America’s Lower-Wage Workforce: Employer and Worker Perspectives

Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research surveys reveals surprising new facts and deeper understanding of how lower-wage workers and their employers view lower-wage jobs and opportunities for advancing the careers of lower-wage workers.

Chicago, March 20, 2013—The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research announces the publication and availability of a major two-part study designed to better understand how lower-wage workers and those who employ them view such jobs and the opportunities for advancing the careers of lower wage workers. Funding for the surveys was provided to the AP-NORC Center by the Joyce Foundation, the Hitachi Foundation, and NORC at the University of Chicago.

“During the Great Recession that began in 2008, about one-half of the U.S. jobs lost were middle-class positions, but only about two percent of the jobs gained in the recovery pay middle-class wages,” said Trevor Tompson, director of the AP-NORC Center, noting that 70 percent of job growth is taking place in lower wage industries.

Studies have shown that jobs that used to require a high school diploma are now being filled by better-trained workers, leaving lower-wage workers facing increased competition for jobs and fewer opportunities to advance through upward mobility.

“There is broad agreement that America needs a skilled workforce for 21st Century jobs,” said Tompson. “There is widespread disagreement about the policies and programs needed to build that workforce. These surveys of lower-wage workers and the employers of lower-wage workers bring important new information to that debate.”

Critical issues revealed by the surveys include:

- Getting ahead is seen as a personal responsibility by both workers and employers, with the government seen as holding only a small share of responsibility for helping workers advance.
• While employers are investing in training, only a slim majority are confident they can continue to provide such training and development opportunities.
• Employers say current employees have needed skills, but did not when they were hired.
• Employers are offering training and benefits for lower-wage workers’ career advancement, but few offer benefits that lead to skills a worker can use to advance their career outside the company.
• There is evidence of widespread underutilization of training programs by lower-wage workers, and only a small minority of employers is taking advantage of public funding opportunities to encourage training of lower-wage workers.
• Lower-wage workers are less likely to be satisfied in their job or to feel valued for the work they do compared to the general population of employed adults.
• Lower-wage workers perceive few opportunities for advancement.
• Pessimism about job opportunity is especially acute among white and younger lower-wage workers.

For purposes of the survey, a lower-wage worker was defined as a person earning $35,000 or less, full-time equivalent, per year.

Associated Press Stories
The Associated Press multi-format coverage of the study began on March 20, 2013 with an article titled “AP-NORC Center survey shows high pessimism among low-wage workers despite sector’s job gains”.

About the Surveys
The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey of lower-wage workers was conducted between August 1 and September 6, 2013 with 1,606 adults between the ages of 18-74 who were currently employed full or part time or on a temporary lay-off of six months or less; not self-employed; and earning $35,000 or less, full-time equivalent, per year.

The employer survey was conducted with 1,487 employers between November 12, 2012 and January 31, 2013. A stratified sample was used to select businesses by size and industry. Only those businesses with at least one lower-wage worker were included in the study.

Survey results and The Associated Press stories related to the AP-NORC lower-wage worker and employer surveys are available at: www.apnorc.org.
area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco. NORC also supports a nationwide field staff as well as international research operations. With clients throughout the world, NORC collaborates with government agencies, foundations, education institutions, nonprofit organizations, and businesses to provide data and analysis that support informed decision making in key areas including health, education, crime, justice, energy, security and the environment. NORC’s more than 70 years of leadership and experience in data collection, analysis, and dissemination—coupled with deep subject matter expertise—provides the foundation for effective solutions to issues confronting society.

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**About the Joyce Foundation:** Skill-building programs can empower students with the basic and technical skills needed for new, better-paying jobs that can transform their lives and support their families. The Joyce Foundation’s Employment program works to improve workforce development and education systems to help underprepared adults learn important skills, earn credentials and pursue jobs in their communities. Across its programs, The Joyce Foundation supports the development of policies that both improve the quality of life for people in the Great Lakes region and serve as models for the rest of the country. The foundation’s grant making supports research into Great Lakes protection and restoration, energy efficiency, teacher quality and early reading, workforce development, gun violence prevention, diverse art for diverse audiences, and a strong, thriving democracy. The Foundation encourages innovative and collaborative approaches with a regional focus and the potential for a national reach.

**The Hitachi Foundation** focuses on the essential roles business plays in addressing complex challenges of our times. The Foundation aims to expand business practices that measurably improve economic opportunities for low-wealth individuals and enhance long-term business value. The Hitachi Foundation’s three programs seek to discover and expand business practices that create tangible, enduring economic opportunities for low-wealth Americans and their employers.