From: Patricia Papernow
To: Harris-Kojetin, Brian
Subject: re: deleting remarriage from the census
Date: Monday, May 06, 2013 6:16:52 PM

Dear Dr. Harris-Kojetin,

As one of the people who has been writing and thinking about remarried and stepfamily relationships for over three decades, I am urging you not to drop the question about the "number of times remarried" question from the census data.

Leading demographers tell us that it is likely that one out of two of us will live in a stepfamily relationship at some point in our lifetimes. We believe about a third of children under 18 currently live in a stepfamily. Despite these huge numbers, it is almost impossible for family scholars and clinicians to determine the number of stepfamilies in the U.S. population. Given the rising number of cohabiting couples, remarried couples are, in fact, only a proportion of stepcouples. To eliminate even this data point would be devastating to family scholarship and to our statistical infrastructure. It would significantly harm the ability of family scholars to study family structure in the U.S.

These numbers are vitally necessary for our understanding of the special characteristics of blended families, what makes them work and what makes them vulnerable. They are key to building a basic understanding of marital stability and instability. The ACS is the only reliable source available for national divorce statistics. A recent working paper by Sheela Kennedy and Steven Ruggles, titled "Breaking Up Is Hard to Count" demonstrates that deleting this question will significantly compromise our understanding of the divorce data. For instance, we will no longer be able to estimate the percentage of people who have ever divorced. It will also be impossible to construct a life table for first marriages.
http://www.pop.umn.edu/sites/www.pop.umn.edu/files/WorkingPaper_Breaking_Up_April2013.pdf

I strongly urge you to reconsider.

Yours,

Patricia L. Papernow

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and *Becoming a Stepfamily* (Taylor & Francis, 1993).