

# IOWA WORKFORCE Senior Study SENIORS STUDY

# 2005

The Iowa state economy recently has taken a turn for the better. One reason is that the state has increasingly expanded into service, technology and other non-farming industries.

As the state economy changes and grows, the demand for labor will change and grow as well. The changing composition of Iowa's workforce faces several challenges. Perhaps the largest of these concerns is how new and vacated positions can be filled as an increasing number of Iowans grow older and leave the workforce.

There have been relatively few formal evaluations of Iowa's aging workforce, and the state has lacked a coordinated and comprehensive strategic plan concerning the intersection between the workforce and the aging population.

The University of Iowa Center on Aging received a contract from Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) to conduct a formal evaluation of labor force participation among Iowans over the age of 55. The primary goal of this evaluation, called the Iowa Workforce Seniors Study (IWSS), was to describe the labor market involving aging Iowans across three counties.

The three specific aims of this research were to: (a) examine the occupational structures and roles being filled by aging Iowans, (b) identify variables related to continued workforce participation among aging Iowans, and (c) distinguish organizations that employ aging Iowans from those which do not. The results of this research study follow.

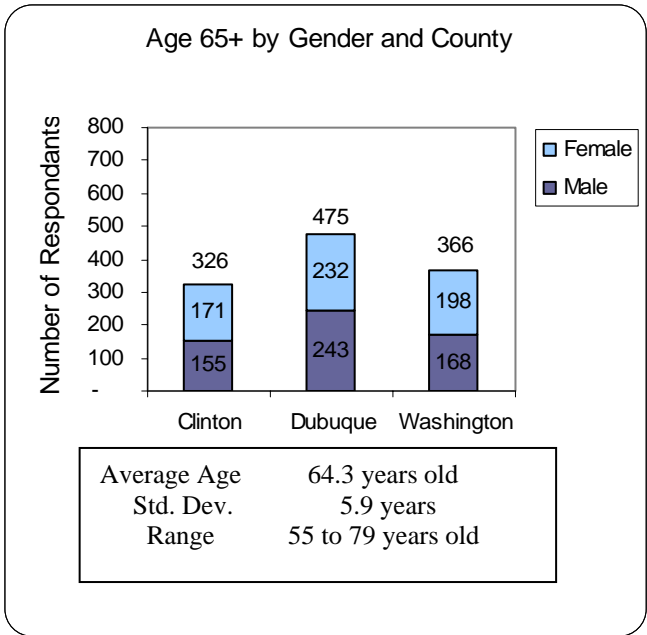
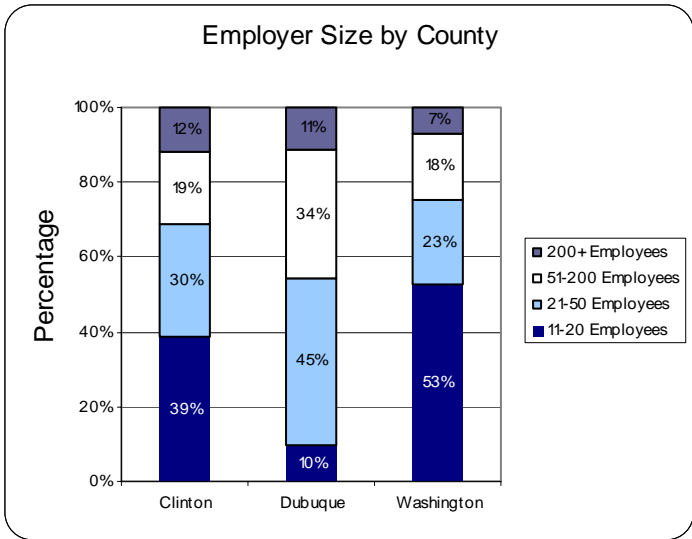


# RESEARCH METHOD

The Iowa Workforce Seniors Study was completed in three phases. First, we conducted a cross-sectional analysis of the labor force markets in Clinton, Dubuque and Washington Counties. This consisted of surveying 1,167 registered voters over the age of 55 in each county, and collecting information about their current workforce participation as well as their attitudes about work and plans for retirement. We also examined the supply of employment opportunities for aging lowans in each county by fielding surveys from 311 businesses with more than 10 employees.

