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Occupational balance among Swedish working academics at the age of 65 and beyond

A qualitative study

Authors: Magdalena Jaros and Joakim Brandt

Supervisor: Björn Slaug

Bachelor's thesis, Empirical study

Spring 2023

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We would like to thank our participants for their time and willingness to share with us their experiences and thoughts.

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Magdalena and Joakim

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Abstract

Background: Academics in retirement age are the longest working professional group in Sweden. The need for a prolonged working life among other professions has been arising due to the aging population and its various implications for society. Occupational balance is associated with subjective health and wellbeing as well as work ability thus potentially, having an impact on an individuals' decision to extend their working life.

Aim: The purpose of this study was to examine occupational balance in daily life of Swedish working academics in retirement age.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 working academics, aged 65 and beyond, who had been chosen via convenience and snowball sampling process. Collected data was examined in conformity with the latent content analysis.

Results: Three themes were derived from the interviews: *work as a central occupation in daily life, engagement in various daily occupations and experience of occupational balance (OB) and strategies to maintain health and well-being.*

Conclusion: The findings expand our understanding of OB among older workers by demonstrating that various aspects of work as well as their engagement in other occupations, need to exist in a relative harmony to achieve OB in everyday life and to continue working.

Key words:

Occupational science, occupational balance, older academics, older workers, extended working life

Upplevelsen av aktivitetsbalans hos svenska arbetande akademiker över 65 år

Kvalitativ studie

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Abstrakt

Bakgrund: Akademiker är den yrkesgrupp som arbetar längst efter 65 år i Sverige. Det finns också ett behov av att förlänga arbetslivet inom andra yrke, detta på grund av att befolkningen blir äldre och för att det kan gynna samhället. Aktivitetsbalans är kopplat till subjektiv hälsa och välmående så väl som arbetsförmåga, vilket kan ha en inverkan på individers beslut om att förlänga deras arbetsliv.

Syfte: Studiens syfte var att undersöka hur svenska arbetande akademiker över 65 år upplever aktivitetsbalans i det vardagliga livet.

Metod: Semistrukturerade intervjuer genomfördes med 8 arbetande akademiker över 65 år som hade blivit valda genom bekvämlighets- och snöbollsurval. Insamlad data granskades genom latent innehållsanalys.

Resultat: Tre teman framkom genom intervjuerna: *arbete som en central aktivitet i vardagen, engagemang i olika vardagliga aktiviteter och upplevelser av aktivitetsbalans och strategier för att underhålla hälsa och välmående.*

Sammanfattning: Studien ger ytterligare insikt om aktivitetsbalans hos äldre arbetare genom att påvisa att olika aspekter av arbete och deras engagemang i andra aktiviteter, behöver befinna sig i harmoni för att uppnå aktivitetsbalans i vardagen och för att förlänga arbetslivet.

Nyckelord:

Arbetsterapi, aktivitetsbalans, äldre akademiker, äldre arbetare, förlängt arbetsliv

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Introduction

For many individuals in retirement age, work is considered to be crucial as it provides not only a structure for their daily activities, but also an opportunity to be productive and efficient that can, consequently, indicate meaningfulness in their lives (Björklund Carlstedt & Hovbrandt, 2022; Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019; Hovbrandt, Håkansson, et al., 2019; Yerxa, 1998). Retirement, recognized as a life transition, can have a negative impact on the pattern of daily occupations, leading to occupational imbalance, consequently, resulting in a diminished sense of well-being and poor health (Jonsson et al., 2000; Jonsson, 2011; Matuska & Christiansen, 2009). Working beyond retirement can enable individuals to facilitate the transitional process into a new stage of life by establishing or maintaining occupational balance that contributes to health and well-being (Hewitt et al., 2010; Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019; Jonsson, 2011; Matuska & Christiansen, 2009; Pettican & Prior, 2011).

Academia is the exceptional environment that has traditionally enabled academics, in retirement age, to continue working or alternatively, to take long- and short-term, formal, and informal positions following their leave from a full-time employment (Cahill et al., 2019; Danson & Gilmore, 2012; Tizard & Owen, 2001). It would come therefore, as no surprise that according to the Swedish Pensions Agency (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2022) university and college teachers had the highest average retirement age in 2021 (66.9 years for women and 67.0 years for men).

Comprehensive insight into older academics' perception of their own occupational balance could contribute to in depth understanding of the role of occupational balance in prolonged employment as well as in the work to retirement transitional process. Such knowledge may further contribute to the occupational therapy practice that aims at assisting older professionals, who wish to remain in the workforce, in establishing and maintaining occupational balance thus contributing to their health and well-being.

Background

Demographic changes and implications for the retirement age

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), the number of people, aged 60 years and over, increases rapidly and by 2050, it will reach over 2 billion globally.

An average life expectancy has also significantly increased in Sweden, where currently every fifth resident is 65 years old or more (Boverket, 2022). There are several implications that arise from an aging population for a society, with potentially far-reaching impacts not only on health- and social care, but also on the labor market.

Although the average age of individuals entering retirement in Sweden was 64,9 years in 2021, the highest in the Nordic countries, many Swedes in retirement age would like to continue working beyond the age of 65 (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2023). Furthermore, according to the Swedish official statistics (Statistikmyndigheten, 2021), in 2021 approximately 20% of individuals, between the age of 65 and 74, were still in employment. This means that work, recognized as a central occupation in adulthood (Matuska & Barret, 2015), will increasingly take a significant place in daily life of many older adults in retirement age.

The concept of occupation and pattern of daily occupations

Occupation is broadly defined as a collection of activities and tasks of daily living (Law et al., 1996; Townsend & Polatajko, 2013), all things that individuals want, need, or have to do in the context of their social environments (Townsend & Polatajko, 2013; Wilcock & Townsend, 2019). Furthermore, occupations are originated, arranged, and given value and meaning by involved individuals and culture (Townsend & Polatajko, 2013; Yerxa, 2000; Wilcock & Townsend, 2019; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020).

Throughout the lifespan, human beings engage in various occupations that are necessary for their survival, development as well as a sense of belonging, meaning and fulfillment that contribute to their perception of subjective health and well-being (Erlandsson & Christiansen, 2015; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Hooper and Wood, 2019; Wilcock & Hocking, 2015; Yerxa, 2000). We are, indeed, the occupational beings, *homo occupacio*, whose choices of and engagements in daily occupations, comprised of work, play, leisure and self-care,

correspond to unique and ever-changing stages, processes, and outcomes of our lives (Erlandsson & Christiansen, 2015; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Whiteford et al., 2000; Yerxa, 2000). By engaging in various occupations including sleep, performed in a specific time and environment, individuals create, within a determined interval, their own unique and complex patterns of daily occupations (PDO) that may be influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as volition, performance capacities, roles, age, gender, culture, social context, and time among many (Erlandsson & Christiansen, 2015; Yamada et al., 2017).

PDO are further recognized as a collection of habits, routines, roles as well as rituals that may assist or obstruct engagement in and performance of daily occupations (Erlandsson & Christiansen, 2015; Matuska & Barrett, 2019). Furthermore, different levels of complexity of PDO may have a direct impact on, but also be a consequence of individuals' health and well-being (Erlandsson & Christiansen, 2015; Eklund, et al., 2017; Erlandsson & Eklund, 2006; Hocking, 2019). PDO also provides an objective insight into individuals' engagement in daily occupations from the perspective of time, location, and social context.

One of the fundamental notions of occupational theory is that individuals' choices and performance of various occupations significantly influence their strongly subjective perception of their own PDO and whether they are balanced, meaningful and health-promoting, in their current life's situation. Their view on the amount of and variety of occupations in their daily life is one of the defining indicators of occupational balance (OB) (Eklund, et al., 2017; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Håkansson & Wagman, 2022; Matuska & Barrett, 2019; Wagman, Håkansson & Björklund, 2012). Both PDO and OB, separate, but interacting phenomena, offer a deeper understanding of engagement in daily occupations and its significance for subjective health and well-being (Eklund et al., 2017).

