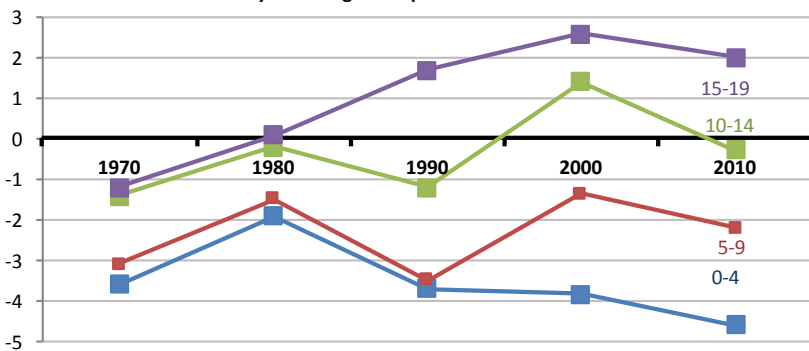


# Census Efforts to Reduce the Undercount of Young Children – Gina Walejko & Scott Konicki, Census Bureau

## The Issue

Percent Difference Between the Census Count and Demographic Analysis Estimates by Select Age Groups: 1970 to 2010



Demographic Analysis uses vital statistics to estimate independently the population size. The Census Bureau compares these estimates to census counts to estimate coverage. In 2010, the total population count was very close to the Demographic Analysis estimate. However, young children, ages 0 to 4, had an especially high undercount of 4.6 percent, or nearly 1 million. Trends suggest this undercount is increasing for children ages 0-4.

## So what?

In 2015, over 130 programs used decennial census data to calculate and distribute more than \$675 billion in federal funds.<sup>1</sup> Several programs provided assistance to young children and their families including:

- Medicaid
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Title I program
- National School Lunch Program
- Head Start and Early Head Start
- Child Care and Development Fund

These and other programs receive nearly \$160 billion annually.<sup>2</sup> The undercount of young children also has implications for political representation and school planning.



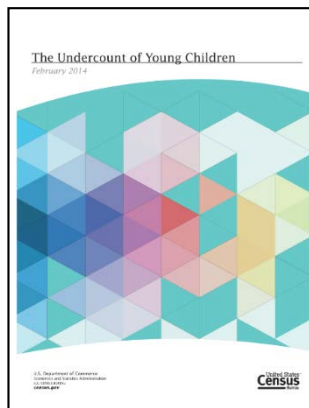
<sup>1</sup>Hotchkiss, M. & Phelan, J. (2017). "Uses of Census Bureau Data in Federal Funds Distribution." 2020 Census Research Series. Retrieved from <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/working-papers/Uses-of-Census-Bureau-Data-in-Federal-Funds-Distribution.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2018). "2018 Kids Count Data Book: State Trends in Child Well-Being." Retrieved from <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-2018kidscountdatabook-2018.pdf>

## The Research

The 2013 Census Bureau Task Force on the Undercount of Young Children reviewed the issue and proposed new research<sup>3</sup>. From 2015 to 2017, a team conducted research using existing data. Topics of released reports include:<sup>4</sup>

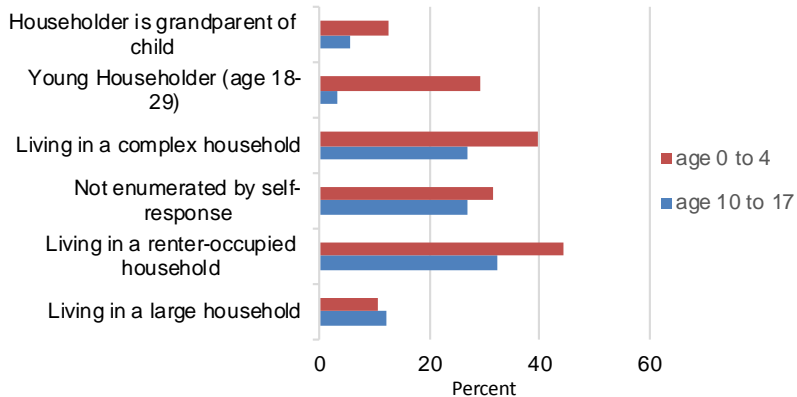
1. Measuring the undercount using demographic analysis
2. Moms missing along with their young children
3. Characteristics of counted children by age
4. Characteristics of counted children by age in the American Community Survey
5. Households that checked the 2010 Census child undercount probe
6. Children enumerated during the post-enumeration Coverage Measurement Survey only
7. Young children added during Coverage Followup
8. Geographic distributions based on Coverage Followup
9. Coverage Followup analysis based on two audience segmentation models



<sup>3</sup>The Census Bureau. (2014). "Undercount of Young Children."

## Some findings...

- Household structure is related to the high undercount. Less evidence of coverage error exists for biological and adopted children of the householder and more evidence exists for grandchildren, other relatives, children unrelated to the householder, and children in complex households.
- Young children may be missed along with their young mothers (i.e., age 15-24) grandchildren.
- Young children are more likely to have certain hard-to-count characteristics than older children.



<sup>4</sup>The 2020 Census Memorandum Series can be found at <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/planning-management/memo-series.html>

## The Changes

In 2017, the Census Bureau formed the Undercount of Young Children Subteam dedicated to implement measures to address the undercount of young children. This group and others in the Census Bureau have modified several decennial census activities including:

1. Updating the wording of the undercount probe on the questionnaire to specifically mention "grandchildren" and "unrelated" children. (See figures below.)

### 2010 Census undercount question

2. Were there any **additional** people staying here April 1, 2010 that you **did not include** in Question 1? Mark  all that apply.

- Children, such as newborn babies or foster children
- Relatives, such as adult children, cousins, or in-laws
- Nonrelatives, such as roommates or live-in baby sitters
- People staying here temporarily
- No additional people

2. Changing the online instrument to prompt respondents to enter the person they are thinking of when they respond "yes" to this undercount probe.

### 2018 Census Test undercount question

2. Were there any **additional** people staying here on April 1, 2018 that you **did not include** in Question 1? Mark  all that apply.

- Children, related or unrelated, such as newborn babies, grandchildren, or foster children
- Relatives, such as adult children, cousins, or in-laws
- Nonrelatives, such as roommates or live-in babysitters
- People staying here temporarily
- No additional people

3. Updating the language on the first mail piece that most households will receive. The letter will read, "We need your help to count all adults, children, and babies," instead of, "We need your help to count everyone."

4. Updating the help text on the internet self-response instrument to provide additional guidance about counting children.
5. Including content and topics related to the undercount of young children in the Frequently Asked Questions read by both field and telephone enumerators.
6. Adding topics related to the undercount of young children in field enumerator classroom trainings including a scenario involving a respondent who is confused about whether or not to count a young child on the census form.
7. Preparing a summary that will recap situations where children may be missed based on research and suggests ways to combat these situations.
8. Focusing partnership, communications, and outreach on the undercount of young children.
9. Presenting to external stakeholders including the Children's Leadership Council, Census Bureau National Advisory Committee, State Data Centers Steering Committee, and Chief Officers of the State Library Agencies.
10. Working with the National Advisory Committee Undercount of Young Children Working Group.

**Disclaimer:** Views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

