

of living defined for the rest of the budget, be it developed category by category, or in the absence of objective measures derived in one operation from an assumed income-food relationship. In any case, the presumed relationship between food and other family living items or between food and income is critical. It is worth mentioning again that the selection will not be value-free. With a fixed set of numbers relating to food and income, and with the same basic assumption about the utility of food expenditures as a thumbnail guide to adequacy, Mrs. Rose Friedman derived a standard and consequently a poverty tally considerably lower than that of the SSA, whereas Dr. Alan Haber's assumptions based on the same data resulted in a higher one. (The dollar criteria for a four-person family ranged from \$2,200 according to Friedman to \$3,400 according to Haber, for the year when the SSA level averaged out at \$3,130.) Yet with basically different assumptions about how to determine equivalent need of households of different sizes, the BLS, SSA, IDA, Mrs. Friedman, and Dr. Eleanor Snyder arrived at much the same scale of relatives. The method used by the SSA in effect applies to the adult male nutrition unit as expressed in the food plans, but assumes probably incorrectly that the sum total for all other categories of family living can be related to age and sex of the members in the same ratio as food needs.

WHAT THE POVERTY STATISTICS DO

Because family size scales arrived at in such varied ways are pretty much of a constant, any poverty index which incorporates them probably could be counted on to give us a reasonable ordering of groups in the population by their degree of vulnerability. Thus the direction of differences between them and their order of magnitude could be useful even if the absolute numbers admittedly are weak. They could help us pinpoint action arenas and evaluate progress. They could illumine the special problems of the South, the slums versus the suburbs, and the difficulties faced by minority groups. They would be improved or at least achieve more stature with some time spent studying cost-of-living differentials, assuming there are any, from place to place and time to time. There must be a framework for adjusting the poverty line, however determined, for change over time in productivity and the general level of economic activity, and even for price change. Our knowledge of how consumers, poor or otherwise, adjust to rising prices and how they trade off one category of family living for another is still by gosh and by gum.

Perhaps the worst use of the poverty numbers is their most needed one. The present poverty lines, developed for gross measurement and admittedly imperfect, are being used as antipoverty guidelines pending results of further and better research. It is necessary to have an operational procedure, but to have it applied to families on an individual basis for program eligibility is at once the simplest and the least defensible extension. The range of individual need cannot be encompassed at a single stroke. All of the limitations discussed with reference to the poverty standard for group assessment are increased beyond measure when applied unaltered to a specific case. Even with separate poverty criteria for each of 124 different family types it was necessary or at least practical to assume only one set of age-sex prototypes for any given family group. Thus the poverty line assumes a family of five with three children always will need more than a family of four with two. Yet everyone knows that three little tots under 6 will not require as much food and clothing as two husky teenagers. In practice, the poverty lines used for program eligibility are abbreviated even further, because only one average income threshold is used for any family size rather than varying it by number of children and number of adults. On the one hand this seems inadequate; on the other hand a constant complaint about Public Assistance procedures is that too much effort is expended by social workers to determine eligibility tailored-to-measure.

As time goes on and our expertise improves along with our exposure, some of the difficulties now confronting us may disappear or at least become so familiar that they no longer disturb us. We can hope for the poverty criteria as for other social problems now confronting us that technology and methods of analysis will grow to meet the need. Over the years we have become sophisticated enough to aggregate data so as to be able to generalize. But now at least in economics and related aspects of the social scene we are become so much more sophisticated as to see the need to disaggregate. It is now not so much the central tendency we seek to isolate but the deviants from it. And our techniques and procedures will have to adjust accordingly.