Occupational balance

The complex concept of occupational balance (OB) has a longstanding and central place in occupational science and occupational therapy. It is defined as the individual's subjective experience and perception of having the right amount and the variety of meaningful occupations in his/ her own occupational pattern, so called "*harmonic mix*" (Eklund, et al., 2017; Wagman et al., 2012). The variety of occupations should be considered not only from the perspective of different occupational categories, but also from their diverse characteristics as well as time allocated to perform them (Håkansson & Wagman, 2022). Furthermore, to establish and maintain OB in daily life requires an individual to possess adequate resources

and abilities to engage in and perform these various desired occupations. Last, but not least it is vital for an individual to experience and recognize congruence between occupations he/she engages in and own occupational values and culturally as well as personally relevant meanings (Eklund et al., 2017).

Occupational balance and health

OB has been recognized as essential for health and well-being (Wilcock et al., 1997; Wilcock & Hocking, 2015). In agreement with the WHO (2020) definition of health, OB can be also regarded as a mix of occupations that are physical, mental, spiritual, social as well as restful. Empirical studies have described the correlation between OB and subjective health, underlying the contribution of the former in promoting the latter (Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010; Håkansson et al., 2011; Håkansson et al., 2009; Wagman & Håkansson, 2014). Furthermore, it was also suggested that having a harmonious occupational pattern as well as engaging in meaningful occupations can lead to experience of balance and well-being in daily life (Håkansson et al., 2006).

Occupational balance and work

Work is an occupational category that was described as a group of activities required for engaging in paid employment or volunteering, namely employment interests, pursuit, seeking and acquisition, job performance and maintenance as well as retirement preparation and adjustment and finally, volunteer exploration and participation (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2014; Christiansen et al., 2015). By participating in work individuals obtain a sense of identity, meaning and purpose in daily living. Furthermore, work helps to create a time structure and daily routines as well as makes it possible for individuals to connect socially, contribute to society and financially support themselves. Work is considered one of the most important occupations in adulthood that is further linked to health and well-being (Christiansen et al., 2015; Dorsey, et al., 2019; Yerxa, 1998). Finally, according to the ValMo model (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020), work is associated for most people with an experience of concrete and socio-symbolic occupational values that may be a consequential aspect to consider, while promoting OB as well as a prolonged working life. It is prudent to differentiate between the concept of occupational balance, preferred in our study, and the concept of work-life balance. The latter focuses on gainful employment and

management of the remaining daily life in such ways as to meet demands of work, while the former focuses broadly on all daily occupations in life (Backman, 2014).

Recent studies have shown that OB can influence not only individuals' work abilities, but also their experiences of work- and life satisfaction (Håkansson et al., 2020, Håkansson et al., 2019). A lack of balance in daily life, linked to an overcommitment to employment can predict stress-related disorders in working adults (Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2018; Lexén et al., 2020). Furthermore, social, and organizational aspects of work environments can have an impact on individuals' perception of OB as well as subjective health (Borgh et al., 2018; Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019; Håkansson, Leo, et al., 2021, Håkansson & Lexén, 2021).

The research problem

Many individuals in retirement age wish to prolong their employment. There are numerous and complex factors, on personal, organizational, and societal levels, that influence older professionals' desire to extend their working life (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Hovbrandt et al., 2019; Björklund Carlstedt & Hovbrandt 2022; Oakman & Howie, 2013; Sewdas et al., 2017). One of the important preconditions for extended work is good health (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Sewdas et al., 2017) that is associated with occupational balance. Poor subjective health as well as a lack of OB in daily life have been found to have a negative impact on work ability (Håkansson et al., 2020) and therefore, on an extension of working life. Furthermore, having challenging and fulfilling work can be another decisive factor in a prolongation of employment (Hovbrandt, Håkansson, et al., 2019).

Occupational balance has been studied in relation to general populations (Wagman et al., 2011; Wagman & Håkansson, 2014), different patient groups (Håkansson, Gunnarsson, et al., 2021; To-Miles et al., 2022; Wagman et al., 2020), various professions (Håkansson, Leo, et al., 2021; Lexén et al., 2020; Wagman et al., 2017) and to some extent, examined in the context of work (Borgh et al., 2018; Håkansson et al., 2019; Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019) and retirement (Jonsson et al., 2000, Pettican & Prior, 2011). However, despite being the longest working professionals in Sweden, to the best of our knowledge, there are no studies of occupational balance among working academics aged 65 and over.

In this study, an academic is defined as “ a member of a university or college, now spec. a senior member, a member of a university or college's teaching or research staff” (Oxford University Press, 2022, para.3).

Academics who continue to work after retirement age, have perhaps more advantageous conditions and possibilities than many other groups, to control their working life (Danson & Gilmore, 2012). Therefore, they could provide new and important insights into OB among workers in retirement age. This knowledge could contribute to occupational science as well as to a development of occupational therapy strategies directed at assisting older workers of other professions to establish and maintain OB in daily life, benefit subjective health, and thereby, enable those who want to extend their working life.

Purpose of the study and research questions

The overarching purpose was to describe occupational balance in daily life as experienced by Swedish working academics in retirement age of 65 years and over, and it was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do working academics in retirement age experience occupational balance in their daily life ?
2. What are the reasons stated for continuing to work after retirement age?
3. Which indicator of OB is the most dominant factor that determines the prolongation of work?
4. If working part-time, how do the patterns of daily occupations change? Are new and past daily occupations established/ reestablished to promote OB as well as healthy and active aging?

Method

The study used a phenomenology approach by conducting semi-structured interviews, which is an approach that is qualitative and inductive in its way (Henricson & Billhult, 2017; Patel & Davidson, 2019). The phenomenology approach and the qualitative method are based on interpretation and development of a comprehensive understanding of individuals' subjective experiences (Patel & Davidson, 2019), which is consistent with the purpose of the study. A cross-sectional study design is used which means that all data was collected at the single occurrence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and it is also the most common design in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2006).

Sample

The participants were recruited by way of convenience and snowball sampling process, which involved contacting those who were available and using the contact network of suitable participants (Patel & Davidson, 2019). Based on data obtained from public registers, a recruitment letter (see Appendix 1) was sent directly to 274 potential participants via email. To make the snowball sampling possible, the recruitment letter was prepared to be forwarded to other prospective participants by instructing that “the information letter may be forwarded to others who meet the criteria” in the email.

Inclusion criteria for the participants in the study were as follows: individuals, aged 65 years or over, minimum five years of university education and being employed at least 25% as a lecturer and/or researcher at a university. The reason for selecting those who work 25% or more, was that work was most likely to occupy a prominent part of their daily life and thus affects it to a greater extent. Exclusion criteria was educated occupational therapists. This because the authors considered that occupational therapists are familiar with the subject and thus it might have influenced how they had answered in an interview, but also because the authors were acquainted with some of them which could affect the data’s anonymity.

23 interested candidates replied to the recruitment email and 8 of them, 4 men and 4 women, were conveniently chosen by the authors. 8 participants were included as it was a criterion, needed to be fulfilled, for the purpose of the bachelor thesis. The selection was heterogeneous and was based on the definite inclusion criteria and maximized by the variation, in terms of workplace, age and gender, for the purpose of acquiring extensive data in consonance with the aim of the study. The participants worked in various faculties at the university. The sociodemographic attributes of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic attributes of the participants, n = 8

Participant	Age	Gender	Civil status	Profession	Working %
I	66	Female	Partner	Researcher	50%
II	75	Male	Married	Professor	100%
III	71	Male	Married	Lecturer	80%
IV	66	Female	Single	Professor	100%
V	65	Female	Single	Adjunct	100%
VI	66	Female	Married	Lecturer	100%
VII	67	Male	Married	Professor	100%
VIII	70	Male	Married	Researcher	50%

Data collection

Data was collected by semi-structured interviews, which allowed identifying the participants' perceptions of occupational balance within specific themes, as well as giving them an opportunity to expand their answers (Patel & Davidson, 2019).

Authors conducted 8 interviews collaboratively that were carried out in Swedish, at the participants' physical place of choice, which also included one online-meeting. The interviews lasted between 20 to 40 minutes and were audio recorded.

An interview guide (Danielson, 2017a) was used to support the authors during the interview (see Appendix 2). The questions were open-ended and based on the study's aim and main focus. A critical review and test of the interview questions was performed before the interviews to minimize the risk of misunderstanding and to determine the most adequate number of questions (Patel & Davidson, 2019).

