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Published

2010

Journal Title

Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal

DOI

[10.1108/13522751011032601](https://doi.org/10.1108/13522751011032601)

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**Consumer retirement planning:
An exploratory study of gender differences**

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**SUBMITTED TO: Qualitative Market Research:
 An International Journal**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Although superannuation planning has been examined within the context of individual choice, life course and cumulative advantage perspectives, little research has been contained within the theories of consumer behavior. This paper, therefore, examines this important issue by delving into the perceptions of retirement planning from the perspectives of both male and female consumers.

Design/methodology: A qualitative research design was adopted to gather in-depth information within a real-life context in order to build theory. Twenty-one exploratory semi-structured interviews, to assist in identifying and describing the variety of thoughts and feelings that female and male consumers hold towards financial retirement planning, were conducted.

Findings: The findings from 21 in-depth interviews indicate that males and females adopt different perspectives when it comes to retirement planning. Males tend to adopt an individual choice perspective, whereby it is assumed that retirement will be another stage in life which will provide for a lifestyle conducive with their current standard of living. Women, on the other hand, adopt very much a life course perspective, which makes no assumptions or predictions about future life stages, but one that views outcomes as contingent upon the circumstances of one's life.

Value: The value of this research lies in its methodology and analysis. Perceptions of male and females in relation to retirement planning have not before been mapped and, as such, the perpetual maps developed in this research contribute new knowledge in relation to attitudes and behaviour towards retirement financial planning.

INTRODUCTION

The substantial increase in the proportion of older people in the global population is at the heart of the current demographic revolution and this trend is predicted to extend well into coming centuries (United Nations Secretariat, 2003). The result of low birth rates, low death rates and increasing life expectancy, ageing societies are of growing concern to many countries and, as such, represent an area of growing research and public debate. Australia is no exception with the proportion of the population aged 65 years and older expected to double from 13% (2007) to 25% by 2056 (ABS 2008). Furthermore, due to a longer life expectancy, a large proportion of older people will be female who, in addition, are more likely than men to live alone in old age (ABS 2005). The ramifications of this demographic shift on national economies are significant, thus highlighting the importance of national saving and forward thinking in relation to retirement planning.

While some countries have introduced compulsory pension/superannuation contributions in order to stimulate saving for retirement, often such schemes fall short of adequately providing the appropriate financial backing to ensure lifestyles are maintained into old age. For example, in Australia, despite significant superannuation reforms over the past decade (i.e. it is compulsory for Australians to contribute 9% of their gross income to superannuation funds which cannot be accessed until retirement), household saving has continued to decline in relation to disposable income. As a result, the desired affect of increasing national savings and, in particular, individual savings for retirement has not been realized (Department of Finance 1996; Rothman 2007). On this basis, from the government's perspective, pressure is applied to provide additional financial support to individuals in retirement in order that their standard of living remains above poverty level. From the individual's perspective, often they find themselves, unexpectedly, experiencing a lower quality of life in retirement due to

insufficient financial planning. Therefore, the area of retirement planning warrants particular research attention so as to assist in the development of new and/or complimentary strategies that will assist and encourage positive outcomes for self-funded retirees. However, in order to do this, broad support needs to be provided by key beneficiary stakeholders i.e. both public sector authorities and individuals. It is the latter group (i.e. individuals) that has attracted little research interest in relation to this issue and, therefore, provides the broader focus of this article. In doing so, a rich insight into individual decision making in the context of financial planning for retirement is gained.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of forces influence the consumer's likelihood of accumulating wealth for retirement. Issues related to life expectancy, taxation policy and income level are important external variables that exert considerable influence on wealth accumulation for retirement. For example, over the past 30 years, life expectancy has risen 2-3 years per decade and this is expected to continue in the future (Selene 2005). Given these figures, financial planning for retirement becomes an important part of one's life plan, yet individuals often undertake minimal planning as need recognition may not occur until mid-life or later. Somewhat concerning, this is often too late for individuals to accumulate sufficient wealth to fund a comfortable retirement (Grace, Weaven and Anderson 2008). In addition, frequent amendments in taxation policies relating to pensions/superannuation have fostered a climate of confusion and consumer mistrust. Consequently, individuals often perceive financial retirement planning as a less attractive investment option given the problems associated with predicting future financial outcomes and the uncertainty regarding future taxation laws (Selene 2005). Finally, one of the most important external factors in relation to wealth accumulation, is income. This is because money needs to be earned before it can be invested and, therefore, income level is a direct determinant of retirement wealth accumulation (Selene

