

# **The Working Poor: Evidence from the Illinois Families Study**

**A University Consortium on Welfare Reform Working Paper  
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**James H. Lewis  
Roosevelt University**

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The Principal Investigators of the University Consortium on Welfare Reform are Dan Lewis (Northwestern University), Paul Kleppner (Northern Illinois University), James Lewis (Roosevelt University), Stephanie Riger (University of Illinois at Chicago), Bong Joo Lee (University of Chicago), and Robert Goerge (University of Chicago). The study is housed at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University.

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## **Executive Summary**

This report explores important questions regarding public and private sector policies affecting supports for work and the path to work. It includes findings bearing on the efficacy of “work first” policies, components needed for successful job placement and retention programs, and critical supports of work such as transportation, child care, and health care.

### ***Continuous Work***

- The study suggests a relationship between continuous work experiences and positive attitudes of low-income persons regarding work and various forms of self-improvement. There has been considerable debate among advocates and politicians about the wisdom of a work-first approach to welfare reform. Our findings suggest that the vast majority of welfare recipients who have had some work experience value it highly and that a habit of working, even for low wages, tends to correlate with positive attitudes and outcomes.
- The study contains important lessons for employment service providers in terms of which occupations provide the best opportunities for long-term employment. Food service employers, for instance, were most prone to firing employees for illness. Jobs in manufacturing were most susceptible to layoffs but were not particularly vulnerable firings.
- Higher wage jobs tended to be held longer, perhaps in part because employees express greater satisfaction with them. However, these jobs were also more likely to result in conflict with co-workers or firing because of the worker’s inability to do the job.

### ***Personal Approach to Client Service***

- Lack of continuity of work is one of the most difficult problems for the working poor, and study findings raise important questions about programming aimed at serving the working poor. The vast majority of persons in our sample found their jobs through their own personal initiative, as opposed to the work of Illinois Department of Human Services staff or job programs.
- Program participants rated program quality higher for self-selected programs compared to programs to which they were assigned. While independence is usually preferable to dependence on an institution, this finding does raise questions regarding the referral process to programs.

- Only a small fraction of the working poor were employed in jobs they preferred. In many cases, only marginally more education or training would be needed for these people to meet their expressed goals.

### ***Supports***

The study identifies a number of supports that correlate with lengthened job tenure.

- Working poor who remained in jobs for longer periods of time emphasized the importance of transportation and child care. Longer job tenure also correlated with greater likelihood of belonging to voluntary groups, and having people who are encouraging or who listen to problems.
- Few of the jobs held by former welfare recipients offered health care benefits, and most paid only slightly more than minimum wage.
- Few of the working poor considered receipt of welfare to be a viable alternative to working.
- Unconventional starting times for jobs do not correlate with employees' views of work or attitudes toward parenting. However, workers who had unconventional work start times or longer commutes to work did report that they had less time to spend with their children.
- A significant number of the working poor reported health problems that could impede work.

### ***Services to Support Employment***

- The study found that firings from jobs tended to occur early in job tenure. Often these problems involved breakdowns of transportation or child care, or conflict with the employer.
- There is a set of associations between higher wages, distance to work, and utilizing a car to get to work. Given sufficient opportunity, long distances to jobs need not be a barrier to work.
- Many of the working poor desired additional education or training. In many cases, that training might make the difference between their ability to work in a job they desire as opposed to one for which they have been forced to settle.
- A significant minority of the working poor report health concerns that bear on their ability to work.

## ***Recommendations***

- The effectiveness and operation of training programs and referral processes need to be carefully scrutinized. Job search agencies need to provide individualized service planning for their clients and direct contact with potential employers.
- State-level policymakers must continue to be aware of the importance of child care and strong public transportation to sustain low-wage work, especially for second and third-shift work.
- Moving people beyond poverty to rewarding work remains a social goal, therefore public and private sector policies that extend health care benefits, and earned income tax credits continue to be important mechanisms to help achieve these goals.
- Employment service providers or case management agencies need to develop the capacity to do intensive follow-up with newly placed clients. In this way they maximize opportunities to surmount problems that occur early in the employment relationship before they lead to termination.

Either better access to health care treatment or accommodation by employers could help reduce job turnover.

## Introduction

Policymakers have been increasingly interested in the working poor in recent years. Increased interest has been motivated to some extent by the success of welfare reform in moving clients off state caseloads, but rarely out of poverty. Federal efforts during the Clinton administration to overhaul the nation's health care system were at least in part motivated by concern that significant proportions of the nation's working poor were employed in low-wage jobs that did not provide adequate health care benefits. The federal earned income tax credit helps make work pay, and since its inception many local governments, including Illinois, have implemented state earned income tax credits. Authors writing in the Summer, 2001 issue of the Brookings Review assessing welfare reform devoted considerable attention to the plight of the working poor.

There is, then, broad interest in developing cost-effective strategies that enhance the employment prospects of the working poor, which make it more probable that they will not return to the ranks of welfare recipients, and that they will increase earnings and move significantly above poverty levels. This paper aims to explore what some of these might be.

The American economy depends upon a mix of jobs with varying wages and degrees of security. Some of these jobs, necessarily, pay less than others and those who occupy these jobs will experience a lower standard of living. As a general rule, low-wage work does not result in poverty under either of two conditions: When the low-wage worker is part of a family or household of workers such that no one is solely dependent upon that wage for a standard of living, or when the low-wage condition is temporary—a step toward a higher standard of living—such as for a student or young person. Working people can find themselves in poverty when low-wage work becomes an extended, or life-long, condition or when too many people depend upon the income of the low-wage worker.

A number of strategies have been introduced to address aspects of this problem. Welfare reformers in many states have imposed “family caps,” limits on the amount of additional welfare a family can receive when a mother bears additional children. Because the vast majority of welfare recipients are women, the intention of the policy is to both limit the expense of welfare by reducing the number of eligible beneficiaries, and make welfare, or work pay somewhat better by reducing the number of people that a low-wage job and/or welfare check is supporting. Additional policies such as income disregards, employed historically by welfare programs nationwide, earned income tax credits, extensions of Medicaid and food stamp eligibility after employment, and subsidized housing are all means of helping make low-wage work pay.

Unless these financial benefits are employed extremely skillfully by the worker, however, none of these policies produces a path out of poverty for most of the working poor. They tend to provide marginally more income to a worker who is usually destined to remain at or near poverty. The amounts of financial resources these programs provide are not

substantial, and most working poor face additional challenges beyond their household finances in order to attain upward mobility. In order to rise occupationally, many of the barriers to individual upward occupational mobility must be addressed.

For most people, occupational mobility is a product of a number of factors:

- Motivation to succeed
- High wage-earning skills
- Education
- Physical and mental health
- Personal support systems and ability to solve problems
- Access to opportunities for continuous employment

The working poor often lack one or more of these critical assets.

