

Adding COVID-19 Questions to the Current Population Survey (CPS)

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Objectives

- Describe basic CPS background
- Discuss the development of new questions
- Provide an overview of the programming, testing, and fielding of the new questions
- Point you to highlights of the data



Current Population Survey (CPS)

- Primary source of information on the U.S. labor force, employment, and unemployment
- Provides labor force data by a wide variety of demographic and job characteristics
- Monthly survey of about 60,000 households collected in-person and by phone (with both self and proxy response)
- Data published about 2 weeks after collection
- Joint venture by BLS and Census Bureau



Can you add questions to a major federal survey in 2 months?

- Clear need for additional information about the labor market that CPS could provide
- Precedent of adding questions to track Hurricane Katrina evacuees
- Different constraints and challenges this time
- Budget and increased respondent burden are important to consider

Constraints for adding questions

- Development of questions began in mid-March, during a maximum telework posture across the federal government
- Specific criteria for development
 - ▶ Only four questions
 - ▶ Simple questions without complex skip patterns or fills
 - ▶ Fielded in May, with ongoing collection
 - ▶ Supplement data already available from the CPS and be able to shed light on labor market effects of the pandemic

Unique challenges

- Work being done very quickly in all-telework environment
- Pandemic still emerging and evolving during development
 - ▶ Craft questions to endure without knowing future needs or relevancy
 - ▶ What terminology were people using?
- Regular processing of the survey and changing labor market conditions also consuming resources

COVID question topics

- Telework
- People unable to work due to (temporary) pandemic-related shutdowns
- Pay status of those unable to work
- People unable to look for work
- Activity “in the last 4 weeks”



Beyond the questions

- Emergency OMB authorization
- Programming the questions (Census)
- Testing the questions
- Publication plan



Cognitive testing

- New questions are tested by BLS survey methodologists to conform with OMB guidelines for statistical surveys
- Traditional testing not an option this time
- Expert review provided by BLS staff before submitting questions to Census
- Limited testing pursued after questions were fielded



LOGISTICS OF FIELDING NEW QUESTIONS

1. Starting Block: Questionnaire
2. Develop a Data Collection Instrument
3. Test the Data Collection Instrument
4. Train the Field Representatives and Staff
5. Collect the Information
6. Edit the Resulting Data

The Starting Block



- ✓ Questions developed and tested by industry experts
- ✓ Final questions decided and provided to the Census Bureau
- ✓ Who gets what question?
- ✓ Skip paths included

Data Collection Instrument

Options to Consider Prior to Programming



Do we program the new questions as part of the “Core CPS” set of questions?

Prefer to avoid disruptions to the Core CPS flow, if possible.

Do we program them as a “supplemental collection” to the CPS?

Not as a true “supplement” (such as Disability, Veterans)

As a stand-alone block of questions, separated from the Core.

Placement of the New Questions

✓ Considered simultaneously with the previous options (part of the Core vs. as a supplement)

Place new questions in the Front, Middle, or End, or the Basic Core CPS?

- *Decided to place them at the end of the CPS*
- *After all eligible persons completed the labor force section*

New questions' reference period differed from Basic Core CPS, thus dictating the placement.

Incorporating the Questions into the CPS Instrument

Converted questionnaire into Instrument Specs quickly
BLAISE® Instrument programmed, ready for testing
Programmed within a few days
Testing began immediately

```
252   changePhotoDescription( cell ) {  
253     document.getElementById( 'bigimageDesc' ).innerHTML = descriptions[page * 9 + cell - 1];  
254   }  
255   function updatePhotoDescription() {  
256     if ( descriptions.length > (page * 9) + (currentImageSubsting[9] - 1) ) {  
257       document.getElementById( 'bigimageDesc' ).innerHTML = descriptions[page * 9 + currentImageSubsting[9] - 1];  
258     }  
259   }  
260   function updateAllImages() {  
261     var i = 1;  
262     while ( i < 10 ) {  
263       var elementId = 'foto' + i;  
264       var elementIdBig = 'bigimage' + i;  
265       if ( page * 9 + i - 1 < photos.length ) {  
266         document.getElementById( elementId ).src = 'images/' + photos[page * 9 + i - 1].src + '.jpg';  
267         document.getElementById( elementIdBig ).src = 'images/' + photos[page * 9 + i - 1].src + '.jpg';  
268       }
```

Testing the Instrument



Created “scenarios” necessary for proper testing

Employed, Unemployed, Not in Labor Force went down different paths

Ensured accurate output data from the instrument

Conducted an ‘in-house’ systems test

To ensure various data processing systems ran without error

To ensure accurate data output after data processing

New questions successfully incorporated into the CPS in May 2020

How the Questions appear within the CPS Instrument - Telework

At any time in the LAST 4 WEEKS, did Jennifer Tyler telework or work at home for pay BECAUSE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC?

♦ Enter No if person worked entirely from home before the Coronavirus pandemic.

☐ 1. Yes

☐ 2. No

How the Questions appear within the CPS Instrument - Employer Closed

At any time in the LAST 4 WEEKS, were you unable to work because your EMPLOYER CLOSED OR LOST BUSINESS due to the Coronavirus?

♦ Enter Yes for the self-employed who lost work or customers because of the Coronavirus pandemic

- ☒ 1. Yes
- ☐ 2. No

How the Questions appear within the CPS Instrument - Paid for Lost Work

Did you receive any pay from your **EMPLOYER** for the hours you **DID NOT** work in last 4 weeks?

♦ Enter No if self-employed and received no pay from customers

☐ 1. Yes

☒ 2. No

How the Questions appear within the CPS Instrument - Prevent Looking for Work

Did the Coronavirus pandemic prevent Courtney Adams from looking for work in the LAST 4 WEEKS?

-
- ☐ 1. Yes
☒ 2. No

How the Questions appear within the CPS Instrument - Need Medical Care

At any time in the last 4 weeks, did you or anyone in your household need medical care for something other than Coronavirus, but not get it because of the Coronavirus pandemic? Please include all adults and children in the household.

♦ Enter NO if all persons in the household voluntarily cancelled or delayed medical care for themselves or another household member.

☐ 1. Yes

☒ 2. No

Field Representative Instructions

To explain the purpose of the new questions and uses of the resulting data

Quick development needed for use prior to May interviews

Inform Regional Office Management



The Finish Line: Editing the Resulting Data



For Unit and Item Nonresponse, Allocation performed

Edited data (from May collection) provided for the first time, in mid-June

For June data collection, edited data provided soon after June collection

Further steps

- Weighting, allocation, and editing
- Publication
 - ▶ Develop tables
 - ▶ Review data
 - ▶ Develop standard errors
 - ▶ Analysis
 - ▶ Integrate into Employment Situation news release

Publishing data from the new questions

- BLS first published data for the first 4 questions online
 - ▶ www.bls.gov/cps/effects-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic.htm
- Data for May and June were published together, with new monthly data added for July
- Data for August were added to the monthly Employment Situation news release

Contact Information

www.bls.gov/cps/effects-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic.htm

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