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Living Wages and Local
Governments

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As the Dust Settles:
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Can Temporary Employment
Scar Your Future Earnings?
Wage Mobility by Type of
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New Books

Vol. 9, No. 2

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The Institute is a nonprofit research organization devoted to finding and promoting solutions to employment-related problems at the national, state, and local level. The Institute is an activity of the W.E. Upjohn Unemployment Trustee Corporation, which was established in 1932 to administer a fund set aside by the late Dr. W.E. Upjohn, founder of the Upjohn Company, to conduct research on the causes and effects of unemployment and seek measures for the alleviation of the hardships suffered by the unemployed.

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Living Wages and Local Governments

Based on our current knowledge, what should local governments be doing about the "living wage"? Living wages, now adopted by over 50 local governments in the United States, require employers with some financial relationship with the local government to pay covered employees a wage that is above the federal minimum wage. Because living-wage laws are diverse, the question of whether living wage requirements are desirable cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."

Like minimum wages, living-wage laws aim at improving the living standards of workers below or near the poverty line. Living wages differ from minimum wages, however, in three crucial ways:

- Living wages are much higher than minimum wages, averaging about \$8.19 per hour, almost 60 percent above the current federal minimum wage;
- Living wages cover relatively few workers, typically only directly raising the wages of less than 1 percent of city residents earning low wages;
- Living wages are enacted by city governments, which have less economic clout in the labor market because local governments must worry about employers moving out of the city or refusing to move in.

The effects of a living-wage law in any particular city are likely to depend greatly on the law's design and on the strength of the city's economy. In addition to differing in the level set for the living wage, living-wage laws differ greatly in terms of which employers and employees are covered.

The higher the level set for the living wage, the greater the potential benefits of the living wage for those covered; but, higher living wages also increase the chances of adverse effects. Employers can respond to living wages by not creating as many jobs in the city, increasing the credentials expected of new hires, reducing fringe benefits, degrading working conditions, or cutting back on training. It is difficult for a city government to prevent all these possible responses, and therefore they must be taken into account in deciding on an appropriate living-wage level.

Studies of industry and firm wage differentials and of unions' effects of wages suggest that it will be difficult to get employers to raise real wages for workers by more than 30 percent above prevailing levels for workers with that skill level. Mandated wage increases that are greater than 30 percent for many workers are likely to lead to employers hiring workers with more credentials or taking other actions that will hurt the intended beneficiaries of living-wage laws.

Broadening the coverage of the living wage increases the number of potential worker beneficiaries, but also may go beyond what a city government can effectively demand of employers, particularly if the city economy is weak. A few living-wage laws only cover the city's own employees. A city can raise wages for its own workers, maintain working conditions, and continue hiring workers with modest credentials. The cost to taxpayers depends on how the higher wages compare to any cost savings from higher wages' effects in increasing productivity and reducing worker turnover.

The symbolic effects of these laws may be important. Living-wage laws are sometimes said to symbolize an anti-business attitude. On the other hand, [they] may symbolize a change in local wage norms.

About 80 percent of living-wage laws cover the city's service contractors. In this case, if the city is willing to pay possibly higher prices for contracts, the city can effectively insist on higher wages. Whether contract prices actually go up depends upon whether the higher wages help lower some costs by increasing worker productivity or lowering worker turnover. With contractors, the city has less control over who is hired, so a living-wage requirement may in some cases lead to contractors hiring workers with higher credentials.

About half of living-wage laws cover firms receiving some kind of economic development subsidy from the city. Most of the economic development literature suggests that business location decisions among different locations within a metropolitan area are quite sensitive to even small variations in costs. Therefore, adding a living-wage requirement to an

existing economic development subsidy is likely to have some significant adverse effects on decisions by some firms about whether to locate or expand in the city. In contrast, if the living-wage requirement is incorporated into a new economic development subsidy and the combined package is attractive to firms, then the city's economic growth will be increased. A possible loss of jobs would be of less concern if the city's economy was strong. In a booming city economy, a living-wage requirement might be one way of managing growth.

A few living-wage laws applied to city contractors or grantees cover all employees of these contractors and grantees, even employees who are not funded by the city. Such extended coverage will be difficult for the city to require, as the city is not paying these employees' salaries. Such requirements, if enforced, may lead to some reduction in interest in bidding on city contracts and grants.

