

# Measuring the Presence and Impact of Same-Sex Married Couples on Poverty Rates in the Current Population Survey

---

Ashley Edwards  
U.S. Census Bureau

Rachel Lindstrom  
Pennsylvania State University

*This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress. The views expressed on statistical, methodological, technical, or operational issues are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.*

# Why do definitions matter?

---

Official poverty rates established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)

Poverty status is assigned at the *family* level—based on comparing total *family* income to an assigned threshold that only varies by *family size and composition*

So who's in a family?

“A group of two or more people who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and are residing together in a household.”

# How is that definition applied?

---

While our definition of a family has remained unchanged, we recognize the growing complexity in family and non-family living arrangements

So how do we actually assign families in the CPS?

- 1) Surveys collect data on the relationship of each household member to the householder (the person who owns or rents the home)
- 2) Additional questions on whether a respondent has a spouse, child, or parent in the household
  - Addition of more detailed opposite and same-sex relationship categories  
(as discussed by Ortman)
  - Newly added question related to cohabitation  
(as discussed by Renwick and Mykyta)

# What about same-sex couples?

---

Survey respondents have always had the ability to report themselves as being in a same-sex marriage

But how are they treated in the CPS?

Prior to 2010

- Reassigned as an opposite-sex married couple
- No impact on family poverty status

