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Those Who Retired and Found a Position in Higher Education



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Abstract

The definition of retirement, which marks the end of working life, has changed over time. In fact, retirement today does not mean the end of working life in a single sense. In both Western countries and in Türkiye, it is observed that working life continues even after retirement for reasons such as increasing life expectancy and retiring at a young age. In this respect, bridge employment, which refers to continuing to work after retirement and which has recently been introduced in Western countries, is an issue that can also be examined in Türkiye. This study seeks to understand what motivates people who continue to work in academia after retiring from state universities along with different sectors. In this context, the study was conducted with 17 participants (7 female and 10 male) through semi-structured interviews, one of the qualitative research techniques. The findings from the study show that most of the participants joined bridging employment primarily for economic reasons. Moreover, the participants engaged in bridge employment in academia for reasons such as still being at a younger age, gaining professional satisfaction, getting out of the house, getting involved in social life, feeling useful, having dependents, and flexible working conditions. Participants stated that working was good for their physical and mental health; although they had problems adapting to technology, they received support from young academics in this regard. At the same time, the participants think that they may benefit students and young academics in terms of experience and knowledge transfer. In this respect, it can be predicted that bridge employment can eliminate the problem of the shortage of qualified staff in foundation universities and relatively newly established state universities and increase intergenerational contact.

Keywords

Retirement • bridge employment • academia • universities • working life



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Those Who Retired and Found a Position in Higher Education

Working after retirement is a common phenomenon in different societies, but it is relatively new for social scientists to address this issue. The main reason for this is the increase in the number of people who start working after retirement. In other words, with the increase in life expectancy, retired people are able to stay in working life because they live longer today than a century or more ago (Beehr & Bennett, 2014:1-2). According to Feldman, traditional retirement has meant the end of a career in full-time jobs. However, frequent entries and exits from the labor force (childcare, elderly care or redundancies, among other reasons) deprive many workers of linear career paths (1994: 285). Today, retirement for everyone takes many different forms (Schellenberg, Turcotte & Ram, 2005: 14) and the classical definition of retirement is changing (Shultz, 2003: 214). According to Doeringer, for many people, retirement also means working after retirement (cited in Feldman, 1994: 286). The study focuses on bridge employment (Beehr & Bennett, 2014: 2; Kim & Feldman, 2000: 1195), which is conceptualized as continuing working life from retirement to full retirement.

There are applied studies on retirement in the world (Atchley, 1974; Palmore, George & Fillenbaum, 1982; Quine, Wells, de Vaus & Kendig, 2007; Ranzijn, Patrickson, Carson & le Sueur, 2004; Richardson & Kilty, 1991; Kim & Feldman, 2000; Midanik, Soghikian, Ransom & Tekawa, 1995; Talaga & Beehr, 1995) and in Türkiye (Sevim & Şahin, 2007; Şahin, 2006; Şahin Baltacı & Selvitopu, 2012). In addition to this literature on retirement, there are also theoretical and applied studies on bridge employment (Ang & Mehta, 2021; Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Cahill, Giandrea & Quinn, 2007; Çakır, Çınar & Denizli, 2013; Davis, 2003; Dingemans, 2012; Dingemans & Henkens, 2013; Gobeski & Beehr, 2009; Hill, Snell & Sterns, 2015; Kerr & Armstrong-Stassen, 2011; Kim ve Feldman, 2000; Mazumdar, 2018; Özgen, 2018; Pengcharoen ve Shultz, 2010; Schellenberg et al., 2005; Shultz, 2003; Smaliukiene & Tvaronavičiene, 2014; Tanğ, 2013; Ulrich, 2003; von Bonsdorff, Shultz, Leskinen & Tansky, 2009; Wang, Zhan, Liu & Shultz, 2008; Zhan, Wang, Liu & Shultz, 2009; Zhan, Wang & Yao, 2013). As can be seen, studies on bridge employment have been largely concentrated in the USA and other Western countries (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 14). In Türkiye, there are few theoretical and applied studies examining the effects of working after retirement (Çakır et al., 2013; Özgen, 2018; Öztuna, 2017; Tanğ, 2013).

This study aims to understand the reasons for bridge employment and the explicit and implicit functions of bridge employment based on the individual experiences of academics. While retirement is relatively preferred in all professions and business lines, retirement in academia is mostly not preferred. So much so that even people who retired from different business lines in the state are employed in academia. This study aims to understand the dominant meaning that 17 participants, who retired from different sectors or from well-established and old state universities in Türkiye but continue to work in academia, attribute to retirement and bridge employment and the reasons for their continued working life.

Conceptual Framework

The Life Course

The life course is a way of expressing the turning points in an individual's life and includes the analysis of important life events (Marshall, 1999: 815). The main interest of the life course perspective has been how life events and transitions, such as changes in work, educational conditions, family and gender roles, have

an impact on later life (Akış and Korkmaz Yaylagül, 2020: 282). Since retirement is one of these transitions, it is an appropriate perspective for the conceptual framework of the study.

