

# Perspectives of Older Nurses in Singapore: A Survey of Their Views on Retirement and Re-Employment

UTHAMAN T, AYOOB S, CHUA TL, HUSSAIN N

Nursing Division, Singapore General Hospital, Singapore

## BACKGROUND

As part of the Singapore government's efforts to help older employees remain economically productive longer, a legislation was enacted in 2012 to raise the official retirement age to 62 years. The law also requires employers to offer post-retirement employment contracts (referred to as "re-employment" henceforth) up to age 65.<sup>1</sup>

As the legislation cannot be a stand alone measure, it is important to evaluate the factors that would entice older nurses to stay in the workforce for a longer period of time.

## AIM

This study aimed to ascertain factors which influence older nurses' decision to extend their working life and to explore their views about the re-employment legislation.

## METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among all nurses aged 50 and above from three acute institutions, one step-down health care institution and one network of nine primary healthcare clinics.

The survey questions were formulated based on a comprehensive literature review and were reviewed by human resource experts and senior nursing managers. All questions had fixed response alternatives, with average item Content Validity Index of 0.89.

The survey included items on demographics, general and specific health issues, work-related injuries and challenges, as well as views on re-employment and retirement. (This paper presents the results of the sections on views on re-employment and retirement)

Table. 1 Perceptions of Respondents

Motivation to work till 65 years of age	disagree and strongly disagree	agree and strongly agree
My work is an important part of my life	6%	74%
I will stop working before age 65 when my spouse/close friend stops working	44%	30%
Among my friends and family members, it is common to work till 65 years of age	24%	52%
I believe the common attitude in society is to stop working before 65 years	38%	34%
Economic Factors	disagree and strongly disagree	agree and strongly agree
I will stop working before 65 as I have saved enough for my retirement plans	36%	33%
I will stop working before 65 as my family can support my retirement plans	46%	26%
Health	disagree and strongly disagree	agree and strongly agree
My work is too physically demanding for working till 65 years	31%	39%
My work is too mentally demanding for working till 65 years	27%	42%
Attitude towards older workers in the organization	disagree and strongly disagree	agree and strongly agree
Due to my age, I get fewer opportunities for training	38%	34%
Due to my age, I get fewer opportunities for supervision	51%	21%
In my organization, the managers' attitude towards older workers is positive	11%	55%
Management is empathetic towards the needs of older workers	17%	39%

\*Numbers do not add to 100% as some respondents gave a neutral response or did not provide an answer

## RESULTS

Data from 386 nurses aged 60 and below was used for analysis. Majority were females (96%), Chinese (69%) and married (75%), with a mean age of 56 years (SD 3) and had worked for an average of 33 years (SD 8) as a nurse.

The results showed that most respondents believed they could (81%) and wanted (80%) to work beyond 60 years old.

Majority (74%) of the respondents felt they would continue working till 65 because they perceived work to be an important part of their lives.

Monetary considerations was an important motivation. "Same salary and benefits" was ranked as the top factor that would increase the respondents' probability of working longer and seeking re-employment. (Fig 1). In addition, only 33% of participants reported having sufficient savings and 26% reported having family support to allow them to stop working before the age of 65. (Table 1)

Flexible and shorter working hours were the next two most frequently reported factors that would increase the respondents' probability to work longer or seek re-employment. (Fig 1)

With regards to health-related concerns as a potential deterrence, the respondents were almost equally split between those who did (39%) and did not find work to be physically challenging (31%) (Table 1). However, a considerable percentage (42%) of respondents found their work to be too mentally challenging (Table 1).

Finally, although 70% of the respondents were aware of the re-employment act, only 54% were familiar with the process and practices for re-employment within their respective organizations.

## DISCUSSION

This study showed that there was consensus among older nurses to continue working, a resonance with the legislation's intent to keep them in the workforce.

Financial concerns had a significant role in older nurses' decisions to continue working, as suggested by their wish for "same salary and benefits" when re-employed, and perceived lack of adequate financial support in latter years. These findings were echoed in another survey on 1000 Singaporeans which indicated that respondents had not saved enough to fulfill their retirement needs<sup>2</sup>. Although achieving individual financial independence goes beyond the influence of an organization, health care institutions could consider partnering with other industries to provide financial advice regarding planning for retirement.

Work arrangements such as flexible<sup>3</sup> or shorter working hours and change in job scope<sup>4</sup> might enable older nurses to continue to work after 65. Such arrangements could mitigate against physical and mental demands of nursing care, as reported by the respondents. Possible roles which demand more intellectual assistance than physical care include mentoring, telephone triage and teaching in the clinical areas<sup>5</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Older nurses in Singapore want to work beyond 60 years of age. To retain older nurses, workforce strategies need to take into account nurses' need to remain financially independent and preferences for working hours and schedule.

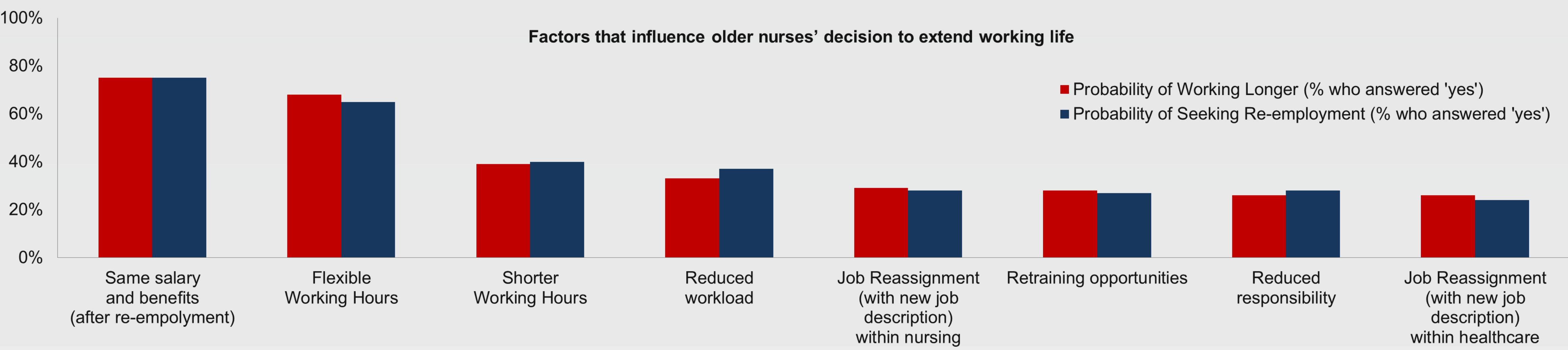
Findings from this study will help in designing measures or even policies at the organizational level to help retain older nurses.

Contact  
Email: salimah.mohd.ayoo@sgh.com.sg  
Tel: (+65) 63265796

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<sup>1</sup> Singapore General Hospital  
<sup>2</sup> Bright Vision Hospital  
<sup>3</sup> National Heart Centre Singapore  
<sup>4</sup> KK Women's and Children Hospital  
<sup>5</sup> SingHealth Polyclinics  
<sup>6</sup> Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies, National University of Singapore

Fig. 1 Factors that increase probability of older nurses working longer or seeking re-employment



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