

Work experience

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Education and experience – the keys to getting and keeping a job. Both factors affect not only an individual’s employability and remuneration, but also, at the aggregate level, the productivity of the labour force. But while extensive information about educational attainment has long been available, data on work experience have been sketchy at best. The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) (see *Data source*) fills this gap by comparing the lifetime work experience of Canadians aged 15 to 69. What are the differences between men and women, people of different ages, in different fields of work and with different levels of education?

Age

Overall, persons aged 15 to 69 in 1993 had an average of 13.6 years of full-year full-time equivalent (FYFTE) experience. However, as might be expected, work experience increases substantially with age (see *Sizing up experience and education*). In 1993, 20 to 24 year-olds had worked an average of 1.8 FYFTE years. People aged 60 to 64 had 27.0 years, representing close to 60% of their adult years. Average experience of the whole population may increase over time with the current aging of the population, which is slowly raising the average age of people still in their working years.

In the population aged 15 to 69, 26% had worked the equivalent of more than 20 years (Table 1). Almost 40% had between 6 and 20 years’ experience, while a smaller proportion (16%) had worked 5 FYFTE

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Data source

The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) is a new longitudinal survey that, like its predecessor, the Labour Market Activity Survey, is designed to monitor individuals’ labour market experiences. However, to get a full picture of economic well-being, it also asks about income, using categories similar to those used by the Survey of Consumer Finances. SLID also contains some unique retrospective information. One such topic is how long individuals have worked, either full time or part time.

Since its preliminary interview in January 1993, SLID has conducted annual cycles of labour and income interviews with some 31,000 individuals across the country. In all, six years of labour and income data will be collected for each panel of the study. A new panel will enter the survey in January 1996, overlapping with the first until the former finishes in 1999, when the third panel will also begin. The cycle of overlapping panels will continue indefinitely.

Sizing up experience and education

Work history begins with the respondent’s first full-time paid job. Previous work, such as part-time or summer jobs while in school, is not included because respondents might have difficulty recalling such information. It might also pose a challenge for respondents reporting on behalf of other household members. Consequently, SLID does not measure the part-time experience of the 15% of men and 23% of women who never worked full time. The effect of this exclusion is not as great as it would be if part-time jobs had always had the same share of employment as they do now.¹

The survey asks respondents how many years they worked at least 6 months (recorded as full years) or not at all. The remaining years are recorded as part years worked. For years during which they worked 6 months or more, respondents are asked whether they worked full time, part time, or both, at different times during the year. Full time is defined as 30 hours or more a week.

To arrive at full-year full-time equivalents (FYFTE), each year of work history is valued as follows:

	FYFTE
Full year, full time (6 months or more, 30 hours per week or more)	1
Full year, part time (6 months or more, under 30 hours per week)	0.5
Full year, some full time/some part time	0.5
Part year (less than 6 months), whether full or part time	0.25

For example, someone who worked 6 years full time for at least 6 months each year, plus 5 years full time but less than 6 months each year, plus 4 years part time for at least 6 months each year, would have 9.25 years’ experience : $(6 \times 1) + (5 \times 0.25) + (4 \times 0.5)$.

SLID’s educational attainment variable has 15 categories, ranging from “never attended school” to “doctorate.” The variable on years of schooling is derived from questions on number of years completed in three categories: elementary and high school; community college or CEGEP, technical institute, trade or vocational school (that is, non-university postsecondary); and university.²

years or less. Approximately one in five working-age adults had never worked full time (excluding summer jobs while still students).

The male-female experience gap

The average work experience of men in 1993 was 17.1 years, compared with 10.1 years for women (Chart).

Young women had almost the same experience as their male counterparts, but at successively older ages the experience gap grew. Starting at ages 55 to 59, the average experience of men was at least double that of women. For example, men aged 60 to 64 averaged 22 years more experience than women.

Parenting often interrupts women's participation in the labour force. The paid work experience of women aged 45 and over who had had or raised children was 15.4 years, compared with 26.5 for those who had not (Table 2).

Labour force³ participation patterns, however, have changed considerably over the past few decades. By 1993, women's participation rate was 57.5%, up from 23.4% in 1953. Over the same period, men's participation fell from 82.9% to 73.3%. Older women are participating more in the workforce than before, but women aged 25 to 54 have made the greatest contribution (Basset, 1994).

