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For almost 30 years, monthly statistics on employment and unemployment have been collected and published, providing such estimates as the number of employed adult men and women, the number of unemployed teenagers, or the number of wives entering or reentering the labor force. Over the long term, they have reflected the labor force effects of economic as well as social and demographic changes.

Today, these statistics have become an important part of the body of social indicators used in assessing the material well-being of American workers. The monthly data, however, have an analytical drawback in that they treat the work force as a group of discrete individuals, thereby touching only lightly and indirectly on the family dimension. The family, however, is still the primary economic unit in this country; most workers are family members--family heads, wives, children, or other relatives. Family members account for 88 percent of the 153 million men, women, and teenagers of working age (16 years and over) in the civilian noninstitutional population. ^{1/} What happens to these individuals in the labor market not only affects them, but their families as well.

In order to provide more relevant and timely information on families, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is developing a new data series which will show the employment status of family heads, wives, or other relatives, crossed by the employment status of other members of their families. This new series, which is based on special tabulations from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and which begins with the first quarter of 1976, should provide particularly useful insights into the family situation of the unemployed. Specifically, it should tell us whether the unemployed were the only wage earners within their families, or whether other family members were employed thereby cushioning the effect of unemployment on the family unit.

During the first quarter of 1976, the number of unemployed persons, at 7.9 million (not seasonally adjusted) ^{2/}, was only slightly below the recessionary peaks registered during 1975. Almost 6.9 million of the unemployed were members of families, including 2.5 million heads, over 1.5 million wives, and 2.8 million sons, daughters, or other relatives.

The new data give us a more complete picture. As shown in table 1, about 1.1 million, or two-fifths, of the families where the head was jobless there was at least one other family member employed. However, there were enormous differences between families headed by men and those headed by women. A far greater proportion of families headed by unemployed women had no other person employed than was the case for families headed by jobless men. This was due in large part to the fact that there was no one else of working age (16 years and over) in

59 percent of the families headed by unemployed women, compared with only some 2 percent of the male-headed families. Moreover, nearly half of the families headed by unemployed men had a wife or child who was employed.

This type of monthly data should be an important addition to the extensive information on families already available. For over a quarter of a century, data on families have been collected and published only on an annual basis (usually in March) through supplemental questions to the basic CPS. At BLS, the data are part of two series of Special Labor Force Reports: "Marital and Family Characteristics of Workers: beginning in 1959; joined by "Children of Working Mothers: in 1970. These publications include information on work experience of husbands and wives, family income, presence, age, and number of children, additional family workers, and much more. In addition to the labor force information published by BLS, household and family data from the March CPS are also available from the Bureau of the Census. Figures on the demographic characteristics of families, family income, as well as a host of other information, are published by Census in its series of Current Population Reports. The new series we are developing at BLS is designed to examine the effects of economic ups and downs on the employment situation in families on a quarterly basis, at first, but eventually on a monthly basis.

Besides giving a more complete view of unemployment, initial findings from the limited amount of preliminary new tabulations that are now available make the same outstanding point that has been evident in the once-a-year assessments of employment and unemployment in the family: Families where the head is employed are more likely to have other employed members than families where the head is either unemployed or not in the labor force. Thus, employment or lack of employment can be a "family affair."

There were a total of 56.3 million primary families ^{3/} in the first quarter of 1976. Of 41.8 million headed by an employed person, over half (53 percent) had at least one other member who was also employed. This proportion compares with 43 percent in families headed by an unemployed person, and only 29 percent in families headed by someone who was not in the labor force. These proportions and the differences between them vary a great deal by the characteristics of the families, such as whether they are male-headed or female-headed, black or white, and older or younger. However, the underlying relationship is remarkably consistent, as illustrated by the figures in table 2. To repeat, employment in the family is a "family affair," and conversely unemployment in the family is also a "family affair." Take wives for example.

Wives whose husbands were employed were more likely to be employed than were wives whose husbands were unemployed or not in the labor force. Of the women whose husbands had jobs in the first quarter of 1976, 17.3 million, or 47 percent also held jobs. However, as shown in table 3, when their husbands were unemployed, only 43 percent of the wives had jobs. Obviously wives were more likely to be unemployed if their husbands were also unemployed. In fact, historical trends from the annual supplemental family data of the March CPS indicate that the labor force participation rate for wives of unemployed husbands tends to be higher than that for wives of employed husbands. And, furthermore, these women have considerably more difficulty in finding jobs. For example, in the first quarter of 1976, the unemployment rate for wives of unemployed husbands--19.4 percent--was triple the rate for wives of employed husbands (6.5 percent). The magnitude of the differences between any of these rates for wives by the employment status of husbands has varied over time. Nevertheless, the pattern of differences has remained consistent over the long-term. Unemployment is unmistakably a "family affair."

Black wives were more likely to be working than white wives, (51 and 41 percent, respectively) whatever the employment status of their spouses. This is in line with the historically higher degree of labor force participation on the part of black than white wives. However, it should be noted that this gap has been narrowing. In March 1975, 54 percent of the black wives and 44 percent of the white were in the labor force, compared with 47 and 34 percent, respectively, 10 years earlier.

In addition to wives, there were about 23 million other relatives--primarily sons and daughters of whom 80 percent were under 25--in families headed by men. About 10.5 million of these other relatives were employed and two-fifths of these, including about half the employed 16 to 24-year-olds, worked part time. Like wives, these relatives were more likely to be working if the head were employed than if he were not. Where the head was employed, 47 percent of the other relatives were also employed, compared with about 43 percent where he was either unemployed or not in the labor force.

