

Title: New family measures: An examination of direct measures of cohabitation and parent pointers.

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The share of children residing with two biological, married parents has been steadily declining while the proportions of children residing in stepfamilies or families formed outside of marriage (e.g., single-parent and cohabiting families) are at all-time highs (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Family structures are now quite diverse not only as a result of the high rate of divorce, but also the proliferation of complex stepfamilies, increasing rates of nonmarital childbearing, and growth in cohabitation (e.g., Bianchi & Casper, 2000). These trends have been especially pronounced among black children, three-quarters of whom are born to unmarried mothers. Whereas two-thirds of white children and one-half of Hispanic children live in two parent married families, just one-quarter of black children do (Fields, 2001). Black and Hispanic children are also more likely than whites to reside in multigenerational families (Kreider & Fields, 2005) and greater proportions are born to cohabiting parents (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). Estimates of children's living arrangements rely on analysis of large scale data collections, e.g. PUMS data, CPS, NSFG or SIPP. The key advantage of the CPS has been the periodicity of the data collection allowing annual assessments of the living arrangements of children.

To better track these changes in family structure, the Census Bureau has added two measures to the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The first is a direct question on cohabitation which asks whether unmarried adults residing in the household are living with a boyfriend, girlfriend or partner. Prior to 2007, the CPS included 'unmarried partner' as a response category in the variable detailing the relationship to only the householder. The new question allows the identification of couples in which neither is the household head (Kreider 2008). The second enhancement allows for the identification of both the number and type of parents in the household through the addition of a second 'parent-pointer'. The parent pointers serve to provide information on each parent that might reside in the household for every child in the survey. Further, each parent can be identified as either a biological, step or adoptive parent. Previously, the CPS identified only one parent and that parent's spouse—children residing with two unmarried parents were counted as living with only one unmarried parent. Kreider's (2008) analysis indicates that these new measures improve our ability to estimate children's living arrangements because they capture couples that do not include the householder.

This research uses the 2007 and 2008 Current Population Survey March Annual Social and Economic Supplement to examine the differences in children's living arrangements focusing on parental marital and cohabitation status. We examine two questions: 1) what are the living arrangements of children, specifically distinguishing children according to race/ethnicity and nativity status and 2) how do the family circumstances of children contrast when applying the new measures versus the traditional measures with attention to the socio-demographic characteristics of the parent(s).

It has become increasingly important to accurately measure children's experience in cohabitation as cohabitation is a family form that often includes children and children's experiences in cohabiting parent families has been steadily rising (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). Between 1997 and 2001 one-fifth of children were born to cohabiting parents, representing half of births to unmarried mothers (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008). Cohabiting households have increasingly included children, in 2006 61% had children less than 18 present in the home (Acs and Nelson 2002) and in 1999, 8% of all children were living with cohabiting parents (Manning and Brown 2003). About half of children living with cohabiting parents are living with two biological parents and the other half are living with a parent and his/her

cohabiting partner in a cohabiting stepfamily (Fields 2001). The new direct measure of cohabitation will provide a better indicator of children's experiences in cohabiting parent families.

Measurement of family living arrangements can be complex when households contain more than one set of adults and further complicated when parents are not married to one another. The traditional strategy of identifying secondary families prevented the measurement of cohabiting parents as a secondary family. The cohabiting partner would be treated as an unrelated male in the home and not a parent. This may be especially important among cohabiting couples with an infant who are living with a parent as a strategy to make ends meet (Smock, Manning and Porter 2005). The new pointer will help to identify three-generation households with cohabiting couples.

To address these questions, we produce estimates of children's living arrangements using the old versus the new measures. We provide evidence on the impact of using more refined measures of cohabitation and parental status and display how this varies by race, ethnicity, nativity, and educational attainment of the parents. The results underscore the limitations of using measures of cohabitation that are limited to the household head.