Older Workers: Trends and Issues Alerts

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.

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*Older Workers

This document begins with an overview of trends and issues in the area of older workers. The overview briefly addresses: the reversal of the trend toward early retirement, growth in the population of individuals over age 55, increased longevity, economic pressures for older persons that lead to work in order to supplement retirement income, low birth rates, and benefits to employers who use older workers. A list follows of resources that provide information about older workers. Print resources available from ERIC are listed by author, with title, place of publication and publisher or source, date, and ED or EJ number. Similar information is provided for non-ERIC print resources. In addition, a listing is provided of organizations that can be contacted for further information. Addresses and telephone numbers are included. (YLB)
OLDER WORKERS

An Overview of Trends and Issues

The past 20 years have seen a trend for men in the 55-to-64 age group to retire prior to age 65, the traditional age for retirement. Recent figures from the Department of Labor indicate that there may be a reversal in this trend toward early retirement and that more workers will remain in the labor force up to and beyond age 65. Although there have always been individuals aged 55 and over in the labor force, a number of economic and demographic trends are focusing attention on these older workers, including the following:

- Individuals over age 55 will continue to constitute a larger proportion of the total population. Between 1960 and 1984, the percentage of individuals in the population aged 55 and over increased from 17.9 to 21 percent. By the year 2020, the Census Department estimates that one in three or 33 percent of the population will be over 55.

- People are living longer, healthier lives and wish to remain productive in their later years. Many see full- or part-time employment as one means of achieving that goal.

- Increased longevity coupled with higher inflation have also created economic pressures for many older persons. They need to work to supplement inadequate retirement income.

- Low birth rates during the past two decades will create a decrease in the number of younger workers between now and the year 2000. Critical shortages of skilled labor in many areas of the workforce are projected, and older workers will be needed to maintain the nation's productivity.

The projected changes in the composition of the labor force have implications for both educators and employers. According to Redmond (1986), most adults aged 55 and over can be employed productively for another 15-25 years, especially if they receive assistance from educators in the areas of counseling, training, and retraining. Employers who use older workers will benefit in a number of ways—retaining valued employees, increasing flexibility in the workforce, stabilizing and supplementing the younger workforce, maintaining a desired public image, attracting older consumers, responding to government policies, and gaining experience in managing the older workforce of the future (National Alliance of Business 1985, pp. 3-4).

This Trends and Issues Alert contains a number of resources that provide information about older workers. Included are print resources as well as organizations that can be contacted for further information.

Primary Resources


Resource Organizations


American Society on Aging, 833 Market Street, Room 516, San Francisco, CA 94103 (415/543-2617).

Green Thumb, 5111 Leesburg Pike, Suite 107, Falle Church, VA 22041 (703/820-4990).

National Association for Hispanic Elderly, 2727 West Sixth Street, Suite 270, Los Angeles, CA 90057 (213/487-1922).

National Association of Older Worker Employment Services, c/o National Council on the Aging, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, West Wing 100, Washington, DC 20024 (202/479-1200).

National Association of State Units on Aging, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, Suite 208, Washington, DC 20024 (202/484-7182).

National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, 1474 K Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005 (202/637-8400).


National Council on the Aging, 600 Maryland Avenue, SW, West Wing 100, Washington, DC 20024 (202/479-1200).