CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS
Household Economic Studies
P70-41

by Martina Shea

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
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Acknowledgments

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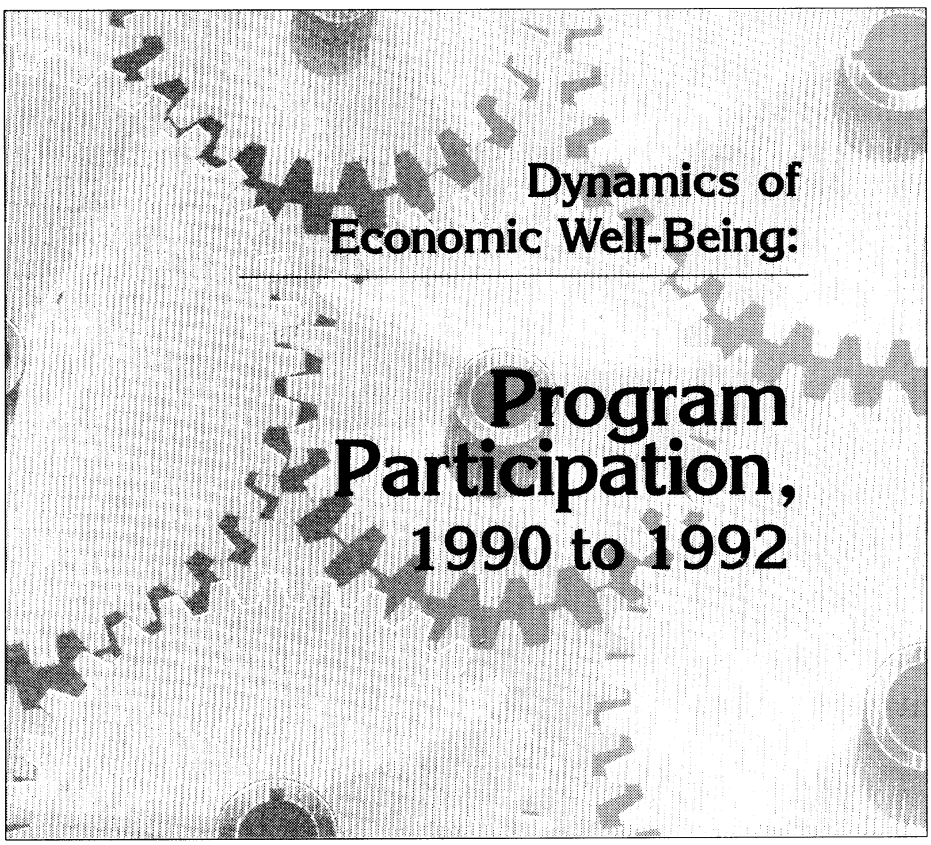
The staff of Administrative and Publications Services Division, **Walter C. Odom**, Chief, provided publication planning, design, composition, and printing planning and procurement.

CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

Household Economic Studies

P70-41

Issued January 1995



Dynamics of Economic Well-Being:

Program Participation, 1990 to 1992

by Martina Shea

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Shea, Martina, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Program Participation, 1990 to 1992,* U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P70-41, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1995.

For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

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Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Program Participation, 1990 to 1992

INTRODUCTION

This report uses data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to examine the participation in various government assistance programs at a point in time and over a 32-month period. It presents data from the complete panel file of the 1990 SIPP, which covers the time period from October 1989 through August of 1992. Descriptions of the SIPP program and the 1990 panel file are contained in appendixes A and D, respectively.

SIPP enables comparisons of rates of program participation and the amounts of benefits received among persons of different demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. It also can be used to study the distribution of spell durations. The panel file contains monthly information on the program participation status of individuals as well as on many other characteristics that can vary over the panel, such as residence and labor force status. Efforts were made during the life of the panel to follow persons who moved to ensure that the sample remained representative of the noninstitutional population of the United States. Persons are characterized by the income and poverty status of their respective family unit based on living arrangements each month during the period of study.

It should be noted that some longitudinal estimates presented here are based on responses of persons who were interviewed in all eight waves of the 1990 panel. Other longitudinal estimates are based on respondents interviewed in all waves of a particular calendar year. Insofar as persons who left the panel differed in their experience of program participation from those who did not, these longitudinal estimates may be biased.

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 to 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 males, the undercoverage is as high as 27 percent compared to the census. It is important to note that the survey undercoverage is an addition to the decennial census undercoverage, which in 1980 was estimated to be about 1 percent overall and about 8.5 percent for Black males. The weighting procedures used by the Census Bureau partially correct for the bias resulting from undercoverage. However, its final impact on estimates is unknown.

The detailed tables cover the years 1990 and 1991 from the 1990 SIPP panel, as well as the years 1987 and 1988 from the 1987 SIPP panel. The later panel coincided with the latest recessionary period from July 1990 to March 1991; no recession took place during the 1987 panel. This could explain some of the large increases in program participation and spell durations that occurred between 1987 and 1990, as illustrated below. Detailed tables covering the period 1987-1988 are contained in appendix E.

Technical note. Some of the estimates presented below are distributions of spell duration for individuals with different characteristics. We use a survival analysis technique to derive these distributions and the resulting estimates of median spell duration for persons observed entering a particular program during the 32 months of the panel. We consider only individuals who were present in the survey all 32 months. One alternative would have been to include all persons up until the time of attrition. It is, however, extremely difficult to come up with appropriate weights for such an analysis and it was therefore not attempted here.

Spells of program participation must have an observed beginning, i.e., have to be preceded by 1 or more months of "non" spells during the panel. Furthermore, although a spell can be as short as 1 month, two spells must be more than 1 month apart in order to be counted as separate spells. If two potential spells are separated by only 1 month, they count as one spell. The connecting month is counted as part of the resulting spell. A spell is observed either until it ends or until it is right-censored.[1] [2]

[1]Since an individual must have completed interviews for all months of the panel in order to be included in the sample, right-censoring occurs only if an individual is still participating in the last month of the panel.

[2]The probability of exiting a spell in month t, given that the person was experiencing a spell in the beginning of that month, is defined as

$$h(t) = \frac{\text{exits}(t)}{\text{prog}(t)-(\text{rcens}(t)/2)}$$

where exits(t) denotes the number of spell exits in month t, prog(t) is the number of spells that were in progress in the beginning of month t, and rcens(t) is the number of spells that were right-censored in month t.

Since a spell must be preceded by a period of nonparticipation, left-censored spells of participation are not included in our analysis. Observations are left-censored when the beginning of a spell of interest is not observed, that is, a spell began at some time before the reference period.

Although dynamic estimates may be unbiased for spells observed beginning in the reference period, there remains concern about the deletion of left-censored spells from such analyses. There may be particular characteristics of persons, associated with the experience of very long spells, that precludes their inclusion in our sample. For example, in our analysis, which is restricted to persons in sample the entire period, selecting spells with observed beginnings leads to a sample without those persons who participated in a means-tested program from the first month of life onward. Even if one defines the spells of those "born into participation" as spells with observed beginnings, the problem of unavailable appropriate weights makes their inclusion all but impossible. Studies of spells with observed beginnings might result in reasonable estimates of spell distribution and median duration for such spells with observed beginnings, but it might result in downward biased estimates of the median duration of all spells.

HIGHLIGHTS

(The numbers in parentheses denote the 90-percent confidence intervals.)

- The average monthly number of persons who participated in one or more major means-tested assistance programs was 28.5 (±1.0) million in 1990, constituting roughly 11.5 (±0.4) percent of the population. About 35.7 (±1.3) million persons, or 14.8 (±0.5) percent of the population, participated at least 1 month in 1990; 18.1 (±1.0) million participated during all months of 1990 and 1991, constituting 7.6 (±0.4) percent of the population.

- In 1991, the average monthly number of persons who participated in one or more major means-tested assistance programs was 30.9 (±1.1) million, constituting roughly 12.4 (±0.4) percent of the population and an increase of 2.4 (±1.5) million over 1990. About 38.0 (±1.3) million persons, or 15.5 (±0.6) percent of the population, participated at least 1 month in 1991.

- Of the assistance programs considered, the Medicaid and Food Stamp programs had the highest average monthly participation in 1990, 19.1 (±0.9) and 17.1 (±0.8) million, respectively. About 10.7 (±0.7) million received housing assistance, not significantly different from the 10.6 (±0.6) million persons who participated in AFDC or General Assistance. About 4.0 (±0.4) million participated in the Supplemental Security Income Program in an average month in 1990.

- Median monthly family benefits from AFDC/General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps were about $420 (±4.9) in 1990 and in 1991.

- When income is defined to include all money income plus the value of food stamps, 49 (±2.1) percent of participants in means-tested programs received at least half of their income from benefits in an average month during 1990, and 30 (±2.0) percent received all of their income from programs. The respective percentages for 1991 were not significantly different, 48 (±2.2) and 29 (±2.0) percent.

- Persons in female-householder families were six times as likely as persons in married-couple families to have participated in a major assistance program in an average month of 1990.

- In an average month of 1990, 7 (±0.4) percent of persons who were White, not of Hispanic origin participated in major assistance programs, compared with 8 (±0.4) percent of all White persons, 25 (±1.0) percent of persons of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race), and 32 (±0.9) percent of Black persons. Most participants in means-tested assistance programs were White. During an average month of 1990, 61 (±2.0) percent of all participants were White, 34 (±0.9) percent were Black, and 18 (±0.8) percent were Hispanic.

- Children were more likely to have participated in major assistance programs during an average month in 1990 than elderly persons and nonelderly adults, 19 (±1.0) percent compared with 12 (±1.1) and 8 (±0.4) percent. They were also more likely to have participated at least 1 month in major assistance programs.

- In an average month of 1990, 21 (±1.2) percent of persons 18 years of age and older without a high school degree participated in major assistance programs, compared with 8 (±0.6) percent of those with a high school diploma, and 3 (±0.4) percent of persons with some years of college.

The survival rate in month t, which is the probability that a spell lasts longer than t months, can then be written as

$$S(t) = \prod_{k=1}^{t} (1-h(k))$$

The survival function evaluated at t gives the probability that an entrant into a program is still participating in the program t time periods later. The median survival time or spell duration M can be estimated by linear interpolation. Let [t, t+1) be the interval such that $S(t) >= .5$ and $S(t+1) < .5$. Then

$$\hat{M} = t + \frac{S(t)-1/2}{S(t)-S(t+1)}.$$

- Unemployed workers had substantially higher average monthly participation rates in major assistance programs than employed persons and those out of the labor force.

- The presence of a work disability increased the likelihood of participating in major assistance programs from 6 (±0.4) to 20 (±1.5) percent in an average month in 1990.

- Fifty-three (±1.8) percent of poor persons participated in an average month of 1990 in a major assistance program, compared with only 5 (±0.3) percent of the nonpoor.

- The median length of time receiving housing assistance was 16 (±3.1) months for those beginning spells during the 1990 panel, significantly longer than spells on Medicaid, 11 (±3.1) months, AFDC/General Assistance, 10 (±3.5) months, and food stamps, 9 (±1.3) months, all of which were not significantly different from one another.

Figure 1.
Rates of Participation in Major Means-Tested Programs: 1990 and 1991
(In percent)

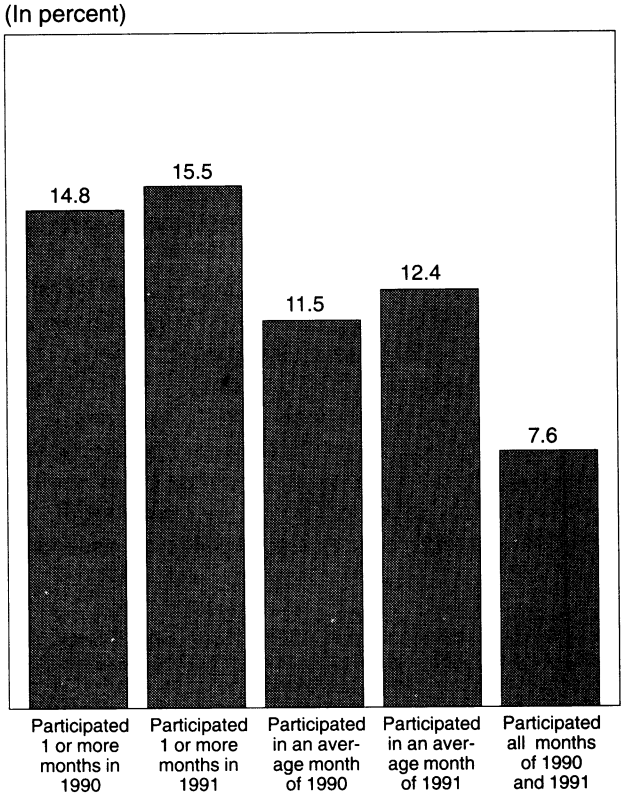
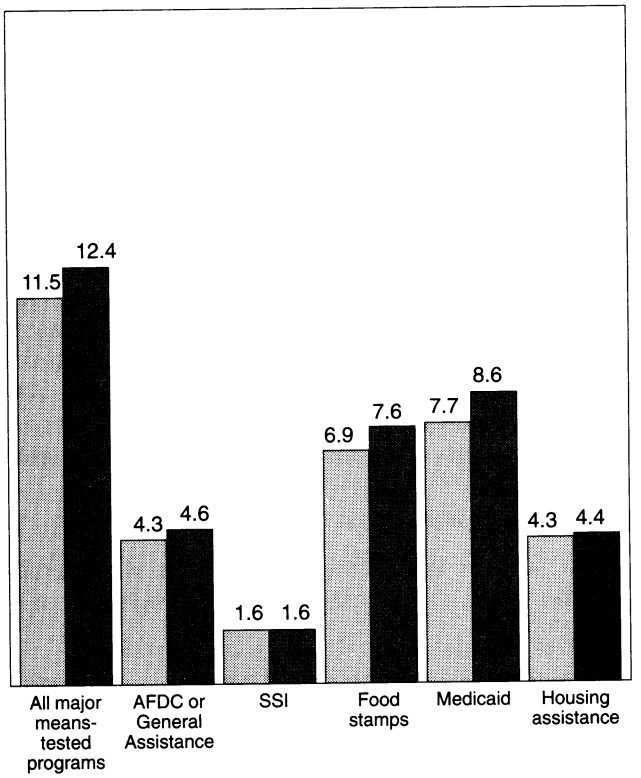


Figure 2.
Average Monthly Participation Rates for Different Programs: 1990 and 1991
(In percent)



PROGRAM PARTICIPATION: 1990 TO 1992

The program participation data in this report refer to the following programs: (1) Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); (2) General Assistance; (3) Supplemental Security Income (SSI); (4) food stamps; (5) public or subsidized rental housing; (6) Medicaid; (7) Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); (8) Social Security or Railroad Retirement Income; (9) Veterans' compensation or pensions; and (10) unemployment compensation.

