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## ARTICLES IN ENGLISH

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### **PATHS OF EXTENDED EMPLOYMENT AMONG INTELLECTUAL AND CREATIVE WORKERS AGED 60 AND ABOVE**

This article explores the employment of people aged 60 and over. Participation in the labor market is one of the ways of inclusion in society and an important part of the concept of active aging. However, the Active Aging Index (AAI) is limited to measuring the number of employed elderly. In this regard, it overlooks the individual meanings, barriers, and inequalities that determine the pathways to extended (or terminated) employment beyond the retirement age. The development of flexible and remote work models, combined with digitalization, is creating new opportunities, although they often require new skills. We considered extended employment as a way to engage and realize the potential of older people. We are interested in how employment changes with age, what individual meanings it has, and what barriers arise. The study has shown that the employment of people of retirement age in intellectual and creative work is stable – these people do not problematize their retirement status and continue to work in the same positions. Nevertheless, the transformations of certain individual paths of the informants suggest that there is a changing and flexible employment, in which the usual format is substituted or supplemented with part-time work, project work and new forms of activity. For people over 60, the extension of employment has a complex meaning, including economic and psychosocial perspectives. The main barriers to extended employment are health and the need to care for family members. The issue of age discrimination is not relevant for older workers if they have a unique/rare set of skills or occupy positions that young people are not interested in. Where workers aged

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60 and over have experienced ageism, it has been distinctly exclusionary, ranging from dismissal or refusal of employment to pay cuts and reduced working hours. Intellectual and creative occupations require constant skill upgrading and self-education, which increases competitiveness but also exacerbates the inequalities. The development of technologies and remote work models (especially during the pandemic) has exacerbated the issue of digital inequality, especially for people in creative occupations, which previously did not suggest active use of new technologies.

*Keywords:* active aging, employment of older people, changing employment, ageism, inequality in the labor market

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Rapid changes in the sphere of employment caused by various factors lead to the fragility of employment, involving new processes and phenomena (Sizova, Grigorieva 2019). At the same time, with the increase in life expectancy and the rapid growth of the number of people over 60, including those who continue to work, we can talk about the restructuring of age limits and significant changes in the activities of older people. The possibility, the desire, and the necessity to continue working at old age, conditioned by economic reasons and the increase of the retirement age, constitute a certain demand on the state and society on behalf of older people. Governments are also interested in extending employment, mainly for economic reasons. The analysis of the corpus of policy documents on active aging in the EU shows that the issues of employment of older people are a priority for government institutions, and key actors emphasize the importance of extending employment and developing flexible forms of employment by reforming labor and retirement systems (López-López, Sánchez 2020). Studies on the labor market participation of different age groups of older people in developed countries confirm that the motivation for employment among older people depends to a large extent on retirement policies. Disincentives to early retirement (benefit cuts, higher retirement age) and incentives for extended employment (subsidies to employers and increased benefits at later retirement) correlate with increased labor market participation of older people (Börsch-Supan et al. 2021).

In the Russian context, the average period of employment after retirement is almost six years (Russian Federal State Statistics Service – Rosstat 2020). The share of employed older people has been increasing over the last decade, which can be considered a key indicator of social inclusion of older people and development of the 'society for all ages' (Grigorieva 2021). At the same time, both the employment of older people and the need for it are growing, despite the lack of systemic programs aimed at supporting and retraining older workers, inflexibility of employers, and ageist stereotypes (Kolosnitsyna, Gerasiimenko 2014; Karpikova, Baeva 2021; Galkin 2021). According to surveys, the

desire and ability to continue working are influenced by several factors, such as financial security, age, family status, and health (Shchanina 2013). At the same time, the development of flexible and remote forms of employment, together with digitalization, creates new opportunities for the older generation. Nevertheless, researchers note that the predominant strategies of extended employment for people of retirement age are either to continue working in areas of high state involvement (education, healthcare, science, housing, and utilities), or to switch to a less qualified position without formal employment. This distinguishes Russia from more economically developed countries, where the economic activity of retired people increases with the growing flexibility of the labor market (Sonina, Kolosnitsyna 2015).

