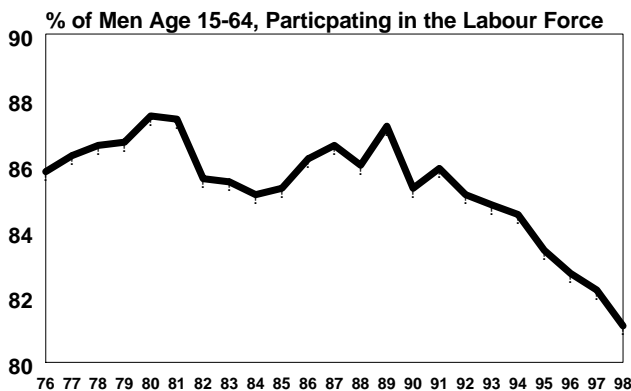


## Earnings and Employment Trends ♦ October 1998

### BC Men -- Their Participation in the Labour Market Continues to Decline

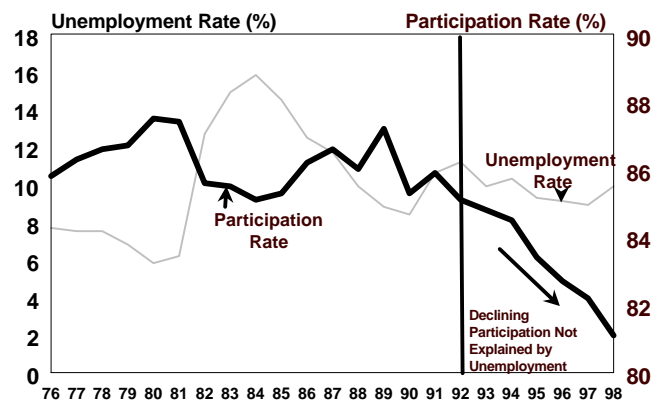
Since the early 1990's, a decreasing proportion of men are participating in the workforce. In 1991, 86 per cent of men, age 15–64, either had a job or were looking for one. Since then, that per cent has declined each year to the 1998 level of 81 per cent.

#### BC Men's Labour Market Participation is at its Lowest Level Since Data Were First Collected



Prior to 1992, the primary influence on whether or not men participated in the workforce was the availability of jobs. Specifically, when the unemployment rate increased, the participation rate would decline. Conversely, in times of declining unemployment, more men would enter the workforce.

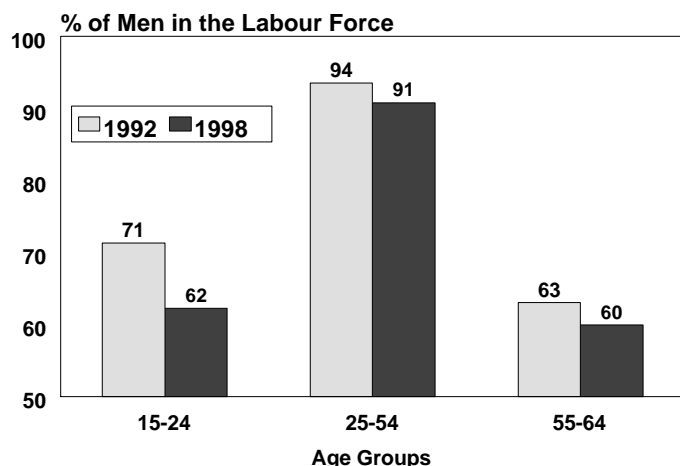
### High Unemployment Does Not Seem To Be the Cause of the Recent Decline in Participation Rates among Men



Since 1992, the availability of jobs is no longer the principal driving force of men's workforce attachment. Between 1992 and 1998, men's unemployment rate declined by more than 1 percentage point and yet it does not appear as though they responded to the increased job opportunities. Instead, their participation continued to drop.

What is causing the labour market participation decline among men? First, there is little evidence that the behavioural change is isolated to any specific age group.

## Men of All Ages Have Recorded a Decrease in their Labour Market Participation



All age groups have been impacted. The young, age 15-24, have seen the largest shift. Much of their changed labour market attachment is explained by a significant increase in school attendance. To what extent their increased school participation is due to a scarcity of jobs is difficult to quantify. Likely, that would partially explain the change, but not entirely – the youth unemployment rate was higher in the early 80's than currently and yet their workforce participation was close to 10 percentage points above what it is today.

Among older men, age 55–64, the participation rate of 60 per cent is the lowest (alongside the rate recorded in 1990), since the data series began. Early retirement is becoming more and more common and there is minimal evidence that this retirement is involuntary. Only a very small per cent of older men who are out of the workforce, claim they want a job.

The participation rate of prime-age males (25-54) has not fallen off as radically as their younger and older counterparts. It has been slowly ratcheting down from 95 per cent in the mid eighties to 91 per cent today. (All the sub age groups of the prime age male group, show similar patterns.) Unfortunately, time series data are not available on the activities of those not in the workforce but other data sources show upward trends in “stay-at-home Dads” and older full-time students. Hence, one can assume that today's proliferation of “working wives” is providing opportunities for males to pursue activities other than “work”.

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