Klockars, 1997). Therefore, while maintaining the productivity of older workers may be a necessary strategy for economic and social adjustment to the inevitable ageing of the population, such strategies should not come at the expense of older adults and their quality of life (Griffiths, 2003; Hawkins, 2004).

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the future workforce will be older than any previously experienced. The Australian population is ageing numerically and structurally, requiring strategies to maintain the number of people in the workforce in order to fund the costs associated with ageing, including specialist accommodation, income support, medical infrastructure and supplies. While age-related physiological
and cognitive declines are observed, there is little evidence demonstrating that job performance decreases with age, indicating that older adults are able to work. Moreover, ergonomic practices and technological changes may further contribute to the productivity enhancement of the workforce as a whole, and older workers in particular.

Questions remain, however, about the factors that contribute to the participation of older workers in the workforce. Age discrimination was identified as contributing to the withdrawal of older workers as they are more likely to be targeted during company downsizing or restructures, and they are less likely than younger applicants to be hired, leading to long-term unemployment. Discriminatory practices that limit training opportunities may also contribute to reducing the attraction of hiring older workers, particularly in occupations subject to technological advancement.

Current government strategies aimed at increasing the workforce participation of older workers focus on limiting alternative income streams. Discriminatory practices have also been recognised by government as contributing to the level of employment for this group. However, the attitudes and perspective of older workers, factors that are likely to play a role in their well-being and level of job performance, have received very little attention. Current policies may prove to be self-defeating if the health and well-being of older adults suffers as a consequence of prolonged employment. Therefore, timely consideration needs to be given to other factors that influence workforce participation.

There is a dearth of knowledge of the thoughts of older workers on working in later life. Current labour force participation rates show that between the ages of 45-55 years participation falls dramatically. Research is needed to identify the factors that
limit and enhance the participation of older workers and it is proposed that older workers themselves are best placed to provide this information. An understanding of work issues from older workers' perspective will add to current knowledge and will identify those areas that need to be addressed in order to formulate informed policies and increase the labour market attachment of older workers.
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Running head: OLDER ADULTS’ PERSPECTIVE ON EMPLOYMENT

Older Adults’ Perspective on Employment and the Extension of Working Life: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

One of the proposed solutions to Australia’s ageing population (12% aged over 65 years in 1997 to 22% by 2031; Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2000) and the perceived burden on the economy, is for older adults to remain in paid employment longer. The present study explored the perspectives of older adults concerning employment and working beyond the age of 65 years. A qualitative methodology was employed and data was collected through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 11 participants aged between 60-75 years of age. Thematic content analysis was performed in order to identify core issues and themes. Four underlying themes of opportunity continuum, continuity, contribution and social engagement demonstrated older adults’ need for flexibility in their work roles. Older adults’ perspectives of the factors that attract older workers or inhibit their participation in employment are also discussed. The findings indicate that older adults want to participate in meaningful roles, however many current work options are dissatisfying and may even impede healthy developmental processes. As well as adding the perspective of older adults to the knowledge base, these findings inform policy makers, identify areas for future research, and could identify a more positive approach to maintaining older workers in employment.

Key words: Adult Development; Older Workers; Flexibility; Australia; Qualitative Research.

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October 31st, 2005
Older Adults’ Perspective on Employment and the Extension of Working Life:  

An Exploratory Study

As a result of population ageing and consequent predicted labour shortages, older workers have increasingly become the focus of policy makers and economic planners. Current demographic predictions highlight an aging population, with the percentage of the population aged over 65 expected to almost double from 12 per cent in 1997 to 22 per cent in 2031 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, (ABS), 2000). Furthermore, birth rates are predicted to fall to 1.75 births per woman in 2006, which will continue the current trend of below-replacement levels of fertility (ABS, 2000). A significant increase in the proportion of the population in retirement is expected to lead to increases in the social expenditure on health services, accommodation services and income support (ABS, 2000). At the same time, fewer entrants are expected to join the workforce, resulting in an increasingly limited tax base to support a growing number of older adults. One of the proposed solutions to this unsustainable situation is the extension of working life for older adults (Judy & D’Amico, 1997; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 1998; Treasury, 2003).

The ability to retain and motivate older workers in the workforce is central to this matter, yet the majority of information on older workers has come from a “top down” approach, resulting in a limited understanding of older workers’ perspectives. Several studies have investigated ways of maintaining and increasing the productivity of older workers (Hopsu et al., 2003; Kilbom, 1999; Louhevaara et al., 2003; Tuomi et al., 2001), yet very little is known about older workers’ perspective and their attraction to employment. Significantly, there has been an increasing trend in the number of men taking early retirement over the past decade, with almost half retiring due to ill health (ABS, 2001). Parallel to this increase in early retirement has been an
increase in the number of men receiving a disability pension. While the factors influencing the number of men in early retirement include labour market conditions such as company downsizing and restructuring, which are known to target older workers (OECD, 1999), it is unclear whether increases in the number of men receiving a disability pension are due to labour market conditions or whether they represent an increase in health risks for this population. Therefore, an understanding of older workers' needs and capabilities is necessary in order to understand and address the social ramifications and possible consequences of extending the working life of older adults.

Some of the factors that have been found to influence retirement decisions include financial incentives for early retirement, such as redundancy packages, disincentives to work embedded in pension and superannuation schemes, and access to other non-employment benefits such as disability pensions (OECD, 1999). These findings suggest that governments can play a major role in influencing the age of retirement, and thereby extending the working life of older adults, through welfare reforms that limit access to alternative income streams.

Current Government strategies aimed at increasing labour participation in older populations include a progressive increase in the preservation age (restricting access to superannuation savings until the preservation or minimum age has been reached, compelling workers to maintain employment); bonuses paid for each year the employee remains in the workforce beyond retirement age; and policy amendments to allow greater flexibility in relation to part-time employment (Costello, 2002; Treasury, 2003). These strategies project a coercive approach that may limit the options available to older workers and pressure them into maintaining employment through punitive economic reforms. Therefore, identifying the needs of older workers
and the factors that influence the attraction of employment, or inhibit full participation in the workforce, could lead to the adoption of more positive strategies by policy makers and employers that aim to entice workers with more attractive working conditions.

Identifying these factors is important given that a greater number of workers are retiring earlier than ever before and many current workers intend to retire before reaching the qualifying age for the Age Pension (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, AIHW, 2002). The expectations that older workers' hold for themselves are also important, as many may have been working for many years and expect to enjoy time off in later life. Those most impacted by the above strategies will be those who have less earnings and must rely on the pension for income. These individuals tend to participate in more physically demanding or monotonous work and are therefore more likely to want to retire but have less choice in the age at which they can do so (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). Furthermore, some individuals may have contributed to their superannuation anticipating access to it prior to the preservation age, thus feeling punished by the above policy changes. Therefore, while maintaining the productivity of older workers may be a necessary strategy for economic and social adjustment to the inevitable ageing of the population, such strategies should not come at the expense of older adults and their quality of life (Griffiths, 2003; Kilbom, 1999).

Significantly, the importance of other factors that influence the retirement decision, such as the attitudes and work-leisure preferences of older adults, the availability of employment options, and the functional ability of older adults, appear to be getting less attention. While governments are being urged to implement pension reforms with the OECD reporting that "Reforms are underway in all G7 countries, but sometimes the measures are too timid or they are being phased-in very slowly"
Older Adults’ Perspectives on Employment (OECD, 1998), it seems timely to consider the attitudes of older adults and the potential consequences of such reforms. With this pressure to conform to global initiatives to resolve issues pertinent to population ageing, it is important to ensure that policy decisions are informed by older adults’ perspectives and the potential ramifications of such interventions for them.

