Counting Couples, Counting Families: Separation, Divorce, & Union Dissolution Panel

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Themes

• What Matters for Children?

• What Matters for Informing Policy?
Challenges in Federal Evaluation Work: Defining Families

• How do children and youth define families and family structure in surveys?
  – How has this been assessed in household surveys?
  – What measures best capture family status (e.g., legal marriage, cohabitation)?
  – How do we keep track of the family context over time (e.g., separation/divorce)?
Example: Measuring Family Structure

- Teen Pregnancy Prevention Replication Study
- Family structure is an important predictor of the risk of early pregnancy; thus, the instrument asks about the parents’ living arrangement
- Question: Are there standards for measuring family structure that can be used across federal evaluations?
Example: Measuring Family Structure

- **Family Structure Questions from the Baseline Instrument:**
  - The next question is about where you live and who lives with you.
  - Do you live in one home, place, or household all of the time or do you go back and forth between two or more different places?
Example: Measuring Family Structure

1. □ Both of my parents live together in one household and they are married to each other
2. □ Both of my parents live together in one household and they are not married to each other
3. □ My parents live in different households and are married to each other
4. □ My parents live in different households and are not married to each other
5. □ I have only one living parent
-1 □ Don’t know
Example: Assessing Parenting Interventions

- State of the Science and Practice in Parenting Interventions Across Childhood project
- Understanding parenting relationships and the contexts in which it is helpful to intervene with parents
- Identifying targets for parenting interventions based on constantly changing living situations and measuring change
Examples: Complexity

• Topics: Adoption, children not living with parents
• Creating data strategies
Informing Policy: Some Dos and Don’ts

• Strength of data vis a vis strength of claims
• Research expertise vs policy expertise
• Synthesis