


2016

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Torraco, Richard J., "The Persistence of Working Poor Families in a Changing U.S. Job Market: An Integrative Review of the Literature" (2016). *Faculty Publications in Educational Administration*. 14.
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The Persistence of Working Poor Families in a Changing U.S. Job Market: An Integrative Review of the Literature

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Abstract

This article explores the persistence of working poor families in the United States— families that live on the threshold of poverty despite at least one family member working full-time. The persistence of poverty in the United States has been exacerbated by recent changes in the job market that have altered the composition and availability of jobs due to technological unemployment, the polarization of jobs, declining job quality, and stagnation in job growth. The relationships between the persistence of working poor families and these changes in the job market are examined. The article concludes with a review of human resource development (HRD) research on poverty and the working poor, and a discussion of the implications of the persistence of working poor families for HRD research and practice.

Keywords

working poor families, poverty, job market, integrative literature review

Jobs are an important source of self-esteem and self-worth, yet job security is increasingly tenuous. The potential of layoffs and unemployment is increasing, and even many who are working are concerned that their jobs may be at risk (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012). For most people, self-esteem and self-worth are closely tied to their work. Having a job fulfills a basic human desire to be needed; others rely on one's contribution at work, providing the personal fulfillment of being part of something valued by others. Widespread unemployment is not just a major economic concern; with it comes loss of hope and its destructive effects on the human spirit (Burtless, 2013). The availability of jobs and the preparation of workers to fill those jobs are of primary concern to human resource development (HRD) (Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs & Hawley, 2003; Torraco & Tuliao, 2014).

Problem Statement

This article examines changes in today's job and labor market and the relationship of these changes to the persistence of working poor families in the United States. The persistence of poverty in the United States has been exacerbated by recent changes in the job market (Bernhardt, 2012). Expansion in certain types of jobs and decline in others are part of normal labor market fluctuations. For example, today web designers outnumber back tellers,

whereas 20 years ago the reverse was true. But changes in jobs are only one part of the equation in today's labor market. The other part of the equation is the labor force itself—those who are needed to fill these jobs. Growing numbers of low-skilled, low-wage workers comprise today's labor force (Working Poor Families Project, 2013) which complicates the process of matching workers with jobs, so that the economy can operate effectively.

This article explores the relationship between changes in the job market and the persistence of working poor families in the United States. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of these developments for HRD. The research questions addressed by the article are as follows:

Research Question 1: How are the composition and availability of jobs and the labor market changing?

Research Question 2: How are changing job and labor markets related to the persistence of working poor families in the United States?

Research Question 3: What are the implications of the persistence of working poor families for HRD research and practice?

Method

This problem is addressed by providing an integrative review of the literature related to this topic. The integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature of topic in an integrated way, such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated (Torraco, 2005b; Webster & Watson, 2002). This methodology is particularly appropriate when existing research is scattered across disparate areas and has not been systematically analyzed and integrated. Such is the case with the literature on the changing composition and availability of jobs and the persistence of working poor families in the United States. An integrative literature review is an appropriate method for addressing this problem because the topic would benefit from a holistic conceptualization and synthesis of the literature to date. The literature on the changing job market and the persistence of working poor families was reviewed and synthesized into a framework that offers an integrated perspective on the topic.

Shifts in the labor market and the ebb and flow of occupational demand mean that some jobs and occupations are expanding, creating opportunities for more workers, while other jobs and occupations are in decline. Advances in technology have resulted in cashiers being replaced by self-checkout and kiosks for flight check-in replacing airline customer service personnel. Several factors can change the composition and availability of jobs, including automation, the polarization of job opportunities, and decline in job growth. A large body of research on this topic has been categorized as literature on "job and labor market dynamics" for the purpose of this article. This literature was reviewed to examine how and why the composition and availability of jobs and labor needs change over time.

The dynamics of job growth and decline are part of normal labor market fluctuations. Our workforce system is expected to adjust to labor market fluctuations, so that there are enough skilled workers for the right occupations to enable the economy to operate effectively despite the ebb and flow of occupational demand. However, the number of low-skilled, low-wage workers in the labor force is increasing (Working Poor Families Project, 2013), which complicates the process of matching workers with jobs, so that the economy can operate effectively. We explore the labor force side of the equation by examining working poor families, the types of jobs held by those in working poor families, and show how recent changes in the job market have exacerbated the persistence of working poor in the

United States. A large body of research on this topic has been categorized as literature on “working poor families in the U.S.” and reviewed for this article.

In summary, two bodies of literature provide the basis for the article—literature on job and labor market dynamics and working poor families in the United States. Next, the methods for selecting and reviewing this literature are described.

Literature on Job and Labor Market Dynamics

Literature on job and labor market dynamics addresses change in the composition and availability of jobs, including the polarization of jobs, the prevalence of precarious employment, technological unemployment, and stagnation in job growth. Literature for this category was selected for review only if it met all of the following criteria:

- Dynamics of job availability in multiple directions—Literature was selected on the dynamics of job availability regardless of the direction of change in the availability of jobs, including job growth, job decline, and job stagnation.
- Recency of job market changes—Literature selected on job and labor market factors was limited to literature addressing changes occurring within the last 5 years.
- Location of job and labor market changes—Literature selected on job market changes was limited to the job market in the United States.
- Multiple determinants of job and labor market changes—Literature on job and labor market dynamics was selected regardless of the nature or source of the factor that resulted in job growth, job decline, or job stagnation. Technical, economic, demographic, and other factors can change the composition and availability of jobs (e.g., automation, off-shoring, technological unemployment, international competition, economic decline, etc.). If it met the other three criteria for this category, literature was selected regardless of the nature or source of the factors that change the composition and availability of jobs.

