


# Occupational health and safety (OHS) and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labour market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors - part 6

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**Bezpečnost a ochrana zdraví při práci (BOZP) a rizikové faktory pracovníků nad 50 let - uplatnění starších osob v pracovním procesu s návrhy na opatření na úrovni odvětví a podniku - 6. část**

**Lenka Svobodová<sup>1</sup>, Bohumila Čabanová<sup>2</sup>, Pavel Kučina<sup>3</sup>, Eva Hanáková<sup>4</sup>, Paulína Tabery<sup>5</sup>, Bohuslav Švec<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Occupational Safety Research Institute, Prague, [svobodovaL@vubp-praha.cz](mailto:svobodovaL@vubp-praha.cz)

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University, Prague

<sup>3</sup> Occupational Safety Research Institute, Prague

<sup>4</sup> Occupational Safety Research Institute, Prague

<sup>5</sup> Public Opinion Research Centre Institute of Sociology Academy of Sciences, Prague

<sup>6</sup> Occupational Safety Research Institute, Prague

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**Abstract**

Another part from series of articles about results from Occupational Safety Research Institute's project "*Occupational health and safety and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labor market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors*" presents results from empirical survey of the over 50 population in the Czech Republic.

**Keywords:** elderly worker, employers over 50 years, quality of working life, working conditions, safety and health at work, risk prevention, labor market, empirical surveys, population over 50, projects, results, Occupational Safety Research Institute

### **Abstrakt**

Další z řady článků ze série přinášející informace o výsledcích projektu "*BOZP a rizikové faktory pracovníků nad 50 let - uplatnění starších osob v pracovním procesu s návrhy na opatření na úrovni odvětví a podniku*" představuje výsledky empirického šetření populace starší 50 let v České republice.

**Klíčová slova:** starší pracovníci, zaměstnanci ve věku 50+, kvalita pracovního života, pracovní podmínky, trh práce, bezpečnost a ochrana zdraví, prevence rizik, pracovní trh, projekty, empirická šetření, populace nad 50 let, výsledky, Výzkumný ústav bezpečnosti práce

The article presents results from empirical survey "*OHS and risk factors of workers over 50 - a quantitative survey among workers between 50 and 65*".

### **Basic information about the collection of data and the chosen sample**

Within the scope of the "*OHS and risk factors of workers over 50*" project, the Public Opinion Research Centre of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Public Research Institution carried out research focused on the target group of economically active inhabitants of the Czech Republic between 50 and 65 years of age who were working during the period of this research (20- 31 January, 2009). Due to the subject of the research, neither unemployed nor retired people (those not pursuing regular employment activity) were included, even though they are part of the given age category. A method of quota sampling was carried out that took note of gender, age, education, size of municipality and region (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics or NUTS 2). The size of the sample were 800 people, the number of respondents in the chosen sample was 658. Questioning was carried out face-to-face (a standardized interview between interviewers and respondents based on a questionnaire).

### **Basic findings from the research**

The basic range of the research was the attitude older workers have to work in general, their relationship to their current employment and their related opinions about retirement and their motivation to remain in the labour market. Another important component was comparing the conditions of younger and older workers both generally and in regards to concrete situations in a given workplace. Likewise, the employer was evaluated in respect to their support of further education for older workers and their remaining in the work force. And last, but not least, workers over 50 were asked to express their opinion on their position in the labour market and on the activity of the state in the area of employing older people.

### **The importance of work and sentiments toward it**

Work still has a markedly significant role in the lives of older workers. Job security is important for a majority of them, even at the cost of more time spent at work (70 %) or lower financial appreciation (67 %). A smaller though still significant segment of older workers (38 %) agree that job security is important even at the cost of worse working

conditions or unpleasant behaviour from their fellow workers. This desire for job security is related to the fact that a convincing majority (86 %) of older workers figure that it is not really probable that they would try to find a new job in the next 12 months. Additionally, the majority of them consider finding a comparable job to be difficult (71 %) and 7 % of older workers find it to be easy.

Regarding the more general attitude to work, it is important for an absolute majority (89%) of workers over 50 to have a meaningful and worthwhile job and 71% say that they like their current job. They also answered questions about what feelings they would have if their employment were terminated now. In other words they would have to end their job. More than two thirds would miss the feeling of self-realization and the feeling of creativity. And they have stated that they would also feel empty and useless. Over half of them also have expressed that they would miss their co-workers. Only a minority of respondents claim that they would either not be upset by such a situation or they would be fine should they find themselves in such a situation.

When assessing the importance of a job that is not time demanding in order to have free time for their family and hobbies, it is interesting to note that this group is divided into nearly the same percentages. For a slight majority (52%) it is important and for the others (47%) it is not. Just as it is not possible to make definite conclusions about the importance of a job that is not time demanding, it is impossible to definitely say that older workers would prefer a relaxing job at the cost of lower pay. Even here it is possible to divide them into two groups: 46% prefer better paid work at a higher tempo and 43% more relaxing work with lower pay. As expected, these opinions are connected with age. People up to 54 tend to prefer better pay and a faster tempo; those between 60 and 65 tend toward the opposite variant.

