

THIS SUMMER TEENS SEARCH FOR JOBS MAY BE FUTILE



What was once considered a gateway to adulthood and maturity, summer jobs are doing the disappearing act. Not only are they fast vanishing, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that they will probably never return to pre-recession levels. During summer jobs were available aplenty for American teenagers, especially in running cash registers, mowing lawns, in the food industry and at the swimming pools and gaming places. However, reports show that less than 3 in 10 teenagers are employed in these areas. Employment for 16-to-19-year olds has declined to its lowest level since World War II. The fall is not totally attributed to lack of availability of jobs, but also to a cultural shift, where more youths are appending their summer months, learning a new activity and attending learning camps, music schools and other activities that will prepare them for college. However, it is a very distressing and troubling times for those teens, who for whatever reason are not going to pursue a college education and with few options of employment available, will probably spend their days in idle unproductive pursuit. Talking about this group of people, who are being denied on-job training and are also not likely to further their education, Harry Holzer, labor economist and public policy professor at Georgetown University said, "I have big concerns about this generation of young people. For young high school graduates or dropouts, their early work experience is more closely tied to their success in the labor market." Debt-laden college graduates are accepting low-pay, low-skill work, as they await jobs of their own liking. Ironically, even though they need it more, elitist white-teens, children of parents from the higher income group, are three times more likely to get jobs as compared to the poor black teens. One reason is that the given the choice between the two, the employers prefer the former. The influential parent's social networks also help in applying pressure on the employers to hire the white kids. Taken as a whole, a little more than half the teens applying for the job, manage to get them. A fairly large proportion, 44 percent, will either not get the jobs, or do part time jobs. Joseph McLaughlin, a research associate at the Northeastern labor studies center said, "Teens are the lowest in the hiring queue because they have less experience and can usually only work limited hours. They are the hardest hit in a recession. That's why we need strong job growth, so employers have to dig down and hire those 16- and 17-year-olds who have limited job experience." A student, 18-year old, Colleen Knaggs, who recently graduated from school called her fruitless job-search "really frustrating." She says that she submitted dozens of applications for summer cashier positions. Failure to find work means that she will spend the summer, babysitting her 10-year old brother. Andrew Sum, director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, said that the teens, especially those who don't attend regular college, needed special opportunities for learning skills. He however, alleged that they were "frequently off the radar screens of the nation's and states' economic policymakers." Washington DC was the place, where teens wanting summer work, were most likely not to find it. Washington DC was followed by Arizona, California, Washington State, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina and Nevada. However, states with fewer immigration workers, Wyoming, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota and Kansas had teens who were more often able to find work. A little less than 30 percent of 16-to-19 year olds found employment last year. This has dipped by around 4 percent. Teen employment remained generally above 50 percent until 2001, but the recessions showed it being cut to half. Generally what happens when teens looking for jobs fail to find one, they either settle for a low-paying one that does not match their existing skills and competence, or they have to settle for lesser hours, or a part-time job. A significant number just stop looking for a job, frustrated and crestfallen from their futile attempts. By race and income, blacks, Hispanics and teens in lower-income families were least likely to be employed in summer jobs. According to an analysis of Census Bureau Current Population Survey data from June to August 2011 by Northeastern's Center for Labor Market Studies, the figure was 14 percent for African-American teens whose family income was less than \$40,000 a year, compared to 44 percent of white teens with family income of \$100,000-\$150,000. Only 19 percent Latinos found employment in families making less than \$40,000. However, black teens with family income of \$75,000-\$100,000 did reasonably better, with 28 percent of the youth finding employment. Government projections predict a further fall. Teens entering the U.S. labor force are expected to decline another 8 percentage points by 2020. Another reason given for the decline is that earlier jobs that went exclusively to the teens are now being sought by aspirants in other age groups. Smith, the Fed economist, says that this owing to this new competition youths are being crowded out of the job market by older workers and immigrants. In a paper Smith says, that there are "potentially troubling long-term consequences." He worries that the teens are not utilizing their time to go to summer school or do other college-preparatory work but are spending the extra time watching TV, playing video games and sleeping rather than on educational activities.