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Understanding Canadian ageing workers' perceptions of workplace changes caused by COVID-19

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Abstract: Today's workers are remaining in the workforce longer than previous generations, resulting in a growing ageing workforce. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made retaining older workers more complex. Ageing workers were particularly vulnerable to the virus, which heightened their fear of infection and reinforced employers' negative perceptions about their performance due to health concerns. To better understand the challenges faced by ageing workers, we conducted a survey investigating their perceptions of workplace changes caused by COVID-19. The survey instrument was systematically developed through a comprehensive literature review to ensure the clarity and relevance of questions. Our findings suggest that both health conditions and organizational support deteriorated between the pre- and post-COVID-19 periods. Interestingly, the number of respondents who felt comfortable with technology increased after COVID-19, indicating a growing adaptability among Canadian ageing workers.

Keywords: ageing workforce; COVID-19; physical and cognitive change; discrimination; technological change; social and organizational support

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching effects globally, disrupting not only public health but also economic systems, labour markets, and social structures. The virus's high contagion rate and mortality risk [1] triggered widespread lockdowns, travel restrictions, and business closures—catalyzing a global economic downturn [2–4]). In many countries, the economic disruption resembled the 2008 financial crisis but introduced new challenges, particularly for ageing populations regarding health risks and labour force participation.

As existing economic policies proved inadequate [5,6], there was increased pressure on policymakers to implement structural reforms. One critical area of focus became the participation of older adults in the labour market [6,7]. The pandemic exacerbated this challenge, as retaining ageing workers became increasingly difficult due to heightened vulnerability, job displacement, and reluctance to return to in-person work environments [8,9].

In Canada, Statistics Canada data revealed a notable decline in labour force participation among ageing workers during the pandemic [10]. **Figure 1** reveals that, between 2014 and 2019, the annual employment growth rate for Canadians aged 60 and above remained consistently positive for both genders. However, in 2020, it dropped to 3.3% for men and 7% for women, with women experiencing a steeper decline. According to Scott [11], this decline reflected broader labour losses among women: 2.8 million Canadian women either lost jobs or had reduced hours in March

2020 alone.

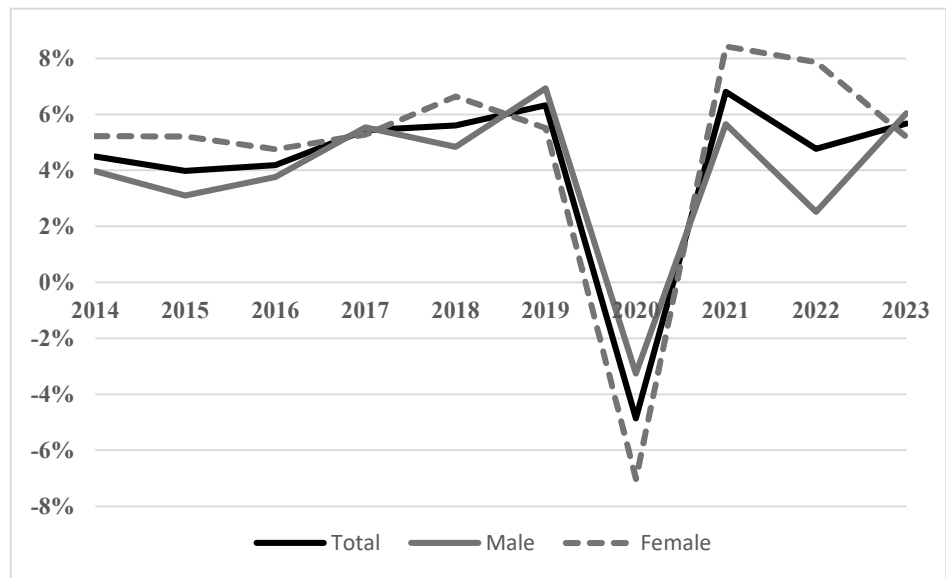


Figure 1. Annual employee growth rate for employees aged 60 and older in Canada (%).

Source: Authors' own computations based on data from International Labour Organization (ILO) [12].

Employment losses overall were steep. Lemieux et al. [13] found that total hours worked in early 2020 dropped by 32%—a sharper decline than in previous recessions. Older workers, especially older women, experienced slower re-employment rates and higher rates of labour market exit [14]. Schuster et al. [9] reported that many older workers retired not by choice, but due to prolonged unemployment. Cui [14] found that involuntary exits were most common among low-income, older women.

Interestingly, participation among older workers began to recover in 2021. Camille [15] reported that the Canadian government invited recently retired frontline workers to return to the labour force to meet COVID-related service demands. This likely contributed to the rising employment rates for those aged 60+ between 2021 and 2023. However, this return may be temporary. Concerns around health, burnout, and readiness for retirement persist, and long-term participation remains uncertain. Additionally, many older workers had to adapt quickly to remote work and digital platforms—a major shift that posed significant challenges [5].

