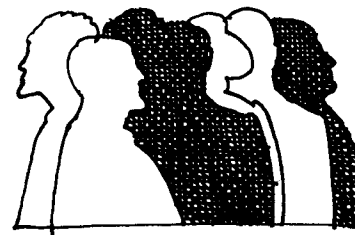


Special Labor Force Reports—Summaries



Absences from work among full-time employees

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American workers with full-time wage and salary jobs lost about 95 million hours a week in May 1979 as a result of illnesses, injuries, and miscellaneous personal reasons. About one employee in 15 reported at least one absence during the week; the total hours lost represented about 3.4 percent of the hours usually worked.

In recent years, the overall level of absence has shown no trend. (See table 1.) The percent of time lost (inactivity rate) fluctuated narrowly between 3.3 and 3.5 percent from 1973 to 1979, while the percent of workers absent (incidence rate) moved between 6.1 and 6.7 percent.¹ Both measures registered their lowest levels during the recession of 1974–75.

The data series reported here are based on information collected once a year in May from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a national sample survey consisting of 56,000 households in 1979.² Absences are classified into two categories: those resulting from workers' illnesses or injuries and those resulting from various personal reasons, including the sickness or death of family members, civic or legal obligations (such as jury duty and military reserve service), and transportation problems. Absences resulting from vacations, holidays, industrial disputes, or weather conditions are excluded. The universe consists of nonfarm wage and salary workers who hold one job and usually work full time (35 hours or more per week).³ Absence rates are shown for men and women, by marital status and by race, as well as by occupation, industry, and union coverage.

Industry and occupation

Time lost from work was a substantially higher proportion of usual worktime in the goods-producing sec-

tor than in the service-producing sector (3.9 versus 3.2 percent of the usual hours worked in May 1979). This was largely because of a relatively high rate of absence in manufacturing, which makes up more than three-fourths of the goods-producing sector. (See table 2.)

Absences were even higher in mining, but this had little effect on rates for the entire goods-producing sector, as the number of mining workers is relatively small. The proportion of time lost in the construction industry was no higher than the average for all industries. Within the service-producing sector, the proportion of time lost differed widely by industry.

Absences of factory operatives resulting from illnesses and injuries (shown in table 3) were a major factor in the relatively high proportion of time lost in manufacturing. Similarly, high rates for transportation equipment operatives and low rates for sales workers affected rates in transportation and trade industries in which these workers represented an important segment of the workforce.⁴

Personal characteristics

Women lost 4.3 percent of their usual weekly hours in May 1979; men lost 3.0 percent. The rates of incidence were 8.6 for women and 5.5 percent for men. Absence rates by sex vary with age and family status. The male-female difference in inactivity rates, for example, is higher for persons age 25 to 44 years than for those in their twenties, probably, in part, because family responsibilities increase absences for women, but not for men. Rates tended to be higher for older workers of both sexes, reflecting an increase in health-related problems.

Time lost by blacks tended to be higher than for whites (5.2 percent versus 3.2 percent).⁵ Although numerous factors are involved, the differences are attributable, in part, to the greater concentration of blacks in occupations which are characterized by high levels of absence. Seven of 10 white workers, compared with 5 of 10 black workers, were in occupations with absence rates below the average. The following tabulation shows the proportion of time lost by race, sex, and marital status in May 1979.

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Table 1. Rate of absence for nonfarm wage and salary workers who usually work full time, by reason, May 1973-79

[Numbers in thousands]

| Year | Number of workers | | Hours | | Incidence rate (Percent of workers absent) | | | Inactivity rate (Percent of time lost) | | |
|------|-------------------|--------|----------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| | Employed | Absent | Usually worked | Lost | Total | Illness and injury | Miscellaneous reasons | Total | Illness and injury | Miscellaneous reasons |
| 1973 | 55,283 | 3,614 | 2,344,970 | 81,549 | 6.5 | 4.1 | 2.4 | 3.5 | 2.4 | 1.1 |
| 1974 | 56,248 | 3,499 | 2,382,300 | 79,706 | 6.2 | 3.7 | 2.5 | 3.3 | 2.2 | 1.1 |
| 1975 | 54,700 | 3,332 | 2,303,410 | 78,873 | 6.1 | 3.7 | 2.4 | 3.4 | 2.3 | 1.1 |
| 1976 | 56,414 | 3,630 | 2,374,910 | 82,222 | 6.4 | 4.0 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 2.3 | 1.1 |
| 1977 | 58,422 | 3,802 | 2,473,740 | 87,487 | 6.5 | 3.9 | 2.6 | 3.5 | 2.3 | 1.2 |
| 1978 | 60,153 | 3,966 | 2,549,220 | 89,888 | 6.6 | 4.1 | 2.5 | 3.5 | 2.3 | 1.2 |
| 1979 | 64,810 | 4,336 | 2,745,060 | 94,641 | 6.7 | 3.9 | 2.8 | 3.4 | 2.2 | 1.2 |

Note: Because of rounding, individual items may not equal totals.