Literature on Working Poor Families in the United States

Literature for this category was selected for review only if it met the following criteria:

- Families only including single-parent families—Literature on working poor families was selected only if the literature addressed a *family* defined as a married couple or single-parent family with at least one co-resident child younger than 18 years old.
- Working families only—Literature was selected only if it addressed family members who are working or active in the labor market. A family is defined as working if all family members aged 15 and older either have a combined work effort of 39 weeks or more in the prior 12 months, or all family members aged 15 and older have a combined work effort of 26 to 39 weeks in the prior 12 months and one currently unemployed parent looked for work in the prior 4 weeks.
- Low-income families only—A low-income family is defined as a family with an income below 200% of the poverty level, or double the threshold for poverty, as defined by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services despite at least one family member working full-year, full-time (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013). Literature was selected only if it addressed those who meet this definition of a low-income family.
- U.S. population only—Literature selected was limited to working poor families in the United States only.

A search was conducted to identify literature on job and labor market factors and working poor families in the United States. Four databases were searched (ERIC, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, and Google Scholar). Key subject terms were used to identify the relevant literature. Literature on job and labor market dynamics was identified using 81 key subject terms, and literature on working poor families in the United States was identified using 79 key subject terms. The search for literature in both areas required using a total of 160 terms. These key subject terms were used to search databases in addition to the subject descriptors provided by the databases as a majority of the 160 key subject terms are not listed as descriptors in the databases. For example, 125 of 160 key subject terms are not listed as subject terms in the Academic Search Premier thesaurus, 127 of 160 key subject terms are not listed as descriptors in the ERIC thesaurus, and 136 of 160 key subject terms are not listed as Business Source Complete descriptors.

A majority of the literature searched was from refereed scholarly journals. As this topic has been examined by independent research centers, private foundations, nonprofit organizations, and federal agencies, the review also included research and technical reports that provide analysis of the problem supported by empirical evidence or citations of other research. A list of 67 websites reviewed for literature relevant to this study is available from the author upon request.

The next stage of the review examined the literature obtained from the literature search. Each piece of literature was examined using a staged review (i.e., abstracts, then main body of each literature source). Critical analysis of the literature deconstructed pieces of literature into their basic elements. The strengths and weaknesses of each piece of literature were examined, which led to eliminating literature from the review because, although a piece of literature was identified using the key subject terms, the literature did not address one or more of the selection criteria listed above. For example, Bernstein's (2013) work on the impact of poverty and income inequality on economic growth, although identified in the literature search, was eliminated from review because it did not address specific changes in the composition and availability of jobs. Critical analysis of each piece of literature selected provided a new integrated perspective on the topic through synthesis. A form of synthesis was used to bring together related streams of knowledge from both major categories of literature into a significant, value-added contribution to new knowledge. The product of this synthesis, shown at the end of the article, shows the relationship of the changing U.S. job market to the persistence of working poor families in the United States and the implications for HRD. This is consistent with the purpose of the article—to examine this issue in an integrated way, leading to better understanding of the topic. Sixty-five pieces of literature were examined for this integrative literature review.

Working Poor Families in the United States

Low-skilled and academically underprepared adults in the United States are increasing in numbers. "Adults who are not prepared with the levels of knowledge and skills they need to get, and keep, good jobs are unable to earn family-supporting incomes and, reluctantly, drift into the ranks of the working poor" (Torraco & Dirks, 2009, p. 2). A working poor family is defined by the characteristics described in the previous section: (a) the degree to which one or more members of the family participate in the labor market as wage earners and (b) the annual combined income earned by all family members. The 2014 poverty threshold for the United States averaged US\$23,850 for a family of four, and thus the low-income threshold for a family of four averaged US\$47,700 (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, 2014). In 2012, 39.6% of American families had incomes below 200% of the poverty level (Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2014). More than one in five children in the United States (21.8%) grows up in poverty. The poverty rate for individuals in unmarried female-headed families is 30.9%, compared with 9.7% for individuals in other types of families (Nichols, 2013).

What is low-wage work and what types of jobs do low-wage workers hold? They work long hours in retail jobs, care for children and the aged, work as cooks and waiters/waitresses, clean hotel rooms and offices, and do agricultural and other seasonal and temporary work. Oxfam America's (2013) study of low-wage workers in the United States found that low-wage workers are disproportionately women. The authors observed that

work that pays low wages often falls into the realm of what has traditionally been considered "women's work": domestic care (children and the elderly), health care, food service work, and cleaning. Because these jobs disproportionately employ women, the female workforce is challenged on several fronts: low wages, inadequate benefits to deal with family challenges, and the balance of home and work. Although women now make up close to half of the national workforce in the U.S., they substantially outnumber men in low-wage jobs. Women make up 60% of the lower paying workforce. Almost 30% of the female workforce is low wage, in contrast to less than 20% of the male workforce. (p. 7)