2. Literature review

2.1. Structural shifts and policy gaps

Beyond the immediate crisis, the post-pandemic labour market accelerated structural trends such as automation and digitization. These changes have disproportionately impacted older workers, particularly those in physically demanding or lower-skill jobs, increasing the risk of job displacement and early retirement [16]. While there has been growth in age-friendly occupations across Canada and other developed countries, older men and non-degree holders have benefited less from these developments [17].

In addition to labour market challenges, there is a significant lack of Canada-

specific empirical research on the experiences of ageing workers. Lagacé et al. [10] found that from 2009 to 2019, Canada produced fewer studies on this topic than other developed countries, particularly in comparison to Europe. This is concerning, as Canada's ageing workforce is diverse in terms of health, educational attainment, ethnicity, and work history. Applying foreign findings may not fully capture the Canadian context.

Tiwana et al. [18] further observed that pandemic-response policies in Canada failed to address the equity needs of older and marginalized populations—particularly immigrants and women in precarious employment. This oversight likely exacerbated labour market exclusion during the crisis and may have long-term implications for income security and re-employment prospects for ageing Canadians.

Given these gaps, the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Canadian ageing workers before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it aims to assess how the pandemic influenced their employment status, work environments, and willingness to remain in the labour market.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews existing literature on the challenges faced by ageing workers in remaining employed. Section 3 outlines the research design, eligibility criteria, and recruitment process. Section 4 presents the analysis and key findings. Section 5 summarizes the study's conclusions and policy implications.

2.2. The impact of COVID-19 on the ageing workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted severe negative economic consequences on people worldwide. According to Martin et al. [4], the disease prevention measures implemented in the early stages of the pandemic—for example, lockdowns, working from home, and mass quarantine—were problematic for many members of the working population. In addition, mass layoffs, downsizing, furloughing, and wage reductions became increasingly commonplace [19,20]. In fact, these cost-cutting strategies have put further pressure on workers. Clarke and Fields [21] estimated that 3.4 million employees lost their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic in Canada alone. As a result, many workers struggled to meet their financial commitments, and many had to resort to using their savings [22]. von Wachter [23] estimated that the pandemic-related lifetime earnings losses of workers in the USA could amount to as much as US\$2 trillion.

The threat of the virus also affected workers' health and well-being and their motivation to remain in the workforce [24,25]. The increase in the reported death rates among the ageing population due to COVID-19 has created fear among ageing workers of being infected, considering their vulnerability to the virus. The fear of being infected, along with the challenges to learning new technology in a short period of time, may increase the stress level of the ageing workers and subsequently affect their productivity.

Therefore, mass layoffs and voluntary redundancies significantly reduced economic growth in many countries [2–4]. Apart from the mass layoffs, the threat of the virus has worsened the workers' health and significantly affected their well-being and motivation to remain in the workforce [24,25]. Therefore, mass layoffs and the

voluntary exit of workers from the workforce have significantly reduced the number of labourers in the labour market.

According to the Bank of Canada [26], the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every sector of the Canadian economy, with some sectors—for example, the energy, travel, hospitality, and service industries—being particularly severely affected. To support the affected sectors, the Bank of Canada subsequently lowered interest rates by making credit affordable [26,27]. While the availability of credit helped many industries to recover from the economic fallout of the pandemic, others are still struggling because of the fall in the labour supply [5,24,25]. Therefore, government agencies are bound to implement policies to overcome the shortage.

Since workers have different needs and demands, there is a need for targeted support mechanisms that consider the unique circumstances of each age group [28]. In particular, deteriorating health, fear of technology, and age discrimination are factors associated with ageing workers, whose needs are often seen as more challenging than those of other groups of workers [9,29,30]. The following section looks at how the pandemic influenced the participation of ageing workers through their physical and cognitive health, ability to cope with technological advancements, experience of discrimination, and level of social and organizational support in the workforce.

2.3. How COVID-19 influenced ageing workers’ workforce participation

Numerous studies indicate that ageing workers’ decisions to remain in, or leave, the workforce were influenced by their physical and cognitive health, ability to cope with technological advancements, their experience of discrimination, and their level of social and organizational support [7,31–34]. The collective impact of these factors created a unique set of challenges for ageing workers during COVID-19 [9,16,24,35,36]. **Figure 2** illustrates the complex interplay of the individual, organizational, and social factors that influenced the ageing workers’ experience in both pre- and post-COVID work environments.

