



# UNIONS: DELIVERING DECENT WORK FOR YOUNGER ADULTS

Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series



POVERTY AND  
EMPLOYMENT PRECARITY  
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO



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## **UNIONS: DELIVERING DECENT WORK FOR YOUNGER ADULTS** **Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series**

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This report was proudly produced with unionized labour.

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## UNIONS: DELIVERING DECENT WORK FOR YOUNGER ADULTS

Unions and the Response to Precarious Work Series

*Unions: Delivering Decent Work for Younger Adults* is the third in our 4-part series on *Unions and the Response to Precarious Work*. In our first report, *The Union Advantage*, our analysis demonstrated that unionized settings mitigated precarious employment and several of its adverse effects. In the second report, *Unions: A Driver for Gender Equity*, we showed the clear benefits of unionization for both women and men, and the importance of unions in addressing the gender pay gap and facilitating gender equity.

In the current report, *Unions: Delivering Decent Work for Younger Adults*, we explore the findings with a focus on how union advantage is experienced by younger and older adults, and consider policy implications for supporting decent work in the face of widespread precarity.

This report series draws on survey data from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project collected in 2011-12 and 2014. Our analysis is based on a sample of 2,741 workers, aged 25-65, living in the city of Toronto. We compare work-related and quality of life outcomes for younger workers, aged 25-44, and

older workers, aged 45-65. We also incorporate findings from a literature review and key themes identified from a focus group discussion with labour unions and worker advocacy organizations.

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Key findings from our analysis include:

- Unionization is associated with a range of positive work-related and quality of life outcomes for workers across the age range including having standard employment, a higher income, a pension, benefits, and paid time off, even after taking into account demographic and education factors
- Multivariate analyses also show that unions make a difference for younger workers in ways not shown for older ones, including having regular full-time work hours, an individual income that did not decline compared to the past year, and not struggling to meet financial commitments
- Unionization is associated with having a stable income for older workers only, after taking into account demographic and education factors
- The individual incomes of older and younger unionized workers in full-time jobs do not differ significantly, while older non-unionized workers have higher incomes than their younger counterparts

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While unionization provides clear benefits for younger and older workers, most workers are not in unionized positions and face barriers to joining a union.

- Unionization rates are higher as we move through each age group from the youngest workers with the lowest rates to the oldest workers with the highest.
- Just over one in ten youth in Toronto have union coverage; followed by workers, aged 25-34, with a unionization rate of 20.3%; workers, aged 35-44, at 25.3%; workers, aged 45-54, at 27.9%; and finally, workers, aged 55-64, at 33.1%.
- Similar patterns of unionization rate by age group are evident for Ontario workers where just over one in ten youth have union coverage, followed by about one-quarter of young adults, aged 25-34, and about 30% of workers, aged 35 and over.

Based on our analysis and related research, we put forward the following recommendations to improve Ontario's labour laws and support workers across the age range:

- Reform the Labour Relations Act to enable workers to organize and get the benefits of unionization including – reintroduce one-step card-based certification for all workers; establish models for broad-based organizing across sectors and franchises
- Amend the Employment Standards Act to provide access to key benefits for workers outside of unions and engaged in precarious work including – deliver on the commitment

to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour; provide workers with 7 paid days off to support individual and family needs; strengthen the language of the equal pay for equal work provision

- For unions, reject two-tiered collective agreements that detrimentally impact new hires and workers with less seniority – workers who are likely to be younger and newcomers who are largely from racialized groups

The provincial government is currently debating Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, a piece of legislation aimed at improving Ontario's outdated labour laws. Current proposals don't go far enough to open access to the benefits of unionization and improve conditions for non-unionized workers. Through this bill, the Ontario government has the capacity to increase access to the benefits of unionization for more workers, including younger workers with lower rates of unionization, and to improve the wages, working conditions and protections of workers who are not covered by a collective agreement. We urge the Province to take action now in support of Ontario workers, including the next generation of workers who face unprecedented precarity in the labour market.



## INTRODUCTION

This report is the third in Social Planning Toronto's 4-part series, *Unions and the Response to Precarious Work*. The first report, *The Union Advantage*, demonstrated broad advantages of unionization in mitigating precarious employment and its adverse effects.<sup>1</sup> It considered the role unions play in addressing issues within a labour market where precarious employment is on the rise, and the importance of legislative intervention where unionization alone is limited in addressing the adversities of precarious work.

In the second report, *Unions: A Driver for Gender Equity*, we documented the benefits of unionization for both women and men, the positive impact of unions in mitigating the gender pay gap, and the capacity of unions to promote gender equity.<sup>2</sup>

In the current report, we explore the role of unions in responding to precarious employment and its negative impacts for younger and older workers, and consider policy implications for supporting decent work in the face of widespread precarity.

This series draws on survey data from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project, a 7-year Social Sciences

and Humanities Research Council Community-University Research Alliance led by United Way Toronto & York Region and McMaster University. Social Planning Toronto is a community partner on the PEPSO project.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In this report, we used cross-tabulations to compare four groups of workers defined by union status (union and non-union) and age (25-44 year olds and 45-65 year olds) on a series of work-related and quality of life indicators across the following categories: income; form of employment & workplace benefits and conditions; income, workplace and household stress; health; workplace discrimination.

We also conducted multivariate analyses to examine the relationship between unionization and work-related and quality of life outcomes for younger and older workers. These analyses allowed us to examine the extent and degree of union advantage for each of these groups after taking into account (i.e. controlling for) demographic factors and education level required for the job.

Rates of unionization are based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. The remainder of our quantitative research findings are based on PEPSO survey data collected in 2011-12 and 2014

1 Social Planning Toronto, 2017a

2 Social Planning Toronto, 2017b

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*Unions: Delivering Decent Work for Younger Adults is the third in our 4-part series on Unions and the Response to Precarious Work. In this report, we focus on how union advantage is experienced by younger and older adults, and consider policy implications for supporting decent work in the face of widespread precarity.*

*This report series draws on survey data from the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project collected in 2011-12 and 2014. Our analysis is based on a sample of 2,741 workers, aged 25-65, living in the city of Toronto. We compare work-related and quality of life outcomes for younger workers, aged 25-44, and older workers, aged 45-65. We also incorporate findings from a literature review and key themes identified from a focus group discussion with labour unions and worker advocacy organizations.*

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using a sample of 2,741 workers, aged 25-65, living in the city of Toronto.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the analysis of survey data, we conducted a literature review and organized a roundtable with representatives from the labour movement and worker advocacy groups. At the roundtable, we presented our initial findings and with participants, explored labour's role in reducing or mitigating precarious employment, addressing emerging challenges and identifying opportunities for change. The results of the literature review and key issues from the roundtable discussion are reflected in the report.

Due to sample size limitations, we were not able to examine issues of intersectionality between workers defined by age group and other demographic and social categories such as gender, race and immigration status. However, our second report, *Unions: A Driver for Gender Equity*, provides a focus on gender. As well, the fourth report in our series will examine unionization and work-related and quality of life outcomes for groups of workers defined by race and immigration status.

For a full description of the research methods and sample description, please see Appendix A.

<sup>3</sup> The PEPSO data includes responses from workers living across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). However, the current report is based on a subset of this dataset. It uses the PEPSO data from workers living in the city of Toronto only.

