1998

Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998

Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR)
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Introduction

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 is the fifth in a series of studies conducted by the Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The purpose of the Omaha Conditions Survey is to produce and disseminate quality information about issues of importance to the community. The 1998 survey focused on measuring detailed characteristics of the local labor force. This information is intended to help members of the community address issues related to labor availability and employment needs.

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 was conducted through telephone interviews with persons 19 years and older from a random sample of area households. The survey sample consists of 1,200 completed interviews conducted between May 7 and July 13, 1998. Some survey questions pertained only to the respondents. Other questions pertained to all persons in the household age 16 years and older. Thus the sample contains some data for not only the 1,200 actual respondents but also for another 1,006 persons living in those households (2,206 total persons). A detailed description of the survey methodology appears on page 20.

Geographic Area

The Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) currently consists of Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, and Cass counties in Nebraska along with Pottawattamie County, Iowa. Survey findings presented in this report are based on the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 metropolitan sample that represents persons living in households within this five-county area. Within Douglas County, findings are presented for three sub-areas: North Omaha, South Omaha, and Balance of Douglas County. The North Omaha area is defined as ZIP codes 68102, 68110, 68111, and 68131. The South Omaha area is composed of ZIP codes 68105, 68107, and 68108. Balance of Douglas County includes all county residents outside these seven ZIP codes areas.

Labor Force Concepts

Analysis of the area's labor force begins with the classification of each person 16 years and older into one of three groups:

- Employed
- Unemployed
- Not in labor force

Employed persons are those who worked at least one hour for pay or profit during a given reference week. Also included are persons who worked at least fifteen hours without pay in a family farm or business as well as those temporarily absent from work because of vacation or illness. Persons not employed who were on temporary layoff, waiting to begin a new job, or actively looking and available for work are *unemployed*. Persons neither employed nor unemployed are *not in labor force*. This latter group consists mainly of retired persons, homemakers, and students.

Employed and unemployed persons together compose the area *labor force*. The *labor force participation rate* is the percentage of all persons 16 years and older in the labor force. The *unemployment rate* is the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed.

Population Estimates

According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimate (1997), 521,425 persons aged 16 and older reside in the five-county Omaha MSA. By applying survey percentages to this figure, we estimate the number of persons who are in the labor force, unemployed, and so on. Population estimates are included throughout this and other Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 reports to give the reader an idea of the approximate size of the labor pool with specific characteristics. The reader is cautioned to note that these are simply approximations, not exact counts.

Omaha's Labor Force: Historical Context

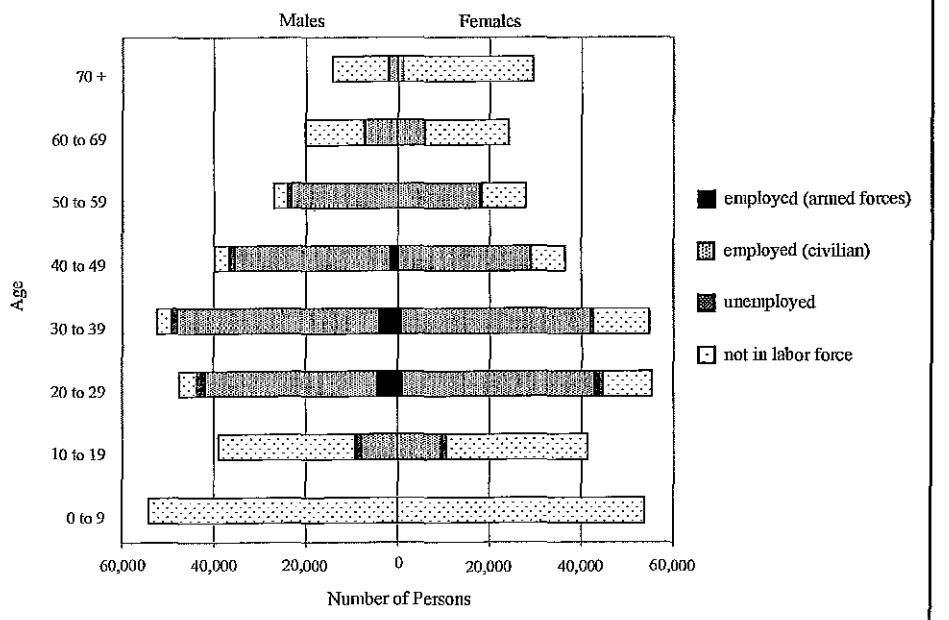
Figure 1 shows the Omaha MSA population distributed by age, sex, and labor force status according to the 1990 Census. Looking at figure 1, we see how demographic trends affect labor availability. Lower birth rates in the 1970s led to a decline of new labor force entrants in the 1990s. This situation should improve somewhat in coming years as the larger 0-to-9 age cohort from 1990 begins to enter the labor force. Figure 1 also illustrates the degree to which labor force participation varies according to sex and age. Not surprisingly, labor force participation is always slightly lower for women than for men. It is also lower among the oldest and youngest age groups.

For several years, the Omaha MSA has enjoyed an unusually high labor force participation rate and an unusually low unemployment rate. According to the 1990 Census, Omaha's labor force participation rate of 71.5 percent ranked twenty-third among the 284 metropolitan areas then defined throughout the nation. The 1990 Census also showed Omaha with a 4.0 percent unemployment rate, ranking 264th among the same 284 areas. More recently (June 1998), the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Omaha's unemployment rate at 2.1 percent, ranking 324th among 335 metropolitan areas nationally.

Omaha's labor force has grown faster than its population in recent years. Between 1990 and 1997, the labor force grew by 49,134 persons (14.7 percent). Omaha's working-age population—persons 16 years and over—grew only 40,771 persons (8.5 percent) over the same period.

Work force statistics provide another measure of area employment growth. Whereas the labor force is an estimate of employed and unemployed persons by place of residence, the work force is an estimate of the number of persons in non-farm wage and salary jobs based on employer records. Since 1990, Omaha's work force has grown even faster than its labor force—67,749

Figure 1. Population by Labor Force Status, Age, and Sex, Omaha MSA, 1990



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census
Calculations by: UNO Center for Public Affairs Research

persons or 20.5 percent. Figure 2 compares growth of the Omaha MSA's population age 16 and over, labor force, and work force from 1990 to 1997.

Labor availability is a concern for the Omaha area as evidenced by its high labor force participation, low unemployment, and rapid growth of the labor force and work force relative to population. Efforts to address the need for labor can focus on two areas. First, what can be done to more fully employ the area's existing population? Second, what can be done to increase the area's population?

