Being an academic retiree: a qualitative, follow-up study of women academics in the Republic of Ireland

Mairead Cahill and Rose Galvin

School of Allied Health, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, Ageing Research Centre, Health Research Institute, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland, and

Judith Pettigrew

School of Allied Health, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, Health Research Institute, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

Abstract

Purpose – Retirement is a complex process that can impact daily lives and relationships. While some gender differences in academic retirement experiences have been noted, few studies have focused exclusively on women academics' retirement experiences. This follow-up study aims to explore the meaning of retirement and its impact on retired women academics' daily lives and relationships over time from an occupational perspective.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a qualitative, longitudinal descriptive design, semi-structured interviews ($n = 11$) were completed with women retirees from one university and an academically linked university-level, college of education and liberal arts, in the Republic of Ireland ($n = 11$). This paper presents the findings of follow-up interviews conducted one year later ($n = 10$). Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. A longitudinal analysis was then undertaken using a recurrent cross-sectional approach (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016) to enable discussion of changes and continuity that had occurred over time in their daily lives.

Findings – The analysis yielded four themes: (i) continuing to navigate occupational identity challenges, (ii) structuring free time, (iii) appreciating health and well-being and (iv) continuing meaningful professional relationships and activities. Participants described on-going occupational identity challenges linked with contextual factors and experiences of occupational injustices of lack of recognition, lack of inclusion and a lack of choice to continue working in their paid academic employment.

Originality/value – These findings suggest that occupational therapists advocate for older adults, so that meaningful choices in retirement timing can be offered to all equally and so that older people are acknowledged for their contributions to society.

Keywords Retirement, Occupational identity, Higher Education, Women academics, Qualitative descriptive, Occupational science

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Retirement is an evolving process that unfolds over time and can vary considerably from one individual to the next (Szinovacz, 2013). Retirement offers multiple opportunities for learning, productivity and transitioning to new identities for some (Kim and Feldman, 2000), while for others the sense of uncertainty brought about by retirement changes can negatively impact their well-being (Haslam *et al.*, 2018). With the lifespan of healthy adults increasing, health outcomes improving and changing retirement policies, the meaning of retirement is changing (Kojola and Moen, 2016; Sawyer and James, 2018). While the term retirement is used widely, there is ambiguity defining the term and what it means (Hershenson, 2016; Ekerdt, 2010). In many countries, for example, in the USA and Australia, mandatory retirement ages have been eliminated which has resulted in a myriad of research studies examining factors that shape retirement intentions, attitudes and experiences (Wang and Shi, 2014). Retirement has been conceptualised as a complex process that can involve a diversity of experiences and trajectories (Vickerstaff and Cox, 2005; Kojola and Moen, 2016) through bridge employment (paid and unpaid), continued education, phased retirement and second (encore) careers (Wang and Shultz, 2010; Kojola and Moen, 2016). Two major theories often applied to retirement adjustment studies include role and continuity theory (Tambellini, 2021). Role theory views retirement as a transition involving role expansion, role redefinition and

change of roles and suggests that socially and personally important roles are central to building self-identity. Continuity theory, proposed by Atchley (1999), emphasises that continuity of life patterns over time, including multiple roles and self-identity, contributes to individuals' adaptation to retirement (Atchley, 1999). While role theory focuses on role loss, continuity theory focuses on the maintenance of social relationships and life patterns (Tambellini, 2021), continuity theory stresses that psychological well-being is maintained through continuity of lifestyle or activities (Wang, 2007). Maintaining pre-retirement lifestyle patterns has been described as the most common pattern of adjustment in retirement (Wang, 2007). Within this study, continuity theory has been chosen as a guiding framework as it is a frequently used theoretical approach in retirement adjustment studies and has relevance to the study population given the conclusion of many academic retirement studies that most academics continue working in retirement.

Retirement from an occupational perspective

Founders of the discipline of occupational science (Yerxa *et al.*, 1989) believed in the power of occupation in enhancing health and well-being (Wilcock and Hocking, 2015) and considered humans as occupational beings. An occupational perspective has been described as "a way of looking at or thinking about human doing" (Njelesani *et al.*, 2014, p. 234). Although the phrase "an occupational perspective" was first used to refer to paid work in the 1950s, it was used in the occupational science and occupational therapy literature in 1996, referring to other activities beyond work (Njelesani *et al.*, 2014). The definition was developed to address gaps identified in previous definitions, following a scoping review of the literature (Njelesani *et al.*, 2014). Occupation is a core construct of the occupational perspective and the focus on doing within the occupational perspective definition differentiates the occupational perspective from other possible perspectives (Njelesani *et al.*, 2014).