Educational Barriers and the Working Poor

Among the characteristics that contribute the most to the vulnerability of the working poor and threaten their economic self-sufficiency is the lack of education to get a job that pays family-supporting wages. As basic skills (i.e., reading, writing, and/or mathematics) form the foundation for the development of other knowledge and skills, deficiencies in these areas are obstacles to further education and prevent many adults from participating productively in the workplace. The relationship between being deficient in basic skills and having a low income is important for understanding the characteristics of working poor families and their prospects for the future. There are many factors in addition to low levels of education that influence income level (i.e., language barriers, poor health, chemical dependency, learning disabilities, a criminal record) (Shipley, 2004). The unfortunate reality is that many adults in working poor families have basic skills that are generally considered insufficient for the modern workplace and consequently low-income levels. Moreover,

their low-income status feeds a vicious cycle in which the unavailability of financial resources for education restricts their ability to acquire additional skills needed for today's workplace, further hindering job advancement and their ability to move out of working poverty. (Torraco & Dirkx, 2009, p. 4)

Lack of education contributes to the persistence of working poor families in the United States. The relationship between education levels and earnings is strong and positive—as one's education level increases, average personal income rises (College Board, 2006). The relationship between socioeconomic status, education level, and low job skills is complex but, in general, they appear to be interrelated. Without making claims about causal attribution, low-income levels, low job skills, and low educational achievement seem to go together (Torraco & Dirkx, 2009). Nonetheless, without adequate education, more people end up at the low end of the education–income continuum (Urban Institute, 2013).

Job and Labor Market Dynamics

The persistence of poverty in the United States has been exacerbated by recent changes in the job market. The erosion of job quality in recent decades identified by Kalleberg (2011) has resulted in proportionately more jobs today that Kalleberg calls “precarious” — those that are temporary, part-time, or seasonal. Expansion of these low paying jobs has meant stagnating incomes for the growing number of part-time and contingent workers and contributes to the rise in poverty. At the same time, jobs have polarized into high-skill and low-skill occupations, with declining opportunities in middle-wage, middle-skill, white-collar, and blue-collar jobs. Employment and earnings are rising in high-education professional, technical, and managerial occupations. But since the late 1980s, job opportunities have also risen in low-education food service, personal care, and protective service occupations where earnings are stagnant (Autor, 2010). Scully-Russ (2005) argued that this emerging structure of work disadvantages a growing number of workers, leading to labor market segregation and significant economic disparity. Although residual unemployment from the Great Recession is also to blame, the expansion of low-skill, low-wage jobs inhibits income growth for an increasing number of people at the low end of the wage spectrum and contributes to the rise in poverty (Nichols, 2013).

This section addresses the changing labor market. The dynamics of job growth are part of normal job market fluctuations, as some jobs expand, creating opportunities for more workers, while other jobs are in decline. Several factors are responsible for the changing composition and availability of jobs in today’s economy, including technological unemployment, the polarization of jobs, declining job quality, and stagnation in job growth. Each of these factors is discussed next.

Technological Unemployment

Jobs are being eliminated by advances in technology, a phenomenon referred to by some as “technological unemployment” (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Bank tellers have been replaced by automated teller machines (ATMs); electro-mechanical assemblers have been replaced by robotics; toll booth operators have been replaced by prepaid scanning technology; transcriptionists have been replaced by automated dictation systems; travel agents have been replaced by online travel and reservation systems; sales personnel are being displaced by web-enabled sales and e-commerce, and touchscreen menus have been introduced for ordering food from one’s table in restaurants. Although the media frequently tout the wonders of new labor-saving technology, the list of jobs eliminated by advances in technology gets longer.

Several factors are responsible for the changing composition and availability of jobs in today’s economy. Computers have had the most dramatic influence on work processes and methods. Computer-based information and communication technology have erased physical and geographic boundaries and enable work in more service and manufacturing jobs to occur seamlessly across time and place. Autor, Levy, and Murnane examined how computerization alters the skill demands of jobs. They found that “Computer technology substitutes for workers in performing routine tasks that can be readily described with programmed rules, while complementing workers in executing nonroutine tasks demanding flexibility, creativity, generalized problem-solving capabilities, and complex communications” (2003, p. 1322). So like other sophisticated tools, computers can increase or decrease the importance of workers to production depending on how they are used.

Another factor that is changing how work is accomplished is the disaggregation of work, or breaking down a complex work project progressively into components and tasks (Manyika et al., 2011). This allows allocation of product components to alternative production sources based on cost, time, and quality criteria. This enables organizations like Motorola to design cellular devices in Schaumburg, Illinois, make components in Mexico, and assemble finished products in China, cheaper and faster than it could in the United States alone. Multi-phase transactions in banking and insurance show that disaggregated work is not limited to manufacturing; a proposed business investment can be drafted by a group in New York, submitted to a committee for audit and revision in Los Angeles, and then approved by representatives from multiple U.S. sites using videoconferencing technology. Through virtual collaboration, people can work together on a project regardless of time or location, enabling work to be accomplished anytime, anywhere.

