

A SPARC/TAEN/ Help the Aged Workshop

Health, workplace design and the older worker: lessons from three new research studies

22nd January 2008

Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining
1 Carlton House Terrace, London

Hosted by SPARC, TAEN and Help the Aged



A SPARC/TAEN/ Help the Aged Workshop

The Importance of Ageing Research and the Older Worker

Professor Peter Lansley
The University of Reading
Director, SPARC,
22nd January 2008

Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining
1 Carlton House Terrace, London



Hosted by SPARC, TAEN and Help the Aged



EQUAL and SPARC

- Ten years of facilitating ageing and disability-related research in the university sector and promoting it to all stakeholders through
 - Funding schemes
 - Workshops
 - Advocacy
- Very successful schemes
 - assisting the professions - design, health, social services.....
 - supporting those who commission buildings, transport systems, products...
 - aiding policy development – housing, transport, care....
 - improving regulations, standards and expectations.....

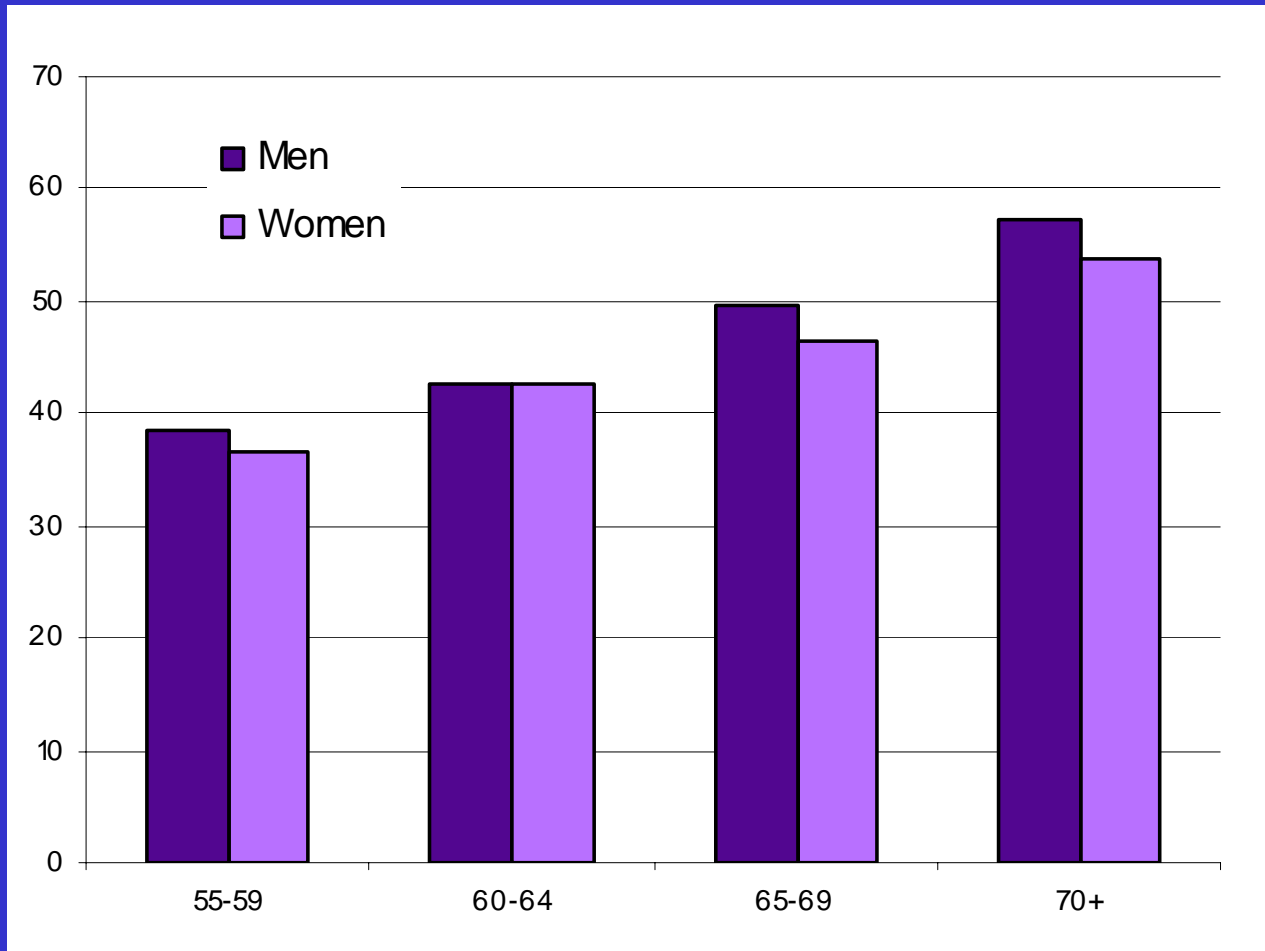
But, what about the workers?

