THE JOB MOBILITY OF OLDER WORKERS

Although the older worker has often been praised for stability, this desirable trait may be accompanied by a diminished job mobility, either geographic or occupational.

Migratory patterns among a sample group of men 18 to 64 were studied recently by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, during the period from March 1962 to March 1963.1/ The study found that men aged 45 and older were only half as likely to move across a county line, or further, as the general average for the group. Married men were less willing to move than the others whether or not they had children, probably because of family ties, home ownership, or the job of the wife.

Other general findings of the study applied generally to both older and younger workers. For instance, professional and technical workers were more apt to move than the others. Some with skills in nationwide demand were more likely to get job offers from a distant location or to be transferred by their company. Having high incomes and better employment prospects, they were financially able to make major geographic moves.

Half the group moved either to take a job, to look for one, or to make a job transfer. Unemployed workers were more likely to migrate than the employed, and in general did better than those who did not move. About 72 percent of those unemployed in March 1962, who migrated during the next year, were employed in the following March, compared to only 55 percent of those who stayed at home. It would appear that the older workers' reluctance to move seriously impeded their chances of re-employment.

Most migrants remained in the same occupational group, no matter where they moved, except for nonfarm laborers. Of the laborers in the sample, only 35 percent were still laborers in March 1963, while 30 percent had become operatives, eight percent were craftsmen, and 18 percent had become white-collar workers.

The older worker's lack of occupational mobility was noted in a study by the United States Department of Labor in seven labor market areas 2/ which showed the pattern of job stability increasing after age 45, and most sharply at age 65. In areas where manufacturing employment was important, holders of one job became more numerous with advancing age than elsewhere. The average duration of jobs also increased with

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1/ Saben, Samuel, "Geographic Mobility and Employment Status, March 1962 - March 1963," Monthly Labor Review, August 1964, Pages 873 - 881. (This article is also summarized in Business Week for October 3, 1963.)

2/ U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment Security, Older Worker Adjustment to Labor Market Practices: An Analysis of Experience in Seven Major Labor Markets. BES No. R151, Washington, D. C., 1956.

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