COUNTING COUPLES:
Improving Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation Data in the Federal Statistical System

Highlights from a
National Workshop
December 13 and 14, 2001
The National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

Sponsored by:
The Data Collection Committee
of the Federal Interagency Forum
on Child and Family Statistics

Targets of Opportunity Identified by National Experts at the Counting Couples Workshop

Measuring Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation

- **Develop cost-effective systems using vital registration and/or survey methods for providing marriage and divorce data at the national, state, and local levels.**

  Conduct a study to assess the relative costs and benefits of vital registration and survey methods for tracking trends in marriage and divorce and providing data at the state and local, as well as national levels, and implement recommended systems.

- **Standardize marital status information across surveys.**

  Collect comparable information on the marital status of people, with cohabitation included as a category.

- **Collect summary measures of marriage and cohabitation history.**

  Ascertain the number of times married and the date the current status began in surveys whose major focus is not marriage and the family.

- **Collect full marital and cohabitation histories.**

  Ensure that complete cohabitation and marital histories are collected on a consistent basis and provided in a user-friendly format.

- **Include special populations.**

  Develop and study strategies for conducting reliable marriage and family related research on specialized populations such as institutionalized or group quarters populations, ethnic and racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and adopted and foster children.

- **Share existing questionnaires and knowledge.**

  Place examples of good questionnaire items from existing federal surveys on the childstats.gov website to be used as templates for surveys seeking to improve data collection. Include methodological reports that examine measurement quality.

- **Improve tabulation and publication of marriage and family formation data.**

  Expand, improve, and standardize categories presented in tables and publications to reflect the diversity of union status and family forms.

Measuring the Causes and Consequences of Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation

- **Increase the detail of household relationship information.**

  Identify the specific relationship of children to the adults in the household.

- **Develop and test key concepts.**

  Undertake small-scale cognitive and qualitative studies to improve the measurement and understanding of important concepts, including marriage, cohabitation, social fathering, men's fertility, father involvement, and reasons for mother or father absence. Issue a report of the findings.

- **Include measures of family-related values and attitudes.**

  Add a core set of attitudinal variables assessing attitudes, perceptions, and values toward family and family life to surveys whenever possible and appropriate.

- **Obtain information for *all* fathers and mothers in studies of children.**

  When appropriate, expand survey(s) to include information on all parents or guardians in the household and all nonresident parents.

- **Develop standard sets of variables to track indicators of the causes and consequences of family change.**

  Form a research group to identify and test important explanatory and outcome variables that should be added to surveys as time permits, and as appropriate to the goals of a particular survey; and compile a report of specific recommendations.

- **Develop a plan for a new family study to examine the causes and consequences of family change.**

  Form a research group to conduct a study to set specific goals and design data collection strategies with the ultimate goal of fielding a comprehensive marriage and family study.

- **Field a couples study.**

  Develop and field a couples study including information from both partners for cohabiting, married, and dating couples.

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This report presents the highlights of a national workshop attended by research, policy, and data experts from academia, nonprofit organizations, and government. It summarizes the presentations, the recommendations of the discussion groups, and the consensus of workshop participants on targets of opportunity for improving data on marriage, divorce and cohabitation. The targets of opportunity were developed by integrating the recommendations of the discussion groups and do not constitute a formal plan of action on the part of any federal or state agency.

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The Data Collection Committee of the Forum, chaired by **V. Jeffery Evans** assisted in planning the workshop and reviewing this report. Members of the Data Collection Committee not represented on the Writing Subcommittee included **Thesia Garner**, **David Johnson**, and **Jay Meisenheimer**, Bureau of Labor Statistics; **Julie Isaacs**, **Kelleen Kaye**, and **Linda Mellgren**, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services; **Shelley Jackson**, National Institute of Justice; **Deborah Rose**, National Center for Health Statistics; **Susan Schechter**, Office of Management and Budget; **Tracy Snell**, Office of Juvenile Justice Programs, and **Jerry West**, National Center for Education Statistics.

Lynne Casper, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and **Jason Fields**, U.S. Census Bureau organized and chaired the workshop on which this report is based. Child Trends, Inc., in support of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, assisted the workshop co-organizers in planning and coordinating the workshop. The workshop was held with funding from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, the Family and Child Well-being Research Network and The Demographic and Behavioral Sciences Branch of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. **Frank Avenilla** and **Janice Wahlmann**, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and **Fanette Jones**, Child Trends, Inc. assisted in coordinating the logistics of the workshop and along with Craig Richardson, Child Trends**,** Inc., staffed the workshop.

Several people facilitated the workgroup breakout sessions from which the final list of the Targets of Opportunity was derived. In addition to the writing subcommittee, facilitators included **Anjani Chandra**, National Center for Health Statistics; **Thesia Garner**, Bureau of Labor Statistics; **Kelleen Kaye** and **Linda Mellgren**, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; **Wendy Manning**, Bowling Green State University; **Kristin Moore**, Child Trends, Inc.; **Theodora Ooms**, Center for Law and Social Policy; **Wendell Primus**, The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities; and **Arland Thornton**, University of Michigan.

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Executive Summary

The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics was established to promote:

"Coordination, collaboration and integration...of Federal data on child and family issues and conditions."

To carry out that mission, the Forum publishes its annual report, **America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being**, and initiates other activities to improve federal statistics on children and families. The Forum's Data Collection Committee undertook a detailed review of federal statistics on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation, holding a workshop, "Counting Couples: Improving Federal Statistics on Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation," on December 13, and 14, 2001. The purpose of the review was to understand what is being collected on these topics, and how the quality and comparability of this information can be improved. This report presents the highlights of the workshop, the recommendations made by its participants, and the rationale for those recommendations. We hope that this report will be helpful to the Forum's member agencies, their staffs, and other interested parties, as they improve the measurement of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation, and their effects on the well-being of men, women, and children in the United States.

Over the past several decades, dramatic changes have reshaped America's families. Young adults have delayed marriage. Cohabitation before marriage has become more commonplace. One in three women giving birth is now unmarried, up from 5 percent in 1960. The proportion of children under 18 living in single parent families rose from 20 percent to 27 percent between 1980 and 2000, reflecting increased rates of both nonmarital childbearing and divorce.

The transformation in U.S. families has profound implications for policymakers. It is clear that family trends have had important effects — both positive and negative — on the lives and well-being of children and adults and on the ways in which families function. Effective economic and social policy depends in part on the ability to understand and address the changing shape and needs of American families. This, in turn, requires valid and reliable data on marriage, divorce, remarriage, (hereafter included in the term marriage), cohabitation, and the family situations of children over time at the national, state, and local levels.

Statistical data are used in the policy arena for a variety of purposes. They are used to provide basic point-in-time descriptive data on the current composition of families and households in the United States; to map trends in family formation and structure; and to understand the causes of family change and how they impact the well-being of children. They are used for developing and targeting policies and intervention strategies, such as those currently envisioned to strengthen marriage, and for evaluating whether programs and strategies are working properly and meeting intended goals.

In December 2001, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics convened the Counting Couples Workshop to assess how some of the major agencies in the federal statistical system were meeting the need for data on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. Over 90 professionals from federal and sate statistical agencies, policy organizations, and academic and research organizations participated. On the first day, participants reviewed information needs of policymakers and academic researchers and the adequacy of data available through existing data collection activities to address these needs. On the second day, participants divided into seven discussion groups to identify the most critical needs and the best strategies for short- and long-term improvements. This report summarizes the presentations, the recommendations of the discussion groups, and the consensus of workshop participants developed through the integration of group recommendations. These recommendations are suggestions for improvements and are not meant to be taken as a mandate for action.

Workshop participants overwhelmingly agreed that the federal statistical system can and should improve the consistency and accuracy of the measurement of family structure and family transitions such as marriage, divorce, and cohabitation. Basic information is needed not only at the national level, but also at the state and local levels where responsibility for policymaking is increasingly shared. Participants also emphasized the need to better understand why family change occurs and the consequences it has for the well-being of families, couples, and children. They called for improved data on several topics related to this need, including the role and presence of fathers in the family, the relationship between family structure and child well-being, the quality of couple relationships, family

attitudes and norms, and the causes and consequences of family change.

A set of 14 specific Targets of Opportunity for improving data on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation and on the causes and consequences of union formation, dissolution and family change were identified through a synthesis of the discussions of workshop participants held in several independent working groups. A list of these Targets of Opportunity can be found at the beginning of this report. The Targets of Opportunity varied with respect to the resources required for implementation and the degree to which the seven discussion groups uniformly endorsed them. Four targets were both highly endorsed (by at least five of the groups) and required substantial investments to accomplish. These include:

- **Develop cost-effective systems using vital registration and/or survey methods for providing marriage and divorce data at the national, state, and local levels.**

  At present, no data on marriage and divorce are reliably available at the state and local level. Two approaches for filling this gap are possible. One relies on universal vital registration of all marriages and divorces, and one relies on surveys designed to produce estimates at the state and local levels. A study should be conducted to assess the relative costs and benefits of vital registration and survey methods for tracking trends in marriage and divorce and providing data at the state and local levels. Cost-effective data collection systems should be put in place in accordance with the study's findings.

