

Meeting the needs of older workers: The case of Library and Information Science

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Background: The aging baby boomer cohort, large portion of individuals who enter the field as a second career, and a reduction in hires in the 70s and 80s during economic downturns (and thus fewer younger entrants) have created an older workforce within the Library and Information Science profession. Further, because LIS continues to be a female dominated profession, there may be a trend to retire earlier to care for an older spouse or other family members. In order to better respond to this aging workforce, LIS will need to implement strategies to successfully accommodate and retain older workers.

Purpose

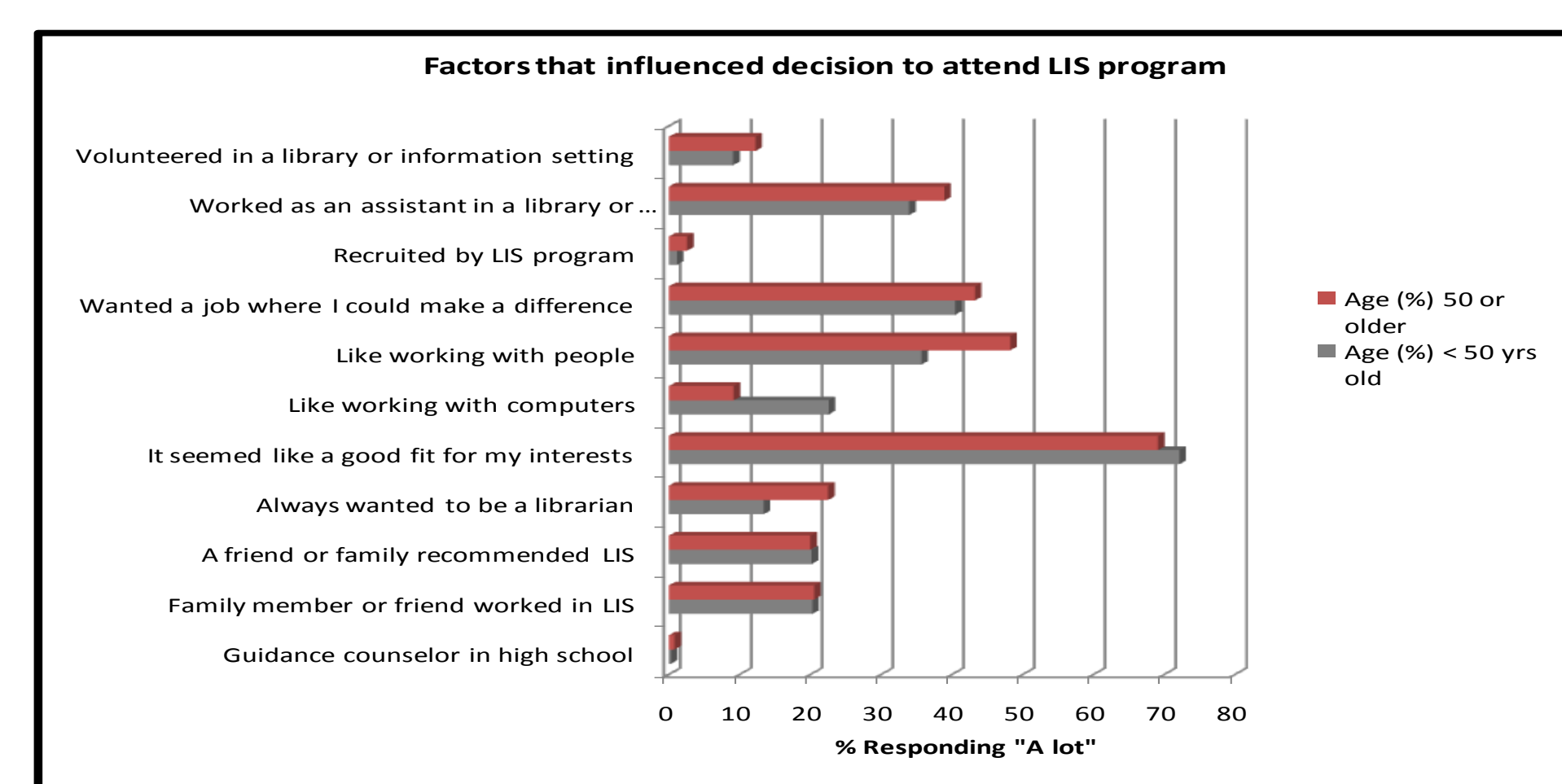
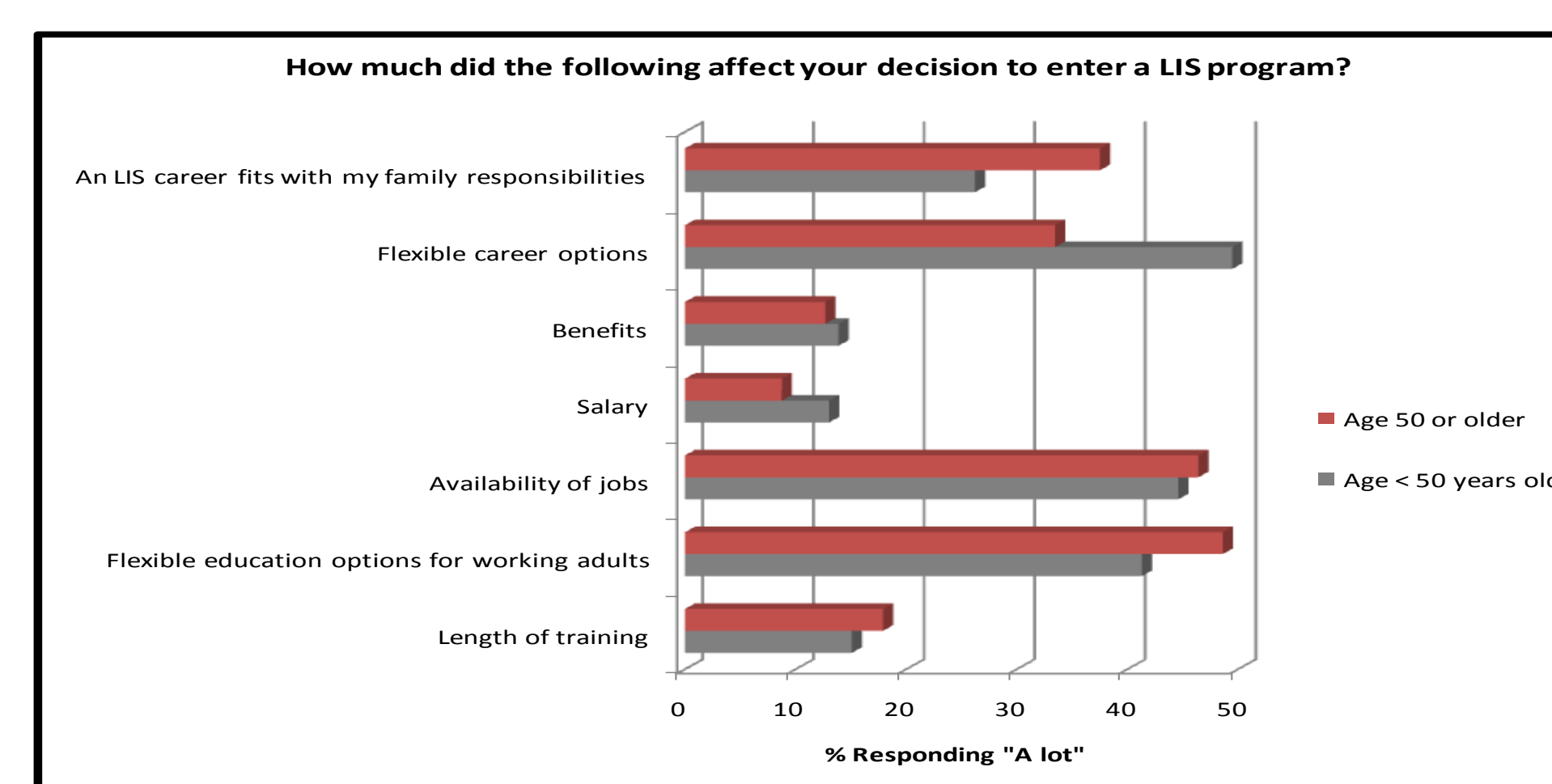
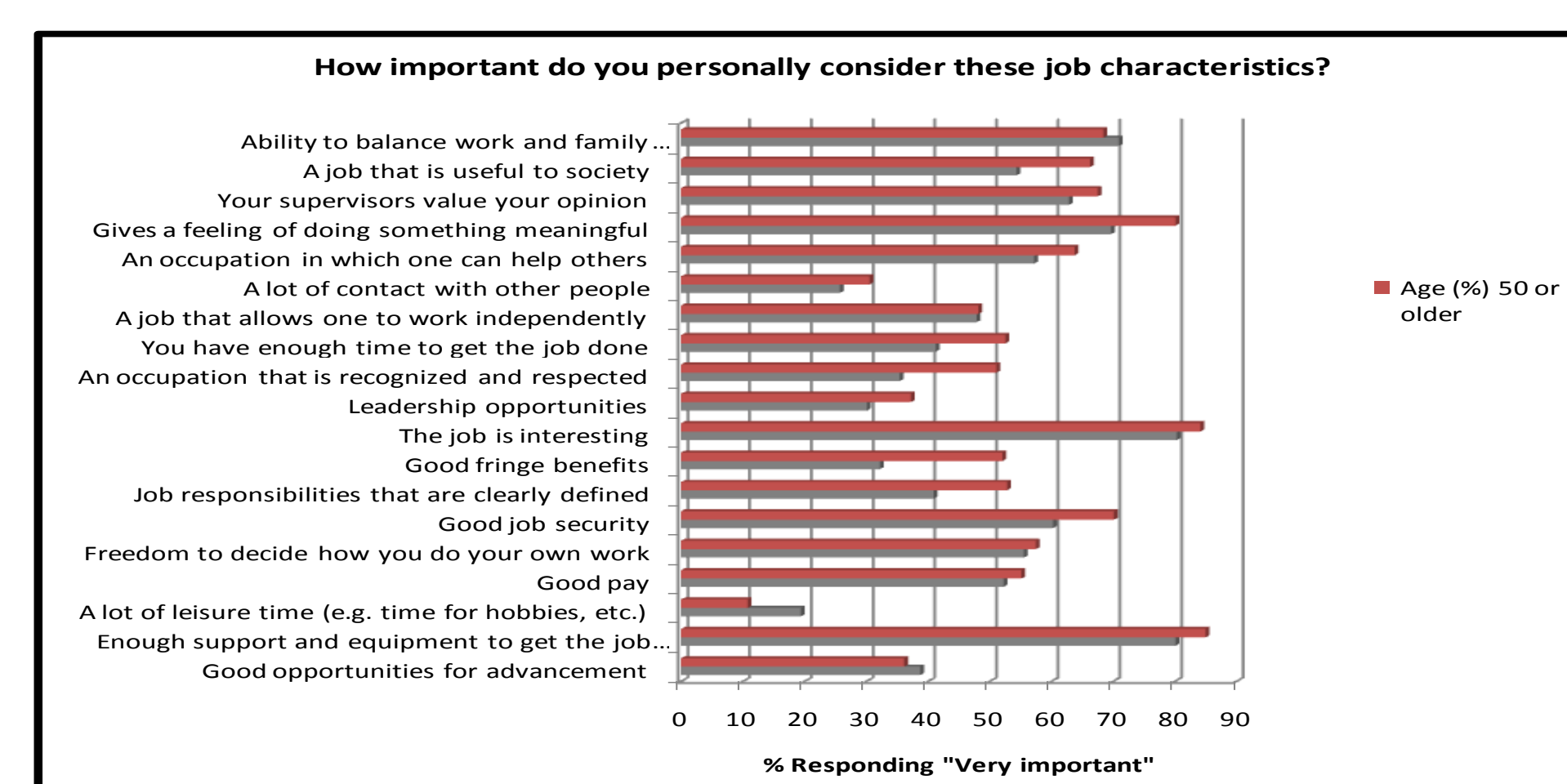
- (1) Describe the age demographics of the LIS workforce
- (2) Highlight differences in pay, job satisfaction, and leadership roles by age
- (3) Identify factors that motivate older workers to enter the LIS profession and job characteristics that older workers find appealing