Additionally, older workers experience age-related physiological changes, such as decreases in cardiovascular functioning, and are reported to be more vulnerable to psychological health issues including stress, depression and anxiety than younger counterparts (Cox, 2003; Griffiths, 2003; Huuhtanen, Nygard, Tuomi, & Martikainen, 1997; World Health Organisation, WHO, 1993). Stress is increasingly being reported by all ages as an impediment to working (Cox, 2003). Therefore, maintaining older workers in employment without an understanding of their perspective may lead to further increases in the incidence and severity of psychosocial injuries such as stress related illness, anxiety, and depression, as well as other related health outcomes such as heart disease. It stands to reason that these issues would be exacerbated within individuals who felt coerced or forced into employment and could result in more problems, such as a strain on medical resources and difficulties for employers who must manage while their staff are on extended sick leave. Thus, it is important to identify strategies that are grounded in the perspectives of older adults and that are designed to encourage positive working environments for older workers.

Another contextual issue is the prevalence of ageism in Australia, where the motivation to work does not necessarily lead to employment for older job seekers due to age discrimination (Encel, 2001; Gringart & Helmes, 2001; Gringart, Helmes, & Speelman, 2005). Attitudes towards the aged are also held by older adults themselves and may influence their self-efficacy in achieving the expectations of
employers, thus influencing their approach to employment (Garska, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the factors that motivate older adults to remain in the workforce as well as identify the factors that limit their full participation.

In response to the dearth of information on older adult’s perspectives on the extension of working life, the present study aimed to explore the perspectives of older adults in order to identify the issues pertinent to them. As the socially accepted age of retirement has been 65 for men, and 60 for women, facing government policies that could prevent people from retiring until later in life is likely to have significant effects on older adults. The study aims to address the knowledge gap and to inform those involved in developing policies and interventions that aim to increase or maintain the participation of older adults in paid employment. Specifically, the present study explored the perspectives of older adults on working past the age of 65 years, which was deemed to embody the extension of working life. The purpose of the study was to identify issues that influence the participation of older adults in paid employment. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. What are older adults’ perspectives on working past the age of 65?
2. What issues do older adults identify that influence the attraction of employment?
3. What issues do older adults identify that inhibit their full participation in employment?

Method

Research Design

A qualitative design incorporating the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which “theories are grounded in the empirical data and built up
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Inductively through a process of careful analysis and comparisons (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 332) was used. This approach was employed to collect emergent data and gain a richer, deeper understanding of the issues from the perspective of older adults (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A qualitative method of enquiry was deemed to be the most appropriate approach given the exploratory nature of the research and the lack of literature addressing older adults' perspectives on employment. Moreover, the importance and benefits of consulting the people on whom policies are intended to impact has been espoused by many (Matwijiw & Wood, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995) demonstrating the importance of enabling the views of older adults to be expressed.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to engage eleven adults aged between 60-75 years of age. As the participants' employment history and current employment status was deemed relevant to their current perspective of employment, a purposive sample (Maxwell, 1996; Smith & Osborn, 2003) was used to ensure that the participants demonstrated a variety of employment statuses including employed, under-employed or unemployed, and retired individuals. One of the participants came from a non-English speaking background. The sample consisted of five women and six men, ranging in age from 61 – 74 years of age ($M = 64.6, SD = 4.0$) who were recruited through advertisements published in Council on the Ageing, Western Australia (COTA, WA) newsletters; through referrals from the author's social networks; and through snowballing techniques (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) where participants referred others from their own social networks. The participants came from a diverse range of occupations that included engineering consultants, teachers, administrators, planning consultants, hospitality workers and small business owners.
The rationale for the age criterion of 60-75 years of age was based on the following reasons: this age range includes the age group being targeted by the government to continue employment; retirement considerations and implications of government policies are most salient to this group; due to the abolition of mandatory retirement older adults may continue their employment beyond the ages relevant to the government changes, yet capping the age at 75 limits confounding data due to the potential cognitive decline that may begin to appear in adults aged from late 70’s to early 80’s (Schaie, 1996).

**Instrument**

A semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix A) consisting of open-ended questions such as “Could you please describe your thoughts about working?” and “What are your expectations for future employment?” was developed to elicit participants’ responses. The use of open-ended questions ensured the participants had an opportunity to introduce their own views without being confined by the researchers frame of reference (Wengraf, 2001). A pilot study with two participants was conducted prior to the interviews to ensure face validity and the clarity of the questions (Breakwell, 1995). However, during the interviewing process the interview schedule evolved through a theoretical sampling approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in which data collection and analysis were intertwined such that the emerging themes guided consequent questions and data collection in order to explore more fully the emerging issues.

**Procedure**

After receiving approval from the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee, all participants were contacted by phone to arrange an interview and to resolve any questions about the nature of the study. The data was collected
over a three-month period, with all interviews conducted in the participants' place of residence or workplace (1 participant). Participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix B) that outlined the purpose and procedure of the study. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) prior to the commencement of the interview and to give their verbal consent to the audio-recording of the interview. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any question, or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Data was collected through the use of face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 1995) enabling the researcher to gain an intimate insight into the issues by establishing rapport and clarifying information during the course of the interview. While semi-structured interviews ensured that the main questions were covered, the open-ended questions encouraged the participants to introduce their own issues, which were then explored further by the use of unscheduled follow-up probes (Berg, 2001) and in subsequent interviews with other participants. A funnelling technique (Wengraf, 2001) was also used to explore unanticipated responses in more detail. The interviews lasted between 30–80 minutes, with most taking approximately 40 minutes. At the end of each interview, the participant was debriefed and given the opportunity to add more thoughts or ask questions. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim omitting any identifying information to maintain confidentiality, and thematic content analysis (Berg, 2001; Patton, 1990) was used to reduce and interpret the data.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were transcribed, an inductive approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980) was used to identify initial themes and patterns that
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emerge from the data. Significant words and concepts were highlighted and coded (Berg, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 1995). As patterns emerged, a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed, where each code was compared with other codes though a process of review and analysis in order to identify similarities, differences, and higher order themes. Data display matrices (Appendix D)(Miles & Huberman, 1994) were also used to identify and track emerging themes so that common themes could be grouped to identify relationships between higher order themes.

Triangulation was used to promote the trustworthiness of the findings and to address any threats to the credibility of the data that may have resulted from researcher bias (Nagy & Viney, 1994). Triangulation through inter-subjective consensus (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was achieved by a peer review process where a co-analysers independently identified themes and relevant concepts (using the transcripts with participants’ identifying information removed), confirming the researcher’s findings. Subsequently, a process of member checking (Breakwell, 1995) was applied with several of the participants contacted to verify significant concepts and themes and to confirm that the findings reflected their perceptions and experiences. Given that data saturation had been reached and all participants had expressed the dominant themes, this verification of the findings strengthens the trustworthiness of the researcher’s interpretations.

Findings and Interpretations

The participant’s perspectives on employment were diverse and complex, with all participants identifying benefits of employment yet conversely, their responses towards maintaining fulltime employment beyond the age of 65 years were overwhelmingly negative. Flexibility, or lack of, was a central concept underlying
participants' negative responses and four major themes related to the need for flexibility were identified. These themes, along with the sub-themes that generated them, are presented in Table 1. The present findings demonstrated that the need for flexibility was linked to older adults' changing priorities, which are discussed under the theme of an opportunity continuum. This theme, and the themes of continuity, contribution and social engagement are discussed in the following section using descriptive quotes from the participants and the exploration of each sub-theme.

**Opportunity Continuum**

*Limited time and opportunity:* The word continuum was chosen as part of the label for this theme to represent the participants' changing sense of time and opportunity. Heightened by the loss of loved ones or peers, older adults may feel a sense of running out of time that leads them to reprioritise how they invest their time. For example, one participant stated:

"I want to do what I want to do now and not put it off and then, yeah I think that has a lot to do with how I feel, I think that when you lose people close to you, you rethink your goals and, I know that I have done that, so that's probably why I feel all, part time work is all I really want to do".

The sense that there may be limited opportunities in the future results in changing attitudes and priorities that influence how people feel about working. Another participant talked about a change in his attitude, and how he felt this change was important for his continued productivity:

"I think the real thing is that there is an attitude of mind... I think that's the difference, the number one priority is to go walking around the river enjoying the world and doing work, where before you used to be flat out doing work and find a bit of time to walk round the river. It's that the priorities have
changed, and they need to I think if you’re going to be able to contribute in a meaningful way”.

