

UMass Lowell Gerontology Community-Engaged Research

Cognitive Health Issues in the Workplace

Karen Devereaux Melillo, Director

*Center for Gerontology Research & Partnerships; Regional
Consortium of Community-Engaged Gerontology Researchers*

Introduction

Aging Workforce Demographics

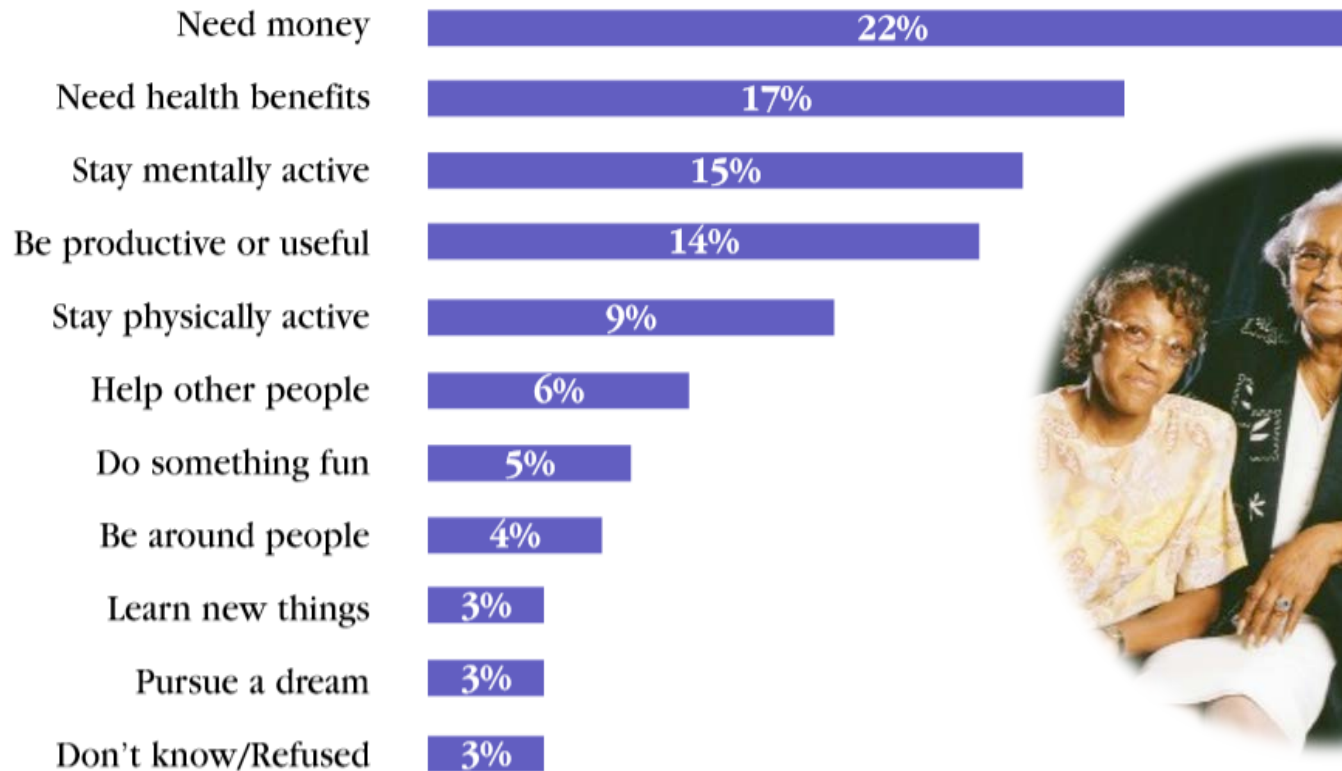
- Nearly 50% of all pre-retirees expected to continue working into their 70's and 18% into their 80's (Brown, 2003).
- 55-75 year-old segment of workforce expected to grow by 11M (about 25% of total workforce) over next 10 years (Toossi, 2009).
- Experiences of older adults who continue to work after retirement age addressed in recent years' literature.
- 2nd career option highly attractive to workers in the 2nd half of their life (Survey by MetLife Foundation/Civic Ventures, 2008).
- Clear benefits related to continuing to work beyond retirement age: Improved financial security, self-esteem & self-confidence (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong & Sheraden, 2009).