The descriptive analysis does not cover the key social insurance programs of Social Security or Railroad retirement income, nonmeans-tested Veterans' compensation or pensions, and unemployment compensation. However, data on these programs are included in the detailed tables, and future reports will be expanded to include such a discussion. The tables in this report show data for persons rather than for families or households. Persons are considered participants in AFDC, General Assistance, and Veterans' compensation or pensions, and in the Food Stamp Program if they are the primary recipient or if they are covered under another person's allotment. Persons receiving SSI payments or unemployment compensation are considered to be participants in an assistance program as are persons covered by

Medicaid[3] or WIC or living in public or subsidized rental housing. Persons are counted as participants in the Social Security or Railroad Retirement program if they received payments on their own, jointly with a spouse, or through a parent.

Persons are counted as participants in a major means-tested assistance program if they live in public housing or are beneficiaries of one of the following programs: AFDC, General Assistance, SSI, Medicaid, food stamps, and Federal or State rent assistance. They are considered participants in any means-tested program if they partake in one of the above programs or in WIC or means-tested Veterans' benefits. Benefit amounts from major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamp benefits. Benefit amounts from any means-tested programs additionally include benefits received from WIC and means-tested Veterans' compensation.[4] For meaningful comparison of benefits, they are valued in constant 1990 dollars.

We consider four types of program participation:

a. The number and percent of persons who participated in various programs in an average month of 1990 (1991).

b. The number and percent of persons who participated 1 month or more during 1990 (1991).

c. The number and percent of persons who participated each month of 1990 and 1991.

d. The length of participation in various programs.

Time spent in programs is an important dimension of program participation. Some individuals have longer spells than others, and policy approaches to provide short-term relief are likely to differ from those intended to remedy long-term dependency. SIPP allows longitudinal analysis of program participation. It allows one to calculate median spell durations as well as distributions of spells by spell length, using survival analysis.

Approximately 28.5 million persons participated in a major means-tested assistance program in an average month during 1990, and 30.9 million did so in 1991, representing 11.5 and 12.4 percent of the population, respectively. The numbers of persons who ever participated during the year were significantly higher, 35.7 million (14.8 percent of the population) in 1990 and 38.0 million (15.5 percent of the population) in 1991, demonstrating substantial mobility (see table A). Although more persons received means-tested assistance in 1991 than in 1990, the proportion did not change significantly between the two years. A substantial number of persons, 18.1 million, participated all 24 months of 1990 and 1991 in major means-tested programs. These long-term participants represented 7.6 percent of the population. Figure 1 shows participation in major means-tested programs by type of participation for the two years 1990 and 1991.

The average monthly number of persons who participated in major means-tested programs, AFDC/General Assistance,[5] food stamps, and Medicaid increased from 1990 to 1991. The proportions of the population who participated in means-tested programs, food stamps, and Medicaid during an average month increased as well, from 11.5, 6.9, and 7.7 percent in 1990 to 12.4, 7.6, and 8.6 percent, respectively, in 1991. Over the same time period, there was an increase in the proportion of persons who participated in the AFDC/General Assistance, Food Stamp, and Medicaid programs for at least 1 month.

As in 1987, participation in 1990 and 1991 was highest for Medicaid and food stamps (figure 2). In 1990, average monthly Medicaid coverage was 19.1 million, representing 7.7 percent of the population. In the same year, 23.4 million persons were covered for at least 1 month by Medicaid (table A).

The proportion of the population who lived in public or subsidized housing was significantly higher in 1990 than in 1987. In an average month of 1987, 3.8 percent of the population lived in public or subsidized housing, and 4.9 percent did so for at least 1 month. The comparable rates for 1990 were 4.3 and 5.7 percent, respectively. Surprising in light of the increase in Medicaid and housing assistance, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of persons who received food stamps for one or more months: from 10.3 percent in 1987 to 9.1 percent in 1990.

As can be seen in figure 3, the median length of time receiving housing assistance was 15.6 months during the 1990 panel, significantly longer than spells on Medicaid (10.6 months), AFDC/General Assistance (10.4 months), and food stamps (8.8 months). The latter three programs had similar spell lengths. Figure 4 shows the distribution of spells in major means-tested programs by spell length. The median duration of major means-tested assistance

[3]Medicaid coverage is determined in a two-step procedure: The initial procedure counts as covered all persons and their dependents who report coverage. The second procedure counts additional persons to be covered by Medicaid, if they did not report coverage but were categorically eligible because they reported receiving AFDC and Federal SSI payments.

[4]The Census Bureau is working on methods to value the noncash benefits received from the housing and medical programs.

[5]A study by Kent Marquis and Jeffrey Moore of the Bureau of the Census supported earlier findings that persons often misreport AFDC as General Assistance. Thus, to minimize potential errors from such misreporting, we do not look at these programs separately. For information on this issue see K.H. Marquis and J.C. Moore, "Measurement Errors in SIPP Program Reports," pages 721-745, *Proceedings of the 1990 Annual Research Conference*.

Table A. **Program Participation Status: 1990 and 1991, 1987 and 1988**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Year and participation	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		SSI		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1990												
Average monthly participation	28,461	11.5	10,573	4.3	3,961	1.6	17,136	6.9	19,110	7.7	10,694	4.3
Persons ever participating	35,663	14.8	12,847	5.3	4,527	1.9	21,941	9.1	23,355	9.7	13,745	5.7
1991												
Average monthly participation	30,859	12.4	11,556	4.6	4,101	1.6	18,870	7.6	21,379	8.6	10,951	4.4
Persons ever participating	37,996	15.5	14,271	5.8	4,605	1.9	24,217	9.9	26,359	10.8	13,212	5.4
1987												
Average monthly participation	27,412	11.4	10,385	4.3	3,831	1.6	17,365	7.2	17,474	7.3	9,222	3.8
Persons ever participating	34,856	14.8	13,432	5.7	4,195	1.8	24,221	10.3	21,767	9.3	11,424	4.9
1988												
Average monthly participation	27,027	11.2	9,919	4.1	3,817	1.6	16,934	7.0	17,502	7.2	9,313	3.8
Persons ever participating	33,763	14.2	12,347	5.2	4,129	1.7	21,918	9.2	21,615	9.1	11,555	4.9

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Figure 3.
Median Durations of Program Spells: 1990 Panel

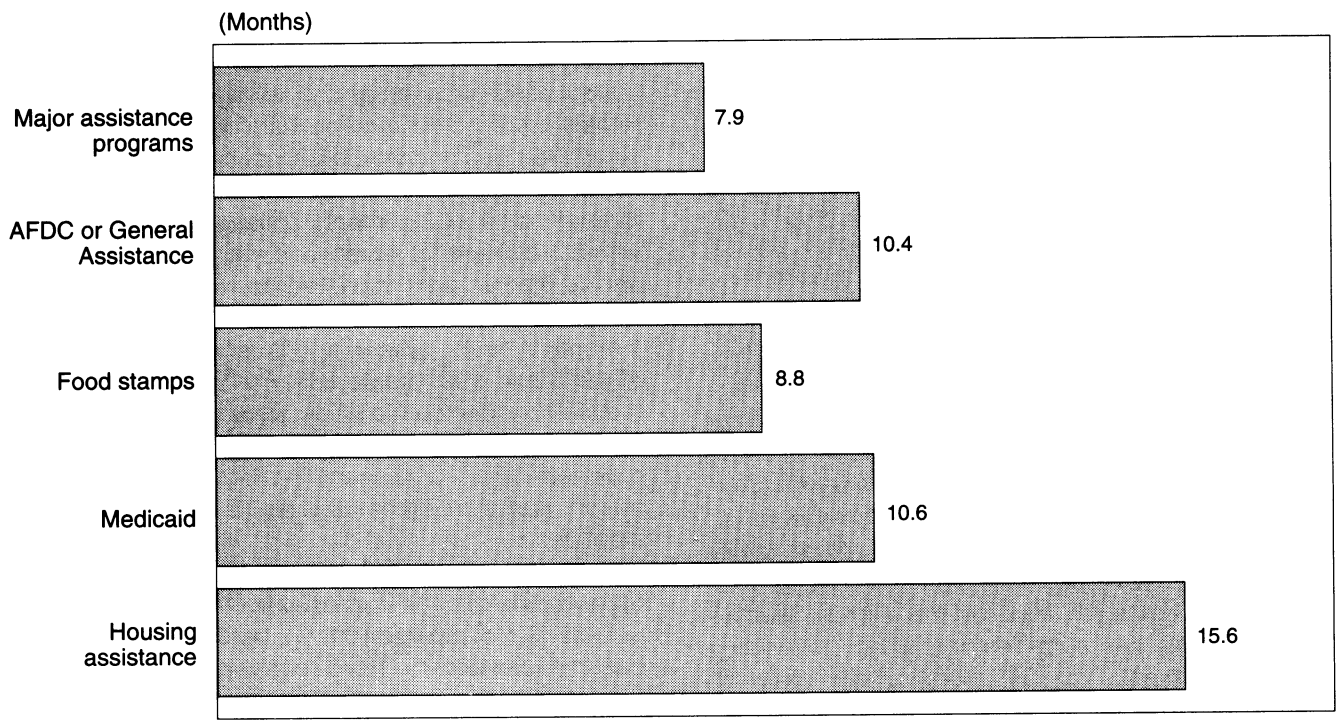
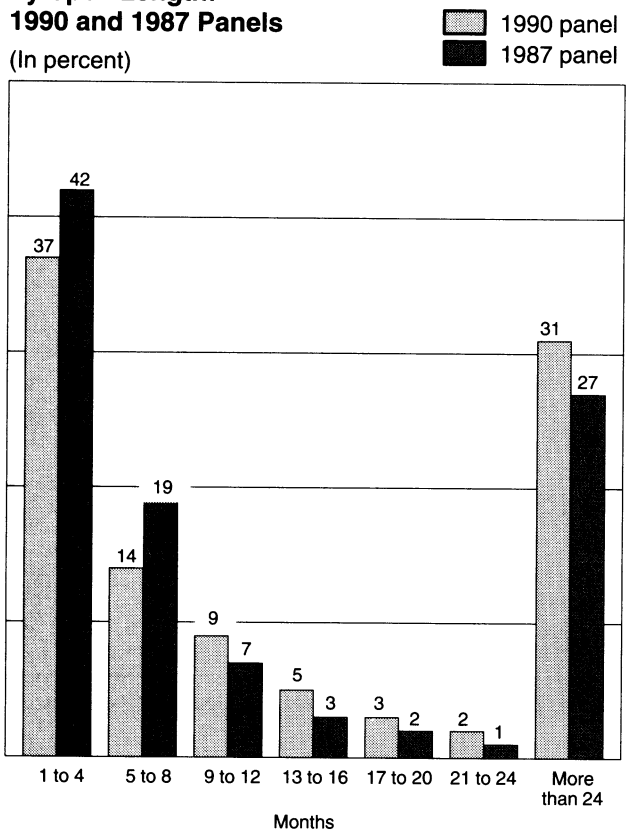


Figure 4.
Distribution of Spells of Participation in Major Means-Tested Programs, by Spell Length: 1990 and 1987 Panels
(In percent)



programs was 7.9 months during the 1990 panel, i.e. half of all spells lasted less than 7.9 months and half lasted longer, not significantly different from the median food stamp spell length. While 37.0 percent of spells lasted between 1 and 4 months, smaller proportions of spells fell in subsequent length categories: 14.0 percent lasted between 5 and 8 months, 9.0 percent between 9 and 12 months, and 5 percent between 13 and 16 months. However, fully 31.0 percent of all spells lasted longer than 2 years.

There is evidence that survey respondents sometimes incorrectly reported that "all" persons in the household were covered by someone else's allotment. This is particularly a problem in the AFDC program, since coverage of only some of the family members is more likely than in other programs such as food stamps. In light of the current welfare debate, and the consideration given to limiting AFDC recipiency to 24 months, we show in appendix F survival rates and median spell durations for AFDC/General Assistance for primary recipients only. A primary recipient is the person whose name is on the check, or more generally, the person in whose name the benefit is issued.

