

Some investigations suggest that illness may be a minor reason for absences. Several recent studies found that as much as 80 percent of absences were caused by such things as hangovers, lack of transportation, looking for other jobs, shopping, poor working conditions, etc. ^{3/}

It may be that the better attendance record of older people results from better work habits and a greater sense of responsibility. Older workers may, in general, have more control of their alcoholic intake, be less inclined to acquire another job, or spend less time in shopping.

There is ample evidence that the older workers are less likely to change jobs. In the furniture and footwear plants studied by the BLS, more workers aged 45 to 64 remained on the job throughout the period of study. In the BLS study of 18,000 manufacturing workers, workers aged 45 and over had a better attendance record than the younger group. The frequency of disabling injuries was highest in the 35- to 44-year-old group. Even excluding workers aged 60 and over, who tend to work in less hazardous occupations, the record of the group aged 45 to 59 showed fewer injuries and minor disabilities such as colds and headaches.

Even though older workers may take longer to recover from an illness, they are apt to be ill less frequently. Older people, too, often have developed immunities to infections which plague the younger group. The aging process does produce physiological changes, but for most people, the changes are not incapacitating. The BLS has found from studies of unemployed workers that older persons do not have a higher rate of physical disabilities constituting vocational handicaps than younger persons. (In the Employment Service, a handicapped worker is one who has a physical, mental, or emotional condition which may require the applicant to change or modify his occupation, restrict his job opportunities, or require special consideration in placement.)

Productive Capacity

BLS on-the-job studies of productivity in the footwear and furniture industries showed that:

1. Output per man-hour rose from the under 25 age group to the 25-34 group and then declined gradually up to age 65, when a sharper decline occurred. However, differences between adjacent age groups up through age 64 were small. Taking the group aged 35 to 44 as a base and assigning the value of 100.0 to its production, all other age groups were within 8 percentage points.

^{3/} a. Jackson, J. J., "Factors Involved in Absenteeism," Personnel Journal, 1944, Vol. 22, Pages 289-295.

b. Bethel, L. L., Et Al., Industrial Organization and Management, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1945, Page 481.