

Section 2 The Attitudes of the Elderly and Issues Related to Employment Promotion

Compared to many other nations, Japan's percentage of elderly in the labour force is high, as is their cited ideal retirement age. Expanding employment opportunities for the elderly who want to work is an important issue. Providing such employment opportunities would not only satisfy the desires of those who want to work, it would help pass on the techniques and skills that the elderly have accumulated through long experience to the next generation.

In addition, the level of health and physical strength among the elderly is increasing, requiring flexible responses to individual cases rather than uniform treatment based solely on age.

It is important to build a vibrant aging society that can draw out the latent ability of the elderly and enable them to be connected to society as long as they have the desire and the ability, no matter how old they are.

(Japan's Elderly Have a Strong Desire to Work Compared to Many Countries)

Looking at the percentage of males 65 and older in the labour force in surveyed countries, South Korea is first, followed in order by Japan, the USA, Germany, and France (Table 39). Looking at desire to continue working, in the same survey, the percentage of those currently employed who said that they wanted to continue working was high in each country surveyed, but Japan was second behind only Germany, with about 90 percent of its working elderly hoping to continue working.

(An Increasing Number of Healthy Elderly People)

Regarding the health of the elderly, according to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "Survey on State of Employee's Health" (2002), the percentage of male workers 60 and over who say they are healthy is 85.9%, a higher percentage than that of the 50–59 age group (Table 40). Although in part this may be because workers 60 and over who are not healthy tend to retire or otherwise leave the workplace, over half of non-employed males in the 60–64 and 65–69 age groups also describe themselves as healthy, so there are also many healthy elderly who do not work.

(Causes of the Strong Desire to Work)

Looking at reasons for wanting to work, the highest percentage of respondents cites economic reasons, but the percentage decreases with age. On the other hand, the percentage naming health reasons, purpose in life, participation in society, and free time increases with age (Table 41).

In addition, the same survey also looked at those without paid employment who are seeking jobs. The percentage responding that they could not find a suitable job was high in each age group. Among those unable to find appropriate employment, a high percentage in each age group stated that they were not particular about conditions but were still unable to find a job. Compared with the same survey in 2000, the percentage of male workers in the 55–59 and 60–64 age groups that could not find a suitable job decreased. Looking at the age group characteristics of those unable to find suitable work, over 30 percent of those aged 65–69 seeking work were unable to find a job even though they were not particular about conditions. Although older age groups have a strong desire to work, the lack of jobs means employment is difficult for them (Table 42).

Table 39 International Comparison of the Percentage of the Elderly on the Workforce (2002)

(Unit: %)

Sex/age group	Japan	USA	Germany	France	Sweden	South Korea
Males 60–64	71.2	57.6	34.0	17.3	60.1	66.5
Females 60–64	39.2	44.1	16.4	15.1	53.4	46.4
Males 65 and over	31.1	17.9	4.4	3.3	–	42.7
Females 65 and over	13.2	9.8	1.8	2.5	–	23.0

Sources: ILO, "LABORSTA"; OECD, "Labour Statistics Portal" for France and South Korea

Table 40 Health Conditions of Workers

(Unit: %)

Sex/age group	All workers	Very healthy	Somewhat healthy	Somewhat unhealthy	Very unhealthy	Neither healthy nor unhealthy
Males	100.0	9.3	69.8	14.1	1.7	3.6
50–59	100.0	4.7	72.0	14.0	1.3	5.3
60 and over	100.0	15.2	70.7	8.9	1.2	2.1
Females	100.0	10.9	69.1	14.0	1.4	3.5
50–59	100.0	7.0	73.2	13.3	1.8	4.0
60 and over	100.0	21.5	60.8	6.9	–	10.0

Source: MHLW, "Survey on State of Employee's Health" (2002)

Table 41 Reasons the Elderly Work, by Gender and Age Group

(Unit: %)