2005). While individuals have some degree of control over their income, other factors exert considerable pressure on income levels. For example, few people can accurately predict their future income given that there are many, often unpredictable, life circumstances (child birth, divorce, illness etc.) which will be instrumental in affecting their income earning potential. Furthermore, it is important to appreciate that such life circumstances will impact differently on an individual's ability to accumulate retirement wealth depending on their gender. For instance, women tend to have significant career and work interruptions due to child birth, thus diminishing their overall income potential. Therefore, it is important to explore and contrast the issue of financial retirement planning from the perspectives of both male and female consumers.

Savings behavior associated with retirement planning has often been explored in the context of retirement behavior theories. Commonly used theories are associated with the individual choice perspective, life course perspective and cumulative advantage perspective. In relation to individual choice, retirement is viewed as a stage in life which is planned and worked toward by the individual. Furthermore, the road to retirement can be designed in accordance with the individual's preferences for abrupt work termination or for a gradual withdrawal from the workforce (Ekerdt, Hackney, Kosloski and De Viney 2001).

In contrast to individual choice theory, the life course perspective refers to retirement as a product of the individual's opportunity structure. Thus, retirement is linked to such things as age, gender, education, experience, income and health etc. which either provide constraints or opportunities to the individual, hence influencing their retirement choices (Devaney and Kim 2003; De Viney 1995). Therefore, this perspective represents a much more situational

approach whereby workers have a normative anticipation of retirement that can change throughout the course of their life (Ekerdt et. al. 2000).

Cumulative advantage theory, on the other hand, denotes that later advantages/disadvantages in life are contingent upon earlier successes/failures and this theory is aligned closely with the human capital model. This model assumes that a worker's investment in themselves (i.e., education, work experience etc) will result in higher income and, subsequently, enhance their retirement options (O'Rand 1996; Becker 1975). Although this theory falls short when it is acknowledged that women, who have similar education levels and experience as men, often earn lower levels of income. (Devaney and Kim 2003). However, as argued by Ekerdt et al. (2001, p. 162), "regardless of the way that retirement behavior is theorized, there is a metamodel of older workers that assumes they are on a path to retirement, holders of plans and preferences".

Another way in which we can seek to understand the behavior of individual's in relation to retirement planning, is via consumer decision making theory. This is appropriate as decisions relating to financial planning for retirement are directed toward financial products, such as pension funds and various savings schemes. Consumer decision-making theory describes the process of decision making as one which commences with need recognition, progresses to pre-purchase search and eventuates with the evaluation of product alternatives (Dewey 1910). Need recognition occurs when there becomes an apparent difference between actual and desired states, enough to motivate action in order to rectify the disparity (Hill 2001). In the case of superannuation or retirement planning, need recognition is complex because, at the individual level, the need develops over time and, in many cases, it is not until the individual gets closer to retirement age that the realization of the discrepancy between their actual and

desired states becomes apparent. At this point, it is often too late to, financially, rectify any such discrepancies.

Furthermore, it is important to understand how consumer decision-making changes when the decision to engage in behavior within a product category (i.e. superannuation) is mandatory, as is the case in Australia where all employees must contribute a minimum of 9% to their superannuation funds. As Government intervention denies the consumer the experience, and consequential learning, related to need recognition, the first stage of the decision-making process (Dewey 1910), the motivation for consumers to engage in search and evaluation activities (i.e. information gathering and processing) may be severely diminished. This may happen because need recognition has occurred more at the societal level (i.e. recognised by the government), rather than at the individual level (i.e. recognised by the consumer).

