Consumer expenditures for selected items, 1999 and 2000

Recent Consumer Expenditure Surveys provide information on what consumers spend their money on; from spending on necessities to entertainment to alcohol, the Consumer Expenditure Survey examines the trends that shape U.S. buying habits

The current Consumer Expenditure (CE) Survey program began in 1980. The survey is conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The principal objective of the survey is to collect information on the buying habits of American consumers. The survey consists of two components:

- A Diary, or recordkeeping, survey completed by participating consumer units for two consecutive 1-week periods.
- An Interview survey in which expenditures of consumer units are obtained in five interviews conducted every 3 months.

Survey participants record dollar amounts for goods and services purchased during the reporting period, regardless of whether payment is made at the time of purchase. Expenditure amounts include all sales and excise taxes for all items purchased by the consumer unit for itself or for others. Excluded from both surveys are all business-related expenditures and expenditures for which the consumer unit is reimbursed.

Each component of the survey queries an independent sample of consumer units that is representative of the U.S. population. In the Diary survey, about 7,500 consumer units are sampled each year. Each consumer unit keeps a diary for two 1-week periods, yielding approximately 15,000 diaries a year. The interview sample is selected on a rotating-panel basis, surveying about 7,500 consumer units each quarter. Each consumer unit is interviewed once per quarter, for five consecutive quarters. Data are collected on an ongoing basis in 105 areas of the United States.

The brief reports that make up this article present data obtained from recent Consumer Expenditure Surveys. Detailed articles, along with supporting statistics, are published in the *Consumer Expenditure Survey Anthology* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2003).

The Interview survey is designed to capture expenditure data that respondents can reasonably recall for a period of 3 months or longer. In general, the data captured report relatively large expenditures, such as spending on real property, automobiles, and major appliances, or expenditures that occur on a regular basis, such as spending on rent, utilities, and insurance premiums. Including global estimates of spending for food, it is estimated that about 95 percent of expenditures are covered in the Interview survey. Expenditures on nonprescription drugs, household supplies, and personal care items are excluded. The Interview survey also provides data on expenditures incurred on leisure trips.

The Diary survey is designed to capture expenditures on small, frequently purchased items that are normally difficult for respondents to recall. Detailed records of expenses are kept for food and beverages—both at home and in eating places—tobacco, housekeeping supplies, nonprescription drugs, and personal care products and services. Expenditures incurred away from home overnight or longer are excluded from the Diary survey. Although the diary was designed to collect information on expenditures that could not be recalled easily over a given period, respondents are asked to report *all* expenses (except overnight travel expenses) that the consumer unit incurs during the survey week.

Interpreting the data

Expenditures are averages for consumer units with specified characteristics, regardless of whether a particular unit incurred an expense for a specific item during the recordkeeping period. The average expenditure for an item may be considerably lower than the expenditure by those consumer units which actually purchased the item. The less frequently an item is purchased, the greater is the difference between the average for all

consumer units and the average of those purchasing the item. Also, an individual consumer unit may spend more or less than the average, depending on its particular characteristics. Factors such as income, the ages of family members, geographic location, taste, and personal preference also influence expenditures. Furthermore, even within groups with similar characteristics, the distribution of expenditures varies substantially. These points should be considered in relating reported averages to individual circumstances.

In addition, sample surveys are subject to two types of errors: sampling and nonsampling. Sampling errors occur because the data are collected from a representative sample rather than the entire population. Nonsampling errors result from the inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, differences in interviewers' abilities, mistakes in recording or coding, or other processing errors.

The box on this page gives the official BLS definitions of some terms used in the CE survey.

Glossary of Consumer Expenditure Survey terms

Consumer unit. Members of a household related by blood, marriage, adoption, or some other legal arrangement; a single person living alone or sharing a household with others, but who is financially independent; or two or more persons living together who share responsibility for at least two out of the three major types of expenses: food, housing, and other expenses. Students living in university-sponsored housing also are included in the sample as separate consumer units.

Reference person. The first member mentioned by the respondent when asked to "Start with the name of the person or one of the persons who owns or rents the home." It is with respect to this person that the relationship of other members of the consumer unit is determined.

