

EMPLOYMENT PROFILES OF SELECTED LOW-INCOME AREAS, 1970

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For many years, researchers, policy makers, and program administrators have been trying to deal with the many and diverse manpower problems in low-income areas of our major cities without having adequate information on exactly what these problems were and how widespread or serious they were. A demand for comprehensive, timely, and accurate information necessary to deal with these problems has come from State and local governments, universities, private research organizations and others. This demand has been somewhat satisfied by several BLS and Census Bureau efforts completed in recent years.

Some early urban area surveys were conducted by the Department of Labor in November 1966 in 8 cities. This was followed by several methodological and experimental surveys in 1967, and by the Urban Employment Survey (UES) from 1968 to 1970, covering the poverty areas of 6 major cities -- Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles and New York City. The findings and results of the UES demonstrated that it was possible to collect detailed and extensive socioeconomic data in low-income areas. In view of the need for these same kind of data for a great many more areas, plans were made to conduct the Census Employment Survey (CES) by tying it into the 1970 Decennial Census. However, the survey was conducted separately from the Census as it would have been impossible to include on the Census questionnaire the detailed information in the fields of labor, housing, education, income and other subject areas which were needed.

The data were collected in low-income areas of 51 cities, 7 rural areas and one Indian reservation. Interviewing began in some areas in August 1970 and was completed for the last area in March 1971. Survey results in the form of statistical reports were published by the Census Bureau in series PHC(3) of the 1970 Census reports. All of the 76 separate reports in the series are now available from the Census Bureau in Washington and its field offices.

The purpose of this paper is to examine each of the major subject matter areas on which information was obtained in the CES. It focuses on reasons why information on specific subjects was collected, how the findings are presented, and notes particularly interesting and useful measures which have been tabulated. Specific areas for possible analysis by those with responsibilities for the application and use of the data are also pointed out. The paper also includes information on potentially significant data which was collected but not tabulated in the CES reports. These unpublished data, which are available through special arrangement with the Census Bureau, vary in amount from one subject area to another and, in some cases, are a substantial part of the overall findings on a particular subject.

Demographic and Social Characteristics

The examination of the CES begins with the most basic information on the group being surveyed -- their personal and social characteristics. The Census Employment Survey provides essentially the same detailed information on demographic and social characteristics for residents of the selected low-income areas as is available for the total United States, individual States, SMSA's and cities from the Decennial Census and the Current Population Survey. Demographic or personal characteristics are essential for a complete profile of any group of persons being studied. They serve as a framework to a fuller understanding of the comprehensive employment related subject matter on which the survey is focused. Available from this survey are detailed data on age, sex, school status, veteran status, race and ethnic origin, marital status, family size and household composition.

CES data for many of the subject matter characteristics are published with data disaggregations for particular age groups; this includes such age breaks as 16-19, 16-21, 20-24, and 10 year breaks for persons 25 years and over, with the amount of detail varying by table. The detailed age categories allow for a greater degree of flexibility in the application of the survey data as labor force and related characteristics of men and women in various age groups differ significantly. For example, labor force participation rates (the proportion of the population in the labor force) vary sharply by age and sex. Men 35 to 44 years usually represent maximum labor force participation and are apt to hold or seek full-time jobs. In contrast, because of family responsibilities, labor force participation of women in that as well as other age groups is significantly lower than that of men, and women workers are more likely than men to hold or seek part-time jobs. Trends show however, that during the 1960's, an increasing proportion of women entered the work force to supplement family income and for other reasons, an occurrence which has narrowed the gap in participation rates for men and women.

Separate figures for Vietnam veterans 22 to 34 years old are presented on a number of tables. The fact that many returning veterans have had serious difficulties in locating a satisfactory job is of great concern at all levels of government -- national, State, and local. The cross-classification of employment status of veterans by other detailed characteristics should shed some light on whether the problems of veterans living in the low-income areas are principally the result of lack of civilian skills, lack of previous civilian work experience, and/or low educational attainment.

Detailed information on race and ethnic origin is included on each table in the CES reports in order to better focus on the particular problems of minority-group residents in the poverty areas. There is a particular need for information on the

employment and other characteristics of low-income area residents with diverse racial and national origin backgrounds. Because of differences in customs, language barriers, low educational attainment, lack of skills, recent migration into the area, discrimination, or other factors, members of minority groups are more likely to have employment problems than their non-minority neighbors. The CES data will enable the user to determine the extent of and reasons for these differences among racial groups in particular low-income areas.