Ultimately, by containing policy decisions in relation to financial retirement plans, within economic theory, important stakeholders, such as the consumers themselves, have not been considered and theories of human behavior associated with consumption have been ignored.

Consumers and Financial Planning for Retirement

Consumers are often disinterested and confused about financial retirement planning and the various associated financial products (Vidler 2004). Many consumers see more value in paying off their debts, rather than contributing to pension plans and, although younger consumers (aged 18 to 24 years) do acknowledge a need to fund their own retirement, this does not translate into the appropriate savings behavior (Webster 1997). While age is an obvious variable that has a significant impact on financial planning for retirement, of equal importance is gender. This is so because, in recent decades, social and economic changes

have had a significant impact on work patterns (Weagley and Huh 2004) and these changes have affected men and women in different ways.

In particular, men and women tend to experience different work patterns throughout their lives and this influences their ability to accumulate retirement wealth. For example, although women are now significant contributors in the workplace, research shows that more than half of working women do not contribute to retirement plans. However, those women who do, tend to contribute significantly less than men because of interruptions to their careers (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). While it could be argued that this would not be the case in Australia (where superannuation (pension) contributions are compulsory for *all* workers), women's dominance in the part-time/casual employment sector and often long periods of non-employment impact significantly on the *amount* of money accumulated in retirement funds.

Previous research has shown that, generally, in the area of financial decision making men and women do differ significantly. For example, women have been found to differ in their investment decisions as they tend to choose less risky investment vehicles than do men (Sunden and Surette 1998). Another differential aspect related to gender is that of financial literacy (sometimes also referred to as financial expertise). While studies generally report low financial literacy scores overall, it appears that women score significantly lower than men (Euwals, Eymann and Borsch-Supan 2004). This is particularly true in Australia where Worthington, (2005, 2006) found that women not only have lower financial literacy scores but also have less overall knowledge of retirement funds than men. Given this, it is not surprising that men have been found to have greater competency and confidence in making financial decisions involving insurance, personal loans, stocks and bonds as opposed to women who are more confident with overall financial management (Chen and Volpe 1998).

This may be a result of many women (particularly older women i.e., baby-boomers) relying on their spouse or partner to plan for their combined retirement and, as a result, they pay little attention to such decisions (Selene 2005). For example, older women tend to have spent much of their time in unpaid child-rearing work, necessitating a financial reliance upon their spouse's income for both their immediate and future needs (Jefferson and Preston 2005). This often leads to situations where men exhibit greater independence of action and confidence in dealing with money, while women experience a concomitant sense of envy and deprivation (Furnham and Argyle 1998).

In order to design strategies to stimulate consumption behavior within the domain of financial retirement planning, we need to understand the issues that consumers experience in engaging in such behavior. To assume that consumers of financial retirement products are a homogeneous group with similar needs and wants is naive. In fact, previous research indicates that there are a number of gender differences in relation to overall financial decision-making, which provides a strong reason to assume the same would be the case with financial planning for retirement. How these differences are manifested is yet to be discovered and, as such, the following research question of this study is posed.

Research Question: To what extent do male and female consumers differ in their perceptions in relation to superannuation and retirement planning?

METHOD

The aim of this research was to examine gender differences in *consumer perceptions* of financial retirement planning. Given the paucity of prior theoretical and empirical research that investigated consumer awareness, expectations and plans, regarding retirement funds in Australia (Quine & Carter 2006), a qualitative personal interview approach was adopted to

gather in-depth information within a real-life context and build theory (Eisenhardt 1989; Mohr et al. 2001; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Although qualitative research is often criticized for lacking objectivity and rigor (Johnson 1997), we believed it to be the most efficacious approach for obtaining 'rich', 'deep' and 'real' information (Deshpande 1983, p. 103) through 'tracking down patterns [and] consistencies' (Mintzberg 1979, p. 584) so as to arrive at analytically generalizable results (Perry 1998; Zaltman 1997).

