

close the door not only to workers nearing that age, but sometimes to younger persons who are too old to complete the stipulated years of service which would qualify them for benefits.

The individual aged 55 to 64 who becomes unemployed is probably among the most severely disadvantaged members of the work force. He may never find his way back into the labor market or if he does, it may be at lower pay and at a lower skill. Although a few pension plans provide limited retirement benefits to persons under age 60, the individual in the 55 to 60 age group will in most cases have no available income from pension or retirement credits.

Although jobs may be available in another community or another State, older workers may be unable to finance a move to a new location or they may hesitate to break up family ties of home ownership, children in school, and friends in the community.

The individual who must continue to support himself and his family may be willing to settle for almost any job that will bring some income, particularly after a long period of unemployment. Such downgrading may sacrifice valuable skills and experience which are needed in the economy. An even greater loss occurs when the older person becomes discouraged at the futile search for work, and simply withdraws from the labor market. Even though the individual may be able to finance his own livelihood from a pension or from savings often depleted by a long search for work, his potential production is lost, his purchasing power is decreased, and he may become a burden on his family or on the community instead of continuing as an active and productive member of society.

The following sections describe some problems of older workers which are most frequently encountered by local office employment interviewers and Older Worker Specialists. Some of the problems arise from the changing nature of jobs and skills, others from attitudes and opinions about the older worker, including his own. The President's Council on Aging noted that there is "a range of problems that are specifically associated with age--some founded in reality, others quite unfounded but no less real--that require special efforts to overcome."¹

2. Age Is Not the Only Problem--There Is Always Something Else

Most older workers are not "problems", as long as they have skills which are needed in the labor market. Age in itself need not be a handicap. Numerous studies show that most older workers are stable and capable employees, whose performance as a group compares favorably with that of younger workers and may even be superior in some types of work.²