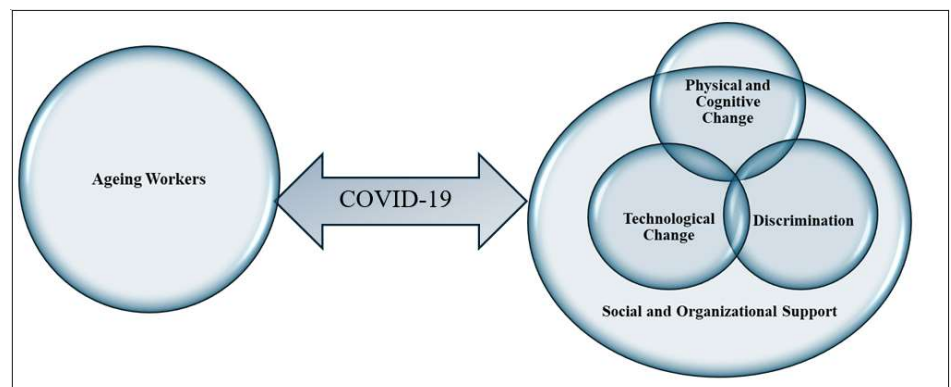


Figure 2. Factors that influenced the performance of ageing workers.

Source: Authors’ own design.

2.3.1. Physical and cognitive change

The mortality risk of the COVID-19 virus was more significant for ageing workers, who were more likely than their younger counterparts to have age-related

immune system challenges and underlying conditions that placed them at higher risk of contracting the disease [24,35]. Many ageing workers reported health conditions that limited their work abilities due to COVID-19, with manual workers facing higher risk factors than other workers [29,37]. Apart from the change in health conditions due to their age, the new organizational set-up has also increased the psychological distress of the ageing workers.

According to Losada-Baltar et al. [38], psychological distress was widespread among the ageing workforce during the pandemic, exacerbated by negative self-perceptions of ageing, age discrimination, age-related stereotypes, and social isolation. The author further stresses that the physical and psychological challenges were compounded by the disruption of regular routines and social connections, which intensified feelings of isolation and anxiety. A study conducted by Pit et al. [8] among ageing workers across 15 countries revealed that they experienced ageism, heightened health risks, and psychosocial concerns during the pandemic. As a result, the pandemic created a pervasive sense of insecurity and fear among ageing workers, further reducing their ability to adapt to the new working environment and remain engaged in the labour market [5].

2.3.2. Technological changes

The increasing integration of technology in the workplace presents significant challenges to the ageing workforce, many of whom have inadequate technological literacy [39,40]. Even prior to the pandemic, numerous studies indicated that cognitive decline associated with ageing diminishes the ability to process highly complex information (cognitive skills discussed in the articles include memory, problem-solving, speed processing, attention, reasoning, and sensory perception) [31,33,40], a critical skill for mastering new technologies. According to Aisa et al. [16], technological advancements discourage less skilled ageing workers from remaining in the workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges by accelerating the rate of digital transformation and necessitating an abrupt shift to remote work for many people. The rapid switch to diverse digital platforms for remote work significantly strained many ageing workers' technical abilities and affected their participation levels [41]. Furthermore, digitization substantially changed many jobs and work environments [19,42]. Workers aged 55 and older were more at risk of being replaced by technology, a phenomenon termed the "dual threat of aging and technology" [43]. The rise in absenteeism among ageing workers made them less productive than other age groups [44]. As a result, many developed countries have invested in adopting automation technologies to replace ageing workers [16].

Specifically, 14.6% of workers aged 55 and older were at high risk of their job changing because of technology, compared to 7.6% of workers aged 25–34 and 10.1% of workers aged 35–54 [45]. This disparity underscores the amplified vulnerability of older workers in the evolving digital landscape.

2.3.3. Discrimination

Age-related discrimination in the workplace, or workplace ageism in overt or covert forms, has been a persistent issue for many years [34,46]. Studies have shown that intergenerational conflict due to ageism negatively impacts ageing workers' health, stress levels, career advancement, and job security [47,48]. Negative

stereotypes and biases against ageing workers became more prominent during the pandemic, as ageing workers were perceived to be less adaptable and less productive than their younger counterparts, leading to their being increasingly marginalized in the workplace [29,30]. Furthermore, as companies focused on pivoting to digital options as quickly as possible during the pandemic, resources were stretched immensely [49]. Consequently, the cultural aspects of the work environment were often neglected, and creating supportive policies and programs for ageing workers during this period was not a priority [49]. Thus, the two-pronged impact of peer discrimination and managerial neglect during the pandemic led to job dissatisfaction and increased turnover among ageing workers [9,34,50].

2.3.4. Social and organizational support

Despite the well-known vulnerabilities of ageing workers, many support services and programs were not readily available to them during the pandemic [36]. This lack of support highlighted gaps in workplace accommodations and exacerbated the challenges older employees face in adapting to a rapidly changing work environment. The level of social and organizational support they experienced dictated their working conditions, which in turn affected their ability to improve their technological literacy, experiences of discrimination, and overall physical and psychological well-being [51–55]. For example, the lack of age-appropriate technological upskilling led to ageing workers' exclusion from social and organizational support services that were provided virtually—for example, psychosocial services and career advancement opportunities [52–54]. This exclusion further marginalized ageing workers, limiting their access to resources that could have mitigated the negative impact of the pandemic on their future employment prospects.