Twenty-one exploratory semi-structured interviews, to assist in identifying and describing the variety of thoughts and feelings that female and male consumers hold towards financial retirement planning, were conducted. Specifically, 11 females and ten males were interviewed. This personal interview approach allowed coverage of key themes (mirroring the research objective) during the course of each interview, and provided a format in which interviewees could provide additional detail and description about the phenomenon of interest. Probe questions such as 'Could you give me an example', and 'What did you mean by...' were used to elicit greater detail and specificity on superannuation issues. Sample selection was purposive and theory driven (Gubrium & Holstein 2001) and only consumers from one cultural group in Australia were interviewed so as to limit extraneous variation in collected data (Eisenhardt 1989). A snowball sampling technique was used in which each respondent was asked to suggest another person who may wish to participate in the study (Aaker et al. 2005). Nominated participants were then contacted by phone or email and sent an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research (via email or fax) and inviting them to participate in the study. Assurances were given as to the ethical conduct of the study and provisions that would ensure interviewee anonymity and confidentiality.

Consistent with expert recommendation, interviews were conducted until data reached a point of saturation and no new themes emerged (Glaser & Strauss 1967). As a result, a total of twenty-one semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with male and female consumers aged from 18 to 63. The sample size was adequate in that it captured variability within the respondent groups and the dimension of interest (gender). Participants were drawn from a variety of occupations including professionals, skilled manual and administrative roles, and their incomes ranged from less than \$25000 to more than AUD\$78 000 per year. Of the 21 semi-structured interviews, 15 were conducted face-to-face in a variety of settings (mainly within respondents' homes or workplaces in the South East Queensland Region). The remaining 7 interviews were conducted by telephone with respondents located throughout the east coast of Australia. Generally, interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours.

Thematic analysis. The data-mining tool Leximancer was used to analyze the interviews and develop a conceptual map for each category of analysis. Leximancer undertakes a form of automatic content analysis (Smith & Humphreys, 2006) thus reducing potential researcher bias (Nisbett & Wilson 1977). Based on the notion that words tend to correlate with other words over a certain range within the text stream (Beeferman et al. 1997), Leximancer examines the text data to develop a ranked list of lexical terms based around frequency and co-occurrence usage (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). By means of a process including seeding a bootstrapping thesaurus builder, these terms are then used to develop both a text concept index and concept co-occurrence matrix which, subsequently, are used to produce a two dimensional concept map via a clustering algorithm (Smith & Humphreys 2006). Additionally, Leximancer has been shown to address issues of reliability (Alexa & Zuell 2000) and to improve validity in qualitative research (Smith & Humphreys 2006). Results

from this initial stage were used to inform the development of 4 overall propositions explaining the relationship between gender and retirement planning.

