

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Contact: Sue Lin Chong, 410-223-2836
media@aecf.org

New Study Finds Young Children Most Often Missed in Census

Challenges in data collection, complex family situations leading factors in large undercount of children

Baltimore, M.D. – Children under age five are missed more than any other age group in the decennial census, according to analysis released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Available online at www.aecf.org, “Why Are Young Children Missed So Often in the Census?” examines data from the Census Bureau’s Demographic Analysis that shows that more than 1 million young children under age 10 were missed in the 2000 Census and over three-quarters of a million children under age five were missed, or nearly 4 percent of this population group.

The statistics are even more pronounced among minority children, with 5.3 percent of black males under age five missed in the 2000 census, compared to 3.3 percent of nonblack males of the same age group. Among girls, blacks under age five are missed at a rate of 5.4 percent compared to 4 percent of their nonwhite counterparts.

“When children are not counted accurately, we don’t get a true picture of our nation, and communities don’t get their rightful share of public funds or political power,” explained Laura Beavers, coordinator of the national KIDS COUNT project at the Annie E. Casey Foundation in Baltimore. “Children depend on the rest of us to make sure they are counted accurately. But, they will be the ones to suffer if their community does not get the resources it deserves for schools, clinics, or child care centers.”

Census counts are used, in whole or in part, for more than 140 programs that distribute more than \$400 billion of federal funds to states and localities, including such child-focused programs as:

- Special Education Grants to states (\$10.8 billion)
- Head Start (\$6.9 billion)
- State Children’s Health Insurance Program (\$5.9 billion)
- Foster Care Title IV-E (\$4.7 billion)
- Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (\$2.9 billion)

The Casey Foundation has been a leader in reinforcing the importance of child health insurance programs, childcare programs, housing assistance, the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit – supports that many families in hard-to-count communities rely on to stay afloat.

Among the reasons for the undercount in the nation’s children are challenges in data collection and differences in the type of households where young children live:

- **Young children are more than three times as likely as adults to be living in large (7+ persons) households.** More than 8.4 percent of children live in such large households, compared to less than 2.6 percent of adults. Because census forms allow space for detailed demographics on up to six household members, children are often left off of the forms.
- **Young children are more likely to live in more mobile families, who are often more difficult to count.** Data show 21 percent of children under age five moved in the last year compared to 16 percent of the total population. The report also examines children living in temporary situations, such as foster care, or living with relatives other than their parents.

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- **Young children are more likely to live in rental units.** Data show 42 percent of households with children under age six live in rental units, compared to only 32 percent of households that do not have a child under age six in the housing unit.
- **Younger children are more likely than teenagers to live in more complex families.** For example, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of children under age one live in a household with an adult other than a parent, compared to only 32 percent of children age 12 to 17.

Report author William O'Hare anticipates more difficulty in achieving an accurate count of children in 2010 due to the increased number of children living in unusual housing situations and the growing number of racial and ethnic minority households which have historically been more difficult to count.

"The undercount of kids is startling, but it is not a new problem," said O'Hare, a demographer and consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "With combined efforts at the federal, state, and local levels, we have a chance to improve on the past and make sure the youngest members of our society are fully counted. We're asking child advocates and those invested in the welfare of the nation's kids to act as partners in delivering the message that the census is easy, important and safe."

The Census Bureau has already made several changes to census forms and procedures in an effort to get a more accurate count of young children in 2010. New forms offer clear instructions on who should be included in a household, such as newborn babies, and foster children. An expansion of the Census in Schools program will reach over 27.7 million families in 28 languages, 20 percent of whom are likely to also have a preschooler in the home.

Recommendations for additional action to overcome this historic trend include enlisting nonprofit and advocate support in local census committees to educate people about the high undercount rate for children and harnessing frequently-accessed supports for hard-to-count families, such as the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program and Head Start.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit www.aecf.org.

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