Retirement studies from an occupational perspective have consistently found that engaging in meaningful occupations positively influences the transition to retirement (Eagers *et al.*, 2018; Jonsson *et al.*, 2001; Pettican and Prior, 2011; Pepin and Deutscher, 2011). A Swedish longitudinal study of the retirement transition from an occupational perspective of 32 people provided empirical evidence on the impact of the transition on meaning, temporal nature of occupations and the value of engaging occupations in facilitating a successful transition (Jonsson, 2000; Jonsson, 2001; Jonsson, 2011). Engaging occupations were described as activities that "evoked a depth of passion or helped them stand out in narratives" (Jonsson *et al.*, 2001, p. 428). Further qualitative, cross-sectional studies have reinforced the value of meaningful occupations to health and well-being in the retirement transition (Pettican and Prior, 2011), in maintaining a positive identity, and facilitating adapting to retirement (Pepin and Deutscher, 2011; Wiseman and Whiteford, 2007). Eagers *et al.* (2018) study of 11 Australian retirees found work attributes linked with participants' pre-retirement employment influenced their work-to-retirement transition. Examining the narratives of how 17 retired Canadians storied their retirement decision-making, Rudman (2015) found that social contexts

imbued with ageism influenced their retirement choices, their perceptions of their occupational possibilities for work and how they experienced the retirement transition (Rudman, 2015). Further studies on retirement from an occupational perspective in different cultural contexts have been called for (Eagers *et al.*, 2018; Jonsson, 2011).

Academic retirement studies

Retirement is a growing concern for academics worldwide (Kaskie, 2017). A meta-ethnography of the retirement experiences of academics found that most academics continue with academic work (paid or unpaid) in retirement (Cahill *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, a dearth of studies of women academics' retirement experiences was noted (Cahill *et al.*, 2019). Three studies highlighted that women academics continued working because their work offered feelings of fulfilment, positive relationships and self-esteem (Williamson *et al.*, 2010), that the transition to retirement impacted identity (Emerald and Carpenter, 2014) and that well-being was supported by having opportunities and choices to structure their post-retirement time (Strudsholm, 2011). A study of 12 older academics' experiences of staying on in a university in the UK post-retirement found that women academics experienced exclusion and discriminatory behaviour through being pressured to retire and their research achievements not being celebrated while male professors enjoyed better support systems and were more likely to be highly regarded (George and Maguire, 2020). Findings of a qualitative, descriptive study of 11 retired women academics in the Republic of Ireland (Cahill *et al.*, 2021), on which this follow-up study is based, highlighted most continued participation in meaningful professional or academic-related activities following retirement. Senior academics who were research active pre-retirement continued with research-related activities of publishing, writing, editing, managing grants and attending conferences post-retirement. Those without active research profiles pre-retirement were more likely to retire early, with some of them participating in paid employment linked with their former occupations (if they had one before being an academic), while a minority completely disconnected from academic and professional activities. Twelve months later the retired women academics of the Cahill *et al.*, (2021) study were re-interviewed. This study reports the findings of these follow-up interviews (*n* = 10). It aims to contribute to the retirement literature in the disciplines of occupational therapy and occupational science by describing the changes that occur over time (12 months) in the retired women academics' daily routine, relationships and the meaning of retirement from an occupational perspective.

Method

Design
A longitudinal, qualitative research (LQR) approach was used for this follow-up study of a group of retired women academics experiences of retirement. The initial study findings were reported in Cahill *et al.* (2021). Qualitative descriptive research, recognising the subjective nature of the topic being investigated, provides straight forward descriptions of the who, what, where, when and why of

experiences and perceptions (Sandelowski, 2010; Kim *et al.*, 2017). This process facilitates the presentation of findings to closely reflect the terminology used in the initial research question (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017; Doyle *et al.*, 2020). A LQR approach involves the collection of qualitative data over at least two time points to explore changes over time (Nevedal *et al.*, 2019). It offers depth, richness and insights to individuals' experiences that differ from insights that arise from cross-sectional data alone (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016). By looking forward and backward over time, LQR enables the exploration of processes and changes over time (Calman *et al.*, 2013; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Torregrosa *et al.*, 2015; Nevedal *et al.*, 2019). Gerontological researchers have frequently used this approach to study aging and life course issues (Lynch and Danely, 2013; Neale, 2015). Recurrent cross-sectional longitudinal analysis, a commonly used approach in LQR, explores themes and changes over time at the level of the entire study sample (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016).

Setting and context

This paper presents the findings of ten individual semi-structured follow-up interviews (T2), of a group of retired women academics, one year after the first interviews (T1) were completed. It discusses the changes and continuity in their retirement experiences across the group between T1 and T2 interviews from an occupational perspective. The study sought participants from one university and an academically linked university-level, college of education and liberal arts in the Republic of Ireland. Historically, Irish universities have been described as being male and middle-class-dominated since their inception (Harford, 2018). In December 2020, 52% of university lecturers and 27% of professors were women (HEA, 2021). Initiatives to progress academic gender equality in the Republic of Ireland have gained increased attention, and the establishment of the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative in 2019, has resulted in 30 full professor women academic posts being granted to seven academic institutions in Ireland, with the last ten posts granted in Autumn 2021.

