

April 14, 2021

Anjani Chandra, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator and Team Lead
National Survey of Family Growth
National Center for Health Statistics
3311 Toledo Road
Hyattsville, MD 20782

Dear Anjani,

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) is responsible for advising the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, in the HHS Administration for Children and Families (ACF), on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of programs to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) is a rich source of detailed data on a range of topics that support the mission of ACF and its research arm, OPRE. As highlighted below, some of these topics include pregnancy prevention, healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, adoption, families participating in TANF, and family strengthening.

Pregnancy Prevention

ACF and OPRE rely heavily on NSFG data to guide work on the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) and Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) programs, both of which fund services to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STI) and teen pregnancy. Prevention science relies on nationally representative data to document trends in pregnancy, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections. Further, evidence-based prevention programs count on up-to-date information and trends regarding sexual behaviors and contraceptive use. Finally, understanding health disparities in STI risk and reproductive health provides a critical empirical foundation for pregnancy prevention initiatives. NSFG is a key data source for all of these domains.

ACF and OPRE are also using the NSFG to guide evaluation work in this area. For example, OPRE oversees an evaluation of the effectiveness of PREP, and the measures used in the PREP data collection instruments have borrowed from NSFG measures. When follow-up data are collected, it will be useful to compare PREP evaluation data to national data in order to further refine and guide pregnancy prevention efforts.

Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood

The NSFG also provides detailed national estimates and trends related to family planning, marriage, divorce, and parenthood, which are relevant to ACF's oversight of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grants. Responsible Fatherhood programs provide parenting, marriage and relationship, and economic stability services for fathers. Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education programs assist adults and youth in building stronger relationships and improving relationship skills. NSFG data on parenting and union formation and

dissolution can inform our guidance to HMRF grantees. The NSFG also helped inform the Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation, which examined the effectiveness of HMRF grant programs. Similar to the PREP evaluation mentioned above, we borrowed from NSFG questionnaires in developing data collection instruments for PACT and considered outcome data in light of NSFG data.

Adoption

The NSFG also provides data that can be useful for the Children's Bureau within ACF. The Children's Bureau focuses on child abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption, and promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and youth. The NSFG provides important information on adoption and demand to adopt. For example, the NSFG collects information about non-biological children who may have lived with respondents under their care and responsibility. Respondents are also asked about their current and previous pursuit of adoption, as well as about preferences for the characteristics of a child they would adopt (for example, age and race). This information is important for understanding adoption experiences in the United States, which informs our work in this area.

TANF

The NSFG also provides data that can be useful for the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) within ACF, which administers grant programs related to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF programs aim to help families foster economically secure households and communities for the well-being and long-term success of children and families. Both single and two-parent households are eligible for TANF. The NSFG asks respondents about whether they have received assistance from programs, such as TANF. This affords us the opportunity to understand both marriage rates and pregnancy/birth rates for individuals receiving TANF. The NSFG is one of the few nationally representative samples that allows us to do this.

Family Strengthening

Much of OPRE's work pertains to strengthening the family system by improving parenting and child development in families with low income. The NSFG contains data that is directly relevant to this work. For example, OPRE oversees a portfolio of research on the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, which provides pregnant women and families resources and skills to raise children who are physically, socially, and emotionally ready to learn. Additionally, OPRE conducts a large body of research related to the Head Start program, which promotes school readiness of children under five from families with low income through education, health, social and other services. The NSFG provides data related to pregnancy rates and income levels, which allows us to track trends for families with low incomes like the ones these programs serve.

Finally, several important methodological features of NSFG enhance its utility. In addition to a rigorous probability sampling design and data collection methods that lead to high response rates, ACASI methods are used to maximize complete reporting of sensitive behaviors. The transition to continuous interviewing is not only more cost-efficient than in previous years, but it also allows for a stream of more current data that is available for use.

We commend NCHS for providing rich data that facilitate the oversight and evaluation of many ACF programs that seek to improve the well-being of children and families. We look forward to continuing to learn from the NSFG data in the future. If there are any questions about OPRE's needs for and uses of the NSFG data, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Selma Caal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Selma Caal
Social Science Research Analyst
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
330 C Street SW, 4th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20201