

## Reporting of SSA Program Participation in SIPP

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### Abstract

This paper uses survey reports linked to administrative records to evaluate misreporting about benefits provided by the Social Security Administration. We investigate how frequently respondents report social security benefits but misidentify the specific program that provided the benefits. This type of mistake accounts for a large portion of the discrepancy between survey and administrative data about participation in these programs.

**Key Words:** Administrative records, program participation, Social Security, Survey of Income and Program Participation, measurement error

### 1. Introduction

This paper documents the extent of agreement between reports in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) about participation in SSA programs and records from the Social Security Administration (SSA). We compare reporting from four panels of the SIPP to administrative data about benefit payments to individual SIPP sample persons under the Social Security (OASDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs.

Under-reporting in the SIPP about participation in these programs is non-trivial for OASDI and substantial for SSI. In the 2008 SIPP Panel, the rate of false negative reporting (survey reports that do not corroborate administratively recorded payments) is 6.7% for OASDI and 28.3% for SSI.

We show that a primary cause of these discrepancies is that survey reports often misidentify which of these two programs provided the benefits. We measure the impact of these errors by creating counter-factual estimates of disagreement rates that correct program misidentifications but not false reports of participation in neither program. The counter-factual false negative and false positive rates are lower than unadjusted rates by more than a quarter for OASDI and by more than a half for SSI.

This mechanism behind under-reporting of SSA programs in SIPP cannot be reduced to social desirability bias, the desire on the part of respondents to avoid reporting potentially stigmatized behavior, such as participating in government programs. While certain aspects of the SIPP interview are likely to produce social desirability bias,<sup>1</sup> there is likely little difference in stigma of participating in one SSA program rather than another. Misidentification of specific SSA administrative programs<sup>2</sup> are more likely to be a product of cognitive mistakes than social pressures.

This paper advances the literature on agreement between the SIPP and SSA administrative data. Marquis and Moore (1990) calculate false negative and false positive rates between the 1984 SIPP panel and SSA data. Huynh, Rupp, and Sears (2002) investigate program misidentification and misreporting of benefit amounts in the 1993 and 1996 SIPP

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<sup>1</sup>SIPP is administered by an interviewer and addresses potentially sensitive questions (Presser and Stinson 1998)

<sup>2</sup>SSI is an SSA-administered program.

panels. Sears and Rupp (2003) update the analysis of Huynh et al. for the 2001 SIPP panel. In this paper, we present both disagreement rates (false negative and false positive rates) and rates of program misidentification for the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 SIPP panels, and take the additional step of assessing the impact of program misidentification on the disagreement rates.

## 2. Data

We compare reports from four SIPP panels (1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008)<sup>3</sup> about receipt of OASDI and SSI benefits to SSA administrative data on these program. We focus on the first wave of each panel, and restrict attention to the single calendar month in common across the four rotation groups. Table 1 presents the calendar month of data studied for each panel and the sample sizes for each panel. Table 1 also presents the proportions of each sample in three person-level response categories, and the item-nonresponse rates for the OASDI and SSI survey questions.

The linking key for merging the SIPP data to administrative data is the Protected Identification Key (PIK), a masked version of the Social Security Number (SSN). The crosswalk file that corresponds SIPP identifiers with PIKs is a restricted-use Census Bureau data file produced using the Census Bureau's Person Identification Verification System (PVS). Wagner and Layne (2014) provide a detailed explanation of the PVS. Some SIPP sample persons do not consent for their survey responses to be linked to administrative records, so no PIK is attributed to these persons in the crosswalk file. Nor is the PVS successful at linking every respondent who does give consent. Table 1 presents the rate of PIK assignment for the wave 1 sample persons in each panel. For the 2008 Panel, the linking rate of sample persons 18 or older is 89.6%.

To produce nationally representative estimates, we adjust the published final person-month weights and replicate weights for each panel to account for observable selection in non-assignment of PIK. The adjustment consists of estimating a probit model for the presence of a PIK and then dividing the published survey weight for each observation by the predicted probability from the model. This gives relatively more weight to the linked sample persons who were more similar on observables to the unlinked sample persons. This probit model includes the survey variables about OASDI and SSI participation and indicators for person-level and item-level non-response. Table A1 presents the estimated coefficients of the model for each of the four panels.