Moreover, inadequate management safeguards against changes to roles and responsibilities compelled some workers to retire earlier than planned or expected [55]. Notably, the work environment, age-appropriate HR policies, strategic management support, and perception of being valued were found to affect the ageing workforce's well-being more than their physiological age did [51]. Developing comprehensive support systems that address these aspects of the workplace experience can play a crucial role in promoting the well-being and productivity of ageing workers and will ultimately benefit organizations as a whole. Thus, robust support mechanisms are a crucial tool to ensure that ageing workers remain in the labour market even during challenging times.

In sum, the labour force participation of ageing workers during the pandemic was significantly influenced by the nuanced dynamics of their physical and cognitive health, technological change, experiences of discrimination, and social and organizational support. The diagram (see **Figure 2**) emphasizes the crucial role that social and organizational support plays in mitigating or aggravating these types of challenges, especially in atypical circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This model underscores the need for a proactive approach to addressing the unique needs of ageing workers through targeted interventions and supportive policies. Strategic support systems—based on, for example, age-responsive policies and upskilling programs—and a safe and inclusive work environment can help ageing workers better navigate the modern workplace. Holistically addressing the interrelated

factors that contribute to the workplace experience of ageing workers is crucial for sustaining and fully valuing their economic contributions, thus fostering a productive and resilient labour force and improving the quality of life for ageing workers. At the same time, the workforce would remain diverse, skilled, and adaptable in the face of future crises.

3. Research methodology

Our study was designed to fill a knowledge gap by providing empirical evidence about older workers' perceptions of workplace changes caused by COVID-19. The experiences of this particular age group will provide helpful information to use in drafting effective policy plans to encourage ageing workers to remain in the workforce beyond their official retirement age. To be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to be English-speaking adults aged 65 and older who had been employed full-time in Canada since at least 2019. Individuals who had left the Canadian workforce in 2019 onwards were not eligible to participate because our objective was to identify Canadian ageing workers' experiences and challenges in post-pandemic work settings. Given that workers who work for family or friends may have certain privileges, such as a good relationship with their employer, and chances of them being discriminated against will be low [56]. Therefore, we excluded individuals who work for family members or friends to help ensure that the responses reflected more generalized experiences of ageing workers in traditional employment settings. The survey instrument was systematically developed based on an extensive review of relevant literature (refer to **Figure 2**). A thorough review of the preliminary survey instrument resulted in refinements in wording and the addition of items to better capture workplace experiences during the pandemic.

The data were collected through an online survey hosted by Qualtrics (The researchers completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE) on 6 October 2021, and received a Certificate of Ethics Review prior to the study. This ensured that our research was conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards, respecting the rights and well-being of our participants). (Qualtrics is an online survey tool used to build and distribute surveys and collect responses to survey questions). We conducted our online survey anonymously to encourage participants to provide honest responses without worrying about being identified (No identifying information (names, locations, IP addresses, dates) was collected. Anonymous surveys allow participants to respond to sensitive issues relating to their working lives without fear of being identified). Using an anonymous survey format also minimizes the risk of social desirability bias and encourages more truthful reporting of potentially sensitive issues such as discrimination and other workplace challenges.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit the participants through online advertisements on social networking platforms—for example, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn—classified sites—for example, Kijiji and Craigslist—and flyers in public areas—for example, grocery stores and community centres. To broaden our participant, reach and enhance sample diversity, snowball sampling was employed by encouraging respondents to disseminate the survey within their personal and

professional networks.

The survey was made available throughout Canada between 15 March 2023 and 15 March 2024. Interested participants signed an informed consent form that explained how their responses would be kept anonymous. A set of screening questions was used to ensure the participant was a Canadian ageing worker. At the end of the survey page, a thank-you note was shared with all the respondents for taking the time to participate in the survey. We took this thorough approach to data collection with the aim of building a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand that could then provide a strong foundation for subsequent analyses and policy recommendations.

4. Empirical results

A total of 500 individuals expressed interest in participating in the survey. However, 53 of them were under the age of 65 and were therefore not included in the study. Of the 447 participants aged 60 and above, 352 completed the survey, while 95 chose not to participate after reading the informed consent form. According to Tabanao [57], as of 2022, nearly one million individuals aged 65 and older were employed in the Canadian labour market. MacEwen [58] stressed that the majority of employees aged 65 and older in Canada are not full-time employees, and only 58% of employees aged 65 and older have been in the workforce as full-time employees since 2011. While the absolute number of ageing workers is significant, their distribution across full-time employment remains low. Since full-time employees work longer hours, their experience and challenges will help us understand the issues ageing workers face in detail. Therefore, based on our inclusion criteria, we were confident that the sample size for our study adequately represented the population of English-speaking adults aged 65 and older who have been employed full-time in Canada for at least five years. The sample size provided sufficient data for drawing meaningful conclusions about full-time ageing workers' challenges and collective experiences in pre- and post-pandemic times.

