

WHAT JOBS DO EMPLOYERS WANT OLDER WORKERS TO DO?

BY ALICIA H. MUNNELL, GAL WETTSTEIN, AND ABIGAIL N. WALTERS*

Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, Americans have been seeking to work to older ages. The current COVID-19 recession notwithstanding, a long-term trend toward later retirement has sharply increased the labor force participation rate among older individuals. However, working to older ages requires more than a willingness on the part of workers; it requires employers to hire them on terms that are worthwhile. While employers often say they are open to employing older workers, evidence of discrimination in audit studies suggests reason to worry. One question is: “what jobs do employers really want older workers to do?”

To answer this question, this *brief*, based on a recent paper, examines a sample of job postings from RetirementJobs.com, a national website that targets older workers.¹ In addition to exploring the characteristics, location, and compensation of these postings, the analysis compares them to two other data sources on job openings: 1) the *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey* (JOLTS), the federal government’s definitive source of aggregate statistics on job openings; and 2) a large general jobs board for workers of all ages.

The discussion proceeds as follows. The first section introduces RetirementJobs.com. Twenty percent of its listings are “direct postings” by employers aiming explicitly at older workers and 80 percent are cross-listings from CareerBuilder.com, which suggest employer willingness to hire older, as well as younger, workers. The second section reports on the characteristics of the jobs on RetirementJobs.com, and the third section compares the geographic dispersion of the jobs with those in the JOLTS and the characteristics of the jobs with a sample from the general jobs board.

The results, at first blush, suggest reason for optimism. While the jobs posted on RetirementJobs.com represent a small fraction of job openings nationally, they nevertheless show the same geographic dispersion as jobs aimed at all age groups, cover a broad swath of occupations, and are likely to be full-time. They also offer higher wages than the postings on the general jobs board, although fewer of them mention health or retirement benefits. A somewhat less positive picture emerges when looking only at the direct postings specifically targeted to older workers. These

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postings tend to have substantially lower average wages than those aimed at a general audience and are even less likely to mention health or retirement benefits.

RetirementJobs.com Postings

RetirementJobs.com posts roughly 250,000 openings at any given time and receives over 176,000 visitors per month. For use in this study, the website provided its set of postings that appeared on November 20, 2019. While RetirementJobs.com is only a fraction of the size of job sites like Indeed.com and Monster.com (see Table 1), it is the only website that segments by age and thereby offers a picture of the jobs available to older workers.

TABLE 1. JOB POSTINGS BY SOURCE, OCTOBER 2019

Source	Number of postings
RetirementJobs.com	232,800
Monster.com	1,486,600
Indeed.com	3,684,000
LinkedIn.com	4,314,000
JOLTS	7,693,000

Sources: Websites for each indicated jobs board (2019) and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS)* (2019).

The RetirementJobs.com postings include part- and full-time work, jobs with and without benefits, and less traditional work arrangements. For each listing, RetirementJobs.com provided the employer's name, region of operation, job title, and whether the job was full- or part-time. These structured fields were supplemented by the job descriptions in the text fields, which were manually coded to provide information on salary, benefits, and the educational and experience requirements.²

When no salary information was available on RetirementJobs.com, the salary for the same job was manually collected from other websites that listed the job (primarily CareerBuilder.com). If no equivalent

posting was found, an estimated salary for similar job titles was acquired from Glassdoor.com, where employees anonymously review their employers and submit salary information. If an estimated salary was not available on Glassdoor.com, the salary was collected from sites like LinkedIn.com. Finally, in the few instances when no estimate could be found, salary information was left out. In all cases, salaries for part-time jobs are reported on a full-time basis.

Standardizations were also required for other variables. Fringe benefits were similarly subject to various levels of detail in job descriptions. For uniformity, job postings were separately classified as mentioning retirement benefits, health benefits, or paid time off. Furthermore, since some postings simply state that they provide unspecified "benefits," jobs were also coded as to whether they mention any benefits at all.

Occupations were coded by manually classifying all the listings into two-digit codes under the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2018 Standard Occupational Classifications System (SOC), based on a combination of SOC codes provided by RetirementJobs.com, job titles, and job descriptions.

As noted above, the job postings on RetirementJobs.com come from two sources. About 20 percent come directly from employers. The other 80 percent are fed into the site by CareerBuilder.com. To simplify the data collection, we selected a 10-percent random sample of these indirect postings. After removing a small number of listings that were not in the United States, not in English, and not actual jobs (e.g., internships), the final sample consisted of 40,656 direct and 17,195 indirect postings. The indirect postings were weighted to reflect the fact that each represents 10 actual postings.

Nature of RetirementJobs.com Postings

The major characteristics of the jobs in RetirementJobs.com are summarized in Table 2 (on the next page). While the listings include a broad array of occupations, about 80 percent of the jobs fall into eight SOC codes. The three largest categories – office jobs, healthcare support, and sales – are often associated with older workers.

