

# WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES OF OLDER LOW-WAGE BLACK WORKERS

What we know

Experiences

What are the gaps

Recommendations



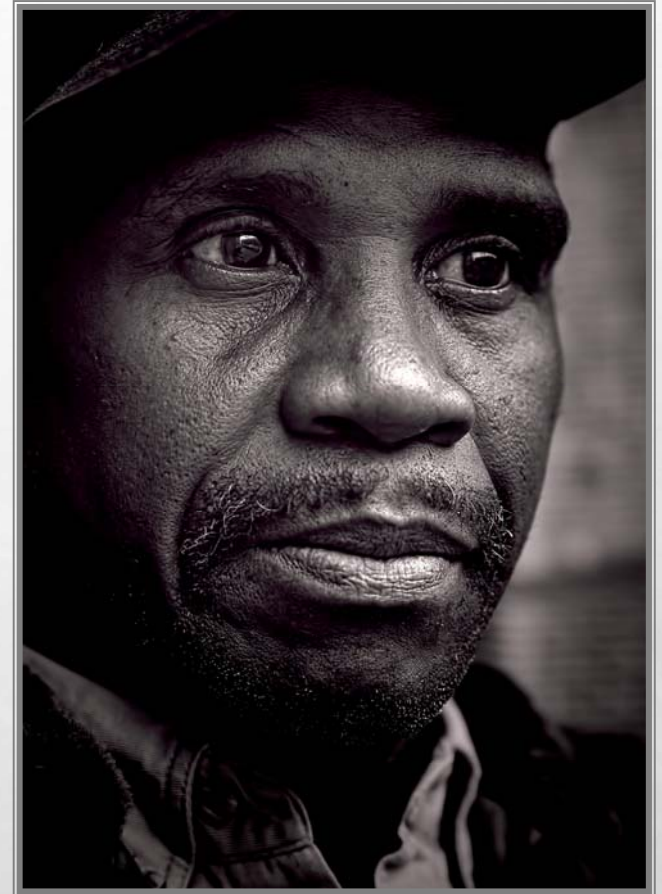
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Employment at Older Ages

# WORKPLACE EMPLOYER BENEFITS

- **Social Security**: a federal insurance plan, which pays monthly monetary assistance to retired adults, calculated in part by the beneficiary's history of income
- **Pensions**: employer-provided retirement benefit, are calculated by years of service and salary
- **The 401(k)**: employer-contribution plan is now the dominant employer benefit

