

The December Review

The severity of the most recent recession has led to widespread interest on how the downturn has affected different groups of people in the United States, particularly those often considered to be most vulnerable to hardship in economic downturns. The marked increase in the share of single-parent families over time also has been a phenomenon of study and commentary. In our lead article this month, Jeungh-hee Kim and Myungkook Joo, assistant professors in the School of Social Work at Rutgers University, return to a subject that was of major policy concern in the 1990s and has remained so since, namely, welfare reform. They attempt to provide consistent measures on paid employment and other work-related activities of single mothers receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Utilizing data from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), they construct new measures of single mothers' participation in work-related activities in 1996—just before national welfare reform law was enacted—and in 2001 and 2004, with a focus on single mothers receiving TANF. By preparing calculations of work experience that incorporate various types of paid employment and other kinds of work-related activities, they suggest that rates of paid employment and work-related participation for single mothers receiving TANF are higher than those which have been reported in the official TANF data. They also examine how demographic characteristics of such mothers changed over the period, estimate how many single mothers received childcare and transportation assistance, try to determine how and why income levels changed, and suggest numerous potential questions for further research.

The subject of household debt also

has received wide coverage throughout the recent and ongoing period of economic hardship. According to Kathleen W. Johnson and Geng Li, economists with the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) is the only survey of households that records both a wide variety of household expenditures and the households' balance sheets. They note that the CE has been used extensively by researchers to study household consumption and saving and distributions of personal income and wealth, among other topics.

In their article this month, Johnson and Li report that several studies have validated the quality of CE data, specifically in regard to expenditures. What has not been addressed is the validity of liability data produced by the survey. The authors attempt to bridge that gap by comparing household debt payments and balances measured in the CE with those measured in the Survey of Consumer Finances, a triennial survey conducted by the Federal Reserve. They also compare the trend in payments on household debt relative to household income, as measured in the CE, with the trend in an analogous aggregate statistic, the household debt service ratio, as measured by the Fed. On the basis of these comparisons, they find that, in each instance, the data from the CE hold up well, and that "this validation suggests that household debt payment data from the CE may be used to help examine the relationship between household debt and other household economic decisions."

BLS economist James Campbell notes in our Regional Trends department this month that, while the national multiple jobholding rate was unchanged in 2008 for the third consecutive year—at 5.2 percent—25 States saw increases in their rates from the prior year. Three northerly States—

North Dakota, Idaho, and Massachusetts—happened to record the largest over-the-year increases in multiple jobholding rates. The States showing the largest decreases were Missouri and Montana, followed by Kansas and then South Dakota and Washington.

As they have since 2005, the multiple jobholding rates for individual States varied considerably around the county in 2008. Nebraska and North Dakota registered the highest rates, at 9.8 percent each, while Nevada had the lowest rate, at less than 4 percent.

Data on people holding multiple jobs are collected in the Current Population Survey. Such people typically are either wage or salary workers who hold two or more jobs, or self-employed or unpaid family workers who also hold a wage or salary job.

New editions of some perennial favorites

This month the Bureau released the latest editions of the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *Career Guide to Industries*. These publications, updated every 2 years, are considered the Government's premier source of career information. They provide profiles of hundreds of occupations and dozens of industries that are comprehensive and up to date. These publications reflect the latest BLS employment projections (covering the 2008–18 period), which were featured in the last issue of *Monthly Labor Review*.

The *Handbook* highlights key characteristics of nearly 300 occupations, such as job prospects, work environment, and education requirements. The *Career Guide* analyzes employment change from an industry perspective, providing information on industries that account for three out of every four jobs in the economy. Online versions can be found at www.bls.gov/oco and www.bls.gov/oco/cg. □