Competing interests: These changing priorities can also result in competing interests such as spending time with grandchildren or pursuing recreational interests, overriding the benefits and motivation to work, as illustrated by the following participants: “I will look after him [grandchild] this afternoon, so that’s a choice, if I was at work I couldn’t do that, I would be expected to be there you know” and from another participant, “it means time for me to spend some time with her [mother], it means I have got time to do things that perhaps I wouldn’t otherwise. You know what I want to do, it wouldn’t fit in to fulltime work”.

These findings are consistent with the theory of socioemotional selectivity (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) that posits that the perception of time plays a central role in the selection and prioritisation of goals. Moreover, Carstensen et al., (1999) assert that a sense of loss of opportunity or an ‘approach of endings’ is associated with a heightened emphasis on feelings and emotional states with a temporal focus on the present rather than the future. Therefore, older adults are more likely to prioritise social interactions that optimise positive emotional responses and avoid negative ones (Carstensen et al., 1999). This suggests that the pursuit of competing interests, such as hobbies, travel, and spending time with family or friends, may be important for older adults’ emotional regulation at a stage in their life when emotional goals are extremely salient.

The way older adults conceptualise their opportunities and how work relates to these opportunities influences how they feel about employment. For example:

“I always think how terribly sad to retire from work and think oh whoopee I am going to do all this and that and you get sick the next year and sometimes
die and you never had time to appreciate or use your superannuation or do anything”

Thus, if they feel that their work limits their opportunities, older adults are likely to resent working and this may contribute to a decreased sense of well-being. For instance: “I enjoy the days when I am not working and I resent if turn around and do bookwork on a day that I have off, because I feel as I’m not doing what I planned to do” and “suddenly, I resented the fact that I couldn’t do the things that I wanted to do”. These quotes reflect this sense of resentment and the perceived incompatibility with doing the things you want and working fulltime. Previous research has indicated that greater life satisfaction is associated with working past retirement age (Aquino, Russell, Cutrona, & Altmaier, 1996; Kim & Feldman, 2000), however, it has since been argued that role preference is a more relevant indicator of life satisfaction and, more specifically, subjective well-being for older adults (Warr et al., 2004).

Importantly, it was demonstrated that older adults who chose to remain employed as a result of financial need had poorer well-being than those who chose employment for enjoyment reasons (Warr et al., 2004). Given that some industries, particularly those with physically demanding working conditions, are more susceptible to “wearing people out prematurely” (Kilbom, 1999, p.294), role choice (or lack of) is likely to have important implications for older adults. Therefore, constraints imposed by policy changes that limit alternative income streams and necessitate a prolonging of employment, may lead to poor health and psychological outcomes for some adults.

As can be seen, older adults work versus leisure preferences are influenced by their perception of diminishing opportunities and competing interests. However, people’s perception of the opportunities and time that they have left is not rigid (Carstensen et al., 1999) and perceptions may change as more and more people
continue working longer. With an increasing extension of working life and the normalisation of working past the age of 65, people may gain an increased sense of future opportunities such that employment and other activities are no longer viewed as conflicting interests. Therefore, promotion of older adults’ capacity to work and a focus on positive working roles and outcomes for older adults may mediate older adults’ attitudes and preferences for the extension of working life. Nevertheless, it is important to also consider that after having worked for the majority of their working lives, older adults may feel they are entitled to some time to pursue more personal interests. For example: “I’m retired. I wanted to do other things. There’s a variety of other things that I want to do including travel, and uh, spending time with the family and all those sorts of things”.

Smelling the roses: The final sub-theme of the opportunity continuum theme represents an ‘in vivo’ code (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of “smelling the roses”. An in vivo code is a code or theme encapsulated by the participants’ exact words, words that, in the present case, were reiterated over and over. A number of participants voiced how fulltime work interfered with time to themselves with comments such as “not having much time to yeah, sort of smell the roses, or whatever” and from another participant’s perspective “I appreciated having that break [from fulltime work] and beginning to smell the roses eventually, you know being able to do things like that and appreciate the world outside”.

For older adults the value of time to oneself and more particularly, time to reminisce, is gaining increasing attention (Erikson, 1982; Peck, 2001; Tornstam, 1999). Erikson (1968, 1982) proposed that the developmental processes relevant to older adults involve a struggle to resolve psychosocial crises of generativity versus stagnation and later, integrity versus despair, with the final crisis leading to a state of
wisdom if successfully resolved. Building on this theory, Tornstam’s (1999) theory of gerotranscendence argues that older adults achieve such maturity and wisdom through a process of reminiscence. According to Tornstam, older adults have a greater need for reflection and become more selective in their choice of activities and social interactions in order to achieve this (Tornstam, 1999). Additionally, therapies that facilitate reminiscence such as life review therapy, have been found to increase life satisfaction (Peck, 2001; Serrano, Latorre, Gatz, & Montanes, 2004). Therefore, it is proposed that the participants’ aspiration for time to smell the roses may reflect an unconscious need for time to sit and reminisce, and that this need is indicative of important developmental processes that may be hindered by participation in fulltime employment. Conversely, the antithesis of integrity is despair (Erikson, 1982) and so, for some individuals, participating in paid work may distract older adults from ruminating over unsatisfying life experiences. Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate this proposition and to further address the impact of fulltime work on the developmental needs of older adults.

**Continuity**

*Grandchildren:* Not surprisingly, an increasing awareness of impending mortality leads to an interest in activities that enable older adults to pass on something to the next generation. Continuity describes the need for older adults to strive for immortality, either through procreation and the nurturing of their family, or through an ability to impart their knowledge and experience to younger generations. Many of the participants spoke about the importance of being able to spend time with their grandchildren. For example:

“One of the great things that I have experienced in later years is the interaction with grandchildren, and ah, if I was going off to the office
everyday, five days a week at this stage in my life, I wouldn’t have that interaction. It would be much muted, much less.”

The following quotes also highlight the important and often unpaid role that many older adults perform in caring for their grandchildren, spouse or parents: “I do need to care for my wife, there is some things that she can’t do”; and “I am happy to do that and [my wife] can look after [our grandchild] and I will look after him this afternoon”; another participant states “I have got quite a full life because I’ve got my family, you know, I’ve got to do babysitting for them and I bond, you know you have to bond with your family”; and “...time with my grandchild, you know if I was working Wednesdays I couldn’t help [my daughter] out”. Thus, as more adults are encouraged to prolong their working life there is also a need ensure there are childcare alternatives for working parents and elder care options for spouses or parents who need support (Halpern, 2005).

As captured by the theme of continuity, the interaction of older and younger generations has important developmental implications for adults and their grandchildren, with both benefiting from the interaction (Erikson, 1982). Older adults benefit from ‘vital involvement’ which encapsulates a sense of purpose and meaning (Erikson, 1982; Peterson, 1999). Other benefits include the gratification of biological renewal, emotional fulfilment and importantly, this interaction also allows for a sense of connection to both the family and the wider community through the experiences of, and with, their grandchildren (Peterson, 1999). This experience may also provide older adults with an opportunity to reconcile some of their grievances related to past experiences. For example, one participant voiced the following:

“I think I wear a bit of a guilt thing... because I had to work I didn’t have as much time as for them as I would have liked to have had, so when I did retire I
thought oh good, I can help with the grandchildren...I do that because I think I should, and I enjoy it of course too.”

Mentoring: Another sub-theme related to continuity and imparting something to the next generation was a mentoring role. Men in particular spoke about the satisfaction of mentoring younger workers and being involved in their development “...there's the element too, of mentoring. I'm sort of thinking well I've got some experience and perhaps I can pass it on” and from another participant “...a lot of that contribution should be from their experience, what they can pass on to the newer generation, and not get in their way”. The men shared their sense of satisfaction in being able to pass on their knowledge and experiences as illustrated by the following participants “I had mentored him for quite some time as well, it was a pleasure for me to see him spreading his wings” and “I enjoyed that part, I enjoyed bringing people in and um helping to develop them and then passing them on”.

