

Study News 2002

Special Thanks

We'd like to extend a special thank you to all of our study members who helped us out with special projects in 2002.

This past summer, about 600 study families took part in a methods study. We tested whether a new way of asking questions would help people remember life events.

We will be using what we have learned from this methods study in our regular 2003 interviews, as described in "Behind the Scenes" (page 4).

We'd also like to thank the 100 study families who helped us test the computer program for our 2003 interviews. No matter how much planning and preparation goes into designing a new system, we still need to test it in a situation that very closely resembles our "real" interviews.

We are using several new computer systems for the interview itself. We also have new computer systems for keeping track of the interviewing over the 7 or 8 months we are "in the field". It takes that long to contact and interview over 7,400 families!

2003 Interviews

It's hard to believe that two years have gone by since we last talked to everyone for our regular Family Economics Study interviews. We will begin calling for our 2003 interviews at the beginning of March.

We truly appreciate the time and effort you give us in doing the interviews. We are pleased to be able to increase the amount of the check you will receive after your completed interview in 2003 to \$55.

This is in addition to the \$10 for returning the address postcard that we sent you in September.

Child Study Round 2

As this *Report* goes to press, we are about to begin interviews for the Child Development Supplement (CDS). We will be talking to the same families who took part in the first Child Development Study in 1997.

We are very excited about this project. It will give us two waves of child development data on the same children, some of whom are now adolescents.

The CDS provides a unique opportunity for researchers and policy makers to understand the various factors that affect child and adolescent development and well-being. It is the only nationally representative study that follows children into their

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adolescence, young adulthood and beyond. Researchers will analyze the data and policy makers will use the research to develop and implement programs designed to promote children's and adolescents' health and achievement.

We will interview the parent or primary caregiver either in person or by phone. Interviews with the children will be in person. The primary caregiver will receive \$75 for his/her participation, and each child who is interviewed will receive \$20. This is our way of showing appreciation for your contribution to the CDS.

We will ask about children's health and education, and about childcare arrangements. We also want to know about participation in after-school programs, sports, community groups, music and other arts. There will be questions about each child's goals and aspirations, hobbies, and interests. We also ask about the neighborhood, a little bit about the caregivers themselves, and different types of available social support.

As always, all participants' identities are treated as strictly confidential. The data we release is numbers only. Individual persons and families will never be identified.

Participation in the study is voluntary. Both parents and children can refuse to answer any or all of the questions.

By the Numbers

We thought you'd be interested in some results we obtained from analyzing your answers to our health and wealth questions in 1999 and 2001.

Smoking

Here's a good example of how we use the intergenerational nature of the study data. In 1986, we asked about smoking habits. We looked at all the men who answered that question in 1986 and who also had a son who was interviewed for the study in 1999. That gave us 1,219 father-son pairs.

When we looked at how many of them smoked we found:

- Of the 1219 fathers in 1986, 35% said that they smoked.
- Of the 1219 sons in 1999, 27% said that they smoked.

Then we looked just at the fathers who smoked.

- Of their sons, 35% said that they smoked.

Finally, we looked just at the fathers who didn't smoke.

- Of their sons, only 22% reported that they smoked.

As you can see, fathers who smoked (in 1986) were more likely to have sons who smoked (in 1999).

Wealth

The following numbers are based on 6,291 study families who participated in both the 1999 and 2001 interviews.

Owning a bank account

We asked whether you had money in checking or savings accounts, money market funds, CDs, government savings bonds, or Treasury bills—excluding assets in employer-based pensions or IRAs.

- In 1999, 84% of you said yes, while in 2001 only 82% said yes.

Owning real estate

We also ask whether you own real estate other than your main home.

- In both 1999 and 2001, 17% of you said yes.

Owning a business

We asked if you own a farm or business.

- In both 1999 and 2001, 13% of you said yes.

But when we looked further, it's clear it wasn't exactly the same set of people.

- Of those people who said they did in 1999, 30% said they did not in 2001.

Owning stock

We asked if you owned stock in publicly held corporations, mutual funds, or investment trusts (excluding employer-based pensions or IRAs).

- About 27% said they owned stock in 1999.
 - That was up to 29% in 2001.
- Of those who said yes to this question in 1999, 73% said yes in 2001, while 27% said no.

Owning an IRA

The situation is similar for ownership of an IRA or private annuity.

- In 1999, 31% of the families owned an IRA, while 35% reported owning one in 2001.
- Of those who owned in 1999, 75% still owned an IRA in 2001, while 25% no longer did.

Credit card and other debt

Finally, we asked about credit card and other debt (excluding mortgages). Again, the numbers for 1999 and 2001 were similar:

- In 1999, 48% said yes, and 52% said no, while in 2001, 50% said yes and 50% said no.

