

Children With Special Health Care Needs: In the Footprint of the Great Recession.

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Abstract: How has the Great Recession affected children under 18 and young people 18 to 24 with special health care needs? Using data from the 2004 and 2008 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), we examine the dynamics of the social and economic characteristics of the both the parents of, and households containing, either children under 18 or young people age 18 to 24 with special health care needs for two contrasting periods: October 2003 through December 2007; and May 2008 through November 2011. The study design is an assessment of indicators measuring the economic characteristics—including income, labor force participation, program participation (especially programs relevant to our analysis, such as SSI), and medical expenditures—using longitudinal data analysis. Additionally, we assess change in household characteristics including parental co-residence, enrollment in school, and home leaving and labor force participation among the young adults.

Extended Abstract:

The overarching goal of the proposed project is to assess how the Great Recession has affected two vulnerable populations: children under 18 with special health care needs and young people 18 to 24 with special health care needs. More specifically, our aims are:

1. To describe the dynamics of the social and economic characteristics of the households containing children under 18 for two contrasting periods of time: a) October 2003 through December 2007; and b) May 2008 through November 2011;
2. To describe the dynamics of the social and economic characteristics of the parents of children under 18 with special health care needs for the same two contrasting periods;
3. To describe the dynamics of the social and economic characteristics of the households containing a young person 18 to 24 with special health care needs for the same two contrasting periods.

The data we will use to address these aims is from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). In particular, we will utilize data from the 2004 Panel and 2008 Panel of the SIPP. The SIPP is widely considered to be the single best source of data in the United States on all aspects of economic well-being of households, including how participation in public and

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private programs contribute to well-being. In both the 2004 and the 2008 panels of the SIPP, the Census Bureau collected data on the income from all sources, assets (i.e. wealth), and participation in an extensive set of local, state, federal and private programs such as Medicaid and those that provide in kind benefits (e.g. school lunch). Participants in the SIPP were (or will be, in the case of the 2008 panel) interviewed 12 times over a period of four years, each time updating information on the core elements of the survey: income, assets (i.e. wealth), and program participation. The fact that the 2004 panel stopped before the 2008 recession began and the 2008 panel covers the period encompassing the recession up and its aftermath provides a unique opportunity to assess the well-being of American households before the Great Recession and during it and its immediate aftermath. The two panels of data collection are remarkably similar and were designed to facilitate comparison.

In addition to the quarterly collection of core information, the survey for each wave also contains items intended to assess a series of topics. For both the 2004 and the 2008 SIPP, special topics included modules concerning adult (defined as 15 and over) functional limitations and disabilities, children's functional limitations and disabilities (including age appropriate questions for different age groups under 19), and medical expenses and utilization (this latter was assessed twice in both panels). These topical modules make it possible to identify households that contain children with special health care needs and households that contain young people 18 to 24 with special health care needs.

Our proposed analysis is an assessment of a set of indicators measuring the economic characteristics—especially but not exclusively income, labor force participation, program participation (especially programs that are especially relevant to our target populations such as SSI), and medical expenditures—using longitudinal data analysis. We will also assess change over time in other household characteristics as well, such as parental co-residence and enrollment in school for the children and home leaving, school enrollment and labor force participation among the young adults. We will regard the results of these assessments for the 2004 panel as a baseline description of the dynamics, over a four year period, of these indicators for our study populations. We will then make a similar assessment of the same indicators for the 2008 panel, which includes the years of the Great Recession, in order to understand how the stresses associated with this period of time affected the well-being of our target populations. As a result of the representativeness and very large sample size of the SIPP, we will be able to estimate whether or not the difficulties affected the households and parents of our target populations more or differently from other households.

The proposed project is highly significant, since much research on the populations in question—children and young adults with special health care needs—is done on small samples in order that precise measurement of treatments or outcomes be conducted. Large omnibus surveys that have good data on household economic well-being (such as the NLS surveys and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics) often do not include items that enable the identification of our target populations or, even if they do, do not contain sufficient numbers for a robust analysis.