Table 2. Inactivity rate (percent of time lost) for nonfarm wage and salary workers who usually work full time, by selected industries, May 1979 and average May 1977-79

[Numbers in thousands]

| Industry | Number of workers May 1979 | Total | | Illness and injury | | Miscellaneous reasons | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| | | 1979 | Average 1977-79 | 1979 | Average 1977-79 | 1979 | Average 1977-79 |
| All industries ¹ | 64,810 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 2.2 | 2.3 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Goods-producing industries ¹ | 24,364 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 2.7 | 2.8 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Mining | 757 | 6.7 | 5.7 | 2.1 | 1.9 | 4.5 | 3.8 |
| Construction | 4,230 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Manufacturing | 19,073 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 2.8 | 3.0 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Durable goods ¹ | 11,789 | 3.8 | 4.2 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 1.0 | 1.1 |
| Metal manufacturing | 2,395 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 3.3 | 3.4 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Machines, except electrical | 2,338 | 3.2 | 3.8 | 2.3 | 2.8 | .9 | 1.0 |
| Transportation equipment | 2,148 | 5.5 | 5.0 | 4.3 | 3.8 | 1.2 | 1.3 |
| Nondurable goods ¹ | 7,284 | 4.1 | 4.0 | 2.7 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 1.1 |
| Food | 1,475 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 2.3 | 2.5 | 1.5 | 1.2 |
| Apparel | 1,161 | 6.1 | 5.4 | 4.4 | 3.9 | 1.7 | 1.5 |
| Printing | 1,032 | 2.8 | 2.7 | 1.9 | 2.0 | .9 | .7 |
| Chemicals | 1,079 | 4.2 | 3.7 | 2.7 | 2.6 | 1.5 | 1.1 |
| Service-producing industries ¹ | 40,447 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Transportation and public utilities | 4,996 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 2.3 | 2.6 | 1.7 | 1.6 |
| Transportation | 2,658 | 5.5 | 5.3 | 2.9 | 3.1 | 2.5 | 2.2 |
| Public utilities | 2,339 | 2.1 | 3.0 | 1.4 | 2.1 | .7 | .9 |
| Trade | 10,951 | 2.5 | 2.6 | 1.7 | 1.8 | .8 | .9 |
| Wholesale | 3,028 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 1.8 | 1.6 | .6 | .7 |
| Retail | 7,923 | 2.5 | 2.8 | 1.7 | 1.8 | .8 | 1.0 |
| Eating | 1,685 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 2.1 | 2.3 | 1.5 | 1.4 |
| Other | 6,238 | 2.3 | 2.6 | 1.6 | 1.7 | .6 | .9 |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate ¹ | 4,057 | 2.5 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| Banking | 1,771 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.1 | .9 |
| Insurance | 1,394 | 2.8 | 3.2 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.1 | 1.5 |
| Services ¹ | 16,111 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Business | 1,320 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 1.7 | 1.0 | 1.2 |
| Personal | 1,398 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| Professional ¹ | 12,240 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| Medical | 4,499 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 2.6 | 2.8 | 1.7 | 1.4 |
| Educational | 5,243 | 3.1 | 2.9 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 1.2 |
| Public administration | 4,232 | 4.1 | 3.5 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 1.7 | 1.2 |
| Federal | 2,000 | 4.4 | 3.6 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 1.9 | 1.3 |
| Postal | 572 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 3.1 | 3.6 | .9 | .8 |
| Other Federal | 1,428 | 4.5 | 3.2 | 2.2 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 1.5 |
| State | 751 | 4.8 | 3.6 | 2.8 | 2.4 | 1.9 | 1.2 |
| Local | 1,481 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 2.1 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 1.0 |

¹Total includes industries not shown separately.

Note: Because of rounding, individual items may not equal totals.

| | Total | Married, spouse present | Never married |
|--------|-------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Total: | | | |
| Men | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| Women | 4.3 | 4.5 | 3.4 |
| White: | | | |
| Men | 2.8 | 2.9 | 2.8 |
| Women | 4.0 | 4.3 | 3.0 |
| Black: | | | |
| Men | 4.6 | 4.3 | 5.0 |
| Women | 6.0 | 6.3 | 6.3 |

As noted earlier, white women who were married had higher absence rates than never-married women. In contrast, rates among black women were the same for married and never-married women. This, in part, may be because single black women are more likely than their white counterparts to have child-care responsibilities.⁶

Union status

Workers represented by unions generally reported higher absences resulting from illnesses and injuries (but not for miscellaneous personal reasons) than other

Table 3. Inactivity rate (percent of time lost) for nonfarm wage and salary workers who usually work full time, by selected occupations, May 1979 and average May 1977-79