Polarization of Job Opportunities

Jobs have polarized into high-skill and low-skill occupations, with declining opportunities in middle-wage, middle-skill, white-collar, and blue-collar jobs. While employment and earnings are rising in highly skilled occupations, since the late 1980s job opportunities have also risen in low-education food service, personal care, and retail occupations where earnings are stagnant (Autor, 2010). Meanwhile, middle-skill occupations have eroded in traditional blue-collar jobs in manufacturing, machine shops, printing, textiles, and other areas vulnerable to routinization by computer technology. This allows employers to substitute capital and automation for labor in positions such as secretaries and administrative assistants, accounting and auditing specialists, typists and transcribers, telephone operators, utility meter readers, and stock and inventory clerks. The polarization of jobs effects worker's wages. As Kalleberg (2011) stated, "It is likely that there is greater polarization in job quality within service industries than in manufacturing industries. Most service jobs tend to be either extremely well paid or poorly paid, with relatively few jobs in the middle-income range" (pp. 62-63).

The two factors that contribute most to the polarization of jobs are the automation of routine work and the international integration of labor markets (Autor, 2010). According to Autor et al. (2003), "A task is 'routine' if it can be accomplished by machines following explicit programmed rules" (p. 1283). Tasks are considered routine if they are well defined and can be accomplished successfully by a computer program. These tasks are also susceptible to off-shoring to developing countries to save labor costs. The core responsibilities of jobs such as transcriptionists, utility meter readers, and electro-mechanical assemblers consist of routine tasks that generally follow well-defined procedures that can increasingly be written into software and performed electronically or, alternatively, sent overseas to be completed by low-skilled workers (Autor, 2010).

Declining Job Quality

Another challenge faced by workers is the shift away from full-time jobs to more parttime, contingent, and seasonal jobs—referred to as precarious employment (Kalleberg, 2011). In addition to being precarious, these jobs generally pay low wages, lack health insurance, and do not provide pension benefits (Kalleberg, 2011). In 2010, 20% of working adults aged 25 to 64 held jobs that paid wages less than what is needed to keep a family of four above the U.S. poverty level (Osterman & Schulman, 2011). The jobs of 14.3% of U.S. workers, or about one in seven, pay low wages, lack health insurance, and do not provide pensions (Kalleberg, 2011). Job quality is often reduced as employers cut costs. For most employers,

employee wages and payroll are their highest expenses. Retailers and other employers increasingly use sophisticated software that uses predictions of customer volume and sales during specified time periods to prescribe staffing levels to meet customer demand at the lowest labor cost. Lambert (2008) examined the way in which these technology-enabled scheduling practices are used to protect employers from retail market instability at the expense of hourly employees by shifting the burden of fluctuations in sales to workers rather than assuming this as a management responsibility.

Reflecting the precarious position of those with part-time and contingent jobs, employers are less likely to offer benefits and more likely to pay low wages to workers in these jobs. Employers who create more part-time jobs know that they can avoid providing health care coverage as there are no penalties under the Affordable Care Act for not covering part-time employees (Henry & Fredericksen, 2013).

Stagnation in Job Growth

According to *The State of Working America*,

At the end of 2007, the Great Recession began, causing the most severe and sustained job loss this country had seen in seven decades, with the loss of 8.7 million jobs over a period of more than two years, dismantling the already-weakened foundation of economic security for countless American families. (Mishel et al., 2012, p. 322)

Over the past two centuries, when a transformative invention was adopted — whether the steam engine in the late 1800s, the automobile in the 1920s, or recently, the personal computer or cell phone — industries and occupations would disappear and workers would lose their jobs. But new job opportunities would appear to employ those whose jobs were eliminated (Uchitelle, 2006). Farm mechanization and factory automation created fear about machines replacing workers that never occurred.

But the current era of job elimination is unlike that of former periods. As information and computer technology displaces workers from jobs, new jobs are not created in the process in place of those who were lost. Fewer new jobs are emerging in which human workers have a comparative advantage over computer-mediated machines and technology (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014). Job loss today occurs more often as permanent job loss, with new jobs being created in different industries and occupations than where the jobs were lost (Manyika et al., 2011).

Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014) believe that as the productivity improvements associated with computer technology accelerate, individuals and organizations will have to work harder to keep up, or else more of the workforce will face technological unemployment. However, instead of racing against computers, the authors resolve the tension between advances in technology and the limitations of human workers by advocating a future in which workers and institutions are “learning to race with machines,” not compete against them (p. 187). While Brynjolfsson and McAfee view investing in human capital as the best way to address this challenge, employer investment in training has lagged behind rapidly changing skill requirements (Cappelli, 2012; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013).

The composition and availability of jobs are one part of the equation in today's labor market. The other part of the equation is the labor force itself — those who are needed to fill these jobs. The increasing proportion of low-skilled, low-wage workers in the labor force complicates the process of matching workers with jobs, so that the economy can op-

erate effectively. Next, we return to the working poor and show how recent changes in the job market have exacerbated the persistence of working poor families in the United States.

