



Questions and Answers about OLDER WORKERS: A Sloan Work and Family Research Network Fact Sheet

Introduction

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared Fact Sheets that provide statistical answers to some important questions about work–family and work–life issues. This Fact Sheet includes statistics about Older Workers. (Last updated: April 2009)



What proportion of the U.S. population are older adults?

- ✔ **Fact 1** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2003, 21.9% of the population was 55 years old or older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004–2005a).
- ✔ **Fact 2** The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2010, people aged 55 or older will make up 24.7% of the U.S. population, and by 2050, their portion of the population will grow to 31.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004–2005b).
- ✔ **Fact 3** In 2000, 33,347,000 persons were 65 years old or older. Of those, 41.9% had a disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).



Are older people still working?

- ✔ **Fact 1** “Workers aged 55+ were only 13 percent of the workforce in 2000, down from about 17 percent in 1950” (Rix, 2004, p. 4).
- ✔ **Fact 2** “Continuing the slow and fairly steady increase first observed in the mid– to late–1980s, the labor force participation rate for those aged 55–64 rose from 62.3% to 62.9% between 2004 and 2005” (Rix, 2006, p. 1).
- ✔ **Fact 3** “Men and women in what might be considered the retirement–age population (i.e., 65–69) were more likely to be in the labor force in 2005 than in 2004; 28.3% were working or looking for work versus 27.7% a year earlier” (Rix, 2006, p. 1).
- ✔ **Fact 4** “The number of employed men and women aged 55 and older rose by more than 1.3 million, or by 5.6%, in 2005” (Rix, 2006, p. 1).



✔ **Fact 5** Of the Boomers born between 1946 and 1964, 68% are working full time and 12% part-time (Roper ASW, 2004, p. 95).

✔ **Fact 6** “The EU working population is ageing (the age distribution of EU workers in 2005 peaked at 40 years of age compared to 25 years of age 15 years ago)” (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005, p. 2).



Which older people are still working?

✔ **Fact 1** The percentage of married women in the labor force between the ages of 45–64 has increased from 44% in 1970 to 67.4% in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004–2005d).

✔ **Fact 2** Eighty three and a half percent of married men between the ages of 45–64 were in the labor force in 2003 compared to only 67.6% of single men in that same age bracket (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004–2005d).

✔ **Fact 3** In 2003, 10.2% of women and 17.8% of men age 65 or older were employed in the labor force (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004–2005c).



How does working at an older age impact employee health?

✔ **Fact 1** “Paid work at older ages reduced the probability of having any ADL limitation by 2 percent, of reporting negative mood indicators by 2 percent, and of dying by 1 percent” (Calvo, 2006, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 2** “Paid work at older ages reduced the probability of reporting fair/poor health in 2002 by 6 percent” (Calvo, 2006, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 3** “Higher job satisfaction is associated with an improved mood. Those who do not enjoy going to work are 5 percent more likely to report negative mood indicators” (Calvo, 2006, p. 4).



What is the financial situation of older workers?

✔ **Fact 1** “Small business owners (50 or more years old) have much higher annual earnings (\$114,102 average; \$65,000 median) than wage and salaried employees (\$52,635 average; \$52,635 median) or independently self-employed (older) workers (\$78,110 average; \$40,000 median)” (Bond, Galinsky, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Smyer, 2005a, p. 5).

✔ **Fact 2** Of people 50 or more years old who are small business owners, wage and salaried employees, or self-employed independents, those “who are self-employed independents are the least likely to have personal health insurance” (89% are insured) (Bond et al., 2005a, p. 6).



Is it harder for older job seekers to find employment?

✓ **Fact 1** “The average duration of unemployment in 2005 was 24.1 weeks for jobseekers aged 55 or older and 17.8 weeks for jobseekers under age 55. This compares to 25.8 weeks and 18.9 weeks, respectively, in 2004” (Rix, 2006, p. 2).

✓ **Fact 2** “Few older Americans who are not currently working say they wish they were. Just over 2% of the 41 million persons aged 55 and older who were not in the labor force in 2005 reported that they wanted a job, but only 30% of those who wanted a job had looked for work during the previous year” (Rix, 2006, p. 2).



Are older workers getting discriminated against or displaced from their jobs?

✓ **Fact 1** “(D)isplacement rates [of workers aged 50–64], while cyclical, show no discernible upward or downward trend over the period 1984–2006” (Hunnell & Sass, 2008, p. 3).