Because living wage laws affect relatively few workers directly, the indirect effects from the symbolic effects of these laws may be important. On the one hand, living-wage laws are sometimes said to symbolize an anti-business attitude. This might lead to adverse effects upon city economic development beyond what would be expected from the modest direct effects of living wages on costs. On the other hand, living-wage laws may symbolize a change in local wage norms. Employers may feel as if they are under some obligation to increase wages even if they are not directly affected by the living-wage law.

There is relatively little research evidence on how living-wage laws have actually affected local labor markets. Some research on Baltimore suggests that this early living-wage law, with quite modest wage requirements, probably did not cause large increases in city contract costs. Research on Detroit and Los Angeles provides some evidence of at least some adverse effects of living-wage laws on city contract costs or on how many less-skilled workers are hired by

affected employers, but the research does not allow an exact quantification of these effects. Finally, at least one study suggests that living-wage requirements applied to economic development subsidies may significantly reduce local poverty rates. The anti-poverty effects in this study are so large that they can only be explained if living-wage laws have effects on the wages and hiring practices of many employers other than those directly affected. Other studies are needed to test this finding and see whether these lower poverty rates might be due to other local economic trends.

Based on our current knowledge, living-wage laws make the most sense applied to a city's own employees and to a contractor's city-funded workers. Living-wage levels should be set no higher than 30 percent above prevailing wage levels for those workers. Cities with strong economies might want to consider whether applying living-wage requirements to economic development programs would be an appropriate part of a managed growth plan. Cities might also wish to attach living-wage requirements to economic development subsidies that are more generous than subsidies offered by nearby jurisdictions.

Suggestions for Further Reading

More extensive discussion, and sources for the data and information presented in this article, can be found in the working paper by Timothy J. Bartik, "*Thinking about Local Living Wage Requirements*," available at the Upjohn Institute's web site at www.upjohninst.org.

Timothy J. Bartik is a senior economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

Leslie A. Whitener, Bruce A. Weber, and Greg J. Duncan

As the Dust Settles: Welfare Reform and Rural America

Understanding rural America is no easy task. It is tempting to generalize and oversimplify, to characterize rural areas as they once were or as they are now in only some places . . . The economies of individual rural areas differ, as do the resources upon which they are built and the opportunities and challenges they face. Some have participated in the economic progress of the Nation, while others have not.

Economic Research Service 1995

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) of 1996, the most significant social welfare legislation in more than 60 years, transformed the federal safety net and the food assistance landscape for low-income households in the United States. Although considerable research has focused on understanding how this transformation is affecting the lives of low-income families, most research to date has focused on urban settings. Yet there is reason to think that welfare reform may not be working as well for the almost 7.5 million people living in poverty in nonmetropolitan areas (Rural Policy Research Institute 2001; Cook and Dagata 1997). The economic boom of the 1990s has left a poorer menu of job options for rural than urban families, and unemployment, underemployment, and poverty levels remain higher in rural than in urban locations (Cook and Gibbs 2000).

In May 2000, a conference sponsored by the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research, and the Rural Policy Research Institute brought together some of the nation's leading scholars to review

current research on welfare reform outcomes in rural areas. The book *Rural Dimensions of Welfare Reform*, edited by Weber, Duncan, and Whitener and published by the W.E. Upjohn Institute, comprises much of the proceedings. The book represents the first comprehensive look at the spatial dimensions of PRWORA, examining how this landmark legislation is affecting caseloads, employment, earnings, and family well-being in rural and urban areas.

PRWORA replaced long-term entitlement to income maintenance benefits with a short-term temporary assistance program aimed at helping families get back on their feet and facilitating the employment of heads of households. It furthermore gave states more flexibility in administering programs to meet their needs. Specifically, the legislation replaced the entitlement Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is funded through block grants. TANF imposes a five-year lifetime limit on receiving federal welfare benefits and requires recipients to participate in work activities within two years of receiving benefits.

In addition to the direct changes to

the cash benefit programs, PRWORA also has had direct and indirect implications for food stamps. The Act tightened some of the provisions of the Food Stamp Program, but in addition, research suggests that welfare reform has reduced food stamp participation. Dion and Pavetti (2000) found that many TANF participants who have left the cash welfare program have also stopped receiving food stamp benefits, even though they are likely to still be eligible. State diversion policies, local office practices, and misinformation may explain this phenomenon.