RESULTS

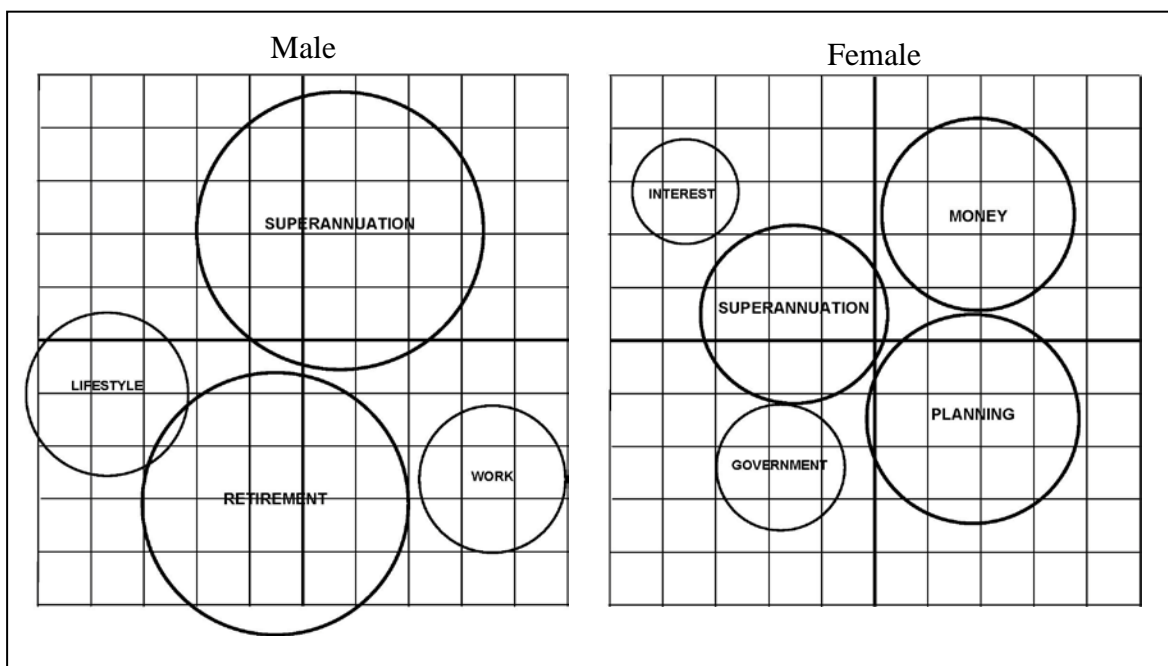
Following the content analysis of the interviews, Leximancer generated concept maps based on gender. Each concept map provides a visualization of the themes identified within the interview text as well as demonstrating the degree to which these themes are, or are not, interconnected. Additionally, the size and centrality of a theme on the concept map indicates its importance within the overall content analysis.

Interviews with females yielded the themes of *superannuation*, *money*, *government*, *planning* and *interest* while interviews with males yielded the themes of *superannuation*, *lifestyle*, *retirement* and *work* (Figure 1). As can be seen, when thinking about the concepts of superannuation and retirement, the most prominent themes for female consumers were *planning*, followed by *money* whereas for males the most prominent themes were *superannuation* and *retirement*. As such, the conceptual maps are fundamentally different for females and males. This suggests that the way in which males and females think about retirement planning is also fundamentally different. Females tended to adopt a more micro view of retirement planning and this may reflect that there are fewer earning opportunities for females or it may relate to a level of concern in regard to having sufficient funds to support a desired retirement lifestyle. Also females seemed to consider a greater range of potentialities than males. The following comment is indicative of a majority (ten in total) responses provided by female consumers:

‘I fully realized a couple of years ago that I had to put a plan in place to be a self-funded retiree, otherwise I will have to rely on the pension which the government

probably would have got rid of by then. So my specific plan is to work a little longer than I originally thought and contribute more to super than I originally believed I would have to. It puts a damper on your lifestyle now, but I really believe it is worth it. I mean you just do not know how things will change in the future, and even though I know I will not be able to afford to keep my current lifestyle in retirement, I still think that what I am going through now should enable me to be fairly comfortable. One thing is for sure, I will live better than my mum who leads a simple life on the pension. Sure she saves a little, but I could not see myself in that situation. That is why super is important to me.’(Interviewee 4, Female, 56 years)

Figure 1: Conceptual Maps based on Gender



In contrast, males tended to adopt a more macro approach to retirement and superannuation planning, with some males considering retirement as simply another life-phase. For example, one male interviewee commented that ‘I’m sure that [in retirement] we will have the same type of life that we have now at least up until we are in our late 80’s. I mean it’s just a

different stage of our life and it will be pretty much the same with a lot of travel like we have now' (Interviewee 20, Male, 30 years). In addition, males did not express as many concerns in regard to obtaining sufficient funds to maintain a desired retirement lifestyle and a majority assumed that little effort would be required to achieve this. The following comment is typical of the majority of the responses provided by male interviewees (nine in total).