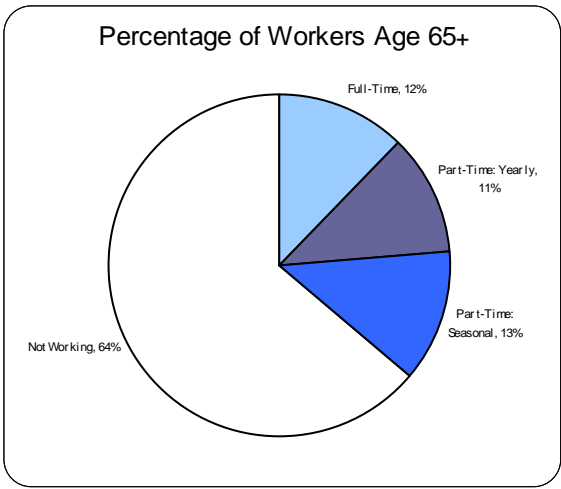
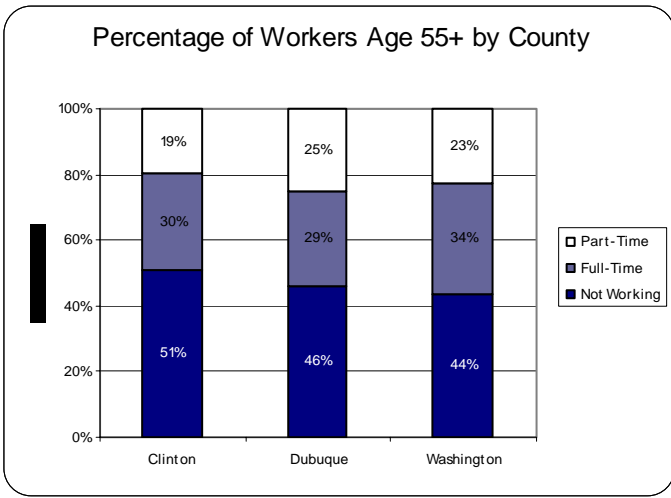
In the second phase, we conducted three focus groups with aging lowans and three focus groups with human resource specialists among the same counties surveyed earlier. These discussions helped us to interpret the survey results, and also identify issues that were not featured in the survey response data.

In the third phase, we completed a statistical analysis of the structures and roles occupied by aging lowans, tested the relationships among variables thought to be related to workforce participation among aging lowans, and examined the organizations that employed them.

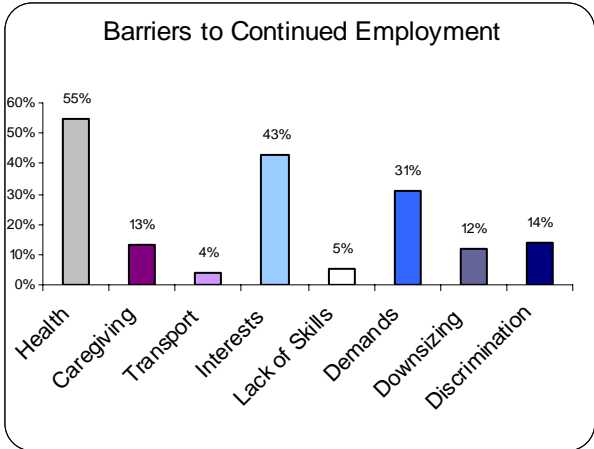
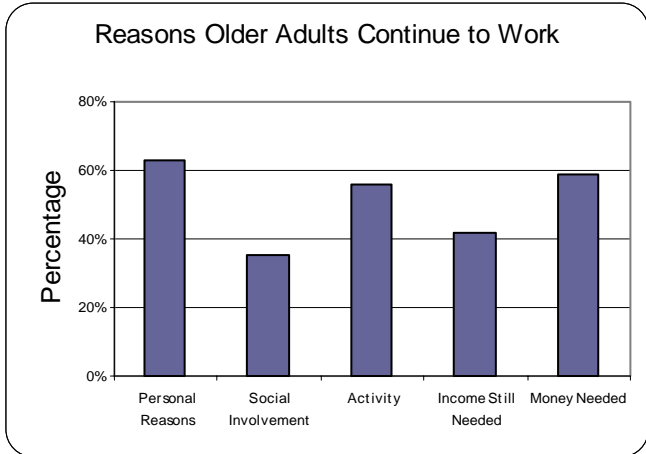