- **Collect full marital and cohabitation histories.**

  The ability to measure trends in marriage, cohabitation, and family formation behaviors is seriously limited by the lack of representative data on individual histories of marriage and cohabitation. Collecting complete marriage and cohabitation history data in, for example, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) would permit analyses of cohabitation histories in conjunction with rich history data on fertility, marriage, work, income, and program participation. Similarly, complete marital and cohabitation history data on the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) would allow research on these behaviors in relation to births and pregnancies, contraception, and other reproductive behaviors.

- **Obtain information for *all* fathers and mothers in studies of children.**

  Studies of the influence of family structure and family interaction on child development and well-being currently paint an incomplete portrait of children's experiences because they seldom collect information from more than one parent in the household (usually the mother). To the extent possible, surveys that collect information on parental-child interaction should collect it for all parents or guardians in the household and for absent parents. Immediate opportunities for implementing this recommendation are available through the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) and SIPP.

- **Develop a plan for a new family study to examine the causes and consequences of family change.**

  Sound research on the causes and consequences of family change is essential to inform policy. However, the federal government does not currently support any major data collection program designed to improve our understanding of the causes of changes in family forms, union formation and stability over time. While there is broad consensus among researchers and policymakers that a data collection program is necessary to fill this void, the exact nature of the study needs careful consideration. Therefore, a planning initiative is recommended to develop a plan for this study.

  In some respects, the workshop that was held, and the resulting proceedings, represent the easy part of the challenge we face. Improving the state of data about couples will require the dedication of financial and human resources and a strong commitment to follow through in our efforts, as recommendations get turned into real improvements in the data systems throughout the federal government. The cost of transforming recommendations into realities will not be small. Workshop participants were asked to address the need for data on union formation and dissolution but not to evaluate these needs against needs in other substantive areas that are also competing for scarce time on federal surveys. In addition to the direct costs of modifying, expanding or developing surveys, there are also the competing pressures to respond to data needs in other areas. However, these recommendations constitute necessary enhancements to improve our understanding of the state of families and their children in an ever-changing society.

Overview of the Counting Couples Workshop

Introduction

The Counting Couples Workshop was held on December 13 and 14, 2001, at The Cloister on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland (see Appendix A for the workshop agenda). Over 90 professionals from a variety of backgrounds — federal and state statistical agencies, policy organizations, and academic and private researchers — gathered to discuss how to improve the measurement and collection of information about couples (see Appendix B for a roster of workshop registrants).

A wide array of participants were selected to represent different perspectives on this topic, including policy, research, and data collection specialists. Their task was to identify critical shortfalls in current data systems, develop consensuses about the most critical points of need, and discuss strategies for possible short and long-term improvements.

Katherine Wallman, Chief Statistician at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, opened the program. She welcomed the attendees and noted that the workshop was one of many important initiatives of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics:

> She stated, "The forum's principal mission is to improve the comparability of data across agencies, to enrich the types of data collected, and to enhance the reporting and dissemination of information on the status of children and families."

Ms. Wallman indicated that the counting couples workshop is one example of the work the Forum is undertaking to improve child and family statistics across a wide range of important domains.

Policy, Research, and Data Presentations

The first morning of the workshop included nine presentations about the policy and research data needs on couples (Appendices C and D). These presentations identified policy and program interests and needs, as well as a series of basic research issues.

In the afternoon, presentations were made by four of the major statistical agencies collecting data on couples (Appendix E). They outlined the types of data currently collected, identified areas for improvement, and delineated substantive gaps in current data collection activities. Presentations by the U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National Center for Education Statistics provided information on the available data pertaining to couples in 14 major national data collection systems. The presentations focused on both the relative strengths and weaknesses of each data collection program.

Dr. Jennifer Madans, Associate Director for Science at the National Center for Health Statistics, concluded the afternoon by summarizing some of the main themes of the first day's proceedings. First, she remarked how enlightening the afternoon sessions had been in revealing the plethora of data on couples already collected by the federal government. Many of the participants could be heard murmuring throughout the afternoon that they did not know the kind of information collected by various surveys.

Dr. Madans' second observation was that the relative utility of couples data is influenced by the context in which the data are collected:

> " In the case of 'counting couples,' we can't expect every data collection system to collect the full range of detail necessary to both monitor and understand trends in marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation. Some surveys are primarily used to monitor family change, while others can be used to understand the causes and consequences of these changes, and still others are used to monitor other social phenomena such as trends in labor force participation or health. "

A first step, then, concerns consistency in data collection: " Since it is not possible for every survey to get all the detailed information needed, there should be some kind of a coordinated effort to assure that data are collected as consistently as possible even if the amount of information collected differs."

One idea that surfaced repeatedly was the need to develop standard questions and questionnaire modules to measure more complicated concepts, such

as information on cohabitation and the nature of the parent/child relationship.

Dr. Madans' final point concerned the vital statistics system. She noted that while this system has the potential of providing a complete and accurate count of basic events at the national level and for sub-national geographic areas, there are also difficulties in collecting quality "couple" data using this methodology. In addition to the inability to obtain information on cohabitation or health outcomes, there are significant logistical constraints inherent in this method. Dr. Madans cautioned that developing a vital statistics system for marriage and divorce requires careful consideration because of the high costs and difficulties in administering the system across states and suggested that it might be more cost effective to modify surveys. She pointed out that resources are scarce and a serious discussion of how to allocate limited funding to meet a wide range of data needs is warranted.

Workgroup Deliberations

Day 2 of the workshop was devoted to a small group exercise focused on identifying "Targets of Opportunity" in the federal data collection system. These targets might either be "easy" to implement within a short time period, with relatively minor additional costs or "difficult" to implement, requiring a longer time-frame and substantial resources. However, all should represent changes which would significantly improve our knowledge of couples. Seven working groups of 6-10 persons each developed a short consensus list of five easy and five difficult targets (Appendix F). In the afternoon session, the full group reconvened to discuss these lists and possible points of commonality. These lists, as well as the ensuing discussion, provided the core information used by the writing subcommittee to refine the targets into a set of recommended changes and improvements. The list of the final 14 Targets of Opportunity is presented in the next section of this report.

Dr. Suzanne Bianchi, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center on Population, Gender, and Social Inequality at the University of Maryland, closed the workshop activities. She began by addressing the issue: "Why does it matter when and if individuals are married, cohabiting, or doing something else?" One critical answer that emerged at the workshop was "the very strong belief on the part of many legislators and researchers that marriage and cohabitation matter for children's well-being." However, Dr. Bianchi asserted that while we do know *that* marriage is associated with greater child well-being, we do not really know *why* or *how much* of the relationship is caused by marriage and how much by other factors. Until we learn the answers to these important questions, we will not be able to develop effective marriage-based policy aimed at improving children's well-being. Therefore, the improvement and expansion of these data are critical.

In closing, Dr. Bianchi noted four core issues repeatedly raised at the workshop, and suggested these might become part of the focus of future work. These four topics are:

- The need for improving how data on complex family relationships are collected, measured, and published;
- The need for state and local data;
- The call for classifying the relationships of each child to everyone in the household; and
- The need for a completely new data collection, beyond those already undertaken to understand the causes and consequences of family change.

Dr. Bianchi was quick to note that these needs still may not be well-articulated, and that these activities, especially those involving large costs, will require substantial planning, research, development, and evaluation before they become reality.

All of the supporting materials for this report including the policy and research presenters' statements, the data presenters' data worksheets, and the workgroups' original "Targets of Opportunity" lists can be found on the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics' Web site (http://www.childstats.gov).

Targets of Opportunity Identified by the Working Groups

On the second day of the workshop, participants were divided into seven working groups and given the task of identifying "targets of opportunity" to improve the collection and dissemination of couples data in the federal statistical system. The groups were instructed to determine whether each recommendation would be "hard" or "easy" to implement.

Following the workshop, a small group of agency representatives formed a writing committee to synthesize the suggestions from each of the seven workgroups into one list of Targets of Opportunity. A relatively broad consensus emerged from the working groups as to the steps that could be taken to improve federal statistics. This final list represents the fourteen highest priorities identified in the workshop. The goals on the final list are not ranked in order of importance; all are viewed as important, although some will take more time and resources to implement than others. The writing group consisted of Drs. Lynne Casper, V. Jeffery Evans, and Mr. Frank Avenilla of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Drs. Jason Fields, Robert Kominski, and Martin O'Connell of the United States Census Bureau; Dr. Bill Mosher of the National Center for Health Statistics and Dr. Chuck Pierret of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

As the workshop progressed, it became clear that improvements were not only necessary in measuring basic indicators, but that policymakers and researchers were also interested in understanding why these changes are occurring and the consequences they have for the well-being of families, couples, and children. Therefore, these Targets of Opportunity are organized in two broad groups: I) the measurement of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation; and II) the measurement of the causes and consequences of union formation, dissolution and family change.