In the Republic of Ireland, academics are considered public sector employees. The age at which they retire is dependent upon their employment contracts, linked with the year in which they entered public service, their pension contributions and their occupational pension provisions. To this end, some academics in the Republic of Ireland have no mandatory retirement age. At the time the participants of this study retired, any public servants, including academics who had entered the public service between 1 April 2004 and 31 December 2012 had no date for retirement, while public servants including academics who commenced employment in the public service before 1 April 2004, (all participants in this study) had a mandatory retirement age of 65 years. The legislation subsequently changed in December 2018 to raise the retirement age from 65 to 70 years but did not impact this sample as all the participants had retired before December 2018.

Profile of the participants

Eleven retired women academics (in receipt of an occupational pension) who participated in the initial study (Cahill *et al.*, 2021) were emailed by the first author. Ten participants agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews. They included professors, senior lecturers and lecturers from various academic faculties of education and health sciences; arts, humanities and social sciences; and science and engineering. See Table 1 for demographic information.

Data collection procedures

Seven of the ten follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author (who had conducted all the interviews at TI), two interviews were completed by Skype and one interview was completed by telephone. Pseudonymns used in the T1 interviews (Cahill *et al.*, 2021) were used in the follow-up interviews. Interviews averaged 37 minutes duration (and ranged from 19 to 91 minutes), were audio-recorded, transcribed and returned to all participants following transcription to verify accuracy, correct any errors or inaccuracies that they noted and provide clarifications before the data analysis stage. The interview guide was similar to the initial interview guide (see Appendix). This allowed for comparison across time points with a focus on discussing continuity and changes in participants' daily routine, their relationships and the meaning of retirement.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Education and Health Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limerick (Ref. No. 2016_12_17_EHS).

Data analysis

A longitudinal analysis was undertaken using a recurrent cross-sectional approach (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016). Analysis occurred in two stages: firstly, the follow-up interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) six-phase approach. All six phases were led by the first author. Phase one involved reading each transcript. Phase two involved coding the data by creating both semantic (surface meaning) and latent codes (interpretative) to ensure adequately capturing the descriptions of the participants' experiences. Phase three involved the coded data being organised into "candidate" themes. In phase four, the first author discussed the codes and themes with co-authors, and the data was refined into four themes. In phases five and six, the themes were reviewed, refined and discussed with the co-authors. In phase six, the first author concluded with writing up the final findings using data excerpts. Next, to facilitate longitudinal analysis for discussion of changes and continuity of academics experiences across time, sequential matrices (tables) were used to summarise and compare the thematic data between T1 and the follow-up interviews (T2) cross-sectionally and compare the data for each participant at each of the time points (Grossoehme and Lipstein, 2016).

Findings

The analysis of the data resulted in four themes: (i) continuing to navigate occupational identity challenges; (ii) structuring

Table 1 Participants characteristics

Name	Retirement type	Time since retirement (at T2)	Retirement age	Years in HEI	Years in academia
Anne	Mandatory	32 months	65	>20	>30
Elizabeth	Mandatory	14 months	65	>20	>20
Sheila	Mandatory	23 months	65	>15	>35
Joan	Early	13 years	Undisclosed	>15	>35
Bridget	Mandatory	6 years	65	<10	>20
Fiona	Early	11 years	62	>30	>30
Kathleen	Early	3 years	62	>10	>10
Marie	Early	7 years	60	>10	>10
Vera	Mandatory	16 months	65	>30	>30
Margaret	Mandatory	9 years	65	>25	>30

Notes: Early retirement was retirement defined as participants retiring before 65 years of age. HEI is the term used to describe either the university or the academically linked university-level college from which participants retired within this study

free time (iii); appreciating health and well-being; and (iv) continuing meaningful professional relationships and activities.

Continuing to navigate occupational identity challenges
This theme describes participants' on-going identity challenges often related to contextual factors, as they adjusted to retirement over time. Although many participants continued their contribution to academic or professional activities and did not view themselves as retired, other people viewed and described them as "retired". One senior lecturer described how others labelled her as "retired" rather than a "retired lecturer":

> Sometimes I wonder, have you lost your identity, you know, the fact that you're retired. You're not actually a retired university lecturer, you're just a retired person. (Vera, senior lecturer)

In contrast to their own identities as continuing to contribute to society, there was a perception by others that retired women's daily lives were focused on leisure participation:

> I think some people have a view, that you're off constantly traveling and going here and there, enjoying the sunshine and playing golf. (Bridget, senior lecturer)

Participants described how the university views retirees to have an impact on their identity. Another professor, Anne, highlighted that she does not identify as retired but that the University validates the retiree identity through arranged social gatherings but does not validate her academic contributions (publications):

> For somebody whose work has been their life, there are huge identity issues. I'm not interested in turning up to the Sunday lunch or the Christmas lunch once a year because my identity is not that I'm retired, but the only identity that's been validated is the one that's a retiree. Some of us don't want to be valorized as retirees and we don't want Christmas lunch on those terms. But we do want a thank you or recognition. (Anne, professor)

Elizabeth (professor) perceived that the university did not want retired people continuing their academic activities on campus. She described how she was excluded from her working environment and its impact upon her:

> The biggest wretch was when my space was taken and it's still empty. They forced me out, so we couldn't finish off some experiments that we wanted to do. I felt that was really mean spirited because they didn't need that space and it's still empty.