Participation in working life after retirement has different meanings depending on individuals and occupational branches. Work, productivity, workplace environment and the value placed on work by the society increase and/or decrease the degree of work engagement. In a qualitative study conducted with 25 participants aged 55 and over who continue to work beyond the retirement age based on the life course perspective, it was concluded that although they have been in the labor market for at least 30 years, increasing experience with age does not bring equal value, respect and prestige to everyone. At this point, the value of the job offers advantages and disadvantages for working (Çınay, 2023: 326). Especially the experiences gained during working life and life course affect people's decision to join or not to join working life in the same or a different field.

Retirement

Social scientists have traditionally conceptualized retirement¹ as the cessation of work and work-related activities (Richardson & Kilty, 1991: 154). While unemployment can be seen as an unconventional path, retirement is an unconventional definition, an expected and now almost universal transition, largely due to job loss (Moen, 1996: 131). Retirement is as much a process as it is a transition. This is clearly stated in recent studies on retirement. Retirement is recognized as a process that begins with planning and decision-making some time before the actual end of one's working life and is not completed until years after the point of retirement (Beehr, 1986: 31).

Retirement is embedded in contemporary social policy and practice; it is normatively defined in terms of timing and legitimacy. These normative expectations, in conjunction with the institutionalization of income support (in the form of social security payments and pensions), distinguished retirement from unemployment as a later life that could be planned, anticipated and positively defined (Moen, 1996: 136). Today, retirement is a multidimensional issue with connotations at different levels.

The separation represented by retirement depends on one's emotional resilience, the good experiences accumulated throughout life and the ability to react to the unknown (Hofman, 2012: 20). Reasons that encourage individuals to retire include type A behavior represented by compulsive, aggressive, impatient activity, skill obsolescence, and health and economic well-being (Beehr, 1986: 47). At the same time, the individual's own position, the social networks with which he/she is associated, and the values of the society guide his/her perspectives on retirement. In his analysis of the history of retirement in the United States, Atchley underlines that the history of retirement cannot be understood by economic or demographic processes alone. According to Atchley, intergroup dialectics play an important role in shaping retirement (Atchley, 1982: 274).

Age, as a variable that motivates or forces retirement, greatly shapes the individual and social lives of the older adults. For instance, retirement is of interest to gerontologists because it affects the way older people spend their time, the amount of their income, their social interactions, their physical and mental health, their self-esteem and life satisfaction (Palmore et al., 1982: 733). The gradual separation of the concept of retirement from the concept of old age was characterized in the case of America's retirement history. When

¹The origin of the public pension system is traditionally attributed to the creation of an old-age insurance scheme in Germany in 1889 under Otto von Bismarck. Financed by social contributions and involving employer and worker representatives, the program provided modest earnings-related benefits for industrial workers and their surviving families. (Kohli & Arza, 2011: 252). However, since the historical origins of pensions are not directly the subject of the study, detailed information will not be presented in the study.

retirement was first constructed, the rationale assumed that workers were not fit for work. However, the retirement age has decreased over time, and the rationale for retirement has come to emphasize the control of unemployment and the creation of job opportunities. Today, retirement does not mean a transition to old age, but rather giving up work (Atchley, 1982: 274). When this situation is read in the Türkiye context, it is obvious that retirement cannot be considered to be entirely related to age periods that include old age.

Bridge Employment

There is no generalizable definition of bridge employment, which is conceptualized as continuing working life from retirement to full retirement (Beehr & Bennett, 2014: 2; Kim & Feldman, 2000: 1195), and not all retirees continue working under all circumstances. In fact, the continuation of working life after retirement is determined by many variables such as age, gender, health, and financial situation (Beehr & Bennett, 2014), as well as work and non-work factors such as job commitment, job search self-efficacy, certainty of retirement plans and attitudes toward retirement plans (Pengcharoen & Shultz, 2010: 332), and the lack of desire to retire (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 19).

Those who retire at a younger age can continue their working life due to the low income. In line with this argument, a study of 539 middle-aged and older workers in the United States found that those who are considering full retirement are among the oldest workers and those who are considering career bridge employment are among the youngest (von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 89). After age, the most important determinant of continuing to work after retirement is health status. Health status positively affects both work engagement and work intention (Kerr and Armstrong-Stassen, 2011: 72). Another reason is that retirement is voluntary. In a mixed-design study, it was found that participants who retired involuntarily were more likely to want bridge employment than older adults who retired voluntarily (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 19). A longitudinal cohort study conducted in the Netherlands with 5-year intervals (2001-2006-2011; age 50-65 in 2001) showed that participation in a bridge job can be a buffer against the negative impact of involuntary retirement on well-being and maintain well-being at pre-retirement levels (Dingemans, 2012: 19). Another study conducted in the Netherlands in the same year periods involving the same author found that involuntary retirement was detrimental to life satisfaction in older adults compared to voluntary retirement, but that participation in a bridge job was effective in mitigating this negative shock (Dingemans & Henkens, 2013: 575). The issue of volunteering varies not only in terms of working after retirement but also in terms of job choice. Indeed, regardless of the type of retirement, retirees seeking bridge employment are more interested in person-job fit (less stressful and part-time jobs) (Ang & Mehta, 2021: 23).