Each target in this final list contains a description of the importance of the activity, including the number of groups that listed it as high priority. Originally the list was organized according to the tasks the groups thought were "easy" to accomplish and those they thought were "hard" to accomplish. However, in synthesizing these recommendations it was difficult to maintain this distinction; some groups' "easy" targets were on other groups' "hard" lists and vice versa. Therefore, for each Target of Opportunity an accounting of the resources needed to implement each goal, including additional funds, staffing, cross-agency collaboration, and time is provided.

Measuring Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation

- **Develop cost-effective systems using vital registration and/or survey methods for providing marriage and divorce data at the national, state, and local levels.**

  Conduct a study to assess the relative costs and benefits of vital registration and survey methods for tracking trends in marriage and divorce and providing data at the state and local, as well as national levels, and implement the recommended systems.

  Importance: Data on the incidence, trends, and characteristics of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation are essential to guide social and economic policy. As policy is increasingly formed at the state and local levels, it is also essential to produce these data at the state and county levels. At present, no data on marriage and divorce are reliably available at the state and local levels. Two approaches for filling this gap are possible. One relies on vital registration of marriage and divorce, and one relies on surveys designed to produce estimates at the state and local levels.

  The vital statistics system collected data on annual marriages and divorces from 1957 until 1995, when funding was no longer available to support the system. State laws governing registration vary, so not all states provided data and, among participating states, the quality and completeness of the data varied. Vital registration systems in the United States never collected data on unmarried cohabitation, and their potential ability to do so is questionable. Comparable survey data on current levels and trends in marriage and divorce are produced at the national level by the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), but existing and planned federal surveys would have to

expand their content and/or their samples to meet this need at the state and local levels.

Participants agreed that many questions remain unanswered, including whether the vital registration system could be expanded and improved to produce adequate and reliable data; whether a large national survey such as the American Community Survey could be expanded to produce these data; whether both types of data are necessary; what costs and benefits each strategy would entail; and what the most efficient use of resources would be. Workshop participants strongly endorsed the need for the federal government to collect these data and unanimously endorsed both undertaking a study and acting on its recommendations as a high priority.

Implementation: A panel should be formed including federal, state, and local representatives, researchers, and policymakers to study whether: 1) the vital statistics system can be modified to produce the data needed; 2) survey instruments can adequately provide the necessary information; 3) the costs and benefits of one approach outweigh another; and 4) both systems of data collection are necessary. This group should issue a report of its findings, and the findings should guide the implementation of statistical systems to produce the needed data. Forming a panel of representatives and conducting the study will require modest resources, but implementing the final recommendation could cost a substantial amount and take several years to implement.

- **Standardize marital status information across surveys.**

  Collect comparable information on the marital status of people, with cohabitation included as a category.

  Importance: The workgroups all agreed that there are measures currently in use in federal surveys that are outdated because they do not consistently measure cohabitation and separation. The groups recommended that federal surveys consider collecting information on five union status categories: married, spouse present; separated; never married; widowed; and divorced. The separated category might be further subdivided to identify those who are separated for reasons of discord and those who are separated for other reasons. Furthermore, information on cohabiting status should be collected for all adults who are not married. Cognitive research should be undertaken to identify the specific survey questions that effectively elicit this information across diverse populations. The independent recommendations of all seven workgroups indicated that this target is a high priority.

  Implementation: This Target of Opportunity is relatively easy to implement, but will require preliminary research and the retooling of questionnaires, data processing routines, and codebooks. The resources associated with this task are considered low and include increased staff time; a slight increase in funding to field an extra question or two, if that is what the research calls for; cross-agency agreement on the questions asked, and a relatively small amount of time to implement.

- **Collect summary measures of marriage and cohabitation history**.

  Ascertain the number of times married and the date the current status began in surveys whose major focus is not marriage and the family.

  Importance: Not all surveys are focused on monitoring changes in marriage, families, and households; and many surveys cannot include full marital and cohabitation histories. Yet the collection of these data is essential for understanding the relationship between union patterns and a variety of other outcomes. Significant information about relationship histories can be garnered with the addition of just a few basic questions. Whenever possible these surveys should collect partial histories by asking questions about the number of times previously married for all adults who are or have been married and the date their current status began (e.g., the date the current marriage or cohabitation began for those currently in a union and the date of separation, divorce, or widowhood, for those not currently in a union). These data should be collected from the individuals themselves and not from proxy respondents. All seven workgroups felt that it is important to include this kind of summary union history information in surveys.

  Implementation: Some workgroups recommended specific surveys that would especially benefit from this recommendation, including the American Community Survey, the Decennial Census, and the Current Population Survey. Congressional approval would be necessary to

include these questions of the Decennial Census. This objective is relatively easy to implement, requiring mainly additional staff time to change questionnaires, modify data processing, and update documentation. Additional funding will be required to field the additional questions, but this type of change could be implemented more quickly than others.

- **Collect full marital and cohabitation histories.**

  Ensure that complete cohabitation and marital histories are collected on a consistent basis and provided in a user-friendly format.

  Importance: Currently no federal survey exists that collects a full cohabitation history from a nationally representative sample of all adults in the United States. Such information is essential for assessing trends in marriage, cohabitation, and family formation behaviors. At least one federal survey should collect complete cohabitation, marriage, and fertility histories in an ongoing basis. In years past, the Current Population Survey (CPS) collected a marital and fertility history every 5 years, but this supplement was discontinued because it duplicated information collected in the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and the quality of the data was deteriorating. The SIPP collects marital, fertility, and work histories, but currently does not collect a cohabitation history. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) collects complete marriage and cohabitation histories, but only for women 15-44 years of age. Abbreviated histories will be included for men in the NSFG beginning in 2002. This Target of Opportunity was recommended independently by five of the seven workgroups.

  Implementation: The most promising opportunities for achieving this goal include adding a full cohabitation history to the SIPP and preparing easy to use public use files; and expanding the age range, coverage, periodicity, and questionnaires in the NSFG to collect full history data. These options have different advantages. A cohabitation history on the SIPP would permit analyses of cohabitation histories in conjunction with rich history data on fertility, marriage, work, income, and program participation. Complete marital and cohabitation history data on the NSFG would allow research on these behaviors in relation to births, pregnancies, contraception, and other reproductive behaviors. Both options require additional funding, although the amounts will vary by the option chosen. They will also require significant staff time to rework the questionnaires, data processing programs, and codebooks. In addition, substantial lead-time would likely be necessary to adequately pretest and implement the addition of these questions.

- **Include special populations.**

  Develop and study strategies for conducting reliable marriage and family related research on specialized populations such as institutionalized or group quarters populations, ethnic and racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and adopted and foster children.

  Importance: Marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation behaviors in the United States vary according to race, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Most federal surveys, due to the expense or difficulty getting an appropriate sample, either entirely exclude certain populations from consideration or do not include large enough samples to produce reliable statistics. This lack of data limits our knowledge of marriage, divorce, cohabitation, remarriage, and family behaviors within these groups. Innovative strategies would need to be devised to begin to collect information on these groups. Four out of the seven groups independently recommended this as a Target of Opportunity.

  Implementation: Substantial funding would be necessary to increase the sample sizes of targeted populations in some surveys. Substantial time would be needed to plan new data collections to include the populations that have not traditionally been included in the past.

- **Share existing questionnaires and knowledge.**

  Place examples of good questionnaire items from existing federal surveys on the childstats.gov website to be used as templates for surveys seeking to improve data collection. Include methodological reports that examine measurement quality.

  Importance: The quality of questions employed in federal surveys usually has been assessed in cognitive laboratories, pilot tests, and ultimately, in large-scale studies. As a result, analysts know which questions work well, which don't, and which need improvement. At a minimum the website should contain good questions on: a)

current marital and cohabitation status; b) household relationships, including ways to identify the specific relationship of children to adults (e.g., biological, step, adopted, foster); and, c) marital and cohabitation histories. In addition, the website should include any references to literature that examines or discusses whether a consensus on the meaning of these concepts exists and how best to measure them, including documenting validity, reliability, and other indicators of measurement quality. This task is a first step toward helping federal agencies, policymakers, and researchers wade through the many alternative versions of these questions. Three working groups listed this endeavor among one of the most important to complete.

Implementation: This Target of Opportunity can be accomplished relatively quickly and primarily requires staff time to implement. The activity will require input from various agencies.

- **Improve tabulation and publication of marriage and family formation data.**

  Expand, improve, and standardize categories presented in tables and publications to reflect the diversity of union status and family forms.

  Importance: The categories federal agencies use to report family and marriage statistics tend to be outdated because they do not include cohabitation, remarriage, and the relationship status of children (e.g., biological, step, adopted, foster). Thus, they do not reflect the existing diversity in families. Different agencies also use different categories for presenting this information. Whenever possible, publications and supporting tables in government publications should be revised to include the expanded categories of marital status and family/household relationships. Four of the seven groups independently identified this target as a high priority.

