The Late Shift: How Retirement Affects Civic Participation and Well-Being

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How does retirement affect people’s lives? Is it good or bad for their well-being? What do they do after retiring? And what factors shape these outcomes of retirement? The primary aims of this dissertation are to provide a broad picture of how retirement influences people’s lives by concentrating on their civic activities as well as their well-being, and to examine the heterogeneity that exists in effects of retirement, mainly by taking into account important features of the job that people held prior to withdrawal from work. Insight into effects of retirement is of enduring importance with the demographic aging process that is underway and will continue well into the 21st century in many societies. Important findings are that retirement leads to more informal and formal volunteering, especially for people who worked in occupations of higher socio-economic status, and that it increases the amount of instrumental support that is provided to friends and children. In terms of health, retirement is found to have positive effects, although this is largely relative to comparable people remaining in employment, who experience a decline in health. Further, retirement particularly offers health benefits for those who experience high levels of stress on their job prior to retirement. Finally, it is found that the experience of a retirement ritual, or a farewell ceremony, positively affects people’s post-retirement satisfaction with life. Overall, the findings indicate that retirement is of merit to both the individual and society as a whole.