Relationship Between Changing Job Market and Persistence of Working Poor Families

What is it like for families to work hard, while losing ground financially? What happens to families that do not make living wages and are forced to make difficult choices between nutritious food, health care needs, paying bills, and saving for emergencies? To learn more about the difficulties faced by low-wage workers, Oxfam conducted a nationwide telephone survey, using random digit dialing, among 804 respondents who were non-students either employed in a job that pays US\$14 per hour or less, were unemployed or looking for work, and had earned US\$14 per hour or less in their previous job (Oxfam America, 2013). The survey revealed that low-wage workers barely get by month to month, are burdened by worries about meeting their families' basic needs, and often turn to loans from family or friends, credit card debt, government subsidies, pawn shops, and payday loans in their efforts to make ends meet. Reflecting their seemingly endless financial concerns, the study found that "A significant majority (79 %) report that they do not have sufficient savings to provide for their families for three months, a common measure of basic financial security" (Oxfam America, 2013, p. 3).

Acs and Loprest (2008) conducted a nationally representative survey of private-sector employers to examine their hiring practices for both entry-level and mid-level jobs. They found that low-wage, non-college jobs are more likely to be filled through walk-ins, word-of-mouth, referrals, and unsolicited applications, whereas higher paying jobs are more likely to be filled through internet advertising, a technology not as available to working poor families (Acs & Loprest, 2008). So it is not just the changing composition and availability of jobs that restrict the opportunities of the working poor; the way higher paying jobs are filled can also work to their disadvantage, thus contributing to the persistence of working poor families.

The Center for Labor Market Studies analyzed changes in labor productivity, the weekly wages of workers, corporate profits, and stock market prices from the end of the Great Recession in June 2009 to the beginning of 2012 (Sum, McHugh, & Palma, 2012). They reported substantial growth in private-sector labor productivity. However, the only beneficiary of this growth was pre-tax corporate profits which grew 37.2% from 2009 to 2012. Conversely, the wages of American workers actually declined during the same period due to the increase in low-wage jobs. Bernhardt (2012) examined the net change in employment since 2008 when the recession began. She found that the majority of mid-wage jobs lost during the recession were gone for good; almost 4 million mid-wage jobs were lost, yet only about 1 million of these jobs were gained in the recovery. In contrast, there has been dramatic growth in low-wage jobs during this period; almost twice as many low-wage jobs were gained in the recovery than were lost during the recession. To make matters worse, the wages paid by these occupations have changed. Between 2001 and 2012, median real wages for low-wage and mid-wage occupations declined by 2.1% and 0.2%, respectively (Bernhardt, 2012).

So despite substantial economic growth after the Great Recession, the recovery was characterized as a "wageless recovery" as it has depressed the average real incomes of most U.S. workers and reduced their ability to consume goods and services (Sum et al., 2012, p. 2). The wageless recovery has exacerbated the persistence of working poor families in the United States.

In summary, several factors are responsible for the changing composition and

availability of jobs in today's economy, including technological unemployment, the polarization of jobs, declining job quality, and stagnation in job growth. These changes in the job market, along with the educational barriers faced by the low-skilled, low-income population, have exacerbated the persistence of working poor families in the United States. Each of the factors associated with the persistence of working poor families is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that educational barriers and the changing job and labor market have contributed to the persistence of working poor families in the United States. "Educational barriers" is linked to "changing job and labor market" in Figure 1 by a dotted line to indicate that, in addition to the challenges of finding well-paid jobs in a turbulent labor market, educational barriers create skill deficits that make it even harder for the working poor to find good jobs in a rapidly changing job market. HRD research and practice can ameliorate problems associated with poverty and the working poor. Conversely, factors associated with the persistence of working poor families influence HRD research and practice. This reciprocal relationship between the factors associated with the persistence of working poor families and the implications for HRD research and practice is represented by a two-way arrow in Figure 1.

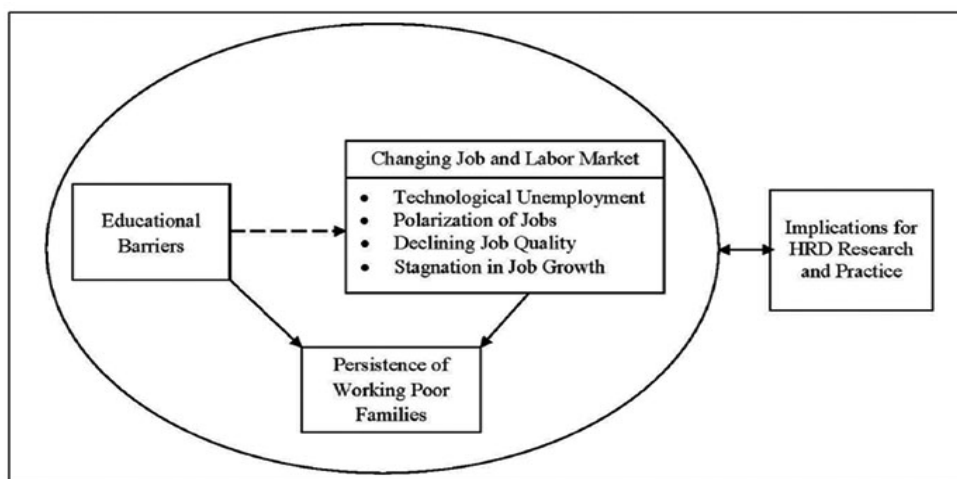


Figure 1. A model of factors associated with the persistence of working poor families and implications for human resource development.

HRD, Poverty, and the Working Poor

HRD has contributed substantially to knowledge about poverty, the persistence of working poor families, and to interventions to alleviate this problem. This section reviews recent HRD literature related to poverty and the working poor.

