



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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To: Anjani Chandra, NCHS/CDC

From: Kelly Kinnison, HSP/ASPE
Monica Feit, HP/ASPE

Subject: ASPE support for the NSFG

The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is a multipurpose survey of family formation, reproduction, reproductive health, and HIV risk and prevention that is in its eighth cycle of data collection since 1973. ASPE has found it to be the best source of detailed data on marriage, divorce, cohabitation, infertility, contraception and teen sexuality of any cross-sectional survey in the government. As such these data have been critical for informing policies around initiatives such as healthy relationships and teen pregnancy prevention. It currently is also one of the few Federal sources of information on fathers and their role in family formation and functioning and on incarceration as a potential risk factor in family formation and family life. This information is critical to policy work on family strengthening, promoting responsible fatherhood and reentry efforts for returning citizens. These efforts are consistent with the central purpose of the NSFG--to provide high-quality, reliable data essential for DHHS policy development, planning, research efforts, and program implementation across a wide variety of health and social welfare programs and issues.

OASPE has a long history of using NSFG data to help inform policies around families, particularly with respect to the low-income and welfare populations. One aspect of the NSFG making it particularly valuable is its rich retrospective data on union formation and fertility. As such, these data are informative not only for monitoring trends in key outcomes (e.g., what proportion of children are born to parents who are cohabiting), but also for analyzing the complex relationships between various outcomes and behaviors over the life course of the family. (e.g., how decisions about union formation affect subsequent family well-being). These life-course measures and analyses are of growing importance as policy makers and researchers realize that family structure is highly dynamic in ways that point-in-time measures cannot capture.

In addition, data on teen sexuality, abstinence and contraception have been critical to ASPE's role in developing policies and briefing materials around the prevention of teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and related sexual risk behaviors and evaluation of these prevention programs. ASPE frequently cites findings on teens from published NSFG reports, including measures of first sexual contact, types of sexual behaviors and attitudes toward outcomes such as having sex outside of marriage.

In Cycle Six (completed in FY 2004) the survey was expanded to ask questions of men as well as women. The additional content on marriage, cohabitation and child involvement as well as STI/HIV risk behaviors that has been included in the male survey makes the NSFG even more useful, as fatherhood is another critical area of policy development for ASPE. The information yielded from the male responses will be particularly valuable for monitoring and improving father involvement, understanding the determinants of marriage and family well-being from both male and female perspectives, and developing policies that would help prevent premature fatherhood.

In addition to the many instances in which ASPE uses NSFG findings for internal briefings and policy development, specific examples of ASPE sponsored reports and analysis using NSFG data are:

- *Fatherhood in the U.S.: Number of Children, 1987-2008*. National Center on Family and Marriage Research (Forthcoming FY 2012)
- *Fatherhood in the U.S.: Men's Age at First Birth, 1987-2008* National Center on Family and Marriage Research (Forthcoming FY 2012)
- *Fatherhood in the U.S.: Non-resident Father Involvement* National Center on Family and Marriage Research (Forthcoming FY 2012)
- *Childbearing After First Marriage Dissolution: Does Union Status Matter?* J.A. Cohen, Poster presented at the 2011 Population Association of America (PAA) Annual Meeting, Washington, DC (March/April).
- *Trends in Cohabitation: Twenty Years of Change, 1987-2008*, National Center on Family and Marriage Family Profile (FP-10-07) 2010.
- *Fertility Intentions Following First Marriage Dissolution: Does Union Status Matter?* J.A. Cohen, J. A. A. Poster presented at the 2010 Population Association of America (PAA) Annual Meeting, Dallas, TX (April) and at the 2010 Charles E. Shanklin Colloquium, Bowling Green, OH (April).
- *Marital Status and Sexually Transmitted Infections Among African Americans*, Eboni M. Taylor, Adaora A. Adimora, and Victor J. Schoenbach, *Journal of Families Issues*, Vol 31. No 9, September 2010
- *Dating Couples' Views about Cohabitation: The Role of Social Context*, W. D. Manning, J. A. Cohen, P. J. Smock, and G. Ostgaard, National Center on Family and Marriage Working Paper (WP-09-13) October, 2009.
- *Pathways to Adulthood and Marriage: Teenagers' Attitudes, Expectations, and Relationship Patterns*, Robert Wood, Sarah Avellar and Brian Goesling, Mathematica Policy Research Inc. ASPE contract HHS-223-02-0086, October, 2008.
- "Teen Sexually Activity, Childbearing and the Risk of Dependency" paper presented at the National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics conference (August 2008).
- *Marital and Unmarried Births to Men: Complex Patterns of Fatherhood, Evidence from the National Survey of Family Growth, 2002*. Steven L. Nock (University of Virginia). ASPE Research Brief, April, 2007.
- *County Couples, Counting Families*, S. L. Brown and W. D. Manning, National Center for Family & Marriage Research, Bowling Green State University, Proceeding from Conference held at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda Maryland, July 19-20, 2011.
- *Experiences with the Criminal Justice System in a Household Survey: Introducing the Survey of Criminal Justice Experience*, S. L. Brown and W. D. Manning, National Center for Family & Marriage Research, Bowling Green State University, August, 2013
- *Increased Coverage of Preventive Services with Zero Cost Sharing under the Affordable Care Act*. Amy Burke and Adelle Simmons (HHS/ASPE). ASPE Issue Brief, June, 2014.