# RESULTS

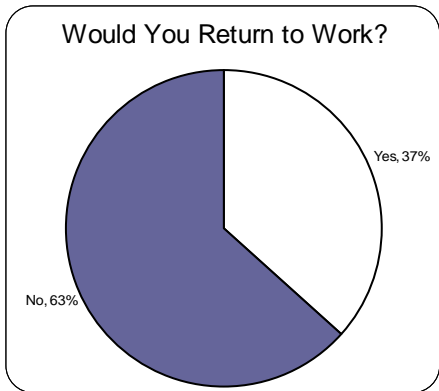
The IWSS revealed lowans over 55 are changing the structure of workforce participation by resorting to more part-time and seasonal jobs. The number of people, especially women, who remain in jobs or return to work after the age of 65 is also increasing. Still, the particular occupations and roles filled by aging workers have remained consistent with previous generations. Aging lowans are most likely to work in service occupations and assume roles that are less physically demanding, less stressful and require less additional training. These roles are found in the education, healthcare and technology industries—which also happen to be occupations with the greatest demand over the next 10 years.



The IWSS also determined that older adults' workforce participation was strongly linked to health and income as well as certain attitudes and behaviors. Healthy lowans with higher incomes are more likely to work. However, aging lowans differ from the rest of the workforce because their motivation for re-entering the workforce involves more than how much they are paid. Many aging lowans place considerable value on being engaged in something they enjoy doing and their continued workforce participation may be linked with how much retirement planning they have completed.



Some organizations already employ a number of aging lowans, and some have made adjustments and accommodations that allow aging lowans to remain in their jobs or return to the workforce. Still, the majority of Iowa employers have not taken any deliberate steps to meet the needs and preferences of aging workers. Given these findings are based only on those organizations that chose to participate in the study, we suspect the lack of targeted activity may be even greater. Policy makers should be concerned about the potential lack of employer interest with an aging workforce.



Until this year, coordinated and comprehensive responses to the challenges presented by the aging of Iowa's workforce were few. The 2005 Iowa State Plan for Workforce Development prioritized the need to create a strategic plan concerning the workforce participation of aging Iowans. Also in 2005, several organizations including Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa AARP, and the Iowa Chambers of Commerce joined the Iowa Mature Worker Consortium. The Consortium has identified a number of goals that are intended to facilitate workforce participation among aging Iowans.

In fact, several individual agencies and organizations already are involved with critical issues pertaining to the intersection of Iowa workforce and the state's aging population. For instance, several local offices of Iowa Workforce Development partner with other agencies and provide employment assistance and opportunities to aging Iowans. Also, state-wide initiatives have taken critical steps to improve and expand workforce opportunities across the state. While it is critical for individual organizations to develop an interest and formal response to their aging workers, the local and state partnerships are the best candidates to implement the following recommendations:

1. Create or amend state legislation and regulations that address priority issues pertaining to the aging workforce;
2. Develop public education campaigns that are targeted towards aging Iowans;
3. Develop professional training campaigns targeted towards employers' human resource managers;
4. Promote workplace adjustments and accommodations for aging Iowans;
5. Increase formal linkages among public, non-profit and private employment assistance agencies, aging Iowans, and employment organizations.

As more Iowans grow older and vacate workforce positions, employers will be challenged to fill them. A comprehensive and coordinated effort to implement these recommendations may contribute to meeting labor force issues as well as providing older Iowans a greater number of desirable workforce opportunities.

This project was supported by a contract awarded to the University of Iowa Center on Aging from Iowa Workforce Development from January 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. Members of the project team include Julie Bobitt, Joseph Cavanaugh, Kenneth Culp, Janice Frey, Sara Imhof, and Brian Kaskie.

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