

Accommodation Use by Individuals with Physical Impairments

Many individuals with disabilities include aging workers need workplace accommodations to perform the essential functions of their jobs. As the workforce ages, information is needed regarding how older workers use accommodations and perceive accommodation effectiveness. Comparison of accommodation use for older and younger workers will identify age-related criteria during accommodation selection. This will help better address barriers to job tasks for all workers with disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Work Accommodations (Work RERC) conducted a study of individuals with disabilities to determine what accommodations were most commonly used by individuals to remove barriers in their jobs. Respondents answered questions in an electronic survey, where they were asked to identify accommodations that they used to address barriers resulting from specific functional limitations. Further, respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with each accommodation, how frequently they used each accommodation, and how important each accommodation was to the completion of their job tasks. Additional questions asked about barriers that still existed in their employment.

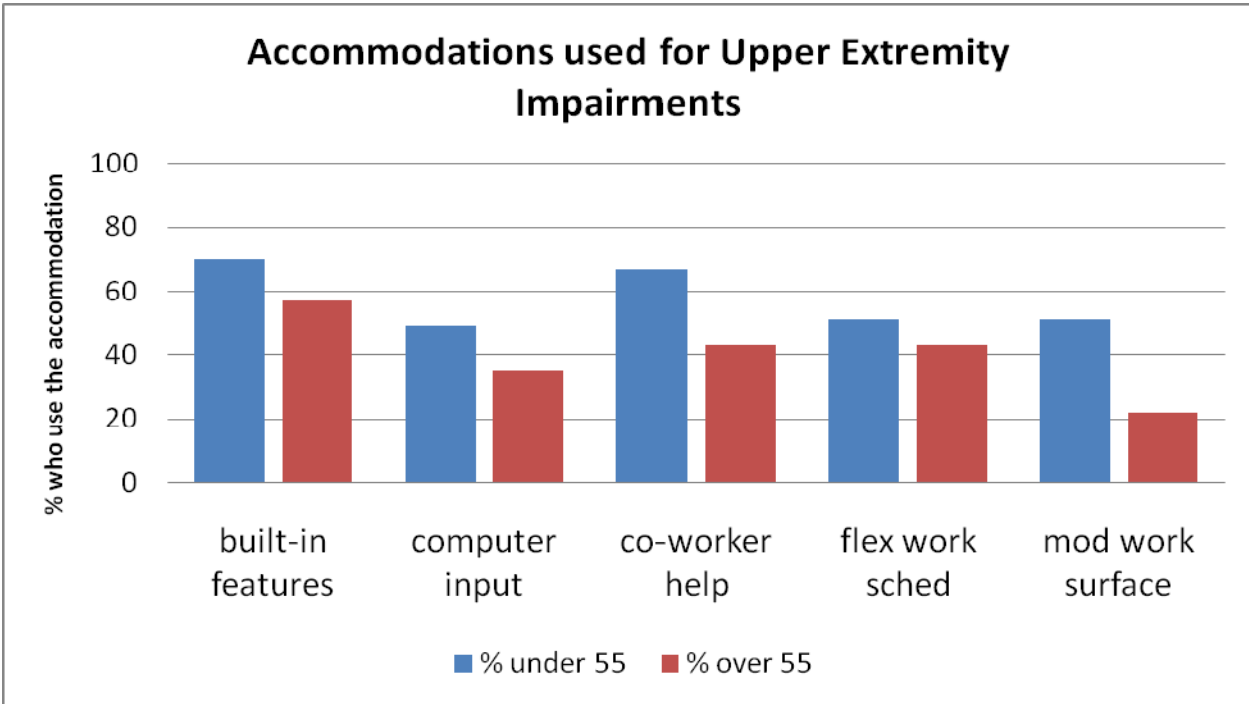
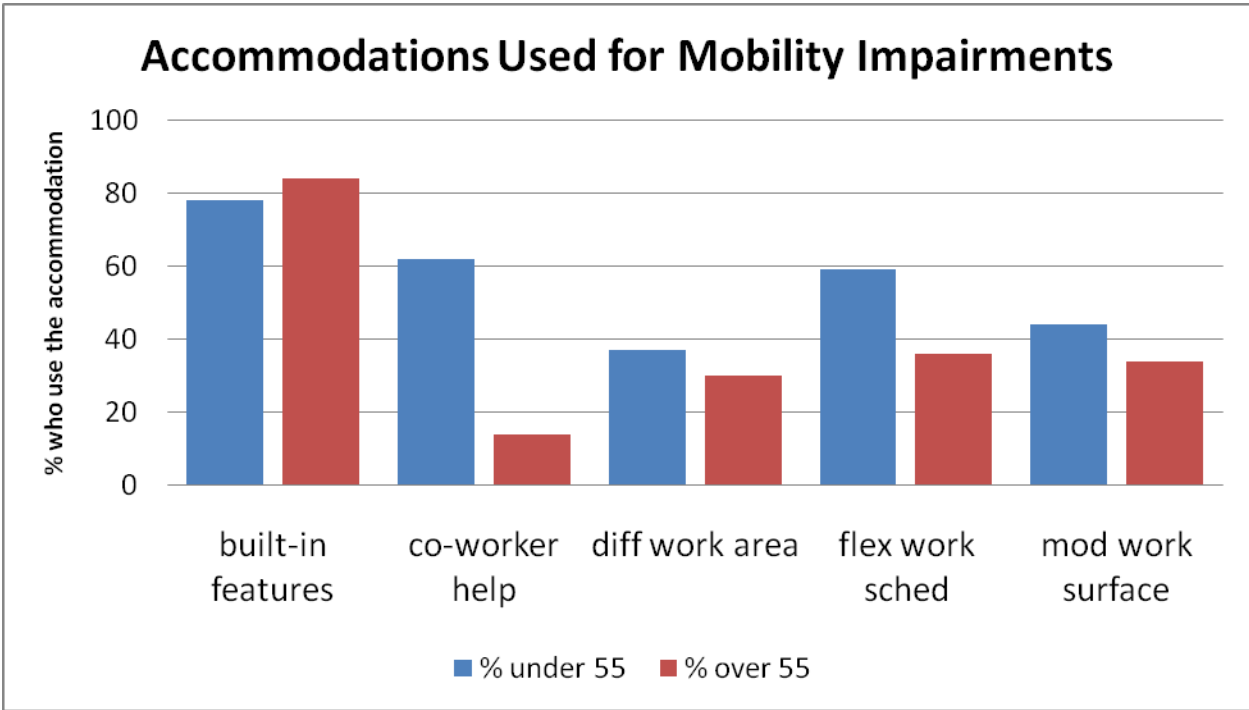
Preliminary results from 232 individuals showed that respondents, on average, reported 1.6 functional limitations. Mobility impairments – difficulty with standing, walking, or bending – were reported by 57% of those who answered the survey. Upper extremity impairments – difficulty with reaching and grasping – were reported by 28% of those who answered. About 37% of those who answered the survey were 55 years or older. Older individuals used fewer accommodations than their younger counterparts. Older individuals with physical limitations used, on average, 4.6 accommodations, while their younger counterparts used 6.1 accommodations.

The four most common accommodations for both types of physical limitations are shown in the two figures below. These include:

- Using features built into the environment, such as automatic door openers, grab bars, easy-access door handles, or ramps.
- The help of a co-worker or friend.
- Flexible work schedules that allow individuals to take extra rest breaks or schedule time for doctors appointments.
- A modified work surface, where, for example, a desk has been raised or lowered, or changed in shape to enable someone to better access their work materials.

Those with mobility impairments commonly used different work areas than their coworkers, such as an office in a more accessible location or tele-working. Those with upper extremity impairments used alternate computer input devices, such as specialized keyboards, pointing devices, or voice input software.

While older individuals use fewer accommodations, we can see from the graph that older individuals with mobility impairments rely more heavily on the built environment, and use co-worker help far less frequently than might be expected. Older workers with upper extremity impairments use modified work surfaces far less frequently than might be expected.



These are preliminary results on a large amount of data. Further analysis will look at individual's satisfaction with accommodations and what unmet needs are common. Please visit us at <http://www.catea.gatech.edu/> for more information.