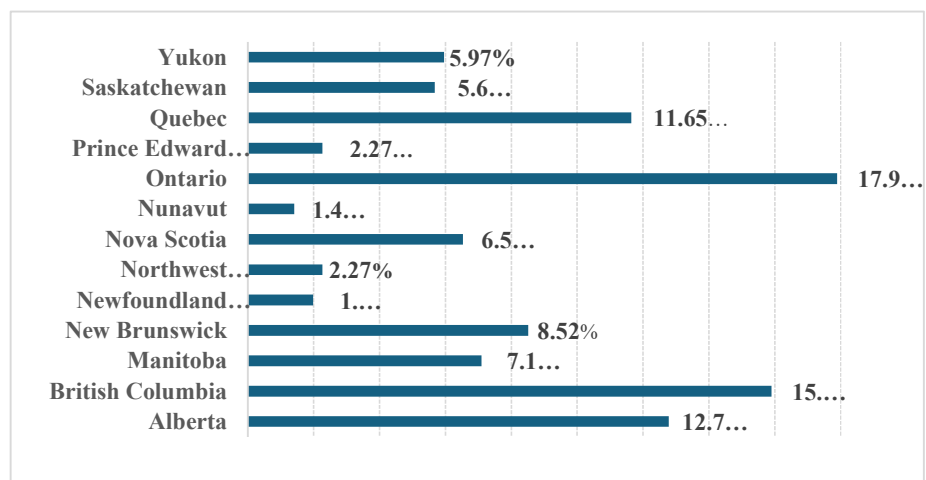


Figure 3. Geographical distribution of responses.

The survey questionnaires were distributed across Canada, covering all provinces and territories. **Figure 3** illustrates the number of respondents from each province and territory, providing a clear representation of the geographical distribution of responses.

Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec had the highest response rates, with 17.9%, 15.91%, 12.78%, and 11.65% of the total respondents, respectively. These provinces contributed the majority of survey responses, reflecting their larger populations and engagement in the study.

We also collected data from respondents based on the sectors in which they work. **Figure 4** shows the highest number of responses from employees in the Health Care and Social Assistance, Educational Services, Accommodation and Food Services, and Public Administration sectors, with response rates of 13%, 11%, 9%, and 9%, respectively. Our results indicate that most respondents are employed in the service-based industry, highlighting its significant representation in the survey.

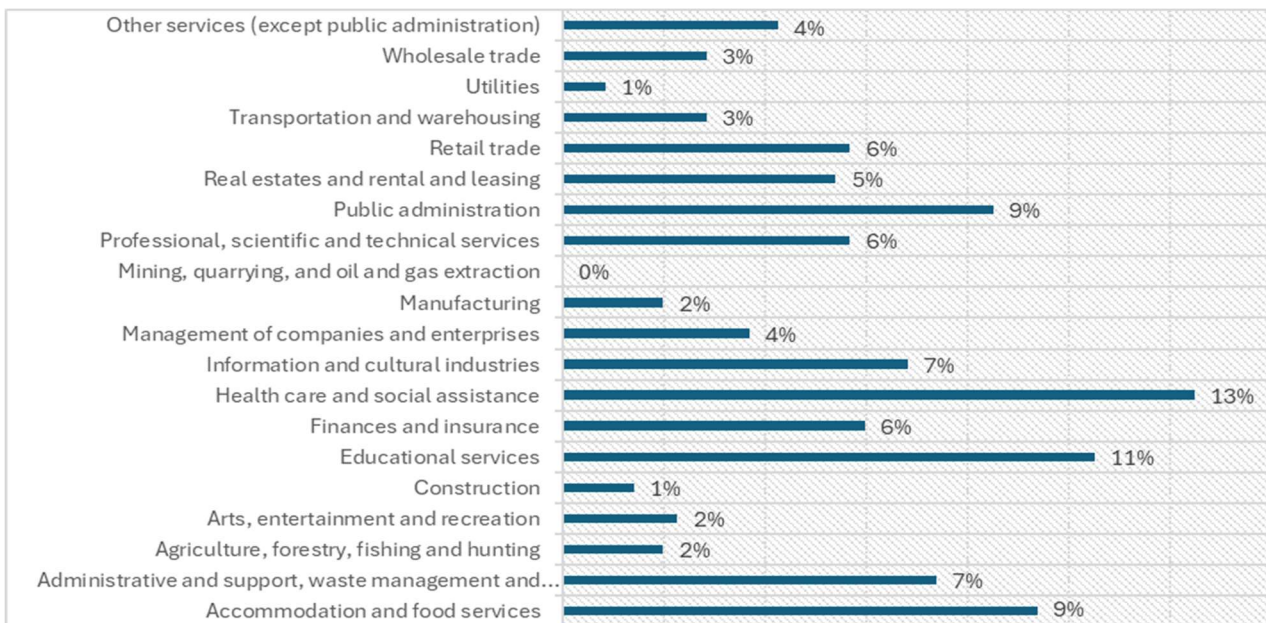


Figure 4. Respondents based on the sectors.