The unemployment rate of these other family members was quite high. As was the case with wives, the incidence of unemployment was higher for those in families where the head was jobless than where he was a jobholder. The unemployment rate of these other family members was 25 percent where the head was seeking work, compared with 16 percent where he was employed.

The only exception to the pattern for all families was among those headed by persons 65 years and over. The proportion of these older families with employed members was the same whether the head was employed or unemployed, probably because most members of these families are also older and hence likely to be out of the

labor force.

An additional point worth noting is that families headed by someone 45 to 64 years old are far more likely than other families to have other employed members whatever the labor force status of the head. This is probably due, in part, to the fact that many of the children in these families are likely to have reached working age.

Families headed by women are a small but growing proportion of American families. In the first quarter of 1976, there were only about 7.4 million female-headed families compared to about 49 million headed by men. The labor force participation rate of female family heads, at 56 percent, was lower than for male heads (82 percent), and their unemployment rate was higher, 10 versus 5 percent. Also, about 1 out of 3 were living at or below the poverty level.

Because female family heads, by definition, have no spouse living with them, and because a high proportion (41 percent compared to less than 1 percent of the families headed by men) have no one else of working age, relatively fewer female-headed than male-headed families have other workers. In the first quarter of 1976, only 28 percent (2.1 million) of the female-headed families had someone employed excluding the head, compared with 50 percent of the male-headed families. Even so, a higher proportion of families where the head was employed than where she was not had additional workers. This was true for black families headed by women as well as white. However, blacks, whatever the employment status of the head, were less likely than white families to have additional workers. This was probably because relatively more black than white families headed by women had no other members of working age.

So far, this new family series is fairly limited in scope. Currently, we can examine monthly changes in the labor force status of family members, but as yet, we have no means of measuring the impact of economic events on family welfare. That is, data are not available on certain elements that would enable us to quantify this impact--elements such as duration of unemployment, size of family, and earnings. Much developmental work remains to be done to improve and broaden the usefulness of this data series. Also, until enough observations are available, it will be impossible to compute the seasonal component of any changes in employment and unemployment. 4/

Despite these drawbacks, the monthly data series on employment in the family can provide new and valuable insights into the family as an economic unit. With it we can observe some of the effects of economic trends on families and some of the reactions of family members to these events. These data will provide researchers with empirical tools to broaden their knowledge of family economics, as well as a timely factual base to evaluate policies and programs designed to soften the hardships engendered by economic fluctuations.

Footnotes

1/ The remaining 12 percent was composed of primary individuals, i.e., heads of households who have no other relatives living with them and other individuals who are not living with relatives, e.g., boarders.

2/ The seasonally adjusted number for the first quarter of 1976 was 7.2 million.

3/ A primary family includes the head of a household and all other persons in the household related to the head by blood, marriage, or adoption.

4/ The Bureau of Labor Statistics uses the Census X-11 method for seasonal adjustment of of data series. This is an adaptation of the standard ratio-to-moving average method with a provision for moving "adjustment factors" to take account of changing seasonal patterns. With this method, 36 observations (12 quarterly observations) are needed to seasonally adjust data.

Table 1. Unemployed family heads by employment status of other family members, first quarter, 1976

(Primary families 1/)

	Unemployed family heads		
	Total	Male	Female
Families with unemployed heads (number in thousands)	2,524	2,097	427
One or more other members employed <u>2/</u>	1,092	1,021	71
Full time <u>3/</u>	833	791	42
Part time only	259	230	29
One or more other members unemployed, none employed	282	238	44
No other members in labor force	1,150	838	312

1/ A primary family includes the head of a household and all other persons in the household related to the head by blood, marriage or adoption.

2/ In addition to employed persons, may also include some unemployed.

3/ May include some part time.

Table 2. Employment status of family members by employment status of family head, first quarter 1976

(Primary families 1/)			
Employment status of family members	Employment status of family head		
	Employed, total	Unemployed, total	Not in labor force, total
ALL FAMILIES			
Total number (thousands).....	41,774	2,524	12,002
Percent with....			
One or more other members employed 2/	53	43	29
Full time 3/.....	38	33	22
Part time only.....	15	10	7
White.....	53	44	29
Black.....	53	37	26
One or more other members unemployed, none employed.....	4	11	3
No other member in labor force.....	43	46	68
Head aged: 16 to 24 years.....	48	34	19
25 to 44 years.....	49	39	23
45 to 64 years.....	60	56	41
65 years and over.....	36	35	25
HUSBAND-WIFE FAMILIES			
Total number (thousands).....	36,881	1,998	8,288
Percent with employed wives.....	47	43	21
White.....	46	43	20
Black.....	57	50	31
FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES			
Total number (thousands).....	3,688	427	3,280
Percent with....			
One or more other members employed 2/	30	17	27
White.....	32	21	32
Black.....	26	7	17
One or more other members unemployed, none employed.....	6	10	5
No other member in labor force.....	64	73	67

1/ See footnote 1, table 1.

2/ See footnote 2, table 1.

3/ See footnote 3, table 1.

Table 3. Employment status of husbands by employment status of wives,
first quarter 1976

(Primary families 1/)

Employment status of wife	Employment status of husband		
	Employed	Unemployed	Not in labor force
Total: Numbers in thousands.....	36,881	1,998	8,288
Percent.....	100	100	100
Employed.....	47	43	21
Unemployed.....	3	10	2
Not in labor force.....	50	46	77

1/ See footnote 1, table 1.