The extent of the race and ethnic origin detail presented in individual CES reports depends directly on the relative make-up of the population in each area. Detail is presented separately for the total area population, the majority and for the largest minority race and ethnic groupings in some combination of the following -- Negro, white, white Spanish-American, other white, and/or other races. The summary tables (A through N) include information on any three of the above race or ethnic groups which comprise at least 5 percent of the population while the detailed tables (1 through 54) present separate data on those groups which make-up at least 20 percent of the population. In addition, there is a special report on the combined New York City low-income area presenting information on the Puerto Rican and the non-Puerto Rican population.

Education and Training

The demand for higher educational and skill requirements to fill most of the new job opportunities in the economy has been rising rapidly. Moreover, in most existing occupations, there has been an increasing demand for workers with more education and training. Educational attainment classifies persons by years of schooling completed in "regular" schools, which include graded public, private, and parochial schools, whether day schools or night schools. Detailed data on educational attainment in the CES poverty areas provide the opportunity to analyze the relationship between levels of schooling and its association with other important socioeconomic indicators, including labor force status, earnings, job training, and annual income.

Also relating to the question of how people prepare themselves for jobs, is information on the extent and sources of formal job training programs completed by low-income area residents. Along with educational attainment, this information was collected in order to help determine the relationship between job preparation and job success. For the purpose of this survey, job training includes completion of any formal job training program in a high school, trade school or junior college, the Armed Forces, or apprenticeship programs. It also includes training programs operated under the Manpower Development and Training Act, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, and other special manpower programs. Job success is measured by current occupational status and hourly earnings of employed persons -- both those who have and those who have not completed training programs. For example, data is available on the occupational distribution and average hourly earnings of both high school and non-high school

graduates who either did or did not complete job training programs. The information is tabulated according to whether the training was completed prior to or since January 1961 in order to focus principally on "recent" job training experience (that completed since January 1961) which is assumed to be more closely related to current work activity than training completed more than ten years ago.

Most of the data obtained on job training is published in the CES reports. However, an important survey question, results of which might bear upon the efficacy or success of job training pro -- "have you ever used any of this training on any of your jobs" -- was not tabulated. These unpublished data would indicate the frequency of use of each source of job training by current occupation of the training recipient and by other variables. This would help in measuring the impact of training programs completed by area residents and could be of major assistance to policy makers and program administrators in the design and operation of both skill development and supportive training programs.

Employment and Labor Force Status

Current employment status is perhaps the most widely used and quoted manpower measure. The proportion of the population in the labor force (labor force participation rate), the number of employed and unemployed persons, and the unemployment rate provide quick measures of the economic well-being of residents of any area. They can be particularly useful in pointing to the differences in employment success between residents of poverty areas and that of the general population.

The CES contains unusually detailed data upon which a profile of the unemployed in the poverty areas can be established. This includes separate information on those who are looking for full-time employment and those who want a part-time job. It also includes a number of other important variables such as duration of unemployment, the reasons for unemployment (lost last job, left last job, and new entrants or reentrants to the labor force) problems in finding a job, methods of seeking work, availability of transportation, extent of unemployment for part-year workers, and main reasons for less than full-year work. Since most of these variables are cross-classified by other important characteristics, the data will identify whether lack of appropriate education, experience or skill, or other factors are the most serious problems for unemployed persons living in these areas. The data should be of assistance in the planning of programs to aid the unemployed in their job search.

In using the CES data, one objective of the analyst might be to provide a measure of the number of additional jobs needed to absorb the unemployed in poverty areas. Another objective might be to measure the number of jobs needed to insure full-time employment for the component most easily discernible as underemployed -- those on part time for economic reasons. The additional jobs needed for residents of the poverty areas must be linked to available or potential worker skills before fully or partially unemployed

workers can be matched with job vacancies, or the demand for workers in the area.

