

The February Review

This special issue commemorates the 25th year that the National Longitudinal Survey—Youth Cohort (NLSY79) has been in the field. Charles Pierret, the BLS program manager for the survey, does a far more thorough job of summarizing the articles in this issue than would normally have appeared in this space. The articles themselves cover a wide range of topics from some of the unique issues of longitudinal methodology to some of the more interesting questions in labor economics. James Walker, Kenneth Wolpin, Julie Yates, Audrey Light, Robert Fairlie, James Spletzer and Harley Frazis, Lawrence Wu and Jui-Chung Allen Li, and Randall Olsen made contributions to this collection.

Union membership

In 2004, 12.5 percent of wage and salary workers were union members, down from 12.9 percent in 2003. The union membership rate has steadily declined from a high of 20.1 percent in 1983, the first year for which comparable union-membership data are available.

Among private industry workers, the 2004 union membership rate was 7.9 percent, about half what it had been in 1983. Among major private industries, transportation and utilities had the highest union membership rate in 2004, at 24.9 percent. Construction, information industries, and manufacturing also had higher-than-average rates. Financial activities had the lowest unionization rate in 2004—2.0 percent.

About 36 percent of government workers were union members in 2004. Two groups—education, training, and library occupations and protective service occupations—had the highest

unionization rates, at about 37 percent each. Protective service occupations include firefighters and police officers. Find out more in “Union Members in 2004,” news release USDL 05–112.

Ad agents profiled

Selling advertising space is the job of advertising sales agents, who are often called account executives or advertising sales representatives. Most employers pay an advertising sales agent using a combination of salary, commissions, and bonuses. Salary varies by geographic location but is generally no more than half of a sales agent’s total compensation. Commissions are usually based on a percentage of the agent’s sales. Bonuses are lump-sum financial awards based on individual performance, the performance of all sales agents in a group, or the firm’s overall performance.

Median annual earnings for all advertising sales agents were \$38,640 in May 2003, including commissions and bonuses. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$19,920, and the highest paid 10 percent earned more than \$87,360 per year. In addition to earnings, advertising sales agents usually get reimbursed for expenses associated with making sales visits, such as transportation costs and meals. For more information about this occupation, see “Sellers for the sellers: Advertising sales agents” by Gregory Niemesh, *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Fall 2004.

State unemployment trends

December 2004 unemployment rates were lower than a year earlier in 43

States, higher in 5 States and the District of Columbia, and unchanged in 2 States. Kentucky and Washington reported the largest rate decreases from a year ago, down 1.5 percentage points each, followed by Hawaii, New Jersey, and Oklahoma, all down 1.4 points. Nine additional States registered rate decreases of at least 1.0 percentage point.

Mississippi reported the largest over-the-year unemployment rate increase, 0.8 percentage point. No other State had a rate increase greater than 0.4 percentage point. See “Regional and State Employment and Unemployment: December 2004,” news release USDL 05–109.

Price trends in 2004

For the 12-month period ended in December 2004, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) rose 3.3 percent. This compares with an increase of 1.9 percent in all of 2003. From December 2003 to December 2004, the Producer Price Index for Finished Goods prices increased 4.1 percent, after climbing 4.0 percent during 2003. Import prices were up 6.9 percent over the year ended in December 2004, compared with a more modest 2.4-percent increase for the year ended in December 2003. The price index for overall exports rose 4.1 percent over the course of 2004.

Errata

Three rows of data were misaligned in table 4 of the article, “Work-related multiple-fatality incidents,” in the October issue. A revised version of page 33 is available at:

<http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2004/10/art2full.pdf>. □