We are interested in how changes in the demographic structure of the society, namely the increase in the number of older people, alongside changing labor conditions, are creating new paths for employment in older years. In this article, we examine the employment of older people (men over 61 and women over 56) who have the opportunity to retire but continue to work. We are not concerned with the mere fact of their employment, but rather with the meanings that extended employment implies, the factors that determine individual paths of employment, and the inequalities that arise. Understanding the perspective of older employees enables a better understanding of what social policy measures might be relevant when the goal is to extend the employment of older people beyond retirement age.

### **Benefits and barriers of extended employment**

This research is based on two theoretical concepts—active aging and social inclusion. The concept of active aging is based on successful aging, which in turn is based on the theory of activity that implies preserving the activities and attitudes of middle age (Havighurst 1961) by extending both usual lifestyle and employment. Employment is a clear marker of activity in midlife and one of the most important determinants of active aging, since employment provides older people with a steady income, extends their contribution to the society, and helps to maintain individual activity (WHO 2002). Currently, the concept of active aging involves the use of the Active Ageing Index (AAI), which was developed and introduced in the EU in 2012 as a tool to measure the realization of older people's potential to 'monitor overall progress with respect to active aging' (European Commission 2015). The methods of calculating the AAI in Russia were established by the order of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service—Rosstat (2019). One of the four principal domains for measuring the AAI is 'employment,' which is limited to statistical indicators of employment in four age groups: 55–59, 60–64, 64–69, 70–74. This domain measures the general activity of older people in the labor market, but not the labor intensity or quality of jobs. The idea of active aging focuses on extending the inclusion of older people

in active life. Employment is one of the main indicators of social inclusion. At the same time, researchers assign it to the field of economic and material resources, suggesting that an income-generating job contributes to the well-being of older people (Walsh et al. 2017). However, the loss of a job in older age has not only economic, but also psychosocial effects, which are currently underexplored. In addition to financial security, occupational activity bolsters social activity, which helps to maintain a certain quality of life (Murdock et al. 2021). Moreover, researchers consider paid employment in older age as a predictor for preservation of mental health and psychological well-being, while the effect is increased in combination with volunteering activities (Nao 2008).

Analyzing AAI in Russia, researchers note the considerable positive influence of employment on other forms of activity. They also recognize that older age groups have great untapped potential for employment. However, the analysis shows that there is no 'dilemma of choice' between different types of activity, for instance employment and caring for grandchildren (Varlamova, Sinyavskaya 2021). The concept of active aging has been criticized for conveying an overly homogeneous view of older people and their activities, which often is often organized and prescriptive in nature and does not reflect the diversity within the group (Formosa 2020; Grigorieva, Bogdanova 2020). Applied to the study of older people's employment, this means that the prescribed nature of professional activity and the indexing of employment numbers do not take into account the individual meanings and needs of older people. At the same time, ageism and changing skill requirements mean that low income older workers, who are most in need of continued employment, often lack the necessary knowledge and skills, and have limited educational and employment options (Anderson et al. 2013). In our study, we consider extended employment as a way of including and realizing the potential of older people. We are interested in how employment transforms in older age and what barriers and individual meanings arise in the process. We examine these questions using the example of individual employment histories of workers aged 60 and over.

