

For Immediate Release

October 29, 2018

Contact: Anthony Fiano, afiano@brookings.edu

Report: <https://brook.gs/2yEzjce>

New report from Brookings examines pathways to good jobs for disadvantaged young Americans

Newly released research identifies factors that lead to successful employment, including training, work-based learning in high school, earlier experiences in the labor market, and a college degree

Washington, D.C. – The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program and Child Trends released new research today that examines the quality of jobs held by 29 year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing insight on how these young people develop the skills and readiness to get good jobs. Additionally, the report showcases key investments and education and training reforms that would provide more young people with a full range of opportunities as they develop and grow, and better prepare them to tackle the problems and jobs of the future.

The report, titled *Pathways to high-quality jobs for young adults*, finds that almost all 29-year-olds are employed, but those who were disadvantaged as adolescents are less likely to have a job and more likely to have a low-quality job, as measured by wages, benefits, satisfaction, and hours. Seventy-nine percent of 29-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds had a job, and among those who were working, only 38 percent had a high-quality job. By contrast, 90 percent of their counterparts – 29-year-olds from non-disadvantaged backgrounds – had a job, and of those, 48 percent had a high quality job.

Consistent with other research, this analysis finds that post-secondary education (including associate, bachelor's and graduate degrees) is the strongest predictor of a high-quality job among young adults who were disadvantaged as adolescents, highlighting education's potential as an equaling force. The analysis also found that some types of career and technical education (CTE) in high school are associated with higher job quality at age 29, including internships, apprenticeships, cooperative education, and mentoring. These CTE programs are all forms of work-based learning and involve a relationship with a supportive adult, either a mentor or workplace supervisor. Their effect on job quality a decade later is notable, given that the effects of training programs sometimes fade over time. Other factors linked to higher job quality at age 29 include employment as a teen, higher wages at age 23, and job training in one's twenties.

Among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the report finds that job quality varies by race and gender: 21 percent of blacks have lower-quality jobs compared to 13 percent of whites and Hispanics. Notably, however, the report finds that after controlling for education, training, work experiences, and several demographic characteristics, the gap in job quality scores between blacks and whites is erased, further emphasizing the value of equipping all young people for success in the labor market.

Additionally, more men (40 percent) have high quality jobs than women (35 percent), in line with other research on factors affecting women in the labor market, including the possibility of working reduced hours after having children, entering lower-paying fields, and discrimination.

Martha Ross, co-author and Fellow at the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, said, “For too many young people, choices after high school are low-wage work or a post-secondary landscape that is confusing, difficult to navigate, and financially out-of-reach. It doesn’t have to be that way. Options to help more young people successfully move into and through post-secondary education and then into a good job are entirely within reach. Many high schools, colleges, employers, and nonprofits are already doing it, but we need to expand those strategies so that they reach all young people.”

Kristin Anderson Moore, co-author and Senior Scholar at Child Trends, said, “One promising finding from this work is that adolescents who participated in a training or internship program that was relationship-based were found to have a higher quality job by age 29.”

Kelly Murphy, co-author and Deputy Program Area Director at Child Trends, said, “This work confirms everything we know about the critical role of education and training from adolescence through young adulthood.”

The report offers four recommendations to improve employment prospects of young people growing up in disadvantaged households, including:

- Strengthening the work-based learning elements of high school career and technical education.
- Increasing completion rates of post-secondary degrees, with an explicit focus on quality and equity.
- Improving on-ramps to employment for teens and young adults, particularly for those without post-secondary credentials.
- Promoting further research and action on the role of positive relationships in employment and training programs for youth and young adults.

Conversely, the report identifies factors that hinder young adults in obtaining high quality jobs, including periods of unemployment in one’s 20s, incarceration, and the likely effects of the Great Recession on young workers attempting to establish a career foothold in a struggling economy.

A full PDF version of the report is available for download here: <https://brook.gs/2yEzjce>.

###

The Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings delivers research and solutions to help metropolitan leaders build an advanced economy that works for all. To learn more, please visit brookings.edu/metro. Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/brookingsmetro.

Child Trends is the nation’s leading nonprofit research organization focused exclusively on improving the lives and prospects of children, youth, and their families. For 39 years, decision makers have relied on their rigorous research, unbiased analyses, and clear communications to improve public policies and interventions that serve children and families. To learn more, visit: childtrends.org.