

The August Review

The spatial dimension of employment dynamics is becoming more important as the economy becomes more international and more mobile. Sharon P. Brown and Lewis B. Siegel map out the use of the Mass Layoff Statistics program to follow at least some of the movement of work. They find that most relocations occurred within a single company and that in cases where work was located outside the United States, the most common destinations were in Mexico and China.

Robert W. Bednarzik examines one of the most visible cases of work relocation, the movement of jobs for information technology workers. While he finds that the volume of work in the field that has been relocated may not yet be substantial, job security will still be a concern for information technology workers.

Judith Banister finishes her two-part series on employment and wages in China with a close examination of the available wage data. After sketching the analytical difficulties involved, Banister finds that wages in China's manufacturing sector average somewhere around 57 cents per hour and that there are large variations between wages in urban factories and the town and village enterprises in more rural areas.

Harriet B. Presser and Janet C. Gornick explore the ways that the shift toward service employment and the increasing labor force participation of women has led to an increasing share of weekend employment being carried out by women.

Flexible work and working shifts

In May 2004, more than 27 million full-time wage and salary workers had flexible work schedules that allowed them to vary the time they began or ended work. These workers were 27.5 percent of all full-time wage and salary workers.

Although more than 1 in 4 full-time wage and salary workers can thus work

a flexible schedule, only about 1 in 10 are enrolled in a formal, employer-sponsored flexitime program. Workers in management, professional, and related occupations were among the most likely to have a formal flexitime program. Those in production, transportation, and material moving occupations were the least likely to have such a program.

Almost 15 percent of full-time wage and salary workers usually worked an alternative shift, including: 4.7 percent on evening shifts, 3.2 percent on night shifts, 3.1 percent working irregular schedules, and 2.5 percent working rotating shifts. The prevalence of shift work was greatest among workers in service occupations, such as protective service and food preparation and serving. Alternative shifts were least common among management, professional, and related occupations. See "Workers on Flexible and Shift Schedules in May 2004," *USDL news release 05-1198*.

Consumer spending in 2003

Among the major components of consumer spending, only apparel and services, with a 6.2-percent decrease, saw statistically significant change in 2003. The trend in the share of total expenditures for apparel and services has been downward over the last several years, possibly due to the competition from cheaper imported clothing as well as a shift to more casual, less expensive styles.

In contrast, consumer healthcare spending showed little change in 2003, rising 2.8 percent, following increases of 7.7 percent in 2002 and 5.6 percent in 2001. Among the components of healthcare expenditures, spending on health insurance continued to increase significantly, with a 7.2-percent rise in 2003, following increases of 10.1 percent in 2002 and 7.9 percent in 2001.

The increase in health insurance spending in 2003 was offset somewhat

by a 4.2-percent drop in spending on drugs. The decrease in drug spending in 2003 followed relatively large increases of 8.6 percent in 2002, 7.8 percent in 2001, and 12.6 percent in 2000.

The other major components of consumer expenditure were little changed in 2003. Spending on food declined by less than 1 percent, transportation spending rose 0.3 percent, and housing expenditures were up 1.1 percent. See "Consumer Expenditures in 2003," *BLS Report 986*.

Contingent workers

Contingent workers are persons who do not expect their jobs to last or who report that their jobs are temporary. Using the broadest definition of contingency, 5.7 million workers were classified as contingent in February 2005, accounting for about 4 percent of total employment. More than half of contingent workers (55 percent) would have preferred a permanent job.

In addition to contingent workers, those workers who have alternative work arrangements were identified. In February 2005, there were 10.3 million independent contractors (7.4 percent of employment), 2.5 million on-call workers (1.8 percent of employment), 1.2 million temporary help agency workers (0.9 percent of employment), and 813,000 workers provided by contract firms (0.6 percent of employment).

An employment arrangement may be defined as both contingent and alternative, but this is not automatically the case. For example, there were 10.3 million people working as independent contractors in February 2005, accounting for 7.4 percent of the employed. Only about 3 percent of independent contractors considered themselves contingent workers and fewer than 10 percent of freelancers reported that they would prefer a traditional job. See "Contingent and Alternative Employment Arrangements, February 2005," *USDL news release 05-1433*. □