

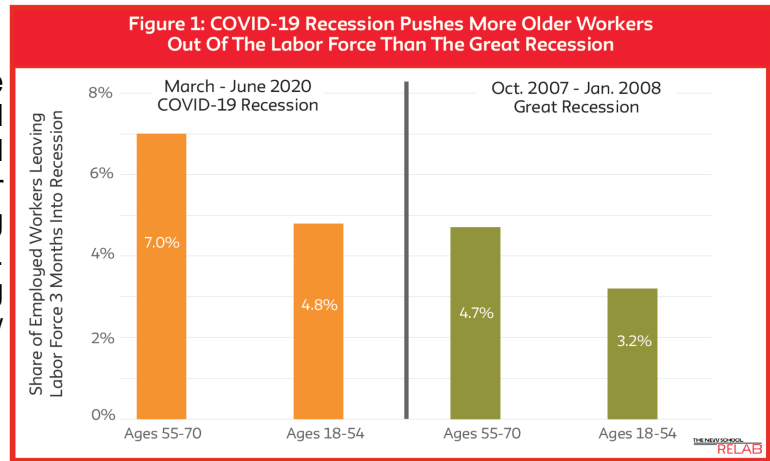
Has The Pandemic Pushed Older Workers into Early Retirement?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the baby boomer generation was on track to be the labor force's largest age group. The pandemic has altered economist's prediction of a "gray wave" of older adults delaying retirement in favor of working and saving. Nearly 5 million Americans between the ages of 55-70 have lost their jobs, and of those, 7% have left the labor force entirely and are unlikely to return. This level is much higher than what was seen during the Great Recession (See Figure 1). In April and June, labor force participation rates started to increase for younger and middle-age workers, but not for older workers. Many are still unable to return to work. Those that can't are faced with the decision to either protect their health or go back to work.

According to a study by the Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis at The New School, around 4 million older workers will potentially be pushed into early retirement before they are financially ready. They also found that women and nonwhite older workers were at a higher risk. Lower paying jobs in food service and entertainment were among the most affected by pandemic related closures. These industries employ a large number of older nonwhite and female workers and typically do not have work from home options. Those who cannot re-enter the workforce as businesses start to reopen will be forced into early retirement. Early retirement can have severe consequences, including an increase in old-age poverty, as many will have to dip into saving and retirement funds.

MaturityWorks is a training program that helps people aged 55 and older increase their job skills through paid community service in local non-profit organizations and public agencies. Participants in the program build their self-confidence and skills through on the job training opportunities while earning a modest income. MaturityWorks continues to support participants during this time of social isolation and has provided technology to individuals to facilitate virtual training.

Source: MoneyWatch, The New School Status of Older Workers



The Rise of Ageism



Age discrimination in the workplace and in hiring has been a persistent issue for older workers. Unemployment rates are high right now, and many older workers are feeling the effects. Economists from the University of California San Diego and the University of Georgia compared the unemployment rates with age discrimination complaints during different economic downturns. They found that age discrimination rises with unemployment rates leading them to conclude that ageism is impacting the mature workforce. According to AARP, ageism can have adverse effects on the economy. In 2018 the U.S economy missed out on \$850 billion in economic activity due to ageism.

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 protects workers over 40. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), some employers might not even realize they are discriminating. The EEOC states that excluding older employees from certain activities is a form of age discrimination, even if it is in their best interest. So, while employers might think they are protecting their older employees' health by isolating them from the rest of the team or reducing their hours, they might be discriminating.

Some other age discrimination signs include using specific language in a job posting, such as "tech-savvy" or "high energy." According to Kellee Boulais Kruse of The Employment Law Group in Washington, D.C., using specific hiring and workplace comments can indicate a discriminatory mindset. The number one way to fight age discrimination in the workplace is to be aware of and bring attention to discriminatory policies and practices.

Source: Forbes, AARP

The Divide Between Technology and Older Workers



Connecting with technology can be a challenge for older Americans, especially those looking to get back into the workforce. To compete in the job market today, it is often necessary to understand technology and how to utilize a computer and basic programs such as Microsoft Office. Having tech skills on a resume is essential and can help make you stand out as a candidate.

Technology has advanced rapidly over the past decade and has changed how we live our everyday lives, including how we apply for jobs. Sites like Indeed.com and LinkedIn.com make it easy for employers to post jobs and simplifies the application process. Job seekers can search for jobs, network, and even upload their resume to be viewed by recruiters and employers.

AARP surveyed Americans over 50 and found that 75% were using social media daily, but not to its fullest potential. Many don't feel confident with their ability to use technology, which can discourage them from using it.

While the advancements in technology may be intimidating for someone who is not well-versed in using a computer, programs like the Senior Community Service Employment Program offer skills training to help older Americans get connected and back to work. Participants in MaturityWorks work with a career counselor to upgrade their job search skills, resume, and get access to skills training. Participants are then placed in a paid work experience where they can further progress and improve their skills. Participants leave the program feeling more confident in their skills and abilities.

Source: AARP

Success Story



Antonia Ledesma came to New York from the Dominican Republic where she worked in reception and maintenance for an agricultural company.

Seeking employment in her new country, Antonia joined the MaturityWorks program in February of 2017. Antonia faced a tall order: she did not know any English when she moved to America, and learning a new

language later in life is extremely difficult. To address this barrier, she was assigned to the Los Sures Senior Center, a host agency with Spanish-speaking staff to assist her. She trained as a kitchen aide, helping to provide daily meals for the seniors who come to the center. She also learned food safety measures and was able to work on improving her English skills.

Antonia's supervisor, Sonia Iglesias, recognized not only the hard work Antonia put in but also how she conducted herself around the staff. She offered her a permanent position. Antonia was hired as a kitchen aide in February of 2020. "I am very grateful and appreciative of what the program did for me, especially despite my language barrier." Antonia reflected.

Host Agency Spotlight

The Staten Island Business Outreach Center (SIBOC) is a not for profit organization that has been serving the Staten Island community since 1980. SIBOC's mission is to provide technical assistance to business owners, managers, entrepreneurs, residents, and job seekers to ensure their individual growth, thereby providing sustainable economic development on Staten Island. They empower low-income people through a combination of business and workforce assistance. Some of the services they provide include counseling, business plan development, financial literacy, resume writing and interviewing skills workshops, and assistance with Women/Minority-Owned Business Enterprise certification, contracting, and related help.

SIBOC partners with MaturityWorks to support the various programs in their organization. Trainees are placed in administrative and clerical assistant roles to assist SIBOC with administrative, organizational, general computer skills, business counseling, and workforce training skills that prepare class attendees for permanent employment.

One trainee used the knowledge and skills she learned from SIBOC, and the resume and interview help she received from MaturityWorks to land a fulltime job. She now works with the City of New York Department of Small Business Services.

