Rethinking Retirement: Should Age or Ability Decide When We Stop Working?

Longer Lives, New Challenges

As human lifespans continue to extend globally, the question of when to retire has grown increasingly complex. Should retirement **hinge** solely on chronological age, as it traditionally has, or should cognitive and physical competence determine a person's readiness to step away from the workforce?

The World Economic Forum projects that individuals born in the current era may live well past 100, while the United Nations estimates the global population of those aged 80 and older will triple, from 137 million in 2017 to 425 million by 2050. This shift challenges long-held assumptions about the relationship between age and work capacity.

A Shift from Age to Ability

In the United States, average life expectancy has steadily increased, rising from 68 years in 1950 to 79 years in 2013, with many forecasts indicating that individuals born in the early 21st century could reach lifespans of 104 years. Therefore, relying solely on age as a retirement marker may overlook the fact that many older adults remain cognitively sharp and physically capable well into their later years.

A Gallup public opinion survey revealed a dramatic change: whereas just 14 percent of employed individuals once anticipated working beyond 65, this figure has risen to 74 percent. Despite these shifting expectations, older workers often confront assumptions that **equate** advancing age with declining ability. Yet, health data shows a more **nuanced** picture—between 1992 and 2010, the proportion of U.S. adults aged 51–54 reporting fair or poor health rose from 17 percent to 22 percent, but this still leaves a majority who are able and willing to contribute.

Financial Pressures on Retirement Decisions

Financial realities further complicate retirement planning. According to the United States Government Accountability Office, half of households aged 55 and older lack retirement savings in employer-sponsored plans or individual retirement accounts, and many depend on social assistance. Globally, similar patterns emerge, highlighting the need for systems that consider both financial readiness and individual capability when determining retirement **eligibility**.

Redefining Retirement for a Changing World

As populations continue to age, it may be neither fair nor sustainable to rely solely on age as the **determinant** for retirement. A more flexible approach—one that balances age, health, cognitive capacity, and financial security—could better serve both individuals and society. Rethinking retirement as an ability-based decision empowers older adults to contribute meaningfully for as long as they are able, while ensuring dignity and choice in later years.

The time has come to move beyond one-size-fits-all retirement policies.

Vocabulary:

Hinge (~에 달려 있다, ~에 의존하다)
To depend on or be determined by something.

Equate (동일하다, 같다)
To consider or regard two things as the same or equal.

Nuanced (미묘한, 세밀한 차이가 있는)
Subtle or having small, fine distinctions in meaning or expression.

Determinant (결정 요인, 결정 요소)
A deciding or influencing factor.

Eligibility (자격, 적격)
The state of being qualified or entitled to do or receive something.

Expressions:

solely on~ (오직 ~에만 근거하여, ~만을 기준으로)
Based only on; with no other basis or consideration.

shift from~ (A에서 B로의 전환)
The transition from one idea to another.

further complicate~
(상황을 더욱 복잡하게 만들다)
To make something even more difficult or complex

Think Deep & Talk

Article Summary

As people live longer worldwide, the idea of retirement is being reconsidered. Traditionally based on age, retirement may no longer suit everyone, as many older adults remain healthy and capable. Life expectancy is rising, and surveys show more people expect to work past 65. However, many still lack sufficient savings, making retirement planning difficult. The article suggests that a flexible system based on health, ability, and finances may better support individuals and society in the future.

*"Article Summary," is supplemental and should be skipped during the main lesson.

A Comprehension

① What global trend is highlighted as a major reason for rethinking retirement policies?

a. Rising global temperatures
b. Increasing life expectancy and aging populations
c. Declining birth rates
d. Technological unemployment

② What key factor, aside from age, does the article suggest should influence retirement decisions?

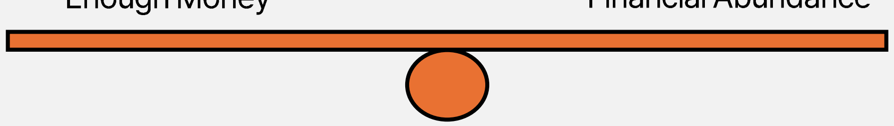
a. Marital status
b. Cultural background
c. Cognitive and physical competence
d. Level of education

Answer: 1) b 2) c

B Your Choice

Early Retirement with Just Enough Money

Late Retirement with Financial Abundance



State 3 reasons behind your decision.

C

Pros of Longer-Living Society 👍

- Empowers capable older workers
- Reduces age-based bias
- Helps fill workforce gaps
- _____Your thoughts_____

Cons of Longer-Living Society 👎

- May pressure seniors to keep working
- Limits job opportunities for younger workers
- _____Your thoughts_____

D Digging in Deeper

① Is it morally fair to force capable people to stop working just because of their age? Why or why not?

② What role should governments and employers play in supporting workers' choices about retirement?

③ Is financial readiness the most important factor in deciding when to retire, or are health and personal fulfillment more significant?

④ Would mandating retirement based on competence infringe on personal dignity by requiring assessments of ability? Who should conduct such assessments?