

Introduction

The current financial crisis has been unprecedented in terms of its scale, spread, and severity. Government bailouts and spending packages have aimed to alleviate short term problems, providing a monetary stimulus and bolstering employment in certain sectors of the economy. However, according to research by Field (1975) "...the effects of a government stimulus package are only every short lived". Wheatfield and Burgher (1989) illustrated, in their study of the HunkyDory cash injection, how a stimulus package may actually accentuate the negative and long term impact of a financial crisis. Assuming that both of these findings hold true in 2009 and beyond, it is safe to assume that the fall out from the current financial turmoil will be felt for many years and by many generations to come.

A large number of papers has been written on the subject of crises, with the aim of establishing the extent to which the current crisis will impact the demographic cohorts born in the period directly after World War II – the Baby Boomers, and those born from the mid 1960s to 1980, Generation X. Two studies by Doyle, Sigfield, Moore and Kettle (2008, 2009) focused on the extent to which the retirement savings and assets of these groups have been depleted. The typical pension has fallen in value by 52% and the average house has lost 32% of its value. Doyle et al., 2008 also made financial projections for these groups and showed that despite the crisis, the vast majority (68%) would still be able to retire as planned. A study by Poole (2008) followed similar lines of analysis but found that the future of 74.2% of Baby Boomers, and 68.4% of Generation X was secure. A study by Kettering and Black (2009) highlighted, however, how the current financial crisis will be far more serious for younger generations given that they have not had the opportunity to create wealth through real estate appreciation.

This paper adopts a different approach to studies into the impact of such an unprecedented financial and economic crisis. No study has evaluated the impact of the crisis on the specific demographic cohort born from the early 1980s to the mid 1990s, so-called Generation Y. The term was first coined in Advertising Age (1993) to describe the demographic cohort following Generation X. Generation Y is characterized by its familiarity with technology: laptops, Blackberrys, iPods and cell phones are the accessories of choice for this generation. Further, this population group is often referred to as "The Trophy Generation" (Alsop, 2008); they consider themselves to be winners because they have always been told that they are. The "perceived sense of entitlement" (Alsop, 2008) associated with this group has distorted their perceptions of what is "normal" behavior. Generation Y consists of employees who are difficult to manage, particularly at a time when there are so few winners in a workforce that is driven by more traditional behaviors. The socioeconomic consequences are potentially catastrophic for society as a whole: The destruction of wealth generating potential and job security do not benefit anyone, least of all those born post-1980. So, just how will this group cope with not being able to save for retirement? Our study suggests that the final irony may be that this wired-to-technology generation, may also be wired-to-work...forever.