

A nationwide survey conducted for the AFL-CIO and the federation's community affiliate Working America reveals the past 10 years represent a lost decade for young workers—those under 35—in which they not only lost ground financially, they also lost some of the optimism associated with youth.

Released to coincide with Labor Day, the survey of 1,156 people by Peter D. Hart Research Associates examined young workers' economic standing, attitudes and hopes for the future. It also compared their responses to the findings of a similar 1999 study, and with the attitudes of workers older than 35. Eighteen- to 35-year-olds make up a quarter of current union membership nationally.

The full report, "Young Workers: A Lost Decade," is available on the NALC website, linked to this article in *The Postal Record* section under News.

Of course, NALC members who fall in the "young worker" group fare far better than most other workers regardless of age—thanks to the strong contract negotiated by their union. Nonetheless, the results of the survey should be of interest to letter carriers of all ages.

Here are some of the most striking findings and conclusions.

The lost decade

Young workers are having more trouble than ever getting ahead financially. Times are even tougher for young workers of color, workers without college degrees and many women. Compared with older workers, workers younger than 35 are

significantly less likely to be covered by health insurance or have retirement plans at their jobs, and are more likely to be unemployed.

Today, 31 percent of young workers report being uninsured, up from 24 percent 10 years ago, and 79 percent of the uninsured say they don't have coverage because they can't afford it or their employer does not offer it. Only 47 percent have retirement plans at work, down 6 percentage points from 1999.

Some other facts and figures:

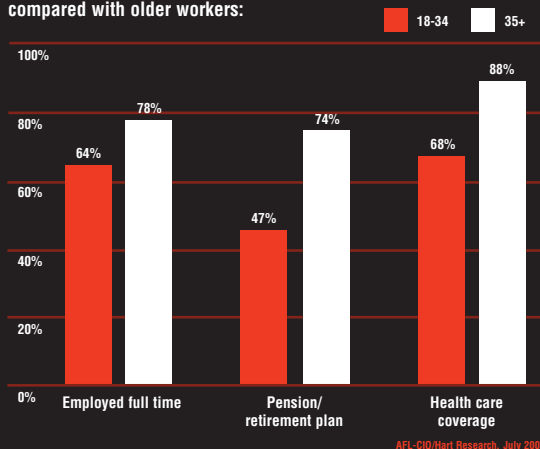
- Only 31 percent say they make enough money to cover their bills and put some money aside—2 percentage points fewer than in 1999—while 24 percent make less than they need just to pay their monthly bills.
- More than one in three young workers worry they will not be able to find a permanent, full-time job with benefits.
- Only 58 percent of young workers receive paid sick days, and only 41 percent are offered paid family leave. One of young workers' top-rated priorities is spending time with their families. But many worry they won't be able to, because time away from work means not getting paid.

This decline in income and benefits no doubt accounts for a significant drop in young workers' optimism over the past decade. Compared with more than 75 percent of young workers in 1999, today just over half say they are more hopeful than worried about their economic future—a 22-point drop.

Adulthood deferred

The survey found that financial constraints are forcing young workers to postpone many of the steps young people traditionally have taken to begin

Percentage of young workers who are employed full-time, receive a pension or retirement plan, or are covered by health insurance compared with older workers:



AFL-CIO/Hart Research, July 2009

their adult lives. One of the most stunning findings of this survey reveals that more than one in three young workers are currently living at home with their parents. That means a lot of older workers are being affected by the plight of younger ones in ways they didn't anticipate.

Nearly two in five young workers have had to delay further education or professional development due to financial worries. At the same time, one in five say they are over-qualified for their current jobs and 22 percent are working outside their chosen field.

While all young workers lost ground over the past decade, low-income workers have been hit hardest. And this problem does not affect just a few: More than half of young workers earn less than \$30,000. The findings about this group are especially disturbing:

- A third of low-income workers cannot pay their monthly bills, and seven in 10 do not have enough saved to cover two months' of living expenses. They are also just as likely to live with parents as to live on their own.
- Forty-four percent do not have health insurance and only 27 percent have pension or retirement plans from their jobs. (Many do not have any retirement savings at all.) Less than half have paid sick leave, compared with more than 75 percent of workers with incomes over \$30,000.

Politics and policy

Despite all the negative factors — or perhaps because of them — young workers are becoming more politically active and have strong views about public policy. Thirty-five percent say they voted for the first time in 2008, and nearly three-quarters now keep tabs on government and public affairs regularly, even without the hoopla of an election campaign.

Along with job-creation programs, health care and education top the economic agenda for young workers. Facing rising health care and education costs themselves, young people understand that access to education and affordable health care are vital to building a better future for their generation, the next generation and America's overall economy.

In general, young workers' priorities for the nation discredit certain brands of conventional wisdom about what's best for "future generations." For instance, by a 22-point margin, young workers favor expanding public investment over reducing the budget deficit. When asked to rank 16 long-term priorities for Congress and the president, they put conservative economic approaches such as reducing taxes, cutting government spending and easing regulation on business among the five lowest.

Asked who is most responsible for the country's economic woes, close to 50 percent of young workers place the blame on Wall Street and banks or corporate CEOs. And young workers say that, plain and simple, the greed of corporations and CEOs is the factor most to blame for the current financial downturn. ☒

Cost is No. 1 reason young workers don't have health insurance:

Cannot afford health insurance	48%
Employer does not offer health insurance	31%
Choose not to have health insurance	10%
Insurance companies refuse to cover me	4%
Other	13%

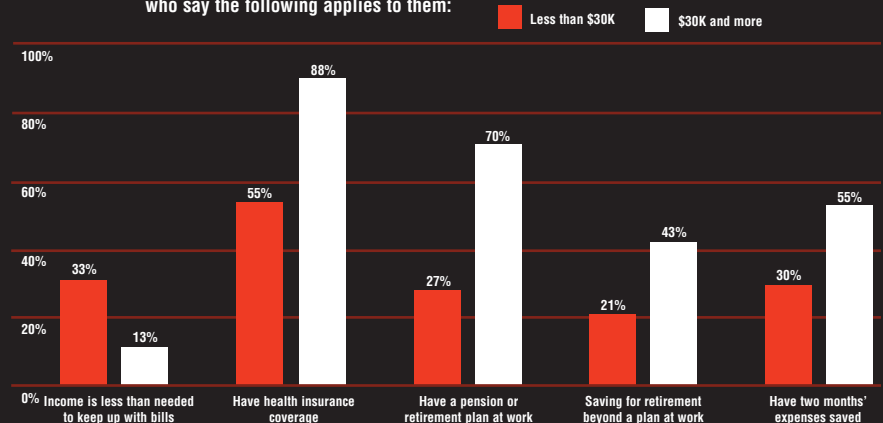
AFL-CIO/Hart Research, July 2009

More than one-third of young workers still live with their parents:

Currently live in parents' home	34%
Men	35%
Women	33%
College	19%
Non-college	41%
\$30K and over	12%
Under \$30K	52%

AFL-CIO/Hart Research, July 2009

Low-income workers are shorted on benefits, too. Percentage of young workers who say the following applies to them:



AFL-CIO/Hart Research, July 2009