



THE 2015 PRIZE IS AWARDED TO Robert J. Willis, Professor of Economics at the University of Michigan and Research Professor at the Institute for Social Research and the Population Studies Center, University of Michigan; Fellow and past President of the Society of Labor Economics.

In the 1970s, Willis was one of the young labor economists who ushered in the modern era of the field with work that combined rigorous modeling and econometric sophistication and that emphasized the tight links between theory and empirical analysis that characterize labor economics. Following his path-breaking work on the economic modelling of fertility, Willis published a number of innovative papers, including collaborations with Jim Heckman, Lee Lillard, and Sherwin Rosen, on the econometrics of longitudinal labor supply models and the treatment of self-selection in estimating the returns to education.

His many contributions to family economics, several coauthored with Yoram Weiss, include work on surprises as determinants of divorce, the inefficiency of child support payments, and an economic model of non-marital childbearing. Working with multidisciplinary teams of researchers, Willis has examined intergenerational ties in Asian countries, including the effect of credit constraints on child investments and exchange motives for intergenerational transfers. His work is well-known among demographers, and in 2002 he received the prestigious Mindel C. Sheps Award for outstanding contributions to mathematical demography and demographic methodology from the Population Association of America.

Willis's contributions to labor economics include his long service (1995-2007) as Director of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a pivotal piece of social science infrastructure that has provided data on aging Americans and their employment, assets, health and family ties for three decades. Under his leadership, the HRS has introduced many new survey instruments, including measures of cognitive functioning and dementia. His latest work studies the extent of cognitive declines with aging and their implications for issues such as retirement planning, earnings, and the caregiving needs of the elderly. This research continues the commitment to innovation, rigorous measurement, and conceptual clarity that characterizes Robert Willis's long career in labor economics.

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[Acceptance remarks by Robert Willis](#)