Current Population Reports
Household Economic Studies

Dynamics of Economic Well-Being:
Program Participation, 1992-1993

Who Gets Assistance?

By Jan Tin

CENSUS BUREAU

P70-58
July 1996

Introduction

How to improve the welfare system has been the subject of intense debate in recent years and many States are modifying their programs substantially under waivers granted by Federal Government. These changes and proposed ones have intensified the interest in information on people who participate in welfare programs. This report uses data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to examine who receives assistance from the major means-tested government programs—namely, Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC), General Assistance, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, and housing assistance—over the 28-month period from October 1991 through January 1994.[1]

Because SIPP provides monthly information on the program participation of individuals, as well as on many demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that can vary over time such as family and labor force status, differences in patterns of participation can be analyzed.[2] Specifically, this report examines similarities and differences in: (1) average monthly program participation in 1993; (2) the percent of people who participated in at least one of these programs at some time during the 1992-1993 period; (3) the percent who participated in at least one program in all 24 months of 1992 and 1993; and (4) the length of time participants stayed in the programs (the duration of the spell).

Highlights

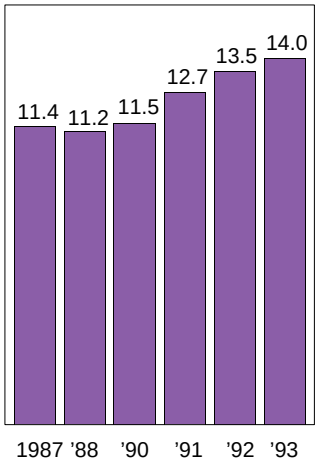
- Approximately 1 in 7 Americans participated in major means-tested assistance programs in 1993. On average, 36.0 (±0.8) million persons or 14.0 (±0.3) percent of the population were assisted that year, an increase of 8.6 million program participants from the 1987 level of 27.4 (±0.9) million.[3]
- In 1993, over one-third of Blacks (35.5 ± 0.8 percent) participated in major means-tested assistance programs, compared with 10.6 (±0.3) percent of Whites. The proportion of Hispanics receiving this assistance was 28.9 (±0.4) percent.[4]
- Nearly a quarter of the Nation's children participated in at least one of these means-tested programs in 1993. About 23.7 (±0.8) percent of children under 18 years of age received assistance, while only 10.0 (±0.3) percent of persons age 18 to 64 years and 12.0 (±0.8) percent of the elderly (65 and older) were participants.
- Over half of the poor in 1993 received means-tested assistance—57.3 (±1.2) percent compared with 6.5 (±0.3) percent of the nonpoor.
- Persons in married-couple families were less likely than those in families with female householders, no spouse present, to participate in means-tested programs—7.7 (±0.3) percent compared with 42.9 (±1.2) percent in 1993.
- The median length of time participants received benefits from these programs was 7.7 (±0.3) months during the 1992-1993 period, similar to that of the 1990-1992 period.

One in Seven Americans Receive Means-Tested Assistance

Of the estimated 258 million civilians living in the United States, approximately 36 million or 14.0 percent participated in one or more of the major means-tested assistance programs. As shown in figure 1, the average monthly program participation rate has

Figure 1.
Average Monthly Participation in Means-Tested Programs: 1987-1988 and 1990-1993

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

[1]Means-tested programs are those that require the income and/or assets of the individual or family to be below specified thresholds in order to qualify for benefits. These programs provide cash and noncash assistance to portions of the low-income population.

[2]Efforts were made during the life of the panel to follow people who moved to ensure that the sample remained representative of the noninstitutional population of the United States.

[3]The figures in parentheses denote the 90-percent confidence intervals of the estimates.