  Implementation: This Target of Opportunity will be moderately hard to achieve. First, the necessary data will need to be collected. Second, the tables will need to be reprogrammed and the reports reorganized and rewritten. Third, the standardization of these reporting categories would require agreement on a standard to be used across agencies. However, other than increased staff time, very few additional funds are required.

Measuring the Causes and Consequences of Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation

- **Increase the detail of household relationship information.**

  Identify the specific relationship of children to the adults in the household.

  Importance: Typically, current studies ask how children in the household are related to the person who maintains the household. This method makes it hard to assess with any degree of accuracy whether a child lives with one or two parents and whether she/he is the biological child of those parents. Questions should be asked to determine the presence of a child's parents in the household and the relationship of the child to those parents (biological, step, adopted, foster). At a minimum, this information should be included on surveys where parent and child information is relevant for the purposes of the study. This recommendation was mentioned as a high priority by all seven working groups.

  Implementation: The task is considered to be relatively easy to accomplish, requiring increases in staff time to modify questionnaires, data processing and codebooks. Implementation could take place immediately, but will also require a small amount of funding to field the additional questions.

- **Develop and test key concepts.**

  Undertake small-scale cognitive and qualitative studies to improve the measurement and understanding of important concepts, including marriage, cohabitation, social fathering, men's fertility, father involvement and reasons for mother or father absence. Issue a report of the findings.

  Importance: Accurately measuring marriage and family change has become more difficult as family forms and unions have become more diverse and their meanings have changed. Many current data collection efforts are unable to detect these changes because they do not accurately measure the underlying structures. In other cases, the empirical measurements have not been sensitive to the diversity of family forms and their meanings across different social and cultural groups. Studies are needed to develop and test methods for collecting information that accurately reflects this diversity and is sensitive to different meanings

across different populations. This was a high priority target for six of the seven working groups.

Implementation: Several federal agencies have the appropriate facilities and staff who are qualified to carry out cognitive studies and prepare a report. It may be necessary to conduct the qualitative studies to better understand the meanings of these concepts outside of the federal government. However, this endeavor will require time and funding to accomplish. The results of these studies should be placed on the website so that all agencies can benefit from this work.

- **Include measures of family related values and attitudes.**

  Add a core set of attitudinal variables assessing attitudes, perceptions, and values toward family and family life to surveys whenever possible and appropriate.

  Importance: Existing research underscores the importance of these factors for family behaviors. Items on attitudes toward marriage, cohabitation, work and family life, and religiosity and religious activity are currently included on some federal surveys. In longitudinal studies, family attitudinal variables can be linked to changes in attitudes and behaviors related to marriage and divorce. These items should be included on other surveys whenever possible. This target was recommended independently by several groups.

  Implementation: These items are relatively standard and could be added easily to existing surveys. Additional staff time would be required for the modification of the questionnaires, data processing programs, and codebooks. Additional funding is required to field these extra questions. Sample modules should be included on the website as they become available.

- **Obtain information for *all* fathers and mothers in studies of children.**

  When appropriate, expand survey(s) to include information on all parents or guardians in the household, and all nonresident parents.

  Importance: National estimates of parent-child interactions, that is, how much time they spend together, the activities they engage in, their patterns of interaction, and their feelings toward each other, paint an incomplete portrait of children's experiences in this country because studies seldom collect information from more than one parent in the household (and that parent is usually the mother), let alone from nonresident parents. To the extent possible, surveys that include parental-child interaction information from one parent should attempt to complete the picture by collecting it for all parents or guardians in the household and for absent parents. Five out of the seven working groups considered this a high priority endeavor and stressed the point that we won't have an accurate picture of parent-child interactions and what parents do that is good for children until we know what nonresident parents do.

  Implementation: This Target of Opportunity is more relevant to some surveys than to others. For example, it would be relatively easy to achieve this goal with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Questions for nonresident parents with child contact in the past month have already been pilot tested and are ready to be implemented. Unfortunately, money is not currently available to field this component of the survey. Questions about nonresident parents could also be added to the Survey of Income and Program Participation. This survey already includes a supplement assessing child support, and contact and visitation by the absent parent. Implementation of this Target of Opportunity will require substantial funds.

- **Develop standard sets of variables to track indicators of the causes and consequences of family change.**

  Form a research group to identify and test important explanatory and outcome variables that should be added to surveys as time permits, and as appropriate to the goals of a particular survey; and compile a report of specific recommendations.

  Importance: Many of the core variables researchers and policymakers need to examine the causes and consequences of family change are not available in existing data sets. These variables might include, for example, quality of couple relationships; conflict and violence within couple relationships; children's contact and visitation with their nonresidential parent; child support orders, and payments; shared custody arrangements; socio-emotional relationships of parents and their partners with children; income earning and

sharing; sharing of major expenditures, asset sharing, and various measures of family processes. Some surveys do not have space for these questions while others are hesitant to include variables outside of their area of expertise without knowing more about them. There is a need to identify the most important of these variables to develop questionnaire modules of different lengths that can be added to surveys as time permits. Qualitative, cognitive, and methodological research is needed to assure the quality of these variables. A report should be prepared (similar to the DADS report supported by the Forum) that outlines alternative modules, discusses their strengths and weaknesses, and provides information about the quality of the individual measures. Five of the working groups included this Target of Opportunity in their list of priorities.

Implementation: This goal will require additional funding and the allocation of staff resources within the agencies. Collaboration among agencies and with policymakers will be necessary to ensure that their needs are met. Even with funding, this task will require several months or years to complete.

- **Develop a plan for a new family study to examine the causes and consequences of family change.**

  Form a research group to conduct a study to set specific goals and design data collection strategies with the ultimate goal of fielding a comprehensive marriage and family study.

  Importance: Currently the federal government does not support any major data collection program designed to improve our understanding of the causes of changes in family forms, union formation, and stability over time. Most surveys contain some useful information, but they are not designed in such a way as to provide decisive findings. While there is broad consensus among researchers and policymakers that a data collection program is necessary to fill this void, the exact nature of the study needs careful consideration. Therefore, a planning initiative is recommended to be followed-up by implementation of the study. All 7 working groups believed this project is essential.

  Implementation: This is a major undertaking, and even the planning phase is expected to require a significant amount of time and money. The planning for this study and its eventual implementation could be accomplished more easily outside the federal government, but with input and resources from various agencies.

- **Field a couples study.**

  Develop and field a couples study including information from both partners for cohabiting, married, and dating couples.

  Importance: Understanding couples' relationships from the viewpoint of each partner is essential to understanding how couples' relationships affect and are affected by both child well-being and family change. Some federal surveys collect selected demographic and economic information from both married or cohabiting partners, but much more detailed information is needed to ascertain how married, cohabiting, and dating couples differ in their relationships, behaviors, and interactions with their children. A planning exercise should be undertaken, similar to that described in the previous Target of Opportunity. This Target of Opportunity was mentioned separately by four of the seven groups who underscored the importance of a family survey and is therefore listed separately.

  Implementation: This endeavor requires substantial funding. This may actually be a subset of the previous Target of Opportunity, and discussions regarding this type of study would be necessary. However, this target would cost substantially less than fielding a comprehensive family study.

APPENDIX A:
Workshop Agenda

The Data Collection Committee of the Federal Interagency Forum on
Child and Family Statistics Announces a Workshop

COUNTING COUPLES:

Improving Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation Data in the Federal Statistical System

December 13 and 14, 2001

Building 60 – The Cloister
NIH Campus
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Workshop Organizers and Chairs:

Lynne Casper, Ph.D.
NICHD

Jason Fields, MPH., Ph.D.
U.S. Census Bureau

Day 1	**13 December, 2001**
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:15	Welcome and opening remarks: -Katherine Wallman – OMB -Theodora Ooms – CLASP
9:15 – 9:45	What's NEEDED? – Policy Perspectives I Moderator: Lynne Casper – NICHD -Naomi Goldstein – ACF -Audience Questions and Discussion
9:45 – 11:00	What's NEEDED? – Policy Perspectives II Moderator: Bill O'Hare – Annie E. Casey Foundation -Ron Haskins – Brookings -Wendell Primus – CBPP -Pat Fagan – The Heritage Foundation -Kris Moore – Child Trends -Audience Questions and Discussion
11:00 – 11:15	Break
11:15 – 12:15	What's NEEDED? – Researchers Moderator: Pat Fagan – The Heritage Foundation -Wendy Manning – Bowling Green State University -Andrew Cherlin – Johns Hopkins University -Arland Thornton – University of Michigan -Audience Questions and Discussion
12:15 – 1:30	Lunch

