The physical demands of aged care work and workers’ intention to leave

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Background

- The ‘X, Y, Z…Boom’ threatens labour supply and will increase the demand for labour in crucial sectors, such as aged care.

- Workforce retention in aged care is already a significant issue and likely to become increasingly important.

- The aged care workforce is highly feminised and has a median age close to 50.

- Therefore, a detailed understanding of the factors that promote or hinder the retention of mature age women in aged care is needed.
Research Questions of the Broad Project

- What are the key factors influencing mature age women’s decisions to maintain or leave employment in the aged care sector?

- How do mature age women’s paid and unpaid roles and circumstances interact to determine their ability/willingness to remain in paid work in the aged care sector?

- What are the implications for policy on the retention of mature age women in Australia’s aged care sector?
Study Phases

Phase 1: Analysis of Australia-wide data on the employment transitions of mature age women

Phase 2: Survey of mature age women in aged care re. employment plans (November 2011)

Phase 3: Follow-up survey of the same workers in November 2012

Phase 4: Interviews with a diverse sample of age care workers in 2012

Phase 5: Analyse data and use to refine models of employment decision making
Survey Method

- Initial survey based on UK “NEXT” survey of nurses
- 19 Aged Care providers recruited
- 6867 surveys sent to direct care workers 45+
- Electronic version on ANF website
- 3945 Surveys completed (2850 Paper, 1095 Electronic)
Survey Method

- Follow up surveys sent out to 6867 direct care workers 45+ from the 19 organisations, targeting those who completed the initial survey
  - some were still working in aged care roles ("stayers")
  - some had left the sector ("leavers")
- 2138 Stayers surveys completed
- 211 Leavers surveys completed
Research questions addressed in this paper…

- How important are the physical demands of aged care work to the retention of mature age women workers?
- What factors influence the impacts of physically demanding work roles on retention likelihood?
How important are the physical demands of aged care work to the retention of mature age women workers?

- Labour supply in the sector is vulnerable:
  - 43.4% of respondents to Survey 1 &
  - 47.4% of respondents to the Stayers Survey indicated they had thought about leaving aged care in the previous 12-month period.

- The physical demands of aged care work is the most commonly cited reason for thoughts about leaving aged care work.
Main reason for thinking about leaving aged care (initial survey)

- Mental demands: 18.2%
- Physical demands: 7.7%
- Plan to completely retire: 2.3%
- No opportunities for improved pay: 14.7%
- Dissatisfied with hours or shifts: 3.8%
- Disrespect/Lack of recognition: 4.0%
- Pay dissatisfaction: 5.0%
- Emotional demands: 9.0%
- Need to care: 15.0%
Important reasons for leaving aged care (leavers' survey)

- 28.0%
- 27.4%
- 29.1%
- 25.5%
- 29.7%
- 21.3%
- 16.3%
- 12.4%
- 4.6%
- 0.0%
- 27.7%

Reasons include:
- Wanted to retire
- Lost interest
- Needed to care
- Poor health
- Physical demands too high
- Mental demands too high
- Emotional demands too high
- Dissatisfied with pay
- Dissatisfied with hours
- Dissatisfied with shifts
- Dissatisfied with direction of AC
- Poor r/ship with supervisor
- Poor r/ship with colleagues
- Poor r/ship with clients
- Work not valued
sources of pay dissatisfaction

- need for income: 29.8%
- importance of work to society: 48.2%
- demands of the job: 57.2%
- skills needed to perform job well: 47.6%
- job security: 28.9%
- overall: 38.1%

% of respondents who rate pay satisfaction as "not at all"
Some leavers appear to have chosen to move to a new job to achieve a less physically demanding role

Q: What have been the positive changes in your work conditions in the last 12 months?

- A: “I do not have any physical pain anymore, I am not tired anymore.”
- A: “I no longer do any clinical nursing which means I don't suffer back problems like I did previously.”
- A: “I'm not scrubbing showers anymore which helps my shoulder injury a little.”
The physical demands of aged care work appear to have ‘pushed’ some mature age women out of the sector

Q (to leavers): Would any changes in the sector have encouraged you to continue to work in aged care?

- A: “If there wasn't so much demand placed on you. Physically and mentally I was unable to cope with the demands of the work.”

- A: “As a carer, more and more clients needed help with housework rather than personal care and I felt as I was finding physical activity harder as I aged, that my experience was not being used to the best advantage. I also injured my knee and I did not feel that I was supported very well.”
What factors influence the impacts of physically demanding work roles?
Recruiting and investing in healthy workers helps to reduce the impacts of physically demanding work.
Physically demanding work is particularly relevant to older workers.
occupational role and physical workability

% with good or very good ability to cope with the physical demands of the job

- Registered nurse (Division 1), inc: 74.0%
- Enrolled nurse/RN (Division 2): 75.9%
- Personal care assistant/nursing: 76.2%
- Community care/homecare: 79.3%
Other data in our survey indicate that night shifts can involve lower physical demands.
the most physically demanding parts of aged-care work

- None/work not physically demanding: 2.9%
- Transferring clients/residents and assisting: 24.8%
- Assisting clients/residents with hygiene: 11.5%
- Being on your feet for long hours/long: 19.1%
- Volume of work/time pressures: 26.1%
- Cleaning: 3.4%
Q (To Stayers): What have been the most positive changes to your working conditions in the last 12 months?

A: “We have two 6am staff now instead of one, it makes a big difference in the morning.”
A: “Introduction of a short shift extra on floor to relieve heavy workload.”
A: “Facility has implemented floater shifts to spread workload at busiest times.”
A: “Extra shift created therefore more staff. Staff work in pairs in each section.”

An emerging theme is that staff ratios and well-designed shifts can ease the physical demands of aged care work.
Q (To Stayers): What have been the most positive changes to your working conditions in the last 12 months?

A: Updated equipment e.g. electric beds, new furniture
A: Air conditioning
A: Purchased a standard machine; Hi.low beds
A: Shifted to brand new building rooms are much bigger for lifter use & bathrooms are ensuite

Another emerging theme is that good quality equipment and facilities can ease the physical demands of aged care work.
Q (to leavers): would any changes in the sector encouraged you to stay in aged care?

- “An extra staff member on night shift in a dementia wing that had highly volatile demented patients. Trying on your own to clean bowel motion which was spread everywhere and other patients walking around and into it. Plus many falls risk patients when you are on your own.”

- “…Ratio of patients, clients, residents per nurse needs to be reviewed. Proprietors should be required to put money-certain amount back into facility to upgrade and maintain equipment.”

This data confirms the importance of staff ratios and equipment.
Q (to leavers): would any changes in the sector encouraged you to stay in aged care?

- “If the management was patient until my health condition was rectified. I was promised light duties which was not forthcoming. No serious effort seemed to be put or assistance to get quick attention to resolve the health condition.”

- “If I had been given the chance to change to office work - after worker's comp. Not given the chance to work in office instead of care work through the company I worked for. Would have been great to continue working with same company instead of having to change to one place, then another until where I work now. Perhaps for the best!”

A further theme in the responses is that organisational flexibility in the allocation of work roles can help
Conclusion

- “Work is very physical, mentally demanding but not paid well. If the changes are made in this area would be more good carers available.”

- Our survey data indicate that the issue is multifaceted. However, strategies include investing in better equipment, improved staff/client ratios, the provision of alternative less demanding work when illness or injury occurs, recruiting and supporting workers to be fit and healthy.
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