[4]Hispanics may be of any race.

increased noticeably, from 11.4 percent in 1987 to 14.0 percent in 1993.[5]

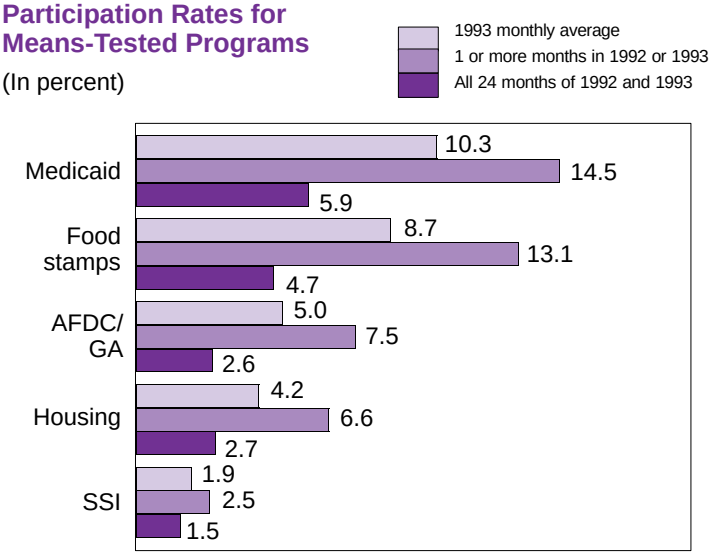
A substantial proportion of the recipients, however, participated in major government programs only on a short-term basis. Only 8.6 percent of persons participated in these programs all 24 months of the 1992-1993 period. These long-term recipients were likely to be children or at least 65 years old. The proportions of children and the elderly that participated in these means-tested programs in each month of 1992 and 1993 were 14.1 percent and 9.7 percent, respectively, compared with 6.0 percent of people who were 18 to 64 years old.

Generally, program participation rates are related to poverty and business cycles—rising along with poverty rates during periods of economic contraction, and both falling during periods of economic expansion. During the expansionary period of 1987 and 1989, the official poverty rate dropped slightly from 13.4 percent to 12.8 percent. The poverty rate then rose to 13.5 percent in 1990 and reached 15.1 percent in 1993—a period when participation rates rose from 11.5 percent to 14 percent.[6]

Medicaid Has the Highest Participation Rate

As shown in table A and figure 2, individuals were more likely to participate in Medicaid than in any other program. In 1993, the average monthly participation rate for Medicaid, 10.3 percent, was higher than that of food stamps, AFDC or General Assistance, housing assistance, or SSI. A similar pattern existed for persons who were long-term participants, that is, who participated in these programs all 24 months of the 1992-1993 period.[7]

Figure 2.
Participation Rates for Means-Tested Programs
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

However, while a higher proportion participated in Medicaid, the length of stay on each of these programs was similar. Specifically, the median durations of participation for Medicaid, food stamps, and AFDC were not significantly different from one another (see table B). The median spells for SSI and housing assistance were not available for analysis, because more than half of their spells continued in the last month of data collection. This situation is especially likely to occur for elderly recipients whose incomes are likely to be stable over time.

Over 1 in 3 Black Americans Receive Means-Tested Assistance

In 1993, the average monthly number of Whites receiving means-tested assistance was far greater than of Blacks, 22.9 million compared with 11.6 million. However, Blacks and Hispanics had higher average participation rates than Whites and non-Hispanics, respectively, both overall and for the individual programs as well. More than one-third (35.5 percent) of Blacks participated in these means-tested programs, compared with only 10.6 percent of Whites (see table A). The proportion of Hispanics who received benefits was 28.9 percent, significantly higher than the 12.3 percent of non-Hispanics who participated.

Additionally, in the 1992-1993 period, the median number of months Blacks received benefits was larger than for Whites (see table B). However, the median duration for Hispanics was not significantly different from the medians for non-Hispanics, Whites, and Blacks.[8]

Blacks tended to receive higher monthly benefits than Whites, a reflection of their relatively lower incomes and larger families. As indicated in table A, the median monthly benefit for Black families

[5]SIPP average program participation rates from 1987 to 1991 were obtained from previous Census Bureau reports, specifically, Current Population Reports, Household Economic Studies, Series P70-31, P70-41, and P70-46. The program participation rate for 1989 was not available for comparison. The 1993 program participation rate was not significantly different from that of 1992.

[6]Estimates of the poverty rates were obtained from Current Population Reports, Consumer Income, series P60-188. The 1988 poverty rate did not differ statistically from those of 1987 and 1989. Both poverty and program participation rates might have peaked in 1993.

