From: Iams, Howard M.
To: Harris-Kojetin, Brian
Subject: FW: ACS to Drop Marriage Question - Comments Needed by May 16!
Date: Monday, May 06, 2013 12:09:07 PM

Brian—

I think it a loss to eliminate the number of times married from the ACS. Steve Ruggles gives the academic reasoning on this. A programmatic reason would be that marriage is one of the two bases for Social Security benefits. As you know, spouse and survivor benefits are awarded to former spouses of entitled workers. The times married could be useful in identifying potential eligibility for benefits. If there are multiple former marriages, the beneficiary receives the highest benefit available. For analysts, statistical relationships could be used to project potential eligibility for benefits based on times married.

Regards
Howard Iams
Social Security Administration

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IPUMS

Dear IPUMS User,

I am writing to alert you that the Census Bureau is planning to drop the question on "number of times married" from the American Community Survey. For those of us who study family demography, this change would be a major loss. 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, the divorce data will be badly compromised; for example, it will be impossible to construct a life table for first marriages, or to estimate the percentage of people who have ever divorced.

The news of this plan appears in the Federal Register in a single sentence at the end of an otherwise harmless notice of request for comments. If you believe as I do that this change would significantly harm the nation's statistical infrastructure, you should make your feelings known to the responsible OMB desk officer, Dr. Brian Harris-Kojetin. He can be reached at (202) 395-7245 or by email at bharrisk@omb.eop.gov. The deadline for comments is May 16.

Thank you,

Steven Ruggles
Regents Professor
Director, Minnesota Population Center

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