Appendix F shows AFDC/General Assistance survival rates and median spell durations of primary recipients only. The median spell duration for all persons is not significantly shorter than for primary recipients only, 10.4 compared with 11.6 months.

As can be seen in table B3, the median duration of a Medicaid spell increased from 7.4 months during the 1987 panel to 10.6 months during the 1990 panel.[6] Likewise, there was an increase in the median spell duration of major programs combined, from 6.4 months in the earlier panel to 7.9 months in the later panel, attesting perhaps to the latest recessionary period that began in July of 1990 and ended in March of 1991.

As can be seen in figure 6, the median benefit amount received from one or more major means-tested assistance programs was $418 in 1990, not statistically different from the $410 received in 1987 (in 1990 dollars). While median food stamp benefits increased from $170 in 1987 to $183 in 1990 and to $191 in 1991, the median AFDC/General Assistance benefit declined from $428 in 1987 to $363 in 1990 and to $344 in 1991.

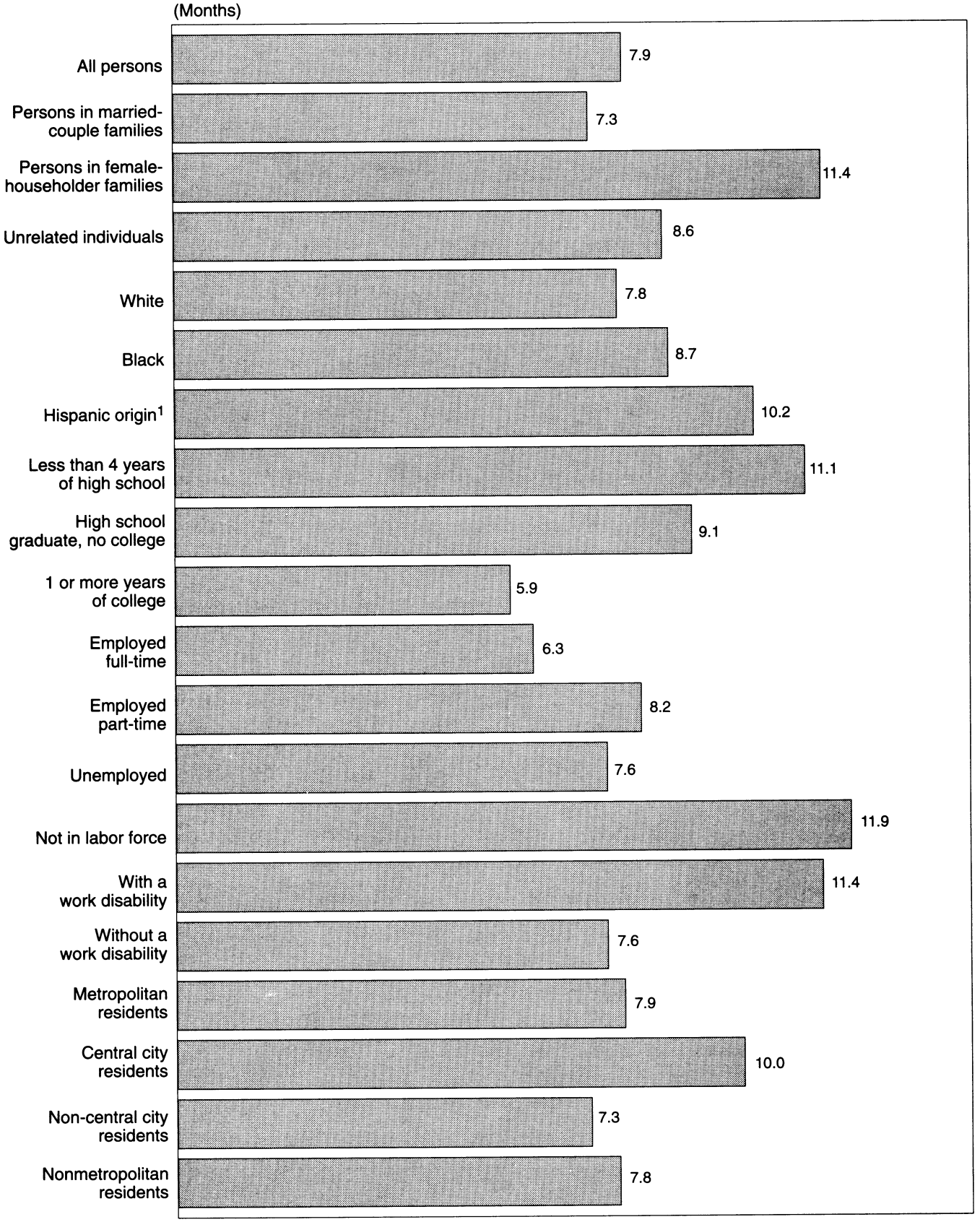
When income is defined to include money income plus the value of food stamps and WIC benefits, 48.9 percent of participants received more than 50 percent of monthly income from means-tested programs in 1990. Furthermore, means-tested benefits constituted the only income for 29.6 percent of participants. The corresponding proportions for 1991 were not significantly different.

Family and marital status. Participation in means-tested assistance programs is higher for persons in female-householder families than for persons in married-couple families and unrelated individuals. In an average month during 1990, persons in female-householder families had a 37.2 percent participation rate, compared with 6.1 percent for persons in married-couple families and 12.6 percent for unrelated individuals (table B). This pattern was repeated for those who participated at least 1 month in 1990 (table B) and those who participated all of 1990 and 1991 (table B1). Furthermore, persons in female-householder families were about 15 times as likely as persons in married-couple families to have received AFDC or General Assistance in an average month, and eight times as likely to have received food stamps.

Persons in married-couple families were less likely to receive food stamps in an average month in 1990 than in 1987 (3.4 compared with 3.9 percent). Likewise, they became less likely to have received food stamps for at least 1 month. However, they became more likely to have received housing assistance for 1 month or more,

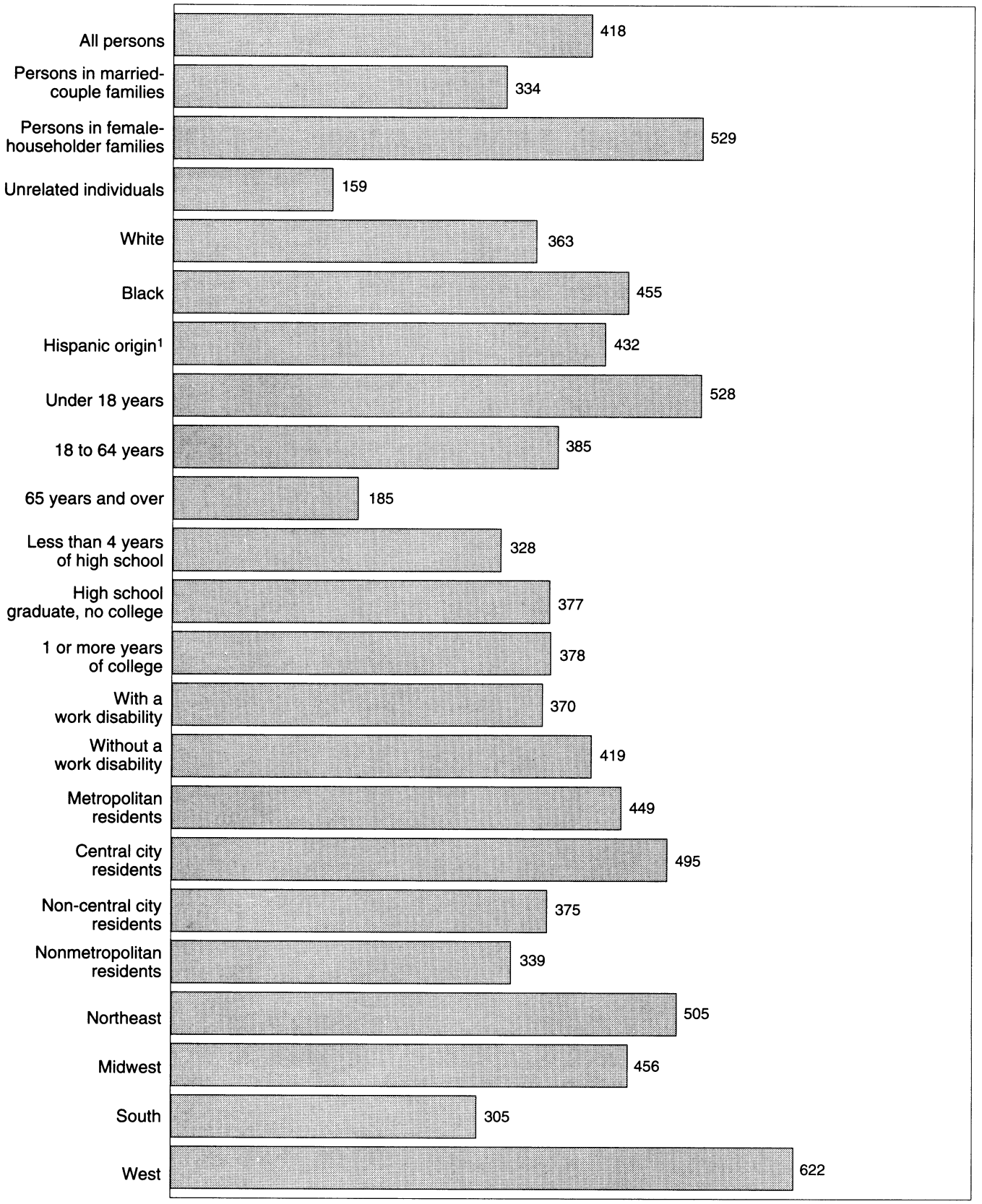
[6]There were no significant differences in median durations of food stamp, AFDC, and housing assistance spells.

Figure 5.
Median Duration of Major Means-Tested Program Spells, by Various Characteristics: 1990 Panel
(Months)



[1]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race

Figure 6.
Median Benefits from Major Means-Tested Assistance Programs, by Various Characteristics: 1990
(Dollars)



[1]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race

Table B. **Program Participation Status, by Family Status: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and family status	1990								1987							
	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Housing assistance		Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation																
Total	28,461	11.5	10,573	4.3	17,136	6.9	10,694	4.3	27,412	11.4	10,385	4.3	17,365	7.2	9,222	3.8
In families	23,951	11.3	10,329	4.9	15,576	7.4	8,461	4.0	23,323	11.2	10,052	4.8	15,822	7.6	7,384	3.6
In married-couple families	10,405	6.1	2,495	1.5	5,817	3.4	2,876	1.7	10,350	6.2	2,544	1.5	6,528	3.9	2,426	1.4
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	12,640	37.2	7,576	22.3	9,358	27.6	5,270	15.5	12,277	37.4	7,366	22.5	9,065	27.6	4,703	14.3
Unrelated individuals	4,510	12.6	245	0.7	1,561	4.4	2,232	6.2	4,089	12.6	332	1.0	1,543	4.8	1,838	5.7
Persons Ever Participating																
Total	35,663	14.8	12,847	5.3	21,941	9.1	13,745	5.7	34,856	14.8	13,432	5.7	24,221	10.3	11,424	4.9
In families	30,405	14.6	12,469	6.0	19,923	9.6	11,052	5.3	30,190	14.7	12,890	6.3	22,242	10.8	9,260	4.5
In married-couple families	15,571	9.2	3,874	2.3	8,971	5.3	4,450	2.6	15,230	9.1	3,758	2.2	10,480	6.3	3,297	2.0
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	13,799	42.4	8,233	25.3	10,461	32.1	6,289	19.3	14,102	43.7	8,889	27.5	11,341	35.1	5,698	17.6
Unrelated individuals	5,258	15.9	378	1.1	2,018	6.1	2,693	8.2	4,666	15.8	542	1.8	1,979	6.7	2,164	7.3

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

from 2.0 percent in 1987 to 2.6 percent in 1990 (table B). Persons in female householder families experienced an increase in the proportion covered by Medicaid on a long-term basis, from 18.3 percent in 1987 and 1988 to 21.5 percent in 1990 and 1991 (table B1).

Persons in female-householder families had longer median spells than persons in married-couple families for major programs taken together and for AFDC/General Assistance, food stamps, or Medicaid separately. As can be seen in table B3, persons in married-couple families received AFDC/General Assistance for 5.8 months, compared with 18.2 months for persons in female-householder families. The shorter AFDC stay of married-couple families is partly caused by the transitory nature of unemployment (needy married-couple families must have an unemployed parent in order to receive AFDC). Longer welfare spells generally reflect the inability of female-householder families to exit poverty. As shown in a companion report, persons in female householder families have significantly longer poverty spells than persons in married-couple households.[7]

[7]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

Unrelated individuals had significantly longer spells of receiving housing assistance and food stamps than persons in married-couple families. As can be seen in table B3, spells in both programs were about 50.0 percent higher for unrelated individuals than for persons in married-couple households.

Persons in married-couple families had longer food stamp and Medicaid spells during the 1990 panel than during the 1987 panel. It can be seen in table B3 that their median food stamp spells increased from 4.9 to 7.0 months, and their median Medicaid spells from 5.4 to 7.9 months. (There was no significant difference between the median spell durations for food stamps and Medicaid in either year.) Persons in female householder families, on the other hand, experienced a large increase in the spell duration of the major programs combined, from 6.8 percent in the 1987 panel to 11.4 percent in the 1990 panel.