Sex/age group	Employed persons	Economic reasons	Specific economic reason				Health reasons (good for health, etc.)	Purpose in life / participation in society	Asked to work / have free time	Other	Unknown	
			To maintain living of self and family	To raise living standard	Other	Unknown						
Males	[71.5]	100.0	79.2	75.0	3.1	0.8	0.2	4.2	6.5	4.8	4.4	0.9
55–59	[90.1]	100.0	91.7	88.7	2.1	0.7	0.1	0.6	2.4	1.1	3.3	0.9
60–64	[68.8]	100.0	71.8	67.4	3.6	0.7	0.3	6.3	9.3	6.1	5.5	1.0
65–69	[49.5]	100.0	60.3	53.9	4.9	1.4	0.1	9.6	11.8	12.1	5.3	0.9
Females	[45.6]	100.0	67.6	57.9	7.5	1.9	0.3	5.1	10.6	8.1	7.6	1.0
55–59	[62.2]	100.0	72.4	62.7	7.9	1.5	0.3	3.2	9.4	6.5	7.6	0.8
60–64	[42.3]	100.0	67.1	56.9	7.6	2.2	0.4	5.6	11.3	9.1	5.8	1.0
65–69	[28.5]	100.0	55.3	46.6	6.0	2.5	0.2	9.3	12.5	10.8	10.8	1.3
(Previous survey) (2000)												
Males	[70.9]	100.0	81.5	77.2	3.4	0.7	0.1	4.1	5.7	4.9	3.1	0.6
55–59	[89.9]	100.0	93.9	91.0	2.3	0.6	0.0	0.3	2.5	0.5	2.4	0.5
60–64	[66.5]	100.0	76.1	70.7	4.2	0.9	0.2	5.7	7.3	6.9	3.3	0.6
65–69	[51.6]	100.0	61.8	55.9	4.7	0.9	0.2	10.2	10.7	12.0	4.3	1.0
Females	[44.2]	100.0	67.2	58.6	6.9	1.4	0.3	5.5	11.4	9.1	6.1	0.7
55–59	[59.7]	100.0	74.6	64.5	8.4	1.4	0.3	2.7	10.5	6.6	5.3	0.4
60–64	[41.5]	100.0	65.3	57.6	5.9	1.4	0.4	6.0	11.6	9.8	6.5	0.8
65–69	[28.7]	100.0	51.8	45.5	4.7	1.4	0.2	11.6	13.3	14.5	7.5	1.3

Source: MHLW, "Survey on Employment Conditions of Older Persons" (2004)

Note: Numbers in brackets [] show the percentage of the elderly who are employed.

Looking at the preferred employment patterns of those who were unable to find a suitable job, the percentage wanting regular employment decreases with age, while the percentage wanting short hours or to work at their own discretion increases. By gender, 70 or more percent of males in the 55–59 age group want regular employment, while 50 or more percent of females in the same age group want short hours.

These results indicate that the percentage of the elderly whose motivation for working tends to have less to do with economic concerns and more to do with health, purpose in life, participation in society, and so on, and who tend to desire shorter work hours as they grow older, is increasing. However, a high percentage of the elderly still desire work for economic reasons and are unable to find jobs even though they are not particular about conditions.

(The Ability of the Elderly to Work)

Looking at perceived expectations for roles of the currently-employed elderly, although many of the elderly perceive themselves as expected to utilize the skills they have cultivated in society over the years, such as provision of leadership and advice to younger employees, provision of specialized knowledge and expertise, and frontline work utilizing experience and personal networks. At the same time, however, a high percentage perceive themselves as expected to perform light work not requiring particular experience or skill (Figure 43).

(Community Activities of the Elderly)

Regarding the question "Do you want to continue or begin participating in voluntary group or organization community activities", 47.7% responded "Want to participate" and 10.5% responded "Want to participate but cannot because of work", while 37.5% responded "Don't want to participate". Compared with past surveys, the percentage answering "Want to participate" is flat, but the percentage responding "Don't want to participate" is on an upward trend (Figure 44).

Regarding ways to work during old age other than employee, the elderly can work at "silver personnel centers" and nonprofit organizations or join volunteer activities and community businesses. In addition, they can start businesses or provide consultation to small and medium enterprises that need their experience and ability.

Other roles the elderly can play are to support childrearing in their families and to touch young people through their families or local governments, helping to raise and guide them in their communities.

Table 42 Reasons Elderly Persons are Unable to Find Suitable Employment, by Sex and Age Group

(Unit: %)

