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The papers by J. C. Moore and D. Kasprzyk, A. M. Roman and D. V. O'Brien, and R. A. Kulka are important efforts to examine sources of error other than that due to sampling. I would hope that this concern with nonsampling sources of variance continues throughout the program of evaluation and research on the new SIPP, and that the results are reflected in reports coming out of the SIPP. There is ample reason to suspect that, in a survey as complex and difficult as is the SIPP, error due to sampling will be swamped by error due to miscommunication between respondent and interviewer, respondent dissembling, respondent ignorance, etc.

The Moore and Kasprzyk paper tackles the problem that the ISDP (the pilot study for the SIPP) can be seen as having measured more change between waves than within waves. The authors argue persuasively that this cannot be reflective of true conditions, citing a number of reasons for thinking that not only did respondents make errors that resulted in the appearance of change between waves but also that post-interview processing may have contributed significantly to this phenomenon.

Their analysis heavily depends on the correct matching of persons across waves. An earlier analysis, by Graham Kalton and James Lepkowski, had depended on a file that contained many identifiers with erroneous codes, making matches very prone to error. Moore and Kasprzyk used instead a "definitive" data file produced by Mathematica, which linked data for the first five of the six waves. The authors assert that this "apparently" corrected the matching problems by correcting person identifiers. This is a curiously ambiguous way of describing what must be one of the central assumptions of the analysis. If it is not now possible for the Bureau of the Census to construct its own matched file, then I suggest that a second-best alternative is to document the matching process used by Mathematica and to obtain an independent validation of that process. This is particularly important given the research now beginning on the ISDP, with support from NSF and other agencies.

The authors do point out the intriguing possibility that the matched file processed by Kalton and Lepkowski contained a higher proportion of correct matches, although fewer matches in all than does the Mathematica file. Reporting that even a low rate of mismatching can produce the level of between-wave change observed (on the basis of a computer simulation), Moore and Kasprzyk raise the question that post-interview processing may have played a large role in the results obtained.

The paper points indirectly to one of the big methodological questions facing the SIPP: when data are not only collected longitudinally (as in the CPS and the SIPP), but are also to be analyzed longitudinally (as in the SIPP), it becomes necessary to examine and perhaps rethink established procedures: editing for consistency within records, imputation for item nonresponse, substitution of persons for missing responses, sample weighting across time, etc. Despite years of experience with the PSID and the NLS, for example, there are not yet widely-accepted solutions to such problems. With the SIPP demanding solutions it is imperative to undertake research now.

The Roman and O'Brien paper focuses on one experiment of the ISDP, the comparison of data obtained from college students living away from home with data obtained from proxies, usually their parents. The experiment was conducted during November and December, certainly not the best months to find students resident at school.

Facts, fate, and perhaps a few gremlins took whacks at the sample size. Over one-quarter of the students who were identified were not interviewed, because their school was more than 50 miles distant. Not all parents gave permission for the interview of their students. Not all students were at home. Not all of the completed interviews could be matched with parent interviews. From a potential sample of 443 students identified as usually living away from home, the result is a sample of only 167 matched proxy-student records. One could argue that the failure to match data is the most fundamental form of discrepancy in parent-student comparisons, and in that event the true sample size is somewhat larger, but even with this increase in sample size it is difficult to generalize from the results, with so large a proportion of the sample lost.

The results seem intuitively right: better jobs come to the attention of parents more than low-paying ones; jobs with fewer hours also attract their attention less. So the proxy data are more like the data provided by the students for the big-ticket items. I wonder whether this result is more general: is the income of any lower-earning member of a household, whether a student, an aged relative, or a spouse, less well-reported by the principal earner in the household than is the principal income? Is there a general tendency to underestimate or otherwise misreport the less crucial items in a family budget?

Kulka makes the important point that the 1979 Research Panel of the ISDP was not primarily designed as a substantive data collection instrument but instead as a flexible vehicle for a number of experiments in the technical and operational problems of an income survey. This means not only that the ISDP is a rich data resource for methodological research but also that substantive research must take account of a variety of design effects.

Because funding for ISDP research was terminated in 1982--just when the data sets were becoming available for research--a number of the experiments described by Kulka have been underanalyzed. Kulka's paper raises more questions than can be answered, as a consequence.

The ISDP results that offer some confidence in the data were based on the particular design adopted in the ISDP. As that design was not transplanted to the SIPP, we must not read Kulka's paper as indicative of the quality of data to be derived from the SIPP. The SIPP may be better, or it may not. The same sort of research agenda planned for the ISDP is needed for the SIPP, so that we can have the confidence in the SIPP data that we can now have in the ISDP.