## FINDINGS

### A. UNIONIZATION RATES

In 2016, only 22.5% of employed residents living in the city of Toronto had union coverage.<sup>4</sup> For the past two decades, Toronto's unionization rate has been consistently lower than that found in Ontario and in Canada.<sup>5,6</sup>

Unionization rates also vary by age group. Unionization rates are higher as we move through each age group from the youngest workers with the lowest rates to the oldest workers with the highest. **Figure 1** shows the unionization rates for Toronto by age group from 1997 to 2016.<sup>7</sup> Among these age groups, youth, aged 15-24, have the lowest rates of unionization at 11.8% in 2016, followed by workers, aged 25-34, at 20.3%; workers, aged 35-44, at 25.3%; workers, aged 45-54, at 27.9%, and finally workers, aged 55-64, at 33.1%. A similar pattern is found for workers in Ontario, with the lowest rates among youth, followed by young adults, aged 25-34, and then

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, 2016

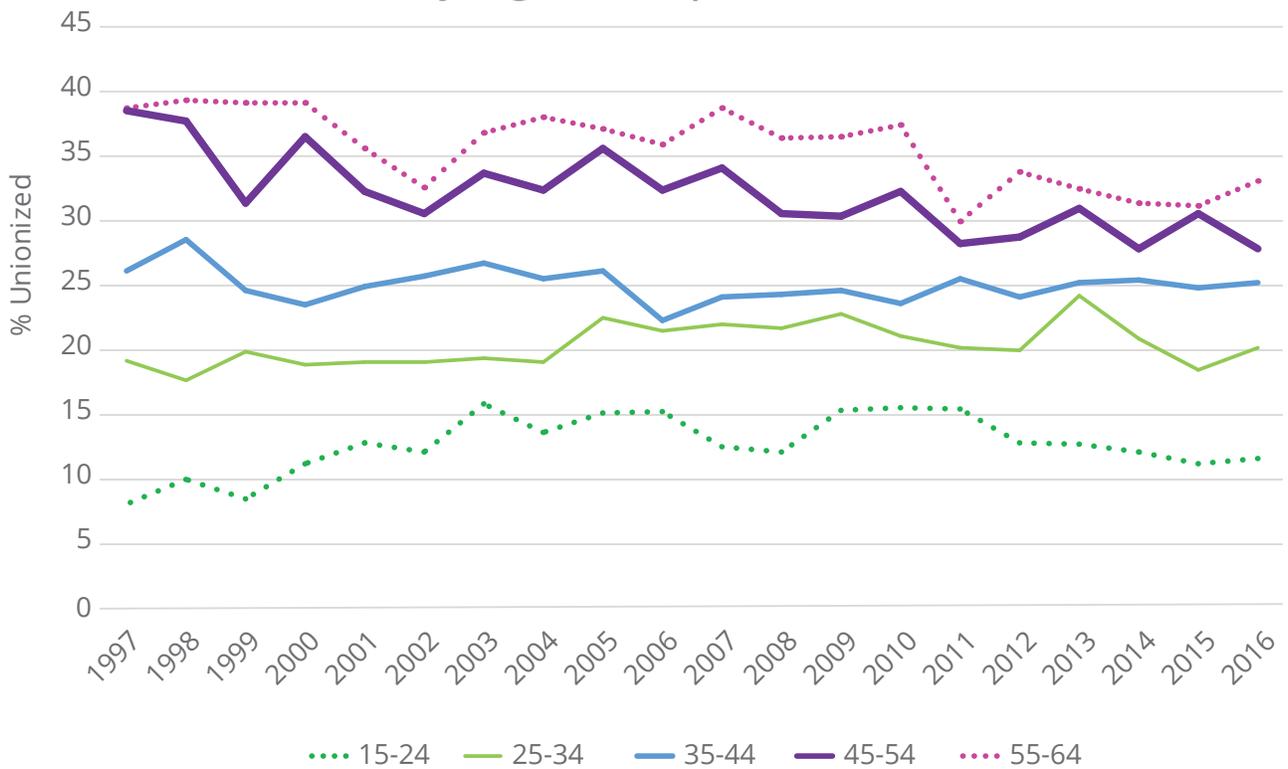
<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, 2017a

<sup>6</sup> In 2016, Canada's unionization rate was 30.3% and Ontario's was 26.7%.

<sup>7</sup> This data was accessed through a custom data request to Statistics Canada. Unionization rates are based on the percentage of employed individuals with union coverage. While labour force estimates are produced for the Census Division, such as the City of Toronto, the Labour Force Survey sample is not allocated specifically at this level of geography. As a result, data level movements may be due to real change, or they may be due to data variability from changes in sample size.

adults, aged 35 and over.<sup>8</sup> Older workers in Toronto have experienced the greatest decline in unionization rates over the past two decades; Ontario data shows a similar decline, particularly for workers, aged 55-64.

Figure 1. Unionization Rates for the City of Toronto by Age Group: 1997-2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997-2016.

8 Statistics Canada, 2017a

## B. COMPARING UNIONIZED AND NON-UNIONIZED WORKERS BY AGE

### 1. INCOME

As shown in **Figure 2**, we found that unionization mitigates the age wage gap. There is no statistically significant income gap between younger and older workers in unions<sup>9</sup>, while older

non-unionized workers are more likely to have higher earnings than their younger counterparts. As well, both older and younger unionized workers are more likely to report higher incomes than their respective non-unionized counterparts.

Figure 2. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Individual Income



Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014.

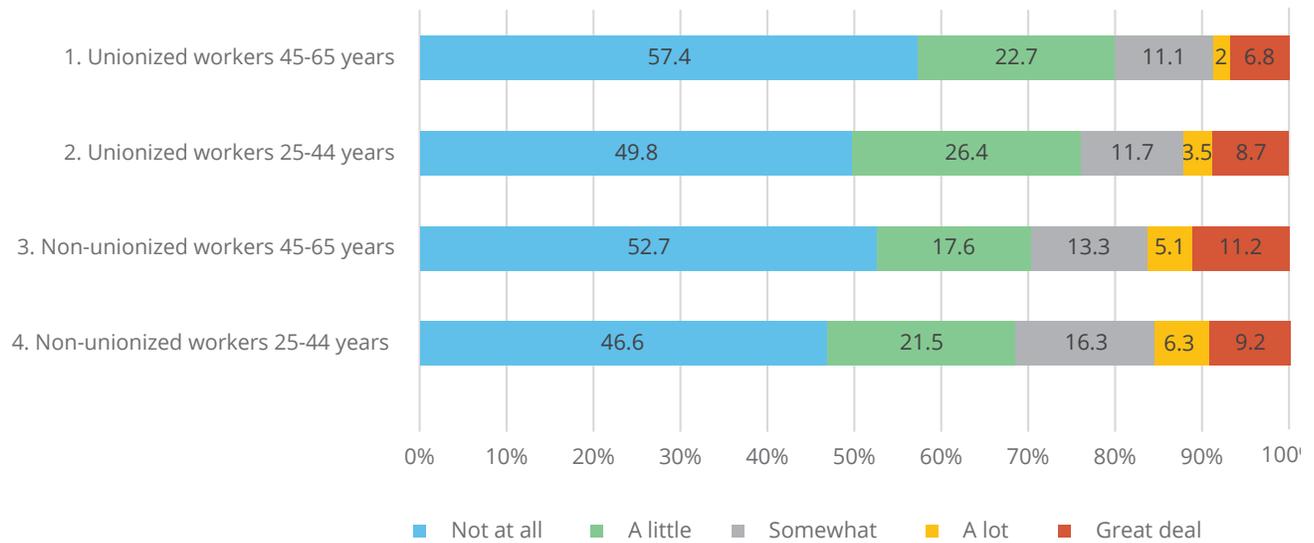
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p<.01, 1 vs 3 p<.001, 2 vs 4 p<.001

<sup>9</sup> Among unionized workers, there is no statistically significant association between age group and individual income categorized into six groups as shown in Figure 2. In analyses where individual income is categorized as under \$40,000 and \$40,000 and over, younger unionized workers are more likely to report lower incomes than older unionized workers. However, there is no statistically significant difference between these two groups when we look at full-time workers only. Analyses with full-time workers support the finding that unions mitigate the age wage gap.

Figure 3 shows that both younger and older unionized workers report less income variability in the 12 months preceding the survey compared to their non-unionized counterparts. While

younger and older unionized workers do not differ in their degree of income variability, there are slight differences between younger and older non-unionized workers.