1:30 – 1:45	Introduction to Afternoon Sessions. -V. Jeffery Evans – NICHD

Moderator for afternoon sessions: Robert Kominski – U.S. Census Bureau

1:45 – 2:30	Current Status of Data and Areas for Improvement I -Jason Fields – Census a. Decennial Census b. American Community Survey (ACS) c. Current Population Survey (CPS) d. Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) e. Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) -Audience Questions and Discussion
2:30 – 3:30	Current Status of Data and Areas for Improvement II -Jennifer Madans/Bill Mosher/Mary Anne Freedman – NCHS; -Gary Thompson – West Virginia DHHR a. National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) b. The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) c. Vital Statistics-National Perspective d. Vital Statistics-State Perspective -Audience Questions and Discussion
3:30 – 3:45	Break
3:45 – 4:15	Current Status of Data and Areas for Improvement III -Chuck Pierret/Thesia Garner – BLS a. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 (NLSY79) b. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997 (NLSY97) c. Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) -Audience Questions and Discussion
4:15 – 4:45	Current Status of Data and Areas for Improvement IV -Jerry West – NCES a. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) b. Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) c. National Household Education Survey (NHES) -Audience Questions and Discussion
4:45 – 5:05	Summary and Wrap-up and Plans for Tomorrow -Jennifer Madans – NCHS
Day 2	**14 December, 2001**
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:15	Welcome and Plan for the Day Presentation of worksheet. Instructions for breakout groups -Robert Kominski – Census
9:15 – 11:45	Breakout Groups Co-facilitators of groups will be the guest speakers (e.g., Ooms, Haskins, Primus, Moore, Manning, Cherlin, Thornton, Bianchi) paired with a federal agency representative. The configuration of each group will depend on the number of workshop attendees. These groups will be assigned in advance and we will attempt to get a mix of federal agency staff from different agencies and other representatives in each group.
11:45 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 2:45	Group presentations of Recommendations and Discussion -Jason Fields – Census /Lynne Casper – NICHD
2:45 – 3:00	Closing Remarks -Suzanne Bianchi – University of Maryland

Appendix B:
Roster of Workshop Registrants

Counting Couples: Improving Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, and Cohabitation Data in the Federal Statistical System

• Workshop Organizers and Co-Chairs
* Workshop Presenter
# Workgroup Facilitator

Joyce Abma, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Katherine Abraham, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
Gregory Acs, *The Urban Institute*
Duane Alexander, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
David Arnaudo, *The Adminstration for Children and Families*
Frank Avenilla, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
Christine Bachrach, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
Richard Bavier, *The Office of Management and Budget*
Douglas J. Besharov, *American Enterprise Institute*
Cassie Bevan, *Congressional Staff for Representative Tom DeLay*
*#Suzanne Bianchi, *University of Maryland, College Park*
Debra L. Blackwell, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Matthew Bramlett, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Peter Brandon, *University of Massachusetts, Amherst*
Barbara Broman, *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation*
Natasha Cabrera, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
Nancye C. Campbell, *The Adminstration for Children and Families*
•*#Lynne Casper, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
#Anjani Chandra, *National Center for Health Statistics*
*Andrew Cherlin, *Johns Hopkins University*
Shinae Chun, *Women's Bureau*
Rachel C. Cohen, *The Administration on Children, Youth, and Families*
Sara Davis, *Center for Law and Social Policy*
Dianne Dawson, *The Administration for Children and Families*
M. Robin Dion, *Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.*
Jane Dye, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Carol Emig, *Child Trends, Inc.*
*V. Jeffery Evans, *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*
*Patrick F. Fagan, *The Heritage Foundation*
Cynthia M. Fagnoni, *U.S. General Accounting Office*
David Fein, *Abt Associates, Inc.*
Alison Fields, *Westat*
•*#Jason Fields, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Barbara Foley Wilson, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Mary Frase, *National Science Foundation*
*Mary Anne Freedman, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Alberta C. Frost, *Food and Nutrition Service*
Tom Gabe, *Congressional Research Service*
*#Thesia Garner, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*

Gary Gates, *The Urban Institute*
*Naomi Goldstein, *The Administration for Children and Families*
Nancy Gordon, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Lawrence A. Greenfeld, *Bureau of Justice Statistics*
Brian Harris-Kojetin, *Office of Management and Budget*
*Ron Haskins, *The Brookings Institution*
Howard Hayghe, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
Hope Hegstrom, *Senate Finance Committee*
Diane Herz, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
Sally T. Hillsman, *National Institute of Justice*
Sandra L. Hofferth, *University of Maryland, College Park*
Wade F. Horn, *The Adminstration for Children and Families*
Julia Isaacs, *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation*
Shelly Jackson, *U.S. Department of Justice*
Susan Jekilek, *Child Trends, Inc.*
David Johnson, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
Kirk Johnson, *The Heritage Foundation*
April Kaplan, *The Administration for Children and Families*
Kelleen Kaye, *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation*
Heather Koball, *The Urban Institute*
*#Robert Kominski, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Rose Kreider, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Anita Lancaster, *Defense Manpower Data Center*
Dan Lichter, *Ohio State University*
Laura Lindberg, *Abt Associates, Inc.*
Laura Lippman, *National Center for Education Statistics*
Jeffrey M. Lubell, *U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*
Marian MacDorman, *National Center for Health Statistics*
*Jennifer H. Madans, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Gaile Maller, *The Administration for Children and Families*
Cynthia Mamalian, *National Institute of Justice*
*#Wendy Manning, *Bowling Green State University*
Gladys Martinez, *National Center for Health Statistics*
David McMillen, *House Committee on Government Reform*
Joseph Meisenheimer, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
#Linda Mellgren, *Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation*
*#Kristin Moore, *Child Trends, Inc.*
*#William Mosher, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Frank Mott, *Ohio State University*
#Martin O'Connell, *U.S. Census Bureau*
*Bill O'Hare, *The Anne E. Casey Foundation*
*#Theodora Ooms, *Center for Law and Social Policy*
Melissa Park, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*
Mary Parke, *Center for Law and Social Policy*
Kevin Perese, *The Urban Institute*
America Peterson, *The Heritage Foundation*
Deborah Phillips, *National Research Council*
*#Chuck Pierret, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*
Val Plisko, *National Center for Education Statistics*
*#Wendell Primus, *The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities*

Kelly Raley, *University of Texas, Austin*
Robert Rector, *The Heritage Foundation*
Howard Rolston, *The Administration for Children and Families*
Deborah Rose, *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*
Jocelyn Rowe, *The Administration for Children and Families*
Sharon Sassler, *Ohio State University*
Liana Sayer, *University of Pennsylvania*
Susan Schechter, *Office of Management and Budget*
Tavia Simmons, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Lisa Simpson, *Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality*
Kirstin Smith, *U.S. Census Bureau*
Shepherd Smith, *Institute for Youth Development*
Tracy Snell, *U.S. Department of Justice*
Carmen Solomon-Fears, *Congressional Research Service*
Edward Sondik, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Freya Sonenstein, *The Urban Institute*
Matthew Stagner, *The Urban Institute*
Doug Steiger, *Senate Finance Committee*
Paul Sutton, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Tom Sylvester, *National Fatherhood Initiative*
Louisa Tarullo, *The Administration for Children and Families*
*Gary Thompson, *West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources*
*#Arland Thornton, *The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor*
Ramona Trovato, *Environmental Protection Agency*
Peter C. van Dyck, *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*
Stephanie Ventura, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Linda Waite, *University of Chicago*
*Katherine Wallman, *U.S. Office and Management and Budget*
William Walsh, *U.S. Department of Transportation - NHTSA*
Jim Weed, *National Center for Health Statistics*
Matt Weidinger, *House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources*
*Jerry West, *U.S. Department of Education*
Stephanie Williams, *National Center for Health Statistics*
John J. Wilson, *U.S. Department of Justice*

APPENDIX C:
Summary of Policy Perspectives - As Discussed by Presenters at the Counting Couples Workshop

Introduction

Policy researchers and advocates, and representatives of federal agencies were asked to discuss how they use current federal statistical data on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation to formulate policy initiatives, craft legislative guidelines, and design intervention strategies. The policy presenters included Dr. Pat Fagan, William Fitzgerald Fellow in Family and Culture Issues at the Heritage Foundation; Dr. Naomi Goldstein, Director of the Division of Child and Family Development in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families; Dr. Ron Haskins, Senior Fellow in the Economic Studies Program at the Brookings Institution and co-director of the Institution's Welfare Reform & Beyond Initiative; Dr. Kristin Moore, President and Senior Scholar at Child Trends; Ms. Theodora Ooms, Senior Policy Analyst on Couples and Marriage Policy at the Center for Law and Social Policy; and Dr. Wendell E. Primus, Director of Income Security at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. These presenters represent various constituencies and encompass a variety of political and social perspectives. They also discussed current gaps in existing data and pointed out several policy questions that are underexamined because of a lack of appropriate data. A number of common issues emerged in these presentations that provide helpful guidelines for improving data collection. Written statements of each presenter can be found on *http://www.childstats.gov*.

Federal data are used in the policy arena for a variety of purposes. They are used to describe the current composition of families and households in the United States; to map changes in family formation and structure; to provide the information necessary to calculate the estimates of population growth and change; and to understand the causes and consequences of family change and how they impact the well-being of children. All these types of information are necessary to inform quality policy and program development and evaluate whether they are working as intended.