This working paper is divided into two sections. Part One provides a brief overview of the characteristics of the working poor captured in the Illinois Families Study (IFS) survey, focusing on items that bear on employment and occupational mobility. Part Two analyzes various characteristics of the working poor on the basis of their association with different types of occupations, continuity of employment, wages, and satisfaction with jobs. The intent is to explore personal characteristics that may be barriers to successful employment in pursuit of possible interventions by social service providers that may assist the working poor in climbing the occupational ladder or maintaining continuous employment.

This study focuses on a particular segment of the working poor population: persons who recently received cash welfare payments in Illinois, who are mostly women with children, and who either currently or recently worked in low-wage jobs. While the IFS study is principally aimed at understanding how welfare reform has unfolded in Illinois, in so doing it has captured data useful for understanding problems of the working poor.

This report is intended as a “working paper” aimed at highlighting areas worthy of additional investigation. Much of the data analysis presented is observational in nature and so is useful for describing patterns and relationships of various factors, but remains short of assigning causality. More complex multivariate analysis can be employed in future work to more rigorously analyze questions raised in this overview.

### ***Definition of the Working Poor***

Policymakers and analysts have utilized a variety of definitions of the working poor, ranging from a person who worked any length of time during a given year but whose family income remained beneath the federal poverty line, to a person who worked 26 weeks during a year with a family income within 150 percent of the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Swartz and Kathleen Maas Weigert, editors, *America's Working Poor*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame and London, 1995 and “Race, Ethnicity,

This study employs similar definitions that are circumscribed to some extent by limitations of the data set used. Because this analysis is drawn from a data set of persons on welfare during 1998, all of the working poor in this study have been on welfare within the recent past. For most of the analyses generated for this report, the criteria for working poverty were that the individual worked for pay in 1998, and his or her household had insufficient income to reach the federal poverty line for that year. Tables based on this group are labeled “IFS working poor.” However, some of the analyses focus on how to keep working people who have been in poverty from returning to poverty, and so focus on the conditions of employment more recently than 1998. In these instances, because the data set does not capture family or household income for 1999 or 2000, the criteria for inclusion was having been on welfare in 1998 and either having any kind of job at the time of interview, or having recently lost a job. For these tables, the sample is labeled “full IFS sample.”

About half of the entire IFS sample met the criteria for being among the working poor. The vast majority of TANF recipients in Illinois are women, as were the persons captured in the IFS sample.

Statistical tests were applied to data tables where appropriate. Levels of significance of tests are noted below the tables. Data in tables without statistical notes should be considered “suggestive” as to their significance.

### ***Illinois Families Study***

The study is based on data drawn from the Illinois Families Study, a longitudinal panel study tracking a random sample of adults who were primary TANF grantees in the fall of 1998, a little more than a year after TANF was first implemented.

Administrative data from the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) were used to select a random sample of TANF recipients from nine counties, stratified along two geographic regions: Cook County and selected “downstate” counties (St. Clair, Peoria, Tazewell, Fulton, Knox, Marshall, Woodford, and Stark).

Together, these nine counties represent 75 percent of the state TANF caseload. They also include cities and towns of varying sizes and demographic makeup, affording important comparisons across subgroups of recipients. A total of 1,362 interviews were conducted between November 1999 and September 2000. The overall response rate was 72 percent. All analyses in the study utilize weights that account for nonresponse bias and adjust proportions of Cook County and “downstate” survey subjects.

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and Working Poverty: A Statistical Analysis for Metropolitan Chicago, “The Working Poor Project, February, 1997, Chicago Urban League, Latino Institute, Northern Illinois University.

## Characteristics of the Working Poor in the Illinois Families Study

### A. Work Experience and Income

The majority of the working poor considered in this sample had multiple years of work experience. About half had more than three years experience. However, much of that experience was in part-time rather than full-time work. About 75 percent of the working poor considered here had less than 7 years of full-time work experience.

**Table 1. Lifetime work experiences of IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than a year	16.3%
1 – 3 Years	37.5%
4 – 6 Years	21.5%
7 – 10 Years	13.4%
10 + Years	11.3%

Because this sample of the working poor was drawn from the entire population utilizing TANF in 1998, it is a set of working poor who are disproportionately likely to have utilized welfare. As the table below indicates, high proportions of this group who were working poor in 1998 continued to utilize public benefits a year later.

Of the group that constituted the working poor in 1998, 60 percent were still working for pay one year later. Another 28 percent had a job during the next year, and only 12 percent did not work in the following year.

**Table 2. Use of selected public benefits by IFS working poor (n=610)**

	<b>Percent using program</b>
TANF	57.4%
Medicaid	79.5%
Food Stamps	61.6%

The working poor are defined as living in a household below the federal poverty level. As Table 3 indicates, this means that the working poor in this sample lived in households with incomes below \$20,000 in 1998.

**Table 3. Household income of IFS working poor families (n=610)**

<b>1998 Household income range</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Less than \$2,500	20.6%
\$2,500 to \$4,999	24.0%
\$5,000 to \$7,499	24.3%
\$7,500 to \$9,999	15.1%
\$10,000 to \$12,499	11.7%
\$12,500 to \$14,999	2.6%
\$15,000 to \$17,499	1.3%
\$17,500 to \$19,999	0.4%

### ***B. Occupations of the IFS Working Poor***

Table 4 indicates the distribution of occupations in which this sample of the working poor worked. Twenty percent of the working poor worked in sales and related occupations. The next most common occupations are personal care, office work, and food preparation.

**Table 4. Occupations of current or recent employment of the IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Sales and related	20.2%
Personal care and service	17.3%
Office, administrative support	15.0%
Food preparation and serving	11.0%
Building/grounds cleaning, maintenance	8.2%
Health care support	8.0%
Production	8.2%
Transportation and material moving	4.7%
Protective service	3.4%
Education, training, library	1.3%

What types of jobs did the working poor prefer? The persons in the sample most preferred office or administrative support jobs, but exhibited preferences for a wide range of occupations.

**Table 5. Occupational preferences of the IFS working poor (n=552)**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Office, administrative support	30.3%
Health care support	13.9%
Personal care and service	10.6%
Sales and related	7.7%
Food preparation and serving related	5.0%
Health practitioners, technicians	4.7%
Computer/mathematical	4.0%
Production	4.0%
Buildings/maintenance	3.1%
Education, training library	2.7%

Most working poor were not in jobs they preferred. Table 20 provides a detailed analysis of the proportion of working poor who were in their choice occupations. The three most desired occupations were office work, health care support, and personal care. Only 37.7 percent, 35 percent and 48 percent respectively of those who wanted to be in those occupations were in them. Of those occupations that significant numbers of the working poor preferred, those in food preparation and maintenance were most likely to be in the jobs of their choice. On the other hand, of the nearly 5 percent of all working poor who wanted to be working as a health practitioner or technician, none were doing so.

