war prices. The surveys show that retired or partially retired workers who were physically able went to work in the war period or had more regular employment than in 1941. This situation supports the presumption that, as a rule, persons over 65 years of age prefer work to other alternatives open to them, namely, living below their customary standard on their retirement incomes or, if in need, asking aid from relatives or public assistance.

Factors Influencing Trends in Employment of the Aged

By S. J. Mushkin and Alan Berman*

The future costs of the old-age and survivors insurance program under the Social Security Act will depend in considerable measure on the extent to which aged persons choose to remain in gainful covered employment rather than to retire and receive an annuity under the insurance system. In turn, the aged worker's decision to retire or to keep on working is influenced by a number of factors. There is evidence that many of the aged now on the benefit rolls are those unable, because of their physical condition, to remain in covered employment. Many other aged workers, however, are able to work and, unless they have other resources, the small average benefit payable under the insurance program, coupled with rising living costs, compels them to continue in employment as long as jobs are available.

As of June 1947, about 800,000 aged workers were receiving retirement benefits under the old-age and survivors insurance program; in addition, approximately a million workers were eligible to receive such benefits but elected instead to remain in covered employment. Despite the large number of aged persons with insured status who preferred active employment to retirement, it is significant that approximately 20 percent of all men 65 years or older were receiving retirement benefits under the old-age and survivors insurance program or under the related programs of the railroad, civil-service, or State and local retirement systems. An additional 20 percent of the aged men in the population were receiving old-age assistance as of June 1947. Similarly, about 35 percent of the aged women were in receipt of benefits under social insurance and related retirement programs or were receiving old-age assistance.

Long-range planning of the Federal program of old-age and survivors insurance requires estimates of the flow of contributions and benefits and of the growth in reserves for many decades ahead. The distribution of ages at which persons will retire and receive benefits is one of a series of many assumptions that form a component part of these long-range projections.

An understanding of the trends in employment status of the aged over the past decades can be gained only by reference to the many changes that have occurred in demographic factors, in the basic employment structure of the economy, in social policy, and in individual and community attitudes.

The decennial censuses for the period 1870–1940, coupled with the estimates for more recent years by the Bureau of the Census in the Monthly Report on the Labor Force, provide a basis for observing the historical trend in the work status of the aged. Since the decennial censuses except that for 1940 were taken at approximately the same level of business activity, they generally furnish a uniform frame of reference for gauging secular employment and industrial trends. However, between the census of 1870 and the last one in 1940, there were changes in scope, in methods of enumeration and processing of returns, and in methods of presenting resultant occupational statistics. The occupational data used in this study are largely those available from a study made by Alba M. Edwards for the Bureau of the Census, in which occupations listed in the censuses from 1870 to 1930 were arranged as nearly as practicable according to similar data in the 1930 census, with estimates when necessary for underenumeration and for interpolated age groups. The age breaks used here for particular occupations for those years came from unrevised census material, but these data were in turn revised in accordance with Mr. Edwards' estimates for aggregate overenumeration or underenumeration for each of the years.

The data for 1940 are those presented in the 1940 census report on the labor force. These data differ only slightly from the adjusted 1940 figures prepared later by Mr. Edwards.

For female gainful workers and the female labor force, the figures used here exclude unpaid family workers. They were eliminated from the employment data both because they were not "employed" in the same sense as other gainful workers and because their inclusion would have made the data less comparable from census year to census year. A correction for male unpaid family workers was not made, since in the aggregate such workers do not represent a significant proportion of all male workers.

The data as adjusted are summarized in table 1, which shows the num-

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* Bureau of Research and Statistics, Division of Finance and Economic Studies.

ber of aged persons in the working population and aged workers as a per-
cent of all aged persons in the country. Over the entire period 1870–1940 the
number of men 65 years or older in-
creased at a relatively greater rate
than did the total population, but
the proportion of aged men in the
working force declined. In 1870, 62.6
percent of the aged men were working;
in 1910, 63.7 percent, and in 1940, 41.5 percent. During the same period,
percentages of aged women who were
working moved somewhat more er-
ratically. Starting from a low in 1870,
the percentages rose until 1910, de-
clined from 1910 to 1940, and rose once
more for 1947. In absolute numbers
there was a rise, in general, for both
men and women throughout this peri-
ode. In April 1947, approximately
2.8 million persons 65 years and over,
or 27 percent of the aged population,
were in the labor force. Of this num-
ber, 2.4 million were men, who com-
prised 48.4 percent of all aged men.
These figures reflect the residue of
wartime demands on the civilian
population to engage in productive
employment and the favorable em-
ployment opportunities for older
workers.