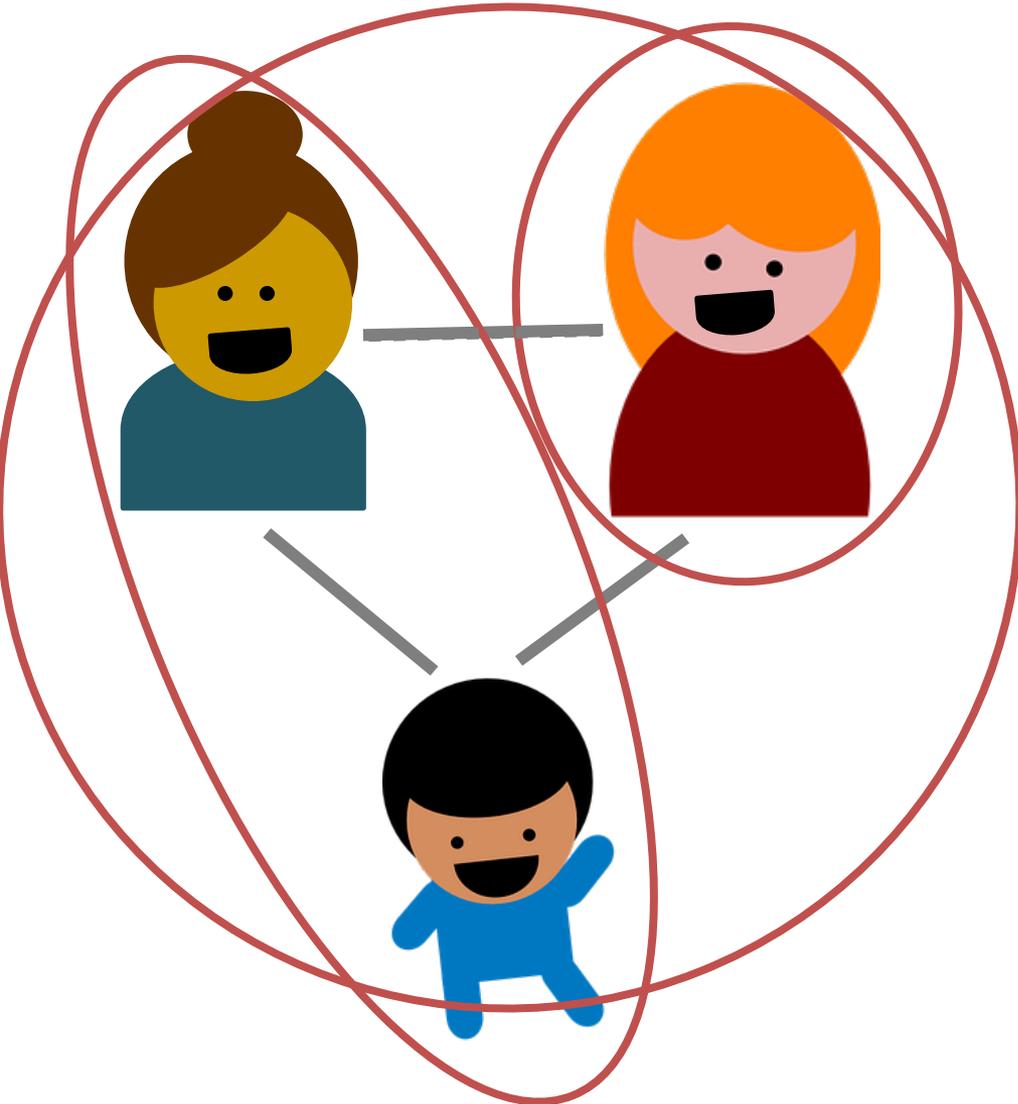
Beginning in 2010

- Reassigned to same-sex unmarried partners
- Couples treated as separate families, no longer related

Anticipated in 2017

- End relationship reassignment
- Couples treated as single family, as reported

# Implications for same-sex couples



## Current Procedures

- One family where child is assigned to household reference person
- One unrelated individual

## Proposed Procedures

- A single family

# Assigning 2015 poverty thresholds

Size of family unit	Related children under 18 years								
	None	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight or more
One person									
Under 65 years	12,331								
65 years and over	11,367								
Two people									
Householder under 65	15,871	16,337							
Householder 65 and over	14,326	16,275							
Three people	18,540	19,078	19,096						
Four people	24,447	24,847	24,036	24,120					
Five people	29,482	29,911	28,995	28,286	27,853				
Six people	33,909	34,044	33,342	32,670	31,670	31,078			
Seven people	39,017	39,260	38,421	37,835	36,745	35,473	34,077		
Eight people	43,637	44,023	43,230	42,536	41,551	40,300	38,999	38,668	
Nine people or more	52,493	52,747	52,046	51,457	50,490	49,159	47,956	47,658	45,822

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Thresholds for 2015.

# Purpose and methods

---

Evaluate the impact of treating same-sex married couples as a single family unit in the measurement of official poverty rates

Data for calendar years 2014 and 2015

- Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC)
- CPS Same-Sex Extract Files

