



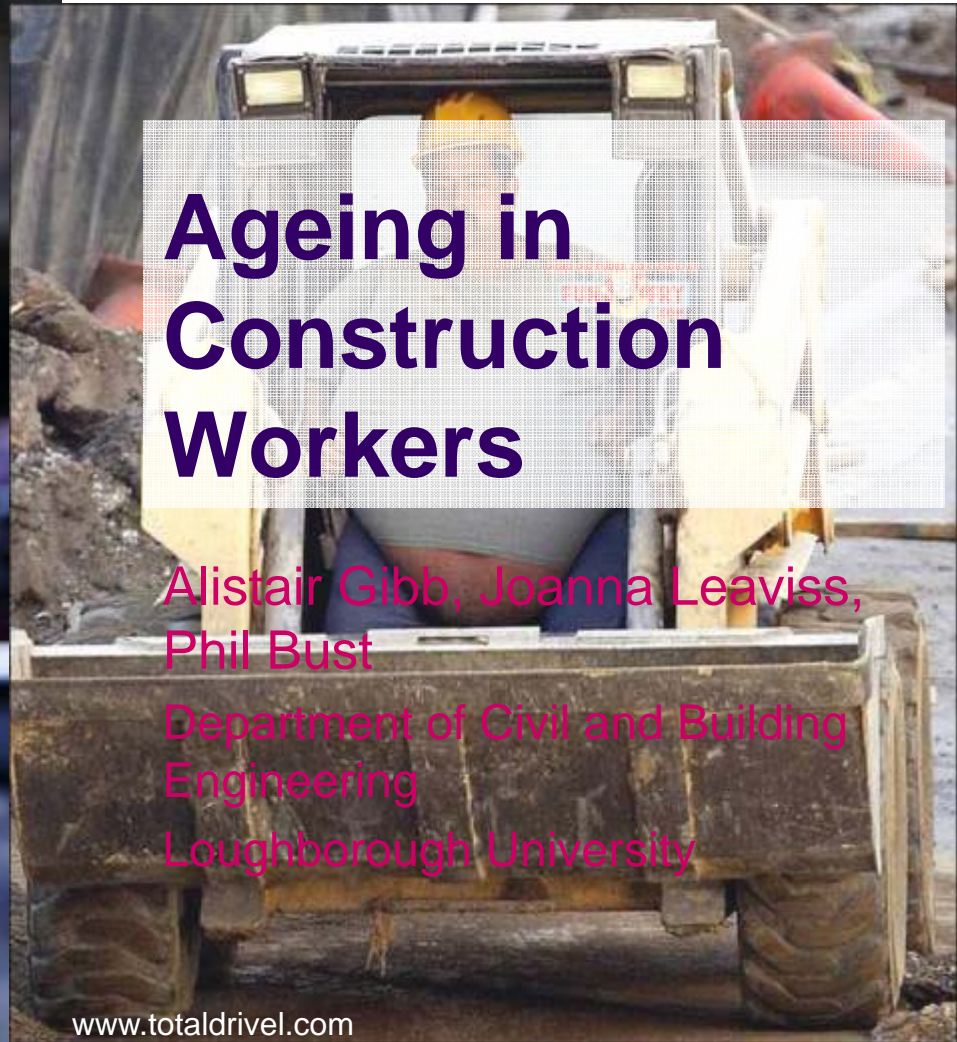
the **BA**
festival
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Liverpool
6-11 sept 08

