

IV. OLDER CANADIANS: EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

In the course of the hearings conducted by this committee, it rapidly became apparent that an age-based erosion of human rights is experienced by two distinct groups: the aging, whose primary concerns relate to the area of employment, and the elderly, whose concerns relate to virtually the full array of contemporary social services. This chapter focusses on the former group, while in the following chapter concerns of the elderly are addressed.

Much of the available data on the employment experience of the aging deals with persons aged 45-64. For the purposes of this examination, therefore, the category of the aging, or older workers, will be defined in terms of this age range. The Committee is aware, however, that within particular vocations and in individual cases, discrimination or other age-based erosions of human rights can be experienced at an age well below 45. The Committee has also been made aware that the experience of Canadians aged 45-64 is not uniform, being differentiated by, among other factors, age, gender, occupation and education. Notwithstanding such differences, the evidence with which the Committee has been provided makes it abundantly clear that the various sub-groups of older workers share experiences reflecting their vulnerability to age-based human rights abuses, and thus warrant treatment together.

A) Labour Force Trends and Implications

Witnesses appearing before the Committee showed widespread awareness that the general demographic trends outlined in Part I are already having, and will continue to have, direct implications for the labour market. The entry of the baby boom generation into the labour market during the 1970's and early 1980's resulted in a decline in the proportion of older workers in the labour force, despite numerical growth of this group. Thus while the proportion of older workers in the labour force stood at 26.5% in 1977, it declined to 23.9% in 1986 even though the number of older workers grew by about 315,000.⁷ Declining labour force participation rates for older male workers (from 84% in 1977 to 81% in 1986), while more than offset by the increasing participation of female older workers (from 41% to 47%), moderated rates of increase for the older worker group.

Early retirement trends are expected to result in a continuing decline in participation rates for older male workers, particularly those over age 55, while rates of labour force participation for female older workers continue to