In a qualitative study conducted in the United States with 24 participants aged 62 and over from different educational backgrounds, professions and geographical regions who participated in bridging employment after retiring from a long-term career job, it was concluded that the reasons for choosing bridging employment include the desire to use their time in a meaningful way, to fill their time, to have a say in what they do, to continue their long-term career in some way and/or to meet their financial needs (Ulrich, 2003: 75). In addition, one of the important variables is the positive satisfaction with one's job during the working life. In a related study conducted in Canada with 609 participants between the ages of 50 and 65, including individuals in career occupations, those who were fully retired, and those engaged in bridge employment; it was concluded that recognition and respect have a great influence on people's decisions to stay in the workforce or return to the workforce after retirement. According to Richardson and Kilty, those in low-prestige jobs may have more difficulty maintaining their status and respect when they retire. Loss of role at work may be more detrimental to those in low status jobs than for those in high prestige occupations.

Individuals who are professionals are more likely to have connections, participate in professional groups and maintain part-time professional employment (Richardson and Kilty, 1991: 165-166).

Bridge employment is divided into two different types: career bridge employment and bridge employment in a different field (Feldman, 1994; Shultz, 2003). The degree of prevalence and reasons for these two types of bridge employment are different. For instance, a study conducted in the United States found that retirees with career-related skills were more likely to work in a career-related bridge job (rather than retiring completely or taking a non-career-related bridge job). On the other hand, it was concluded that retirees who experience workload in career jobs are more likely to take a bridge job that is not related to their previous career rather than a career bridge job (Gobeski & Beehr, 2009: 401). According to the study, another reason for this is that older workers often accept lower pay and status in exchange for the flexibility of a bridge job (2009: 402). Similar to this study, a mixed-design study conducted in Canada found that retirees' sense of having choice and control over their work (consideration of leave entitlements, medium- and short-term contracts, comfortable and stable shifts, and manageable workload) is important for their satisfaction with their work life (Mazumdar, 2018: 132, 134).

While men prefer employment in a different field, women prefer career bridge employment more than bridge employment (Wang et al., 2008: 824; von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 92). At the same time, Wang et al. (2008) found that being younger, having longer education, having better health, positive psychological effects of work (less job stress and higher job satisfaction), and considering retirement less were positively associated with participation in career bridge employment rather than full retirement (Wang et al., 2008: 824). Compared to retirees who chose full retirement, retirees who engaged in both forms of bridge employment reported fewer illnesses and fewer functional limitations, while those who engaged in bridge work only in career fields reported better health (Zhan et al., 2009: 383). At the same time, factors such as having a tenure position or not, marital status, and number of dependents are important in continuing to work after retirement. However, retirees who are younger, have a longer education (more than 1 year), have better health and financial conditions, experience less job stress and consider retirement less are more likely to enter bridge employment in a different field instead of full retirement (Wang et al., 2008: 826). The study also found that retirees who have better financial conditions, experience less job stress and higher job satisfaction in pre-retirement jobs prefer career bridge employment rather than bridge employment in a different field (2008: 826-827).

In bridge employment, the expectation to meet the necessities of life rather than a job-dependent role leads people to work. For example, in a study conducted in Türkiye, it was concluded that although most retirees prefer leisure activities and rest to work, financial needs, inadequacy of prior savings and lack of additional sources of income lead them to work. At the same time, a significant number of retirees may choose to work for new career prospects, development and experience sharing (Çakır et al., 2013: 53). This situation gives a clear idea about the reasons for continuing to work for those who retired from unqualified jobs and those who retired from qualified jobs. As a matter of fact, in the first case, material needs and in the second case, individual satisfaction, intellectual fulfillment and contribution to society predominate. This situation is similar in studies conducted in different countries. While the motivation to work in lower income groups is primarily based on financial reasons (Loi & Schultz, 2007: 286); those who are not under financial pressure are more likely to make decisions in bridge employment according to their career attitudes (Zhan et al., 2013: 370).