Total expenditures. The transaction costs, including excise and sales taxes, of goods and services acquired during the 3-month Interview period. Estimates include expenditures for gifts and contributions and payments for pensions and personal insurance.

Income. The combined income earned by all consumer unit members 14 years or older during the 12 months preceding the interview. The components of income are wages and salaries; self-employment income; Social Security and private and government retirement income; interest, dividends, and rental and other property income; unemployment and workers' compensation and veterans' benefits; public assistance, supplemental security income, and food stamps; rent or meals or both as pay; and regular contributions for support, such as alimony and child support.

Complete income reporters. In general, a consumer unit that provides quantitative data on at least one of the major sources of its income, such as wages and salaries, self-employment income, and Social Security income. Even complete income reporters may not provide a full accounting of all income from all sources.

Quintiles of income before taxes. Five groups with the same number of complete income reporters, ranked in ascending order of income. Incomplete income reporters are not ranked and are shown separately in the quintiles-of-income tables.

Consumer spending for necessities

Abby Duly

The proportion of household spending used to purchase basic necessities is of interest to policymakers and social researchers as an elementary indicator of economic well-being. There are several complexities, however, in this application of the data; for example, the definition of "well-being" itself is not necessarily universal, and, once defined, the criteria upon which to evaluate well-being are also subjective and debatable. This report does not attempt to address these complexities; rather, data on consumer spending for necessities are presented in a manner that may be interpreted by a variety of readers for a variety of uses.

The discussion that follows uses the expenditure shares tables published by the CE survey program. These tables provide the proportions of average annual expenditures (or total spending) allocated to various categories of items. The categories of interest here are those designated to be necessities: food, housing, and apparel. It is important to note that while it is certainly reasonable to define these categories as necessities in 2000, there have been changes to them over time. For example, within the necessity category of food, the allocation among subcomponents has shifted such that the share of the food dollar spent on food away from home (including meals at restaurants or fast food, carryout, and home delivery) has grown from 3.0 percent in 1909, to 29.0 percent in 1987, to 41.0 percent in 2000.

Whereas data on food and apparel are taken directly from the published CE tables, the housing category is constructed specifically out of two main subcomponents: shelter and utilities. This is an important deviation from the published data. The reason is that, arguably, shelter and utilities are the actual necessities of housing and that other components used in the CE survey, such as household furnishings and equipment, are not, in fact, basic goods.

In the next paragraph, necessity shares are compared across income quintiles. Then, data are presented to provide a broad overview of necessity spending by additional demographic groups: homeowners and renters, urban consumers and rural consumers, black households and white and other households, Hispanic and non-Hispanic households, consumer units living in different regions, and consumer units living in different regions.

In the CE survey, the share of average annual expenditures used to purchase food declines from 14.9 percent to 11.6 percent as income increases from the third quintile to the fifth quintile. However, consumer units in the first quintile allocate a smaller proportion of total spending to food (14.9 percent) than do consumer units in the second quintile (15.7 percent). Expenditure shares for housing clearly decline across income quintiles. While consumer units in the highest income quintile devote 22 percent of their total spending to shelter and utility costs, those in the lowest income quintile spend almost 30 percent. The shares of average annual expenditures allocated to apparel are barely discernible from one another. In fact, the range of apparel shares is less than 1 percentage point, from 4.7 percent spent by those in the lowest income quintile to 5.3 percent spent by those in the highest income quintile.

Consumer units that rent their homes devote a greater share of their total expenditures to food (15.0 percent) and apparel (5.4 percent) than do their homeowning counterparts (13.1 percent and 4.7 percent, respectively).

Urban consumers spend a higher portion of their total expenditures on housing than do consumers living in rural areas. Food, however, makes up a slightly greater proportion of total spending by rural households than that by urban households.

Black consumer units spend higher shares of total expenditures on all three of the necessity categories than do white and other (Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian, and Pacific Islander) consumer units. The same is true for Hispanic households in comparison with non-Hispanic households, although the relevant housing shares are not very different.

Among consumer units living in different regions, necessity shares vary little from each other. For example, expenditure shares used to purchase food range from 13.4 percent in the West and Midwest to 13.8 percent in the Northeast. (Households in the South spend a comparable 13.6 percent on food). Housing shares across regions are more variable, with consumer units in the Midwest having the lowest share, 23.3 percent of total spending, and consumer units in the Northeast region having the highest share, 27.7 percent.

