

the risk of pathologising religion and spiritual experience. This is avoided in DSM-IV by 'Z' codes for relevant psychoreligious and psychospiritual experiences. Other obstacles identified include the differences between patients and practitioners in religious beliefs, the risk of inappropriate pressure on patients from the religious beliefs of practitioners and feasibility problems connected with measuring the existential rather than the purely nominal value of religion. Attribution theory, personal construct theory and interpersonal and psychodynamic theories are suggested as ways of approaching religious experience in psychiatric research.

K. Ritchie, Mental status examination of an exceptional case of longevity. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, **166** (1995), 229–235.

Finally, our wonderful old lady! J. C. was 118 years and 9 months old in November 1993. She was born in France and, at the time of the original paper, was living in Arles. Dr Ritchie presents a short history of the subject and the results of neuropsychological examinations over six months as well as a CT scan showing some atrophy. The subject's performance on tests of verbal memory and language fluency was comparable to people in their eighties or nineties. The subject was deaf and blind but there was no evidence of functional or organic mental illness, despite the 'atrophy' on the CT scan. J. C. actually showed improvement over the period of testing, attributed tentatively to increased stimulation. *The Lancet* used the report of J. C. as the centre piece of an editorial announcing their intention to hold a major conference in 1996, 'The challenge of the dementias: towards a better understanding of cognitive impairment'.

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**Older Workers**

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Paul R. Jackson and Philip E. Taylor, 'Factors associated with employment status in later working life', *Work, Employment and Society*, **8**, 4 (1994), 553–567.

This article reports on factors affecting the withdrawal of older male workers from the labour market associated with unemployment, premature retirement and retirement at 65 years of age. The findings

are based on data for 175 respondents extracted from a larger study. All were unemployed men aged over 50 years whose previous employment had been in unskilled or semi-skilled manual work. Each had been interviewed three times over twenty months. At the first two interviews, each described themselves as unemployed. At the third, however, 8 per cent had reached formal retirement age, 14 per cent were in paid employment, 63 per cent had been continuously unemployed since the start of the study, and the remaining 15 per cent described themselves as retired although they had not reached official retirement age. The researchers divided the sample into five groups based on this self-reported employment status: the retired, the early retired, the re-employed, the shorter-term unemployed, and the longer-term unemployed.

The first aim of the study was to examine factors associated with choices about labour market trajectories – psychological well-being, perceived degree of control over events, extent of commitment to employment, self-reported health status, and financial strain. The results showed no differences between groups at the first interview on either psychological or physical health but the two retired groups at this time felt more in control of their lives, less committed to employment and under less financial strain. This, the authors suggest, is an element of ‘psychological withdrawal’ from the labour market prior to describing themselves as retired. The other marked difference was between the two unemployed groups. The shorter-term unemployed reported the least financial strain while the longer-term group reported the most.

The second aim of the study was to explore the changes associated with alternative labour market trajectories. Regarding this, between the first and third interviews, the shorter-term unemployed group felt events were less beyond their control, less committed to employment and under much greater financial strain. The authors suggest that this represents a degree of disengagement from the labour market despite increased financial pressure. The longer-term unemployed were more stable over the study period showing no change on any of the indicators except employment commitment which declined. The retired group also showed stability over time. The prematurely retired, however, showed a reduced feeling of being in control between interviews one and two, when they regarded themselves as unemployed, but an increase again at interview three after they had classified themselves as retired. The commitment to employment of this group similarly fluctuated ending with the lowest commitment to employment of all the groups. For both retired groups, psychological well-being and

financial strain remained much the same, but self-reported health status declined and then improved over the three interviews. For those who had returned to employment by the third interview, psychological well-being which had fallen between the first two interviews rose at the third. The return to work was also accompanied by an increased feeling of control, an improvement in self-reported health status and a drop in financial strain.

The authors conclude that re-employment and retirement are alternative ways of restoring psychological well-being and a sense of personal control after prolonged unemployment. Overall they suggest that earlier exit from the labour market is having a 'profound impact' on older workers. Many are being forced to adapt to a way of life they had not anticipated and for which they feel unprepared.

#### COMMENT

This article clearly demonstrates how work and retirement are being reconstructed. As the authors point out, the study raises questions about the meaning of the terms employed, unemployed and retired. For older workers who have had full-time employment, there is an increasing tendency for them to be shifted to the margins of the labour market into an ambiguous position. Whether they define themselves as partially retired or in part-time employment, as self-employed or unemployed, may be critically important for their psychological well-being but also a reflection of the degree of financial pressure they may be under. Some may feel seriously threatened by poverty arising not only from low income but also from debt (such as continuing mortgage repayments). Others, with a substantial occupational pension to draw upon, may view low paid employment as a 'rewarding' post-retirement activity.

Philip E. Taylor and Alan Walker, 'The ageing workforce: employers; attitudes towards older people', *Work, Employment and Society*, 8, 4 (1994), 569-591.

This paper reports the initial findings of an ESRC funded postal survey of 500 large employers covering the whole range of industrial sectors (excluding agriculture, forestry and fishing). The authors draw attention to the government appointed advisory committee on older workers and its plan, *Getting On*, which encourages employers to adopt positive attitudes towards the older worker. This survey explores employers' attitudes and behaviour towards older workers.

