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Work patterns in later life: Work intentions and behaviours in older New Zealanders

A thesis presented in fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (by thesis only) in Psychology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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Abstract

The overarching goal of this study was to find positive predictors of workforce participation for older workers, therefore assisting in retaining and prolonging participation of this group in the labour force. This outcome is of prime importance to New Zealand in the future. The study consisted of three parts. The first explored the predictors of older New Zealand workers’ intentions to remain in paid work 2 years later. The second assessed the accuracy of work intentions in terms of later work status and explored the predictors of divergence between the two. The third analysed the predictors of remaining in some form of paid work 2 years later. Gender differences were also assessed in each section. The sample, from the Health, Work and Retirement study, consisted of 1389 males and females, aged 53-76 years. Data from waves one (in 2006) and two (in 2008) of the HWR study was utilised.

Using logistic regression analysis, several significant predictors of intending to remain in paid work 2 years later were identified, including: demographics, health and wealth, and work-related factors. Gender differences were found in these predictors in that work-related factors were important in predicting intentions for males but not for females.

Work continuance intentions were more accurate than retirement intentions in predicting work status 2 years later. Female participants retired at a lesser rate and were less accurate in their retirement plans than male participants. Significant predictors of divergence between plans and subsequent behaviour included demographics, health and wealth and career commitment. No gender differences in these predictors were found.

Remaining in some form of paid work 2 years later was predicted by earlier work status, demographics, wealth, work-related factors, and previous work intentions for the total sample. Gender differences were also found in these predictors, in that work-related factors were important in predicting females work status but not males.
These findings extend previous research by focusing on factors that predict work continuance behaviour rather than retirement behaviour. This has important implications for organisations wishing to encourage continued work participation for older workers. Limitations and possible extensions of the research are discussed.
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