Most working poor were qualified or nearly qualified for the jobs they reported they would have liked. Most of the expectations of the working poor in the IFS sample were not inappropriate to their education and training. In most cases, there appears to be a mismatch only between placement in one low-skilled job or access to it. For others, getting the job they desire might necessitate a minimal upgrade of skills. For instance, 30.8 percent of persons who wanted office work now work in sales. Sixteen percent of those who wanted to work in health care support wanted to work in personal care. One of the major challenges of the employment support system, then, appears to be the ability to help people effect these modest but significant transitions to work they would like to be doing. These changes could create more continuity in the workplace.

**Table 6. Occupation desired by IFS working poor by current occupation**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Percent working in occupation who consider it their preference</b>	<b>Percent who would prefer occupation working or recently working in a different occupation</b>
Office (n=146)	37.7%	Sales (30.8%); Personal care (8.9%)
Health care support (n=60)	35.0%	Personal care (16.7%); Maintenance (11.7%); Sales (11.7%)
Personal care (n=54)	48.1%	Sales (14.8%); Food prep (11.1%)
Sales (n=35)	48.6%	Transportation (11.4%); Personal care (11.4%)
Food preparation (n=25)	68.0%	Production (16%)
Health practitioners/technicians (n=22)	0%	Health care support (45.5%); Personal care (22.7%)
Production (n=19)	31.6%	Maintenance (26.3%); Protective services (21.1%)
Computer mathematical (n=19)	0%	Sales (47.4%); Personal care (21.1%)
Education, library (n=14)	14.3%	Personal care (35.7%); Production (28.6%)
Maintenance (n=11)	81.8%	Personal care (18.2%)
Transportation (n=9)	22.2%	Production (55.6%); Personal care (22.2%)
Arts/media (n=8)	25.0%	Production (25%); Personal care (25%); Building/grounds (25%)
Community/Social services (n=7)	0%	Health care (28.6%); Personal care (28.6%); Sciences (28.6%)
Protective service (n=6)	66.7%	Sales (33.3%)
Business/financial (n=6)	33.3%	Office admin. (33.3%); Sales (33.3%)
Management (n=4)	0%	Food prep (50.0%); Sales (50.0%)
Construction (n=2)	0%	Transportation (100%)
Science (n=3)	0%	Transportation & material moving (100%)
Legal (n=2)	0%	Food prep (100%)
Installation/repair (n=2)	0%	Personal care (100%)

The occupations most in demand by the working poor do not pay the highest wages. Working-poor office workers averaged about \$9.00 per hour but health care-support workers averaged only \$8.21 and personal-care workers averaged only \$6.65 per hour.

As Table 7 indicates below, there is some variation in wages for different occupations held by the working poor, although none of the average wages is high enough to lift a person out of poverty if they have dependents.

**Table 7. Wages per hour by current job IFS full sample**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Mean wage</b>
Education, training, library (n=20)	\$10.36
Transportation and material moving (n=25)	\$9.76
Community and social services (n=10)	\$9.65
Office, administrative support (n=92)	\$9.06
Health care support (n=61)	\$8.21
Protective service (n=25)	\$7.41
Production (n=47)	\$7.29
Building/grounds, cleaning, maintenance. (n=44)	\$7.25
Sales and related (n=94)	\$6.66
Personal care and service (n=88)	\$6.65
Food prep and serving (n=55)	\$6.38

Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Analysis of Variance)

Moderate, but statistically significant, correlations exist between the highest grade of education achieved and the amount of wages per hour.

### ***C. Attitudes Toward Work and Welfare***

In general, the working poor in the IFS sample displayed positive attitudes toward work. Almost none expected to be receiving welfare a year later. While about half of the working poor felt that people had a right to receive welfare without working, about 90 percent felt that using welfare was a poor idea.

- 96.1 percent of IFS working poor indicated that if money and medical coverage were the same, they would prefer work to welfare.
- 88.3 percent of IFS working poor indicated that they thought “plain hard work” was “very important.”

**Table 8. Attitudes toward work of IFS working poor**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Total</b>
It's a good idea to require people on welfare to work (n=609)	5.8%	4.6%	35.9%	53.7%	100%
It's a good idea to limit time people are on welfare (n=609)	26.5%	13.9%	28.3%	31.2%	100%
A year from now I expect to be receiving welfare (n= 609)	1.6%	0.7%	11.5%	86.2%	100%
People have a right to receive welfare without working (n=609)	19.7%	29.6%	40.9%	9.9%	100%

#### ***D. Health***

Successful work experience depends on having health at least adequate to attend work regularly and perform work-related tasks. About 80 percent of working poor categorized their health as at least “Good.”

**Table 9. Self-assessment of condition of health of IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Health condition</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Poor	5.0%
Fair	16.3%
Good	23.9%
Very good	21.5%
Excellent	33.3%

As Table 10 indicates, most respondents reported no problems doing nonstrenuous physical activities. While about 20 percent did report difficulty doing vigorous activity, for most working-poor women in this sample physical limitations did not present a barrier to work.

**Table 10. Health limitations on potential work activities of IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Health limitation</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
Vigorous activity	14.1%	11.5%	74.4%
Lifting or carrying groceries	6.0%	8.5%	85.5%
Climbing flights of stairs	9.4%	9.3%	81.3%
Bending, kneeling, stooping	7.3%	8.8%	84.0%
Walking more than a mile	9.3%	6.5%	84.2%

As Table 11 below indicates, the most common problems reported by the IFS working poor were back problems (27.7%), chronic health problems (19.8%), asthma or emphysema (16.9%), and arthritis or bone pain (16.6%).

**Table 11. Chronic medical problems reported by IFS working poor (n=224)**

<b>Medical condition</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Back problems	27.7%
Have chronic health or medical problems prevent/affect working	19.8%
Asthma/emphysema	16.9%
Arthritis/bone pain	16.6%
Headaches	8.7%
High blood pressure	7.4%
Nerves/anxiety/stress	6.2%
Emotional/mental health problem	5.1%
Diabetes	5.0%
Heart condition	4.9%
Leg/knee/foot	4.6%
Obesity	4.1%
Fatigue/tiredness	3.0%
Anemia/blood problems	1.8%
Stomach problems	1.7%
Eye problems	1.6%
Cancer	1.0%
Hernia	0.8%
Carpel Tunnel/hand/wrist problems	0.8%
Learning disability	0.4%

The vast majority of working poor in the IFS sample were between the ages of 20 and 39, substantially younger than the American workforce as a whole. The youth of the IFS

sample is an artifact of its having been drawn from a sample of recent welfare recipients who have children.

