

Introduction

Measurement of race and ethnicity is a critical component of research used to inform policy. However, the standards for measuring race and ethnicity are often confusing for analysts. SHADAC has developed two issue briefs as a resource for those who are conducting surveys or using federal survey data for policy development. These briefs are intended to assist state and federal analysts with survey development and/or analysis of existing survey data to estimate health insurance coverage and access to care for disparities populations. This brief discusses the collection and classification of survey data for populations defined by race, ethnicity and immigrant (REI) status. SHADAC's companion brief, "Data availability for Race, Ethnicity, and Immigrant Groups in Federal Surveys," discusses availability of these data in public use files.¹

These briefs focus on surveys conducted by federal agencies that collect information on health insurance coverage and access to care on an annual or periodic basis for the general population of the United States. While tracking national trends is important, policy decisions and funding priorities are typically made at the state and local level. Thus, our emphasis will be on identifying federal data sources that afford both national and state-level estimates, either with public-use files or through restricted access at a Research Data Center (RDC). These surveys and their associated agencies are listed in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Federal Surveys Examined in This Issue Brief

Census Bureau

- › CPS: Current Population Survey, 2007
- › SIPP: Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2004

National Center for Health Statistics

- › NHIS: National Health Interview Survey, 2007
- › NHANES: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2005-2006
- › NSCH: National Survey of Children's Health, 2003-2004

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- › BRFSS: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2007

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality

- › MEPS: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Household Component, 2006

Background

In 1997, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a revision to OMB Directive 15, which provides recommendations for the collection and classification of race and ethnicity in federal surveys.² The OMB guidelines were not developed to define the concepts of race or ethnicity; they were intended only to standardize data collection and publication across federal agencies.

Major directives related to collection of data on race and ethnicity in the OMB standards were threefold:

- 1) recommending self-identification rather than interviewer observation;
- 2) recommending two separate questions on race and ethnicity with ethnicity coming first; and
- 3) allowing for identification of more than one race.

It is important to note that OMB standards represent a *minimum* standard, and surveys can collect more detailed information as long as the minimal standards are met. Therefore, while all surveys are governed by the same OMB guidelines, the implementation of these guidelines differs by survey, resulting in race and ethnicity data that are not always comparable across surveys. These standards are thought to provide improved data on racial and ethnic diversity; however, data collected under the new standards are not directly comparable with data collected under previous standards. Caution is warranted for those monitoring disparities over time, as federal surveys were only required to be in compliance with the new OMB standards as of 2003.

Race Measures

All of the federal surveys examined conform to the minimum standards set forth in the 1997 revision to the OMB standard for collection of data on race. However, the implementation of these guidelines does vary across surveys.

- › Four surveys (CPS, NSCH, BRFSS, MEPS) ask respondents to self-identify based on the five minimum category options.
- › Two surveys (NHANES, NHIS) provide more detailed response options for the race question, allowing respondents to choose selected Asian (Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, other) or NHOPI (Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, other) subgroups as their race response.
- › SIPP initially asks about the five race categories, but asks detailed follow-up questions if the respondent identifies as Asian or NHOPI. The detailed follow-up responses are the same as the subgroup response options in NHANES and NHIS.

In accord with the OMB standard, all surveys allow respondents to select one or more races. For those who select more than one race response, three surveys (NHANES, NHIS, BRFSS) ask a follow-up question regarding which of the multiple races “best” identifies the respondent.

The following summarizes race data collection by the five minimum standard OMB categories (see Exhibit 2).

- › **White:** all seven surveys have a single comparable response option for this group.

- › **Black:** all seven surveys have a single comparable response option representing this group.
- › **AIAN:** Three of the surveys provide disaggregated response options for American Indian or for Alaska Native (NHANES, NHIS, NSCH). The other four surveys have a single response option aggregating the two groups.
- › **Asian:** Two surveys (NHANES, NHIS) provide more detailed Asian response options. One survey (SIPP) allows detailed responses only as a follow-up to an initial selection of the aggregated Asian response. Four surveys (CPS, NSCH, BRFSS, MEPS) provide only a single Asian response option.
- › **NHOPI:** Two of the surveys (NHANES, NHIS) provide more detailed response options. SIPP allows detailed responses only as a follow-up to an initial selection of the aggregated NHOPI response. NSCH distinguishes between Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. The other three surveys (CPS, BRFSS, MEPS) have a single response option aggregating the groups.
- › **Other:** NHIS allows respondents to choose “other” as a response option, while all but one of the other surveys (CPS, SIPP, NHANES, BRFSS, MEPS) ask respondents to specify the other race.

Exhibit 2: Race Group Categories Collected in Selected Federal Surveys

	CPS	SIPP	NHANES	NHIS	NSCH	BRFSS	MEPS
	2007	2004	2005/06	2007	2003/04	2002	2007
White	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Black	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
AIAN	x	x				x	x
American Indian			x	x	x		
Alaska Native			x	x	x		
Asian	x	x			x	x	x
Asian Indian		*	x	x			
Chinese		*	x	x			
Filipino		*	x	x			
Korean		*	x	x			
Japanese		*	x	x			
Vietnamese		*	x	x			
Other Asian		*	x	x			
NHOPI	x	x				x	x
Native Hawaiian		*	x	x	x		
Pacific Islander					x		
Guamanian or Chamorro		*	x	x			
Samoan		*	x	x			
Other Pacific Islander		*	x	x			
Other				x			
Other race specified	x	x	x			x	x

* These subcategories were not all provided as response options to the initial race question. Rather, they were provided to respondents only on follow-up when the major category was selected.