Major Factor for Decision to Work in Retirement

Among retirees who plan to work in retirement

ONE MAJOR FACTOR IN DECISION TO WORK IN RETIREMENT

Base: Pre-Retirees Who Plan to Work in Retirement, n=1020



Question 6a: "Which of the things we just talked about is the ONE major factor in your decision to work in retirement?"

Cognitive Health in Older Workers

Is this a problem?

- The cognitive health of older workers and its impact on job demands, new learning, and safety in the work environment have not been well studied.
- This area of research is critical if we are to understand and impact this growing workforce.

What Does Research Evidence Say?

Social Ecology Model

- The Social Ecology Model of Health Promotion (McLeroy, Steckler & Burdine, 1992) is applicable for promoting cognitive health in older working adults and in promoting healthy, safe working environments for older adults (Melillo, 2013).
 - ✓ Limited research-based evidence in Human Resource literature could be found.
 - ✓ Concerns center on how to avoid litigation and compliance with ADA.

What does research have to say?

Healthy workplaces: WHO global model for action

- Enterprises expected to go beyond their legal requirements and act more responsibly
- Creating workplaces healthy for all employees
- No existing comprehensive scheme for good practice

Retrieved October 13, 2014, from http://www.who.int/occupational_health/healthy_workplaces/en/

Social Ecology Model of Health Promotion

Research Approaches

- Areas for potential research can be identified through the five inter-related levels of inquiry:
 - ✓ Intrapersonal
 - ✓ Interpersonal
 - ✓ Institutional
 - ✓ Community, and
 - ✓ Public policy

Factors to Enhance Workplace Climate for Older Workers

TABLE

FACTORS TO ENHANCE WORKPLACE CLIMATE FOR OLDER WORKERS

• Provide organizational support (including retirement planning policies, volunteering opportunities).
• Ensure non-discriminatory practice.
• Target training opportunities for enhancing skills/knowledge.
• Recognize and acknowledge institutional history/value and expertise of older adults.
• Promote a culture of caring and teamwork.
• Provide flexible work schedules/varied work arrangements.
• Avoid shift work for older workers.
• Reduce distractions in the work area.
• Provide space enclosures or a private office.
• Allow employees to play soothing music using headset.
• Increase natural lighting.
• Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment.
• Plan for uninterrupted work time.
• Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps.
• Restructure job to include only essential functions.
• Provide information and referral assistance with ability to manage child/grandchild care and elder care responsibilities through formal care networks/referrals.
• Offer flexible retirement options.
• Offer career development program for management/leadership.
• Educate on incorporating adult learning principles; build on making a connection with past learning and experience.
• Consider instruction by peer workers of same age.
• Arrange wellness days to inform workers about the value of exercise, diet, lifestyle choices, and work-life balance.
• Make other employees aware of the value of hiring and retaining older workers.
• Have older workers mentor younger employees.
• Have an expert on aging talk to employees.
• Encourage employee feedback on aging issues by surveying employees and listening to concerns or suggestions.

Adapted from Bal and Visser (2011); Koopman-Boyden and MacDonald (2003); Loy (2011); and Work Safe Alberta (2006).

From: Melillo, K.D. (2013).
Cognitive health and older
workers: Policy implications.
JGN, 39(6), 13-18.



Intrapersonal

Areas for Investigation

- Assessment of individual physical and mental health and its effect on cognitive well-being and learning
- Family history of cognitive loss, genetic predisposition
- Response to life stressors
- Life style habits

Interpersonal

Areas for Investigation

- Family caregiving stress and responsibilities
- Social support
- Job stress
- Work life balance
- Socioeconomic status
- Culture and ethnicity

Institutional

Areas for Investigation

- Work place health programs
- Physical work environment
- Psychosocial work environment
- Learning environment
- Shift work
- Safety climate & safety culture
- Policies to protect workers' safety, health, and well-being
- Cost-effectiveness of workplace safety & health programs
- Management philosophies

