

The February Review

Wedding rings and a baby bottle on this month's cover illustration either mean the *Monthly Labor Review* is markedly changing its focus or, more likely, we're leading off this month with an examination of the changing impact of marriage and children on women's labor force participation. And—no surprise—it's the latter.

Saul D. Hoffman examines this changing impact over the two decades from 1984 to 2004, using data derived from the Current Population Survey. He finds that women with children were more likely to be working at the latter end of the period than in its beginning. Interestingly, when focusing on *married* women with children—especially young children—he finds that they were working less in 2004 than a decade earlier, although more than they were two decades earlier. Marital status and the presence of children prove to be crucial variables in their impact on the labor market participation of women over this time frame.

What seems like sometimes wildly gyrating trends in prices over the last couple of years has received widespread attention. William H. Casey and Myron D. Murray describe trends in the prices of imports to, and exports from, the United States in 2007. Import prices that year, which rose 10.6 percent, were noticeably affected by rising costs in energy, chemicals, and metals, as well as the devaluation of the dollar. Export prices increased by 6 percent, driven in part by higher prices for agricultural goods such as wheat, soybeans, and corn. Agricultural product export prices, in fact, increased almost 24 percent, reflecting strong global demand and

the impact of weather-related events on the global food supply.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey collects data on employee access to individual paid-leave benefits. As Iris S. Diaz and Richard Wallick point out, this collection allows analysts to estimate the incidence of specific benefit programs. But, further, when benefits can be used interchangeably, useful information can be created by examining combinations of benefits, such as, in their research, leisure and illness leave. They make a compelling case that a fuller picture of access to benefits can be developed by studying not just the use of these benefits in isolation.

Regional report

BLS periodically issues reports prepared by analysts in our network of Regional Offices. The latest report (available at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/collegesboston.pdf>) examines the impact on the Boston metropolitan area labor market of its noteworthy concentration of institutions of higher learning.

As the report indicates, the Boston area is home to more than 80 private colleges and universities. Supporting over 360,000 students, they employ nearly 70,000 people. Moreover, since 1990, they have acted as a powerful job generator, with employment growth roughly twice the rate for private industry in the area. Further, they generate wages for their workers that make up a much higher proportion of the wage base in the area than colleges and universities do compared to the Nation as a whole. The extent and prominence of higher learning employment in Boston also serves to elevate the educational profile of the local labor

force and to help attract businesses in knowledge-based industries, such as biotechnology and financial services.

To find out more about the information available from the BLS regions, please go to this Web address: <http://www.bls.gov/bls/reghome.htm>.

Paid-leave benefits

As touched upon in the article alluded to earlier by Diaz and Wallick, it is common for U.S. employers to offer paid leave to their employees in forms such as holidays, vacations, sick leave, and personal leave. The latest issue of the BLS publication *Program Perspectives* showcases the latest data and trends about this desirable aspect of employment.

Paid holidays and vacations were available to more than 75 percent of private-industry workers as of March 2008. Leave benefits in private-sector business establishments vary by characteristics such as number of employees and type of industry. Eighty-six percent of workers in goods-producing industries, for instance, receive paid holidays and vacation leave, compared with about three-quarters of workers in service-providing industries. A higher share of workers in larger establishments—those employing 100 or more workers—receive these benefits than workers in smaller businesses.

While access to paid holidays and vacations has remained stable for the past two decades, access to paid personal leave has been increasing significantly. In the early 1990s, less than 15 percent of workers in private industry had this benefit available to them; by last year, the share had grown to 37 percent. In the world of benefits, this represents rapid change.

This issue of *Program Perspectives* can be found on our Web site at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/perspectives/issue2.pdf>.