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Policy Brief: Summary Review of Data Sources for School to Work Transitions by Youth with Disabilities

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Abstract

This brief summarizes our findings from a review of potential data sources to examine school-to-work transitions by youth with disabilities (Wittenburg and Stapleton, 2000). Our objective was to identify data sources for future school-to-work analyses that contain longitudinal information on youth with disabilities.

We conclude that the following data sources are most promising based on our selection criteria: Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP); National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health); Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 Database and RSA's Longitudinal Study of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR); state administrative data (multiple states); National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88); National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS); National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students-2 (NLTS-2); and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth: 1997 (NLSY:97).

Introduction

Numerous survey and administrative data sets provide information on youth with disabilities. Some provide information on specific populations (e.g., special education students), while others include broader samples of the United States population.

This brief summarizes our findings from a review of potential data sources to examine school-to-work transitions by youth with disabilities (Wittenburg and Stapleton, 2000). We reviewed several data sources to identify information that could address the following five research questions:

1. Which factors influence the development of a youth's skills for employment?[1]
2. What determines the level and type of effort devoted to preparing the youth for employment?
3. What type of initial employment and program participation transitions do youth with disabilities make after they have completed their formal schooling?
4. What are the employment, income, and program participation outcomes for adults who had childhood disabilities, and how do they vary with individual characteristics and childhood circumstances?
5. What effect do current public policies have on the incentives for youth making transitions from school-to-work?

Because of the broad scope of the research questions, our review should be of interest to anyone interested in conducting longitudinal research on school-to-work transitions by youth with disabilities. In future work, we will conduct an empirical analysis using a subset of the data sources highlighted in this brief on school-to-work transitions by youth with disabilities.

[1] Researchers refer to this more formally as the process of human capital accumulation.

Data Sources Reviewed

In Wittenburg and Stapleton (2000) we presented detailed reviews for several data sources, which we split into the following categories (***Exhibit 1***):

- Longitudinal Surveys of the General Population;
- Longitudinal Surveys of Youth;
- Longitudinal Surveys of Youth with Disabilities; and
- State Administrative Data;

The longitudinal surveys of the general population provide information on a nationally representative sample of the U.S. population. While these surveys do not focus specifically on youth, they contain longitudinal information on a large sample of youth with disabilities. The longitudinal surveys of youth provide information on different cohorts of youth (under the age of 22). These surveys contain information on various youth outcomes (e.g., school achievement) and influences (e.g., parental time) that are generally unavailable in surveys of the general population. Some of these surveys also include information on adult outcomes. The longitudinal surveys of youth with disabilities provide information on different cohorts of youth with disabilities. Unlike the surveys of youth, these surveys focus on specific populations of youth with disabilities. Finally, we summarize two types of administrative data sources that contain data from various state and federal programs.[2] These data contain information on transitions by youth with disabilities into and out of various state and federal programs (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid).

[2] Another major source of administrative data that we do not provide a separate review for is Social Security Administrative records on Supplemental Security Income participation, Disability Insurance participation, and earnings. We do have, however, a detailed discussion on the advantages of using these records in the context of our summary of other data sources that have been linked to SSA data, such as the SIPP.

Exhibit 1: Summary of Data Reviewed

Longitudinal Surveys of the General Population
Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)
Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD)
Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID)
Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)
Longitudinal Surveys of Youth
National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)
National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88)
High School and Beyond (HS&B)
Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS)
Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (BB:93)
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth: 1979 (NLSY79)
National Longitudinal Survey of Youth: Mothers and Children (NLSY: Mothers and Children)
National Survey of Youth: 1997 (NLSY97)
Longitudinal Surveys of Youth with Disabilities
National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS)
National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students-2 (NLTS2)
School-to-Work Transition Survey of Deaf Youth (SWTS)
Administrative Data
Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 Database and Longitudinal Study of the Vocation Rehabilitation Service Program
Selected State Administrative Data (California Welfare Research Archive, The Florida Education and Training Performance Information Program, and Illinois Integrated Database on Children's Services)

Selection Criteria

We selected the most promising data sources for future work on school-to-work transitions by youth with disabilities using six criteria. First, each of the selected data sources contains detailed information on health and/or disability program participation. Second, each of the selected data sources contains a sample of youth with disabilities (at least 500 observations). Third, each of the selected data sources contains information on a broad population of youth with disabilities. Fourth, each of the selected data sources includes recent information (compiled since at least 1992) on outcomes for either youth or young adults with disabilities. Fifth, each of the selected data sources contains specific information to address at least one of our research questions. Finally, none of the selected data sources contains heavy "planned" or "unplanned" attrition.[3]

Summary of Selected Data Sources

[3] Planned attrition occurs when only a subsample of the base population from the first interview is included in the follow-up interview. Unplanned attrition occurs when interviewers cannot conduct a follow-up interview with a base sample member.