One participant highlighted that policy mandating retiring people by age chronologically, rather than by their desire to contribute seemed wrong, impacting her sense of being:

> I still feel it's wrong, even yet, to push people out at 70. It's less wrong than pushing them out at 65 and it's also stupidly short-sighted. So I still get worked up about it because it is morally wrong and economically stupid. (Anne, professor)

Structuring free time
This theme describes how participants enjoyed the freedom from the daily academic responsibilities and realised over time that intentionally structuring and choosing how to use their newly available free time was essential to their daily lives post-retirement. Almost all participants at T2 reiterated freedom from university schedules, freedom to choose how to spend their time and freedom from the managerial practices that influenced their time use before retirement as the main benefits of retirement congruent with descriptions at T1 (see Table 2). One senior lecturer reiterated that retirement freed her from administrative tasks:

> Academic life has also been overtaken by managerialism, I am so glad to be able to rush past that and not have to worry about it. That's what I mean by freedom. (Margaret, senior lecturer)

Two participants described how retirement offered the freedom to spend time caring for their ill partners:

> Being retired meant I could spend all the time, giving the support and care that was required. So, it allowed me that freedom to be available at that time. (Sheila, senior lecturer)

Conversely, there was a realisation, that although freedom was to be enjoyed, some structure on free time was useful:

> I like to have that structure. I couldn't survive from just day-to-day without knowing I've this on Wednesday or this on Thursday (Joan, senior lecturer)

One senior lecturer described how since T1 she was more intentional about structuring her time and activities:

> I try to have targets for myself because I think it's important, but at the same time you have to be flexible enough so that you can change when something arises. (Margaret, senior lecturer)

Anne (professor) highlighted the challenges of having too much time, now recognising the need for structure to fulfil her writing and publishing that gave her retirement meaning:

> It's terrifying because I have so much freedom. I have to do a list system every evening. So, you have freedom and in a way, I suppose, the opportunity to write sustainedly is an opportunity, that's an advantage. But on the other hand, you have to be very, very disciplined to sit down to write.

The ability to intentionally choose what and how much to do with her time was described by Kathleen (senior lecturer), who

Table 2 Themes at time 1 and follow-up (T2) and the changes in the themes over time

Time 1 Themes	Time 2 Themes (follow-up)	Changes in themes over time
The impact of retirement on identity	Navigating occupational identity challenges	Academics continued to experience identity challenges as they adapted to retirement
		Over time there were tensions between how they view themselves versus how others in society viewed them as retirees
The freedom of retirement	Structuring free time	Academics continued to find freedom from their work (creating more time) as the main benefit of retirement. Over time participants structured their free time intentionally. Those who were retired for some time balanced their free time so that it has some structure, yet had space for them to choose to participate in activities spontaneously
Striving for health and well-being (physical exercise and the absence of stress)	Appreciating health and well-being	Academics continued to enjoy health with many focused on appreciating their current health and well-being. They became aware of potential for changes in their daily lives associated with the aging process
The value of ongoing professional relationships in retirement	Continuing meaningful professional relationships and activities	Academics continued to attend conferences and get invited to collaborate in projects. Relationships and engaging occupations were essential to continued participation (especially for the senior research-active academics)

had retired early and then returned to work in her former (pre-academic) profession post-retirement:

> I definitely would go as far as saying I have dropped off some parts that I would say yes to and now I'm going to drop off a few more. Just enough is perfect. Too much is too much and too little is very stressful.

Appreciating health and well-being

This theme describes participants' appreciation of their own health and well-being at this time, which led to a desire to maximise their participation in their daily lives while their health allowed. For many participants who described striving for health and well-being in the T1 interviews (Cahill *et al.*, 2021), there was a shift in perception to an appreciation of their health and well-being in the T2 interviews (see Table 2). There was an awareness that at any future time their health status could change. Between T1 and T2, some participants reported that they had witnessed other colleagues and family members become ill and deceased, making them more appreciative of their current health. They described wanting to maximize their time, continuing to participate in activities intentionally for as long as possible:

> One of our colleagues in our department died. All of a sudden you realise there are only a few of us left. What we called the X Group seems to be getting smaller and smaller. People are retiring, people are old. People are passing away. It just stops you in your tracks, and you kind of stop and think and it hammers home to you, enjoy and live each day. (Joan, Lecturer)

Margaret (senior lecturer) describes her appreciation of her current health status and routine:

> I see these days, these months, years as a great bonus. Yeah, I am feeling fulfilled. I'm not worrying about the clock because anybody I know, we don't talk about age because it isn't really relevant. Most people I know are just doing things. The only thing I think that will make a change would be health. I am aware that there's something around the corner for all of us.

