



Aging and the Accommodating Workplace: Policy Implications of Employer Practice

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Overview

- Older worker demographics
- Age-related disabilities and workplace accommodations
- Preliminary results of attempt to collect data on current provision of workplace accommodations for age-related disabilities
- Analysis of survey methodology and alternative options for collection of data on workplace accommodations



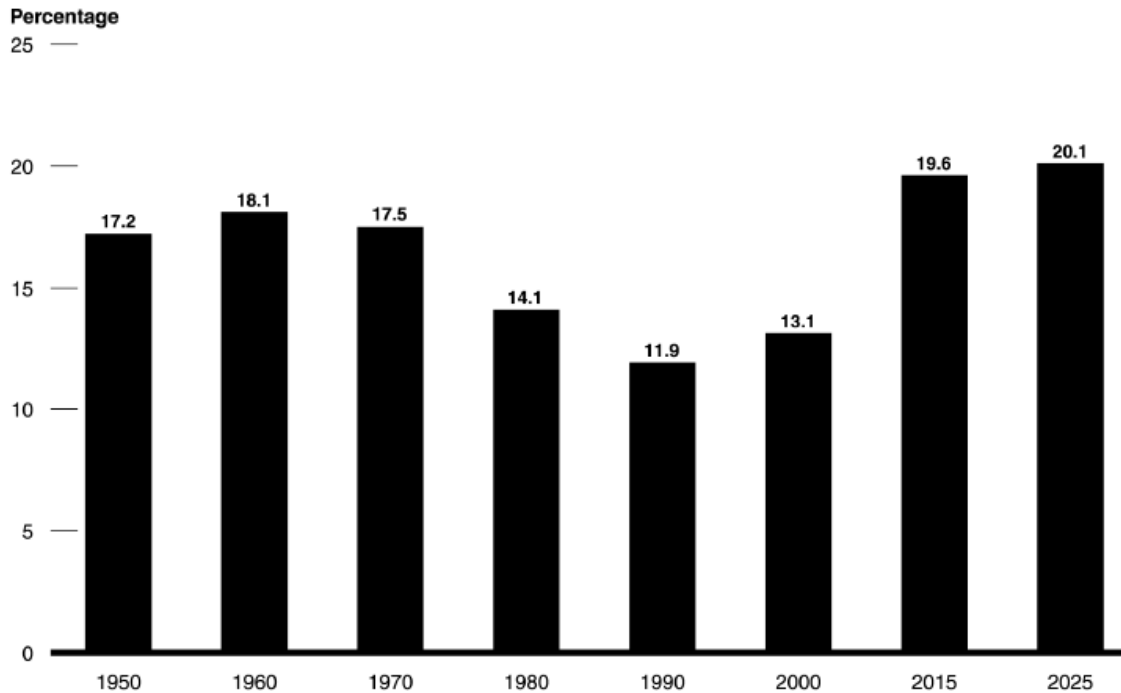
Older Worker Demographics

- Between 2001-2010, the number of workers over age 55 will increase 46.6%, while workers between the ages of 25-54 will increase by only 5% (SHRM, 2003)
- By 2015, nearly 20% of the labor force will be over the age of 55 (GAO, 2001)
- Increase in retirement age from 65 to 67 will likewise increase the number of older workers

