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DISCUSSION
MEASUREMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE STATUS

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BACKGROUND: The macrohousehold income structure can be divided into five social systems: (1) employment, (2) social insurance, (3) welfare, (4) capital income, and (5) inter-intra household transfers. (Reference 1) The tax system encompasses all of these components. The discussion attempted to identify work needed to improve the public welfare statistical system covering such public assistance programs as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Medical Assistance (Medicaid), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps (FS), certain social services (SS) categories, and the Work Incentives (WIN) programs. Compared with other components, e.g., the employment system, the public assistance statistical system can be significantly improved.

Detailed program descriptions are found in reference 2. According to reference 3, these programs involved total expenditures of $54 billion in FY 1976. About 66 percent of the total were Federal transfers, with the rest coming from State and local governments. Approximately 25 million beneficiaries participated in one or more of these programs.

We need to know the operating characteristics of these programs to understand statistical reporting problems. Some of these are: (1) Assistance programs are fragmented. Coordination efforts to reduce overlaps are difficult to implement effectively. (2) Since programs involve Federal, State, and local government participation, management becomes complicated because of competing priorities generated from legislative and administrative initiatives. (3) States' administrative structures for collecting and reporting data vary, e.g., State-administered versus county-administered operations. (4) Wide variations exist among States in channeling program funds, e.g., some States operate mostly through public agencies while others use contractors. (5) Priorities on information needs are always evolving because of legislative and administrative mandates. (6) Data processing capabilities of State agencies vary widely. Financial and grant award processing are given higher priorities than statistical reporting. (7) Although some States have privacy laws, others are still developing such legislation. (8) Because of complexity of program operations, the ideal integration of financial, cost, and performance data for planning and managerial purposes is not practical.

These complex institutional arrangements, the lack of adequate analytical models (probably due to paucity of integrated data), the lack of adequate resources and difficult coordination and administrative problems encountered in producing data are important analytical considerations.

The writer believes that the production or supply side in generating data on public welfare assistance should have higher attention than the demand side on data needs. Thus, States need help in establishing computerized sample data files to generate adequate State data. National data could be consolidated from such sample State data. A project is currently under way in the State of Texas to test this concept. (Reference 4) In addition, better information on target eligible populations is required from general purpose sample surveys on households.

Other priorities include establishment of strong Federal-State-local government statistical cooperative systems, development of State confidentiality laws, formulation of minimum data sets, and standardization of data elements used by State agencies.

Finally, we need to develop a public assistance transaction accounts system which can trace the flow of transfer payments between and among different public welfare assistance program category populations, with appropriate accounting for multiple beneficiaries. (Reference 5) This social accounts system could also include social progress indicators.

DISCUSSION: Items discussed can be divided into four major headings. The first dealt with the need for better coordination and interchange of information among users and producers of general purpose household surveys and censuses, which provide data used to estimate low-income households and welfare programs' eligible population. These sources cover the Decennial Censuses, the Current Population Survey, the Survey of Income and Education, the Consumer Expenditures Survey, etc. Participants expressed the need for better documentation of User Manuals especially for public use samples, for more interchange of ideas between users and producers in forums such as CPS Workshops to take wider account of users' needs and problems, etc. It was also noted that

DHEW is currently testing a proposed Survey of Income and Program Participation which should provide data presently not included in the Current Population Survey.

The second covered the need for more accuracy of data obtained from household surveys and censuses, especially on income data. In this regard, it was noted that the Social Security Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Census Bureau are jointly cooperating in evaluation projects aimed to obtain results which could be used to reduce not only survey response errors but also improve adjustments for nonresponses. These studies use administrative records and household survey data. New techniques derived from these projects will be valuable in improving future surveys and censuses, especially on collecting income data.

The third area of discussion dealt with the lack of adequate guidelines regarding the meaning and scope of confidentiality. There appears to be a need to differentiate situations where confidentiality rules can be used with some flexibility. This calls for clearer definitions.

The fourth topic covered work needed to develop and expand the use of sample microdata files for public welfare assistance statistical reporting and analyses in States which have capabilities of doing so. The basic approach used in the Texas demonstration project outlined in reference 4 appears to be promising.

Other areas of discussion touched on the need to obtain better small-area data from general purpose surveys and censuses for local government administrative use and the impact of the current OMB directive to reduce reporting burdens of Federal reports.

NOTE: Participants agreed that the discussion was made more interesting and useful because of the

diverse background of discussants. A suggestion was made that, if possible, participants should review background papers before the meeting. As an alternative, it was suggested that participants be queried beforehand on topics/questions they would like to discuss and this listing be distributed before the meeting. The background paper used for this meeting can be obtained from the writer, address: OPRE, OHDS, DHEW, Room 2614, Switzer Building, 330 C Street, S. W., Washington, D. C. 20201.

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CURRENT NATIONAL FERTILITY SURVEYS

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A great number of recent, current and projected national surveys have developed in many countries under the aegis of the World Fertility Survey. These are vey largely modelled on KAP studies and earlier national studies undertaken in a few developed countries. In the United States specifically, the major current national studies in the area of fertility are the 1975 National Fertility Study (based on a follow-back to once-married, currently married women in the 1970 NFS and a supplemental sample of women married in the intervening years), the Johns Hopkins studies of teenage pregnancy (1971 and 1976) and the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) 1973 and 1976.

The presentation and discussion focused largely on the NSFG. Described as a lineal descendant of the earlier NFS and GAF studies going back to 1955, the NSFG is a new data system in the National Center for Health Statistics. Field

work for the first two cycles of the survey was done in 1973 and 1976, respectively. In order to exploit the data of these first two cycles as fully as possible, and to expand the coverage to include all women 15-44 years, regardless of marital status, Cycle III has been postponed to 1980.

The NSFG is a household survey based on personal interviews with an area probability sample of women 15 through 44 years of age, who have children of their own in the household or have ever been married, and who reside in the conterminous U.S. Completed interviews in the first two cycles were 9,797 and 8,611, respectively. The topics of the interviews included a detailed marital history, a complete pregnancy history with dates, outcomes, and various characteristics of each pregnancy, a pregnancy planning history with information on the "wantedness" of each pregnancy and details on