

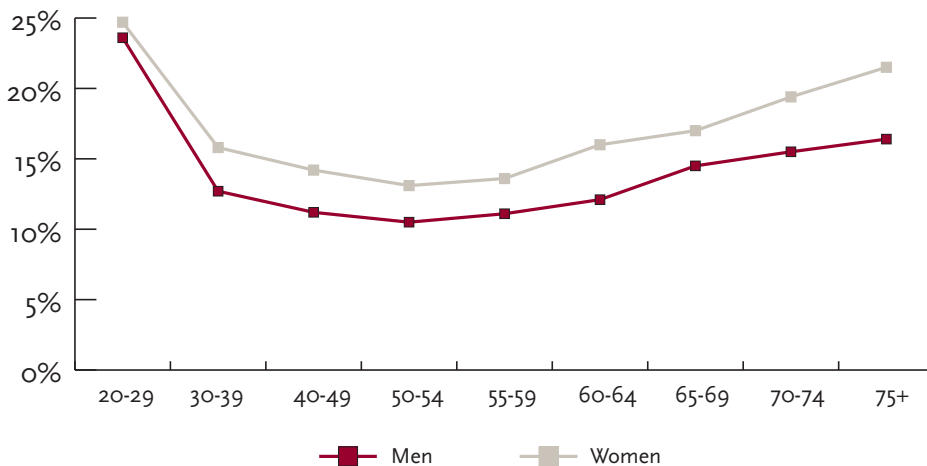
FACTORS AFFECTING OLDER WOMEN IN THE WORK FORCE

Are older working women likely to be poor or underemployed?

“Older female employees tend to live in households with lower family incomes than their male counterparts. 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.”¹

In a 2008 analysis of CPS data, “across all age groups women faced higher rates of underemployment” [defined as either unemployed, discouraged, involuntary part-time, or earnings less than 125% of the poverty threshold]. Among workers aged 20-29 in 2003-2005, underemployment rates were 24.7% for women, compared to 23.6% for men. For workers aged 60-64, 16.9% of women report underemployment, compared to 12.1% of men.² (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Percentage of Adults Underemployed by Age and Gender²



Source: Slack, T., & Jensen, L. (2008).

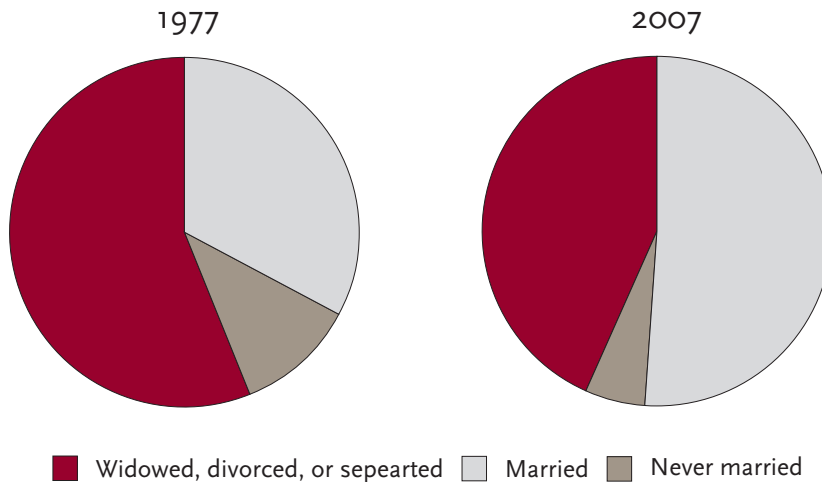
In 2001 when most of the women were in retirement ages (ages 64-78), nearly one-third of them were either in poverty (18%) or in near-poverty (15%), according to a recent analysis of The National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women (2008).³

How does marital status affect older working women?

According to a 2008 BLS report, “in 1977, about one-third of employed women 65 and older were married, but by 2007, married women accounted for nearly one-half of these workers. Women workers who were widowed, divorced or separated represented 56% of employed women 65 and older in 1977; by 2007 their share had fallen to 48%. During the same time period, the fraction of older women workers who were never married shrank from about 11% to about 6%.”⁴ (See Figure 2.)

In a 2008 analysis of data from the National Survey of Mature Women, in 2001, when most of the women were in retirement ages (ages 64-78), “among whites, unmarried women were nearly three times more likely than married women to live in poverty or near poverty (44% vs. 15%). Among African-American unmarried women 47.7% were poor and 21.0% were near poor; for married women 25.4% and 21.2% were poor and near poor, respectively.”³

Figure 2. Percentage Distribution of Employed Women Age 65 and Over By Marital Status⁴



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

What other factors affect older women in the workforce?

In a 2008 study on women's poverty status, 53% of African-American women reported good health during the years from midlife (ages 30-44 in 1967) until they reached retirement years (ages 64-78 in 2001), compared to 67% for white women. "A higher percentage of African-American than white women also reported changes in their health status, from good to poor (26% vs. 17%) during the years of study."³

Based on analysis of 2003-05 CPS data, the results "showed that the predominance of working poverty as a form of underemployment was especially pronounced among nonmetropolitan area women, particularly among those of older age. For nonmetropolitan women aged 55-59, the percentage earning less than 125% of the poverty threshold was 10.4%, compared to 5.8% of metropolitan women. For women aged 60-64, the rates were 12.0 % and 8.2% for nonmetropolitan and metropolitan, respectively."²

"Among women and men of all ages, women ages 50 to 64 are the group most likely to be caring for sick and disabled family members. Nearly one in five (18%) of these women report being a caregiver--a rate two and a half times higher than reported by women 19 to 29."⁵

References

- 1 Bond, T. J., Galinsky, M. E., Pitt-Catsouphes, M., & Smyer, M. A. (2005). *The diverse employment experiences of older men and women in the workforce*. (Research Highlight 02). Chestnut Hill, MA: Center on Aging & Work/Workplace Flexibility. Retrieved October 25, 2007 from http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/RHo2_DiverseEmployExper.pdf
- 2 Slack, T., & Jensen, L. (2008). Employment hardship among older workers: Does residential and gender inequality extend into older age? *The Journals of Gerontology. Series B, Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 63(1), S15-24.
- 3 Lee, S., & Shaw, L. (2008). *From work to retirement: Tracking changes in women's poverty*. Washington, DC: AARP. Retrieved from http://www.aarp.org/research/assistance/lowincome/2008_03_poverty.html
- 4 Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2008). Spotlight on statistics: Older workers. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Labor. Retrieved from http://stats.bls.gov/spotlight/2008/older_workers/pdf/older_workers_bls_spotlight.pdf
- 5 Ho, A., Sara, R. K., Karen, D., & Michelle, M. (2005, August). A look at working-age caregivers' roles, health concerns, and need for support. (Issue Brief). New York: The Commonwealth Fund