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# Factors Which Contribute to Successful Job Change for Women Aged in Their Fifties

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## **Abstract**

Demographics show that older New Zealanders are in better health and living for longer. Women aged in their 50s in paid employment make up ten percent of the New Zealand population in paid work (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). As there is no compulsory retirement age and the government superannuation entitlement age may increase, these women may not want to, or perhaps financially cannot, stop work.

Privileging of youth and negative stereotypes of older workers combine to further position women aged in their 50s on the margins within the paid workforce. This has significant implications for women in this age group who, for whatever reason, seek to change their employment. The question addressed in this research was what factors contribute to successful job change for women aged in their 50s.

Five main themes were identified in the literature review: the workforce is ageing; people are remaining actively involved in the world of work for longer; the world of work is constantly changing; the meaning of career success has changed; and traditional career planning is no longer relevant. Underpinned by a feminist framework, this research used semi-structured interviews with six women who had made a self-defined successful job change.

Rather than a one-size-fits-all model for effective job change for women in this age group, the study revealed the participants used a range of effective job-change strategies. The identified strategies include ensuring that their skills were updated and relevant and the participants not necessarily seeing their age as a barrier. However contradictory subjectivities were evidenced through some participants being influenced by ageist stereotypes. As well as displaying career resilience, through exercising some degree of agency, participants also looked for and had developed the skills to take advantage of opportunities.

This research has confirmed that further study into the embedded nature of ageism by employers and older female workers themselves is needed and that the issues around age, agency and ageism is an area for further feminist theorisation.

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