Final Report on RDRC Project NB23-01

Expanding Research Capacity at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Project Aims

This project seeks to strengthen, expand, and build the capacity for conducting research on retirement and disability policy at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). We will conduct a data workshop, primarily targeted at HBCU faculty, designed to familiarize HBCU faculty and students with secondary data sources that can be used to explore research questions on retirement and disability policy. We will then circulate a call for applications among HBCU constituents, and support HBCU faculty in the development of SSA proposals.

Project Accomplishments

The NBER RDRC sponsored a data workshop on February 3, 2023. The workshop was presented by Amanda Sonnega, a research scientist with the Health and Retirement Study at the University of Michigan. Faculty and students from HBCUs and other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) were invited to participate in the workshop and a sizable number attended. The workshop focused on how to use the HRS for Social Security related research.

Following the workshop, the NBER RDRC solicited study applications from workshop participants and other HBCU/MSI faculty investigators and received nearly a dozen research proposals. We then supported these investigators in refining their proposals for submission to SSA. Seven proposals by HBCU/MSI faculty were included as part of the NBER's recent application to SSA to continue as a Retirement and Disability Research Center.

NB24, Proposal 1
Structural Barriers to Receipt of Income Support and Health Insurance among Disabled Adults by Race and Ethnicity, Phase II
Rand Obeidat, Bowie State University

This is the second phase of a project to better understand racial and ethnic differences in SSDI enrollment. In phase 1, we focused on SSDI application rates by race with some surveys suggesting that population rates of SSDI enrollment have fallen for Hispanic and Black Americans while remaining steady for White Americans. The planned research focuses on the mechanisms underlying these caseload trends by race, and specifically, the role of office closures and more stringent eligibility determinations. It will analyze the impact of people's proximity to a closed SSA office, geographic differences in application rejections, and other factors, such as English as a second language, rural residence, and broadband access.

NB24, Proposal 2
Improving Recipiency in U.S. Social Insurance: A Scoping Examination
Isaac Marcelin, University of Maryland Eastern Shore

This project explores the obstacles to SSDI/SSI take up in the United States by analyzing the population of non-recipients who appear qualified for benefits, and by contrasting U.S. programs with those of other OECD countries. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research will compare program features, target populations, and estimated participation rates across disability insurance programs in other countries. It will develop new estimates of the population of individuals who appear qualified for SSDI and/or SSI, but who are not currently participating. It will also study how non-participation relates to household composition, income, employment, health, education, gender, age, race, geography, participation in other government programs, and attitude toward Social Security.

NB24, Proposal 3
Barriers to SSDI and SSI Program Participation for the Visually Impaired Community
Wendy Edmonds, Bowie State University, LaTanya Brown-Robertson, Howard University

This project is a qualitative exploration of the barriers to SSDI/SSI participation by people with visual impairments, including the nearly 1 million Black Americans who have diabetic retinopathy. Following a literature review, the project will involve a series of recorded focus groups and individual interviews with individuals in the visually impaired community, probing how they navigated and were impacted by the SSDI/SSI application process, what supports they received or wish they had received, and how prospective modifications in the application process might affect for future applicants with visual impairments.

NB24, Proposal 6
Designing Digital Retirement Outreach Programs Targeting Black, Hispanic, and White Workers, Phase II
Luisa Blanco, Pepperdine University and Angelino Viceisza, Spelman College

This project is the next phase of work on how to better target Social Security outreach programs to people with different cultural backgrounds. Phase I involved the design of a digital retirement outreach program targeting low to moderate income (LMI) Black, Hispanic, and White workers as part of the Understanding America Study. The Phase II follow-up will use the findings from phase I to develop a refined outreach intervention that will be tested in a community sample of 450-900 LMI workers, recruited via community-based organizations.

NB24, Proposal 7
Assessing Underserved Communities Beneficiaries Communication Needs and Its Influence on Customer Experience and Satisfaction, Phase II
Dayo Oyeleye, Bowie State University

Thi project is the second phase of a project to improve SSA customer service and satisfaction in underserved communities. In ongoing Phase I, qualitative findings from focus groups suggest that information about Social Security benefits from SSA can be overwhelming and difficult to

understand, and that for many, a lack of adequately knowledgeable SSA support staff makes it difficult to seek assistance. This Phase II continuation uses both qualitative (exploratory case studies) and quantitative (surveys) methods to evaluate whether individuals from underserved communities perceive the information they receive about SSA benefits to be "in plain language." It also solicits recommendations for enhancing SSA customer experience, satisfaction, and service delivery.

NB24, Proposal 16
The Perceived Influence of Race and Gender in Work History, Work Attitudes, Economic Resources, and Health on Black Women's Retirement
Danielle Dickens, Spelman College

This project analyzes the retirement experience and pre-retirement expectations of Black women. It involves a series of interviews of Black women who have retired within the last year or plan to retire within the next three years. Background information will be collected on participants' age, income, work history, health, and motherhood. In a 90-minute semi-structured interview via Zoom, participants will be asked about their retirement experience or expectations, the perceived influence of race and gender on their work and retirement experience, their psychological wellbeing as it relates to retirement, why they are/were looking to retire, and how health relates to their retirement decision or plans. The project also involves a review of current literature and statistics on Black women's retirement related decisions and experience.

NB24, Proposal 23
Variation in Maryland's Opioid Response Program by Race and Place-Based Economic Indicators, Phase II
LaTanya Brown-Robertson, Howard University; and Tibebe Assefa, Nega Lakew, George Onoh, Azene Zenebe, all Bowie State University

This is the second phase of a project analyzing issues of equity and access to care in Maryland's federally funded State Opioid Response (SOR) program. The Phase I project (NB22-17) found similar rates of program service utilization among Blacks and White residents, based on service needs. However, overdose death rates are high and rising for Black residents specifically. This Phase II project will drill down on the quality/type of treatment services provided by race, age, and gender; and whether there is further variation across the 11 SOR initiatives in the state.