The Requirements of Jobs: Evidence from a Nationally Representative Survey

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A new survey, known as the Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS), is currently in pre-production at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This establishment-based survey collects data on the physical demands, cognitive demands, and vocational preparation of jobs, as well as on the jobs' environmental conditions. These data are being collected in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, who plans to use occupation-level estimates in SSDI adjudication. In addition to providing needed information for SSA, these data will provide useful insights in a number of different areas. While much is known about the education levels of jobholders in the economy, for example, much less is known about the skills actually demanded in jobs. Data from this survey will help fill this important gap.

Pre-production survey data will be obtained from roughly 2,500 establishments (including units from both the private sector and from state and local governments), with a random sample of jobs being selected at each establishment. We will present initial estimates of occupational requirements for the economy as a whole and by broad occupation and industry groups. We will also examine the relationship between cognitive elements (such as job complexity and communications) and vocational preparation (education, work experience, certifications, licensing, and training).

ORS data are selected from the same sampling frame as other BLS surveys, enabling the linkage of ORS data with those from other surveys. Pairing initial ORS estimates with data from the National Compensation Survey will allow us to estimate the relationship between the various occupational requirements and wage levels, including an assessment of which skills have a high return. Finally, we will assess the relationship between ORS physical demands and environmental conditions and safety outcomes, using occupation-level estimates from the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses.