

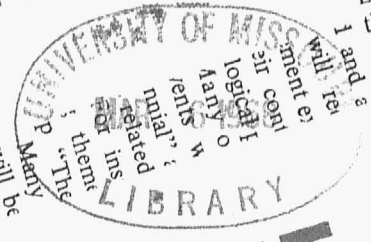
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PERCEPTION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES

AMONG

LOW INCOME GROUPS IN MISSOURI



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IN MISSOURI

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BACKGROUND,

PURPOSE,

AIMS OF THE STUDY

REX R. CAMPBELL AND SUSAN A. MULVEY*

Both social scientists and public officials concerned with the problems of employment have recognized that certain individuals and groups tend to have distorted or incorrect ideas and perceptions of the work situation or their opportunities for employment. These distorted perceptions can, of course, have profound effects on the national employment picture. Many people have ideas and perceptions about the job market, job training, requirements for jobs, and the existence of discrimination which do not accurately reflect the facts. The problem is significant because these distorted perceptions are likely to be held by members of low-income groups, placing them at even more of a disadvantage in terms of employment.

The project was designed with two objectives in mind:

1. To provide descriptive and analytical material concerning the perception of job opportunities among low-income groups in Missouri.
2. To provide jobs and, it was hoped, useful training for a number of teen-agers involved in the Youth Corps Program.

A sub-purpose was to collect, by means of cross-racial and intra-racial interviews, some initial data to be used in an analysis of the differential responses made relating to various external characteristics of interviewers.

For the first purpose of the study, the following areas of inquiry were thought to be relevant.

1. General demographic information—needed for purposes of analysis and comparison.
2. Information about present and past employment. This section included data on how jobs were found, qualifications and training thought to be necessary for the jobs, and also satisfaction with the job.

3. Questions concerning methods and agencies used in looking for work. It was hoped that this section would provide information about the perceptions of the usefulness and availability of existing agencies and also the extent to which more informal methods were used.
4. Data dealing with the desirability and/or availability of job training. Many officials are concerned about the problems of disseminating information on retraining programs. It was felt that this section could indicate the extent to which low-income groups were aware of and understood the purposes of programs which were, in fact, designed to help them.
5. Information dealing with what a better job might mean. This was included in order that some idea of the group's expectations might be gained.
6. The group's view of the employment situation in the area. This could provide a direct check on the discrepancy between perception and reality.
7. Data concerning discrimination. This section included questions dealing with all types of discrimination: educational (that is, did the respondent feel he was discriminated against because he lacked education or training), sexual, age, racial, and others.

The secondary purpose aimed at discovering whether or not there would be differences in response related to racial characteristics of the interviewer and the respondent. It was decided that the four possible combinations (Negro interviewer-Negro respondent, Negro interviewer-white respondent, white interviewer-white respondent, and white interviewer-Negro respondent) would be compared on selected questions which might be affected by racial concerns.

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Finally, a note on the organization of the report and the treatment of the data. A short discussion of the research design will be presented, to include sampling and interviewing techniques. The finding will be examined for the total sample and by race. Also there will be a short, preliminary analysis of the differences in response as related to racial combinations, and in conclusion, a general summary and analysis.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The data was gathered by means of an area probability sample in low-income urban areas of the state. An income level of the area was defined by using tract data from the 1960 U.S. Census of Population. Some 1,600 interviews were collected in seven urban areas in Missouri: St. Louis, Kansas City, Columbia, Sedalia, Fulton, Rolla, and Jefferson City.

The interviewing was done by participants in the Job Corps Program. The interviewers were selected by means of a simple ability test and then received the same type of training given professional interviewers. They were more closely supervised than is usual for professional interviewers. Some purposive selection of sample for different interviewers was necessary to make sure each interviewer collected inter- as well as intra-racial interviews.

The male or female head of the household was interviewed whenever possible; when that could not be done, either the spouse or some other adult within the household was questioned.