Data analysis process

Qualitative latent content analysis was used and provided an evident and systematic procedure to find underlying meaning in the collected data, in an inductive way (Kleinheksel et al., 2020), which meant that the analysis was based on the collected empiric data instead of predetermined theory (Danielson , 2017b).

The analysis process followed six steps: immersion in the data, unit of meaning, condensation, code, category, and theme (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). First, the interview data was transcribed and carefully read several times by both authors to examine that they corresponded with each audio recording (immersion in the data), and after that, words and sentences of great importance were collected after discussion between the authors about what was important in the raw data in relation to the study purpose and research questions (units of meaning). Thereafter, the units of meaning were compressed without affecting the content (condensation). The compressed units of meaning were then converted to codes that consisted of one to three words (code), then similar codes were gathered and organized into groups (category). The categories were then transformed into themes (theme) as two or more categories had the same underlying meaning. Categorization and thematization was performed mainly by one of the authors, but was discussed between both to ensure common understanding, and through thematization realistic conclusions were drawn (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). For an example of the analysis process see Table 2.

Table 2*Example of data analysis process.*

	Example 1	Example 2
Unit of meaning	<i>“I like to work, and I like to give lectures and supervise people who are on the way to their professional life, so to say. (...) It is very inspiring as well as it gives me satisfaction and then also the feeling that one is actually doing the right thing, (...) and contributing to something, so it feels right.”</i> (Participant III)	<i>“I get quite a lot of my social contacts here, at work, so to speak. So, I think that has become an important part (...) of the workplace, that I have colleagues I can go for lunch with and talk about anything.”</i> (Participant VIII)
Condensation	Satisfaction and meaning found in educating students	Importance of working and socializing with colleagues
Code	Meaningfulness at work	Social interactions
Category	Preconditions and reasons for a prolonged working life	Organizational and social aspects of work
Theme		Work as a central occupation in daily life

Ethical considerations

To prevent any distress and exploitation of the participants in the study, the following ethical issues were considered: the research’s useability and benefits as the expected result value is greater than the risks for the participants, specified information about content and design of the study, obtaining an informed consent, and confidentiality (Kjellström, 2017).

The authors have evaluated the useability of the research and its benefit to the participants, the society and the occupational therapy science and practice with the conclusion that the study essentially benefits the latter. Risk analysis was initiated prior to the beginning of data

collection and was assessed continuously during the research to protect the participants and ensure that the study risks were low in comparison to the study's value.

During the recruitment process all participants were given written and comprehensive information regarding the study's purpose, which method was intended to be used, as well as what the researchers' expectations for the participants were.

Furthermore, the participants were informed about required consent as well as given the assurance that their partaking was voluntary and could be ceased whenever they thought it to be necessary. The participants were able to give their consent in writing on a prepared document prior to the interview. The collected data was handled with confidentiality, which meant anonymization and secure storage to make it inaccessible to unauthorized persons (Kjellström, 2017). Furthermore, all collected data will be permanently erased once this study is approved.

Results

Three themes emerged from the data analysis and pertain to the following: *Work as a central occupation in daily life*, *Engagement in various daily occupations and experience of occupational balance (OB)* and *Strategies to maintain health and well-being*. Further analysis of these themes revealed several categories as shown in Table 3. Although the themes are described separately for the purpose of a clear result reporting, it is crucial to emphasize that they intertwine with one another, to demonstrate the complexity of OB experienced by the participants in their extended working life.

Table 3

Overview of main themes and categories.

Themes	Work as a central occupation in everyday life	Engagement in various daily occupations and experience of OB	Strategies to maintain health and well-being
Categories	<i>Preconditions and reasons for a prolonged working life</i>	<i>Typical working day vs. weekend</i>	<i>Regular physical activities</i>
	<i>Organizational and social aspects of work</i>	<i>Occupations in leisure time</i>	<i>Importance of rest</i>
	<i>Challenges and strategies related to work</i>	<i>Diverse perceptions of balance in everyday life</i>	
	<i>Attitudes towards retirement: work does not end at retirement</i>		

Work as a central occupation in daily life

Preconditions and reasons for a prolonged working life

The necessary prerequisite for an extended work that was named by all participants, was sufficiently good health. As one of the participants expressed it: “(...) *he [the participant’s acquaintance] asked me how long I would be working, and I answered: As long as I can. As long as I am healthy*” (Participant IV).

However, the participant, who acknowledged the importance of good health while continue working, also stated that he would keep working even if he was unwell: “(...) *it would have been terrible not to have work to go to. No, I believe I would have continued in any case. I have always thought it was so much fun. I’m happy with students*” (Participant VII).

Being in a good physical health was further seen as the condition, not only for a prolongation of work, but also for participation in other daily occupations as well as contentment with life at large: “(...) *in order for me to be satisfied with things, and it's about being able to do these other things, being able to work, being able to play golf, and whatever, physical health is a*

prerequisite” (Participant VIII). A few participants, despite suffering from some health issues such as musculoskeletal disorders, still considered themselves to be healthy and able to work. The necessity of actively taking care of one's own health and well-being was mentioned by all participants and considered very important.

There were several reasons for an extended work life that emerged during the interviews. One of the most significant was the enjoyment of working as an educator and contributing with own knowledge, skills and longstanding experience towards students' education and professional development: *“I like to work, and I like to give lectures and supervise people who are on the way to their professional life so to say. (...) It is very inspiring as well as it gives me satisfaction and then also the feeling that one is actually doing the right thing, (...) and contributing to something, so it feels right* (Participant III).

Work in academia was perceived by the participants, to be a significant part of their life, that brought meaning, value, and a sense of fulfillment. It was another key motive for working beyond retirement age: *To work? It is very important (...) it is like an important part of life (...). I am not forced to work due to finances, but because it is meaningful and valuable for me* (Participant III). Furthermore, the participants acknowledged that they were privileged to be able to remain in active employment as researchers that enabled them to continue pursuing their professional interests, often described in terms of fun, challenge, excitement, and an ongoing curiosity: *“I think (...) it is this enormous interest in what one does, so I would do this even if I had no salary”* (Participant VII).

Maintaining their occupational identity was yet another reason for the participants to extend their working life. Many participants felt that spending their working life in academia contributed significantly to their sense of personal identity, as one participant described it: *(...) professors are a special breed, it's the same as I imagine, you would get roughly the same answers from a person who is an artist or (...) an actor, or a musician, or someone like that. (...) We do our own thing all the time* (Participant IV). Coming to work was also regarded by some participants as a habit, a regular commitment that provides a structure and help to regulate their daily existence, that they were not prepared yet to change or give up as it had influenced their daily routine for many years of working life: *So, it is a regular habit. (...) that will be the structure as you go there every day. Yes, I think I have a really hard time quitting that (...) no, I don't know, I would find it hard to give it up* (Participant VII).

Finally, the participants also addressed the need to ensure their financial stability as one of the reasons for the extended working life, however that seemed to be most relevant for

individuals who were single and/or lived on their own: *If you are single like me, it is also a financial issue (...) our salary development is terribly bad here* (Participant V).

Organizational and social aspects of work

One of the distinctive and crucial organizational aspects of working at a university is flexibility that enables the participants to work, in various life circumstances, by allowing adjustable working hours and periods of varied work intensity. Majority of participants reflected that it was vital for them to have a freedom to regulate and control their own working time and in some cases, also a working place. Some participants associated flexibility at work with an experience of their own well-being and ability to perform: *“I would not have felt well if I had to be at the same place, where I would always do the same thing, at the same time. (...). [flexibility] is important, very important, I believe that I would never manage a job where you work between 7 and 4 pm”* (Participant VI). As many participants emphasized, with this freedom comes *“a moral obligation (...). The employer must have an exchange for the salary I receive”* (Participant IV).

Some participants admitted to working over-time, even those who were supposed to work part-time: *“(...) I use the rest of the time to try to catch up with all the articles that are in my chest of drawers. And I think it is a fairly common experience for most academics that there is not enough time, the working time is not enough for what we want to do”* (Participant I).

However, they also assured that they enjoyed working a lot and found it engaging and stimulating: *“I work, well, maybe I work 50-60 hours a week. It sounds very foolish, when you say that you do it, but I think it is lots of fun”* (Participant V). Other participants decided to reduce or alternate working hours, depending on their work-related activities and projects: *“So, some weeks I only do teaching and then that's all. Some weeks, like right now, we are sitting a lot with applications to various research facilities. (...) it's actually going up and down. Sometimes I work a lot and sometimes a little less”* (Participant VII).

