



Seniors in the Workforce in Singapore

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**Ultimately, we must look at older workers
Not as burdens but as assets, and an
integral part of the labour landscape. After
all, Singapore's key resource is our people.
It is clear then that we must work to keep
our older workers employed, especially
since they will make up a growing portion
of our labour force.**

Interview with Min of State, Gan Kim Yong, 2007

Outline of presentation

- Retirement and Re-Employment Act, Jan 2012
- Significance of Qualitative study
- Meaning of work and motivation
- Importance of family support
- Gender dimension
- Positive impact of work; sociopsychological
- Recommendation to legislation
- Conclusion

Singapore Context

- Singapore is a demographically ageing population, with 11% of its population above 65 years in 2013
- In terms of speed, one of the fastest in SE ASIA
- It will transit from ageing to aged society in a period of 18 years – stress on every segment of society
- Policy makers see this as a major challenge and it is on the National Agenda

Seniors in the workforce

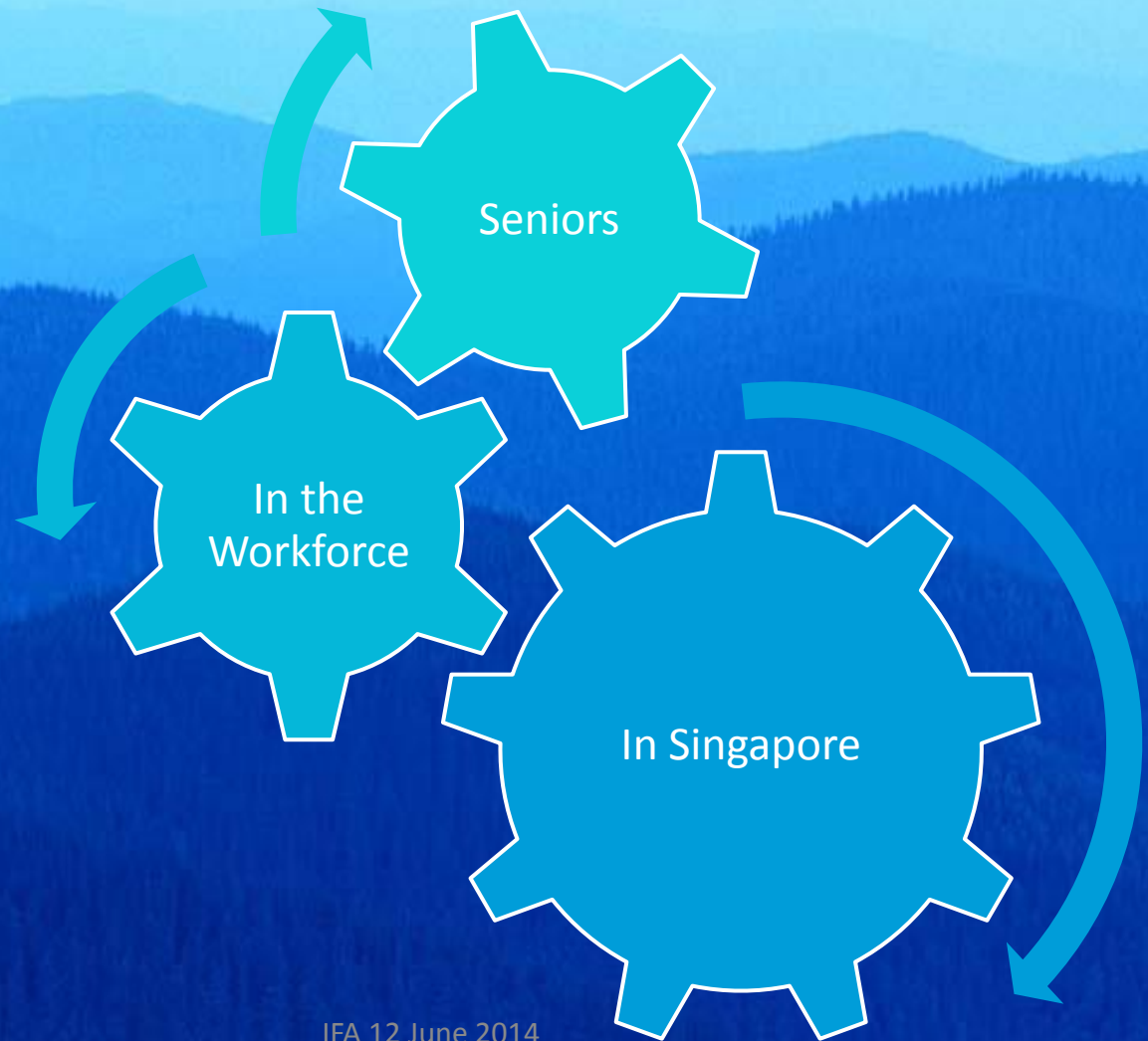
- One of the strategies to cope with an ageing population is to encourage older persons to work beyond the retirement age (In Singapore 62 years is the mandatory retirement age)
- It is a strategy to help the older person stay economically secure, psychologically and socially connected with the society, and maintain self-esteem in family, community and society at large

