

Symposium Title

Anticipating the retirement experience: a cross cultural perspective

Objectives

Objective 1: After attending this session participants will gain an understanding of the inter-relationships between: motivations for retirement; lifestyle plans; anxieties about the transition; anticipated retirement orientations; and how these vary in different national contexts.

Objective 2: After attending this session participants will be able to identify some of the factors associated with lifestyle change over the retirement transition period; circumstances associated with expected health behaviour changes; whether these are part of pre-retirees 'anticipatory planning'; and foreseen health risks associated with retirement.

Objective 3: After attending this session participants will gain an understanding of how patterns of retirement and plans for the future can be shaped by different welfare regimes and distinct cultural contexts with implications for longer term health, wealth and wellbeing.

Objective 4: After attending this session participants will gain an understanding of how the prospect for continued work later in life can improve older individuals' outlook for their retirement years and overall well-being.

Programme Overview

Retirement is undergoing significant change in Western societies as an increasingly individualised experience, with greater variety of timing and pattern. These changes, while reflecting greater freedoms, are also theorised as being associated with greater risk and insecurity. Of interest is the heterogeneity of the retirement experience and the circumstances associated with positive transitions. Drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives, this symposium explores cross cultural differences in: motivations for retirement; lifestyle plans; anxieties about the transition; and anticipated retirement orientations. Potential implications of differences across these dimensions are also discussed both at the national level in terms of the extended working lives agenda and at the level of the individual in terms of longer term health, wealth and wellbeing. Variation reflects both inter-country cultural differences in relation to values and work/leisure ethics and also distinct welfare regimes shaping the opportunity structure confronting individuals at this stage of their lives. Findings are based on a 3 year study examining the transition from work to retirement in England, North West USA and Central Italy, using qualitative research methods. In this symposium results from the baseline year are presented while individuals were still employed with the intention of retiring within 12 months.

Deborah Smeaton - Individual Symposium Abstract 1

Concerns about the burden of ageing populations on healthcare services have highlighted a need to encourage positive health related behaviour. Lifestyle diseases can be prevented or delayed and several studies have suggested that interventions targeting people on the cusp of retirement may be particularly effective as this life-transition is associated with an

increased risk of reduced physical activity, social engagement and healthy eating. Yet knowledge about the influence of retirement on various health behaviours remains sketchy - building on this largely quantitative evidence base the study introduces the voices of older people to explore whether the retirement transition point represents a potential rupture with the past in terms of attitudes, expectations and practices in relation to healthy lifestyles. The study examines: whether shifts to more positive health behaviours are part of their 'anticipatory planning'; whether retirement is expected to lead to a break with past habits and lifestyles; and foreseen health risks associated with retirement.

Andrea Principi - Individual Symposium Abstract:

Title: the anticipation of retirement in Italy, UK and US: expectations and plans

Although several theoretical perspectives concur to explain the retirement transition (including activity theory, continuity theory, disengagement theory and lifecourse models), the latter phenomenon is far from being uniform due to heterogeneity at the individual, meso and macro levels. This study investigates the anticipation of retirement in the USA, Italy and England, based on 133 interviews with older workers very close to retire. Themes concerning general retirement expectations in terms of life changes and specific plans for the retirement years were linked between them and to the work context (e.g. positive or negative work experience and reasons for retirement). Also the opportunity structure had an impact, and how well developed were institutionalized opportunities for future meaningful activities. Differences between countries were substantial. For example, while in Italy retirement was anticipated as a time to be devoted mainly to the family, in the US prevailed the intention to find new work opportunities.

Kevin Cahill - Individual Symposium Abstract:

Title: Does the option of continued work lead to a more optimistic view of retirement?

In America the majority of older workers exit the labor force gradually, in stages, by reducing hours in career employment, moving to bridge jobs, or reentering the labor force. At the same time, older Americans' views about retirement are generally positive. This paper explores the link between work options and individuals' views about retirement. Data for this paper come from 38 original qualitative interviews of older Americans on the cusp of retirement in 2014 and from the HRS, a large ongoing nationally-representative longitudinal survey of older Americans. We also compare the experiences of older Americans with those of individuals on the cusp of retirement in Italy and the United Kingdom to explore cross-cultural differences. Preliminary evidence suggests that optimism about retirement is related to perceived work options in the years ahead, where work serves as a contingency plan if financial resources are insufficient or if leisure time is not fulfilling.