Another senior lecturer, Kathleen, who had returned to work in her pre-academic professional career, described an appreciation for her current state of health:

> I guess I'm just thinking I'm enjoying being in a state of health at the moment. I'm not desperate to do like the bucket list as I said, but just like

day-by-day appreciating that and continuing to work and then continuing to live as fully as I can.

Speaking of her current and future health status, Fiona (lecturer) commented:

> Health-wise I'm fine. I got an infection and a lot of mouth ulcers and I wondered at that point, because you never know whether anything is the beginning of something or not, whether it's a passing thing. But I went to the GP and he said, oh yeah that's viral.

She continues considering the future:

> I just see myself as a person who does stuff. And you know, if it became necessary I would do different stuff you know. Yeah there will be some event, there will be some health issue or something but I think that I'll just deal with that, whenever that happens.

Continuing meaningful professional relationships and activities

This theme describes the participants' continued engagement in professional relationships and activities over time as central to their daily lives in retirement, sometimes without recognition from the university. For six of the ten participants, their passion and love for research remained central to their identity and doing in their everyday lives in the T2 interviews with no evidence of participants considering tapering off their involvement soon. For senior academics, their continuing academic work had increased and flourished since T1 (see Table 2). For example, one professor highlighted pride in her research productivity through her publications over the past year:

> So I have had six articles or chapters accepted in the past year, which for me is phenomenal. I wouldn't generally have that many in a year. I have one submitted, and I'm working on another one and I suppose there are a couple of others […] I'm editing a book, so I'm doing a chapter for that. (Anne, Professor)

Three senior academics (two professors and one senior lecturer) continued to travel to academic conferences internationally over the past year. For one professor, the research activities (writing, publishing, editing, collaborating,

sharing her research at conferences) gave her retirement meaning:

> Writing pleases me most, but I mean in a way, obviously if I weren't having these trips away with people and in on various projects, it would be even harder to sustain meaning. (Anne, Professor)

The participants discussed their plans for continued research collaborations, indicating their intention to continue with academic activities. Their visibility on international projects and international research projects collaborations within the previous year had led to invitations from colleagues to collaborate on new projects, ensuring continued academic and professional activities:

> Some of them are new. Mostly they are colleagues that say 'are you interested in still being involved or do you want to do this?' So most of them, I think are standing relationships and they still want me engaged. But a couple of them are new. (Bridget, Senior Lecturer)

For the senior academics, their plans suggested that they viewed themselves as having a continued contribution to make with the invitations from their international colleagues reaffirming this. However, it was clear for some senior academics, that although they continued to publish and contribute to the academic community, they were experiencing a lack of recognition from their pre-retirement University:

> There just doesn't seem to be an appreciation that you have something to offer, even if you are offering something that's recognised. And I don't even mean financially, I mean just 'great work, thanks very much'. (Anne, Professor)

Another senior academic described how she perceived her expertise was not being optimised by her former institution:

> The university could probably use my talents a little bit more but it doesn't, it doesn't use my expertise. (Vera, Senior Lecturer)

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of retired women academics to gain an in-depth understanding of changes in the meaning of retirement, the impact on their daily lives and relationships over time. The findings are discussed in the context of changes and continuity in the participant's experiences over time (since T1) where appropriate (see Table 2)

Participants' accounts highlighted continued participation in professional work and academic activities, primarily research-related activities of, writing papers, editing, attending conferences and collaborating on research projects. This echoes previous academic retirement studies that found that most academics continue with academic or professional activities in retirement, particularly research-related activities (Rapoport *et al.*, 2015; Altman *et al.*, 2020; Dorfman, 2000; Williamson *et al.*, 2010; Dorfman, 2009; Rowson and Phillipson, 2020). Freedom from work to spend time as one wishes has frequently been discussed as the main benefit of retirement (Eagers *et al.*, 2018; Jonsson, 2001) and was consistent for most participants over time. Findings demonstrated how participants adapted to structure their free time to optimise their daily lives, leaving space in their daily routine to spontaneously participate in other activities when opportunities arose. The findings suggested that they have adjusted to deal with the paradox of freedom as described by Jonsson (2001) where there is the potential to experience an

occupational imbalance in retirement going from too many external demands (pre-retirement) to experiencing another imbalance post-retirement (absence of demands upon oneself).

