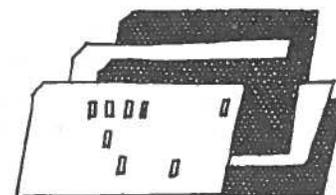


Research Summaries



Workers' expectations about losing and replacing their jobs

CHARLES N. WEAVER

How secure do workers feel about keeping their jobs? How confident are they that they could find another job?

Two recent nationwide surveys indicate a high degree of confidence on both counts, despite relatively high unemployment. In 1977 and in 1978, only a few of the workers surveyed feared the loss of their jobs, and a majority thought they could find comparable work without much difficulty. (In 1977, the national unemployment rate was 7 percent and in 1978, 6 percent.)

The results indicate considerable variations, however, among various categories of full-time workers. Certain workers, including blacks, those with less education, lower earnings, and lower skilled jobs, tended to experience greater insecurity of employment. They were more likely to fear the loss of their jobs or of being laid off within the next 12 months and were more likely to anticipate difficulty in finding a comparable job. Similarly, workers with more education, higher earnings, and higher skilled jobs typically experienced a greater sense of security in their present jobs and were more likely to believe that finding a comparable job would be easy.

The data were taken from the 1977 and 1978 General Social Surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, with funds from the National Science Foundation.¹ Expectations about losing one's job and about finding another job were measured by responses to the following questions:

Thinking about the next 12 months, how likely do you think it is that you will lose your job or be laid off—very likely, fairly likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?

About how easy would it be for you to find a job with another employer with approximately the same income and fringe benefits you have now? Would you say very easy, somewhat easy, or not easy at all?

When both sets of expectations are considered, several important dimensions of worker attitudes toward job security become apparent (table 1). For instance, blacks were not only almost twice as likely as whites to expect to lose their jobs or be laid off within the next 12 months, but were also significantly less likely than whites to believe that finding another job would be easy. Additionally, older workers were less likely to expect that they would lose their jobs or be laid off within the next 12 months (probably due to seniority), but they were more likely to believe that it would be difficult to find a job with similar earnings and fringe benefits.

Table 1. Workers who expect to lose their jobs and those who think they could find another job without much trouble

[In percent]

Characteristics	Expect to lose job	Could find another job
Overall	7.7	59.2
Sex:		
Male	7.7	60.5
Female	7.7	57.6
Race:		
White	7.0	60.2
Black	13.2	50.3
Age:		
18 - 29	11.1	67.9
30 - 39	8.5	62.3
40 - 49	5.2	59.5
50 - 59	4.5	46.7
60 and over	3.4	24.4
Education:		
Grade school	9.0	48.8
High school	8.8	56.9
Some college	9.0	68.4
College degree	2.7	62.2
Graduate work	1.3	72.3
White-collar workers:		
Professional-technical	3.2	67.4
Administrative-managerial	5.4	65.4
Salesworkers	3.8	58.9
Clerical workers	8.0	61.4
Blue-collar workers:		
Craftworkers	9.3	63.1
Operatives	13.7	45.8
Laborers	15.1	41.1
Service workers	8.2	54.0
Personal income:		
Less than \$5,000	12.7	65.1
\$5,000 - \$6,999	8.1	59.9
\$7,000 - \$9,999	9.5	57.2
\$10,000 - \$14,999	7.4	55.2
\$15,000 - \$19,999	6.8	55.8
\$20,000 and over	1.0	63.8

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Workers with elementary school, high school, or some college education were much more likely than those with a college or graduate school education to believe they would lose their jobs or be laid off within the next 12 months, and workers with an elementary school or high school education were less likely than those with higher education to believe that it would be easy to find a similar job.

In contrast to blue-collar workers, white-collar workers were only half as likely to believe they would lose their jobs or be laid off within the next 12 months, and were significantly more likely to believe that finding another job would be easy. However, expectations of losing and finding employment varied considerably within the white- and blue-collar occupational categories. Professional-technical and administrative-managerial workers had the lowest expectations about losing their jobs or being laid off, and had the most confidence about finding another job. On the other hand, salesworkers also had low expectations about losing their jobs or being laid off but were least confident (among white-collar workers) about finding another job. And, compared with other white-collar workers, clerical workers had the highest expectations about losing their jobs or being laid off but had moderately high expectations about the ease of finding another job. Among blue-collar workers, operatives and laborers felt most insecure about their jobs, and were most skeptical about finding a similar job. Service workers were the least concerned about blue-collar workers losing their jobs but did not believe that finding a similar job would be easy. Craftworkers had moderately high expectations about losing their jobs, but had the highest expectations (among blue-collar workers) that finding another job would be easy.

Workers whose annual salaries were less than \$5,000 had the highest expectations that they would lose their jobs or be laid off within the next 12 months, but they also had the highest expectations that it would be easy to find a similar job with another employer. Workers in the highest salary category, over \$20,000, had the lowest expectations that they would lose their jobs or be laid off and had highest expectations that it would be easy to find a similar job. Workers whose salaries ranged in categories between \$5,000 and \$20,000 had approximately the same expectations about both losing their jobs and about finding similar jobs with other employers.

Knowing the characteristics of workers who expect to lose their jobs and of those who believe that they could easily find other jobs should be important for the following reasons. Because job security and job satisfaction are correlated,¹ those interested in improving morale should benefit from having knowledge of the conditions under which worker expectations about losing their jobs are most intense. And, because unemploy-

ment is correlated with jobseeker discouragement,³ those interested in increasing employment should benefit from having knowledge of the conditions associated with fluctuations in worker expectations about finding another job. Furthermore, having knowledge of the conditions associated with *both* of these sets of expectations for the *same* workers should increase understanding of the attitudes of workers toward their overall employment security. □

— FOOTNOTES —

¹ Only persons age 18 and older who reported in the face-to-face interviews that they were employed full-time (35 hours or more per week) were included in this study, and the two groups were pooled into a single sample of 1,463 for analysis.

² F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, R. O. Peterson, and D. F. Capwell, *Job Attitudes: Review of Research and Opinion* (Pittsburgh Psychological Service of Pittsburgh, 1957).

³ Carol M. Ondeck, "Discouraged workers' link to jobless rate reaffirmed," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1978, pp. 40-42.

Hours and earnings of production or nonsupervisory workers, 1968-78

HOWARD DAVIS

Average hourly earnings of production or nonsupervisory employees on private, nonagricultural payrolls increased between 1968 and 1978 at an annual rate of 7.2 percent.¹ Average weekly hours dropped by 2 hours, from 37.8 to 35.8.

All industry divisions exhibited hourly declines except mining, as shown in table 1. Rising from a low of 41.9 hours in 1974 and 1975, mining reached a decade-high of 43.4 hours in 1977 and remained the same in 1978 under the stimulus of strong gains in coal mining and oil and gas extraction. The largest 11-year drops occurred in retail trade (-3.7 hours), services (-1.9 hours), and wholesale trade (-1.3 hours). Average weekly hours did not increase in any of these three industries after 1969. This was also true for hours in the finance, insurance, and real estate industry, although the total decline was only 0.6 of an hour.

A general cyclical pattern appears in mining, manufacturing, construction, and transportation and public utilities. Decreases in the number of hours in these industries occurred after the peak of economic expansion and either stopped descending or increased within the year following the recession low.²

The persisting decline of hours in trade and services

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