Why do TANF Recipients Underreport in Surveys?
Evidence from Matching Census Survey Data with Maryland Administrative Records

PRELIMINARY RESULTS
Purpose

• Compare the survey estimate and the administrative count of households on public assistance in Maryland and identify the discrepancy between the two data sources

• Investigate why survey respondents receiving TANF in Maryland do not accurately report their participation in the TANF program
Data Sources

• U.S. Census Bureau
  American Community Survey/Supplementary Survey for 2001 (ACS/SS01)

• Maryland Department of Human Resources
  Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES)
Phase One

The Estimate-Count Discrepancy
Phase One Questions

• What is the estimate-count discrepancy?
• What is the estimate-count discrepancy attributable to survey error?
• What is the estimate-count discrepancy attributable to error from respondents giving false-negative reports?
Published estimate of number of households with public assistance income in the past 12 months in Maryland:

30,979
Maryland CARES File

Count of public assistance households in Maryland from CARES, adjusted to reflect the universe of the published estimate:

69,168
Maryland CARES File

Count of public assistance households from CARES adjusted to reflect the universe of the survey question:

62,960
Results

- Published estimate misses 55 percent of total number of public assistance households
- Published estimate misses 51% of total number of public assistance households in survey universe
- False-negative reporting may account for virtually all of estimate count discrepancy
Phase Two

False Negative Reporting
By TANF Recipient Households
Research Questions

• Is there enough statistical evidence to conclude that particular household characteristics are related to the probability that respondents provide false-negative reports about their household participation in TANF?

• What is the relative risk of false-negative reporting associated with particular household characteristics?
Methods

- Used subset of TANF households from the matched file
- Conducted chi-square tests of household characteristics that we believed would be high risk factors for false negative reporting
Finding

• Respondents in the sample of TANF households were more likely than not to misreport household participation in TANF.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reported “yes”</th>
<th>Reported “no”</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All TANF households</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finding

- TANF households that were correctly reported were not representative of all TANF households in the sample.
Finding

• There was a significant relationship between TANF non-report and certain household characteristics
Survey Respondent not a Member of the TANF Unit

- 15% of non-TANF respondents in the survey correctly reported participation of other household members who were TANF recipients
- 67% of respondents who participated in TANF correctly reported that at least one household member participated in the program
Complex Households

- 34% of complex households correctly reported TANF participation
- 62% of households were correctly reported when the composition of the household roster was the same in the survey and the administrative records
No Adults in Household Received TANF

- 18% of households where the only recipients of TANF were children aged 15 to 18 reported correctly
- 51% of the households with an adult TANF recipient reported correctly
No-one Participating in TANF at the Time of the Survey

• 28% of households were correctly reported if no one was participating in TANF at the time of the survey

• 58% correctly reported TANF participation if at least one household member was a current participant
Household has Income from Employment

- 40% of households with income from employment correctly reported TANF participation
- 64% of households with no income from employment correctly reported TANF participation
Other Characteristics

• Respondents assume the income series does not apply to certain household members
• Respondents are embarrassed about household participation in public assistance
Conclusions – Phase One

Two main reasons for discrepancy between published ACS/SS01 estimate and CARES count of public assistance recipient households in Maryland:

– Universe differences
– Respondent nonreport
Recommendations for Evaluating Choice of Universe

• Include data users in discussions about what the public assistance question needs to measure
• Determine whether public assistance data produced by ACS and other Census Bureau surveys provide data that users seek
• Use of administrative records to develop adjustment factors
• Test effect of moving question
• Test effect of rewriting instructions for public assistance question
• Impact of design changes
Conclusions – Phase Two

Results from Phase Two illuminate possible causes of respondent nonreport:

• Comprehending the survey question
• Recalling the relevant memories
• Making a judgment
• Providing the response
Recommendations

- Conduct multivariate analyses with samples large enough to include all suspected high risk factors
- Evaluate previous multivariate analyses
- Cognitive testing on respondent problems with dates of recipiency
- Begin cognitive testing on respondent problems with reporting about others