**Table 12. Age of IFS working poor**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Percent</b>
18 or 19	1.7%
20 to 29	45.7%
30 to 39	41.2%
40 to 49	11.0%
50 to 52	0.6%

### ***E. Education and Training***

As the American workplace becomes increasingly complex, there has been a declining difference in the financial returns between those who complete high school and those who do not. One of the strongest predictors of future poverty is an individual’s level of education. Almost 40 percent of the working poor in this report have less than 12 years of formal education. Another 42 percent attained only a high school diploma. About one quarter of the working poor studied here reported having been held back at least one grade at some point in their schooling. This education deficit tends to reduce the likelihood of these women attaining jobs and incomes that will lift them above working poverty if they attain no education beyond high school.

With these low levels of education, most of the working poor observed in this study perpetuated the experience of their parents. About 80 percent of mothers and fathers of these working-poor women had no more than a high school degree. The current generation of working poor appears somewhat more likely than their parents to have at least a year or two of college, and is slightly less likely to have only attended 10<sup>th</sup> grade or lower.

**Table 13. Education levels of working poor and their parents**

<b>Education completed</b>	<b>Highest grade completed of respondent (n=606)</b>	<b>Highest grade mother completed (n=390)</b>	<b>Highest grade father completed (n=251)</b>
10 <sup>th</sup> or Less	15.3%	21.1%	21.5%
11 <sup>th</sup>	22.8%	10.1%	7.0%
12 <sup>th</sup>	42.0%	51.2%	50.0%
1 Year college	8.3%	0.8%	2.3%
2 Years college	8.9%	4.5%	6.2%
3 Years college	1.0%	1.5%	0.8%
4+ Years college	1.7%	10.8%	12.3%

As Table 14 indicates, 30 percent of these working poor did attain further education beyond high school through a professional or trade school, an associate’s degree or a four-year college degree.

**Table 14. Degrees and licenses of IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Degree/license</b>	<b>Percent</b>
High school diploma	51.6%
GED	10.7%
Professional or trade school	18.9%
Associates degree	10.2%

A large percentage of the working poor surveyed for the IFS appeared to want additional education. Eighty-five percent reported they would like to pursue skills training or further education. Most of the interest in future education or training was aimed at achieving conventional educational milestones such as a GED, associates degree, bachelor’s degree, or additional vocational education—levels of education that could be attained within a couple of years at minimal expense.

**Table 15. Types of future training desired by IFS working poor (n=514)**

<b>Training</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Adult job skill training	11.0%
Adult basic education	0.4%
GED	18.1%
High school degree	2.6%
Associate degree	11.9%
Bachelor’s degree	21.5%
Trade certification	6.2%
Vocational education	15.4%
Other	12.8%

Most working poor report having utilized rudimentary work skills in previous jobs. The most common three skills were typical of customer service. Less than half reported having used the skills that are typically associated with supervisory or technical positions. These include writing documents (40.4%), working with a computer (42.4%), watching instruments (35.1%) or supervising others (32.7%). Most of the jobs the working poor take do not provide opportunities for workers to learn these skills, which are more common to higher paying jobs. Therefore, jobs the working poor perform generally do not create the type of vocational preparation necessary to advance on a career ladder.

**Table 16. Skills from past jobs of IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Past job</b>	<b>Percent with skill</b>
Talk to customers face-to-face	83.7%
Fill out form	67.5%
Talk with customers over phone	64.1%
Work with electronic machine	64.0%
Do arithmetic/make change	63.0%
Read instructions or reports	62.6%
Hospitality services	47.2%
Work with computer	42.4%
Write letters or memos	40.4%
Work with light equipment	39.2%
Watch over gauges or instruments	35.1%
Supervise others	32.7%
Heavy lifting/construction	32.0%
Care for others' children	32.0%
Provide nursing care	31.9%
Work with equipment/machinery	26.4%
Cosmetology	18.8%
Fix cars/equipment/plumbing	6.6%

### ***F. Child Care and Family Life***

For many working mothers, child care is an essential support for work. Ideally, child care is of good quality, is accessible either to home or to work, is affordable and dependable. The absence of any of these conditions can lead to loss of employment.

As Table 17 shows, the IFS working poor exhibit a wide variety of concerns about child care at roughly equal levels. About one-third of working poor respondents indicated at least one child care concern. The most common, expressed by 17 percent, was concern that it cost too much.

**Table 17. Prevalence of child care concerns among the IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Concern</b>	<b>Percent with concern</b>
Have at least one child care concern	30.2%
Cost too much	17.0%
Lack of relatives/friends to help	14.7%
Not dependable	14.5%
Can't find during work hours	14.4%
Couldn't arrange care	14.0%
Couldn't arrange emergency care	13.7%
Fear caretaker might harm child	12.8%
Provider too far away	11.4%

As Table 18 indicates, the length of time traveling to work corresponds to some difficulties with child care. People most concerned that their provision for emergency child care was inadequate, or that their provider was too far away, tended to be people who traveled farther to work. Longer travel times require child care that is open for longer hours during the day—a circumstance that can impose greater burdens on the caretaker. Parents may feel stress regarding the dependability of the caretaker. Conversely, people who have shorter commutes to work tend to be more concerned about cost and quality.

**Table 18. Mean minutes to work by concern about child care, IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Child care concern</b>	<b>Mean minutes: No concern</b>	<b>Mean minutes: Concern</b>
Concerned about quality of child care	44.4	40.3
Child care provider too far away	43.1	48.9
Child care not dependable	43.6	44.0
Child care cost too much	44.1	41.8
Don't have friends/relatives to help with child care	43.6	44.6
Afraid caretaker might harm child	43.7	43.2
Couldn't arrange child care for child	43.4	45.7
Couldn't arrange emergency child care	42.9	47.7

There was little correlation between when a person began their work day and their attitudes toward parenting. Parents with conventional start times did report more

opportunities to play with their children, and long travel times to work correlated with less time spent playing with children. However, adverse reports on parenting have a small inverse relationship to amount of time traveling to work.

**Table 19. Work start time by quality of personal and family time for IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Assessment of parenting</b>	<b>7 PM to 6 AM</b>	<b>7 AM to 10 AM</b>	<b>11 AM to 6 PM</b>
Have too little time to yourself very often **	1.4%	18.2%	16.2%
Wish you didn't have so many responsibilities very often	8.7%	10.6%	8.1%
Child gets on nerves often or very often	7.4%	4.7%	0
Child making too many demands on you often or very often *	5.7%	15.9%	11.0%
Feel they aren't a good enough parent often or very often	8.6%	8.8%	8.1%
Much more work than pleasure often	14.5%	11.8%	13.5%
Tired, worn out, exhausted raising family often	21.4%	17.8%	17.6%
Do something special with kids often **	58.0%	62.4%	50.7%
Play sports, hobbies or games with children very often or very often**	76.8%	66.8%	57.5%

\*\* Differences are statistically significant.  $p < .05$  (Chi Square)

\* Differences are statistically significant.  $p < .07$  (Chi Square)

### **G. Transportation**

Access to reliable transportation is essential for sustaining employment. The study indicates that most working poor had access at least to public transportation, and over three-quarters had access to a car.