- Despite 10 years of research council support, Foresight reports etc about the age shift, virtually no interest and little research on older workers
 - Except some on on
 - older worker's rights, economic issues, occupational health
- Within ageing research, dominant influence is the focus on retired people and the older old
 - Wrong skill sets and orientations amongst research community
 - Poor representation of the issue amongst science policy makers
 - Lack of confidence in government departments in ability to scope and commission work outside of social policy (very timid about ergonomics, workplace design etc) and lack of urgency (mainstream worker v marginal worker)
 - Industry, all sorts of issues and where to begin?

Some Questions

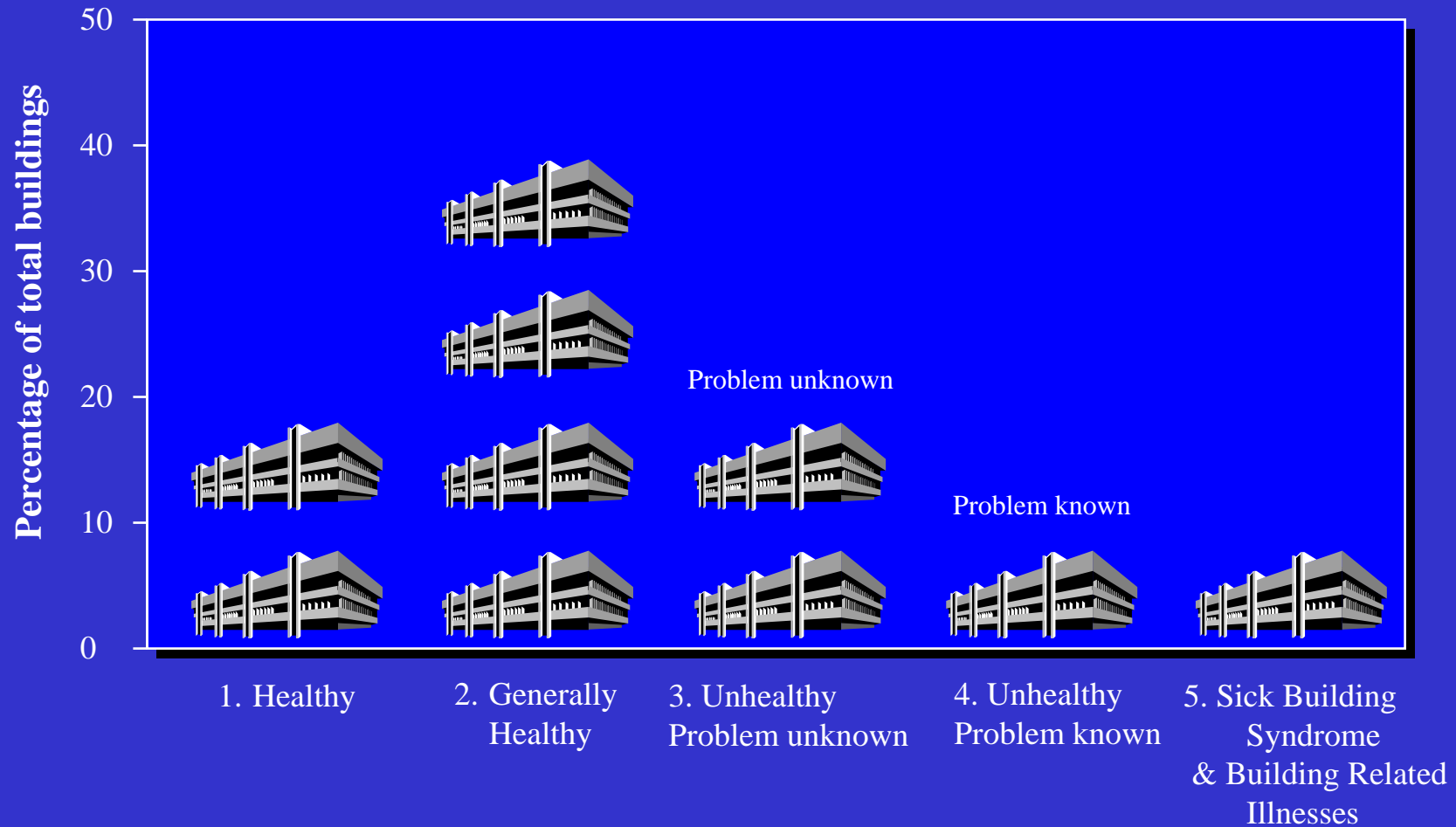
So, how do these people manage? We don't know!

Proportion of employed people who report having a long term health problem or disability: by age band and sex, 2007, GB
Percentages



And how can we improve those buildings that are unhealthy places to work?