Trends in family structure and family formation

Family composition and union formation processes have changed dramatically over the past several decades. The extent to which effective policies can be developed to address the changing needs of American families depends, in large part, on the identification and measurement of different family characteristics. The policy representatives at the workshop all agreed that the major national datasets reviewed at the workshop need to improve the consistency and accuracy of family structure measurement, which at the minimum, requires distinguishing between two-parent biological married and cohabiting families, married and cohabiting step-families, and single-parent families. Federal data sets would also be enhanced by including dynamic measures of transitions into and out of various relationships and family types.

Dr. Goldstein and Ms. Ooms noted that in the current era of devolution, state and local governments now have greater control over the implementation of federal policies that affect families and children. As a result, the policy presenters stressed the need for a uniform set of family formation and structure measures to be integrated at national, state, and county levels so that state and federal policymakers can effectively craft legislation that addresses regional differences and the needs of specific state and local constituencies.

Recognizing the many barriers to implementing these changes, specific recommendations included:

- Identifying the specific relationship (biological and/or social) of a child to each adult in a household;
- Measuring adult-child relationships longitudinally in order to assess change over time in family relationship and residential status;
- Developing a standard set of measures or modules that can be used on different types of surveys to monitor marital and cohabitation statuses and histories; and

- Improving the basic data to calculate the denominators needed to monitor changes in marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation at the state and local levels.

Improving our understanding of marriage and divorce

Empirical evidence documenting an association between family structure and poverty has led to legislative initiatives that call for a better understanding of the dynamics of marriage and divorce. Drs. Goldstein and Haskins noted that policymakers are trying to develop and evaluate prevention and intervention strategies that strengthen marriages and reduce divorce, particularly among lower-income families. Precise data on marriage, marital quality, and marital relationships is a vital tool for policymakers in developing appropriate programs addressing marriage and divorce. Drs. Fagan and Moore and Ms. Ooms noted that Federal data on marital quality and marital relationships are insufficient.

The speakers recommended specific improvements:

- Form an advisory council of respected public policy analysts representing various political views to assist in the design of federal surveys;
- Incorporate measures of marital and relationship quality into national surveys that go beyond static measures of satisfaction or conflict;
- Define and incorporate measures of marital commitment;
- Include a basic measure to assess frequency of religious worship in all social surveys;
- Assess perceptions of both the negative and positive aspects of marriage; and
- Develop a standard set of modules that can be easily implemented in different types of surveys to further understand the causes and consequences of family change.

Family income and economic conditions

The well-being of children and families is intricately tied to the composition and the economic stability of families. Policymakers need precise data to evaluate welfare programs and the economic well-being of children. Income from work and public assistance are basic indicators measured in the majority of federal surveys. However, tracking income transfers and expenditures, and the economic well-being of children is complicated because of the great diversity in the composition of families and households and the changes in these arrangements across time. Few surveys monitor how income is allocated and spent among individual family members. Ms. Ooms and Dr. Fagan stressed the need for improvements in measures of household, family, and individual income, particularly in assessing the flow of resources between adults and children within and outside of the household. Dr. Primus noted that the transfer of economic resources occurs at a variety of levels that include, but are not limited to parent-child exchange, exchange among unrelated household members, intergenerational flows, and institutional/government transfers (e.g., EITC, food stamps, etc.)

To address these issues the following recommendations were suggested:

- Collect data on the frequency of sharing financial resources in families and households and the amount shared;
- Accurately track income and in-kind transfers to partners and children;
- Improve and expand assessment of family and individual program participation (e.g., food stamps, TANF, unemployment, EITC, etc.);
- Improve and expand assessments of the frequency and amount of basic family expenditures (e.g., food, clothing, housing); and
- Expand and standardize reporting categories of economic well-being for different household and family configurations.

Fathers and father involvement

The role and presence of fathers in families continues to receive considerable attention in public policy and policy interventions. Drs. Goldstein, Haskins, Moore, and Primus stressed the need to include *all* fathers and/or father-figures (for example, residential fathers, nonresidential fathers, cohabiting partners, or boyfriends) in surveys and to measure their involvement with children and contributions to families.

Specific recommendations include the following:

- Incorporate measures of father's financial contributions and child support payments;
- Assess the quality of father-child relationships; and
- Assess the quality of mother-father relationships across different types of families and households.

APPENDIX D:
Summary of Research Perspectives - As Discussed by Presenters at the Counting Couples Workshop

Introduction

A second session of the Counting Couples workshop was devoted to the perspectives of leading family demographers from academia on data needs for research questions. Three distinguished researchers presented their ideas at the workshop, Dr. Wendy Manning, Associate Professor of Sociology at Bowling Green State University; Dr. Andrew Cherlin, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University; and Dr. Arland Thornton, Professor of Sociology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The researchers were asked to describe the types of data they use, elaborate on the shortcomings of current data collections, and provide suggestions for improvements. Their complete statements can be found on *http://www.childstats.gov*.

All three researchers described the value of federal data for describing differences among families; tracking trends in union formation, dissolution, and family structure; and understanding the causes and consequences of family change. Dr. Manning noted that researchers most often use vital statistics, decennial censuses, the Current Population Surveys, the Survey of Income and Program Participation and the Survey of Program Dynamics, the National Survey of Family Growth and the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth for their analytic studies. There was strong consensus among all three researchers about the aspects of data collection in the federal statistical system that could be targeted for improvement. This summary focuses on five key themes expressed in the presentations: (a) improvement and consistency in the collection of data; (b) collection of both marital and cohabitation history data; (c) exploratory qualitative and cognitive studies to better understand the meanings of marriage and cohabitation and to evaluate the accuracy of current procedures used to collect couples data; (d) changes to current datasets that would improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of family change; and (e) development of a data collection program specifically for understanding the processes of family formation and change.

Improvement and consistency in basic data

Drs. Cherlin, Manning, and Thornton all agreed that the current definitions and measures used to collect union status in federal statistical surveys do not precisely reflect the changing patterns in family structure and union formation, most especially among low-income families. Each emphasized the need to collect consistent indicators of current marital and cohabitation status on surveys. They suggested that relatively few additional questions would be needed to vastly improve the data on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation. The researchers also recommended consistent collection of the necessary information to identify various configurations of families, such as married couples with biological children, cohabiting couples with biological children, married stepfamilies with children, cohabiting stepfamilies with children, and single-parent families. They also commented that children should be identified as to their biological, adoptive, step-, or foster child status vis-à-vis each adult in the household. This identification requires knowing how all individuals in the household are related to each other, not just to the householder. Recommendations were also made to expand survey sample sizes to better examine different patterns among minority and low-income populations. Dr. Cherlin suggested that once these measures are developed, consistent guidelines could be made for the tabulation and presentation of the data.

Specific recommendations for improving and standardizing data included:

- Collect cohabitation status in conjunction with marital status measures;
- Improve standard marital status questions by dividing the separated category into separated because of marital discord, or separated for other reasons;
- Add questions about the number of marriages, date first marriage began, date first marriage ended, and whether it ended by death or marital discord;

- Collect detailed relationship information to more accurately identify the types of families that exist and the relationship status of the children within them;
- Increase sample sizes or put measures on larger surveys to ensure adequate coverage of minority and low-income populations.
- Revise family categories and children's statuses in tabulations and reports so that they more accurately reflect existing circumstances.

Collection of Marital and Cohabitation Histories

Of particular interest to all three researchers was the expansion of marital history information to include a parallel collection of cohabitation histories. Specifically, Dr. Cherlin urged the collection of the "dates of formation and dissolution of cohabiting and marital unions, including in the case of marriages, the dates of both separations and divorces."

All three researchers highlighted this critical data need:

- Collect complete cohabitation histories in conjunction with marital histories.

Exploratory studies to understand the meaning of marriage, divorce, and cohabitation

The third theme echoed by all three researchers was the need for exploratory studies to aid in the accurate measurement of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation and to better understand their meanings. According to Dr. Thornton, cohabitors are a diverse group with varying levels of commitment and differences in the nature of their relationships. Drs. Manning and Thornton also suggested that the meaning of marriage is changing. Marriage is less powerful in structuring sexual relations, living arrangements, and the bearing and rearing of children. Dr. Cherlin remarked that the meanings of marriage, cohabitation and, singlehood differ across race and income levels, and hence may affect the well-being of some families and children more than others. The meaning of marriage, cohabitation, and even "dating" relationships is characterized by beliefs regarding love, commitment, childbearing, and childrearing, as well as behaviors such as sharing economic resources and homemaking responsibilities. The researchers also suggested cognitive evaluations of the current concepts and data collection procedures to ensure that they are accurately capturing the diversity in family relationships that exist today.

Specific recommendations included:

- Conduct qualitative studies, including ethnographies, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to more fully understand the meaning of marriage and cohabitation;
- Collect data from both members of the couple;
- Evaluate current definitions and procedures for collecting data to ensure practices are in step with societal realities; and
- Include an adequate representation of minority and low-income people in these studies.

Expansion of surveys to better understand the causes and consequences of union formation and dissolution

The presenters agreed that we still know relatively little about the factors that are driving the growth in cohabiting unions and the relative decline in marital unions. The diversification of family forms, growth of cohabiting unions, and strong public policy interest in the role of fathers in families and in strengthening marriages has created the need for datasets that can help us understand why marriage behaviors are changing and the consequences of these changes.

