

# Experience in the Coal Mining Industry among West Virginia Residents

## West Virginia Social Survey Report

WVSS-20-04

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### Background

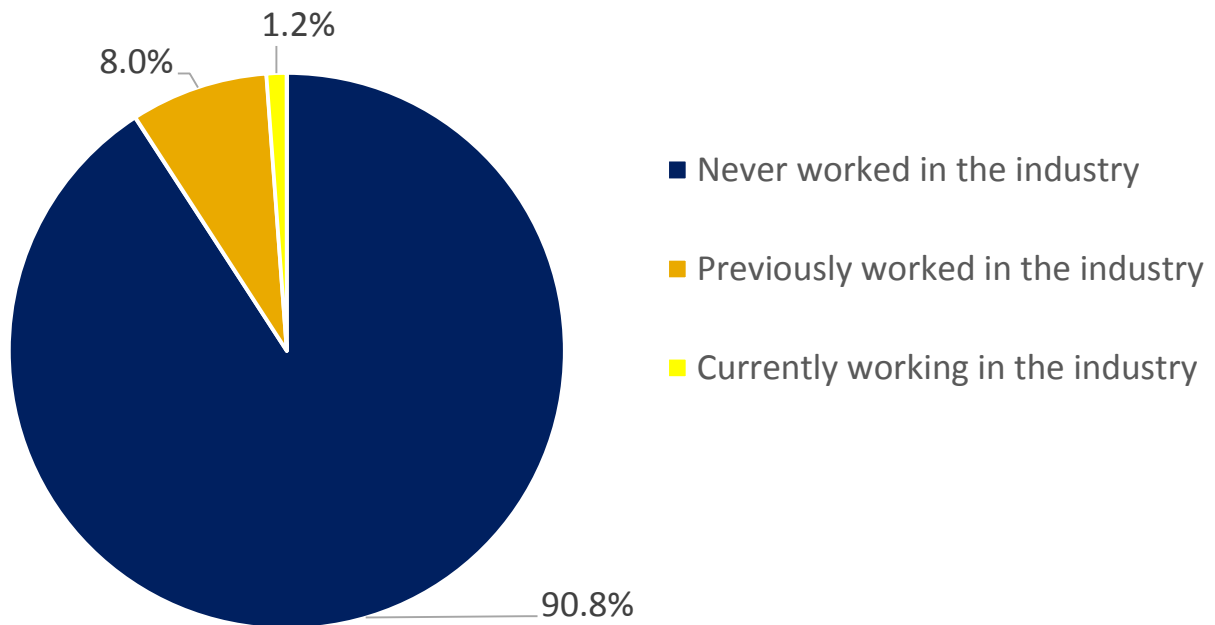
According to the West Virginia Office of Energy, West Virginia is the second largest coal producer in the nation, and coal can be found and “is economically recoverable” in 43 of 55 counties in the state. Data from the US Department of Labor 2018 shows that 13,962 West Virginians were working in the industry at the time, 7,709 fewer people than was reported in 2009.

This report provides a basic overview of the results from a statewide social survey of adult (18 years or older), current West Virginia residents conducted in 2020 with particular attention paid to those respondents who indicated previous or current work in the coal mining industry.

### Highlights

- 9.2% of West Virginia residents report either current or former employment in the coal mining industry.
- Participation in the coal industry is more common among male West Virginians and those born in the state. It is less common among women, younger individuals, and those born outside of West Virginia.
- There is some evidence that the self-reported health is worse for those that participated in the coal industry when compared to similarly-aged individuals who did not work in the industry.

**Figure 1 - Participation in the Coal Industry by West Virginia Residents**



Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey

### **Participation in the Coal Industry**

The West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS) asked individuals, “Which of the following best describes you...” and provided the following answer options, “I have never worked in the coal industry”, “I have previously worked in the coal mining industry, but do not currently work in the industry”, and “I am currently working in the coal mining industry.”

A total of 90.8% of West Virginia residents report that they have never worked in the

coal mining industry, 8.0% report previously working in the industry, and only 1.2% report currently working in the industry.

### **Gender**

Traditionally, coal mining has been a male dominated industry due to its physical nature, as well as prevailing social norms.

The WVSS finds that 17.3% of men in the state report previous or current employment in the coal