✓ **Fact 2** “In fiscal year (FY) 1999, slightly more than 14,100 age charges were filed with the EEOC, 28% fewer than in FY 1992. As the economy soured, age charges rose, reaching 19,921 in FY 2002. Since then, however, the number of charges has fallen. In FY 2005, 16,585 charges were filed with the EEOC, down 7% from FY 2004” (Rix, 2006, p. 3).



How are older workers different from younger workers?

✓ **Fact 1** “Workers, 50 or older, are significantly more likely than younger workers to be independent self-employed workers (17 percent of older workers vs. 12 percent of younger workers) or small business owners (9 percent of older workers vs. 5 percent of younger workers) and thus, less likely than younger workers to be wage and salaried employees who work for someone else (74 percent of older workers vs. 83 percent of younger workers)” (Bond et al., 2005a, p. 2).

✓ **Fact 2** “Compared with their younger counterparts, workers, 60 or more years old, are about twice as likely to own small businesses or to be self-employed” (Bond et al., 2005a, p. 2).

✓ **Fact 3** “Overall (when combining the response of older men and women), older employees exhibit significantly greater commitment to their employers (32 percent high commitment) than younger employees under 50 years old (26 percent)” (Bond, Galinsky, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Smyer, 2005b, p. 14).

✓ **Fact 4** “According to a major study Towers Perrin conducted in 2003 among roughly 35,000 employees working for midsize and large U.S. companies, employees over age 50 were more motivated to exceed expectations on the job than were younger workers” (Feinsod, Davenport, & Arthurs, 2005, p. 22).



✔ **Fact 5** “Towers Perrin’s analysis of company–paid medical claim costs shows that employees age 50 to 65 use on average from 1.4 to 2.2 times as much health care as workers in their 30s and 40s” (Feinsod et al., 2005, p. 17).



What are some differences between older male and female workers?

✔ **Fact 1** “Gender differences are especially pronounced in the 65–plus workforce: 27% of employed men and 19% of employed women aged 65 or older can be found in nontraditional or alternative work arrangements” (Rix, 2006, p. 2).

✔ **Fact 2** “Older women earn 55 cents for every dollar that men earn from all hours worked at all jobs. If we compare hourly rates of pay at main jobs (with salaries converted to hourly rates), older women earn 69 cents for every dollar older men earn—still a substantial difference” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 6).

✔ **Fact 3** “In 2002, the average (mean) annual income of older men is \$80,839 compared with \$64,444 for women. There is a similar disparity in median annual family income: \$66,300 for older men versus \$51,134 for older women” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 4** “Only 80 percent of the women compared with 91 percent of the men have access to health insurance through their employer” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 8).

✔ **Fact 5** “Among those older employees who live with immediate family members (e.g., spouse, partner, and/or children), 46 percent of the men indicate that they are ‘very satisfied’ with their family life, but only 32 percent of the women report this high level of satisfaction” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 12).

✔ **Fact 6** “(A)bout one of every eight male employees 50 or more years old (13 percent) exhibit self–reported symptoms of poor mental health compared to one of every five women (20 percent) in this age group” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 14).

✔ **Fact 7** “(S)imilar percentages of older men (53 percent) and women (58 percent) report ‘high’ satisfaction with their jobs” (Bond et al., 2005b, p. 12).



What are the future trends for older workers in the workforce?

✔ **Fact 1** “The total labor force is projected to increase by 14.7 million (10%) from 2004 to 2014, with persons aged 55 and over accounting for nearly 77% of the increase” (Rix, 2006, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 2** “The [labor force participation] rate for men aged 55 and over is projected to increase from 43.2% in 2004 to 46.3% in 2014, a 7.2% increase, while that for women is projected to rise from 30.5% to 36.8%, or by nearly 21%” (Rix, 2006, p. 3).



✔ **Fact 3** “By 2014 men and women aged 55 and over may account for one in five labor force participants (21%), compared to one in seven (16%) in 2005” (Rix, 2006, p. 3).

✔ **Fact 4** “By 2014, women will be 48% of the aged 55+ workforce, up from 46% 10 years earlier and only 23% in 1950” (Rix, 2006, p. 3).



What percentage of the workforce will retire soon?

✔ **Fact 1** “Defining eligibility to retire as meeting the age and/or years of service rules in their retirement plans, 16.9 percent of respondents reported that more than one-quarter of their current workforce will be eligible to retire over the next five years. Other studies have estimated that nationwide just over 40 percent of the U.S. workforce will be eligible to retire during the next ten years” (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 10).

✔ **Fact 2** “Just over 19 percent of respondents reported that the average age of those workers who had retired from their organization during the last 12 months was 65 or older. Another 22.9 percent reported the average age at 63–64 and 21.7 percent reported the average age at 61–62. Only 2.4 percent reported the average age at 55–56. Almost 23 percent of respondents, however, did not know the average age of recent retirees” (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 11).

