

In March of 1985, older female workers remained unemployed for an average of 23.4 weeks, 2.1 weeks longer than the average for all unemployed women. Older male workers remained unemployed for an average of 31.8 weeks, fully 7.8 weeks longer than the average for all unemployed males.¹⁰ Just over two years later, despite the general improvement in labour market conditions, the average duration of unemployment for males over 45 was 36.7% greater than for all unemployed males, and the average duration of unemployment for females over 45 was 18.1% greater than for all unemployed females.¹¹ These figures indicate that older workers, once unemployed, encounter considerably greater difficulty in finding new employment than their younger peers, and that unemployed older workers are more likely than the younger unemployed to sustain serious long-term unemployment.

This conclusion is confirmed in Statistics Canada data for the year 1985, which reveal that 18.1% of those over age 45 and unemployed at some point during the year were unemployed for 1-4 weeks, while 17.2% in the same age category were unemployed for forty or more weeks.¹² For those aged 25-44, comparable figures are 21.6% and 12.3%, indicating a higher incidence of unemployment but a relative shift away from long-term unemployment for the younger group. Particularly vulnerable to long-term unemployment were men aged 45 and above, 16.7% of whom sustained short-term (1-4 week) unemployment while fully 19% were unemployed for more than forty weeks.

A final element in the older worker unemployment picture is the relatively high rate of departure from the labour force of unemployed older workers, which is widely acknowledged to result in a disproportionate under-estimation of their unemployment rates in normal unemployment statistics. A 1983 Statistics Canada study concluded, on the basis of surveys of those desiring work but not actively seeking it (and therefore, technically, outside the labour force), that 1983 official unemployment rates for men over 45 of 9.2% concealed real unemployment rates on the order of 10.5%.¹³ A 1985 report prepared for the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto estimated that, once discouraged workers and involuntary early retirees were allowed for, the level of unemployed older workers — long-term and otherwise — would be more than double that suggested by official employment statistics. As one of the Committee's witnesses observed: "It is clear that older workers have been hardest-hit by long-term unemployment, and that the consequences for them are