[7]The long-term participants receiving AFDC and housing assistance were not significantly different.

[8]The median number of months Whites received benefits was not significantly different from that of Non-Hispanics.

($526) was significantly higher than the median for White families ($399) in 1993, whereas the median benefit of Hispanics was not significantly different from that of non-Hispanics.

About One-Quarter of Children Under Age 18 Receive Means-Tested Assistance

Program participation is closely associated with the age of an individual, as shown in figure 3. In 1993, nearly 1 in 4 (23.7 percent) children younger than 18 received some type of means-tested assistance, compared with only 1 in 10 (10.0 percent) persons age 18 to 64 years and 1 in 8 (12.0 percent) of the elderly.

Recipients Have Lower Educational Levels

For people age 18 and over, lower educational attainment is associated with greater program participation (see table A). In 1993, about 1 in 4 (23.6 percent) of those with less than 4 years of high school received means-tested benefits, compared with 1 in 10 (10.1 percent) of those who completed high school but did not attend college, and only 4.1 percent of those with at least 1 year of college.

As expected, individuals who had not graduated from high school stayed in these programs longer than those with more education. The median duration of receipt for those without a high school degree (11.7 months) was higher than the medians for high school graduates (7.7 months) and persons with some college experience (7.4 months).[9]

One-Quarter of Those With Work Disabilities Receive Means-Tested Benefits

In 1993, on average, 25.2 percent of people 15 to 69 years old with a work disability received means-tested benefits, compared with only 7.8 percent of those with no work disability. Although SSI was designed for the disabled and automatically confers eligibility for Medicaid, people with work disabilities were also more likely than others without work disabilities to participate in General Assistance and housing assistance.[10]

[9]The median spell durations of receipt for high school graduates and persons with some college experience were not statistically different.

[10]For disabled persons, the average monthly participation rates of food stamps and SSI were not statistically different, neither were those of AFDC and housing assistance. For persons with no work disabilities, the average monthly participation rate of Medicaid was not significantly different from that of food stamps. Their average monthly participation rates of AFDC and housing assistance were also not significantly different.

Table A.

Average Monthly Participation Rates and Median Monthly Family Benefits by Selected Characteristics: 1992 and 1993

Characteristic	Participation rates (in percent)					
	Means-tested programs[1]		AFDC/General Assistance		SSI	
	1992	1993	1992	1993	1992	1993
Total number of recipients (thousands)	34,464	35,968	12,366	12,790	4,721	4,987
As percent of the population	13.5	14.0	4.8	5.0	1.9	1.9
RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN[2]						
White	10.3	10.6	3.1	3.1	1.4	1.5
Not of Hispanic origin	8.6	8.7	2.4	2.4	1.3	1.4
Black	34.2	35.5	16.3	16.4	4.4	4.7
Hispanic origin	27.0	28.9	10.4	10.9	2.6	2.9
Not of Hispanic origin	12.0	12.3	4.2	4.3	1.8	1.8
AGE						
Under 18 years	22.7	23.7	11.1	11.4	0.0	0.0
18 to 64 years	9.8	10.0	3.0	3.0	1.8	2.0
65 years and over	11.8	12.0	0.2	0.2	6.1	5.9
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)						
Under 4 years of high school	22.8	23.6	5.3	5.3	7.6	7.8
High school graduate, no college	9.9	10.1	2.7	2.8	1.7	2.0
1 or more years of college	4.0	4.1	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.7
DISABILITY STATUS (PERSONS 15 TO 69 YEARS)						
Wiith work disability	24.6	25.2	5.4	5.0	10.3	11.0
With no work disability	7.5	7.8	2.7	2.8	0.3	0.4
RESIDENCE						
Metropolitan	12.8	13.3	5.0	5.1	1.7	1.8
Central city	19.9	19.8	8.6	8.5	2.5	2.6
Noncentral city	8.2	8.8	2.5	2.8	1.2	1.2
Nonmetropolitan	15.9	16.2	4.5	4.5	2.4	2.5
REGION						
Northeast	13.2	13.8	5.6	5.7	1.7	1.8
Midwest	11.6	11.9	4.7	4.7	1.2	1.2
South	15.0	15.5	4.2	4.4	2.2	2.3
West	13.7	14.2	5.5	5.5	2.1	2.3
FAMILY STATUS						
In families	13.6	14.2	5.5	5.7	1.3	1.4
In married-couple families	7.3	7.7	1.6	1.7	0.8	0.9
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	41.6	42.9	23.6	23.9	3.3	3.6
Unrelated individuals	13.3	12.8	0.9	0.8	5.0	5.2
EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE STATUS (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)						
Employed full time	3.4	3.5	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2
Employed part time	8.4	8.6	1.6	1.8	1.0	1.0
Unemployed	24.5	24.3	9.5	9.3	1.4	1.3
Not in the labor force	19.6	20.2	5.5	5.6	6.9	7.2
FAMILY INCOME-TO-POVERTY RATIO						
Less than 1.00	56.2	57.3	26.8	26.8	6.0	6.6
1.00 and over	6.2	6.5	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.1