We concluded that the following data sources are most promising for longitudinal school-to-work research based on our criteria:

- Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP);[4]
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health);
- Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 Database and RSA's Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR);
- State Administrative Data (multiple states).
- National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88);
- National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS);
- National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students-2 (NLTS-2); and
- National Survey of Youth: 1997 (NLSY97);

The SIPP, Add Health, RSA 911 Database (and longitudinal study), state administrative data, NELS:88 and the NLTS provide relatively current information on youth with disabilities. Researchers have already used the NLTS, NELS:88, and state administrative data to address issues related to our research questions (Wagner, et al, 1996, Horn and Bobbitt, 1999, Goerge, et al., 1996). In addition, the Research Triangle Institute plans to use the RSA data for a study on youth with disabilities in the VR systems.[5] The NLTS-2 and NLSY-97 provide information that will be valuable in the future studies (the NLTS-2 will not be available until 2001 and the NLSY-97 currently only contains one wave of available data). We are unaware, however, of any past or on-going study that uses data from the SIPP or Add Heath to examine school to work transitions by youth with disabilities.

Below, we highlight the types of research questions that researchers could address with each of these data sources. ***Exhibit 2*** summarizes our findings.

[4] The SIPP, however, is somewhat limited if researchers can not obtain restricted research files that are matched to SSA earnings and program participation files.

[5] A review of these studies will be available in our upcoming literature review.

Exhibit 2: Summary of the Most Promising Data Sets to Address Questions Related to Youth with Disabilities								
	SIPP	Add Health	RSA 911 and Longitudinal Survey	State Admin. Data[6]	NELS:88	NLTS	NLTS-2	NLSY-97
Question 1: Which factors influence the youth's preparedness for employment?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Question 2: What determines the level and type of effort devoted to preparing the youth for employment?		X			X	X	X	X
Question 3: What type of employment and program participation transitions do youth with disabilities make after they have completed their formal schooling?	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Question 4: What are the employment, income, program participation, and independent living outcomes for adults who had childhood disabilities, and how do they vary with individual characteristics and childhood circumstances?	X[7]			X				X
Question 5: What effect do current public policies have on the incentives for youth making transitions from school-to-work?	X		X	X				X

[6] We discuss the advantages and limitations of using administrative data from various states (see Section V for more details).
[7] Researchers can use matched records from the SIPP and Social Security Administration records on earnings and program participation to address this issue.

1. SIPP

Researchers could use restricted research files of the SIPP that are matched to Social Security Administrative (SSA) data on earnings and program participation records over several years to address questions related to short term (2 to 3 years) and long-term (5 to 15 years) transitions by youth with disabilities (research questions 3, 4, and 5).[8] The SIPP contains detailed information on demographic and health characteristics of large samples of youth with disabilities and the matched SSA records provide employment and SSA program participation information over a person's lifetime. Researchers could, for example, use these matched data to observe transitions into work (using SSA earnings records) or SSI (using SSA program records) by youth with disabilities (age 14 to 22) over their young adulthood (age 23 to 30). We have performed similar analyses in a recent evaluation of transitions by former AFDC recipients onto SSI in Stapleton, et al. (2000).

2. Add Health

Researchers could use Add Health data to address questions related to the early schooling and training experience of youth with disabilities (research questions 1 and 2). Add Health contains extensive information on family, school, and community characteristics for a large nationally representative sample of youth with and without disabilities in grades 7 through 12 in 1995, collected from students, parents, and/or administrators. Unlike most data sources, the Add Health includes very specific information on the types of parental investments (e.g., parental time, expectations) that the youth receives during high school. Researchers could use these data to examine issues related to the child's human capital development. For example, researchers could examine whether the level and type of investments provided by parents vary depending on the child's disability status.

The major limitation of these data is that only one follow-up interview exists. Hence, these data only provide very limited information on the outcomes of school-to-work transitions.

3. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 911 Database and RSA's Longitudinal Study of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Researchers could use the RSA 911 longitudinal study to address questions related to initial post-secondary outcomes and factors that influence those outcomes (including factors related to policy changes) (research questions 1, 3, and 5).[9] These data contain detailed descriptive information on individuals who received VR services, including for a significant number of youth with disabilities. Because of the large samples included in the RSA databases, researchers

[8] If the matched data are not available, then the ability to use the SIPP to address research questions 3, 4, and 5 is limited primarily because of the short SIPP panel (approximately 32 months). One potential alternative is to match the 1992 and 1993 SIPP panels with the Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD), which continues those SIPP panels. This match would provide information over a ten-year period. Unfortunately, Huggins and King (1998) found that the SPD has significant attrition bias. Further, sample size issues might limit the SPD's usefulness to evaluate specific issues related to school-to-work transitions.

