

EXTENDED MEASURES OF WELL-BEING IN 2003

A variety of measures, including health, housing, economics, education, or safety, can be used to gauge well-being. The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) asks questions about five subject areas to provide one of the most extensive measures of individual well-being found anywhere.¹ These subject areas include appliances and electronic goods, housing conditions, neighborhood conditions, meeting basic needs, and receiving assistance in times of need.

Appliances and Electronic Goods

The extent to which householders possess common appliances and electronic goods has varied little over time. For instance, the percentage of householders with a refrigerator (99 percent) or stove (99 percent) has remained virtually unchanged since 1992.

Other subcategories showed greater variability. For example, the pervasiveness of computers has increased over time. In 1998, 42 percent of households had a computer, compared with 63 percent in 2003.

Although the proportion of households with landline telephones grew in the 1990s, the 2003 SIPP data found a decrease since 1998—to 94 percent. This change was due at least in part to the increase in cellular telephones. By 2003, 63 percent of households had a cellular telephone, compared with 36 percent in 1998.

Housing Conditions

Since 1992, the share of households in housing that is free of problems with basic repair has risen. Leaky roofs were not a problem for 95 percent of respondents in 2003, compared with 92 percent in 1992. The share of households without plumbing problems grew from 95 percent to 98 percent over that same time period. Most households in 2003 reported that they

¹ The information in this chapter comes from the SIPP, 2001 Panel, Wave 8 Topical Module, which followed respondents through September 2003. The estimates in this chapter (which may be shown in text and figures) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

were satisfied with their housing conditions and less than 10 percent reported specific problems, such as broken windows, pests, or holes in the floor large enough to trip on.

Neighborhood Conditions and Community Services

A number of measures of neighborhood conditions, community services, and neighborhood safety showed improvement between the 1990s and 2003:

- A larger share of householders reported their streets were not in need of repair in 2003 than in 1992—86 percent and 80 percent, respectively.
- No abandoned buildings were reported in the neighborhoods of 93 percent of respondents in 2003, compared with 90 percent in 1992.
- The proportion of householders who felt their neighborhoods were safe increased from 91 percent in 1992 to 93 percent in 2003.
- The share of householders satisfied with local hospitals and police services grew from 89 percent and 92 percent, respectively, in 1998, to 91 percent and 93 percent, respectively, in 2003.

In 2003, the SIPP asked householders with children about satisfaction with their local public schools:

- Of households with children in private school, 24 percent expressed dissatisfaction with the local public schools, while 7 percent of households with children in public school expressed dissatisfaction.
- About one-fifth of households with a child in a magnet school rated local public school as unsatisfactory.
- Households with children in private school were less likely than those with children in public school to prefer that their children attend a different school.
- Like households with children in private school, households in which a child was being home schooled had a less favorable opinion of local public schools than those with children in public schools.

Meeting Basic Needs

The SIPP asked householders if, over the last 12 months, they had any problems meeting “essential expenses.” It also asked about specific difficulties, such as paying mortgage, rent, and utilities, and seeing a doctor or dentist. During the time period from 1998 to 2003, the proportions of householders reporting no unmet essential expenses and no unpaid utilities or disconnects improved.² In 2003, 87 percent of householders said they did not have problems meeting essential expenses and 91 percent said they had no unpaid utility bills.

Getting Help When Needed

Individuals and organizations often assist households that have difficulties meeting their needs. Expectations of assistance from family members have increased over time. In 1992, 41 percent of households indicated that, should they need help, they would be able to get most or all of the help they need from their family. By 2003, the percentage had risen to 48 percent. Household expectations of assistance from social agencies or churches has also increased over this same time period—with 21 percent of householders reporting they might expect help from this source in 2003.

Well-Being by Income

Household income and poverty were related to the SIPP measures of well-being. The percentage of households with a full set of appliances (stove, refrigerator, clothes washer, clothes dryer, dishwasher, and telephone) increased as income increased. Among high-income households (those in the top 20 percent), 82 percent had a full set of appliances. Among those with incomes in the bottom 20 percent, 29 percent were this fully equipped.

Households that were not in poverty reported having fewer housing problems than did households in poverty—on every housing indicator in the SIPP. As income decreased, the percentage reporting neighborhood problems increased.

² With the exception of food sufficiency, all basic needs estimates for 1998 were statistically different from the 2003 estimates.

Support Providers (2002)

In 2002, the SIPP estimated that 7.8 million adults provided an aggregate of \$40 billion in financial support to people outside their immediate household.³ In 1997, there were 8 percent fewer providers (7.2 million) and the total aggregate support was 15 percent less (\$34 billion).

About 60 percent of support paid in 2002 (\$24 billion) was exclusively for children under 21 years old living outside the household. Another \$13 billion was paid to other nonhousehold members who were at least 21. The remaining \$3 billion of support was paid for children and other nonhousehold members.

