

# Skills, credentials and social networks: older multiple job holders in the Christchurch labour market

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# **Skills, Credentials and Social Networks: Older Multiple Job Holders in the Christchurch Labour Market**

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In recent years, the labour market structure in New Zealand has become highly fragmented and increasingly competitive, with lifetime careers no longer a certainty. Policies that encourage skill development and lifelong learning aim to create a highly flexible and skilled work force, making credentials increasingly necessary for employment. Changing demographics, indicating an ageing of New Zealand's workforce, create a need for researchers and policymakers to address the impact of these changes on older workers to ensure the wellbeing of both the economy and New Zealand society. As workers adapt to changing labour market structures, multiple job holding, as a form of employment previously considered non-standard, is increasingly adopted.

This paper focuses on the 35 to 64 age cohort, as a group exhibiting higher than average levels of multiple job holding. Drawing on qualitative interviews with multiple job holders in the Christchurch labour market, this paper elaborates on New Zealand and Christchurch based statistical data providing a deeper insight into the situation of multiple job holders in a local labour market and the extent to which their age has influenced their position in the labour market. In doing so it discusses the motivations behind holding more than one job, and the contribution that the possession of various skills, qualifications and social networks makes to their labour market situations.

Multiple job holding is a flexible work practice that in recent years workers have adopted as they adapt to a changing labour market structure, resulting from the impact of globalisation processes and technological advancement. In the past, multiple job holding has been more commonly referred to as "moonlighting", a label that traditionally conjures up notions of clandestine working practices and financial greed. In fact, multiple job holding is a practice that has been adopted by individuals as a strategy to cope with circumstances that may arise through labour market influences, situational changes, financial constraints or a desire to fulfil personal goals.

Statistical data provides a snapshot of the multiple job holding situation in New Zealand. New Zealand currently has a multiple job holding rate of 9.7%. Over the entire working population aged between 15 and 64 years, older age groups (45 years and over) have the highest multiple job holding rates along with the youngest working age group (between 15 and 17 years), who are often in a transitional stage between schooling and employment (Baines, Newell et al. 2002: 11). Gender differences are also apparent with women participating in multiple job holding more than men (10.4% and 9.1%). Data based on the 2001 *Census of Population and Dwellings* indicates that multiple job holding is more likely among those with very high or very low incomes. Those with very high education levels are also more likely to hold multiple jobs. A holder of a higher degree is 2.4 times as likely to hold a second job than a person with no qualifications (Baines and Newell 2003). In the Christchurch labour market, approximately one in twelve (8.11%) workers declared in the 2001 census that they held more than one job. Of the four main centres, only Wellington (9.5%) has a higher multiple job holding rate (Baines and Newell 2003: 13).

The predominant view of researchers, has been that hours constraints are the main motive for multiple job holding, with workers not being able to work and earn as

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much as they would like in their current jobs. Therefore, they have sought additional employment (Smith Conway and Kimmel 1998; Averett 2001). Additional motives explored, have linked multiple job holding to skill development and credential possession. Smith Conway and Kimmel (1998: 136) point out that work in the primary job may provide the credentials allowing a worker to take on a higher paying secondary job, for example, consulting work. Similarly holding a second job may be a means to develop the skills or credentials necessary for a future, more lucrative position, or to start a business (Heineck 2003). Multiple job holding may also be a response to uncertainty, with insecure workers hedging their chances by “diversifying their human capital into new jobs” (Böheim and Taylor 2003: 2). Alternatively, it may provide an opportunity to participate in an occupation that has a particular interest for the worker, for example a musician (Smith Conway and Kimmel 1998; Sussman 1998). Kimmel and Smith Conway (2001) recently examined various motives for multiple job holding and while finding evidence to support “heterogeneous” motives concluded that the “primary job constraint” model remained the most common motive.

Conclusions in past research have generally been drawn from statistical investigations based on various types of population surveys. The “*life cycle squeeze*” is a theory that grew out of a more qualitative research process and was introduced by Wilensky (1963) to explain the occurrence of multiple job holding in the early 1960s. Wilensky found that men became multiple job holders when they were pressured by a lack of resources to cover the family’s needs. Wilensky also suggested those who had experienced “an unusual amount of social discontinuity” (sudden and unpredictable disruptions to jobs and community, often necessitating breaks with friends and family) were also more likely to moonlight. This he referred to as “*blocked mobility*” (Wilensky 1963: 108). In the belief that motivations for multiple job holding for older workers are complex and not always immediately apparent, this paper draws on Wilensky’s notion of a “*life cycle squeeze*” to discuss motivations for multiple job holding, while accounting for the influence of age, labour market and skill possession.

## **Methods and Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen multiple jobholders aged between 35 and 64 within the Christchurch Territorial Local Authority (TLA). Eight participants were under the age of fifty, three of whom were males and eight were over fifty, four of whom were males. The majority of participants were married, one was in a same sex, defacto relationship, two were either divorced or separated and one participant was a widow. Thirteen participants were New Zealand European. Other ethnicities included one Maori, one Australian/New Zealander and one Egyptian. Interviews used a life story approach to complement statistical data already gathered<sup>1</sup> and provide a more in depth understanding of employment history, motivations for multiple job holding and the impact it was having in participants lives. A short questionnaire designed to obtain generic information including age, ethnicity, partner’s occupation and hours spent working in various jobs was also completed by participants.