Since the skill level of the worker is closely aligned with his occupation, an analysis of both the occupational structure and the educational, earnings, and other characteristics of workers in each occupational group is essential to obtain a comprehensive picture of the unemployed, the underemployed, and the full-time employed. For poverty areas such as those surveyed in the CES where low-skill levels contribute heavily to the employment problems and low earnings of area residents, occupational data are of primary importance. For this reason, specific focus in the CES was aimed at the occupational composition of the work force.

Three of the CES tables present data for subdivisions commonly referred to as "detailed occupation groups" for current job, first regular full-time job, and longest job since leaving school. These data should be of primary interest in the analysis of worker skills available to the community. On the remaining CES occupational tables, major occupation group data are cross-classified by several important variables which should add considerably to knowledge of characteristics of workers at general levels of skill. Information on possible occupational upgrading is also presented by a cross-tabulation of occupation of current job with occupation of longest job.

Problems Affecting Jobholding and Jobseeking; Desire for Work Among Persons Not in the Labor Force

Because of interest in information on barriers to satisfactory employment faced by low-income area residents, the CES obtained specific data on the problems or responsibilities that prevent or affect jobholding or jobseeking and on the desire to work of persons outside the labor force. This information is central to the purposes of the CES. Hopefully, it will assist in the design of effective manpower programs to alleviate these problems and enable low-income persons to find and keep good jobs.

The list of specific problems or responsibilities keeping some low-income area workers from searching for or from finding or holding a good job is quite extensive. The specific reasons identified in the CES included several categories. Family responsibilities; health problems; lack of experience, skills, or education; and employers think too young or too old were tabulated for employed and unemployed persons as well as those not in the labor force. In addition to these four categories, persons not in the labor force were also classified as to whether their nonparticipation status was due to one of the following reasons: transportation problems, looked but couldn't find work, or retirement.

Each problem category may include a variety of aspects. Family responsibilities might be housekeeping duties, care of children or care of sick relatives. Health problems include general poor health, physical handicaps, specific illness, and other disabilities. Persons indicating lack of experience, education and skill include those who are unable to find jobs because of limited education, experience or skills.

Those who indicated that employers thought they were too young or too old consist of those too young to get work permits, as well as those who have been refused a job because either the job requires someone more "mature" or someone younger who can be expected to remain on the job for a longer time.

Among the additional reasons identified for those not in the labor force, the retirement category includes persons who report old age as their reason for not looking for work or wanting a job. It consists of persons who think of themselves as beyond working age, as contrasted to those who report that employers regard them as too old to work. Transportation problems include poor or non-existent public transportation or no car or other private transportation being available. The category looked but couldn't find work is for an individual who is not presently looking for work because he had looked unsuccessfully at a previous time. The presumption here is that he believes that there are still no jobs available for him, so he is not bothering to look.

A great deal of attention has recently been focused on "discouraged workers" -- persons not in the labor force who want a job but are not looking because they think they cannot get work. In the CES, a count of these persons could include persons whose primary reason for not seeking work was one of the following: they previously had looked but couldn't find work; employers thought them to be too young or too old; they lacked necessary skills, experience, or education; or they had transportation problems preventing them from getting to a job.

For persons out of the labor force, information also was obtained and published on the extent of desire for a job in addition to the information on reasons for not seeking work. Persons classified as employed or unemployed may be assumed to have some desire for a job -- they are either actually working or actively seeking work. Thus, any reason they perceive as preventing them from finding a job or getting a better one may be considered a barrier to satisfactory employment. On the other hand, persons not in the labor force may or may not want to work and any attempt to gather and evaluate information on reasons for their nonparticipation must first ascertain their desire for work and degree of labor force attachment. Those who indicate a desire for a job and who identify specific reasons for not looking for work also may be considered as facing a barrier to satisfactory employment.

Thus, in terms of desire for a job, the CES classifies persons not in the labor force as follows: those who want a job now, those who may want a job, those who would want a job if it weren't for their problem or responsibility, and those who do not want a job. Nonparticipants were first asked if they wanted a job. Those who wanted or might have wanted a job were asked for their reasons for not seeking work, the remainder were asked why they did not want to work. If a member of the latter group indicated a specific reason for not wanting a job, he was asked if he would want a job if it were not for the specific problem or responsibility keeping

him out of the labor force.

