

## Statistical standard for partnership status in current relationship

### Rationale

Partnership status in current relationship is a key variable for determining the demographic characteristics of a population.

### Definition

Partnership status is a person's status with respect to their current relationship.

The following supporting concepts are defined in the glossary:

- de facto relationship
- marriage (legally registered relationship)
- civil union (legally registered relationship).

### Operational Issues

Partnership status in current relationship (referred to as 'partnership status') is more difficult to operationalise than legally registered relationship status because the definition of a de facto relationship is less precise than that of a legally registered relationship. While a question on legally registered relationship status is relatively straightforward (for example: "Are you legally married?" or "Are you in a legally registered civil union?") a question on partnership status is more difficult to pose. De facto relationships are defined as "two people who usually reside together as a couple in a relationship in the nature of marriage or civil union" (see the glossary section for full definition).

Respondents may be unwilling to disclose information about their partnership status. For example, some people who are partnered may not report themselves as such in order to conceal the relationship. It is also possible that partnership status might be perceived differently by different respondents. For example, some people may not distinguish between a legally registered relationship and a long-term de facto relationship.

### Explanatory notes

#### Changes since the 1999 review of the statistical standard

The marital status statistical standard, which included both legal marital and social marital status, was updated in 1999 and has been reviewed as part of a review of a suite of household and family classifications between June 2007 and August 2008. As a result, two new statistical standards have been developed; one for legally registered relationship status, which replaces legal marital status; and one for partnership status in current relationship, which replaces social marital status. Both statistical standards are timetabled for review within the next 10 years.

The social marital status classification needed to be updated to better reflect the range of relationships in our society today. De facto relationships (same-sex and opposite-sex) have replaced consensual unions and civil unions (same-sex and opposite-sex) have been incorporated into the classification. Civil unions became an alternative to marriage with the passing of the Civil Union Act 2004, which came into force in April 2005. The definition of de facto relationship has been aligned with the legal definition in the Interpretation Amendment Act 2005. The classification was renamed 'partnership status in current relationship' to better reflect its scope.

During the review process it became apparent that, because of the needs of different survey areas both within Statistics New Zealand (including the area, Population Statistics, which processes administrative data supplied by the Department of Internal Affairs) and other Official Statistics System (OSS) collections, it was not possible to create one simple classification that would meet the needs of every data collection.

### **Flexible approach to classifications**

The approach taken was to create a core classification (or master version) for partnership status. The master version is a framework that contains a set of approved levels and categories, as well as a glossary of defined terms. The partnership status master version framework provides a workable solution to a highly complex list of possible alternatives for sample surveys, the Census of Population and Dwellings, and administrative data collections.

This approach provides flexibility for survey areas, as they do not need to use every level of the classification, or need to use every category within a level. The master version can be aggregated to form alternative versions to meet the needs of specific collections. Aggregations will be versions of the master framework and will be developed by the classifications team, in consultation with survey areas, and stored in the Classifications and Related Standards (CARS) database. This will enable more comparison between surveys, as the definitions and conceptual basis will be consistent.

### **Partnership status information across households**

During the review users indicated they would like to be able to collect partnership status information across households. The *Report of the Review of Official Family Statistics (2007)* discussed families across households as a major area of interest and noted couples living apart together (LATs), which is an emerging social construct.

At the time of the household and families classifications review Statistics NZ surveys were not collecting information about partnered people who live in separate households, and there were no plans to do so in the immediate future. Before this type of information can be collected, the size of this emerging group needs to be monitored, to help determine whether a specialist survey or new questions in an existing survey are required. More research and work is needed to determine what information about partnerships (and families) across households is required and how this information could be collected. Until this work is done it is not possible to construct a classification.

Defining complex social constructs can be difficult particularly when there is inconsistent use of terminology by different people and social groups. For example, someone who has been married and their spouse has passed away may prefer the term 'widowed' and would not want to be referred to as a 'surviving partner', while others may have no preference. Conversely, someone whose civil union partner has passed away may prefer the term 'widowed', while others may not want to be classified this way. One term to cover those who are widowed and those who are surviving civil union partners was not found during this review and the decision was made to use both these terms in the classification.