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Travel expenditures in 2000

George Janini

Consumer units that went on trips in 2000 spent an average of $875 on travel for the year. Altogether, such consumer units had roughly $32 billion in travel expenditures. Travel expenditures are broken down into expenditures for transportation, food, lodging, entertainment, and gifts. Transportation expenditures include all costs incurred traveling to and from the destination, as well as other transportation costs incurred while on the trip. Food expenditures encompass all costs for food and alcohol consumed on the trip. Lodging expenses include the costs for hotels, motels, cottages, trailer camps, and other types of lodging. Entertainment

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expenditures take into account all types of entertainment, such as admission to sporting events, parks, museums, and tours, as well as any type of fees related to these events. Gift expenditures include all gifts purchased on the trip for persons other than those in the consumer unit.

Overall, consumer units that traveled in 2000 spent an average of $352 on transportation, $204 on food, $66 on entertainment, $76 on gifts, and $177 on lodging. This amounted to an aggregate of about $13 billion spent on transportation, $7.6 billion on food, $2.4 billion on entertainment, $ 2.8 billion on gifts, and $6.5 billion on lodging. Out of approximately 109 million consumer units, 37 million, or 34 percent, reported taking a trip or vacation in 2000.

The highest percentage of trip takers, 38 percent, was posted by those 45 to 54 years of age, the lowest, 27 percent, by those 65 and older. The latter group, however, had the highest average travel expenditures of any of the age groups. Interestingly, the group spent an average of 4 percent of its total average annual expenditures on trips and vacations, about twice that spent by most of the other age groups. However, the 65-and-older age group did not account for the highest aggregate travel expenditures in 2000: the 45- to 54-year age group accounted for 24 percent of aggregate travel expenditures, followed by the 35- to 44-year age group, with 23 percent; then came the 65-and-older group, with 19 percent.

Fully 58 percent of consumer units with reported annual incomes of more than $50,000 took a trip or vacation in 2000, almost double that of consumer units with reported incomes of less than $25,000. Consumer units in the highest income bracket, $75,000 or more, outspent each of the other income groups. The highest-income group also accounted for 41 percent of aggregate trip expenditures in 2000, well above the 22 percent spent on travel by the next-highest group, those with incomes from $50,000 to $75,000. Overall, consumer units with incomes of $35,000 or more accounted for 76 percent of total travel expenditures.

Out-of-pocket spending for private health insurance

Eric J. Keil

Total out-of-pocket medical spending was significantly higher, on average, for consumer units with fee-for-service insurance ($2,315 per year) than for consumer units covered by a health maintenance organization ($1,789). For health care insurance alone, consumer units with fee-for-service insurance paid $1,029, on average, while those covered by a health maintenance organization paid $870. Other significant differences in spending were for physicians' services ($210 for those with fee-for-service coverage, $129 for those with health maintenance organization coverage), laboratory tests and x rays ($38, compared with $15), hospital services other than room ($68 and $37, respectively), prescriptions drugs and medicines ($329 and $236), and dental services ($311 and $265).

The percentage reporting medical expenditures in several categories also was higher for fee-for-service consumer units. (The percentage reporting is defined as the percentage of all consumer units reporting at least one, but possibly more, expenditures during the year they were interviewed.) Significant differences existed in the percentage reporting expenditures for laboratory tests and x rays (23 percent for those with fee-for-service coverage, 13 percent for those covered by a health maintenance organization), hospital services other than room (16 percent, compared with 13 percent), prescription drugs and medicines (80 percent and 75 percent, respectively), dental care (51 percent and 48 percent), purchases of medical or surgical equipment (4 percent and 2 percent), and eye exams, treatment, or surgery (32 percent and 28 percent).

Although the *percentage* reporting was higher for the fee-for-service group in every category of medical expenditure, the *number* of reported expenditures per item was generally higher for the health maintenance organization group. Significant differences in receipts for services performed appeared in the following categories: physicians' services (13.1 million receipts reported by those with health maintenance organization coverage, 11.2 million reported by those with fee-for-service coverage), prescription drugs (26.9 million, compared with 24.1 million), dental care (6.4 million and 5.7 million, respectively), and eyeglasses and accessories (2.4 million and 1.9 million). The fee-for-service group had significantly higher expenditures only for laboratory tests and x rays (1.5 million, compared with 0.9 million).