We use data from two SSA administrative data files: extracts from the Payment History Update System (PHUS) and the Supplemental Security Record (SSR). The PHUS is a month-by-month record of SSA payments of OASDI benefits to recipients. The SSR is a month-by-month record of SSA payments of Supplemental Security Income benefits to recipients. The SSA uniquely identifies beneficiaries in these data by their SSN. The Census Bureau replaces SSN identifiers with the corresponding PIK in the version of these files available to Census Bureau researchers.

SSI is a federal program, but some State governments supplement the federal benefit amount. In some cases, the SSA still administers the benefit. In addition to information about benefits from the Federal SSI program, the SSR includes information about State SSI for states which opt to have their State SSI program administered by the SSA. We employ measures of SSI receipt constructed from the SSR that reflect benefits from either or both

<sup>3</sup>The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a nationally representative household panel survey began in 1984 with a sequence of panels each with a fresh sample and lasting 2 to 6 years. Up through the 2008 Panel, each sampled household was interviewed every four months. Visit [www.census.gov/sipp](http://www.census.gov/sipp) for more information.

of the Federal and State programs. When comparing SSI *amounts* between the survey and the SSR, we restrict attention to states for which State SSI is SSA-administered.

### 3. Method

We estimate, by panel and program, several measures of agreement between survey and administrative data. We classify each linked program-specific fact-of-receipt report as: true positive (TP) if the administrative record and survey report both indicate receipt, true negative (TN) if both sources indicate no receipt, false positive (FP) if there is no administrative record of survey-reported receipt, or false negative (FN) if the administratively recorded receipt is not reported in the survey.

We estimate fact-of-receipt agreement rates for each program as the sum of TP and TN counts as a percentage of the count of all linked reports. The FN rate is the FN count expressed as a percentage of the sum of FN and TP counts. The FN rate is the percent of the administratively-recorded participation in not reported in the survey. The FP rate is the FP count expressed as a percentage the sum of FP and TP counts. The FP rate is the percentage of the survey reported participation that is not corroborated in the administrative records.

For TP reports, we estimate the mean absolute deviation between administratively-recorded and survey-reported benefit amounts. Dollars amount are expressed as CY2001 dollars using the CPI-U.

To investigate the extent to which respondents misidentify the SSI and OASDI programs in reporting receipt of benefits, we divide the linked sample persons into four categories based on the administrative data. A linked sample person with non-imputed data on fact-of-receipt for both programs is coded as participating in both programs, neither program, OASDI only, or SSI only according to the administrative records. For each of these categories, we tabulate the proportion of the sample persons who reported participating in both programs, neither program, OASDI only, and SSI only.

To investigate the impact of misidentification of benefit source, we estimate counterfactual FN and FP rates in which we correct survey reports about which program provides benefits received. We only do this for cases in which SSA benefits are reported but, the program is misidentified. We do not correct any reports of no benefit. A respondent who is actually getting only SSI, but reports receiving only OASDI or receiving both programs would have their report corrected. A respondent who is actually receiving only SSI but reports not receiving any SSA benefit would not have their report corrected. This approach allows us to isolate the discrepancy between administrative and survey data that remains after accounting for misidentification of program.

We estimate standard errors using Fay's method with 108 replicate weights, a replicate factor of 0.5, and the mean squared error formula.<sup>4</sup> We test the equality of estimates using two-sided t-tests of equality of means and consider rejection of equality at the 10% level to indicate a statistically significant difference.

### 4. Results

The rate of overall agreement between reported and recorded OASDI participation is slightly lower in the 2008 Panel than in the earlier panels (see Table 2). The OASDI FN rate in 2008 Panel (6.7%) is higher than in the earlier panels. The OASDI FP rate for the 2008 Panel (4%) is higher than 2004 but is not different than in the 2001 or 1996 Panels. The mean

<sup>4</sup>See <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/methodology/sampling-error.html>.

absolute deviation between recorded and reported OASDI benefit amount is higher in the 2008 Panel than in the 2001 and 1996 Panels, but is not different than in the 2004 Panel.

