Return to Work After Retirement: Contributing Factors and Health Implications

PCLC Substantive Report
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The annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences is a multidisciplinary conference in which researchers, practitioners, and policymakers are brought together to share knowledge and to develop collaborative relationships that will aid the progress of academic work in the social sciences and humanities, and that will allow this academic work to inform policy. This year, Congress was held in Victoria, BC. I presented two papers related to my MA thesis and co-authored by my supervisor at Western University, Professor Julie Ann McMullin.

My paper, ‘Who Engages in Bridge Employment?,’ was presented on June 4th as part of the 2013 Canadian Population Society (CPS) - Graduate Research Development Conference, which was co-organized by the Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster (PCLC). As with the other paper I presented at Congress (discussed below), this paper was related to Canada’s aging population. In response to concerns that an aging population could result in labour force shortages, some scholars have investigated what predicts whether an older individual will remain a part of the labour force. This paper builds on this work through the study of factors that are associated with return to work after retirement that includes the testing of a number of interactions among these factors. Our study of how gender moderates the relationship between marital status and return to work after retirement revealed that men who have never married are less likely than men who have married to be involved in post-retirement work, and that separated and divorced women are more likely than other women to return to work after retirement. Our study of how gender moderates the association between current age and post-retirement work reveals that younger cohorts of men and women are more similar in their post-retirement work patterns. We also found that higher age at retirement is associated with a greater decrease in the likelihood that a man becomes involved in post-retirement work than it is with that of a woman. Explanations for these results focus on how family dynamics are experienced differently by men and women, on how the experience of gender is moderated by birth cohort, and on how men and women experience different work trajectories in their early and middle adult years that place them in different financial circumstances in their later years. Our policy recommendations focus on the need for training programs that will facilitate the return of older individuals to the workforce.

This conference paired my paper and presentation with Professor Alain Belanger of the National Institute of Scientific Research, who provided me with detailed feedback on both. He suggested I focus more on the discussion and interpretation of my original results rather than on the results that have already been found by others. He also emphasized the importance of addressing social theory even within a paper focused on statistical results. I am grateful for this advice, especially as it has aided me in the writing of my MA thesis. Professor Belanger also provided me with advice concerning how my study
could be extended, such as by considering spousal characteristics, number of children, and family circumstances more broadly.

My other paper, ‘Work After Retirement and its Association with Health and Well-Being,’ was presented in the Canadian Sociological Association session WP05, ‘The Intersection Between Mental Health Trajectories and Employment Patterns.’ This paper is also related to my MA thesis, and it deals with the relationship between post-retirement work and three measures of health/well-being. A study was conducted of how post-retirement work in interaction with current age and age at retirement is associated with levels of general health, of general mental health, and of life satisfaction. We found that post-retirement work is generally associated with higher levels of health and well-being. We found that the positive relationship between post-retirement work and general health is somewhat stronger among younger cohorts, and that post-retirement work is not associated with higher levels of life satisfaction among those who first retired at the age of 65 years and older. Our policy recommendations focus on workplace practices that might allow for post-retirement work to be beneficial for life satisfaction even among those who first retired after turning 65 years of age.

The question-and-answer period that followed allowed me to think through numerous methodological and conceptual aspects of my paper. A few questions required of me that I explain the rationale for the statistical procedures that I employed. Another question I received required of me that I think through the financial and non-financial aspects of return to work after retirement. This feedback has also helped me in the writing of the final draft of my MA thesis.

Furthermore, I attended a wide variety of sessions at Congress, allowing me to acquire much knowledge even concerning topics on which my present work is not focused. The opportunity to meet and discuss with professors and other graduate students was of great value. It was a very enjoyable and enriching experience to be a part of this conference, and I am thus thankful to the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

The knowledge I acquired through these two presentations at Congress has been incorporated into my MA thesis, which will be published in the public section of Scholarship@Western. I am also aiming to have a portion of my thesis published in a professional journal. The advice I received at Congress will have contributed to these publications that will be available to a wide audience. A bound copy of my thesis will be placed in the Population Studies Centre of Western University, where it will be accessible to a wide audience of academics. I have furthermore posted some of my comments concerning the CPS – Graduate Research Development Conference in the PCLC blog. My MA thesis and the papers I presented at Congress involve discussion of the policy implications of my work, and my results might thereby make contributions to the formulation of policy.

I would like to express my gratitude to the PCLC for helping me fund my trip to Victoria and participation in Congress 2013. I cherish having had the opportunity to take part in this enriching event.

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