

# THROUGH THE AGES

Dr Katherine Ravenswood joined AUT University as a senior lecturer in 2012. Her research is based in employment relations and focuses on several themes that have at heart the examination of power, gender and diversity in the employment relationship.

Currently Dr Ravenswood is working on the results from the New Zealand Aged Care Workforce Survey 2016, which was supported by the New Zealand Work Research Institute.

Using survey data, she is working on a journal article looking at the connections between safety and physical and verbal abuse, training, and job satisfaction/turnover. She helped lead the survey in 2014 and 2016.

Dr Ravenswood says her own personal experience of working part-time in aged care work in the 1990s, while she was a student, has helped her understand the key issues faced by aged care workers in New Zealand.

The 2016 survey questioned healthcare assistants, nurses and managers in both residential aged care and home and community aged care.

Conducted online between May and July last year, the survey asked about the characteristics of their jobs, pay, work environment, job satisfaction, skills and qualifications, occupational health and safety, and use of technology.

A total of 592 home and community care workers, 327 residential aged care workers, 362 nurses and 187 managers responded.

The survey leads on from the original 2014 New Zealand Aged Care Workforce Survey.

“In 2014, we were the only ones asking questions around their experiences,” she says.

The 2014 survey was based on an Australian survey and Dr Ravenswood worked with a core group of key stakeholders to create tailored questions for New Zealand respondents.

“Between 2014 and 2016 there was a need to keep similar questions, but looking at ‘do new questions need to be asked?’ We meet regularly on a national level with the Caring Counts Coalition and the Kaiawhina Workforce



Action Plan, which both have links into the District Health Boards, Ministry of Health and key industry stakeholders. We report our survey findings and progress through those networks.”

There were several key take-outs from the survey:

## STRESS

Stress was an important issue, and levels had increased between the 2014 and 2016 surveys.

“This has been identified as a concern, we are hoping to follow up with interviews regarding health and safety,” Dr Ravenswood says.

## PAY

A majority of aged care workers disagreed with the statement ‘My rate of pay fairly reflects the skills, responsibility and and experience needed to do my job.’ They also had very high dissatisfaction with their pay.

The 2016 survey was done before the historic aged care workers pay settlement was announced by the Government in April. A \$2 billion package meant from July this year more than 55,000 aged care workers received a minimum pay rise of \$4 an hour.

“It will be really interesting to see 2019 results. The intention is to run the survey

in 2019 to see if there has been a change in response... [The pay settlement] was well-overdue. Care work is hard work.”

## RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a rising aged population in New Zealand and this means more people require care. The amount of dependency (how much care is required) has increased, with those needing home care less independent than 20 years ago.

“This means the work is physically and emotionally harder for care workers. Tasks that used to be delegated to nurses are now done by caregivers or care workers,” Dr Ravenswood says.

## SAFETY

Respondents across all occupations thought they had the skills and ability to do their job, and aged care workers felt safe at work.

Dr Ravenswood says the survey and its results are important.

“Aged care workers are a pretty crucial workforce, who have been overlooked for a long time. The survey helps us plan and helps understand the issues of people working in the industry.”

AUT supports and values industry engaged research and it significantly supports the New Zealand Work Research Institute, Ravenswood says. ●