Identity challenges, also discussed in the T1 interviews, continued to be a feature of some retirees' experiences over time. Tensions continued to exist between how they perceived themselves and how others in society viewed them, suggesting feelings of being insignificant in retirement. Identity challenges as a consequence of the transition to academic retirement have been previously described (Onyura *et al.*, 2015; Emerald and Carpenter, 2014; Williamson *et al.*, 2010). Challenges maintaining their post-retirement occupational identity support some occupational scientist scholars' view that occupational identity can be influenced by one's social interactions (Phelan and Kinsella, 2009) and the socio-culture environment (Asaba and Jackson, 2011).

More distinctive over time was the continued, evolving occupational identity challenges experienced by some senior academics. Two issues were highlighted by participants: lack of recognition for their research achievements and the loss of pre-retirement workspace impacting on their sense of self. Their experiences suggest issues of marginalisation and discrimination similar to women's academic experiences of exclusion and discriminatory behaviour described in a study of 12 academics in the UK, who continued working post-retirement (George and Maguire, 2020).

The lack of choice in retirement timing for some participants, forcing them to retire at age 65 years, highlighted the role of context in constraining occupational possibilities for aging academics who may wish to continue working in meaningful employment beyond chronological retirement age. The findings support the view that possibilities to participate in meaningful occupation are not available to everyone equally and support Rudman's (2015) assertion that socio-cultural context shapes one's retirement experiences.

These findings are significant as they shine a light on occupational injustices that some women academics experienced in retirement: injustices of recognition, perceived injustices of lack of inclusion and a lack of choice to continue working in their paid academic employment due to structural barriers posed by legislation linking retirement to chronological age. Occupational therapy, being a justice-oriented profession (Bailliard *et al.*, 2020), is becoming increasingly aware of its enactment in practice by focusing on the language of occupational rights (Hammell, 2017). The World Federation of Occupational Therapist's (WFOT) (2019) position statement on human rights asserts that occupational therapists are obliged to promote occupational rights, including addressing occupational injustices. Advocating for the human rights of the older population, so that meaningful choices in retirement timing can be offered to all equally, and so that older people can be acknowledged and celebrated for their contributions to society, is an increasingly relevant role for occupational therapists.

Limitations: Focusing on women academics from one university and a linked college in the Republic of Ireland, some of whom had a mandatory retirement age, may limit the generalisability to similar contexts. Recruiting participants through the institutional email, through a gatekeeper at the retirement association of one university and through a snowball

recruitment strategy, may have resulted in academics still connected to the university volunteering to participate, rather than those who had disconnected from academia.

Conclusion

Participants continued with valued professional and academic activities, in spite of legislation limiting women's choice to continue working and some experiencing perceptions of being marginalised. Occupational therapists need to be cognisant of how occupational injustices affect many older people's occupational rights so that they can be prepared to advocate for the provision of meaningful retirement choices for all and the recognition of older people's contributions and achievements to society.

References

Altman, Y., Baruch, Y., Zoghbi Manrique-de-Lara, P. and Viera Armas, M.M. (2020), "Baby boomers at the cusp of their academic career: storming ahead, hanging on, or calling it a day", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 45 No. 7, pp. 1335-1350.

Asaba, E. and Jackson, J. (2011), "Social ideologies embedded in everyday life: a narrative analysis about disability, identities, and occupation", *Journal of Occupational Science*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 139-152.

Atchley, R.C. (1999), *Continuity and Adaptation in Aging: creating Positive Experiences*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Bailliard, A.L., Dallman, A.R., Carroll, A., Lee, B.D. and Szendrey, S. (2020), "Doing occupational justice: a central dimension of everyday occupational therapy practice", *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 87 No. 2, pp. 144-152.

Bradshaw, C., Atkinson, S. and Doody, O. (2017), "Employing a qualitative description approach in health care research", *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, Vol. 4, p. 233393617742282.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 77-101.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019), "Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis", *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 589-597.

Cahill, M., Galvin, R. and Pettigrew, J. (2021), "The retirement experiences of women academics: a qualitative, descriptive study", *Educational Gerontology*, Vol. 47 No. 7, pp. 1-15.

Cahill, M., Galvin, R. and Pettigrew, J. (2019), "The transition to retirement experiences of academics in 'higher education': a meta-ethnography", *The Gerontologist*, Vol. 59 No. 3, pp. e177-e195.

Calman, L., Brunton, L. and Molassiotis, A. (2013), "Developing longitudinal qualitative designs: lessons learned and recommendations for health services research", *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 1-10.

Dorfman, L.T. (2000), "Still working after age 70: older professors in academe", *Educational Gerontology*, Vol. 26 No. 8, pp. 695-713.

Dorfman, L.T. (2009), "Ten years later: a follow-up study of professors still working after age 70", *Educational Gerontology*, Vol. 35 No. 11, pp. 1032-1045.

Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A. and McCann, M. (2020), "An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research", *Journal of Research in Nursing*, Vol. 25 No. 5, pp. 443-455.

