

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE U.S. OLDER ADULT LABOR FORCE

The older adult labor force is becoming increasingly diverse, both in terms of ethnic and racial composition and in the proportion of workers who are foreign-born. Reasons for working, access to benefits, and the impact of the current economic recession all vary among races and ethnic groups.

How racially and ethnically diverse are older adults in the labor force?

Black workers aged 55+ working full-time, full-year had the largest percentage point increase from 1987 to 2008, “from 52.7% in 1987 to 66.7% in 2008,” according to a 2010 analysis of Current Population Study data. White workers this age had the lowest percentage working full-time, full-year” [62.8%], an increase from 55.8% in 1987. Among Hispanic workers aged 55+, 67.2% were employed full-time, full-year, compared to 61.6% in 1987.¹

“About 3.2 million Hispanics ages 50-69 were employed in 2007, accounting for 8% of all employed workers in that age group,” as indicated by an analysis of 2009 U.S. Labor Department data. “In 2007, seven in ten Hispanic men ages 50-69 participated in the labor force (by working or looking for work), nearly identical to the rate for

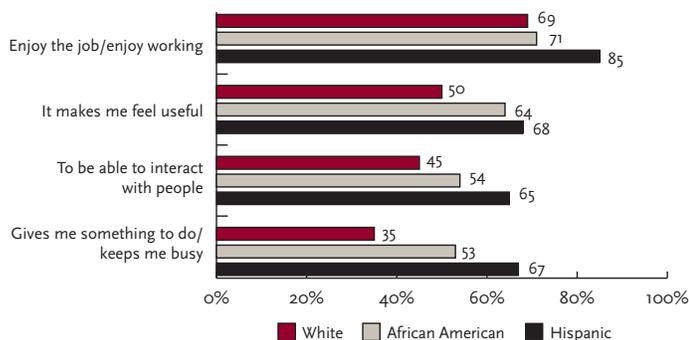
non-Hispanic whites and substantially higher than the rate for non-Hispanic blacks. In 2007, only about one-half of Hispanic women ages 50-69 participated in the labor force.”²

In addition, “the demographic characteristics of the foreign-born labor force differ from those of the native born,” according to a 2009 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In 2008, a slightly higher proportion of the foreign-born than native-born labor force was made up of 55-64-year-olds (65.7% and 64.8% percent, respectively). The proportion of the foreign-born labor force, made-up of workers aged 65+, was 16.8%, compared to 17.2% for their native-born counterparts. Among foreign-born workers aged 55-64, the unemployment rate in 2009 was 8.8%, compared to 6.3% for native-born workers.³

How will immigration affect the racial and ethnic diversity of the older adult population?

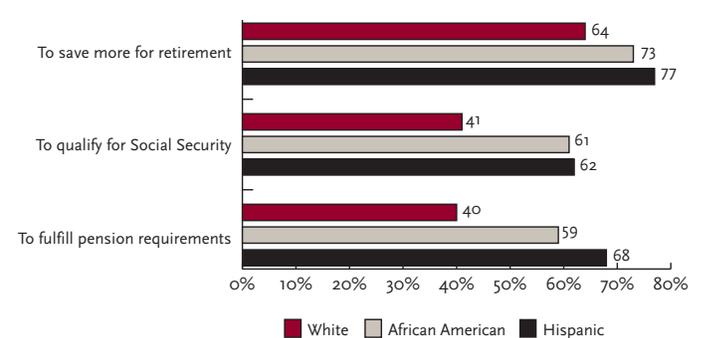
“There were roughly 80.0 million baby boomers in the U.S. in 2000; 8.0 million (10.0%) of these were Latinos. Of the 80 million boomers, 15.0% (12.0 million) were born outside of the United States; Latinos accounted for over 5 million (43%) of these foreign-born boomers,” according to a 2010 analysis of Census Bureau data.⁵

Figure 1. Social and Psychological Reasons for Working by Race



Source: Groeneman, S. (2008)

Figure 2. Financial Reasons for Working by Race



Source: Groeneman, S. (2008)

A 2008 Pew Research Center analysis of the U.S. population projects, “about four out of five immigrants (81%) are ages 18-64. That share will decline slowly as the foreign-born population ages, reaching 73% in 2050. “As younger immigrants age into the elderly group [aged 65 and older], they will make-up a growing share of that population. In 2050, 16 million of the projected 81 million elderly will be foreign born, about 20%; in 2005, only 10% of the 37 million elderly were foreign born.”⁴

According to a 2009 analysis of U.S. Census data, “in 2007 about 57% of Hispanics ages 50 to 69 were foreign-born, compared with only 9% of their non-Hispanic counterparts. Between 2007 and 2050, the number of Latinos ages 50 to 69 is projected to nearly quadruple, growing from 5.6 million to 22.2 million. In 2020, Latinos will account for about 13% of the U.S. population ages 50-69, up from 9% in 2007. By 2050, they will account for about 24% of the ages-50-to-60 population.”⁶

How does quality of employment vary across a diverse older adult workforce?

The major social/psychological reason for working among Hispanics was because they “enjoy the job” or “enjoy working” (85%), according to a 2008 AARP survey. Enjoying one’s job was also the major reason for working among whites and African Americans, though to a lesser degree (71% and 69%, respectively).⁷ See Figure 1.

Among financial reasons for working, “working to pay for health care costs for self or other family member” is identified as a major reason by 81% of Hispanics, 67% of African-Americans, and 55%

of whites... Two-thirds of Hispanics also cite the need to support other family members as a major reason for working, compared to only 54% of African Americans and 44% of whites.”⁷ See Figure 2.

According to a 2010 analysis of job characteristics data, “among those age 58 and older, difficult jobs [that is, either physically demanding jobs or jobs with difficult working conditions], were held by 62.4% of Latino workers, 53.2% of black workers, 50.5% of Asian Pacific American workers, and 42.6% of white workers...and 56% of immigrant workers.”⁸

What impact has the economic recession had on the diverse older workforce?

“Job loss in the last year for Hispanics ages 45+ was double that of the general population (21% versus 10%),” a 2010 AARP study states. “Further, 10% of Hispanics ages 45+ returned to work from retirement (versus 5%).”⁹

In another 2010 AARP report, among African Americans aged 45+, “13% have taken training to get a different type of job, and 18% have attended a job fair to help with their career or job search. Three in ten reported taking training to keep skills up to date or learn new skills for their current job.”¹⁰

“At age 65 and older, 2009 male unemployment rates reached about 11% for African Americans, 8% for Hispanics, and 6% for non-Hispanic whites... Among men age 55 to 64, about 11% of Hispanic workers and 10% of African American workers were unemployed, compared with 6% of non-Hispanic white workers,”¹¹ according to a 2010 Urban Institute report.

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