The Rural Context

Many rural areas are characterized by conditions that are likely to impede the move from welfare to work. As a result of low rural population densities, distances to jobs are often great, creating needs for reliable transportation. Key social and educational services may be unavailable or available only with a long commute. Child care options are fewer and harder to arrange. At the close of the century, after almost a decade of unprecedented economic growth, nonmetropolitan poverty remained 2 percentage points higher than in metro areas, with over 14 percent of the nonmetro population living below poverty. Unemployment and underemployment was also higher in nonmetro than in metro labor markets. Job growth, per capita income, and earnings per job were lower.

The Economic Research Service (1995) identified over 500 persistently poor nonmetro counties, and as Table 1 shows, they are characterized by a disproportionate number of economically at-risk persons, including racial/ethnic minorities, female-headed households, and high school dropouts.

Lagging Behind, but Not as Far Back as Might Be Expected

Despite the many reasons to suggest that welfare reform may not work as well for the one-fifth of the nation's poor living in rural areas, the systematic look

at the rural dimensions of welfare reform by the authors in this book enumerated both some serious warning signs for policymakers interested in rural poverty. Most of the case studies reported in the book found smaller welfare reform impacts on employment and earnings in rural than in urban areas. We believe that space makes a difference and not all places have benefitted equally from the strong economy and welfare reform. The following paragraphs summarize a sampling of the chapters.

Using county-level data from Mississippi and South Carolina, Mark Henry found that rural areas in these states have had more difficulty than urban areas in reducing welfare participation. Henry Brady and coauthors examined administrative data from California and found that the seasonality of employment in rural, agricultural counties led welfare recipients to combine seasonal work with welfare in the off-season when the labor market softens. They raise a significant concern about the advent of time limits, because the families will have to find other ways to support themselves in the off-season once their benefits have ended.

In an examination of recidivism in Iowa, Helen Jensen and colleagues found that rural recipients were more likely to return to the rolls than their urban counterparts during the first two quarters after leaving the program, but after this initial period, the rates of return were quite similar. Signe-Mary McKernan and coauthors use both primary and secondary national data sets to assess whether the employment responsiveness of single mothers differs in rural and urban areas. Their qualitative fieldwork identified as potential problems in rural areas the following: inadequate transportation, limited employment services, weak labor markets, low education levels, and shortfalls in transitional benefits. But, contrary to expectations, using nationally representative quantitative data, these authors found that rising employment

rates of single mothers between the ages of 19 and 45 were approximately as high in rural as in urban areas.

A concern frequently raised in welfare reform debates is, "Will there be enough jobs for those leaving the rolls?" Frank Howell assessed the capacity of labor markets in Mississippi to absorb the 1996 cohort of TANF recipients by comparing their educational credentials with the skills needed in the projected job openings in 1997–2002. He concluded that urban labor markets will be better able to provide both "skill-matched" jobs for welfare leavers and child care services than rural labor markets.

The conference also considered the demand side of the labor market. Drawing on a survey of Minnesota employers, Greg Owen and his coauthors found little difference in the attitudes of employers in rural and suburban/urban areas. In both areas, employers generally viewed lack of "soft skills" as the primary barrier to workforce participation of welfare leavers. Interestingly, these authors also interviewed welfare recipients and found a different perspective. These individuals cited low wages, lack of child care, and lack of education as the primary barriers.

Table 1 Counties with Persistent Poverty: Selected Characteristics

Characteristic	Counties with persistent poverty	All nonmetro counties
No. of counties	535	2,276
% of nonmetro population, 1999 ^a	18.5	100
Population change ^a (%)		
1980-90	-0.16	2.69
1990-99	6.15	7.61
Annualized employment change ^b (%)		
1979-89	0.5	0.9
1989-99	0.8	1.1
Unemployment rate ^b (%)		
1990	8.1	6.5
1999	7.1	5.2
Poverty rate, 1990 ^c (%)	29.1	18.3
Black population, 1990 ^c (%)	21.2	8.0
Hispanic population, 1990 ^c (%)	7.8	4.3
Female-headed households with children, 1990 ^c (%)	7.5	5.2
High school dropouts ^c (%)	14.3	11
Earnings per job, 1998 ^d (\$)	22,931	24,408
Per capita income, 1998 ^d (\$)	17,910	21,384

^a Bureau of the Census.