See footnotes at end of table.

Table A.

Average Monthly Participation Rates and Median Monthly Family Benefits by Selected Characteristics: 1992 and 1993—Con.

Characteristic	Participation rates (in percent)						Monthly family benefits[3] (in dollars)			
	Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance		1992		1993	
	1992	1993	1992	1993	1992	1993	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error
Total number of recipients (thousands)	21,757	22,553	24,590	26,453	10,749	10,759	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
As percent of the population	8.5	8.7	9.6	10.3	4.2	4.2	452	3.0	454	4.5
RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN[2]										
White	6.2	6.2	7.1	7.7	2.8	2.7	400	9.5	399	4.0
Not of Hispanic origin	5.0	4.9	5.8	6.2	2.4	2.3	359	4.5	365	5.5
Black	24.3	25.4	26.1	27.0	13.4	13.7	536	6.0	526	3.5
Hispanic origin	17.7	18.9	19.8	21.6	7.7	7.9	490	7.5	478	7.5
Not of Hispanic origin	7.5	7.6	8.5	9.0	3.8	3.8	448	4.5	443	4.5
AGE										
Under 18 years	16.4	16.9	18.0	19.5	6.6	6.6	565	7.0	555	5.5
18 to 64 years	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.6	3.1	3.0	425	4.5	426	4.5
65 years and over	3.8	3.9	7.9	8.1	4.7	4.8	202	4.5	197	6.0
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)										
Under 4 years of high school	13.0	13.5	15.8	16.5	7.1	7.2	386	8.0	380	8.0
High school graduate, no college	5.8	5.8	6.1	6.5	3.2	3.1	359	10.0	373	10.5
1 or more years of college	1.9	1.9	2.4	2.4	1.6	1.6	415	10.0	436	13.0
DISABILITY STATUS (PERSONS 15 TO 69 YEARS)										
With work disability	13.4	13.2	18.6	19.5	6.2	6.2	417	6.5	412	10.0
With no work disability	4.9	5.1	4.4	4.7	2.6	2.6	434	7.5	438	3.0
RESIDENCE										
Metropolitan	7.9	8.1	9.4	10.0	4.2	4.3	498	9.0	493	5.5
Central city	13.0	12.8	14.7	14.9	7.3	7.3	551	7.0	551	6.5
Noncentral city	4.5	4.9	5.9	6.6	2.2	2.3	428	6.0	430	5.5
Nonmetropolitan	10.7	10.9	10.5	11.2	4.2	3.7	349	6.0	345	6.5
REGION										
Northeast	8.0	8.2	9.9	10.5	5.6	5.8	552	11.5	548	12.0
Midwest	7.5	7.7	8.4	8.9	4.0	3.8	486	9.0	481	6.0
South	10.3	10.7	9.4	10.3	4.1	4.0	362	7.0	362	8.0
West	7.3	7.3	11.3	11.7	3.4	3.4	625	7.5	600	2.5
FAMILY STATUS										
In families	9.1	9.4	9.9	10.6	3.9	3.9	489	3.0	482	4.5
In married–couple families	4.2	4.3	4.7	5.2	1.6	1.6	355	5.0	340	7.5
In families with a female house–holder, no spouse present	31.7	32.6	33.4	34.8	14.5	14.4	571	5.5	564	4.5
Unrelated individuals	5.1	4.9	8.1	8.1	6.0	5.7	184	6.5	188	8.0
EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE STATUS (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)										
Employed full time	1.5	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.5	233	6.5	231	6.5
Employed part time	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.9	3.1	2.9	277	9.0	282	9.5
Unemployed	18.1	18.6	14.7	14.2	6.8	7.3	400	19.5	411	20.5
Not in the labor force	10.9	11.2	14.8	15.5	5.9	5.8	434	0.0	433	1.0
FAMILY INCOME–TO–POVERTY RATIO										
Less than 1.00	45.0	45.7	43.6	44.9	17.6	18.0	496	7.0	496	7.5
1.00 and over	2.3	2.4	3.9	4.3	1.9	1.8	334	6.5	349	4.5