It was interesting, however, to note a gender difference in the reporting of mentoring experiences, with nearly all the men and only one woman reporting such experience. This may be related to the vocational differences between the participants, with more of the men performing managerial tasks that expose them to mentoring roles, or it may be that mentoring younger workers is more important for those men for whom their working role is a significant part of their identity. Alternatively, women may invest their time nurturing their own children or grandchildren and have less need to fulfil that role in the workplace. As mentoring roles have been proposed as a potential area of employment for older workers (Borus et al., 1988; Griffiths, 1999, 2003) future investigation into possible gender differences in mentoring role outcomes is recommended.
Intergenerational Conflict: Finally, also related to continuity was a sub-theme of intergenerational conflict. This theme was presented in varying contexts such as the different work ethic and attitudes of younger people, for example “I still believe older people do a better job...they have still got a work ethic which a lot of young people I find don’t have a work ethic”. The potential for tension between older workers and their younger managers was also raised, indicating that role changes later in life were a concern for some older adults. The comments related to intergenerational conflict included an older adults experience of re-entering the workplace “I need to step back and remember from time to time, I’m not boss anymore, I work for them. I work for the people who used to work for me” and another participant’s comment on the same issue, “It may cause friction I believe that where the senior boss type person retires and wants to come back and work part-time and is put under somebody he used to command for example”. These comments suggest that the transition from fulltime to part-time work may be distressing, with the potential for ongoing tension if workers return to the same working environments. It also demonstrates that some working environments may be incompatible with the fulfilment of the need for continuity by inhibiting positive interaction with younger generations.

Designing roles for older workers, that allow them to participate in valued roles with flexible hours, is a major undertaking that must be address by employers if they are to retain and motivate this group. However, this must also be achieved without stimulating resentment from younger counterparts and creating further tensions in the workplace. Reconceptualising the transition from fulltime work to retirement and providing roles that younger adults can aspire to, may entail educational interventions, positive discrimination and establishing roles specific to
older workers' needs and abilities. Therefore, while research on the needs of older adults may inform this process, these roles must be identified and established through a process of collaboration with employers and older workers.

Contribution

*Misleading participation*: Following on from older adults’ changing perspectives along the continuum of opportunity, the participants in this study consistently reported a need to make a contribution by participating in meaningful activities, reflecting a need for meaning in their life and their actions. This sense of purpose is important for the healthy development of older adults and has been referred to as a need for generativity (Erikson, 1982; Mor-Barak, 1995). One participant stated “you’ve got to feel that the work you are doing has some, it’s got some value to it. Providing something useful, no matter what the work might be”. The participants were aware of their changing priorities and some described how their attitudes had changed over time “When you are young...you are trying to get on, you are trying to create a career for yourself...I think when you are older you are quite happy to lose that”. The following quotes further exemplify older adults’ need for meaningful activities: “it’s doing something that you enjoy and that you feel you are contributing”; as well as “The satisfaction of achieving something useful, uh, making a contribution”; and,

“people want to feel useful and ah, things that they don’t want is to be a semi,[sic] semi meaningless job that they can’t see the use of, and to be in an um unhappy situation where you get up in the morning [and] you don’t want to go to work or you cant wait to get home.”

*Paper work and bureaucracy*: As a result of the need for meaningful activity, people reported feeling disillusioned with their working roles and frustrated with
mounting paperwork in particular. For example, “*your typing up the simplest letter and your sitting there and stuffing letters... that's a waste of time*”; and in the words of another participant, “*I don't enjoy the bookwork and stuff, it's just a necessary evil that I've got to do*”. The following comments also reflect changes in the participants’ perspectives towards paperwork over time: “*The whole bureaucracy of the thing started to get, to get me down, filling in time sheets...driving to Perth...I had enough of that*”; another participant adds “*The paperwork just got worse and worse as my career went on...those sort of things, the hassles with that, didn't interest me*”; and “*It became more paper warfare towards the end*”. As a result of company restructures, older workers also often found themselves with diminished responsibilities and fewer support staff. Some of the participants felt that they were sidelined and excluded from full or meaningful participation, which added to their sense of frustration.

In regard to the theme of contribution, research (Aquino et al., 1996; Baker, Cahalin, Gerst, & Burr, 2005) has suggested that the amount of productive activities and the time committed to these activities is positively related to subjective well-being for older adults. However, the above comments make it clear that some productive activities may have a deleterious effect on life satisfaction and wellbeing and provide support for the proposition that role choice is an important predictor of subjective wellbeing for older adults (Warr et al., 2004). These comments also suggest that prolonging employment for financial reasons may be a significant burden for older adults and is likely to have a negative effect on health and wellbeing. Therefore, policies that target the maintenance of employment for older adults must also consider the negative effects of stressful working environment on older adults. (Huhtanen et al., 1997) in order to ensure that such policies do not threaten the well-being of older adults.
Volunteering: Furthermore, older adults’ need for meaningful activities was demonstrated by the finding that, while some of the adults interviewed were no longer working fulltime, all were engaged in activities that they felt were meaningful and contributed to others, most often involving volunteer work. It is proposed that volunteer work provides older adults with the flexibility, choice and meaningful contributions that they aspire to fulfil in their paid employment, but that are often not met through their existing paid roles. Thus, research that can identify the factors that underlie the attraction of volunteering for older adults may help to inform employers of specific incentives that may be transferable to paid positions. Therefore, if we are to positively engage older adults in the workforce there is a need to identify roles that are both compatible and valued.

Social Engagement

Social interaction: The relationship between social interaction and well-being has been well established (Aronson, 1999; Krause & Jay, 1991; McMillian & Chavis, 1986; Newsom, Nishishiba, Morgan, & Rook, 2003; Tajfel, 1982) and many of the participants acknowledged the benefits of social support such as “It gives you a feeling of belonging”, and for another participant “I suppose you have got much more contact with other people, you know on a regular basis”. Women without partners spoke in particular about their sense of isolation, “nobody wants to know about you because you are single women on your own” and the consequent attraction of employment for social interaction.

However, as well as social contact and a sense of belonging, employment offered a unique type of social interaction for the participants, that was defined as social engagement. Although the participants described interacting socially with family and friends, their work role offered them an opportunity to connect and engage
with the wider community. The following participant shared his experience of working from home: “I was feeling professionally lonely. I didn’t have people to turn to, to help me and confer with, and the second thing was that I missed the social contact”. Another participant stated, “I guess you know, that there is a connection there um and perhaps by going into work I would perhaps get more connection there”. These findings suggest that although working from home may be compatible with flexibility, there is a risk that older adults will feel isolated and experience low job satisfaction. A case may be made for the role of Internet communication in facilitating social engagement for older adults working from home. However, before advocating such a solution, it is recommended that future research is undertaken to establish older adults satisfaction with this form of communication as their primary source of social engagement.

**Work identity:** Work relationships reflect a major part of people’s lives, and for older adults these relationships continue to be an important means of feeling connected to the wider society. Particularly for men, their work identity is an important aspect of their sense of self, and this may increasingly become the case for women as more of their time is spent in the paid workforce (Altschuler, 2004). Maintaining a link to this identity, and a feeling of engagement either through a network of friends with a shared work history, or through participation in committees or interest groups, was identified as an important aspect of work life. For example:

*It's been important for me to keep in touch with my former colleagues...it is very enjoyable and rewarding to keep in touch with people I have worked with over the years and meet up with them and have a yarn with them about old times*. 
As people age, they often lose important roles such as their working roles, and volunteering opportunities may offer role substitutes in order to compensate for this role loss (Baker et al., 2005). Furthermore, the attraction of committees and interest groups identified by some of the participants suggests that influence is an important element of their need for social engagement. Influence and shared emotional connection are important elements of a sense of belonging (McMillian & Chavis, 1986) indicating that older adults aspire to retain community ties after exiting from work. Furthermore, for those individuals at risk of isolation in the community, such as single men and women, flexible employment options may offer a beneficial opportunity for social engagement.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance flexibility for older workers. The main themes included the opportunity continuum and a sense of running out of time, as well as a need for continuity, contribution and social engagement for older adults. These themes have illustrated important factors that underlie the need for choice and flexibility in regard to employment for older adults and identify factors that may be necessary for the healthy development of older adults. These factors included: Time for reflection; meaningful participation; and positive intergenerational interactions.