**Table 20. Access to transportation by IFS working poor (n=610)**

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Have public transportation nearby	96.7%	3.3%
Currently have valid drivers license	51.4%	48.6%
Regular access to a car	60.9%	39.1%

## Supporting Work

In order to make policy recommendations that support continuous work experiences and mobility into higher wage occupations, we need to explore the experiences and attributes that are associated with higher wages, continuous employment, and higher job satisfaction. The following section explores a number of correlates with successful work experiences of the working poor.

### ***A. Attitudes Toward Work***

Much of the pre-welfare reform debate centered on how people's values improved or diminished their likelihood of working. The analysis here indicates that a relationship does exist between work experiences and experiences in pre-employment programs on the one hand, and attitudes toward work and receipt of welfare on the other. While causal inference cannot be made at this point, it appears that successful experiences in training or work and positive attitudes toward work tend to coincide.

Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between people's attitudes toward work and how long they tend to retain their jobs. The survey records the start and end date for the most recent job held by someone who was unemployed at the time of the survey. The lengths of these jobs could then be compared with attitudes toward work and welfare to study that relationship.

The length of time that persons spent on their most recent job correlated with:

- Considering it a good idea to require people on welfare to work
- Expectation of future work
- Expectation of being off welfare in the future
- Preference for working over welfare if equal

Holding a job for a long time also correlated with the belief that hard work is valuable. Persons reporting that hard work is "very important" averaged 9.1 months on their most recent job, compared with persons reporting that hard work is only "somewhat important," who averaged only 7 months.

**Table 21. Average months of a lost job by attitudes toward work and welfare (full IFS sample)**

<b>Attitude toward work</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
It's a good idea to require people on welfare to work (n=261)	7.2	5.2	7.3	11.3
A year from now I expect to be receiving welfare (n=261) **	29.2	4.4	6.1	9.2
People have a right to receive welfare without working (n=254)	9.2	8.9	10.4	3.6

\*\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Analysis of Variance)

The amount of previous work experience correlated with positive attitudes toward work, negative attitudes toward welfare, and greater expectations regarding likelihood of future work.

### ***B. Job-Training Programs***

One of the major challenges faced by social service providers is accurately assessing the needs of their clients and then referring them to appropriate social services.

Many people in the IFS sample who expressed desire for more training or skill development did not get it and were only referred to job search. Conversely, many people indicated that they were assigned to programs for which they had no need.

- 18 percent of the working poor in the IFS sample told their caseworker they needed more jobs skills or training.
- 23 percent of the working poor in the IFS sample told the welfare office they needed more education or schooling.
- About half of individuals in the IFS sample requesting more skills or training were referred only to a job search.

Whether because of a shortage of job-training programs, inadequate case management, or lack of understanding by the working poor of their own needs, the working poor in the IFS sample frequently failed to be enrolled in the programs they requested and were more likely to be directed to a job search rather than a training program.

**Table 22. Of IFS working poor who were referred to a program, percentage who told welfare office they needed job-skills training**

Client told welfare office she/he **needed** job-skills training: (25%, n=42)

Client was referred to:

Job search	54.8%
Job skills	40.5%
Trade school	4.8%
Self-employment training	0%

Client told welfare office she/he **did not need** job-skills training (75%, n=127)

Client was referred to:

Job search	77.2%
Job skills	15.0%
Trade school	5.5%
Self-employment training	2.4%

Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Chi Square)

In general, people who had good experiences with training or working also expressed more positive attitudes toward work. The relationship was particularly strong for those who reported the most positive experiences with pre-employment or training programs. From this data, it is impossible to infer the causal direction of the finding. It may be that people who were more highly motivated to work participated more actively in training or preparation for work and so reported a better experience. Conversely, a strong pre-employment program may enhance an individual's desire to work.

The greatest challenge that consistently faces providers of job-training services is determining how to operate job-training or employment-preparation programs that consistently enhance opportunities for employment and help people to rise above poverty levels. The data presented here indicates that the most effective employment and training programs are the ones that are more attentive to the needs of individual service recipients.

Working poor generally expressed greater satisfaction with programs they chose over programs to which they were assigned. Tables 23 through 27 indicate the strong relationship between a person saying they were referred or assigned to a program and lack of satisfaction with the program. Respect for the desires of the client is an extremely important aspect of conducting successful social work. Most working poor did not work in jobs that were their first choices. There appears to be a relationship between client satisfaction with a job training or pre-employment program, and the client's level of satisfaction with the program. This finding may help to explain the low returns to job training that have been observed so often in recent decades.

**Table 23. Whether a program helped you get a permanent job, a better job, or a pay raise by whether person was assigned or referred to the program (full IFS sample)**

Program type	How much program helped you get a better job	Welfare office assigned or referred you to this program	
		Yes	No
Job search *	Not at all	35.7%	30.4%
	A lot	23.8%	43.5%
		(n = 277)	(n = 23)
Job skills **	Not at all	10.8%	5.3%
	A lot	24.6%	57.9%
		(n = 65)	(n = 19)

\*\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.01 (Chi Square)

\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.07 (Chi Square)

**Table 24. Whether a program taught you skills you need to be successful on the job by whether person was assigned or referred to the program (full IFS sample)**

Program type	How much program taught skills to be successful at job	Welfare office assigned or referred you to this program	
		Yes	No
Job search **	Not at all	33.1%	22.7%
	A lot	16.9%	40.9%
		(n = 278)	(n = 22)
Job skills *	Not at all	16.4%	0%
	A lot	32.8%	55.6%
		(n = 67)	(n = 18)

\*\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.001 (Chi Square)

\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.02 (Chi Square)

**Table 25. Whether a program made you feel frustrated or like you were wasting your time by whether person was assigned or referred to the program (full IFS sample)**

Program type	How much you felt program was frustrating or wasted your time	Welfare office assigned or referred you to this program	
		Yes	No
Job search	Not at all	51.8%	70.8%
	A lot	18.7%	16.7%
		(n = 278)	(n = 24)
Job skills	Not at all	55.2%	66.7%
	A lot	14.9%	11.1%
		(n = 67)	(n = 18)

**Table 26. Whether a program made you more confident in your ability to succeed at work by whether a person was assigned or referred to the program (full IFS sample)**

