CPI Research

The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality (CPI) has built a comprehensive research program focused on measuring and explaining trends in poverty, inequality, and labor market outcomes. This program features 15 research groups (RGs) that address some of the important poverty-relevant measurement problems facing the nation. The current infrastructure for measuring poverty is antiquated, rests on seemingly arbitrary decisions made more than a half-century ago, and typically fails to take into account all manner of "big data" developments that are revolutionizing other fields but, to date, have been largely ignored within the poverty and inequality field. The CPI has therefore set up research groups that take on the task of building a new infrastructure for measuring trends and evaluating policy.

Consumption [1] (Luigi Pistaferri): The purpose of the Consumption RG is to monitor trends in consumption-based poverty and inequality and to understand the sources of those trends. The analyses within this RG will focus on the individual components of consumption because they are not always moving in lockstep.

Discrimination and poverty [2] (Cecilia Ridgeway, David Pedulla, and Shelley Correll): The RG on discrimination and poverty is building new measures of labor market discrimination based on survey and field experiments. Although an influential wave of field experiments in the last 15 years has shown that discrimination is an important source of labor market disadvantage, the U.S. lacks the infrastructure for monitoring trends in the extent of such discrimination. The purpose of our new RG is to develop a regularized protocol for measuring discrimination that makes it possible (a) to compare the strength of different types of discrimination, and (b) to track trends in each type of discrimination (pertaining to the homeless, the incarcerated, working mothers, and other categories).

Education [3] (Sean Reardon): The purpose of the Education RG is to examine trends in the extent to which educational access and achievement are related to poverty and family background. The scholars working within this RG are examining state-level differences in the effects of social origins, uncovering the causes of the recent rise in the socioeconomic achievement gap, uncovering the causes of the yet more recent turnaround in this rise (among kindergarten children), and examining the ways in which high-achieving children from poor backgrounds can be induced to go to college.

Family [4] (Elizabeth Peters, Sara McLanahan): The continuing decline in prime-age employment interacts with ongoing changes in the structure and composition of low-income families. The charge of the Family RG is to evaluate related policy proposals and to better understand how the safety net is adapting to changes in family structure.
Health Disparities (Sanjay Basu, Mark Cullen, Jeremy Freese, David Rehkopf): The affiliates within the Health Disparities RG are using new computer modeling and statistical techniques to examine how poverty affects the health of children and adults and how some anti-poverty programs are reducing those effects.

Housing (Matthew Desmond and Rebecca Diamond): The Housing RG is tasked with exploring the inner workings of disadvantaged neighborhoods and the low-cost housing market, with a focus on (a) the relationship between housing, employment, and poverty, (b) the causes, dynamics, and consequences of eviction, and (c) the effectiveness of housing vouchers and other housing programs.

Incarceration (David Harding, Stephen Raphael, and Joan Petersilia): Since the mid-1970s, the United States has experienced a precipitous rise in incarceration, with about 2.3 million U.S. adults now incarcerated in state and federal prisons. In recent years, there has been increasing pressure to wind down this commitment to mass imprisonment, and it’s accordingly important to study ways to reintegrate successfully. The Incarceration RG is tasked with monitoring and evaluating the relationship between poverty and sentencing, parole reform, probation, reintegration, and recidivism.

Income and Wealth Inequality (Nicholas Bloom, Raj Chetty, and Emmanuel Saez): The CPI is home to some of the country’s most influential analyses of the income and wealth distribution. The purpose of the Income and Wealth RG is to monitor the ongoing takeoff in income inequality, to better understand its sources, and to analyze its implications for labor market performance, educational attainment, mobility, and more.

Labor markets (Gregory Acs, David Card, Michael Hout, Jesse Rothstein): Low-skill individuals are working less and, even when they are working, there is no guarantee that their jobs will lift them and their families out of poverty. The Labor Markets RG is tasked with conducting research on these related problems and exploiting administrative and other data to assess possible policy responses to them.

Life course (Greg Duncan, Arnold Milstein, Sean Reardon, Gregory Walton): The Life Course RG is dedicated to advancing research on life course theory and assessing how it can contribute to reducing poverty. The research within this RG focuses on issues of toxic stress, neurodevelopment, and epigenetics.

Poverty and deep poverty (Linda Burton, Kathryn Edin, and David Grusky): The main tasks of our Poverty and Deep Poverty RG are to describe trends in poverty and deep poverty, to assess the effectiveness of current anti-poverty programs, and to examine the likely payoff to introducing new anti-poverty programs.

Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration (Linda Burton, Toma?s Jime?nez, Hazel Markus, Douglas Massey, Marybeth Mattingly, and C. Matthew Snipp): The CPI has an extensive research program on race, ethnicity, immigration, and poverty. The National Poverty Study, for example, is designed to rigorously compare differences across rural black, deindustrialized, reservation, and other racialized poverty forms. The CPI also runs a comprehensive program on Hispanic poverty that explores such topics as the chilling effect of anti-immigrant laws on program use, the reasons why, contrary to much speculation, the Hispanic poverty rate has not taken off, and the causes of the so-called Hispanic Health Paradox.

Social mobility (Raj Chetty, Gary Solon, and Florencia Torche): The purpose of the Social Mobility RG is to develop and exploit new administrative sources for measuring mobility and
the effects of policy on mobility out of poverty. This research group is doing so by (a) providing comprehensive analyses of intergenerational mobility based on linked administrative data from U.S. tax returns, W-2s, and other sources, and (b) developing a new infrastructure for monitoring social mobility, dubbed the American Opportunity Study, that is based on linking census and other administrative data.

Safety net use [14] (Mark Duggan, Hilary Hoynes, and Karen Jusko): The Safety Net RG is devoted to monitoring changes in government transfers and anti-poverty programs and assessing whether they are meeting the needs of the poor. The CPI affiliates working within this research group are monitoring changes to the safety net, examining their implications for poverty, assessing the effectiveness of key government and nongovernment programs in reducing poverty, and modeling the costs and benefits of possible changes in policy and programs.

Residential segregation [15] (Robert Mare and Daniel Lichter): The available evidence suggests that income-based residential segregation is strengthening. Although past studies differ on the details of the increase, they mainly agree that metropolitan area income segregation grew from 1970 to 2000 and that such growth was most prominent in the 1980s and among black families or households. The residential segregation RG is charged with developing a new monitoring system that allows us to better understand these and related trends in residential segregation.

Learn more about our research projects [here][16] and view our recent publications [here][17].

The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, a program of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences [18], is partly supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Elfenworks Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the State of California, Sunlight Giving, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Ballmer Group, The James Irvine Foundation, Tides Foundation, the UPS Endowment at Stanford University, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation). From CPI’s opening in 2007, the Elfenworks Foundation [19] has been an especially generous supporter, and it continues to support many CPI activities.
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[16] https://inequality.stanford.edu/research/projects
[17] https://inequality.stanford.edu/cpi-research/all
[18] https://iriss.stanford.edu/