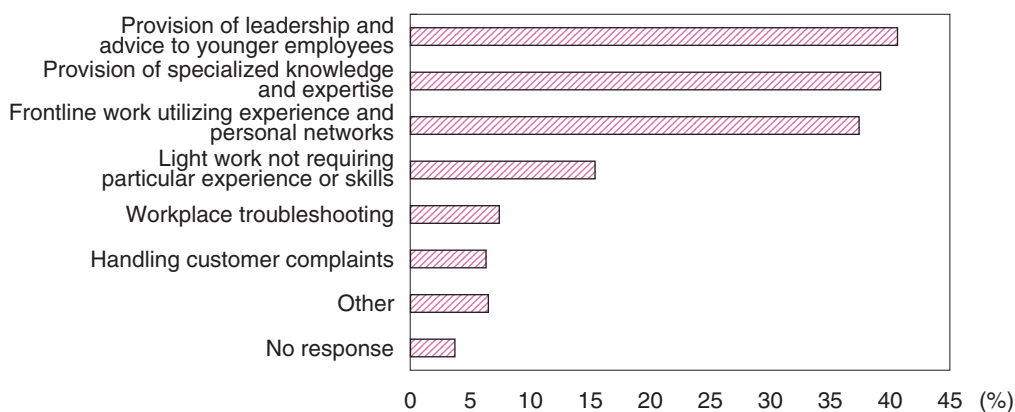
Sex / age group	Unable to find suitable employment	Reason							
		Job type was different from that desired	Hours were different from those desired	Pay / remuneration was different from that desired	Commute was longer than desired	Not concerned with conditions, no job	Other	Unknown	
Males	[57.5]	100	29.4	9.0	4.6	0.9	48.6	7.6	-
55-59	[56.3]	100	29.5	7.8	10.0	1.6	44.8	6.3	-
60-64	[58.9]	100	34.1	12.0	5.4	0.3	42.1	6.1	-
65-69	[56.8]	100	24.7	6.7	1.1	1.1	56.8	9.6	-
Females	[49.0]	100	20.9	15.0	0.9	3.2	47.6	12.1	0.3
55-59	[47.6]	100	27.9	16.9	1.8	4.7	35.0	13.4	0.4
60-64	[51.7]	100	19.3	16.5	0.7	3.3	49.5	10.8	-
65-69	[47.1]	100	16.2	11.3	0.4	1.5	57.4	12.7	0.4

Source: "Report on Survey on Employment Conditions of Older Persons" (2004), MHLW

Notes: 1) Figures in brackets [] show the percentage of job seekers unable to find employment.

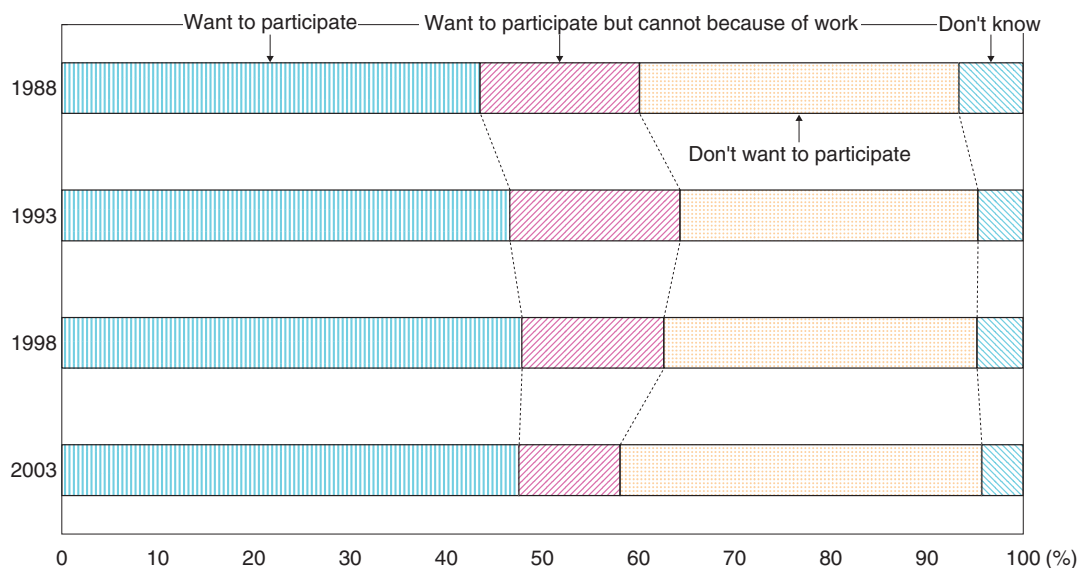
2) The category "Not concerned with conditions, no job available" was added in 2004, so comparison with the previous survey (2000) is not possible.

Figure 43 Roles Expected of the Currently Employed Elderly by Their Employers



Source: "Survey of conditions related to the activities of the elderly in the workplace," Japan Institute of Labour (2000)

Figure 44 Inclination to Participate in Community Activities



Source: Cabinet Office, "Survey of the desire of the elderly to participate in community activities" (2003)