The trend in the work status of
the aged in the nonagricultural sector
of the economy is of more direct interest
than the aggregate employment trend
in evaluating the development of Fed-
eral old-age and survivors insurance,
since agricultural workers are not as
yet strictly comparable. The trend
in the work status of the aged in the
nonagricultural sector of the economy
is difficult because of the movement
of retired farmers from farms to towns
and cities and the lesser movement of
industrial and commercial workers to
towns and rural farm areas when they
retire. By way of approximating the trend
in employment of aged workers in
nonagricultural industries, the num-
ber of aged persons engaged in such
industries was compared with the non-
farm aged population (table 2). In
1920, 49.5 percent of all aged men in
urban and rural nonfarm areas were
gainfully employed. Between 1920 and
1930, this proportion declined by
only 1.5 percentage points, while the
proportion of gainfully employed
women 65 years of age and over in
urban and rural nonfarm areas in-
creased slightly—0.3 percentage
points. A sharper decline in the em-
ployment of the aged occurred by 1940:
Census data for that year show a de-
cline of 12.2 percentage points from
1930 in the number of aged men in the
nonagricultural labor force and of 1.7
percentage points for aged women
workers. These changes parallel
those indicated by the data on aged
men and women workers in all pur-
suits shown in table 1.

In evaluating the sharp decline from
1930 to 1940, two major qualifications
must be considered, namely, the count
of aged in the population and of aged
in the labor force. The Sixteenth
Population Census gives the following
qualification on the count of the aged:

A comparison of the 1940 age data
for the United States with a compu-
tation of the expected survivors from
the 1930 population indicates that the
number of persons enumerated in 1940
65 years of age and over was ap-
preciably in excess of the number
that might be expected to have sur-
vived from the group 55 years old and
over in 1930. This comparison also
indicates that the number of persons
55 to 64 years of age in 1940 was some-
what smaller than the number that
might be expected to have survived
from the age group 45 to 54 years in
1930. It is possible that the enact-
ment of old-age insurance and old-
age assistance legislation during the
decade may have led to some over-
statement of age in 1940 by persons
actually 55 to 64 years old, but it is
also possible that persons in this age
range may have understated their ages
in 1930.5

Concerning the aged in the labor
force, the Bureau of the Census says:

For persons over 65 years of age,
and to some extent for those 55 to
64 years old, the statistics on em-
ployment status are less reliable and less
meaningful than for younger persons.
In these age classes it is difficult to
draw the line between able-bodied
persons seeking work and old and
retired persons no longer in the labor
force. Moreover, many men in
these age groups at the time of the
census had been forced into retire-
ment because of their inability to
compete with younger workers, al-
though they were still able and will-
ing to work. Many of these premiu-

Table 1.—Men and women 65 years of age
and over who were gainfully occupied in
nonagricultural industries or who were
in the nonagricultural labor force, as
percent of the urban and rural non-
farm population, 1870–1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,494</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,508</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>2,050</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Census classifications, 1900-40, for urban, rural
65 years, and all nonfarm and farm areas are not strictly comparable.
2 Percents were estimated from trend lines, and applied to
population of men and women 65 years of age and over. The 1870
population was corrected for underenumeration (see Comparative
Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1940, p. 91, table
14, footnote 5).
3 Assuming 5,000 unpaid family workers.
4 Excludes unpaid family workers.
shortage, although they were not actively seeking work at the time of the 1940 census.1

Because of the lack of census data on the age distribution of urban and rural nonfarm population before 1920, another measure was developed in this study to isolate the influence of farm employment on the employment trends of the aged. For each of the census years 1870–1940 the proportion of aged men to all men gainfully occupied (or in the labor force) was computed separately for agricultural and nonagricultural pursuits. These two percentages for each census year were then applied respectively to modified figures for all males in agricultural and nonagricultural classifications.2 The resulting numbers of aged men gainfully occupied in the two categories were added together for each census year and then expressed as percentages of the total aged male population (see tabulation). The same procedure was followed to obtain the percents for the aged women who were estimated to be gainfully occupied. The method used assumes that the proportion of aged persons in agriculture and in nonagricultural industries would be the same as those indicated by each census despite the assumed 1940 distribution between industry and agriculture for each census year of employment.