X Not applicable.
[1]Major means-tested programs include AFDC, General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
[3]Median monthly family benefits are the total received from AFDC, General Assistance, food stamps, and SSI.

When we examine program participation over time, those with disabilities were more likely to be long-term recipients than others—19.2 percent of them collected benefits in all 24 months, compared with 4.0 percent of those without work disabilities.

Over Half of the Poor Receive Means-Tested Assistance

Not surprisingly, 57.3 percent of the poor received means-tested benefits in 1993, compared with 6.5 percent of the nonpoor (see figure 4). Over half (53.5 percent) of the poor participated in all 24 months of 1992 and 1993, as did only 3.0 percent of the nonpoor. In addition, the median duration of receipt for the poor was about twice that of the nonpoor

(11.5 months compared with 6.0 months).[11]

[11]The poverty status of a person in a given period is defined by dividing the sum of his/her monthly family incomes by the sum of his/her monthly family poverty thresholds. The person is considered "poor" if the ratio is less than one and is considered "non-poor" otherwise. This implies that individuals who are considered "poor" in a year may not necessarily be "poor" in every month of the year.

Families Maintained by Women Have Higher Participation Rates

Reflecting their relatively low incomes, individuals in families maintained by women were much more likely to participate in means-tested programs than those in married-couple families—42.9 percent compared with 7.7 percent in 1993. Moreover, over half (51.1 percent) of those in families maintained by women participated in means-tested programs during at least 1 month of 1992 and 1993, compared with 13.8 percent of those in married-couple families. Similarly, a higher proportion of families maintained by women received means-tested

Table B.

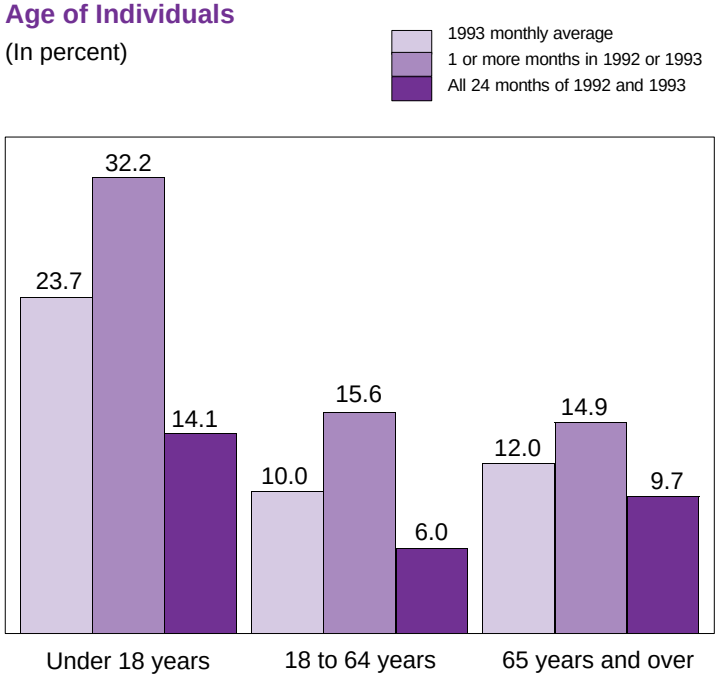
Median Duration of Participation and Standard Errors by Program: 1992-1993

(In months. Median duration cannot be computed when more than half of the spells are continuing in the last month of data collection. This situation is especially likely to occur for elderly recipients whose income from other sources is unlikely to rise over time.)