^b Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

^c 1990 Census of Population.

^d Bureau of Economic Analysis.

SOURCE: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service.

The decline in food stamp caseloads after welfare reform raised concern about why eligible families were not participating, and whether there was a regional dimension to this issue. Sheena McConnell and James Ohls examined Food Stamp Program participation data and concluded that the program is at least as successful in serving nonmetropolitan area households as it is in serving their metropolitan counterparts. Participation rates are higher in rural areas, and the recent declines occurred primarily in metro areas.

Using data from the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements, Mark Nord found that food insecurity increased substantially among low-income households not using food stamps, suggesting that reduced access may be a problem. However, hunger among this population did not increase, suggesting that those who most needed food assistance still had access to food stamps. Nonmetropolitan patterns were not substantially different from national patterns.

Reauthorization

The Congress is now beginning the process of reauthorizing PRWORA in 2002. The research studies comprising

this conference and its proceedings provide a strong empirical basis to help inform the policy debate and will serve to identify some of the challenges and opportunities facing low-income families residing in rural areas.

Leslie A. Whitener is chief of the Food Assistance and Rural Economy Branch, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C.

Bruce A. Weber is a professor of agricultural and resource economics at Oregon State University. He is currently serving as chair of the Rural Policy Research Institute Rural Welfare Reform Research Panel.

Greg J. Duncan is a professor of education and social policy and a faculty associate in the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. He also directs Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research.

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Suggestions for Further Reading

Cook, Peggy, and Elizabeth Dagata. 1997. "Welfare Reform Legislation Poses Opportunities and Challenges for Rural America." *Rural Conditions and Trends: Federal Programs* 8(1): 38-47. Available at <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/rcat/rcat81/rcat81g.pdf>>.

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Mini-Grant Funded Research

Can Temporary Employment Scar Your Future Earnings? Wage Mobility by Type of Work Contract in Spain

Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes and Ricardo Serrano-Padial

The 1990s have been characterized by the rapid growth of nonstandard work arrangements, particularly in Spain, where temporary workers have accounted for more than one-third of the workforce over the past decade. It is difficult to generalize because temporary workers are heterogeneous, but concern arises that they are the most likely to incur fewer opportunities for career advancement and to receive lower wages. Less opportunity for advancement may inflict long-term harm due to lack of access to better jobs and higher earnings, while low wages contribute to poverty.

Using Spanish data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), we have examined the effects of temporary work of different durations on current and future wages while accounting for the worker's recent job mobility and job search patterns. We find that while temporary workers earn approximately 5 percent less at a given point in time than permanent workers, they experience greater wage growth than their permanent counterparts in the short run. In particular, temporary workers' wages are 6 percent higher than those of their permanent counterparts a year later, once we account for recent job mobility and job search patterns. Various factors might explain this finding. Temporary workers' greater wage growth might represent the payoff to their greater effort in order to keep their jobs or a

compensating wage differential for worse working conditions. Alternatively, in an environment of high unemployment, a permanent worker may suffer a substantial wage penalty when switching jobs if employers perceive of them as "damaged goods," whereas job changing among temporary workers is not extraordinary.

We also find that the wage gaps between temporary and permanent workers and the wage growth experienced by temporary workers vary substantially with the duration of the temporary work contract. In particular, relative to permanent workers and accounting for recent job mobility and job search practices, temporary workers with up to six-month contracts earn approximately 5 percent less than their permanent counterparts. Interestingly, their wage gap widens to 11 percent a year later, possibly due to the interrupted employment patterns typically associated with this short-term work category.

On the other hand, longer-term temporary workers (e.g., those with one-year contracts or one-year or more contracts) might experience a wage gap in some instances (such as in the case of work contracts lasting more than six months and up to one year), but they also enjoy greater wage growth than their permanent counterparts. As a result, their wages are 4–6 percent higher than those of similar permanent co-workers a year later. This finding emphasizes the different nature of short-term and long-

term temporary employment, with long-term temporary contracts displaying better future employment prospects and thus possibly inducing greater employee work effort.