Furthermore, the variety of work-related activities was much appreciated: *“The profession is so attractive, it's that you do different things all the time”* (Participant IV) as well as the opportunities to participate in new projects: *“(...) all the time there are so many exciting things you can do, things appear like every other day* (Participant V). The intellectual activities were found to be challenging, but also valued as one of the participants expressed: *“You get intellectual challenges every day here, but they are a lot of fun”* (Participant I).

Another important aspect of work that was frequently mentioned by the participants, was social interactions with work colleagues, who one could enjoy time with as well as share and discuss various, not only work-related topics and interests with: *“I get quite a lot of my social contacts here at work, so to speak. So, I think that has become an important part (...) of the workplace, that I have colleagues I can go for lunch with and talk about anything”* (Participant VIII). Additionally, the interactions with students were described as engaging and enjoyable: *“I think it's great fun to be with the students, and in some way, I think, it might keep you young (...)”* (Participant V).

Challenges and strategies related to work

For the purpose of work continuation, some participants adapted strategies that would help manage an age-related decline in their abilities and resources. One of the most common strategies was to work part-time or simply not over-time and thus to be able to rest or engage in other occupations. Structuring workdays in such a manner that they would allow taking breaks and thus hold tiredness at bay was yet another strategy. The participants described that although giving lectures and supervising students was performed without any difficulties, as it was mainly based on a long-standing experience, it was much more challenging to do research: *“ (...) write articles for scientific journals, it takes time, it's not that easy. Then you can say that I've already written so much, yes, but I can also say that the bar raises, the complexity increases”* (Participant II). Memory loss was managed by writing lists and notes as well as using the internet for a quick overview of the relevant research material: *“Internet is my best friend. So, if we hadn't had internet development (...) I wouldn't have managed. So, it's, you could say, my big strategy there”* (Participant I).

Alternating work activities and tasks to avoid sitting and writing for long periods of time as well as maintaining focus was also mentioned as the strategy employed at work. Finding ways of saving time and energy that can be used on prioritized activities, has been frequently mentioned by the participants. For example, instead of traveling, described as a regular and time-consuming activity, one participant opted for mainly attending hybrid or digital meetings. Another participant decided to save energy and time by writing group feedbacks instead of individual ones and use the saved energy more efficiently during seminars with the students: *“it is better to put your energy into meeting the students during the seminar than to put so much energy into writing individual feedback as I did before”* (Participant VI).

Attitudes towards retirement: work does not end at retirement

Majority of participants in the study felt determined to continue their work, at least to some extent. One participant explained the reasoning behind her decision to not retire, from the societal perspective:

“It is a completely absurd thought that we should spend almost one third of our lives as children and students (...) they are like the most expensive ones we have, so to speak. Children do not produce anything, they need supervision, they need training. Then, we have some time when we are productive and then we all retire at 65 and live to 95, which is completely absurd. There are families where there are two generations of pensioners” (Participant IV).

Furthermore, many participants pointed out that with their knowledge, skills, experience and contact networks, developed throughout their professional life, they had so much to contribute to the society that they would not consider retirement as long as they are relatively healthy, capable to continue working and in actual fact, needed.

However, to continue working did not necessarily mean or require staying employed. Other alternatives were often discussed such as working at own clinics, being involved in various projects in Sweden and abroad, but also writing articles and books as well as consulting from own home office : *“Well, it's not necessarily that I have to be employed here to work, but I'm also writing, so I'm very involved in the theoretical knowledge about (...), so I'm writing a book, so why to stop?”*(Participant III).

Gradual transitioning from work to retirement, preferably over a few years, was contemplated mainly by the female participants. In general, the male scholars expected to be employed or engaged in some form of work as long as it was possible. They didn't regard themselves as potential retirees: *“It is very hard to see myself as a pensioner, I kind of don't have that identity, I haven't got it yet”* (Participant III). In contrast, the majority of the female academics, expressed acceptance and plans for retirement in the near future. Some of them considered a gradual transition as the most optimal way of ceasing the employment: *“I think that after 68 years, I probably won't work as much of course, (...), but maybe I will work like twenty, thirty percent or something and then slowly reduce it, a few more years, it depends on how I feel too”* (Participant V). Only one female participant felt ready to stop working at the university: *“I will be emerita. (...) I mean I've had a lot of fun in my professional life, and I would never choose to do anything else than that here, but I am satisfied”* (Participant I), however she would like to continue working on her book during retirement.

Engagement in various daily occupations and experience of OB

Typical working day vs. weekend

The data analysis has demonstrated that during weekdays the participants dedicated most of their time to work and work-related activities. The remaining time during a week was mainly used on regular care occupations that were part of the daily routine such as doing dishes, shopping, cooking dinner, etc. Activities that were often considered as something that needed to be done, and not necessarily as something they wished to do: “(...) then I go home. I throw myself on the bed for half an hour and then I have to wash the dishes, because it's never done when I get home. It's one of my biggest irritations in life and then it's like the day is over” (Participant I). Additionally, several participants were engaged in their regular physical activities such as training in a gym, that were scheduled on weekdays.

In contrast to the working days, the weekends were dedicated to a social life and filled with various recreational and play occupations. It was common for the participants to spend their weekends in the countryside, hiking and being close to nature as well as to engage in various activities that allowed them to relax, catch a breath, and recharge energy for the coming working week: “On the weekends, I usually drive up there. We do everything possible, visit friends or if the weather is nice, we take the sports car for a drive, just have coffee or lunch somewhere” (Participant IV).

Furthermore, the participants were in general, satisfied with the amount of intellectual, physical, social as well as rest activities in their daily life, although some wished for improvements such as engaging more frequently in physical activities: “Yes, I would like more to happen, and that is the problem. I'm lucky, I'm physically healthy and I have lots of things to do. Just keep going? Yes absolutely!” (Participant III). Most of the interviewed academics felt that their work, engagement in recreational occupations as well as social activities, all contributed to their experience of relatively well balanced life.

Occupations in leisure time

It was vital for the majority of participants to engage in recreational and play occupations in their spare time as those promoted their well-being: *“There, I perhaps prioritize things that mean a lot to my own, what should I say, feeling well, being able to read a book in peace, being able to go for a walk and exercise 3 times a week”* (Participant IV). Going for walks in nature was a very popular activity among the participants and strongly associated with their health and well-being: *“Being in nature makes me feel well. (...) As often as I can, I do it. Out in nature, even if it is only to the nearby woods”* (Participant I). Furthermore, spending time in the summerhouses was often referred to as a way of relaxation and rest.

Some participants engaged in various creative occupations, namely, playing musical instruments and craftworks, others enjoyed reading fiction or listening to music that they found also gratifying and relaxing. Many of the occupations that were mentioned, had a strong social character such playing bridge or golf, participating in book clubs and film clubs as well as inviting friends over. Recreational occupations with their families were a great part of many participants' lives that were perceived as important and fulfilling : *“So it's kind of like priority one, actually, of what's outside of work, it's my children and my grandchildren”* (Participant V).

Diverse perceptions of balance in everyday life

The majority of the participants expressed relative satisfaction with existing balance in their everyday life. However, their perception of and named contributors to occupational balance greatly varied. For some of the participants, balance was seen as being able to spend time outdoors and taking a breath of fresh air by either cycling or going for walks. *“If I imagined a balanced day, it would be a day when I also managed to, ... be out in the forest”* (Participant I). Balance was also described in terms of having a sense of control over work-related tasks and activities as well as being able to manage them efficiently and in good time: *“It's when you are able to go home from work and feel that you are somewhat finished for the day, the feeling of control”* (Participant V).

Taking breaks between different work activities were also important. *“I think it's when you have time to catch your breath between going from one thing to another. The time to adjust”*(Participant IV). The participants described that having a moment for oneself, allocating time, especially in the mornings, for reflection and quietness, contributed

to the experience of balance during a day: *“To get up a little earlier in the morning to enjoy a quiet morning by myself, have a cup of coffee and just sit all by myself. ... I think that’s really important, because it sort of gives me a good start”* (Participant VI).