Persons in married-couple families had significantly higher AFDC/General Assistance benefits than persons in female-householder families; the opposite held true for benefits from major programs and from SSI, as shown in table B2. Median combined family benefits for persons in female-householder families amounted to $529 in 1990, which is substantially higher than the $334 received by their counterparts in married-couple

Table B1. **Long-Term Program Participation, by Family Status: 1990 to 1991, 1987 to 1988**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Family status	Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991				Persons participating all 24 months of 1987 and 1988			
	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Medicaid		Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Medicaid	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6	11,752	4.9	17,137	7.4	10,490	4.5
In families	15,108	7.4	10,073	4.9	14,444	7.1	8,865	4.4
In married-couple families	5,533	3.3	3,028	1.8	5,625	3.4	2,974	1.8
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	9,154	29.0	6,787	21.5	8,578	27.5	5,725	18.3
Unrelated individuals	2,985	9.3	1,679	5.2	2,693	9.5	1,625	5.7

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include ADFC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table B2. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Family Status: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Family status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI
Total	418	363	300
In families	455	368	359
In married-couple families	334	404	330
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	529	354	370
Unrelated individuals	159	203	199

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

families. This suggests that female-householder families drew benefits from more programs or from a different mix of programs than married-couple families. Households composed entirely of recipients of AFDC or SSI are automatically eligible for food stamps as long as they meet food stamp employment-related requirements.[8] Multiple program participation through "categorical" eligibility explains in part the higher combined median benefits of female-householder families compared with married-couple families. In addition, not only was the poverty rate of persons in female-householder families significantly higher than that of persons in married-couple families (35.2 compared with 7.0 average monthly percent in 1990),[9] but persons in female-householder families were also significantly more likely than persons in married-couple families to have family incomes below one-half of their respective poverty thresholds (18.2 compared with 1.9 percent in 1990).[10] Such low income levels make multiple program participation, and therefore higher combined benefits, more likely.

There was also a strong correlation between marital status of persons 18 years and over and program participation. Married persons were less likely to participate in major means-tested programs in an average month of 1990 than never-married persons, and the latter were less likely to participate than separated, divorced, or widowed persons. This pattern held also for housing assistance, the Medicaid and Food Stamp programs, and SSI (see tables C and C1). About 4.4 percent of married persons participated in a major means-tested program during an average month of 1990, compared with 13.1 percent of never-married persons, and 18.3 percent of those who are separated, divorced, or widowed. The comparable long-term rates were 2.3, 10.0, and 13.6 percent, respectively (table C2). Similarly, while 6.8 percent of married persons participated at least 1 month during 1990, 16.6 percent of never-married persons and 21.7 percent of separated, divorced, or widowed persons did so.

[8]U. S. Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service. *Cash and Noncash Benefits for Persons With Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data, Fiscal Year 1986-88.* Report for Congress No. 89-595 EPW, compiled by Vee Burke. Washington, DC, 1989. 86 p.

[9]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990-1992*, forthcoming.

[10]U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No.175, *Poverty in the United States: 1990*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1991.

Table B3. **Median Spell Durations, by Family Status: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Family status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
In families	7.8	6.0	10.9	7.5	8.6	6.6	9.9	7.2	16.2	12.5
In married-couple families	7.3	5.4	5.8	5.4	7.0	4.9	7.9	5.4	7.8	7.9
In families with a female householder, no spouse present	11.4	6.8	18.2	11.7	11.5	13.7	15.5	10.5	(X)	(X)
Unrelated individuals	8.6	8.1	5.7	9.6	10.5	9.6	17.5	15.1	11.9	12.7

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table C. **Average Monthly Participation, by Marital Status: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Persons 18 years and over. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Marital status	AFDC or General Assistance		SSI		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	10,573	4.3	3,961	1.6	17,136	6.9	19,110	7.7	10,694	4.3
Married	898	0.8	769	0.7	2,555	2.4	2,419	2.2	1,558	1.4
Separated, divorced, or widowed	1,417	4.2	1,970	5.8	3,124	9.2	4,068	11.9	2,587	7.6
Never married	1,848	4.6	1,185	2.9	2,729	6.8	3,592	8.9	2,255	5.6

Married persons were less likely to receive food stamps in 1990 than in 1987 (table C1). Average monthly participation fell from 3.0 to 2.4 percent. The proportion of married persons who participated for at least 1 month declined from 4.8 to 3.9 percent and long-term participation decreased from 1.4 to 1.0 percent. Never-married persons became more likely to receive housing assistance in one or more months as well as in an average month during the year, from 5.8 and 4.5 percent in 1987 to 7.5 and 5.6 percent, respectively, in 1990. Table C1 shows that persons who were separated, divorced, or widowed became less likely to ever receive AFDC or General Assistance during 1990 than 1987, 5.2 compared with 7.1 percent.

Marital status also influenced how long persons participated in means-tested programs. As can be seen in table C3, married persons had shorter median spells of participation than separated, divorced, and widowed persons, regardless of program, with the possible but unlikely exception of SSI and Medicaid.[11] In addition, married persons had significantly shorter Medicaid, AFDC/General Assistance, and housing assistance spells than persons who were never married. For instance, while married persons spent a median 7.7 months in public or subsidized housing, never-married persons lived there about twice as long.

Median spell durations often changed significantly between panels. Married persons participated longer in the Food Stamp and Medicaid programs in the 1990 panel than the 1987 panel. Separated, divorced, and widowed persons received assistance from major means-tested programs in general and from AFDC/General Assistance specifically for longer periods of time during the 1990-1992 period than during the 1987-1989 period. Those who were never married lived twice as long in public or subsidized housing during the later panel.

[11]A median Medicaid spell experienced by separated, divorced, or widowed persons exceeded 30 months, but precise length, and therefore the standard error, can not be established because of the 32-month total panel length.

Table C1. **Program Participation Status, by Marital Status: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Persons 18 years and over. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and marital status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				AFDC or General Assistance				Food stamps				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation																
Total	28,461	11.5	27,412	11.4	10,573	4.3	10,385	4.3	17,136	6.9	17,365	7.2	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
Married	4,729	4.4	5,167	4.9	898	0.8	1,031	1.0	2,555	2.4	3,173	3.0	1,558	1.4	1,447	1.4
Separated, divorced, or widowed	6,223	18.3	6,087	18.8	1,417	4.2	1,562	4.8	3,124	9.2	3,099	9.6	2,587	7.6	2,463	7.6
Never married	5,297	13.1	4,550	12.0	1,848	4.6	1,488	3.9	2,729	6.8	2,185	5.8	2,255	5.6	1,718	4.5
Persons Ever Participating																
Total	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	12,847	5.3	13,432	5.7	21,941	9.1	24,221	10.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Married	7,288	6.8	7,626	7.2	1,541	1.4	1,634	1.5	4,201	3.9	5,087	4.8	2,417	2.2	1,963	1.9
Separated, divorced, or widowed	6,926	21.7	7,232	23.8	1,650	5.2	2,166	7.1	3,654	11.5	4,247	14.0	2,998	9.4	2,881	9.5
Never married	6,303	16.6	5,317	15.0	2,147	5.6	1,830	5.2	3,334	8.8	2,884	8.2	2,858	7.5	2,049	5.8

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table C2. **Long-Term Program Participation, by Marital Status: 1990 to 1991, 1987 to 1988**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Marital status	Persons participating all 24 months in major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Persons participating all 24 months in AFDC or General Assistance				Persons participating all 24 months in the Food Stamp Program			
	1990 to 1991		1987 to 1988		1990 to 1991		1987 to 1988		1990 to 1991		1987 to 1988	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6	17,137	7.4	5,634	2.4	5,208	2.3	9,102	3.8	8,860	3.8
Married	2,439	2.3	2,939	2.8	320	0.3	373	0.4	1,067	1.0	1,434	1.4
Separated, divorced, or widowed	4,127	13.6	4,210	14.5	741	2.4	703	2.4	1,781	5.9	1,687	5.8
Never married	3,710	10.0	2,803	8.1	1,104	3.0	880	2.5	1,456	3.9	1,071	3.1

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table C3. **Median Spell Durations, by Marital Status: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Marital status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
Married	7.8	6.1	4.8	5.3	7.2	4.6	9.7	7.3	7.7	8.2
Separated, divorced, or widowed	11.5	7.6	12.0	7.4	10.8	9.4	(X)	10.1	17.7	(X)
Never married	10.5	7.3	15.9	10.1	9.2	7.4	15.1	15.1	15.3	7.8

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Marital status was also correlated with benefit amounts. Married persons had significantly higher median benefits from major programs combined, and from SSI and food stamps separately, than persons who were separated, divorced, or widowed. Never-married persons had the lowest family benefits from these programs. As can be seen in table C4, the median sum of family benefits from means-tested programs was $279 for never-married persons, followed by $299 for separated, divorced, or widowed persons, and $528 for married persons. Only AFDC/General Assistance benefits were larger for separated, divorced, or widowed persons than for married persons, $411 compared with $385.

The relative participation rates reflect in part the differential probabilities of being poor. About 5.8 percent of married persons were poor in an average month of 1990, compared with 15.1 percent of never-married persons, and 18.8 percent of divorced or separated persons.[12]

Race and Hispanic origin. There was a strong association between race and Hispanic origin[13] and the likelihood of receiving means-tested assistance. Whites had significantly lower participation rates than Blacks, and persons of Hispanic origin had rates intermediate between Whites and Blacks. In 1990, 8.4 percent of White persons participated in a means-tested assistance program in an average month, compared with 32.2 percent of Blacks and 24.9 percent of persons of Hispanic origin. As shown in tables D and D1, this

[12]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

[13]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table C4. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Marital Status: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Marital status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
Married	528	385	368	218
Separated, divorced, or widowed	299	411	346	179
Never married	279	323	239	98

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

Table D. **Program Participation Status, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and race and Hispanic origin	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Food stamps				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation												
Total	28,461	11.5	27,412	11.4	17,136	6.9	17,365	7.2	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
White	17,401	8.4	16,258	8.0	9,638	4.6	9,852	4.9	5,888	2.8	4,600	2.3
Black	9,777	32.2	9,775	33.7	6,601	21.7	6,595	22.7	4,435	14.6	4,409	15.2
Hispanic origin[2]	5,223	24.9	4,197	22.1	3,128	14.9	2,984	15.7	2,194	10.5	1,360	7.1
Persons Ever Participating												
Total	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	21,941	9.1	24,221	10.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
White	23,009	11.3	21,556	10.8	13,127	6.5	14,108	7.1	8,128	4.0	5,962	3.0
Black	11,173	37.7	11,434	40.2	7,811	26.3	8,716	30.7	5,099	17.2	5,070	17.8
Hispanic origin[2]	6,505	33.3	5,097	28.5	3,896	19.9	3,770	21.1	2,712	13.9	1,361	7.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

pattern of differences held also for persons who ever participated during 1990 and for those who participated during all of 1990 and 1991. One-fourth of all Blacks received assistance from a means-tested program during all 24 months of 1990 and 1991. The comparable figures for Whites and persons of Hispanic origin were 5.0 percent and 17.7 percent, respectively.

Both Whites and persons of Hispanic origin experienced an increase in housing assistance from 1987 to 1990, as can be seen in table D. While the percentage of Whites who received housing assistance for 1 month or more increased from 3.0 in 1987 to 4.0 percent in 1990, that of Hispanic-origin persons increased from 7.6 to 13.9 percent. At the same time, the long-term participation rate for Blacks decreased. Although 11.8 percent of Blacks had received housing assistance in each month of 1987 and 1988, only 9.5 percent did so in 1990 and 1991. Blacks also experienced a decrease in the likelihood of ever receiving food stamps. This tendency was observed as well for all means-tested programs combined. On the other hand, the participation rates for all means-tested programs combined increased substantially for Hispanics. As can be seen in table D, 28.5 percent participated for at least 1 month in 1987, compared with 33.3 percent in 1990.

Lengths of participation in most programs differed significantly between Whites and persons of Hispanic origin (see table D2). Whites received AFDC/General Assistance, food stamps, housing assistance, and major combined benefits for shorter periods during the 1990 panel than persons of Hispanic origin. For instance, a median AFDC/General Assistance spell lasted 8.3 months for Whites, compared with 15.3 months for persons of Hispanic origin. There were no significant differences in the median time of participation between Whites and Blacks on one hand, and between Blacks and persons of Hispanic origin on the other hand.

Persons of Hispanic origin had generally longer spells during the 1990 panel than during the 1987 panel,

Table D1. **Long-Term Program Participation, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 to 1991, 1987 to 1988**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Race and Hispanic origin	Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991				Persons participating all 24 months of 1987 and 1988			
	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Housing assistance		Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6	6,475	2.7	17,137	7.4	5,898	2.5
White	9,894	5.0	3,468	1.7	8,921	4.6	2,525	1.3
Black	7,172	24.6	2,780	9.5	7,227	25.9	3,277	11.8
Hispanic origin[2]	3,323	17.7	1,493	7.9	2,539	14.6	918	5.3

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table D2. **Median Spell Durations, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Race and Hispanic origin	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
White	7.8	6.4	8.3	7.1	7.8	5.4	10.1	7.4	11.1	8.7
Black	8.7	6.7	14.0	11.3	13.9	15.2	11.1	7.4	(X)	(X)
Hispanic origin[2]	10.2	7.2	15.3	7.9	10.5	7.5	10.3	7.2	23.3	11.9

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

regardless of program;[14] Whites experienced longer food stamp spells and Blacks longer Medicaid spells during the 1990 panel compared with the 1987 panel.

