Research Assignment Involving Internet Access to Family-Relevant Census Tables. SOC214Y

Handed out on June 7th 2004.   Due June 23rd 2004 (later than in course outline)

Objective. This project (around eight pages of text and four pages of tables or graphs with a page or so of footnotes and references) is intended to give students experience in gaining access to family-relevant tables and commentary from the Census of Canada or other countries. This is important because only the Census allows comparisons over long periods of time and/or between detailed ethnic or regional groups. Only the Census allows us to address some important policy debates.

We are offering three broad options for this assignment. Option (1) focuses on the Census of Canada's changing definitions of family households, over the hundred years up to 2001. Option (2) focuses on Canadian Census tables that are mostly from 1991 and 1996 and permit breakdowns by region, visible minority status as well as age, gender, etc. Option (3) is only for students who already know how to use the SPSS package. Web searches (Google etc.) are relevant for all three options. Your assignment should include a brief paragraph describing your search procedures.

Option 1. Changing Definitions of Family Households Over 100 Years.
Start with the paper by Bettina Bradbury ("Single Parenthood in the Past" *Historical Methods*, Fall, 2000, 33 (4): 211-7 in the course pack) and use it as background comparison material for looking at changing definitions of family households (including tables and explanatory texts) in Statistics Canada's web site for the 2001 Census.

Option 2. Families in Recent Censuses of Canada: Income, Visible Minority Status, etc.
Start with the University of Toronto Data Library web site for the Census of Canada up to 1996 at
www.chass.utoronto.ca/datalib/cc96.htm
Go to "aggregate statistics" and search for tables relevant to family. You have the choice of writing an essay based on "static tables" (.htm or .pdf) or alternatively of using a package called *Beyond 2020* that is required to open "dynamic tables" (.ivt). You are not required to use *Beyond 2020*.

Option 3. Family Households in the US and Other Countries.
This is only for students who are familiar with downloading data files and reading them into SPSS. Use Google to locate the web site for IPUMS (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series). The main IPUMS site makes available sample data from US Censuses between 1850 and the present. The site for "IPUMS International" makes available sample data from recent censuses in a variety of countries, including some located in the developing world. You will need to register as an IPUMS user, then to specify some variables to be included in a "tiny" sample file

Whichever option you choose, there are four steps to the assignment: (1) deciding on a family-relevant topic that is covered by Census questions; (2) searching for two or more appropriate tables that include relevant data; (3) analyzing your selected tables, usually by calculating and reporting appropriate percentages; (4) writing up your results with some sociological interpretation.

Help can be obtained from the course Web Forum, from the TA and from the instructor. If you are on the St. George campus you can ask the Data Library staff on the fifth floor at Robarts (ask at the desk at Government Documents up the stairs from the fourth floor reference section at Robarts).

Writing up Results: Organization of your Report

Your assignment should have a title, a brief summary and a brief table of contents. Put your name on it. There should be some footnotes, references and other scholarly stuff. Aim to be succinct: around eight pages of text and four pages of tables or graphs should be enough to make your points. You should organize your papers by section, e.g.

Introduction; Theory and Literature Review; Methods and Data; Results; Discussion; Conclusion

You need to posit a sociological hypothesis and then examine this in light of the empirical data. Once you have completed your tables, you need to explain the results. This part of the assignment is descriptive. Simply write about what you see in your tables. Next, you need to analyze the results: What is the sociological explanation? Here, you may want to discuss different theories or explanations. It is important to remember that your sociological explanations should not reach too far from the data: your explanation needs to be connected and supported by your findings. Finally, your analysis should be followed by a conclusion: Restate your hypotheses, your findings, your explanation, the limits to your study, and perhaps some future directions of study.

Further Comments, Hints and Suggestions Relevant to the Assignment.

Deciding on a family-relevant topic

The Census does not ask about everything, certainly not about family violence or voting intentions. Some of your interests will not be covered by the materials available in past Censuses. In previous years, students choosing option 2 have addressed topics such as:
The growth of common-law unions in different provinces and territories of Canada from 1981 to 1996.
Hours of unpaid care given to the elderly as a function of gender and family structure (1996).
Age of youngest child and family income in male and female headed lone parent families.
The distribution of marital status in Canadian visible minority groups (1991 and 1996)
Family incomes in husband-wife families compared to male and female lone parent families.
Characteristics of families in Canada's Aboriginal population.
Common-law relationships in Quebec as a function of age and level of schooling.
Gender, employment status, family status, presence of children and contributions to unpaid housework (1996)
The relationship between family structure and family income.
The relationship between highest level of schooling and lone parenthood

The precise choice of research question is up to you. Feel free to discuss it on the Web Forum or with the TA or the instructor either face to face or via e-mail.