Figure 3. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Income Varied in Last 12 Months



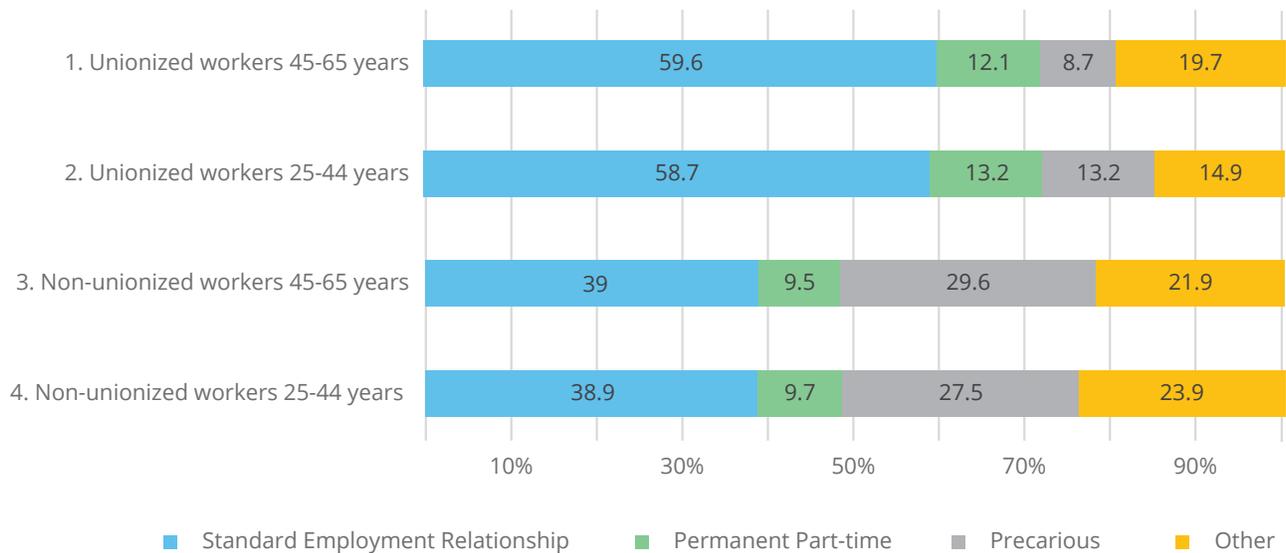
Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014.  
 The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p<.05, 1 vs 3 p<.01, 2 vs 4 p<.05

## 2. FORM OF EMPLOYMENT & WORKPLACE BENEFITS AND CONDITIONS

As shown in **Figure 4**, unionized workers aged 25-44 and 45-65 are more likely to have standard employment (i.e. full-time permanent work with employer-provided benefits beyond a wage) than

their non-unionized counterparts. Almost 60% of younger and older unionized workers have the benefit of standard employment compared to less than 40% of their non-unionized counterparts. Among unionized workers, age is not associated with form of employment. This is also the case for non-unionized workers.

Figure 4. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Form of Employment



Other category includes workers who may be employed full-time but experience certain aspects of precarity, including uncertainty about keeping their jobs in the next 12 months or work without any employer-provided benefits other than a wage.

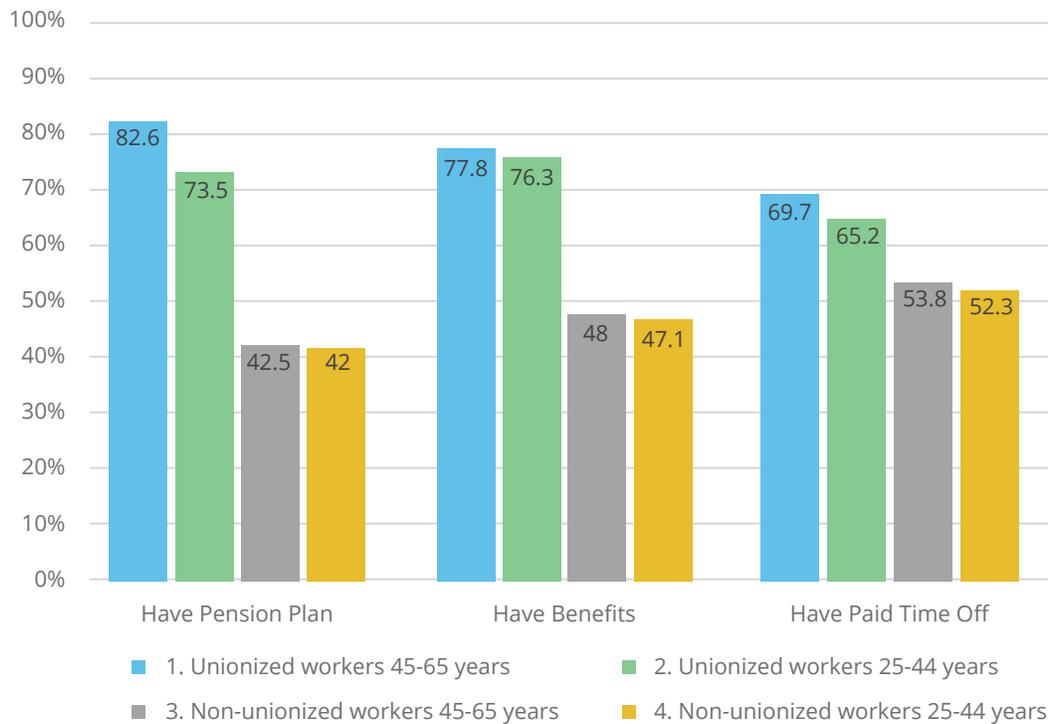
Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014.

The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 p<.001, 2 vs 4 p<.001

Figure 5 shows that both unionized older and younger workers are more likely to have an employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off compared to their non-unionized counterparts. While unionized older workers are more likely to have a pension than their younger

counterparts, there are no statistically significant differences in access to benefits and paid time off between older and younger unionized workers. Among non-unionized workers, younger and older people have similarly low rates of access to pensions, benefits and paid time off.

Figure 5. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Pension, Benefits and Paid Time Off

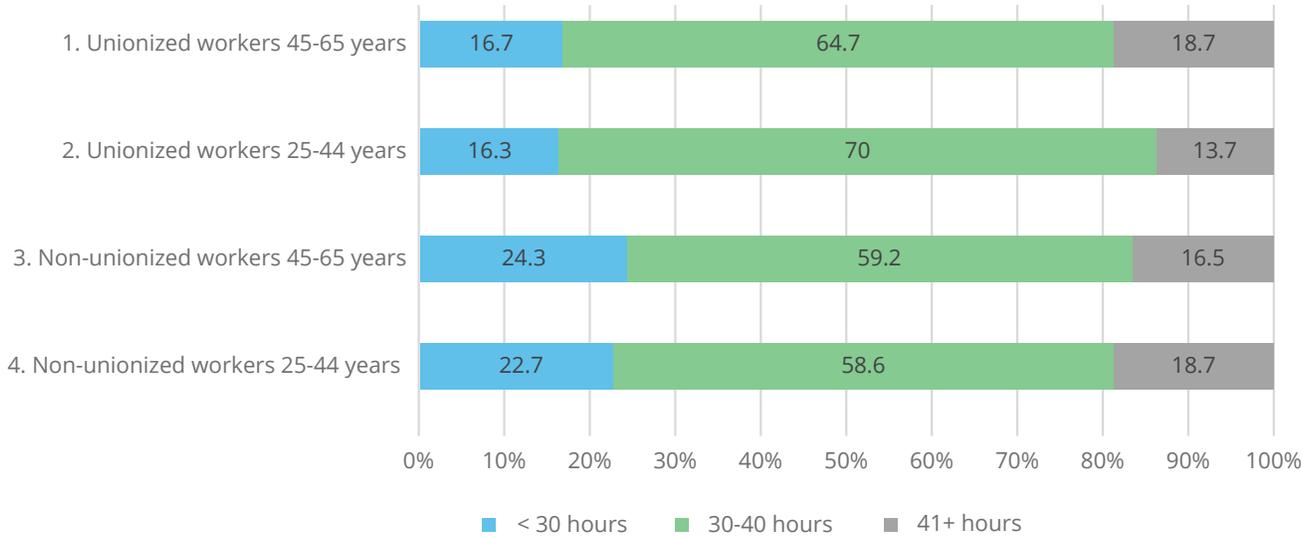


Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014. The statistical significance of the difference between categories:  
 Pension plan: 1 vs 2 p<.01, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 p<.001, 2 vs 4 p<.001  
 Benefits: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 p<.001, 2 vs 4 p<.001  
 Paid time off: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 p<.001, 2 vs 4 p<.001

Younger and older unionized workers do not differ in terms of unexpected schedule changes or number of hours worked per week; this is also the case comparing older and younger non-unionized workers. In addition, older unionized and non-unionized workers have similar rates of unexpected schedule changes. However, unionization is associated with more predictable work schedules for younger workers; over 40% of younger unionized workers never experience unexpected schedule changes compared to over one-third of their non-unionized counterparts.

