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Technical information: (202) 523-1944
523-1371
523-1959
Media contact: 523-1913

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EMPLOYEE TENURE AND OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE EARLY 1990S

The amount of time that U.S. workers had been with their current employers in 1991 was little different from 1983 and 1987, according to data released today by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. There was, however, a significant rise in tenure among women, while men's tenure declined in most age groups.

The survey also showed that workers changed occupations at about the same overall rate in 1990 as in the years covered by the two earlier surveys. These data also contrasted by gender, as occupational mobility increased somewhat for women and decreased slightly for men.

The data released today were derived from a special supplement to the January 1991 Current Population Survey (CPS), a survey of about 60,000 households conducted monthly for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census.

Tenure with employer

The median time that all workers had been with their current employers was 4.5 years in January 1991, compared with 4.4 and 4.2 years in 1983 and 1987, respectively. Noteworthy changes, however, took place during the 1983-91 period within certain demographic groups.

While the average length of service with one employer tends to be higher for men than women, the difference narrowed between 1983 and 1991. Over that period, median tenure rose from 3.3 to 3.8 years for women, whereas it held steady for men at 5.1 years. The tenure differential between men and women generally increases with age and is greatest among workers age 45-64 years. It was in the 45- to 54-year age group, however, that the gender differential narrowed the most, as median tenure declined for men--from 13.4 to 12.2 years--and increased moderately for women--from 6.9 to 7.3 years. (See tables 1 and 2.)

Overall tenure for men age 25 and over fell half a year between 1983 and 1991 to 6.4 years, but would have declined even more had their age distribution stayed the same. In fact, tenure declined between 1983 and 1991 for all age intervals for men except the 25- to 34-year group, but the effect was partly offset by the shift of the bulk of the baby-boomers out of that group (in which median tenure was 3.7 years) into the 35- to 44-year group (in which tenure was nearly twice as long). These age-specific declines for men's tenure with their current employers provide some support for the notion that the ties between certain groups of workers and their employers may be loosening.

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Tenure differences between men and women vary among whites, blacks, and persons of Hispanic origin. In the latter two groups, median tenure was about the same for men and women in January 1991, while the gender difference among white workers was about 1-1/2 years.

At the time of the 1991 survey, about 1 in 10 workers had been with their current employer for 20 years or more, about the same proportion as in 1983. For workers aged 45 years and over, nearly 3 in 10 had been with their employer for at least 20 years, again similar to the earlier survey results. One difference between the data for January 1991 and earlier years was among workers 65 years of age and over. Only 34 percent had been with their current employer 20 years or more in 1991; in both 1983 and 1987, the figure was 38 percent. Earlier labor force exits and increases in "post-retirement" work for new employers may help explain this decline. (See table 3.)

Workers in agriculture and public administration have the highest median tenure levels--10.1 and 8.1 years, respectively. The largest tenure increase over the 1983-91 period was in mining--from 5.0 years in 1983 to 7.3 years in 1991; mining employment declined throughout most of the period, and the seniority of its remaining workforce helped drive up tenure in the industry. Tenure declined the most in transportation and public utilities. (See table 4.)

Occupational mobility

About 1 in 10 employed persons changed occupations between January 1990 and January 1991. Women were slightly more likely than men to have changed occupations; their respective mobility rates were 10.7 percent and 9.2 percent. Since 1983, occupational mobility has increased somewhat for women, while it has decreased slightly for men.

Occupational switching is higher for white workers (10.1 percent) than for blacks (8.7 percent) or Hispanics (9.5 percent). Compared with the 1983 survey, occupational mobility was unchanged for whites, up somewhat for blacks, and down for Hispanics. (See table 5.)

Conclusion

While overall tenure and occupational mobility have remained relatively stable in recent years, both have increased somewhat for women. Although these two measures typically are inversely related--greater employment stability being generally indicated by increases in tenure and decreases in occupational switching--the data suggest that women are staying with their employers longer while also changing occupations more frequently as they advance their careers.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 606-STAT; TDD phone: (202) 606-5897; TDD Message Referral phone: 1-800-326-2577.