Efforts to more fully employ the existing population would include:

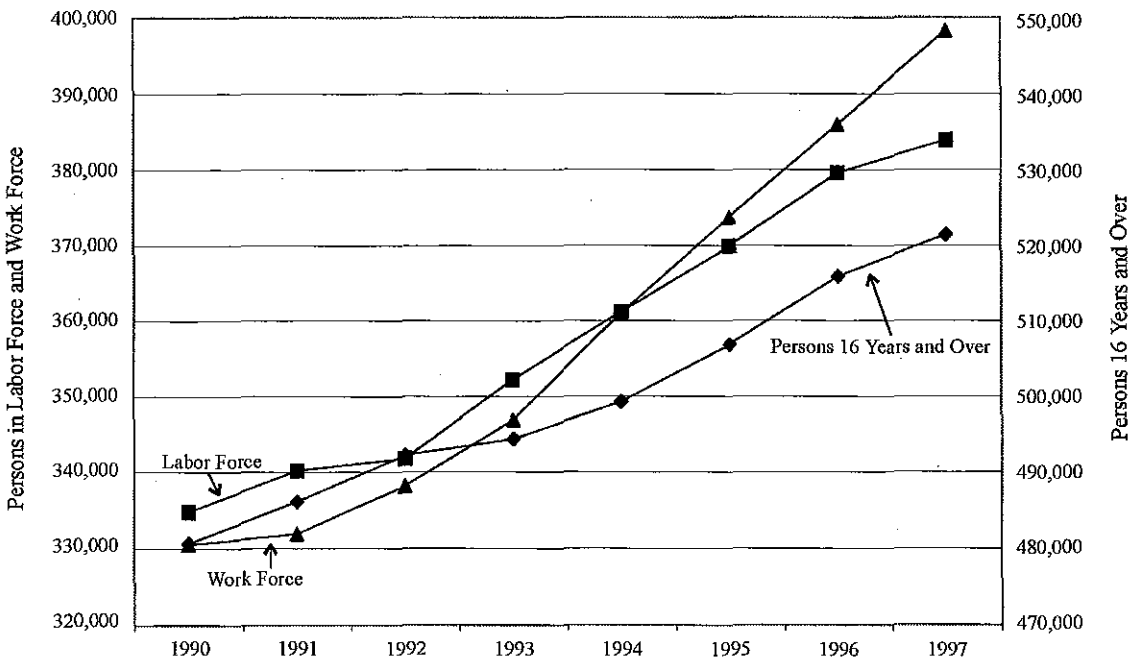
- Bringing more persons into the labor force
- Reducing unemployment
- Creating more hours for the under employed
- Creating better jobs for underemployed

Efforts to increase the population would include:

- Encouraging people to move into the area
- Encouraging people not to move out of the area

The survey findings that follow address issues related to more fully employing the existing population. A later report will address issues related to increasing the population.

Figure 2. Population Age 16 Years and Over, Labor Force, and Work Force, Omaha MSA, 1990-97



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Nebraska Department of Labor

Labor Force Profile

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau estimate (1997), 521,425 persons age 16 years and older lived in the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). This chapter profiles the labor force status of those individuals. Information presented is based on the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 sample of 2,206 persons.

Labor Force Participation and Discouraged Workers

One strategy for more fully employing the existing population would be to encourage more persons to enter the labor force. As indicated earlier, the Omaha MSA reported one of the highest labor force participation rates in the nation according to the 1990 Census. The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 measured a labor force participation rate of 77.1 percent—nearly ten percentage points higher than the national average. This works out to an estimated 402,019 persons in the labor force and an estimated 119,406 persons not in the labor force. (See table 1.)

Persons choose to remain outside the labor force (neither working for pay or profit nor looking for work) for a variety of reasons. They may be retired or disabled, they may have family or home responsibilities, or they may be in school. A small proportion of persons not in the labor force may be "discouraged workers." These are persons who want jobs but are not actively looking for work because they believe no suitable jobs are available to them. The survey included questions to identify any such individuals. Persons who were not in the labor force but wanted a job, were available for work, and had looked for work within the last six months were counted as discouraged workers. Of those individuals not in the labor force, about one in one hundred (0.9 percent) met the criteria for discouraged workers. This is equivalent to an estimated 1,075 persons total in the Omaha MSA.

The small number of discouraged workers coupled with the already unusually high labor force participation rate suggests that, in general, efforts to bring more local people into the labor force would not lead to a significant number of new workers. At the same time, however, there may be some small groups of individuals that could be successfully added to the local labor force. This possibility will be discussed in a future report.

As one would expect, the survey found labor force participation to vary by sex and age. The labor force participation rate for males was 83.1 percent. For females, it was 71.7 percent. Over 90 percent of persons between the ages of 16 and 49 were in the labor force, and about three-fourths of the persons age 50 to 64 were in the labor force. Only about one out of six persons age 65 and over were in the labor force.

Differences in labor force participation by race were not statistically significant.

Labor force participation was lower for persons with a high school education or less. This is easily understood since such persons for the most part are in the youngest or oldest age groups (still in school or retired). Labor force participation also varied by area. Washington and Sarpy counties had the highest rates of labor force participation (85.0 and 84.0

Key Findings

- Over three out of four persons age 16 years and older (77.1 percent) were participating in the labor force, either working or looking for work. This is nearly ten percentage points higher than the national average.
- The overall unemployment rate, as measured by the survey, was 3.3 percent. This represents approximately 13,267 persons. The unemployment rate was substantially higher for persons age 16 to 24 than for persons 25 years and older. Likewise, the unemployment rate was higher for African-Americans (7.2 percent) and Hispanics (6.0 percent).
- About one out of twenty employed persons (5.1 percent) worked only part-time and wanted to work five or more additional hours per week. This form of underemployment (in terms of hours) affects an estimated 19,826 persons.
- About one out of six employed persons (17.9 percent) was reported to have had to settle for a job that he or she was overqualified for because nothing better was available. This form of underemployment (in terms of job quality) affects an estimated 69,587 persons.
- Overall, 21.6 percent of the employed (about 83,970 persons) were under employed in terms of either hours or job quality. The rate of underemployment was higher among young persons as well as among non-whites and Hispanics.
- A small fraction of persons not in the labor force (0.9 percent) were discouraged workers, persons who report wanting jobs although they are not actively looking. This represents about 1,075 persons.

Table 1. Labor Force Status, Participation Rate, and Unemployment Rate, Omaha MSA

Persons 16 years and older	521,425
Labor Force	402,019
Employed	388,752
Underemployed (hours)	19,826
Underemployed (quality)	69,587
Underemployed (either hours or quality)	83,970
Other Employed	304,782
Unemployed	13,267
Not in Labor Force	119,406
Discouraged Workers	1,075
Other Not in Labor Force	118,332
Labor Force Participation Rate (percent)	77.1
Unemployment Rate (percent)	3.3

Source: Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998
Number of persons based on estimated population age 16 and older from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1997).

percent respectively), and Cass County had the lowest rate (65.3 percent). Labor force participation rates by sex, age, race, education, and area are summarized in table 2. Percentages shown in bold indicate the differences across categories are statistically significant ($p<.05$). The survey did not find enough discouraged workers to allow for analysis of these persons by sub-groups.

Unemployment

Another strategy for more fully employing the existing population would be to reduce the number of unemployed.

The survey unemployment rate was 3.3 percent. Based on the survey unemployment rate, an estimated 13,267 persons were unemployed (table 1). This was slightly higher than the Nebraska Department of Labor's official June 1998 unemployment rate (2.1 percent), but it was still below the national average.

Although Omaha's unemployment rate is low overall compared to many cities, the survey found relatively high levels of unemployment among the area's young as well as among the minority community. The most striking disparity in unemployment was across age groups. The survey measured unemployment at 12.4 percent for persons age 16 to 24; unemployment was below two percent for all age groups above 25 years. Unemployment was higher for African-American (7.2 percent) and Hispanic (6.0 percent) persons than for white, non-Hispanic persons (2.9 percent) and those of other races (3.0 percent). The unemployment rate for women was slightly higher than the unemployment rate for men (4.2 percent versus 2.3 percent). The unemployment rate was substantially higher for persons with less than a high school education, but this was because most of those persons are in the youngest age group. Looking at areas, the highest unemployment rates were in Douglas County east of 45th Street. The North Omaha unemployment rate was 6.2 percent, and the South Omaha unemployment rate was 6.1 percent. (The difference between the two areas is not statistically significant.) The unemployment rate for the balance of Douglas County was 3.2 percent. Other counties had unemployment rates of two percent or less. Differences in unemployment by sex, age, race, education, and area are summarized in table 2.

