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Participation in, and unsuccessful searches for, bridge employment: The case of Dutch retirees

Objectives. Bridge employment is often defined as the paid work pattern among those who receive a pension income. Empirical studies on the predictors of bridge employment have already tried to answer the question what determines the intentions of older adults to work post-retirement, while other studies investigated the determinants of the actual participation in post-retirement employment. Few studies have accounted for the step from the willingness to perform bridge employment to the actual behavior. Hence, the investigation of the actual behavior provides an incomplete picture of the retirement forces at work, because they focus on the situation in which selection has already occurred

We believe that to elucidate the driving forces behind bridge employment, it must be acknowledged that the bridge employment decision may not always be under volitional control of the individual worker. Instead, people differ in their ability to successfully implement their bridge employment intentions. The social patterning exemplifies that while post-retirement work is an emerging reality for some, it may be less attainable for others. The current study, therefore, distinguishes bridge employees and bridge job-seekers in the investigation of the decision to work post-retirement. This approach contrasts previous studies in which bridge job-seekers were

implicitly assumed to be equal to fully retirees not considering bridge employment. As a consequence, these previous studies may have overlooked the social stratification into bridge jobs, for example due to age discrimination and social inequality in the access to paid work.

In the explanation of the access to bridge employment, we explicitly focus on the social forces that create the opportunities and restrictions to participate in paid labor after retirement. More specifically, we examine the degree to which the access to bridge employment is socially patterned, in terms of being unequally distributed across social class, health, and other markers of stratification. In addition, we follow the life course perspective by viewing bridge employment in the social context. Social structures, such as the family context, the organizational context, and the specific retirement context, may impose situational constraints on individual choices. These multilayered contexts in which the retirement transition unfolds are theorized to influence the process to decide on and capability to attain bridge employment.

In sum, this study aims to improve the understanding of the social forces that potentially sift and sort people into and out of the work force after retirement. We focus on socio-economic factors, the social context, and psychosocial factors, to explain why some people fully retired after career exit, some participated in bridge jobs and others unsuccessfully searched for a bridge job.

Methods.

The current research is based on a three-wave panel dataset obtained from the NIDI Work and Retirement Panel. The panel was first convened in 2001 and follow-ups took place in 2006-2007 and 2011. The analytical sample consists of about 1200 respondents who made the retirement transition in the 10-year observation period. By design, all respondents were working in their career jobs in wave 1. In subsequent waves, those who retired from their career jobs were asked about their bridge job-seeking behavior and actual engagement in a bridge job. For each individual, we determined the timing of retirement (i.e., between wave 1 and 2 or between wave 2 and 3) and then included the information on the bridge employment status of the first wave after retirement. The independent variables were measured at the pre-retirement wave, except for the partner status and the retirement transition characteristics.

We used a multinomial logit model to explain the post-retirement work status. A potential drawback of this model is that it imposes the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) property, requiring the odds ratio for two categories to be independent of other categories. Violation of this property would result in inconsistent parameter estimates. In the literature, the multinomial probit model is often presented as an alternative method since the IIA property is not required. However, recent research concluded that the multinomial logit model provides more stable and accurate estimates, even when the IIA property is severely violated. Sensitivity analyses and a generalized Hausman specification test provided support for the insignificance of the IIA property for the preliminary models.

Results. While most respondents retired after career exit without considering further employment, we found that about one in four retirees participated in bridge jobs after retirement and seven percent searched for a bridge job but was not able to find one.

The results of the multivariate model (see Table 1, Model 1) show that whether older adults participate in bridge employment specifically depends on the retirement transition characteristics en psychosocial factors. Involuntarily retirees, mainly those who had retired for organizational reasons, were found to have a higher likelihood of participating in bridge employment compared with those who had retired of their own volition. In addition, those who were older at retirement had a lower likelihood of participating in bridge employment instead of entering full retirement. With regard to the psychosocial factors, the results show that people who were more disengaged from the work domain prior to retirement had a lower likelihood of participating in bridge employment. Furthermore, older adults who had higher expectations of opportunities in the labor market prior to retirement had a higher likelihood of participating in a bridge job instead of entering full retirement

Model 2 in Table 1 provides the results for the comparison between those unsuccessful at finding bridge employment and those participating in bridge jobs. Some support was found for the hypothesis that poor health increases the probability of remaining unsuccessful in finding bridge employment. Probably the most influential factor behind the likelihood of being unsuccessful in finding a bridge job was the voluntariness of the retirement transition. Our results show that involuntary retirement increased the likelihood of being unsuccessful in finding a bridge job when compared with those who had voluntarily retired. We find comparable results in Model 3 (Table 1) in which we compared those unsuccessful in finding a bridge job with full retirees.