Buildings by health category (Dorgan, 1994)



The well-designed workplace and the older worker

- What if we had better designed workplaces?
 - Fewer people
 - Would “wear out” through poor workplace design
 - With long-term sickness absence
 - Better retention of employment through
 - Earlier return to work
 - Recovery being enhanced through work
 - Stronger desire to work
 - Better chance of keeping jobs, using skills and fulfilling aspirations
 - Higher levels of employment
 - Higher productivity for UK plc!

General Services Administration, USA

- Older workers have valuable experience, skills, reliability, loyalty which is worth retaining
- Qualities not readily reflected in younger staff
- Either retention or unfilled jobs, as difficult to recruit suitable staff
- Inclusive design
 - improves quality of environment for all employees, not just older workers
 - Enhances productivity
- Redesign of facilities provides strong evidence for a business case for:
 - Retaining skills
 - Filling jobs
 - Increased productivity

Workplace design research in UK

- Directly relevant
 - Important programme at Royal College of Art
 - led by Jeremy Myerson
 - Office Age (with Japan)
 - The Welcoming Workplace (EPSRC, AHRC)
 - **SPARC** pump-priming projects
 - Design of the workplace for the older worker
 - Ageing in construction workers
 - Two New Dynamics of Ageing networks
 - Also some consultants and design practices are involved
- Indirectly relevant
 - Air quality, facilities management, environmental health, indoor environments, workplace design, productivity etc (largely EPSRC)
- Very little support from the research councils, some from charities, professional bodies
 - For example, The Colt Foundation

The immune system and the older worker

- What if we could boost older workers' immune systems - “a pill a day”?
 - Less downtime from common ailments
 - Quicker recovery from more significant accidents or illnesses
 - Better retention of employment
 - people would keep their jobs
 - people would use their skills and fulfil their aspirations
 - Higher levels of employment
 - Higher productivity for UK plc!
- Very promising work in hand.

SPARC

- SPARC – EPSRC & BBSRC
 - Bringing life to ageing research
 - 34 pump-priming awards for newcomers to ageing research
 - Workshops to showcase ageing research to all stakeholders
 - Advocacy of the needs of older people and the value of ageing-related research
 - Four year, one-off programme, 2005-2008, £1.6m
 - *“One tenth of the funding of New Dynamics of Ageing but ten the times the enthusiasm”*

The 34 award holders



From furniture design to stem cells

- All pump-priming projects, to build capacity
 - Furniture design, Smart homes, Adaptations to the home
 - Better recovery from hip fracture
 - **Design of the workplace for older people**
 - Better packaging
 - Safer more friendly streets
 - **Computers that are easier to use**
 - **Assisting local government with transport planning**
 - **Keeping your car and driving it safely**
 - Regaining speech after stroke
 - Understanding automated telephone messages
 - Ageing eyes, Stepping safely, Following moving objects
 - Activity, Exercise, Nutrition in later life
 - Oxidative stress, Ageing cells, Stem cells, Lots of biology!

Worker-related projects

- Directly relevant
 - Design of the workplace for the older worker
 - Ageing in construction workers
- Indirectly relevant
 - Getting to Work - Transport services, Safer driving, Advanced vehicle technology
 - What people do at work - Improved use of computers
 - Keeping healthy and fit - Several projects relating to physical health, exercise, diet
 - Visual impairment - Biology of the eye through to eye/limb coordination
 - The immune system and recovery - Some projects seeking to develop understanding of the immune system in older people

Workshops for all

- In one week in March 2007
 - *Ageing Research and Occupational Therapy: building partnerships, creating opportunities*
 - Jointly with the British Association of Occupational Therapists
 - *Anglo-Japanese Werner's Syndrome Consortium*
 - Tokyo
 - *Designs for a Caring Society*
 - British Polio Fellowship, Caversham Methodist Church Hall

Advocacy

- Making the case that:
 - older people are important
 - ageing research can and is making a difference
- Lobbying
- Developing a good track record
 - Some MPs do listen!
 - Two questions in Parliament on,
 - Ageing Research and Older Workers
 - Some Ministers do listen



- » Royal Patronage
- » HRH The Princess Royal participated in *Ageing Research and Occupational Therapy: building partnerships, creating opportunities*

Today's Sessions

- **Understanding the Design of the Workplace for the Older Worker**
 - Professor Peter Buckle,
 - University of Surrey
- **Ageing in Construction Workers,**
 - Professor Alistair Gibb,
 - Loughborough University

Thanks!

- Today's Presenters
- The Chair
- Our Hosts and Partners
 - TAEN, Help the Aged
- You, the Participants

- And, of course, EPSRC and BBSRC

www.sparc.ac.uk

The ultimate aim