The rate of overall agreement between reported and recorded SSI participation is lower in the 2008 Panel than in the earlier panels (see Table 2). The SSI false negative rate in 2008 Panel (28.3%) is higher than in the earlier panels. The FP rate (24.9%) is higher in the 2008 Panel than in the earlier panels. The mean absolute deviation between recorded and reported SSI benefit amount is higher in the 2008 Panels than in the earlier panels.

We find evidence of misidentification of SSA programs in SIPP. Across panels, for SSI FN reports, up to 15% of sample persons recorded in the SSA data as receiving SSI benefits but not OASDI benefits (SSI only) report receiving OASDI benefits but not SSI benefits (see Table 3). This proportion is higher in the 2008 Panel than in the 1996 and 2001 Panels. Across panels, up to 5% of the SSI-only group report receiving both benefits.

For OASDI, across panels, up to 1.7% of those receiving OASDI benefits only reported receiving only SSI benefits (see Table 3). Another small fraction (0.3 to 0.6% across panels) of the OASDI-only group reported receiving benefits from both sources.

Counter-factual estimates of FN and FP rates for OASDI and SSI that correct for misidentification of source of benefit payment indicate that misidentification of program explains a substantial portion of FN and FP discrepancies. The OASDI FN rate for 2008 Panel is reduced 31% from 6.7% to 4.6% when misidentification of benefits is corrected (see Table 4). The OASDI FN rates for the other panels are also reduced by 27 to 32% by the correction. The OASDI FP rates across panels are reduced by 26 to 35% by the correction.

For SSI, the reduction in FN and FP rates between the counter-factual and actual estimates are even more dramatic. The counter-factual SSI FN and FP rates for the 2008 Panel are 61 and 68% lower, respectively, than the actual rates (see Table 4). For the other panels the reductions range from 50 to 68%.

## 5. Conclusion

Misidentification of benefit source between the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income programs is an important explanation for misreporting in SIPP of participation in these programs. When this type of error is corrected, misreporting rates for OASDI fall 26 to 35% and, for SSI, 50 to 68%.

The findings suggest that stigma about program participation can explain only a limited portion of under-reporting for these programs as it is unlikely that stigma can explain reporting benefits from one SSA program over another.

Among the sources of misreporting, misidentification of programs may be relatively straightforward for the Census Bureau to address. Survey questions about these programs could be refined to better differentiate between the programs, and training of interviewers could draw a clearer distinction between the programs.

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**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics

	2008	2004	2001	1996
Month	August	January	January	March
Size of 18+ sample	105,476	110,467	90,260	95,141
Size of 18+ linked sample	94,480	85,739	46,199	79,505
Linking rate	0.896	0.776	0.512	0.836
Self-reports	0.684	0.679	0.687	0.717
Proxy-reports	0.297	0.311	0.303	0.274
Person-level nonresponse	0.018	0.010	0.009	0.009
Imputation rate: OASDI receipt	0.023	0.015	0.016	0.014
Imputation rate: OASDI benefit amount	0.158	0.159	0.123	0.100
Imputation rate: SSI receipt	0.022	0.013	0.016	0.013
Imputation rate: SSI benefit amount	0.172	0.142	0.104	0.088

The table presents unweighted descriptive statistics for the indicated SIPP panels. The statistics describe the subsample of SIPP sample persons aged 18 years with valid linking identifiers (PIKs). The rows labeled self, proxy, and person-nonresponse give the distribution of the linked sample across these mutually-exclusive and collectively-exhaustive person-level response categories. The imputation rates reflect imputation for item- and person-nonresponse. The imputation flag for fact-of-receipt for the programs is in universe for all sample persons aged 18 years or older. The imputation flags for the benefit amount variables are in scope only for those for whom the survey data (reported or imputed) indicates receipt of benefit under the corresponding program.