But again, there seems to be movement in and out of debt.

- Of those who reported having credit card/other debt in 1999, 25% said they didn't in 2001.

These numbers show how using longitudinal data—information from the same people over several years—can give you a very different and more accurate picture of a financial situation than information from a cross-section of the population at one moment in time.

Behind the Scenes

Memory Magic

Studies have shown that our ability to recall events gets worse for events that occurred longer ago. Those of us over a certain age probably didn't need the studies to tell us that!

But they *can* tell us just how bad the problem is. For instance, one study

asked people to recall times they were hospitalized. The researchers found that people failed to report 3% of hospitalizations when they were asked about them within 10 weeks of the event. When the time lag was a whole year, people failed to report a whopping 42% of the times they were hospitalized.

That's the kind of research finding that gets those of us in academic survey research worried. The Family Economics Study has come to be known for the high quality of its data. But we do ask about events that may have occurred months earlier, such as job changes. For people who are new to the study, or recently returned, the events we ask about can be much earlier. And now that we interview every two years, the time between the event and our questions can be even longer.



Not to mention that it can be hard on you! For many of you, every other year interviewing is great. But then when we ask about things you were doing two years earlier, it can be frustrating. Some of you have even asked us to go back to interviewing every year.

Luckily, it turns out there's a better way. The research on recall of events has also shown that different ways of asking the questions can help.

Memory cues especially can help. A simple list of questions, like we've used before, doesn't provide them. So we've adopted a new strategy that has potential for greater accuracy—and for simply being more fun.

It's called an Event History Calendar. At the point in the interview when we're ready to ask about your jobs and whether you've moved, you'll notice the difference. The interviewer will have in front of her not just some questions, but a calendar, consisting of some questions and some timelines.

First, she'll ask you for a few "landmark" events—things that happened in 2001 or 2002 that you can easily remember the date for. Examples might be a wedding, a vacation, a move or job change. (You can also use holidays—major ones will already be marked on the

computer program.) We'll be looking for 2 to 4 events, and this should only take a minute or two. The landmarks will serve as memory aids, to help you recall other events and the order in which they occurred.

After the landmarks, we'll ask about places you've lived in the last couple of years, then about the jobs you've had in that time, and finally about periods when you were not working. Your interviewer will enter the dates and the computer will display a summary of all the events together. You will be able to use all of this information to help you recall dates and put things in order.

For example, you may not remember exactly when you changed jobs. But you might remember that it was just after your nephew's wedding, because you used time off between jobs to attend the event. Or you might remember that you moved the day before the 4th of July, because you were able to go to the parade in your new hometown.

One thing that makes this way of gaining the information better is simply that it's more fun! The exchange is more like a conversation with the interviewer, than a list of questions and answers.

This summer, several study families helped us test this new way of asking questions. We're happy to say that the response was very positive!

Sept 11th, ISR, and the FES

After September 11 2001, the world changed for all of us. We cannot look at our lives—our sense of personal security and its effect on our behavior—in the same way. It was hard for all of us to know how to respond. Still, the Institute for Social Research (ISR) is a world leader in social science. We conduct some of the most widely cited studies in the nation, and ISR researchers collaborate with social scientists in more than 60 other countries. Our understanding of what it takes to do this research, and our position in the research community, led us to have two different reactions.

The first was to stop interviewing. As the Family Economics Study directors began to realize the extent of the tragedy, we asked our interviewing staff to stop making calls. For several days, interviewers contacted only those study members with whom they had appointments, to let them know that we could call later. Yet many of those people did their interviews then anyway. It seemed that people were home from work, out of their normal routines, and simply needed to talk. We are grateful to all of you who did the interviews in those first few days and later, when all of us were still very strongly affected. It is now even more important to get a detailed look at how our country's families are faring.

Research Results

The other reaction at ISR was to *start* interviewing. As a premier social science survey research institution, we felt it was an important responsibility of ours to get out there and find out what people were thinking and feeling. Senior researchers at the Institute organized a special survey of a national random telephone sample of Americans, called *How America Responds*. We talked to 668 American adults between Sept 15th and October 7th, 2001.

This survey found a significant impact on Americans' sense of personal safety. When asked if the attack had shaken their sense of safety and security, 20% said it had "a great deal", 29% said "a good amount", and 51% said "not too much or not at all". Over 66% reported some trouble concentrating, 52% said they felt depressed, and almost 62% reported restless sleep in the week before the survey. Only 21% said they often felt hopeful about the future.

Yet there were positive signs as well, including a sense of cohesion among Americans. More than 90% agreed or agreed strongly that they were proud to be an American. Nearly 60% agreed that the world would be a better place if people from other

countries were more like Americans. These are higher levels of patriotic feelings than any reported in national surveys in the past 5 years. And this was a patriotism of inclusion—positive feelings toward people of diverse racial and ethnic groups were higher than just a couple of years earlier.