**BLACK WORKERS DISPROPORTIONALLY  
FACE CHALLENGES IN LABOR MARKET  
COMPENSATION AND RETIREMENT  
BENEFITS**

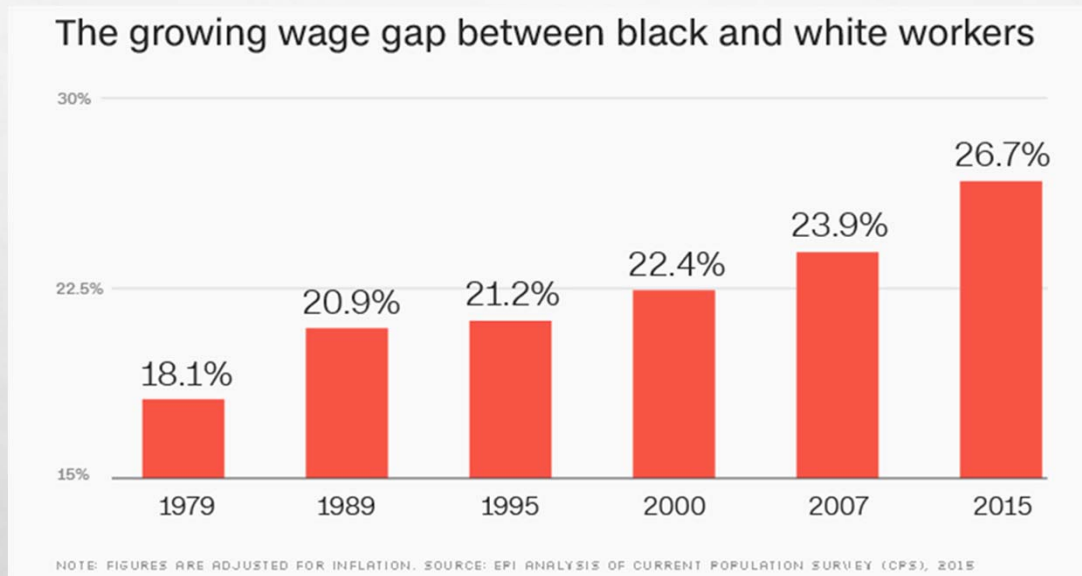


# EARNING DIFFERENCES



Source: BLS; FRED; RSM US

# THE WAGE GAP CONTINUES TO GROW



# **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION & ECONOMIC OPPRESSION**

- **Government-sponsored retirement programs and employer benefits are directly tied to individual employment history and wages**
  - Black workers earn less income over the life course
  - Black workers are less likely to have insurance support in comparison to their white counterparts in older age
- Diminishing unionization decreases workers' access to defined benefit plans



# Discrimination Effects in Later Life

- Those who face regular discrimination are disproportionately burdened by multiple chronic conditions (MCC) and thus face greater challenges with respect to continued employment
- Perceived discrimination produces frequent stressful circumstances that increase risks related to the deleterious effects of MCC on the ability to function in later life

Williams, David, Harold Neighbors, and James Jackson. 2003, Shadmi, E. 2013, 2014

# Black-White Health Disparities in Later Life

- Black adults suffer from more chronic illnesses, poor health outcomes, and death at higher compared to nearly all other racial groups
- Black adults report higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, asthma, arthritis, and obesity in comparison to Whites
- Older Black adults experience relatively higher depressive symptoms relative to older White adults



Day 1996; McKinnon 2003; Boedenheimer, Chen, and Bennett 2009; Erving 2017; Green, Baker and Sato 2003



# WORKING LONGER

- Black adults to remain in the workforce longer for financial support and health insurance
- This relationship is further compounded when the individual is a low-wage worker and cannot afford to retire

# MY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify the health and work challenges of older Black, low-wage, full-time workers with MCC
- To understand how workplace environment fosters or hinders resilience
- To identify workers' strategies to remain engaged in the workforce despite health problems
- Further develop intervention and recommendations to help them remain in engaged in work for as long as they desire

# Resilience

Resilience in an individual refers to successful adaptation despite risk and adversity (Masten 1994)

Resilience: Successful Management of Health (challenges) and (hard) Work

**Research Question: What are the structural explanations for their resilience?**



*Imagine mopping a college cafeteria with arthritis while feeling dizzy from blood pressure medication.*

# Resilience, Captured

*I'm the type [of person] that, if I'm given a task to do, I'm gonna get it done. And I'm gonna do it to the best of my ability. It doesn't affect my job for the most part, in a negative way. It affects me, because I push myself harder, to push through it. So that's harder on me.*

*-Housekeeper, Female, 57, 4 chronic conditions*

*I just go right on, keep on rollin'...*

*-Housekeeper, Female, 55, 2 chronic conditions*

# Preferred Employer (managing health)

- Respondents' employment at a “preferred employer” was the most important factor when **managing their health**.
- They are employed at an organization that pays higher wages for low-skilled work and offers full benefits at a lower out of pocket cost than all their previous low-skill, low-wage workplaces.

# Scheduling (managing health)

- Typically workers worked Tuesday-Saturday. They arrive about 5am and are off at 2pm. This allows for easy medical appointment scheduling.
- Workers were provided consistent but inflexible scheduling.



# Coworkers (managing work)

- Respondents often relied on teamwork with other older workers to get job tasks completed when working while sick.
- Younger workers were often deemed not helpful in sharing tasks or alleviating physical jobs.