Although by this method the proportion of aged men gainfully occupied in the labor force is shown to have increased, the decline from 1970 to 1930 is small; table 1, on the other hand, indicates a steep and continuous decrease. For women the tabulation would seem to be in agreement with table 1; in both instances the trend values are rather indeterminate.

Demographic Factors

In the 70-year period from 1870 to 1940, the proportion of aged persons in the population more than doubled (table 3). The proportion of aged men rose from 3.0 percent of the male population in 1870 to 6.6 percent in 1940, and the proportion of aged women in the female population rose from 3.0 percent to 7.0 percent.

The aged have constituted an increasing proportion of the total labor force over the past decades. Although the proportion of aged men who were working has declined over the decades, workers 65 years and over have accounted for a slightly rising percent of the total male labor force (table 4). Women workers aged 65 and over, in contrast, have represented a fairly constant proportion of the female labor force.

The age distribution of persons 65 years and over is an important factor in determining their employment status, since their age determines in part their availability for work.

While the median age of the population rose from 20 years in 1870 to 29 years in 1940, the median age of those aged 65 and over remained almost constant—about 71.2 for men and 72.2 for women.

Table 3.—Men and women 65 years of age and over: Total number and percent of total population in the United States, 1870–1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (in thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>1,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>1,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>1,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>1,242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1,325</td>
<td>1,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,377</td>
<td>1,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>1,428</td>
<td>1,424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


2 The modified agricultural gainfully occupied figures were based on the percentage of the total male population engaged in agriculture in 1940 applied to the various total male populations of each census year. Then the modified figures for the nonagricultural gainfully occupied were obtained by subtracting the derived modified figure for agricultural gainfully occupied from the reported total gainfully occupied in the census.

Table 4.—Percent of total population gainfully occupied or in the labor force and percent of gainfully occupied or in the labor force, 65 years of age and over, by sex, for the United States, by decennial years 1870–1940, 1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent of total population gainfully occupied or in the labor force</th>
<th>Percent of gainfully occupied or in the labor force, 65 years of age and over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Represents percentage of total population in the labor force and of labor force 65 years of age and over.

Notes:


The relative stability of the age distribution among the aged suggests that increasing age has not been a factor in the decline in the proportion of aged in the working force during this period. The intermediate population estimates prepared by the Bureau of the Census, based on earlier National Resources Planning Board estimates, indicate that by the year 2000 the median age of the aged will have increased by about 1 year.

**Economic Factors**

The gradual transition of the Nation from an agricultural to a primarily industrial economy has had a significant influence on the aggregate trends in the employment status of the aged. With industrialization came mechanization and a rationalization of industrial processes. A variety of such forces reduced the possible areas of work for those 65 years and over. On the other hand, the greater opportunity for employment in consumer services of various kinds and in the professions and the marked variety of such forces reduced the possible areas of work for those 65 years and over. On the other hand, the greater opportunity for employment in consumer services of various kinds and in the professions and the marked reduction in hours of work are factors that should be favorable for the older worker.

The relative decline in agricultural employment over the past decades has undoubtedly had an important influence on the employment status of the aged. Individuals can be useful on the farm to a considerably more advanced age than is possible in industry. The chances for work were accordingly greater when a large segment of the working force of the Nation was engaged in farming than at present, when industrial and commercial pursuits predominate and large-scale enterprise has narrowed the area of effective self-employment.

From 1870 to 1947 the proportion of the male population at work in agriculture dropped more than 70 percent. In 1870, 43.5 percent of all men who were working were employed in agriculture and by 1947, 12.0 percent. In 1870, 6.4 million men were employed in agriculture. The number reached a peak—10.4 million—in 1910 and then declined to 6.9 million in 1947. During the same period, 1870-1947, total male employment increased fourfold.

When unpaid family workers are excluded, employment of women in agriculture has been relatively insignificant throughout the entire period 1870-1947. In 1870, 0.2 percent of the female population of working age was engaged in agriculture; in 1920, 1.3 percent; and in 1947, 0.6 percent. There was a continued rise in female agricultural employment until 1920, when the figure stood at 500,000. From then until 1940 it declined. During the war, all-time highs were reached, but by April 1947 the number had dropped off to 350,000. Over the period 1870-1947 all female employment rose from 1.8 million to 15.4 million.

