

Research findings

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OLDER WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA

Citation: Forbes, Miriam K., Spence, Karen M., Wuthrich, Viviana M., Rapee, Ronald M., (2015) Mental Health and Wellbeing of Older Workers in Australia, *Work, Aging and Retirement*; doi: 10.1093/workar/wav004

WHAT WAS THE AIM?

Our ageing population has catalysed social and political reform to encourage Australians to work later in life, and delay retirement. We don't yet have a good understanding of how these changes will impact workers' mental health and wellbeing. This study aimed to understand how being retired, working part time, or working full time affected the wellbeing of Australians aged 60 and over.

HOW DID WE DO IT?

A total of 2,149 men and women aged 60–79 from the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing were included in the study. We compared the mental health and wellbeing of people who were retired, working part time, or working full time. In our analyses, we accounted for the effects of age, gender, physical health, financial stress, being married, having low qualification levels, and working in physically demanding occupations.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

People working part time reported the best mental health and wellbeing, compared to others retired or working full time. Older age groups (e.g., 75-79) reported better mental health than younger age groups (e.g., 60-64), and men reported better mental health than women, on average. We also found that being physically healthy, having adequate financial resources, and/or being married were related to better mental health. Qualification levels and physically demanding occupations were not related to mental health and wellbeing, regardless of whether someone was working full time or part time.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN PRACTICE?

These results suggest that working full time later in life is no better or worse for our mental wellbeing than being retired. However, older people working part time consistently reported the best mental health and wellbeing outcomes. This is probably because part time work combines the positive effects of retirement (e.g., less stress, more time for leisure activities) and the positive effects of work (e.g., sense of purpose, autonomy, social networks, financial independence). These findings suggest that bridging jobs between full time work and retirement could be a positive way to continue working in later life without detriments to physical or mental health. Options for government-supported transitions from full time to part time work could thus offer a valuable area for investigation as the pension and superannuation ages are increased over the next two decades.

FIND OUT MORE

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