The National Academies of SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL STATISTICS

Creating the American Opportunity Study: A New Tool to Study Trends in Social Mobility

Carol House - CNSTAT; Michael Hout - New York University; Trent Alexander, Amy O'Hara - U.S. Bureau of the Census; Jonathan Fisher, David Grusky, Aliya Saperstein, and Matthew Snipp - Stanford University

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Why Study Trends in Social Mobility?

- Long-standing commitment to free and open competition in the labor market
- Belief that opportunities to get ahead are widely available
- But massive changes in recent decades



Why Study Trends in Social Mobility?

We are now asking

"to what extent do the conditions and circumstances of early life constrain success in adulthood?"

Inadequate Tools to Study Social Mobility

- Longitudinal data is required
- Inadequate sample sizes in ongoing longitudinal surveys
- Last large-scale survey of social mobility was fielded in 1973
- Some recent work in using administrative data - Chetty, 2014



Envisioning a New Tool

- Workshop in 2013 with subsequent planning meetings
- Special issue of the Annals of the American Academy of political and Social Science

Envisioning a New Tool

- De facto intergenerational panel exists
 - the decennial censuses
 - potential to add depth by linking survey and administrative data

Few users have linked components together

American Opportunity Study

Project initiated by National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

- funding from the Carnegie Corp of New York
- working with Census Bureau and universities
- Envisions linking on-demand for approved projects - no permanently stored, pre-linked database



Census Infrastructure

 Census Bureau has initiated the Census Longitudinal Infrastructure Project (CLIP)

- PIKs have been assigned to
 - 2000 and 2010 Censuses
 - More recent surveys such as SIPP, CPS, ACS
 - Administrative data from federal and state sources

American Opportunity Study

Goals

- Work within the CLIP infrastructure
- Add the 1990 Census
- Provide expertise to explore improved matching and linkage
- Assist in identifying key longitudinal research opportunities

All work involving census data and names is conducted within a Census facility by individuals who have been certified as sworn agents.

1990 Census

- Names were handwritten on Census form but not captured electronically
- All other variables captured and available in microdata file
- Census forms exist on rolls of microfilm



Step One – Scanning

- More than 120,000 reels of microfilm
 - $-\sim62,000$ for short form
 - ~62,000 for long form
- Using 2 microfilm scanners
- ~500 reels (same on each scanner)

Housed at Census National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, IN

Step Two - Optical Character Recognition

- Optically read names from scanned pages
- Forms not designed to assist in optical reading of names
- Age and handwriting adds difficulty



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Person # Last Name First Name Middle Initial

11-digit Household ID

- Working with vendors
- Matching first name to "known first names" and last name to "known last names"
- Retaining multiple possible matches
- Census Bureau created a dictionary of names to generate the match probabilities

Step Three – PIK, Match & Link

- Append PIKs to 1990 names using Census Bureau methodology
- Match and link names across censuses using the PIK identifier

Beyond the 1990 Census

 Experiment with alternative linkage and matching methodology

Identify broad range of uses

Generate excitement and support

More to come!!