THE SAMPLE

DEMOGRAPHIC

CHARACTERISTICS

As expected, the percentage of non-white households in the sample was disproportionately high in relation to the non-white population of the state; 55.5 percent of the families were classified as non-white whereas non-whites comprise only 9.2 percent of the Missouri population. The average population per household was 3.2 which is nearly equal to that of the state (3.1); this low average is related to the large number of aged individuals in the sample who for the most part lived alone or in households of two (the other individual was either the spouse or an aged friend or relative). The income dispersion of the sample is compared with that of the state in Table 1. The median income of the sample is considerably lower than that of the state.

TABLE 1-- PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME, AND MEDIAN INCOME, FOR THE POPULATION OF MISSOURI AND FOR THE SAMPLE

Total Income	The State Percent	The Sample Percent
under 1,000	15.6	15.9
1,000 to 1,999	12.5	16.2
2,000 to 2,999	10.2	16.5
3,000 to 3,999	9.8	11.1
4,000 to 4,999	10.2	10.0
5,000 to 5,999	10.2	10.1
6,000 to 6,999	8.1	6.5
7,000 to 10,000	14.0	9.0
over 10,000	9.3	4.7
Median Income	\$4,186	\$3,500

Heads of Households—Since the detailed information dealt only with the head of the household the following demographic material concerning the heads is presented. Only 66.4 percent of the heads in the sample were male, while 81.4 percent of the heads in the total population were male. This seems to reflect the higher percentage of aged in the sample rather than the racial makeup of the sample. As shall be seen later, there is almost no difference in terms of the sex of the head among the racial groups.

The age distribution of the heads for the sample and for the total population of the state is presented in Table 2. It reveals that the low-income group contains a higher percentage of individuals over 65 years than does the state population. This was expected since clustering at the extremes of youth and old age is typical of a low-income group. The educational distribution for the sample compared to that of the state is found in Table 3. This table shows that the educational attainment of the low-income group is not much different than that of the state. Only among the group which completed 16 or more years of school is there any real difference and that is relatively slight. This high attainment may be related to the fact that the sample was taken in urban areas which tend towards higher levels of educational achievement.

The last general demographic characteristic to be treated is employment status. In the sample it was found that 58.9 percent of the heads were employed, 12.7 percent were unemployed (4.2 percent of the state population was unemployed), 28.1 percent were disabled or retired, and .3 percent were students. As expected, the unemployment rate was high as was the percentage of retired or disabled individuals.

TABLE 2-- PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE AGE OF THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD FOR THE POPULATION OF MISSOURI AND FOR THE SAMPLE

Age Group	The State Percent	The Sample Percent
19 years & under	.6	.8
20 to 24 years	4.6	6.1
25 to 29 years	7.6	5.9
30 to 34 years	9.0	6.9
35 to 39 years	9.9	7.6
40 to 44 years	9.4	7.8
45 to 49 years	10.0	8.3
50 to 54 years	9.8	8.5
55 to 59 years	9.4	7.2
60 to 64 years	8.3	9.7
65 and over	22.0	29.0
No age given	-	2.1

TABLE 3--PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF YEARS OF SCHOOL COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD FOR THE POPULATION OF MISSOURI AND FOR THE SAMPLE

Years of School Completed	The State Percent	The Sample Percent
0-8 years	45.8	42.9
9-12 years	38.8	42.0
13-15 years	7.8	8.2
16 years or more	7.6	5.9
No answer given	-	1.0

DETAILED

EMPLOYMENT

DATA

Present and Past Employment—In terms of occupational classification, it was found that 55 percent of the employed in the sample were service workers, laborers, or operatives; 16 percent were craftsmen or foremen; 15 percent were clerical and sales workers; and 13 percent were managers, proprietors, professional, and technical workers. For the most part the individuals included in the last group (managers, proprietors, professionals, or technical workers) were proprietors of very small busi-

nesses or minor technical workers. Few (12 percent) of the heads of households had received formal training for the jobs they held, 41 percent had no previous training and 41 percent had informal training.