Underemployment: General Discussion

Yet another strategy for more fully employing the existing population would be to focus on reducing underemployment, that is, better utilizing those persons who are already employed.

Underemployed persons are those who are willing and able to work longer hours or at higher skill levels than their current jobs allow. An example might be a person who wants to work full time but can only find part-time employment. Another example might be a computer programmer driving a taxi. The concept of underemployment, then, has two dimensions: (1) not enough hours available (quantitative), and (2) a mismatch between the skills of the labor force and available jobs which leads some persons to accept employment that does not fully use their talents (qualitative). Persons may be underemployed in terms of hours only, job quality only, or both.

Table 2. Rates of Labor Force Participation, Unemployment, and Underemployment by Selected Population Characteristics and Area, Omaha MSA

	Labor Force Participation Rate (percent of persons 16 years and over)	Unemployment Rate (percent of labor force)	Underemployment rate (percent of employed)		
			(hours)	(quality)	(either hours or quality)
All persons	77.1	3.3	5.1	17.9	21.6
Sex					
Male	**83.1**	**2.3**	4.1	17.7	21.3
Female	**71.7**	**4.2**	6.3	18.1	22.0
Age					
16 to 24	**95.4**	**12.4**	**16.0**	**23.0**	**33.8**
25 to 34	**91.6**	**0.9**	**4.4**	**20.5**	**23.8**
35 to 49	**91.3**	**1.7**	**2.5**	**16.4**	**18.1**
50 to 64	**75.6**	**1.6**	**2.7**	**15.7**	**18.0**
65 and over	**16.0**	**0.0**	**6.5**	**9.4**	**15.2**
Race					
Hispanic	83.3	**6.0**	7.1	**33.3**	**36.4**
White, not Hispanic	77.3	**2.9**	5.1	**16.4**	**20.1**
African-American	75.8	**7.2**	4.7	**27.8**	**31.5**
Other	63.5	**3.0**	3.3	**25.8**	**26.7**
Education					
Less than high school	**65.7**	**14.8**	**18.7**	16.8	**31.2**
High school or GED	**71.9**	**3.9**	**4.6**	18.4	**22.1**
Some college, but no degree	**81.4**	**2.6**	**5.3**	21.3	**24.2**
Associate degree	**79.1**	**0.7**	**5.4**	17.8	**22.3**
Bachelor's degree	**82.6**	**0.9**	**2.7**	16.7	**18.0**
Advanced degree	**83.0**	**2.3**	**2.3**	14.7	**17.0**
Area					
North Omaha	**74.2**	**6.2**	**5.2**	**29.9**	**33.5**
South Omaha	**70.2**	**6.1**	**6.1**	**22.9**	**25.3**
Balance of Douglas County	**78.8**	**3.2**	**3.6**	**15.0**	**17.9**
Sarpy County	**84.0**	**2.0**	**8.7**	**18.4**	**24.3**
Pottawattamie County	**72.4**	**1.0**	**5.6**	**16.2**	**21.2**
Cass County	**65.3**	**2.0**	**0.0**	**15.6**	**15.9**
Washington County	**85.0**	**2.0**	**6.1**	**8.0**	**12.5**

Differences across categories shown in bold are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Neither the federal nor the state government produces any official statistics on underemployment. The reason is that it is difficult to come up with an objective set of criteria for measuring underemployment, particularly the qualitative dimension. For example, how does one distinguish between the computer programmer who drives a taxi because there are no computer jobs available and the computer programmer who for whatever reason decides he would rather drive a taxi than program computers? To distinguish between the two, one would have to question them not only about their background and experience, but also about their work preferences. Government economic surveys tend to avoid questions about preferences, limiting themselves instead to objective questions about behavior.

Despite the lack of an official definition or measure of underemployment, the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 included questions designed to identify persons who might be considered underemployed.

In the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998, persons were counted as being underemployed in terms of hours if they:

- were currently employed, and
- usually worked fewer than 35 hours per week, and
- reported wanting to work at least five hours per week more than the number of hours they usually worked.

Persons were counted as being underemployed in terms of job quality if they were currently employed and answered "yes" to this question: "Sometimes persons have to settle for a job they are overqualified for because nothing better is available. Are you one of those persons?" Admittedly, this is a rather simple way of measuring a complex concept. Nevertheless, it seems sufficient for estimating the number of persons who consider themselves underutilized in their jobs and describing the characteristics of those persons.

Underemployment: Hours

The survey found that 5.1 percent of employed persons in the Omaha MSA were underemployed in terms of hours. This works out to an estimated 19,826 persons (see table 1).

There was no significant difference in the percentage of persons underemployed in terms of hours by sex or race. Persons in the youngest age group (16 to 24 years) were more likely to be underemployed in terms of hours than those in older age groups. Persons with less than a high school education likewise were more likely to be underemployed in terms of hours, no doubt because they also tend to be in the youngest age group. By area, the percentage of persons underemployed in terms of hours was slightly higher among residents of Sarpy County. These differences are summarized in table 2.

Underemployment: Job Quality

About one out of six employed persons in the Omaha MSA (17.9 percent) was identified as being underemployed in terms of job quality. This works out to an estimated 69,587 persons (see table 1).

As was the case with underemployment in terms of hours, there was no significant difference in the percentage of men and women underemployed in terms of job quality.

A larger proportion of younger than older workers reported having to settle for jobs they were overqualified for because nothing better was available. Of workers age 16 to 24, 23.0 percent were underemployed in terms of job quality. For workers age 25 to 34, the figure was 20.5 percent. The proportion declined to 16.4 percent for workers age 35 to 49 and 15.7 percent for workers age 50 to 64. About one in ten (9.4 percent) workers age 65 and older were underemployed in terms of job quality.

The percentage of minority workers underemployed in terms of job quality was higher than the percentage of white, non-Hispanic workers. One-third (33.3 percent) of Hispanic workers reported having to settle for jobs they were overqualified for, as did 27.8 percent of African-American workers and 25.8 percent of other races. Among white, non-Hispanic workers, 16.4 percent were underemployed in terms of job quality.

By area, there were marked differences in percentage of workers underemployed in terms of job quality. Workers residing in the North and South Omaha areas were the most likely to report having to settle for jobs they were overqualified for (29.9 and 22.9 percent respectively). Workers residing in Washington County were the least likely to report being underemployed in terms of job quality (8.0 percent).

Underemployment: Either Hours or Quality

Overall, the survey found that about one out of five workers (21.6 percent) was underemployed in terms of hours, job quality, or both.

The rate of underemployment overall did not vary by sex, but it did vary by age, race, education, and area. In general, underemployment was higher among the younger workers, non-white workers, workers with lower levels of education, and workers residing in North and South Omaha as well as Sarpy County. These findings are summarized in table 2.

Characteristics of the Employed

An estimated 388,752 residents of the Omaha MSA are employed for pay or profit. This chapter describes the characteristics of those individuals—the kinds of work they do, their education levels, and their earnings. Information presented comes from the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 sample of 1,618 employed persons. Included in the employed segment of the labor force described here are persons defined as underemployed as well as persons who are not so defined. A separate report will describe the characteristics of just the underemployed segment of the labor force.