Ethnicity Measures

In federal surveys, ethnicity refers to Hispanic ethnicity. The minimum OMB standard for collecting data on *Ethnicity* includes the options: 1) Hispanic/Latino or 2) Not Hispanic/Latino. Each of the surveys reviewed in this brief inquires about a person’s Hispanic ethnicity in one of a few key ways. All surveys specifically ask about Hispanic or Latino origin (and in some cases, Spanish as well). These surveys either ask whether the person is Hispanic or Latino, ask what Hispanic/Latino group represents his/her ethnic background, or ask whether the person considers him/herself to be Hispanic or Latino.

In terms of the specific Hispanic/Latino/Spanish groups recorded (*see Exhibit 3*), the surveys vary from none (the BRFSS and NSCH simply ask a yes/no question about Hispanic or Latino origin) to as many as eight Hispanic, Latino or Spanish groups in the NHANES. The survey that collects the most detailed information on Hispanic ethnic origin is NHANES, whereas again the BRFSS and NSCH collect the most limited. In summary:

- Most surveys collect information on at least the following groups: Mexican, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban and “other.”
- Two of the surveys (NHIS, NHANES) allow for multiple ethnicities to be identified.

- All of the surveys that ask for a particular group allow for an “other” Spanish or Hispanic or Latino category, but only four of the surveys (CPS, SIPP, NHANES, NHIS) ask the respondent to specify this other group.

Immigrant Status Measures

There are no OMB standards for the collection of data on immigrant groups. We reviewed survey questionnaires to determine what data are collected related to immigrant status, with particular attention to information that will allow analysts to distinguish specific immigrant groups or, at a minimum, identify foreign-born respondents for subgroup analyses. Across surveys, three main concepts related to immigrant status are captured: nativity, time lived in the U.S., and path to U.S. citizenship (*see Exhibit 4*).

Nativity refers to one’s place of birth. Two surveys (SIPP, NSCH) ask only whether the respondent was born in the U.S., while three surveys (CPS, NHIS, NHANES) ask specifically for the country of birth. CPS and NHIS allow open-ended responses, but NHANES has only response options of U.S., Mexico, or elsewhere. CPS also asks for country of birth for the respondent’s parents. The SIPP asks about U.S.-born status of everyone in the household, while NSCH inquires only for the mother and father.

Time lived in the U.S. is captured by four surveys (CPS, NHIS, NHANES, NSCH) by asking respondents what year they came to the U.S.

Exhibit 3: Ethnicity Groups Collected for Selected Federal Surveys

	CPS	SIPP	NHANES	NHIS	NSCH	BRFSS	MEPS
	2007	2004	2005/06	2007	2003/04	2002	2007
Not Hispanic or Latino	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hispanic or Latino					x	x	
Mexican, Mexican-Am., Chicano							
Mexican	x	x	x	x			x
Mexican-American	x	x	x	x			x
Chicano	x	x	x				
Puerto Rican	x	x	x	x			x
Cuban/Cuban-American				x			x
Cuban	x	x	x				
Cuban-American	x	x	x				
Dominican (Republic)			x	x			x
Central or South American			x	x			x
Other Latin American			x	x			x
Other Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	x	x	x	x			x
Multiple Categories Allowed			x	x			
Other Category Specified	x	x	x	x			

Exhibit 4: Immigrant-Status Related Concepts Collected in Selected Federal Surveys

	CPS	SIPP	NHANES	NHIS	NSCH	BRFSS	MEPS
	2007	2004	2005/06	2007	2003/04	2002	2007
Nativity							
Respondent	x	x	x	x	x		
Other Household Members		x					
Mother	x				x		
Father	x				x		
Time Lived in the U.S.							
Respondent	x		x	x	x		
Other Household Members							
Mother	x				x		
Father	x				x		
Path to U.S. Citizenship	x	x	x	x			

Four of the surveys that capture nativity (CPS, SIPP, NHIS, NHANES) also ask about U.S. citizenship and the path to U.S. citizenship. CPS has follow-up questions asking whether respondents were born a citizen or became a citizen through naturalization. NHIS and NHANES embed possible pathways in detailed response options: Yes, born in the U.S.; Yes, born in U.S. territory; Yes, born abroad to American parent(s); Yes, U.S. citizen by naturalization. SIPP also has a follow-up question asking how the respondent became a citizen, and offers response options representing the same general categories as NHIS and NHANES, with the addition of citizenship through military service in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Two surveys, the BRFSS and MEPS do not include any questions related to these concepts and hence offer no data on immigrant status.

Conclusions

This brief is intended to draw attention to the way in which data on race, ethnicity, and immigrant groups are measured and collected. Since all of the surveys reviewed are conducted by federal agencies, they are all governed by the same OMB standards for the collection and classification of data on race and ethnicity. Even so, there are some differences in the implementation of the minimum standards.

There are no standards for the collection of data on immigrant groups or immigrant status. In light of recent federal policy changes regarding coverage of immigrant children and pregnant women, access to data that allow analysts to examine changing trends in coverage for immigrants will be needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these policy changes.

The surveys reviewed are rich with questions on race, ethnicity, and immigrant groups. However, not all data collected are *available* in the public use files. The companion to this brief documents data availability for the concepts described here.¹

Suggested Citation:

State Health Access Data Assistance Center. 2009. *“REI: Measurement of Race, Ethnicity, and Immigrant Groups in Federal Surveys.”* Issue Brief #16. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

References

¹ State Health Access Data Assistance Center. 2009. “Data availability for Race, Ethnicity, and Immigrant Groups in Federal Surveys.” Issue Brief #17. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

² Office of Management and Budget. 2000. “Provisional Guidance on the Implementation of the 1997 Standards for Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity” [accessed on Mar, 2000]. Available at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/re_guidance2000update.pdf.