Eagers, J., Franklin, R.C., Broome, K. and Yau, M.K. (2018), "The influence of work on the transition to retirement: a qualitative study", *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 81 No. 11, pp. 624-632.

Ekerdt, D.J. (2010), "Frontiers of research on work and retirement", *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, Vol. 65 No. 1, pp. 69-80.

Emerald, E. and Carpenter, L. (2014), "The scholar retires: an embodied identity journey", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 20 No. 10, pp. 1141-1147.

George, R. and Maguire, M. (2020), "Academics 'staying on' post retirement age in English university departments of education: opportunities, threats and employment policies", *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 69 No. 4, pp. 1-18.

Grossoehme, D. and Lipstein, E. (2016), "Analyzing longitudinal qualitative data: the application of trajectory and recurrent cross-sectional approaches", *BMC Research Notes*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 1-5.

Hammell, K.W. (2017), "Opportunities for well-being: the right to occupational engagement", *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 84 Nos 4/5, pp. 209-222.

Harford, J. (2018), "The perspectives of women professors on the professoriate: a missing piece in the narrative on gender equality in the university", *Education Sciences*, Vol. 8 No. 2, p. 50.

Haslam, S.A., McMahon, C., Cruwys, T., Haslam, C., Jetten, J. and Steffens, N.K. (2018), "Social cure, what social cure? The propensity to underestimate the importance of social factors for health", *Social Science & Medicine*, Vol. 198, pp. 14-21.

Hershenson, D.B. (2016), "Reconceptualizing retirement: a status-based approach", *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 38, pp. 1-5.

Higher Education Authority (2021), Higher education system performance institutional and sectoral profiles 2018/19. A report by the Higher Education Authority.

Jonsson, H. (2000), *Anticipating, Experiencing and Valuing the Transition from Worker to Retiree: A Longitudinal Study of Retirement as an Occupational Transition*, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm.

Jonsson, H. (2011), "The first steps into the third age: the retirement process from a Swedish perspective", *Occupational Therapy International*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 32-38.

Jonsson, H., Josephsson, S. and Kielhofner, G. (2001), "Narratives and experience in an occupational transition: a longitudinal study of the retirement process", *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp. 424-432.

Kaskie, B. (2017), "The academy is aging in place: assessing alternatives for modifying institutions of higher education", *The Gerontologist*, Vol. 57 No. 5, pp. 816-823.

Kim, S. and Feldman, D.C. (2000), "Working in retirement: the antecedents of bridge employment and its consequences

for quality of life in retirement", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 6, pp. 1195-1210.

Kim, H., Sefcik, J.S. and Bradway, C. (2017), "Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: a systematic review", *Research in Nursing & Health*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 23-42.

Kojola, E. and Moen, P. (2016), "No more lock-step retirement: boomers' shifting meanings of work and retirement", *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 36, pp. 59-70.

Lynch, C. and Danely, J. (Eds) (2013), *Transitions and Transformations: Cultural Perspectives on Aging and the Life Course*, Vol. 1, Berghahn Books, New York, NY.

Neale, B. (2015), "Time and the lifecourse: perspectives from qualitative longitudinal research", in Worth, N. and Hardill, I. (Eds), *Researching the Lifecourse: Critical Reflections from the Social Sciences*, Policy Press, Chicago, IL, pp. 25-42.

Neale, B. and Flowerdew, J. (2003), "Time, texture and childhood: the contours of longitudinal qualitative research", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 189-199.

Nevedal, A.L., Ayalon, L. and Briller, S.H. (2019), "A qualitative evidence synthesis review of longitudinal qualitative research in gerontology", *The Gerontologist*, Vol. 59 No. 6, pp. e791-e801.

Njelesani, J., Tang, A., Jonsson, H. and Polatajko, H. (2014), "Articulating an occupational perspective", *Journal of Occupational Science*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 226-235.

Onyura, B., Bohnen, J., Wasylenki, D., Jarvis, A., Giblon, B., Hyland, R., Silver, I. and Leslie, K. (2015), "Reimagining the self at late-career transitions: how identity threat influences academic physicians' retirement considerations", *Academic Medicine*, Vol. 90 No. 6, pp. 794-801.

Pepin, G. and Deutscher, B. (2011), "The lived experience of Australian retirees: 'I'm retired, what do I do now?'", *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 74 No. 9, pp. 419-426.

Pettican, A. and Prior, S. (2011), "It's a new way of life': an exploration of the occupational transition of retirement", *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 74 No. 1, pp. 12-19.

Phelan, S. and Kinsella, E.A. (2009), "Occupational identity: engaging socio-cultural perspectives", *Journal of Occupational Science*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 85-91.

Rapoport, M., Finlay, S.J. and Hillan, E. (2015), "Retirement in the post-vocation context at one Canadian University: experiences of phasing and delaying", *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 1-17.

Rowson, T.S. and Phillipson, C. (2020), "I never really left the university: continuity amongst male academics in the transition from work to retirement", *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 53, p. 100853.