Methods

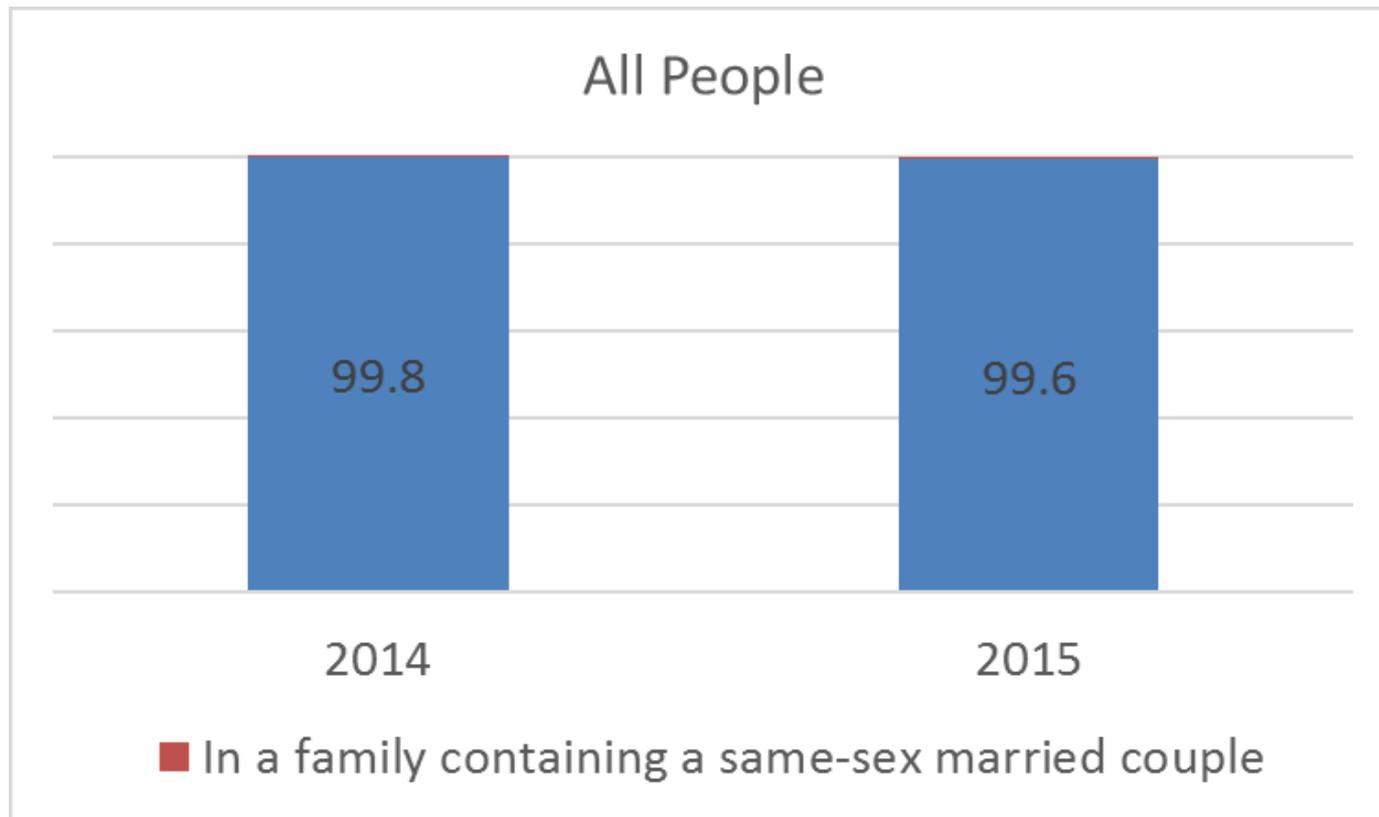
- Reassign families based on same-sex spouse identifiers
  - Determine new family poverty thresholds
  - Aggregate family income under new family groupings
- Reassign poverty status

Analysis