Older people
and the construction site
Alistair Gibb – Loughborough University





www.jeffsweather.com



Ageing in Construction Workers

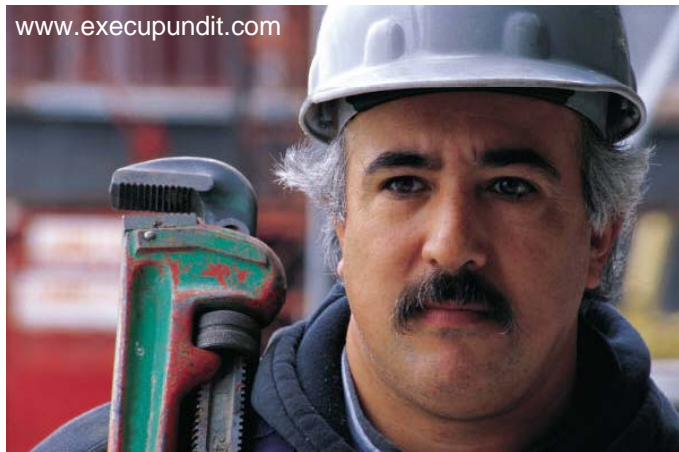
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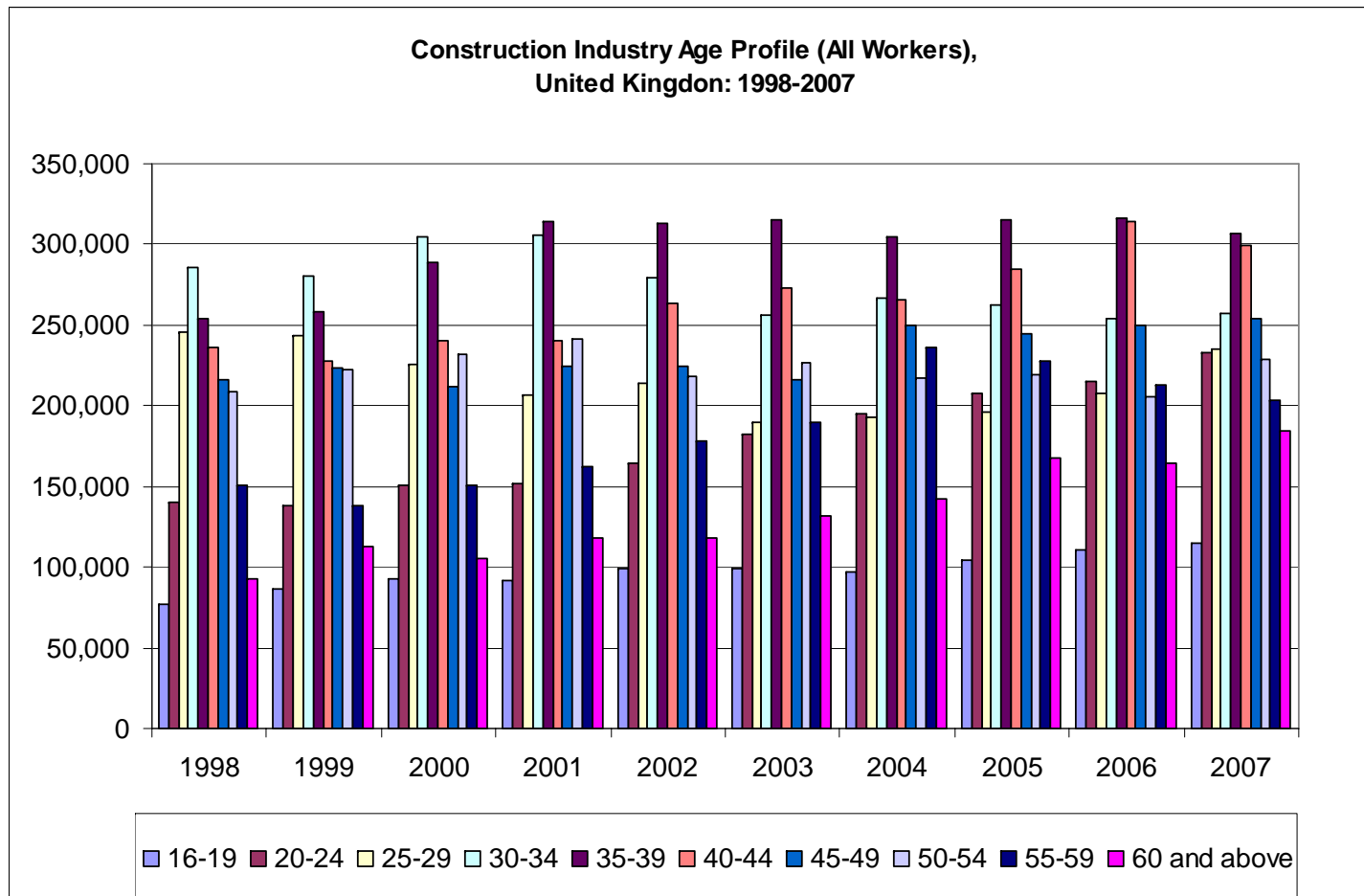
www.totaldrivel.com

What we know about ageing

- Normal physical ageing results in decline in physiological fitness:
 - Heavy physical workloads exacerbate physical decline
 - Other risk factors produce ill-health/injury