Rudman, D.L. (2015), "Situating occupation in social relations of power: occupational possibilities, ageism and the retirement 'choice'", *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 27-33.

Sandelowski, M. (2010), "What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited", *Research in Nursing & Health*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 77-84.

Sawyer, A.M. and James, S. (2018), "Are baby boomer women redefining retirement?", *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 12 No. 10, p. e12625.

Strudsholm, T. (2011), "Effect of retirement transition on women's well-being: a study of academic women", Master's thesis, Graduate Studies.

Szinovacz, M. (2013), "A multilevel perspective for retirement research", in Wang, M. (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Retirement*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, pp. 152-173.

Tambellini, E. (2021), "Exploring the relationship between working history, retirement transition and women's life satisfaction", *Ageing and Society*, pp. 1-30.

Torregrosa, M., Ramis, Y., Pallarés, S., Azócar, F. and Selva, C. (2015), "Olympic athletes back to retirement: a qualitative longitudinal study", *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, Vol. 21, pp. 50-56.

Vickerstaff, S. and Cox, J. (2005), "Retirement and risk: the individualisation of retirement experiences?", *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 77-95.

Wang, M. (2007), "Profiling retirees in the retirement transition and adjustment process: examining the longitudinal change patterns of retirees psychological well-being", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 2, pp. 455-474.

Wang, M. and Shi, J. (2014), "Psychological research on retirement", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 65 No. 1, pp. 209-233.

Wang, M. and Shultz, K.S. (2010), "Employee retirement: a review and recommendations for future investigation", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 172-206.

Wilcock, A.A. and Hocking, C. (2015), *An Occupational Perspective of Health*, 3rd eds, Slack Incorporated, Thorofare, NJ.

Williamson, M.L., Cook, L., Salmeron, L. and Burton, D. (2010), "Retaining nursing faculty beyond retirement age", *Nurse Educator*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 152-155.

Wiseman, L.M. and Whiteford, G. (2007), "Life history as a tool for understanding occupation, identity and context", *Journal of Occupational Science*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 108-114.

World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) (2019), "Position statement: occupational therapy and human rights", (Revised 2019), available at: www.wfot.org/resources/occupational-therapy-and-human-rights

Yerxa, E.J., Clark, F., Frank, G., Jackson, J., Parham, D., Pierce, D., Stein, C. and Zemke, R. (1989), "An introduction to occupational science, a foundation for occupational therapy in the 21st century", *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 1-17.

Appendix. Interview questions follow-up interviews post-retirement

Introduction

Recap on first retirement interview – Can you tell me again a little about yourself in terms of your job title when working, department and the number of years working at the university (full time, part-time) and what your job entailed (teaching, research, administration); when you retired and the type of retirement (early, voluntary, mandatory, etc.)?

The interview is a follow-up of the last interview (12 months ago) and will cover the four main areas again to see what changes if any you have to report since we last spoke:

1 meaning of retirement
2 planning for retirement
3 anticipated changes in daily life (productivity/work and leisure activities)
4 maintaining professional and personal relationships

Part 1: Meaning of retirement
1 I would like you to describe what retirement means to you now . . .
2 Prompt if not covered:
3 Freedom – from teaching research admin?
4 Flexibility – free schedule
5 Have your views on what retirement means, changed over time since we last spoke?
6 If so, what influenced that change of thinking?

Part 2: Planning for retirement
In this section, we will look again at your experience of planning for retirement and the measures you took to plan for your retirement and changes, if any, in your thinking about planning since we last spoke:
1 Had you planned for retirement?
2 Financial; new activities/hobbies; location; further work/ productivity
3 If yes, what prompted you to plan for this?
4 If not, what are your reasons or barriers for you not planning for retirement?
5 Do you feel now that additional supports or training are required for academics in planning for retirement and what do you think this should cover now that you are retired?

Part 3: Typical day/productivity/work and leisure activities since retirement
In this section, we will look at your experiences of your daily activities since retirement and since we last spoke and any new benefits, if any, that you perceive in your lifestyle:
• Can you describe a typical day for me now?
• Since retirement and the last interview can you describe your work/productive activities, if any, now?
• Have they changed, since we last spoke? If so, how?
• Since retirement and since we last spoke can you describe your leisure activities?
• Have they changed since we last spoke? If so how?

Part 4: Professional and personal relationships
• Since your retirement and since we last spoke, can you describe your perceptions of the impact of retirement on your work/professional relationships (if at all?)
• Since retirement and since we last spoke, can you describe your perceptions of the impact of retirement on your personal relationships (if at all?)

Wrap up question and conclusion
• Before we finish up, is there anything you would like to add to what has already been covered about any comments about your experience over the last 12 months since we last spoke?

Thank you for your time.

Corresponding author
Mairead Cahill can be contacted at: mairead.cahill@ul.ie