Retirees' Participation in Bridge Employment and Psychological Distress: The Mediating and Moderating Effects of Social Support

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Abstract

Many people who retire from long-term career jobs now seek bridge employment before completely exiting the labor force. However, little attempt has been made to understand whether participation in post-retirement employment is associated with better psychological well-being and what motivates retirees to participate in post-retirement employment. The purpose of this study is threefold: 1) to examine whether retirees' participation in bridge employment status is associated with psychological distress; 2) to determine whether social support from friends mediates the relationship between retirees' employment status and their psychological distress; and 3) to determine whether social support from spouse, family or friends moderates the relationship between retirees' employment status and their psychological distress. Data from the 2004 National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP) was used for analysis. Results indicate that retirees engaged in paid work have lower psychological distress than those not working. However, the difference in psychological distress is largely a function of differences in educational achievement, wealth, and disability. Perceived support from friends is both a mediator and moderator of the relationship between retirees' employment status and their psychological distress.

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I would like to dedicate this paper to all those who are retiring and about to retire. I hope that this paper can contribute to positive change that is needed in policy to help people get adjusted to being retired.

INTRODUCTION

People are living longer than ever before and are remaining healthy for longer periods of their lives (Crimmins et al 1989). The median age of population in developed world is expected to reach to 45 years in 2050 (Bongaarts 2004). This potent demographic trend creates a series of social problems such as labor supply concerns, intergenerational relationships, increased healthcare cost, and social and private income security problems. In response the labor supply shortages, the government of United States, other nations and extraterritorial organizations are striving to increase rates of participation among older workers in the work force (Cooke 2006). In the United States, many people now participate in post-retirement employment after retiring from their career jobs (Cahill et al. 2006). About 50 percent of men and 65 percent of women aged 65 and older work for pay after retiring from their career employment (Cahill et al 2011; Quinn and Kozy 1996). Participation in bridge employment is increasingly advocated as an alternative to full retirement that may help retirees to supplement their income, avoid the sudden loss of work-based social networks, develop new networks before losing contact with colleagues, and maintain continuity and routine (Goldberg 2002; Kim and Feldman 2000; Kim and Moen 2002; Latulippe and Turner 2000; Shaw et al. 1990). In theory, the benefits of participating in post-retirement employment should lead to a decrease in one's psychological distress; however, there is little evidence to suggest that participating in post-retirement employment actually leads to better psychological outcomes for retirees (De Vaus et al. 2007). The sparse research that has been conducted has produced mixed results. Therefore, this paper will examine whether working for pay after retirement is actually associated with lower levels of psychological distress.

Past research shows that one of the reasons retirees feel more distressed after retirement is due to the loss of social support they previously had while working (Hardy 1991). This suggests that people's transition to retirement is not experienced independently from others. People's life events and transitions are lived interdependently, as stressed by the life course framework (Elder 1995). For the same reason, literature on social support and the well-being of retirees often focuses on retirees

providing care work and social support for other family members (Kim and Moen 2001; O'Rand and Farkas 2002; Van Solinge and Henkens 2008). However, researchers have not studied whether or not retirees' mental health is influenced by the amount of *perceived* social support they receive from others. The retirees' perception of social support received from others is very important in determining their psychological well-being (Thoits 2011). During the transition to retirement, workers may need support from others because they are losing contact with colleagues (Wheaton 1990). Therefore, it is important to study whether going back to work increases retirees' social support and decreases their distress—a mediating effect of social support.

Social support has been shown to be an important predictor of health (Thoits 2011). However, documentation of the moderating effects of social support on elders' health during stressful events and transitions is less consistent (Cobb 1976; Cohen and Wills 1985). This is partially due to the various conceptualizations of social support. Amongst different types of support, high levels of perceived support are the strongest predictors of better mental health. Therefore, this study will examine whether perceived social support from a spouse, family members or friends moderates the difference in distress experienced by retirees participating in bridge employment compared to those who do not.

Bridge Employment and Mental Health

Studies of the transition to retirement have found that retirees are more distressed than currently employed workers for three main reasons: retirees are unable to support themselves financially after retiring; retirees report that they have lost their work identity; and retirees have lost their social network and social support from work (Goldberg 2002; Kim and Feldman 2000; Kim and Moen 2002; Latulippe and Turner 2000; Shaw et al. 1998; Wheaton 1990). Although many studies examine retirement as a transition from working full-time to being retired full-time (Dannefer 1984; Kim and Moen 2001; Moen 1996; O'Rand and Farkas 2002; Shultz et al. 1998; Van Solinge and Henkens 2008; Wang 2007), they are criticized for not taking bridge employment into consideration (Feldman 1994;

Shultz 2003; Shults and Adams 2007; Weckerle et al. 1999). Nevertheless, the theoretical frameworks used in studying the transition to retirement can also be used in studying bridge employment since they all concern the retirement process.

Two main theoretical perspectives worth examining for bridge employment are the continuity theory and the life course perspective. According to continuity theory (Atchley 1989), retirees benefit greatly from participating in bridge employment (Von Bonsorff et al. 2009). Continuity theorists see bridge employment as an opportunity to provide a stable income and keep the social contacts and social network after full-time employment. Bridge employment is widely thought to be a gradual exit from the workforce that helps retirees supplement their income, avoids the sudden loss of work-based social networks, develops new networks before losing contact with colleagues, and maintains continuity and routine (Goldberg 2002; Kim and Moen 2002; Kim and Feldman 2000; Latulippe and Turner 2000; Shaw et al. 1990).