What we know about ageing



Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics, 9 07

What we were trying to do

- understand needs and abilities of older construction workers
- explore how the working environment may be improved to accommodate older workers
- explore possible interventions to ease the physical workload for older workers



What we did

- 6 month exploratory study
- qualitative methodology
- semi-structured interviews and small focus groups
- broad perspective
- participants from many areas of construction industry (N=55)



What we found

- Things perceived to create a hostile environment for older construction workers
- wide ranging
- micro and macro levels



- *Client demands*
- *employment policy*
- *design considerations*
- *Specific work practices*
- *personal responsibility for safe work practice*
- *availability of tools & equipment*

Why older workers are valued

Management and workers see value in retaining older workers

- skills, experience and knowledge
- work ethic
- workmanship
- younger people not entering construction



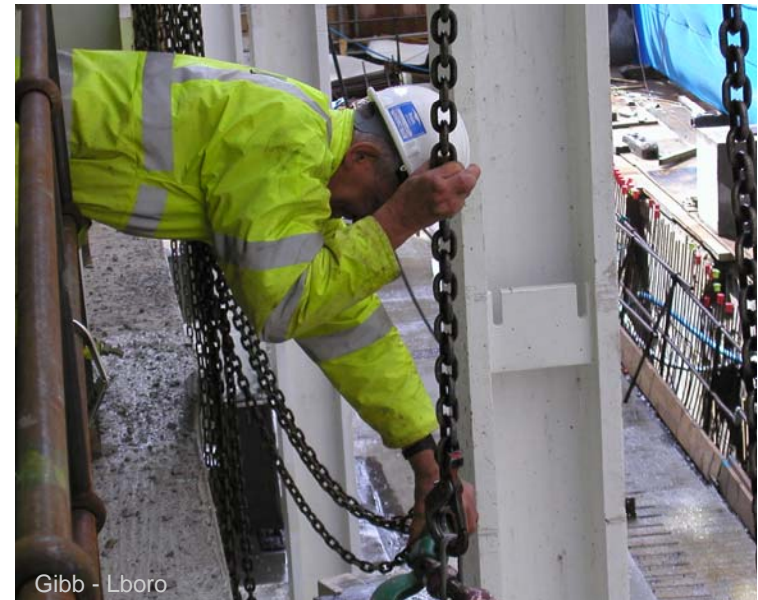
Why older workers aren't wanted

- Nature of industry makes environment hostile for older workers
- Lack of fitness
 - older workers perceived to be slower and unable to keep up pace of work set by younger workers
- Safety behaviours
 - older workers perceived to have more relaxed attitude to H&S
- Change
 - older workers perceived to be resistant to change
- Cost
 - older workers perceived to be more expensive because of lack of pace



What workers think (micro level)

- Accept ill-health and early retirement as part of the job
- Consider H&S regs and rules 'over-the-top'
 - preventing workers doing their job properly
 - reducing what they can earn
- Can't see any way out
 - *'Nothing can make the job easier'*



Barriers to interventions (micro level)

- Personal responsibility
 - reluctance to wear PPE or use equipment
- Financial pressures
 - responsibility for tools and equipment often blurred



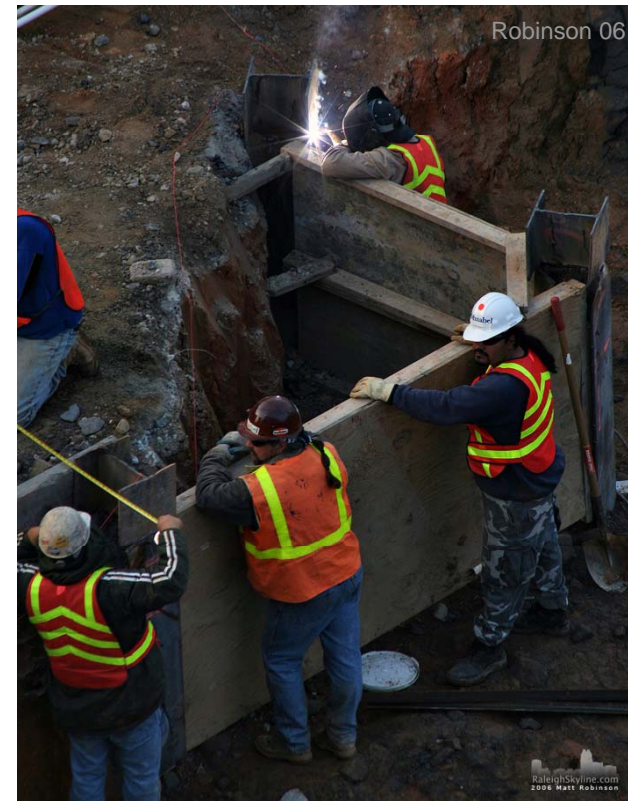
Price-driven projects (macro level)

