

Number of children born

1996 Census question

29 If you are female, answer this question.
(If you are male, go to 30.)
How many babies have you given birth to?

COUNT ONLY any who were born alive

none

OR

number born alive

OR

object to answering this question

Background

The 'number of children born' topic is cyclical and was last included in the 1996 Census. The sensitivity of this question, which asks for the number of babies born alive, continues to be an issue raised in consultation. However, the 2006 redevelopment focused on ways to make this question more acceptable to respondents while maintaining data quality.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to:

- improve the sensitivity of the question while maintaining data quality
- identify reasons for objections and assess the impact on response
- explore data quality issues surrounding stillbirths, non-biological children and non-custodial fathers.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted including cognitive testing, analysis of data from field tests and consultation with key stakeholders.

Cognitive testing

The cognitive testing programme was conducted between April 2003 and May 2005 with respondents of varied age, gender and ethnicity. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

The 'number of children born' question was redeveloped and an identical question was tested in all rounds of the cognitive testing programme with similar results, therefore, findings are discussed jointly.

Cognitive testing results

All four rounds: April 2003 to May 2005

In testing respondents often made comments to suggest that they were surprised by this question and thought other people would be upset by it. Many referred to women they knew who had experienced stillbirths or miscarriages. One respondent who was pregnant at the time of testing and due to give birth felt the question was particularly sensitive. However, targeted testing with a small number of women who had experienced stillbirths and miscarriages indicated that they were no less willing to answer the question than other respondents had been.

Although most respondents saw and understood the option 'object to answering this question', few opted to do so. However, this may be the result of the testing situation, where respondents were volunteers and therefore much more likely to provide answers.

Some respondents commented that the questions could be threatening for women who had given babies up for adoption, particularly if their family did not know. Although the 'object to answering this question' option was available for these respondents, comments suggested that such an answer might also raise questions.

When respondents were asked whether they would include adopted or step children in their answer, most respondents clearly understood they should not do so. However, some respondents commented that they would include them anyway, due to the emotional bond.

No males answered this question in cognitive testing.

Field test results

Field test: November 2003

The vast majority of those who should have answered the question did. The objection rate in the November test was lower than the objection rate for the same areas in 1996 and lower than the objection rate for all New Zealand adult females in 1996.

Field test: June 2004

The item non-response rate for this question in the June test was very similar to 1996 results.

The number of adult female respondents who selected the 'object to answer' option increased slightly in the June test compared with the same areas in 1996.

Some adult males answered this question in the June test.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

Response distributions obtained in the dress rehearsal were very similar to the results obtained for the same areas in 1996.

However, the number of adult female respondents who did not answer this question (response not stated) in the dress rehearsal was higher than the levels observed in the same areas for the 1996 Census.

Conversely, the objection rate in the dress rehearsal was lower than the rate obtained from the same areas in 1996.

Changes made for the 2006 Census

25 If you are male → go to **26**
If you are female, answer this question.
How many babies have you given birth to?

number born alive

none

object to answering this question → go to **26**

A screenshot of a census question interface. The question is numbered 25 and asks 'How many babies have you given birth to?'. It includes a routing instruction for males to go to question 26. There are three response options: a text box for 'number born alive', a radio button for 'none', and a radio button for 'object to answering this question'. A blue arrow points from the 'object to answering this question' option to a 'go to 26' label.

This question is a cyclical question and was last included in the 1996 Census. The instruction 'count only any who were born alive' used in 1996 has been removed. To facilitate correct routing for male respondents colour and arrows have been used.

Future development

As this is a cyclical question it is unlikely to be included in the 2011 Census, therefore, no redevelopment will be required at that time.