

The October Review

In its official employment measures, the Bureau of Labor Statistics usually defines part-time workers to be those who work less than 35 hours per week. BLS further classifies part-time workers into those who work part time on an involuntary basis and those who work such hours on a voluntary basis. In this month's lead article, Luke Shaefer, assistant professor at the University of Michigan's School of Social Work, analyzes part-time worker data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) with a slightly different approach—by dividing part-time workers into *primary* and *secondary* wage earners. Primary wage earners, as the name implies, are the main source of income for themselves and their family, whereas secondary wage earners depend on another worker for the majority of their family's income. The author finds, on the basis of the estimates presented in the article, that the proportion of part-time workers accounted for by primary wage earners has increased slowly during the past three decades, and that primary wage earners currently make up more than 36 percent of all part-time workers. The article also indicates, perhaps unexpectedly, that most part-time primary workers choose part-time work over full-time hours.

One of the most widely known and anticipated releases from BLS each month is the findings from the survey of employer payrolls, which provide a snapshot of the number of net job gains or losses for a particular month. It is notable that underlying these job gains and losses is a dynamic flow of job-change activity. One Bureau program that measures this activity is Business Employment

Dynamics (BED). BED data capture the level of “gross” job-change activity that is behind the net change. In an article by Solidelle F. Wasser, formerly from the Bureau's New York–New Jersey Regional Office, and Bruce J. Bergman and Michael L. Dolfman of the same office, BED data are used, along with data on net payroll change, to gauge job activity in Manhattan's financial sector during the 2005–07 period. The authors find that, just before the recession beginning in December 2007, Manhattan enjoyed above-average employment growth. The authors also conclude that the latest period of relative employment growth in Manhattan was caused not by a higher rate of job creation but by a slower pace of job loss in contracting and closing establishments.

Do parents of infants spend their time differently than parents of older children? Professor Robert Drago of The Pennsylvania State University presents us with this question and uses data from the Bureau's American Time Use Survey to help provide an answer. The article also includes a look at the trade-offs that parents make in order to make more time for their children, and a look at variations in the amounts of time spent on childcare, paid work, and housework among groups of differing socioeconomic status. The author finds that parents of infants do in fact exhibit different patterns of time use compared with parents of older children. The analysis also indicates that fathers have become more involved with infant childcare in recent decades, but that infant childcare is still predominantly provided by the mother. The paper also finds, not surprisingly to most parents, that single mothers of infants not

only provide more childcare relative to single mothers of older children, but they also spend more of their time sleeping. This perhaps suggests that mothers of infants may experience exhaustion because of frequent interruptions of sleep at night.

This issue's concluding article is by Wayne Vroman, an economist with the Urban Institute. The article uses data from unemployment insurance (UI) supplements to the CPS to understand why less than half of all unemployed workers in the United States are compensated by the UI program. The author finds that most people who do not file for UI benefits believe that they are not eligible for them, but the specific reasons they do not apply for benefits strongly depend on their reasons for unemployment. For example, the paper suggests that, among people whose temporary jobs have ended, many do not understand key elements of UI program coverage and eligibility requirements.

2008 economic stimulus tax rebates

How did you use your 2008 economic stimulus tax rebate? According to a report published this month by the Bureau's Consumer Expenditure Survey program, almost half of us used this rebate mostly to pay down debt. Another 30 percent reported mostly spending the rebate, and another 18 percent saved it. Those with at least one parent and qualifying child were more than twice as likely to have used the rebate to pay off debt than they were to spend it, and single parents were much less likely to save the rebate than families with a husband, a wife, and children. The report is available online at www.bls.gov/cex/taxrebate.htm. □