The decline in employment opportunities for the aged that accompanied the decline in the importance of agriculture in the economy has been offset, in part, by the growth in other types of occupations in which the aged have been able to engage in productive employment. Nonagricultural self-employment, in which the aged can set their own conditions and pace of work, has shown some increase. Chart 1 illustrates the broad changes in patterns of employment that have occurred from 1910 to 1940. The relative number of professional persons increased about 50 percent. The proportion of proprietors in wholesale and retail trade also went up somewhat. The continued importance of self-employment as an occupation for the aged is illustrated by the fact that 55 percent of all aged men employed in 1940 were employers or "own-account" workers. Other occupations in which there was a concentration of aged workers include the apparel and accessory shops, finance and real estate, and various personal services, as well as the professions.

The differences in the age distribution of workers in different industries suggest a variety of factors that influence job opportunities for aged persons or those approaching retirement age. These include such factors as the historical influx of various national groups into specific industries, such as that of Jewish immigrant workers into the clothing trades at the turn of the twentieth century, the effects of seniority provisions and union and industry restrictions on the training of new workers in skilled trades, the physical requirements of an occupation in relation to the capacity of the older worker, and the importance of skills that permit the aged to keep their jobs in specific industries. Table 6 shows the median age of the employed labor force, excluding emergency workers, for industries in which at least 5 percent of the workers were aged 65 or over. Of this group, agriculture was by far the most important, with 41 percent of all employed men 65 years of age and over. The median age of all men engaged in agriculture was 39.4 years. The second most important group, from the standpoint of employment of the aged, was insurance and real estate, which accounted for 3 percent of the aged employed men in 1940; the median age of the men in this industry was 43.2 years. As a whole, the table reflects the concentration of aged men in services, trades, professions, and agriculture. In only three industries—agriculture, hotels and lodging places, and certain non-profit organizations—did aged women account for as much as 5 percent of all the women employees.

Employment opportunities for the aged are affected not only by the general patterns of employment but also by the changes in industrial processes. The dilution of skills reflected in the relative growth in the number of semiskilled workers as compared with the relative decline in the number of skilled workers has lessened the opportunity of skilled older workers to compete for Jobs. Along with the dilution of skills, the increasing speed of industrial processes has acted as a deterrent to the employment of older workers.

However, increased mechanization of industry and the application of mass production techniques have been accompanied by a steady reduction in working hours. From 1870 to 1940 the average weekly hours of employment dropped more than one-third, from 66.3 to 43.0 hours. While, thus far, the reduction in the workweek has not seemingly altered the declin-

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10 J. Frederic Dewhurst and Associates, America's Needs and Resources, p. 29, table 3. (Twentieth Century Fund.)
ing trend in employment of persons aged 65 and over, with further reduction in the workweek, workers may find continued employment possible even after reaching age 65.

The chances of aged persons' finding jobs are tied in very closely with the national employment situation. The influences of cyclical fluctuations on employment trends of the aged are sharply revealed by the situation of older workers in 1940 and that in subsequent years. In the depression of the 1930's many aged persons lost their jobs and were forced into retirement. These withdrawals are reflected in the sharp drop in the proportion of aged workers in the labor force in 1940. The favorable economic climate during the war created employment opportunities for the aged as well as for other workers, and the proportion of the aged in the labor force increased and in 1947 was above the 1940 level. The Nation is committed to a policy of fostering maximum production, purchasing power, and employment through the cooperative efforts of industry, agriculture, labor, consumers, and government. The continued enjoyment of a high level of production and employment would maintain favorable job opportunities for the aged. A prosperous Nation, however, can afford the luxury of allowing its aged citizens to choose between gainful employment and retirement and leisure.

Charts 1.-Percentage distribution of persons aged 14 and over gainfully occupied in 1910, 1920, and 1930 and in the labor force in 1940, by social-economic groups

Socio-Economic Policies

Protective Federal and State legislation relating to minimum wages, working conditions, accident prevention, lighting, sanitation, and rest periods also influences the conditions surrounding employment and both the suitability of aged persons for work and their decisions to remain on the job.

With the growth in labor-union organization, seniority provisions established by labor-management agreements have assumed increasing importance in recent years. These provisions generally operate to safeguard the jobs of older workers during periods of lay-offs and rehiring. This is especially true since older workers are generally less mobile; labor turnover among the upper age groups tends to be substantially lower than that in the younger age groups.