Program type	How much program made you more confident in ability to succeed	Welfare office assigned or referred you to this program	
		Yes	No
Job search	Not at all	32.7%	23.8%
	A lot	24.1%	47.6%
		(n = 278)	(n = 21)
Job skills *	Not at all	10.8%	5.6%
	A lot	36.9%	72.2%
		(n = 65)	(n = 18)

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .05$  (Chi Square)

**Table 27. Whether a program would help you get a job, a better job, or a pay raise in the future by whether a person was assigned or referred to the program (full IFS sample)**

Program type	How much program will help get a job, better job or raise	Welfare office assigned or referred you to this program	
		Yes	No
Job search **	Not at All	59.7%	21.7%
	A Lot	10.4%	30.4%
		(n = 278)	(n = 23)
Job skills **	Not at All	47.1%	5.6%
	A Lot	16.2%	33.3%
		(n = 68)	(n = 18)

\*\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.01 (Chi Square)

As Table 28 indicates, more-intensive programs appear to have been more satisfactory to clients than less-intensive programs. For instance, programs that clients reported helped them a lot to get a job or a pay raise averaged about 19 hours per week while programs reported not to have helped at all averaged only 14 hours per week.

**Table 28. Program hours per week by client satisfaction with program (full IFS sample)**

Training outcome	A lot	Pretty much	Somewhat	Not at all
Help get job, pay raise (n= 418)**	16.8	20.1	21.0	15.3
Taught skills to be successful at job (n= 418) *	17.3	20.4	16.6	15.7
Made feel frustrated/wasting time (n= 416)	17.2	15.8	18.0	17.3
Made more confident to succeed at work (n=415)**	16.6	21.4	16.2	15.3
Help get job, better job or pay raise in future (n=416) *	17.4	18.7	19.1	14.7

\*\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.01 (Analysis of Variance)

\* Differences are statistically significant; p<.08 (Analysis of Variance)

For many among the working poor, additional education may be required to ascend the occupational ladder. There was a statistically significant difference in the average amount of education of workers in different occupations represented among the IFS sample. Higher wage and higher prestige occupations such as those in education, social services, and office jobs may require more education than production, cleaning, food preparation, and personal care jobs.

**Table 29. Mean years of education by occupation (full IFS sample) \***

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Mean years of education</b>
Education, training, library (n=31)	14.1
Community and social services (n=18)	13.0
Office, administrative support (n=154)	12.6
Health care support (n=72)	12.4
Protective service (n=30)	11.9
Transportation and material moving (n=42)	11.8
Sales and related occupations. (n=176)	11.7
Personal care and service (n=149)	11.6
Food prep and serving (n=96)	11.3
Building/grounds cleaning (n=78)	11.2
Production (n=80)	10.9

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .05$  (Analysis of Variance)

### **C. Job Search**

The source of a working-poor person's job appears to have had some influence over how long the person was likely to hold the job and the level of wages. In general, jobs that were attained from a source that had personal knowledge of the job seeker tended to last longer than jobs attained in more impersonal ways. Although few jobs were acquired through the help of a previous employer, these jobs were destined to be held the longest. They were, however, among the least well-paying, averaging around \$6.00 per hour.

Among the other possible sources of jobs, there was little variation in how long a job was likely to last. There were, however, significant differences in the wage levels depending on how a job was found. Family and friends were by far the most common sources of jobs, but the jobs found this way often did not pay as well as jobs found through other sources.

**Table 30. Source of job by mean months of job and mean wage (full IFS sample)**

<b>Source of job</b>	<b>Mean months</b>	<b>Lost jobs mean wage*</b>	<b>Current jobs mean wage *</b>
Previous employer (n=4)	38.6	\$5.66	\$6.43
Friend/neighbor (n=90)	9.9	\$6.90	\$7.22
Family member (n=42)	9.6	\$6.66	\$8.15
Job search (n=16)	8.7	\$7.99	\$7.49
Classified ads (n=20)	8.6	\$7.77	\$8.34
Welfare office (n=14)	8.2	\$7.04	\$7.02
Help-wanted sign (n=11)	8.2	\$9.09	\$7.06
Called/went in/asked (n=46)	7.5	\$6.40	\$7.48
Employment agency (n=11)	4.1	\$7.09	\$9.03

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Analysis of Variance)

As Table 31 indicates, there were substantial differences in levels of job satisfaction depending on how the job was found. Workers reported finding very few of their jobs through an “Unemployment Office” but those jobs they did find that way appear to have been highly satisfactory. High levels of satisfaction were also expressed for jobs found through friends or neighbors, employment agencies, and classified ads. Jobs found through institutions such as school placement offices, welfare offices or job search tended to be lower in satisfaction.

**Table 31. Percent “Highly satisfied” with job by method of finding current job (full IFS sample)**

<b>Job Source</b>	<b>Highly satisfied **</b>
Unemployment office (n=9)	66.7%
Employment agency (n=18)	44.4%
Friend/neighbor (n=198)	42.9%
Called/went in (n=129)	39.5%
Classified ads (n=51)	37.3%
Family member (n=112)	32.1%
Welfare office (n=37)	29.7%
School placement office (n=37)	29.4%
Job search (n=50)	18.0%
Help-wanted sign (n=23)	17.4%
Previous employer (n=4)	0%

\*\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Chi Square)

### **D. Social Supports**

The working poor relied heavily on social networks to find jobs, and the data suggest that personal relationships may be helpful in retaining them. Friends and neighbors help out when transportation fails, when child care arrangements break down, and often when temporary financial assistance is needed. The importance of a variety of social supports to sustain employment is indicated in this study for longer job tenure correlates with:

- Belonging to a voluntary group
- Having people to listen to problems
- Having someone to loan you money in an emergency
- Having people to encourage you to meet your goals

Jobholders with the longest tenure in their employment, several years or more, were among those with stronger social supports.

**Table 32. Months of last employment by membership in voluntary groups (full IFS sample)**

<b>Belong to any voluntary groups</b>	<b>Mean months</b>
No (n=228)	9.2
Yes (n=33)	9.7

**Table 33. Months of last employment by social supports available (full IFS sample)**

<b>Social support needed</b>	<b>None to count on</b>	<b>Too few people</b>	<b>Enough to count on</b>
When you need a person to listen to problems are there:	5.6	6.7	10.5
When you need help with small favors	10.7	5.6	11.1
When you need a loan in an emergency *	7.6	5.4	13.2
When you need encouragement in meeting your goals *	6.7	5.5	11.5

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .05$  (Analysis of Variance)

## **E. Preventing Job Loss**

One of the keys to attaining longevity in employment is avoiding the problems that lead to either quitting or being fired. As data below indicates, some job loss, such as a general layoff, is unavoidable. But other job losses could probably be prevented by better social support systems, better work by social service agencies, clearer thinking by the employee, or more enlightened employers.

