Measuring Cohabitation in National Surveys

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Cohabitation Measurement Across Surveys

- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health)
  - Roster: “Partner/boyfriend/girlfriend” on the household roster.
  - Relationship: “How many romantic or sexual partners have you ever lived with for one month or more? By ‘lived with’ we mean that neither of you kept a separate residence while you were living together.”
  - N = 6,264; from wave 4

- National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97)
  - Roster: “Lover/romantic partner” on the household roster.
  - Relationship: “In this study we define a marriage–like relationship as a sexual relationship in which partners establish one household and live together.”
  - N = 4,349; from rounds 11 and 12

- National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)
  - Card: Respondents are shown a card and asked to identify their marital status. Respondents who select “not married but living with a partner of the opposite sex” are considered currently cohabiting.
  - N = 1,519; from first 8 quarters of 2006-2010 NSFG

- Current Population Survey (CPS)
  - Partner Pointers: All unmarried adults in the household asked to identify their cohabiting partner on the household roster.
  - N = 11,543; from 2007 and 2008 CPS

Research Questions

1. How do levels of cohabitation differ across surveys and according to gender, education, and race/ethnicity?
2. Are differences in reports of cohabitation due to sociodemographic compositional differences across surveys?

Sample

- 2007-2008
- Aged 26 to 28
- Non-Institutionalized
- Cohabiting with a Different Sex Partner

Standardization

Predicted Percentage Currently Cohabiting Using Survey Sample Coefficients and Means Versus CPS Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Sample Coefficients</th>
<th>NSFG</th>
<th>Add Health</th>
<th>NLSY-97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add Health</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Predicted values based on logistic model of current cohabitation that includes indicators for variables shown in table 1.

Discussion

- Measurement of cohabitation widely varies across national surveys.
- In comparison to household rosters, direct questions result in lower estimates of cohabitation.
- Estimates of current and any cohabitation experience differ across the surveys.
- Estimates of cohabitation differ by gender, education, and race/ethnicity.
- Differentials in estimates of cohabitation across surveys are due more to measurement than sample composition.
- Next steps include analyses of children’s family structure, more contemporary cohorts, and same-sex cohabitation.

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