As shown in **Figure 6**, union status is associated with the number of hours worked per week for both younger and older workers. Younger non-unionized workers are more likely to work either part-time hours or more than 40 hours per week compared to their unionized counterparts. For older workers, the non-unionized group is more likely to work part-time hours compared to their unionized counterparts.

Figure 6. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Number of Hours Worked per Week in Last 3 Months



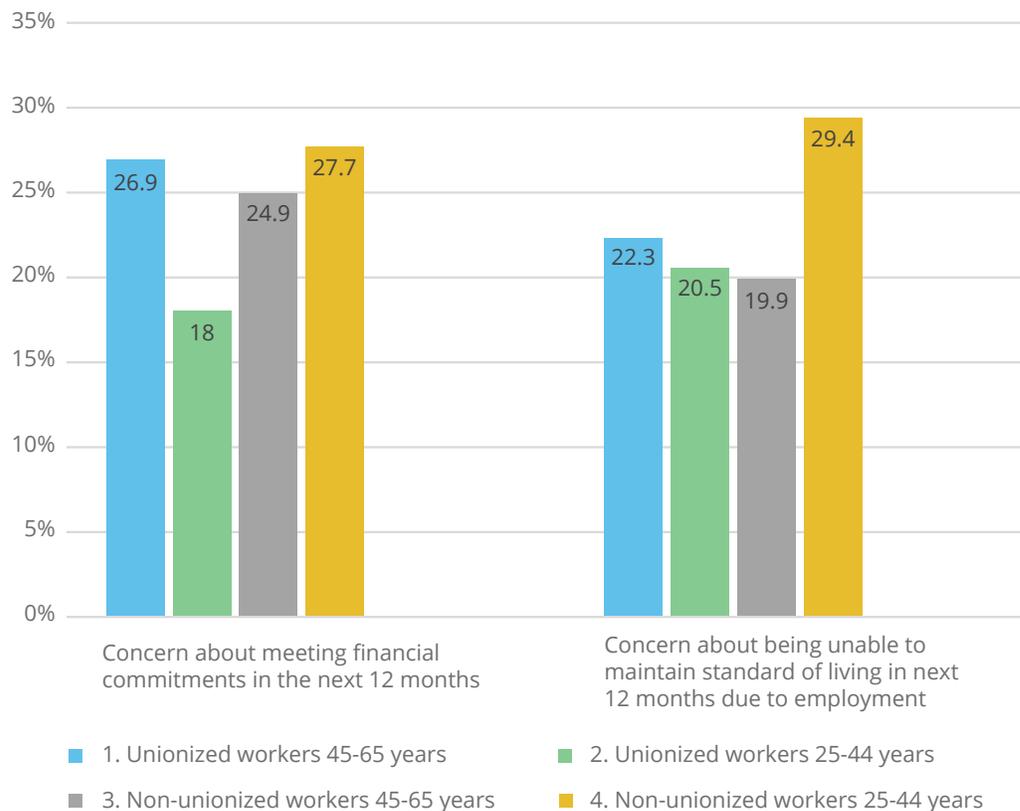
Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014.  
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 p<.05, 2 vs 4 p<.001

### 3. INCOME, WORKPLACE AND HOUSEHOLD STRESS

As shown in **Figure 7**, among younger workers, those who are not in unions are more likely to report concerns about meeting financial obligations and concerns about maintaining their standard of living compared to those in unions. In contrast, unionized and non-unionized older workers had similar rates of reporting these financial concerns.

Among unionized workers, older workers are more likely to report having concerns about meeting financial obligations compared to younger workers. However, among non-unionized workers, age is not associated with having this concern. In contrast, younger non-unionized workers are more likely to have concerns about being unable to maintain their standard of living compared to older non-unionized workers. Among unionized workers, age is not associated with having this concern.

Figure 7. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Concerns about Meeting Financial Obligations and Maintaining Standard of Living

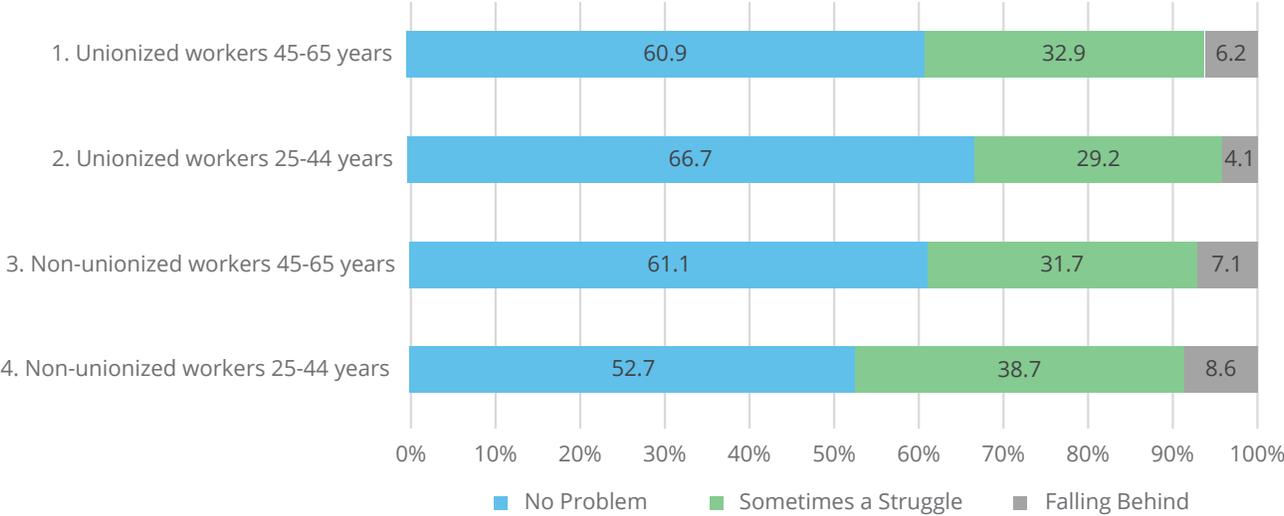


Source: PEPSO Survey 2014. The statistical significance of the difference between categories:  
 Financial commitments: 1 vs 2 p<.10, 3 vs 4 not significant, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p=.01  
 Standard of living: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p=.001, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p<.05

As shown in **Figure 8**, younger unionized workers are more likely to report having no problem paying their bills compared to their non-unionized counterparts. In contrast, older unionized and non-unionized workers do not differ in their ability to pay their bills. Among non-unionized

workers, older adults are more likely to report having no problem paying their bills compared to their younger counterparts. In contrast, age is not associated with ability to pay the bills among unionized workers.

