

SOME THINGS WE KNOW ABOUT HOW WORK AND RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AFFECT ADAPTATION OVER THE LIFE COURSE

1. Throughout the life-course the nature of the 'work' one does affects and is affected by the individual's psychological functioning.
2. The characteristics of the work for which we have found the strongest psychological effects are the interrelated characteristics of complexity and self-directedness.
3. High levels of work complexity and self-directedness lead to higher levels of intellectual functioning and more autonomy- valuing self -directed orientations towards oneself and others.
4. There are reciprocal effects such that higher levels of intellectual functioning and self-directed orientations affect the likelihood of holding relatively self-directed jobs. These jobs, in turn, affect the individuals' positions in the social-structures of their societies.
5. Carrying out complex "work-like" tasks outside of paid employment (e.g., in housework or leisure time activities) has similar effects on intellectual functioning to those of complex paid work.

6. Intellectual functioning, self-directed orientations and other characteristics associated with social structural position affect the psychological mechanisms (e.g., coping) that individuals use to deal with financial and health related problems throughout the life course. Those in advantaged social structural positions are more likely to employ more effective modes of dealing with the problems facing them.

Remaining questions:

1. What are the present levels and probable limits of the effects of environmental complexity and relative individual autonomy on psychological functioning through out the life-course?
2. Are there other relatively specific environmental conditions- work related or otherwise- that may predictably affect individual's psychological functioning in ways that can help individuals meet the problems aging brings?
3. Given the constraints imposed by the interrelated economic, social-structural and ideological characteristics of our society, are there any ways in which our findings can be used to develop interventions that demonstrably positively affect the lives of the elderly?