According to the life course perspective (Elder 1995), the retirement experience is influenced by previous events and trajectories in one's life course. The life course framework views lives in terms of interdependence. Social interdependence of human life refers to the interactive social worlds and networks that connect individuals and their life experience to broader changes in society. In addition, a transition in one's life is influenced by one's previous trajectory. The life course perspective emphasizes the influence of individual attributes, job-related psychological variables and family-related variables in retirement (Wang et al. 2008).

Empirical Findings

Continuity theory tends to view bridge employment as preferable to full retirement, but there is surprisingly little research that evaluates the health benefits of bridge employment. There are no conclusive findings on whether post-retirement employment makes people happier or is associated with lower levels of psychological distress. Kim and Feldman (2000) and Luoh and Herzog (2002) found

that participation in bridge employment is associated with greater post-retirement life satisfaction among retired professors and retired professionals. Their conclusion does not confirm that working after retirement is beneficial to all people; it only confirms that bridge employment increases life satisfaction among these professionals. This may be evidence for the life course perspective, which connects retirement satisfaction to pre-retirement job status and career trajectories. Other studies have found that bridge employment has little independent effect on life satisfaction. For example, Reitzes and Mutran (2004) found that after six months up to two years of retirement, there was no difference between retirees who participated in post-retirement employment and those who did not when examining the prevalence of positive post-retirement attitudes. De Vaus and colleagues (2007) examined the health effects of participation in bridge employment and found that, for most health outcomes, there are no differences between retirees who participated in bridge employment and retirees who did not. Because of the varied findings of previous studies, this paper examines whether retirees with paid jobs have lower psychological distress than retirees without paid jobs.

A key issue regarding retirement and health is *why* people choose to go back to work after they have retired. Many researchers view financial necessity as the main reason retirees go back to work (Chen and Scott 2003; O'Rand and Farkas 2002; Purcell 2005; Van Solinge and Henkens 2007). According to continuity theory, having income allows retirees to have a relatively smooth adjustment to retirement (Van Bondorff et al. 2009). As a result, working in post-retirement employment removes a part of the financial stress that many retirees experience. Other research shows that people with low-level jobs tend to dislike their jobs due to their hazardous work environments, and thereby experience better, not worse, health outcomes after retirement (Bacharach et al. 2007; Wheaton 1990). Thus, people with low-level jobs often prefer to remain retired instead of participating in post-retirement employment. There is also the possibility workers with low-level jobs cannot find post-retirement jobs due to their disabling injuries from previous work experience (Amick et al. 2002) or discrimination of elderly workers in blue collar work environments(Settersten 1998). Nevertheless, Purcell (2007) argues

that workers with low-level jobs often need the extra income of post-retirement employment that they are willing to take jobs that they do not enjoy.

Conversely, other research has found that people with higher education, stable work trajectories, professional jobs, and better health are more likely to work after retirement than people with lower levels of education, unskilled jobs and blue-collar jobs (Ruhm 1990; Hardy 1991). The life course perspective would conceive these to be examples of early life experiences and trajectories shaping workers' experiences in later in life. In other words, workers' previous work trajectories and life experiences shape how well they adjust to being retired, their psychological well-being after retirement, and whether they decide to work after retirement. Bridge employment will not influence workers' well-being. Workers with higher education are more likely to find professional jobs and stable work trajectories than workers with lower levels of education. These jobs are also equipped with amiable work environments preventing exposure to harsh physical labor and physically demanding tasks (Flippen and Tiend 2000). Over time, workers who have high levels of education will accumulate more wealth and more positive work experience than workers with low-level jobs. Due to their relatively healthy work environment, workers with high SES have also avoided the accumulation of health problems. At the time of retirement, workers with high socioeconomic status are more likely to be in good health to work again. In addition, Mutchler and colleagues (1997) found that people with stable work trajectories and professional jobs are more likely to enjoy a high level of autonomy and power at work, thereby enhancing their work identity. Therefore, they prefer to go back to work again after retirement to retain their work identity. Workers with high socioeconomic status may prefer to go back to work mainly for reasons of self-fulfillment and a greater social network.

Thus, the two theoretical perspectives point to different interpretations of *the effect of* bridge employment on retirees' psychological distress. Some researchers argue that people participate in bridge employment due to financial necessity. Other researchers argue that people who participate in bridge employment tend to be highly educated people with professional jobs who go back to work for

self-fulfillment. It is unlikely that the most highly educated workers with professional jobs are also workers with the most financial necessity. Therefore, we will examine and compare the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of retirees who participate and retirees who do not participate in post-retirement employment.

Social Support as a Mediator

The life course perspective sees retirement as a transition that not only influences retirees, but also others around them. For this reason, most research has focused on how providing care to family members influences the psychological well-being of retirees (Moen 1996; Van Solinge et al. 2007). However, researchers have not studied whether or not retirees' mental health is influenced by the amount of *perceived* social support they receive from others. Since one of the reasons retirees feel more distress after retirement is the loss of social support they previously had while working (Wheaton 1990), it seems reasonable to study social support as a mediator of psychological distress among retirees of different employment status.