Table 3 summarizes selected characteristics of employed persons living in the Omaha MSA.

Multiple-job Holders

People hold more than one job for a variety of reasons. Some are unable to find suitable full-time work and instead take two or more part-time jobs. Persons with full-time jobs may take second jobs to supplement their incomes. Others—students, for example—prefer the scheduling flexibility that comes from holding several part-time jobs. Still others might operate their own business in addition to working for someone else.

About one out of ten employed persons (11.1 percent) held more than one job. This works out to about 43,151 persons. Nearly all multiple-job holders (89.3 percent) held two jobs; the remainder held three or four jobs.

There was no statistically significant difference in the percentage of workers holding more than one job by sex, age, education, or area. By race, Hispanic workers were slightly less likely than average to hold multiple jobs; workers in the "other race" category (largely Asian and American Indian) were more likely than average to hold more than one job (see table 4).

Self-employed Workers

As with multiple-job holders, about one in ten employed persons (11.3 percent) was self-employed. An estimated 43,929 workers fall into this category.

The percentage of self-employed workers did not vary significantly by sex, race, or education. By age, older workers were more likely to be self-employed than younger workers. By area, workers living in Washington County were most likely to be self-employed and workers living in Sarpy County were least likely to be self-employed (see table 4).

Workers in Temporary Jobs

For only those persons who were employed by others, the survey asked whether they were hired as temporary employees or as permanent employees. This can be a difficult concept to measure accurately because respondents will sometimes reply "temporary" because they plan to quit the job, not because the employer hired them only for a predetermined period of time. With that caution in mind, 8.8 percent reported being hired as a temporary employee. Approximately 30,344 persons fall into this category.

There was no significant difference in the percentage of temporary workers by sex, race, or area. By age, the rate was substantially higher among the youngest and oldest age groups. Among workers (other than self-employed) age 16 to 24, 24.9 percent were temporary employees; the equivalent figure for those age 65 and over was 22.0 percent. For the middle age groups between 25 and 64 years, the figure was between 4.0 and 6.7 percent.

Key Findings

- About one out of ten employed persons (11.1 percent) held more than one job. Likewise, 11.3 percent of employed persons were self-employed.
- Of those employed, 15.1 percent worked part-time. This represents about 58,702 persons.
- Close to one-third of the employed had a bachelor's (21.4 percent) or advanced degree (10.7 percent). A similar proportion had some college, but no degree (23.1 percent) or an associate degree (8.4 percent).
- Employed persons had median annual earnings of $26,937.
- About one out of twenty employed persons (5.6 percent) were reported to be working for minimum wage ($5.15 per hour).

By education, the percentage was highest among those who had not finished high school (largely young persons). It was also slightly higher among persons who had completed some college but had no degree (see table 4).

Years with Current Employer

To gauge labor turnover, the survey asked employed respondents how long they had worked for their current employer. Nearly one-third (30.1 percent) reported ten or more years. At the other extreme, 10.4 percent reported working for their current employer less than a year. A summary appears in table 3.

Part-time Workers

Part-time work is defined as fewer than 35 hours per week. Of those who were employed, 15.1 percent worked part-time. This is equivalent to an estimated 58,702 persons.

The percentage of employed persons working only part-time did not vary significantly by race or area. Not surprisingly, twice the proportion of women as men worked part-time (21.2 percent of women, 9.2 percent of men).

By age, part-time workers were most prevalent among the oldest and youngest age groups; 45.7 percent of workers 65 and older worked part-time as did 34.4 percent of workers ages 16 to 24. In contrast, the percentage of workers in the middle age groups (25 to 64 years) employed part-time ranged from 8.7 to 12.6 percent. Persons with less than a high school education were much more likely than others to be working only part-time, but again many of these are young persons still in school (see table 4).

Table 3. Characteristics of the Employed, Omaha MSA

	Number	Percent
Total persons	388,752	100.0
Holding more than one job	43,151	11.1
Holding one job only	345,601	88.9
Self-employed	43,929	11.3
Working for someone else	344,823	88.7
Hired as temporary employee	30,344	8.8
Hired as permanent employee	314,479	91.2
Years with current employer		
Less than 1 year	35,813	10.4
1-2 years	78,819	22.9
3-4 years	53,245	15.4
5-9 years	73,286	21.3
10 or more years	103,659	30.1
Working part-time (fewer than 35 hours per week)	58,702	15.1
Working full-time (35 or more hours per week)	330,050	84.9
Education		
Less than high school	23,745	6.1
High school graduate or GED	118,035	30.4
Some college, but no degree	89,647	23.1
Associate (2-year) degree	32,565	8.4
Bachelor's (4-year) degree	83,147	21.4
Advanced degree	41,612	10.7

(Continued on next page)

Table 3. Characteristics of the Employed, continued

	Number	Percent
Industry		
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	3,888	1.0
Construction	21,381	5.5
Manufacturing	36,543	9.4
Transportation, communications, and utilities	25,269	6.5
Trade	68,032	17.5
Finance, insurance, and real estate	35,765	9.2
Services	133,342	34.3
Government	64,533	16.6
Occupation		
Executive, administrative, and managerial	59,090	15.2
Professional specialty	66,088	17.0
Technicians	19,049	4.9
Sales	42,374	10.9
Administrative support and clerical	78,917	20.3
Private household	1,944	0.5
Protective service	4,665	1.2
Service except private household and protective	34,210	8.8
Farming, forestry, and fishing	7,775	2.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	34,599	8.9
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	12,440	3.2
Transportation and material moving	15,550	4.0
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	6,998	1.8
Unique military	5,054	1.3
Annual Earnings (all jobs)		
Under $10,000	50,538	13.0
$10,000 to 15,999	45,484	11.7
$16,000 to 19,999	36,543	9.4
$20,000 to 21,999	25,658	6.6
$22,000 to 25,999	24,491	6.3
$26,000 to 27,999	24,880	6.4
$28,000 to 31,999	38,486	9.9
$32,000 to 39,999	52,482	13.5
$40,000 to 49,999	40,819	10.5
$50,000 to $59,999	16,716	4.3
$60,000 or more	32,655	8.4
Workers in Minimum Wage Jobs		
Holding more than one job, at least one of which is minimum wage	4,658	1.2
Holding one job only, minimum wage	17,292	4.4
Holding more than one job, all of which are for more than minimum wage	38,493	10.0
Holding one job only, more than minimum wage	328,308	84.4

Education

Close to one-third of the Omaha MSA's employed labor force had a bachelor's (21.4 percent) or advanced degree (10.7 percent). A similar proportion had some college, but no degree (23.1 percent) or an associate degree (8.4 percent). Just over one-third had a high school diploma or GED only (30.4 percent) or less than a high school education (6.1 percent). Many in this latter group were young persons still in school. Table 3 shows the approximate number of employed persons in each of these categories.

Industry

The survey recorded a description of the primary activity of each person's employer or business. Each employed person was then categorized into a major industry based on that description. This differs from the approach used by the Nebraska Department of Labor to compile the area's monthly work force statistics by industry. The work force statistics are based on an employer survey of persons on non-farm wage and salary payrolls. Consequently, some persons (farmers, for example) are excluded, and multiple-job holders are counted each time they show up on a payroll. In contrast, the figures presented here are based on a household survey where nobody is excluded and each person is counted only once. (Multiple-job holders were classified into the industry of the one job in which they worked the most hours.)