	Both sexes	Men	Women
		%	
Total	100	100	100
Never worked full time	19	15	23
With at least some full-time experience	81	85	77
Only full-year full-time	58	69	46
Some part-year or part-time*	23	16	31
Years of experience**			
5 or less	16	12	20
6-10	15	12	18
11-15	13	12	13
16-20	12	13	11
21-25	8	9	6
26-30	6	7	4
Over 30	12	20	5

Source: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
 * Includes years with a mixture of full- and part-time work
 ** Full-year full-time equivalent; see Sizing up experience and education



	Average	
	Years of experience*	Age
Both sexes aged 15-69	13.6	38.3
Men	17.1	38.2
Women	10.1	38.5
Under 45		
Men	9.6	29.9
Women	6.9	29.7
45 and over		
Men	32.7	55.4
Women	16.5	56.2
Had or raised children	15.4	56.1
Without children	26.5	56.9

Source: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics
 * Full-year full-time equivalent; see Sizing up experience and education

Eventually, women's average experience will approach that of men, as the younger generation's work patterns replace those of the older generation, but this will happen slowly. New trends in work patterns could also narrow the gap – for example, earlier retirement among men, and men leaving paid work for parenting.⁴

Full- and part-time work

Eight in ten adults aged 15 to 69 had some full-time work history and therefore some work experience as defined by the survey. On average, they had worked at least part of the year for 18 years (Table 3), with only two of those years being either part-time or for less than 6 months. For just those adults with some part-time experience complementing their full-time work history (29% of those with some full-time experience), full-time employment was still more important than other work; of an average of 17 years worked, almost 10 were full-year full-time.

Occupations and industries

The work experience of people in specific occupations or industries may reflect the sets of skills required to obtain jobs in those occupations or industries, although part of their experience may have been acquired elsewhere. For example, managerial and administrative occupations tend

to be “high” experience, while clerical, sales and service occupations tend to be “low” (Table 4). The experience of employees in the three service industries is also low. Lower experience, however, may reflect fields that have grown more in recent decades; for example, service industries compared with goods-producing industries. Some traditional industries, such as agriculture, other primary, and to a lesser extent, manufacturing, have workers with higher-than-average experience.

Level of education

People with higher levels of education have more experience relative to their “potential” than those with lower levels of attainment. An estimate of time *not* spent in school, “potential” experience, was computed as: age minus years of schooling minus five years (see *Mincer's measure*). This measure takes into account the extra time to acquire education.

The average difference between potential and actual work experience was 2 to 3 years for respondents with any university education and 5 to 8 years for those with any non-university postsecondary education or graduation from high school. The minor difference between potential and actual experience for people with a master's degree or higher – under 2

Table 3
Full- and part-time work experience, 1993

	Total	Full-year full-time	Part-year or part-time*	Full-year full-time equivalent**
Average years				
Population aged 15-69	14.5	12.9	1.7	13.6
With at least some full-time experience	17.9	15.9	2.1	16.8
Only full-year full-time	18.4	18.4	...	18.4
Some part-year or part-time*	16.7	9.5	7.2	12.9

Source: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

* Includes years with a mixture of full- and part-time work

** See Sizing up experience and education

Table 4
Work experience, by occupation and industry, 1993

	Average years*
Occupation	
Religion	24.6
Mining	20.6
Transport equipment operating	18.5
Managerial and administrative	17.9
Machining	17.1
Construction	16.9
Farming	16.6
Product fabricating	16.4
Other crafts and equipment operating	16.2
Forestry	15.9
Processing	15.8
Fishing	14.5
Teaching	14.0
Natural science, engineering and mathematics	13.0
Medicine and health	12.5
Sales	12.0
Clerical	11.7
Social science	11.6
Material handling	11.1
Service	9.9
Artistic, literary and recreational	9.2
Industry	
Transportation and storage	18.7
Agriculture	17.9
Other primary**	16.9
Other utilities	16.8
Manufacturing	16.5
Government service	16.1
Construction	15.7
Finance, insurance and real estate	15.2
Communication	14.6
Community service***	12.9
Trade	11.7
Miscellaneous service †	11.6
Business and personal service ††	9.9