SIPP data are from the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels of SIPP. See <http://www.census.gov/sipp> for source and accuracy information.

**Table 2:** Agreement rates

	2008 Panel	2004 Panel	2001 Panel	1996 Panel
Overall agreement: OASDI	0.979* (0.001) 71,144	<b>0.983*</b> (0.001) 64,063	<b>0.984*</b> (0.001) 33,866	<b>0.984*</b> (0.001) 57,709
False negative rate: OASDI	0.067* (0.002) 15,824	<b>0.053*</b> (0.003) 13,193	<b>0.046*</b> (0.003) 6,514	<b>0.045*</b> (0.002) 11,584
False positive rate: OASDI	0.040* (0.002) 15,437	<b>0.034*</b> (0.002) 12,986	0.037* (0.003) 6,449	0.038* (0.002) 11,513
Mean absolute deviation: Benefit Amount	141.60* 4.44 14,832	136.86* 6.77 12,568	<b>101.30*</b> 4.75 6,207	<b>83.42*</b> 3.53 11,092
Overall agreement: SSI	0.986* (0.001) 71,144	<b>0.990*</b> (0.000) 64,063	<b>0.989*</b> (0.001) 33,866	<b>0.992*</b> (0.000) 57,709
False negative rate: SSI	0.283* (0.012) 2,113	<b>0.237*</b> (0.012) 1,645	<b>0.217*</b> (0.015) 1,034	<b>0.163*</b> (0.011) 1,794
False positive rate: SSI	0.249* (0.012) 2,073	<b>0.170*</b> (0.011) 1,583	<b>0.184*</b> (0.015) 1,025	<b>0.150*</b> (0.011) 1,776
Mean absolute deviation: SSI Benefit Amount	106.69* 14.33 635	<b>71.03*</b> 8.27 448	<b>62.05*</b> 12.85 371	<b>66.59*</b> 9.29 646

The table present estimates of rates of agreement between the SIPP and SSA administrative data.

FN rates give the number of false negative reports as a percentage of the number of administratively-recorded beneficiaries for the program. FP rates give the number of false positive reports as a percentage of the number of survey-reported beneficiaries for the program.

SIPP data are from the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels of SIPP. See <http://www.census.gov/sipp> for source and accuracy information.

All estimates are weighted using the published SIPP person-month survey weights divided by the predicted probability of successful PIK assignment. The cell size counts are unweighted.

Standard errors (in parentheses) are calculated using Fay's method. See Section 3 for details.

Estimates in bold are statistically different at the 10% level than the corresponding estimate for the 2008 Panel.

A single star indicates that the estimate is statistically significant at the 10% level.

**Table 3: Relationship between OASDI and SSI reporting discrepancies**

PHUS/SSR	SIPP				
	Both Programs	Neither Program	OASDI only	SSI only	
Both Programs	2008	0.619* (0.019) 596	0.049* (0.010) 32	0.228* (0.018) 187	0.104* (0.010) 91
	2004	0.647* (0.021) 480	<b>0.024*</b> (0.007) 13	0.215* (0.017) 133	0.114* (0.015) 65
	2001	<b>0.747*</b> (0.025) 312	0.043* (0.013) 13	<b>0.139*</b> (0.022) 47	<b>0.072*</b> (0.014) 29
	1996	<b>0.793*</b> (0.020) 670	0.036* (0.008) 25	<b>0.085*</b> (0.012) 61	0.086* (0.015) 57
Neither Program	2008	0.000* (0.000) 8	0.995* (0.000) 52,466	0.004* (0.000) 255	0.001* (0.000) 37
	2004	0.000* (0.000) 6	0.996* (0.000) 48,911	0.004* (0.000) 196	0.001* (0.000) 24
	2001	0.000* (0.000) 8	0.994* (0.001) 26,093	0.005* (0.000) 126	0.001* (0.000) 34
	1996	0.000* (0.000) 8	<b>0.993*</b> (0.000) 44,146	<b>0.006*</b> (0.000) 262	<b>0.001*</b> (0.000) 57
OASDI Only	2008	0.006* (0.001) 96	0.040* (0.002) 528	0.937* (0.002) 13,705	0.017* (0.001) 257
	2004	<b>0.003*</b> (0.001) 47	<b>0.033*</b> (0.002) 357	<b>0.952*</b> (0.003) 11,724	<b>0.012*</b> (0.001) 148
	2001	<b>0.004*</b> (0.001) 31	<b>0.026*</b> (0.002) 158	<b>0.957*</b> (0.003) 5,755	<b>0.013*</b> (0.001) 87
	1996	<b>0.004*</b> (0.001) 47	<b>0.030*</b> (0.002) 310	<b>0.959*</b> (0.002) 10,218	<b>0.007*</b> (0.001) 74
SSI Only	2008	0.048* (0.006) 61	0.098* (0.011) 98	0.148* (0.013) 165	0.706* (0.016) 788
	2004	0.046* (0.008) 47	0.088* (0.012) 74	0.128* (0.015) 108	0.737* (0.017) 683
	2001	<b>0.025*</b> (0.006) 19	0.095* (0.015) 53	<b>0.097*</b> (0.013) 54	<b>0.783*</b> (0.019) 477
	1996	0.040* (0.007) 38	0.087* (0.011) 71	<b>0.086*</b> (0.010) 73	<b>0.787*</b> (0.016) 772