The December 2014 issue of the *International Journal of Training and Development* published three articles on the role of training in reducing poverty. Bharti (2014) examined the role of training in self-employment and microenterprise development to generate income and reduce poverty in India. Observing the outcomes of 50 participants in microenterprise development training who attempted to start their own microenterprises, Bharti reported that only one third of the participants started a microenterprise and all 50 participants failed to sustain their small businesses. Bharti concluded that, while training may have helped the participants, it alone was insufficient for participants' success.

In addition, participants lacked the finances and access to banks that were needed for microenterprise development. Two other *International Journal of Training and Development* articles examined the role of training in reducing poverty in Bangladesh: One article examined Bangladesh's population of ultra-poor and the other article addressed agricultural workers in Bangladesh receiving microcredit (i.e., small loans to those who typically lack collateral and an adequate credit history). Noting that nearly one half of the Bangladesh population is served in some way by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on poverty alleviation, Khan and Ali (2014) studied the effects on individual income levels of participation in NGO training programs associated with income generation. Contrary to expectations that participation in the training would raise participants' income levels, the results of the study showed the opposite: Income levels of participants after training were lower than pre-training levels, prompting the authors to question the methods used to select participants and implement the training. Mahmud, Parvez, Hilton, Kabir, and Wahid (2014) studied the influence of participation in training by female agricultural workers who were receiving microcredit from the largest NGO in Bangladesh. The authors sought to demonstrate the effects of participation in training on the participant's household income level, measured as total household expenditures. However, the results of the study showed that training had no significant effect on household expenditures due to limitations in the training (i.e., low participation rates and the short duration of training).

Devins and Gold (2014) conceptualized an approach to sustainable talent management and development to improve opportunities for low-wage workers in the U.K. Sectors of the British economy that produce low specification goods and services minimize labor costs and wages, underutilize skilled workers, and rely on the lowskilled, low-wage labor market for workers. These conditions are exacerbated by the polarization of jobs into high-skill and low-skill occupations (Autor, 2010). The authors proposed sustainable talent management and development as a means for developing the capabilities of low-skilled, low-wage workers through greater emphasis on education and training, employee retention, and the linkage between employee development and business outcomes.

Razvi and Roth's (2010) literature review describes how NGOs in India support the socioeconomic development of low-income women to help them overcome their marginalized status in the Indian workforce. Concerned that "mainstream HRD does not explain how and why only a certain segment of the Indian population participates in formal job sectors" (p. 66), the authors discussed the origin of Indian NGOs and described how they provide basic literacy education, job skills training, and access to credit and savings accounts to enhance the socioeconomic development of low-income women. However, they concluded that, despite progress since achieving independence in 1947, India has not adequately improved the welfare of the laboring class, especially for women working in largely unregulated, informal work sectors.

Hamilton and Torracco (2013) reviewed the literature on adults in the United States with limited education and skills from five related streams of research on this population. Critical analysis of the literature in five categories (i.e., the low-skilled adult population, barriers to educational success, barriers to employment, and instructional innovations to help adults with limited education and skills, and related research reports) provided the basis for synthesis represented visually as a model of the literature that links the barriers with the innovations for low-skilled adults.

Advances in Developing Human Resources devoted an issue to national HRD in transitioning societies in the developing world (Lynham, Paprock, & Cunningham, 2006). In-

cluded in the issue are articles on the Philippines, Morocco, and Brazil where poverty reduction is a major goal. Paprock, Yumol, and Atienza (2006) described recent history in the Philippines as characterized by instability and corruption in national leadership, economic uncertainty and reoccurring financial turmoil, and conditions in which 40% of the population live below the poverty line. Although the education system in the Philippines is effective enough to result in Filipino access to employment in desirable international labor markets, the authors contend that HRD is needed to strengthen the capabilities of the workforce in the use of technology, teacher education, and in other areas to improve the Filipino economy. Cox, Arkoubi, and Estrada (2006) examined HRD's role in helping to alleviate persistent problems with illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, and educational deficits in Morocco. Along with recent reforms to combat ineffective governance, corruption, public disenfranchisement, and emigration of educated Moroccans, the authors urged HRD professionals and policy makers to promote job creation and increased earnings for the workforce, and collaboration among the government ministries for education, training, and economic development. Similar challenges are discussed by Hasler, Thompson, and Schuler (2006) in their examination of the role of national human resource development (NHRD) in addressing the socioeconomic and political issues in Brazil. Finally, published case studies reported the use of job training and organization development for poverty alleviation and community development in Thailand and Bangalore, India (McLean, Kuo, Budhwani, Yamnill, & Virakul, 2012).

Another issue of *Advances in Developing Human Resources* explored HRD as national policy with articles examining NHRD in 11 countries (McLean, Osman-Gani, & Cho, 2004). Although these countries represented every continent except Australia, poverty reduction was among the main goals of HRD as national policy in every country included in the issue.

Marquardt (2007) urged the HRD community to support globalization in part because it enhances global economic growth and alleviates poverty. Marquardt (p. 287) invoked the statement by Kofi Annan (2000), the former secretary general of the United Nations: "Whatever cause you are championing, the cure does not lie in protesting against globalization itself. I believe the poor are poor not because of too much globalization, but because of too little."