Figure 8. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Paying the Bills

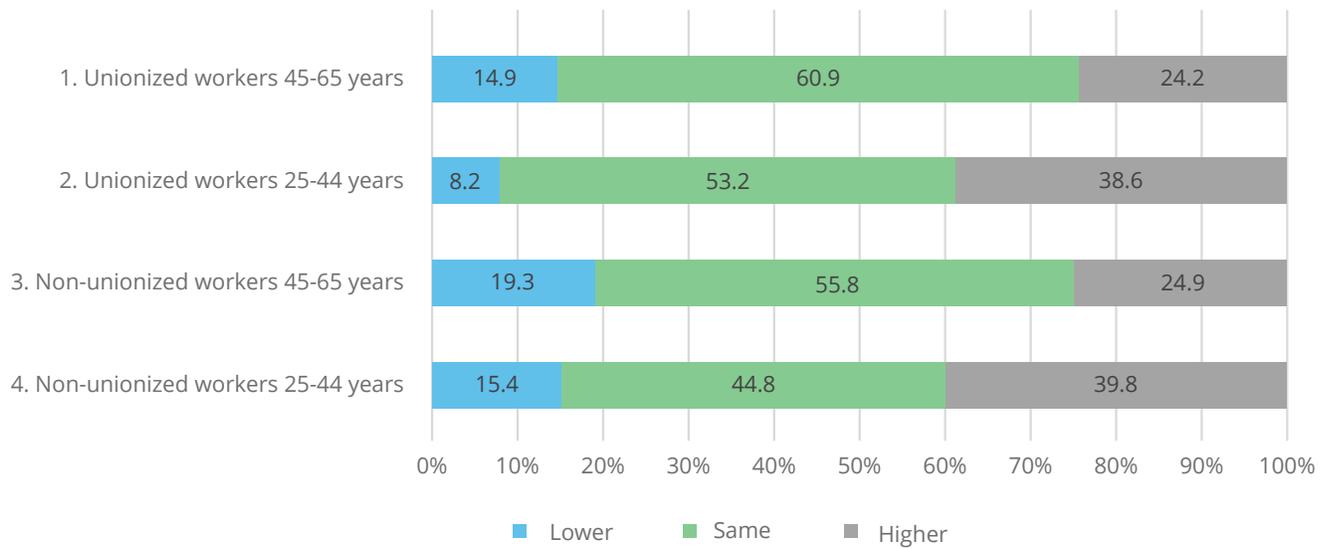


Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.  
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p<.05, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p<.01

Figure 9 shows that younger non-unionized workers are more likely than their unionized counterparts to have a lower income compared to the previous year. However, union status is not associated with income changes for older workers. Among unionized workers, younger

adults are more likely to report an increase in their income compared to their older counterparts. This is true for non-unionized workers as well.

Figure 9. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Income Compared to Previous Year

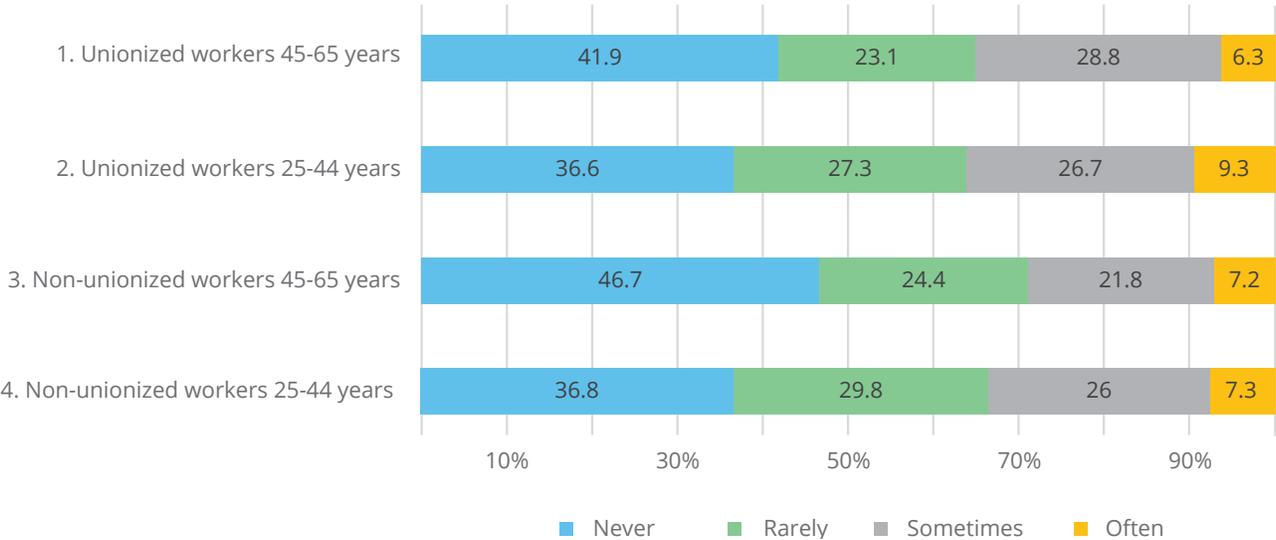


Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.  
 The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 p<.01, 3 vs 4 p<.001, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p<.05

Figure 10 shows that union status is not associated with the frequency of feeling depressed as a result of work. This is the case for younger workers and for older workers. Among non-unionized workers, younger workers are more likely than their older counterparts to feel

depressed as a result of work. However, age is not associated with the frequency of feeling depressed as a result of work for unionized workers.

Figure 10. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Depressed as a Result of Work

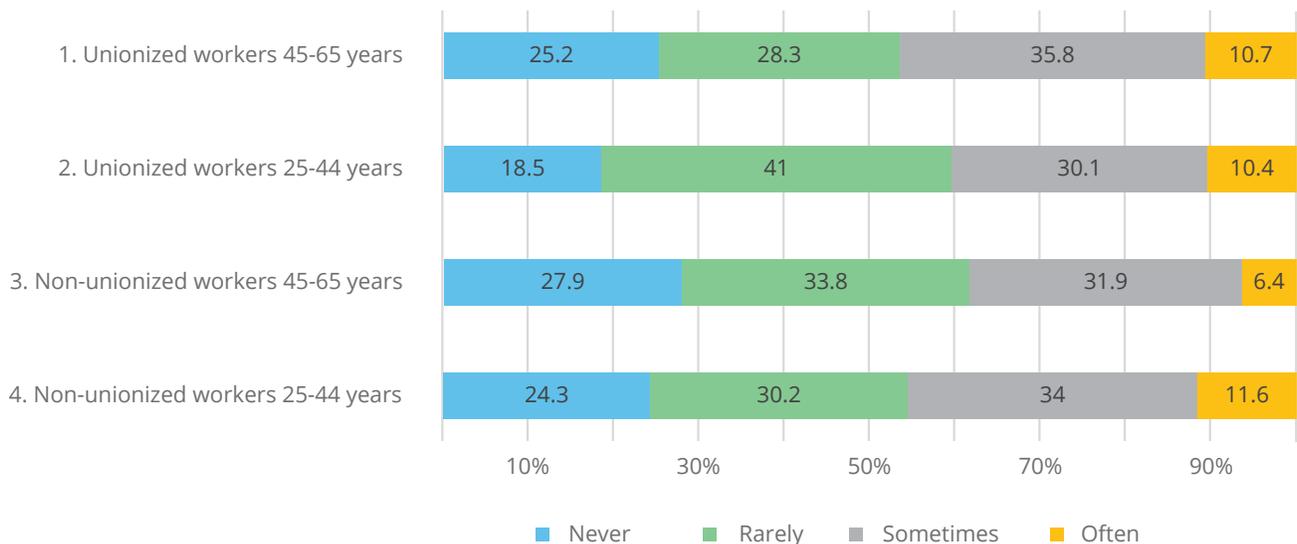


Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.  
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p<.05, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 not significant

The relationship between age, union status and feeling angry as a result of work is not straight forward. As shown in **Figure 11**, union status is associated with frequency of feeling angry as a result of work among younger workers but not for older workers. Almost one-quarter of non-unionized younger workers never feel angry as a result of work compared to less than one in five unionized younger workers. However, over 40% of unionized younger workers report rarely feeling angry as a result of work compared to 30% of non-unionized younger workers.

Age is associated with the frequency of experiencing anger as a result of work among both unionized and non-unionized workers. Among unionized workers, a higher proportion of older workers report never experiencing anger as a result of work compared to their younger counterparts. However, it is also the case that a higher proportion of older unionized workers report sometimes or often experiencing anger as a result of work compared to their younger counterparts. Among non-unionized workers, a higher proportion of younger workers report sometimes or often feeling angry as a result of work compared to their older counterparts.

Figure 11. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Anger as a Result of Work



Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.