Additional data for some of the problem categories faced by both workers and potential workers were collected but not published. For persons with health problems, the specific illness or disability and its duration were also obtained from the respondent. Persons indicating that their family responsibilities included child care were asked additional questions about their problems in arranging for the care of their children during work hours and specifically for their attitudes toward child care centers. Persons indicating a lack of skill, education or experience were asked about their interest in returning to school for additional training. In addition, persons not in the labor force because they looked but couldn't find work were asked a series of questions about the jobseeking methods which they used and the job training programs which they might have taken.

Work Experience

In addition to the wealth of information on the current employment status of poverty area residents, the CES collected some important data on their employment experience over the 12 months prior to the survey week. These data are conceptually the same as those collected annually for the Nation as a whole in the March supplement to the Current Population Survey and published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in its Special Labor Force Report series.

Work experience data provide a more comprehensive insight into the overall employment experience of workers by obtaining information on the number of weeks a person was employed or unemployed during the entire year rather than his status as of the survey week, which may or may not be typical of his usual status. Thus, the work experience data provide a more useful tool for indicating patterns of labor force participation by measuring the components of both stability (the proportion of year-round workers) and of movement (part-year workers).

The work experience data are particularly useful for an analysis of the employment situation of persons likely to have multiple employment problems, such as residents of low-income areas. The year-long concept permits the development of measures that supplement the more often used information on employment and unemployment at a point in time. For example, it provides information on the number of persons who were successful in obtaining only intermittent or part-year employment, the number working year-round full-time, but earning low wages; the number who experienced several spells of unemployment during the year; and other measures of the lack of employment success.

Most of the work-experience data are published in the CES reports. However, there are some non-tabulated data relating to the work history of the population that would shed additional light on the extent of unemployment during the year among two specific worker groups. The first group is those persons who unsuccessfully looked for work during the year but never worked. In addition, data are not shown on the number of year-round workers who could have been unemployed 1 or 2 weeks during the year. Although part-year

workers make up the vast majority of the unemployed over the year, the missing data would provide a complete measure of the extent of unemployment among the low-income area population.

Principal Jobseeking Methods

One of the reasons sometimes cited for the lack of success that workers in low-income areas have in finding jobs or getting better ones is that they have a limited knowledge of the available job opportunities, and their job search techniques are inefficient. How do poverty area residents seek jobs? Do they generally use formal or informal means? Do methods differ substantially among occupational groups? In order to shed some light on these questions, the CES provides information on the principal job seeking methods used by workers who looked for a job during the previous 12 months cross-tabulated by occupation, industry and spells of unemployment.

Most of the information obtained on jobseeking methods is published in the CES reports. However, the data were tabulated only for the principal method of job search used by part-year workers. In addition, information from the question -- "Which way of looking for work got you your present (or most recent) job?" -- was not tabulated. The collation of these data would permit a much better measure of the impact of effectiveness of the various jobseeking activities and could provide valuable information for the planning and structuring of employment programs aimed at more effective matching of job seekers with available jobs.

Transportation

The absence of quick, inexpensive, and adequate transportation to the workplace, particularly those located in the fast growing job markets outside central cities, can be a major barrier to the finding and holding of good jobs by inner city residents and may create a sense of isolation from socio-economic opportunities. More important, it can perpetuate the marginal existence of low-income area residents of inner cities by exacting daily transportation costs (in terms of time and money) large enough to make working at a regular job not a viable way out of poverty conditions. The CES tabulations relating to transportation provide information on the usual place of work, method and cost of transportation, and time required to get to work for the employed and the availability of transportation to work for unemployed poverty area residents. The interrelationship of these data with several key variables should answer many questions about the commuting problems of inner city residents, particularly those who must daily go to jobs outside the city. Hopefully, they will permit a clearer basis for policy decisions in this area.

Most of the data collected on transportation characteristics is published in the CES reports. However, information was collected, but not published, from the following question asked of employed workers: "What time do you usually get to work" and "Do you use any other way at least once a week?" In addition, responses to questions on the place unemployed workers usually went to look for work and the time required and cost of transportation used to get there have not been tabulated. Collation of these data would

allow a fuller profile of the transportation to work characteristics, patterns and problems of low-income area workers.