'Superannuation is fairly straightforward; it's not something to get stressed about. We have compulsory contributions and there is always an opportunity to invest as well. I don't even worry about the value of the super fund falling, because it will always rebound over the long term. I only have a few more years to go and I feel that everything should be right' (Interviewee 14, Male, 62 years).

The fundamental differences in the way in which males and females think about retirement and superannuation planning as reflected in the conceptual maps leads to the following research propositions;

P1a Females are more likely than men to adopt a micro-level view of retirement planning.

P1b Males are more likely than females to adopt a macro-level view of retirement planning.

A second theme to emerge suggests differences regarding the type of perceived lifestyle in retirement. For males, the proximity of *work* and *lifestyle to retirement* suggests that these concepts have a conceptual association, whereas for females these concepts do not appear. Rather, for females, the proximity of *money* and *planning* suggests that these concepts are conceptually associated (Figure 1). The focus by females on *money* and *planning* suggests a pragmatic approach towards retirement and superannuation planning and indicate concern by many female respondents regarding their day-to-day survival in

retirement. For example, the following commentary is indicative of a majority of responses provided by female interviewees (nine in total).

‘I really hope that I have enough money when I retire, but who really knows. I continually increase my contributions because I am not totally convinced that the superannuation funds are doing a great job with my money or that the economy is going to be buoyant when I leave my job. I have gone to a few financial planning seminars which have helped me understand about the tax advantages of salary sacrificing, but again, this is no real guarantee that my strategy will leave me with enough to survive. The only thing that gives me some confidence is that I am putting more money into my fund than I would have if I hadn’t put this plan in place when I did’ (Interviewee 6, Female, 51 years)

This level of concern was not expressed by males who conceptually linked *retirement* and *lifestyle*. For example, the following comment is typical of the majority (eight) of male interviewee responses.

‘I tend to think that not a lot will change when I retire. We often go overseas at least once a year, and I can not see this changing when I stop working. When I retire, I think I will have more time to do the things I like, like seeing a movie or going out for a meal’ (Interviewee 11, Male, 36 years).

A pragmatic approach towards retirement and superannuation planning was not expressed by males who tended to focus on the more esoteric concept of *lifestyle*. The pragmatic view of females contrasted with the more esoteric view of males leading to the development of two further research propositions.

P2a *When considering the future, females are more likely than males to view retirement planning from a ‘survivalist’ perspective.*

P2b When considering the future, males are more likely than females to view retirement planning from a 'lifestyle' perspective.

A third theme to emerge is involved with the notion of retirement funding. For females, a weak conceptual relationship is found to exist between *superannuation* and *government*, focusing mainly upon areas of government support. This link exemplifies the perception that the Government will provide alternative funding if, as expected by many of the females interviewed, their personal retirement funds are inadequate. For example, most female interviewees commented when asked about their financial requirements in retirement that they would potentially need to '...rely on the pension to top-up...funds' (Interviewee 7, Female 51 years), or seek '...some kind of government assistance to help...through the tough times' (Interviewee 12, Female 35 years). The conceptual relationship between *superannuation* and *government* was not found to exist in the conceptual map for males. The following statement is indicative of a majority of responses provided by male consumers.

'I have chosen a relatively stable super contribution, I think its called 'capital stable' which is around the mid-point of risk. This will be enough for us to be comfortable and do the things we like doing. I know that super has not performed that well, but there will be another correction, so it will be okay by the time I retire' (Interviewee 15, Male, 50 years).

This reflects expectations that government assistance would not be required during retirement. Males of all ages tended to believe that they needed to be far more self-reliant in relation to retirement funding than indicated by women interviewees. Thus, the following research proposition is presented.

P3: When considering the future, females are more likely than males to perceive that they will wholly or partially rely upon government financial assistance in retirement.