Factors influencing older adults participation in paid employment

The present study also captured the participants’ perspectives of the incentives and barriers to employment for older adults. These findings are presented in Table 2. These findings highlight the role of contextual issues, such as age discrimination and fiscal policy, in influencing older adults’ decision to participate in paid employment. Some of the participants spoke about the benefits of “the financial situation...the issue of super[annuation] goes up more”; while other felt that there were financial
disincentives to stay employed. For instance "financially I was worse off... I couldn't change my superannuation date... it changed my status'. The impact of financial incentives to retire was also described by participants, for example, "[the retirement decision] was made a bit easier by the fact that eventually I was offered this um severance". These comments clearly demonstrate the relevance of adults' financial situation to their decision to remain in, or retire from, paid employment. Therefore, further research is warranted to investigate the financial incentives and disincentives embedded in existing policies or company practices, and how these influence older adults' participation in the workforce.

In regard to their health, the participants discussed several aspects of the relationship between health and employment. Several participants identified that "your body wont let you keep doing that, you have to be able to accept that you are older um and you've got to give your body a bit of respite"; and how health impacted on their decision to work: "touch wood, you know I have fairly good, I don't have any pressing health problems, so no way would it be on my agenda to retire now".

Another issue in regards to health was that working limited their ability to look after their health. For example "You can only do those programs [live longer live stronger health program for seniors] once your retired actually because they are all during the day", and from another participant "one of the advantages of being partly retired is that I can put more time into looking after my own health". Finally, the participants' perceptions of the health of the older population was also raised, as illustrated by the following quote,

"Because lets face it, uh, a terrific amount of people get disease and die at an early age these days, you know, and I mean they talk about that we live to a longer age and I don't really think that is true."
Therefore, health was an important issue for older adults both in terms of the status of their own health, their opportunities to look after their health, and their perceptions about the health of older adults in general. These perceptions of the general health of older populations may reflect the experiences of the participants in the study, or they could reflect more widely held negative stereotypes of older adults. Future research is recommended to explore the stereotypes held by older adults and how these may influence their decision to participate in employment. As explored under the theme of the opportunity continuum, older adults who believe their health is failing are less likely to remain in the workforce and more likely to pursue other interests.

Another factor that was identified was the impact of age discrimination on older adults' participation in paid employment. Many participants raised their concern that "employers don't want older people, and people always pick young staff." Feeling that their contribution is unwanted is likely to contribute to older adults sense of worth and to their job seeking behaviour (Encel & Studencki, 2004). If they feel that they are not wanted they are less likely to be motivated to pursue new positions. Another participant shared his experience of job hunting:

"[having] applied for somewhere between 100 and 150 jobs, ...I would have been 54, and so I was fairly jacked off at the situation... it was just thankyou for your application but no thanks... they must have a fear of employing older people or something because ah, the duties of the job were absolutely identical to what I was doing."

These findings are consistent with the high rate of mature-age unemployment (ABS, 2004; Encel & Studencki, 2004) and with evidence that employers are unlikely to hire older workers due to negative stereotypes (Gringart et al., 2005). This demonstrates
the need to address the attitudes of employers and to promote the benefits of hiring older workers.

Other factors that inhibited older adults participation in employment were factors that contributed to the person’s perceived level of stress. Participants talked about the stress of travelling to and from work, and the related difficulty of finding a car park. For some, better public transport or private (but affordable) car parking would increase the attraction of paid employment. Writing job applications was also considered a taxing experience, with one participant stating that she had spent more than a week getting her application together. She states:

"if they want to keep older workers they cant put them through like a public service application it is just too stressful, like the position is advertised and the selection criteria, you have to write to the selection criteria, you have to get an interview and then you have to win a position, that it is just so stressful"

Clearly, if older adults are to be expected to prolong their working lives as a result of policy changes that impose restrictions on access to alternative income streams such as pensions or superannuation, there is a need to identify what effect these changes will have on the well-being of older adults. Older adults are more vulnerable to stress due to physiological changes that take place as people age (Cox, 2003; WHO, 1993), and the participants in this study have clearly identified a need for choice and flexibility in employment. Therefore, any barriers that limit older adults’ choice to work or retire, could result in poorer health outcomes for them.

Strengths and Limitations

While socio-economic data was not specifically collected, the range experienced by the participants is illustrated by the following data drawn from the transcripts "In our age group money is not so essential because you get enough
older adults' perspectives on employment

pension really, we do, I've never had so much money in my life, since I've been on the pension", and "... and a holiday is out of the question really on straight centrelink, so with our reduced centrelink and my income you know, we plan some holidays" and finally "but it doesn't help when you are a level 6 or 7 and they are paying you 78,000 a year". Importantly, these quotes not only reveal the participants diverse socio-economic status but also identify the reliance of some of the participants on welfare based income streams, thus making them likely targets of government strategies that limit alternative income streams.

Data saturation was reached, with many of the findings consistent across participants, signifying that the diversity of the participants also contributes to the transferability of the research. Sampling of the greatest diversity is necessary for transferability in qualitative research (Nagy & Viney, 1994) and because the participants were representative of a range of socio-economic groups and employment statuses, their perceptions are likely to be illustrative of a wider sample of older adults. However, only one participant came from a non-English speaking background suggesting that future research is necessary to explore the relation between cultural differences and the present findings.

A further limitation of the present study was that there was a lack of comparison between the themes and factors affecting employment for older adults. The current data was rich and descriptive, however further research is necessary in order to understand which themes are more salient and how they rank in importance for older adults. Building on the present research, a greater understanding of the relationship between the developmental needs of older adults and the factors that influence their participation in employment, is likely to contribute to the development of focused interventions that lead to greater flexibility in the workplace.
Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to communicate and explore older adults' perspectives on employment and the extension of working life. Factors that influenced the attraction of employment, and those that inhibited the full participation of older adults were identified. An important conclusion drawn from this research was that meaningful participation was central to older adults' motivation to work, however, current working environments offered very little in the way of satisfaction for them. From the perspectives of older adults, the prevailing factors related to older adults participation in paid employment were choice and flexibility.

The themes of an opportunity continuum, continuity, contribution and social engagement were identified as important aspects that underlie the need for choice and flexibility in regard to employment for older adults. Therefore, the practical implications of these findings include the need for greater flexibility if older workers are to remain in the workforce. Accordingly, in order to ensure the well being of older adults, it is important that those policies that challenge or address access to flexible working conditions are implemented after consideration of the underlying issues. Key underlying issues included pursuing personal interests, having time for reflection, meaningful participation and positive intergenerational interactions.

However, while flexibility was identified as a key issue, it is important that older adults aren't forced into flexible or reduced hours as a result of their increasing age. Age has been demonstrated to be a poor indicator of the ability of older adults to participate in employment (Avolio et al., 1990; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989). Furthermore, as older adults are not a homogenous group, the implementation of policies that target groups based on age, and which limit the choices of individuals, are discriminatory for older workers and could lead to poor outcomes for adults.
These findings demonstrate the need to identify work roles that are conducive with the skills and abilities of older workers, and that also support the establishment of practical means of introducing flexibility into the workplace.

The present study also acknowledged older adults unpaid contribution to society in relation to caring for parents, partners, and grandchildren, as well as participation in volunteer programs. These roles were conducive to older adults developmental needs and offered choice, flexibility and an opportunity for meaningful contribution. It is proposed that research into the attraction of volunteering may enlighten employers in regard to key motivators that could be useful in attracting and retaining older workers. However, if older adults are to increase their participation in the paid workforce then there will be a greater need for social policies to address the gap between available volunteers and the need for such services. In particular, the current research highlights a need for choice and affordable access to childcare alternatives and eldercare services, as these were the roles most often identified as conflicting with participation in employment.