Being able to have a flexible weekly schedule with optional days off and diverse daily activities that varied from one day to another, was described by the participants as an important and contributing factor to one’s OB: *“A balanced daily life, it’s the one that varies, that is not the same all the time. So when it changes, then I think life is very good. ... I’m able to take a day off or do something else, any day”* (Participant VII). Finally, OB in everyday life was associated with engaging in enjoyable activities including work, which was further described as an important component. *“Basically it’s about me doing the things that I enjoy doing. ... In some way, work has become a more important part of this balanced life”*(Participant VII).

Strategies to maintain health and well-being

Regular physical activities

Almost all participants were engaged in regular physical activities, often several days a week, and had always done so to maintain health and well-being. Going for a walk was one of the most frequent activities among the participants, who tried to engage in it as often and as much as they could: *“I walk as much as I can. (...) so yes, it happens that I walk ten thousand steps in a day”* (Participant II). Furthermore, hiking was another important physical activity to some of the participants, *“We walk outdoors a lot, Alnarp, you could almost say it is our second home. A fantastic place”* (Participant VIII).

To keep fit, several participants chose to exercise using bicycles, both in- and outdoors: *“Everytime I go to work, I cycle. If I have an errand in town, I cycle”* (Participant IV). *“I bought a bike, an exercise bike [for use] at home, sometimes I hop on it and exercise”* (Participant II).

Physiotherapy was also a recurring answer regarding physical health. A couple of the participants exercised daily by following training programmes recommended by their physiotherapists : *“I do physical therapy exercises every morning, it takes at least 20 minutes , (...). So I do it every day, because it makes me feel so much better”* (Participant I). Other participants were receiving physiotherapy to improve their mobility and general health.

Furthermore, one participant also described that the physical activities were scheduled on different days and had the same priority as work. *“Yes, work and physical activity (...). These sporting activities, they are pretty much scheduled, (...) on Monday evenings I play football, (...) on Sunday afternoons I play golf. It is quite a priority (...)”* (Participant VIII).

Importance of rest

Restful activities in everyday life, next to work, were considered an essential and strategic component to maintain health and well-being by several of the participants.

One participant described this as follows. *“Yes, but you have to. It is not possible to work 7 days a week, it is an impossibility”* (Participant II).

Working a lot was thought to be acceptable and manageable as long as there was a time allocated for rest: *“I think that as long as I can see that I can recover quite quickly. (...) then it feels okay to have a lot to do at work. As long as I perceive that I can relax and recover”* (Participant VI).

Many participants actively rested through engaging in different kinds of activities and what was recognized as a resting activity was a subjective and varied experience. Some participants experienced rest by doing various things they found enjoyable, but it didn't have to be entirely sedentary: *“I'm great at resting. (...) It doesn't have to be that you sit still, but that you do something completely different”* (Participant V). Other participants opted for more passive forms of rest by simply ensuring a good quality sleep or taking short naps that would allow them to continue working longer during a day: *“Sometimes I'm tired and then I can sort of fall asleep (...). You have to think about your health (...)”* (Participant II).

Discussion

Discussion of the results

It was found in the present study that the participating academics in retirement age, generally experienced balance in daily life and furthermore, work was considered to be one of the main factors significantly contributing to their OB, health, and well-being. Furthermore, the

engagement in various recreational and play occupations also promoted the participants' experience of OB by ensuring the "*harmonic mix*" of meaningful occupations in everyday life.

Work as a central occupation in daily life

The results from this study revealed that the prerequisite for a prolonged working life, named by all the participants, was good health. The majority of participants in the study stated that their overall health status was good and thus positively affecting their decision to continue working beyond the retirement age. Our findings confirm the results of several studies that good health correlated with the commitment to an extended employment (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Kerr & Armstrong-Stassen, 2011; Nilsson, 2012; Nilsson, 2017; Patrickson, 2016; Sewdas et al., 2017). Furthermore, a few interviewees expressed their intention to continue working despite some or potential health issues that confirms findings in the previous study, where some participants were also willing to work independently of their health status (Hovbrandt, Håkansson, et al., 2019). The participants actively took care of their health by engaging in various physical activities with the purpose of maintaining their physical health as well as ability to work. This result stands in the agreement with the previous studies (Arvedson Lindin et al., 2007; Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010) that highlighted the importance of health and regular fitness activities as one of the components of a healthy workplace and OB in everyday life. As the one of the indicators of OB (Eklund et al, 2017) is related to an individual's "*abilities and resources*" to perform various daily occupations, including work, the participants' personal health care was one way to ensure that their abilities are sustained and not significantly affected by age-related decline. Furthermore, the evidence from the previous studies suggest that a prolonged working life can have a positive impact on some individuals' experience of mental and physical health as well as well-being (Baxter et al., 2021, de Wind et al., 2016; Hoglund et al., 2009; Reynolds et al., 2012), which we also found, to some extent, in our study.

One of the main and strongest reasons for an extended working life, identified in the study, was the meaning and value found at work that fostered not only the participants' sense of fulfillment and purpose, but also fun, excitement, curiosity and challenge in life. The significant majority of participants associated educating students, contributing with their wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience, as well as advancing research, with an increased feeling of enjoyment, fulfillment and meaning, that is a fundamental need as well as

motivation in human's life (Hammel, 2004; Yeoman, 2014). This shared perception of work in academia as a source of enjoyment is perhaps not so easily acquired in other workplaces, where older workers may feel less inclined to extend their working life. However, a sense of fulfillment found at work by older workers of various professions, was described in recent studies, in terms of satisfaction as well as challenge and stimulation gained from solving relevant problems and it was considered to be as important as staying healthy (Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019; Nilsson, 2012; Nilsson 2017). Furthermore, having a purpose in life was linked to work in another study and identified mainly as a contribution and participation in society (Sewdas et al., 2017).

Some academics in the study declared that they would continue working even if not paid a salary, which indicates that the meaning found at work went beyond the need of survival, as it was intrinsically gratifying and offered a sense of purpose, efficacy, occupational identity, and self-fulfillment. It has also been suggested that meaningful occupation, such as work, can be perceived as “the mechanism that enables people to achieve balance in their everyday life” (Håkansson et al., 2006, p. 81).

We suggest that for the majority of participants in the study, work had a high value in all occupational dimensions, that is concrete, socio-symbolic as well as self-rewarding, thus contributing to the participants' discovery and an overall experience of meaning in life that is positively associated with subjective health and well-being (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Erlandsson et al., 2011; Frankl, 2008). From occupational science perspective, the sense of meaning is linked to experience of OB and *congruence between individuals' occupational engagement and their values as well as personal meanings* is considered to be one of the indicators of OB in everyday life (Håkansson et al., 2006; Eklund et al., 2017) that was also found to be the most decisive factor for the participants to prolong working.

The participants in the study remarked that one of the other reasons to continue working in the retirement age was to ensure financial stability. That was for the most part, relevant for the participants in the study, who were single and/or lived on their own. However, the findings in the prior studies demonstrate that the personal economy was an important reason for an extended working life for a majority of the participants and it did not necessarily, depend on of their gender, civil status or even profession (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Hovbrandt, Håkansson, et al., 2019; Sewdas et al., 2017). Furthermore, another recurrent reason that was named by the participants, was related to work as a facilitator that helps to structure and regulate a daily life. This demonstrates the importance of work in terms of time, location, and social context as well as habits, routines and roles and its impact on the participants' PDO and

consequently, their subjective perception of OB (Eklund et al., 2017; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Håkansson & Wagman, 2022) that was also found in the previous studies (Bratun & Zurc, 2022; Sewdas et al., 2017).

Organizational and social aspects of work in academia seem to have a significant impact on the participants' experience of OB in everyday life as well as their decision to continue working. Flexibility, in terms of work hours as well as varied periods of work intensity, facilitated the participants' undertaking of work-related activities. Control over their working time as well as academic freedom to choose their own activities and tasks was associated not only with the participants' ability to work, but also with their experience of well-being. Furthermore, the variety of work-related activities and tasks was considered to make work in academia continuously stimulating and challenging, especially the intellectual and social activities at work were much appreciated and valued. All above can be regarded as indicators of a supportive work environment. From the perspective of the Demand-Control Model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990, referred to in Theorell, 2000) that focuses on the psychosocial conditions at work, work in academia, as described by the participants, can be considered to be the combination of mainly, high psychological demands and high decision latitude, or in other words, a challenging and stimulating work. This active situation allows academics to manage high psychological demands at work by equipping them with a sense of control over their own work hours as well as decision making related to all activities and tasks.

