

DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION ↓
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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Division of Research
and Statistics

October 18, 1963

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
School of Medicine
Stanford University
300 Pasteur Drive
Palo Alto, California

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Your letter of September 11 addressed to Mr. Edward Rosse has been referred to me. I am sorry that this has resulted in some delay in a reply.

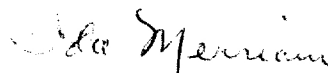
We recognize the many potential uses of the OASDI record data for research purposes. With the development of computer technology, the fairly widespread interest in data banks, and the increasing reliance on sample surveys for which our data provide unusually useful sample frames, we anticipate an increasing number of requests for access to the data.

Within the limits of administrative feasibility we are able to and do prepare statistical tabulations on a cost reimbursable basis for a considerable variety of users. What many researchers want, however, is the raw data. Here the problem we face is that of disclosure of confidential information. For what I think you would recognize as valid and important reasons, the Social Security Administration has always maintained the confidentiality of information relating to individuals. We have from time to time made such information available to outside researchers under very carefully circumscribed conditions. We are just now in the process of attempting to develop a more carefully formulated policy as to the conditions under which information should be released for research purposes.

I am enclosing some publications which will give you an indication of the nature of some of our records. In response to your comments I might point out that we do not have occupational information. What we do know is the industry (on a four-digit classification) and for some purposes this can substitute for occupational data. The income data that we have relate entirely to covered earnings up to the taxable limit which is at present \$4,800 a year. Except for certain groups of beneficiaries we do not have family data. While we have information on the death of beneficiaries and some workers, we do not receive copies of death certificates. We are currently discussing with the Internal Revenue Service, the Bureau of the Census and the National Vital Statistics Division the possibility of record linkages which would greatly enhance the value of our several series of data. This, however, is largely a matter for the future.

If you or a member of your staff expect to be in Washington or in Baltimore some time in the near future, we should be glad to talk to you about your specific as well as your general interest in the SSA data. With regard to your specific question as to the possibility of matching birth dates of individuals both from Terman's study and from the San Francisco blood bank study, the feasibility of such matching would depend on the extent of information in your records. If you have the social security account number matching is of course very easy. We can also match quite effectively if we have only mothers and fathers names, though the expense is greater. It is also possible that we could work out some way of giving you the statistical tabulations that would serve your purposes without involving any disclosure of individual information. Would you want to give us a little more information as to just what type of information you would want from us? We should certainly try to meet your needs if it is at all possible to do so.

Sincerely yours,



Ida C. Merriam
Director

Enclosures