Johnson and Bartlett (2013) examined the tourism industry within the context of NHRD in Jamaica. Although unnoticed by most tourists and largely ignored by the Jamaican government, employment for many workers in resorts, hotels, and large population centers is characterized by long hours and low wages.

Scully-Russ (2005) explored low-wage labor markets to examine the reality confronting those employed in low-wage jobs. She demonstrated that the dispositions of individual workers (agency) interact with labor market conditions (structure) to disadvantage low-wage workers. As education and work-related learning are a means for advancement in the labor market, the author examined the implications of this for low-wage workers, employers, and the HRD field.

In developing a new conceptual framework for examining demographic shifts and changing careers, Lyons, Ng, and Schweitzer (2014) discussed the interplay among changing demographics and career expectations, experience and outcomes, illustrated with Canadian examples. They accounted for the influence on careers of generational differences, immigration, gender, socioeconomic effects, and the interaction among these factors and discussed the challenges organizations face in adjusting to these changes.

In the course of advocating for the elimination of child labor especially in devel-

oping countries, Budhwani, Wee, and McLean (2004) discussed the conditions of poverty, illiteracy, unrestrained population growth, lack of education, and social norms associated with child labor that need to be accounted for in strategies to eliminate it.

Adding their voices to the chorus of concern for the working poor, calls to work toward the elimination of poverty come from those involved in the practice of organization development (Martin & Agostino, 2015) and industrial-organizational psychology (Maynard & Ferdman, 2009). In summary, the HRD literature on poverty and the working poor reviewed here shows the global scope of HRD's efforts to better understand poverty and improve the welfare and self-sufficiency of the working poor.

So far, we have seen that changes in the composition and availability of jobs have exacerbated the persistence of poverty in the United States. The obstacles faced by the working poor including unemployment, low-wage jobs, and inadequate preparation for the workforce have important implications for HRD. Next, the implications of these developments for HRD research and practice are discussed.

Implications for HRD Research and Practice

Workers in full-time jobs have been displaced with the rise of the permanent temporary workforce (Hatton, 2012). Technology and labor market factors have unequivocally eliminated mostly mid-skilled jobs, yet few new jobs have been created to take their place (Rothman, 2013). Workers without postsecondary education and marketable skills are now relegated to low-wage jobs or unemployment (Carnevale et al., 2013). Low-income and disadvantaged populations are among the most vulnerable to being left behind in a changing economy. What are the implications of these important developments for HRD?

The polarization of jobs into high-skill and low-skill occupations points to several implications for HRD. With almost a third of America's working families living on the threshold of poverty already, what are the consequences of the continued rise in lowskill occupations for individuals and society? High-skill occupations are appealing to workers because, among other things, they offer higher wages than low-skill occupations. Yet, more research is needed on how to develop the workforce needed to keep pace with accelerating technology for high-skill, high-wage jobs (Yawson, 2010). Lowskill workers especially need the education, work skills, and support for career advancement that HRD can provide (Scully-Russ, 2013). In this way, HRD can help move workers from the low-wage to the high-wage end of the job earnings continuum.

Declining job quality and precarious employment have several implications for HRD research. Some organizations take the "high road" to create more quality jobs as part of a high performance workplace strategy, whereas others have taken the "low road" to minimize wages, employment levels, and personnel costs (Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995). What responsibility do employers have to offer more and better jobs in their communities? HRD research should continue to promote good corporate citizenship and socially responsible employment policies (Ardichvili, 2013).

Although appealing to many employers, part-time and contingent jobs are the least desirable jobs for workers (Kalleberg, 2011). HRD research is needed to examine the implications of the proliferation of precarious employment for the welfare of workers, families, and society (Lyons et al., 2014). In addition to helping individuals prepare for the workforce, Scully-Russ (2005) challenges HRD to accept responsibility for mitigating the growth of low-wage work and its individual and social consequences. HRD research is also needed to address overcoming the barriers to economic selfsufficiency, particularly

those faced by women and minorities (Alfred, 2007).

In an environment where job security is increasingly tenuous, HRD can provide reassurance and direction for concerned workers. HRD professionals are qualified and well positioned to assess changes in the job market and recommend new programs for workers to meet changing labor market needs (Holton & Naquin, 2002; Jacobs & Jones, 1990). In a changing labor market that frequently results in dislocated workers, HRD has a prominent role in supporting workers to make their employment transitions as seamless as possible (Wilson & Brown, 2012).

HRD Research, Poverty, and the Working Poor

The review of literature on HRD and its involvement with poverty and the working poor shows the global scope of HRD's efforts to better understand poverty and improve the welfare and self-sufficiency of the working poor. A majority of the literature is written by two or more scholars with at least one author from the country examined in the research. The research describes the challenges faced by families who work hard yet struggle to earn a living wage in several countries representing every continent except Australia. It exposes the plight of the working poor in the context of sociocultural, political, and economic factors responsible for the persistence of poverty despite international efforts over several decades to alleviate it.