Community

Areas for Investigation

- Access to physical activity resources
- Media campaigns for promoting well being
- Community access to healthy food choices

Public Policy

Areas for Investigation

- Administration on Aging
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- National Institute on Aging
- National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- AARP
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
- Executive Office of Elder Affairs (Mass Gov.)
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Community-Engaged Research

Promoting Interprofessional Collaboration

- Healthy workplaces: A WHO global model for action
Five keys to healthy workplaces identified:
 1. Leadership commitment and engagement
 2. Involve workers and their representatives
 3. Business ethics and legality
 4. Use a systematic, comprehensive process to ensure effectiveness and continual improvement
 5. Sustainability and integration

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Questions?

Promoting Cognitive Health in the Workplace



References

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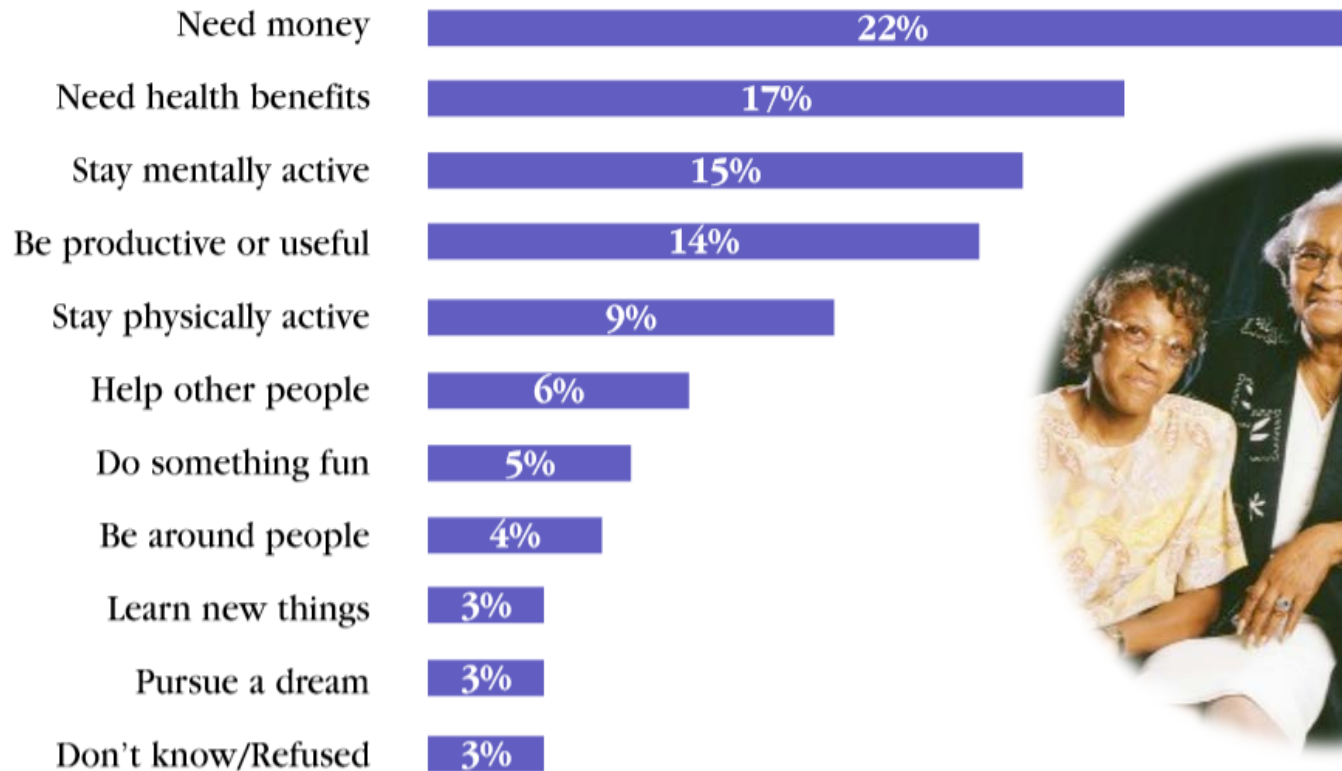
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