When the respondents were asked about how they obtained their present jobs, 77.7 percent said they had used what might be termed informal methods, i.e., friends and relatives, places they thought might have jobs, or newspapers. Only 2.8 percent used local, state, or federal employment services. It seems that individuals in the sample were either unaware of, or placed little faith in, the governmental agencies which are now increasingly interested in their problems.

The employed heads of households were for the most part (83.8 percent) satisfied with their present jobs, 11.3 percent felt "so-so" about their jobs, and only 4.9 percent felt their jobs were not very good or couldn't stand them.

In reference to past employment, it was found that more than 80 percent of the employed heads had held two or more jobs prior to obtaining their present jobs. Most of these jobs were low status, characterized by long hours and low wages. There was little or no indication of vertical mobility.

Future Employment and Unemployment—59 percent of the heads were employed and not looking for a job, 10 percent were unemployed and looking for another job, and 3 percent were unemployed but not looking for a job. Of those who were unemployed and not looking for a job, 27 percent were not looking for a job because they were in ill health or disabled, 61 percent because they were retired or too old, and only 2 percent because they were afraid of losing some type of welfare payments.

When the individuals looking for a job were questioned about their experiences, aspirations, and perception of the job market, the following picture emerged. Most of the heads were looking for about the same kinds of jobs that they held or that they had previously held. The heads felt that very few of the jobs they wanted had any special training requirements. It is likely that most of those looking for work were realistic in their appraisal of what type of training they would need since few "low status" jobs require anything but previous experience and/or minimal educational achievement. While a large percentage indicated that they had tried informal means of finding work, almost 30 percent used public employment agencies. The Missouri State Employment Agency was ranked number two in terms of helpfulness in looking for a job. (See Table 4 for ranking.) Perhaps such agencies are becoming more significant as a result of increased expenditures and dissemination of information concerning their services.

Those in the sample tended to feel it would be hard

TABLE 4--RANK OF PLACES USED TO SEEK EMPLOYMENT (FROM "BEST" TO "LEAST HELPFUL" IN LOOKING FOR A JOB).

Place	Rank
Places where I thought jobs might be available	1
Missouri State Employment Service	2
Friends	3
Private Employment Agency	4
Newspapers, Radio, T.V., etc.	5
Union	6
Local Welfare Office	7
School	8

to get a job in their area. This was consistent with the feeling of those who were looking for jobs—that they would not have an easy time finding them. When asked what a better job would mean to him, 84.5 percent of the heads felt it would mean more money and better conditions (shorter hours, less travel distance to and from work, longer vacations). Very few were concerned with equal treatment or more prestige. They seemed to realize that their opportunities for finding power and prestige by means of employment were severely limited. However, their hopes cannot be termed unrealistic since it is quite possible for individuals in "low status" or "unclean" jobs to gain at least a relative degree of material prosperity. However, although these gains may seem large to the individual and may make it possible for him to support his family, they are not, in most cases, sufficient to break down what has been called the "poverty syndrome." Thus the children remain educationally and culturally deprived, often lacking the achievement motivation (with all of its concomitant anxieties) which, rightly or wrongly, is required for "success" or upward mobility.

Job Training—In general, the respondents were neither informed nor enthusiastic about job-training programs. More than 40 percent of the heads said they thought they could get some type of retraining; however, when they

were asked what kinds they thought were available, many named private technical schools and only a small percentage mentioned adult education classes or vocational rehabilitation programs. Only 24 percent had ever thought of taking job training, and very few (less than 5 percent of those looking for jobs) were participating in any program. The heads, especially those with families, were more knowledgeable about youth employment training programs since quite a number of the teenagers in the sample were employed by the Job Corps.

DISCRIMINATION

Only 22 percent of the heads of households admitted that they had been turned down for a job. Of that group, 31 percent felt they had been turned down due to lack of experience or training, 29 percent because they were Negro, 20 percent due to their age, 12 percent because of inadequate education, and 8 percent because they were disabled. Thus, the group perceived (most likely realistically) education or training and race as the most important factors in employment discrimination.