The two groups of insureds were similar with respect to age, income, family size, and the number of children living in the consumer unit. Annual income averaged $43,226 for those with health maintenance organization coverage and $43,728 for those with fee-for-service insurance. The fee-for-service group had an average age of 50, the health maintenance organization group 48. On average, fee-for-service consumer units were composed of 2.6 persons, of which 0.80 was a child, while health maintenance organization consumer units comprised 2.7 persons, of which 0.91 was a child. The demographic differences between the two groups likely are not large enough to be a contributing factor in expenditure differences.

More consumer units in the 25-to-54-year age group had health maintenance organization insurance than had fee-for-service insurance, but more in the upper age categories had fee-for-service coverage than had health maintenance organization coverage. More consumer units with no children had fee-for-service coverage than had health maintenance organization coverage.

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The costs and demographics of vehicle acquisition

Laura Paszkiewicz

In 1999–2000, 81 percent of those who purchased new vehicles financed their purchases, compared with 56 percent of those who purchased used vehicles. Of those who financed, 87 percent of new-vehicle purchasers and 79 percent of used-vehicle purchasers had payments remaining. On average, lessees paid $868 as a down payment, only about 76 percent of what a used-vehicle purchaser paid as a down payment ($1,147), and only 30 percent of what a new-vehicle purchaser paid ($2,914).

Among the factors that play a role in deciding whether to lease, buy new, or buy a used vehicle are the average monthly payment and the amount of time it takes to pay off a loan or to complete a lease. The average monthly payment was $353 for lessees, $399 for purchasers of new vehicles, and $273 for purchasers of used vehicles; the average *number* of monthly payments made was 39 by lessees, 54 by new-vehicle buyers, and 43 by used-vehicle buyers.

The demographic analysis that follows looks at the entire sample of those acquiring a vehicle in 1999 or 2000, either through an outright purchase or with financing. Among the factors examined are income, gender, geographic region, and race.

Consumer units that purchased used vehicles had the least income, on average. The average income of someone who bought a used vehicle was $48,004, compared with $72,992 for lessees and $69,875 for new-vehicle purchasers. Those in the lowest income quintile were the most likely to buy a used car, with 80.9 percent of the group doing so. In comparison, 54.1 percent of those in the highest income quintile bought used vehicles. With regard to purchasing a new vehicle, the situation was essentially reversed: almost 36 percent of those in the highest income quintile bought a new car, a figure more than 20 percentage points above that for those in the lowest income quintile who bought a new vehicle.

Of those acquiring vehicles in 1999 and 2000, 28 percent were in the 35- to 44-year-old age bracket, although that group made up a lesser 22 percent of the population. The 25- to 34-year-old and 45- to 54-year-old age groups each posted more than 20 percent of all acquisitions, yet made up less than that percentage of the population. The oldest group (75 and older) acquired the fewest vehicles, with only 2.6 percent of acquisitions.

Men, with 54 percent of the total population, acquired 58 percent of all vehicles. Men and women acquired vehicles differently. Single men leased vehicles 9.6 percent of the time, bought new vehicles 20.6 percent of the time, and bought used vehicles 69.9 percent of the time. Single women leased vehicles 11.5 percent of the time, bought new vehicles 36.9 percent of the time, and bought used vehicles 51.5 percent of the time.

Consumer units in the South and the Northeast acquired a smaller percentage of vehicles than their population shares in 1999 and 2000. Southern consumer units, with 35 percent of the total U.S. population, had 31 percent of acquisitions, while those in the Northeast, making up 19 percent of the U.S. population, had 16 percent of total vehicle acquisitions. In contrast, consumer units in the Midwest and the West accounted for 27 percent and 25 percent, respectively, of vehicle acquisitions, while making up 24 percent and 22 percent, respectively, of the total U.S. population. Consumers acquiring vehicles in the Northeast were more likely to lease an auto than those in the West; consumer units in the West were more likely to buy a used vehicle. In the Northeast and the West, about 30 percent of those who acquired a new vehicle purchased it. In the Midwest, 9 percent of the vehicle-acquiring population leased, 23 percent purchased new cars, and 69 percent bought used cars. In the South, the corresponding figures were 8 percent, 25 percent, and 67 percent.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey has four race categories: white; black; Asian or Pacific Islander; and American Indian, Aleut, or Eskimo. Asians and Pacific Islanders accounted for 3.1 percent of the population acquiring vehicles. A little more than half of the group bought a used vehicle, 42 percent bought a new vehicle, and the remaining 7 percent leased a vehicle. The white population accounted for 88 percent of those acquiring vehicles, with 65.5 percent buying used vehicles, 26.5 percent buying new, and 8 percent leasing vehicles.