Social support as a mediator should minimize or prevent illness in the face of stress (George 1993). In the transition to retirement, social support may act as a pathway that connects exposure to stress related to adjustment in retirement to distress. However, not all sources of support may act as a mediator (Bossé et al. 1993). In the literature on retirement, support from friends and colleagues support are thought to be effective mediators of distress (Bossé et al. 1993; Nahum-Shani and Bamberger 2011). The level of perceived support from friends is different for workers and retirees; people who work full-time are in contact with a wider network of social support compared to retirees. Conversely, spousal support and family support are unlikely to be mediators because the level of perceived support from spouse and family members will not change based on the retirees' employment status. In other words, not all sources of social support will be an effective mediator in all situations.

The effectiveness of a mediator largely depends on whether the source of stress is associated with the source of social support.

Most research suggests that retirees experience a decline in social support due to the loss of formal co-workers, confidants, friends, and associates (Cozijnsen 2010). When individuals enjoy their jobs and have positive relations with their colleagues, the loss of social support may increase individuals' distress (Mutran and Reitzes 1981). Conversely, other research finds that a loss of social support from undesirable sources might lead to health-promoting behaviour. Bacharach and colleagues (2007) report that retirement from blue-collar jobs provided individuals a kind of "relief" from permissive drinking environments that were prevalent in the workforce. As a result, alcoholism decreased through the mediation of low levels of social support from colleagues. The difference in findings is largely due to the different conceptualization of social support. Most research that conceptualizes social support as positive and supportive generally finds that a low level of perceived social support is associated with more psychological distress and an increase in health problems.

Researchers have found that retirees cope with the loss of colleague and friend support by joining community activities, volunteer groups and making new friends (Carr and Kail 2012; Palmore et al. 1979; Reitzes and Mutran 2004). Also, Cozijnsen (2010) has found that some retirees try to maintain work-related relationships as friends following retirement. Going back to the paid labor force may be another way of compensating for the lost social support from colleagues and friends. However, there is little to no research on whether going back to work is correlated with higher levels of friend support and whether friend support can act as a mediator.

Social Support as a Moderator

An extensive body of research shows that social support is an important predictor of good physical and mental health, life satisfaction, and reduced risk of institutionalization among older adults (Cohen 2004; House and Landis 1988; Turner and Turner 2013; Uchino 2009; Yang 2006). Social

support as a moderator is supposed to affect the direction and/or strength of the relationship between retirees' employment status and psychological distress. There are, however, inconsistent findings regarding the effectiveness of social support as a moderator of the relationship between stress and distress. These inconsistencies are due largely to limitations in the variety of conceptualizations of social support used in empirical research. Sometimes, social support, originally a positive concept, is often confused with negative social interaction (Nimrod 2008). Thoits (1995) suggests that the "dark side" of social relationships should not be included as negative social support. In addition, many different types of social support, such as instrumental support, emotional support, informational support, perceived support and actual support, have been identified (Turner and Turner 2013). A review of previous studies shows that perceived social support is fundamental to the relationship between stressful situations and distress among older adults (Thoits 2011).

A recent review of the literature shows that the effectiveness of support such as love, care and sympathy are most effective at buffering stress when coming from close family members and spouse, while validations of feelings, advice and role modeling are most helpful coming from friends and colleagues (Thoits 2011). Therefore, the efficacy of social support as a moderator is dependent on who in the network is supplying what type of social support. In addition, Thoits (1995; 2011) suggests that the source of the stressor also influences whether distress can be moderated by social support. If the source of social support is the same as that of the stressor, then there may not be any moderation.

Although research has found contradictory evidence for the effectiveness of the buffering that social support has on work stress such as unemployment, it has not examined whether access to social support might buffer the relationship of the employment status of retirees and their mental health (Gore 1978). Since there is a large number of retirees who now participate in bridge employment, it is valuable to examine whether social support from spouse, family and friends are more important for retirees with paid jobs than retirees without paid jobs.

METHODS

Data

I analyze data from the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project (NSHAP), a nationally representative probability sample of 3,005 community-based individuals between the ages of 57 and 85 living in the United States screened in 2004. I selected this dataset because there is a large number of respondents who are retired and there are questions that ask retirees about their post-retirement employment status. In addition, the NSHAP is modeled after the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a study that is used in most research regarding health and retirement. Several questions in the NSHAP are similar to those in the HRS. The NSHAP is different from the HRS in that the NSHAP asks respondents about their perceived social support, but the HRS does not. In addition, the NSHAP oversampled African Americans, Latinos, and men.

I restrict the analytic sample to respondents between the ages of 57 and 74 to focus on the population around the ages when people are experiencing the transition to retirement or bridge employment. Among the 2,112 respondents in the selected age group, 54 percent (1,138) define themselves as retirees. I exclude 36 percent of the respondents because of missing data on the household asset variable. The final analytic sample is 726 retirees.

MEASURES

Psychological distress. The outcome variable of this study is psychological distress. It is measured by 11 items from the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies - Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff 1977). The items of the scale are included in the Appendix. The CES-D is one of the most widely used measures of psychological distress (Moen 1996). Among retirees in this study, Cronbach's alpha for

this version of the CES-D is .80, reflecting high internal consistency. Scores on the CES-D can range from 11 to 44, 11 indicating no feelings of distress and 44 indicating extremely high levels of psychological distress.