- Prevalence and characteristics of same-sex married couples
- Within-person changes in poverty rates
- Overall changes in the official poverty rate

# Prevalence

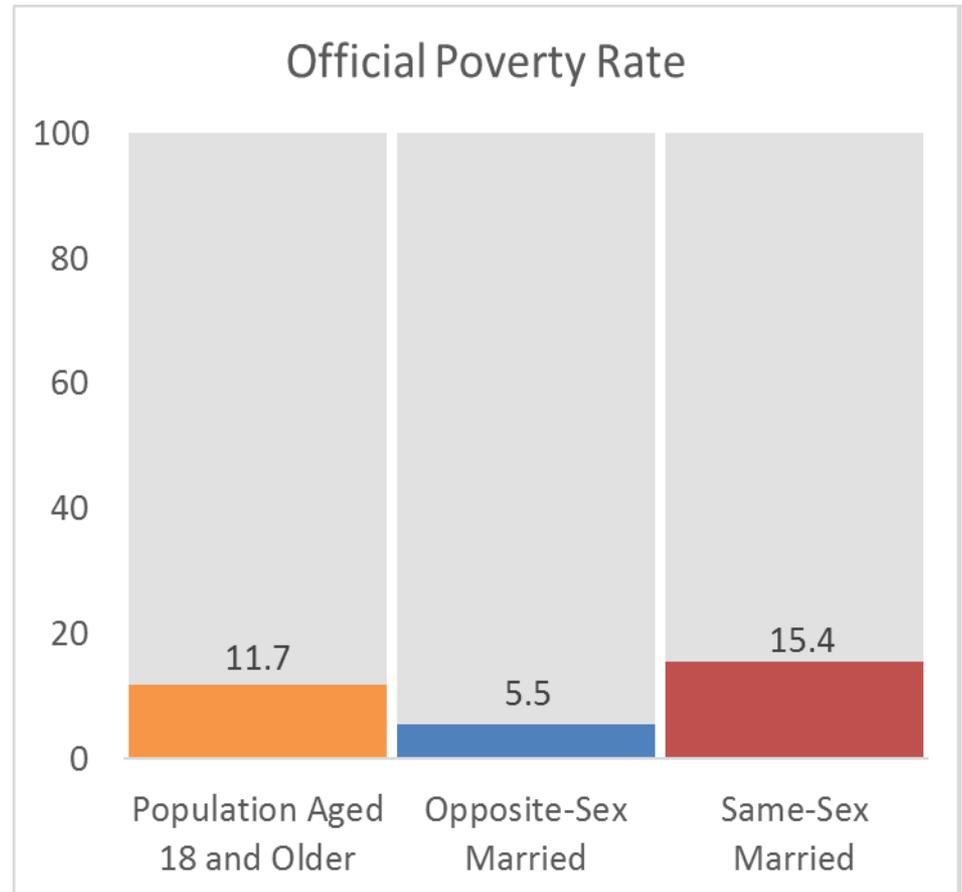
0.4 % of all people reported being in a same-sex married couple in 2015