Characteristic	Major assistance programs[1]		AFDC/ General Assistance		SSI		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error	Median	Standard error
All recipients	7.7	0.310	8.5	1.110	(X)	(X)	8.0	0.444	8.1	1.505	(X)	(X)
RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN[2]												
White	7.3	0.317	7.3	0.581	(X)	(X)	7.2	0.534	7.9	0.288	14.5	2.072
Not of Hispanic origin	6.9	1.173	7.5	0.591	(X)	(X)	6.6	0.951	7.9	0.388	11.9	0.973
Black	13.3	1.894	13.8	1.888	(X)	(X)	13.3	0.563	11.5	0.924	(X)	(X)
Hispanic origin	9.3	1.567	7.5	1.717	(X)	(X)	9.5	1.464	7.9	0.436	18.1	0.475
Not of Hispanic origin	7.5	0.384	8.8	1.109	(X)	(X)	7.8	0.529	8.4	1.878	(X)	(X)
AGE[3]												
Under 18 years	7.2	0.438	10.0	1.870	(B)	(B)	8.5	1.141	7.1	0.375	(X)	(X)
18 to 64 years	7.8	0.397	7.8	0.641	(X)	(X)	7.5	0.520	11.4	0.660	14.6	2.063
65 years and over	(X)	(X)	(B)	(B)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)												
Under 4 years of high school	11.7	1.061	7.9	1.194	(X)	(X)	10.3	1.936	17.5	2.733	(X)	(X)
High school graduate, no college	7.7	0.608	7.6	0.811	(X)	(X)	7.3	0.808	11.1	0.897	11.5	1.194
1 or more years of college	7.4	0.713	7.8	1.559	14.3	3.6	5.6	1.264	9.9	3.231	14.3	1.644
DISABILITY STATUS (PERSONS 15 TO 69 YEARS)												
With work disability	10.6	2.035	8.3	4.155	(X)	(X)	7.3	1.354	19.1	2.133	(X)	(X)
With no work disability	7.6	0.434	7.5	0.957	7.8	1.646	7.5	0.574	7.9	0.360	13.6	5.416
RESIDENCE												
Metropolitan	7.9	0.328	9.5	1.772	(X)	(X)	8.4	1.015	7.9	0.301	(X)	(X)
Central city	8.5	4.551	9.8	3.873	(X)	(X)	9.7	1.679	7.8	0.384	(X)	(X)
Noncentral city	7.7	0.406	9.3	1.772	(X)	(X)	7.5	0.781	8.0	0.479	(X)	(X)
Nonmetropolitan	7.4	0.803	7.4	0.572	(X)	(X)	7.4	1.095	9.3	2.235	14.0	3.697
REGION												
Northeast	7.9	0.491	7.5	0.699	(X)	(X)	7.5	0.876	8.0	0.479	(X)	(X)
Midwest	7.4	0.844	10.9	1.552	17.4	2.619	7.9	1.463	11.5	1.297	19.4	1.888
South	8.9	1.800	9.7	1.965	(X)	(X)	9.5	1.571	7.8	0.487	(X)	(X)
West	7.3	0.466	7.5	2.404	(X)	(X)	6.9	0.896	7.8	0.487	(X)	(X)
FAMILY STATUS												
In families	7.6	0.332	8.5	1.124	(X)	(X)	7.9	0.459	7.9	0.274	(X)	(X)
In married-couple families	6.3	1.569	5.0	3.544	19.7	5.531	6.7	0.858	7.2	0.306	15.1	1.668
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	13.1	6.196	12.3	1.726	(X)	(X)	11.5	1.556	12.6	1.843	(X)	(X)
Unrelated individuals	11.2	0.898	13.1	2.057	(X)	(X)	10.6	3.512	12.1	1.746	11.2	1.123
EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE STATUS (PERSONS 18 YEARS AND OVER)												
Employed full time	5.4	1.091	3.7	0.293	7.0	2.624	4.2	0.709	7.0	0.554	10.6	2.949
Employed part time	7.5	1.162	7.0	1.340	(B)	(B)	7.2	1.745	7.8	0.525	(X)	(X)
Unemployed	9.0	1.353	6.1	1.641	(B)	(B)	7.8	0.709	12.2	1.938	(X)	(X)
Not in the labor force	16.7	0.549	11.5	1.462	(X)	(X)	12.8	2.677	19.7	0.788	(X)	(X)
FAMILY INCOME-TO-POVERTY RATIO												
Less than 1.00	11.5	0.831	9.6	1.402	(X)	(X)	9.8	1.461	11.9	0.568	(X)	(X)
1.00 and over	6.0	1.118	5.5	1.627	(X)	(X)	5.9	1.076	7.1	0.294	(X)	(X)

