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Boom Times a Bust for Less-Educated Young Men *Report Shows that Less-Educated Young Men Saw Employment Drop Over Last 20 Years*

(Washington, DC) — Most demographic groups saw their employment rates and incomes rise in the economic heyday of the late 1990s, especially less-educated women. However, on the whole, less-educated young men have bucked this trend. According to a new report from the Center for Law and Social Policy, this demographic group saw employment rates *drop* during this period of economic growth.

The report, *Boom Times a Bust: Declining Employment Among Young Less-Educated Men* by Elise Richer, Abbey Frank, Mark Greenberg, Steve Savner, and Vicki Turetsky, finds that in 1999, men aged 18 to 24 with a high school diploma or less were less likely to be working than their counterparts in 1979, another economic peak. And when they were working, they were likely to be earning significantly less. During this 20-year time period employment rates have fallen by 5 percentage points for this group of young men, from 83 percent employed to 78 percent employed. When the authors look specifically at African American men in this group, the numbers are worse—the employment rate dropped 13 percentage points, from 66 to 53 percent.

The authors offer potential reasons for this decline, including the following:

- Employers are looking for higher-skilled workers than in the past.
- Many manufacturing and other blue collar jobs have moved to the suburbs, while a large percentage of less-educated young men live in urban centers.
- High incarceration rates among these young men diminish employment.
- Employers' negative perceptions and discrimination of this group.
- Wage garnishment for child support might drive young fathers “underground” into informal employment.

Others have posited that the influx of less-educated women into the employment market has adversely affected the prospects of less-educated young men. Research on this point, however, is conflicting.

“This decline in employment rates during economic boom times is counterintuitive,” said Elise Richer, CLASP Senior Policy Analyst and lead author of the report. “With the economy now stagnant, this trend isn’t apt to improve without programs and policies aimed at helping this group of young men.”

The authors conclude the report with public policy recommendations, which include: expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, increasing the minimum wage, setting realistic child support orders, creating public jobs for youths, developing quality job training programs, and improving pre- and post-release employment assistance for prisoners.

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To read the new CLASP report, *Boom Times a Bust: Declining Employment Among Young Less-Educated Men*, visit: www.clasp.org/DMS/Documents/1058362464.08/Boom_Times.pdf. To set up an interview with one of the authors, contact Gayle Bennett at (202) 906-8024.

A national, nonprofit organization founded in 1968, CLASP conducts research, policy analysis, technical assistance, and advocacy on issues related to economic security of low-income families with children.