- Tight profit margins
 - difficult to make allowances for 'slower' older workers
 - 'slower' workers cost more
- Some thought clients should help bear cost of older workers



Direct vs. indirect labour (macro level)

- Direct vs. indirect labour
 - directly employed better 'looked after' than 'subbies'
 - Sick pay (although minimum) provided if direct labour
 - Self-employed don't get sick pay
- Subcontractors perceived to be selected for work on basis of how fit they are



Pay structure (macro level)

- Piece work / bonus payments
 - appeals to younger, fitter workers
 - older workers prefer day rates as focus becomes quality over speed
- Employment flexibility
 - older workers want to stay in the industry
 - but want to work flexibly (part-time or day rates)
 - many take on small private jobs themselves



So what?



What contractors can do₁

- More direct labour
- Pay by 'day rate'
- Reorganise how work is carried out
- More general labourers
- Use 'loading out' gangs
- Partnering with subcontractors



What contractors can do₂

- Shorter working hours
- Flexible working patterns
- Self-selection
- Work rotation
- Improve sick pay
- Provide 'employers' medical care
 - e.g. osteopaths



What materials & equipment suppliers can do

- 'Offsite' products
- Lighter blocks
- Lighter kerbs
- Pre-mix mortar
- Low-vibration tools
- Power hand tools
- Block splitters
- Ladder assists
- Access equipment
- Fall arrest equipment
- Vacuum lifters
- Mechanical handlers
- Electrical hoists
- Scissor-lifts
- MEWPS
- Conveyor belts
- Forklifts
- Mini diggers



Summary₁

- Older workers valued by industry
- Often a trade-off between skills / experience and physical fitness
- It is unclear how the financial cost from losing a worker to illness is met; particularly if self-employed
- Injury and ill-health go hand in hand with the job
- Nevertheless..... older workers want to stay in the industry.



Summary₂

- Direct employment is better than self-employment
 - associated with a more favourable working environment for older workers
 - especially re impacts on ill-health and early retirement
- Workers who fill the gaps created by older workers often have poorer skills
- In a competitive industry where cheap labour is readily available, there may be little incentive for firms to bear the costs of making the workplace less hostile for the older worker.





Cook - Lboro

What we are doing now

- £148k Research Council grant to develop 'older construction worker simulation devices'
- Based on car designers' 'Third Age Suit'
- Features to include:
 - musculoskeletal impairments, HAVS, dermatitis, noise induced hearing loss/tinnitus
- Intervention tool for H&S training
- Aid for tools & equipment designers
- Working Late Network – www.workinglate.org.uk
 - £1.5M Research Council collaboration with Cambridge & Sheffield



Ford/Lboro



'Ageing' Suit

'I STILL CAN'T GET MY HEAD AROUND WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO HAVE ARTHRITIS, I'VE JUST GOT A BETTER IDEA'

I usually take the mick out of my dad because he'll say he can't do things because of his back. When he's off work I say he's just being lazy. Wearing the suit has changed how I think. I might not tell my dad that, but I'll feel different in my head.

I think the suit's a good idea. I still can't get my head around what it feels like to have arthritis, I've just got a better idea. It's like a man trying to understand what it's like to be pregnant.'

Arthritis News - August 2007

Chris Murray is Ewan's dad.

'I think the suit's a good thing. Teenagers can be wrapped up in their own world so it's good if Ewan can get an idea of what it feels like for me. I've been a bricklayer for most of my working life which is hard on the lower back.

Wearing the suit might change Ewan's attitude. I don't think he understands that picking the kids up from school, cooking tea or even walking a few yards is hard sometimes. Anything that helps people's understanding is a good thing.'



Ewan gets to grips with the suit

*Sharon Cook & Karen Walmsley
Loughborough for Napp Pharma*



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