

Floor Discussion

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The first paper, presented by Eleanor Singer of the University of Michigan, discussed findings from a random digit dial national survey designed to examine public attitudes toward federal agencies, specifically the Social Security Administration, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Internal Revenue Service, providing selected administrative data to the Census Bureau. Dr. Singer explained the study's methodology and how the questions were administered within the context of using administrative records to improve the decennial count, lessen respondent burden, and reduce cost. Dr. Singer explored the findings and their relevance to Census Bureau plans to use administrative records for Census 2000 and beyond.

Linda Standish of Statistics Canada presented the second paper on the representativity of their Longitudinal Administrative Databank (LAD). The LAD is a one percent Bernoulli sample of tax filers and their dependents derived, using matching and imputation procedures, from a file based on Canada's annual income tax return (T1FF). The presentation focused on details of the LAD sample and a comparison of the sample-based estimates with the (T1FF) population.

The final presentation by Pat Doyle of the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research examined many of the issues and challenges of using administrative data systems to improve the measurement of poverty. Using the case of out-of-pocket medical expenses, she examined the relative contributions that survey and administratively collected data could play in the short and long-term to improve the poverty measure. She explored the potential of using administrative records for analysis by highlighting standardization and quality issues with an existing multi-state data integration effort using hospital discharge data.

Alan Rapoport of the National Science Foundation opened the floor discussion by commenting on many of the inherent problems with existing hospital records such as the inconsistency of including doctor's charges on patient bills, the prevalence of hospital errors in costs, and the fact that some bills are never paid. Pat Doyle replied by saying that they look at charges on patient bills and have no idea what is actually paid. She stated that it is the best measure available now and is used as a proxy for cost. She concluded by noting that there are still some big unknowns associated with an era of managed care.

Denice Myers of the National Agricultural Statistical Service questioned the final presenter on the percent of out-of-pocket costs that were used for items other than hospital costs such as prescriptions and prosthetics. Pat Doyle replied that the National Medical Expenditure Survey will allow you to look at that type of information.

Clyde Tucker of the Bureau of Labor Statistics questioned Eleanor Singer, the first presenter, on the effect of non-response. She responded by saying that they worked on the assumption that the people who refused to participate are among those opposed to data sharing but they don't know.

Another floor participant, citing census experiences of other countries where confidentiality and privacy concerns became important issues, questioned how negative publicity and strong attacks on the Census Bureau would effect the findings of this study. Singer reiterated that the survey's findings are context dependent; one context being a lack of attention to issues of privacy and data sharing. If these issues were a hot issue, opposition would be larger and stronger than reflected in this survey.

Turning attention to the second presentation, a member of the audience questioned whether plans to take the LAD File from a one percent to 10 percent sample for small area analysis in Canada would entail stratification and stratified sampling. Linda Standish responded that stratified sampling was less appealing for longitudinal data because of the loss of stratification over time and the potential need to continually resample. She stated that they plan to stay with simple Bernoulli sampling and hope it will work regionally.

Signe Wetrogan of the Census Bureau asked how census families were created from individual tax records. Linda Standish responded by explaining some common matching techniques and problems using Social Insurance Numbers, names, and addresses to derive husband, wife, children, and other living arrangements. She would be glad to send detailed information on their methodology upon request.