

README
Household Relationship Content

2017 Current Population Survey
Annual Social and Economic Supplement
Research File

Introduction

The 2014 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) included redesigned questions for income and health insurance coverage, followed by changes in the 2015 CPS ASEC to allow spouses and unmarried partners to specifically identify as opposite- or same-sex. While data from the updated collection methods were released on schedule, data processing changes to take advantage of this new content are now available. We are re-releasing the 2017 CPS ASEC file to provide data users the opportunity to see the impact of these data processing improvements. We plan to use the new processing system for the CPS ASEC data that will be released in September 2019.

The 2017 CPS ASEC Research File provides income, poverty, and health insurance estimates based on these updated CPS ASEC questions as well as a redesigned processing system. This new system introduces demographic changes to account for same sex couples, revised procedures for editing income and health insurance data, and several new income and health insurance variables. Changes to the editing procedures encompass both changes to the resolution of logically inconsistent data and changes to the imputation methods.

The research file can be linked to other CPS ASEC files and supplements, including the previously released 2017 CPS ASEC Production File. There are changes in income, poverty and health insurance estimates between the 2017 research file and the 2017 production file. The 2018 CPS ASEC file will also be processed using the new system and re-released later this year.

Impact on Family and Household Content

In order to improve the measurement of same-sex families, the 2017 CPS ASEC Research File contains the following changes to the household relationship content. First, the relationship to householder measure (*perrp*) divides spouse and unmarried categories into opposite-sex and same-sex groups (i.e., opposite-sex spouse/husband/wife, same-sex spouse/husband/wife, opposite-sex unmarried partner, and same-sex unmarried partner). Second, the parent identification variables have changed from respondents identifying a mother and father in the household (*pelnmom*, *pelndad*) to identifying a parent and another parent (*pepar1*, *pepar2*). This allows easy reporting of children living with two mothers or two fathers. These changes will allow CPS data to more accurately reflect American families and households.

Background

Since the 2010 Census, the Census Bureau has worked to improve measurement of same-sex couple households in its demographic surveys. In reviewing the Census 2010 data, the Census Bureau became aware of a reporting error that affects data quality for same-sex married and unmarried couples (O'Connell and Feliz 2011). When two groups are related, and a very small proportion of the large group mismarks their answers to the relationship or sex questions, this can affect the estimates of the smaller group. This reporting error has the largest effect on the estimates of same-sex married couples, but also has a noticeable effect on same-sex unmarried couples. The effect of mismarks on the estimate of same-sex married couple households is substantial.

Working in the context of an Office of Management and Budget-led interagency group focused on measuring household relationships in federal surveys, the Census Bureau revised the relationship question to list additional categories and to address these kinds of reporting error. Specifically, the response categories for the relationship to householder question have changed from 'spouse' and 'unmarried partner' to dividing these groups into opposite-sex and same-sex categories (i.e., 'opposite-sex spouse,' 'opposite-sex unmarried partner,' 'same-sex spouse,' 'same-sex unmarried partner'). The revised relationship question was tested in multiple field tests, including the 2015 National Content Test (NCT) and the 2016 American Community Survey Content Test (ACS CT). The experimental groups produced similar distributions on the relationship question to the control groups and did not significantly increase item nonresponse rates (Kreider and Mayol-Garcia 2017; Seem and Coombs 2017). For numerous papers and reports detailing our investigation of this reporting error and results of quantitative tests of the revised question, please see the working papers available on the Census Bureau website (<https://www.census.gov/topics/families/same-sex-couples.html>). Beginning in May of 2015, the new question was introduced to incoming sample members in the CPS, and by the time of ASEC 2017, the entire sample was receiving the new question. The revised question was implemented in the Survey of Income and Program Participation in the 2014 panel, and implementation in the ACS is planned for 2019. The revised question will be used for Census 2020.

In addition to the revised relationship question, the Current Population Survey has shifted from asking about the presence of a mother and father, which was introduced in 2007, to asking whether a respondent has a parent in the household and a second parent in the household. As qualitative research suggested broadening the enumeration of parents in household surveys beyond just mother and father in order to include same-sex parents (Grady and McPhee 2011), the National Household Education Survey (NHES) tested new parent 1 / parent 2 living in household items beginning in January 2012. The results indicated that the parent 1 /parent 2 questions yielded higher identification of same-sex parents (Grady and Redford 2012). Likewise, the change in the CPS should allow respondents to identify two mothers or two fathers, not just a mother and father, increasing the detection of same-sex parents.

Background on the impact of family composition on poverty rates is summarized by Edwards and Lindstrom (2017) "Measuring the Presence and Impact of Same-Sex Married Couples on Poverty Rates in

the Current Population Survey,” available at <<https://census.gov/library/working-papers/2017/demo/SEHSD-WP2017-01.html>>.

Plans for Public Engagement

The Census Bureau continues to finalize the CPS ASEC processing system, which will be used to produce estimates from the 2019 CPS ASEC. Researchers at the Census Bureau expect to present detailed estimates using the new processing system for the 2017 and 2018 CPS ASEC at the annual meetings of the Population Association of America, the American Association for Public Opinion Research and the Joint Statistical Meetings in 2019. We also plan to host an expert meeting to discuss these changes before the September 2019 release of annual income, poverty and health insurance estimates.

References

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