✔ **Fact 3** “For 27.4 percent of respondents, workers over age 50 comprise more than one-quarter of their workforce. Another 15.5 percent of respondents reported that 21–25 percent of their workforce is over age 50. For 42.9 percent of respondents, more than one-fifth of their workforce is over age 50” (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 9).



What issues are companies thinking about in order to prepare for their older workers retiring?

✔ **Fact 1** “Almost half of the respondents rated the aging of their workforce as *very important* or *important* to their organization’s goals and strategy over the next five years. Another 41.1 percent rated it *somewhat important*. The remaining 11 percent rated it *not important at all*” (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 13).

✔ **Fact 2** When asked about their attitudes towards human capital, respondents stated that, “(t)he availability of talent was rated as a top human capital concern (just over 38 percent). Talent management (right employees/right positions) was cited by 29.1 percent of respondents. Retention of key employees was cited by 20.9 percent and maintaining intellectual capital by 17.4 percent. The cost of compensation and benefit programs, people not taking advantage of benefits and related programs/systems currently in place, and employee productivity were each cited by only 7 percent of respondents” (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 11).



The Network has additional resources related to this topic.

1. Visit a topic page on Older Workers at: <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/topic.php?id=9>
Topic pages provide resources and information, including statistics, definitions, overviews & briefs, bills & statutes, interviews, teaching resources, audio/video, suggested readings, and links.
2. Visit our database of academic literature with citations and annotations of literature related to the issue of Older Workers. You can connect to this database at: http://library.bc.edu/F?func=find-b-0&local_base=BCL_WF



References

Bond, J., Galinsky, E., Pitt-Catsouphes, M., & Smyer, M. (2005a, November). *Context matters: Insights about older workers from the National Study of the Changing Workforce* (Research Highlight, Issue 1). Chestnut Hill, MA and New York: Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility, Families and Work Institute. Retrieved from http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/RH01_InsightOlderWorker.pdf

This report presents the findings of in-depth analyses of the Families and Work Institute's 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). It compares and contrasts the experiences of men and women 50 and older in the U.S. workforce. "Older workers" are defined as those who were 50 or more years old in 2002.

"The NSCW surveys representative samples of the nation's workforce once every five years (1992, 1997, 2002). Sample sizes average 3,500, including both wage and salaried employees and self-employed workers." Several of the questions in the National Study of the Changing Workforce were taken from or based upon questions in the Quality of Employment Survey (QES) conducted three times by the Department of Labor from 1969 to 1977 (Highlights of the National Study of the Changing Workforce, 2002, p. v).

Bond, J., Galinsky, E., Pitt-Catsouphes, M., & Smyer, M. (2005b, November). *The diverse employment experiences of older men and women in the workforce* (Research Highlight, Issue 2). Chestnut Hill, MA and New York: Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility Families and Work Institute. Retrieved from http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/RH02_DiverseEmployExper.pdf

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Calvo, E. (2006, February). *Does working longer make people healthier and happier?* (Issue in Brief, Series 2). Chestnut Hill, MA: Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. Retrieved from http://crr.bc.edu/images/stories/Briefs/wob_2.pdf?phpMyAdmin=43ac483c4de9t51d9eb41

"The following analysis assesses the impact of individuals' work status in 2000 on their physical and psychological well-being in 2002. It uses longitudinal data drawn from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and the RAND-HRS data base...The sample analyzed is composed of individuals aged 59 to 69 who were working or not-working in the year 2000 and were alive in 2002. People dead in 2002 were included in the regressions analyzing mortality" (Calvo, 2006, p. 2).



Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice with the assistance of ExecuNet Inc. and The Human Capital Institute. (2006, January). *The aging of the U.S. workforce: Employer challenges and responses*. Retrieved from <http://www.maryfurlong.com/studies/AgingWorkforceEYWhitePaper.pdf>

Survey findings are based on responses from HR executives representing a cross section of some of the largest employers in the U.S. in a variety of industry sectors. The survey was conducted electronically from November 11, 2005 to December 21, 2005. Of those responding, 25.9 percent represented employers with 1,000–4,999 employees, 20 percent with 5,000–9,999 employees, and 12.9 percent with 10,000–24,999 employees. Employers with 25,000–99,999 employees comprised 9.4 percent of respondents and another 8.2 percent were employers with 100,000 or more employees. The remainder represented employers with fewer than 1,000 employees. While employers in virtually all types of industries responded, 23.5 percent of the respondents represented companies in the manufacturing industry. Government and non-profit groups accounted for 18.8 percent of respondents, and financial services firms for 9.4 percent. Natural resources and retail industries were each represented by 8.2 percent of respondents. Technology, communications, and entertainment accounted for 5.9 percent of respondents, followed by health sciences and transportation, each with 4.7 percent, and energy, consumer products, and industrial products, each with 3.5 percent. Other industries represented were: real estate, professional services, hospitality, construction, and aerospace" (Ernst & Young LLP Human Capital Practice, 2006, p. 3–4).