Changes in the beliefs, attitudes, values, and orientations towards cohabitation, marriage, divorce, and family life in general, have been cited as both cause and consequence of structural changes in the family. Both Drs. Manning and Thornton observed that studies of beliefs and values about families would provide better information on the internal dimensions of family life. Understanding the emotional and psychological dimensions of family relationships can help place family behaviors in context with respect to how individuals in different family forms interrelate and exchange resources. Similarly, Dr. Cherlin suggested that measuring the contributions of adults to the overall household budget would provide additional measures of family life.

Other suggestions included:

- Add attitudinal, emotional, and psychological measures of family life to surveys;
- Include better measures of economic contributions and consumption within and across households, including measures for nonresident dads;
- Extend surveys to include measures of courtship and dating processes; and
- Gather information from both partners in the relationship.

Data Collection Program Devoted to Understanding Family Change

Drs. Manning and Thornton called for a new program of data collection devoted to the study of family change. They remarked that currently there is no federal data set specifically tailored for this purpose. Limited sets of questions can be added to existing surveys to increase our understanding of some of the causes and consequences of family change, but without a survey dedicated to examining the issue we will not have a complete picture. Such a survey would be expensive and would require extensive planning.

The researchers recommended:

- Fund a planning project for a data collection effort designed specifically for the purpose of studying marriage, divorce, cohabitation and remarriage; and
- Fund and implement the data collection plan.

APPENDIX E:
Summary of Data from Federal Statistical Agencies - As Discussed by Presenters at the Counting Couples Workshop

Introduction

Representatives from four of the primary federal statistical agencies (U.S. Census Bureau, National Center for Health Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and National Center for Education Statistics) that collect and disseminate data relevant to marriage and family research, presented brief overviews of their respective data sets. They explained the current uses of their data and detailed how each survey measures and collects the data. They also discussed potential areas of improvement in both data collection and dissemination.

United States Census Bureau

Dr. Jason Fields of the U.S. Census Bureau presented the status of the Bureau's collection of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation data. The U.S. Census Bureau provides most of the basic statistics currently used to describe the characteristics of the American population. While basic estimates of the current marital status of the population are available in all of the datasets, some discrepancies exist in the categories collected. Standardization of the categories is a priority, and will ensure consistent of data presentation in tables and reports.

Measurement of current cohabitation is a more challenging task. The mode of administration and the context of data collection play a significant role in the quality of the data. Self-administered instruments and data collections focused on an individual's family context obtain better cohabitation information than in-person interviews and general purpose or economically focused surveys, even using the same questions and probes. Modification to the way current cohabitation information is collected is necessary to develop measures that produce consistent results across surveys. The Decennial Census is the best Census Bureau source for estimates of cohabitation in the population, and the only source for estimates of same-sex cohabitation.

Remarriage is the current-status concept that is measured least well. Presently no datasets have a routine basic measure of marital status that enables the distinction of first marriages from remarriages among the currently married. The addition of some simple follow-up questions on the number of times married, for example, would greatly improve our knowledge base.

The agencies that collect these data recognize the desire to improve the availability of more detailed and complex data as well. Some aspects of union formation and dissolution require longitudinal (prospective and/or retrospective) data to understand adequately. Currently, the Survey of Income and Program Participation is the only Census Bureau survey with a detailed marital history, and none of the Census Bureau's data contains cohabitation histories. Integrating a cohabitation history with the current marital history would provide a rich retrospective data source for describing and analyzing patterns of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation. This type of data also can provide estimates of the rates of transition between different marital and cohabiting states.

Providing statistics at a sub-national level is an important service to state and local governments. Currently the primary sources of data at this level from the Census Bureau are the Decennial Census and American Community Survey. These data sources can provide basic marital and cohabitation status, but at this point do not collect union or marriage histories, or simplified history items.

National Center for Health Statistics

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is another major source of family formation and union data. Ms. Mary Anne Freedman, the Director of the Division of Vital Statistics at NCHS, described the vital statistics system. Ms. Freedman noted that the registration of vital events — births deaths, marriages, divorces — is covered by state laws, but not required by any federal law. The primary reason for the registration of these events is administrative. Both births and deaths have been registered and reported for the entire country since 1933. Marriages and divorces were registered from 1957 until 1995; 44 states were reporting marriages and 31 states were reporting divorces, but in each participating state, a sample was processed and

reported. The Marriage and Divorce system was ended in 1995 because of lack of resources. A notice was placed in the Federal Register when this decision was made, and very few comments were received. Dr. Freedman recommended a study to determine what would be needed to reinstate the system in a way that would produce high quality data on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation.

Mr. Gary Thompson, the State Registrar of West Virginia in the Department of Health and Human Services made a brief presentation on the status of marriage and divorce data at the state level. Mr. Thompson noted that there is considerable variation from state to state in how marriage and divorce records are handled. In some states, the vital records office processes the marriage and divorce records, while in other states the records are handled entirely by county or other local officials. When a birth or death occurs outside the person's state of residence, state vital statistics offices share and exchange records so that birth and death data can be tabulated by state of residence. These exchanges do not occur with marriage and divorce records. Until recently, for example, many West Virginia residents were married in Virginia and other adjacent states, making trends in marriage and divorce by state difficult to interpret. Mr. Thompson also said that state vital statistics offices are currently coping with several important and complex changes, leaving the states unprepared to take on additional challenges, such as resuming registration of marriage and divorce.

Dr. Jennifer Madans described the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). The NHIS has been conducted annually since 1957, and its purpose is to produce national data on acute and chronic health conditions, health behaviors, access to health care, use of health care, and health insurance coverage. Demographic and family composition data are also collected, including a household roster. The roster includes the parent of each child in the household, and delineates whether the parent is a biological, adopted, or step parent. State estimates are possible for some large states, and modules could be added to the questionnaires in some years to enhance data on marital or family-related topics.

Dr. Bill Mosher described the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). The NSFG has been fielded 5 times by NCHS — in 1973, 1976, 1982, 1988, and 1995 — with national samples of women 15-44 years of age. Data were collected on marriage and divorce, cohabitation, and other factors related to pregnancy and birth rates. The NSFG will be conducted again in 2002, with a sample of both men and women 15-44 years of age. Marriage, divorce, and remarriage histories have always been a central focus of the survey. Current cohabitation data has been collected since 1982, and in 1995, a complete cohabitation history was added. The combination of both marital and cohabitation histories permits the analysis of many types of union transitions. These outcomes can be shown by a rich array of characteristics, such as race, religion, family background, education, and characteristics of the neighborhood or community. Potential ways to enhance the information in the NSFG include expanding the upper age range of the survey from 44 years to 59 years, collecting the data every year to allow faster response to policy concerns, and adding selected topics to the questionnaire when needed.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Dr. Charles Pierret of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) discussed data on marriage, divorce, and cohabitation available in the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS). The NLS program sponsors a family of longitudinal surveys of individuals focusing on employment issues and a wide array of related information. Starting in 1979, the NLSY79 (National Longitudinal Study of Youth) has followed a cohort of almost 10,000 men and women who were born in the years 1957 to 1964. These cohorts were interviewed annually from 1979 until 1994, and biennially since that date. At each interview, the NLSY79 collects a complete history of marriages and divorces, along with information about spouse's age, education, and employment. While cohabitation histories were not collected until the most recent round, most cohabitation can be inferred from the record of all co-resident individuals, which is collected in every interview. Also, starting in 1990, respondents are asked for the first date of cohabitation for all new spouses.

Since 1986, the children of all female respondents to the NLSY79 have been part of another NLS survey, the Children of the NLSY79. Children 14 and under are administered a series of assessments of their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Chil-

dren over 10 are asked questions about schooling, relationships with parents, friendships, health, and substance abuse. Starting in 1994, children age 15 to 21 are administered an interview similar to the NLSY79 interview about education, employment, dating, fertility and marital histories, and household composition. With these data, researchers can study the effects of parents' marital status on children as well as the marital history of young adults.

The newest NLS survey is the NLSY97. This survey, started in 1997 with youths 12 to 17 years old, will, over time, provide a complete picture of marriage, divorce, and cohabitation for this cohort. Starting in 2003, the survey will also collect information on dating partners. Like all NLS surveys, the NLSY97 covers a broad range of topics that are related to varying degrees to marriage and cohabitation decisions. These range from histories of education, employment, fertility, and participation in government programs to information on tobacco, alcohol, and drug use, family processes, dating and sexual experiences, and expectations. In round 1, parents were administered an interview about the youths' early years. From these interviews, the NLSY97 has information on each youth's family structure and residence while growing up. These data allow analysts to relate family structure in the respondents' youth to outcomes as adolescents and young adults.