Finally, the present study provided support for the existing literature that identifies the role of age discrimination in limiting the employment opportunities for older adults. Therefore, it is crucial that policy and intervention focuses on minimizing age discrimination and negative stereotypes. Strategies suggested by the present findings include the promotion of positive intergenerational interactions that could be facilitated by mentoring roles and through the promotion of positive role models for older adults. The responses from the participants also revealed that their own stereotypes and expectations of older workers' health and participation in the workforce could provide a fruitful area for further research and intervention. As a result of increasing longevity, older adults who retire at 65 may find that their
retirement period is more than 20 years. Therefore, this research highlights the need to establish flexible and valued working roles in order to facilitate the healthy development of older adults and to enable the continued participation of older adults who choose to remain in the workforce.
Table 1. *Themes and Sub-themes Related to the Need for Flexibility*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity continuum</td>
<td>Limited time and opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competing interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smelling the roses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intergenerational Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Meaningful participation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Paper work and bureaucracy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>Social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. *Factors Affecting Older Adults Participation in Paid Employment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivating factors</th>
<th>Inhibitory factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial benefits</td>
<td>Competing interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental stimulation</td>
<td>Care commitments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>Financial disincentives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of retirement</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction and fulfilment</td>
<td>Travel to and from work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job application process</td>
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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

**Q1. Could you please describe your thoughts about working?**
What things come to mind?
How do you feel about work? Why
Has this changed over time? How? Why?

**Q2. Could you please tell me about your experiences of employment?**
What are some of the things you enjoy(ed) at work?
What, for you, are the best aspects of employment?
Have you experienced any difficulties? Could you please describe these for me.
What other issues can you think of?
Do you feel you are given the opportunity to work to the capacity that you would like to work?

**Q3. What are your thoughts on working past the age of 65?**
(& how do you feel about working past 65?)
In your experience, did your thoughts about work change over time? How?
What, in your opinion are some of the issues that older people face in relation to work?
Are there other issues you can think of?

**Q4. Could you please describe your ideal job, past 65 years of age**
What would you be doing? How many hours would you work? Could you please describe those things that are important to you? Could you please tell me what makes these things more important to you than others?

**Q5. What things do/did you consider when deciding to work (stop work)?”**
Could you please discuss those things that you thought about in making your decision? What were the most important issues? Why?

**Q6. Could you please tell me what would make work attractive to you?**
(people over 65?)

**Q7. In your opinion, how can employers successfully accommodate the needs and requirements of older workers?**
What are some of the issues they should consider?
How can employers motivate older workers to remain in (return to) employment.

**Q8. What are your expectations for future employment? What do you see yourself doing in five years time?**
What issues might influence this? How?
What other issues do you think might come up?
How do you feel about that?

Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?
Appendix B
Information Letter- Older Adults' Perspective on Employment

Dear Participant,

Thankyou for your interest in my research project on older workers and employment. This paper is designed to give you some information about my research and on how I intend to gather the data. I am interested in talking with you about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences regarding employment.

This study will form part of my course requirements as a psychology honours student and aims to improve our understanding of older adults' perspectives on employment. This is an important and topical issue for older adults, employers, and policy makers and your participation in this research is appreciated. This study has gained ethics approval from the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Science Ethics Committee of Edith Cowan University.

I will be asking you to share your thoughts and feelings and should you not wish to answer a particular question, or if you wish to withdraw your participation, you may do so at anytime without any penalty. You are welcome to contact the Honours co-ordinator (details below) to discuss any difficulties or questions you may have regarding the process.

The interview is expected to take approximately 60-90 minutes and will be audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim. No identifying information will be included in the transcript and important words will be replaced with pseudonyms or simply blanked out. The interviews will be conducted at a venue that suits you and may include your home, office or a meeting room at a local library or university. If you would like to participate in an interview, please contact me on the details below to arrange a time and venue.

If you require further information about this project please contact me on –

Monica Cooper    ph. 0419 866 522

or my Supervisor, Dr. Eyal Gringart (ph. 6304 5631)

If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact the Honours Co-ordinator, Edith Cowan University –
Ms Julie Ann Pooley (ph 6304 5591)
Consent Form

Older Adults’ Perspectives of Employment

I __________________________ (the participant) have read the information sheet provided with this consent form and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this study, realising I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study can be used to complete a publishable research report provided that I am not identifiable.

I understand that I will be interviewed and that the interview will be audio recorded.

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Interviewer’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________
### Older Adults’ Perspectives on Employment

#### Appendix D

**Data Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thoughts of work</th>
<th>Positive experience</th>
<th>Negative experience</th>
<th>Working past 65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(1) I'm just at the stage where I'm thinking perhaps that I'd like to go down to part time work. I'd like to do some volunteer work. (5) I'd like to do something different...getting a bit sick of just spending say most of the time in the office. (12) I mean it is not always easy being employed. I mean generally I enjoy my work yeah, and always have done.</td>
<td>Could be some really interesting work.</td>
<td>(5) Sick of spending most of the time in the office. People leave and...so you have twice the work to do. You have to go to training...that contributes to stress. You know that's a waste of time...gets you down (48) people leave and no job replacements so you have twice the work to do. (49) you know things like mail merging and all these sorts of things to get letters out...and that sort of thing contributes to stress. Probably technology.</td>
<td>(13) No, I think I've done my bit. I have been working since I was 17 and I think that's long enough. (14) You haven't got that same zest (15) I think you get too old to a point. (28) I don't know there are many older people who actually want to work full time...you know certainly none of my friends would want to work full time (47) I am just trying to think of some older people at work yeah but there aren't any, they are all stressed out and retired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(11) if there was an opportunity for working a bit more at main roads I would, because I really like that sort of work you know. (23) I didn't want to retire... I felt, I felt early sixties is far to early to retire, (26) I'd probably give up easier I suppose, not give up but you know what I mean, like next year I will be 62 and you know, we like the beach! I kept all the rejection letters Monica for years just as a hobby or not a hobby just as a er because I could hardly believe that situation, it was, over a hundred rejection letters is quite a lot of paper, um and um, you know I'm not, I couldn't be bothered going through that again, I don't think so anyway.</td>
<td>(6) a friend of mine has got a business so he, offered me some part time work which was just basically labouring (22) the challenge, um the, the um, seeing something develop, um you know in engineering we work on you know fairly large projects, some of them are quite innovated and fairly, fairly um, state of the art technology is used.</td>
<td>(7) I must admit that the wind was taken out of my sails a little bit if you know what I mean. I applied for oh I dunno twenty odd jobs (12) the period that was very frustrating for me was 1998, at 54 um, and applying for well over a hundred jobs and getting letters of rejection, um the employers were decent enough to at least write back and say um, thanks for your application, but jump in the lake! (17) you know just the continual letters of rejection were, yeah very frustrating (41) I mean I think talking to guys that are there fulltime they have their own frustrations with the way things happen and get done er and you know they might get frustrated just about the fact that the the um management aren't identifying that they need younger people to you know in more areas to to continue the work.</td>
<td>(32) I think I would have had enough by then, if it was going to go that long, no I don't think I would bother to be honest (40) I no no they wouldn't . I think most guys there have just had enough I by then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(2) I enjoy it. I don't, I can't imagine stopping work at this stage you know (9), I didn't like working fulltime, that was the first thing but the second thing is there was no continuity with, even with staff, your staff came and went and um so I didn't like that and I didn't like the fact that um you didn't have the, the personal contact really at all. (12) Yeah, I just didn't like the the commitment of</td>
<td>(5) I enjoy the contact with the people (26) that's why I enjoy doing what I am doing. I feel that it fills in time and gives me a reason for doing what I am doing because I have got a commitment to the girls that work for me as well.</td>
<td>(7) I don't enjoy the bookwork and stuff, it's just a necessary evil that I've got to do.</td>
<td>(50) I think we've all reached the stage where we don't want to work fulltime but we do want to still have some cash input so if there was more part time work offered to seniors once they have turned sixty then I think they will keep more of us in the workforce.</td>
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(13) I loved working when I was younger ... maybe age had a lot to do with it, I'm not sure. But I mean I don't, I don't plan on working fulltime again, just would depend I suppose if you really loved what you are doing you'll do it, but then I know I love what I'm doing and I don't want to work fulltime.

