

Issues



in Labor Statistics

U.S. Department of Labor
Bureau of Labor Statistics

Workers Are On the Job More Hours Over the Course of the Year

The average length of the workweek has risen only slightly since the 1970s. But rephrasing the question from “What has been the trend in the length of the workweek?”—a question addressed in a companion piece released at the same time as this report—to the broader “What has been the trend in hours at work over an entire year?” identifies more dramatic shifts.

Two factors in addition to the length of the workweek affect time spent at work in a year. First, is the extent to which a person works at all during any particular year. Second, is the number of weeks that a person works during the year. In the calculation of average weekly hours, workers are included only when they work; they are “out of scope” when they do not. Yet we know that changes have taken place in the number of weeks a year that workers are spending on the job, particularly women who increasingly have been working year round (see table).

The following formula takes into account changes in the share of the population working and the extent of their work activity: The aggregate number of hours worked in a *week* is the product of the number of persons at work in an average week and their average hours. This is then multiplied by 52 weeks to obtain an estimate of the total number of hours worked during the *year*. Dividing this estimate of aggregate annual hours by the number who worked at any time during the year (obtained from the work experience questions in the March Current Population Survey) yields average hours worked per worker per year.

Annual hours calculated in this fashion rose steadily for women until the late 1980s when the rate of growth

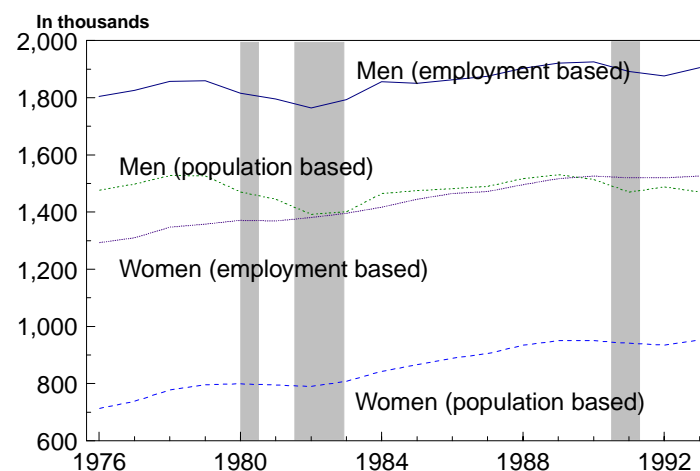
slowed slightly. Men’s annual hours have risen much less than women’s since the mid-1970s, and appear to be more sensitive to the business cycle. (See chart.) The hours series for men is higher than that for women because men both work longer work weeks and are more likely to work year round.

As shown in the tabulation, employed women worked an average of nearly 20 percent more in 1993 than in 1976, adding 233 hours to their average work year, while men added 100 hours to theirs. But, as with the weekly hours data, the changing age distribution of the population had an impact. Adjusting for this age shift in annual hours only modestly reduces the rise. Women’s hours, after age-adjustment, were up nearly 200 (or 15 percent) over the period, while men’s average workyear rose 62 hours or 3 percent.

	Average annual work hours	
	Men	Women
1976	1,805	1,293
1993	1,905	1,526
1976-93 change	100	233
Age-adjusted change	62	193

These calculations still leave one important trend unaccounted for: the change in the likelihood of an individual to work at all during the year could affect annual hours considerably. Using the entire population of males as the denominator, not just those who worked, there was no net change in the average annual hours worked by men since the mid-1970s. This is because men have become somewhat less likely to be employed. Their employment-to-

Average annual hours at work for men and women, 1976-93



NOTE: Shaded areas represent recessions.

**Persons with work experience who worked year-round full time by age and sex, annual averages,
1976 and 1993**
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total who worked during the year		Percent who worked 50 to 52 weeks	
	1976	1993	1976	1993
Total, 16 years and over	104,219	135,464	54.3	60.9
16 to 24 years	26,251	22,936	27.2	29.0
25 to 54 years	61,491	94,794	64.9	69.9
55 years and over	16,475	17,734	57.7	54.2
Men, 16 years and over	59,507	72,049	64.2	68.1
16 to 24 years	13,919	11,919	29.2	32.0
25 to 54 years	35,619	50,458	77.4	78.1
55 years and over	9,969	9,671	66.1	60.5
Women, 16 years and over	44,712	63,415	41.1	52.8
16 to 24 years	12,332	11,017	25.0	25.8
25 to 54 years	25,874	44,337	47.8	60.6
55 years and over	6,507	8,062	44.8	46.6

NOTE: Data for 1976 and 1993 are not strictly comparable because they reflect population controls based on the 1970 and 1980 censuses, respectively.

population ratio was 75.2 percent in 1993 compared to 77.5 percent in 1976. In contrast to men, a growing share of women worked over the period. As a result, when women's total hours at work are distributed across their *population* base, the rise was even more rapid than in the *employment*-based series. When allocated across the entire population of women age 16 and over,

the average number of hours each woman worked grew by 33 percent from 1976 to 1993 (See chart).

For additional information on hours at work and a technical description of the Current Population Survey from which the data used in this report were derived, contact Jennifer M. Gardner or Randy Ilg, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of

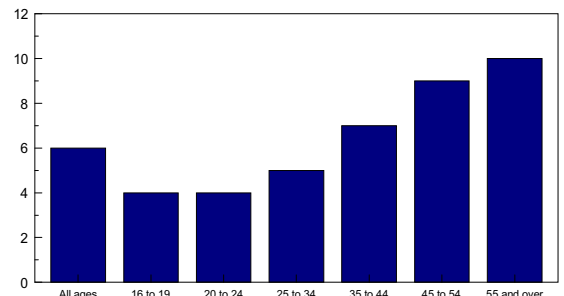
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Median number of workdays lost due to work injury or illness by age, 1993



SOURCE: BLS, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses--cases involving days away from work