Discussion. The results of the current study provide evidence for the impact of the social structure on the post-retirement work behavior. The most striking finding of this study is that bridge job-seekers are mainly the ones who were involuntarily retired from their career jobs. In addition, those unhealthy retirees who want to stay active in bridge jobs seem to be restricted in their opportunities to do so. This suggests a cumulative disadvantage in the work domain in later life. Retirees who felt forced to exit the career job or suffered from health limitations appeared to have lower chances to successfully reenter the labor force.

Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression analysis predicting post-retirement work behavior.

	<i>Bridge job vs. fully retired</i>			<i>Unsuccessful in finding a bridge job vs. bridge job</i>			<i>Unsuccessful in finding a bridge job vs. fully retired</i>		
	logit	SE	OR	logit	SE	OR	logit	SE	OR
Constant	9.23**	1.97		8.45*	3.50		17.69**	3.38	
CONTROLS									
Women	-0.93**	0.24	0.39	0.35	0.37	1.42	-0.59†	0.33	0.55
Length of time since retirement	-0.05	0.06	0.95	-0.11	0.10	0.90	-0.16	0.10	0.85
Study wave (wave 3 = 1)	0.48*	0.21	1.62	0.86*	0.36	2.36	1.34**	0.34	3.82
SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS									
Pension shortfall	0.03	0.16	1.03	0.11	0.27	1.12	0.13	0.26	1.14
Health	0.16†	0.10	1.17	-0.29†	0.17	0.75	-0.13	0.16	0.88
Supervisory position	0.27†	0.16	1.31	-0.85*	0.34	0.43	-0.58†	0.33	0.56
Occupational level									
Low	-0.16	0.29	0.85	0.56	0.45	1.75	0.40	0.39	1.49
Middle									
High	0.48**	0.17	1.62	-0.22	0.31	0.80	0.26	0.29	1.30
SOCIAL CONTEXT									
Employment status of partner									
No partner	-0.30	0.29	0.74	0.43	0.46	1.54	0.12	0.42	1.13
Partner not working									
Partner works	0.05	0.17	1.05	0.49	0.30	1.63	0.54†	0.28	1.72
Partner no information	0.07	0.28	1.07	0.54	0.47	1.72	0.60	0.45	1.82
Grandchildren									
No children	-0.03	0.23	0.97	0.35	0.39	1.43	0.33	0.36	1.39
Children, no grandchildren									
Grandchildren	-0.32†	0.18	0.73	0.51	0.32	1.67	0.19	0.30	1.21
Voluntariness of retirement									
Voluntary									
Involuntary reasons									
Health	0.03	0.41	1.03	-0.36	0.79	0.70	-0.33	0.75	0.72
Organizational	0.47*	0.19	1.60	1.32**	0.29	3.74	1.79**	0.28	5.99
Health & organizational	-0.26	0.50	0.77	1.22†	0.67	3.39	0.97†	0.56	2.64
Other	0.12	0.36	1.13	1.06†	0.56	2.89	1.18*	0.51	3.25
Retirement age	-0.18**	0.03	0.84	-0.15**	0.06	0.86	-0.34**	0.05	0.71
PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS									
Work disengagement	-0.30*	0.12	0.74	-0.00	0.21	1.00	-0.30	0.20	0.74
Labor market opportunities	0.24**	0.08	1.27	-0.13	0.14	0.88	0.11	0.13	1.12

Source: NIDI Work and Retirement Panel (N = 1221).

† p ≤ 0.10; * p ≤ 0.05; ** p ≤ 0.01.