About one-third of the Omaha MSA's employed labor force (34.3 percent) worked in the services industry. Other industries employing large proportions of workers were trade (17.5 percent) and government (16.6 percent). Included in the government category were members of the military stationed at Offutt Air Force Base as well as persons employed by government-operated utilities and hospitals such as the University of Nebraska Medical Center. The complete distribution of employed persons by industry, along with estimated population counts, appears in table 3.

Occupation

The survey also recorded a short description of each person's primary job duties. From these, each person was categorized into a major occupational group. Multiple-job holders were categorized on the basis of the one job in which they worked the most hours. Occupational groups employing large proportions of Omaha workers were administrative support and clerical (20.3 percent), professional specialty (17.0 percent), and executive, administrative, and managerial (15.2 percent). The complete distribution of employed persons by occupation, along with estimated population counts, appears in table 3.

Annual Earnings

The median annual earnings of employed persons was $26,937. Table 3 shows the complete earnings distribution and estimated population counts for employed persons in the Omaha MSA. The reader should note that the earnings categories in table 1 are not all the same size. Instead, the middle category ranges alternate between $4,000 and $2,000. The survey was designed this way intentionally to facilitate analysis of questions regarding the respondent's willingness to apply for hypothetical jobs at selected wage rates. That analysis will be part of a future report.

Workers in Minimum Wage Jobs

The survey found that about one out of twenty employed persons in the Omaha MSA works for minimum wage ($5.15 per hour). Of all employed persons in the Omaha MSA, 1.2 percent hold more than one job, at least one of which is a minimum-wage job. Another 4.4 percent hold one job only and work for minimum wage. Ten percent hold more than one job, all of which are for more than minimum wage, and 84.4 percent hold one job only for more than minimum wage. Estimated population counts for each category are shown in table 3.

Table 4. Percentage of Multiple-job Holders, Self-employed, Temporary Employees, and Part-time Workers Among the Employed by Selected Population Characteristics and Area, Omaha MSA

	Multiple-job holders (percent of employed)	Self-employed (percent of employed)	Temporary employees (percent of employed working for someone else)	Part-time workers (percent of employed)
All persons	11.1	11.3	8.8	15.1
Sex				
Male	11.3	12.6	8.3	**9.2**
Female	10.8	10.0	9.3	**21.2**
Age				
16 to 24	11.0	**4.0**	**24.9**	**34.4**
25 to 34	12.6	**5.8**	**6.7**	**12.6**
35 to 49	10.5	**12.8**	**4.3**	**8.7**
50 to 64	10.8	**18.3**	**4.0**	**9.6**
65 and over	13.0	**23.6**	**22.0**	**45.7**
Race				
Hispanic	**2.1**	8.5	4.7	7.1
White, not Hispanic	**11.0**	12.0	8.9	15.2
African-American	**12.9**	7.8	7.6	13.8
Other	**21.9**	3.1	12.9	25.0
Education				
Less than high school	8.2	7.2	**23.6**	**43.6**
High school or GED	10.3	12.2	**6.8**	**11.3**
Some college, but no degree	13.0	11.4	**12.3**	**17.4**
Associate degree	13.3	12.6	**6.8**	**15.2**
Bachelor's degree	10.8	10.8	**6.6**	**14.2**
Advanced degree	10.5	12.8	**4.0**	**7.0**
Area				
North Omaha	14.4	**10.2**	9.4	11.5
South Omaha	9.4	**8.2**	7.7	9.8
Balance of Douglas County	11.7	**12.4**	8.3	16.3
Sarpy County	11.4	**6.8**	9.9	18.6
Pottawattamie County	10.3	**14.9**	10.3	14.4
Cass County	4.2	**14.6**	12.2	11.1
Washington County	6.0	**18.0**	7.3	12.5

Differences across categories shown in bold are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Characteristics of the Underemployed

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 found that about one out of five workers (21.6 percent, or about 83,970 persons) in the Omaha MSA were underemployed in terms of hours, job quality, or both. This chapter describes the characteristics of underemployed residents of the Omaha MSA. In addition, significant differences between the underemployed and workers not underemployed ("other employed") are noted. Information presented comes from the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 sample of 340 underemployed persons.

Table 5 summarizes selected characteristics of underemployed persons living in the Omaha MSA.

Multiple-job Holders

People hold more than one job for a variety of reasons. Some are unable to find suitable full-time work and instead take two part-time jobs. Persons with full-time jobs make take second jobs to supplement their incomes. Others—students for example—prefer the scheduling flexibility that comes from holding several part-time jobs. Still others might operate their own business in addition to working for someone else.

About one out of ten underemployed persons (12.8 percent) held more than one job. This compares to 10.5 percent of the other employed. The slight difference in the percentage of underemployed and other employed persons who held more than one job was not statistically significant.

Self-employed Workers

As with multiple-job holders, about one in ten underemployed persons (8.2 percent) was self-employed. This is not significantly different than the 11.2 percent measured for the other employed.

Workers in Temporary Jobs

For only those persons who were not self-employed, the survey asked whether they were hired as a temporary employee or as a permanent employee. This can be a difficult concept to measure accurately because respondents will sometimes reply "temporary" because they plan to quit the job, not because the employer hired them only for a predetermined period of time. With that caution in mind, the survey found that underemployed persons were more likely than other employed persons to be in temporary jobs. Of the underemployed, 13.4 percent (roughly 18,133 persons) reported being hired as a temporary employee. This was significantly higher than the percentage of other employed persons in temporary jobs (6.7 percent).

Years with Current Employer

Underemployed persons were much more likely than other employed persons to have been with their employer only a short period of time. Over half the underemployed (54.5 percent) had been with their current employer two years or less. Only about one-fourth of the other employed (27.4 percent) had been with their employer two years or less. Fully one-third (34.3 percent) of the other employed had been with their current employer 10 years or more compared to only 13.8 percent of the underemployed.

Education

Overall, the underemployed tended to be slightly less educated than the other employed. While the difference was statistically significant, in real terms it appears relatively minor. The complete distribution of underemployed persons and other employed persons by education, along with population estimates, appears in table 5.

Key Findings

- Underemployed persons tended to have been with their current employer for a shorter time than other employed persons. Over half the underemployed (54.5 percent) had been with their current employer for two years or less.
- Underemployed persons had median annual earnings of $18,451.
- Close to one out of ten underemployed persons (8.9 percent) worked for minimum wage ($5.15 per hour).
- For persons underemployed in terms of job quality only, the most frequently mentioned obstacles to getting a better job were education (18.1 percent) and age (15.3 percent, the vast majority of whom were in 35 years or older). There was no response for 13.3 percent, and 11.3 percent mentioned lack of jobs and opportunity to advance.

Industry

Underemployed persons were more likely than other employed persons to be working in the services or trade industries. Of the underemployed, 41.0 percent worked in the services sector compared to 31.6 percent of the other employed. Another 23.4 percent of the underemployed worked in trade compared to 15.7 percent of the other employed. See table 5 for the complete distribution by industry together with population estimates.

Occupation

Looking at occupations, underemployed persons were more likely than other employed persons to work in administrative support and clerical, service (except private household and protective), and sales jobs. For a comparison of the distribution of the underemployed and other employed by occupation, see table 5.

