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The life course in qualitative research on work and retirement.

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NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

May 20, WAHE, 2016, 8.55am





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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



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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)
- Work-life balance (Bobat et al, 2012, Breuning & Dixon, 2008)
- Changing economic conditions: wage-earning women (Ames et al, 2006)
- 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

- Retirement: 1910 cohort (Allen and Pickett, 1987)
- 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 History Grids/Forms/Calendars (Allen & Pickett, 1987, Harris & Parisi, 2007). Occupational History Calendars (Duberley & Carmichael, 2016, Porcellato et al, 2014, Nico, 2016)
- 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



Timeline Grid (example)

Age	Educational & other qualifications or skills	Marriage Partnerships; Children; grandchildren	Periods of dependent children or other caring	Work history, type of work	Voluntary work/ Hobbies	Other significant life events: major health events, location moves
14-19						
20-29						
30-39						
40-49						
50-59						
60-69						
70 +						



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
- Mixed methods: quant. plus qual: sequential design (Vickerstaff, 2012, Verd and Lopez, 2011, Hagestad and Dykstra, 2016)
- Qual. methods: existing longitudinal studies: open-ended questions



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Thank you

Any Questions?

