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MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES USING SLID DATA

§ We're looking forward to throwing the ball into your court soon in a big way, when we release a microdata file containing data from the preliminary interview and the first wave of labour and income data. Of course, the research potential will grow as each year of collected information is added to the file. On the other hand, this first file itself will provide many opportunities for analysis (some of it dynamic) and will introduce users to working with SLID data.

All along, we've been thinking about the possibilities for research to support social and labour market policy. These expectations have influenced the questionnaire content and, more recently, the design of output files. Discussions so far with prospective users and insights from other panel surveys with similar content helped us develop the following seven major research themes. The longitudinal dimension of the survey is its *raison d'être*, but SLID will also support many interesting cross-sectional analyses not otherwise feasible.

Employment and unemployment dynamics Usually, labour force activity data show the net changes between employment, unemployment and inactivity; SLID will also show the gross flows) how many

Editor's Note

SLID has already reached several key milestones in the data collection activities. Now, on the output front, we are quickly approaching significant dates. The first of these, the release of a publication *Dynamics of Labour and Income: 1994 Report*, is scheduled for March 28. As described in the September 1994 issue of *Dynamics*, this publication will feature five analytical articles focusing on the content of the SLID preliminary interview conducted in January 1993. These studies

highlight some interesting variables. For your convenience, an order form for this new product is included in the middle of this newsletter. We are planning to publish *Dynamics of Labour and Income* annually, as a collection of analytical articles and survey highlights. Therefore, we would appreciate any comments and suggestions, both positive and negative.

Philip Giles

individuals experience a change one way or the other in any time period. Flow data are possible for many variables; for example, job turnover, by industry, occupation, or worker characteristics. Durations of spells will be of interest too; for example, to what extent are long and repeated spells of unemployment experienced by the same individuals? What are the major determinants? Why do people withdraw from the labour market, and what precedes a transition into self-employment?

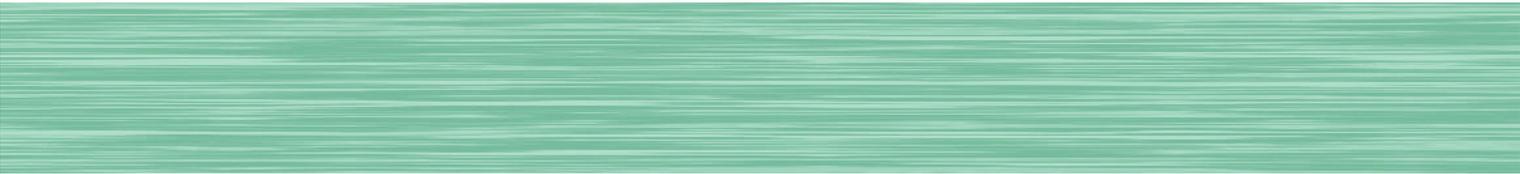
Life cycle labour market transitions One can study major labour market transitions associated with particular stages of the life cycle, such as transitions from school to work, transitions from work to retirement and work absences taken to have or raise children. What are typical life-cycle patterns in Canada today?

Job quality SLID will support research in such areas as wage differences between men and women, under-employment, occupational mobility, earnings growth over a period of several years, and wage and hours polarisation among the working population.

Family economic mobility How stable is family income? What proportion of families experience a significant improvement or deterioration in income between two points in time? What are the determinants of these changes? How important are changes in family composition (divorce, remarriage) in explaining a change in financial well-being?

Dynamics of low income This research theme concerns the incidence and duration of spells of low income and the factors related to families moving into or out of low income. Researchers may attempt to isolate and characterize a "persistently poor" subpopulation, as has been done using other longitudinal surveys. There will also be interest in looking at receipt of Unemployment Insurance benefits, social assistance and other government transfers in relation to flows into and out of low income.

