

New and Improved: A Discussion of Innovations in Data Quality for the Consumer Expenditure Survey

Introduction

This session was designed to describe new methodologies and means of data presentation to facilitate the use of results from the Consumer Expenditure Survey, a major data source familiar to many members of disciplines within the family of consumer scientists. Each speaker described major innovations currently scheduled for implementation. The presentations were followed with questions from the audience.

Presentations

All presenters are economists employed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Division of Consumer Expenditure Surveys.

William D. Passero, Moderator

(Due to Valerie Vannett's departure from the Division of Consumer Expenditure Surveys, Bill Passero presented Ms. Vannett's work as well as moderating the session.)

"We All Have our 'Ups' and 'Downs': Providing Variances for Expenditure Data," by Valerie Vannett. Means and variances are two basic statistics that complement each other in analysis. The Consumer Expenditure Survey results have long reported means of expenditures and certain demographic characteristics. However, variances have been available only periodically. This discussion will describe techniques being devised to calculate and present such information as variances, standard errors of means, and coefficients of variation for data from both the Interview and Diary Surveys on a continuing basis.

Wolf D. Weber

"I Know What You Earned Last Summer (But I Promise Not to Tell): Changes in Applications of Microdata Disclosure Limitation." Recent advances in data processing capabilities are enabling more researchers to analyze large data sets. While increased computing power may result in better research, it also adds to the capability of linking microdata file records to survey respondents, thereby compromising privacy. The Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board (DRB) is responsible for minimizing the probability of respondent disclosure for Census sponsored or Census collected microdata. Recently the DRB began to enforce a new rule regarding the release of "highly visible" or sensitive variables. This discussion will focus on the new rules, how the Consumer Expenditure Survey microdata are affected by them, and implications for researchers using these data.

Geoffrey D. Paulin

"Putting it all Together: Summary Variables, Income Imputation, Variances and Disclosure Limitation." The Division of Consumer Expenditure Surveys is currently experimenting with summary variables for gifts, travel expenditures, and certain variables for which an "outlays" approach may be more useful to some researchers than an "expenditures" approach. (For example, mortgage principal outlays are collected from homeowners, but not reported as housing "expenditures.") In addition, imputation is scheduled for implementation as a method to adjust for nonresponse to income questions. This presentation uses imputed income data created from the public use data sets in analyses of summary variables to demonstrate how the improved data might be used by a typical researcher.