The lower sense of personal security was linked to the decline in consumer confidence. Rising unemployment was people's top concern—61% expected the national rate to rise during the year ahead. Assessments of personal safety also affected people's reactions to potential tax cuts, making them more likely to use such money to reduce debt or rebuild savings. "The sense of community and shared fate produced by the attacks have made consumers more in favor of spending programs that strengthen the economic safety net for those most harmed by the terrorist attacks' economic repercussions," explained one of the researchers.

Among those who said their sense of personal safety had been shaken a great deal, just 32% thought it was a good time to invest in the stock market, compared with 54% of those who said their sense of personal safety was not much affected.

ISR's *Surveys of Consumers* have been tracking consumer attitudes for decades. UM economist Richard Curtin says there have been few other instances where non-economic factors have played such a dominant role in determining trends in confidence.

As most of you know, the FES added a few questions about feelings during the month prior to the interview day. Since we interviewed several hundred of our study families after 9/11, we wondered how the responses from those families would compare to those of families we talked to before the attacks.

A preliminary analysis revealed that women had higher rates of depression and anxiety symptoms both before and after 9/11 than men. Rates of depression and anxiety increased significantly following September 11th, but only among women. Other symptoms of distress, such as feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, did not show any change after Sept. 11th for either men or women.

Perhaps this is because the questions made no direct reference to the attacks, in contrast to the *How America Responds* survey. Perhaps, as several of us realize from our personal experience, the full reaction to the tragedy took some time to sink in. Or perhaps this can show us that we as Americans, no matter how much we may be affected, are a pretty resilient group.

Stressed at work? Not to worry— Bored at work? Better read this!

Suffering in a high stress job? Think that a boring one might be better for your health?

Think again. Or so goes the wisdom of a recent study by researchers from the University of Texas School of Public Health. Using Family Economic Study data, they found that people who spent their working lives in jobs that were undemanding and provided little control were 35% more likely to die during a 10-year period than people with jobs involving decision-making responsibilities. This result held after controlling for other relevant factors such as age, income, race and gender.

Traditionally, a job considered dangerous to one's health was one involving physical danger, such as firefighting and mining, or a manufacturing job with exposure to hazardous chemicals. But the workplace and what we do there have changed significantly in the past 30 years. Computerization is up. The manufacturing sector has shrunk while the service sector and "knowledge work" have expanded.

These changes mean that the definition of adverse working conditions has changed. Nowadays, it's not physical danger but psychological and

social stresses on the job. Moreover, gone are the days when one job was a lifetime career. Today, a person in the U.S. with two years of college can expect to change careers and acquire new skills many times. Each shift brings a new set of job stressors into play, which could affect health.

Other changes involve balancing work and family life. With more part-time work and flexible schedules people are working with varying intensity over the course of their working lives. So to estimate the health effects of job stresses over a lifetime means looking at a person's experience over a whole set of working environments. A "snapshot" of working conditions at one specific time won't suffice.

Enter the Family Economics Study, with its 30-plus years of information about jobs, health, and mortality. The University of Texas researchers looked at the FES data from 1968 to 1991. They included only people who had worked for at least 3 years during that time, and were between the ages of 18 and 62 (so that the work would represent their primary life course activity).

The FES staff codes each of your jobs using a coding system developed by the U.S. Census Bureau and widely used in economics research. The Texas researchers classified these occupations according to factors



such as the freedom to make decisions, the psychological job demands, job security, the amount of workplace support, and the physical job demands. Then they classified the jobs into four categories:

High strain: highly demanding, little decision-making latitude

Low strain: low demands, lots of decision-making latitude

Passive work: low demands, little decision latitude

Active work: high demands, high decision latitude

The conventional wisdom today is that it's the high strain jobs—the high-stress managerial positions—that can ruin your health. The surprising finding of the Texas team was that it's the workers who spend their lives with little control over their work that are more likely to die within a 10-year period.

People who have little say in what they do, when they do it and how they do it are more prone to dying than those who have more control in their working lives. High strain jobs, on the other hand, are *not* more prone to shorten your lifespan.

What could account for that result? The researchers suggest that bored workers may live more sedentary lives than their “take charge” counterparts. Or, passive jobs could represent work depleted of meaningful content, leading to social disengagement, or riskier behavior after the plant whistle blows. While the CEO works out in the gym after work, the assembly worker heads to the

local bar for a beer and a smoke. But this must remain a subject for future research.

One conclusion reached by this study is clear: the value of long-term nationally representative studies like the FES. Only these can provide statistically reliable information about people's cumulative life experiences. The Texas team's research, using FES data, is the first study of life course exposure to psychosocial work conditions in a representative sample of U.S. working-age adults.