Demographics Central to SLID's demographics potential is new survey information on relationships, namely the relationship of each person to every other member in a household. This will make it possible to accurately identify blended and multi-generational families, for example. The longitudinal aspect will permit the study of the duration and frequency of life events and their determinants. For example, what are the family's economic circumstances preceding a marriage break-up, and what are they



for each spouse and any children following a separation? A number of interesting demographic variables are featured in "Following life events", one of the articles contained in *Dynamics of Labour and Income: 1994 Report* (order coupon enclosed).

Education It will be possible to view educational activity and attainment in the evolving context of an individual's other activities and family circumstances. What are the family circumstances of children completing grades at non-standard ages? What are the subsequent activities of high school drop-outs, and what precedes a return to school? How much do high school or postsecondary students combine work and school?

More discussion on these themes, the resultant data needs and the types and groupings of SLID variables is contained in SLID Research Paper No. 94-04, "Social and labour market policy research using the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics".

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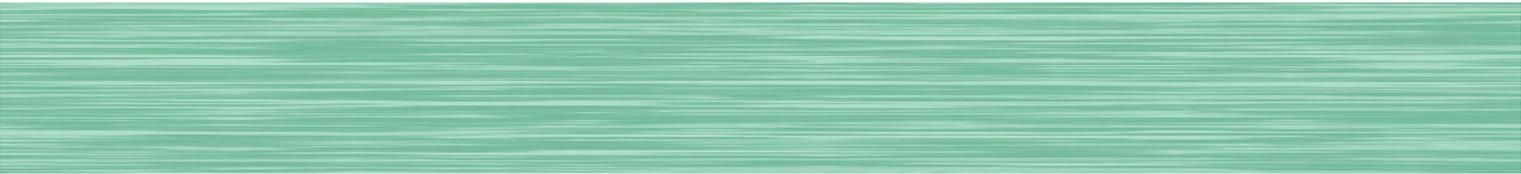
**RESPONDENT
RELATIONS**

§ Any survey that interviews the same people several times must take particular care in fostering and maintaining good relations with its respondents. Even monetary incentives, which some panel surveys use, cannot always ensure high response rates. SLID is counting on two factors to maintain good relations and encourage respondents to participate. As with any household survey, first and foremost is the work of interviewers themselves--their excellent rapport with respondents and ability to explain the importance of the survey and each person's participation.

In addition to that, we're trying to support the interviewers' work by mail-outs to respondents around interview time. Below is a list of the motivational materials we've used or planned so far. Notice that we squeezed into the package a change-of-address card--just in case anyone who moves would help us out further by returning it. The number of cards we've received has been surprisingly high...that's motivational material for us in return!

- *Prior to January 1994 labour interview:* A letter from the Director of the Statistics Canada Regional Office together with a brochure with some general information on SLID and a business reply card to receive further information. We received back about 700 cards. Note that by this time, respondents had already completed the SLID preliminary interview in January 1993.

- *February/March 1994:* SLID's first respondent newsletter, sent to those who returned the request-for-further-information card, and also those who refused to respond to the survey--in which case a covering letter from the regional director encouraged them to participate in the May income interview. The newsletter listed some questions of general interest that the survey would like to answer, as well as points on who will use the information, the use of computer-assisted interviewing to replace paper questionnaires, and confidentiality.
- *Prior to May 1994 income interview:* A letter and an Income Guide were sent, along with income questionnaires for each adult in the household, so that respondents could prepare for the interview by consulting their financial records.
- *July 1994:* A letter sent to everyone in the sample thanking them for their time and interest so far and reminding them that their participation will be requested again, plus a change-of-address card. So far, we have received over 350 cards from this mail-out.
- *Prior to January 1995 interview:* The 1994 letter, brochure, reply card and first respondent newsletter were succeeded by our second respondent newsletter, sent to all respondents in this case. This newsletter included greetings from the regional director on the front page, some information on SLID respondents based on information collected in the preliminary interview, and reminders of the importance of the survey and respondents' participation. In future as more data become available, we'll have many more survey highlights to choose from for the newsletter.
- *Prior to May 1995 income interview:* An Income newsletter together with income questionnaires for each household member. This time, in addition to a short guide section on how to fill out the questionnaire, a front page letter from the regional director will offer respondents the option of allowing Statistics Canada to access their tax file data in lieu of completing the interview.
- *July 1995:* Again, a change-of-address card is planned, plus a letter of thanks and "see you next year" from the regional director.