Students should be prepared to use professional librarians, Google, Sociological Abstracts, PsychLit etc. in order to locate relevant sources. A professional literature review contains a paragraph describing the methodology by which you carried out your search. Sociological Abstracts can be accessed via http://www.library.utoronto.ca/ and navigating to e-Indexes (so long as you are using a U of T server or proxy server (via MyAccess).

Specific Suggestions for Students Choosing Option 2

Searching for an appropriate table

Statistics Canada and the U of T Data Library Service have provided a large number of different tabulations from the Census, many of them relevant to Sociology of the Family. Each table has been produced by cross-tabulating several "dimensions", for example Marital Status and Sex. You may want to use a search engine available from Data Library's 1996 Census web page, (via Table of Contents and Aggregate Statistics).

The address for the Data Library's 1996 Census web page is:
http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/datalib/
Once there, you can go to the 1996 Census and select on the Table of Contents:
Go to: Aggregate statistics
then go to: search aggregate statistics

Suggested search words include: family structure; visible minority;
aboriginal family; family income; lone parent; care; unpaid;

This search engine will allow you to identify files containing the variables you are looking for, regardless of which of Statistics Canada's grouping categories they belong to (i.e. the Nation, Dimensions, Profiles or Basic Summary Tabulations). Tables with names ending in .ivt require Beyond 20/20. Those with names ending in .pdf or .htm are static tables, which cannot be manipulated by the user, though they may still contain interesting information which may be relevant to your project report.

For legal reasons some tables are restricted to users identified as using a U of T server. If you wish to access such tables from home you will have to use the My Access feature that identifies you as a U of T student.

Locate tables which show Dimensions such as the following:
Census Family Status (10)
Family Structure (4)
Living Arrangements (11)
Marital Status (6)

The number in brackets is the number of categories. This usually includes categories for subtotals and totals, so you may be disconcerted to find that gender is Sex (3).

Make a choice to focus on a family-related topic such as:
- Aboriginal ethnic origin population
- Elderly persons
- Hours of unpaid care or housework
- Immigrant Families
- Lone parent families (this is the Statistics Canada term for Single Parent Families)
- Visible minorities

Manipulating the table with *Beyond 20/20*. This is a sub-option, within option 2.

Beyond 20/20 is an application that allows you to simplify tabulations that have been generated from the Census and made available to the University of Toronto by Statistics Canada. The key point here is that the tabulations have already been created and your task is to simplify them. *Beyond 20/20* will help you to show the parts that are most important for your argument while hiding the parts that are irrelevant. We will be having demonstrations in class.

Read over "Searching the 2001 Census of Canada", "Beyond 20/20 Concepts" and "Guide to Using the Beyond 20/20 Browser", (at the end of the course pack.) *Beyond 20/20* is a browser helper application under Windows. Public access Windows workstations with *Beyond 20/20* installed are available at Robarts library (3rd floor and above only) and at Gerstein.

Locate the tabulations of at least one family-relevant dimension by at least one other characteristics of interest (e.g. Family Structure or Living Arrangements by Age or by Province or by Aboriginal/Visible Minority status)

If you choose to calculate percentages in *Beyond 20/20* (View, then Distributions) make sure to "hide" subtotals and totals before requesting the distributions (percentages) since their presence can mess up the percentages. In the past some students have lost marks by using percentages by row when they ought to have used percentages by column or vice versa.

Presenting data as tables of percentages is often useful but is not essential, especially if you choose to focus upon an indicator such as median income or employment to population ratio.

It is often easiest to use average or median income as the indicator for each group. To do this in *Beyond 20/20*, you select the summary statistic (e.g. median income), pull down the Item menu and click on the Show command. (Alternatively you could Hide all the other items in the dimension). If you are looking at income as a dependent variable, you should create a table with average income for each category of the independent variable.

Data from a *Beyond 20/20* window can be cut and pasted into other applications, (such as Excel and via Excel to Powerpoint). This is not necessary for successful completion of this assignment.

Use the search engine available from Data Library's 1996 Census web page, (via http://chass.utoronto.ca/datalib/ and then "Census", then "Table of Contents" then "Aggregate Statistics"). Remember that the search is carried out on the contents of Dimension names. (For example, "Korean" is an item within the Visible minority status dimension so to get to Korean you have to search on Visible).

Print appropriately percentaged (by row or by column) versions of those tables.
- Use percentage differences or differences between averages to make appropriate comparisons.
- Test what happens when you introduce a third dimension as a control.
- If you are looking at income as a dependent variable, you should create a table with average income for each category of the independent variable.
- Write a summary of your findings.