Annual Earnings

Underemployed persons had median annual earnings of $18,451 compared to $29,983 for other employed persons. Part of this difference, but not all, is attributable to the higher proportion of part-time workers among the underemployed. (The proportion of part-time workers is higher among the underemployed by definition; persons working part-time who want to work an additional five hours or more per week are counted as underemployed.) Even looking just at persons underemployed in terms of job quality, earnings are lower than for workers not so categorized. Table 5 shows the complete earnings distribution and estimated population counts for underemployed persons (either hours or job quality) as well as for the other employed.

Workers in Minimum Wage Jobs

The survey found that close to one out of ten underemployed persons in the Omaha MSA (8.9 percent) works for minimum wage ($5.15 per hour). This is about twice the proportion of other employed who work for minimum wage (4.2 percent). Estimated population counts for each category are shown in table 5.

Obstacles to Getting a Better Job

On one hand, some Omaha area businesses report difficulty finding qualified workers in certain occupations. On the other hand, roughly one in five Omaha workers may be considered underemployed in terms of hours, job quality, or both. Clearly many (but perhaps not all) of the underemployed would not immediately qualify for those hard-to-fill openings. What do they perceive as the obstacles that keep them from getting a better job?

For those persons underemployed in terms of job quality only, the survey asked what was the biggest obstacle to getting a better job. Respondents were asked to identify up to three such obstacles. The results were summarized by counting the number of times a particular item was mentioned. The count for each item was expressed as a percentage of all persons underemployed in terms of job quality. The resulting percentages add up to more than 100 percent because each person was asked to identify up to three obstacles. (The "no answer/don't know" response was counted only for those giving this as their first answer, not subsequent answers.)

Education was the most frequently mentioned obstacle to getting a better job. This was mentioned for 18.1 percent of those underemployed in terms of job quality. The next most frequently mentioned answer was age—too old, too young, age discrimination, and so on. Age was mentioned as an obstacle for 15.3 percent of persons underemployed in terms of job quality. The vast majority of persons for whom age was mentioned as an obstacle (6 out of 7) were age 35 or older. No obstacle to a better job was mentioned for 13.3 percent of those underemployed in terms of job quality. Lack of jobs and opportunities to advance was mentioned as an obstacle for 11.3 percent. Table 6 shows the distribution of obstacles mentioned along with population estimates.

Table 5. Characteristics of the Underemployed (either hours or quality) and Other Employed, Omaha MSA

	Number		Percent	
	Underemployed	Other employed	Underemployed	Other employed
Total persons	83,970	304,782	100.0	100.0
Holding more than one job	10,748	32,002	12.8	10.5
Holding one job only	73,222	272,780	87.2	89.5
Self-employed	6,886	34,136	8.2	11.2
Working for someone else	77,084	270,646	91.8	88.8
Hired as temporary employee	10,329	18,133	**13.4**	6.7
Hired as permanent employee	66,755	252,513	**86.6**	93.3
Years with current employer				
Less than 1 year	11,948	22,976	**15.5**	8.5
1-2 years	30,063	51,141	**39.0**	18.9
3-4 years	12,488	41,769	**16.2**	15.4
5-9 years	11,948	61,807	**15.5**	22.8
10 or more years	10,638	92,954	**13.8**	34.3
Education				
Less than high school	7,305	16,153	**8.7**	5.3
High school graduate or GED	25,275	89,606	**30.1**	29.4
Some college, but no degree	21,832	68,881	**26.0**	22.6
Associate (2-year) degree	7,305	25,297	**8.7**	8.3
Bachelor's (4-year) degree	15,031	68,881	**17.9**	22.6
Advanced degree	7,221	35,964	**8.6**	11.8
Industry				
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	n/a	3,353	**n/a**	1.1
Construction	3,779	18,287	**4.5**	6.0
Manufacturing	7,557	29,869	**9.0**	9.8
Transportation, communications, and utilities	4,450	20,725	**5.3**	6.8
Trade	19,649	47,851	**23.4**	15.7
Finance, insurance, and real estate	4,702	32,307	**5.6**	10.6
Services	34,428	96,311	**41.0**	31.6
Government	9,405	56,080	**11.2**	18.4

(Continued on next page)

Table 5. Characteristics of the Underemployed (continued)

	Number		Percent	
	Underemployed	Other employed	Underemployed	Other employed
Occupation				
Executive, administrative, and managerial	9,005	51,203	**10.7**	16.8
Professional specialty	9,128	57,299	**10.9**	18.8
Technicians	1,043	18,592	**1.2**	6.1
Sales	11,962	30,173	**14.2**	9.9
Administrative support and clerical	21,723	59,128	**25.9**	19.4
Private household	290	1,524	**0.3**	0.5
Protective service	1,176	3,657	**1.4**	1.2
Service except private household and protective	11,815	20,725	**14.1**	6.8
Farming, forestry, and fishing	639	6,096	**0.8**	2.0
Precision production, craft, and repair	8,375	25,602	**10.0**	8.4
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors	2,380	10,058	**2.8**	3.3
Transportation and material moving	3,550	11,887	**4.2**	3.9
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and laborers	1,705	4,877	**2.0**	1.6
Unique military	1,178	3,962	**1.4**	1.3
Annual Earnings (all jobs)				
Under $10,000	17,621	29,514	**21.0**	9.7
$10,000 to 15,999	16,398	28,018	**19.5**	9.2
$16,000 to 19,999	13,014	22,433	**15.5**	7.4
$20,000 to 21,999	6,544	19,444	**7.8**	6.4
$22,000 to 25,999	7,738	16,970	**9.2**	5.6
$26,000 to 27,999	7,083	18,017	**8.4**	5.9
$28,000 to 31,999	4,033	35,621	**4.8**	11.7
$32,000 to 39,999	7,377	46,294	**8.8**	15.2
$40,000 to 49,999	1,989	39,972	**2.4**	13.1
$50,000 to $59,999	1,294	15,726	**1.5**	5.2
$60,000 or more	878	32,774	**1.0**	10.8
Workers in Minimum Wage Jobs				
Holding more than one job, at least one of which is minimum wage	768	2,772	**0.9**	0.9
Holding one job only, minimum wage	6,680	9,924	**8.0**	3.3
Holding more than one job, all of which are for more than minimum wage	9,980	29,230	**11.9**	9.7
Holding one job only, more than minimum wage	66,542	262,856	**79.2**	86.2

Percentage distributions for the underemployed shown in bold differ from corresponding distributions for the other employed with a statistical significance of $p < .05$.

"n/a" indicates the survey sample contained no persons in this category.

Table 6: Obstacles Mentioned to the Underemployed Getting a Better Job

	Number	Percent
Total underemployed (job quality only)	69,587	100.0
Education	12,621	18.1
Age (too old, too young, discrimination)	10,656	15.3
No answer/don't know	9,263	13.3
Lack of jobs, opportunities to advance	7,881	11.3
Experience	4,960	7.1
Can't afford to look, job security	4,617	6.6
Student	3,749	5.4
Family considerations	3,008	4.3
Transportation	2,982	4.3
Satisfied with current job	2,102	3.0
No time to look	2,000	2.9
Attitude	1,917	2.8
Don't know how to look, new in town	1,669	2.4
Disability	1,504	2.2
Availability	1,275	1.8
Race, ethnicity	850	1.2
Health	822	1.2
Child care	732	1.1
Discrimination	630	0.9
Language problem	610	0.9
Gender	336	0.5
Other	4,865	7.0

Characteristics of Unemployed and Discouraged Workers

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 measured unemployment at 3.3 percent of the labor force (about 13,267 persons). In addition, the survey identified 0.9 percent of persons not in the labor force (about 1,075) as discouraged workers. Recall that discouraged workers are persons not in the labor force who say they want a job, are available for work, and have looked for work within the last six months. They are not counted as unemployed because they are not currently looking for work.