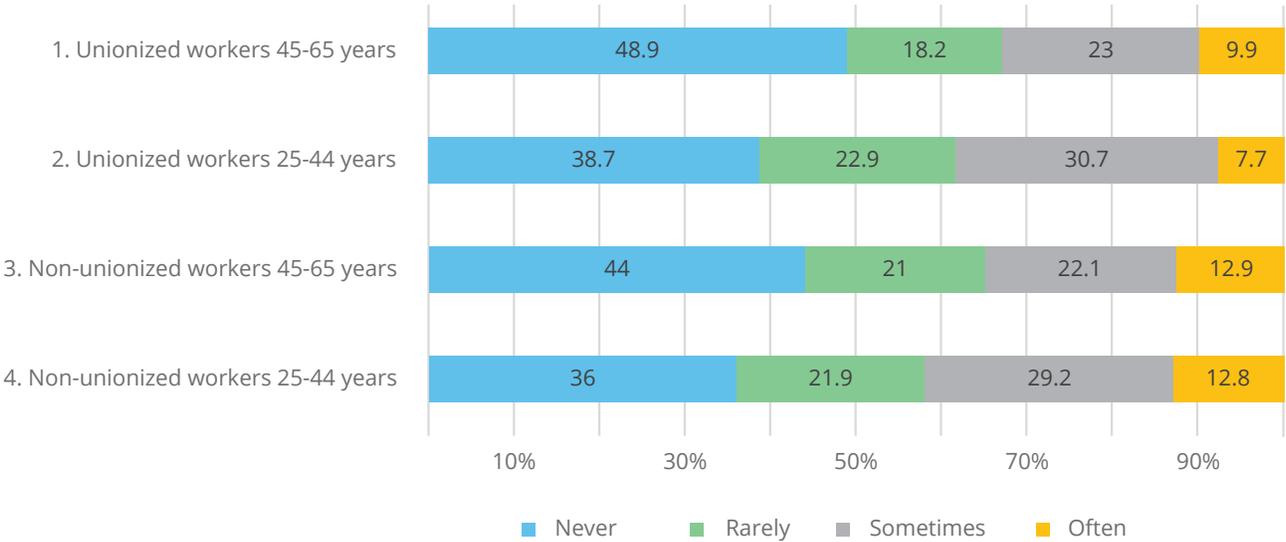
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 p<.10, 3 vs 4 p<.05, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p<.10

Figure 12 shows slight differences between unionized and non-unionized younger workers in the frequency of experiencing anxiety about employment interfering with personal and family life. A total of almost 13% of non-unionized younger workers report often experiencing this type of anxiety compared to nearly 8% of unionized younger workers. Union status is not associated with frequency of experiencing anxiety

about employment interfering with personal and family life among older workers.

Older workers are more likely to report never experiencing anxiety about employment interfering with personal and family life compared to younger workers. This is true among unionized workers and non-unionized workers

Figure 12. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Anxiety about Employment Interfering with Personal and Family Life

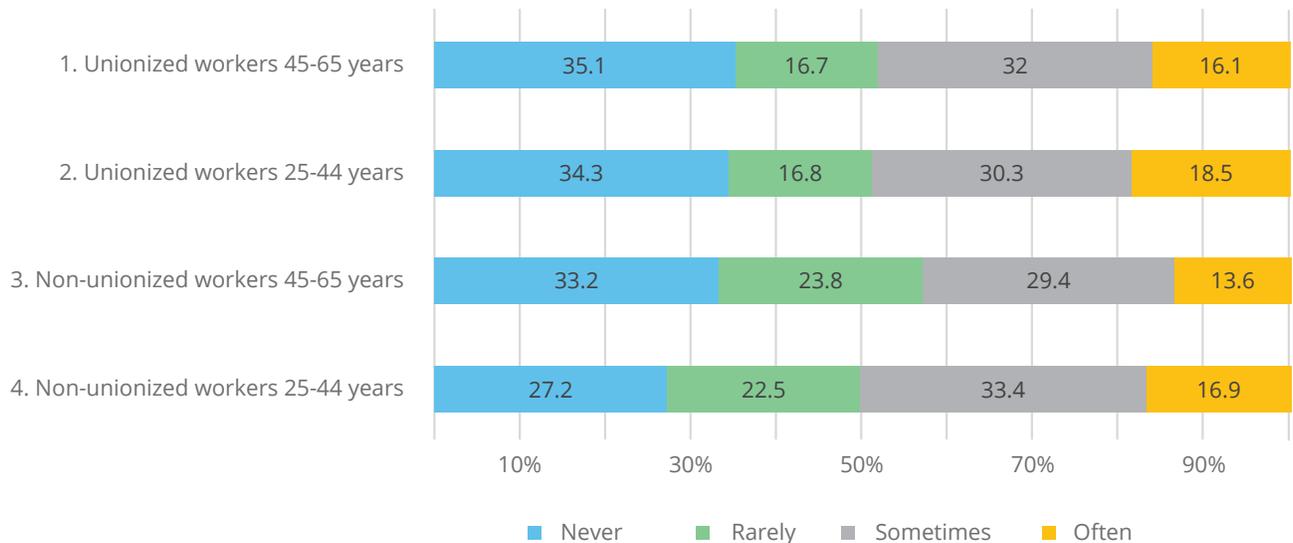


Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.  
The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 p<.01, 3 vs 4 p=.001, 1 vs 3 not significant, 2 vs 4 p<.10

**Figure 13** shows an association between union status and being unable to do things with family and friends due to uncertainty over work schedules. This is the case for older workers and younger workers. Among older workers, almost half of unionized workers report sometimes or often experiencing this problem compared to 43% for non-unionized workers. For younger workers, there are modest differences between unionized and non-unionized workers in the proportions of workers that report never vs. rarely experiencing this problem.

Among unionized workers, age is not associated with experiencing this problem. However, among non-unionized workers, a higher proportion of younger workers report being unable to do things with family and friends due to uncertainty over work schedules compared to their older counterparts.

Figure 13. Unionized and Non-Unionized Older and Younger Workers: Uncertainty over Work Schedules Prevents Doing Things with Family and Friends



Source: PEPSO Survey 2014.  
 The statistical significance of the difference between categories: 1 vs 2 not significant, 3 vs 4 p<.01, 1 vs 3 p<.10, 2 vs 4 p<.05

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## 4. HEALTH

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Older unionized workers are more likely to report compromised health than their younger counterparts; about one in ten older unionized workers report poor or fair health compared to about one in twenty younger unionized workers. However, older and younger non-unionized workers have similar self-reported health.

These findings are unexpected. Since population health studies show declining self-reported health ratings among older adults<sup>10</sup>, we would expect to see age correlated with self-report health for both unionized and non-unionized workers. However, unlike population health studies, our analysis includes adults with paid employment only. When union status is not taken into account, our data for Toronto workers show no association between age and self-reported health. This may be due to older workers with compromised health leaving the workforce. Our finding that older unionized workers are more likely to report compromised health than their younger counterparts may be related to factors such as the types of industries or occupations that older unionized workers occupy. However, detailed industry and occupation data are not available to examine this question.

Union status is not associated with self-reported health for younger workers or older workers.

Among unionized workers, age is not associated with mental health ratings. As well, unionized and non-unionized younger workers did not differ on self-reported mental health. In contrast, older non-unionized workers are more likely to report very good or excellent mental health compared to their younger counterparts. Non-unionized older workers are also more likely to report very good or excellent mental health than older unionized workers.

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## 5. WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

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Older and younger unionized workers did not differ in their rates of experiencing workplace discrimination. This is also the case comparing older and younger non-unionized workers, unionized and non-unionized younger workers, and unionized and non-unionized younger workers. While age is the third most common form of workplace discrimination in the PEPSO study<sup>11</sup>, it may affect both older and younger workers. Our analysis may not have detected differences by age group for this reason.

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10 Shields & Shoostari, 2001

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11 United Way Toronto, McMaster University & PEPSO, 2015

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## C. EXAMINING UNION ADVANTAGE BY AGE GROUP USING MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

In the first two reports in this series, our findings based on multivariate analyses demonstrate the benefits of union membership across several indicators, as well as, a similar degree and extent of union advantage for women and men.<sup>1213</sup>

As shown in **Table 1**, multivariate analyses also show union advantage for younger and older workers. Taking into account gender, race,

immigration status and education level required for the job, unionization is associated with having standard employment, an individual income over \$40,000, an employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off for both younger and older workers. For older workers but not younger ones, unionization is associated with having a stable income. In contrast, for younger workers and not older ones, it is associated with working a regular number of hours (30-40 per week), having an individual income that did not decline since the previous year, and not struggling to meet financial obligations in the next 12 months.

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12 Social Planning Toronto, 2017a

13 Social Planning Toronto, 2017b

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Table 1. Significant Associations between Unionization and Workplace Conditions for Younger and Older Workers

Controlling for Gender, Race, Immigration Status and Education Level Required for Job

	Younger Workers (25-44 Years)	Older Workers (45-65 Years)
Standard employment	★	★
Individual income above \$40,000	★	★
Pension	★	★
Benefits	★	★
Paid time off	★	★
Stable income		★
Regular number of hours worked (30-40 per week)	★	
Did not have lower income this year vs. last year	★	
Meeting financial commitments is not a struggle	★	

Source: PEPSO Surveys 2011-12 & 2014.  
Please see Appendix B for odds ratios and confidence intervals.



## DISCUSSION

### 1. UNIONS: MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR YOUNGER WORKERS

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While unionization is associated with many positive work-related and quality of life outcomes for workers across the age range, younger workers especially benefit from union membership in some respects. The multivariate analyses showed that both younger and older workers in unions are more likely to have standard employment, a higher income, a pension, benefits and paid time off, even after taking into account demographic and education factors. In addition, these analyses demonstrated that unions make a difference for younger workers in ways not shown for older workers. Among younger workers only, unionization is associated with regular full-time work hours, an individual income that did not decline compared to the previous year, and not struggling to meet financial commitments. In contrast, unionization is associated with having a stable income for older workers only.

Our analyses also showed no statistically significant difference between the individual income levels of older and younger unionized workers with full-time work, while younger non-unionized workers had lower incomes than their older counterparts with full-time work. This may be explained, in part, by differences in

educational attainment levels, where younger unionized workers have higher levels of education than older unionized workers.

Younger workers in unions had higher income levels than their non-unionized counterparts. This finding remained even after taking into account other factors including education level required for the job. Not surprisingly, unionized younger workers also had lower levels of income-related and household stress compared to non-unionized younger workers.

Research demonstrates the benefits of unionization among youth under age 25 and shows union advantage to be greatest among workers with lower paid jobs, including younger workers.<sup>14,15,16</sup> However, few studies consider the benefits of unionization comparing older and younger adult workers, aged 25 and over. Because unionized workers tend to be older, there may be an assumption that older workers enjoy greater benefits from unionization. Our research shows comparable levels of union advantage across age groups, and some ways in which unions are making a difference specifically for younger workers.

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<sup>14</sup> Canadian Labour Congress, 2015

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, 2003

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, 2013

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## 2. ACCESS TO UNION MEMBERSHIP

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While our research and related studies demonstrate the benefits of unionization for younger workers, only a minority have access to union membership. We found that unionization rates are the lowest among youth, aged 15-24, with just over one in ten Toronto workers with union coverage. Rates steadily increase as we move through each age group to the oldest group of workers, aged 55-64, with about 30% of workers with union coverage. A similar pattern is found among Ontario workers where just over one in ten youth have union coverage, followed by about one quarter of workers, aged 25-34, with union coverage, and about one-third of workers, aged 35 and over, with union coverage.<sup>17</sup>

Some commentators have suggested that unions are an institution of the past and not of interest to younger workers. Related research challenges this notion, finding a great deal of unmet demand for unions among workers across the age range.<sup>18</sup> Policy change is needed to reduce barriers to unionization.

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<sup>17</sup> Statistics Canada, 2017a

<sup>18</sup> Gomez, Gunderson & Meltz, 2002

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## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LABOUR MOVEMENT**

In our first report, *The Union Advantage*, we set out a series of policy recommendations and identified opportunities for the labour movement based on our research findings.<sup>19</sup> Among these policy recommendations and opportunities for the labour movement, three are particularly critical for improving the wages, working conditions and benefits of younger workers:

- Reforming the Labour Relations Act to enable workers to organize and get the benefits of unionization
- Amending the Employment Standards Act to provide access to key benefits for workers outside of unions who are also engaged in precarious work
- Addressing tiered collective agreements at the bargaining table

The Ontario government's Bill 148, Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act proposes changes to the province's two key pieces of labour legislation: the Labour Relations Act and the Employment Standards Act. While the bill provides an important opportunity to substantially improve

<sup>19</sup> For a complete discussion on these policy recommendations, as well as, opportunities for the labour movement, please see pages 27 to 36 of *The Union Advantage* at [www.socialplanningtoronto.org/the\\_union\\_advantage](http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/the_union_advantage)

labour laws in support of Ontario workers, proposals to date do not go far enough to increase access to the benefits of unionization and protect non-unionized workers.<sup>20</sup>

### **1. REFORMING THE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT**

In Bill 148, the provincial government proposes to reintroduce one-step card-based certification for some groups of precarious workers, including workers in the building services industry, home care and community services industry, and the temporary help agency industry. However, the majority of workers, including most workers in precarious employment, are excluded from this provision.

A one-step card-based process, which had been in effect in Ontario for over forty years<sup>21</sup>, would make it easier for workers who want to join a union to form one and would reduce opportunities for employers to attempt to dissuade employees from doing so.<sup>22,23</sup> A return to this simplified process would open up the benefits of unionization to more workers, including younger workers in precarious employment.

<sup>20</sup> At the time of the publication of this report, Bill 148 had not yet become law. The bill had passed Second Reading.

<sup>21</sup> Mitchell & Murray, 2016

<sup>22</sup> Slinn, 2007, December 7

<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see the first two reports in the series, *The Union Advantage* and *Unions: A Driver for Gender Equity* at [www.socialplanningtoronto.org](http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org)

The bill also fails to put forward new models for union organizing that allow for sector-wide and franchise-wide organizing. This means that workers in fast food outlets, such as Tim Horton's, McDonald's or Wendy's, cannot form a single union local across the franchise, but rather would have to organize one outlet at a time. This lack of provision, in particular, affects the large number of younger workers employed in retail and fast food franchises.

The reintroduction of one-step card-based certification for all workers, and new models of organizing across sectors and franchises would increase access to the benefits of unionization for workers across Ontario. These measures would be especially beneficial for younger workers, with their relatively lower rates of unionization and higher concentrations in retail and fast food employment.

## 2. AMENDING THE EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS ACT

As shown in our research, most workers do not have the benefit of union representation. In Toronto, unionization rates among youth and younger adults are low, benefiting just over one in ten youth, one-fifth of workers, aged 25-34, and one in four workers, aged 35-44. Ontario youth and young adults under 35 years of age, show similarly low unionization rates. Without a union, workers must rely on the employment

protections set out in Ontario's Employment Standards Act. Proposed improvements to the Employment Standards Act under Bill 148 are important for the majority of Ontario workers without union representation, and particularly younger workers, many of whom struggle with precarious employment.

Not surprisingly, most youth, under age 25, will benefit from the proposed increase of the provincial minimum wage to \$15 per hour.<sup>24</sup> But the increase is important for workers across the age range, including young adults, aged 25-39, who make up 24% of the workers who will get a raise under the proposed increase.

Bill 148 also proposes 10 personal emergency days off including up to 2 paid days.<sup>25</sup> This is a good start but does not recognize the needs of young families with children. More than one-third of Toronto residents, aged 25-44, live in households with children, and more than half of adults, aged 35-44, do so.<sup>26</sup> Parents with children require more paid days off to meet family demands in addition to their own personal needs.

The equal pay for equal work provision in the bill is intended to require employers to pay the same wage to workers doing similar work, regardless of employment status. The intention is that employers ensure that casual, temporary,

<sup>24</sup> MacDonald, 2017

<sup>25</sup> Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2016

<sup>26</sup> Statistics Canada, 2017b

part-time and seasonal employees receive the same wage as full-time workers doing similar work for the same employer.<sup>27</sup> However, the language needs to be strengthened in order to realize this goal. This is an important provision for younger workers who lack standard employment. According to the PEPSO data, over half of Toronto workers, aged 25-34, and almost half of Toronto workers, aged 35-44, are in this situation. When doing similar work for the same employer, these workers should be compensated at the same rate as those with full-time work.