### **Classification changes**

The partnership status classification remains hierarchical with four levels. The first two levels are simple. The first level classifies people as either partnered or non-partnered. For partnered people, the criterion used at level 2 and 3 is whether the person is a spouse (that is, married), civil union partner, or de facto partner. For non-partnered people, the criterion used at level 2 is whether they have previously been married or in a civil union and the person's partnership status is either separated, dissolved, widowed/surviving civil union partner. Level 3 classifies different types of relationships that have ended, for example 'separated (marriage)' or 'separated (civil union)', and distinguishes between those who are widowed or a surviving civil union partner.

The last two levels are more detailed and are primarily incorporated to cover the administrative data collection for vital statistics. Level four includes opposite-sex and same-sex options where appropriate.

The categories 'first marriage' and 'remarried' have been removed as this information was not needed.

The partnership status master classification will be concorded to the previous New Zealand standard social marital status classification. Each survey-specific version can also be concorded to the master version of the partnership status classification.

These changes were a result of users' requirements, and have enabled a wider variety of surveys to use the standard classification framework.

### **Classification criteria**

Partnership status is a hierarchical classification with four levels. The criterion used to place people into level 1 is whether they are partnered or non-partnered.

#### **Partnered**

For those who are partnered, levels 2 and 3 of the classification specify whether a person is the spouse or civil union partner (in a marriage or civil union), or whether they are a de facto partner (in a de facto relationship). Level 4 incorporates opposite-sex and same-sex options where appropriate.

#### **Note**

The living arrangement takes priority over other categories, for example a person who has permanently separated from their spouse or civil union partner (or their marriage or civil union has been dissolved) and who is living in a de facto relationship is classed as being a 'de facto partner' in a de facto relationship.

#### **Non-partnered**

For those who are non-partnered, level 2 classifies those who have previously been married or in a civil union and specifies whether their status is separated, dissolved, widowed/surviving civil union partner; or whether they have never been married and never been in a civil union. Level 3 classifies different types of relationships that have ended, for example 'separated (marriage)' or 'separated (civil union)' and distinguishes between those who are widowed or a surviving civil union partner. At level 4 opposite-sex and same-sex options have been included where appropriate.

### **Classification**

Partnership status is a hierarchical classification with four levels. Excluding residual categories, level 1 has two categories, level 2 has 10 categories, level 3 has 18 categories and level 4 has 30 categories.

This classification will also be used by Population Statistics for processing, coding, analysing and disseminating vital statistics, which has necessitated a number of extra categories being included. These are identified with the words '(vital statistics use only)'.

A usual residence criteria applies to all partnerships in this classification and the living arrangement takes priority over other categories. For example a person who has permanently separated from their spouse or civil union partner (or their legally registered relationship has been dissolved) and who is living in a de facto relationship is classed as being a 'de facto partner' in a de facto relationship.

Partnership status information is obtained differently depending on the mode of the survey, so there is not one standard coding process or question.

The partnership status classification master version is an input classification only. Survey-specific aggregated versions of the framework can be used for both input and output.

Classification	Partnership Status in Current Relationship – Standard Classification 2008 – Master Version
Abbreviation	PTSTCURREL08
Version	V1.0
Effective date	25 August 2008

Classification	Partnership Status in Current Relationship – Standard Classification 2008 – Alternate Version 1 (Core Module)
Abbreviation	COR.PSCR
Version	V1.0
Effective date	25 August 2008

The residual categories are defined in the Glossary.

### Coding process principles

People currently living with a partner (that is their spouse or civil union partner or de facto partner) are coded in the following way:

- People who report living with a partner are coded to 'partnered' at level 1.
- People who are in a legally registered relationship (not separated) are coded to 'spouse' or 'civil union partner' at levels 2 and 3.
- People who are in a de facto relationship are coded to 'de facto partner' at levels 2 and 3.
- People who are in a de facto relationship or in a civil union, and a breakdown of whether the partnership is same-sex or opposite-sex is required are coded at level 4.
- When people are partnered, but also have a legally registered relationship status of never married and never in a civil union, separated, dissolved, widowed or surviving civil union partner, the legally registered status should be ignored and they should be coded to the 'partnered' grouping of the partnership status classification. For example, a person who is partnered in a de facto relationship but is also permanently separated from their spouse or civil union partner should be coded to 'partnered' at level 1. At levels 2 and 3 they should be coded to 'de facto partner'. At level 4 they should be coded to opposite-sex de facto partner or same-sex de facto partner, according to the sex of the partner they are living with (not the separated spouse or civil union partner).
- When 'partnered' status is indicated, but no further information is given, responses should be coded to 'partnered, not further defined' at levels 2, 3, and 4.
- When 'partnered' status is indicated and the type of partnership is known, they should be coded to the appropriate category at the appropriate level, but if a further breakdown is required and that information is not known, then code to the appropriate 'not further defined' category at levels 2, 3 or 4.