This chapter describes the characteristics of unemployed and discouraged workers residing in the Omaha MSA. Information presented comes from the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 sample of 60 unemployed and discouraged workers. Because the survey sample contained relatively few unemployed and discouraged workers, only some general observations are possible. Table 7 summarizes significant characteristics of unemployed and discouraged workers.

Age

Unemployed and discouraged workers living in the Omaha MSA tend to be young. Nearly two-thirds of unemployed and discouraged workers in the survey (63.6 percent) were between the ages of 16 and 24 years.

Industry Last Worked in

The vast majority of experienced unemployed and discouraged workers (78.0 percent) last worked in the trade and service industries.

Occupation Last Worked in

Most experienced unemployed and discouraged workers last worked in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations (43.5 percent), as operators, fabricators, or laborers (20.6 percent), or in service occupations (18.7 percent).

Education

Roughly one-third of unemployed and discouraged workers (31.9 percent) have less than a high school education. One-third (33.2 percent) have a high school education only, and the remaining third (34.9 percent) have at least some education beyond high school. The educational level of this group is not surprising given that close to two-thirds are between the ages of 16 and 24.

When Last Worked

About three out of four unemployed and discouraged workers had been employed within the last year. Over half (56.2 percent) had been employed within the previous six months. Another 19.7 percent had been employed between six months and one year ago.

Key Findings

- Unemployment is most prevalent among the young. Nearly two-thirds of unemployed and discouraged workers (63.6 percent) were between the ages of 16 and 24 years.
- Over three out four experienced unemployed and discouraged workers (78.0 percent) last worked in the trade or service industries.
- About one-third of unemployed and discouraged workers have at least some education beyond high school, another third have only a high school diploma or GED, and a third have less than a high school education. Many of this latter group are young people still of high-school age.
- Over half of unemployed and discouraged workers (56.2 percent) were employed within the previous six months.

Obstacles to Finding a Job

The survey included a question about obstacles to finding a job. The question was asked only about unemployed persons who had been looking for work during the past month. The sample included usable responses for only ten such persons. This is not really enough to identify any significant patterns. Nevertheless, the responses are listed below as the interviewers recorded them.

- Not old enough.
- Age (51) and being out-of-work currently.
- It is tough to get a job when you are in school and in town for only a week.
- Most want full-time employees.
- Hasn't been employed for years.
- I am either overqualified for where agency sends me or my lack of college degree is more important than my 30 years of job experience.
- Too many people applying.
- I was terminated which sends a red flag. After answering questions, I must sign giving the future employer [permission] to check into my past and prior employer, which I refused to do because they would not give a good recommendation.
- Too far away.
- Transportation.

Table 7. Characteristics of Unemployed and Discouraged Workers, Omaha MSA

	Number	Percent
Total persons	14,341	100.0
Age		
16 to 24	9,121	63.6
25 to 64	5,220	36.4
65 and over	n/a	n/a
Industry last worked in		
Trade	5,323	37.1
Services	5,857	40.8
Other	3,161	22.0
Occupation last worked in		
Managerial and professional specialty	2,209	15.4
Technical, sales, and administrative support	6,238	43.5
Service	2,682	18.7
Farming, forestry, and fishing	n/a	n/a
Precision production, craft, and repair	258	1.8
Operators, fabricators, and laborers	2,954	20.6
Unique military	n/a	n/a
Education		
Less than high school	4,575	31.9
High school graduate or GED	4,761	33.2
More than high school	5,005	34.9
When last worked		
Less than six months ago	8,060	56.2
Six months to just under one year ago	2,825	19.7
One to just under two years ago	1,420	9.9
Two or more years ago	703	4.9
Never	1,334	9.3

"n/a" indicates the survey sample contained no persons in this category.

Survey Methodology

The Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998 was conducted through telephone interviews with adults from a random sample of area households. The sample was drawn from households in the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Omaha MSA is composed of Douglas, Sarpy, Washington, and Cass counties in Nebraska along with Pottawattamie County in Iowa.

Survey Objectives

The UNO Center for Public Affairs Research consulted with the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Business Research Council to determine what kind of labor force information would be of most value to the community. Through a series of joint discussions, the following key survey objectives were identified:

- Produce current information on basic labor force indicators such as labor force participation, unemployment, and underemployment for the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- Produce current information on the characteristics of the underemployed for the Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- Profile basic characteristics of the labor force in North and South Omaha.

The group also identified several other desirable survey objectives such as developing information on migration to and from the Omaha area, minimum wage workers, and computer use. Questions addressing some such topics were included in the survey. Other objectives were considered but dropped because they would have been too burdensome to the respondents, too costly to include, or not of broad enough value to the community.

Survey Design

The survey objectives called for two different kinds of questions to be asked in the interview. Unemployment, for example, is measured by asking questions about *behavior*—for example, "Have you looked for work in the last four weeks?" Other objectives required asking questions about *opinion*—for example, "Why do you plan to move from the Omaha area?"

It was desirable to gather employment data not just on one person in the household, as is typical of most opinion polls, but of each person in the household age 16 and over. To attempt to interview each household member separately, however, would be far too burdensome on the household and far too costly. The compromise was to ask one respondent in the household to answer a basic set of employment questions for him or herself as well as on behalf of every other person in the household age 16 and over. Since the basic employment questions are ones of behavior, not opinion, allowing one household member to respond on behalf of another should not significantly affect the quality of the results.

With questions of opinion, on the other hand, respondents were not asked to answer on behalf of other household members. Instead, opinion questions as well as some other questions not required to develop basic measures of labor force status were asked only of the respondent.

Survey Instrument

The survey design necessitated two separate survey instruments. A short questionnaire of basic labor force questions was used to ask the respondent about the labor force status of other members of the household. A longer questionnaire containing the basic labor force questions, opinion questions, and other questions was used to interview the respondent about him or herself. Both instruments were based on the questionnaire used by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to measure the national unemployment rate each month. The UNO Center for Public Affairs Research adapted the original BLS instrument for local use and added questions on subjects of local interest as determined in consultation with the Business Research Council.

Sample

The survey used a sample of 1,200 households interviewed in two phases. Phase 1 consisted of 929 households from throughout the five-county metropolitan area. Telephone numbers for the first phase were selected using a random digit dialing design. This allowed for the inclusion of both listed and unlisted telephone numbers in the sample. Phase 2 called for interviewing 138 additional households in selected North Omaha ZIP code areas and 133 additional households in selected South Omaha ZIP code areas. The purpose for doing so was to have a large enough sample from North and South Omaha to support a more in-depth analysis of the labor force in those areas than would be possible otherwise. Telephone numbers for the second phase were selected from published phone lists and included only persons with listed telephone numbers. The reason for using phone lists rather than random-digit dialing was to avoid the costs of contacting large numbers of households outside the relatively small target areas. (By its nature, random digit dialing prevents one from predetermining exactly where a household is located.) Even working from published phone lists, a small proportion of households surveyed during the second phase ended up being outside the North and South Omaha areas. Table 8 shows the number of planned and actual interviews in each phase by area.