See further Amick III, Benjamin C. et al. 2002. *Relationship Between All-Cause Mortality and Cumulative Working Life Course Psychosocial and Physical Exposures in the United States Labor Market From 1968 to 1992*. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 64:370-381.

The American Family—Transitions & Transformations, Part 2

Frank P. Stafford, an economist and Director of the FES, was interviewed about changes in American family culture and behavior, and what the FES shows us about the American family over time and through successive generations. Part I of his interview appeared in the 2001 Respondent Report. Here is Part II.

Has divorce become more socially acceptable? There certainly has been a shift, and it is not a result of having more women in certain age-ranges where there is more divorce; rather, there is a wider social phenomenon of acceptability of family separations.

We see this in other areas where social belief and values are changing economic behavior. If you go back to the 1980s, when bankruptcy had a greater stigma attached to it, adults were much less likely then to go bankrupt than they were in the 1990s. One common thread with divorce is that once enough of a certain event takes place—either divorce or bankruptcy—then it creates acceptability. As there are more divorces, more unmarried people are available and this creates what social scientists call a “marriage market”—more single people to meet. This in turn creates a willingness to divorce.

With both parents working, how do children adapt to their parent's schedules? Social scientists use measures called time diaries that give accurate indications of what people have been doing with their time. This turns out to be very important. If you ask people how much time they spend taking care of their children, they will tell you that they spend many hours doing so, since this is obviously a socially desirable activity. In contrast, if you ask parents what they were doing starting at midnight, going through a chronology of a recent 24-hour day, you will find much less childcare than in self reports.

One of the main findings regarding time use is that from the 1950s through the 1980s, in the U.S. and many other industrialized countries, there has been a drift toward more free time. Though we think we are more stressed today, the fact

is that typical work hours by men have fallen from the 1950s and 1960s. But women spend more time in the job market and the number of two-income families has increased. This creates a “time-squeeze”—where market work, housework and childcare combine to leave little time for free time and rest—which we have actually observed as early as the 1970s. Where both adults in a family have a career, you can’t expect one to leave the labor market for 10 years and then reappear as a surgeon. You have to stay with your career, and this creates the time squeeze.

What we have been able to observe through these time diary studies is that people literally sleep less. Dual-career couples with children, particularly mothers, have less free time and sleep less. The time squeeze also carries over to create stress for the children.

The other side of this is that the care of children has shifted to institutions outside the family: high and low quality day care. There is an interesting question here about how effective these institutions are as caregivers, and at what ages and under what circumstances. This is a large research area, but all we know from the evidence to date suggests that there are good ones and that there are poor ones. Given this time-squeeze for parents, out-of-home care can be very effective. If it’s done well, the child will do well. There are limits. The out-of-home setting will not provide the family warmth that’s very

important to the child’s stability and development. It’s a tricky balance.

The time squeeze has also shaped a lot of school activities. Schools are responding with after-hours activities such as sports and clubs. Children spend more time at their school.

One of our goals as social scientists is not just to do research but to advise people on what kinds of situations are not good for children. We certainly know that lots of instability, income problems, turmoil, family stress, are clearly costly to children. There are some things we can suggest that are good to do in terms of child development. For example, early reading to and playing with preschool children does boost their grade school performance.

What differences or similarities have been found among families of different backgrounds? African American income and educational attainment has improved since the 1970s. The income gap between African American and other families is still substantial, but narrowing. The wealth gap is still very large, on the order of nine to one at the median—that is, \$9,000 versus \$81,500 in household net worth. A lot of this is a generational effect. African American families were far less likely to have parents who utilized financial institutions: banks, the stock market, etc. So in the 1980s and 1990s when the stock market took off, there were very low

rates of stock ownership by African Americans (outside of pensions)—in 1999 17% for African American families vs. 61% for all others.

Ownership rates of bank accounts among African American families were under 50% until just recently when it approached 55%. This is a stark fact. If you look at ownership patterns in African American families in 1984, and then look at their young adult children in 1994, we do see a movement toward more ownership, particularly for more educated families, who are also more likely to own stocks and bonds.

However, there still is a family effect, which is *not* different by race. If the family is not putting money in the bank, but instead uses check-cashing places or credit cards, and deals with finances outside the banking system, these habits carry over into the perspectives of the children. In one of our current projects—our child supplement—we’re looking at children’s financial behavior, particularly teenagers, to see how they actually learn this. We know the parents’ financial behavior, e.g., portfolio choices and participation in financial markets. So then we will see how this gets translated to environments where children get different signals about saving, earning, or taking on part-time work.

The Family Economics Study
Survey Research Center
University of Michigan
PO Box 1248
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248