Data and Methods: Alumni of five LIS degree programs in NC who graduated during the years of 1964-2005 were invited to participate in the Workforce Issues in Library and Information Science (WILIS) project. The web-based survey collected data on the educational and career histories of respondents, as well as data related to demographics, specific jobs held, breaks in employment, continuing education, opinions about trends in LIS, satisfaction with LIS as a career and perspectives of recent graduates about their LIS programs and entry into the workforce. The web survey had a 36% completion rate (n=2689).

Results:

Age	
Currently Working	
Mean	47.09
S.D.	10.65
Not Currently Working	
Mean	50.21
S.D.	12.15

	Age (%)		Total (%) (N = 1873)
	< 50 yrs old	50 or older	
Annual Salary			
Mean	\$52,845.29	\$57,682.62*	\$55,208.21
Median	\$48,000.00	\$54,000.00	\$50,000.00
Standard Deviation	\$24,462.56	\$29,004.84	\$26,939.27
Type of workplace			
Library or Information Center	78.60	77.77	78.19
Non-library or non-information center	21.40	22.2*	21.81
Supervisor Responsibilities			
Yes	56.70	63.96*	60.41
No	43.30	36.04	39.59
Overall, I am satisfied with what I do in my job			
Strongly Disagree	2.00	1.25	1.62
Disagree	7.91	6.76	7.41
Agree	61.50	63.83	62.53
Strongly Agree	28.59	28.17	28.44
Mean	3.17	3.19	3.18



"I began a career in my 40s. I taught one year and decided I did not wish to spend the rest of my career as a teacher. I loved libraries and after checking into the requirements and time to complete the program, chose to obtain my MLS in 1 year."



Implications:

- There are significant and perhaps important differences in what draws workers to jobs and occupations by age.
- A strong desire for both increased job security and good fringe benefits appear to appeal to older workers more than younger.
- These findings can be used productively by employers, educational institutions, and workforce planners in designing and implementing strategies that improve jobs and careers by targeting individual group needs.
- Some strategies to be considered include flexible employment, which may mean implementing job redesign, phased retirement, flexible scheduling, part-time options (perhaps with the option of health benefits), job sharing, telecommuting and other ways to help individuals be both productive contributors to employers and to their families.