[9] The RSA 911 Database (without the Longitudinal Study) could also be used to address some of these research questions, though the information in the Longitudinal Study significantly enhances the 911 Database.

can also use these data to make cross-state comparisons of employment and program participation outcomes.

The major limitation of these data is that they only provide a relatively limited period to observe transitions. Hence, while these data might provide excellent information on initial post-school outcomes, they will not provide information on long-term adult outcomes (e.g., over 10 years after the youth leaves secondary school).

The RSA data could be further enhanced if they were matched to SSA records on earnings and program participation. While there are no plans to match the RSA data to SSA records at this time, the RSA data does include SSNs.[10] Hence, it is technically possible to link these data to SSA administrative records. Similar to the matched SIPP/SSA data, the major advantage of a matched file of RSA/SSA data is that they would contain information to examine long-term transitions by youth with disabilities.

4. State Administrative Data

Several state administrative databases (California, Florida, Illinois) could be used to address questions related to short- and long-term transitions by youth from various programs (e.g., AFDC, SSI) into work or other programs (research questions 3, 4 and 5). The major advantage of state administrative data is that they provide information on the experiences of youth who participate in a program or multiple programs (e.g., Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Special Education) in a particular state.

Unlike survey data, one major obstacle in using state administrative data is accessibility. Many states place confidentiality restrictions on the use of data. Hence, these data might be more costly to obtain than the public data sets mentioned above. Further, some states may not release their data for various other reasons (e.g., expense, political sensitivity of the research).

5. NELS:88

Similar to Add Health, the NELS:88 data are most promising to address questions related to the early schooling and training experience of youth with disabilities (research questions 1 and 2), as well as initial transitions from school-to-work (research question 3). NELS:88 provides extensive information on a cohort of eighth graders as they move through high school. Researchers can use these data to observe how changes in multi-period factors (schooling, environment, home) influence the youth's preparedness for employment and school outcomes. A follow-up interview is conducted two years after the youth is scheduled to finish high school that researchers could use to analyze immediate high school-to-work (or other school) transitions.

There are two major limitations of the NELS:88. First, it excludes a large number of youth with severe disabilities, including those from separated special education schools, area vocational schools, those in "ungraded" classrooms, and those deemed by local staff to be unable to participate because of physical disability, mental illness, or language. Hence, these data do not provide representative information on large samples of youth with specific limitations. Second,

[10] Previous matches exist of RSA/SSA data in the early eighties.

NELS:88 only provides information on youth up to age 20. Hence, these data do not provide long-term employment and other outcomes.

6. NLTS

Researchers could use the NLTS to address questions related to the schooling experience (research questions 1 and 2) and initial transitions from school made by youth from special education programs (research question 3).[11] Because the NLTS only samples youth in special education programs, essentially all of the NLTS respondents have some type of disability.[12] Researchers could use these data to evaluate the youth's experience while in school, such as the type of investments received (e.g., teacher time), as well as their experiences as they finish their secondary education, using responses from the three NLTS follow-up interviews.

A major drawback of the NLTS data is that they only contain information on a 1987 student cohort. The experiences of the NLTS cohort of special education students might not necessarily represent the more recent experiences of youth with disabilities. To address this limitation, the Department of Education is funding a new NLTS survey (NLTS-2). Another issue is that it is difficult to compare findings from this survey to findings for youth without disabilities from other surveys.

7. NLTS-2

Researchers could use the NLTS-2 data in the future to address the same types of questions as the NTLS, except for a more recent cohort of special education students (fall 2000). The strengths and limitations of the NLTS-2 are similar to the original NLTS because it includes the same target sample (special education students), though the NLTS-2 will follow this sample for a much longer period than the original NLTS (approximately ten years vs. four years).

8. NLSY-97

In the future, the NLSY:97 could be a valuable data source for analyzing transitions by youth with disabilities to address issues related to all of our research questions. These data include a relatively large sample of youth with disabilities from a recent cohort that will be followed for several years. In addition, unlike the surveys mentioned above, researchers can use the NLSY:97 to compare the experiences of youth with disabilities to those without disabilities.

Because the initial interview sample only includes individuals age 12 to 16 in 1997, researchers will not be able to observe school-to-work transitions in the NLSY:97 for most of the sample until approximately 2004, when the youngest person in this sample reaches 18. Consequently, the NLSY:97 provides promise for future research, but is very limited in its current form.

Bibliography

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[11] Several researchers have already used the NLTS to evaluate postschool transitions (SRI International, 1993; Blackorby and Wagner, 1996; Wagner and Blackorby, 1996).

[12] Further disability assessments could be made based on survey information provided by students, parents, teachers, and school administrators (e.g., specific health conditions, difficulties with certain activities).

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