Table 8. Number of Households in Survey by Area, Planned and Actual

Area	Planned			Actual		
	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total	Phase 1	Phase 2	Total
Total	929	271	1,200	929	271	1,200
Douglas	587	271	858	585	264	849
North (ZIP codes 68102, 68131, 68111, 68110)	62	138	200	56	123	179
South (ZIP codes 68105, 68107, 68108)	67	133	200	58	113	171
Balance of Douglas County	458		458	471	28	499
Sarpy	165		165	156	6	162
Pottawattamie	119		119	130		130
Cass	33		33	34		34
Washington	26		26	24	1	25

Respondent Interviews

Professional interviewers from Midwest Survey and Research conducted the interviews between May 7 and July 13, 1998.

After making contact with someone at a telephone number on the call list, interviewers asked to speak with a person who was 19 years or older and had the next birthday in the household. Interviewers asked for the adult with the next birthday to avoid biasing the sample in favor of persons more likely to be at home or to answer the phone. Interviewers made at least two callbacks if the correct household member was not available. Since the survey design called for the respondent to answer a set of basic labor force questions on behalf of other members of the household, the protocol of interviewing the adult with the next birthday really affected only those questions that were asked just of the respondent. Respondents were promised that their responses would remain confidential. Surveys were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Spanish-speaking interviewers were available to conduct interviews, if necessary.

Error and Confidence Levels

As with all sample surveys, the Omaha Conditions Survey results are assumed to contain some degree of error. The reliability of sample survey results depends on a variety of factors. Among them are the degree of care exercised during survey administration, the sample size, the extent to which the sampling frame corresponds to the population under study, and the amount of nonresponse.

Survey Administration. Errors can creep into the data in a number of ways during survey administration. For example, respondents may misunderstand questions, and interviewers may misunderstand or misrecord answers. The extent of such errors cannot be estimated. Researchers made every effort to minimize the potential for these types of errors throughout the survey process, and their effect on the results of the Omaha Conditions Survey is probably very small.

Sample Size. Another source of error stems from using a sample of persons to estimate the characteristics of a population. How large a difference is there likely to be between the results of the sample survey and the results one would obtain from interviewing the entire population? This difference, or sampling error, can be estimated for a random sample using accepted statistical techniques.

Questions asked about all 2,206 persons in the sample have a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 2.1 percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Questions asked only of the respondent (1,200 persons) have a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 2.9 percent at the same level of confidence. Note, however, that many of the survey findings pertain to sub-groups of the total sample. For example, information on the characteristics of the employed is based only on those 1,618 persons in the sample who were employed. Information on the underemployed is based on a sample of 340 underemployed, and information on the unemployed and discouraged workers is based on a sample of only 60 persons. The sampling error for these samples at the 95 percent confidence level is plus or minus 2.5 percent, 5.4 percent, and 12.7 percent respectively.

These estimates of sampling error assume a random sample—that is, all members of the population under study had a known, equal chance of being included in the sample. However, telephone surveys can violate the basic assumption of randomness because the sampling frame does not correspond perfectly to the population and because of nonresponse.

Sampling Frame. The sampling frame is the list of units from which the sample is drawn. Ideally, the sampling frame consists of all members of the population under study. In practice such a list is rarely available, so a list that approximates the ideal is used. This is the case with the Omaha Conditions Survey where for basic labor force questions the population under study is persons 16 years and older (for other questions, persons 19 years and older), and the sampling frame is a list of telephone numbers. As a consequence, not everyone had a known, equal chance of being included in the sample.

In the first phase, for the basic labor force questions (asked of the respondent about all persons 16 years and older in the household), a person's probability of being included in the sample varied depending on how many telephone numbers served his or her residence. For example, persons living in households without telephones had no chance of inclusion in the survey sample. The exclusion of persons without telephones can result in the underrepresentation of certain groups, particularly minority, low income, young, and more mobile persons within the area. According to the 1990 Census, 3.1 percent of households in the five-county area did not have telephones. By the same token, persons living in households with multiple telephone numbers had a greater chance of inclusion than persons living in households with single telephone numbers. An earlier Omaha Conditions Survey (1990) found that 8.3 percent of respondents in Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington counties had multiple telephone numbers. An analysis of the responses in 1990 found no significant differences between persons with multiple telephone numbers and those with only on telephone number.

For those questions asked only of the respondent, a person's probability of being included in the sample also varied depending on how many persons age 19 years and older were in the household. For example, an adult living alone in a household whose phone number was selected would be asked those questions with certainty. An adult living with another adult whose telephone number was selected would have a one in two chance of being asked those questions, an adult living with two other adults would have a one in three chance, and so on.

In the second phase only, phone lists were used rather than random-digit dialing. This means that in addition to the variations in probability of selection described above, persons with unlisted telephone numbers had no chance of being included in the second phase sample.

Nonresponse. Survey nonresponse is the failure to obtain measurements on sampled units. This occurs when an eligible individual is unable or unwilling to complete the interview or to answer specific questions. This type of error is probably the most difficult to work with since the characteristics of the nonrespondents are typically unknown. Researchers took reasonable steps throughout the survey process to minimize nonresponse. For example, interviewers tried at least three different times to complete an interview for each telephone number selected.

Weights

Once the data were collected, they were weighted. The purpose of weighting is to adjust the data for the over or underrepresentation of certain groups. The metropolitan area analysis included all valid data from phase one and phase two. By design, the total sample included a disproportionately large number of persons in North and South Omaha. It was therefore necessary to weight the sample by area to accurately reflect the Omaha MSA. Once this was done, the age, race, and sex characteristics of the weighted sample were compared to estimates of the population by age, race, and sex produced independently by the Census Bureau. The comparison revealed that minority racial groups were slightly underrepresented in the area-weighted sample. This is not surprising since minority households are less likely to have telephones than non-minority households. Additional weights were therefore calculated to further adjust the data by race.

A separate analysis of respondent characteristics revealed that a larger-than-expected proportion of respondents within households were women. Since the interviewers sought to interview the adult with the next birthday in each household, the proportion of male and female respondents should have been roughly equal. Interview records indicate that interviewers did as directed, but nevertheless 61.3 percent of the respondents were women. In some cases, apparently, those answering the phone misunderstood the request to interview the person with next birthday to mean the person with the next birthday who happened to be home at the time. Or perhaps some chose to answer that screening question inaccurately. At any rate, separate weights were devised for those questions asked only of the respondent. The respondent weights are used only for those questions answered just by the respondent. The weights adjust the data by area, race, and sex.

Population Estimates

Often the objective of survey research is to estimate the proportion of a population with a given characteristic—the percentage of persons who think the president is doing a good job, for example. The number of persons represented by the percentage in this example is of little importance. All that really matters is that X percent think the president is doing a good job, and Y percent do not.

In studying an area's labor force, on the other hand, it is valuable to know not only that about 3.3 percent are unemployed but also roughly how many persons compose that 3.3 percent. Is it

closer to 100, or 1,000, or 10,000? To aid in the interpretation of findings from the Omaha Conditions Survey: 1998, population estimates are included.

The method used to develop population estimates is straightforward. According to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimate (1997), 521,425 persons aged 16 and older reside in the five-county Omaha MSA. By applying survey percentages to this figure, we estimate the number of persons who are in the labor force, unemployed, and so on. The reader is cautioned to note that these are just approximations, not exact counts. Minor differences in the number of persons reported with one characteristic or another are not significant. Rather, the population estimates are provided simply to give a sense of perspective in interpreting the survey findings.

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