However, the literature on HRD, poverty, and the working poor says little about poverty and the working poor in the United States. Nearly all of the 17 HRD publications reviewed for this article address HRD and poverty in non-U.S. countries, most in under-developed nations in Africa and Asia. Yet, poverty rates have reached historic highs in developed countries, including those considered rich nations like the United States, which has the highest poverty rate among developed nations (Oxfam America, 2013). The global scope of HRD's involvement with poverty and the working poor is laudable and demonstrates HRD's commitment to developing human resources at all levels of society around the world. However, more HRD research is needed to better understand the persistence of poverty and working poor families in the United States and to develop more effective interventions to alleviate this problem. HRD has a strong record of responsiveness to compelling social needs. Poverty, the persistence of working poor families, and increasing economic inequality in the United States are undeniably important. But more HRD research is needed on this problem that has the same rigor and impact as the research on this topic done for other countries.

The relationship of job and labor market factors to the persistence of working poor families and the implications for HRD research and practice are shown in Table 1.

As the skills required of employees change over time, or when brand new jobs are created, HRD anticipates these changes and provides employees with opportunities to develop the skills to meet these needs (Torraco, 2005a). HRD is committed to improving the skills and employability of all workers including those having limited education and skills (Hamilton & Torraco, 2013). But when employment levels are stagnant and job availability declines, fewer people need training and HRD's role changes. Job skills and training are meaningless if too few jobs are available for those who want to work. HRD is well positioned to assure that the workforce development needs of employers, employees, and society are met, and to advocate for adequate employment opportunities for all.

Table 1. Job and Labor Market Factors, Their Relationship to the Persistence of Working Poor Families, and the Implications for HRD.

Job and labor market factor	Definition of factor	Relationship of factor to the persistence of working poor families	Implications for HRD research and practice
Polarization of job opportunities	Jobs have polarized into high-skill and low-skill occupations, with declining opportunities in middle-wage, middle-skill, white-collar, and blue-collar jobs (Autor, 2010).	The continued loss of middle-wage, middle-skill jobs has displaced most workers without transferable skills or retraining to lower-wage jobs. Income growth in working poor families is negatively affected by the loss of these jobs (Working Poor Families Project, 2013).	HRD research is needed to examine the effects of the changing composition and availability of jobs on workers and society at large, especially for those on the low-skill, low-wage end of the continuum. Low-skilled workers need the skills and support for career advancement that HRD can provide (Scully-Russ, 2013). HRD research, policy, and practices are needed to help workers acquire higher-wage jobs.
Declining job quality and precarious employment	More jobs today are "precarious"—temporary, part-time, or seasonal. The proliferation of precarious employment is due in part to employers seeking to avoid providing health care coverage and other benefits to employees.	Temporary, part-time, or seasonal employment contributes to the persistence of working poor families. These jobs pay low wages, lack health insurance, do not provide pensions, and contribute to the rise in poverty (Kalleberg, 2011).	HRD research is needed on the implications of the proliferation of precarious employment for the welfare of workers, families, and society (Scully-Russ, 2005; Wilson & Brown, 2012). What responsibility do organizations have to offer better jobs in their communities? (Ardichvili, 2013).
Technological unemployment	"Technological unemployment" is the elimination of jobs due to advances in technology (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).	Workers are displaced from jobs by machines even as fewer new jobs are being created. Because job loss due to technology is more often permanent, displaced workers face challenges with reemployment, contributing to the slide into poverty (Shipley, 2004).	HRD develops the human capital needed to assure that workers are prepared for new jobs and technologies (Yawson, 2010). Yet, more HRD research, policy, and practices are needed to help workers acquire the skills needed to keep pace with rapidly advancing technology.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Job and labor market factor	Definition of factor	Relationship of factor to the persistence of working poor families	Implications for HRD research and practice
Increase in low-wage employment	Most employment growth since 2010 has been in low-wage jobs, while mid-wage jobs have declined substantially. Almost twice as many low-wage jobs were gained in the recovery than were lost during the recession (Bernhardt, 2012).	The proliferation of low-wage employment contributes to the persistence of working poor families. More than 40% of families with jobs in fast-food, retail, and temp jobs live in poverty on incomes 2 times the federal poverty level or less. Families of more than half of full-time, fast-food workers are enrolled in public assistance programs (Allegretto et al., 2013).	By developing job skills, HRD can enhance the self-efficacy and potential for success of those in poverty (Hamilton & Torraco, 2013). HRD can advocate for more high-skill, high-wage jobs so that, through HRD, a greater share of the workforce is qualified for better paying jobs (Alfred, 2007). HRD support for progressive minimum wage legislation can raise income levels due to the higher-wage threshold for all workers (Bernhardt, 2012). Low-wage employment is prevalent in underdeveloped countries. Although ample HRD research addresses the predicament of the working poor in other countries, little HRD research addresses this in the United States. The United States has the highest poverty rates among developed countries. More HRD research is needed to address poverty and the working poor in the United States.
Stagnation in job growth	The Great Recession caused the most severe and sustained job loss this country had ever experienced since the 1930s Depression, with the loss of 8.7 million jobs during 2008-2009 (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012).	Job growth, especially those that pay family-supporting wages, has not kept pace with the employment needs of new entrants to the workforce (Ruetschlin & Draut, 2013).	HRD is well positioned to assess changes in the job market and recommend new programs to meet changing job and labor market needs (Holton & Naquin, 2002). Yet, more research is needed on emerging workforce development needs in a rapidly changing economy.

Note. HRD = human resource development.

Author's Note

This article is the author's original work, has not been published elsewhere, and it has not been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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