

The April Review

The series of annual review articles continues this month with Todd Wilson's report on development in consumer prices in 2004. The overall rate of increase in the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) rose to 3.3 percent in 2004, as higher rates of price increase for motor vehicles and shelter joined the more publicized acceleration in consumer energy prices.

David S. Johnson, Timothy M. Smeeding, and Barbara Boyle Torrey analyze the distributions of income and consumption among broad groups of the population. Their general findings, perhaps too neatly summed up, are that childless adults are over-represented in the highest quintiles of household income, elders are somewhat over-represented in the highest quintiles of household consumption, and children are over-represented in the lowest quintiles of both distributions.

John D. Morton and Patricia Aleman describe recent changes in the mental health and substance abuse treatment benefits offered by employers. These benefits are increasingly being offered on terms more similar to those offered for the treatment of other illnesses. In the past, mental health and substance abuse programs were offered on much more restrictive terms.

Tarek M. Harchaoui, Jimmy Jean, and Faouzi Tarkhani compare the productivity performance of Canada and Australia as the 20th Century came to a close. Australia's record on productivity increase was a bit better than Canada's, but standards of living in the two countries grew at about the same rate.

State unemployment rates

In 2004, State unemployment rates varied in a range of 4.2 percentage points. Hawaii had the lowest jobless rate among all States at 3.3 percent. West North Central

States posted the next lowest rates. North Dakota's jobless rate was 3.4 percent and South Dakota's was 3.5 percent. Five additional States reported annual average unemployment rates below 4.0 percent. Overall, 30 States had rates below the national average of 5.5 percent in 2004.

Two States that border the Pacific—Alaska and Oregon—recorded the highest jobless rates in 2004, 7.5 and 7.4 percent. Michigan, at 7.1 percent, was the only other State with a rate above 7.0 percent. Overall, 16 States and the District of Columbia had unemployment rates above the national average of 5.5 percent in 2004. Four of the five Pacific division States and three of the four West South Central States recorded rates above the national rate. More data on regional and State unemployment rates are found in "State and Regional Unemployment, 2004 Annual Averages Summary," news release USDL 05-385

Employee compensation

In December 2004, compensation costs in private industry averaged \$23.90 per hour worked. Wages and salaries averaged \$17.02 per hour, while benefits averaged \$6.88. Employer costs for legally required benefits such as Social Security and workers' compensation averaged \$2.08 per hour worked. Insurance benefits averaged \$1.70 per hour worked, paid leave averaged \$1.53, retirement and savings averaged 88 cents, and supplemental pay averaged 66 cents. See "Employer Costs for Employee Compensation, December 2004," news release USDL 05-432, for more information.

Common work injuries

Sprains and strains, most often involving the back, accounted for 43 percent of the 1.3 million injuries and illnesses in private industry that required recuperation away from work beyond the day of the incident in 2003. When sprains and strains, bruises

and contusions, cuts and lacerations, and fractures are combined, they accounted for nearly two-thirds of the cases with days away from work.

The three occupations with the overall greatest number of injuries and illnesses were laborers and material movers; heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers; and nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants. Laborers and material movers, and heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers often suffered sprains and strains to the trunk or lower extremities, stemming from overexertion or contacts with objects or equipment. Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants predominantly suffered sprains and strains to their trunk (typically their back), due to overexertion related to lifting or moving patients. To learn more, see "Lost-worktime Injuries and Illnesses Characteristics and Resulting Time Away From Work, 2003," news release USDL 05-521.

The Class of 2004

Of the 2.8 million youth who graduated from high school in 2004, 1.8 million (66.7 percent) were attending college in October 2004. The enrollment rate of young women, 71.6 percent, continued to exceed that of young men, 61.4 percent. Asian high school graduates (76.0 percent) were more likely than white graduates (68.4 percent) to be enrolled in college. Black and Hispanic or Latino graduates were about equally likely to be college students in the fall—61.1 and 61.9 percent, respectively.

In October 2004, 44.8 percent of college students who had graduated from high school in the previous 12 months were either working or looking for work. Among recent high school graduates enrolled in college as full-time students, 42.1 percent were employed or looking for work in October 2004. In contrast, 82.4 percent of part-time college students participated in the labor force. For more information, see "College Enrollment and Work Activity of 2004 High School Graduates," news release USDL 05-487. □