### 3. CHILD CARE & PAY EQUITY: ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR GENDER EQUITY

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In our first report, *The Union Advantage*, we identified several opportunities for the labour movement to address precarious employment and its adverse effects. Perhaps most relevant to younger workers, as well as, newcomers to the labour market, is the need to reject two-tiered collective agreements in bargaining.

Through two-tiered collective agreements, employers seek to introduce lower levels of wages, benefits and protections for new hires or workers with less seniority. This is a harmful practice that erodes solidarity among workers, reduces the power of unions to negotiate better deals, and results in lower wages, poorer working

conditions, and reduced protections for workers in the long term.<sup>28</sup> It is particularly detrimental to younger workers and newcomers who are largely from racialized groups. These workers are more likely to be among the new hires and employees with less seniority.

Recommendations for addressing two-tiered bargaining include engaging workers to improve understanding about the cost of two-tiered contracts, working with governments and public sector workers about fair treatment for these workers, and identifying ways to address cost issues including, in some circumstances, considering accepting lower across the board wage increases to prevent a two-tiered agreement.<sup>29</sup> The future of the labour movement depends on the active engagement and leadership of the next generation of workers. Preventing two-tiered collective agreements is critical to the labour movement.

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27 Statistics Canada, 2017b

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28 CUPE, 2014

29 *ibid.*



## CONCLUSION

Our research shows the benefits of unionization for workers across the age range, as well as, specific advantages for younger workers.

Through Bill 148, the Ontario government has the capacity to increase access to the benefits of unionization for more workers, including younger workers with lower rates of unionization, and to improve the wages, working conditions and protections of workers who are not covered by a collective agreement. We urge the Province to reintroduce one-step card-based certification for all workers, adopt models for sector-wide and franchise-wide organizing, make good on its commitment to a \$15 minimum wage, strengthen the language for the equal pay for equal work provision, and expand the number

of paid days off for non-unionized workers. For unions, bargaining for equal wages, benefits and protections for all workers, including new hires and workers with less seniority, is key to supporting and building solidarity with the next generation of workers.





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# APPENDIX A

## RESEARCH METHODS

### 1. QUANTITATIVE DATA

Rates of unionization are based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. The remainder of our research findings are based on PEPSO survey data collected in 2011-12 and 2014 using a sample of 2,741 workers, aged 25-65, living in the city of Toronto. As our analysis focuses on the role of unionization in mitigating precarious employment and its effects, we excluded two groups of respondents where union membership is not an option or is unlikely: a) self-employed individuals with employees and b) workers with incomes over \$100,000 who also required a degree for their job, as these respondents are likely in management positions. The analysis does include self-employed workers without employees and those with incomes over \$100,000 who did not require a degree for their jobs.

In the analysis for this report, we ran cross-tabulations to compare workers on several work-related and quality of life indicators (described below). In the first series of cross-tabulations, the data was disaggregated by age group (25-44 years old and 45-65 years old). In the second series, the data was split by union status to compare the degree of union advantage for younger and older workers.

Using the disaggregated data, we conducted a series of multivariate logistic regression analyses to examine the relationship between unionization and the work-related and quality of life indicators, taking into account gender, race, immigration status, and education level required for the job.

Work-related and quality of life indicators:

#### 1) Income

- Individual income, income variability

#### 2) Form of Employment & Workplace Benefits and Conditions

- Form of employment, employer-provided pension, benefits and paid time off, scheduling instability, hours of work

#### 3) Income, Workplace and Household Stress

- Income stress: concern about maintaining standard of living, employment situation negatively affects large spending decisions, challenges paying bills, concern about meeting financial obligations in next 12 months, income change compared to past year
- Workplace stress: experiencing anger as a result of work, experiencing depression as a result of work
- Household stress: anxiety about employment interfering with personal and family life, uncertainty over work schedule preventing doing things with family and friends

**4) Health**

- Self-reported health and mental health

**5) Workplace Discrimination**

- Experience of discrimination getting work, keeping work, and advancing at work

This report presents findings based on age group. Unfortunately, it was not possible to incorporate a broader intersectional analysis including social categories such as gender, race and immigration status due to methodological limitations and inadequate sample size. Where possible, we have discussed related literature to address this limitation of the research. Our second report, *Unions: A Driver for Gender Equity*, incorporates a gender lens. Also, the fourth report in this series will examine findings based on race and immigration status.

**2. QUALITATIVE DATA**

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We convened a roundtable with representatives from the labour movement and worker advocacy groups to discuss our initial findings and implications for organizing and public policy. In this roundtable, we explored organized labour’s role in reducing or mitigating precarious employment, emerging challenges and opportunities for change.

Participants in this roundtable represented both private and public sector unions as well as worker advocacy groups. Groups represented included: Workers’ Action Centre, Parkdale Community Legal Services, Ontario Public Service Employees Union

(OPSEU), Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR), UNITE HERE, Unifor, Workers United Canada Council, and Sheet Metal Workers’ and Roofers’ Local 30 Toronto. Participants were selected based on their experience in organizing and working on the front-line with precarious and vulnerable workers.



### Study Sample: Demographics and Education Levels

	<b>Union Workers, 25-44 years old (n=402) (24.9% of younger workers)</b>	<b>Union Workers, 45-65 years old (n=356) (31.6% of older workers)</b>	<b>Non-union Workers, 25-44 years old (n=1,213)</b>	<b>Non-union Workers, 45-65 years old (n=770)</b>
<b><i>Gender</i></b>				
Male	46	41.6	51.1	44.3
Female	54	58.4	48.9	55.7
<b><i>Race</i></b>				
White	60.1	70	52.7	71.4
Chinese	1.5	2.8	8.2	4.3
South Asian	14.6	6.8	13.7	7.5
Black	9.5	9.3	9.4	5.7
Filipino	3	3.7	3	3.4
Latin American	2.5	2.8	3.7	1.7
Southeast Asian	1.8	1.4	3	2
Arab+West Asian	3.3	0.8	2.8	1.3
Other Groups	3.7	2.4	3.5	2.7
<b><i>Immigration Status</i></b>				
Newcomer (10 years or less)	10	5.9	15.2	6.7
Longer-term Immigrant (> 10 years)	27.2	39	27	38.9
Born in Canada	62.8	55.1	57.8	54.4
<b><i>Highest Educational Attainment</i></b>				
< High School	2	3.1	2.7	2.1
High School	10.3	16.1	11.1	15.6
Trade/College/Some University	33.5	31.3	35.1	32.4
Bachelor's Degree	26.8	27.6	33.3	30.7
Graduate Degree	27.5	22	17.7	19.1
<b><i>Degree Required for the Job</i></b>				
Yes	46.5	38.7	35.8	31.3
No	53.5	61.3	64.2	68.7



## APPENDIX B



### RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

The following chart shows statistically significant results from a series of multivariate logistic regression analyses. In the multivariate analyses, we controlled for gender, race, immigration status

and education level required for the job. After controlling for these factors, we examined the relationship between union status and each of the outcome measures. The table shows the odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals associated with being in a union and the outcome measures identified in the first column, after controlling for other factors.

	Age 25-44		Age 45-65	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Standard Employment	2.074	1.631-2.636	2.205	1.691-2.875
Individual income over \$40,000	1.767	1.339-2.333	1.989	1.437-2.754
Pension	3.854	2.971-5.000	6.246	4.534-8.604
Benefits	3.525	2.698-4.605	3.626	2.699-4.871
Paid time off	1.492	1.160-1.919	1.877	1.424-2.475
Stable income			1.975	1.291-3.021
Hours 30-40 per week	1.564	1.218-2.008		
Did not have lower income this year vs. last year	1.944	1.068-3.538		
Meeting financial commitments is not a struggle	1.596	1.099-2.317		