## Research methods

The analysis is based on twenty-five semistructured interviews with working people aged 60 and over who reside in different cities: ten informants are from Saint Petersburg, six from Kazan, and others are from Petrozavodsk, the Republic of Karelia, Tiumen, and Salehard<sup>1</sup>. The main criteria for selecting informants were age (no lower than retirement age) and intellectual or creative occupations. The informants can be conveniently divided into two age groups – 60–70 years

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<sup>1</sup> The geographic diversity is attributed to the fact that within the project we collected interviews with different types of informants and city residents were interviewed based on the ability of the project participants to reach out to them. At the same time, we did not set ourselves a task of comparing different regions or types of settlement.

old (eighteen people) and 71–79 (seven people). All informants continue to work in one form or another, and in the past and predominantly in the future represent intellectual and creative occupations (teachers, musicians, financial workers). On the basis of the in-depth interviews, we tried to reconstruct the meanings, opportunities, and inequalities associated with the continuation of professional activity in older age, when many peers have left or are leaving the labor market. The transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. During the analysis of the interviews, we distinguished the following topics: changing employment, meanings of employment in older age and opportunities for its extension; barriers, ageism, and inequalities. The study is limited to interviews with representatives of intellectual or creative professions, which does not allow us to extrapolate the conclusions of the study to representatives of other professions.

### **Changing employment**

The study has shown that working older people do not problematize the extension of employment – practically everybody who continues working does it 'automatically,' which allows us to speak about seamless extension of professional activity in middle age. Only four informants changed jobs after retirement. However, the career changes followed different paths. For instance, one informant devoted some time to cultural activities after her retirement, but later found part-time employment that did not require high qualification, which she combines with leisure activities for self-development and side jobs using skills she has learned in training courses (desktop publishing). Another informant was dismissed 'for age reasons' and could not find a full-time job and now works as a freelancer in projects as a guide, reporter, and artist's model. Employees of state-funded organizations (university teachers, creative professionals at childcare facilities) tend to have more stable employment.

Different paths of extended employment suggest that employment changes in older age. It is becoming more flexible and diverse, ranging from the most obvious – continue to work as before to options that imply wage cuts, change of jobs (sometimes less qualified), and search for new types of side jobs. The main professional background and the knowledge gained in various educational courses allow older people to occasionally work part-time in addition to their main job and in the future earn extra money after retirement. Among periodic or regular part-time jobs, the informants named the following occupations: tour guide, artist's model, desktop publisher, exhibition designer, tutor, and cleaner. Changing to a less qualified and less remunerative job also fits the paradigm of changeability and flexibility:

I: And what do you do there, what is your position called?

R: Since I needed flexible working hours, the position is called an intern, as only interns can work as they like. I've been an intern for three years now. What do we do? We receive mail, sort it, and deliver it to recipients.

I: So you have practically flexible time?

R: Absolutely. I can come in the morning or evening (Interview 2).

In this case, the informant has deliberately left her previous job upon retirement and found a part-time job, arguing that the work schedule was more convenient, allowing her to manage her time freely and attend cultural events, and find time for a hobby and volunteer work. In situations when employees reach the retirement age and gain 'guaranteed income' in the form of retirement benefits, they can afford a more flexible approach to their employment.

Another informant 'downshifted' even more drastically when she retired leaving her job as an accountant and taking a job as a cleaner, arguing that it was more psychologically comfortable and less responsible. Sometime later, she quit the job, remained retired, and later returned to the same position:

Then I decided that, well, maybe it's enough, I should retire. I stayed retired at home for a year and you know I still have a desire, I'm healthy enough, and when you stay at home, alone, yes, no-no-no no-no-no – this is not for me yet, you can lose your mind. No, once again I threw myself into cleaning <...> And so, in October, probably, it will be three years I've been working here (Interview 9).

This scenario is peculiar because the informant was not only brave enough to downshift professionally (despite her children advising against it), but she also found advantages in the new type of employment, as well as had little difficulty finding a new job when she needed one.

The distinctive characteristic of this study is that almost all of the informants are intellectual or creative workers. These occupations require regular upgrading of knowledge and skills. Almost all of the informants mentioned that they do regular skill-upgrading, although they assessed this process differently – ranging from merely superficial to an insightful way to remain competitive. Skill-upgrading is done in the form of self-education and is driven by an active professional stance – the desire to learn, develop and stay competitive:

...all the time I self-educate on various channels and chats with colleagues. Without this, it is impossible to continue the work. Students are so well-informed sometimes. Not all of them, of course, but some are just ahead of the curve. They ask questions that require constant development both in medicine and in the search for teaching methods for classes (Interview 16).