Table 1. Median years with current employer by workers' age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, January 1991

Age	Total			White		Black		Hispanic	
	Total	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Total, 16 years and over	4.5	5.1	3.8	5.3	3.8	4.4	4.3	3.2	3.2
16 to 24 years	1.2	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.8	1.1	1.2	1.0
25 years and over	5.6	6.4	4.8	6.6	4.8	5.7	5.4	4.1	3.9
25 to 34 years	3.5	3.7	3.2	3.8	3.2	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.8
35 to 44 years	6.0	7.2	5.0	7.4	4.9	6.7	6.1	5.3	4.6
45 to 54 years	10.0	12.2	7.3	12.5	7.1	11.0	10.5	6.2	5.5
55 to 64 years	12.4	15.5	10.4	15.7	10.2	15.1	13.9	8.8	8.0
65 years and over	11.1	13.1	10.4	13.4	10.5	15.1	9.5	(¹)	(¹)

¹ Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

Table 2. Median years with current employer by workers' age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, January 1983

Age	Total			White		Black		Hispanic	
	Total	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Total, 16 years and over	4.4	5.1	3.3	5.3	3.3	4.7	4.4	3.3	2.5
16 to 24 years	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0
25 years and over	5.7	6.9	4.8	7.0	4.7	6.0	5.5	4.8	3.5
25 to 34 years	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.2	2.4
35 to 44 years	5.8	7.7	4.6	7.8	4.4	7.8	5.8	5.2	4.3
45 to 54 years	10.3	13.4	6.9	13.8	6.8	11.6	9.0	7.7	6.8
55 to 64 years	13.6	17.0	10.5	17.6	10.4	13.9	11.5	13.0	8.1
65 years and over	13.2	14.6	11.9	14.7	12.1	13.4	11.1	(¹)	(¹)

¹ Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

Table 3. Distribution of workers by years of tenure with current employer, age, and sex, January 1991

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(Numbers in thousands)

Age and sex	Number employed ¹	Percent distribution by years with current employer						
		Total	1 year or less	2 to 5 years	6 to 9 years	10 to 14 years	15 to 19 years	20 years or more
TOTAL								
16 years and over	115,224	100.0	27.0	32.2	11.9	11.9	6.9	10.2
16 to 24 years	17,388	100.0	61.7	35.3	2.9	-	-	-
25 years and over	97,836	100.0	20.9	31.7	13.4	14.0	8.1	12.0
25 to 34 years	32,906	100.0	30.2	42.6	14.5	10.8	1.9	-
35 to 44 years	30,801	100.0	19.5	30.6	14.4	17.0	11.9	6.6
45 years and over	34,129	100.0	13.1	22.2	11.6	14.3	10.5	28.4
45 to 54 years	19,743	100.0	14.5	23.0	12.4	15.3	10.8	24.0
55 to 64 years	11,207	100.0	11.2	20.3	10.3	13.0	10.6	34.5
65 years and over	3,179	100.0	11.4	23.2	10.7	12.0	8.8	33.9
Men								
16 years and over	62,636	100.0	24.5	30.6	12.0	12.0	7.7	13.2
16 to 24 years	8,951	100.0	59.5	37.3	3.2	-	-	-
25 years and over	53,685	100.0	18.8	29.4	13.4	14.0	9.0	15.3
25 to 34 years	18,138	100.0	27.9	42.4	15.5	11.9	2.3	-
35 to 44 years	16,684	100.0	16.7	27.5	14.6	18.4	14.7	8.1
45 years and over	18,863	100.0	11.8	18.8	10.3	12.1	10.5	36.5
45 to 54 years	10,672	100.0	12.9	18.8	10.9	13.4	11.4	32.6
55 to 64 years	6,384	100.0	10.5	17.9	9.0	10.8	9.6	42.3
65 years and over	1,807	100.0	10.2	21.9	11.2	9.5	7.9	39.3
Women								
16 years and over	52,588	100.0	29.9	34.2	11.8	11.7	5.8	6.6
16 to 24 years	8,437	100.0	64.1	33.3	2.7	-	-	-
25 years and over	44,151	100.0	23.5	34.4	13.5	13.9	6.9	7.9
25 to 34 years	14,768	100.0	33.0	43.0	13.2	9.3	1.5	-
35 to 44 years	14,118	100.0	22.9	34.2	14.2	15.3	8.5	4.9
45 years and over	15,266	100.0	14.7	26.3	13.1	16.9	10.6	18.3
45 to 54 years	9,071	100.0	16.3	28.0	14.2	17.6	10.0	13.9
55 to 64 years	4,822	100.0	12.2	23.5	12.0	16.0	12.0	24.3
65 years and over	1,372	100.0	12.9	25.0	10.0	15.3	10.0	26.7

