From:	Andrew Cherlin
To:	Harris-Kojetin, Brian
Subject:	Removing the number of times married question from the ACS
Date:	Wednesday, May 08, 2013 3:41:32 PM

Dear Dr. Harris-Kojetin:

I am a social demographer who is often contacted by reporters to comment on trends in American family life. Over the years, reporters have expressed amazement that we do not have good, up-to-date statistics on divorce rates for their state or metro area, especially given the public policy attention to marriage. For example, when the governor of Oklahoma led an effort in the early-2000s to combat his state's high levels of divorce, everyone was surprised how little information there was.

The ACS was the solution to that problem. But the removal of the "number of times married" question substantially weakens it. There will still be a question about divorces within the past 12 months, which is good. But without the "number of times" question, we will not know how many people have ever divorced in Oklahoma -- or anywhere else.

The reason is that divorced people marry again -- some rather quickly. And once they are married, we cannot tell whether they have ever divorced. Unless, that is, we can determine whether they are in a second or subsequent marriage. If we have that additional information, we can count them as having divorced in the past, at least for young and middle-aged adults. (For older adults, some of the remarriages will have followed widowhood.)

That's why the "number of times married" question is valued -- not so much because we care how many times people have married in states and localities, but rather because we care how many people have ever divorced in states and localities. Only the ACS provides that information. I hope you will be able to retain this important question.

Regards,
Andrew Cherlin

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