

Extended Measures of Well-Being: Living Conditions in the United States: 2011

Household Economic Studies

By Julie Siebens

Issued September 2013

P70-136

INTRODUCTION

Although money can provide access to a variety of goods and services common to modern life, financial resources alone cannot provide an overall picture of well-being. That is why the U.S. Census Bureau uses the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to collect information on a variety of other measures, creating a broad picture of well-being.¹ Since 1992, SIPP has been asking householders questions from five broad “domains” of well-being: (1) appliances and electronic goods, such as possession of refrigerators, landline and cellular telephones, and computers; (2) housing conditions, including level of satisfaction with overall home repair, adequate living space, and sufficient privacy; (3) neighborhood conditions and community services, such as road conditions and the presence of abandoned buildings; satisfactory police, fire, and medical services; and attitudes towards local schools; (4) meeting basic needs, including the ability to pay bills in full to avoid eviction, and to have sufficient food; and (5) the expectation of help, should need arise, from friends, family, and the community.

This report continues the examination of well-being, using data from the Adult Well-Being topical module administered periodically throughout the SIPP panels. Although most of this report uses data collected in 2011, comparisons across years use data going back to 1992. SIPP collects information on material well-being only from the householder reference person. The “householder” refers to the person who owns or rents the home.

¹ Similar reports using previous SIPP data on well-being can be found at <www.census.gov/sipp/p70s/p70s.html>.

SUMMARY MEASURES OF WELL-BEING

Extended measures of well-being include a variety of indicators of how households fare. Table 1 provides summary measures of each of the five broad domains of well-being in 2011.² Among all householders, just 64 percent had all six of the following appliances and electronic goods: clothes washer, clothes dryer, refrigerator, stove, dishwasher, and a landline or cellular phone.³ Nearly 85 percent reported having no problems with housing repairs.⁴ Many fewer households (72 percent) had no neighborhood problems with street conditions, traffic, trash or litter, abandoned buildings, industries or businesses, or smoke or odors. Just under 9 in 10 householders were able to meet all but one or fewer of their basic needs. Regardless of whether or not householders had difficulty with meeting these needs, 86 percent of them expected to obtain help from friends, family, or community agencies if the need arose.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS GROUPS

The age of the householder was associated with the level of material well-being in a household. Across four of the five summary measures, householders aged 15 to 29 had the lowest (or among the lowest) rates of favorable conditions. These youngest householders did report above average expectation of receiving help (87 percent), although householders aged 65 and over had the highest expectation (90 percent).

² Detailed tables of extended well-being measures can be found at <www.census.gov/hhes/well-being/>.

³ Throughout this report, “landline” refers to a landline telephone, and “cell phone” refers to cellular or mobile telephones.

⁴ “No problems with housing repair” is defined as not reporting a problem with pests, leaky roofs, broken windows, exposed wires, plumbing problems, cracks in the walls, or holes in the floor.

Table 3.

Percentage of Households With Selected Indicators of Material Well-Being: 1992, 1998, 2003, 2005, 2010, and 2011