### **Meanings of employment in older age and opportunities for its extension**

The next important questions we consider are why the informants continue working, what meaning extended employment has for them and what influences their opportunities to extend employment. The need to extend

employment is conditioned by various motives. The most popular one is economic, the need to have income in addition to retirement benefits. This motive, in turn, is subdivided into several others – income from professional activity is seen as the main living income since retirement benefits are meager, or it is seen as a 'bonus' to retirement benefits in situations of part-time employment and side jobs. Salary is also important since it allows helping children and grandchildren and for making loan payments. The need to help the younger generation and personal expenses contribute to the planning of further employment, for example to continue working while children are pay the mortgage or until the daughter graduates from university. This helps to reconcile downshifting scenarios that are psychologically hard to perceive as full-time employment.

Another important motive can be tentatively called psychosocial. It reflects the need for self-realization, development, communication, and sometimes human interaction. The informants see work as beneficial to their physical and psychological state:

It is all interrelated. You cannot name just one. Because communication is a no-brainer, I've got used to my colleagues, they are like a family to me. Salary, can one do without it? And as for staying at home – not once in my life have I stayed at home. So for me, staying home will be the death of me. And I feel this acutely during vacations, when by the end of the vacation I do not know what to do with myself (Interview 25).

Overall, we can say that extended employment is not a goal in itself. The motives are very similar to those of the younger generations. The informants are not faced with the dilemma whether to continue working or not, since the retirement age does not automatically lead to drastic changes in their needs. Those who are satisfied with their jobs continue to work as before. In some cases, older people restructure their employment based on personal needs and the desire to help their relatives, for instance by reducing working hours and combining work with caring for grandchildren.

Examining the factors that, according to the informants, allow them to preserve professional activity, we can distinguish several principal ones. The first is territorial proximity/accessibility when it is convenient to walk or ride to work. Sometimes this reason is deciding in choosing a workplace even when the new profession implies lower status. The second main factor influencing the extension of employment is the possibility to combine employment with other activities, personal life or care for relatives. Thus, flexible/part-time employment allows the informants to combine it with eventful cultural life, self-education, and regular traveling. The third factor is rapport with colleagues. Tensions and conflicts at the workplace are seen by the informants as a factor that can prompt them to quit their jobs, which is psychologically easier to do since they already receive the retirement benefits and thus there is no financial dependence on the current job and they can afford to change workmates/job.

## Barriers, ageism and inequalities

Although the extension of employment into older age seemed to happen organically to the informants, they nevertheless talked about barriers and inequalities, potential and actual, which affect the form of employment and the possibility of extending it. One obvious and important barrier is health, as many informants mentioned health when asked what would force them to stop working. Some even stated that there are no other reasons for leaving work, as the desire to work does not diminish with age.

Only health, I think. I will not have a desire to quit. The wish to work will last for a long time. Health, on other hand, won't. Circumstances won't make me. Financial reasons hardly make a difference. Even if they increase retirement benefits five times, how can you stay at home? The grandchildren will grow up. This is a downside. You have to keep yourself busy. (Interview 1).

Health is mentioned as the condition precluding future employment, while other factors, on the contrary, motivate to continue working: income does not increase, one does not want to stay at home, especially since 'the grandchildren will grow up.'

Another barrier, both actual and potential, is the necessity to care for close relatives, most often parents. One more obstruction to continued employment is ageism. People of pre-retirement and retirement age have high risks of encountering it while attempting to continue employment or find a new job, which, in turn, results in high risks of social exclusion. The analysis of the interviews revealed that when the informants consider their position to be non-competitive, for example teaching, ageism is absent, since 'young colleagues are not lining up for the position.' In several cases, age is accompanied with a high status of a professor or rare specialty. In this case, we register 'anti ageism,' which is manifested in special treatment from the management and respect from colleagues.