¹ Includes about 3.2 million persons who did not report data on tenure. These persons are excluded from the distribution shown in this table.

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Table 4. Median years with current employer for workers 25 years and over by industry and sex, January 1983 and January 1991

Industry	Total		Men		Women	
	1983	1991	1983	1991	1983	1991
Agriculture	10.9	10.1	11.5	10.5	7.0	7.2
Wage and salary workers	4.5	3.9	4.8	4.0	3.1	3.8
Self-employed workers	17.3	18.2	19.0	18.9	10.4	14.9
Unpaid family workers	18.7	(¹)	(¹)	(¹)	18.7	(¹)
Nonagricultural industries	5.7	5.6	6.7	6.3	4.8	4.8
Wage and salary workers	5.6	5.5	6.6	6.2	4.8	4.8
Mining	5.0	7.3	5.2	8.0	4.7	5.0
Construction	4.9	5.3	5.0	5.3	3.4	4.6
Manufacturing	7.5	7.0	8.9	8.0	5.8	5.4
Transportation and public utilities	9.0	7.9	9.8	8.8	6.7	6.7
Wholesale and retail trade	4.7	4.3	5.6	4.8	3.4	3.8
Finance, insurance, and real estate	4.9	5.0	5.4	5.5	4.6	4.7
Services	4.9	5.0	5.6	5.7	4.6	4.7
Public administration	7.6	8.1	9.2	9.2	5.9	7.0
Self-employed workers	6.4	6.5	7.5	8.1	4.4	5.0
Unpaid family workers	6.7	6.5	(¹)	(¹)	7.3	8.6

¹ Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

Table 5. Employed civilians in January 1991 by employment status and occupation in January 1990 by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin

Age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin	Employed in January 1991	Status in January 1990				
		Employed				Not employed
		Total ¹	Same occupation	Different occupation		
				Number	Occupational mobility rate ²	
Total, 16 years and over	115,224	104,889	94,324	10,341	9.9	10,335
16 to 24 years	17,388	12,921	9,539	3,346	26.0	4,468
25 years and over	97,836	91,969	84,785	6,995	7.8	5,867
25 to 34 years	32,906	30,361	28,882	3,595	11.9	2,545
35 to 44 years	30,801	29,058	26,940	2,055	7.1	1,744
45 to 54 years	19,743	18,862	17,901	931	4.9	882
55 to 64 years	11,207	10,745	10,390	348	3.2	482
65 years and over	3,179	2,943	2,871	66	2.3	235
Men	62,636	58,062	52,561	5,357	9.2	4,574
Women	52,588	46,827	41,763	4,984	10.7	5,761
White	99,798	91,079	81,742	9,149	10.1	8,719
Black	11,749	10,525	9,584	910	8.7	1,224
Hispanic origin	8,574	7,441	6,715	708	9.5	1,134

¹ Includes persons who did not report occupation in January 1990.

² Percent represents number in a different occupation in January 1991 as a proportion of the total reporting either same or different occupation.

NOTE: Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups.