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| **From:** | ruggl001@umn.edu on behalf of Steven Ruggles |
| **To:** | Harris-Kojetin, Brian |
| **Subject:** | Comments on ACS times married question |
| **Date:** | Saturday, May 04, 2013 2:14:45 PM |

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Dear Dr. Harris Kojetin,

I am writing about the Census Bureau proposal to drop the question on "number of times married" from the American Community Survey, as announced in the Federal register. I am very disturbed by the proposal. I am a member of the Census Bureau's Scientific Advisory Committee, but unfortunately the Committee was not informed of the proposed change until it was published. I am confident that if we had been notified, the committee would have unanimously advised against making this change.

For those of us who study family demography, losing this question would be a major blow. It is our main indicator of "blended families," which have become one of the most important kinds of families in the country. The times married question is not only vital for understanding blended families, it is also necessary for basic studies of nuptiality and marital instability.  A recent working paper by Sheela Kennedy and myself demonstrated that the ACS is the only reliable source currently available for national divorce statistics. Without the number of times married, however, these data will be severely compromised; for example, will be impossible to construct a life table for first marriages, or to estimate the percentage of people who have ever divorced.

I feel strongly that this change would do significant damage to the nation's statistical infrastructure. I would be happy to discuss the matter further and to explain how the decline in the vital statistics system has made the ACS the primary source of information about marriage. I can be reached by email of phone at 612-624-4081.

Thank you,

Steve Ruggles

Steven Ruggles
Regents Professor
Director, Minnesota Population Center