Retirement and Bridge Employment in Academia

According to Article 30 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547, “the age limit for faculty members to be dismissed from their duties is the date they turn 67 years old”. “Without prejudice to the provision of the second paragraph of Provisional Article 55, those who have applied before the date they will reach the retirement age and who are in faculty member positions as of the date of the contract, and who are deemed beneficial to remain in their positions in the departments and programs determined by the higher education institutions, may be employed on contract for periods of one year from the date they reach the retirement age, with the proposal of the higher education institution and the approval of the Council of Higher Education, until they reach the age of 75 and until they receive a pension or old-age pension, not exceeding 75 years of age” (Higher Education Law, Article 30). At the same time, “The retirement age for faculty members stipulated in Article 30 is 75 years of age, provided that they work at the State universities established by Laws No. 5467 dated 1/3/2006, No. 5662 dated 17/5/2007, No. 5662 dated 17/5/2007, No. 5765 dated 22/5/2008, as well as Kafkas University² and Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Kanunu³. This practice continues until December 31, 2025” (Law on Higher Education, Provisional Article 55). In the study, participants working in 8 different (state and foundation) universities in Turkey (with the exception of one participant who exceeded the working age limit specified in the law (P5-82)) were selected among those who retired and returned to working life. As can be seen in the study, academics prefer bridge employment even when they retire. This is similar to Ruhm’s (1990) longitudinal study conducted at 2-year intervals over a 10-year period. In that study, it was found that well-educated retirees were more likely to stay in their career fields after retirement. Moreover, it is possible to come across scientific studies showing that this is beneficial for health. For example, an article in *The New York Times*, based on health experts, argues that the age of 65 does not make sense for retirement, especially for those working in knowledge-based jobs (Smith, 2023, April 13).

In accordance with the Civil Servants Law (Sarı, 2022), when academics retire from civil service and start working at state universities again, their pensions are cut off. However, when academics who retired from state universities start working at a foundation university, their pensions are not cut off. The same applies to academics who retire from foundation universities and work at state universities again. In these cases, the participants received double salaries. Similar to this situation, the participants in the study who retired from state universities and worked at foundation universities received double salaries. However, participants who transferred from a different civil servant grade and state university to another state university received a single salary.

Purpose, Importance, Population and Sample of the Study

The aim of this study is to question the dominant meaning attributed to retirement and bridge employment by academics who retired from a different sector and state universities and continue to work as faculty members at another state university or foundation university. At the same time, the study aims to reveal why they participate in bridge employment. In this respect, the article is the first study that deals with academics in Türkiye specifically on bridge employment. The study was conducted with semi-structured interviews, one of the qualitative research techniques. Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used in the study. The population of the study consists of academics who have chosen bridge employment in Türkiye, and the sample consists of 17 participants who have chosen bridge employment and are actively working in

²The date of establishment is July 11, 1992.

³The date of establishment is May 18, 2018.



state and foundation universities. The Ethics Committee of Siirt University Rectorate on 14.09.2023 at 10:00 on session number 659 authorized the study. Among the academics in different regions and provinces of Turkey, 3 of them were interviewed face-to-face and 14 of them were contacted through telephone interviewing in September 2024. Participants were asked questions such as what retirement and bridging employment meant to them, for what reasons they re-entered work life, and what problems they experienced in their current jobs. The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and converted into text. Information about the participants is given in the table below:

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Number of participants	Age	Gender	Marital status	Year of retirement-state or foundation	Bridge Employment Type	Title	Type of University
P1	69	Male	Married	2013-State (Specialist Doctor)	Bridge employment in a different field (retired from State Hospital and worked in academia)	Asst. Prof.	Foundation
P2	70	Female	Married	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P3	72	Male	Married	2019-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P4	63	Male	Married	2013-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof..	Foundation
P5	82	Male	Married	2003-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P6	67	Female	Widow	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P7	74	Male	Married	2004-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P8	58	Male	Married	2007-Military	Bridge employment in a different field	Assoc. Prof. Dr.	Foundation
P9	69	Female	Married	2022-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P10	72	Male	Married	2019-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P11	60	Female	Married	2012-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	State
P12	61	Female	Divorced	2021-State University (Asst. Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	State
P13	58	Female	Single	2014-Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Expert)	Bridge employment in a different field	Asst. Prof.	State
P14	68	Male	Married	2001-State University (Assistant Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	Foundation
P15	63	Female	Widow	2005-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation

Number of participants	Age	Gender	Marital status	Year of retirement-state or foundation	Bridge Employment Type	Title	Type of University
P16	65	Male	Married	2021-State University (Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Prof.	Foundation
P17	64	Male	Married	2013-State University (Asst. Prof.)	Career bridge employment	Asst. Prof.	State

As seen in Table 1, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants, 7 of whom were female and 10 were male, aged between 58 and 82 years. The average age of the participants was 66.76 years. All participants were married except for two widows, one divorced and one single participant. 14 of the participants had career bridge employment and 3 of them had employment in a different field. Five of the participants are assistant professor, 1 is an associate professor, and 11 are professors. Currently, 6 of them work at state universities and 11 at foundation universities. All of the participants working at foundation universities retired from a state university or a state department. In particular, the participants working at foundation universities stated that they work full-time at the university they are affiliated with regardless of their title and that they come to the university they are affiliated with upon an offer. It was revealed that stress was not a dominant feature of their work tempo, regardless of whether they worked at state or foundation universities. According to them, stress was a binding feature for individuals at the beginning of their career in academia. A distinctive example in this regard is P13. This participant revealed that not being promoted academically was a stress-inducing factor in the late stages. Especially for the participants who are at the last stage of their academic career, their experience and mastery of the subjects of study in the following years eliminate the stress factor. However, another issue that should be mentioned here is the stress caused by a job change. According to P10, this stress is temporary.

