Categorization of U.S. Demographics and Their Estimates

By: Min Qi Wang, PhD, James M. Eddy, DEd, Joan Cowdery, MS, Joan Trucks, MS


Made available courtesy of PNG Publications and American Journal of Health Behavior: http://www.ajhb.org/

*** Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document

Article:

Demographic information is often an important component of a health survey because a disease or a health behavior may likely be associated with some demographic variables. For example, one study found that the smoking prevalence rate dramatically increases for 15 to 16 year old adolescents.1 When ethnic differences were examined, the study also found that Black adolescents have significantly lower prevalence rate and tend to initiate smoking later than do their white counterparts.1 Attempting to validate self-report smoking data with biochemical indicators as a comparison standard for adolescents 12 to 14 years old, researchers found that Blacks were more likely than whites to underreport cigarette smoking and tobacco use.2 All these findings suggest that without examining some demographic factors, we may not get a full picture of the prevalence of adolescent smoking.

Examining demographic differences can help researchers better understand the phenomenon and develop health-promotion and disease-prevention activities accordingly. Furthermore, if researchers can standardize these demographics, it is likely that results of similar studies can be compared from study to study. The purpose of this research note is to provide readers with the commonly adopted demographic categorizations and their estimates from national sources (e.g., U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Age

By asking the birth date or the age of respondents, a general category (i.e., children, adolescent, young adult, older adult, and elderly) can be defined as below with the estimated 1991 population in the United States.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants/Preschool (under 5 years)</td>
<td>19.222 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children (5-11 years)</td>
<td>25.603 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent (youth) (12-17 years)</td>
<td>20.322 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adult (18-24 years)</td>
<td>26.385 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older adult (25-64 years)</td>
<td>128.893 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly (65 years and above)</td>
<td>31.754 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Race/Ethnicity
According to the current U.S. census classification, individuals are grouped into four racial/ethnic groups, and their estimates in 1991 are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>210.899 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31.164 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, all other individuals</td>
<td>0.113 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic origin (of any race)</td>
<td>23.350 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The "Other" category mainly consists of American Indians, Eskimo (2.117 million), and Asian and Pacific Islanders (7.996 million). The Hispanic origin can be of any race (i.e., White, Black, or Other). Consequently, when the total population is counted, only the population in the White, Black, and Other categories should be included.

Education
Education refers to the number of years of regular schooling the individuals completed as of the date of survey. In 1991, the U.S. population ages 25 and over was categorized as follows:

- Did not complete high school 21.6%
- Completed 4-year high school 38.6%
- Completed 1-3 years of college 18.4%
- Completed 4 or more years of college 21.4%

Income
The best indicator of family income is the poverty-level income. The poverty definition is adopted for official government use by the Office of Management and Budget and consists of a set of monetary income thresholds. The poverty-level income is the ratio of the total family income to the poverty-level threshold for a specified family size, as published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. For example, the 1992 thresholds were $7,143 for one person, $9,137 for a family of two, $11,186 for a family of three, $14,335 for a family of four, and up to $28,745 for a family nine or more. If Family A of four and Family B of four had an income of $30,000 and $12,000 respectively, their poverty-level incomes are

**Family A**
$30,000/$14,335 = 209% poverty level.

**Family B**
$12,000/$14,335 = 84% poverty level.

Families or individuals with income below their appropriate poverty threshold are classified as below the poverty level. Thus, Family B is considered a poverty family.

In 1992, the number of persons below the official government poverty level increased 1.2 million in the United States compared to the number in 1991 (see the following)
1992 poverty family = 36.9 million (14.5%)
1991 poverty family = 35.7 million (14.2%)

**Urban / Rural**
Individuals in the U.S. household population can be divided as residing in urban or rural areas. In 1991, the urban classification includes metropolitan areas with populations of 50,000 or more. Metropolitan areas can also be divided into large (1,000,000 or more) or small (50,000-999,999) metropolitan areas. The rural classification includes small towns and rural nonfarm and farm areas outside the metropolitan areas with populations below 50,000. The most recent (1991) estimates of urban/rural population are as follows

Urban resident 200.4 million
Rural resident 51.7 million

**Geographical Region**
Region corresponds to the Census categorization of the coterminous United States into four regions. Their associated states and the total population are listed below:


**Midwest** (60.7 million) consists of Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas.

**South** (88.1 million) consists of Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas.

**West** (55.1 million) consists of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska, and Hawaii.

**Living Arrangement of Persons Under 18 years**
This is concerned with the presence of parents in the household of adolescents under 18 years. Adolescents may live with both parents, single parent, other relatives, or other nonrelatives. The 1991 estimates are as follows

Both parents 71.7%
Single parent 25.5%
   (single mother 22.4%)
   (single father 3.1%)
Other relative 2.2%
Other nonrelatives 0.6%

**Marital status**
Marital status reported in most national sources reflects the person’s status as of the survey date. For instance, the number divorced is a count of persons currently divorced and not yet remarried. It is not the count of all persons who ever divorced in their lifetime or the number of persons who were granted a divorce. The marital status (in percent) of U.S. population over 18 years old for 1970, 1980, and 1990 is listed below." Note, the "Unmarried" consists of "never married", "widowed", and "divorced" categories.
---|---|---|---
Married     | 61.4 | 65.5 | 71.7  
Unmarried   | 38.6 | 34.5 | 28.3  
Never married | 22.6 | 20.3 | 16.2  
Widowed     | 7.4  | 8.0  | 8.9   
Divorced    | 8.6  | 6.2  | 3.2   

**Employment**

In 1992, an estimated 117.6 million people 16 years and over, were employed in the civilian labor force, while 9.4 million were unemployed.

**Gender**

In 1991, it was estimated that males constitute approximately 122.979 million (≈48.767%) of the U.S. population and females approximately 129.198 million (≈51.233%). Before age 30, the male population slightly exceeds the female population (50.98% vs 49.02%), whereas at age 30 and above, the female population overtakes the male population (53.01% vs 46.99%).

**Health-Care Coverage**

Health-care coverage can be categorized as covered or not covered:

- **Covered** includes private insurance (i.e., nongovernmental sources, Blue Cross and other insurance companies, private industry, etc.) and Medicaid and Medicare.

- **Not Covered** means not covered by private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare, and military plans. In 1992, 17.2% of the population was not covered for persons under 65 years of age.

**REFERENCES**