The table presents estimates of the proportion of each column category in each row category by panel.

SIPP data are from the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels of SIPP. See <http://www.census.gov/sipp> for source and accuracy information.

All estimates are weighted using the published SIPP person-month survey weights divided by the predicted probability of successful PIK assignment. The cell size counts are unweighted.

Standard errors (in parentheses) are calculated using Fay's method. See Section 3 for details.

Estimates in bold are statistically different at the 10% level than the corresponding estimate for the 2008 Panel.

A single star indicates that the estimate is statistically significant at the 10% level.



**Table 4:** Impact of program misidentification on discrepancy rates

	2008 Panel	2004 Panel	2001 Panel	1996 Panel
Corrected FN rate: OASDI	<i>0.046*</i>	<b>0.036*</b>	<b>0.031*</b>	<b>0.033*</b>
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
	15,824	13,193	6,514	11,584
FN rate: OASDI	0.067*	<b>0.053*</b>	<b>0.046*</b>	<b>0.045*</b>
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)
	15,824	13,193	6,514	11,584
Corrected FP rate: OASDI	<i>0.026*</i>	<b>0.021*</b>	<i>0.027*</i>	<i>0.028*</i>
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
	15,437	12,986	6,449	11,513
FP rate: OASDI	0.040*	<b>0.034*</b>	0.037*	0.038*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
	15,437	12,986	6,449	11,513
Corrected FN rate: SSI	<i>0.109*</i>	<b>0.076*</b>	<i>0.109*</i>	<b>0.079*</b>
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.009)
	2,113	1,645	1,034	1,794
FN rate: SSI	0.283*	<b>0.237*</b>	<b>0.217*</b>	<b>0.163*</b>
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.011)
	2,113	1,645	1,034	1,794
Corrected FP rate: SSI	<i>0.079*</i>	<b>0.058*</b>	<i>0.066*</i>	<i>0.077*</i>
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.009)
	2,073	1,583	1,025	1,776
FP rate: SSI	0.249*	<b>0.170*</b>	<b>0.184*</b>	<b>0.150*</b>
	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.011)
	2,073	1,583	1,025	1,776

Each panel presents the counter-factual and actual FN and FP rates for OASDI or SSI. The counter-factual rates are estimated using survey reports corrected for misidentification of source of benefits between the two programs.

FN rates give the number of false negative reports as a percentage of the number of administratively-recorded beneficiaries for the program. FP rates give the number of false positive reports as a percentage of the number of survey-reported beneficiaries for the program.

SIPP data are from the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels of SIPP. See <http://www.census.gov/sipp> for source and accuracy information.

All estimates are weighted using the published SIPP person-month survey weights divided by the predicted probability of successful PIK assignment. The cell size counts are unweighted.