While 14 of the participants performed career bridge employment, 3 of them performed bridge employment in a different field. Although P1 found an academic career in the same field with the advantage of being a doctor, P8 completed her PhD while working in the military, and P13 joined bridge employment at the university after retiring from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of the Republic of Türkiye. The finding in the literature (Wang et al., 2008: 824; von Bonsdorff et al., 2009: 92) that women prefer career bridge employment more than bridge employment, while men prefer employment in a different field, is not similar to the participant profile of the study. Among the participants, having an academic background facilitated the maintenance and adoption of working life at the university. This is similar to the findings in the literature (Gobeski and Beehr, 2009: 401) that retirees with career-related skills are more likely to work in a career-related bridge job (rather than retiring completely or taking a non-career-related bridge job). Among those who decided on bridging employment, university life was a positive option. Indeed, the fact that most of the participants have been working in academia for many years (Kim and Feldman, 2000) may be an important factor in accepting bridge employment. The participants retired between 2001 and 2022, and most participants joined bridge employment after a while.

None of the participants stated that they were subjected to discriminatory behavior in their current workplace. They also stated that the university and the academic unit they transferred to have a familiar culture, and therefore, since they attach importance to seniority, they embrace themselves, and they embrace the institution and their colleagues. All of the participants stated that their colleagues and the institution helped them in every area they needed. This shows that the academic community (whether old or new) carries the traces of a deep-rooted past that values knowledge and experience with a social

inclusion approach. P15 provided a different example in this regard. P15 criticizes the lack of a chair tradition in foundation universities and the lack of clear job descriptions.

A divorced female participant (P12) stated that she provided financial support for the education of her daughter who went to university; P17 stated that she provided financial support for her foreign national husband living abroad and for the education of her young son. Another participant, P3, stated that her 2 adult male children were unemployed and that she and her husband supported them financially. Other participants stated that their children have professions, and they do not expect financial support from them, while some stated that they support their children financially even if they are working.

Findings

The Meaning of Retirement

Retirement itself points to a period that creates advantages and disadvantages for working people. This process, which can be considered as the end of one's life and the beginning of another, is perceived differently at different ages. Participants explain retirement as a change of occupation, making time for oneself, a state of inactivity, a period of rest, and engaging in occupations:

"I think retirement is **to change your occupation...** I mean, I think so. (When asked if you could elaborate on this a bit) Let's say doing things that you have been working on but could not do... **Spending more time on your hobbies...**" (P1, male, 69 years old).

"Retirement is **a state of inactivity**. In short, it is **a period of rest**" (P14, male, 68 years old).

"... **It is to give people the opportunity to spare time for themselves** in life. I mean, you are constantly going to work, coming back from work. Retirement means **that you can listen to yourself a little bit** and then, sir, **you can engage in better occupations**" (P10, male, 72 years old).

An important element in sustaining retirement is planning for the future. In a study conducted in a health care organization between 1985 and 1987 with 595 members aged from 60 to 66 who were planning to retire and 595 who were not planning to retire, it was found that retired members were more likely to have lower stress levels and to exercise regularly during the working period compared to non-retired members (Midanik et al., 1995: S61). One participant stated that although he planned for his retirement while working, he could not realize this planning during his retirement. P11, who plans to retire again in a short time and plans to do so, plans to open a business with his wife after retirement based on the experience he has gained in his current job. This participant defines retirement as "going/going home". In addition, unlike other participants, she has a more positive approach to retirement and post-retirement:

"I told you, I **retired** from (meaning a state university in Turkey) **and stayed home for two years. I was depressed**. So, **when I went to** (meaning a foundation university abroad), **it was like I was reborn**. Of course, **I was young then. Now I am 60 years old... I should just go...** (Retirement is meant) I should sit in my house. I should have a dog in my garden again. I mean, I want to work with flowers, plant grass. I want to spend some time like that. **I am tired**" (P11, female, 60 years old).

In retirement, the older adults lack the means to maintain their authority arising from expertise throughout their lives. Because when the expected retirement comes, he/she has to leave working life and

transfer the authority of expertise to younger generations (Tufan, 2002: 189). At the same time, retirement is an irreversible stage; it is the death of the productive asset after a long and difficult working life. It is a time that is expected but at the same time dreaded (Hofman, 2012: 20). People who have worked in one job or the same job for a lifetime may fall into existential emptiness (Frankl, 2019: 121) when they retire; this situation may cause problems in giving meaning to their lives:

“Well, I didn’t like retirement very much. I felt bad. I mean, useless, old... I started again because I felt like that...” (P2, female, 70 years old).

“I thought I would be very happy when I retired, but it was not like that. I mean, I will rest; then I will travel, see my friends, and so on. But of course, it didn't work out like that. I mean, it all goes to a certain point... I mean, I was very, very bored. **I found retirement very boring”** (P12, female, 61 years old).