Post-retirement employment status. The key independent variable of our study is post-retirement employment status. Although most researchers use respondents' self-reports of retirement status (Kim and Moen 2001; McCubbin et al. 1980), I distinguish between respondents' self-reports of retirement and their official employment status as of the previous week. Thus, I categorize retirees into two groups: those who are not engaged in paid work (full retirees) and those who are engaged in paid work (partial retirees).

Social support. Social support is a key mediator and moderator in our study. It refers to the perception of received support, which has been found to be an important predictor for well-being (Antonucci 2001; Buckley et al. 2000; Lin et al. 1999; Wethington and Kessler 1986). The NSHAP dataset includes a 12-item measure of perceived social support. I constructed three indices based on the source of support: spousal, family, and friend. Distinguishing among these three sources of support is a common strategy in other studies of perceived positive emotional support (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987; Lee et al. 2004). For each source, respondents were asked how often they 'open up to' and 'rely on' the source of support; how often the source 'makes too many demands'; and how often the source 'criticizes the respondent'. A five-point scale was employed for each item, ranging from 'none of the time' to 'all of the time'. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for spousal support, family support and friend support are .56, .44 and .41, respectively. It is likely that these low values are a function of the small number of items in each index. Other papers that focus on perceived social support typically include 10 questions or more per scale (for example: Lin et al. 1999; Yang 2006).

Control variables. Age is measured in years and ranges from 57 to 74. Gender is coded dichotomously. Race/ethnicity is measured with four dummy variables: "white"; "black"; "Hispanic"; and "other". Education is coded into four categories: less than high school diploma; graduated high

school; attended vocational school or college; or completed university degree. Household income is coded as the natural log of the actual dollar amounts. Household total assets/wealth or net worth includes the value of an owned home, cars, other rental properties and businesses, and financial assets such as savings accounts, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and pensions after accounting for loans yet to be paid off. Total wealth/asset is also coded as the natural log of the actual dollars amount. Disability status is measured by seven items from the Activities of Daily Living (ADL), then coded dichotomously into disabled = 0; not disabled = 1. More details about these items are included in the Appendix.

ANALYSIS

This study uses ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to test the association between post-retirement work status and psychological distress.

First, I estimate the association between retirees' employment status and their levels of psychological distress without control variables. Then, I re-estimate the relationship between employment status and distress controlling for a number of demographic and socioeconomic factors. Third, I estimate whether perceived support from friends *mediates* the relationship between retirees' employment status and their levels of psychological distress. Last, I estimate whether support from spouse, family, or friends *moderates* the relationship between retirees' employment status and their level of psychological distress. All analyses were computed with SPSS version 20.0.

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the analytic sample and the subsamples of respondents engaged and not engaged in paid work. In the sample of 722 retirees, 78 percent (584) of the respondents are fully retired and 22 percent (138) are partially retired. It is important to keep in mind that this percentage is not the total percentage of retirees who have ever participated in paid work;

longitudinal research using the HRS has shown that at least 60 percent of workers will participate in bridge jobs before full retirement sometime in their life (Cadhill et al. 2006). Since the analysis utilizes only cross-sectional data, it only indicates the percentage of retirees who are working for pay in the year 2004, not whether people have ever participated in post-retirement employment in their life time.

The first row shows the mean level of psychological distress for all retirees and those engaged and not engaged in paid work after retirement. The mean CES-D score is 15.85 within the range of 11 to 44. Retirees engaged in paid work have significantly lower distress (mean 15.03) than those who are not working (16.03). Although retirees who do not work for pay have slightly higher levels of perceived social support from spouse, family and friends than retirees who do work for pay, none of these differences is significant.

There are significant differences by gender and age in the working and non-working samples. Retirees who work for pay are more likely to be males. Retirees engaged in paid work are 1.5 years younger on average than retirees not engaged in paid work. Also, retirees who work for pay tend to be better educated than retirees who are fully retired. A larger percentage of university graduates and smaller percentage of high school graduates work for pay after retirement. Retirees who work for pay have higher household incomes than retirees who do not work for pay. Retirees working for pay are largely concentrated in the top two quartiles whereas retirees not working for pay are largely concentrated in the bottom two quartiles of household income.

Another variable that is thought to influence people's decision to go back to work after retirement is disability (Van Solinge and Henkens 2008). We tested a total of seven measures of functional health in the NSHAP (whether retirees have any difficulty eating, bathing, dressing, using the toilet, walking across the room, walking a block, getting in and out of bed). Seventeen percent of all retirees are disabled; 14 percent of the retirees working for pay versus 18 percent of the retirees working for pay.

Retirees' Employment Status and Psychological Distress

Table 2 tests whether retirees engaged in paid work have lower levels of psychological distress than retirees not engaged in paid work, and whether the difference in distress level by employment status remains significant when controlling for demographic and socioeconomic variables. Table 2 presents unstandardized coefficients from OLS regression models predicting psychological distress among retirees with demographic variables and socioeconomic status controlled. Results from Model 1 show that retirees working for pay are significantly less distressed than retirees not working for pay (by an average of 1.05 points on a scale that ranges from 11 to 44).

