

Most low-income NYers have less than \$1K in bank

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A survey of low-income New Yorkers shows that two-thirds have less than \$1,000 in savings to fall back on should even tougher times hit, while one-third have no savings at all.

[The survey](#), commissioned by the Community Service Society of New York and titled, "The Unheard Third," defines low-income New Yorkers as those earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level, or less than \$36,000 for a family of three. It presents a stark picture of how hard life can be for poor people in New York, many of whom have lost jobs, hours worked or employee benefits.

"New Yorkers who are living in poverty are really frantic, scrambling to make ends meet," said David Jones, president of Community Service Society, an advocacy group for the poor.

A full 59% of the low-income New Yorkers surveyed are concerned a member of their household will lose a job in the next year.

Despite the recession, seven in 10 low-income households in the city include at least one worker. But the study says the quality of those jobs has declined in the past year, making life more difficult for the city's poor.

For New York workers earning between 101% and 200% of the federal poverty level (or between \$18,000 and \$36,000 for a family of three), the percentage of workers receiving health insurance fell to 47% from 53% last year. Just 26% of the workers receive prescription drug coverage, vs. 42% last year; 33% get paid sick leave, compared with 42% last year.

"What we see across the board are major declines in employer-sponsored benefits for poor workers," said Jeremy Reiss, director of workforce and economic security initiatives at the Community Service Society.

Concerns about employment are twice as prevalent as in previous surveys, and low-income New Yorkers identify the economy as the No. 1 issue they'll consider when casting their votes in November.

Even though job quality has declined and unemployment is up, government assistance is underutilized, the survey shows. Half of all New Yorkers eligible for food stamps do not receive them, with the most common reason being that they don't think they're eligible to receive the assistance.

Half of all New Yorkers earning less than 100% of the federal poverty level (or \$18,000 for a family of three) report experiencing three or more economic hardships recently, including falling behind on rent, not filling a prescription and receiving free food. Hours, wages or tips were reduced for 25% of respondents in that income category, while 30% fell behind on rent or mortgage payments.

For families earning between 101% and 200% of the federal poverty level, 40% report three or more hardships. Hours, wages or tips were reduced for 28%, while 25% fell behind on rent or mortgage payments.

The recession has hit low-income Latinos the hardest, according to the survey, with 43% seeing a reduction in their hours, wages or tips and/or losing their jobs. That compares to 29% of low-income blacks and 32% of whites.

Mr. Reiss said that's because blacks are more likely to be working in unionized sectors like healthcare and government, where job and benefits are more secure. Latinos are more prevalent in fields like retail and construction, which are less stable, he said.

The survey—the only one in the nation that asks low-income people in a major metropolitan city about the quality of their lives—is in its eighth year. Designed by Community Service Society and conducted by Lake Research Partners, it polls more than 1,200 New Yorkers, and has a margin of error of 2.8%.

The problems of the poor could reverberate throughout the city if the local unemployment rate, which hit 10.3% in August, is not brought under control, Mr. Jones said.

“The implications of the struggles of this third of the population have enormous impact on the overall future of the city,” he said. “If they're working, it's fine. If they're not, we've got a problem that makes New York much less competitive and much more difficult to govern.”

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