

**Consumer Expenditure Survey Showcase:
Give Me Your Retired, Your Hungry, Your Poor....**

Organizers:

**Jessie X. Fan, University of Utah
Geoffrey D. Paulin, Bureau of Labor Statistics**

Moderator:

Geoffrey D. Paulin

Discussants:

**Michael Walden, North Carolina State University
W. Keith Bryant, Cornell University**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Surveys contain the most detailed information on family expenditures collected by the U.S. government. In addition, these surveys collect data on demographic characteristics for families as a whole (such as family size and region of residence), and for members of the family individually (such as age and ethnicity), as well as other socioeconomic characteristics, including income, assets, and liabilities. The data collected provide an extremely rich source of information for analysis in any number of applications of interest to consumer researchers.

There are two different expenditure surveys conducted under the program. One is a survey in which respondents are interviewed once every three months in an effort to ascertain how much their families spent on various goods and services during that time. These interviews are conducted for five consecutive quarters, although only results of the second through fifth are made available for research. (The first is used strictly for bounding purposes.) In this way, data for a full year are available for families that participate in all interviews. The other survey is one in which a diary is placed with a household, in which the respondent is asked to record all expenditures made during the week. At the end of that week, the first diary is retrieved and a second is left in its place with similar instructions to the respondent. At the end of the second week, the second diary is retrieved and the survey process ends. Each survey contains a large number of observations. The most recent Interview surveys contain information from about 6,000 families each quarter. The Diary surveys collect data from over 5,000 families annually. The samples for each survey are drawn independently, so no family participates in both surveys simultaneously.

To demonstrate a few of the uses of these data, this showcase included papers from experienced users of these resources. In order to expose the breadth of the data collected, the organizers chose papers using data from both the Interview and Diary surveys. The first paper (presenter: Deanna Sharpe) compared both income and spending patterns of the poor and nonpoor, addressing issues important in the debate about how poverty is best measured. Similar to the first paper, the second paper (presenter: Sherman Hanna) explored expenditures and incomes of low-income families. However, its purpose was to assess regressivity of different taxes. The third paper (presenter: Geoffrey Paulin) explored ethnic variation in food expenditures. The paper examined what associations exist between food and various ethnic groups, and whether or not these associations are valid; it further examined whether there are broader implications to be drawn from the data—for example, do some groups in general eat more healthfully than others? The final paper (presenter: Brian Riordon) addressed issues related to the life-cycle hypothesis. Specifically, how well prepared for retirement are today's 55 to 64 year olds compared to those of a generation ago? The first, second, and fourth papers used data from the Interview survey; the third used data from the Diary survey.

Prior to the first presentation, the moderator presented a brief description of the surveys in general, terms frequently used in the surveys, data publications, and similar issues. Perhaps the most exciting news for researchers was the announcement that the sample size for each survey will increase substantially in 1999.

It is hoped that the showcase inspired both new and experienced users to engage in new research using these important data. The abstract for each paper follows in the order in which the papers were presented.