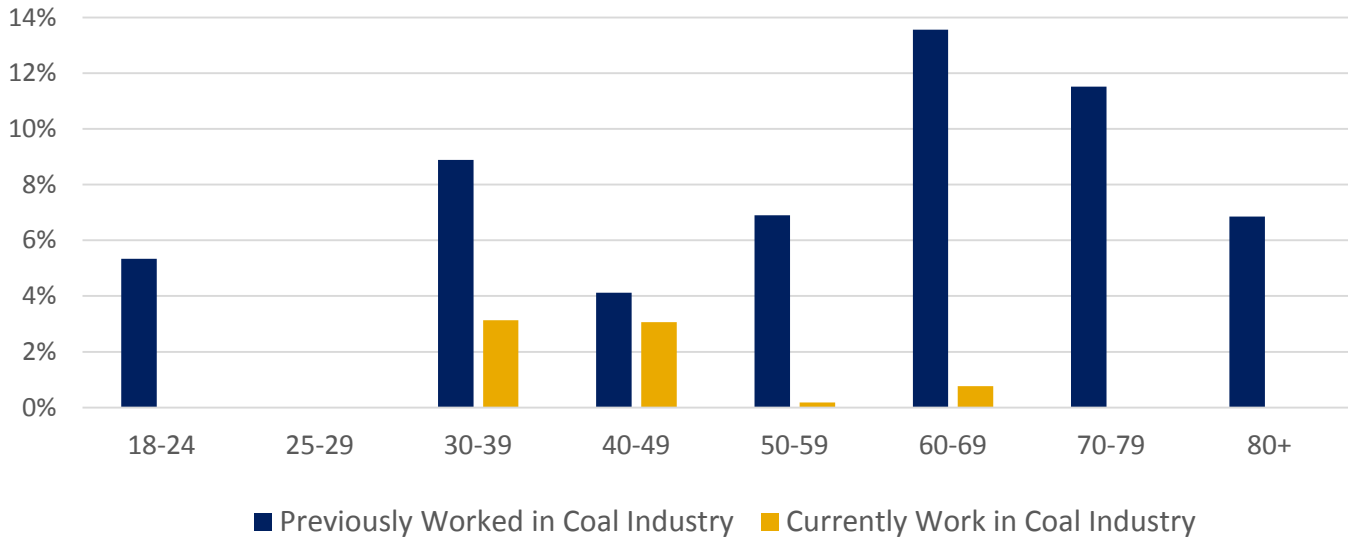
industry. This compares to 1.44% of women.

### **Age**

Looking at participation in the coal industry by age shows that the highest rate of current participation is among those aged 30 to age 49. About 3% of this age group is currently working in the industry.

Current participation rates are the lowest among the youngest and oldest age groups. For instance, no WVSS respondents aged 18 to 29 reported that

**Figure 2-Participation in the Coal Industry by Age**



Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey

they currently work in the industry.

Although likely for different reasons, no respondents to the WVSS aged 70 or older reported that they currently work in the industry, either.

**Region**

Participation in the coal mining industry also differs across regions in West Virginia. Residents in the southern region of the state report both the highest current (2.1%) and previous (11.1%) participation in the coal mining industry. Those residents in the Eastern panhandle region report the lowest current (0.0%) and past

(1.9%) rates of participation in the coal mining industry.

Fewer than 1% of those in the Northern region report currently working in the coal mining industry (0.7%), although 7.4% of residents in this region say that they previously worked in the industry.

Of those in the North panhandle of the state, 0.4% report currently working in the coal mining industry and 4.1% report previously working in the industry.

**State Origins**

The WVSS also finds that past or current participation in the coal mining industry differs by

the state origins of West Virginia residents.

Of state residents who were born in West Virginia, 9.3% report previously working in the coal mining industry and 1.6% report currently working in the industry.

Of those that were born outside of West Virginia, 3.4% report previously working in the coal mining industry and 0.2% report currently working in the industry.

**Health Impacts**

The WVSS provides some evidence that participation in the coal industry is associated with negative health outcomes.

For instance, among those aged 60-69, 48.3% of those individuals who have never worked in the coal mining industry say that their health is “excellent” or “good.”

In contrast, only 27.6% of West Virginia residents aged 60-69 who previously worked in the coal industry describe their health as “excellent” or “good.”

### Summary

While current employment in the coal industry can be estimated from labor reports, it is more difficult to assess whether individuals have previously participated in the industry.

The West Virginia Social Survey finds that, while 1.2% of West Virginia residents say that they are currently working in the coal mining industry, another 8.0% report that they have previously worked in the industry.

As might be expected, men are much more likely to say that they are or have been employed in the industry.

A relatively small proportion of young adults aged 18-29 in West Virginia report current or previous participation in the coal mining industry, and participation is much more common among those born in

**Table 1-Self-Reported Health of West Virginians Aged 60-69 by Participation in Coal Industry**

In general, would you say that your own health is excellent, good, fair, or poor?		
	Never worked in coal industry	Previously worked in coal industry
Excellent	5.8%	2.4%
Good	42.5%	25.2%
Fair	43.9%	54.9%
Poor	7.8%	17.5%
	100%	100%

Data: 2020 West Virginia Social Survey

West Virginia compared to residents who were born in other states.

Finally, the WVSS finds some evidence that individuals who have participated in the coal mining industry report poorer health than similarly-aged peers who have not participated in the industry.

### Data Source

The WVSS is produced by the Survey Research Center at West Virginia University. The purpose of the WVSS is to gather information on the attitudes, concerns, and challenges facing WV residents.

The WVSS is a mail survey utilizing an address-based sample of nearly 5,000 households across the state.

The 2020 WVSS received nearly 1,900 responses for a response rate of 38.1% (American Association of Public Opinion Research Definition #3). Data are weighted to be representative of the West Virginia adult population.

### Suggested Citation

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