TABLE 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF RETIREMENTJOBS.COM POSTINGS BY OCCUPATION, 2019

Occupation	Percent of total jobs	Percent full-time	Percent temporary	Average compensation		Percent with benefits ^a
				Full-time	Part-time	
Office and administrative support	15%	38%	55%	\$35,800	\$34,300	17%
Healthcare support	14	29	1	22,900	14,900	59
Sales and related	11	55	41	52,400	51,700	25
Computer/mathematical	10	71	29	70,200	70,100	17
Transportation/material moving	9	79	8	39,300	38,300	28
Healthcare practitioners and techs	7	78	9	68,300	61,700	41
Management	7	94	5	79,700	79,300	35
Food preparation/serving	7	71	5	21,200	19,700	67
Other ^b	20	--	--	--	--	--
All	100%	62%	21%	\$43,800	\$41,000	34%

^a Percent with benefits refers to listings that explicitly mention benefits.

^b See Endnote 3 for occupations in the “other” category.

Source: Authors’ calculations from RetirementJobs.com (2019).

Many of these heavily represented occupations offer relatively low pay. Looking at full-time annual salaries, the averages in the three most common occupations are \$35,800 (office support), \$22,900 (healthcare support), and \$52,400 (sales); these numbers compare to an economy-wide average wage in 2019 of \$51,500.⁴ Naturally, occupations requiring more education and skills, such as management, computers, engineering, and health and legal practitioners, offer much higher salaries – over \$65,000. However, all these categories comprise only one-quarter of the listings.

Accordingly, overall, the full-time positions on RetirementJobs.com offered an average salary of \$43,800, again somewhat below the average for all U.S. workers. However, comparing compensation on job ads to existing jobs in the economy may not be an apples-to-apples comparison, since pay typically increases with tenure. The analysis therefore turns next to comparing the characteristics of job postings on RetirementJobs.com to other job openings in the economy.

RetirementJobs.com Compared to Other Offerings

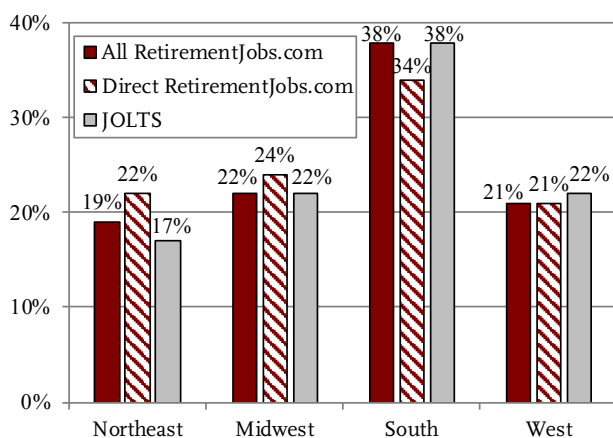
This section compares the location and characteristics of the job listings on RetirementJobs.com to the JOLTS and to a large general jobs board aimed at all ages. The results are presented both for the entire set of listings on RetirementJobs.com and for the subset of direct postings targeting older workers. Distinguishing between listings from these two sources is useful: while the total listings from both sources reflect the job options for older workers offered by employers that are at least open to hiring them, the direct listings reflect the jobs employers have gone out of their way to advertise to older workers.

Geographic Distribution of Jobs

To compare the geographic distribution of jobs aimed at older workers to all job openings in the economy, the analysis relies on the JOLTS, the definitive survey of U.S. job openings. For comparability with the listings from RetirementJobs.com, the reference jobs selected from the JOLTS are also the jobs that were open in November 2019.

Figure 1 shows the share of all jobs by source (RetirementJobs.com, both overall and the direct postings alone, and the JOLTS) in each Census region (the finest geographic cut available in the JOLTS). The regional distribution of the jobs on RetirementJobs.com appears to reflect the distribution of job openings nationally.

FIGURE 1. SHARE OF JOB POSTINGS BY SOURCE IN EACH CENSUS REGION, 2019



Sources: Authors' calculations from RetirementJobs.com (2019) and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, JOLTS (2019).

Quality of Jobs

While the JOLTS provides a comprehensive count of all job openings, it has virtually no information about the nature of the job. To compare the quality of jobs targeting older workers relative to job openings not segmented by age, it is necessary to turn to one of the nation's largest general jobs boards.

The goal was to collect job postings from the general jobs board in November 2019 to coincide with the RetirementJobs.com data, but the soonest this task could be accomplished was March 13-17, 2020. This delay raises two concerns: seasonality and COVID-19. Seasonality is unlikely to lead to much difference in the types of jobs listed across the two samples, since the big difference is between summer and winter, not between fall and spring. Of greater potential concern is the outbreak of COVID-19. While many of the postings would likely have been added before the shutdowns commenced and economic activity began to decline, some evidence suggests job posting online

was beginning to be impacted by mid-March.⁵ Relative to the same point in previous years, job postings were about 10 percent lower. If this 10 percent of "lost" postings contains disproportionately low-quality jobs, the comparison of RetirementJobs.com to general job postings would show a downward bias in the relative quality of jobs advertised to older workers.