In Model 2, I control for demographic characteristics to test whether the focal relationship remains significant. I find that there are differences by ethnicity in the average levels of distress, but that this does not change the differences in distress by work status. Model 3 tests whether the significant relationship between retiree's employment status and CES-D scores persists when education has been added as a control variable. Achieving high levels of education is significantly correlated with lower levels of psychological distress. Completing high school, vocational college, or university is related to a significant decrease in distress of more than two points. More importantly, education accounts for the status difference in reports of distressful symptoms. The significant association between employment status of retirees and CES-D scores disappears when education is included. In addition, the coefficient decreases by 20 percent when education is controlled. Model 4 tests whether the significant relationship between retirees' employment status and CES-D remains the same when wealth instead of education is controlled. Having more wealth significantly decreases respondents' reports of psychological distress. For every percentage increase in wealth, there is a 0.5 point decrease in the CES-D score. Similar to education, wealth also makes a contribution in accounting for the status difference in reports of symptoms of distress.

In Model 5, I added all the relevant variables to test whether there is a significant difference in distress between the two groups of retirees. There is no significant difference in CES-D for retirees of

different employment status after controlling for age, gender, education, wealth and disability status. Education, wealth and disability status remain significantly correlated with distressful symptoms. This could mean that the differences in distress are not due to differences in work status at all, but rather to differences in education, wealth and functional limitations.

Mediating Effect of Friend Support

Table 3 shows the association between retirees' employment status, CES-D scores and perceived support from friends. In Model 1 of Table 3, I present the results of the initial regression estimating the association between retirees' employment status and level of distress without any control variables. In Model 2, I add friend support as a mediating variable. A high level of support from friends is significantly correlated with low levels of depressive symptoms. A one point increase in perceived support from friends is associated with a .53 point decrease in CES-D scores. More importantly, friend support is a weak mediator of the difference in CES-D scores between retirees of different employment status.

Model 3 tests whether the mediation effect still exists when control variables are added. The results reveal that there is no longer a significant difference in CES-D scores between retirees of different employment status; therefore, no mediation can exist. It appears that education, wealth and disability status account for the difference in CES-D scores. The model shows that retirees working for pay are more highly educated, wealthier and healthier which explains their better mental health. The retirees engaged in paid work also derive some mental satisfaction from their support from friends.

Moderating Effect of Spousal Support, Family Support and Friend Support

Table 4 tests whether perceived spousal support, family support or friend support moderate the correlation between retirees' employment status and CES-D scores. Model 1 in Table 4 is the same as Model 1 in Tables 2 and 3, indicating that there is a negative correlation between retirees' employment

status and distress. Models 2 to 4 test the moderating effects of spousal support, family support and friend support, respectively. Model 2 reveals that perceived spousal support does not moderate the difference in CES-D between retirees of different employment status. Model 3 shows that family support is not a significant moderator of the correlation between retirees' employment status and psychological distress. Model 4 indicates that perceived support from friends significantly moderates the association between retirees' employment status and their level of distress.

Figure 2 graphs this interaction in Model 4 by plotting the predicted distress for partial retirees and full retirees for three values of friend support values (-1SD, Mean, and +1SD). The actual values of friend support used in this graph are 8.64, 10.02, and 11.4, respectively. This graph shows that at low levels of perceived support from friends, retirees engaging in paid work have slightly higher CES-D scores than retirees not engaging in paid work. However, at a high level of perceived support from friends, retirees not engaged in paid work have significantly higher CES-D scores than retirees engaged in paid work.

Model 5 in Table 4 adds all the control variables. The results show that perceived support from friends is the only statistically significant moderator of the relationship between retiree's employment status and their levels of psychological distress.

DISCUSSION

This study has three main objectives: to examine the association between retirees' employment status and psychological distress; to examine whether perceived support from friends *mediates* the relationship between retirees' employment status and their levels of psychological distress; and to examine whether spousal support, family support or friend support *moderates* the relationship between retirees' employment status and their level of psychological distress.

One key finding is that retirees engaged in paid work have lower distress than those not working and that the difference is largely a function of differences in educational achievement, wealth,

and disability. Higher levels of education and wealth and lower levels of disability are each associated with both higher participation rates in post-retirement employment and lower psychological distress. This means that retirees who work after retirement are not the least well-off retirees. Rather, they tend to be well-educated, healthy and relatively well off compared to retirees who do not work for pay. This finding provides evidence contradicting the argument of Purcell (2007) and Van Solinge and Henkens (2007), who argued that most retirees work out of financial necessity. Although, there is a possibility that even workers who are well off may feel that they do not have enough liquid assets to support the same kind of lifestyle they had before retirement, this study reveals that there may be important motivations other than financial necessity that encourage retirees to return to work. These results reaffirm Hardy's (1991) finding that retirees who work after retirement tend to be highly educated and have had professional jobs.

