

Arthritis & Employment Study Results

EXAMINING THE EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES OF PEOPLE WITH RHEUMATIC DISEASE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

Lead researcher: Dr. [Arif Jetha](#), an Associate Scientist at the Institute for Work & Health ([IWH](#))

Background

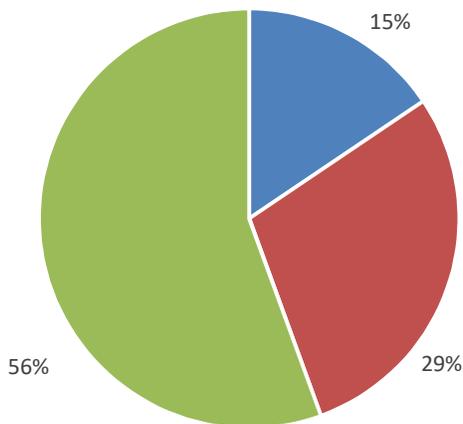
Arthritis affects 4.3 million Canadians, 60% of whom are under the age of 65. Not surprisingly, the health condition has a big impact on the ability of people with arthritis to find work and keep working throughout their lives. Yet, we know little about how people with arthritis balance their work responsibilities with the management of their health condition at different stages of their lives.

Through our study, conducted through the federally funded Canadian Disability Participation Project ([CDPP](#)), Dr. [Arif Jetha](#) aimed to learn more about how unique milestones shape employment experiences at different times of life.

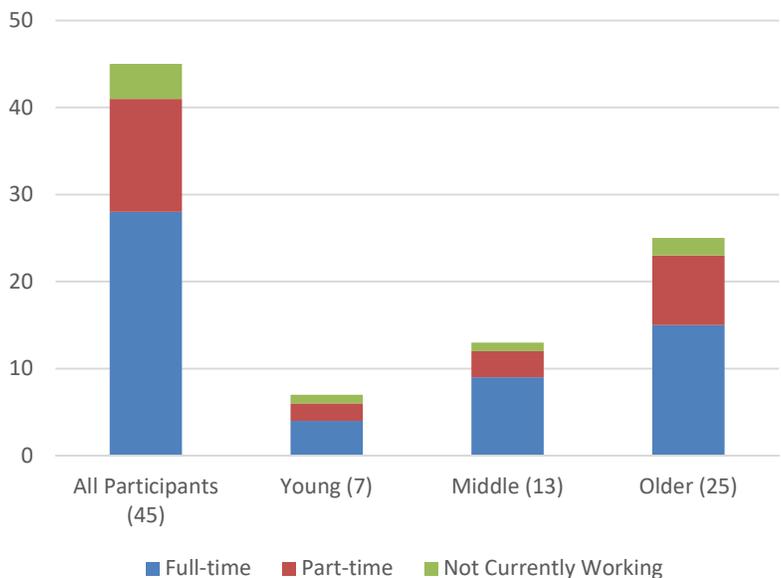
Who we talked to

Through interviews and focus groups, our research team talked to 45 working-aged adults living with arthritis to learn about their experiences of working with arthritis at different times of life. In particular, we talked to 7 young adults (18-34 years), 13 middle-age adults (35-54 years) and 25 older adults (55+ years).

■ Young (18-34) ■ Middle (35-54) ■ Older (55+)



About two thirds of the people we spoke with were working full-time (62%); 29% worked part-time and 9% were not working at the time of the interview, but had worked recently.



What we learned

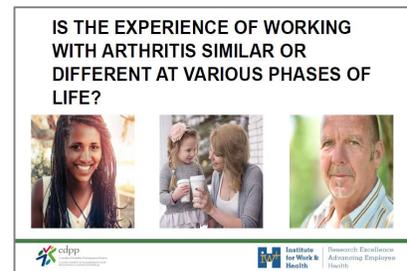
In talking to people, we learned that life and career stage do matter when thinking about the impact of arthritis on employment.

For young adults with arthritis, the transition from school to work was a significant source of stress. They devoted a great deal of time and energy to finding full-time employment, even if that meant sacrificing involvement in other areas of life. Middle-aged people with arthritis were handling the most responsibility in their careers while juggling roles outside of work, including parenting, marriage and leisure. Older adults with arthritis were considering the transition from work to retirement. Older participants described weighing multiple factors such as health, financial and personal interests in their decision to retire.

We also examined the different types of job accommodations that were needed and used by participants at different times of life. We learned that, regardless of age or career stage, adults with arthritis needed flexible scheduling, extended drug benefits, accessibility within the workplace, opportunities to modify work, and support from supervisors and co-workers.

On the other hand, the availability and use of job accommodations tended to differ at different career stages. Being at the early career stage, young adults with arthritis were often working in part-time or non-permanent jobs where job accommodations were not always available. Because arthritis is often seen as only affecting older people, young adults found it particularly difficult to disclose their arthritis and request accommodations within the workplace.

In comparison, middle-aged and older participants were more likely to access the job accommodations they needed to sustain employment. This was especially true for those who had been with the same organization for a long period of time and had built up a level of trust with their colleagues and supervisors that enabled them to gain access to the accommodations that were most needed.



[Click here](#) to watch a presentation by Dr. Jetha on this research.

What's next

According to Dr. Jetha, the results of this study clearly indicate a need for greater organizational awareness about the impact of arthritis on employees of all ages. The job accommodations and modifications needed to support workers with arthritis may be similar for young, middle-aged and older adults. But the experiences of working with arthritis differ across life and require unique workplace strategies to encourage access to the job accommodations and support that are most needed.

To learn more about the study or participate in future research, please contact the study [author](#).



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