P5 criticizes the negative meanings attributed to retirement. He makes a definition of retirement against the existing assumptions. Here, he states that retirement does not mean lying down and letting oneself go within the continuity of life. P6 states that work is the enabler of the continuation of many activities in life. Therefore, according to P6, retirement means the end of activities. P8 and P9 explain retirement as the withdrawal from working life or the completion of an obligatory job.

P17 explains the end of working life as the “last station”. Some participants equated death with retirement. P5 stated that working in academia is a lifestyle reflected in the whole of daily life. P7 explains this by associating the continuity of brain activities with academics. Working life is decisive for people to prefer bridge employment as a positive point of engagement in the rhythm of daily life.

“...What about retirement? They say rest. No... I say this. Retirement, if you directly say you want to rest, it means you are waiting for death. The three classes cannot retire. For example, let me tell you. **Soldiers, policemen, professors, especially university professors cannot retire...”** (P5, male, 82 years old).

“People cannot retire, the brain is constantly working in academics. Therefore, the brain of academics is constantly solving problems. They deal with science and reach its happiness” (P7, male, 74 years old).

“(When asked if there is an advantage to retiring) I don't think there is an advantage. (Slightly laughing) Because I mean, the children have grown up, the troubled times are over. Therefore, retirement did not seem more advantageous. I mean, **I liked working”** (P2, female, 70 years old).

Life satisfaction in retirement, quality of life and adaptation to retirement life differ according to factors such as change in income level, affordability, diversity of income sources and household income level (Yıldırım, 2021: 187, 201). In all levels of professions and lines of work, the income obtained in retirement decreases. The decrease in income resulting from retirement lowers the social status of the retiree and creates social problems and adaptation difficulties for the older adults (Emiroğlu, 1995: 41). In a survey conducted on 123 retirees in Şanlıurfa, it was found that retirement was perceived as an economic weakness for the participants (Sevim & Şahin, 2007: 192). Keeping in mind that money provides independence for every generation (Hofman, 2012: 124), its presence or absence is decisive on the individual. Material fulfillment implies an increase in freedom and horizons of choice; its absence implies an increase in dependency. At this

point, expectations from retirement and the requirements of real life explain the difference between what retirement should be and what it is. This situation enables people to transition back to their working life:

“Well, I think retirement should be what it should be rather than what it is... **Retirement is basically a person working and producing for many years at work and then, when he reaches a certain age, he should live a happy life with the values he has produced up to that day, the values he has produced,** what shall we say? He **should live a happy life with his yields and products. This should be retirement...** But **unfortunately, it is not possible to realize this** under the conditions of our country...” (P16, male, 65 years old).

The most prominent answer to the question of whether retirement has an advantage is that it ensures a guaranteed income. Other participants explain this similarly to Tanğ's (2013: 60) association of bridge employment with continuing to work while earning income:

“So, the advantage of being retired now, is there an advantage? **You only have a second salary if you work again economically.** Other than that, an advantage can be a rest, if you are very tired” (P6, female, 67 years old).

“Right now, not only mine but **all academics' e especially e entitlements have fallen far behind economically. There is a general dissatisfaction at the moment,** I can say that” (P15, female, 63 years old).

Reasons for Participation in Bridge Employment

The decision to retire is an individual one, but it is influenced by the attitude of society and older employers toward older workers, the situation in the labor market and the implementation of active labor policy (Smaliukiene & Tvaronavičiene, 2014: 389). The return of retirees to work has positive consequences for the employer and the nation as well as the employee. According to one study, the re-entry of retirees into the workforce has widened the labor pool for employers, making it easier for them to access older and skilled workers. For the nation as a whole, it has enabled people to remain more productive later in life. Thus, there are fewer dependents on social programs; the nation has more goods and services to distribute to the aging population (Cahill et al., 2007: 7). Taken together, all of these can be considered as positive outcomes for employers and the state, as well as for retirees. Participants work in foundation and state universities, stating that it is a necessity for universities to keep them in working life. As a matter of fact, the entry of retirees into working life can be an advantage for these universities despite staff shortages. Participants express necessity based on the need to enter working life. P3 argues that the conditions of the newly established universities in Türkiye are not sufficient for a university identity through the competence of the graduates. At the same time, P9 highlights the difference between state and foundation universities and that the need disappears when the staff shortage is closed. Another participant, P2, talks about the obligation created by not being able to find the necessary teaching member.

Education may be a determinant of career-oriented bridge employment (Zhan et al., 2013: 370). Participants mentioned that it is economically difficult to live in Türkiye and that retiring at a young age is an important determinant of staying in the working life after retirement. So much so that there are participants who would not want to stay in working life if there was no decrease in income:

“Everyone must work now... (When asked why) I mean economic, economic reasons... I mean, in our country, there is the opportunity to retire at a young age. Therefore, the pension we receive after retirement does not provide you with a living in today’s conditions. Therefore, additional work (?)... (necessary)” (P8, male, 58 years old).