The fourth theme to emerge concerns perceived lifestyle quality in retirement. Again, considerable differences were evident between females and males with opposing views evident. Females tended to take a slightly more pessimistic view and expressed the belief that the quality of their lifestyle would either remain unchanged or decline in retirement. Again this may reflect the more pragmatic attitude adopted by females interviewees. For instance, one interviewee commented that:

‘I am not too certain that I will be able to maintain my current lifestyle in retirement...who knows what our living expenses will be in the future? My fund provides some tables about how much money people will need in 20 or 30 years to survive, but I tend to think that these are overly optimistic and there are constant tax changes which affect your contributions. So even if you are aware of everything now, you can not be certain of what will happen in the future. Overall, a majority of female interviewees (nine in total) shared this sentiment’ (Interviewee 16, Female, 29 years).

Males, however, were far more optimistic regarding future lifestyle and expressed the belief that their lifestyle would either remain unchanged or improve beyond current levels. This may reflect greater earning opportunities afforded males throughout their working lives. The following quotation is indicative of a majority of responses provided by male interviewees.

‘Nothing will really change when I give up work except I may be able to work on my golf handicap and travel a little more. I have increased my super contributions and invested in a little property which will definitely pay-off when I retire’ (Interviewee 21, Male, 37 years).

Therefore, the following relationship is proposed.

P4: When considering the future, females are more likely than males to perceive that their lifestyle quality will diminish in retirement.

DISCUSSION

From the preceding discussion it is clear that females and males do not perceive retirement planning in the same way. The concept map generated for females yields different themes to that generated for males. When thinking about retirement planning, females focus on the practical themes of *money, planning* and *government*, whereas males focus on the more abstract themes of *work, retirement* and *lifestyle*. This difference may indicate that females consider themselves, generally, as having limited opportunity to acquire sufficient funds for their retirement compared to males. In comparison, males do not consider that they will have limited opportunities to accrue financial wealth in their working lives and this is reflected by their focus on the overall concepts of *retirement, work* and *lifestyle*.

As such, we see a clear separation in the perceptions, assumptions and expectations of male and female consumers, when considering retirement planning. Males tend to adopt the individual choice perspective as they view retirement as a natural progression in life that occurs after their work life has terminated. In this sense, they believe that they have a degree of control over this stage and that there will be few surprises. Their main concern is maintaining an appropriate lifestyle, but this is viewed as being relatively attainable.

In contrast, women tend to adopt a life course perspective, they are very mindful that unplanned obstacles may occur during the course of their lives and these could potentially impede their financial stability in retirement. Given their uncertainty in this domain, need

recognition becomes obvious in females at a relatively early stage. Moreover, they are quite fearful that their actual state in retirement may well be very different to their desired state and this moves their interest to the areas of money, planning and government support. On this basis, when superannuation bodies and organisations are dealing with consumers it will be important to understand the perceptual differences between males and females and reflect them accordingly in documents and promotional material produced.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that males and females adopt different perspectives when it comes to retirement planning. Males tend to adopt an individual choice perspective, whereby it is assumed that retirement will be another stage in life which will provide for a lifestyle conducive with their current standard of living. Little thought is given to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of achieving a comfortable self-funded retirement, rather it is just expected that it will happen. Women, on the other hand, have difficulty in conceptualizing their retirement, given their concerns over their ability to accumulate enough wealth over their often-interrupted working life. On this basis, they are very concerned with the ‘how to’ of superannuation planning focusing much of their attention on what they can do in their current life circumstances to work towards self-funded retirement. Many females, however, realize that this may not even be achievable and that they will have to rely on future government assistance. In this sense, the female perspective is very much a life course perspective, which makes no assumptions or predictions about future life stages, but one that views outcomes as contingent upon the circumstances of one’s life.

While the identification of the theoretical perspectives associated with the perceptions of male and female superannuation consumers is informative, we need to determine how these

perspectives translate to consumption behavior in order for appropriate behavioral change to occur. The findings clearly indicate that need recognition (the first stage of the consumer-decision-making process) does, in fact, occur at different times for different groups. For example, it appears that women are more likely to envisage a discrepancy in their desired-versus-actual financial situation in retirement earlier than men. Furthermore, self-employed people (regardless of gender) are also more likely to recognize their need for financial planning for the future. Thus, it is these groups of consumers who are more likely to progress through the other stages of consumer decision-making (i.e. search and evaluation of alternatives) and, in doing so, be more perceptible and attentive to marketing communications associated with financial products/planning.