The median of the sum of means-tested family benefits was higher for Black participants than for their White counterparts (see table D3). Whites received median benefits of $363 in 1990, compared with $455 for Blacks. Persons of Hispanic origin had median benefits intermediate between Whites and Blacks. Whites also received significantly lower SSI and food stamp benefits than Blacks and persons of Hispanic origin. In contrast, the median benefits from AFDC and General Assistance received by Black participants were substantially lower than those received by their White and Hispanic-origin counterparts.

White participants were less likely than their Black and Hispanic counterparts to have incomes that consisted mainly of benefits, as can be seen in table D4. When income is defined to include money income plus the value of food stamps and WIC benefits, 42.7 percent of White participants received more than 50 percent of monthly income from means-tested programs in 1990, compared with 56.8 percent of Blacks and 48.9 percent of Hispanic persons. Furthermore, while means-tested benefits constituted the only income for 26.0 percent of White participants, they did so for 33.2 percent of Black participants and 33.5 percent of persons of Hispanic origin. The difference between Blacks and Whites was not significant.

The proportion of Blacks whose income consisted only of means-tested benefits was significantly lower in 1990 than in 1987, 33.2 compared with 38.0 percent, as can be seen in table D5.

Differences in recipiency between Whites, Blacks, and persons of Hispanic origin result from differences in poverty status and its correlates, such as family type. About 30.1 percent of Blacks and 26.1 percent of persons of Hispanic origin lived in poverty in an average month of 1990, as compared with 10.2 percent of Whites.[15] In the same year, 10.0 percent of Whites lived in female-householder families without a spouse present, compared with 38.5 percent of Blacks and 18.7 percent of persons of Hispanic origin.[16]

Despite significantly higher participation rates for Blacks and persons of Hispanic origin, most participants were White. During an average month of 1990, 61.1 percent of all participants in major means-tested programs were White. The respective percentages for Blacks and persons of Hispanic origin were 34.4 and 18.4 (table D).

Age. Children had higher rates of participation in major means-tested assistance programs than persons in other age groups, reflecting their higher likelihood of living in poverty. As shown in table E, 18.8 percent of all children participated during an average month in 1990 in a means-tested assistance program, while 8.3 percent of nonelderly adults and 11.9 percent of the elderly did so. In the same year, the average monthly poverty rate of children was 20.1 percent, compared with 10.5 percent for nonelderly adults and 9.4 percent for the elderly.[17]

The elderly were more likely than other age groups to participate in SSI because of its eligibility rules that require financially needy persons to be aged, blind, or disabled. Elderly participants also differed significantly from those in other age groups in their likelihood of participating in a major means-tested assistance program for the entire 1990 and 1991 period. As can be seen in tables E and E1, of 3.9 million elderly who ever participated in such programs during 1990, 2.5 million or 64.7 percent participated during the entire 2-year period. The rates for nonelderly adults and children were 46.7 and 51.6 percent, respectively.

[14]Median SSI spell durations either exceeded 30 months or could not be reported because of the small sample size.

[15]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

[16]U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No.175, *Poverty in the United States: 1990*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1991.

[17]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

Table D3. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Race and Hispanic origin	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
White	363	390	277	168
Black	455	321	298	208
Hispanic origin[2]	432	426	374	192

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table D4. **Average Monthly Participation in Means-Tested Programs, by Monthly Family Benefits as a Percent of Family Income, Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands]

Race and Hispanic origin and monthly family benefits as a percent of family income[1]	Number	Percent distribution
All Persons		
Total	22,474	100.0
Under 50 percent	11,488	51.1
50 percent and above	10,987	48.9
100 percent	6,654	29.6
White		
Total	13,390	100.0
Under 50 percent	7,670	57.3
50 percent and above	5,721	42.7
100 percent	3,479	26.0
Black		
Total	7,968	100.0
Under 50 percent	3,443	43.2
50 percent and above	4,524	56.8
100 percent	2,644	33.2
Hispanic origin[2]		
Total	3,902	100.0
Under 50 percent	1,992	51.1
50 percent and above	1,910	48.9
100 percent	1,305	33.5

[1]Benefits from means-tested programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, WIC, and means-tested veterans' compensation or pensions. Family income includes the value of food stamps and WIC.
[2]Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Table D5. **Average Monthly Participation of Blacks in Means-Tested Programs, by Monthly Family Benefits as a Percent of Family Income: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands]

Monthly family benefits as a percent of family income[1]	1990		1987	
	Number	Percent distribution	Number	Percent distribution
Total	7,968	100.0	8,013	100.0
Under 50 percent	3,443	43.2	3,436	42.9
50 percent and above	4,524	56.8	4,577	57.1
100 percent	2,644	33.2	3,042	38.0

[1]Benefits from means-tested programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, WIC, and means-tested veterans' compensation or pensions. Family income includes the value of food stamps and WIC.

Table E. **Program Participation Status, by Age: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and age	1990								1987							
	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		SSI		Food stamps		Housing assistance		Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		SSI		Food stamps		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation																
Total	28,461	11.5	3,961	1.6	17,136	6.9	10,694	4.3	27,412	11.4	3,831	1.6	17,365	7.2	9,222	3.8
Under 18 years[2]	12,213	18.8	36	0.1	8,729	13.5	4,295	6.6	11,608	18.3	3	0.0	8,909	14.0	3,594	5.7
18 to 64 years	12,713	8.3	2,277	1.5	7,334	4.8	4,876	3.2	12,260	8.3	2,071	1.4	7,206	4.9	4,252	2.9
65 years and over	3,536	11.9	1,647	5.6	1,074	3.6	1,523	5.1	3,544	12.6	1,757	6.2	1,251	4.4	1,375	4.9
Persons Ever Participating																
Total	35,663	14.8	4,527	1.9	21,941	9.1	13,745	5.7	34,856	14.8	4,195	1.8	24,221	10.3	11,424	4.9
Under 18 years[2]	15,146	23.7	80	0.1	10,752	16.8	5,472	8.6	14,680	23.3	0	0.0	12,004	19.0	4,531	7.2
18 to 64 years	16,632	11.1	2,698	1.8	9,958	6.7	6,608	4.4	16,141	11.1	2,310	1.6	10,734	7.4	5,383	3.7
65 years and over	3,885	13.8	1,748	6.2	1,230	4.4	1,665	5.9	4,035	15.1	1,885	7.1	1,483	5.6	1,510	5.7

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]In the case of SSI, data in the SIPP is only collected for persons who are at least 15 years of age. The "under 18 years" category therefore contains only 15-to-17-year-old recipients of SSI.

Table E1. **Long-Term Program Participation, by Age: 1990 to 1991**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables. Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991 in major means-tested assistance programs[1]]

Age	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6
Under 18 years	7,817	12.2
18 to 64 years	7,761	5.3
65 years and older	2,515	9.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

The proportion of children who received food stamps for at least 1 month decreased from 19.0 percent in 1987 to 16.8 percent in 1990. In contrast, the proportions of children and nonelderly adults who received housing assistance increased, as can be seen in table E. About 8.6 percent of children and 4.4 percent of nonelderly adults lived in public or subsidized housing in 1990, compared with 7.2 and 3.7 percent, respectively, in 1987.

In comparison to other age groups, the elderly experienced the longest spells of participation in the Food Stamp Program. Table E2 shows that the median spell duration of elderly entrants was 15.3 months compared with 9.5 months for children and 7.9 months for nonelderly adults. The difference between food stamp spell length of children and nonelderly adults was not significant. Nonelderly adults had longer Medicaid spells than children, 11.6 months compared with 7.7 months.

Although the elderly experienced no significant changes in spell lengths from the 1987 to the 1990 panel, children had significantly longer spells of major programs combined and of AFDC/General Assistance in the later panel. As can be seen in table E2, their median AFDC/General Assistance spell lasted 12.5 months during the 1990 panel, but only 8.0 months during the 1987 panel. Nonelderly adults experienced significant spell length increases for food stamps and Medicaid.

Table E3 shows median monthly family benefits from major assistance programs, both combined and separately. They were substantially higher for children than for nonelderly adults, and they were higher for nonelderly adults than for the elderly.[18] While children received median benefits from means-tested programs in the amount of $528 in 1990, nonelderly adults and the elderly received $385 and $185, respectively.

In 1990, benefits from AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, WIC, means-tested Veterans assistance, and food stamps accounted for over one-half of total family income for 55.4 percent of participating children (see table E4). The proportion of nonelderly adults for whom it did so was lower, 48.5 percent, and the proportion of elderly was smallest, 22.5 percent. Benefits constituted all income for 34.1 percent of all participating children, 30.0 percent of nonelderly adults, and 8.9 percent of elderly participants.

Education. Education of those 18 years and older is highly correlated with program participation. Table F shows that 20.9 percent of persons without a high school diploma participated in a major means-tested program during an average month in 1990, compared with 7.9 percent of high school graduates without college and 3.3 percent of persons with at least 1 year of college. Moreover, 15.6 percent of all persons who had not completed high school participated in a major assistance program during all of 1990 and 1991, compared with 5.1 percent of high school graduates and 1.6 percent of persons who attended college (table F1).

The relative participation rates reflect in part the differential probabilities of being poor by educational background. While 20.8 percent of persons without a high school diploma were poor in an average month of 1990, only 9.3 percent of high school graduates and 5.5 percent of persons with 1 or more years of college were poor.[19]

Participation in housing assistance programs increased from 1987 to 1990 for persons without a high school diploma. About 7.7 percent lived in public or subsidized housing for at least 1 month, not significantly different from the 6.5 percent who did so in an average month of 1987. In 1990, 9.5 percent received housing assistance for at least 1 month and 7.7 percent received such assistance in an average month. During the same time

[18]The sample of child recipients of SSI is too small for a meaningful assessment.

[19]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

Table E2. **Median Spell Durations, by Age: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Age	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4
Under 18 years	7.4	4.9	12.5	8.0	9.5	7.5	7.7	5.1
18 to 64 years	8.1	6.4	9.1	7.3	7.9	5.8	11.6	8.1
65 years and older	13.5	(X)	(B)	(B)	15.3	(X)	(X)	(X)

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

Table E3. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Age: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Age	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
Under 18 years	528	385	368	218
18 to 64 years	385	341	383	165
65 years and over	185	163	194	32

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

Table E4. **Average Monthly Participation in Means-Tested Programs, by Monthly Family Benefits as a Percent of Family Income and Age: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands]

Age and monthly family benefits as a percent of family income[1]	Number	Percent distribution
All Persons		
Total	22,474	100.0
Under 50 percent	11,488	51.1
50 percent and above	10,987	48.9
100 percent	6,654	29.6
Under 18 Years		
Total	10,292	100.0
Under 50 percent	4,590	44.6
50 percent and above	5,702	55.4
100 percent	3,513	34.1
18 to 64 Years		
Total	9,767	100.0
Under 50 percent	5,026	51.5
50 percent and above	4,741	48.5
100 percent	2,926	30.0
65 Years and Older		
Total	2,415	100.0
Under 50 percent	1,872	77.5
50 percent and above	544	22.5
100 percent	215	8.9

[1]Benefits from means-tested programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, WIC, and means-tested veterans' compensation or pensions. Family income includes the value of food stamps and WIC.

period, there was also an increase in the proportion of high school graduates who were covered by Medicaid for at least 1 month, from 5.3 to 6.4 percent.

There were some differences in median spell durations by education categories. Table F2 shows that persons without a high school diploma had significantly longer food stamp and Medicaid spells than persons in other education groups. They also received assistance from major means-tested programs in general and housing assistance in particular for longer periods than those with 1 or more years of college. High school graduates with no years of college generally did not differ significantly from others in the median length of recipiency, with the exception of housing assistance. They received housing assistance twice as long as those with 1 or more years of college, 15.2 compared with 7.5 months.

High school graduates with no years of college experienced increased spell lengths for food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance between the 1987 and 1990 panels of SIPP. For instance, their median housing spell lasted 7.6 months during the 1987 panel but 15.2 months during the 1990 panel.

In 1990, median family benefits from all programs combined and separately were lowest for adults without a high school diploma. Table F3 shows that persons without a high school diploma received $328 in median family benefits from major programs, compared with $377 for those with a diploma. There was no significant difference between those with a diploma and those with 1 or more years of college. Persons with some years of college had higher median AFDC/General Assistance benefits than persons with a high school diploma, while the opposite held true for food stamp benefits.

Employment status. Table G shows data on the relationship between the employment status of persons 18 years and older and their participation in means-tested programs. The average monthly rate of participation in AFDC or General Assistance and major means-tested programs was highest for unemployed persons.