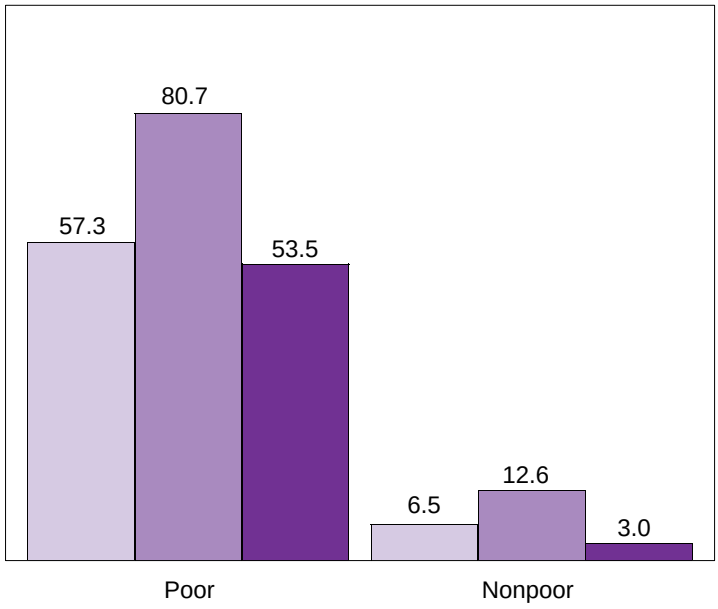
X Not applicable. B Base less than 200,000.
[1]Means-tested programs include AFDC and General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
[3]Age, educational attainment, and other variables are measured at the time the spells begin, excluding those who are already on programs at the start of the survey.

Figure 3.
Participation Rates by Age of Individuals
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

Figure 4.
Participation Rates by Poverty Status
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

benefits in all 24 months than of married-couple families.

Nearly One-Quarter of the Unemployed Receive Means-Tested Benefits

As shown in figure 5, in an average month of 1993, almost one-quarter of the unemployed received means-tested assistance, as did 1 in 5 individuals not in the labor force. In contrast, only 3.5 percent of those with full-time jobs and 8.6 percent of those with part-time jobs received these benefits at some time during 1993.

The unemployed and those who were not in the labor force received higher monthly benefits than people with full- or part-time jobs. The median monthly benefit from AFDC, General Assistance, food stamps, and SSI for families with an unemployed worker was $411, not significantly different from that of families with no members who were in the labor force. The median benefits for full- and part-time workers were $231 and $282, respectively. In addition, the median unemployment compensation benefit among recipients was $618 in 1993, although only 28.7 percent of the unemployed received these benefits.

Residential and Regional Differences

As shown in table A, people living outside metropolitan areas had a higher average program participation rate in 1993 than those living inside metropolitan areas. However, dividing metropolitan areas into central cities and noncentral cities reveals a different picture, with those in central cities having participation rates significantly higher than either of the other two groups.

