Chapter 7
Lived Experiences of Women Over 50 Who Lost Their Jobs

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ABSTRACT

The study includes a transcendental phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences of women over 50 following job losses, the barriers faced to reemployment, and the ways by which women overcame the barriers to reemployment, and compares these experiences to the experiences of men. The data gathered from a convenience sample of 10 women between the ages of 56 and 74 provided in-depth descriptions of participant experiences following job loss. The findings indicated that women and men view and cope with job loss differently. Further studies could lead organizational leaders and policy makers to a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of women over 50 following job loss and provide guidance when considering strategies to address the unique needs of older workers seeking reemployment.

INTRODUCTION

The current state of economy in the U.S. marks the first time women have lost more jobs than men (Cusick, 2020). The unemployment rate for women reached double digits (16.2%) in April 2020, three times higher than the unemployment rate for men (Schmidt, 2020). As more women enter the workforce, they become the target population for job loss due to an unstable economy (Schmidt, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The first time women represented the majority in the workforce was during the Great Recession between June 2009 and April 2010 (USA Facts, 2020). Women's majority decreased after the Great Recession and has remained low for the last 10 years (USA Facts, 2020). Once again, in December 2019, women in the U.S. outnumbered the presence of men in the workforce (USA Facts, 2020). Women held 50.04% of nonfarm payroll jobs and outnumbered men in the workforce by 109,000 (Law, 2020; USA Facts, 2020). However, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, women represented 55% of 20.5 million jobs lost in April 2020 (Connley, 2020). The number of jobs lost by women is greater

than the 11.1 million jobs women gained between the end of the Great Recession and the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in February 2020 (Connley, 2020).

Losing one's job is an emotional and stressful event, and older workers are the group most affected (Climent-Rodriguez et al., 2019). During the last recession, workers between the ages of 51 and 60 years averaged nine months finding another job, compared to six months for younger workers between the ages of 25 and 34 (Malito, 2020). The unemployment rate for U.S. workers aged 55 and over rose to 13.6% in April 2020. Workers aged 55+ are likely to experience long-term unemployment and face more challenges reentering the workforce than younger counterparts (Lipnic, 2018; Palmer, 2019). Older women are losing jobs at a disproportionate rate, compared to men (Malito, 2020). In April 2020, the unemployment rate for women aged 55 and over was 15.5%, compared to 12.1% for men (Malito, 2020). Older workers will likely be impacted emotionally than any other group (Climent-Rodriquez et al., 2019). Older workers will likely face barriers to reemployment that include age discrimination, stereotypical beliefs, forced retirement, long-term financial consequences, and discrimination in hiring practices (Hesig & Radl, 2017; Lipnic, 2018).

Researchers have explored older workers' experiences following job loss. Based on Leana and Feldman's (1992) coping behaviors theory, individuals will often experience depression, anger, apathy, and signs of physical illness as a result of job loss. Researchers who explore job loss have included the experiences of older men and women. However, none of the studies the author reviewed included a focus on all the three constructs of this study: The experiences of women over 50, the barriers to reemployment, and the ways women overcame the barriers to reemployment. An important factor is the limitation in the body of literature on the experiences of older women and job loss. It was important to address this gap in literature and to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study to bring insight and a greater understanding to the experiences of older women, specifically women over 50, and job loss.

This study gathered data to answer four research questions and to provide a snapshot of the impact of involuntary job loss on women over 50. Interview questions related to Research Question 1 addressed in detail the participant's perception of their experiences following job loss and Research Question 2 addressed how the study participants described their experiences related to the barriers faced to reemployment. How the study participants overcame barriers to reemployment was addressed in Research Question 3 and Research Question 4 addressed how the experiences of women over 50 following job loss compared to the research findings on men over 50.

BACKGROUND

The Great Recession of 2007–2009 had a significant impact on the U.S. labor market (Ahn & Song, 2017). In order to remain competitive, U.S. companies outsourced work abroad in technology, call centers, human resources, and manufacturing (Amadeo, 2020). Millions of people lost their jobs, and long-term unemployment increased (Ahn & Song, 2017; Schmidt, 2020). Seventy percent of men were displaced; they worked in industries such as construction and manufacturing where employees had a greater risk of losing their jobs (Schmidt, 2020). Men were hit the hardest with job loss at the beginning of the Great Recession, and the unemployment rate for men moved ahead of the unemployment rate for women (Kalleberg & von Wachter, 2017).

Although millions of U.S. workers lost their job during the Great Depression, employment rates for women increased (Pearce Rotondi, 2019). The increase from 10.5 million to 13 million women in the

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