See SLID Research Paper 94-02 *Respondent Relations in Longitudinal Surveys* for a description of the approaches taken by other panel surveys and the use of monetary incentives.

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**WEALTH DATA
COLLECTION
POSTPONED**

§ As a result of user consultation, asset and debt (wealth) data are part of the SLID base content. The decision was made to collect these data twice from every panel of respondents, tentatively as part of waves 2 and 5. Following this plan, wealth data would be part of the SLID interviews conducted in 1995.

However, there is much development work needed before we are in a position to include wealth questions in SLID. An interesting development since the decision was made to include wealth content in SLID has also contributed to the postponement. Statistics Canada last conducted a household asset and debt survey in 1984. Efforts are now under way to mount a new survey, including some developmental work for a very important asset: value of pension. This developmental work will help to ensure that the wealth information eventually collected in SLID is of high quality.

Although no firm decision has been made, it is likely that wealth data will not be collected until wave 5 in 1998, but would then be collected every three years as originally planned.

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**DISCUSSION ON SLID
DATA**

§ Interested in research using SLID data? On June 1 1995 from 16:00 to 19:00, the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) is organizing an informal meeting of researchers interested in carrying out such work. The meeting will be held in Montreal to coincide with the Learned Societies Conference, just before the meeting of the Canadian Economics Association (CEA). At this session, you will be able to interact with other researchers and with Statistics Canada staff. To participate or for more information, please contact François Vaillancourt, Senior Fellow IRPP, 1470 rue Peel, Suite 200, Montreal, Quebec, H3A 1T1. (Fax: (514) 985-2559)

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RESEARCH PAPERS

§ The following are recently released Research Papers which can be ordered individually (\$5) or by annual subscription (\$15 on diskette or \$50 for paper versions). For more information, contact Anne Palmer by phone at (613) 951-2903, by fax at (613) 951-3253, or by mail at 11-D8 Jean Talon Building, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, K1A 0T6. Internet users: GILES@STATCAN.CA.

94-18 *SLID Derived Variables: Demographic, Cultural and Geographic*
Joanne Murray, Ruth Dibbs, Philip Giles

Frequently, the information needed by data users cannot be reliably obtained by a single question collected from respondents. Thus, data files produced by surveys contain many "derived variables", those not collected directly from respondents, but calculated or derived from survey responses. SLID intends to document all derived variables, including definitions of how they are derived. This research paper is the first part of this documentation, focusing on demographic, cultural and geographic variables.

95-01 *SLID Coding Structure: Mother Tongue, Country of Birth and Ethnic Background*
Philip Giles, Ruth Dibbs, Yves Saint-Pierre

95-02 *SLID Coding Structure: Major Field of Study for Postsecondary Graduates*
Philip Giles, Ruth Dibbs, Joanne Murray

Code lists are needed for efficient data manipulation of textual data. For data items with many possible responses, the assignment of codes is done as part of the survey processing. As part of its objective to inform data users, SLID is documenting the code lists for four of the six variables handled in this manner:

- country of birth
- mother tongue (language first spoken which the respondent still understands)
- ethnic background
- major field or subject of study (for postsecondary degrees, certificates and diplomas)

The other two variables (industry in which a person's employer does business, coded to the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification, and occupation in which a person is employed, coded to the 1980 Standard Occupational Classification) are documented as Statistics Canada publications (catalogue numbers 12-501 and 12-565, respectively). In addition to the detailed codes, some standard "roll-ups" are included. All roll-ups will be included in the documentation of derived variables.