*I'm not gonna let that old man work hard. You chill out. I got you. 'Cause I'm young enough. My back's strong enough. I can do that. I work harder than y'all [young wokers] and I shouldn't be.*

*-Stock Room Attendant, Male, 55, 3 chronic conditions*

# Inflexible Work Arrangements (managing work)

- “There is no light duty.” -Housekeeper, Female, 50, 2 chronic conditions

- Inflexible work schedules

*I know of one of my co-workers, she has cataracts [and] on Mondays she works from 8 'til 5. And it's like dark. So she asked the managers if she could, you know, up her time to 7 to 4 [pm] so she could get off before dark because the lights bothers her. And they, they just flat out refused for that one hour.*

*-Housekeeper, Female, 57, 4 chronic conditions*

- Work is allocated equally amongst all workers (regardless of age, illness, or physical ability)

# Stress and work environment (managing work and health)

- **Less stress at work**
  - Friendly clients
  - “Compassionate” supervisors
  - Camaraderie with peers
  - Familiar work
- **More stress at work**
  - Short staff (high absenteeism)
  - Write ups/new management
  - Organization systems transition
  - Technology/computer use

# Discussion: Navigating Risks

- **Managing Health Risks**
  - Seeking employment with better pay and affordable full coverage healthcare
    - Preferred Employer
  - Full time schedule allows for 2pm release and one weekday off for medical appointments
    - Consistency in scheduling
  - Communicating with supervisors of health-related time off
    - Management and human resource policy for time off

# Discussion: Navigating Risks

- **Managing Work Risks**

- Working in teams (building camaraderie) with other older workers to share workload
  - Teamwork
- Doing familiar jobs (cleaning, restaurant, stock, cashier)
  - Secondary market jobs with primary market benefits
- Engaging with clients and enjoying the job
  - Favorable work environment

## THESE STUDY FINDINGS REVEALED...

- Older workers with differing social supports, finances, physical limitations, and education described their workplace (e.g., pay, benefits, culture) as the primary factor to successful management of their chronic illnesses.
- More research needs to be done that addresses organizational factors as imperative to enduring workforce engagement for older (low-wage) workers with chronic illnesses.





**COVID-19**  
**RACIAL INJUSTICE**  
**EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY**

## HEALTH EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS & RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS, CDC, JULY 2020



PEOPLE FROM SOME RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED IN ESSENTIAL WORK SETTINGS SUCH AS HEALTHCARE FACILITIES, FARMS, FACTORIES, GROCERY STORES, AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. SOME PEOPLE WHO WORK IN THESE SETTINGS HAVE MORE CHANCES TO BE EXPOSED TO THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES COVID-19 DUE TO SEVERAL FACTORS, SUCH AS CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE PUBLIC OR OTHER WORKERS, NOT BEING ABLE TO WORK FROM HOME, AND NOT HAVING PAID SICK DAYS.

# (OLDER) BLACK WORKERS & COVID-19

**AARP, THE NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT LAW  
PROJECT/ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE, ETC...**



- AMONG OLDER WORKERS, BLACKS AND WOMEN FACE HIGHER COVID-19 RISKS
- CORONAVIRUS: OVER-55 MAIN VICTIMS OF EMPLOYMENT CRISIS, WATCHDOG FINDS
- HEALTH WORKERS, ESPECIALLY MINORITIES, AT HIGH RISK FOR COVID, EVEN WITH PPE
- BLACK WORKERS FACE TWO OF THE MOST LETHAL PREEXISTING CONDITIONS FOR CORONAVIRUS—RACISM AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITY
- BLACK ESSENTIAL WORKERS TWICE AS LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE WORKPLACE RETALIATION DURING PANDEMIC

# RECOMMENDATIONS/FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Center the experiences of Black workers to better gauge the health of the nation and the state of the economy (Jason)
- Center the experiences of older Black women workers: caregivers, low-wage, service, professional, marginal, and socially mobile (Erving & Jason)
- Center the workplace as a point of analysis (Carr, Jason, Taylor, & Washington)



## METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Value qualitative and mixed methods research designs

Consider workplaces as a viable level of analysis

Fund community-based research designs

Support & fund Black health disparities researchers



**THANK YOU!**

**QUESTIONS?**

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