Since the general jobs board contains millions of listings, it was necessary to construct a sample. The sampling involved randomly selecting 15 listings from each state and Washington, DC for a total of 765 listings. Because the total number of listings varies by state, the sample for each state was weighted to reflect its total underlying listings.

The results of the comparison are in Table 3. From the perspective of an older job seeker, the pattern that emerges is positive. The listings on RetirementJobs.com have higher salaries for both full- and part-time work (again, on a full-time basis), and these differences are statistically significant.⁶ The salary differences are also large, with the average salary for full-time work on RetirementJobs.com more than 15 percent higher than on the general jobs board. Furthermore, the jobs posted on RetirementJobs.com are more likely to be full-time.

TABLE 3. COMPARISON OF JOB POSTINGS BETWEEN RETIREMENTJOBS.COM (ALL AND DIRECT) AND A GENERAL JOBS BOARD

Item	RetirementJobs.com		General jobs board
	All	Direct	
Average compensation, full-time	\$43,800	\$26,900	\$37,900
Average compensation, part-time	41,000	22,300	37,700
Percent full-time	62%	18%	35%
Percent temporary	21	40	37
Percent that mention any benefits	34	36	47
Percent that mention health benefits	22	19	37
Percent that mention retirement benefits	16	7	29

Sources: Authors' calculations from RetirementJobs.com (2019) and a general jobs board.

Two caveats to these positive headline numbers are worth stressing. First, RetirementJobs.com listings are less likely to mention benefits. This pattern of relatively high salaries and few fringe benefits suggests that while jobs available to older workers may offer good opportunities for workers seeking bridge jobs to retirement, they may not offer good solutions for workers seeking retirement saving plans or health insurance. A mitigating factor on the health insurance front is that those still working at age 65 are eligible for Medicare. Employers may view a compensation bundle with more wages and fewer benefits as catering better to the desires of older workers who already have access to health insurance.

The second caveat to the positive takeaway of higher salaries on RetirementJobs.com is that this pattern does not hold when restricting attention to the direct listings posted by employers who went out of their way to target older workers. These jobs have salaries substantially lower than the rest of the jobs on RetirementJobs.com and the jobs on the general jobs board. These lower salaries are further compounded by a lower percentage of listings that mention health and retirement benefits specifically.

In sum, the jobs available to older workers are broadly dispersed geographically, and are of generally good quality when compared with jobs aimed at the general population. This pattern is particularly true for bridge jobs that offer income but no fringe benefits. However, the jobs that employers actively try to recruit older workers to fill are of poorer quality than general jobs, in terms of both salary and benefits.

Conclusion

In recent years, Americans have been trying to work to older ages. In order for this strategy to lead to a more secure retirement, it is not enough that people are willing to work – employers must also be willing to hire them on good terms.

The summary findings from RetirementJobs.com have some positive components. Overall, the jobs available to older workers are similarly distributed geographically to the jobs available to workers more generally. Furthermore, the pay offered for jobs open to older workers tends to be better than the pay offered for jobs in general.

Less reassuring is the fact that, for jobs open to older workers, job postings more rarely mention health and retirement benefits. Furthermore, when restricting attention to vacancies that employers proactively advertise to older workers, the picture is relatively bleak. For these vacancies, posted salaries are lower than for vacancies not aimed at older workers, while the relative scarcity of benefits persists.

Endnotes

- 1 Munnell, Wettstein, and Walters (2020).
- 2 Salary was reported in a wide array of formats. To standardize the variable, whenever a range was reported, the job was assigned the minimum of the range. Wages were also translated to annual salaries based on 40-hour workweeks, for 52 weeks a year. Thus, part-time and temporary jobs are assessed on a full-time basis for comparability. When jobs were characterized as part-time with no specific duration or hours, they were assumed to be half-time, e.g. 20-hour workweeks for a full 52-week year.
- 3 Occupations making up fewer than 5 percent of jobs are included in the “other” category. These occupations are: protective service; business and financial operations; installation, maintenance, and repair; production, architecture and engineering; community and social service; education, training, and library; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; life, physical, and social science; arts, design, entertainment, and sports; construction and extraction; personal care and service; legal; and farming, fishing, and forestry. No jobs in military occupations were listed.
- 4 The economy-wide average wage for 2019 is an estimate based on earnings of \$50,000 in 2018 (U.S. Social Security Administration (2020a) that are inflated by 3.1-percent nominal wage growth for 2019 (U.S. Social Security Administration (2020b)).
- 5 Campello, Kankanhalli, and Muthukrishnan (2020).
- 6 The differences are statistically significant at the 99-percent and 95-percent levels for full-time and part-time salaries, respectively.

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