(24) you know that I don't think I could even consider, even for a monetary reason that I would go back to fulltime work. I don't believe I would, I mean I would rather live in cheaper accommodation and spend less, because I am not a shopper (25) In fact if I did what I would really like to do I would have someone picking up the tab for me and looking after me and I would work at all (36) you know I keep thinking that I can't imagine not working um but I dare say that if I was in a relationship where the guy wasn't working then I wouldn't want to work either.

4 (1) Not full time, no. Um, partially yeah. (16) Like that's part of what I find is a bit of a battle now is you get so relaxed sometimes, like, and you forget appointments and things. I usually write in my diary to make sure I don't do that, you know, and I look but today I didn't look, you know, and so, um I think you do start ah relaxing to the point where the ah, the habit is not there anymore to be motivated to want to hurry (34) I think you know some days it will do you good to have to actually make the move, you know, so but that, you know, you lose that because that's right I mean um my mind used to be very sharp but it isn't as much any more just because it's sort of not, it's not a necessity. So you just relax back and let it all happen (40) to weight up the balance is it worth it to get the extra money and to do that extra work? (70) not everybody wants to go back to work and maybe I wouldn't if my husband was still around. Because I would be whizzing around doing more social things.

5 (1) Working is really lovely, very nice working because you meet people and you have (15) I think it keeps you motivated it keeps your brain going (17) Part-time work, oh no part-time work what I am doing is wonderful, I love (19) now everything is computers now and I don't want to go for (74): it could well be that you are going to find older people who are happy to job share you know do a few days each and you know whatever, that is a possibility, but then again you are going to find and awful lot of older people who just aren't well enough to do it,
colleagues and you are not lonely and you know you feel fulfilled. You know if you have the right job, you are really love it. You really thrive on it really. It lift the self-esteem and you feel better in your dress and you get you know (5) no I wouldn't like to work no, I wouldn't like to, no, no not in this year. Not in our age group, unless you are really highly qualified, like a school teacher, or you know trained or you got something um going for you, like um, your on the top of the ladder and you do research and you’re a lecturer or something like that, then it is really good, like that. (6) Because um, because I’m not um, really qualified to really enjoy that type of work now, really you know, now I mean, hospitality, you know it is all demanding more and more, so what I have been used to and then, um, go back to work, I wouldn’t go back to work. No, no too much stress. (26) But I don’t, I’m not interested, I’m too old

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<th>Older Adults’ Perspectives on Employment</th>
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<td>6</td>
<td>(1) Oh, I couldn’t say that I ever really enjoyed working. I worked because I had to. And I don’t want to go back to working (2) Oh, well, I guess I just don’t want to work, yeah</td>
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<td>it mm. You see satisfaction in answering the phone and telling the people, nice, you know, that they sort of, some of them are very grateful and they thank us and everything like that, and um you have the satisfaction of you helping you know, your own, your own, your own, age group. Even other people who ask us things, I don’t mind but it’s really satisfying and you feel good. Yes you do, you feel your self-esteem, you know you feel good. I do</td>
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<td>special training, I don’t want to do that.</td>
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<td>people who um, go cleaning and things like that, domestic work. I don’t think it is very satisfying for them because they always have something you know, tired and they don’t want to do this and they don’t want to do that, their quality of like goes down. Unless you are very qualified for something really on the top, then it is worth it, I believe in that yes (14) I think more seniors want to do things, like you know, working and all that doesn’t have a really bad effect unless it is a really stressful job or they are only doing it for the money. (32) If people want to do things, I don’t think they want to do it for money ... she feels fulfilled doing that, mm, you know that is what I am saying, she feels fulfilled doing that and um.</td>
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|   | (7) most of the time but I didn’t mind the actual work that I was doing. |
|   | (6) Uh well I had a pretty stressful job, um, and there’s lots of personality conflicts and Um I was in um ah in charge of groups of people and there is always problems when you’re responsible for people, you have problems with them and problems between them and other staff um that you have to sort out so its not a particularly nice sort of thing, (14) dealing with different personalities, dealing with staff (19) um well I was in my mid fifties, um I was retrained and I tried to find other jobs and nobody wanted to know me, I was too old |

| 7 | (1) Oh I enjoy working, I have always enjoyed working, I worked for the state Government for most of my life, I have always enjoyed it and um I enjoy what I am doing now. (50) I really enjoy work, it not a slog, I mean that’s the thing, I think if work becomes a slog it loses its value. But I have been very lucky, I have always had a job that was interesting and challenging and exciting, whatever, so it was a pleasure |
|   | (2) there are a number of course well, not necessarily in order but there’s the finance side of course you need to ah maintain yourself, there’s the social side, there’s the challenge side of having to think through problems, there’s the interactive side with people, trying to get people to um come together to an agreement when they might be in [unclear] positions that |
|   | (4) if you work for an organisation you are normally tied into set hours, you have got to be behind a desk where you have got to be available, (6) I only had problems with probably around three people in my whole working life which is good but some people can be a problem, most people are really excellent but occasionally you find people that you just don’t |
|   | (9) Don’t want to do it. (10) I would think the same reasons as me, they want to do other things with their time, I am sure they have got other interests (11) I know there are other people who like their jobs, I know people who um, work for the government and seem to have very much less stressful jobs and they’re quite happy to keep going in every day and keep building up huge super balances uh, so people in those situations may be happy to work longer (24) Only that there are some people who enjoy working and enjoy their jobs, I wasn’t one of them but there are people I believe, so they would be happy to stay on in their jobs. |

|   | (15) oh I would be very happy to, at my own pace and um in my own way yes, I would be happy to work until I’m 70 if it is at my own pace and the things that I enjoy doing |
to go to work most days, you didn’t get up and think oh gawd, you know. I think I’m very lucky, I’m probably at the peak,

| sort of thing, it all very interesting | get on with. So that’s a negative yeah (42) well, I am trying to think, one way is not to sideline people, put them in boxes and, in a closed room where, dead end, there’s a fair bit of that goes on (44) I was in a box on my own in the corner with no staff and no money and I said I don’t really think this is fair and that is one of the reasons eventually I went to the CEO and I said well obviously in the restructure I’m off there, you don’t really need me, pay me out. So I don’t think that showed very much respect at the end of the day |

| (6) so that’s exceptionally satisfying, the bit that made it really satisfying was the team of people I developed and to see them perform under pressure, and the other aspect of it was the way they teamed together because the pressure was quite horrendous and they would see someone start to flag and what would happen, you know we would send them on a few days holiday or whatever and someone else would move into the gap (8) so it was a lot of satisfying things like that because you knew what we were doing was outstanding and um I would have defied any team to have done it better (9) fortunately for me my boss wanted to protect me (12) so that was all exceptionally satisfying, the whole range, and the other thing that’s been satisfying, I don’t know why right from when I was, I was pretty much a loner but I always seemed to fall into leadership positions |

| (10) I went through a big trauma of ah, them all being split and my people going, having to go to the outside world, ah, that was very very stressful, ah ah, and a lot of work on my part and it was interesting in the end every body in my branch finished up with a good job in the world, (49) he was “rusting out” (59) I guess frustration, I guess I don’t really pick up those sort of questions in in this sort of operating mode because when you’ve come from being the centre of everything and controlling everything and now your working on the side um where before if you wanted something done you just asked for it and it was done, but now you have got to queue up and see where if you can get to see somebody so so its your not as productive and it can be frustrating from that point so you get to a point um its evaluating if I am making enough for me to invest my time |

| (23) I had really got to a point where I thought well um I cant, and the corporation was going through another restructure, and um and I was thinking I cant, I haven’t got the energy to take it again you know I had been through restructures and protecting the stuff and developing staff and doing a whole range of things and I was thinking I cannot, I haven’t got the energy to go another round (29) I think that its up to the individual, um if you have got a job that you enjoy um they see no problems with that. I would have to retire earlier and it was disappointing you had to, it was sort of interesting and ah, I think there are benefits to working past but you don’t want to be forced to, this has got to be a choice thing the big difference is that you don’t have to if you don’t want to, which is you know when your in your 30’s, 40’s and 50’s you’ve got to work to bring money into the house and whatever so there is a different mind set, you are not working just to, your doing it for the enjoyment of it. (32) if you force people to work, I don’t know if they would be that productive. You know, If your saying to people oh you’ve got to work until 66, 67 or something, they’ll only be [unclear] they want be productive so why do you want them working you only want people working |
Older Adults’ Perspectives on Employment

