

Women with arthritis more likely than men to stop working

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Arthritis can have significant physical and psychological repercussions that impact quality of life and for those of working age, it can affect their ability to remain employed. Compared to individuals with other types of chronic diseases or disabilities, arthritis appears to have a more profound effect on a person's ability to work. Previous studies have found that about half of those with severe forms of arthritis were not working, leading to a loss of skilled workers and increasing the personal and socioeconomic burden of the disease. Few studies have looked at sex differences in the work experiences of people with arthritis, but a new study found that women may be more likely to leave employment, while men may be more likely to remain working and report negative experiences. The study was published in the May issue of *Arthritis Care & Research*.

Led by Simone A. Kaptein of the Toronto Western Research Institute, the study used data from the Canadian Participation and Activity Survey, a national telephone survey administered in 2001-2002 to almost 29,000 individuals. The study analyzed responses for almost 9,000 individuals between the ages of 25 and 64. Respondents were questioned about the intensity and frequency of activity limitations for activities likely to be encountered in the work place, such as standing for long periods, bending and picking up objects, climbing stairs, carrying objects, using their fingers, traveling by car and moving about between rooms. They were also asked whether they needed work place accommodations, what type and whether these were available, as well as questions about workplace discrimination or disadvantage.

The results showed that 2.3 percent of the working-age population had [arthritis](#) disability, the second-most frequent cause of disability after back and spine conditions. More than half of those with arthritis disability reported being out of the labor force, almost 41 percent were unemployed, and 5 percent were unemployed and looking for work. A higher proportion of [women](#) were out of the labor force than men.

Although men with children were more likely to remain employed, in contrast to previous studies, the current study found that single or previously married women were more likely to be out of the labor force. Married women were more likely to continue working, possibly due to the fact that these women may have the option of working part-time, which would be difficult for sole-income earners who may have had to give up employment and receive disability insurance. "Additional research needs to examine in more detail the specific reasons that men and women give up employment and their relationship to family composition and marital status," the authors state.

Not surprisingly, older individuals with arthritis disability were more likely to take early retirement than their younger counterparts. The authors point out, however, that the financial ramifications of retirement may be more serious for those with arthritis disability, since they may have to give up medication coverage and extended health care benefits, they may not be as financially prepared for retirement having often worked reduced hours prior to retiring, and arthritis is often associated with extra financial costs for medications and other expenses.

The study found that greater education was significantly associated with being in the labor force for both men and women and may act as a resource enabling individuals to more easily change or modify their jobs. It also showed that men were more likely to report perceived arthritis-related discrimination than women and were more likely to make changes such as the amount or type of work they performed, which may

account for the higher percentage of men remaining in the work force.

The authors conclude that the study highlights "the need for greater attention to differences in gender roles that may influence the impact of arthritis in the lives of women and men."

More information:

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/77005015/home>

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