

The June Review

With Father's Day 2008 occurring this month and Mother's Day just a month earlier, perhaps it is timely that this issue of *Monthly Labor Review* offers two reports related to working parents and decisions they make regarding their use of time.

First, Mary Dorinda Allard and Marianne Janes of the Bureau's American Time Use Survey program provide an analysis displayed through a series of charts of how working parents allocate the investment of their time in pursuits such as work, child-care, and household and leisure activities. Among their findings, the authors show that the chances of married mothers working full time rise steadily with the ages of their children, while the age of their children seems to have little relation to whether or not mothers work part time. Married fathers today overwhelmingly still work full time, whether they have one child or four or more children.

Next, Wen-Jui Han, Christopher J. Ruhm, Jane Waldfogel, and Elizabeth Washbrook assess data on the timing of mothers' employment after childbirth from a new national longitudinal study. While a number of factors seem to influence the speed with which a woman goes to work after having a child, the strongest was whether or not the new mother had been working prior to the birth. They examine differences in the rapidity of mother's labor force reentry via demographic comparisons, family structure, years of schooling, and other variables.

Of perennial interest to working moms and dads, as well as most everyone else, is the subject of health insurance and its costs. Christine Eibner and M. Susan Marquis study data

from two BLS programs, the Employment Cost Index and the Employee Benefits Survey, over the 1996–2005 period. They examine trends in rates for particular types of businesses in offering health insurance to their employees, the change over time in health insurance costs relative to payroll, and how the generosity of benefits has changed for workers enrolled in health insurance plans.

Focus on unemployment

Joblessness nationally has been on a gradual uptrend over the last year or so and registered an unusually large upward spike in May. Concern has been mounting over the state of the economy and specifically the labor market, as workers and businesses face rising prices for fuel, energy and other basic commodities. Two new reports from the Bureau illuminate some aspects of the unemployment situation.

Through a careful examination of experimental data on labor force flows, BLS economist Randy Ilg provides some insights into the question of why unemployment has risen. This report, available at www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils66.pdf, points out that reported monthly changes in employment and unemployment are the net result of millions of movements by individuals to and from jobs or entering and leaving the work force. The upward pressure on the jobless rate resulting from these flows was different in 2007 than thus far in 2008.

For many years, the Bureau has published data series that, in addition to the basic unemployment rate, provide additional perspectives on the extent of labor market hardship. BLS economist Sharon Cohany

rightly notes that no single statistic can reflect all of the circumstances jobseekers face, and she draws attention to the alternative statistics in "The Unemployment Rate and Beyond: Alternative Measures of Labor Underutilization" (available at www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils67.pdf). Each of these measures has risen over the last year, from that defined to include the fewest number of potential workers (at 1.8 percent in May 2008) to that with the most (at 9.7 percent).

Coal mining safety

The past 2 years have witnessed several high profile coal mining incidents, including that at the Sago mine in West Virginia. While the rate of work-related fatalities in the industry declined from 2004 to 2005, it increased in 2006. Due to the unusual working conditions in the industry, fatal accidents in coal mining are more likely to involve multiple fatalities than similar incidents in other industries. In addition to workplace fatalities, the coal mining industry also has a higher incidence rate of work-related injuries and illnesses than the private sector as a whole; fortunately, that rate has been declining in recent years.

BLS economists James B. Rice and Jill A. Janocha analyze the most recently available safety and health data for the industry in the June 2008 issue of *Compensation and Working Conditions Online* (available at www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/home.htm). They summarize the types of injuries workers suffer, the number of days away from work for workers due to such injuries, and how these data differ by occupation. They conduct a similar review of the data on fatalities. □