Regionally, the average monthly program participation rate was highest in the South (15.5 percent) and lowest in the Midwest (11.9 percent). The average participation rate in the West was similar to those of the Northeast and the South, but the average rates in

the Northeast and the South were significantly different. However, disaggregation by type of program shows that people in the West were more likely to be covered by Medicaid than those in the South or the Midwest. People in the South were more likely to be covered by food stamps than those in any other region, but less likely to receive AFDC.[12]

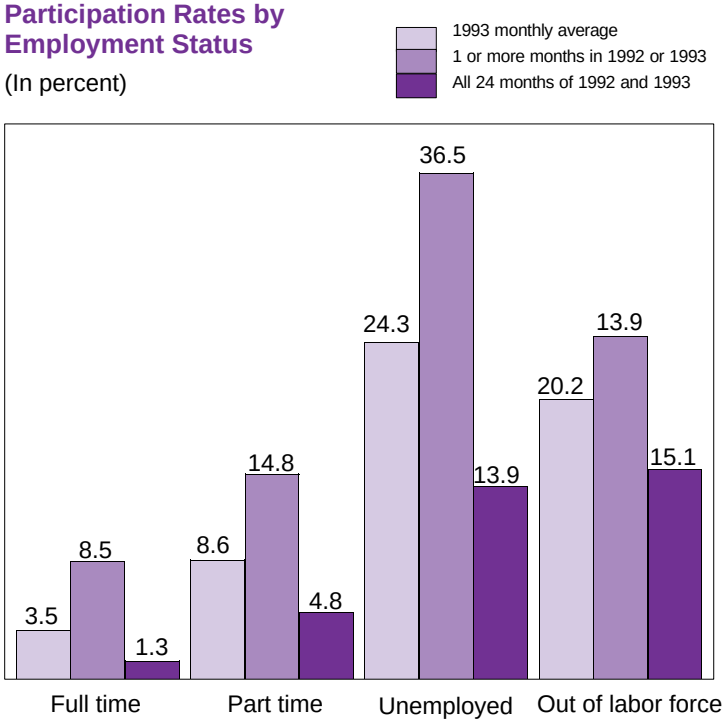
Source and Accuracy of Estimates

All statistics are subject to sampling error, as well as nonsampling error such as survey design flaws, respondent classification and reporting errors, data processing mistakes, and undercoverage. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors in the form of quality control and edit procedures to reduce errors made by respondents, coders, and interviewers. Ratio estimation to independent age-race-sex population controls partially corrects for bias attributable to survey undercoverage. However, biases exist in the estimates when missed persons have characteristics different from those of interviewed persons in the same age-race-sex group.

Analytical statements in this report have been tested and meet statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources.

Contact Elaine Hock, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4182 or on the internet at ehock@census.gov for information on (1) the source of the data, (2) the accuracy of the estimates, (3) the use of standard errors, and (4) the computation of standard errors.

Figure 5.
Participation Rates by Employment Status
(In percent)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

Note: All demographic surveys, including SIPP, are affected by undercoverage of the population. This undercoverage results from missed housing units and missed persons within sample households. Compared with the level of the 1980 decennial census, overall undercoverage in SIPP is about 7 percent. Undercoverage varies with age, sex, and race. For some groups, such as 20 to 24 year old Black men, the undercoverage is as high as 27 percent compared with the census. It is important to note that the survey undercoverage is in addition to the decennial census undercoverage, which in 1980 was estimated to be about 1 percent overall and about 8.5 percent for Black men. The weighting procedures used by the Census Bureau partially correct for the bias due to undercoverage, but its final impact on estimates is not known.

Comments from Data Users

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of data users. If you have suggestions or comments, please write to:

Daniel H. Weinberg
Chief, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division
U.S. Bureau of the Census
Washington, DC 20233-8500

or contact:
Program Participation Statistics-Jan Tin
301-763-8375
JTIN@CENSUS.GOV

Statistical Methods Division-Vicki Huggins
301-457-4192
VHUGGINS@CENSUS.GOV

[12]The AFDC participation rates in the Northeast, Midwest, and West were not significantly different from one another. The food stamp participation rates in the Northeast, Midwest, and West were not significantly different from each other. The Medicaid participation rate in the Northeast was not significantly different from those in the South and West. In the Midwest and South, the Medicaid participation rate was not significantly different from the food stamp participation rate.