[Numbers in thousands]

| Occupation | Number of workers May 1979 | Total | | Illness and injury | | Miscellaneous reasons | |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| | | 1979 | Average 1977-79 | 1979 | Average 1977-79 | 1979 | Average 1977-79 |
| All occupations ¹ | 64,810 | 3.4 | 3.5 | 2.2 | 2.3 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Professional and technical ¹ | 10,886 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.1 |
| Engineers | 1,323 | 2.3 | 2.5 | .7 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.2 |
| Health workers | 1,646 | 2.9 | 3.5 | 1.7 | 2.2 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Teachers | 2,767 | 3.1 | 2.7 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.5 |
| Managers and administrators | 7,515 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 1.0 | 1.2 | .9 | .8 |
| Sales workers ¹ | 3,182 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 1.7 | .9 | 1.0 |
| Wholesale | 703 | .8 | 1.2 | .5 | .9 | .4 | .4 |
| Retail | 1,280 | 2.7 | 3.2 | 2.2 | 2.3 | .6 | 1.0 |
| Clerical ¹ | 12,124 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 2.2 | 2.1 | 1.1 | 1.2 |
| Bookkeeper | 1,100 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.2 |
| Secretary | 2,886 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 2.1 | 1.9 | .9 | 1.1 |
| Craft and kindred workers ¹ | 10,033 | 3.0 | 3.3 | 2.1 | 2.3 | .9 | 1.0 |
| Construction | 2,711 | 3.3 | 3.4 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 1.2 |
| Mechanics | 2,755 | 2.7 | 3.1 | 2.0 | 2.2 | .7 | .9 |
| Operatives, except transport ¹ | 9,003 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 3.7 | 4.0 | 1.8 | 1.7 |
| Assemblers | 1,175 | 5.0 | 5.7 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 1.1 | 1.5 |
| Welders | 660 | 4.3 | 4.7 | 3.7 | 3.5 | .7 | 1.1 |
| Transport equipment operatives ¹ | 2,697 | 3.9 | 4.2 | 2.3 | 2.9 | 1.6 | 1.3 |
| Truck drivers | 1,595 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 2.4 | 2.8 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Nonfarm laborers | 3,103 | 4.9 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 2.9 | 1.4 | 1.3 |
| Service workers ¹ | 6,266 | 5.0 | 4.5 | 3.3 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 1.5 |
| Cleaning | 1,524 | 4.9 | 4.8 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| Food | 1,717 | 4.8 | 4.4 | 3.0 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 1.6 |
| Protective | 1,023 | 3.8 | 3.4 | 2.8 | 2.6 | 1.0 | .5 |

¹Total includes occupations not shown separately.

NOTE: Because of rounding, individual items may not equal totals.

workers. However, in some industry groups, nonunion members lost about the same or larger proportions of time because of illnesses and injuries than workers represented by unions for May 1979, as shown in the following tabulation:

| | Union | Nonunion |
|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Total (in percent) | 3.0 | 1.8 |
| Manufacturing | 3.9 | 2.1 |
| Trade | 3.1 | 1.5 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Finance, insurance, real estate | .7 | 1.4 |
| Educational services | 1.7 | 2.0 |
| Medical services | 3.8 | 2.2 |
| Federal public administration | 3.2 | 1.8 |

The generally higher rate of absence for workers represented by a union may result in part from differences in occupational mix as well as a higher proportion of the union group being eligible for paid sick leave. □

—FOOTNOTES—

¹ The inactivity rate is defined as

$$\frac{\text{Number of hours absent}}{\text{Number of hours usually worked}} \times 100.$$

For example, the overall inactivity rate in May 1979 was calculated as

$$\frac{94,641,000 \text{ hours}}{2,745,060,000 \text{ hours}} \times 100 = 3.4 \text{ percent.}$$

The incidence rate is defined as

$$\frac{\text{Number of workers absent}}{\text{Total employed}} \times 100.$$

For example, the overall incidence rate in May 1979 was calculated as

$$\frac{4,336,000 \text{ absent workers}}{64,810,000 \text{ workers employed}} \times 100 = 6.7 \text{ percent.}$$

² The CPS is conducted for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. Data derived from the survey underestimate absences of workers on full-time schedules because information on absence is available only for those who were at work fewer than 35 hours. No information is available for workers on part-time schedules.

³ The universe in the year ended May 1979 grew from 60.2 million to 64.8 million or nearly 8 percent. This was substantially greater

than the increase for all wage and salary workers on full-time schedules, and resulted from a repositioning of the question on usual hours that reduced the nonresponse rate and from the allocation of certain remaining nonresponses. The larger universe probably had a minimal effect on rates of absence.

⁴ For a description of some of the environmental and personal factors influencing absence and some company programs designed to reduce absence from work, see *Reducing Worker Absenteeism*, proceedings of a University of Michigan Workshop sponsored by the Graduate School of Business Administration and the Industrial Development Division, Institute of Science and Technology, The University of Michigan, 1979.

⁵ Black workers lose more time and are absent more frequently than white workers, particularly for illnesses and injuries. In May of 1979, the only year for which absence data are available by race, the incidence rate for blacks was 9.6 percent versus 6.3 percent for whites (for illnesses and injuries the figures were 6.0 for blacks and 3.6 percent for whites). These data seem to contradict other findings that nonwhite workers are absent less frequently than white workers. See Steven G. Allen, *Absenteeism and the Labor Market*, prepared under a grant from the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, p. 168.

⁶ Unpublished Bureau of Labor Statistics data on the marital and family status of workers, March 1980.