In sum, our results indicate that while temporary workers earn significantly less than their permanent counterparts, their earnings quickly improve. Within the period of one year, only employees holding short, six-month contracts continue to earn significantly less, while employees holding longer-lived temporary work contracts experience greater wage growth than their permanent counterparts. This finding has important policy implications, since policies targeting the poverty consequences of temporary employment might differ depending on the duration of such effects. Given the high percentage of workers employed in temporary work arrangements, the reliance of welfare-to-work programs on these work contracts to alleviate poverty, and the observed poverty recidivism among welfare leavers employed in temporary jobs in a variety of countries, these findings provide important policy lessons for the regulation and use of the shortest-lived temporary work contracts.

Catalina Amuedo-Dorantes is an assistant professor in the Economics Department of San Diego State University. Ricardo Serrano-Padial is a graduate research assistant in economics and will be a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, San Diego, next year.

The Upjohn Institute provides small amounts of funding (mini-grants) that are intended to facilitate the research and publications of nontenured faculty. This article reports the work done with one such grant.

New and Recent Books

How New Is the "New Employment Contract"?

Evidence from North American Pay Practices

David I. Levine, Dale Belman, Gary Charness, Erica L. Groshen, and K.C. O'Shaughnessy

Traditionally, the "old employment contract" entailed wages set by employers within limited internal labor

markets. This included a number of wage rigidities, e.g., that large employers paid higher wages than small employers, they paid similar wages to similar workers across different regions and labor markets, and large employers and small employers rewarded employee characteristics such as age and education differently.

Levine et al. view such rigidities as hypotheses to be tested to see whether the old employment contract has indeed been supplanted by a new, more flexible contract. They utilize five data sources including a unique data set with information on employers and employees in both the United States and Japan and a survey on fairness in employment collected specifically for this study. The somewhat surprising conclusion; the rigidities of the old employment contract apparently remain entrenched, casting doubt on the factors assumed to be determining wage patterns and rigidities. In fact, the results are unresponsive of any single theory of how wage structures are established at large U.S. employers.

Visit our Web site for the full text of the book's introductory chapter, as well as a synopsis by lead author David I. Levine that appeared in the January 2002 issue of *Employment Research*.

270 pp. \$40 cloth ISBN 0-88099-232-8 / \$22 paper ISBN 0-88099-231-X / April 2002.

Pay at Risk Compensation and Employment Risk in the United States and Canada

John A. Turner, Editor

The contributors to this book investigate whether employment and compensation risks for U.S. and Canadian workers have increased. Both wage and nonwage aspects of compensation are examined, as well as whether workers in either country face more job-related risks. The authors also seek to identify trends in risk bearing and whether they differ by country. Included are

- **Wage and Job Risk for Workers,** John A. Turner
- **Risk in Employment Arrangements,** Sophie M. Korczyk
- **Health and Coverage at Risk,** Robert B. Friedland, Laura Summer, Sophie M. Korczyk, and Douglas E. Hyatt
- **Risk Sharing through Social Security Retirement Income Systems,** John A. Turner
- **Risk Bearing in Individual and Occupational Pension Plans,** James E. Pesando and John A. Turner
- **Risk Shifting in Workers' Compensation,** Douglas E. Hyatt.

215 pp. \$36 cloth ISBN 0-88099-222-0 / \$19 paper ISBN 0-88099-221-2 / 2001.

Labor, Business, and Change in Germany and the United States

Kirsten S. Wever, Editor

This book illustrates how employment relations and management development in Germany and the

United States are influenced by the distinct and diverse institutional characteristics of the countries' political economies. How and why change occurs in both countries is

explored against the backdrop of four contemporary settings including telecommunications deregulation and privatization, management development systems, supplier relations, and employment relations. Included are

- **Mutual Learning with Trade-Offs,** Kirsten S. Wever
- **Deregulation and Restructuring in Telecommunications Services in the United States and Germany,** Rosemary Batt and Owen Darbyshire
- **Institutional Effects on Skill Creation and Management Development in the United States and Germany,** David Finegold and Brent Keltner
- **National Institutional Frameworks and Innovative Industrial Organization,** Steven Casper
- **Perils of the High and Low Roads,** Lowell Turner, Kirsten S. Wever, and Michael Fichter.

170 pp. \$35 cloth ISBN 0-88099-216-6 / \$17 paper ISBN 0-88099-215-8 / 2001.

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