



Can We Put Poor Men To Work?

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Overview:

- The men's work problem.
- Errors to avoid.
- Causes of the problem.
- Policy history.
- Implications for policy.
- On to our panels.

Poverty rates (percent) by work level (2007):

	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Female heads</i>
Worked:	6	5	21
Worked FT/FY:	3	2	10
Did not work:	21	20	47

Source: March 2008 CPS

Work levels (percent) by poverty:

	<i>Any work</i>	<i>FT/FY</i>
<i>All adults:</i>	68	46
<i>All men</i>	74	56
<i>Poor adults</i>	36	11
<i>Poor men</i>	41	15

Source: March 2008 CPS

Work among men aged 16-50:

	<i>FT/FY</i>	<i>No work</i>
<i>Not poor:</i>	67	13
Whites	68	11
Blacks	59	21
<i>Poor:</i>	19	50
Whites	21	46
Blacks	11	64

Source: March 2008 CPS



Key groups of men with work problems:

- Child support defaulters—perhaps 1 million.
- Ex-offenders on parole—perhaps 500,000.
- The groups overlap—probably 70 percent of offenders are non-custodial parents.



Errors to avoid:

- Welfare reform was delayed by:
 - Partisan division.
 - A focus on freedom.
 - Economism.
- Solutions required instead:
 - Problem-solving.
 - Obligation—help and hassle.
 - Institution building.

The economic approach:

- Globalization has reduced low-skilled wages.
- Mismatch makes jobs less available in cities.
- Employers fear to hire low-skilled men.
- Barriers explain wages better than nonwork.
 - Men's employment fell even during the 1990s.
 - Immigration shows jobs are available.
 - Poor men generally have held many jobs—problem is retention.
- But not all low-skilled men can get jobs.

The cultural approach:

- Falling work levels reflect breakdown of work discipline.
- Search for respect blocks employment.
- Ethnographic studies suggest that poor men lead disorganized lives.
- Child support, prison deter working but also reflect lack of discipline.
- Culture explains nonwork better than wages.
- Combining the approaches.



Policy implications:

- Higher wages are needed.
- But this alone won't solve the work problem.
- Work obligation is also needed.
- Wage subsidies might be combined with expanded work programs.



Policy history:

- Programs offering higher wages have had little effect on men's work levels.
- Education and training by itself has evaluated poorly.
- The most successful programs have been directive.
- The military as a possible model.



Child support/fatherhood programs:

- Many have been run in 1980s-2000s.
- Some have shown encouraging gains in employment and/or child support payments.
- But evaluations have been weak.
- Recruitment problems cast doubt on effects.



Prison reentry programs:

- In criminal justice, a dearth of successful programs.
- Rehab programs in prison show only small effects.
- A focus on reentry may achieve more.
- Recent reentry programs suggest promise.
- Evaluations are again limited.
- CEO has the only experimental evaluation.

Policy implications (1):

- Work programs *probably* can succeed:
- But programs to date have generally been:
 - Voluntary for clients.
 - Small relative to the potential need.
 - Not institutionalized.
- To produce change they must become:
 - Mandatory.
 - Larger relative to the need.
 - Built into child support and criminal justice.
- Welfare reform made this transition.

Policy implications (2):

- Men's programs must center more on work.
- A general model for men's programs:
 - Case management centered on work.
 - Work first, then skills.
 - Assured employment.
 - Help with other problems in a context of work.
- Work may help with more intractable problems: marriage and crime.
- Work is what we know how to do.



Policy implications (3):

- Need to center on the men in their own right, not only as family providers.
- Government does little for them compared to mothers and children.



Reactions?