Courts and Communities Survey

Methodology Report
**Prepared for The
Pew Charitable Trusts**

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Study Overview

The Pew Charitable Trusts engaged SSRS to conduct the Courts and Communities Survey, a national survey in the United States seeking to gain a better understanding of people's opinions and experiences with state and local courts. Some of the questions were specifically designed to get a better understanding of people's interactions with courts in their communities, such as the reasons for having to go to court and the possible emotional, financial, and social impacts this may have had.

The Courts and Communities Survey launched on August 22, 2024, and field closed on September 13, 2024. The survey collected data online from a nationally representative sample of n=2,016 adults (age 18 and older), with n=1,916 coming from web respondents and n=100 from phone respondents. On average, web respondents completed the survey in 15 minutes and phone respondents completed it in 27 minutes.

The data for this survey was weighted to represent the adult population of the United States. This report provides additional information about the methods used to collect the data and report the survey results.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was initially developed by the staff of The Pew Charitable Trusts. SSRS provided feedback regarding new question wording, order, clarity, and other issues pertaining to questionnaire quality. Together, the SSRS and Pew teams worked to finalize the questionnaire.

Upon final approval, SSRS formatted and programmed the survey for completion via phone and online. After programming, the SSRS team tested the program to ensure that skip patterns were working correctly, and that the program could be used efficiently by respondents. Additional steps were employed to ensure a quality experience in survey administration regardless of the device or browser utilized by respondents. Furthermore, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, so respondents were able to complete the survey in English or Spanish.

Pretest

Once the survey was programmed, SSRS conducted 11 cognitive interviews by Zoom to help identify questions that were confusing or not understood as intended, to evaluate the usability of the online survey instrument, and to allow for any further respondent feedback. Upon completion of the cognitive interviews, SSRS provided recordings and a detailed memo to Pew that included feedback and suggested revisions to the overall instrument. Following the pretest phase,

adjustments were made to the questionnaire and the survey program, and the program was prepared for the full launch.

Sample Design

The interviews for the Courts and Communities Survey were completed using the [SSRS Opinion Panel](). Most interviews were conducted with web panelists (n=1,916) with a small subset (n=100) conducted over the phone with panelists who prefer to take surveys over the phone. By using both web and phone panelists, we increase the likelihood that we reach populations that are typically less likely to complete surveys online, such as low-income individuals and older respondents.

Additionally, Pew was interested in assessing the opinions and experiences of individuals across two groups: people with disabilities and those who have had previous experience with courts (outside of jury duty). For individuals with disabilities, SSRS oversampled this group using information from the panel that relies on a series of questions asking individuals to self-assess if they have different types of disabilities.[1] Regarding the second group, best efforts were made to achieve a minimum of n=200 completes for those who have had previous experience with courts outside of jury duty.

Ultimately, SSRS conducted interviews with n=821 respondents who have disabilities and n=766 respondents who had previous experience with courts outside of jury duty.

Data Collection

Web Administration Procedures

Most of the interviews were completed via self-administered web survey.

A "soft launch" inviting a limited number of panelists to participate was conducted on August 22. After checking soft launch data to ensure that all questionnaire content and skip patterns were correct, additional sample was released to meet the study goals.

Panelists were emailed an invitation that included a unique passcode-embedded link to complete the survey online. In appreciation for their participation, panelists received a modest incentive (in the form of an electronic gift card). All respondents who did not respond to their first invitation received up to five reminder emails, and panelists who had opted into receiving text messages from the SSRS Opinion Panel received text message reminders.

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[1] See Appendix A for details on the questions used to oversample disabled panelists.

Overall, the average length of the Courts and Communities Survey for web respondents was 15 minutes.

Phone Administration Procedures

In addition to the self-administered web survey, n=100 interviews were completed by telephone with SSRS Opinion Panelists who do not (or prefer not to) use the internet. Phone interviewers were provided with both formal training and written materials on the survey. The written materials included an annotated questionnaire with information about the goals of the study as well as detailed explanations of why questions were being asked, potential obstacles to be overcome in getting meaningful responses to questions, and potential for respondent confusion that could be anticipated as well as strategies for addressing the potential challenges.

Overall, the average length of the Courts and Communities Survey for phone respondents was 27 minutes.

Table 1: Fieldwork Schedule

TOUCHPOINT	DATE
Web – Soft launch invitation	8/22/2024
Web – Full launch invitation	8/23/2024
Phone – First night of dialing	9/3/2024
Field close	9/12/2024

Data Processing and Integration

SSRS implemented several quality assurance procedures in data file preparation and processing. Prior to launching data collection, extensive testing of the survey was completed to ensure that it was working as anticipated. After the soft launch, survey data was carefully checked for accuracy, completeness, and nonresponse to specific questions so that any issues could be identified and resolved prior to the full launch.

The data file programmer implemented a "data cleaning" procedure in which web survey skip patterns were created to ensure that all questions had the appropriate numbers of cases. This procedure involved a check of raw data by a program that consisted of instructions derived from the skip patterns designated on the questionnaire. The program confirmed that data was consistent with the definitions of codes and ranges and matched the appropriate bases of all questions.

Final quality control checks for this study included a review of responses to insincerity or "trap" questions[2] to ensure that respondents are paying attention, "speeders,"[3] and the internal response rate (number of questions answered divided by the number of questions asked). Open-ended responses were key for assessing the validity of the answers, and they were reviewed for any illogical or out-of-place responses. Additionally, the SSRS team conducted logic checks to identify inconsistencies across questions. While some inconsistency in responses is expected, any unusual answers were subjected to further scrutiny.

While SSRS team members reviewed cases for each of these quality control measures, the decision to remove or keep any case was made by considering all measures as a whole. That is, someone may have completed the survey relatively quickly, but if their open-ended responses indicated a valid response, the case was kept in the datafile. In total, three cases were removed based on these quality control measures. Among all respondents, the vast majority (99%) answered all survey questions they received.

Weighting

The data for this project were weighted to represent the residential adult population of the United States. The data was weighted by applying a base weight and balancing the demographic profile of the sample to target population parameters.

Design Weight

The design weight accounts for differential probabilities of selection for the sample. The design weight for the SSRS Opinion Panel was computed differently depending on whether the panelist was recruited from an address-based sample (ABS), a prepaid cell sample, or the SSRS dual-frame RDD telephone Omnibus.

ABS Recruits

The design weight for ABS recruits corrects for the disproportionate ABS design by adjusting the distribution of sample across the ABS strata to match the distribution of the ABS frame across strata.

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[2] One type of "trap" question we typically use is to ask respondents to select a specific response option (e.g., "Select the option that is not a fruit") to ensure they are fully reading the question before selecting an answer.
[3] As part of the data quality checks, we review how long respondents take to complete the survey, relative to the average respondent time. When the length of the interview is significantly below the average, it can indicate a lack of attention to the questions or low data quality. However, this is not always the case, which is why "speeding" is reviewed in conjunction with other measures, such as reviewing open-ended responses.

ABS recruits come from a variety of sample sources, some of which employ different stratification schemes. The design weight for ABS recruits is tailored to the stratification scheme used for the sample from which the panelist was recruited. Currently, ABS recruitment waves for the SSRS Opinion Panel are stratified on a combination of geographic region and model-based indicators of the presence of key subpopulations.

Prepaid Cell Recruits

The design weight for prepaid cell recruits accounts for any disproportionate sampling of prepaid cellphone numbers from the cellphone RDD frame.

Telephone Omnibus Recruits

The design weight for the telephone Omnibus recruits is their original base weight computed at the time of the original omnibus interview. This base weight accounts for selection probabilities associated with the overlapping dual-frame Omnibus sample design.[4] This base weight is a function of the landline and cell frame sample sizes as well as each respondent's telephone usage and number of adults in the household.

Nonresponse Adjustments

Two adjustments are applied to the design weight to create the final base weight:
- A nonresponse adjustment correcting for variability in the recruitment response rate.
- An attrition adjustment correcting for variability in the rate at which originally recruited panelists are retained on the panel.

Both steps use a weighting class adjustment in which adjustment cells are defined by a cross of the recruitment channel and geographic strata.

For ABS recruits, a household size adjustment is also applied to correct for the sampling of one adult within each sampled address.

Disability Status Oversample Adjustment

A composite adjustment was applied to combine the probability panel base sample and the probability panel oversample. This composite adjustment brings the proportion of the two targeted groups in the combined sample to equal the proportion in the main probability panel sample.

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[4] T.D. Buskirk and J. Best J. "Venn Diagrams, Probability 101 and Sampling Weights Computed for Dual Frame Telephone RDD Designs," *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics* 15 (2012): 3696-3710.

The composite adjustment can be expressed as $\lambda_{i|PP,OS} = P_{i|PP}/P_{i|PP \cup OS}$, where $P_{i|PP}$ is the proportion of the probability panel interviews in stratum i and $P_{i|PP \cup OS}$ is the proportion of interviews from the combined probability panel and oversample in stratum i. The strata used for this adjustment were disability status.

Final Base Weight

The final base weight is the product of the initial base weight ($d0$) and the composite adjustment.

$$d0_{FINAL} = d0 \times \lambda_{i|PP,OS}$$

The final base weight was standardized to sum up the number of interviews.

Raking

With the base weight applied, the data was weighted to balance the demographic profile of the sample to the target population parameters.

Missing data in the raking variables was imputed using hot decking. Hot deck imputation replaces the missing values of a respondent randomly with another, similar respondent without missing data. Hot decking was done using an SPSS macro detailed in "Goodbye, Listwise Deletion: Presenting Hot Deck Imputation as an Easy and Effective Tool for Handing Missing Data" (Myers, 2011).

Weighting was accomplished by raking sample distributions to target population distributions using iterative proportional fitting. This procedure balances each calibration variable to target benchmarks individually and iteratively. The entire set of calibration variables is cycled through until the weights converge across all dimensions.

Data was weighted to distributions of: sex by age, sex by education, age by education, detailed education, race/ethnicity, census region, home tenure, number of adults per household, civic engagement, population density, party ID,[5] voter registration, religious affiliation, internet use frequency, age by disability status, sex by disability status, education by disability status, race/ethnicity by disability status, home tenure by disability status, number of adults in HH by disability status, and the marginal of disability status. The following table shows the data sources used for calibration totals.

Table 2: Calibration Variables and Source

DIMENSIONS	SOURCE
Sex	
Age	
Education	
Race	
Hispanic nativity	ACS 2022
Census region	
Home tenure	
Disability status	
Number of adults per Household	
Population density	Claritas Pop-Facts Premier 2023[6]
Religion affiliation	
Internet frequency	Pew Research Center's National Public Opinion Reference Survey (NPORS)[7]
Party ID	
Civic engagement	September 2021 CPS Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement[8]
Voter registration	CPS 2022 Voting and Registration Supplement[9]

Weights were trimmed at the fourth and 96th percentiles to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey-derived estimates. The table below compares unweighted and weighted sample distributions to target population benchmarks.

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[6] https://environicsanalytics.com/data/demographic/pop-facts-premier

[7] https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/fact-sheet/national-public-opinion-reference-survey-npors/ - Feb 1 to Jun 10, 2024.

