

Why do TANF Recipients Underreport in Surveys?

**Evidence from Matching Census Survey
Data with Maryland Administrative Records**

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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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?

ACS/SS01

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

TANF Households by Accuracy of Response

	Reported "yes"	Reported "no"	Total	Sample Size
All TANF households	45%	55%	100%	95

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 reciprocity
- Begin cognitive testing on respondent problems with reporting about others