

Older women in the workforce

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OLDER WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

More older women are in the workforce than ever before. In fact, much of the increase in labor force participation of older workers overall is due to the larger proportion of women in the workforce. Challenges facing older women workers include lower salaries and greater likelihood of working part-time, compared to men. They also face greater family caregiving responsibilities and express concerns about health and retirement security.

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Are there more older women in the workforce now than in the past?

Yes. Labor force participation among older women, although still lower than that of men, has increased significantly and is now at a record high. Women's salaries are lower than men's at all ages, although the gap is narrowing, and women are more likely to work part-time than men.

"74.7% of women aged 35-44 were in the labor force in 2011, compared to 75.4% of those aged 45-54, and 59.5% of those aged 55-64. Among those 65 years and over, 14.0% were in the labor force. Among men, the rates are 90.9%, 86.2%, 69.3% and 22.8%, respectively," according to a 2013 report based on Current Population Survey data.¹

Among all workers "at or over age 55, a higher percentage of men are in the labor force (46.4 %) than women (36.4 %). While this is a slight reduction for men since 1975 (when almost 49.4% were in the work force), it is a record high for women," according to a 2011 analysis of Census data.²

"The overall gain in labor-force participation among workers age 55 and older was primarily driven by the increases in female labor-force participation rates, as the male labor-force participation rates of

that age group were lower in 2010 [46.4%] than they were in 1975 [49.4%]. In contrast, among women aged 55 and older, the rates were 35.1% in 2010, compared to 23.1% in 1975, according to a 2011 analysis of Census Bureau data.³

"Between 1979 and 2011, the earnings gap between women and men narrowed for most age groups. The women's-to-men's earnings ratio among 25- to 34-year-olds grew from 68% in 1979 to 92% in 2011, for example, and the ratio for 45- to 54-year-olds increased from 57% to 76%," according to a 2012 analysis of Current Population Survey data.⁴

In 2011, 27% of employed women usually worked part time—that is, fewer than 35 hours per week. In comparison, 11% of employed men usually worked part time," according to a 2013 report based on Current Population Survey data.⁵

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Are older women workers involved in family caregiving?

Yes. Older women workers are more likely to be caregivers than men. They are more likely to be providing eldercare on a regular, rather than intermittent basis. Older women workers who are caregivers are more likely to report poor health themselves, compared to non-caregivers. Older women who are not employed are more likely to be providing basic care to their parents than women who work.

"Among workers aged 45-74, caregivers (those who have either taken leave from a job or quit a job in the past five years to care for an adult family member)...are more likely to be female (64%)," according to a 2013 AARP survey.⁶

"Among the entire workforce, women (20%) and men (22%) are equally likely to have provided family care in the past five years. Women are more likely (44%) than men (38%) to provide family care on a regular basis rather than on an intermittent basis," according to a 2010 analysis of data from the National Study of the Changing Workforce.⁶

"Adult children who work or do not work are nearly as likely to provide basic personal care to parents in need (54% and 59%, respectively). However, non-working daughters are far more likely than daughters who work (34% vs. 23%) or sons, regardless of work status, to provide basic care to their parents," according to a 2011 analysis of data from the Health and Retirement Survey.⁷

"Among female employees ages 50 and older, 17% of caregivers reported fair or poor health compared to 9% of non-caregivers," according to a 2010 Metlife report.⁸

Are older women concerned about retirement?

Yes. Older women are more likely than men to express concern about their financial well-being as they approach retirement, and many expect that they will have to postpone their retirement for financial reasons. However, more women than men report that they actually had to retire earlier than planned, often for health reasons (their own or that of a family member). Slightly more women than men decide to return to work after retirement.

According to a 2012 AARP survey of older Americans' concern about their financial well-being during and following the recent recession, "boomer women were one-third more likely than boomer men to express a high degree of financial concern (30.1 % vs. 22.3 %)."⁹

Among the respondents "nearing retirement age—ages 50 to 61—a 63% majority think they might have to delay retirement because of the recession. Women in this retirement 'threshold generation' have been most affected by the ailing economy. Fully 72% fear they will have to postpone their retirement plans, compared with 54% of men in this age group," according to a 2009 Pew survey.¹⁰

Among Baby Boomers born in 1946 who turned 65 in 2011, "of those who have already retired, half (51%) report they retired earlier than they had expected. Another 8% said they retired later than planned. The remaining retired as planned. More women than men reported

an earlier retirement (57% versus 43% respectively). The reason most retirees gave for why they decided to retire early was health-related (37%), followed by a loss of job (16%). Four in ten retirees said they retired early for 'other' reasons," according to a 2012 MetLife survey.¹¹

"About 26% of men and 29% of women born 1933 to 1937 returned to full-time or nearly full-time employment after fully or partially retiring," according to a 2010 analysis of Health and Retirement Study data.¹²

"Continued employment in something other than the career job... rises to a maximum of 32% of the men and 37% of the women when the HRS respondents are aged 59 to 69, but still remains significant (more than 20% of the sample) even among those aged 67 to 77," according to a 2011 report on retirement trends.¹³

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