### **Evaluating work performance**

If workers over 50 are asked to evaluate their abilities to perform their job, react to change and find motivation to further their education, they are quite deeply convinced about the quality of their job performance (89% of respondents say that their abilities to perform their job well have not changed, 86% consider their job performance to be unchanged). To a somewhat lesser degree, though still a majority, older workers are willing to further their education (71%) and almost two-thirds are willing to adapt to new requirements from their employer. In questions about the possible impact age has on health limitations at work and, in some cases, a more frequent sick rate, the majority of interviewed workers actually deny that age has such influences (even though 30% of older workers admit that they feel certain health limitations while performing their jobs).

### **Relations at work and relations between younger and older workers**

Interpersonal relations at work have been mostly evaluated as good, both generally and between individual groups of workers (63%). Relations between younger and older colleagues have been characterised as good by nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%), and another fourth view them as neutral. Not many conflicts nor tensions in connection with age have been reported, as evidenced by 64% of workers over 50 who view their workplace as an environment of cooperation between younger and older workers rather than as a place of rivalry and conflict (18%).

### **A general view on the problematic areas in firms and in the labour market in the Czech Republic**

The research has identified recruiting and dismissal processes as fundamental problems for the group of workers over 50. These areas have been evaluated as the worst when looking into the equality of conditions for younger and older workers within a particular firm and also when assessing the equal status of workers over 50 in the labour market in general. A majority of people consider other areas to be equal for both younger and older people, such as possibilities to have various arrangement of working hours, non-financial company perks and assurance of occupational health and

safety. Financial assessment has been viewed as equal for all without respect to age by 56% of workers and 18% claim that, in their company, older workers have better terms in this respect. The area of rewards has been evaluated as relatively good from the general point of view (50% of older people think that workers over 50 years old have the same conditions as others). A more critical view has been given to access to further education; 63% of respondents see older workers in our country as more disadvantaged in comparison to others. At the same time, 54% of workers over 50 say that their current employer does not support them in further education nor offers them any training or courses.

## **Job Retention**

The group of older workers is split in their attitude to retirement. 46% of workers over 50 are for continuing working for as long as possible once they reach the retirement age, while 48% are for retiring as soon as possible. Financial security and the maintenance of their living standard are the main reasons why older people plan to remain working. Reasons such as contact with people or an interesting job are far less significant. On the other hand, reasons for older people not wanting to remain working are primarily that they want to have more free time; significantly less are reasons of tiredness or health conditions.

From the perspective of retaining older workers at work, answers to the question about taking advantage of various forms of working hours and flexible types of jobs were interesting. When considering the proposed forms of work from a general point of view, respondents find them quite useful and think that they would help a majority of people to remain working longer. However, when considering the same from the point of view of their own personal situation, they would appreciate such measures in a lower extent. The question about how prospective it is for people over 50 years old to be self-employed also had interesting answers. At a general level, more respondents gave it support (though not by a majority; 35%) when considering their own prospects and plans. Approximately one-fourth of respondents see self-employment as a promising form of job for themselves, whereas there is an absolutely clear difference between employees and the self-employed. Employees, in contrast to the self-employed, do not see themselves having this type of job form in the future.

From the older workers' answers it is obvious that they are motivated to work to a large extent, which can be seen not only in their evaluation of themselves, their work performance and attitude to work, but also when they considered the over-50 group in general: 86% think that people over 50 in the Czech Republic are interested in remaining in their job. More than a half inclined to the view that older people are sufficiently active in respect to adapting to new conditions and looking for a job when they lose one. While the group of older workers does express their own motivation, the feeling is a bit different in regards to the support from the outside. Approximately half of the respondents say that their employer supports retaining older workers in their jobs. However, only a minority (10%) have noticed such support from the state. As a group these people feel very endangered in the labour market (94%) and, additionally, think that the state should pay more attention to employing people over 50 years old (76%).

## **Conclusion**

Based on their views and opinions the group of workers over 50 can be characterized as a group with a high level of motivation to work, which is intensified by a feeling of endangerment in the labour market. This feeling has also been documented in the answers regarding certainty of employment. A majority are able to work longer hours or for less money in order to have such job security; another proportion of the workers which is clearly not negligible (nearly two-fifths) are willing to suffer in even worse working conditions or unpleasant work environment for this job security. From the point of view of equality, older workers feel especially disadvantaged in the recruitment and dismissal processes, which explain their critical perception of them. Worse conditions have also been reflected in the area of continuing education for older workers. It is possible to submit that if people are already working, which means they have already passed the period of hiring or dismissal, that the conditions set in the firm regarding financial and non-financial

rewards, the setting up of work schedules or workplace safety and health protection are, according to the opinions of older people, mostly the same for all workers regardless of age.

### **Vzorová citace**

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Autor článku:

[Ing. Lenka Svobodová](#)

[Ing. Bohumila Čabanová, Ph.D.](#)

[JUDr. Pavel Kučina](#)

[MUDr. Eva Hanáková](#)

[Mgr. et Mgr. Paulína Tabery](#)

[PhDr. Bohuslav Švec](#)