Most of the heads felt that it would not be more difficult for a Negro to get the same job that they held or had held. This, of course, is biased by the large percentage of Negroes in the sample and the problem will be discussed later in the racial breakdown. A little more than 10 percent said they knew of an actual instance of racial discrimination. Over 80 percent felt there is less hiring discrimination now than five years ago. When asked what type of job they thought would give a Negro the best possible chance of equal treatment, a janitor was ranked highest followed closely by mailmen, teachers, doctors, and lawyers. Only a small percentage felt Negroes would have equal chances as salesmen, clerks, or mechanics.

Generally the heads felt women had fairly equal chances for employment. Very few of the heads were aware of any set retirement age for their job. This may reflect the fact that few individuals in the low-income group can look forward to an enjoyable, secure retirement or it may indicate that this group is not very well informed about the formal procedures of their employers.

RACIAL DIFFERENCES

Only those areas in which a significant difference between Negro and white respondents was found to exist,

or in which a similarity is notable, will be discussed in the following presentation.

GENERAL

DEMOGRAPHIC

DATA

The population per household was, as expected, greater for the Negro group (3.6 percent) than for the white (2.7 percent). Surprisingly, the percentage of female heads of households was the same for both groups (33 percent). This is probably due to the higher percentage of people over 65 in the white group. Those over 65 tended to be widows living alone or with another widow on some sort of retirement benefits. Omitting those over 65, the white group was slightly younger than the Negro. About 14 percent of the Negro heads of households were unemployed compared with 11 percent of the whites. More than 32 percent of the whites were retired as were 23 percent of the Negroes.

DETAILED

EMPLOYMENT

DATA

Past and Present Employment—In terms of occupational classification, the percentage of Negroes working as laborers and private household workers was much higher than in the white group. The whites surpassed the Negro group in percentage of professional and managerial workers. Negroes had considerably less formal

training for their jobs than did whites.

Negroes were more likely to have used governmental agencies in locating their present jobs. This is probably due to the fact that they would expect less discrimination from these agencies.

The whites tended to be more satisfied with their jobs than the Negroes.

Future Employment and Unemployment—More Negroes, employed and unemployed, were looking for jobs. The Negroes ranked the Missouri State Employment Service number one, whereas the whites ranked "places I thought jobs might be available" number one. The Negroes were more optimistic about their chances of getting a job than the whites.

Job Training—The Negroes were more informed about, and interested in the Job Corps. Whites responded as if they felt the programs were not designed for them. They were not as eager as were Negroes to take advantage of such programs.

DISCRIMINATION

Negroes were more sensitive to racial prejudice than were whites. They knew of more cases of discriminatory practices. Whites were less likely to say that Negroes would have an equal chance in getting the jobs they held. They were also more likely to feel that Negroes would have equal chances in "low status" jobs such as janitors or mechanics.

INTRA-RACIAL

AND

INTERRACIAL INTERVIEWING

As the project was designed and carried out, steps were taken to make sure that there were significant numbers of cross-racial and intra-racial interviews. In this way it would be possible to discover whether or not racial differences and similarities between respondent and interviewer would have a significant effect on the way in which questions were answered. In terms of this problem, a very basic hypothesis was to be tested. It was thought that interracial interviews would have, in certain selected areas, a significantly different pattern of response than would intra-racial interviews. To make a prelimi-

nary test the interviews were divided into four groups: Negro interviewer-Negro respondent, white interviewer-white respondent, Negro interviewer-white respondent, and white interviewer-Negro respondent. These four groups were compared on certain selected questions dealing with opinions about racial discrimination. The findings were as follows.