4.1. Fear of COVID-19

Since COVID-19 was a new disease, there was initially little knowledge about its symptoms, long-term impact, and recovery process [1]. Ageing workers were therefore concerned about being exposed to the virus [8]. The fear of staying in the workforce during the pandemic is expected to increase the risk of exposure. As a result, many ageing workers have chosen to leave the labour market [9,54]. Because ageing workers are at a higher risk of COVID-19, employers have also expressed concern about hiring them [9].

Table 1 demonstrates the participants’ responses to the questions related to their decision to continue work during COVID-19. Overall, 80.57% of respondents stated that they were exposed to or infected by COVID-19, and 72.34% said that the pandemic affected their inclination to return to work after being infected with COVID-19. Furthermore, 56.57% of participants said the pandemic would affect their decision to continue working even if they did not contract the disease. Hence, as noted by Schuster et al. [9], it is evident that the pandemic has instilled fear among ageing workers to remain in the workforce. These findings indicate a pervasive sense of vulnerability and uncertainty among ageing workers, which could have long-term

implications for their future labour market participation and mental health.

As **Table 1** shows, 51.14% of participants reported being laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 78.69% said their job description changed since COVID-19. In fact, Lemieux et al. [13] reported a 12.1% decline in employment among Canadians aged 50 and above during the first months of the COVID-19 crisis. These results align with the argument that many companies are reluctant to hire ageing workers because of their health risks and high absenteeism due to illness [29,37]. This reluctance reflects broader systemic issues within the labour market that disadvantage older workers, further complicating their efforts to remain employed during and after the pandemic.

Table 1. Responses showing the fear of participating in the labour market due to COVID-19.

Item	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer
Have you been exposed to or infected by COVID-19?	277 (78.69%)	75 (21.31%)	0 (0%)
If YES, did this affect your inclination to return to work (either on-site, blended, or virtually)?	157 (56.68 %)	120 (43.32%)	0 (0%)
If NO, is the risk of COVID-19 infection affecting your decision to continue working?	30 (40%)	41 (54.67%)	4 (5.33%)
Do you feel your job description has changed since COVID-19?	255 (72.44%)	97 (27.56%)	0 (0%)
Have you been laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic?	180 (51.14%)	172 (48.86%)	0 (0%)

4.2. Physical and cognitive changes

The literature reveals that the ageing population is at higher risk of developing a severe case of COVID-19 [59,60]. Although 66.86% of the participants rated their current level of physical and cognitive health as average, our findings indicate that 57% felt that their post-pandemic health status was worse compared to their pre-pandemic health (see **Figure 5**). Our findings suggest that ageing workers’ physical and cognitive health has declined since the pandemic, as predicted by Wister and Speechley [59]. This decline could be attributed to several factors, including reduced access to healthcare services, increased stress levels, and the overall impact of prolonged isolation and reduced physical activity during the lockdowns [8,9,38].

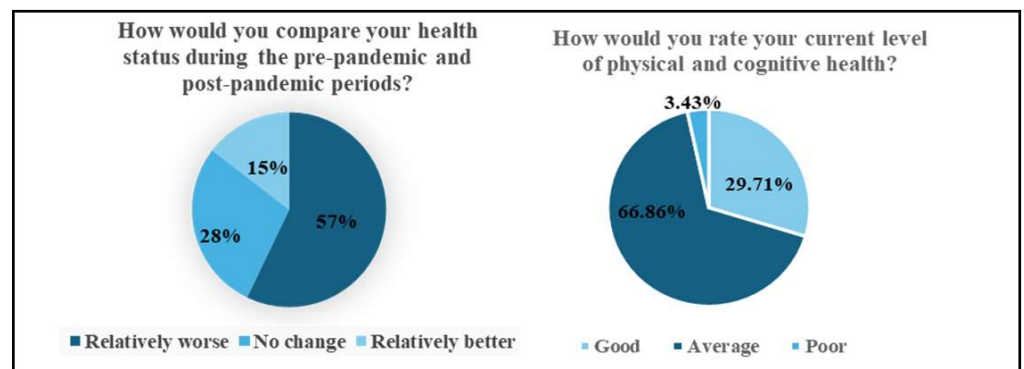


Figure 5. Participants’ perceptions of their physical and cognitive health.

Many researchers argue that ageing workers’ physical and cognitive health

significantly affects their productivity [7,29,37]. We asked our participants to rate changes in their productivity level from pre-COVID to post-COVID. **Figure 6** shows that 65% of the participants felt they were less productive after the COVID-19 pandemic than they were before it. However, our findings also show that 32.01% of participants felt no change in their productivity level, and 3% felt more productive despite experiencing a decline in their physical and cognitive health. This variation in perceptions of productivity suggests that factors beyond health—for example, changes in roles and responsibilities and workplace accommodations—might be at play.