As Table 34 indicates, the most common reasons for job loss among IFS respondents were quitting or resignations. But it is significant that persons who were fired from jobs averaged shorter duration than persons who quit or resigned, or who were laid off. Evidently if something happens to displease the employer, it is more likely to happen relatively soon after hiring.

**Table 34. Mean number of months on last job by reason for job loss (full IFS sample)**

<b>Reason for job loss</b>	<b>Months</b>
Laid off (n=59)	8.5
Fired (n=32)	5.7
Hired temporary (n=37)	4.7
Quit/resigned (n=123)	10.9

Poor job performance, illness or tardiness/absence resulted in the quickest firings. Persons fired from jobs because of illness averaged 5.1 months in the job, those fired for tardiness or absences averaged only 4.9 months, and persons fired for inappropriate behavior lasted on average 7.5 months.

Many job quits may be preventable by addressing child care, transportation, family problems, and employer conflicts as early as possible. As Table 35 indicates, people who quit jobs because of child care needs, transportation problems, care for a sick person or conflict with an employer averaged the shortest duration of employment. Individuals who quit jobs because of school or training or becoming ill or disabled averaged the longest duration of employment.

Breakdowns in child care and transportation tend to happen early on and, if surmounted, employment can proceed for a longer duration. The mean statistics for job loss due to ill/disabled and pregnant/birth were 25.8 and 13.6 respectively, making these two categories the reasons for job loss with the longest average job tenure preceding the job loss.

Loss of a job because of conflict with an employer, low wages, and inconvenient hours tended to correlate with low levels of overall job satisfaction. Two of these factors are known going into employment and would seem to be modest predictors of quitting a job.

**Table 35. Median months on job and job satisfaction by type of reason for job quit (at least 5 instances reported) (full IFS sample)**

<b>Reason for quit</b>	<b>Median months</b>	<b>Mean job satisfaction *</b>
Conflict with co-worker (n=5)	3.0	3.66
Conflict with employer (n=8)	3.9	1.67
Problems with child care (n=16)	5.0	3.44
Too hard (n=5)	5.0	1.64
Ill/disabled (n=29)	6.9	2.86
Wages too low (n=7)	7.0	2.27
Pregnant/birth (n=22)	8.0	2.84
Personal/family issues (n=9)	9.4	2.38

\* Job satisfaction could range from 1 to 4, where 4 = “very satisfied.”

Consideration of satisfaction and job duration tended to separate occupations into two broad categories:

High satisfaction/Longer duration

Health care support  
Office, administrative support  
Food preparation and serving  
Personal care and service

Less satisfaction/Less duration

Production  
Sales and related  
Transportation and moving  
Landscape and maintenance

The lone exception to this pattern was health care support, where average satisfaction was low because, as shown earlier, many people working in health care support did not want to be doing that job and may not have adapted to it easily.

As Table 36 indicates, there were substantial differences in the average duration of the job by the type of occupation. In general, the duration corresponded to the types of jobs persons said they wished to have and the amount of physical strength and male tradition attached to them.

- The longest duration jobs were in health care support, food preparation/serving, personal care, and office administrative support.
- The shortest duration jobs were in protective services, building, grounds and cleaning, sales and production jobs.

**Table 36. Mean months on job by occupation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Median months</b>	<b>Mean months</b>	<b>Mean satisfaction *</b>
Health care support (n=10)	7.0	20.2	2.39
Office, administrative support (n=43)	6.0	14.2	3.38
Food preparation & serving (n=26)	7.0	13.8	3.18
Protective service (n=4)	9.4	10.1	2.96
Personal care & service (n=25)	8.5	10.0	3.07
Production (n=29)	5.1	7.7	2.85
Sales and related (n=78)	3.0	6.2	2.86
Transportation and moving (n=16)	5.6	6.1	2.56
Landscape and maintenance (n=29)	3.0	3.9	2.87

\* Satisfaction could range from a minimum of 1 to 4 = “very satisfied”.

As Table 37 indicates, there was a substantial range of worker satisfaction with jobs. While there appears to be a fairly constant percentage of workers who were strongly dissatisfied with their work whatever the job, jobs vary substantially with regard to percentage of workers who were highly satisfied with them. Food preparation, buildings and grounds maintenance work, and health care support appear to be the most satisfactory jobs to the working poor. Satisfaction levels were significantly lower for the protective services, sales and production jobs.

It is important to note that most of the working poor sample in this study is female. While all of these occupations are now open to women to some degree, the pattern suggests that physical strength required to do the work, and the extent to which the job has traditionally been a male field, may have contributed to whether the female working poor considered in this study derived satisfaction from the job. Production and material moving generated the highest levels of dissatisfaction.

Health care stands out among the jobs performed by the working poor in that people who worked in health care support tended to either like it a lot or dislike it a lot. While many people may have taken jobs providing health care support because they were available, it may be difficult to adapt to these jobs if the worker is not predisposed toward finding it appealing.

**Table 37. Job satisfaction of IFS working poor by type of job**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Very satisfied *</b>	<b>Very dissatisfied</b>
Food preparation and serving (n=59)	50.8%	5.1%
Health care support (n=43)	47.5%	23.3%
Building/grounds cleaning (n=42)	45.2%	2.4%
Personal care and service (n=91)	40.7%	8.8%
Office, administrative support (n=78)	38.5%	3.8%
Transportation and material moving (n=26)	38.5%	19.2%
Education, training, library (n=6)	33.3%	0%
Protective service (n=18)	33.3%	11.1%
Sales and related (n=107)	32.7%	8.4%
Production (n=43)	30.2%	23.3%

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .001$  (Chi Square)

While there was a correlation between higher wages and greater job satisfaction, the correlation was not as high as one might have expected. This is true in part because by virtue of being working poor, one worked within a fairly low and narrow wage band. Other factors such as whether the job was of their choosing, the hours, and whether the worker liked that type of work are also important.

**Table 38. Job satisfaction by wages (full IFS sample)**

<b>Satisfaction</b>	<b>Mean wage – current job *</b>
Very dissatisfied (n=64)	\$7.21
Somewhat dissatisfied (n=55)	\$7.16
Somewhat satisfied (n=255)	\$7.43
Very satisfied (n=197)	\$7.64

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .01$  (Analysis of Variance)

Different job sectors correlated to the likelihood that workers would leave the job voluntarily or involuntarily. Jobs most likely to result in quitting were health care support and transportation.

- Temporary jobs were most common in personal care and office support.
- Firings were most common in food preparation and sales.

- Layoffs were most common among production jobs.
- Food preparation jobs were most highly correlated with firing because of illness.
- Jobs that people tended to work in most, such as sales and office administration, had relatively low incidence of employees quitting.

