

Section 1

Introduction

Background

This is the second report providing information collected from the Family Resources Survey (FRS) Northern Ireland 2003-04. The report is intended to produce NI specific results and to compare these with the rest of the UK.

The FRS was launched in Great Britain in October 1992 to meet the information requirements of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) analysts. Traditionally, the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland had relied on other government social surveys, notably the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) and Continuous Household Survey (CHS).

Households interviewed in the survey are asked a wide range of questions about their circumstances. Although some of the information collected is available elsewhere, the FRS provides new or much more detailed information in a number of areas and brings some topics together on one survey for the first time.

Although the NI FRS results are specifically of interest to DSD, other government departments and outside researchers will benefit from the availability of such a data source. This report provides a summary of findings for 2003-04. The database from which it is derived has been deposited at the Data Archive of the University of Essex and is being made available directly to other government departments such as the Inland Revenue and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Data collected

Modelling Social Security benefit entitlement is central to many of the uses of FRS information, and the data collected reflects this, focusing on income, including receipt of Social Security benefits, housing costs and circumstances of household members, such as whether someone gives or receives care or has child care costs.

This focus also underlies the routing of some questions. For example, detailed questions on the value of liquid assets held are only asked of those respondents who are willing to provide an estimate of the value of their total savings and report a figure between £1,500 and £20,000.

Around a quarter of households surveyed fall into this category. This range is wide enough to capture those who may be entitled to benefit based on their capital but reduces the burden on the majority of respondents.

Further questions address other areas relevant to policy such as barriers to moving off benefits and into work, pension provision and maintenance payment and receipt.

The methodology section of this report summarises the information collected on the survey.

Contents of the report

The NI 2003-04 report is based on the UK report and has been produced primarily for the Internet. The report can be assessed at http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research.htm

Our aim is to present the information in a clear and systematic way.

An explanatory note has been given at the start of each section, which describes the tables, along with a summary of results.

Analyses, which set the results of the survey in context, are available in other publications such as the Department's Households Below Average Income report and compendia publications produced by the Office for National Statistics such as Social Trends, Regional Trends and the Social Focus series.

The structure of the report is as follows:

- Section 2 *Household Characteristics*
Overview of households, benefit units and individuals
- Section 3 *Income and State Support Receipt.*
Tables are shown on both a household and benefit unit basis and aim to exploit the detailed information that is collected by the FRS in this area.
- Section 4 *Tenure and Housing Costs*
Although primarily a survey of incomes, the FRS collects detailed information on this aspect of expenditure.
- Section 5 *Assets and Savings*
Like other surveys, the FRS collects information on the interest received on various types of investments. However, unlike most, for some respondents it also attempts to collect information on the actual value of holdings.
- Section 6 *Carers*
Information on those giving and receiving care on an informal basis.
- Section 7 *Occupation and Employment*
Information on the sample, data collection and processing.
- Section 8 *Local Government District Analysis*
Cross sectional analysis by LGD.
- Section 9 *Methodology*
Information on the sample, data collection and processing.

The questions concerning NHS treatment were scheduled to be rotated off the questionnaire this year but have been retained, as they are needed by FRS users to monitor the effectiveness of the new tax credit system introduced this year.

Information on ethnic groups is collected by the FRS in NI, but is not included in the analysis due to insufficient sample size. Regional tables on ethnic groups are included however and the following should be noted. In line with National Statistics harmonisation guidance the 'Asian or Asian British' category has been disaggregated to provide separate estimates for 'Indian' and 'Pakistani' and 'Bangladeshi'. The 'Other Asian' group is now included within 'Other Ethnic Groups'.

Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit replaced Working Families Tax Credit, Disabled Persons Tax Credit, Children's Tax Credit and the child element of new claims to Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance. Receipt of both regimes is referred to as 'Tax Credits' in this report.

Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) was replaced by Pension Credit in October 2003. Receipt under both regimes is included in this report as 'MIG/Pension Credit'.

Invalid Care Allowance has been replaced by Carer's Allowance.

An extra £100 annual payment was made with the Winter Fuel Payment to all those aged 80 or over. This has been included in state support payments.

Ownership of Basic Bank Accounts and Guaranteed Equity Bonds were collected for the first time this year.

Also in line with National Statistics' harmonisation guidance the tenure categories for 'Rented privately furnished' and 'Rented privately unfurnished' have been re-classified to include 'partly furnished' as 'unfurnished' instead of 'furnished'.

Changes for 2003-04 Report

In GB in 1999-2000, the rotation of questions was introduced in order to reduce the length of the questionnaire and the burden on respondents. Certain questions are now asked every other year, rather than every year. For 2003-04, questions on travel to work costs have been rotated off; questions on vehicle ownership and consumer durables have been reinstated. Questions on vehicle ownership are no longer asked of respondents aged 75 or over. The UK report, and hence the NI report reflects this change.