“...Retirement may be a step more relaxation, a step more comfortable... I mean, right now I can say this clearly... If they gave me the income I earn here now when I retire, I would retire immediately” (P17, male, 64 years old).

Similar to the finding that those who are not under financial pressure are more likely to decide on bridge employment based on career attitudes (Zhan et al., 2013: 370), P1 stated that being educated offers the possibility of choice and that even if there is a change in income, this does not affect the decision to work in the first place. Instead, according to the participant, like to work is a motivating force. P1 stated that the experiences gained in retirement are wasted, while by working, the accumulation of experience is transferred to younger generations.

Work-related and non-work-related factors impact the reasons for choosing and not choosing bridge employment (Pengcharoen & Shultz, 2010). The majority of the participants evaluated the reasons for their retirement at different levels within the scope of voluntary retirement; they saw the reason for choosing bridge employment as the necessity of a purpose to live, and as a descriptor at the academic level, not being separated from social life and being productive. According to P16, this situation is manifested by the difficulty of living conditions, especially in big cities. P8 considers working again as a restorative identity and a way of life in the face of age-related limitations in social life:

“You need to have a purpose in your daily life... If you do not have that purpose, you can go to bed again without washing your face. But when there is such a thing, when you work, it is possible to get dressed and go out, socialize at work, **share** something with your circle of friends... Otherwise, an **antisocial life** here is also... What is it called? **It leaves you in a difficult situation”** (P8, male, 58 years old).

Good health positively affects work engagement and work intention (Kerr and Armstrong-Stassen, 2011: 72; Kim and Feldman, 2000; Wang et al., 2008: 824; Zhan et al., 2009: 383). Participants cited participation in working life as a way to be healthy:

“The more I work, the fitter I feel... I see that my mental capacity is not diminishing. On the contrary, I see that it is increasing. The increase in my mental and intellectual capacity makes me jubilant. I am also very healthy physically...” (P1, male, 69 years old).

Recognition and respect (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008: 47-48) is a determining factor in entering and staying in bridging employment. In this context, the characteristics of the province and the university constitute a source of motivation for the participants to work:

“When I was at, I mean (referring to a long-established and large university in Turkey and the province where it is located), there was nothing like that. Recognition, respect, etc. But here (meaning a small university founded in 2007 in Turkey), there is something very extreme. How can I put

it? **Respect for the people working at the university...** So of course that **makes me happy** here..." (P12, female, 61 years old).

Another aspect is the efficient use of time. In their study, Ang and Mehta concluded that retirees are motivated by social interactions in bridge employment; that retirees see work as a balance between "self and work" and "self and others"; and that bridge employment increases retirees' self-confidence (2021: 20-21). In this respect, bridge employment is seen as a necessity for participants to use their time in a meaningful way, to fill their time, to have a say in what they do (Ulrich, 2003: 75):

"(In working life) time is used effectively. Because there are things that you should not leave from today to tomorrow. But in retired life, when you are at home, you have the chance to leave it for the next day. You have such flexibility. But **in working life**, you have to use **time in a more planned, organized...**(?) way" (P6, female, 67 years old).

Although retired women are less willing to work than men (Çakır et al., 2013: 53), behaving based on gender roles is one of the reasons that motivate participants to work. In some cases, the same participants believed that the change in gender roles was also the enabling force for women to work. However, it should be noted that in both cases, the presence of a (male/female) spouse who picks up the slack enables people to work. P13 states that her reason for pursuing a career is the roles of women and their disadvantages due to these roles. P15 states that gender discrimination has been effective in the academic and administrative decline of women, even if not for her. P5 and P10 stated that the fact that women have more gender-related roles is a justification for their retirement; hardworking men do not desire retirement. However, participants affirm that men work for jobs that require mental labor, such as academics. Therefore, by revealing the difference between men's and women's work on the one hand and, mental-physical labor on the other, it is stated that working at an older age should be in jobs that require mental labor. However, P4 shows that personal characteristics impact gender-based distinctions.

The presence of academics with a long history in the academic world provides an important function for universities to gain and maintain their identity. P13 summarizes the contributions of academics participating in bridge employment to the institution as experience; P15 summarizes knowledge, equipment, experience, and balance in the teacher-student relationship; P16 summarizes accumulation, free and flexible thinking. P14 states that loss of performance is eliminated through the transfer of experience. In this respect, he makes a self-criticism and evaluates the positive and negative effects of bridge employment participants on the institution they are affiliated with:

"A career in academia is built up over years; knowledge, equipment. Let us not just include theoretical knowledge. I mean, **there is the experience of spending years in that academy. There is a balance between the teacher-student relationship** has established over the years... One, after years with such a perspective, **it can be viewed more flexibly and the student-teacher relationship is more balanced...**" (P15, female, 63 years old).

"Just when they reach their most productive age, they are told to go and sit at home. ...I can see this in myself when a person acquires a certain academic background and reaches a certain age. You can think more freely, you can think more flexibly. You can become more flexible. I think that these can provide important support to both scientific life and social life..." (P16, male, 65 years old).

Challenges in the Working Life

It can be said that prejudices such as older individuals not being open to innovations, not following technological developments, not being as agile as young people, and having low work motivation create prejudice against older people in working life (Kalafat, 2023: 63). However, the quality and quantity of the work and expectations from the employee are decisive in reducing such losses or ignoring them in the eyes of the employer. At this point, the presence of young academics has a positive effect on the participants' adaptation to working life in a changing world:

"I still think I can adapt to any technology I want, and because of my administrative work, I have always been surrounded by very **talented assistants**. Unfortunately, those young people **quickly take over and solve** all my technological burdens..." (P4, male, 63 years old).

P11, who identifies bridge employment with productivity in the academic world, questions the contribution of academics, who are professors in academia, to working life. This situation shows us that academics, as conscious recipients of experience participating in working life, do not perceive academia only as a material gain gate:

"**Most academics do nothing after they get their professorship** (she puts her hand under her head and make the sleep sign). In general... So, then there is no production. I mean, children, assistants, if they are hardworking, if they want to do something, they can benefit a lot from those professors. A little bit depends on what the student... (when asked if it doesn't depend on what they want) Yes..." (P11, female, 60 years old).

P14 considers the decrease in performance as a difficulty encountered in working life in academia. However, he also states that experience, which was among the reasons why some participants participated in working life above, compensates for the lack of performance:

"Of course, experience, I think **experience**, accumulation **is essential**... Of course, **performance inevitably decreases** along with it. It decreases compared to the performance in the youth period. **But experience covers it to a great extent**..." (P14, male, 68 years old).

Evaluation and Conclusion

Retirement and bridging employment have different meanings in different business lines and professions. One of the factors that determine this definitional difference is that retirement is not planned and there is no institution or organization that prepares for retirement. When retirement, which is one of the critical transitions of life, occurs as an unplanned end, this situation creates material and moral dissatisfaction in the individual. At this point, bridge employment can assume an important function in overcoming the problems created by retirement and reducing this dissatisfaction. Indeed, in line with the existing literature, participation in bridge employment is effective in alleviating the negative shock of involuntary retirement (Dingemans & Henkens, 2013: 575). Despite this general statement, the reasons for bridge employment vary from society to society and from person to person. According to Beehr and Bennett (2014: 9), the explicit function of bridging employment is financing, while its hidden functions are providing identity, better time utilization, and widening the social environment. Participants in the study had similar evaluations of these

functions. Retirement in academia does not mean the end of working life. With bridge employment, academics gain economic security and remain committed to the living standards they are used to. Although most participants critically stated that the decrease in income motivates them to work again, some participants emphasized that academic working life is a top priority in finding and establishing belonging. This situation contributes to the physical and mental health of the individual participating in bridge employment and keeps them in social life.

In a study conducted at the University of California in 1994; it was concluded that good health, tenure, having a working spouse and dependent children are important factors in accepting bridge employment (Kim & Feldman, 2000). Similarly, the study concluded that reasons such as being healthy, staying in academia for a long time, having a non-working spouse, and having to take care of adult children who are studying or unemployed are decisive in choosing bridge employment.

Similar to the findings obtained, it has been indicated in different studies that only those who are engaged in bridge jobs in their career fields report better health status (Zhan et al., 2009: 383). Since the study only evaluated academics, no data on the health status of those who prefer bridging employment in different sectors could not be reached. Studies to be conducted with people engaged in bridging employment in different sectors will fill this gap.

When considered from a life course perspective, most of the participants stated that having an academic background was decisive for them to continue their working life in addition to the personal characteristics mentioned above. As a matter of fact, as a profession that requires knowledge, experience and effort, academics allow for professional maturation over time. Academics mostly define themselves through their profession.

One of the results of the study is gendered career choice. For some female participants, gender roles increased the likelihood of entering and staying in academia. However, the fact that male academics consider retirement as a right for female academics later in life on the grounds that they are worn out makes it possible for us to question the work and domestic responsibilities directed toward women in society. This situation is seminal for future studies on women's participation in bridge employment.

The world of academic work requires following and adapting to current developments as well as providing experience. Although the fact that most of the participants know enough about technology to be useful compared to younger people can be seen as a disadvantage, it can be said that they make important contributions to the university they are affiliated with in terms of gaining flexibility in the teacher-student relationship and transferring experience and knowledge. As a matter of fact, the participants, most of whom work in foundation universities, stated that their maturity in age and years of experience in long established universities enabled them to embrace and maintain the academic tradition. This situation contributes significantly to the establishment of university identity in foundation and newly established state universities and ensures that these are passed on to generations. However, the fact that retired academics prefer bridge employment may pose obstacles for young academics to find a position in academia. The increase in the salary offered by the state to retired academics may reduce the necessity of bridge employment. In addition, in order to prevent the decline in social status, opportunities should be offered to make their lives meaningful psychologically, physically and socially. In this way, their active participation in economic, social and cultural life can be ensured without the need for bridge employment.



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