Earnings and Income

The CES reports include an abundance of data on both the earnings and income of low-income area families. Earnings and income data are among the most connotative indicators of the well-being of workers and their families. The data reflect the labor force status of the population and often are direct measures of employment problems; they are particularly useful in measuring the employment difficulties of low-income area residents. For example, high hourly or weekly pay coupled with low annual earnings indicate the incidence of part-year or part-time employment (or both). Data on annual earnings below poverty levels for full-time year-round work provide still another measure of lack of employment success. Other revealing measures are the percent of families below the poverty level by source of income or occupation of the family head, and levels of family income by number of family earners.

When coupled with the large number of demographic and employment variables tabulated in the CES reports, the earnings and income data provide a quite comprehensive economic profile of the survey area worker and his family. They are also useful as a measure of the well-being of persons and families living in the target areas compared to those living in the Nation as a whole.

The annual income data are quite diverse and cross-tabulated with a number of important variables. In addition, most of the income tables include information on the number and percent of persons and families below the poverty line. The data on annual income and poverty level are tabulated by size of family, number of children under 18 years, fixed monthly expenses, monthly charges for mortgages, rent, and utilities, age and education of family head, age and education of unrelated individual, number of earners and nonearners, source of income, detailed source of income (without poverty level information), work experience of family head in last 12 months, and major occupation group of family head's longest job in last 12 months.

Lowest Acceptable Weekly Pay

One subject matter for which little information is available for the general population or for persons living in specific areas is that of the lowest pay acceptable to persons when they were looking for work. One well-known hypothesis which has been advanced to explain why the unemployed, particularly jobless youth, are unsuccessful in the job search is that their wage expectations are unrealistic, that is, they are not willing to accept the prevailing wage for the type of job which is available to them. Information is available in the CES reports on the lowest weekly pay acceptable to persons who looked for work at any time during a 12 month period prior to the survey. This information is presented in extensive detail by age and sex, family status, educational attainment, major occupation and industry group, and duration of unemployment of part-year workers. The lowest acceptable pay data could be evaluated in conjunction

with actual weekly earnings data from the survey. Together these data would provide an indication of whether low-income workers in these cities have unrealistic wage demands, or whether they expect realistic pay, consistent with prevailing local wage rates.

Mobility and Migration Patterns

The CES provides important information on mobility and migration of poverty area residents. One of the most significant factors affecting the job market in large American cities in recent years has been the migration of large population groups. The exodus of Negroes from the rural South to large northern cities, the large number of Puerto Ricans moving from Puerto Rico to New York City and other eastern cities, the migration of Cuban residents to cities in Florida, and the movement of Mexican residents to many southwestern and western U. S. cities are examples of this pattern. Unfortunately, little is known about the condition of the newly arrived compared to that of the long-time resident.

It is necessary to seek the answers to a number of questions concerning the residents of these areas. For example, who are the people living in the Nation's low-income areas? Are the majority of the residents members of a particular ethnic group? Where did these residents come from? Are those who have been lifetime residents of the area better off than the newcomers? Are those who were born in farm or rural areas as well off as those who were born in the city in which they now reside? Are newcomers to the area younger than longtime residents? Is educational attainment higher for residents born in the area than it is for migrants? Substantive answers to these questions should indicate more clearly the direction that programs and action should take in order to solve the employment, income and related problems of the residents of these areas. The CES provides information relative to several of these questions based on place of birth and place of residence 5 years ago cross-tabulated by annual income, size and composition of family, and educational attainment of family head.

Additional information on residential mobility was collected but not included in the CES reports. These data include the number of years the respondent has lived at his present address, how many times he moved during the last year, where he lived at age 16, and how many years (in detail) he has lived within his present city limits.

The CES reports contain a substantial amount of detailed data on these as well as other subject matter characteristics. The data are presented in each urban area report according to the formats described in this paper. However, there are several differences in the subject matter content of the rural area surveys. Thus, many statements in this paper do not apply to the CES rural area data.

Although the Census Employment Survey will obviously not answer all our questions concerning the complex socio-economic problems of low-income area residents, it does provide more

information for more specific areas than was previously available. When viewed and used together with other survey data such as that from the Decennial Census and the Current Population Survey, it will hopefully help all of us to at

least better understand the extent and kinds of employment difficulties faced by a large number of our fellow citizens. Once those problems are accurately measured however, there still remains the infinitely difficult job of solving them.