

Older workers are the healthy 'survivors' of the workplace

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Experts at The University of Nottingham say our stress levels at work peak when we reach about 50 to 55 years of age and decrease as we head towards retirement.

In the first comprehensive report into age related [stress](#) and [health](#) at work to be carried out in Britain researchers from the Institute of Work, Health and Organisations also found that the effects of stress in our working lives can stay with us well into retirement.

The research, led by Amanda Griffiths, Professor of [Occupational Health Psychology](#), reviewed hundreds of publications from the last 20 years. Professor Griffiths, said: "Work related stress is thought to be responsible for more lost working days than any other cause and it is becoming clear that it is also one factor affecting older workers' willingness and ability to remain in the labour force. Therefore, protecting tomorrow's older workers, as well as today's, will pay dividends, as older workers will form a major part of tomorrow's [workforce](#)."

Many of us are likely to be working much longer than we expected. Until now the majority of reviews of research into work-related stress — its causes and its effects — have been based on large groups of workers and very rarely distinguished by age. This report, for TAEN — The Age and Employment Network, Age Concern and Help the Aged, aimed to address that gap.

This new research suggests that the reason studies show smaller number of workers report high stress levels once in their 50s might be because they have left stressful posts in favour of something less demanding; they already have retired voluntarily or because of ill health; or increasing seniority can give staff more control over their working life which makes it less stressful. The report says this makes older staff the healthy 'survivors' of the workplace.

Chris Ball, TAEN Chief Executive, said: "This report fills an important gap in our understanding of how stressful work can impact upon people towards the end of their working lives and into retirement. Demographic change and ageing populations have made extending working life a priority both in the UK and elsewhere. Clearly, we have to consider the kind of work people do and every aspect of the working environment with a view to removing stressors where we possibly can. TAEN and our sister charity, Age Concern and Help the Aged, sincerely hope this report will influence thinking and practice, so the casual acceptance of work-created mental ill health, permeating into older age, becomes a thing of the past."

The report suggests that stress could be eased by giving older staff more control over their job; better recognition for the contribution they make; increased flexible working; and improvements in social support.

Professor Griffiths said: "As we get older people's priorities may also change; they often have caring responsibilities, or wish to spend time with grandchildren and develop other interests. Their work and career may not be their primary drivers. Making work attractive and flexible — to allow older people to balance work and their other interests more easily may be one very important step forward". She suggests that such investments in the quality of people's 'third age' — their life after retirement — should be made during working life, not just afterwards.

Source: University of Nottingham ([news](#) : [web](#))

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