Participants were recruited using a combination of theoretical and snowball sampling methods, a method selected to avoid any compromising situations that may develop through approaching workers via employers who may be unaware of their

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employee's multiple job holding. Statistical data was used to locate occupations with high multiple job holding rates and initial approaches made to participants in those statistical groups. Although networks did not lead to people in similar occupations as was initially expected, the occupations of further referrals tended to naturally reflect occupations that, according to the statistical data, had relatively high multiple job holding rates in Christchurch. As a result, emphasis shifted to selecting participants according to representation of age groups rather than occupations. A process that increased in difficulty as the required age rose to over fifty and numbers of multiple job holders in those age groups diminished.

## Results

### Financial Constraint:

An element of financial constraint or perceived necessity is evident for the majority of participants. However, the weighting of financial necessity versus other reasons appears to alter with the age and gender of the participants. Males and the older participants over the age of forty-five are more likely to be holding multiple jobs out of a perceived financial necessity. Six of the eight participants aged over fifty work more than fifty hours per week with five holding a full time and a part time position. Only two of those eight, one with a working partner and one with a retired partner, have a combined household income over \$50,000.

Six of the ten participants aged over forty-five indicated they would prefer to have only one job. Their reasons related to their mental and emotional well-being and included tiredness, stress and lack of time. Jenny (62) and Geoff (61), the two oldest participants both commented on the impact raising the retirement age had on their need to work longer hours. Those who indicated they were multiple job holding mainly out of choice were all women, three of whom were aged between thirty-nine and forty-two the fourth was fifty-four. Three had postgraduate degrees, working partners and teaching qualifications, while the fourth claimed she simply loved to work and enjoyed the variety.

The interviews provide strong evidence to support Wilensky's (1963) findings that some form of social discontinuity or blocked mobility was a characteristic apparent among multiple job holders. For all participants some form of disruption or change in their normal lifestyle pattern was apparent at the time immediately prior to beginning their current multiple jobs. For those over the age of fifty these disruptions included divorce, widowhood, redundancy and health problems. For those under the age of fifty reasons included leaving full time work to have children, relocating and returning to Christchurch from both within New Zealand and overseas, health problems and a short period in prison.

### Redundancy:

Three of the participants over the age of fifty had experienced redundancy. For all three, redundancy interrupted relatively stable career paths in the same occupational area and threw each of them into a period of unemployment and instability that resulted in their current primary jobs. Donald (50) and Colin (55) were made redundant at the ages of thirty-seven, and thirty-five respectively. Sharon (58) was made redundant at the age of fifty-two. Colin and Donald's redundancies occurred in the mid to late 1980's coinciding with a period of worldwide economic downturn and massive labour market restructuring. Sharon's redundancy was in the years following the introduction of the 1991 *Employment Contracts Act*, that effectively ended compulsory unionism.

Although only out of work for short periods, Donald and Colin both spoke of an extremely stressful period trying to earn enough money to support their families. Both Colin and Sharon resorted to commission sales work at some stage during that period. Sharon in particular, had a very traumatic time when she lost her long-term job as a union secretary

*“Well basically I had a few years of hell really. Here I was at 52 or whatever I was, wondering if there was anything in life for me again, you know. I wanted to work, I had to work, I couldn’t get a job ...”*

Initially Sharon blamed her association with unions for her inability to find secure employment. However, she also felt that her age was a definite barrier.

*“... I think there’s a lot of employers that don’t look at the over fifty’s. They want them young, they want to train them, they want to pay them peanuts... and they want to train them their way... you know, sometimes... somebody who’s over fifty might be a bit stropky and know how to do things a bit better maybe, I don’t know...”*

Sharon was forced to take on a number of low paying commission jobs to try to make a living. At one stage, she was holding four of these jobs simultaneously. Sharon discusses this period.

*“I got to the stage where I couldn’t go for interviews, couldn’t face them any more. So, get out there and sell for commission, you know. I didn’t have to worry about interviews... I didn’t have to miss out on any of those jobs...when people don’t have to pay you they don’t care so much do they... and it was a huge setback financially... In fact we’ll never recover.”*

Six months ago at the age of fifty seven, Sharon made what she called her ‘*last ditch effort*’ to get a full time job and ended up employed full time as an electorate secretary, a position she loves. She was asked to continue in one of her commission sales positions and now enjoys the variety of the two different jobs. She sees her commission sales job as a balance for the stressful nature of her primary job as electorate secretary. Working fifty to fifty five hours per week, she intends to continue in both, as long as her health permits.

#### Health:

Health problems were a common motivator among the male multiple job holders. Vincent (48) has a wife working part time and a grown family living away from home. Having spent a period of approximately a year out of the workforce owing to an injury Vincent did not feel he was able to return to full time work immediately so he applied for a part-time job as a playgroup supervisor. Later, he was offered another part-time job as a property facilitator in the same organisation. At this time, he felt better able to cope with full-time work. He described how he came to be a multiple job holder.