The black population and the American Indian, Aleut, and Eskimo population were most different from Asians and Pacific Islanders, and similar to each other, in their choice of a method of acquisition. Of the consumer units acquiring vehicles in the black population, 5.3 percent leased, 19.6 percent purchased a new vehicle, and 75.2 percent purchased a used vehicle. Of those acquiring a vehicle in the American Indian, Aleut, and Eskimo population, 4.2 percent leased a vehicle, 16.5 percent purchased a new vehicle, and 79.4 percent purchased a used vehicle.

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Consumer expenditures for alcohol in 2000

Geoffrey Paulin

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2000 average per capita consumption of alcohol was 24.9 gallons, mostly in the form of beer (21.7 gallons). That same year, the average consumer unit reported expenditures of $372 for alcoholic beverages. About 1 dollar was spent on alcohol for every 8 dollars spent on food at home. On the basis of either mean weekly expenditure or percent reporting alcohol purchases, beer is the

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most popular form of alcohol purchased by the average consumer unit. However, on the basis of mean weekly expenditure for those reporting alcohol purchases, a figure that can be calculated by dividing mean weekly expenditure by percent reporting, the largest average expenditure for all consumer units is for wine at home.

As one might expect, expenditures for alcohol increase with income, regardless of the type of alcohol purchased and regardless of whether the expenditure is for alcohol at home or alcohol away from home. Overall, the fifth income quintile spends about 3.5 times as much for alcohol as does the first income quintile—2.7 times as much for alcohol at home and more than 7.1 times as much for alcohol away from home. As regards which type of alcohol, the ratios of the fifth to the first income quintile range from 1.6 for beer at home to 9.2 for other alcohol away from home.

Expenditures for alcohol away from home rise with age up to 35 to 44 years old and then decline. Expenditures for wine follow the pattern, except that they peak for those aged 45 to 54. Expenditures for beer at home actually decline with age, ranging from a high of $5.48 per week for the under-25 group to a low of $0.65 per week for the 75-and-older group. Most other expenditures for alcoholic beverages follow a similar pattern for the percent reporting, peaking either for the under-25 group or the 25- to-34-year-old group. The lone exception is expenditures for wine, which peak with the 45- to-54-year-old group and reach a low point with the 75-and-older group.

The predicted probability of purchase of alcohol, based on logit regressions, is highest for the youngest group (46 percent) and lowest for the oldest group (22 percent). Similarly, the probability of purchase is lowest for the first quintile (29 percent) and highest for the fifth quintile (50 percent).

Hispanic, as opposed to non-Hispanic, ethnicity appears to have little relationship to the probability of purchasing alcohol in general. However, race appears to play a role: black and Asian consumers have much lower probabilities of purchase than white consumers have. Occupation apparently plays a role as well: among salaried (or wage-earning) workers, those in technical, sales, or service positions and those in agricultural fields (forestry and farming), for example, are more likely to purchase alcohol than are managers and professionals.

The probability of purchasing beer is strongly related to age, declining from 29 percent for the youngest group (under 25) to 10 percent for the oldest group (75 and older). The probability of purchase for the lowest income quintile is 17 percent, compared with 27 percent for the highest quintile. Single men are the most likely to purchase beer (23 percent), single women (12 percent) and single mothers (9 percent) the least likely. Among salaried workers, members of the armed services (38 percent), blue-collar workers (30 percent), agricultural workers (35 percent), and technical, sales, and service workers (28 percent) have the highest predicted probabilities of purchasing beer. Retirees have a higher probability of purchase than wage and salary workers have. The purchase of wine or other alcohol strongly increases the probability of purchasing beer. However, the purchase of *both* wine *and* other alcohol does not significantly increase the probability of purchase.

