

Discussion

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Each of these excellent papers points up interesting problems of coordination, standardization, and comparability. In the short time allotted to me I can touch on only a few of them.

First of all, I want to take issue with Selma Mushkin's proposal for centralizing the making of demographic and economic projections for states and local areas. The states will not give up responsibility for such projections for their respective jurisdictions. Highly sophisticated work is going on in many of the states, and the familiarity of local people with local trends should not be lost.

I would go for partnership or a cooperative arrangement between a national agency or organization and the states in developing projections for the states. I can see many advantages to such an arrangement. But I am certain the states will not be receptive to accepting projections handed down to them from above.

Interstate comparability

Selma Mushkin's paper points up the problem of lack of interstate comparability of many statistical series. I would like to touch briefly on the difficulties in those fields where laws and administrative practices vary from state to state, and where there are no effective inducements to achieve comparability.

Most of us would agree that it is highly desirable to have good comparability of federal, state, and where applicable, local statistics. In some fields, comparability may not be essential to the particular operation, but the administrator likes to know how his jurisdiction compares with others. It may help him in gauging how well he is doing, or suggest modifications he may introduce to improve efficiency.

Governor Bellmon stressed this point in his address to the National Conference on Comparative Statistics held in Washington, D. C. in February 1966.

"We looked for statistics to indicate the degree of progress our state was making under my administration. We sincerely wanted measuring sticks by which we could compare our state with other states. In short, we wanted a standard by which we could judge our performance."

Workmen's compensation is a good example of a field where interstate comparability of statistics may not be needed to operate the program in any one state. But ever since the beginning of this social insurance program more than a half century ago administrators have decried the lack of comparability of statistics. The international organization of workmen's compensation administrators--the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions--has, for years, urged that something be done about this.

The Committee on Statistics of the IAIABC wrestled with this problem for a number of years. Valiant attempts were made to bring about a small measure of comparability by focusing on those items which were generally common to most of the jurisdictions.

One of the first things we did was to develop a "Glossary of Terms for Workmen's Compensation Statistics," which attempted to standardize terminology, define terms and present some elementary rules for standardizing tabular presentation. This glossary was officially adopted by the IAIABC at one of its annual meetings and all workmen's compensation agencies were

urged to use the standard definitions and terms. So far as I know, very few states or provinces have made any serious attempt to do so.

We developed a standard form for use by employers in reporting work injuries sustained by employees. It was our hope this universal form would lead to greater comparability of both injury and workmen's compensation statistics. To date only a few of the states use this form.

This has been the discouraging experience in one field.

I turn now to another field where we have had better success.

The members of the Association of Labor Mediation Agencies found they had difficulty in comparing their respective state statistics. A committee appointed to work on this problem asked several of us from the labor statistics field to serve as consultants.

We developed what we called "A proposal for uniform mediation statistics." The proposed standard was adopted by the Association, and many states have moved far toward converting their statistics to the recommended basis. Differences in laws relating to the functions and responsibilities of the mediation agencies as well as differences in administrative practices make it difficult to conform strictly to the standard on uniform mediation statistics. Nevertheless, there is greater comparability now than there ever has been, and I look for further improvement in the years ahead.

It should not be very difficult to achieve reasonably good interstate comparability of statistics in fields where there are Federal-State cooperative arrangements such as the BLS current employment statistics program. But how can we best achieve the greatest degree of interstate comparability in those cases where there is no federal-state relationship, and where laws and administrative practices differ, and where no effective machinery now exists to achieve standardization?

Coordination and quality

Harold Rubin's fine description of New York's new program points up the fact that statistical coordination agencies are now being established in many states. This is a development long overdue. We have had a coordinating unit in California for 21 years. Governor Earl Warren established the California State Interdepartmental Research Coordinating Committee in 1945, and it has functioned actively and continuously ever since.

One of the important functions of all statistical coordinating organizations is the improvement of the quality of statistical work.

I would like to ask what are the specific mechanics for accomplishing this objective? What powers with respect to quality do the state coordinating agencies and the Federal Office of Statistical Standards have?

More particularly, I would like to know what has been done, or is being done, to police the quality of work done for federal, state and local agencies by outside contractors. I have seen some pretty bad statistical work performed by outside consultants for government agencies and, in some cases, for pretty fat fees.

How can we best guard against this? I hope we can stimulate some discussion from the floor as to how coordinating agencies can best function in carrying out responsibility, not only for the quality of statistical work performed by government agencies, but also for government agencies.

Vertical coordination

I now turn to a problem of coordination that has bothered me for some time. It relates to what I call "vertical coordination" and concerns the release of two different figures by federal and state agencies which purport to measure the same thing.

Here are a few examples:

The Census Bureau regularly publishes estimates of current population by states. The figures for California are close to, but not the same as, those published by the California agency responsible for population estimates.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics recently issued state estimates of union membership in 1964. The figure for California was close to, but not the same as, the one my agency published for the same year.

The President's Manpower Report for 1963 and 1964 carried labor force projections by states, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. A total labor force of 9,660,000 was projected for California for 1970. Our published projection for that year was 9,001,000, a difference of 660,000. In this case, unlike the population and union membership estimates, the figures were not close, but were quite far apart.

Statistics released by the U. S. Public Health Service indicate that the number of non-white live births in California decreased by 1,000 between 1963 and 1964; those released by the State Department of Public Health show an increase of 1,000.

The Federal Bureau of Narcotics reported 691 new narcotic addicts in California in 1964. The California Bureau of Criminal Statistics published a figure of 2,310 newly reported "addict users" for the same year—(more than 3 times the federal figure).

The user who finds the two figures asks: "Why the difference? Which one shall I use?"

In most cases there may be a simple explanation of how the difference came about. But I submit, this may not be a good reason why two different figures which purport to measure the same thing need to be published. I want to make a plea that we attempt, wherever possible, to eliminate these situations.

It has been done quite successfully in some fields. Let me cite a few examples:

The California Division of Labor Statistics and Research and the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics have worked out an arrangement whereby the statistics of work stoppages for California, published by the two agencies, are identical.

Some years ago we found that the statistics of net and real spendable earnings of manufacturing production workers for the San Francisco-Oakland and Los Angeles-Long Beach Metropolitan Areas, published by our agency and the regional office of BLS, differed slightly. The reason for this was that we deducted State income tax while BLS, in line with the national computation, did not. We took this matter up with the regional director of the Bureau of Labor Statistics who immediately recognized that the two sets of figures could cause confusion. It was agreed that only one set would be published—that which makes allowance for State income taxes.

The current estimates of personal income in California, prepared by our Department of Finance, are tied directly to the previous year's state figures published by the Department of Commerce. As soon as the official Department of Commerce figures are released they become the official California figures. Our state agency believes a better set of California figures can be produced, and is working with the Department of Commerce to bring about improvements.

I am convinced that if earnest attempts are made, the issuing agencies can get together and agree upon a common set of figures. I know that in some cases it's not going to be easy, but I believe the effort would be well worthwhile.

It has been done—it can be done!

Summary

We are in a period of intensive action to set up "coordination" and "standardization" machinery. I predict that much good will come of this effort, and that the greatest achievements will be in the states, along the lines of horizontal coordination within the states.

More difficult to attain will be coordination between different levels of government and between states, particularly where machinery for interstate coordination does not now exist.

We should set up a coordinating organization of coordinating agencies—federal, state and local—and work together toward such goals as the improvement of statistical output, the filling of important data gaps and the elimination of duplication of effort.