These analyses suggest that the decision to go back to work is largely a selection effect based on the retirees' previous experiences in the workplace and educational institutions. It may be that retirees select themselves into bridge employment based on whether they liked their jobs before retirement and whether they are healthy enough to work. One main motivation for retirees to go back to the labor force may be how much the retirees liked their jobs before retirement. Although this study only shows that retirees who are better off financially and well educated are more likely to continue to work for pay, past studies show that wealthy and highly educated people tend to enjoy working (Hardy 1991; Wheaton 1990). People with high SES tend to like working is largely because their jobs provide intrinsic satisfaction, healthy work environment, rewarding tasks and high levels of autonomy (Wheaton 1990). Combining the current findings with the past results, it is reasonable to suggest that one of the main reasons for retirees returning to work is that they miss their work identity and the sense of fulfillment that their previous jobs gave them. This study also found that people with lower levels of education and wealth and high levels of disability are less likely to participate in post-retirement employment. Flippen and Tienda (2000) have found similar results. They report that people with low

SES are less likely to enjoy their jobs because of the harsh environments that are often associated with low-level jobs. In addition, working in harsh environments and physically demanding jobs often leads to the accumulation of disabling health conditions (Flippen and Tienda 2000). Thus, workers with manual labor or semi-skilled jobs are more likely to have physical disabilities at a younger age than workers with professional jobs.

In the current study, disability is one of the factors associated with a lower probability of returning to work after retirement. It appears that people opt into or out of post-retirement employment based on whether they enjoyed working before retirement and whether they are healthy enough to work. This finding seems consistent with the life course perspective, which argues that events or transitions experienced earlier in life affect subsequent life course patterns (George 1993). In this case, working in a challenging environment for a long period of time may take a toll on the worker's physical health and, as a result, their decision to return to work after retirement is constrained by their prior work experiences.

The second research question concerned the mediation effect of friend support. The analysis showed that perceived support from friends is a weak mediator of the association between the employment status of retirees and their psychological distress. This finding reaffirms past research that found a mediating effect of social support on retirees experiencing the transition to retirement (Bossé 1993). Previous studies reported that the transition to retirement decreases people's level of support from colleagues, thus increasing one's level of psychological distress (Bossé 1993). This study shows that going back to work is associated with high levels of perceived support from friends and low levels of psychological distress.

The third research question examined the moderation effects of spousal support, family support and friend support. The results show that there is a robust moderating effect of support from friends on the relationship between retirees' employment status and their psychological well-being. At low levels of friend support—retirees who work after retirement are slightly more distressed than retirees who do

not work. However, with high levels of social support, retirees who work for pay are much less likely to be distressed than retirees who do not work. This might suggest that perceived support from friends is more important to retirees engaging in paid work than retirees not engaging in paid work. Retirees engaging in paid work might be more social than retirees not engaged in paid work; thus a high level of perceived friend support is more important for their psychological well-being. Therefore, a high level of friend support does not decrease the distress felt by the retirees who do not participate in paid employment. Moreover, since retirees engaged in paid employment tend to be in contact with a larger network of people outside their families, support from friends might play a larger role in their lives and, therefore, exert more influence on their psychological well-being.

Although friend support has a strong moderating effect, spousal support and family support do not have moderating effect on the focal relationship. In other words, only social support from outside the family is able to moderate the distress related to the employment status of retirees. This result reaffirms LaRocco and colleagues' (1980) finding that differences sources of support have differential effects on different variables and relationship. They argued that work-related stresses and strains are affected primarily by work-related sources of support and family stresses are more affected by sources of support in the family. In this study, distress experienced by retirees of different employment status is only moderated through friend support, which may include colleague support and friend support. Nevertheless, both friend support and colleague of support are sources from out side the family.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this study is the use of cross-sectional data, which does not allow for any inferences regarding causality between retirees' employment status and their psychological distress (Podsakoff and Orga 1986). It is not possible with cross-sectional data to determine whether working after retirement decreases the psychological distress experienced by retirees, or if retirees with less psychological distress tend to work after retirement. In addition, cross-sectional data cannot

differentiate age effects from cohort effects. Since the retirees in this sample were born between 1931 and 1948, it is likely that they had very different education and career trajectories, which in turn influenced their wealth and health status after retirement. Future studies should use longitudinal data that would make it possible to address more complex issues regarding bridge employment and psychological well-being. Obtaining longitudinal data would allow for the exclusion of period and cohort effects, which might have had an effect on the results of this study.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of survey questions asking why some retirees chose to return to paid employment while others did not. Future research should focus more on the motivations of employees returning to work.

Another limitation of this study is that there is no differentiation between support from friends and support from colleagues. Future studies should distinguish between support from friends and support from colleagues in the workplace as well as between support from old friends and ex-colleagues, and new friends and new colleagues. These distinctions might clarify which sources of perceived support are more important for retirees' well-being.

Finally, sample selection bias is present due to the deletion of 36 percent of the sample with missing data on wealth. This bias can be addressed through the use of multiple imputations in future analyses.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper suggests that workers are often selected into post-retirement employment based on their previous work experience and disability status. Contrary to previous beliefs suggesting that most retirees return to work due to financial necessity, this study finds that retirees who are selected into post-retirement employment generally have high net worth and are living without disabilities. It is unlikely that retirees with the highest net worth are working for pay due to financial necessity. Therefore, there must be other motivations encouraging retirees to return to the work force. According

to Flippen and Tienda (2000), people with high net worth also tend to have professional jobs that they enjoy. Combining past research with the current findings, it is possible to conclude that workers with professional jobs are more likely to return to the workforce after retirement due to their positive work experiences before retirement. These results reaffirm the life course perspective that suggests events or transitions experienced earlier in life affect subsequent life patterns (George 1993). Workers who have had intrinsically rewarding jobs are more motivated to return to the labor force. Also, a safe working environment that is characteristic of the professional jobs prevents the erosion of the workers' physical health over their entire work trajectory, thereby increasing the likelihood of them returning to the labor force after retirement.

