The life course in qualitative research on work and retirement.

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Outline

- Theoretical approaches
- Strengths of qualitative methods in LCR
- Selected key areas of research
  - employment and retirement
- Example from GENDOWL
- Future Directions
Theoretical approaches

- Time and place: linked lives: human agency; timing.
  - trajectory; turning points; transitions (Elder, 1994, Giele & Elder, 1998):
- Life history approach (Bertaux, 1981)
- Institutional life course: (Kohli, 2009)
- Cumulative dis/advantage (Dannefer, 2003)
  - Dis/advantage becomes exacerbated over the life course
Strengths of qualitative methods in LCR

- A focus on meaning – how an individual worker understands and acts and his/her degree of agency (Hermanowicz, 2016)
- Links micro with meso and macro levels (Giele and Elder, 1998)
- Retrospective and prospective element: decision-making: can more fully and accurately inform future policy.
- Contextualises experience: linked lives – family; work organisation; health trajectory; policy environment
- Dynamic: attempts to understand changing processes eg in the economy or policy or in person’s own perspective
- Disadvantages: - recall bias (Fehring and Bessant, 2009) Unrepresentative.
Selected LCR on employment using qualitative methods

- Careers: single occupations (e.g. academics) (Hermanowicz, 2009, Davies & Jenkins, 2013, Ni Leime, 2016)
- Migration (Kou et al, 2015)
- Changing norms: paid/unpaid work – linked lives (Giele, 2004)
- Changing employment policies (Brumley, 2014)
- Paid vs unpaid caring work across the life course (MaloneBeach, 2004)
Selected themes in LCR on retirement- qualitative

- **Influences on retirement** (Davey, 2008)
- **Effects of social protection policies on career paths** (Verd and Lopez, 2011)
- **Race uplift work in retirement activities of retired African American professional women** (Slevin, 2004)
Key qualitative methods

- **Interviews:**
  - Life history (Bertaux, 1981)
  - Semi-structured (Davies & Jenkins, 2013, Breuning & Dixon, 2008)
  - Structured – large (longitudinal) surveys - reconstructing biographies from survey data (Heinz, 2003).

May be combined with:


- Life-lines
Gender, Older Workers and the Life-course

Policy change: extending working life

• Comparative policy (US and Ireland) (Ní Léime, and Street, 2016)
• Undifferentiated policies: *but* gender-differentiated life-courses
• Design: gender: health; precarity
• Purposive sample: 30 men; 30 women. 3 occupations
• Home health care workers; teachers; academics
• Interview and life history grid:
  – 4 parallel trajectories: education; work; family; health/other events
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Educational &amp; other qualifications or skills</th>
<th>Marriage Partnerships; Children; grandchildren</th>
<th>Periods of dependent children or other caring</th>
<th>Work history, type of work</th>
<th>Voluntary work/Hobbies</th>
<th>Other significant life events: major health events, location moves</th>
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What do qualitative methods add to this project?

• Patterns already identified in quantitative studies and policy analysis (Duvvury et al, 2012, Ni Leime & Street, 2016)

• Qualitative study allows closer access to the experiences, intentions and understandings of workers themselves

• Can identify constraints that affect people and the intersecting categories – those in physically demanding jobs tend to have poorer health and this can affect their ability to extend their working lives.

• Yet EWL policies treat all occupational groups in the same way

• Can inform whether and how policy needs to be modified.
Future directions

• Cross-nationally comparative research to assess policies and impact of welfare state regimes (Hagestad & Dykstra, 2016).

• Intra-cohort and inter-cohort variation: e.g. different occupations; (Hagestad and Dykstra, 2016)

• Health across the life course

• Intersectional studies: eg gender, age, race, class, ability etc

• Precarious employment; changing retirement policies


• Qual. methods: existing longitudinal studies: open-ended questions
References


References (contd.)


Thank you

Any Questions?