The probability of purchasing wine is much lower than the probability of purchasing beer, and age does not appear to be strongly related to the purchase of wine. The probability of purchase increases with income, and ethnicity is, at best, only weakly related to purchasing. However, as with alcohol in general, race is a factor: blacks and Asians are less likely to purchase wine than are whites. Occupation plays little, if any, role, although, of all working consumers, blue-collar workers have the lowest predicted probability of purchasing wine. Similarly, those who are not working for reasons other than retirement or unemployment have a lower probability than other groups. Both the purchase of beer and the purchase of other alcohol separately increase the probability of purchasing wine. Nevertheless, purchasing *both* beer *and* other alcohol adds little to the probability of purchasing above what purchasing beer or other alcohol alone adds.

As with wine, the predicted probability for the purchase of other alcohol is, in general, low. Although age is not a statistically significant factor in the probability of purchase of other alcohol, income is: consumer units in the fourth income quintile and those in the fifth income quintile are more likely to purchase than are consumer units in the middle income quintile. Consumer units headed by women have a lower predicted probability of purchasing other alcohol than households headed by single men have. Hispanics and Asians have lower predicted probabilities than white non-Hispanics have.

Expenditures on entertainment

Neil Tseng

In the Consumer Expenditure Survey, entertainment expenditures are divided into four categories: fees and admissions; television, radios, and sound equipment; pets, toys, and playground equipment; and other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services. Fees and admissions include expenses for out-of-town trips, fees for recreational lessons, and admission to sporting events, cultural and theatrical events, the movies, and special events, such as live musical performances. The category of television, radios, and sound equipment includes color televisions, digital videodisc players, videocassette recorders, compact disc players, video game consoles and software, videotapes and discs, speakers, and various other

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home theater sound systems. The category of pets, toys, and playground equipment includes toys, games, and playground equipment; hobbies and tricycles; and pet food, veterinary services, and pet services. Other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services include more "volatile" expenditures, such as the rental or purchase of recreational vehicles and the purchase of boats.

In 2000, those under age 35 spent 22 percent of the $203 billion that was allocated on entertainment that year, whereas those 55 and older spent 25 percent of the total entertainment amount. The 35- to-54-year-old age group (with just 42 percent of the population) accounted for more than half of the total $203 billion spent on entertainment.

Consumer units with reference persons who did not graduate from college accounted for 60.5 percent of the aggregate expenditures on entertainment, whereas college graduates accounted for 39.5 percent. Of those who did not graduate from college, the group that did not graduate from high school spent 8 percent of the aggregate $203 billion on entertainment, high school graduates spent 24 percent, and high school graduates with some college accounted for 20 percent. Average incomes for the four education groups were as follows: those who did not graduate from high school, $23,329; high school graduates, $36,134; high school graduates with some college, $38,837; and associate's degree, $50,060. Among the college graduates, those with a bachelor's degree and those with advanced degrees had aggregate expenditure shares of 25 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

The proportion of aggregate expenditures allocated to entertainment ranged from 9 percent by the lowest income quintile to 40 percent by the highest. Not surprisingly, consumer units in the highest quintile contributed the most to each of the four categories of entertainment expenditure, spending more than $22 billion on fees and admissions; approximately $17 billion on televisions, radios, and sound equipment; $10 billion on pets, toys, and playground equipment; and $13 billion on other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services. The $22 billion spent by the highest quintile on fees and admissions was more than twice the amount spent by consumers in the fourth income quintile and almost 7 times the amount spent by those in the first quintile.

The proportion of total aggregate entertainment expenditures allocated to fees and admissions ranged from nearly 7 percent for those in the lowest quintile to more than 50 percent for those in the highest quintile. For pets, toys, and playground equipment, the range of expenditures was 7 percent for those in the lowest quintile to 37 percent for those in the highest quintile. Total entertainment expenditures allocated to other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services ranged from 8 percent in the lowest quintile to almost 38 percent for those in the highest quintile. The 11 percent that the lowest quintile contributed toward televisions, radios, and sound equipment was the largest share of their expenditures on entertainment, indicating that the category may be the main form of entertainment for those in that income quintile. □