Table F. **Program Participation Status, by Educational Attainment: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Persons 18 years and older. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and educational attainment	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Medicaid				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation												
Total	28,461	11.5	27,412	11.4	19,110	7.7	17,474	7.3	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
Less than 4 years of high school	8,435	20.9	8,936	20.8	5,546	13.7	5,654	13.2	3,113	7.7	2,773	6.5
High school graduate, no college	5,431	7.9	4,917	7.3	3,291	4.8	2,717	4.1	2,121	3.1	2,012	3.0
1 or more years of college	2,383	3.3	1,951	2.9	1,242	1.7	1,006	1.5	1,164	1.6	843	1.3
Persons Ever Participating												
Total	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	23,355	9.7	21,767	9.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Less than 4 years of high school	9,886	25.7	10,588	25.9	6,390	16.6	6,672	16.3	3,643	9.5	3,172	7.7
High school graduate, no college	7,341	10.8	6,782	10.2	4,320	6.4	3,532	5.3	2,952	4.3	2,495	3.8
1 or more years of college	3,291	4.6	2,805	4.3	1,530	2.1	1,354	2.1	1,678	2.4	1,226	1.9

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table F1. **Long-Term Participation, by Educational Attainment: 1990 to 1991**

[Numbers in thousands. Persons 18 years and older. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Educational attainment	Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991 in major means-tested assistance programs[1]	
	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6
Less than 4 years of high school	5,750	15.6
High school graduate, no college	3,402	5.1
1 or more years of college	1,123	1.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table F2. **Median Spell Durations, by Educational Attainment: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months. Persons 18 years and older]

Educational attainment	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
Less than 4 years of high school	11.1	9.2	10.2	8.5	19.7	15.7	17.0	14.9
High school graduate, no college	9.1	6.0	8.2	4.6	11.5	8.3	15.2	7.6
1 or more years of college	5.9	5.4	6.2	4.0	9.3	6.9	7.5	7.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

About 23.9 percent of the unemployed participated in major assistance programs in an average month of 1990, followed by 18.0 percent of persons out of the labor force, 6.6 percent of those employed part time, and 3.0 percent of full-time workers.

Table G1 shows that unemployed workers also had the highest probability of participating in a means-tested program for at least 1 month in 1990, 31.4 percent. This was followed by 20.5 percent for persons who were out of the labor force, 9.8 percent for the part-time employed, and 5.6 percent for full-time workers. This pattern of differences held also for the separate means-tested programs, except SSI. However, the percentages of full-time and part-time workers who received housing assistance were not significantly different.

Long-term participation in AFDC and General Assistance and food stamps followed the same pattern as well. As can be seen in table G2, the unemployed had the highest food stamp participation rate of 9.4 percent, compared with 0.3 percent for the full-time employed. However, there was no significant difference between the unemployed and persons out of the labor force in terms of their propensity to participate for a prolonged period of time in one or more means-tested programs, Medicaid, and housing assistance. The share of unemployed who participated the entire 1990-1991 period in a major means-tested program was 16.7 percent, statistically indistinguishable from the 14.2 percent of persons out of the labor force who participated. The shares of full-time and part-time employees who participated in each month of the 2-year period were significantly lower, 1.3 and 3.3 percent, respectively.

There was a significant increase in the average monthly proportion of persons out of the labor force who received housing assistance, from 5.4 percent in 1987 to 6.4 percent in 1990. There was also an increase in the proportion of full-time workers who received means-tested benefits or housing aid at least once during the year (table G3).

The differences between employment status groups in the receipt of assistance reflect differences in income.

Table F3. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Educational Attainment: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars. Persons 18 years and over]

Educational attainment	Major means-tested assistance programs	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
Less than 4 years of high school	328	322	256	136
High school graduate, no college	377	346	368	167
1 or more years of college	378	380	343	147

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

Table G. **Average Monthly Participation, by Employment and Disability Status: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Employment and disability status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	28,461	11.5	10,573	4.3
Employment Status (persons 18 years and over)				
Employed full-time	2,943	3.0	242	0.2
Employed part-time	1,377	6.6	289	1.4
Unemployed	1,231	23.9	548	10.7
Not in the Labor force	10,698	18.0	3,084	5.2
Disability Status (persons 15 to 69 Years)				
With a work disability	5,966	20.0	1,321	4.4
With no work disability	9,045	6.3	3,438	2.4

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table G1. **Persons Ever Participating in Programs, by Employment and Disability Status: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Employment and disability status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		SSI		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	35,663	14.8	12,847	5.3	4,527	1.9	21,941	9.1	23,355	9.7	13,745	5.7
Employment Status (persons 18 years and over)												
Employed full-time	5,281	5.6	706	0.7	229	0.2	2,293	2.4	1,488	1.6	2,702	2.8
Employed part-time	2,053	9.8	557	2.7	165	0.8	1,167	5.6	1,145	5.5	763	3.6
Unemployed	1,666	31.4	793	14.9	137	2.6	1,335	25.1	1,101	20.7	579	10.9
Not in the Labor force	11,517	20.5	3,283	5.8	3,915	7.0	6,394	11.4	8,506	15.1	4,230	7.5
Disability Status (persons 15 to 69 years)												
With a work disability	6,880	24.9	1,645	5.9	2,791	10.1	3,899	14.1	5,127	18.5	2,231	8.1
With no work disability	12,579	8.9	4,379	3.1	509	0.4	7,566	5.3	6,576	4.6	5,458	3.9

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table G2. **Long-Term Participation, by Employment and Disability Status: 1990 to 1991**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables. Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991]

Employment and disability status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	18,093	7.6	5,634	2.4	9,102	3.8	11,752	4.9	6,475	2.7
Employment Status (persons 18 years and over)										
Employed full-time	1,191	1.3	46	0.0	298	0.3	211	0.2	718	0.8
Employed part-time	677	3.3	103	0.5	234	1.1	333	1.6	305	1.5
Unemployed	821	16.7	286	5.8	465	9.4	559	11.4	268	5.4
Not in the Labor force	7,586	14.2	1,731	3.2	3,307	6.2	5,404	10.1	2,427	4.6
Disability Status (persons 15 to 69 years)										
With a work disability	4,258	16.4	660	2.5	1,678	6.5	3,178	12.3	1,096	4.2
With no work disability	5,050	3.6	1,661	1.2	2,497	1.8	2,590	1.8	2,214	1.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

The unemployed had the highest average monthly poverty rate, 39.8 percent, followed by persons not in the labor force (18.2 percent), those employed part time (11.6 percent), and those employed full time (3.7 percent).[20]

Persons who were not in the labor force had longer AFDC/General Assistance spells and food stamp spells than any of the groups in the labor force. For instance, table G4 shows that the median duration of AFDC/General Assistance spells was 14.7 months for persons out of the work force, 7.3 months for the unemployed, 6.1 months for part-time workers, and 3.5 months for full-time workers.[21] Persons out of the labor force had longer median spells of participation in major programs

[20]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990-1992*, forthcoming.

[21]There was no significant difference in median AFDC/General Assistance spell lengths between the unemployed and part-time workers, and between part-time and full-time workers. Also, there was no significant difference in the median food stamp spell lengths of the three labor force groups.

Table G3. **Program Participation Status, by Employment Status: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Persons 18 years and over. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Employment status	Average monthly recipiency of housing assistance				Persons ever participating							
					Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Employed full-time	1,666	1.7	1,451	1.6	5,281	5.6	4,000	4.5	2,702	2.8	1,935	2.2
Employed part-time	539	2.6	571	2.8	2,053	9.8	2,087	10.2	763	3.6	687	3.4
Unemployed	415	8.1	463	8.1	1,666	31.4	2,656	37.4	579	10.9	726	10.2
Not in the Labor force	3,778	6.4	3,142	5.4	11,517	20.5	11,432	20.6	4,230	7.5	3,545	6.4

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table G4. **Median Spell Durations, by Employment and Disability Status: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Employment and disability status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
Employment Status (persons 18 years and over)										
Employed full-time	6.3	5.2	3.5	3.8	5.7	3.9	7.3	5.3	6.9	7.1
Employed part-time	8.2	6.7	6.1	3.9	6.5	4.5	10.8	7.4	13.6	(X)
Unemployed	7.6	4.9	7.3	5.8	7.2	4.2	10.3	9.5	17.4	7.6
Not in the Labor force	11.9	8.9	14.7	10.3	11.9	9.7	(X)	15.1	23.9	(X)
Disability Status (persons 15 to 69 years)										
With a work disability	11.4	9.0	6.8	11.3	9.2	9.8	20.5	12.0	19.7	(X)
With no work disability	7.6	5.2	9.6	5.3	7.8	5.0	9.5	7.3	9.2	7.6

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

than the unemployed and full-time workers.[22] Full-time workers experienced much shorter spells of living in public or subsidized housing than both the unemployed and those out of the labor force, 6.9 months compared with 17.4 and 23.9 months, respectively.[23]

Between the 1987 and 1990 panels, the unemployed experienced significantly increased median spell durations for major programs combined, and for the Food Stamp and housing assistance programs separately. This is partly because of longer spells of unemployment in the later panel.[24] Also, full-time workers were found to have longer food stamp spells during the 1990 panel than during the 1987 panel, 5.7 months compared with 3.9 months.

In 1990, the median sum of benefits from means-tested programs for unemployed workers and persons out of the labor force, while not statistically different from each other, were higher than for those holding full-time or part-time jobs. As table G5 shows, persons out of the labor force had higher AFDC/General Assistance benefits than any of the three labor force

[22]The difference between spell lengths of the unemployed and full-time workers is not significant.

[23]Median housing spell lengths did not differ significantly between the unemployed and those out of the labor force.

[24]Paul Ryscavage found that the median unemployment spell lasted 2.4 months during the 1990 panel, but only 1.8 months during the 1987 panel.

Table G5. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Employment and Disability Status: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Employment and disability status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	Food stamps
Total	418	363	183
Employment Status (persons 18 years and over)			
Employed full-time	216	309	171
Employed part-time	264	277	163
Unemployed	387	317	183
Not in Labor force	385	353	135
Disability Status (persons 15 to 69 years)			
With a work disability	370	317	119
With no work disability	419	354	192

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

groups.[25] Unemployed workers received more generous food stamp benefits than full- and part-time workers and persons out of the labor force.[26]

Disability status. The presence of a work disability in persons 15 to 69 years of age increased the participation rates in major means-tested programs, both separately and combined. Although 6.3 percent of persons without a disability received assistance from one or more programs in an average month in 1990, 20.0 percent of those with a disability did so (table G). About 24.9 percent of persons with a disability participated at least 1 month in 1990, and 16.4 percent participated in all months of 1990 and 1991. The respective proportions for persons without a disability were 8.9 and 3.6 percent (tables G1 and G2).

Again, the relative participation rates reflect differential propensities of being poor. Persons with a work disability were much more likely to be poor than persons with no disability, 17.8 compared with 9.0 percent in an average month of 1990.[27]

Persons with a work disability had longer median spells for major programs combined and for Medicaid than persons without a disability (table G4). For instance, a disabled entrant in the Medicaid program had a median spell duration of 20.5 months as compared with 9.5 months for a person without a disability. AFDC/General Assistance spell durations decreased considerably from 11.3 months during the 1987 panel to 6.8 months during the 1990 panel for persons with a work disability.

Median monthly family benefits from major assistance programs, as well as from the Food Stamp and AFDC/General Assistance programs were significantly higher for persons without a work disability than for persons with a work disability, as can be seen in table G5. In 1990, a work disability was associated with a median monthly family benefit of $370 for participants of major assistance programs. Participants without a work disability received a median benefit of $419 during the same year.

Residence. Persons in central cities were much more likely than persons in suburban areas to participate in means-tested programs in an average month. Persons living outside of metropolitan areas were more likely to participate than suburban residents but were less likely than central city residents to do so (see table H). About 17.3 percent of central city residents participated in a major assistance program during an average month of 1990, followed by 13.3 percent of persons who were living outside a metropolitan area, and 6.8 percent of suburban residents. This pattern also holds for AFDC and General Assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid.

About 21.0 percent of central city residents participated in a means-tested program at some time during 1990, and 12.8 percent participated during all of 1990 and 1991. Suburban residents had the lowest rates of participation: 9.6 percent participated in major assistance programs for at least 1 month in 1990 and 4.2 percent participated all months in 1990 and 1991.

Suburban residents were more likely to receive major means-tested benefits in an average month of 1990 than 1987, 6.8 compared with 6.0 percent as can be seen in table H1. Suburban residents were also more likely to receive housing assistance in 1990 than in 1987. Their average monthly participation rate was 2.2 percent in 1990, and 3.3 percent participated sometime during that year. The comparable rates in 1987 were 1.6 and 2.3 percent. Metropolitan residents as well experienced an increase in the likelihood of receiving housing assistance sometime during the year, from 4.9 percent in 1987 to 5.7 percent in 1990.

[25]Median AFDC benefits of unemployed workers were not significantly different from those of full-time workers, and the latter group's benefits were not significantly different from those of part-time workers.

[26]There was no significant difference in food stamp benefits of full- and part-time workers.

[27]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990-1992*, forthcoming.

