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Media Release

Retirees who need the work less likely to find post-retirement jobs

Study says wealth, health and education are key indicators of ability to get post-retirement employment

ST CATHARINES, Ontario — May 25, 2014 — The retirees most likely to go back into the job market are not necessarily those who need the work, but those who have the best job background and who remain fully abled, says Annie Gong, a Masters graduate from Western University.

The study also reveals retirees who suffer psychological distress from being away from work can have that need met by taking jobs that involve social interaction outside the family.

Annie Gong, who is entering a PhD program in sociology at McGill, did her research on retirement at during her Master's at Western University. She presented her M.A. research on retirees' participation in bridge employment and psychological distress at the 2014 Congress of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Gong became interested in post-retirement work as she watched how own parents near retirement age. She began wondering whether working longer, or finding a new job after retirement, would make people happier. She also wanted to understand what motivates retirees to participate in post-retirement employment, and whether it is associated with better psychological well-being.

To do this, she analyzed data in the 2004 National Social Life, Health and Aging Project, an American study she says translates well into the Canadian context.

She found that people who participate in paid work report less psychological distress than people who are out of the job market.

But she also found that the people who are more likely to take paying jobs post-retirement are those who are healthier, wealthier and have a higher level of educational achievement.





“People often thought that retirees who worked, worked because they needed the money,” she said.

“I found, actually, that people who are wealthier are the ones who work.”

Gong says that when it comes to hiring retirees, employers tend to favour people who had higher-level jobs or whose work was perceived as more valuable.

“There are people who, after they retire, choose a completely different job – like being a greeter at Walmart,” she said. “But the key is that employers tend to hire people who have more education and experience.”

She adds that healthy retirees are the ones most likely to go back into the work force, and therefore people whose careers allowed them to remain healthy (and avoid injury) are the ones most likely to return to work after being pensioned off.

Gong says one of the reasons people go back to work is that they miss not having an identity and they miss the social interaction.

Her study also looked at what kinds of social interaction could mitigate psychological distress that can result from retiring. She found that even when a retiree’s spouse and family were supportive, only social interaction with friends or peers could moderate the distress.

“So the explanation is that the source of stress comes from not being able to work outside the family,” she said.

“When governments are making policies to increase the wellbeing of retirees, they might think of not only providing jobs, but also providing jobs with a lot of social interaction.”

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About the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

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