

themselves by taking employment aptitude tests or by learning a new job while trying to adapt to a strange environment. An appreciation of such differences may make it easier to understand how employers can prefer older employees and be reluctant to hire older applicants for the same work.

4. Compensation Costs

Since employment decisions hinge largely on economic factors, relative compensation costs for older workers are important.

a. Very Young Female Clerical Workers Are Cheaper

As was mentioned in the first section of this chapter, large employers generally prefer very young females for unskilled clerical work and seek such applicants, particularly for positions where routine contact with the public is frequent. As the amount of skill required increases, a preference for older employees becomes stronger. (It should be noted, by the way, that employers in general seem to consider 30 to 35 as "older" when discussing female clerical workers.) In larger companies, preference for the older employee is usually satisfied through promotion from within while small companies frequently fill senior clerical positions by hiring older applicants from the outside.

It is difficult to say to what extent a preference for young females is due to economics and to what extent it is due to the glamour factor. Several companies stated that young females "brighten the office" and are preferred for that reason. Representatives of one union also stated flatly that employers preferred young women because of attractiveness. Most companies and unions indicated, however, that appearance was a factor primarily for receptionists and counter service personnel only and that, in general, cost was the primary consideration.

Most large companies and a few others said that they preferred young girls simply "because they're cheaper". Medium-sized and small companies, however, generally approached the problem of cost by favoring female clerical employees and applicants between 25 and 35 or 40. Preference for the latter is based on a stated desire to avoid the consistently high and expensive turnover of the very young female employee groups. Employers who do prefer younger females for clerical work consider that the low salary cost of such employees, coupled with their working flexibility and attractiveness, outweigh the problem of turnover; they often have simplified and