Table H. **Program Participation Status, by Residence: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Residence	Average monthly participation								Persons ever participating in major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991 in major means-tested assistance programs[1]	
	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid					
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	28,461	11.5	10,573	4.3	17,136	6.9	19,110	7.7	35,663	14.8	18,093	7.6
Metropolitan	20,888	11.0	8,459	4.4	12,371	6.5	14,266	7.5	25,790	14.0	13,447	7.5
Central city	13,070	17.3	5,922	7.8	8,099	10.7	9,225	12.2	14,938	21.0	8,797	12.8
Non-central city	7,819	6.8	2,537	2.2	4,272	3.7	5,041	4.4	10,852	9.6	4,650	4.2
Nonmetropolitan	7,573	13.3	2,115	3.7	4,765	8.4	4,844	8.5	9,873	17.3	4,645	8.2

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table H1. **Program Participation Status, by Residence: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and residence	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Food stamps				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation												
Total	28,461	11.5	27,412	11.4	17,136	6.9	17,365	7.2	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
Metropolitan	20,888	11.0	19,458	10.6	12,371	6.5	11,671	6.3	8,398	4.4	7,336	4.0
Central city	13,070	17.3	12,925	17.0	8,099	10.7	8,148	10.7	5,899	7.8	5,573	7.3
Non-central city	7,819	6.8	6,532	6.0	4,272	3.7	3,523	3.3	2,499	2.2	1,763	1.6
Nonmetropolitan	7,573	13.3	7,955	14.3	4,765	8.4	5,694	10.2	2,296	4.0	1,886	3.4
Persons Ever Participating												
Total	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	21,941	9.1	24,221	10.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Metropolitan	25,790	14.0	24,208	13.5	15,616	8.5	15,901	8.9	10,463	5.7	8,762	4.9
Central city	14,938	21.0	14,876	20.8	9,597	13.5	10,378	14.5	6,733	9.5	6,336	8.9
Non-central city	10,852	9.6	9,333	8.7	6,019	5.3	5,523	5.1	3,730	3.3	2,426	2.3
Nonmetropolitan	9,873	17.3	10,647	19.1	6,324	11.1	8,320	14.9	3,282	5.8	2,662	4.8

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Nonmetropolitan residents were much less likely to receive food stamps in 1990 than in 1987. About 8.4 percent received food stamps in an average month of 1990, and 11.1 percent did so sometime during the year. The comparable rates for 1987 were 10.2 and 14.9 percent.

The relative participation rates reflect in part the differences in the likelihood of being poor between central city, suburban, and nonmetropolitan residents. In 1990, the average monthly poverty rates for central city and nonmetropolitan residents were similar, 17.6 and 16.4 percent, followed by 8.0 percent for suburban residents.[28]

Median spell lengths of the major means-tested assistance programs combined and of housing assistance programs differed by residence. Specifically, central city residents had longer spells in major programs

[28]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990-1992*, forthcoming.

than their suburban and nonmetropolitan counterparts, as can be seen in table H2.[29] Also, nonmetropolitan residents lived for shorter periods of time in public or subsidized housing than metropolitan residents as a whole, and central city and suburban residents taken separately.[30]

Metropolitan residents in general and central city residents in specific experienced rises in median spell durations of Medicaid and of all major programs combined. Also, persons living in the suburbs had longer median food stamp and housing spells during the 1990 panel than during the 1987 panel.

Median combined family benefits as well as benefits from the individual programs were higher for participants living in central cities than for those living in the suburbs and in nonmetropolitan areas, as can be seen in table H3. Median benefits from major programs amounted to $495 for central city participants, $375 for those living in the suburbs, and $339 for nonmetropolitan residents.

Region. Southern residents were significantly more likely than persons from other regions to have participated at least 1 month of 1990 in one or more major means-tested programs (table H4). About 17.2 percent of persons living in the South participated, compared with 14.2 percent of Westerners, 13.8 percent of persons from the Northeast, and 12.8 percent of persons in the Midwest.[31] Southern residents were also significantly more likely to receive food stamps than residents from other regions. About 11.4 percent received food stamps sometime during 1990, 8.5 percent did so in an average month, and 4.8 percent received food stamps for the entire 1990 and 1991 period. Persons from the South, however, were the least likely to have received AFDC or General Assistance. Only 4.6 percent participated sometime during 1990, compared with 5.6 to 5.8 percent of persons in the other regions.[32] Southerners were also the least likely to participate in AFDC/General Assistance in an average month, as well as to participate the entire 24 months of 1990 and 1991. Residents from the Northeast were significantly more likely than persons from other regions to receive housing assistance in an average month and on a long-term basis. In an average month of 1990, 6.0 percent lived in public or subsidized housing, compared with 4.1 percent of Southerners, 3.9 percent of persons from the Midwest, and 3.5 percent of persons in the West.[33]

Compared with 1987, Southern residents experienced an increase in the likelihood of receiving Medicaid and housing assistance. As can be seen in table H5, about 7.5 percent of Southerners received Medicaid in an average month of 1990, and 9.9 percent received it sometime during that year. The respective numbers for 1987 were 6.2 and 8.2 percent. Average monthly housing assistance increased from 3.4 to 4.1 percent, and the proportion of Southerners who participated sometime during the year in a housing program increased from 4.4 to 5.8 percent.

The higher likelihood of Southerners compared with residents of other regions to receive means-tested assistance reflects their higher poverty rate. The average monthly poverty rate was 15.9 percent in the South,

[29]Nonmetropolitan and suburban residents did not differ significantly.

[30]However, there was no significant difference between all metropolitan residents and their separate parts, central city and suburban residents.

[31]Participation rates of persons from the West, Northeast, and Midwest were not significantly different from one another.

[32]There was no significant difference between Western, Northeastern, and Midwestern residents.

[33]The differences in average monthly and long-term recipiency of housing assistance do not differ statistically between residents of the South, Midwest, and West.

Table H2. **Median Spell Durations, by Residence and Region: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months]

Residence and region	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
Residence								
Metropolitan	7.9	6.2	8.4	6.3	11.1	7.4	16.5	14.5
Central city	10.0	6.7	9.8	7.7	11.3	7.7	16.9	(X)
Non-central city	7.3	5.6	7.7	5.1	10.6	7.3	13.9	8.2
Nonmetropolitan	7.8	6.8	9.6	7.8	9.7	7.3	8.5	6.7
Region								
Northeast	7.7	6.8	11.8	6.1	10.4	8.8	13.0	(X)
Midwest	9.6	3.9	8.9	6.1	12.1	7.9	16.8	7.2
South	7.5	7.2	8.3	7.9	7.8	7.4	16.7	12.5
West	8.3	5.7	8.2	4.0	11.2	6.2	8.8	13.8

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table H3. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Residence: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Residence	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]
Total	418
Metropolitan	449
Central city	495
Non-central city	375
Nonmetropolitan	339

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

followed by the Midwest (11.9 percent) and the West (11.6 percent). The latter two rates were not statistically different from each other. The South had a disproportionately large share of the Nation's poverty population: 42.3 percent of the 1990 average monthly poverty population lived in the South, compared with 34.1 percent of the total U.S. population.[34]

Spell durations of the Food Stamps, Medicaid, and Housing Programs varied by region, as can be seen in table H2. Persons living in the Northeast had longer median food stamp spells than persons living in any of the three other regions.[35] Also, persons living in the West stayed shorter periods of time in public or subsidized housing (8.8 months) than persons in the Midwest (16.8 months) and South (16.7 months).[36] However, Western residents were covered for longer time periods by Medicaid than their Southern counterparts.

Western residents experienced longer food stamp and Medicaid spells, but shorter housing spells during the 1990 panel than during the 1987 panel. For instance, the median food stamp spell duration of Westerners doubled from 4.0 months to 8.2 months. Persons from the Midwest experienced sharp increases in spell durations of all major programs combined and of housing assistance. Their median length of participation in major programs was 2.5 times as long during the later panel, and they lived 2.3 times as long in public or subsidized housing. Southern residents also had longer spells of receiving housing assistance during the 1990 panel (16.7 months) than during the 1987 panel (12.5 months).

The Western region paid the highest median combined benefits from means-tested programs, $622 in 1990, followed by the Northeast with $505, the Midwest with $456, and the South with $305. This pattern also held for AFDC/General Assistance, as can be seen in table H6. SSI benefits followed the same pattern as well, except that the difference between benefits paid to Western and Northeastern residents was not statistically significant. In contrast, Western residents received $139 in median food stamp benefits, far below the $185 received by Northeastern residents, the $198 of Southern residents, and the $199 of Midwestern residents. Median food stamp benefits of persons living in the South were not statistically different from those in the Midwest.

Income status.[37] The data in table I show that poverty and participation in major means-tested assistance programs were indeed closely related. The poor, i.e., those

[34]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-70, No. 42, *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty, 1990 to 1992*, forthcoming.

[35]The other three regions did not differ significantly from each other in food stamp spell length.

[36]The difference between persons in the Midwest and South was not statistically significant.

[37]In calculating average monthly participation, income status was determined by forming the ratio of family income-to-poverty threshold that pertained during the month of participation. In calculating the number of persons who ever participated during a given year, income status was determined by the ratio of total family income during the 12 months of the year to the sum of the 12 monthly poverty thresholds. Likewise, in determining the number of persons who participated all of 1990 and 1991, income status was obtained by forming the ratio of total family income during the 24 months of 1990 and 1991 to the sum of the 24 monthly thresholds.

Table H4. **Program Participation Status, by Region: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Region	Average monthly participation						Persons ever participating						Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991					
	AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Housing assistance		Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Housing assistance	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	10,573	4.3	17,136	6.9	10,694	4.3	35,663	14.8	12,847	5.3	21,941	9.1	5,634	2.4	9,102	3.8	6,475	2.7
Northeast	2,353	4.7	3,180	6.3	3,024	6.0	6,662	13.8	2,724	5.6	3,685	7.6	1,364	2.8	1,831	3.8	1,974	4.1
Midwest	2,866	4.6	3,935	6.4	2,387	3.9	7,939	12.8	3,591	5.8	5,281	8.5	1,567	2.5	2,161	3.5	1,378	2.2
South	2,970	3.5	7,189	8.5	3,488	4.1	14,168	17.2	3,822	4.6	9,389	11.4	1,401	1.8	3,858	4.8	2,057	2.6
West	2,384	4.7	2,833	5.6	1,795	3.5	6,894	14.2	2,711	5.6	3,585	7.4	1,302	2.8	1,252	2.7	1,065	2.3

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.

Table H5. **Program Participation Status, by Region: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and region	Medicaid				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation								
Total	19,110	7.7	17,474	7.3	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
Northeast	3,900	7.8	3,866	8.0	3,024	6.0	2,625	5.4
Midwest	4,511	7.3	4,457	7.4	2,387	3.9	2,345	3.9
South	6,313	7.5	5,065	6.2	3,488	4.1	2,777	3.4
West	4,387	8.6	4,086	8.1	1,795	3.5	1,475	2.9
Persons Ever Participating								
Total	23,355	9.7	21,767	9.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Northeast	4,441	9.2	4,557	9.7	3,540	7.3	2,932	6.3
Midwest	5,590	9.0	5,560	9.2	3,049	4.9	3,011	5.0
South	8,154	9.9	6,521	8.2	4,787	5.8	3,471	4.4
West	5,171	10.6	5,129	10.6	2,369	4.9	2,010	4.1

Table H6. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Region: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Region	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
Northeast	505	420	367	185
Midwest	456	366	265	199
South	305	228	238	198
West	622	628	376	139

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, and food stamps.

with a family income-to-poverty ratio of less than 1.0, were significantly more likely than the nonpoor to participate in each of the means-tested programs examined in this report. They had an average monthly participation rate in major assistance programs of 52.8 percent in 1990, similar to their long-term participation rate of 52.4 percent. In contrast, the rate for the nonpoor was 5.4 percent. The percentages of persons who participated at least 1 month during a given year and of those who participated all months during 1990 and 1991 vary similarly with poverty status. The nonpoor had an 8.3 percent probability to ever participate in 1990 and a 2.8 percent probability to participate during all of 1990 and 1991. The corresponding numbers for the poverty population were 70.5 and 52.4 percent.

The nonpoor were significantly more likely to participate in one or more means-tested programs in 1990 than in 1987 as can be seen in table I1. In 1987, 7.5 percent of the nonpoor participated sometime during the year, and 4.8 percent participated in an average month. In 1990, the respective proportions were 8.3 and 5.4 percent. The poor, however, became less likely to ever participate in a major means-tested program during the year, 74.4 percent in 1987 compared with 70.5 percent in 1990. The poor also became less likely to ever receive food stamps.

Medicaid participation of the nonpoor increased over the same time period. In 1987, 3.8 percent were covered by Medicaid sometime during the year, and 2.6 percent were covered during an average month. In 1990, coverage had increased to 4.6 and 3.1 percent, respectively.

Both the poor and the nonpoor were more likely in 1990 than in 1987 to live in public or subsidized housing for 1 or more months. While 2.6 percent of the nonpoor and 23.6 percent of the poor received such assistance during 1987, these percentages rose to 3.1 and 28.2 percent, respectively. In addition, there was an increase in the likelihood of the poor to receive housing assistance in an average month, from 16.3 percent in 1987 to 19.5 percent in 1990.

Premeans-tested income consists of cash income prior to the inclusion of means-tested cash benefits.