*“...[they were] the jobs I first applied for after damaging my back... I didn’t want to go back into a fulltime position. I felt that was probably ... asking for trouble ...part of it was recuperating and the idea of 18 hours a week to start with was like starting off back into the workforce after ... I think I probably had another year off nearly, with my back, being in hospital and what.”*

Vincent had been working in two jobs for approximately 48 hours per week. He had been doing so for one year at the time of the interview. Vincent indicated he would prefer to be working one full-time job as he felt the two hour break he had between jobs made his working day seem extremely long and tiring. Vincent was hopeful that his position as a property facilitator would become full time at the end of the year. Vincent had gone into part-time work as a coping strategy after his injury and then on to multiple job holding because of financial necessity. He enjoyed his position as a property facilitator; therefore, the disadvantages involved with his multiple job holding were not enough to make him seek alternate employment.

Colin (55) started up his own business for security. This move was a direct result of health problems and age. His job as a prison officer requires a relative degree of fitness. Being one of the oldest prison officers in his institution, he has realised a time is coming where he will no longer be able to do his current job and has started his own home business as a backup.

*“I’ve been running a small computer business here for a good 10 years. It started off as a part time thing with a view of building it up to the point where if anything went wrong in the job, I had something to go to... I’ve got a couple of health issues and disabilities that won’t really get me a job if I went out on the open market now... and age...I’ll be hard pressed to get a job...because who wants people at that age. It’s just nearly impossible to get ...”*

Colin is a qualified aircraft engineer and has no formal qualifications in the area of his business, having learnt everything he knows off the internet. Colin currently employs his son full-time and spends most of his time away from his primary job working in his home business. As a result, he spends approximately 70 hours a week working. He views his home business as a hobby and enjoys his work. His work area is a garage with internal access to the main living area. With the door always open, his business is very much integrated into his home and family life.

### **Skills and Qualifications**

For those under fifty, maintenance of skills and qualifications was a common reason for multiple job holding, with at least two of the women in their forties being approached to undertake different jobs because of their skills. For the majority of those over the age of fifty it was their age and their more informal life skills that they believed helped them into at least one of their current positions. Particularly those involved in work with the community- Sharon (58) an electorate secretary and commission sales person, Pam (56) a PA administrator in two community organisations and Kate (54) a lay chaplain and music teacher all felt their age was a positive influence in their current employment. Pam and Kate both gained at least one of their jobs through volunteer involvement in a community organisation. Pam commented.

*“I think my age as far as my life experience goes has been a definite plus and certainly, particularly in [this job] it’s better to have someone who’s more mature. They’ve made an active choice to do that because they find that ... with the terrific variety [of people] and the various types they’ve got to cope with... the young ones don’t cope. So they have made a choice to have older people...”*

For those over the age of forty-five who had completed formal qualifications, their current employment positions were generally only vaguely related to those qualifications. Interestingly, none of the three men who had completed apprenticeships were working in areas related to their qualification. Geoff (61), a qualified minister whose jobs of church minister and hospital chaplain Mary (54) whose second job was as a music teacher, and Vincent a playgroup supervisor in his secondary job were the only ones in that age group that needed their formal credentials for their current jobs. However, although Vincent needed his teaching qualification to be able to supervise the playgroup, he felt it was the numerous informal skills he had in potting, building, music and other areas and his maturity that secured him the position.

## **Discussion**

The results suggest that multiple job holding occurs through a combination of primary or immediate motives and secondary, less apparent, motives. For older multiple job holders “*blocked mobility*” is not only a characteristic they have in common but a motivator for multiple job holding. Blocked mobility often occurs from life situations outside of the individual’s control and can be seen as a secondary motivator, creating the situation in which the worker must make decisions about their employment futures. Particularly for older participants’, blocked mobility led to a type of *lifecycle squeeze*. However, this squeeze was not simply financial for older workers, it involved an interplay of age, labour market prospects, skills and participants own perceptions of their situation. For those under fifty, immediate or primary motivators were more likely to include skill retention and utilisation, choice or interest. For males and those over fifty, financial need or hours constraint was the primary motivator with multiple job holding being used as a coping mechanism to deal with their labour market situation.

Examination of motivations for multiple job holders in this sample raise particular concern for those workers over the age of fifty who are reluctant multiple job holders, working long hours in more than one job out of a real or perceived financial need and apparent acceptance of multiple job holding as their only option. A combination of previous labour market experiences and their own perceptions of issues surrounding age, skills and qualifications have led many of these older workers to have limited expectations of their work prospects. These findings have important implications for policy, suggesting preconceived stereotypes of older workers, among not only employers but the workers themselves, must be addressed in order to ensure they are able to realise their full potential. As policymakers move to encourage “positive ageing” in the new “knowledge economy” encouraging optimal skill utilisation and positive labour force experiences for workers as they get older is a vital step towards ensuring the well being of older workers in an ageing society. Multiple job holding provides a flexible work practice that can be extremely beneficial to both workers and employers. However, it needs to be a personal choice for all workers rather than a perceived necessity for many in their later working life.

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