

Tools for Analyzing Consumer Spending: Recent Research and Applications using the Consumer Expenditure Survey

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Key Words

Consumer expenditures; income; assets and liabilities; demographics

Target Audiences

Researchers and analysts with an interest in studying how consumers spend, including students (undergraduate and graduate); professors; and professionals in government or private industry, ranging from those who have never used data from the Consumer Expenditure Survey to expert users.

Objectives/Purpose

The purpose of this session is to provide information about the Surveys and their use for researchers and practitioners at all levels of career development and experience using the data (see “Target Audience”); to provide examples of current research using the data, as well as guidance and suggestions on how researchers might use the data in their own work; and to answer questions and obtain comments and suggestions regarding the data from researchers currently using them in their work.

Content/Description

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is the most detailed source of expenditure information collected from households by the Federal government. In addition, information on demographics, income, and assets and liabilities are collected. On occasion, special questions are added, such as those regarding the use of the 2008 Economic Stimulus Payments distributed by the Internal Revenue Service. Consisting of two components, the Interview Survey and the Diary Survey, the data are a unique and rich source of information used by researchers in specific fields, such as consumer economics and financial planning, from a wide range of professional areas, such as academia, government, and private industry.

This session features brief presentations of highlights from current research using each of the component surveys, including work in progress and work that is soon to be published. As current employees of the Division of Consumer Expenditure Surveys, the presenters are experienced users of these data who will share insights and tips regarding use of the data, including information on how public use microdata and related products (e.g., tables and documentation) can be obtained.

The session will have the following format:

- Description of data collected (expenditures, demographics, and income sources);
- Explanation of methodology for each component survey (Interview and Diary);
- Presentations of research (two using Interview data, and one using Diary data);
- Interactive discussion with the audience, including examples of how to use the microdata.

The presentations include a special analysis on how consumers used the 2008 Economic Stimulus Payments, also known as “tax rebates” (Interview Survey); research comparing resources and expenditures of married couples and unmarried partners (Interview Survey); and a study of Inter-Ethnic Variation in Food Expenditure Patterns Within and Outside the Asian Community (Diary Survey).

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