Standard errors (in parentheses) are calculated using Fay's method. See Section 3 for details.

Estimates in bold are statistically different at the 10% level than the corresponding estimate for the 2008 Panel.

The counter-factual estimates are all statistically different than the corresponding actual estimate.

A single star indicates that the estimate is statistically significant at the 10% level.

**Table A1:** Probit models of PIK assignment

	2008 Panel	2004 Panel	2001 Panel	1996 Panel
Hispanic	-0.665* (0.0208)	-0.344* (0.0203)	-0.170* (0.0184)	-0.306* (0.0214)
Black	-0.114* (0.0237)	-0.127* (0.0185)	-0.0389* (0.0168)	-0.191* (0.0199)
Other race	-0.264* (0.0249)	-0.113* (0.0227)	-0.101* (0.0243)	-0.205* (0.0293)
Age 26 to 35	-0.0605* (0.0250)	0.0553* (0.0212)	-0.0468* (0.0200)	-0.0430* (0.0231)
Age 36 to 45	0.171* (0.0276)	0.265* (0.0224)	-0.0256 (0.0205)	-0.0342 (0.0245)
Age 46 to 55	0.400* (0.0297)	0.334* (0.0237)	-0.0358 (0.0218)	-0.0652* (0.0264)
Age 56 to 65	0.487* (0.0335)	0.428* (0.0273)	-0.0281 (0.0248)	-0.0827* (0.0301)
Over age 65	0.437* (0.0468)	0.199* (0.0347)	-0.0685* (0.0321)	-0.118* (0.0385)
Proxy report	-0.138* (0.0165)	-0.177* (0.0131)	-0.144* (0.0117)	-0.374* (0.0140)
Person-level nonresponse	-0.776* (0.0381)	-0.813* (0.0422)	-0.714* (0.0430)	-1.216* (0.0421)
Married, spouse not present	-0.595* (0.0500)	-0.755* (0.0482)	-0.168* (0.0464)	-0.337* (0.0507)
Widowed	-0.0803* (0.0375)	-0.269* (0.0251)	-0.0858* (0.0233)	-0.139* (0.0271)
Divorced	-0.0170 (0.0267)	-0.278* (0.0194)	-0.0122 (0.0179)	-0.0633* (0.0222)
Separated	-0.204* (0.0474)	-0.341* (0.0366)	0.0113 (0.0344)	0.103* (0.0427)
Never Married	0.0123 (0.0212)	-0.244* (0.0173)	-0.0470* (0.0157)	-0.141* (0.0192)
OASDI receipt reported	0.326* (0.0366)	0.121* (0.0262)	0.0558* (0.0241)	0.126* (0.0294)
SSI receipt reported	0.333* (0.0514)	0.173* (0.0360)	0.173* (0.0328)	0.335* (0.0416)
Paid work in the month	0.192* (0.0183)	0.192* (0.0148)	0.104* (0.0142)	0.128* (0.0167)
Total household income	0.0204* (0.00193)	0.0162* (0.00163)	-0.00290* (0.00122)	0.00545* (0.00186)
High School	0.203* (0.0218)	0.163* (0.0179)	-0.0282* (0.0163)	-0.0753* (0.0186)
Some college	0.428* (0.0222)	0.287* (0.0177)	0.0277 (0.0169)	0.0593* (0.0199)
Bachelors Degree	0.259* (0.0265)	0.280* (0.0224)	0.0142 (0.0199)	-0.00876 (0.0241)
Graduate degree	0.275* (0.0340)	0.272* (0.0280)	0.0524* (0.0243)	-0.0138 (0.0305)
Constant	0.628* (0.0666)	0.149* (0.0496)	0.0833* (0.0501)	1.131* (0.0566)
<i>N</i>	78354	80698	65312	68131

The table presents regression coefficients of probit models of successful PIK assignment for each panel. Models were estimated using the published SIPP person-month survey weights. Standard errors are in parentheses. Stars indicated statistical significance at 10% level. SIPP data are from the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels of SIPP. See <http://www.census.gov/sipp> for source and accuracy information.