

Research and Evaluation Brief

Facts, figures, and insights for workforce development practice and policy

Volume 1, Issue 12
April 2004

Who Gets Training?

REPORT FOCUS

Estimating the Pool of Massachusetts Adults Eligible for WIA Adult Training Programs and their Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Labor Market Characteristics

The Low-Income Adult Population

This brief presents estimates of the pool of adults in the state who are eligible for training compared with those who actually receive it, through Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the primary federal program serving adults. Definitions of poor and low-income range from the federal government's official poverty income definitions to various multiples of the poverty line to combinations of money income and public assistance reciprocity. As such, researchers selected three definitions on which to base estimates.

All of the estimates of the numbers and characteristics of the "low-income" adult population are based on the findings of the March Current Population Surveys (CPS) for the years 2000, 2001, and 2002.

Characteristics

Over the 1999-2001 period, on average, there were 3,676,000 adults 22-65 years old in the civilian, non-institutional, resident population of the state. Of this group, 383,000 or slightly over 10% were members of poor/near-poor families. A somewhat higher total of 468,000, or nearly 13% were categorized as economically disadvantaged, and 739,000, or one of five (20%) had an income below 200% of the poverty line and are classified as low-income individuals.

Increasing the income level used to define "low-income" from 125% of the poverty line to 200% of the poverty line nearly doubles the number of low-income adults in Massachusetts from 383,000 to 739,000, or from 10% to 20% of the adult population.

Gender, Age, Race and Ethnicity

Women constitute a majority (58% to 59%) of the low-income adult population in each of the three low-income categories. The incidence of economically disadvantaged problems among the state's adults also varied by age, and race-ethnic group (See Table 1). Of the state's adult population under 25, 22% were economically disadvantaged versus only 13% of those 25-34 and 10% of those 35-54. Among those 55-65, the incidence of economically

Table 1: Low-Income Definitions

- **Near Poor** Persons 22-65 years old in families with a combined pre-tax income below 125% of the federal poverty line for their family's size and age composition.
- **Economically Disadvantaged** Persons 22-65 years old in a family with either a combined income below 125% of the poverty line or receiving cash public assistance income (TANF, general relief, Supplemental Security Income) or food stamps. This definition is very close to the existing WIA definition.
- **Less than 2x Poverty** A person 22-65 years old living in a family with an income below 200% of the federal poverty line.

Report Released: August 2003

Authors: Andrew Sum, Mykhaylo Trubs'kyy, Paulo Tobar, and Sheila Palma
(Center for Labor Market Studies Northeastern University)

“The least well-educated Massachusetts adults were 10 times more likely to be economically disadvantaged than their counterparts with the most education.”

disadvantaged problems rose to 14%. Nine percent to 10% of the state’s Asian and White, non-Hispanic populations were economically disadvantaged versus 28% of Black, non-Hispanics and 38% of Hispanics. A high share of the state’s Hispanic population in recent years have been immigrants, many of whom arrived in the state over

the past decade with limited formal schooling and English-speaking abilities.

Education and Income Levels

The educational attainment of the state’s adult population had a very strong influence on their likelihood of being economically disadvantaged. Adults lacking a high school diploma or GED certificate were the most likely to be economically disadvantaged. Of those lacking a diploma or GED, 35% were classified as economically disadvantaged versus slightly under 15% of those with a high school diploma/GED certificate, only 6% of those with a Bachelor’s degree, and slightly under 4% of those adults with a Master’s or higher. Thus, the least well educated Massachusetts adults were 10 times more likely to be economically disadvantaged than their counterparts with the most education.

Unemployment and Income

Employed adults were far less likely to be economically disadvantaged than those who were jobless, including both the unemployed and those not actively looking for work. Nearly 38% of the jobless were economically disadvantaged versus only 8% of the employed. A slight majority (55%) of the disadvantaged over the 1999-2001 period was jobless. As the income criteria used to define the “low-income” population is increased, the number of employed classified as “low-income” rises sharply. (See Figure 1.)

The Foreign-born Population

During the past two decades, foreign immigration was the driving force behind population growth in the state. The foreign-born in Massachusetts account for a disproportionate share of the economically disadvantaged population. Over the 1999-2001 period, the foreign-born represented 17% of the state’s 22-65 year old population, but they accounted for nearly 29% of the adult economically disadvantaged. The younger ages of new immigrants and their more limited English-speaking abilities reduce their earnings potential in their early years after arriving in the U.S. Past research has shown that the employment status and annual earnings of immigrant men and women are strongly linked to their educational attainment and English-speaking proficiencies.

Program Participant Characteristics

The first part of this brief examined the eligible population, now we look at the population of actual participants. WIA Title I adult programs are heavily targeted to adults from low-income families. In recent years, nearly 3 of every 4 adults who participated in a WIA Title I adult employment and training program in our state were classified as “low-income.” Findings are based upon the Workforce Investment Act Standard Record Data System (WIASRD) for the 2001 Program Year (PY01).

Women accounted for a substantial majority (76%) of the terminees from WIA adult Title I programs in the state during PY01. Slightly more than 3 in 4 terminees were women, a ratio well above the 57% share prevailing nationwide. In fact, during PY01, the female share of WIA adult terminees in Massachusetts was second highest in the nation, exceeded only by Delaware.