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2005). *Fifteen years of working conditions in the EU: Charting the trends*. Dublin, Ireland: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/85/en/1/ef0685en.pdf>

"The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) is carried out every five years by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, a tripartite European Agency based in Dublin. The questionnaire is developed by the European Foundation team in close cooperation with an expert questionnaire development group. This group comprises representatives of the European social partners, other EU bodies (EU Commission, Eurostat, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work), international organisations (OECD, ILO), national statistical institutes, as well as leading European experts in the field. The sample of the EWCS is representative of persons in employment (according to the Eurostat definition this comprises both employees and the self-employed) in the countries covered for the respective periods. In each country, the EWCS sample followed a multi-stage, stratified and clustered design with a random walk procedure for the selection of the respondents at the last stage. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's own household" (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2005, p. 8).

Feinsod, R., Davenport, T., & Arthurs, R. (2005). *The business case for workers age 50+: Planning for tomorrow's talent needs in today's competitive environment*. Washington, DC: AARP. Retrieved from http://assets.aarp.org/rqcenter/econ/workers_fifty_plus.pdf

"Compiled in the winter and spring of 2005 by a team of consultants and associates in Towers Perrin's HR Services business, the findings presented in this report were drawn primarily from AARP research, Towers Perrin's proprietary data, and other previously published research" (Feinsod et al., 2005, p. 93; further information is available on this page of the document).

Rix, S.E. (2004). *Aging and work: A view from the United States* (No. #2004–02). Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://assets.aarp.org/rqcenter/econ/2004_02_work.pdf

"This report examines Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data and reviews many of the recent studies and surveys on older workers. Its purpose is to explore trends in the employment and retirement of older Americans over the past 50 years; highlight some of the factors behind those trends; describe where and under what circumstances older persons in the United States are employed; speculate on what the future may hold for older workers; and identify policies and programs that do or could encourage labor force attachment at later ages." (p. i)

Rix, S.E. (2006). *Update on the aged 55+ worker: 2005*. Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://assets.aarp.org/rqcenter/econ/dd136_worker.pdf



"Unless otherwise noted, statistics are from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), *Employment and Earnings* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2005 and January 2006). Also, unless otherwise specified, 'older' refers to persons aged 55 and above" (Rix, 2006, p. 4).

Roper ASW. (2004). *Baby Boomers Envision Retirement II: Survey of Baby Boomers' expectations for retirement*. Washington, DC: AARP Knowledge Management. Retrieved from http://assets.aarp.org/rqcenter/econ/boomers_envision.pdf

"The survey was conducted by telephone, between October 9, 2003, and November 26, 2003...The survey was conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,200 people, 38 to 57 years of age. Oversamples were also included to yield a total, when combined with those from the general sample, of at least 300 African American and 300 Hispanics interviews. Random-digit-dialing (RDD) procedures were used to select a nationally representative sample (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) of households who were screened to identify people 38 to 57 years of age" (p. 107-108).

U.S. Census Bureau. (2003). *Statistical abstract of the United States. Table no. 38: Persons 65 years old and over—grandparents, disability status, and language spoken at home: 2000*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/pop.pdf>

The chief source of these data is the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The sample includes employed full-time wage and salary workers 16 years old and over in the US. Excludes the self-employed. Data relate to the primary job.

For description of data sources, see <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/labor.pdf>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004-05a). *Statistical abstract of the United States. Table no. 11: Resident population by age and sex: 1980 to 2003*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/04statab/pop.pdf>

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U.S. Census Bureau. (2004-05b). *Statistical abstract of the United States. Table no. 12: Resident population projections by sex and age: 2005 to 2050*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/04statab/pop.pdf>

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For description of data sources, see <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/labor.pdf>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2004-05c). *Statistical abstract of the United States. Table no. 31: Persons 65 years old and older—Characteristics by sex: 1990 to 2003*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/04statab/pop.pdf>

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For description of data sources, see <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/03statab/labor.pdf>



U.S. Census Bureau. (2004–05d). *Statistical abstract of the United States. Table no. 577: Labor force participation rates by marital status, sex, and age: 1970 to 2003*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/04statab/labor.pdf>

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