[8] Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren and Michael Westberry. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 10.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V10.0

[9] Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren, Daniel Backman, Annie Chen, Grace Cooper, Stephanie Richards, Megan Schouweiler, and Michael Westberry. IPUMS CPS: Version 11.0 [dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2023. https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V11.0

Table 3: Sample Demographics

CATEGORY	VALUES	PARAMETER	UNWEIGHTED	WEIGHTED
SEX BY AGE	Male 18-24	5.7%	3.3%	4.8%
	Male 25-34	8.8%	7.1%	8.4%
	Male 35-44	8.6%	6.9%	8.5%
	Male 45-54	7.8%	6.4%	8.0%
	Male 55-64	8.0%	8.6%	8.3%
	Male 65+	10.0%	14.4%	10.4%
	Female 18-24	5.4%	4.8%	5.0%
	Female 25-34	8.7%	11.6%	9.0%
	Female 35-44	8.6%	10.2%	8.5%
	Female 45-54	7.9%	8.5%	8.1%
	Female 55-64	8.4%	7.8%	8.5%
	Female 65+	12.2%	10.6%	12.5%
EDUCATION	Less than high school	10.3%	7.7%	9.2%
	High school graduate	26.9%	33.0%	27.9%
	Some college/ associate degree	29.0%	26.9%	28.6%
	College graduate+	33.8%	32.4%	34.3%
SEX BY EDUCATION	Male HS grad or less	19.3%	17.2%	18.7%
	Male some college	13.6%	11.4%	13.4%
	Male college grad+	15.9%	18.1%	16.4%
	Female HS grad or less	17.9%	23.5%	18.4%
	Female some college	15.4%	15.5%	15.2%
	Female college grad+	17.9%	14.3%	17.9%
AGE BY EDUCATION	18-34 HS grad or less	10.8%	12.3%	10.2%
	18-34 some college	9.1%	7.7%	8.4%
	18-34 college grad+	8.7%	6.7%	8.5%
	35-54 HS grad or less	10.8%	12.8%	10.7%
	35-54 some college	9.0%	8.2%	9.1%
	35-54 college grad+	13.0%	10.9%	13.3%
	55+ HS grad or less	15.6%	15.6%	16.2%
	55+ some college	10.8%	10.9%	11.1%
	55+ college grad+	12.1%	14.8%	12.5%

Table 4: Sample Demographics (Cont.)

RACE / ETHNICITY	White non-Hispanic	60.6%	58.3%	61.0%
	Black non-Hispanic	11.4%	15.1%	11.6%
	Hispanic, U.S.-born	8.9%	11.6%	9.0%
	Hispanic, foreign-born	8.3%	6.7%	8.2%
	Asian, non-Hispanic	6.2%	5.7%	6.3%
	Other non-Hispanic	4.5%	2.6%	3.9%
CENSUS REGION	Northeast	17.4%	16.5%	17.2%
	Midwest	20.6%	21.0%	20.6%
	South	38.4%	40.1%	38.2%
	West	23.7%	22.5%	24.1%
HOME TENURE	Owns home	69.1%	59.8%	68.9%
	Rents home/ does not own home	30.9%	40.2%	31.1%
NUMBER OF ADULTS PER HOUSEHOLD	1 adult	17.0%	27.1%	17.7%
	2 adults	51.6%	49.8%	52.3%
	3 or more adults	31.4%	23.1%	30.0%
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	Not engaged	73.0%	67.3%	72.3%
	Civically engaged	27.0%	32.7%	27.7%
POPULATION DENSITY	1 lowest 20%	20.0%	19.1%	19.6%
	2	20.0%	20.6%	19.7%
	3	20.0%	19.8%	20.4%
	4	20.0%	19.6%	20.3%
	5 highest 20%	20.0%	20.8%	20.0%
PARTY ID (PANEL)	Republican	29.1%	30.2%	29.0%
	Democrat	29.3%	32.9%	30.1%
	Independent/Other	41.7%	37.0%	40.9%
VOTER REGISTRATION	Registered to vote	74.8%	81.2%	76.7%
	Not registered	25.2%	18.8%	23.3%
RELIGION	Affiliated	71.0%	69.5%	70.8%
	Not affiliated	29.0%	30.5%	29.2%
INTERNET FREQUENCY	Almost constantly	41.8%	47.6%	42.7%
	Several times a day	43.6%	43.3%	44.0%
	About once a day or less	14.6%	9.1%	13.4%

Table 5: Sample Demographics - Disabled vs Nondisabled

CATEGORY	VALUES	PARAMETER	UNWEIGHTED	WEIGHTED
DISABILITY	Yes	15.7%	33.9%	16.4%
	No	84.3%	66.1%	83.6%
DISABILITY STATUS BY GENDER	Disabled, male	7.4%	13.2%	7.7%
	Disabled, female	8.3%	20.7%	8.7%
	Not disabled, male	41.4%	33.5%	40.8%
	Not disabled, female	42.9%	32.6%	42.8%
DISABILITY STATUS BY AGE	Disabled, 18-34	2.3%	8.9%	2.5%
	Disabled, 35-54	3.2%	10.2%	3.4%
	Disabled, 55+	10.2%	14.9%	10.5%
	Not disabled, 18-34	26.2%	17.8%	24.7%
	Not disabled, 35-54	29.7%	21.8%	29.6%
	Not disabled, 55+	28.4%	26.5%	29.3%
DISABILITY STATUS BY EDUCATION	Disabled, some college or less	12.5%	26.4%	13.0%
	Disabled, college+	3.2%	7.5%	3.4%
	Not disabled, some college or less	53.7%	41.2%	52.7%
	Not disabled, college+	30.7%	24.9%	30.9%
DISABILITY STATUS BY RACE	Disabled, White/other	11.5%	22.1%	12.0%
	Disabled, Black	2.0%	5.3%	2.1%
	Disabled, Hispanic	2.2%	6.6%	2.3%
	Not disabled, White/other	59.9%	44.4%	59.3%
	Not disabled, Black	9.4%	9.9%	9.5%
	Not disabled, Hispanic	15.1%	11.8%	14.9%
DISABILITY BY HOME TENURE	Disabled, owns home	10.4%	17.7%	10.8%
	Disabled, rents home	5.3%	16.3%	5.6%
	Not disabled, owns home	58.7%	42.1%	58.1%
	Not disabled, rents home	25.6%	24.0%	25.5%
DISABILITY STATUS BY NUMBER OF ADULTS	Disabled, 1 adult	4.0%	10.1%	4.2%
	Disabled, 2 adults	7.1%	15.8%	7.5%
	Disabled, 3+ adults	4.5%	8.0%	4.7%
	Not disabled, 1 adult	13.0%	17.0%	13.5%
	Not disabled, 2 adults	44.5%	33.9%	44.8%
	Not disabled, 3+ adults	26.8%	15.1%	25.3%

Effects of Sample Design on Statistical Inference

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. SSRS calculates the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using this data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic nonresponse. The total sample design effect for this survey is 1.67.

SSRS calculates the composite design effect for a sample of size n, with each case having a weight, w, as:[10]

$$deff = \frac{n \sum w^2}{(\sum w)^2}$$

The survey's margin of error is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample — the one around 50%. For example, the margin of error for the entire sample is ± 2.8 percentage points. This means that in 95 out of every 100 samples drawn using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 2.8 percentage points away from their true values in the population. Margins of error for subgroups will be larger. For example, the margin of error of the disability group is 4.8. It is important to remember that sampling fluctuations are only one possible source of error in a survey estimate. Other sources, such as respondent selection bias, questionnaire wording, and reporting inaccuracy, may contribute additional error of greater or lesser magnitude.

How to Analyze Data With Oversamples

It is a common practice to oversample certain groups of interest to provide larger sample sizes for analysis. When groups are oversampled, weighting will correct for the oversampling by "weighting down" the groups to their proper proportion of the sample.

It is important for researchers to understand the weighting implications of these oversamples. SSRS typically computes "balancing weights," which means that the weights across the entire sample sum to the total number of interviews. If we have oversampled a group, the sum of that group's balancing weight will then be less than the number of interviews we completed with the group because that group has been weighted down in the aggregate. If such data was analyzed with a basic statistics package like SPSS, the margin of error for the oversample population would reflect the weighted n-size and not the number of interviews, which would lead to an overestimate of the sample variance.

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[10] L. Kish, "Weighting for Unequal Pi," *Journal of Official Statistics* 8, no. 2 (1992): 183-200.

There are two solutions to this problem. The first is to utilize a statistics package that can apply a Taylor series linearization to the data. Under this procedure, the researcher would enter a strata variable[11] into the statistics package that indicates the sample selections upon which under/oversampling occurred. This will allow the statistics package to calculate proper margins of error for estimates based on the true sample sizes of groups. Taylor series linearization will also account for the impact of any complex sample design features, such as stratification, on sample variances. The researcher will also attain a margin of error appropriate to the number of interviews rather than the weighted n-size, which can be problematic in some statistical software packages such as SPSS. Statistics packages that can compute linearized variance estimates include SAS with the survey procedures module, R with the *survey* package, Stata, and SPSS with the Complex Samples module.

In the case Pew does not have access to such a package, SSRS has provided a secondary weight that can be used to conduct analyses within oversampled groups or between oversampled groups and other respondents, as the main weight supplied with the data will be appropriate for analysis of the overall population only.

Researchers should be aware that although these two methods will obtain equivalent point estimates, they may not obtain equivalent sample variances, meaning that the results of statistical tests could differ depending on the method used. In general, when the two methods differ, Taylor series linearization will obtain the most accurate sample variances and statistical tests, both overall and within subgroups. Therefore, if the researcher has access to software that can conduct Taylor series linearization, this is the preferred method.

Regardless, SSRS has identified the strata variables so that researchers can properly analyze their data with the correct margins of error. The final variable used to identify the disability status is Q1. For this study two weights were developed for varying analytical purposes:

Weight

- This weight should be used when producing estimates within the following key sub-populations or in total, or when comparing the subgroups to each other.
  - Disabled
  - Not disabled

Disabled vs. Not Disabled_Weight

- This weight should be used only when making comparisons between the disabled and nondisabled groups as defined by Q1, and not for analysis across the entire sample.

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[11] Or a Primary Sampling Unit (PSU) for a multistage sample design.

Response Rate

For this survey, the response rate was calculated using the AAPOR Response Rate 3 formula.[12] The completion rate for this survey was 45% and the response rate was calculated to be 2% accounting for response rates to the SSRS Omnibus and ABS recruitment. While response rates are often linked with data quality, research finds that a low response rate does not necessarily lead to meaningful nonresponse bias in substantive outcomes.[13]

Limitations on the Design and Data Collection

All forms of public opinion research are subject to unmeasured error that cannot be eliminated. Efforts are used to reduce coverage error and nonresponse error through recruitment, study sampling, panel management strategies (including communication, incentive, and retention protocols), and weighting of the final data. These strategies support the computation of sampling error to estimate the extent to which the results from the sample might differ from population values. To reduce measurement error, our research staff evaluates questionnaires in terms of item flow, wording, and response formats to provide respondent-friendly surveys and elicit high-quality data and during quality control review of data processing steps and any data cleaning to minimize errors. For more information about this study, contact Maria Borden at mborden@pewtrusts.org.

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[12] For more on AAPOR response rates, see here: https://aapor.org/response-rates/

[13] R.M. Groves and E. Peytcheva, "The Impact of Nonresponse Rates on Nonresponse Bias: A Meta-Analysis," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2008): 167-89.

Appendix: Disabled Oversample

The oversample for the disabled population was carried out using flags from the SSRS Opinion Panel. Disabled panelists are identified as those who answer yes to at least one of the following items:

Do you have any of the following health conditions?

1 Yes
2 No
999 Don't know/Refused/Web Blank

01.   Are you deaf or do you have serious difficulty hearing?
02.   Are you blind or have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
03.   Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
04.   Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
05.   Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?
06.   Do you have serious difficulty learning how to do things most people your age can learn?
07.   Using your usual language, do you have serious difficulty communicating (for example, understanding or being understood by others)?
08.   Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?