

Lived Experiences Of Women Over 50 Who Have Experienced Involuntary Job Loss

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Abstract

This study explored the **lived experiences of women over 50** following job loss. Findings indicate women experienced financial, emotional and psychosocial experiences. Age discrimination, organizational practices, technological challenges, and stereotypical beliefs emerged as barriers to reemployment. Organizational leaders and policy makers can use the findings to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of women over 50 following job loss.

Problem

Organizational downsizing dramatically increased the **overall unemployment and long-term unemployment** rates of **older workers** (55 and older) in the United States (Itkin & Salmon, 2011; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012).

Women are the target population for job loss due to the increase of women in the workforce (Nuttman-Schwartz & Gadot, 2012).

The experiences of women, specifically women over 50, and job loss have been underrepresented.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of women over 50 who had experienced involuntary job loss, the barriers faced to reemployment, how the barriers to reemployment were overcome, and compare their experiences to research studies relating to men over 50.

Add to the body of literature the experiences of women over 50 related to job loss. Provide organizations with a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Dr. Judith Forbes, Committee Chairperson
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Relevant Literature

Theoretical Framework

- **Bandura's (1988)** theory of coping efficacy (degree to which a person believes he or she is capable of controlling specific threatening situations).
- **Leana and Feldman's (1992)** theory of coping behaviors (attempts to gain reemployment and attempts to reestablish a degree of psychological well-being after losing one's job). Theory was built on Bandura's (1988) coping efficacy.

Background

Older workers – only group in the U.S. workforce showing a significant increase in the labor force participation rate (Toossi, 2012).

Dramatic change in workforce participation of older women in the U.S. since the 1970s (Macunovich, 2012).

More women entered the workforce or increased working hours as the men who were breadwinners lost their jobs (Mattingly & Smith, 2012).

Women have become the target population for job loss due to a higher number of women entering the labor force (Nuttman-Schwartz & Gadot, 2012, p. 275).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do women over 50 in a Northeastern metropolitan city describe the experiences of involuntary job loss?

RQ2: How do women over 50 in a Northeastern metropolitan city describe the barriers to reemployment?

RQ3: How do women over 50 in a Northeastern metropolitan city describe how they overcame the barriers to reemployment?

RQ4: How do these experiences compare to other reports focused on the job losses of men over 50?

Procedures

Face-to-face (30-60 minute) interviews with convenience, and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interview guide.

Ten women over 50 located in a **northeastern city** who experienced involuntary job loss.

Digital audio-recording of interviews.

Demographic questionnaire.

Expert Panel included two administrators from workforce development and dissertation chair.

Pilot test included three known participants.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of three constructs:

Experiences of women over 50 who had experienced involuntary job loss; barriers faced to reemployment; how barriers to reemployment were overcome.

Meta-analysis of RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 compared to prior studies of men over 50 and job loss to address RQ4.

Findings

Dominant themes:

RQ1: emotional, financial, family and social

RQ2: age, organizational practices, technology, stereo-typical beliefs

RQ3: job programs, education/retraining, networking, support groups

RQ4: meta-analysis of RQ1, RQ2, RQ3:

1. Men viewed themselves as failures, women did not.
2. All women were breadwinners (supports prior studies indicating societal move from traditional role of men as wage earners).
3. Women and men view and cope with job loss differently.
4. No studies found exclusively on men related to barriers to reemployment and how barriers to reemployment were overcome.

Limitations

Limited to women over 50.

Generalizability - focused on one metropolitan area.

Transferability - limited to similar populations of women who are the same age and share the same experiences of involuntary job loss.

Conclusions

Majority of literature regarding adverse effects of job loss focused on men. Assumption is job loss is less serious for women (Nuttman-Schwartz & Gadot, 2012).

Economic and societal barriers continue to negatively impact reemployment opportunities for women over 50.

Majority of women in the study were not prepared for a changing job market. New skills were needed to reenter the job market.

Challenges:

Economic instability.

Barriers to reemployment.

Limited research regarding women over 50 and job loss.

Lack of emphasis on organizational policies to keep older workers in the workforce.

Social Change Implications

Woman in the study may feel empowered as a result of sharing their stories and experiences.

Organizations may have a greater understanding of the needs of women over 50 who have lost their jobs.

Organizations may consider the findings when creating policies that directly impact older workers.