From a practical perspective the findings in this study provide interesting implications for superannuation organizations, employers and government bodies. As males and females are shown to adopt quite different perspectives regarding retirement planning this should be reflected in the types of information available regarding superannuation and retirement planning. The effect of providing the same types of information in the same way to males and females potentially minimizes the potential impact of this information for either males or females. Superannuation and government organizations should consider producing different documents and different types of information, targeted to males and females, that focus on superannuation and retirement through a focus on the key themes identified for each segment.

A further practical implication regards intervention time. An issue for superannuation organizations and government bodies is identifying the lifecycle stage or age at which superannuation messages are best received. The identified differences between males and

females suggest that perhaps these stages differ for males and females. Additionally, in order to develop the best understanding of superannuation and retirement issues and planning, a well developed and balanced view is required so that a complete range of issues can be considered. The findings in this study suggest that males tend to adopt a macro-oriented view of superannuation while females tend to adopt a micro-oriented view of superannuation. Neither gender tends to adopt a balanced view. This clearly becomes an educational issue for superannuation organizations and government bodies. Ways need to be investigated to help males adopt a greater understanding of micro issues while simultaneously helping females develop a greater understanding of macro-issues. In this way both genders are better equipped to understand and make decisions regarding superannuation and retirement planning.

However, the effect of superannuation policy in Australia should also be considered in relation to one's behavior towards retirement planning. The current system of compulsory contributions definitely has advantages to those who have un-interrupted work patterns (generally, males) and who are not self-employed. These groups are more likely to have a greater amount of accumulated wealth in superannuation at the end of their working life. Interestingly, from the findings of this study, it is also these groups that are relatively complacent when it comes to superannuation planning. Thus, we speculate that government policy may well be impeding appropriate saving behavior for retirement. This would not be the case if compulsory superannuation contributions were around 18% because many would be able to self-fund their retirement at that level (Fitzgerald 1993). However, given that compulsory contributions in Australia are only 9%, complacency in relation to self-motivated additional saving for retirement cannot be afforded. This means that a lack of planning and foresight on the part of men may eventuate in disappointment and possible hardship in

retirement. Other groups, such as women and the self-employed, are already well aware that some additional planning will be required to protect their future standard of living.

As Government intervention denies the superannuation consumer the experience, and consequential learning, related to need recognition, the first stage of the decision-making process (Dewey 1910), the motivation for some consumers to engage in search and evaluation activities (i.e. information gathering and processing) may be severely diminished. This may occur because need recognition has occurred more at the societal level (i.e. recognized by the government), rather than at the individual level (i.e. recognized by the consumer). Thus, government bodies and pension funds need to seriously investigate avenues which will, firstly, stimulate need recognition in consumers early and, secondly, educate them accordingly.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory research has some associated limitations. As the research was conducted using a realist paradigm and qualitative methodology, analytical, and not statistical generalizability may be claimed (Johnson 1997; Yin 2003). Future research may provide support for the present study through use of a large scale survey of consumers of financial products and services. In addition, as data was collected in Australia the applicability of these results within other country contexts should be considered in light of regulatory peculiarities. Although it is argued here that the results provide a broad platform for understanding consumer-decision making processes in relation to retirement planning, it is recommended that future comparative assessments with other countries be conducted to verify and test the propositions espoused in this research. Moreover, future studies should give consideration to the influence of other antecedents (such as age and employment status) upon individual

approaches to financial planning so as to provide a more holistic appreciation of consumer perceptions and approaches to superannuation. In doing so, further insight will be provided into how governmental policy and regulation impacts upon consumer decision making in relation to the choice and ongoing commitment to financial products and services.

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