The rapid development and extension of retirement plans in the past decade or so have undoubtedly influenced retirement practices. Private industrial pensions for the aged were first introduced about 1875. In its initial stages the pension movement grew rather slowly; by 1900 only about a dozen plans had been set up, by 1920 about 270 were in force, by 1935 there were approximately 750 voluntary pension plans in operation. The majority of the workers covered by these plans were employed in the large heavy industries, however, and at no time before 1935 were there more than 15 percent of the employees in industrial, commercial, and transportation establishments covered. In 1935, Federal legislation set up retirement programs for all workers in industry, commerce, and rail transportation. In 1946, 41.5 million workers had insured status under the old-age and survivors insurance program. 11.75 million jobs were

12 Excluding veterans insured under section 210 of the 1946 amendments to the Social Security Act.
Table 6.—Percentage distribution of all aged employed men and women and median age of employed men and women (excluding emergency workers) in industries in which 5 per cent or more of the workers were aged 65 and over, 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex and Industry</th>
<th>Median age</th>
<th>Percent of all aged employed men or women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All employed men aged 65 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, except footwear</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparel and related services</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware, farm implements, and building materials retailing</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other retail stores</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, insurance, and real estate</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance and real estate</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and repair services, except automobiles</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal services:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic service</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and lodging places</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous personal services</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and related services</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical and other health services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal, engineering, and miscellaneous professional services</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable, religious, and membership organizations</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government (not elsewhere classified)</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All employed women aged 65 and over</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, except footwear</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and lodging places</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable, religious, and membership organizations</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


covered under railroad retirement, 2.25 million under Federal civil-service and related systems, and 2 million under State and local retirement plans. In addition, many private industry plans have been adopted or amended to provide supplementary retirement benefits for their employees. In 1946 there were about 7,500 such plans in operation, or 10 times the number in effect in 1935.

Retirement plans meet an essential need for security of workers in their old age if they are unable to work or if they lose their earnings through unemployment. Such programs facilitate the retirement of older persons whose continued employment might lead to inefficiency in production processes or, as in the railroad industry, might be hazardous to public safety. These plans also provide a basic income to aged individuals who retire voluntarily.

Psychological Factors

More intangible influences affecting trends in employment of the aged are the psychological and social factors that determine the availability of the aged for gainful employment. Most people want to be one of the group and to act as the other members of the group do; if most of the older members of the community have jobs, the jobless old person feels he is the "odd" one and out of his group's activities. Community sentiment, the attitude of society, opinions of friends and family all contribute to shaping the motivation of the older worker to seek or continue in employment. The wartime delay in retirement and the return of many aged workers to employment after they had retired demonstrated the importance of community sentiments on the employment of the aged. Patterns of thought concerning the work status of the aged generally evolve slowly and are conditioned in turn by earlier experiences. The declining trend in employment of the aged over the past 70 years occurred within the framework of an age distribution of population in which the aged, though increasing in relative importance, represented only a small percent of the total population. In another four or five decades, when the aged are expected to represent more than 15 percent of the population, the increase in their relative importance may alter their attitude toward remaining in the labor market, and the attitude of industry toward fostering favorable work conditions for aged persons may also alter, thereby encouraging a larger participation of the aged in employment.

Contributing to the desire for employment on the part of the aged, along with the necessity of family and self-support, are the desire for self-expression and the need to make a contribution to society. On the other hand, with increased leisure time resulting from the shortening of the workweek, recreation habits and hobbies take on greater importance in the normal life of adults. Habits of leisure and established hobbies, when they exist, reduce the pressure on older persons to maintain active interests through gainful employment and accordingly make the environment for more retirement favorable.

Summary

The proportion of all aged persons who engage in gainful employment has declined fairly steadily over the past seven decades. This decline was interrupted by the demand for rapid expansion of the labor force during the world wars but was accelerated by the depression of the 1930's. Many factors—demographic, economic, social, and psychological—are reflected in this historical trend. As older citizens become an increasingly large proportion of the total population, however, the earlier trend may possibly be reversed. Employment policies and practices that were satisfactory when only 3 percent of the population was 65 years and over and the median age of the population was about 20 may prove unsatisfactory when more than 13 percent of the population is in the older ages and the median age of the population rises to 37 or 38 years. In the past, job opportunities for the aged diminished with the relative decline in agricultural employment, the growth of large-scale industries, and the development of mass-production techniques. However, many factors—including the growth in professional employments and in employment in the trades and service industries, the shortening of the workweek, and the improvement in working conditions—may create a more favorable environment for employment of the older worker. Improved health of the population and of the aged would increase the availability of the aged for work. The growth in application of seniority rules in industries and in provisions for retirement annuities for the aged, as well as changes in psychological and community sentiments toward their employment, will also have a profound influence on their employment status in the future. Whatever changes occur in the proportion of the aged employed in the labor force will significantly affect the costs of the old-age and survivors insurance program.