Whites were less likely to admit to a Negro interviewer that they had been turned down for a job (17.3 percent) than they were to a white interviewer (25.4 percent). They were also less likely to admit to a Negro

(3.0 percent) than a white (7.1 percent) that they felt they were turned down due to age. Yet they more readily admitted they were turned down because of inadequate education, training or experience to Negroes (6.5 percent) than to whites (3.9 percent). It was speculated that they perhaps feared showing any signs of diminishing strength to Negroes, preferring instead to blame inadequate education. Or perhaps they were in effect saying to the Negro "Look, I suffer from just as many inequalities of opportunities as you do, but I'm not making a fuss over it."

Negroes were more apt to tell Negro interviewers that they felt it was more difficult for a non-white to obtain a job like theirs (23.2 percent) than they were to tell white interviewers (13.6 percent). Whites also were more pessimistic about the question to interviewers of their own race (30.7 percent) than to Negroes (22.1 percent). This seems to show that respondents generally felt more free to express opinions and feelings to members of their own race. This was pointed out when the respondents were asked if they knew personally of any company or person in their area who discriminated in hiring. The Negro respondents answered "yes" 21.8 percent of the time to Negro interviewers but only 14.6 percent of the time to white interviewers.

When asked about the lessening of hiring discrimination in the last five years, 82.4 percent of the Negro-Negro combinations felt there had been a lessening while only 73.6 percent of the white interviewer-Negro respondent group answered in this way. Researchers speculated that Negroes may have failed to express as much optimism to whites as they did to Negroes for fear that if they appeared satisfied, white support for their efforts would fade.

In response to what they would do if they were discriminated against and felt they were qualified, several important differences among the four groups were found. Negroes were much more likely to tell Negroes that they would appeal to CORE or the NAACP (16.0 percent) than they were to tell whites (3.6 percent). In fact, Negroes, when looking for employment, more often used governmental agencies than did the whites. Negroes more often told whites that they would do nothing (40.0 percent) than they did other Negroes (28.1 percent).

Whites, also, told members of their own race they would do nothing (49.3 percent) more than they did Negro interviewers (37.2 percent). Perhaps they were reminded, merely because they were talking with a Negro, that something can be done about discrimination. Respondents had a more emotional response (expressing anger, fear, hostility towards the interviewer) to the question when being interviewed by members of the opposite race (11.8 percent and 12.8 percent) than when interviewed by members of their own race (6.6 percent and 8.4 percent).

Whites responded emotionally (11.2 percent) more often than Negroes (7.2 percent). This emotional response reflects the inherent tension in the situation and perhaps was a way of expressing suppressed racial prejudice.

Finally, whites more often told Negro interviewers that they would just keep trying (24.6 percent) than they did interviewers of their own race (14.3 percent). Researchers speculated that perhaps the whites were more likely to express the traditional WASP values to Negroes in an attempt to show disapproval toward the Negroes' active and vocal demand for equality.

SUMMARY

AND

CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings the following generalizations and analysis have been drawn:

- 1) Low-income groups contain a large percentage of aged individuals. There was a higher percentage of whites over 65 in the sample than there were Negroes. The problem of poverty is more widespread in the Negro population. A significant amount of white poverty is due to a loss of income by the aged population which is to be expected.
- 2) Unemployment among Negro low-income groups is higher than among comparable white groups.
- 3) Low-income groups are relatively realistic in their perception of their skills and the types of jobs they are qualified for. Their views of the job market are also realistic, as are their hopes for getting ahead.
- 4) Low-income groups, either through lack of knowledge or through distrust, are not taking advantage of the employment agencies or job training programs available to them; however, the use of such agencies is increasing. Negroes use both types of agencies more often than do whites.
- 5) In general, members of low-income groups know why they are discriminated against in hiring. Whites are less likely to know any way to combat this discrimination than Negroes.
- 6) The biggest problems concerning the perception of job opportunities among low-income groups which have emerged from this study are lack of information and apathy. This group must be told about the opportunities available and then encouraged and even prodded into taking advantage of them.
- 7) A significant difference in the responses of inter- and intra-racial interview pairs does exist, especially when questions deal with racial matters. Various explanations were offered to account for the findings, all of them are tentative and impressionistic but have provided fruitful leads for continuing research into the problem.