These results have implications for policies promoting participation in bridge employment. Since retirees tend to select themselves in or out of post-retirement employment, it is difficult for policymakers to govern workers' decision to return to the work force. After all, disabled workers and unwilling workers cannot be forced back into the labor force. Therefore, to attract more retirees to participate in post-retirement employment, policies should focus on improving the workplace safety, organizational culture as well as providing more intrinsically rewarding jobs and less physically demanding jobs for older people. Also, instead of simply encouraging retirees to return to the work force after retirement, long-term policies need to protect workers' well-being and improve people's work experience over their entire life course. Policymakers should especially focus on improving of work environment for lower level jobs so that they are less damaging to workers' health, this would decrease workers' chance of being selected out of post-retirement employment due to disabilities.

APPENDIX

Notes:

1. CES-D score is measured through the sum the respondent's score on 11 questions. The survey asks the respondents about their levels of distress in the past week on: I did not feel like eating, I felt depressed, I felt that everything was an effort, my sleep was restless, I felt lonely, people were unfriendly, I felt sad, I felt that people disliked me, and I could not get "going", I was happy (reverse scored) and I enjoyed life (reverse scored). The answers were structured with four options of rarely or none of the time, some of the time, occasionally and most of the times. The scores are added together to determine their total CES-D scores. The scores range from 11 to 44, 11 being the least distresses and 44 being the most distressed.

2. Activities of Daily Living or functional health is measured through how much difficulty the respondent have in doing 7 activities. The activities include walking one block, walking across the room, difficulty dressing, difficulty bathing or showering, difficulty eating, difficulty getting in or out of bed, and difficulty using the toilet. The respondents have four choices: no difficulty, some difficulty, much difficulty and unable to do. When the respondent choose no difficulty doing all the tasks they are coded as being not disabled. When the respondent choose having some difficulty or more doing one or more of the tasks, they are coded as being disabled.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Post-Retirement Employment Status (Source: NSHAP, N=1138)

	Overall (n=722)		Not engaged in Paid Work (n=584)		Engaged in paid work (n=138)
	Mean(SD)/Percentage		Mean(SD)/Percentage		Mean(SD)/Percentage
Dependent Variable					
CES-D	15.85 (4.90)		16.03 (5.03)	**	15.03 (4.02)
Social Support Variables					
Spousal support (range 4-12)	10.58 (1.47)		10.60 (1.46)		10.45 (1.53)
Family support (range 4-12)	10.29 (1.52)		10.32 (1.51)		10.15 (1.54)
Friend support (range 4-12)	10.07 (1.38)		10.09 (1.37)		9.98 (1.39)
Demographic Variables					
Age	67.24 (4.37)		65.98 (4.65)	***	67.50 (4.27)
% Male	54		51	***	68
% Female	46		49	***	32
% Have Spouse	69		68		74
% Do Not Have Spouse	31		32		26
Race/Ethnicity					
% White	72		69		77
% Black	18		19		16
% Hispanic	8		9		6
% Other Race	2		3		1
Socioeconomic Status					
Education					
% Did not Complete High School	18		19		12
% High School Graduate	26		28	**	19
% Vocational/College Graduate	32		31		36
% University Graduate	24		22	**	33
Income Quartiles					
% Bottom 25th Quartile (1-17 thousand)	26		27		21
% Bottom 50th Quartile (18-34 thousand)	32		34		24
% Top 50th Quartile (35-63 thousand)	23		21		29
% Top 25th Quartile (64-600 thousand)	19		18		27
Wealth Quartiles					
% Bottom 25th Quartile (1-54 thousand)	21		21		20
% Bottom 50th Quartile (55-195 thousand)	20		20		17
% Top 50th Quartile (204-455 thousand)	29		28		30
% Top 25th Quartile (500-15,000 thousand)	31		31		33
% Not Disabled	83		82		86
% Disabled	17		18		14

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

TABLE 2. Unstandardized Coefficient from OLS Regression Models Predicting Psychological Distress Among Retirees (Source: NSHAP, N=1138)

	1	2	3	4	5
Retirement & Pay Status (retired not paid)	-1.05**	-.90*	-.72	-.89	-0.72
	(.40)	(.40)	(.40)	(.45)	(.44)
Age		.11**	.07*	.04	0.02
		(.03)	(.03)	.04	(.04)
Female (Male)		.32	.28	.01	-.092
		(.30)	(.30)	(.36)	(.36)
Race (White)					
Black		.87*	.44	-.52	-0.68
		(.39)	(.39)	(.52)	(.52)
Hispanics		1.93***	.79	.65	0.51
		(.55)	(.57)	(.62)	(.63)
Other		.35	.53	-.48	-0.81
		(1.00)	(.98)	(1.12)	(1.10)
Education (less than high school)					
High School Graduate			-2.02***		-1.05
			(.48)		(.58)
Vocational/College Graduate			-2.32***		-0.53
			(.46)		(.58)
University Graduate			-2.95***		-1.26*
			(.49)		(.62)
Natural Log of Total Asset/Wealth				-.50***	-0.46***
				(.07)	(.08)
Disability Status					2.02***
					(0.37)
Constant	16.26	15.76	17.91	18.93	20.745
R Square	.01	.02	.05	.09	.14
Adjusted R Square	.01	.02	.05	.08	.12