Uses of Family Resources Survey Data

The NI FRS will be used widely across DSD, the main uses being:

Analysis of patterns of benefit receipt for policy monitoring and evaluation, and benefit forecasting. Examples are the extent of multiple benefit receipt and the distribution of individual benefits.

Households Below Average Income (HBAI) NI publication. The income measure used is based on weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (i.e. income adjusted for household size and composition by means of equivalence scales).

Estimates of Take-Up of Income Related Benefits. Figures are based on a combination of administrative and survey data. The FRS provides information about people's circumstances, which is used to estimate numbers of people who are not claiming benefits to which they appear to be entitled.

The FRS traditionally has also been used as a sampling frame for follow-up studies to look at particular groups. The most recent example in GB is a follow-up survey of pensioners entitled to, but not claiming, Minimum Income Guarantee. The survey remit was to look at the circumstances of this group and establish why some pensioners were not claiming benefits to which they appeared to be entitled.

The largest example is the Disability Survey, which re-interviewed over 7,000 disabled respondents who appeared in the FRS between July 1996 and March 1997. The survey provided a detailed picture of type and severity of disability, extra needs and participation in leisure activities of the disabled. Merged with FRS information, findings were used to measure and analyse receipt of disability benefits and gather information to enable more accurate forecasting of expenditure.

Although primary users of FRS data remain within the DWP, the survey is increasingly being used outside this Department. The data set is provided to other government departments on request. Researchers and analysts outside government can also access the data through the Data Archive of the University of Essex. DSD will be the primary user of the NI FRS data.

Units and presentation

Throughout the report, tables refer to households, benefit units or individuals. The definition of a household used in the FRS is "a single person or group of people living at the same address who either share one meal a day or share the living accommodation, i.e. a living room". So, for example, a group of students with a shared living room would be counted as a single household even if they did not eat together, but a group of bedsits at the same address would not.

A household will consist of one or more benefit units, which in turn consists of a number of individuals (adults and children). "Benefit unit" relates to the tighter family definition of "a single adult or couple living as married and any dependent children". A dependent child is aged under 16 or under 19 if still in full time non-advanced education. So, for example, a man and wife living with their young children and an elderly parent would be one household but two benefit units. It should be noted that "benefit unit" is used throughout the report as a description of groups of individuals regardless of whether they are in receipt of any state support.

Figures for percentages based on sample estimates have been reweighted so that they apply to the overall population. This involves the use of a set of adjustment factors that attempt to correct for differential non-response at the same time as they scale up sample estimates. These factors take into account demographic variables such as age, sex and marital status together with region and tenure. Tables give unweighted sample counts as "sample size=100%" figures to help users to judge the robustness of the information (the larger the sample size, the more robust the relevant percentage figure).

In some cases tables within this publication may not be directly comparable to that in the UK since it has been necessary to aggregate parts of the tables to meet minimum sample size requirements.

Information on variables and data items tabulated in the report is provided in the Glossary. It should be stressed that definitions of items such as income and its components might differ from those used in other publications and from those used in GB FRS reports for 1997-98 and earlier. More details are given in the Methodology section.

Rounding and accuracy

The tables in this report show the results after validation and imputation for item non-response, and after adjustment for unit non-response using weights that control for a number of factors. However, validation can only be effective where it is possible to correct the response, for example by referring to interviewers' notes. Weighting can only correct for known non-response biases and results are sensitive to the values of control variables used to generate the weights.

Therefore, although work has been undertaken to try to ensure that the figures that have been collected are valid and that adjustments are made for non-response, problems will remain. For example, comparisons of benefit recipients on the survey with administrative data still show a mismatch following weighting. This may be partly due to misreporting of certain data items and sampling error, but may also reflect non-response biases not controlled for in the weighting factors. Efforts are continually being made to minimise these problems, for example through greater reliance on documentary evidence at the interview and maintaining response rates.

More information on NI FRS non-response and data quality is given in the Methodology section.

In the tables that follow, the following conventions have been used:

- 0 nil
- negligible
- . not available due to small sample size

Individual figures have been rounded independently. Therefore, the sum of component items does not necessarily add to the totals shown. Some tables do contain percentages based on sample sizes of less than 30. Care must be taken when referring to figures based on an individual cell.

Acknowledgements

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Contact points

If you would like further information on the NI FRS, please contact :

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Any comments on the presentation and content of this and future reports should also be sent to this address.

You can also find background to the FRS on our home page:

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research.htm

If you would like further information on the UK FRS, or have any general queries on FRS please contact:

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or

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