

Introduction

This edition of Kevin's Corner uses data from the United States Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey to review the main reason adults report they are not working.

Background

The United States Census Bureau's Pulse Survey is a weekly sample-based survey of several hundred thousand U.S. households. It aims to "collect data to measure how emergent issues are impacting U.S. households from a social and economic perspective." Topics include school enrollment, employment, food security, health, housing and transportation.

Note: As of January 2025 the methodology and timing of the Household Pulse Survey is being changed. The new version of the survey will be called the Household Trends and Outlook Pulse Survey (HTOPS).

In any labor market, a portion of the population will always be out of the labor force – in other words, neither employed nor actively seeking work. There are a wide range of reasons why someone might be out of the labor force. These include retirement, child care needs, advancing one's education and other factors. The review below focuses on a specific portion of the employment section of the Household Pulse Survey, questions regarding the reasons why a person is not working. We compare the main reasons given by Vermonters to the main reasons given by respondents nationwide.

This is an experimental data set from the US Census Bureau. The sample size at the state level is quite small. Therefore, the error ranges in the data are quite large; please note them when deciding how to use this information.

Vermont Findings

Among those who are not working, a majority of Vermonters (55.2% or 108,334) report they are not working due to retirement. At less than a third of the count of retirees, "Other reason" is the next largest pool of respondents (17.1% or 33,609).

People who report that they are not working because they are sick or disabled represent 9.4% (18,545) of the population of people not working. The only other reasons that garner more than 4% of respondents are people who report they "did not want to be employed at this time" (4.3% or 8,352) and "caring for children not in school or daycare" (4.1% or 8,146). See Table 1.

Table 1: Vermont Respondents' Main Reason For Not Working

Reason for not working	Vermont		
	Number	Percent	Error range
Did not want to be employed at this time	8,352	4.3%	+/-3,912
Caring for children not in school or daycare	8,146	4.1%	+/-4,686
Caring for an elderly person	6,320	3.2%	+/-4,254
Sick or disabled	18,545	9.4%	+/-6,900
Retired	108,334	55.2%	+/-9,734
Laid off or furloughed	3,795	1.9%	+/-3,694
Employer closed temporarily or out of business	4,224	2.2%	+/-3,344
Do not have transportation to work	639	0.3%	+/-645
Other reason	33,609	17.1%	+/-12,681
Did not report	4,346	2.2%	+/-2,470

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National Findings

Nationwide, the results of this inquiry from the Household Pulse survey show similar results. Some intriguing differences do exist, however. One cohort that is significantly smaller than the Vermont share? People reporting they are not working because they are retired. Nationally, 46.3% of respondents who were not working said it was due to retirement. In Vermont that figure stood at 55.2%.

This matches the known demographic trend that Vermont's population is older and our share of the population over 65 years of age is larger than the nation as a whole. According to the US Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey, 22.2% of Vermonters and 17.7% of all US residents were over 65.

People who report they are sick or disabled as the main reason they are not working constitute 16.3% of all non-working respondents nationally verses 9.4% of Vermonters. With the exception of "Other reason (16.0%), the next largest group is those reporting that they are not working due to caring for children. At 4.7%, this figure is just above Vermont's share of 4.1%.

Combining people who report they were laid off or furloughed with people whose employer closed temporarily or went out of business, the national figure stands at 5.9% (3.9% and 2.0% respectively.) In Vermont, the combined figure is 4.1% (1.9% and 2.2% respectively). This comports with a Vermont unemployment rate that is much lower than the US average (2.6% vs. 4.1% respectively).

Finally, somewhat more Vermonters are not working because they are caring for an elderly person (3.2%) than US residents (2.0%). As with the retirement figures, this number is likely influenced in part by Vermont's larger share of people over 65 years of age.

Table 2: US Resident Respondents' Main Reason For Not Working

Reason for not working	United States		
	Number	Percent	Error Range
Did not want to be employed at this time	4,152,915	4.2%	+/-1,309,943
Caring for children not in school or daycare	4,734,945	4.7%	+/-354,311
Caring for an elderly person	2,000,307	2.0%	+/-167,814
Sick or disabled	16,270,211	16.3%	+/-545,703
Retired	46,192,613	46.3%	+/-354,304
Laid off or furloughed	3,943,877	3.9%	+/-299,685
Employer closed temporarily or out of business	1,974,988	2.0%	+/-218,402
Do not have transportation to work	1,425,048	1.4%	+/-207,636
Other reason	15,946,820	16.0%	+/-477,702
Did not report	3,210,322	3.2%	+/-280,482

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