

## DISCUSSION

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All three papers presented at this session are very informative from the point of view of describing ongoing programs or plans for such programs. At the same time, they are somewhat frustrating to a statistician such as myself because hardly any statistical data are provided nor is there any analysis of the operations and effects of these programs. For this reason, and also because I have had no personal experience with these programs, my comments are more in the nature of questions for future consideration, and some may be naive.

The paper by Deutch is a good example of the quandry in which I am put. The procedures described in the paper seem excellent and a great deal of information is provided on how the SSA Measurement System is evaluated. However, we are given virtually no information on how it works in practice, perhaps because the system is relatively new. Thus, what are the results of this evaluation? What sorts of errors have been found? How have these results been used? To what extent have they resulted in any improvement in the SSA System?

Information of this type would be very useful, as would information on how well the system is operating. For example, how long does it take until the six-month sample is 95% complete and administrators are given the results.

A broader sort of question relates to Deutch's very apt opening comments that in quality control the production worker may be only part of the problem and that most of the problems may lie in the area of management and the structure of a system. This sort of observation might well be leveled at the SSA evaluation itself. In other words, in this system, to what extent are problems due to the production workers (in this case, the evaluators), and to what extent are they due to the evaluation system and its administrators?

The Ossman paper on the AFDS Program is also very informative with regard to the manner in which the program operates. Unfortunately, we are again given little information about what actually happens, which leads me to raise a number of questions, such as the following:

1. What is the rationale for using systematic random sampling in the re-review at the federal level of the cases reviewed by the states? Would it not be better perhaps to stratify in the re-review sample by amount of error reported in the state review? Would this not yield a better base for evaluation of the efficacy of the state reviews?
2. Who are the reviewers that check the cases at both the state and the federal levels? How thoroughly are they trained.
3. How much time is available for review of the case record? Is this time adequate?

4. In this review is it a good idea to put the main emphasis once more on the client as the principal source for information? Is the reviewer given, for example, information that the client had supplied previously (and which might therefore bias the reviewer's judgment), or does the reviewer work completely without any such information as seems to be the case with the SSA evaluation?
5. To what extent do more intensive reviews yield more accurate results? In other words, what is the trade-off between more thorough reviews and more accurate pinpointing of errors, against higher costs and more time?
6. How are the findings implemented in the form of procedural changes? Does the initiative come from the federal level or the state level? What sort of approvals are needed for such implementation to take place?

Numerous operational problems can be expected in a program of this type. It would have been interesting to hear more about these problems, their effects and how they are handled. For example, similar to interviewer effects in personal interview surveys, to what extent is there a reviewer effect in the review of these cases? What sort of scheduling and personnel problems arise in this work? What is the frequency with which different types of errors have been pinpointed? Only a couple of percentages cited, just enough to whet one's appetite.

The Hiemstra paper differs conceptually from the other two because they report on evaluation programs already underway whereas here we have an evaluation program still in its formative stage. Hence, discussion and interchange of ideas should be especially fruitful in this case. Moreover, to judge from the presentation, the planning for this study is by no means completed.

As Hiemstra mentions, the contemplated national survey would be of major proportions. The four objectives mentioned are certainly very broad and also very worthy. I would suggest a fifth, namely, some investigation of the attitudes of the people in the program and their experiences with it.

In view of the huge amount of data that will be sought, a number of operational problems will have to be handled successfully, such as setting up control groups, obtaining cooperation, inducing people to remain in these panels, and using various devices to stimulate complete and accurate reporting, among others. Since I am not familiar with some of these other studies of the Food Stamp Program, it would seem most useful in this brief space to offer some general comments on the procedure to be followed in carrying out this study.

In particular, I would urge that a study of this magnitude not be launched without a great deal of consideration to previous studies that have

experimented with these techniques, and with some pilot work to test various alternative approaches. The 1972-73 national survey of consumer expenditures and income conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for the BLS contains a gold mine of such information for these purposes. An evaluation of those data is currently being carried out by Bob Pearl and should be available in the next few months.

As a further preliminary step, pilot tests of particular techniques and combinations of techniques in limited geographic areas should be carried out in advance of the projected national survey. Experience with other major studies has shown, without exception that such pilot operations are invaluable for reducing costs and improving the efficiency of the later full-scale study.

In view of the uncertainty that seems to surround the planning of this program, it would seem like a very good idea for this agency to use a technical panel to assist it in all stages of this study, from the initial plans, through the implementation of the results. Even if an agency has

highly trained technical survey people of its own, an outside panel can provide a different, and usually broader, perspective on the problem, and help lend credibility to the results.

From a more technical point of view, let me suggest that in a comprehensive survey of this type the data collection be divided into components so that the questionnaire is not too long. In other words, there might be a single basic questionnaire administered to all sample members, supplemented by several component parts, each part administered to a different interpenetrating sample.

Also, if the study can be designed as a panel study so that data are available on these households over time, the problem mentioned by Hiemstra of having many endogenous variables would be reduced very greatly in importance because most such variables that are endogenous on one basis are exogenous on the other basis. Hence, by using appropriate forms of multivariate analysis, problems of estimation because of the presence of endogenous variables would be of little importance.