Marriage and cohabitation, father involvement, pregnancy and intendedness, and teen sexuality and risk taking will continue to be important policy issues for ASPE. Adoption and reproductive health (infertility, breastfeeding, women's health care) are also emerging issues. NCHS's report on the adoption experiences of women and men (Jones, 2008) helped inform analysis of the National Survey of Adoptive Parents which ASPE and ACF have sponsored using NCHS's SLAITS mechanism. ASPE and NCHS staff have met to talk about how the findings relate and potential ways adoption data in the NSAP and the National Survey of Children's Health (to which the NSAP is an added module) might be used to further explore findings identified in the NSFG data. Thus, ASPE will continue to depend on frequent and reliable information that, based on a recent review of known health and social science surveys, is not

readily available outside of the NSFG.

The NSFG is currently the only survey collecting life history data for both males and females on family formation, sexual activity including STI/HIV risk behaviors, fertility, and contraception. The survey collects more information on fatherhood – both becoming and being a father--providing enormous potential for policy and program development. The survey was highlighted at the 2011 Counting Couples, Counting Families Conference, jointly sponsored by the National Center for Marriage and Family Research, ASPE, NIH and other agencies across the Federal government. The purpose of the conference was to examine the state of data collection on couples and families. This conference was a follow-up to several conferences sponsored a decade earlier by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics.

Equally important is the extensive socio-demographic information collected on the NSFG—not only detail on age, race/Hispanic origin, and education, but also characteristics not available elsewhere, e.g., religious affiliation and practice, income, employment and welfare dependency. Measures of immigrants and legal status are important for the same reasons. These characteristics are all likely to influence the family formation and well-being outcomes of interest. Attitudinal data on outcomes such as desired family size, marital intentions, and social acceptability of sex or childbearing outside of marriage are also key markers of societal trends that need to be accounted for when developing and evaluating policies.

Recently, information collected by the NSFG on incarceration played an important role in a joint DOJ-HHS panel of academic experts convened by the National Center on Family and Marriage Research (Bowling Green State University) to discuss expanding federal data collection on incarceration and other criminal justice involvement. Incarceration is one of the social determinants of health and also has been shown to be a risk factor for decreased family well-being.

The change to continuous interviewing for data collection from 2006 to 2010 has enhanced the policy relevance of these data even further by providing a mechanism for ongoing updating of the data rather than relying on periodic, time bound cross-sectional findings. We look to continue learning from this valuable survey as the results from the 2011 to 2015 continuous interviewing cycle are released.

If there are any questions about ASPE's needs for and uses of the NSFG data, please contact us.

Kelly Kinnison
Director, Division of Economic Support for Families
Office of Human Development Policy/ASPE
202-401-6659
Kelly.Kinnison@hhs.gov

Monica N. Feit
Director, Division of Public Health Services
Office of Health Policy/ASPE
202-690-6051
Monica.Feit@hhs.gov