The average amount of support in 2001 was \$5,200 and in some cases assisted more than one recipient. In 2001, 5.7 million people paid an average of \$4,200 to children under 21 who lived outside their household. Another 2.1 million people in 2002 paid an average of \$6,100 to other people outside their household.

The relationship of the support recipient to the support payer was likely to be a parent (36 percent), a child over 21 years of age (27 percent), or another relative (23 percent).⁴ Spouses or ex-spouses accounted for 11 percent of people receiving support payments.

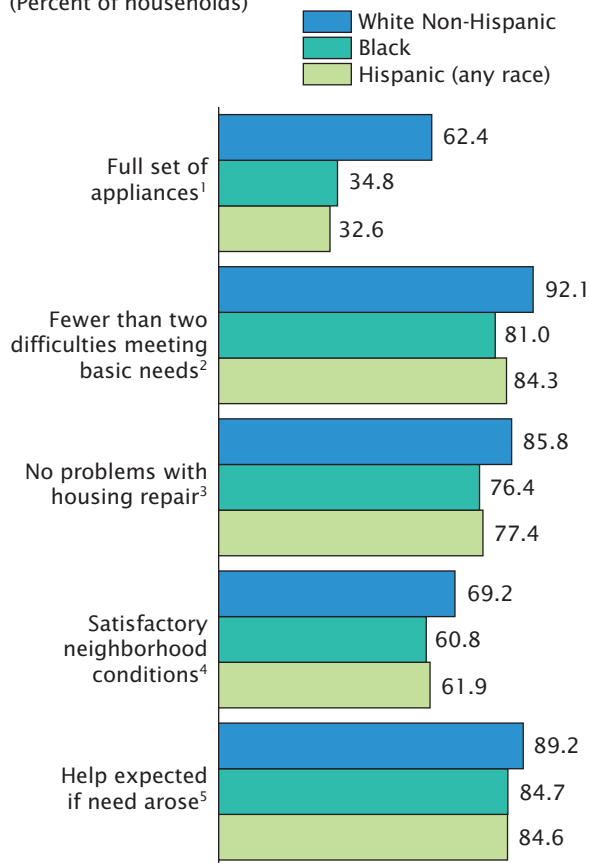
³ The information in this section comes from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, June–September 2002. All dollar amounts in this section have been inflation-adjusted to 2002 dollars.

⁴ The proportion of support recipients who were children over 21 years old was not statistically different from the proportion of recipients who were another type of relative.

A larger percentage of householders that were not in poverty had no unmet essential expenses—90 percent, compared with 70 percent of householders in poverty. About 96 percent of householders who were not in poverty reported that they had paid the rent or mortgage in full, compared with 86 percent of poverty households.

Figure 1.
Summary Indicators of Material Well-being by Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder: 2003

(Percent of households)



¹ Full set of appliances is defined as having a clothes washer, clothes dryer, refrigerator, stove, dishwasher, and a landline telephone.

² Fewer than two difficulties meeting basic needs is defined as having fewer than 2 instances of not meeting expenses or any of the other measures from the section on difficulty meeting basic needs.

³ No problem with housing repair is defined as not having reported a problem with pests, leaky roofs, broken windows, plumbing problems, cracks in the walls, or holes in the floor.

⁴ Satisfactory neighborhood conditions is defined as not having reported any problems with street conditions, traffic, trash or litter, abandoned buildings, or smoke or odors.

⁵ Help expected if need arose is defined as whether help was expected from friends, family, or community agencies.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2001 Panel Wave 8.

Well-Being by Race and Hispanic Origin

For most summary measures by race and Hispanic origin, non-Hispanic White households reported higher levels of well-being than did Black and Hispanic households (Figure 1).⁵ For instance, a full set of appliances was reported by 62 percent of non-Hispanic White households, compared with 35 percent of Black households and 33 percent of Hispanic households.⁶ Also, 89 percent of non-Hispanic Whites expected help if needed, compared with 85 percent of both Black and Hispanic households.

⁵ The race or Hispanic origin of the household is based on the race or Hispanic origin of the householder regardless of the race or origin of other household members. Because Hispanics may be any race, data for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population. Data for American Indians and Alaska Natives, Asians, and Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders are not shown in this chapter because of their small sample size in the SIPP.

⁶ There is no statistical difference between the percentage of Blacks and the percentage of Hispanics reporting a full set of appliances.

The Census Can Tell You More

For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *Extended Measures of Well-Being: Living Conditions in the United States, 2003 (P70-110)* by Annette L. Rogers and Camille L. Ryan.

Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's Web site <www.census.gov>. Click on "Subjects A to Z" at the top of the home page and click on "W" for "Well-Being/Dynamics of Economic Well-Being." Look under "Extended Measures of Well-Being."

Contact the Census Bureau's Demographic Call Center (toll-free) at 1-866-758-1060.

E-mail <ask.census.gov>.

For information on the accuracy of the estimates, see Appendix A.