Furthermore, it promotes developing better coping strategies, "facilitating feeling of mastery and control" (Theorell, 2000, p.98), that is associated with psychological growth and also means working without a psychological pressure, such as overwhelming stress. Additionally, the experience acquired during many years of work in academia and being well-established in their careers allowed the participants to enjoy and engage in many work-related activities, without feeling stressed, but rather stimulated and challenged and that also contributed to their experience of OB in daily life and sense of well-being.

By comparison, findings in the previous studies among workers in education and health sectors, demonstrated that the combination of overcommitment to work, difficulties to cope with the workload, seen as high demands and low decision latitude, can lead to increased stress, a poor subjective health and thus diminished work abilities. All that can be seen as barriers for older workers to postpone their decision to retire. Additionally, a lack of or difficulties to maintain OB in everyday life can further negatively impact health as well as work ability (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Håkansson & Ahlberg, 2018; Håkansson et al., 2020; Håkansson, Leo, et al., 2021; Lexen et al., 2020).

The social aspect of work, namely interacting with students as well as collaborating and socializing with work colleagues was much valued by the participants and perceived as a great motivator to an extended working life. Socio-symbolic value of work was emphasized by the participants' sense of *belonging* (Wilcock & Hocking, 2015) to the professional group as well as contributing to the society. Having professional relationships and sharing interests in chosen fields was such a vital part of work, that it continued to be important even in retirement as it provides an opportunity for keeping the connection with academia (Cahill et al., 2019; Cahill, et al., 2021). Furthermore, the social characteristic of work, along with the intellectual, can also contribute to the experience of OB in daily life (Håkansson & Wagman, 2022).

Although the flexibility and variety at work made it possible for the participants to continue working, they acknowledged their need to adopt certain strategies to be able to manage functional challenges related to ageing. Issues with mobility were addressed by a regular physical training at the gym or in- and outdoors cycling as well as following exercise programs recommended by their physiotherapists. Taking regular walks was another way of maintaining their physical and mental health. Memory loss, if experienced, was dealt with by making notes, "to do " lists as well as using the internet as the form of a quick and efficient reminder regarding, namely a research material. Tiredness seemed to be a recurrent issue that was managed by reducing working hours, taking pauses or power naps, alternating work-related activities and tasks as well as ensuring that the periods of intensive work were followed by the time of less demanding activities and tasks. Finally, utilizing their energy on the most important activities was an important strategy. The general attitude of the participants towards age- related decline was, whatever the strategies were employed, to actively take care of own health thus maintain their occupational engagement as well as work abilities. Similar findings were described in various studies, where it was stated that the age related decline did not prevent the participants to continue working as well as the use of various strategies on both, personal and organizational levels, enabled the participants to extend their working life (Björklund Carlstedt et al., 2018; Hovbrandt, Carlsson et al., 2019). Although the strategies for managing age-related decline were mainly examined in the context of work activities, it is crucial to emphasize that the same approach and similar strategies were employed by the participants, to ensure their *resources and abilities*, therefore to facilitate their engagement in other daily occupations and maintenance of OB.

Attitudes towards retirement among the participants were relatively homogeneous, however the reasonings behind were quite diverse. From the societal perspective, retirement at the age

of 65 was discussed and considered by the participants to be unsustainable, and with potential consequences for health- and social care sectors and labour market as approximately 20% of Swedish current population are retired and over 2,3 million received general pension in 2022 (Pensionsmyndigheten, 2023). The participants expressed their desire to continue their contribution to the society by sharing their professional knowledge and further advancing their research as long as they were healthy, able to work and crucially, needed and recognized.

It was however, acknowledged that they were very privileged to be able to do so, as the nature of their work is not physically demanding thus, not significantly impacted by the age related, physical decline. Furthermore, the organizational and social structures at the university were regarded as supportive of a work prolongation.

It awakes questions about older workers in other professions and their opportunities to continue working. Current studies suggest that not all work environments are supportive of a work prolongation (Nilsson, 2017; Oakman & Howie, 2011; O'Loughlin et al., 2017), although work resources have been shown to significantly influence a decision to continue working or to retire (Carr et al., 2016). Feeling forced into retirement can be perceived as an occupational injustice, when individuals who wish to continue using their potential, knowledge, and skills, by engaging in work activities, are prevented from doing so. That may lead to occupational imbalance and consequently, resulting in diminished health and well-being (Jonsson, 2011; Matuska & Christiansen, 2009; Wilcock and Hocking, 2015). It is, therefore, important not only for working individuals, but also for the society, to facilitate older workers, with their wealth of professional experience, who wish or need to continue working, by coordinating their work abilities with demands of employment. Furthermore, older employees' work abilities can be promoted by reducing work hours thus allowing time for a recovery, which can also have a significant impact on their decision regarding an extension of working life (Oakman & Howie, 2013).

The findings in this study suggest that flexibility in work hours as well as opportunities to engage in a variety of stimulating work-related activities and tasks, are important conditions for a continuation of working in retirement age. However, to create suitable work opportunities and environments for older workers demands support, not only from employers, but also the society. Various forms of *the bridge-employment* (Beehr & Bennett, 2015), a paid work between retirement from full-time job and complete cessation of employment, that accommodates flexible working hours as well diverse work activities can be considered as

one of the suitable ways to promote an extended working life among older workers of various professions.

Further findings of this study demonstrate that the cessation of employment does not necessarily mean the end of work. The work in academia was described as the great interest and pursuit of knowledge, therefore other forms of relevant work were often considered by the participants. That can be associated further, with a deep sense of meaning found in academic work that contributed to the participants perception of own identity and competence, thus influencing their views on alternative ways of work continuation that would still maintain their occupational identity as well as well-being (Eriksson et al., 2015, Erlandsson & Persson, 2020).

Finally, a gradual transition from work to retirement was contemplated mainly by the female participants who were very much involved in their families' lives and engaged in other occupations such as actively taking care of their grandchildren. Therefore, they felt that being an academic was not their only role that contributed to their occupational identity.

Interestingly, Ludvig et al. (2007) found that productive occupations such as childcare, can have a direct impact on grandmothers' experience of their meaningful occupations in retirement, with the right amount of care duties, enhancing the sense of meaning in their daily occupations as well as well-being.

Engagement in various daily occupations and experience of OB

The findings in the study did not show how much time was spent by the participants on various occupations, however they demonstrated the difference between the occupational choices made on weekends and during a working week. Diverse work-related activities and tasks dominated a typical working day, even for the participants who worked part-time. The participants who were working part-time, continued to engage mainly in work-related activities and despite having more spare time, they didn't make any major changes to their occupational repertoire. Work was followed by care occupations that were a part of daily routines and habits and perceived as something that must be done. Occasional recreational and play occupations were also present during a working week and perceived as a form of active resting that contributed to the participants' energy level and satisfaction with daily life. However, it was on weekends when the recreational and play occupations truly reigned. The results from the previous study about balance among a working population in Sweden (Wagman et al., 2011) suggested that it is not the equal amount of time spent on occupations

that matters to experience of OB, but rather an engagement in the variety of occupations, “*harmonious mix*”, in daily life as a whole. The findings in our study indicate that there was a relative harmony between all occupational categories in the participants’ daily life, significantly between work and leisure, that is thought to be a predictor of health (Håkansson & Ahlberg, 2010). Additionally, the engagement in occupations with different characteristics, intellectual, physical, social, and restful, further strengthened the participants’ subjective experience of OB in their lives (Wagman et al., 2012). The participants engaged in various different occupations in leisure time that mainly belonged to the categories of play and recreational, and were considered personally meaningful as well as intrinsically gratifying. Engaging in creative occupations such as writing a book, playing a musical instrument, handcrafts and even playing bridge or golf were a way of creating meaningful occupational experiences, a source of relaxation, enjoyment, and fun, in the context that was not related to work. Engaging in valued play occupations can be further associated with individuals’ expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas that promote discovery and personal growth, (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020) as Winnicott (2005, p.73) observed “it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self”. The self-rewarding as well as socio-symbolic values generated from play occupations can contribute to general experience of meaning, and therefore promote the “*congruence with values and personal meanings*” aspect of OB in daily life (Eklund et al., 2017; Erlandsson & Persson, 2020).