Nevertheless, ageism is more frequently encountered as it occurs at different professional stages and can be expressed to various degrees, from implicit to harshly discriminatory:

Each team has its own ways. As a matter of fact, I was still approached even though I was in good standing; I had my own signature style. They came to me and said that I need to give way to the young. That's how they put it. Well, if you must, you must. <...> by the way, after I was dismissed from the newspaper, I was actively looking for a new job, naturally. The most fruitful meeting was at one of the municipal institutions, where I was invited for a job interview. And it was evident that I was not suitable purely because of my age. (Interview 3).

In some cases, ageism does not lead to job loss, but rather wage cuts. Moreover, the informants themselves do not recognize ageism in these cases and even condone it:



Every department has to cut wages, who should be cut? Well, retired people would be less affected by it, since they receive some retirement benefits such as they are, but what about the rest? Those who are not getting benefits would be more affected by wage cuts. In twenty sixteen, I think, I was left with three fourths of my wage, then there was another cut, I was offered to cut it to a half wage. At the end of the day, it is natural, as years went by I am not becoming stronger, thereby it is quite fitting (Interview 7).

Age discrimination against older employees becomes more acute and pronounced as the needs and opportunities for older people to continue to participate in the labor market increase. Researchers rightly point out that these issues need to be addressed by considering the options available to employers and reducing their prejudices (Axelrad et al. 2022).

Ageism is one of the most important contributors to inequality in the labor market. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the issue of digital inequality. The need to move to a remote work model and actively learn new digital technologies caused frustration for some informants who had no previous experience of this. This was particularly relevant for cultural workers who had not previously used computers and the Internet in their work.. The digital divide between younger and older generations is relevant even in developed countries with a high level of Internet diffusion (Friemel 2016), so it is even more relevant in the Russian context:

I: Do you think that further digitalization of education could result in lower status of older teachers?

R: Yes, it has already led to lower status, but it is not due to continuing digitalization of education, but rather this can be explained by teachers' reluctance to learn these technologies. They could learn them, yet they do not want to change with the changing world. Yes, their status will continue to decline. (Interview 22).

Thus, intellectual workers with digital skills, who are accustomed to learning and who understand that self-development provides them with opportunities to maintain professional status, increase their competitiveness and thereby extend employment, are in a more advantageous position.

## **Conclusion**

The study showed that the employment of workers of retirement age in intellectual and creative occupations is usually stable. They problematize their retired status and continue to work in familiar positions. This looks like a seamless extension of the professional activity of middle age. Nevertheless, transformations of individual paths allow us to talk about changing and flexible extended employment, when familiar work formats are replaced or supplemented by part-time employment, project side jobs or new forms of activities. The employment of today's older people can be described as changing and

flexible. In addition to the obvious options to continue to work in familiar places and positions, employees of retirement age are also exploring other options – reducing their working hours to free up time and energy for other activities, they find another job or side jobs, including those that require digital skills. In this respect, we can say that extended employment after the age of 60 begins to resemble middle age employment in its flexibility, variability, and precariousness. The extension of employability have different, usually complex, but mainly economic and psychosocial meanings for employees aged 60 and over. The individual meaning cannot be reduced to purely economic arguments even in the cases of a decline in status, because in these cases the opportunity to communicate with people, learn something new, and to feel useful and active are also meaningful. This is further evidence that employment has a high potential for the inclusion of older people, not only in terms of financial security, but also in other areas of life and self-esteem.

The issue of ageism in the workplace is prominent, but it is irrelevant for employees over 60 who do not feel competition for their positions and do not consider them as popular among younger colleagues, as well as for professionals who have unique or rare qualifications and experience. In cases where older employees do encounter ageism, it is distinctly exclusionary, ranging from dismissal or refusal to hire to forced pay cuts and reduced working hours.

The pandemic has actualized the digital inequality of older employees in the labor market. Once the work has shifted to a remote format, those who lacked sufficient experience in using digital technologies have become the most vulnerable and frustrated.

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