**Table 39. Reason for job loss by occupation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Laid off</b>	<b>Fired</b>	<b>Hired temporary</b>	<b>Quit/resigned</b>
Transportation/material moving (n=17)	11.8%	0%	11.8%	76.5%
Food prep/serving (n=5)	9.1%	22.7%	0%	68.2%
Health care support (n=8)	37.5%	0%	0%	62.5%
Production (n=29)	41.4%	0%	3.4%	55.2%
Building/grounds cleaning maintenance (n=29)	10.3%	13.8%	20.7%	55.2%
Sales and related (n=79)	21.5%	20.3%	5.1%	53.2%
Personal care and service (n=25)	32.0%	0%	36.0%	32.0%
Office/administrative support (n=41)	24.4%	12.2%	34.1%	29.3%

\* Overall differences are statistically significant;  $p < .001$  (Chi Square)

As Table 40 indicates, working poor who were laid off averaged higher wages than persons who were fired or who quit.

- People fired because of illness averaged the lowest wages.
- People who quit because of illness or disability averaged the lowest wages.

**Table 40. Mean wage by reason for job loss full IFS sample**

<b>Reason for job loss</b>	<b>Mean wage</b>
Laid Off * (n=56)	\$7.50
Fired (n=28)	\$6.66
Hired Temporary (n=30)	\$7.50
Quit/Resigned * (n=121)	\$6.63

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .05$  (Sheffe)

## **F. Transportation**

Paradoxically, jobs located at a greater distance from home averaged substantially longer duration than jobs located closer to home. While we do not know what accounted for these incentives at more distant jobs, the finding does suggest that distance to work alone need not be a barrier to employment.

**Table 41. Mean months on recent job by distance to job (full IFS sample)**

<b>Distance to work</b>	<b>Mean months *</b>
Worked at home (n=4)	6.45
Less than 1 mile (n=31)	7.85
1 to 10 miles (n=96)	8.61
11 to 20 miles (n=70)	6.16
21 to 30 miles (n=30)	15.14
Over 30 miles (n=30)	14.34

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .08$  (Analysis of Variance)

Consistent with the correlation of distance and longevity, people walking or riding the bus or train to work averaged shorter job duration than persons driving or getting a ride. People who drove to work also tended to earn higher wages and reported higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs. Twenty-seven percent of the working poor in the IFS sample told the welfare office they needed help with a transportation problem.

**Table 42. Mean months of recent job by mode of transportation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Mean months</b>
Walked (n=34)	8.12
Drove * (n=44)	15.48
Got ride (n=29)	10.3
Bus, train * (n=146)	7.38

\* Differences are statistically significant;  $p < .05$  (Sheffe)

**Table 43. Mean wage by mode of transportation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Mean wage current job</b>
Walked (n=54)	\$6.57
Drove (n=179)	\$8.72
Got ride (n=56)	\$8.30
Bus, train (n=269)	\$7.04

“Walked” and “Bus, train” significantly different from “Drove” and “Got ride.”  $p < .001$  (Sheffe)

**Table 44. Mean satisfaction with current job by mode of transportation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Percent very satisfied with job</b>
Walked (n=61)	31.1%
Drove (n=213)	42.7%
Got ride (n=60)	43.3%
Bus, train (n=319)	31.7%

“Walked” and “Bus, train” significantly different from “Drove” and “Got ride.”  $p < .03$  (Chi Square)

**Table 45. Mean satisfaction with most recent job by mode of transportation (full IFS sample)**

<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Percent very satisfied with job</b>
Walked (n=33)	36.4%
Drove (n=43)	37.2%
Got ride (n=33) *	12.1%
Bus, train (n=149)	41.6%

Item significantly different.  $p < .01$  (Scheffe)

## **F. Health**

There was a small, but statistically significant, relationship between self-assessment of quality of health and the likelihood that a recent welfare recipient was working. Eighty-five percent of those who reported health that was at least “good” were working, whereas less than 75 percent of those with “poor” health were working. Those whose health was “poor” were far more likely to have lost a job in the past year than those whose health was at least “good.”

However, it appears that even when health was assessed as “fair” it began to affect work. At 21 percent, that group represents a significant portion of the working poor.

**Table 46. Health status by employment status: Former welfare recipients employed during the past year (full IFS sample)**

<b>Self-assessment of health</b>	<b>Currently employed (n=678) *</b>	<b>Recently employed in past 12 months (n=269) *</b>
Poor	2.8%	6.3%
Fair	13.9%	20.4%
Good	25.1%	21.9%
Very Good	23.6%	19.0%
Excellent	34.7%	32.3%

\* Group differences statistically significant;  $p < .0001$  (Analysis of Variance)

## **Conclusion: Policy Implications**

This study supports the argument that interventions hold promise for improving employment outcomes of the working poor. Many reasons for job loss may be preventable and it appears that worker satisfaction with employment could be improved at minimal costs.

### ***Education and Training***

As a group, the working poor lack formal education. Among the working poor, workers in higher prestige and higher wage occupations tended to have higher levels of education than those performing lower wage work. Yet, the data indicate that many of the working poor who wanted additional education and training were instead referred to job search programs.

Numerous studies have indicated poor, or even negative, returns to job training. The findings herein suggest that training is more likely to lead to better returns when clients choose it for themselves rather than when they are referred to the program. Agencies need to work to personalize their approaches to recruitment and referral to assure that they address real client needs. The working poor would likely benefit from greater access to education and training programs. The greatest return on this participation will likely come from responsive case management that effectively assesses and addresses the needs of the client.

### ***Better Matching of Workers to Jobs***

Only a small percentage of the working poor were working in their occupational preference, yet most who were not in their preferred occupation worked in occupations only marginally different in terms of educational qualifications needed. The study also found that job tenure corresponded to how the worker found the job. This suggests that a higher level of worker satisfaction could be achieved through better matching of job seekers to job openings, and in some instances through modest amounts of job training or preparation.

### ***Interventions to Prevent Job Loss***

Keeping jobs is as important as finding them, and the study indicates that the presence of social supports is associated with longer job tenure. It is possible that employers or institutions providing case management, training, or job placement, may be able to create mentoring programs that help low-wage workers establish relationships with people who can be supportive of them in times of need. Firings tended to take place early in the job tenure, suggesting that if the worker survived the first few months on the job, prospects for longer job tenure became much higher. Both employers and employment agencies should make special efforts to help employees through the initial months on the job.

Low-wage jobs often lack health benefits, yet better worker health is associated with improved employment outcomes. Employment prospects for the working poor would likely be improved with better access to health insurance.

For more information about the Illinois Families Study, go to [www.northwestern.edu/ipr/research/IFS.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/research/IFS.html).

For more information about this working paper, contact:

James H. Lewis

Director, Institute for Metropolitan Affairs

Roosevelt University

430 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 846

Chicago, IL 60605-1394

Phone: 312-341-3541

[jlewis@roosevelt.edu](mailto:jlewis@roosevelt.edu)