
A quarter of Americans couldn't find \$2,000 in 30 days, study shows

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About one fourth of Americans age 18 and older said they could “certainly not” and another fourth could “probably not” come up with \$2,000 in cash within 30 days from any source, according to an analysis of 2009 survey data by a team of business and sociology professors.

The findings, an indication of the level of household savings in the U.S., were published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in a paper entitled, “Financially Fragile Households: Evidence and Implications,” by Anna Maria Lusardi of George Washington University, Peter Tufano of Harvard, and Daniel J. Schneider of Princeton.

Generally, low levels of ability to access \$2,000 on short notice correlated with low income, low wealth levels, low education levels and losses in the financial crisis. But the researchers were also surprised to see so many high-income households without \$2,000 readily at hand.

“It seems somewhat unbelievable that nearly a quarter of households making between \$100,000 and \$150,000 claim not to be able to raise \$2,000 in a month, but this fact may be less shocking when one considers costs of living in urban areas, costs of housing and childcare, substantial debt service, and other factor,” the authors wrote.

“A material fraction of seemingly “middle class” Americans also judge themselves to be financially fragile, reflecting either a substantially weaker financial position than one would expect, or a very high level of anxiety or pessimism,” the paper also said.

To get \$2,000 in an emergency, 52.4% of those surveyed (excluding those who were certain they couldn't find the money at all) would draw from savings, 29.6% would turn to family members, 22.9% would work more, 20.9% would use credit cards and 18.8% would sell possessions, to list the most common resources.

Comparing developed Western nations, the researchers found that ability to “certainly” come up with the equivalent of \$2,000 varied from 57.7% in the Netherlands, to 48.2% in Italy, 44.3% in Canada, 36.2% in France, 31% in Portugal, 30.7% in Germany, 24.9% in the U.S. and 24.1% in the United Kingdom.

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