# 2015 Characteristics

Individuals in same-sex marriages are:

- More likely to be female (61.4%)
- More likely to be under age 65 (86.2%)
- Demographically similar to those in opposite-sex marriages
- More likely to have advanced educational attainment (50.6%)
- More likely to have incomes over \$75,000 (27.8%)
- More likely to be in poverty (15.4%)



# Relationship dynamics

---

Same-sex couples are similar to opposite sex couples in terms of:

- Percent of dual-income marriages (88.1%)
- Median income differential across spouses (\$27,501)
- Median total family income in 2014 (\$84,802)
  - Same-sex couples have higher incomes in 2015 (\$105,020 vs. \$84,482)

Same-sex couples have a larger age difference (6.3 years) than opposite-sex married couples (3.9 years)

# Impact on poverty measure

Poverty for individuals in same-sex marriages is 10.9 percentage points lower in 2015

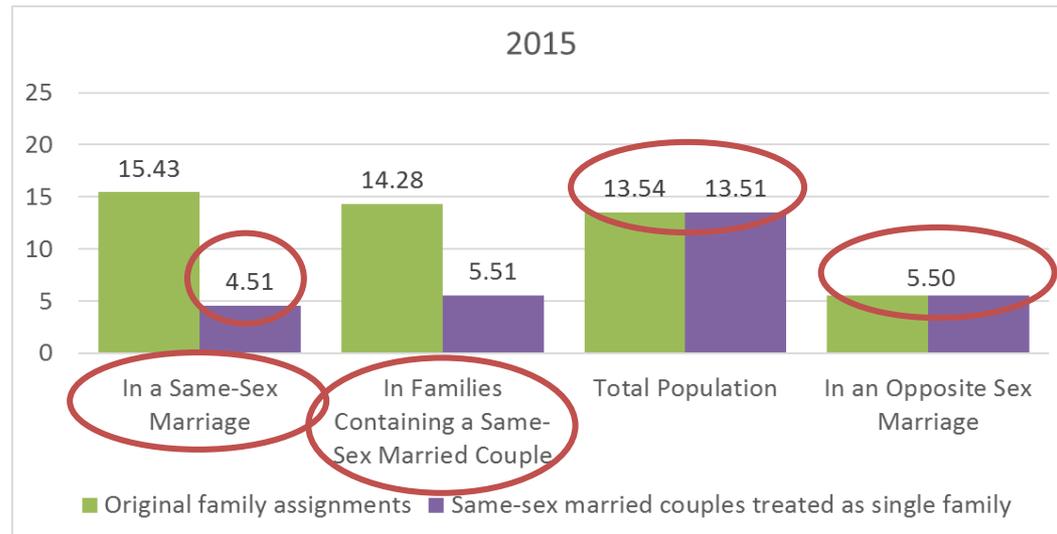
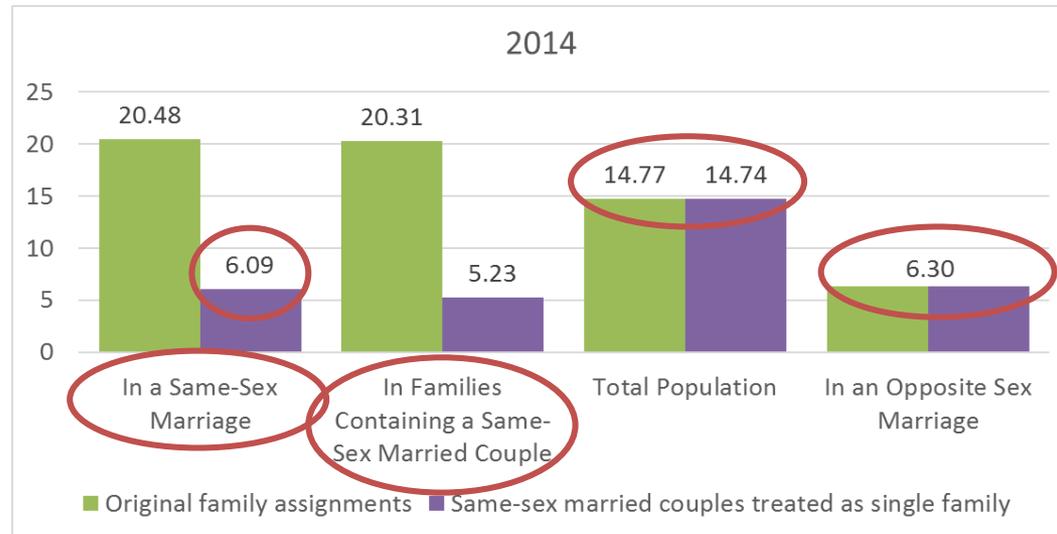
- Consistent impact in 2014

Poverty for individuals in families with a same-sex married couple is 8.8 percentage points lower in 2015

- Lowered 15.1 percentage points in 2014

National estimates consistent to the nearest tenth of a percentage point

Poverty rates for the married population do not vary statistically based on relationship type



# Conclusions and implications

---

Current data processing rules lead to higher poverty rates among same-sex married individuals, as well as for related family members in the household

When same-sex married couples are assigned to family units consistent with those in opposite-sex marriages, poverty rates for the married population do not vary statistically based on relationship type

Few adults report being in a same-sex marriage

- Overall poverty rates remain consistent to the nearest tenth of a percentage point

2018 CPS ASEC editing procedures for income and health insurance coverage will be updated to move to gender-neutral references for married couples

Limited to identifying individuals who report being in a coresidential same-sex marriage or cohabiting partnership

# Resources

---

“Same Sex Couples.” *United States Census Bureau.*

<https://www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/>

“Demographic Extract Files.” *United States Census Bureau.*

[https://www.census.gov/housing/extract\\_files/toc/data/](https://www.census.gov/housing/extract_files/toc/data/)

# References

---

Lofquist, Daphne and Renee Ellis. “Comparison of Estimates of Same-Sex Couple Households from the ACS and CPS.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America. Washington, D.C. March 31-April 2, 2011.

[www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/files/2011Final\\_PAA\\_Poster.pdf](http://www.census.gov/hhes/samesex/files/2011Final_PAA_Poster.pdf)

Vespa, Jonathan, Jamie M. Lewis, and Rose M. Kreider. (2013). America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2012. Current Population Reports. P20-570. U.S. Census Bureau. Washington, DC.

# Contact

---

Ashley Edwards  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Social Economic & Housing Statistics Division  
[ashley.edwards@census.gov](mailto:ashley.edwards@census.gov)