9

(1) I finished a few years ago but I enjoyed it while I was there but I wouldn’t like to go back.
(4) I enjoyed teaching when I was doing it, um I enjoyed the interaction with the children, I enjoyed the activities we did, I enjoyed the staff, the adult staff commitment, commitment is the wrong word (16) I did have a look, it’s very, it would have been very hard to go to something else when you have never worked with other adult people, it would have been very difficult to fit into any other type of work.
(30) Not really, I’ve worked nearly all of my life I have raised four children, working full-time, I would like now to have time to enjoy myself to travel, to sew to do craft things to spend time with my grandchildren.

(2) It keeps you active, it stimulates me intellectually, it makes me think. It takes me out into the world and I meet lots of people I would not otherwise meet and there is money comes in. All of those things.
(24) I learnt to build a professional support network um, because there are other people that I know, old colleagues and long friends who also like me retired out of the department and established their own little one man business and have gone out of my way to establish these people or develop these people into a little bit of a professional network and so we do concern, help each other, that’s one thing I could do that now that I couldn’t before, and that’s been greatly facilitated by the advent of e-mail, and um, which I didn’t have in the early days – there was no such thing. And so um,

(5) the best aspects were with my own children, teaching is a great job because of the hours and holidays, the financial security of it. It was a worthwhile job an interesting job and something you could be proud of I guess

(35) they wished to retrain in an office which I would have hated

(9) For me, it was, wouldn’t have been a possibility I would have been too impatient, as I got older. But if people enjoy working they should be allowed to (11) As a teacher I could not imagine working past 65 (27), if they financially need to work fine, you know they have to do it (29) if they are being forced to work, and they don’t want to, their health will suffer

30. Not really, I’ve worked nearly all of my life I have raised four children, working full-time, I would like now to have time to enjoy myself to travel, to sew to do craft things to spend time with my grandchildren.

10

(1) I enjoyed working, it was stimulating, its intellectually rewarding and it provides social contacts (4) At the moment, I feel that I could, I could do much more work. I do less work than is available for me. I choose not to work to some degree, I am happy to be a part-time worker not a full-time worker.

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(3) No recently, I had when, I had difficulties or unhappy experiences years ago for a time, when I was at work…. Working with unpleasant people basically. Personality conflicts.

(6) I think it would depend on the person, in some cases people would ah, be resentful about having to work beyond 65, if it were simply to keep" the wolf from the door" in other cases there are people who enjoy their work so much that they don’t want to retire, so it depends on what their situation is and who they are. I, I have known people that it came as a terrible blow to them when they were forced to retire, they didn’t want to. So it depends on, there is no blanket answer to that question – people’s circumstances are different.

23. There are things they want and things they don’t want isn’t there. Theres, thers, they want to enjoy their work – that’s the first thing. It needs to be rewarding in both a technical, professional sense and in the social sense.

(30) Not really, I’ve worked nearly all of my life I have raised four children, working full-time, I would like now to have time to enjoy myself to travel, to sew to do craft things to spend time with my grandchildren.

if they (7-1) are going to be very productive and um adding a lot of value rather than getting in the way, in many organisations having more people doesn’t get work done, it’s having a good, the right number of competent people, or people who wish to contribute. (42) I think the difference is that if you are going to work beyond that age then it should be parttime, I don’t think it should be fulltime.

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(9) For me, it was, wouldn’t have been a possibility I would have been too impatient, as I got older. But if people enjoy working they should be allowed to (11) As a teacher I could not imagine working past 65 (27), if they financially need to work fine, you know they have to do it (29) if they are being forced to work, and they don’t want to, their health will suffer

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23. There are things they want and things they don’t want isn’t there. Theres, thers, they want to enjoy their work – that’s the first thing. It needs to be rewarding in both a technical, professional sense and in the social sense.
I'm now in touch with all sorts of people, in fact people all round the world on, on all, almost a daily basis that I can confer with.

(1) I've always, I've been lucky enough to have a career that I enjoy doing, well most of it I enjoy doing. So I mean I am a scientist and I have worked in my chosen field so, I'm happy about working. (19) it may be that other people are looking for a complete change in career and would like to keep working in a, you know, past, having retired and would like to do something else full-time. Not that that's my case but I sure there is a variety of possibilities.

(3) well obviously earning an income <laughs> um but also just rewarding in terms of the results that I saw and the results since that I have managed to achieve and see the results come out of the work that I have done.

(4) Oh, working with colleagues with the same sort of attitudes and interests, being able to travel widely in Western Australia, I saw a lot of remote places, um, feelings about some of the good outcomes of my work in terms of more and more land set aside for natural conservation, parks and reserves and so on, um problems that I had helped solve and getting some results, threatened species that I had worked on benefiting from that work and increasing in abundance and those sort of things.

(5) oh, difficult people, shrinking budgets, too many meetings, too much paper work. (8) Drudgery, boredom, conflict, with people um those sorts of things I guess ah would affect people. I have been fortunate enough that most of the time I have enjoyed my work so.

(7) obviously I'm in favour of it because I am hoping to do it <laughs> I'm not 65 yet! But yeah I mean I think its ah if you can keep working and you've got your health and your doing something that interests you um that would be fine from my point of view. I don't need to keep working past 65 for financial reasons but for all those other reasons that would be good, it keeps the brain active, hopefully stops you getting Alzheimer's too soon, um those sort of things.

(9) Do you think older people have the capacity to work beyond 65?
Participant: I think it probably varies with the person. I think a lot of old people do yes, but um, yeah it varies considerably from person to person I think.
Instructions for Contributors

Ageing & Society

All contributions and correspondence should be sent to: Professor Tony Warnes, Director, Sheffield Institute for Studies on Ageing (SISA), University of Sheffield, Community Sciences Centre, Northern General Hospital, Sheffield S5 7AU.

All books for review should be sent to: Angela Russell, Review Editor’s Assistant, Ageing & Society, School of Health and Social Welfare, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK.

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Articles should generally contain between 3,000 and 10,000 words. All contributions (articles, reviews and all kinds of review articles) should be typed double-spaced with at least one-inch or two-centimetre margins throughout (including noted and the list of references). Most papers have the following sections in sequence: Title page, Abstract (of around 200 words), Keywords (three to eight), Main text, Acknowledgements, Notes, References, Correspondence address. The tables and figures should be presented one to a page in sequence at the end of the paper.

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- Use the British variants of English-language spelling, so ‘ageing’, not ‘aging’.
- First level headers are in bold, sentence case and left justified
- Second level headers are in italic (not bold), sentence case and left justified
- Do not number paragraphs or sections. Avoid very short (particularly one sentence) paragraphs. Do not use bold text in the text at all. For emphasis, use italic.
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Titles of Papers, articles and book chapters are in sentence case and not italicised.

Page ranges for book chapters should always be given. Page ranges should be condensed, so 335-64 not 335-364, and S221-9 not S221-229.

Use (eds) and (ed.) where required (no capitals, full stop after truncated ed. but not compressed eds).

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Give authors, date, title, publisher (or name of host website) as for a printed publication. Then follow with … Available online at … full Internet address [Accessed date].

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Figures should also be provided on separate pages and numbered consecutively. Captions should be provided on a separate sheet. Indicate in the margin of the typescript approximately where in the text tables and figures should fall.

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(Revised 10/2/05)