Item	1992		1998		2003		2005		2010		2011	
	Percent	Margin of error ¹	Percent	Margin of error ¹	Percent	Margin of error ¹	Percent	Margin of error ¹	Percent	Margin of error ¹	Percent	Margin of error ¹
Appliances and Electronic Goods												
Washing machine	84.8	0.5	82.0	0.4	84.3	0.4	84.2	0.4	85.3	0.3	85.2	0.3
Clothes dryer	77.9	0.6	77.8	0.4	81.0	0.4	81.2	0.4	83.2	0.4	83.4	0.4
Dishwasher	49.3	0.7	56.0	0.5	62.3	0.5	64.0	0.5	69.4	0.4	69.3	0.4
Refrigerator	99.1	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.2	0.1
Freezer	37.1	0.7	34.9	0.5	36.9	0.5	36.6	0.5	37.9	0.5	35.8	0.5
Television	96.6	0.3	98.4	0.1	98.8	0.1	98.9	0.1	98.5	0.1	98.3	0.1
Gas or electric stove	99.0	0.1	98.7	0.1	98.8	0.1	98.8	0.1	98.6	0.1	98.6	0.1
Microwave	82.2	0.5	90.7	0.3	95.9	0.2	96.4	0.2	97.1	0.2	96.8	0.2
Video cassette recorder ²	73.8	0.6	85.2	0.4	90.0	0.3	92.2	0.3	92.1	0.3	90.9	0.3
Air conditioner	68.8	0.7	77.7	0.4	84.6	0.4	85.7	0.4	88.5	0.3	88.7	0.3
Computer	20.7	0.6	42.0	0.5	63.1	0.5	67.1	0.5	75.2	0.4	78.0	0.4
Land line telephone	94.7	0.3	96.2	0.2	94.1	0.3	90.6	0.3	75.0	0.4	70.5	0.4
Cellular phone	N	N	36.3	0.5	62.8	0.5	71.3	0.5	87.2	0.3	89.0	0.3
Housing Conditions												
General conditions:												
No leaking roof	91.4	0.4	93.1	0.3	94.6	0.2	95.1	0.2	95.1	0.2	95.3	0.2
No problem with pests	85.1	0.5	87.3	0.3	90.5	0.3	90.2	0.3	92.5	0.3	91.3	0.3
No broken windows	92.4	0.4	95.9	0.2	97.0	0.2	97.0	0.2	97.2	0.2	97.0	0.2
No exposed electrical wiring	98.6	0.2	99.2	0.1	99.4	0.1	99.4	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.4	0.1
No holes or cracks in the wall	95.4	0.3	96.0	0.2	97.0	0.2	97.2	0.2	97.4	0.2	97.1	0.2
No plumbing problems	95.0	0.3	97.4	0.2	97.9	0.2	98.1	0.1	98.1	0.1	97.8	0.1
No holes in floor large enough to trip	98.9	0.1	99.1	0.1	99.4	0.1	99.4	0.1	99.3	0.1	99.3	0.1
Satisfaction:												
Satisfied with warmth of home in winter	N	N	91.2	0.3	93.4	0.3	93.1	0.3	93.6	0.2	93.4	0.2
Satisfied with coolness of home in summer	N	N	89.7	0.3	92.5	0.3	92.2	0.3	92.6	0.3	92.8	0.2
Satisfied with state of repair of home	N	N	92.2	0.3	93.4	0.3	93.3	0.3	93.6	0.2	93.9	0.2
Generally satisfied with home	N	N	95.7	0.2	96.1	0.2	96.2	0.2	96.5	0.2	96.6	0.2
Neighborhood Conditions and Community Services												
Safety:												
Did not stay home for safety	89.2	0.4	87.1	0.3	90.4	0.3	89.2	0.3	89.5	0.3	89.4	0.3
Did not carry anything to protect self	88.5	0.5	92.5	0.3	94.3	0.3	94.4	0.2	93.7	0.2	93.6	0.2
Did not travel with someone for safety	N	N	88.5	0.3	91.9	0.3	90.7	0.3	91.4	0.3	91.7	0.3
Not afraid to walk alone at night	N	N	71.2	0.5	78.0	0.4	77.5	0.4	79.4	0.4	79.5	0.4
Home is considered safe	94.1	0.3	95.9	0.2	96.7	0.2	97.0	0.2	97.0	0.2	97.4	0.2
Neighborhood considered safe	91.0	0.4	91.4	0.3	92.8	0.3	92.3	0.3	92.9	0.2	93.3	0.2
General conditions:												
No trash or litter on streets	88.8	0.4	91.8	0.3	92.6	0.3	92.7	0.3	94.1	0.2	93.5	0.2
Streets not in need of repair	80.2	0.6	83.6	0.4	86.0	0.4	87.1	0.4	88.0	0.3	86.2	0.3
No abandoned buildings	89.6	0.4	92.0	0.3	93.0	0.3	93.0	0.3	92.9	0.2	92.2	0.3
No street noise or heavy traffic	75.5	0.6	78.6	0.4	81.8	0.4	81.9	0.4	86.6	0.3	86.0	0.3
No smoke or odors in neighborhood	92.7	0.4	95.1	0.2	96.3	0.2	96.6	0.2	97.2	0.2	96.9	0.2
No problem industry or business	90.4	0.4	92.7	0.3	94.5	0.2	94.4	0.2	95.9	0.2	95.4	0.2

See footnote at end of table.