Source: The AARP Work and Career Study by Roper ASW, 2002



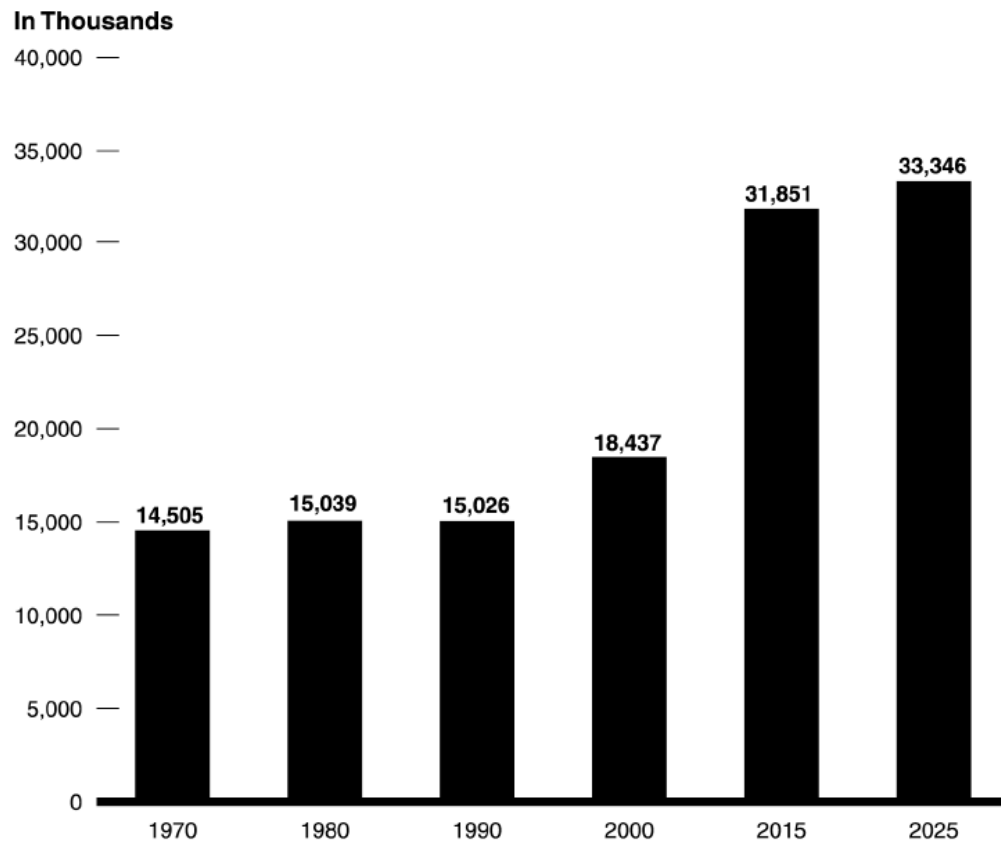
Percentage of the Labor Force that is 55 Years of Age and Older 1950-2025



Source: BLS.



Past and Projected Number of Workers Over Age 55, 1970-2025



Source: BLS.



Why Are We Concerned About Older Workers?

- Potentially a large percentage of the labor force
- Assuming retirement, loss of valuable skills and knowledge
- Older workers experience physical, neurological and sensory changes throughout the aging process – “age-related disabilities” which may affect their safety and productivity if they remain in the workforce



Why Workplace Accommodations for Older Workers?

- Significant portion of the labor force with age-related disabilities
- Accommodations address:
 - Loss of productivity
 - Safety issues
 - Assuming retirement, loss of valuable skills and knowledge
- Examples:
 - Making existing facilities accessible;
 - Job restructuring;
 - Part-time or modified work schedules;
 - Providing assistive technology (AT)



Data on Workplace Accommodations

- Little national data on the prevalence and nature of workplace accommodations
- Without information on accommodation practices, creating accommodation strategies for a large number of older workers will be difficult
- Our interest:
 - Demographics of older employees
 - Workplace accommodation policies
 - What employers are doing now to accommodate older workers

Methodology

- Environmental scan/ Literature review
- Telephone interviews of Fortune 500 (n=61) from BLS-projected areas of economic growth
- Targeted group: HR professionals
 - Typically recipients of ADA and disability-related training
 - Considered to be contact for identifying and securing workplace accommodations



Survey Results

- 2 responses - Very difficult to find appropriate person to survey
- No accurate count on number of employees with disabilities (self-disclosed)
- Records on accommodations are difficult to keep due to the number of unofficial (ad hoc) accommodations
- One company continually assesses and modifies accommodation arrangements



Additional Insights

- Respondents report very small percentage of employees age 65 or older (~2-3%)
- Most accommodations not related to age, but driven by medical need
- Respondents are aware of the growing workforce of older adults, but are not targeting this group for accommodations
- Companies anticipate supplying a greater number of workplace accommodations for older workers within the next 20 years



Alternative Methodology

- Online survey format
 - Directed to appropriate person (supervisors) from within the company
 - Avoid roadblocks faced by telephone interviews
 - Time aspect - convenient and flexible
- Business Advisory Network - WorkRERC



Conclusions

- Employers must take action now to prepare for aging workforce - including plans for workplace accommodations
- “Post mortem” analysis of original study methodology
- Data on workplace accommodations:
 - With this data, employers can anticipate and address key workforce-related issues
 - Need to find valid, reliable methods of collecting data on workplace accommodations
- Public policy standpoint:
 - Increase awareness of importance of proactive approaches by employers in addressing the issues of the aging workforce



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