

Using the 2008 CPS-ASEC-SSA Matched Data Set to Show Who Is and Is Not Captured in the Official BLS Six-Question-Sequence on Disability

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Short Abstract (100 words)

With 2008 CPS-ASEC-SSA administrative records data, we will measure the degree that work-limitation-based and six-question disability sequence-based samples of the working-age population with disabilities capture the SSDI/SSI-disabled adult population. Using other variables on the SSA files (medical listing, stage at acceptance or rejection, etc.), we investigate the characteristics of those systematically missed. This research, which is an extension of Burkhauser, Houtenville, and Tennant (2011), will provide policymakers with a face validity test of the official BLS six-question sequence's ability to capture an unbiased sample of the working-age population with disabilities and its employment and SSDI/SSI take-up rates.

Introduction

Any set of questions that aims to fully capture the working-age population with disabilities must include those receiving the two main forms of disability transfers—Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income-disabled adults (SSI). Both programs have strict guidelines for determining health-based eligibility for benefits—whether or not the recipient has a health-based impairment that results in their being unable to perform any substantial gainful activity. Burkhauser, Houtenville, and Tennant (2011a) find plausible evidence that, by not including a work-limitation question, the official Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) six-question sequence on disability in the CPS-BMS generates a biased sample of working-age people with disabilities that not only understates the size of that population but overstates its employment rates and understates its SSDI and SSI take-up rates. We base this conclusion in part on the results of a face validity test. The test compares two alternative samples of the working-age population with disabilities drawn from the 2010 CPS-ASEC. All respondents answer a work-limitation question in that March survey as well as a six-question sequence on disability either then or in another month in the CPS-BMS. Using these two samples of the working-age (aged 25-61) population with disabilities, we find that the six-question sequence-based sample only captures 63.3 percent of SSDI/SSI beneficiaries. The marginal contribution of those who only report a work limitation adds another 28.7 percent, for a total of 92.0 percent of all self-reported SSDI/SSI beneficiaries in the CPS-ASEC.

SSA plans to link the March 2009 CPS-ASEC to SSA administrative records data by late 2011 but the March 2008 CPS/SSA link has just been completed. Since the six-question sequence was added to the CPS in June 2008, the March 2008 CPS does not have any respondents who were asked these questions contemporaneously with the work-limitation

question. However, using a method that takes advantage of the longitudinal nature of the CPS, we can create a dataset that includes those who answer the work-limitation question in March 2008 and the six-question sequence either in June 2008 or in their fifth month-in-sample.¹ While the forthcoming March 2009 CPS/SSA link data will give us a larger sample, in Burkhauser, Houtenville, and Tennant (2011a), we found that approximately 35 percent of the March 2008 working-age (aged 25-61) sample answered both the work-limitation question in March and the six-question sequence at some point in their interview cycle. Hence we will use the 2008 CPS-ASEC-SSA administrative records data in this project.²

This research builds on our previous work. We expect that access to the newly matched 2008 CPS/SSA data will greatly improve the precision of our face validity test and allow us to test the sensitivity of our previous results. We will again create three alternative samples of the working-age population with disabilities—a work-limitation-based sample, a six-question sequence-based sample, and a seven-question sequence-based sample (i.e., the union of the other two). We will then use SSA administrative records information (instead of the previous self-reported SSDI-SSI income) for our face validity test to best capture those receiving SSDI or SSI-disabled adults benefits. To the degree we find that these alternative samples of the working-age population with disabilities fail to capture the SSDI-SSI population, we will determine what part of the latter population is systematically missed, a policy-relevant extension of our previous work. In doing so, we will not only provide the Census Bureau and BLS with some evidence on the validity of their disability questions in the CPS, and by inference the American Community

¹ Burkhauser, Houtenville, and Tennant (2011b) test the sensitivity of their previous results. They find results that are slightly more precise using only those who answer all questions in March and excluding the 75 percent of the sample that does not do so. But their key face validity results hold in the smaller and larger samples.

² Our proposal is based solely on work using the 2008 CPS-ASEC-SSA administrative records data. If the 2009 CPS-ASEC-SSA administrative records data file is completed and made available to us before the end of the contract year, we will, subject to time constraints, compare our 2008 results with those using the 2009 data.

Survey (this survey only contains the six-question sequence on disability), but also provide some evidence of who is and is not captured in these measures by type of medical listing and other administrative record subcategories as well as more generally show the validity of self-reported SSDI and SSI data.

Data

The CPS, a joint undertaking of the BLS and the Census Bureau, is a monthly survey of approximately 57,000 households and is the primary source of labor force information for the U.S. working-age (16 years and over), non-institutionalized population.³ The CPS-BMS data contain labor force information and demographic information, and since June 2008 include a series of six types of disability questions. In June 2008, this six-question sequence on disability was asked of all respondents in that month-in-sample. Thereafter it was asked in the respondents' first and fifth months-in-sample (CPS, 2009b). These new questions encompassed disabilities and limitations that affected vision, hearing, remembering/making decisions/concentrating, physical matters like walking and climbing stairs, self-care and independent living in the form of being able to leave the house for an errand or doctor's appointment. However this six-question sequence does not include a work-limitation question, although this subject is still included in the March supplement.

The March supplement provides the usual monthly labor force data provided in the BMS, but also adds data on work experience, income, non-cash benefits and migration (CPS, 2009a). It also separates the many forms of household income, including SSDI and SSI.

The CPS uses a rotation system for its interviews. Each housing unit is followed for a 16-month period—four months in-sample, eight months out-of-sample, and then four months in-

³ <http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsmar09.pdf>, 2-1

sample. That is, a respondent in a selected housing unit is interviewed with respect to all persons living in that housing unit for four consecutive months. After eight consecutive months, a respondent in that housing unit is interviewed for another four consecutive months, after which the housing unit is retired from the CPS sample. In any sample month, one-eighth of the sample is being interviewed for the first time (month-in-sample, or MIS = 1), one-eighth is being interviewed for the second time (MIS = 2), and so on (CPS, 2006, p. 3-13). Because this is a housing unit-based survey rather than a person-based survey, not only can the respondent differ but some members of the household can also vary each month, and, in the extreme, all the original members of the housing unit can leave.

Because of the 4-8-4 rotation system described above, in the absence of any matching issues, a person who is in his first month-in-sample would be interviewed one year (12 months) later but would only be in his fifth month-in-sample.⁴ Specifically for the March 2008 CPS-ASEC-SSA linked data, those in month-in-sample 1 and 5 in March 2008 will be the only ones in the March 2008 sample whose housing units are interviewed in the June 2008 sample and hence answer the six-question sequence then. Those in month-in-sample 2 in March 2008 will answer the six questions in February 2009, those in month-in-sample 3 in March 2008 will answer in January 2009, and those in month-in-sample 4 in March 2008 will answer in December 2008. Those in month-in-sample 6, 7, and 8 in March 2008 are in housing units that were retired before the six questions were asked for the first time in June 2008. Therefore, because we will focus on the 2008 March CPS-ASEC data sample in this work, at most 63 percent of the 2008 sample could answer the six-question sequence before retiring from the

⁴ MIS = 2 and MIS = 6, MIS = 3 and MIS = 7 or MIS = 4 and MIS = 8 also create year-long matched samples.

sample. Burkhauser, Houtenville, and Tennant (2011a) find that because of attrition, approximately 35 percent of the working-age sample does so.

References

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