The statistics on seniors in workforce

- In 2004, only 55.9% of persons between 55-59, and 33.6% of persons between 60-64 years were in the workforce
- In 2007 the group between 55-59 years increased to 63.3 years and the second group increased to 44.9%
- But this was not sufficient!
- (Source:Retirement and re-employment Practices 2010 (2011) Paper no. 1/11, Ministry of Manpower

Retirement and Re-employment Act (RRA)

- Drawing from the work of the Tripartite Committee on the Employability of Older Workers (established in 2006) which aimed at increasing the employability of older workers and help them to stay longer in their jobs
- RRA was enacted to give more opportunities for employees nearing 62 years to continue working, change employers' mindsets, and provide more training opportunities to them



Significance of Study

- Surveys tell one side of the story, but the voices of older employees give depth and meaning to their issues, experiences and concerns
- 27 older employees above 58 years were interviewed face-to-face for about 1 – 1.5 hours.
Funded by SIM University
- IRB permission obtained
- The authors, and a research assistant interviewed using the same guideline of questions (English and Mandarin languages used)

Empirical Qualitative Study

Sample Description, Analysis

- 13 Males , 14 Females
- Age range 58 – 76 years
- Inclusion criteria: Working, above 58 years, willing to be interviewed
- Used Nvivo Ver 10 for analysis
- Thematic analysis applied

Source of Sample

- Purposive sample
- Centre for Seniors
- Personal contacts
- Snowballing technique (referrals by respondents)
- Ethnic representation from all major ethnic communities
- Sectors: manufacturing, services, educational, HR

Meaning of Work

- Work gives them a social purpose – *do something useful for others and society*
- Recognition – *performance is valued*
- Positive relationships – *being at the workplace means having friends and meaningful relationships*
- Autonomy – *opportunity to use their skills and implement decisions, solve problems*

Findings

- Why did they wish to continue working?
 - a. Gain financial independence
 - b. To remain socially integrated
 - c. Maintain good health (physical & mental)
 - d. Self actualisation

A substantial proportion of respondents explicitly expressed the desire to impart knowledge, experience and skills to younger generations. They were also keen to learn.

Findings cont'd

- Strategies to adjust to workplace

- a. Realism

- While barriers existed, the respondents said that they looked at the situation practically

- b. Positivity and reframing

- In this reframing strategy, they focussed on the increases in psychological well being and job satisfaction

To quote

- *“... the RRA is good. Of course I agree that the employees must be fit. This is important. Performance must be satisfactory. But even after 65, and the person is fit they should be allowed to continue working. The Act has been of help to me. I have been reemployed. A few of my elderly colleagues are also reemployed.”*

Challenges faced at Workplace

- *“I am not happy. Because I don’t have any salary increments. I don’t get pay cut but my salary is stagnant. Everybody gets increment. I have annual leave cut from 21 to 14 days. That leave is equal to money, you know. I don’t get promotion. All these demoralize me you know, but I am very positive in my thinking. If I want to work, I take it.”*

Importance of family support

- *“My family support me to work. They see that I am very happy working, so they support me. Because if I stay at home, I will be very unhappy. I am not the stay-at-home type!”*

Ultimately, it is CHOICE

- The study has its limitations such as a small sample, but this is compensated by the in-depth voices of the respondents
- The main take away point is that AGE should not be the chief factor to determine whether a person terminates or continues to work
- Competency and willingness to work should be the main driving factor.



Mature workers' positive experiences

- *“ I would like to work as long as I can contribute to society. It keeps us more active, keeps us occupied and also give us some earnings to carry on with our life. And we don't have to depend on our children; they are also burdened with mortgages and bringing up their children.”*

Gender dimensions

- Males and females have similar motivations to work, but females may have exited out of the workforce for caregiving duties and often have a hard time re-entering the workforce
- Grandmothers are often persuaded by family to look after grandchildren (vs working)
- When health deteriorated, both males and females wished to retire

Shortcomings of RRA

- Annual contract left older workers feeling insecure about their future
- Loss of medical benefits experienced by many were seen as unfair
- Reduction of income, if workload was the same, was seen as unjust

Recommendations

- Policy makers need to publicize and visibly support change in attitudes towards seniors
- Employers need to be persuaded that with a tight labour market, senior workers are priceless
- Training and mentoring opportunities should be available for older employees. Technology could be tapped to help senior workers adapt.
- Family members could be educated to support seniors if they wished to work

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THANK YOU!

- Any questions?