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Note: CESD score ranges from 11 - 44

TABLE 3. Unstandardized Coefficient from OLS Regression Models Predicting CES-D of Retirees With Social Support as Mediating Factors (Source: NSHAP, N=1138)

	1	2	3
Retirees not engaged in paid work	-1.05**	-.89*	-0.52
	(.40)		(.44)
Friend Support		-.53***	-0.38**
		(.11)	(.12)
Age			0.03
			(.04)
Female (Male)			0.16
			(.36)
Race (White)			
Blacks			-0.56
			(.50)
Hispanics			-0.08
			(.67)
Others			-1.26
			(1.05)
Education (<High school)			
High School Completion			-.83
			(.60)
Vocational School			-0.61
			(.58)
Bachelor +			-1.21*
			(.63)
Natural Log of Total Asset/Wealth			-0.49***
			(.09)
Disability Status			1.84
			(.36)
Constant	16.26	21.49	23.50
R Square	.01	.03	.16
Adjusted R Square	.01	.03	.14

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

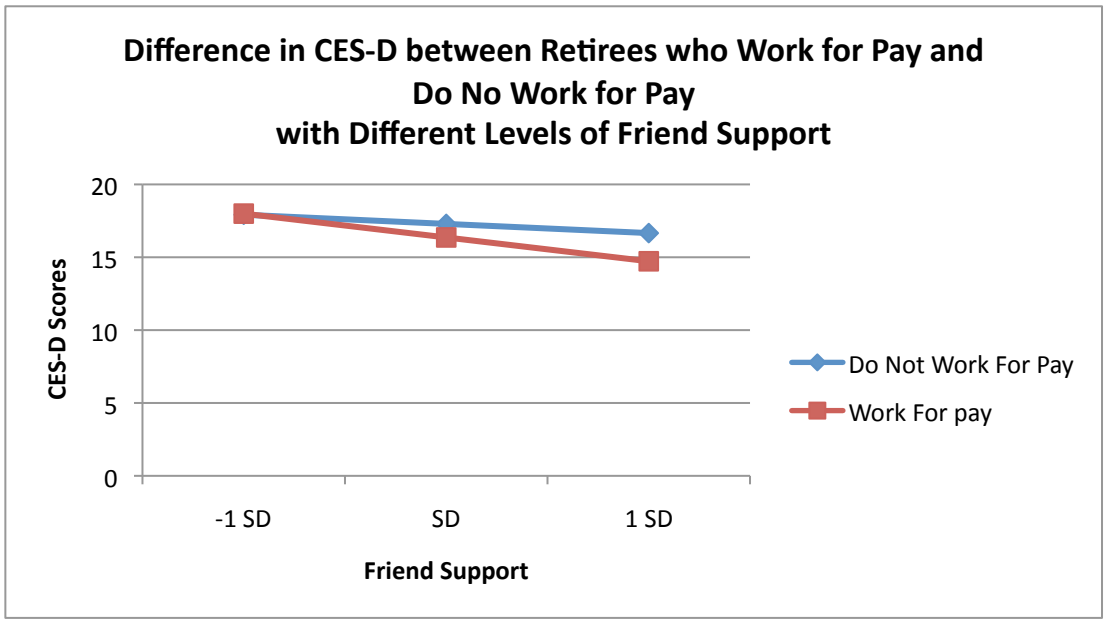
Note: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.

TABLE 4. Unstandardized Coefficient from OLS Regression Models Predicting CES-D of Retirees With Social Support as Moderating Factors (Source: NSHAP, N=1138)

	1	2	3	4	5
Retirees not engaged in paid work	-1.05**	-1.05**	1.37	5.77*	5.47
	(.40)	(.39)			(3.81)
Spouse/No Spouse		-1.46***			-.77*
		(.31)			(.44)
Spousal Support		-.86***			-.76***
		(.13)			(.16)
Retirees' Employment Status x Spousal Support		-.04			.10
		(.30)			(.45)
Family Support			-.65***		-.39*
			(.11)		(.42)
Retirees' Employment Status x Family Support			-.24		.21
			(.26)		(.14)
Friend Support				-.42**	-.06
				(.12)	(.31)
Retirees' Employment Status x Friend Support				-.67*	-.85*
				(.29)	(.15)
Age					-.02
					(.35)
Female (Male)					-.11
					(.38)
Race (White)					
Blacks					-1.01
					(.53)
Hispanics					-.93
					(.70)
Others					-1.17
					(1.07)
Education (<High school)					
High School Completion					-1.52*
					(.64)
Vocational School					-.89
					(.63)
Bachelor +					-1.35
					(.70)
Natural Log of Total Asset/Wealth					-.36***
					(.09)
Disability Status					1.72***
					.36
Constant	16.26	17.29	23.29	21.49	26.24
R Square	.01	.07	.05	.03	.22
Adjusted R Square	.01	.07	.05	.03	.20

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are standard errors.


Difference in CES-D between Retirees who Work for Pay and Do No Work for Pay with Different Levels of Friend Support
CES-D Scores
20
15
10
5
0
-1 SD
SD
1 SD
Friend Support
Do Not Work For Pay
Work For pay