

## **Appendix A: About the American Time Use Survey**

### **What does the American Time Use Survey measure?**

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) is the Nation's first federally administered, continuous survey on time use in the United States. The goal of the survey is to measure how people divide their time among life's activities. After years of planning and development, the first ATUS results were collected in 2003. ATUS results are now available annually approximately one to two years after the survey year, and can be obtained from the ATUS web site, <http://www.bls.gov/tus/home.htm>.

In ATUS, individuals are randomly selected from a subset of households that have completed their eighth and final month of interviews for the Current Population Survey (CPS). ATUS respondents are interviewed only one time about how they spent their time on the previous day, where they were, and whom they were with. The survey is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The major purpose of ATUS is to develop nationally representative estimates of how people spend their time. Many ATUS users are interested in the amount of time Americans spend doing unpaid, nonmarket work. These include unpaid childcare and adult care, housework, and volunteering. The survey also provides information on the amount of time people spend in many other activities, such as religious activities, socializing, exercising, and relaxing. In addition to collecting data about what people did on the day before the interview, ATUS collects information about where and with whom each activity occurred, and whether the activities were done for one's job or business. Demographic information—including sex, race, age, educational attainment, occupation, income, marital status, and the presence of children in the household—also is available for each respondent. Although some of these variables are updated during the ATUS interview, most of this information comes from earlier CPS interviews.

### **How can the survey results be used?**

ATUS significantly furthers understanding about how Americans spend their time. Because ATUS data are collected on an ongoing, monthly basis, time-series data eventually will be available, enabling analysts to identify any changes in how people spend their time. ATUS data can provide a wide range of applications for different users.

For example, many economists are interested in estimating the monetary value of nonmarket work. Lawyers can use this type of information when calculating the value of lost time (or life) in personal injury or wrongful death cases, thus allowing judges and juries to more accurately determine reasonable compensation in such cases. Policymakers can use ATUS data to better understand the economic and noneconomic effects of their policy decisions. Likewise, businesses can use ATUS data on how people spend their time to determine what kinds of goods and services to develop or market to a particular group.

ATUS data also include information on with whom and where respondents spend their time. From this, sociologists can determine, for example, the average amount of time fathers or mothers spend with their children or how much time people spend with colleagues and friends. It also is possible to determine how much time people spend working outside of the office. All of this information can help researchers understand how people in the United States are dividing their time among the duties of childcare; the demands of their jobs; their need to relax or exercise; and their religious, volunteer, and other commitments.

Many other countries have done time-use surveys, and more are planning to conduct them in the future. Time-use data are currently collected in North America, South America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. ATUS was designed to ensure that time-use information in the United States can be compared, at broad levels, with information from other countries.

### **ATUS methodology**

ATUS covers all residents living in households in the United States who are at least 15 years of age, with the exception of active military personnel and people residing in institutions such as nursing homes and prisons.

Data collection for the ATUS began in January 2003. Sample cases for the survey are selected monthly and interviews are conducted continuously throughout the year. In 2008, approximately 12,700 individuals were interviewed. Estimates are released annually.

ATUS sample households are chosen from the households that completed their eighth (final) interview for the Current Population Survey (CPS), the nation's monthly household labor force survey. ATUS sample households are selected to ensure that estimates will be nationally representative. One individual age 15 or over is randomly chosen from each sampled household. This "designated person" is interviewed by telephone once about his or her activities on the day before the interview—the "diary day."

All ATUS interviews are conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. Procedures are in place to collect information from the small number of households that did not provide a telephone number during the CPS interview.

ATUS designated persons are pre-assigned a day of the week about which to report. Pre-assignment is designed to reduce variability in response rates across the week and to allow oversampling of weekend days so that accurate weekend day measures can be developed. Interviews occur on the day following the assigned day. For example, a person assigned to report about a Monday would be contacted on the following Tuesday. Ten percent of designated persons are assigned to report about each of the five weekdays. Twenty-five percent are assigned to report about each weekend day. Households are called for up to 8 consecutive weeks (for example, 8 Tuesdays) in order to secure an interview.

In the time diary portion of the ATUS interview, survey respondents sequentially report activities they did between 4 a.m. on the day before the interview ("yesterday") until 4 a.m.

on the day of the interview. For each activity, respondents are asked how long the activity lasted. For activities other than personal care activities (such as sleeping and grooming), interviewers also ask respondents where they were. And for activities other than personal care and work, they are asked who was in the room with them (if at home) or who accompanied them (if away from home). If respondents report doing more than one activity at a time, they are asked to identify which one was the “main” (primary) activity. If none can be identified, then the interviewer records the first activity mentioned. After completing the time diary, interviewers ask respondents additional questions to clearly identify work, volunteering, and secondary childcare activities. Secondary childcare is defined as having a child under age 13 in one’s care while doing other activities.

The ATUS coding lexicon, or activity classification system, was originally based on the one used for the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997 time-use survey. Codes are periodically evaluated and updated prior to the start of each year’s data collection. The 2008 ATUS Coding Lexicon can be accessed online at <http://www.bls.gov/tus/lexicons.htm>.

- **Limitations of the data**

While attempts have been made to collect the most accurate data possible, the ATUS data do have limitations. With the exception of childcare, information on secondary activities (activities that are done at the same time as the primary activity) is not collected. This could lead to underestimates of the amount of time people spend doing activities that are frequently done in combination with other activities. For example, ATUS estimates likely underestimate the amount of time people spend listening to music since so many people listen to music while doing other things.

Survey estimates are subject to nonsampling errors that may arise from many different sources, such as an inability to obtain information from all households in the sample, data entry errors, coding errors, and misinterpretation of definitions. Errors also could occur if nonresponse is correlated with time use. Nonsampling errors were not measured. However, the Census Bureau uses quality-assurance procedures to minimize nonsampling data entry and coding errors in the survey estimates.

### **Obtaining ATUS data**

- **BLS publications** Each year the BLS publishes press releases of time-use estimates. These press releases are available on the ATUS web site, [www.bls.gov/tus/](http://www.bls.gov/tus/). The releases include descriptive highlights and selected tables showing estimates of time-use data for the previous year. The ATUS web site also contains a list of titles of, and links to, ATUS-related papers published in BLS publications, as well as BLS working papers. The ATUS staff plans to release topical issues papers on the ATUS web site periodically.

- **Unpublished tables from BLS** In addition to the selected tables published with the annual press release, ATUS data are compiled in numerous tables showing time use by various groups of respondents. These include tables of time use by various combinations of respondents’ demographic characteristics, marital status, employment status, educational

attainment, geographic location, and the presence and age of household children. These unpublished tables are available in PDF format on request.

- **Public use data files** Public use files containing ATUS microdata are released at least once each year. These files contain records of respondents' answers to the survey questions as well as other information about the respondent and his or her household. These data are intended for users who wish to do their own tabulations and analyses. These files are available for downloading on the ATUS web site.

- **For more information** The ATUS Web site is a resource for up-to-date information about the American Time Use Survey. It includes background information about the survey, as well as links to time-use news releases, publications, and the public use files. The ATUS homepage is available at [www.bls.gov/tus/](http://www.bls.gov/tus/). Information about ATUS also is available by e-mail ([ATUSinfo@bls.gov](mailto:ATUSinfo@bls.gov)) or by telephone (202-691-6339).