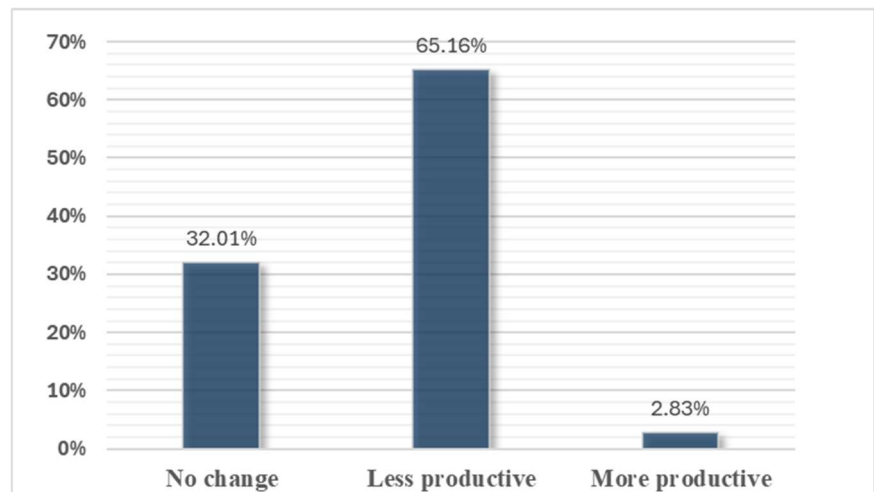


Figure 6. Participants’ perceptions of changes in their productivity level during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the impact of physical and health conditions, researchers have noted that working conditions such as adapting to technological change are expected to influence ageing workers’ productivity levels [19,42]. For example, researchers argued that the reliance on technology during the pandemic likely posed a challenge to ageing workers as they tried to adapt to the remote working environment and consequently affected their productivity [19,42].

We therefore asked the participants about their comfort level with technological changes. **Table 2** summarizes the participants’ responses to questions about their comfort level with technological change before and after the pandemic: 187 (53.43%) participants felt relatively comfortable with technological changes for office productivity before the COVID-19 pandemic, and 219 (62.57%) felt relatively comfortable with technological changes for office productivity after COVID-19.

Table 2. Comfort and expertise levels with technological changes for productivity.

Item	Neutral	Not comfortable	Relatively comfortable	Very comfortable
How would you rate your comfort and/or expertise with technological changes for productivity before the COVID-19 pandemic?	25 (7.10%)	112 (31.82%)	187 (53.13%)	28 (7.95%)
How would you rate your comfort and/or expertise with technological changes for productivity after the COVID-19 pandemic?	12 (3.41%)	86 (24.43%)	219 (62.22%)	35 (9.93%)

The number of respondents who felt very comfortable was low both before and after the pandemic (7.43% and 9.43%, respectively). This finding highlights a critical area for intervention, as improving technological literacy and comfort levels with technology and changes in technology among ageing workers could significantly enhance their productivity and overall job satisfaction.

4.3. Discrimination

Table 3 shows participants' responses to questions about experiences of discrimination. Overall, their responses show that they were experiencing age-related discrimination in the workplace both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (50.86% and 74%, respectively). Likewise, Pit et al. [8] and Schuster et al. [9], our responses show that age-related discrimination in the workplace increased between the pre-COVID-19 era and the post-COVID-19 era. The participants' responses reflected findings from earlier research conducted by the Nova Scotia Centre on Aging [61]. That study found that older adults seeking work in Nova Scotia face discrimination during candidate selection. This persistent ageism reflects deep-seated biases that underestimate the value and potential contributions of ageing workers and points to a need for more robust anti-discrimination policies and enforcement mechanisms.

Table 3. Participants' responses to discrimination.

Item	Yes	No
Have you experienced discrimination in the workplace due to your age before the COVID-19 pandemic?	181 (51.42%)	171 (48.58%)
Have you experienced discrimination in the workplace due to your age after the COVID-19 pandemic?	217 (61.65%)	135 (38.35%)
Are there accountability mechanisms or redress options for age discrimination in your workplace?	148 (42.05%)	204 (57.95%)

Looking into the accountability measures to redress age discrimination in the workplace, only 125 (35.71%) respondents said such facilities existed in their workplace. This suggests that where policies exist, they are either poorly implemented or not adequately communicated to the employees who need them most. The lack of adequate support structures leaves many older workers vulnerable to age-related biases, with limited options for recourse or redress [34]. Although there is literature [62] that contains policy measures for overcoming age discrimination, the findings from our survey suggest that it is still not entirely solving the ageism issues in the workforce. Previous studies [9] argued that the existing solutions to address age discrimination were ineffective for ageing workers. Our findings corroborate this: 64.29% of participants feel there was no accountability mechanism for age discrimination in their workplace.