Nearly one-fourth of the terminees were under the age of 25, and a majority (55%) were under the age of 35. Relatively few of the adult participants were 55 or older, with only 6% of all terminees in this age group, and only 12 terminees (0.7%) over the age of 65. One-half of all



*Center for
Research and
Evaluation*

terminees were White, non-Hispanic. Hispanics were well-represented among this group of terminees, accounting for 31%, followed by Blacks (15%), and Asians (3%).

A strong majority (61%) of the adult terminees were

high school graduates/GED holders, with no post-secondary schooling. High school and primary school dropouts accounted for just under 22% of the terminees, and persons with some post-secondary schooling repre-

sented the remaining 17%. There were 119 terminees who held a Bachelor's or higher degree, accounting for nearly 7% of all terminees from WIA Title I adult programs in the state. A substantial majority, 82%, of the adult terminees were not employed at the time of their application for program services. The working poor are heavily under-represented in these programs in our state.

To compare the demographic/socioeconomic distribution of WIA Title I adult program terminees to that of the overall economically disadvantaged adult population of the state, researchers estimated the percent of economically disadvantaged adults in subgroups and compared these percentages to those for Title I WIA adult program terminees in the state during PY01.

Findings reveal that adult women are clearly over-represented in WIA adult programs while men are substantially under-represented. There are several key factors likely underlying these large gender differences: more disadvantaged men are employed, and WIA does not do a good job in recruiting the working poor into its programs. Many more disadvantaged women are public assistance recipients especially TANF, and program operators have had stronger ties to the welfare population. The weak

Table 2: Comparison of the Demographic/Socioeconomic Composition of the Economically Disadvantaged Population in Massachusetts and the WIA Title I Adult Terminees (Numbers in Percent)

Economically Disadvantaged Adults by Age and Race-Ethnic Group, 1999-2001			
Group	A Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged	B Percentage of Title I WIA Adult Terminees	C Ratio of B/A
Gender			
Female	57.9	76.0	1.31
Male	42.1	24.0	0.57
Age Group (1)			
<25	11.4	23.0	2.02
25-34	25.3	31.7	1.25
35-44	23.6	25.0	1.06
45-54	19.8	14.3	0.72
55-65	19.8	5.2	0.26
Race/Ethnic Group			
Asian	2.5	3.1	1.24
Black, Not Hispanic	13.5	15.4	1.14
Hispanic	20.1	30.9	1.53
White, Not Hispanic	63.9	50.0	0.78
Educational Attainment			
High School dropout	30.8	21.5	0.70
High School graduate, no college or GED	34.4	61.4	1.78
One or more years college	34.8	17.1	0.49
Employment Status			
Employed	45.1	18.0	0.40
Not Employed	54.9	82.0	1.49

For more information, contact
 Johan Uvin,
 juvin@commcorp.org.
 Please visit the Center for
 Research and Evaluation's
 web site at
 www.commcorp.org/wss/re
 for additional workforce
 development findings.

representation of men in these programs should be viewed as disturbing by state policymakers, particularly given the findings of a recent long term evaluation study of adult training programs in Massachusetts undertaken for Commonwealth Corporation that revealed that men enrolled in occupational training programs received large earnings gains from their participation. These findings suggest an under-investment in disadvantaged male training.

The youngest members of the economically disadvantaged population (those under 25) were the most over-represented in the WIA adult training system. Many of these individuals were welfare recipients. Adults 25-34 also were over-represented while 35-44 year olds were represented in WIA programs at a share approximately equal to that of their share of the disadvantaged adult population. Disadvantaged persons 55-64 were substantially under-represented in WIA programs. Given

the high risk of long-term poverty and dependency among this group and their growing numbers over the coming decade, greater attention to their employment and training needs may be called for.

Each of the three race-ethnic minority groups were over-represented in WIA Title I programs, with Hispanics being the most over-represented (a ratio of 1.53). A high fraction of the Hispanics and Asians were likely immigrants, given the fact that nearly 13% of Title I participants were classified as limited English-speaking at the time of their entry into the program, nearly double the national average for this variable. White, non-Hispanics were under-represented in WIA Title I programs, partly reflecting their older ages and lower dependence on public assistance programs.

High school graduates were substantially over-represented in WIA Title I programs (a ratio of 1.78) while high school dropouts and those with one or more years of post-secondary schooling were under-represented. Only 21% of all adult terminees in PY01 were high school or primary school dropouts even though they represented 31% of the disadvantaged adult population of the state during 1999-2001. Similar problems prevail nationally, with only 18% of terminees being dropouts. Finally, the employed members of the disadvantaged were substantially under-represented in WIA Title I programs in PY01. The working poor are substantially under-represented in WIA programs while the jobless and dependent poor are over-represented. It is not clear whether the observed service patterns under Title I WIA adult programs are the result of explicit policy choices or whether they are due to problems in more actively recruiting males, older adults, high school dropouts, and the working poor. More field-based research on this issue seems to be called for.

Figure 1: Number of Employed 22-65 Year Old Adults in Massachusetts in Selected Low-Income Categories, 1999-2001 Averages (in 1000s)