Despite exhortations to the contrary both from government and the

Institute of Personnel Managers (IPM), nearly half of the employers surveyed considered age to be an important factor in the recruitment of staff. Forty three per cent thought 55 years was 'too old' for employment and sixty per cent thought 60 was 'too old'. Fifteen per cent of employers specified maximum ages in job advertisements. A significant number did not provide training to any employee aged over 50 years. Regarding retirement policies, more than two-fifths had voluntary early retirement schemes – the majority for both men and women commenced at 50 years. However, such schemes were more common in the production and construction industries than in service industries, reflecting the greater difficulty experienced by the latter in retaining staff. The equalisation of the pension age at 65 years was favoured by only 9 per cent of employers; nearly half favoured the idea of a flexible decade of retirement.

The main factor given for not employing older workers was lack of appropriate skills. The government acted upon this finding in December 1993 and extended access to the 'Training for Work' scheme for people aged from 59 to 63 years. Significant proportions of employers however still considered older workers to be less trainable than younger workers and as having difficulties in adapting to new technology. Attitudes towards older workers were found overall to be ambivalent. On the positive side were factors such as loyalty, productivity and reliability; on the negative side were cautiousness, new technology, flexibility and interaction with younger managers. The service sector was more positive towards older workers than the construction and production sector. Although positive attitudes outweighed negative ones, legislation such as the *Redundancy Payment Act* (1965) inclines employers towards targeting redundancies on older workers.

The authors discuss strategies for reducing age discrimination in employment. They tentatively conclude that the IPM guidelines miss their target – just under half the sample of employers recalled having seen them. Even then, many did not appear, judging by their expressed attitudes, to be influenced by them. Fifty three per cent of employers favoured anti-discriminatory legislation, while 36 per cent were against. Senior managers were less likely to favour such legislation. In responding to skills shortages, the authors found that employers do not give priority to trying to retain older workers either by encouraging later retirement or introducing partial retirement. In the production and construction industries early retirement schemes were widespread. They were likely to respond to skills shortages by improving those of existing employees or replacing them by technology. The service sector

was more likely to recruit older workers in response to staff retention problems.

The authors conclude that there is a danger of employment opportunities for older people, particularly older women, becoming increasingly confined to low-skill, low-responsibility and low-paid jobs in the clerical and service sectors. In the production and construction sector, they argue, there may be wage inflation as firms compete for the declining number of younger workers while the employment of older workers continues to diminish. This will leave many ex-production workers without a secure income.

#### COMMENT

This paper demonstrates the importance of labour force composition, the structure of the labour market, and the way that employers respond to historical trends both in demography and in government policy. Older workers are just one element of the marginal labour force that employers are able to draw upon. The financial rewards accruing to them depend heavily upon their fitness, flexibility and willingness to accept low pay, low status or poor working conditions. Whilst it may be true that some male industrial workers have entered an unofficial early retirement by drawing upon invalidity benefits, both this and Jackson and Taylor's study suggest that we should be alarmed about their prospects now that they are being forced to reconstitute their sources of income through the introduction of 'Incapacity Benefit' and the fitness for work tests.

Jay Ginn and Sara Arber, Exploring mid-life women's employment, *Sociology*, 29, 1 (1995), 73-94.

This article reports on another ESRC funded project focusing on women and employment. The aim was to assess a number of supply-side factors on mid-life women's employment. A key issue was 'to understand why women's employment declines so dramatically in their fifties, prior to the state retirement age, while employment is at a high level for women in their forties'. The authors used a nationally representative sample of 11,000 women aged between 40 and 64 years living in private households drawn from the General Household Surveys, 1988-90. Four-fifths of the sample were married (including cohabiting) and since the fall in employment rates after the age of 45 years was broadly similar for all the women, despite marital status the analysis was limited to the married majority.

A broad range of variables and their association with the women's participation in labour market are considered. It is the contrast between those in their forties and those in their fifties that is particularly interesting. Multivariate analysis revealed some important differences between these two groups. Personal attributes, such as age and education, were found to be more important among the older women whereas household characteristics, such as having dependent children, were more important for the younger women. The older group were more likely to be employed through self-employment than the younger group. Another finding was the positive association between women's non-employment and their partners' receipt of Income Support. This was found to be stronger in the younger women than the older women. Conflicting tendencies were found with regard to age. For example, the need for wives to work is reduced as mortgage payment pressure reduces but at the same time opportunities to go out to work are increased by children leaving home.

In conclusion, the authors speculate that the decline in women's employment, which they found from the age of 53 years onwards, may be due to age-related attitudes and discrimination. These, they argue, could include the perceptions of the women themselves regarding the appropriate age for retirement and of discriminatory practices, as well as actual discrimination.

#### COMMENT

Given the increase in the number of women of all age groups in employment over the last two decades, the contrast between the employment experiences of older men and older women are particularly interesting. Ginn and Arber reveal a complex picture of employment and unemployment amongst older women. The complexity of women's employment histories has long been recognized. As a consequence they have generally been omitted from studies of unemployment and retirement modelled as they are on assumptions about normal working lives. In post-modern society, where such assumptions are no longer tenable for either men or women, researchers are struggling to find new ways of studying the relationship between the individual and the labour market.

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