4.4. Social and organizational support

Like workers, organizations often struggle to retain their place in the market. They face various challenges, including making sure their business is profitable, adapting to new standards of operation, and managing employees. Many businesses

found it challenging to support their employees during the pandemic, as organizations consist of a wide range of age groups [7,28,63,64]. Since social and organizational support played a vital role in retaining ageing workers during the pandemic, the participants were also questioned about the support their employer provided during this period. **Table 4** shows that 266 (76%) participants stated that the organization they worked for took sufficient measures to prevent COVID-19 infection. The participants' responses indicated that most organizations took sufficient health measures to protect the health of their workers. However, when asked if their management provided special policies/programs to benefit their age group in the workplace both before and after the pandemic, the majority of participants responded that they did not (66% and 84.57%, respectively). These figures suggest no improvement in age-specific support and a significant decline in the perceived organizational support for ageing workers during a critical period. This, in turn, indicates that while organizations may have followed specific health measures listed by the relevant health authority, they did not provide adequate, if any, age-specific support to ageing workers. Our findings align with D'Angelo et al.'s [55] argument, which indicated that while management may meet baseline requirements, the support they provide for the ageing workers is often minimal. In fact, a recent survey conducted by Schellaert and Derous [65] indicates that ageing workers in Belgium expressed no interest in extending their retirement decisions during the pandemic due to the lack of social support at work. An absence of targeted initiatives can lead to increased job insecurity and a higher risk of disengagement among older employees. The gaps in support could have long-term implications, not only for the well-being of older workers but also for the overall retention and productivity of the workforce.

Table 4. Participants' perceptions of levels of organizational support.

Item	Yes	No
Are there sufficient health measures undertaken by your workplace to prevent COVID-19 infection?	266 (75.57%)	86 (24.43%)
Does your management provide special policies/programs to benefit your age group in the workplace before the COVID-19 pandemic?	119 (33.81%)	233 (66.19%)
Are there additional support mechanisms after the COVID-19 pandemic?	56 (15.91%)	296 (84.09%)

5. Conclusion

An ageing population and labour shortages are significant and growing challenges in Canada. Policymakers have traditionally addressed these issues by increasing immigration, identifying strategies to retain older workers, and adopting innovative technologies [66]. However, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for significant policy reforms to mitigate the impact of population ageing on national productivity. Although encouraging older workers to remain in or return to the workforce is often seen as complex, it is increasingly viewed as a more sustainable solution compared to relying solely on immigrant labour [66,67].

While factors such as health, technological change, age discrimination, and organizational support are widely cited as influences on older workers' participation, limited empirical research focused specifically on Canadian ageing workers provides

little direct evidence to support these assumptions [10]. In contrast, recent studies suggest that pandemic-driven shifts toward remote and hybrid work have helped reduce barriers, offering older workers more flexibility to remain employed [16,60].

Our survey findings also challenge prevailing assumptions about these influencing factors. Contrary to the literature that characterizes older adults as less technologically proficient [16,39,41,68], most participants in our study reported being relatively comfortable with technological tools. Moreover, the proportion of respondents who felt confident in technology increased after COVID-19. This growing adaptability is a promising sign for the continued participation of older workers. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain, particularly around job displacement, skill mismatches, and access to age-friendly employment opportunities [17,18].

Given the scarcity of empirical research focused on Canadian ageing workers, it is essential to conduct further studies to understand their unique experiences—especially in the post-pandemic context. Future research should investigate how factors such as age-related health disparities, digital transformation, and workplace policies affect the resilience of older workers across various sectors, with particular attention to gender and immigrant status [17].

Finally, the results of this research aim to provide an impetus to employers and policymakers, through quantitative evidence, to implement targeted policies and programs to support ageing workers' continued participation in the labour market. Key recommendations include prioritizing digital literacy and technology support tailored to this demographic, strengthening and effectively communicating anti-discrimination policies to foster inclusive workplaces, and implementing targeted health and social initiatives—especially during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic—to enhance worker retention and well-being.

6. Study limitations and directions for future research

The authors acknowledge several limitations of this study. First, the use of convenience and snowball sampling introduces selection bias, as respondents may differ from the broader population of ageing workers. However, this approach was purposefully chosen by the authors to protect participant privacy and employment status, given the sensitivity of the research topic. Second, reliance on an online survey may have excluded workers in less technology-intensive sectors (e.g., manufacturing) and those with limited digital literacy or internet access, potentially skewing the sample toward more technologically adept individuals. To address these limitations, follow-up interviews and supplementary methods may be conducted under strict ethical protocols to validate findings while preserving confidentiality. Third, while social desirability bias may affect responses to sensitive questions, the anonymous survey design aimed to reduce apprehension and encourage candid responses. Finally, the findings are context-specific and not intended for direct application beyond Canada. National differences in employment standards, retirement systems, healthcare access, and social policies may limit the broader applicability of the results. All in all, to manage these limitations and strengthen qualitative credibility, the authors engaged in collaborative, iterative analysis of open-ended responses to employ a thematic analysis approach, enhancing interpretive trustworthiness despite the absence of

formal reliability testing.

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