



‘What do workplaces need to know to help older workers stay on the job? A qualitative study of older workers’ disclosure decisions.’ [A webinar](#) by Monique Gignac for The Institute for Work & Health (IWH) Speaker Series.

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Speaker Bio: Monique Gignac is a Professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto.

Study summary: Insights from research on the experiences of older workers and the barriers they face communicating their support needs to stay employed. Conclusions that the stereotypes of aging make workers less willing to share their personal needs with their managers, HR etc... Summarises proactive ways employers can promote job sustainability across the life course.

The problem: Historic labour shortages are affecting every Canadian job sector. Many workers aged 50 years or more want to work longer, often beyond the traditional retirement age. However, we understand little about the different workplace support needs they may have and whether workers choose to share their needs with others.

The method: The study was based on focus group interviews with sixty-eight participants from the greater Toronto area, aged 50 years or older, from diverse sectors of the economy and with a range of experiences and circumstances (e.g., health conditions, caregiving responsibilities, job experiences). Participants were asked about their work experiences, age-related changes, and disclosure decisions and experiences.

High level findings

- Most participants *wanted to remain employed*, up to or past age 65 years.
- Participants recognized that *sharing personal information was part of a good relationship* with others (fosters connections; proactively addresses work-related issues).



- There was *reluctance to share information about personal needs* or a recommendation to only share what information was needed. The four (interrelated) themes that guided older worker disclosure decisions were:
 - I. The need to communicate information – unless you absolutely must, best to not share too much person information.
 - II. The desire to maintain one’s reputation - Reputations were seen as fragile and vulnerable to age misperceptions (i.e., stereotypes, ageism). Experienced as an affront because considerable time and effort went in to cultivating a reputation as a productive and skilled worker over the course of one’s working life.
 - III. Trust in others and perceived support – In general there was a preference for informal support over formal supports/intervention because of concerns about privacy and gossip.
 - IV. Perceived job insecurity – even with stable, secure workers. Job insecurity was related to challenges in fear that if fired they could not find a new job and perceptions about cost-benefits of older workers including the idea that it was cheaper to employ younger workers.

Conclusion

Older adults face challenges in remaining employed with respects to communicating their needs because communicating support needs, especially health-related needs, is seen to undermine one’s reputation and make a person vulnerable to gossip, misperceptions about job abilities, or lost future opportunities.

<u>Implications</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
Older worker preference for informal assistance challenges organisational approaches for communication and support.	Need policies that proactively create flexible and supportive environments to enable workers to adapt and maintain privacy
Ageism is a threat to wellbeing – it diminishes trust and undermines the willingness to communicate work related needs.	Highlight the importance of awareness and addressing ageist attitudes and behaviours as part of equity, diversity, and inclusion policies