Source: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

* Full-year full-time equivalent; see Sizing up experience and education

** Fishing, forestry and mining

*** Educational services, health and social services, religious organizations, and amusement and recreational services

† Membership organizations, excluding religious organizations, and other services

†† Business services, personal and household services, and accommodation, food and beverage services

Mincer's measure

When survey data are unavailable, proxy estimates of experience based on age and education are sometimes used. Jacob Mincer (1974) suggested such a measure: "potential" experience defined as age minus years of schooling minus a constant equal to the preschool years (five). A negative result is possible if the individual began working full time and continued or resumed studies while working. The gap between potential and actual work experience is narrow for a much higher proportion of men than women. For example, in 1993, the gap for 33% of men was one to two years, whereas this was the case for 21% of women. On the other hand, 22% of women had a gap of at least 20 years, compared with just 4% of men.

The approximation of work experience with potential experience would appear reasonably good for men. However, the relatively flat distribution for women – which reflects the diversity of women's experience even within age

groups – illustrates the likely inadequacy of any simple measure based on age and years of schooling to approximate their actual experience.⁵

Potential minus actual work experience of 15 to 69 year-olds, 1993

Difference (years)	Men Women	
	%	
	100	100
40 and over	1	7
20 to 39	3	15
10 to 19	7	17
5 to 9	13	15
3 to 4	16	10
1 to 2	33	21
0	14	10
-1 to -2	10	5
-3 and less	4	2

Source: Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

years – may reflect not only fairly steady careers upon completing school, but a higher occurrence of full-time work before they finished their qualifications.

In contrast, the gap between potential and actual work experience was wide for people with less than 9 years of schooling – an average of 19 years or more in each lower attainment category. This may reflect higher unemployment rates in addition to lower participation rates, although it results partly from the overestimate of potential experience for people who left school when they were very young. Also, people in each of these attainment categories are roughly 10 years older than those with higher levels of education. Nevertheless, across the whole range of qualifications, people with higher levels of education come closer to fulfilling their potential work experience defined this way

than do people with lower educational attainment.

Summary

In 1993, the average experience of all adults aged 15 to 69 was 13.6 years (summarized in full-year full-time equivalents); for those currently in the labour force it was 14.5 years. These figures will rise in the future with the "greying" of the labour force.

As might be expected, work experience tends to increase with age. There are also substantial differences between the work experience of men and women, largely reflecting the impact that having children used to have on women's labour force participation. As well, work experience varies by industry and occupation. And although people with higher levels of educational attainment gener-

ally start their careers later, the gap between their potential and actual work experience is narrower than that among people with less education. □

Notes

1 Only observations with valid answers to all work history questions were used in the analysis. The proportion of remaining observations – those with unknown or invalid answers to the composite work experience variable – was fairly high at 13.7%. In completing the paper questionnaire, interviewers may have mistakenly left the first question on work history blank if the respondent reported never having worked full time, rather than checking the appropriate box. This oversight would have resulted in all remaining work history questions being coded zero. A pattern in the characteristics of omitted respondents supports this explanation; for example, this group contained slightly higher proportions of women, older people, and people not in the labour force. However, overall results are not likely to be affected significantly. Computer-assisted interviewing introduced in January 1994 should eliminate this problem.

2 For some respondents the values for both years of schooling and experience were very high, resulting in an apparent overlap of work and formal education by at least 10 years. While such cases are plausible, they may obscure results for the general population. There were 32 respondents for whom the overlap of school and work was at least 10 years and who had not achieved a doctorate; these cases were deleted from all analyses in this study.

3 Labour Force Survey data prior to 1966 refer to persons aged 14 and over; thereafter, persons 15 and over were surveyed.

4 The average experience of people aged 15 to 69 in the labour force, that is, people working or looking for work, was 14.5 years, compared with 11.6 years for those not in the labour force (whose average age was 4.6 years older). For women – though not men – the effect of excluding those not in the labour force is substantial: it adds from about 1 extra year of experience for women in their thirties to 6 extra years for women aged 60 to 64.

5 While Mincer's proxy is still used, other indirect measures have been developed to better reflect women's labour force participation (see Kidd and Shannon, 1994).

■ References

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