Recreational occupations were also present in the participants’ occupational repertoire, mainly on weekends. Hiking, staying in their summerhouses and being close to nature were mentioned as most relaxing occupations that are known to benefit health and well being (White et al., 2019). Furthermore, listening to music, reading for pleasure and socializing with friends and family were much valued, not only in terms of well-being, but also significantly, in connection to others (Whalley Hammel, 2014). The importance of engaging in recreational occupations has been emphasized as it also promotes balance in everyday life, especially in relation to work (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Matuska & Barrett, 2015). The predominant socio-symbolic and self-rewarding values found in the recreational occupations considerably influenced participant’s perception of and promoted further their experience of OB, subjective health and well-being. Results in the previous studies suggest that participating in leisure occupations have a significant impact on the women’s views on their health and OB, more so than on men’s (Håkansson et al., 2006; Håkansson & Ahlberg, 2010). Most likely, due to a small size of the sample, the results in our study did not reveal any major differences between male and female’s engagement in leisure occupations, in correlation with

the experience of OB and self-rated health. However, the results have shown that the social character of recreational occupations was greatly appreciated by the participants, nurturing their sense of *belonging* and well-being. Furthermore, the results in the study, in agreement with the previous studies (Hovbrandt, Carlsson, et al., 2019, Håkansson & Ahlborg, 2010), demonstrate the significance of the harmony between work and other occupations as well as the uniqueness of occupational choices made by the participants in regard to their leisure time.

It seems that the participants were generally satisfied with their experience of OB in daily life, although they perceived it in various ways. Allocating time for oneself to reflect and find inner peace and meaning as well as being close to nature to experience harmony and contentedness, was considered important for maintaining OB as it corresponds to *congruence with values and personal meaning*. Engagement in diverse occupations, including work, was the participants' reoccurring understanding of balance in everyday life, that clearly relates to *harmonic mix*. Finally, the participants' recognized that a flexible work schedule as well as a sense of control over work-related activities were a vital part of their comprehension of OB that can be regarded as *abilities and resources* that contribute to OB (Eklund et al., 2017; Wagman et al., 2012). It is crucial to remember that establishing and maintaining balance in daily life is the result of complex and dynamic process between all three described aspects of OB, therefore all of them need to be broadly considered, while supporting individuals' efforts to achieve OB thus improving their subjective health and well-being (Wagman & Håkansson, 2014).

Strategies to maintain health and well-being

The findings in the study revealed that physical exercise was an important part of the participants' daily routine and contributed to their experience of OB. They performed and prioritized these activities each week to actively care for their health and well-being. The physical activities varied in form, ranging from relaxing walks and cycling trips to more intense sports such as football and tennis. Previous studies describe a connection between being physically active and feeling healthy in older people, the more physical activities were performed, the better health (Arbesman & Lieberman, 2012). For example, taking walks, which many of the participants did, is described to promote health (Wensley & Slade, 2012). The physical training, associated with well-being, indirectly enabled the participants to engage in meaningful activities as well as positively impacted their work-ability.

This is because older people who exercise have a higher level of functioning and therefore better cope with the self-care and household chores than those who do not exercise (Arbesman & Lieberman, 2012), which probably releases time for the participation in meaningful activities that is linked to better well-being (Håkansson et al., 2006). Restful activities were also found to be a strategy for recovery and better health among participants. This way of taking care of one's health is consistent with previous research and theory. Rest is important for health and maintenance of OB, but it also increases engagement in other activities (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020; Nurit & Michal, 2003), such as physical activities, that can further promote health. Restful activity is a subjective experience (Erlandsson & Persson, 2020), which is consistent with this study's results, as some participants took power naps, while others did something more active that they found enjoyable and energizing.

Discussion of the method

To explore the phenomenon occupational balance, a qualitative method was chosen and used by conducting semi-structured interviews in a cross-sectional design, this to keep a holistic approach, which in generally occupational therapy is considered to possess, and to investigate subjective experiences (Fossey et al., 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

The qualitative method gave the authors the right conditions to obtain empirical data that was in-depth and rich in content in order to be able to interpret and understand the entirety of occupational balance in accordance with the purpose of the study, something that a quantitative method could not satisfy to the same extent. Patel & Davidsson (2019) explains that a quantitative method is more strict and focuses mostly on measurable things based on a natural science approach, while the qualitative one is linked to phenomenology, which is the study approach, and focuses on understanding experiences through people's own words and expressions, such as feelings and perceptions. Since the authors chose not to proceed from theory, in other words not to use a deductive way, the qualitative method was better suited because it is more inductive oriented and linked to the phenomenological approach (Patel & Davidson, 2019). Why the study had a cross-sectional design was because the authors had a time frame of 10 weeks that they had to keep, but also because it was considered that relevant data that would answer the study purpose could be obtained by collecting data at a single occurrence. The advantages of the cross-sectional design are that fewer participants drop out

and that there is less administration (Billhult, 2017; Mann, 2003), which created the right conditions to finish the study within 10 weeks.

Trustworthiness is essential for a qualitative study, therefore the authors observed four determining indicators: participation, validity, reliability, and transferability. Furthermore, to attain these indicators, the following has been adapted: strategic and sufficient data collection from evenly chosen participants of both genders and with relevant experience, providing a detailed description of the selection of the participants, data collection and analysis in the study, collaborative analysis work, distancing from the collected data by both of the authors during the analysis process and reporting of the relevant citations in the results (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017). Above all else, the authors have tried to work on the basis of having a logical and red thread throughout the course of the study and then endeavored to describe it clearly, from introduction to discussion, so that the readers themselves could form their own opinion about the research process, which is the core to strengthen trustworthiness in a qualitative study (Fossey et al., 2002; Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017; Patel & Davidson, 2019). Trustworthiness will be discussed further in detail below in each paragraph.

The recruitment via convenience sampling combined with snowball sampling provided the authors with applicants way over the 8 that would be included in the study. That it only included 8 can be considered few. But a qualitative study should not focus on the number of participants, rather on what new information the sample can contribute with (Malterud et al., 2016), and the amount of participants is not decisive for validity either, it is the quality of the collected data (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017). However, not all of these met the inclusion criteria and were thus automatically excluded, the most common reason was that they did not work at least 25%. The authors considered this to be of great importance because the work then likely affected their everyday life to a greater extent, but meant that some participants who had increased the variety were excluded. The exclusion criteria of excluding occupational therapists also reduced the numbers. That, in combination with the fact that the authors wanted an even gender distribution and a varying age range, which is considered important for increasing the breadth of experiences (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017), and that they worked at different faculties, was for example a random sampling not possible, which means that all persons have an equal chance of being selected and allowed to participate in a study (Patel & Davidson, 2019). Random sampling is more widely used in quantitative studies with a large number of participants, and convenience sampling when it is a qualitative study so that the authors can select the participants who they believe can provide

the right kind of informative responses that answer the research questions (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018), which in this study was, among others, about occupational balance and extended working life. Choosing participants who are estimated to be able to answer the purpose of the study is a component that contributes to the study's validity (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017), and since this is something the authors did, the choice of sampling method can be considered to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. The semi-structured interviews provided the authors with a content-rich data as the participants themselves could shape and develop their answers regarding their experiences of OB, which was the purpose of the interviews (Patel & Davidson, 2019). However, there were difficulties in carrying out the interviews. Although the interview questions were tested before together with an independent person, there could sometimes be a uncertainty about what was to be answered, the participants could occasionally say after they answered: does that answer the question?. It was also problematic sometimes when the questions were not about their work, but about the rest of their everyday life and their private lives. Sometimes the authors had to ask the question again, rephrase the question or specifically ask about the private in order to get an answer within this domain, which is described as a common dilemma (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Why these complications occurred may have been part of the fact that the authors were novices at interviewing, that the way of conversing and conveying information to the interviewee was substandard. An interview benefits from the interviewer having the experience and knowledge of how a conversation is conducted so that it benefits the interviewee so that life experiences can be shared (Adams, 2010; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). This can also affect trustworthiness, since the interviewer creates the data together with the participant, which influences the data quality (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017).