Table I. **Participation in Major Means-Tested Programs, by Income Status: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands. Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Income status	Average monthly participation		Persons ever participating		Persons participating all 24 months of 1990 and 1991	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	28,461	11.5	35,663	14.8	18,093	7.6
Family Income-to-Poverty Ratio						
Under 1.00	16,805	52.8	17,711	70.5	11,985	52.4
1.00 and above	11,657	5.4	17,952	8.3	6,108	2.8
Family Premeans-Tested Income-to-Poverty Ratio[1]						
Under 1.00	18,968	55.0	20,043	72.2	13,687	53.3
Under .50	12,726	67.0	11,739	86.6	9,452	76.8
.50 to .74	3,300	47.9	3,983	66.7	2,405	41.7
.75 to .99	2,941	34.2	4,321	52.4	1,830	24.1
1.00 and above	9,494	4.5	15,620	7.3	4,406	2.1
1.00 to 1.24	2,214	20.7	3,393	35.4	1,303	13.4
1.25 to 1.49	1,562	13.3	2,826	24.7	846	7.7
1.50 to 1.99	2,061	8.3	3,050	12.4	868	3.6
2.00 to 2.99	2,051	4.0	3,645	7.0	891	1.7
3.00 and over	1,605	1.4	2,707	2.3	498	0.4
Family Pre-Transfer Income-to-Poverty Ratio[2]						
Under 1.00	21,100	40.6	23,077	52.5	15,117	36.2
Under .50	16,671	48.2	16,242	60.2	12,229	49.0
50 to .74	2,475	29.7	3,395	43.7	1,627	21.4
.75 to .99	1,954	21.6	3,440	37.2	1,261	13.8
1.00 and above	7,361	3.8	12,586	6.4	2,976	1.5
1.00 to 1.24	1,623	15.1	2,589	24.8	844	8.4
1.25 to 1.49	1,071	9.7	2,129	19.7	527	4.8
1.50 to 1.99	1,680	7.2	2,607	11.2	493	2.2
2.00 to 2.99	1,607	3.5	2,900	6.2	732	1.6
3.00 and over	1,381	1.3	2,361	2.2	380	0.4

[1]Based on money income excluding means-tested government cash transfers.
[2]Based on money income excluding government cash transfers.

This concept allows us to look at poverty counts and rates that would exist in the absence of means-tested programs. As can be seen in table I, the ratios of premeans-tested income-to-poverty thresholds were negatively correlated with average monthly participation in means-tested programs over the whole range of observations, ranging from a 67.0 percent participation rate for those with family premeans-tested incomes of less than one-half of their respective thresholds to a participation rate of 1.4 percent for those with premeans-tested incomes of three times the poverty level or more. The same held true for persons who participated 1 month or more during 1990: Those with premeans-tested income of less than one-half of their thresholds had a participation rate of 86.6 percent, compared with 2.3 percent for those with a income-to-poverty ratio of 3 or more. This negative relationship did not exist over the whole range of values, if means-tested transfer income was taken into account, due to the redistributional effects of transfer payments.

The neediest persons, those with a pre-transfer income-to-poverty ratio of less than 0.5, experienced a decreased probability of ever participating in one or more means-tested programs in 1990 when compared with 1987. Although 65.0 percent participated sometime in 1987, only 60.2 percent did so in 1990 (table I1).

The median spell durations of persons who were poor at the onset of a spell exceeded those of nonpoor persons for all means-tested programs, with the possible exception of SSI (table I2).[38] Most pronounced was the difference between the poor and the nonpoor in the median duration of a housing assistance spell, 23.1 months compared with 8.6 months.

The poor experienced increases in durations of the major programs combined and of the Food Stamps Program from the 1987 to the 1990 panel. As can be seen in table I2, a median food stamp spell of the poor lasted 7.8 months during the 1987 panel but 10.6 months during the 1990 panel.

As shown in table I3, median family benefits from one or more major assistance program were substantially

[38]Both poor and nonpoor had median SSI spell durations exceeding 30 months.

Table I1. **Program Participation Status, by Income Status: 1990 and 1987**

[Numbers in thousands. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Participation and income status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]				Food stamps				Medicaid				Housing assistance			
	1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987		1990		1987	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Average Monthly Participation																
Total	28,461	11.5	27,412	11.4	17,136	6.9	17,365	7.2	19,110	7.7	17,474	7.3	10,694	4.3	9,222	3.8
Family Income-to-Poverty Ratio																
Under 1.00	16,805	52.8	17,354	54.3	13,235	41.6	14,143	44.2	12,364	38.9	12,071	37.7	6,202	19.5	5,219	16.3
1.00 and above	11,657	5.4	10,058	4.8	3,901	1.8	3,222	1.6	6,746	3.1	5,402	2.6	4,492	2.1	4,003	1.9
Persons Ever Participating																
Total	35,663	14.8	34,856	14.8	21,941	9.1	24,221	10.3	23,355	9.7	21,767	9.3	13,745	5.7	11,424	4.9
Family Income-to-Poverty Ratio																
Under 1.00	17,711	70.5	19,082	74.4	14,889	59.2	16,914	65.9	13,464	53.6	13,745	53.6	7,095	28.2	6,061	23.6
1.00 and above	17,952	8.3	15,773	7.5	7,051	3.3	7,307	3.5	9,891	4.6	8,022	3.8	6,650	3.1	5,363	2.6
Family Pre-Transfer Income-to-Poverty Ratio[2]																
Under 1.00	23,077	52.5	24,101	54.6	17,372	39.5	19,482	44.1	17,238	39.2	17,012	38.5	8,949	20.3	7,758	17.6
Under .50	16,242	60.2	18,247	65.0	12,465	46.2	14,769	52.6	13,474	49.9	14,263	50.8	6,811	25.2	6,142	21.9
.50 to .74	3,395	43.7	3,083	41.9	2,472	31.8	2,419	32.9	2,021	26.0	1,704	23.1	1,133	14.6	734	10.0
.75 to .99	3,440	37.2	2,772	31.9	2,435	26.4	2,293	26.4	1,743	18.9	1,045	12.0	1,005	10.9	881	10.2
1.00 and above	12,586	6.4	10,754	5.6	4,569	2.3	4,740	2.5	6,117	3.1	4,755	2.5	4,796	2.4	3,666	1.9
1.00 to 1.24	2,589	24.8	2,612	26.9	1,471	14.1	1,791	18.5	1,320	12.6	912	9.4	686	6.6	738	7.6
1.25 to 1.49	2,129	19.7	1,753	17.0	977	9.0	1,328	12.9	968	8.9	724	7.0	825	7.6	363	3.5
1.50 to 1.99	2,607	11.2	2,306	10.9	886	3.8	928	4.4	1,374	5.9	1,214	5.7	954	4.1	808	3.8
2.00 to 2.99	2,900	6.2	2,264	5.0	831	1.8	503	1.1	1,507	3.2	999	2.2	1,115	2.4	964	2.1
3.00 and over	2,361	2.2	1,820	1.7	404	0.4	189	0.2	947	0.9	905	0.9	1,216	1.1	794	0.8

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Based on money income excluding government cash transfers.

higher for poor participants than for nonpoor participants, $451 compared with $342 in 1990. However, while poor participants received higher food stamp benefits than their nonpoor counterparts, they received lower AFDC/General Assistance benefits than the nonpoor.[39] Categorical food stamp eligibility of AFDC recipients results in a higher likelihood of multiple program participation of the poor than the nonpoor.

Table I3 also depicts median family benefits of participants by detailed categories of family premeans-tested cash income-to-poverty ratios. As expected, median benefits from means-tested programs were related to the "severity" of poverty prior to the receipt of means-tested assistance. In 1990, median benefits ranged from $188 for those with a premeans-tested income-to-poverty ratio between .75 and .99 to $564 for those with a ratio below .50. This pattern also held for the Food Stamp program.

[39]Since income includes any AFDC/General Assistance payments, higher benefits result in higher income and a lower probability of being poor, everything else constant.

Looking at participants in means-tested programs, a significantly larger proportion of the poor than the nonpoor received over one-half of their monthly income from benefits (table I4). In 1990, 66.2 percent of the poor participants had incomes consisting mostly of benefits, but only 15.0 percent of the nonpoor participants had such incomes. Furthermore, 41.9 percent of all poor participants had incomes consisting solely of benefits in 1990, compared with 5.7 percent of all nonpoor participants.

FUTURE REPORTS

Nonmeans-Tested Benefits

The descriptive analysis in this report does not cover the key social insurance programs of Social Security or Railroad retirement income, nonmeans-tested Veterans' compensation or pensions, and unemployment compensation. However, data on these programs are included in the detailed tables, and future reports will be expanded to include such a discussion.

Table I2. **Median Spell Durations, by Income Status: 1990 and 1987 Panels**

[Numbers in months. Bases for percentages can be found in the detailed tables]

Income status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]		AFDC or General Assistance		Food stamps		Medicaid		Housing assistance	
	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel	1990 panel	1987 panel
Total	7.9	6.4	10.4	7.5	8.8	6.9	10.6	7.4	15.6	12.6
Family Income-to-Poverty Ratio										
Under 1.00	10.4	7.4	12.1	9.3	10.6	7.8	12.2	10.7	23.1	(X)
1.00 and above	7.1	4.1	6.7	4.8	6.0	3.9	8.0	4.4	8.6	8.7
Family Premeans-Tested Income-to-Poverty Ratio[2]										
Under 1.00	10.6	7.3	11.6	7.9	10.4	8.0	13.0	9.8	(X)	(X)
Under .50	11.9	7.2	15.4	9.6	12.7	8.3	17.3	11.3	(X)	14.9
.50 to .74	9.1	7.3	4.3	7.7	8.7	7.2	11.7	8.6	7.8	(X)
.75 to .99	8.7	8.0	3.8	4.1	8.2	9.7	9.8	7.8	23.1	(X)
1.00 and above	7.0	4.2	7.1	4.7	5.5	3.8	7.7	4.1	7.3	7.6
1.00 to 1.24	7.5	4.9	4.4	6.5	5.7	3.8	7.7	4.8	(X)	(X)
1.25 to 1.49	10.0	6.2	(X)	(B)	5.1	3.8	11.9	6.1	11.4	7.9
1.50 to 1.99	7.1	6.2	5.2	17.1	5.1	3.2	7.6	4.0	6.9	10.1
2.00 to 2.99	4.0	3.9	6.0	5.1	7.2	3.8	6.0	4.0	4.1	6.0
3.00 and over	4.1	3.9	4.0	3.7	6.2	5.1	7.0	3.8	4.6	5.4

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, and housing assistance.
[2]Based on money income excluding means-tested government cash transfers.

Table I3. **Median Monthly Family Benefits, by Income Status: 1990**

[Numbers in dollars]

Income status	Major means-tested assistance programs[1]	AFDC or General Assistance	SSI	Food stamps
Total	418	363	300	183
Family Income-to-Poverty Ratio				
Under 1.00	451	359	225	199
1.00 and above	342	386	341	146
Family Premeans-Tested Income-to-Poverty Ratio[2]				
Under 1.00	471	373	343	195
Under .50	564	382	385	209
.50 to .74	230	317	138	180
.75 to .99	188	290	219	145
1.00 and above	254	312	256	145
1.00 to 1.24	188	312	199	148
1.25 to 1.49	239	286	327	144
1.50 to 1.99	262	312	256	148
2.00 to 2.99	311	309	253	148
3.00 and over	293	341	256	110

[1]Major means-tested assistance programs include AFDC or General Assistance, SSI and food stamps.
[3]Based on money income excluding means-tested government cash transfers.

Valuation of Noncash Benefits

Over the last decade, the Census Bureau has developed experimental methods to value some types of noncash benefits (such as Medicaid, public or subsidized housing, free or reduced-price school lunches). Thus far, these valuation efforts have been restricted to the Current Population Survey. We are currently working toward transferring these valuation techniques to the SIPP. Thus, future SIPP analyses of the effect of means-tested transfer programs on economic well-being will be enhanced by the inclusion of more types of benefits.

Table I4. **Average Monthly Participation in Means-Tested Programs, by Monthly Family Benefits as a Percent of Family Income and Poverty Status: 1990**

[Numbers in thousands]

Poverty status and monthly family benefits as a percent of family income[1]	Number	Percent distribution
All Persons		
Total	22,474	100.0
Under 50 percent	11,488	51.1
50 percent and above	10,987	48.9
100 percent	6,654	29.6
Poor		
Total	14,863	100.0
Under 50 percent	5,022	33.8
50 percent and above	9,842	66.2
100 percent	6,221	41.9
Nonpoor		
Total	7,611	100.0
Under 50 percent	6,466	85.0
50 percent and above	1,145	15.0
100 percent	433	5.7

[1]Benefits from means-tested programs included AFDC or General Assistance, SSI, food stamps, WIC, and means-tested veterans' compensation and pensions. Family income includes the value of food stamps and WIC.

Program Participation and Eligibility

It is important to track program eligibility and program participation rates by various characteristics of the eligible population in order to examine the reason for changes in participation rates. For example, the food stamp caseload increased rapidly in the early 1990's, and it is not known whether the increase was the result of an increase in the eligible population or an increase in participation rates of eligible units.

Preliminary research exploring the relationship of eligibility compared with participation for AFDC, Food Stamps, and SSI has been initiated at the Census Bureau. This research consists of modeling eligibility by various characteristics and exploring the ways eligibility and participation vary among the three programs. Future work improving and expanding these eligibility models and testing the sensitivity of their results to both program changes and model changes is currently being planned.

Quality of SIPP Data on Transfer Income

The Census Bureau is currently developing a "Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing" (CAPI) instrument that will replace the current instrument starting with the 1996 panel. Continuous efforts are made to decrease the under- and misreporting of transfer income. For example, although respondents prior to the 1996 panel could report that "all" persons were covered by another person's allotment, they are asked to list covered persons separately in the new instrument. This might decrease recipiency misreporting substantially. Also, greater insistence on persons using records to facilitate reporting of recipiency and corresponding amounts might decrease the degree of underreporting.