The great breadth of NLS surveys gives researchers the ability to relate a large number of variables to outcomes of interest. The fact that the NLS surveys are panel datasets also means that almost all information is collected on a current basis, and does not rely on retrospective recall of events. The repeated measurement of life events also permits clarification of reported inconsistencies over time — both inadvertent reconstructions of histories as well as intentional misreports. Finally, repeated observation aids in the control of individual heterogeneity.

At the same time, NLS surveys are not very useful for national tracking purposes because they are longitudinal data sets. They follow particular cohorts so they do not generally allow us to make comparisons of the same age groups across time, except between different cohorts. A good longitudinal tracking survey would require continuously fielding new cohorts. Another difficulty is the long lag between the inception of a longitudinal survey and the period of its greatest usefulness. To study marriage, one would want to start with young people and follow them through their prime years of marriage and divorce. This may mean a wait of up to 15 or 20 years between funding a survey and being able to study the dynamics of cohabitation, marriage, and divorce. Longitudinal data sets such as the NLS are indispensable for examining the causes of trends in marriage and divorce; however they can never replace cross-sectional surveys or administrative data for tracking those trends.

Dr. Thesia I. Garner discussed another BLS survey, the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE). This survey, which dates back to the late 1800s, measures the expenditures of "consumer units" using both interviews and diaries. A consumer unit is defined in one of two ways: a) as all people living in a household who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, or b) other legal arrangement; or as unrelated individuals who share expenses in at least two of three categories - housing, food, and other living expenses. Currently, however, in published official CE data, cohabitating couples are not identified separately from singles and other consumer units. The only household composition distinction that addresses marital status is for husband-wife consumer units. Within the micro data, it is possible to find the relationship of all people in the household to the reference person. By using the gender of each household member, crossed by whether this household is a single consumer unit, one could make assumptions regarding whether individuals of the consumer units are cohabitating. However, not all of these consumer units are cohabitors. Thus, any attempt at this time to study the expenditure patterns of married and cohabiting couples and divorced individuals using the CE is limited. Future data will be collected with cohabitors as a categorical choice for the marital status item.

National Center for Education Statistics

Dr. Jerry West of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) presented information on several of the education studies that collect data on children and families. Dr. West presented some basic information on four cross-sectional surveys and seven longitudinal surveys. The cross-sectional surveys include: The National Post-Secondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), the Third International Math and

Science Study (TIMSS), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the National Household Education Survey Program (NHES). Past and present longitudinal education surveys include: Beginning Post-Secondary Survey (BPSS), Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B), High School and Beyond (HS&B), the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88), the Education Longitudinal Survey of 2002 (ELS: 2002), and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies (Birth and Kindergarten Cohorts).

These education studies are all national-level studies, focusing mainly on children (students) preparing for and moving through the educational system. The marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation data collected help provide context and can serve as independent or explanatory variables. Current marital status is the predominant focus in these surveys with a few exceptions. Among the cross-sectional surveys, much of the information is collected from students, and therefore there is relatively little detailed information about the marital status of other members of the household, with the exception of the National Household Education Survey. Among the longitudinal surveys, the more recent surveys devote more resources to collecting this type of information. A useful product of this workshop would be the development of core sets of items that can be included on all of the basic federal surveys to create consistent and comparable measures within as well as across organizations.

Summaries of the marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation data and evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses can be found on *http://www.childstats.gov*

APPENDIX F:
Summary of Working Group Recommendations

Table 1. **Easy Improvements**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Group 1	Provide examples of good questions on websites: Roster, current status, marital/ cohab-history.	On surveys, determine relationship (bio, step, adopted) of children to all adults in household.	On surveys, ask age at marriage and age when each member began living in household.	Conduct cognitive research on how cohabitation is understood, fertility reporting by men, social parenthood.	Expand age range on NSFG to get better data on cohabitation, marriage, and divorce.	-	-
Group 2	Collect basic information on cohabitation status in all surveys.	Include cohabitation information in marital histories.	Collect information that provides incidence and prevalence of cohabitation.	Include existing roster probes in other surveys to identify biological/step/ adopted status of children.	Document availability of marriage/ divorce/cohabitation data in existing retrospective surveys.	Conduct background literature research and cognitive testing of the "cohabitation" concept.	Study best practices for measuring same-sex relationships, and implement in other data collections.
Group 3	Form working group to define key terms/ develop consistent module on marriage/cohab in federal surveys.	Conduct a literature review to see what has already been done.	Build consensus to support development, implementation, and use of the "new" module.	Develop core questions to include marital/union status, cohabitation, children's relationship, absent parents.	-	-	-
Group 4	Collect cohabitation in all surveys and include as a separate category in tabulations.	Collect limited marital/union history in March CPS, ACS, and Census (e.g., date of first marriage/ cohab).	Expand household rosters to include relationship of children to adults in the household.	Standardize predictors/correlates across surveys both in terms of variables and measurement.	Foster cooperation at agencies to create standardized, valid, and reliable measures on marriage/cohab.	Expand age range of surveys limited to "childbearing ages" to capture variation in union histories.	Pay greater attention in survey design and analysis to monitoring trends in marriage and cohabitation.
Group 5	Develop and implement a core set of marriage and union formation/dissolution statistics consistently across all demographic surveys for people old enough to be in unions.	Collect complete first-person marital and cohabiting histories whenever possible.	Determine presence of biological, social, economic parents of all children; collect information on non-residential parents.	Collect info on values, attitudes, beliefs, and norms on unions, children, family, and gender roles.	Implement the collection of annual vital statistics data from federal surveys such as the CPS.	Collect information on religiosity and religious activity as contextual variables.	-
Group 6	Develop, test, and implement a module of core marriage/ cohab constructs to include on every survey.	Include core data in administrative data where possible (e.g. marital/cohab status on birth records).	Collect data on the ECLS-B for both residential and non-residential fathers.	Restore the CPS marriage and fertility history module and expand it to include a cohabitation history.	Expand and improve reporting on marriage, cohabitation and family categories in official tabulations and reports.	-	-
Group 7	Make marital status questions consistent across surveys.	Ask living arrangements question/ cohab question - test wording and placement.	Ask person number of mom and dad as well as type of relation for all people.	Include simple marital history info: times married, events in last year, start/end date of recent relationship.	Increase samples - age ranges/over samples/etc.	-	-

The detailed recommendations of each workgroup can be found on *http://www.childstats.gov.*

Table 2. **Hard Improvements**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Group 1	When surveys collect marital history, also collect cohabitation history. (i.e. collect a "union" history).	Begin development work on a new National Family. Survey for the long term.	While new survey is developed, provide marriage/cohab/ fertility data through bridge survey.	Get data on decision-making by couples with survey in which partners interviewed separately.	Study how to obtain reliable state and local data on marriage, divorce, and if possible, cohabitation.	-	-
Group 2	Implement national longitudinal survey of child well-being that details relationships, parenting, and father's involvement.	Implement a survey collection that yields annual state estimates of union formation and dissolution.	Include existing relationship matrix rostering techniques in other surveys.	Create a standard for reporting family structure across federal datasets.	-	-	-
Group 3	Make federal survey samples large enough that state level data are statistically reliable.	Collect information on family histories and relationships in federal surveys.	Develop new survey to understand how and why marriage and family-like unions form and dissolve.	Create Forum task force to shape new survey and develop justification for it.	Revive system of marriage and divorce vital statistics and augment with cohabitation.	Bottom line regarding vital statistics: not a substitute for household surveys but a complement.	-
Group 4	Perform feasibility study on improving vital statistics for marriage and divorce.	Field new study on marriage/cohab/ family life with full marriage/cohabitation event histories.	Broaden household surveys to include institutionalized populations (e.g., prisoners, military).	Study meaning of marriage, divorce, cohabitation (and visiting relationships) in special populations.	Improve the ability of surveys to cover nonresidential parents.	-	-
Group 5	Conduct qualitative studies on union formation/dissolution to understand cultural context of unions.	Conduct qualitative study on meaning of marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and related union statuses.	Over-sample the Hispanic population to allow reporting of data in small areas.	Obtain information on both members of a couple wherever that is possible and appropriate.	Study courtship processes leading couples from singleness into unions.	Undertake methodological work to increase the validity and reliability of measures.	Design a new data collection project to study union formation and dissolution processes.
Group 6	Develop "level-two" module of marriage/ cohab constructs to be included on surveys as time permits.	Develop "level-three" module of marriage/cohab constructs to be included on surveys as time permits.	Design, assess, and implement couples survey of partners in married/cohabiting/ dating unions.	Develop and test independent/mediating variables to explain union and family formation/ dissolution.	Design "Family" study to ascertain external and internal causes and consequences of union formation/dissolution.	Improve existing surveys (e.g., field NSFG on a more regular basis & raise age range; improve CPS child support module).	Increase sample sizes or conduct targeted studies to get better data on small populations (e.g., foster and adopted children, children living with fathers).
Group 7	Collect state/local level statistics via ACS and Vital Stats.	Include cohabitation histories wherever marital histories are collected.	Commission research on scope, nature, and design of new survey of family demography.	Add basic dimensions of family relationship and quality to existing surveys.	Restore marital fertility history and cohab history to June CPS.	-	-

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