The offer to the participants to carry out the interviews at a location of their choice gave the authors a flexible and rapid booking system which was managed via email contact. 7 of the participants chose their own physical and specific location, and 1 chose to make an internet-based video call. Both options provide approximately equal quality in terms of information gathering, but the physical interview may be better for those who are older because the technology may be difficult to manage (Krouwel et al., 2019), which may have been a reason why the majority of the participants chose the physical one. Another reason may have been that the physical places provided a sense of security, which is an important component for an interview in order to provide comprehensive and in-depth data collection (Danielson, 2017).

In the semi-structured interviews, the authors used an interview guide (Appendix 2) to collect the content rich data about experiences of occupational balance. The interview guide gave the authors a structure that contained open-ended and follow-up questions that could be easily followed during the interview, which semi-structured interviews should contain (Danielson, 2017; Stanley, 2015). The trustworthiness of the study was also strengthened due to the semi-structured interview guide. That is because the authors: deemed that the research questions could be answered through a semi-structured interview, acquired sufficient background knowledge about the subject, created a provisional guide and then tested it to develop the final version that was used during the interviews (Kallio et al., 2016).

The use of latent content analysis to interpret collected data provided the authors with a red thread throughout the analysis process, from transcribing to generating themes. Since the authors had done the interviews together, both of them already had memory and knowledge of what the participants had told before the start of the analysis, which may have been important because the transcription process is a part that affects the validity, especially when spoken language is to be transferred to writing, which creates the basis for the analysis (Patel & Davidson, 2019).

That both of the authors read and examined all the 8 transcribed interviews, also increased trustworthiness in terms of reliability (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017). The condensation and the coding was initially done by one of the authors. But to further strengthen trustworthiness, collaboration, as previously mentioned, in parts of the analysis process is important (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017), therefore the second author did his own condensation and coding to compare and hold a discussion based on the first coding results with the other author. The authors confirmed that there was no major difference between the codings. This element may have been important to prevent a phenomenon called coder fatigue, which means that a coder starts to think that all the data looks the same, which also affects trustworthiness (Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

The authors present in Table 2 an example of the various stages of the analysis process, from raw data to thematization. The table is intended to provide a transparent insight into how the analysis was executed, which enables reconstruction and assessment of the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020; Patel & Davidson, 2019). The table combined with the description of the other parts of the method is also important to provide the opportunity to assess the transferability of the results, as previously mentioned, is part of trustworthiness (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017). As described in the results, for example, academics have certain special and flexible organizational working conditions that

are rarely seen in other professions, which probably affects their experience of occupational balance and means that the transferability of their experiences may be limited.

In summary, qualitative latent content analysis was useful for finding and interpreting underlying meaning in collected data and consequently, gaining a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). However, it is dependent on the researchers' personal knowledge and experience, which may be considered limited, and their description of the analysis process in order to achieve trustworthiness (Lundman & Hällgren Graneheim, 2017).

Conclusion and implications

Working academics in retirement age are the professional group that remains in employment the longest in Sweden. This qualitative study provides insight into older academics' perceptions and experiences of OB in daily life, where work was still, not only a central, but also valued and meaningful occupation. The findings demonstrate that maintaining OB in everyday life was possible for the participants due to their engagement in diverse meaningful occupations that included work, with its flexible work hours and a variety of engaging and challenging activities. Furthermore, it has been found that complex and multidimensional aspects of OB need to be in continued and relatively harmonious interplay for the participants to experience subjective health and well-being thus continue working. This research can contribute to deepening understanding of OB among older workers and moreover, can potentially guide occupational therapists (OT) in their efforts to support individuals in retirement age who wish to prolong their working life. By assisting older individuals in establishing and maintaining OB in daily life, OTs can also promote, associated with OB, subjective health, and well-being, where the former is recognized as a main prerequisite to an extended work. Furthermore, OTs can utilize their occupational knowledge by assessing work-related demands as well as organizational and social conditions at a work environment to develop suitable strategies that could promote older employees' work abilities and allow the prolongation of working life. Further research is needed to establish the range of occupational therapy interventions, which can provide support to older workers in their efforts to maintain OB in their daily life as well as to continue working if desired.

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Appendix 1 (2)

Recruitment letter

Upplevelsen av aktivitetsbalans hos svenska arbetande akademiker över 65 år

Du tillfrågas om deltagande i ovanstående intervjustudie.

Vi har genom kontakt med en HR sektion på ett universitet i södra Sverige begärt ut allmän handling bestående av en lista på personer som är över 65 år och arbetar som akademiker på universitet. Utifrån den listan har vi sedan använt universitetets medarbetarwebbs sökfunktion för att få fram personernas e-postadresser

Studiens bakgrund och syfte

Aktivitetsbalans handlar om upplevelsen av olika aktiviteter i vardagen och i vilken mån variationen av aktiviteter är väl balanserad. Arbete är en av många aktiviteter som bidrar till en balans i vardagen, som också är kopplat till hälsa och välmående. Akademiker som arbetar på universitet har den högsta genomsnittliga pensionsåldern (cirka 67 år) i Sverige och har därför särskilda erfarenheter av att balansera arbete med andra aktiviteter även efter 65 års ålder. Denna studies syfte är att undersöka hur äldre arbetande akademiker upplever balans i vardagen och hur balansen påverkar ett förlängt arbetsliv.

Vi skulle vilja göra en intervju med Dig som arbetar mellan 25–100% som forskare och/eller lärare på universitet. Intervjun kommer fokusera på vardagslivet och hur balansen mellan olika aktiviteter upplevs. Intervjutillfället kommer ske under vecka 11 och 12 och beräknas ta cirka 40 minuter. Den kommer genomföras av en av författarna, Joakim eller Magdalena. Vi erbjuder plats för intervjun alternativt att Du själv föreslår plats, ett online-möte går också bra. Intervjun kan göras på svenska eller engelska.

Med Din tillåtelse vill vi gärna spela in intervjun. Inspelningen kommer att förvaras på Lunds universitets studentkontos hårddiskutrymme för säkerhetskopiering, vilket är säker förvaring från obehöriga. Insamlad data kommer att förstöras efter godkänd examination.

Deltagandet är helt frivilligt och Du kan avbryta när som helst utan att du behöver ange varför. Den information Du lämnar kommer att behandlas konfidentiellt, d.v.s. så att inte någon obehörig får tillgång till den.

Om Du vill delta ber vi Dig förmedla ditt intresse till någon av författarna nedan via e-post senast 2023-03-13. Samtyckesblankett skrivs under innan intervjun startar vid intervjutillfället. Den finns även bifogad nedan.

Studien ingår som ett examensarbete i arbetsterapeutprogrammet.

Om Du har några frågor eller vill veta mer, kontakta gärna oss eller vår handledare.

Interview guide

The participant's sociodemographic background

- ❖ How old are you?
- ❖ What is your civil status? (Do you live on your own or with a family?)
- ❖ What is your position at the university at the moment?
- ❖ How long have you been working as an academic/ university lecturer/ researcher?
- ❖ Are you working full- or part- time?

Occupational balance

a) "harmonious mix" of occupations in daily life

- ❖ Would you describe your typical week and the occupations you usually engage in?
- ❖ If you work part-time, how do you spend/ use the remaining time? Do you engage in new or past occupations to keep you active?
- ❖ Are you satisfied with the amount of physical, intellectual, social as well as restful occupations in your life?
- ❖ How do you find managing work, play, leisure, and self-care occupations as well as rest/ sleep in your everyday life?
- ❖ What does balance in everyday life mean to you?

b) congruence with occupational values and meaning

- ❖ Why have you decided to prolong your work? What was a decisive factor for you to continue your work?
- ❖ How long would you like to continue working?
- ❖ What motivates you most to continue working?
- ❖ How important and meaningful is it for you to prolong your working life?
- ❖ Which daily occupations do you tend to prioritize and why?

c) abilities and resources

- ❖ Do you take care of your health and in what way?
- ❖ With consideration for your age, how do you manage work- related tasks and activities? (Strategies, compensation, working hours)
- ❖ Would you like to tell us if you employ strategies in your daily life to promote health and well-being that would also facilitate your work?

Supporting questions

- ❖ Could you explain that further?
- ❖ What do you mean by....?
- ❖ How do you feel about?
 - ❖ Is that important for you to