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Kansas Counts is a statewide effort aimed at increasing engagement, awareness, and participation in the 2020 Census.



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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Counting Young Children

The broad goal of the 2020 Census is to count everyone in the United States and grasp a better image of our demographic makeup. It may surprise you that the U.S. Census Bureau has a long-standing undercounting of a key population: young children. The Census Bureau has noted the American Community Survey, Current Population Survey, and Survey of Income and Program Participation also undercounts children which leads to biased survey estimates.ⁱ Furthermore, the Census Bureau notes there is a differential undercounting of young children across geography and demographics, which, in turn, makes this a larger problem for some racial and ethnic groups.ⁱⁱ Along with other goals for the 2020 Census, the counting of young children remains a top priority.

To understand how to better count young children, the U.S. Census Bureau has taken a hard look at past practices and results. To most efficiently perform this task, the Bureau established an Undercount of Young Children Research Team to research the undercounting of young children, who are defined as age 0 to 4.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is estimated that 5% of kids under the age of 5-years-old were not counted in the 2010 Census; this adds up to about 1 million young children, this is the highest of any age group.^{iv} Looking at the 2010 Census specifically, there are multiple reasons young children were missed in this Census:

- different types of error involving missed households or portions of the home - whole-household errors were more common for biological and adopted children whereas the partial-household errors were more common for grandchildren or other relatives/non-relatives;
- young children live in hard to count households with enumeration challenges - young children may have been missed along with their young mothers; self-respondents made errors when they created household rosters.^v

With the 2010 findings, the Team discerned which young children have the highest risk of coverage errors:

- children who are not a biological or adopted child of the householder (i.e. grandchildren, other relatives, and children who were not related to the householder); Children who are Hispanic or racial minorities;
- children living in complex households, defined as all households other than nuclear families, and single-parent families;
- children living in renter-occupied housing and multiunit structures; very young children (those born in the few months prior to the census reference day);
- children living in the largest and the smallest households; Children not enumerated by self-response.^{vi}

With these identifications, the U.S. Census Bureau has established various ways to improve the counting of these young children that are particularly vulnerable. The most commonly undercounted young children include:

The Census has offered advice for how to respond to the Census based on common situations where young children aren't counted. One example is a child who splits time between two homes or a child who lives/stays with another family or with another relative. In this case, it is important to remember the Census counts everyone where they live and sleep most of the time, even if the arrangement is temporary or the parents of the child do not live there.^{vii}

Additionally, if the child truly splits time equally between homes or if it is unclear where the child lives/sleeps most of the time, count them where they stayed on Census Day, April 1, 2020.

Another common situation where young children are not counted is a child who lives in a lower income household. The Census states it is important to communicate with low-income families and explain how the Census data determines \$675 billion in funding nationwide (\$6 billion in Kansas alone) in local funding for programs such as food stamps, the National Lunch Program, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). It is important to advocate this because when children are missed in the census, these programs miss out on funding when based on the number of children counted.^{viii}

Another scenario is a child who lives in a household with young parents or a young, single mom. The last common example provided by the bureau is that of newborn children. It is important to note that parents should include babies on census forms, even if they are still in the hospital on April 1, 2020.^{ix} Again, the census should only take about 10 minutes to complete and there are numerous ways to submit your responses.

While the Census Bureau wants to share these scenarios to spread awareness and establish relatability, they have also made improvements to the 2020 Census. A major adjustment to the 2020 census is an update to the language about counting young children. The Census has adjusted its materials to reinforce the idea that the census counts everyone in the household, regardless of age or relationship to the householder. A complete verbiage adjustment is that the primary documents most household will receive now say count "all adults, children, and babies living or staying at this address" instead of simply "everyone living or staying at this address."^x

Additionally, the 2020 Census has updated a question asking respondents if any additional people are staying in the household who were not included in the household count, now the Census provides examples of young children who may be missed so the document mentions grandchildren and unrelated children.^{xi} Lastly, the online response platform now offers additional guidance to respondents about counting young children in the form of a help text that instructs the respondent to count babies and children of all ages and other types of children who are living/staying at the address most of the time.^{xii}

A further improvement is updated enumerator training materials emphasizing the importance of including young children. The training Census employees go through includes language to specifically mention counting babies and children. Additionally, the enumerators are taken through scenarios where children are often undercounted, so they can prepare for real-life scenarios and how to navigate them.

A final major improvement is increased outreach and awareness to advocate for this issue and how to progress. One aim of this communication campaign is to make sure there is an understanding an accurate count of young children is a critical message to respondents and communities. Infographics, press kits, and various count young children documents have been generated by the U.S. Census Bureau to increase awareness and advocacy.^{xiii}

The U.S. Census Bureau is tackling the issue of undercounting young children, a frequent problem for all countries in their census process. By analyzing mistakes of the past, specifically the 2010 Census, the Bureau was able to identify errors in their process and frequently vulnerable young children. Based on these findings, the bureau has crafted marketing materials to inform the public and respondents about scenarios where children are undercounted while making internal improvements to language, enumerator training, and outreach and awareness.

ⁱ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/research-testing/undercount-of-young-children.html?#>

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^v <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/research-testing/undercount-of-young-children.html?#>

^{vi} <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/research-testing/undercount-of-young-children.html?#>

^{vii} <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-2020.html?#>

^{viii} <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-2020.html?#>

^{ix} <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/counting-children-2020.html?#>

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