People who are currently non-partnered are coded in the following way:

- People who do not live with a partner are coded to 'non-partnered' at level 1.
- People who do not live with a partner and who have never been in a legally registered relationship are coded to 'never married and never in a civil union' at levels 2, 3 and 4.
- People who do not live with a partner and who have had their legally registered relationship dissolved are coded to 'dissolved' at level 2, and 'dissolved (marriage)' or 'dissolved (civil union)' at level 3. If same-sex, opposite-sex breakdowns are required, code to 'dissolved (marriage)' or 'dissolved (same-sex civil union)' or 'dissolved (opposite-sex civil union)' at level 4.
- People who do not live with a partner and who are permanently separated from their spouse or civil union partner are coded to 'separated' at level 2, and 'separated (marriage)' or 'separated (civil union)' at level 3. If same-sex, opposite-sex breakdowns are required, code to 'separated (marriage),' or 'separated (same-sex civil union)', or 'separated (opposite-sex civil union)' at level 4. This coding process also applies to people who do not live with a partner and who are living apart from their spouse or civil union partner, and intend to do so permanently.
- People who do not live with a partner and have not entered into another legally registered relationship following the death of their spouse or civil union partner are coded to 'widowed or surviving civil union partner' at level 2, and 'widowed' or 'surviving civil union partner' at level 3. If opposite-sex, same-sex breakdowns are required, code at level 4.

#### Note

- **For interviewer-administered surveys**  
When the respondent's spouse or partner (or the respondent themselves) is temporarily away at the time of the collection (for example, due to work or medical reasons), and the intention is to resume residing together, the respondent should be recorded as partnered (that is, married, or in a civil union or in a de facto relationship) and not as non-partnered.
- **For self-complete surveys**  
It is unlikely this component can be operationalised to the degree of accuracy required to collect good quality data. For example, the Census of Population and Dwellings is excluded because it is unlikely this component can be operationalised to enable it to be collected accurately in the living arrangements question, which is based on usual residents within a household. The living arrangements question is also used for other purposes, namely to aid in coding of complex families and households during census processing.

#### Process for deriving partnership status in current relationship

Examples of survey-specific derivations will be attached to this statistical standard when they become available.

### Questionnaire module

#### Requirements

The partnership status questionnaire module must:

- collect at the minimum level 1 of the classification (that is whether a person is partnered or non-partnered)
- allow (and encourage) same-sex couples to report their partnership.

Alternatively, partnership status can be derived from living arrangements, legally registered relationship status, and sex.

#### Example

The example questionnaire module below is used in the core module in the General Social Survey, which is a computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI). This question asks respondents:

Showcard C4

- 11. spouse or partner
- 12. son or daughter
- 13. father or mother
- 14. brother or sister

- 15. grandchild
- 16. grandparent
- 17. great-grandchild
- 18. great-grandparent

- 19. nephew or niece
- 20. uncle or aunt
- 21. other relative

- 22. unrelated

tabRelationship  
tabHQ\_RelationshipCore  
CORHQT3

**Table 3**

*Relationship Table*

*Showcard C4*

Looking at showcard C4, *[iRltnText1]*?

*[iRltnText2]*

*Include natural, step, adopted and foster relationships.*

*{relationship response options from showcard C4*

*88 DK*

*99 RF}*

*iRltnText1*

If dealing with respondent's relationships, insert "what is [first name] [family name]'s relationship to you?"

Otherwise, insert "what is [first name] [family name]'s relationship to [first name] [family name]?"

*iRltnText2*

If dealing with respondent's relationships, insert "So [first name] [family name] is your ...?"

Otherwise, insert "So [first name] [family name] is [first name] [family name]'s ...?"

The core module is a standard set of questions that will be implemented steadily over time into Statistics New Zealand's social surveys under the Programme of Official Social Statistics. Each survey may be administered differently for example CAPI, computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), or a self-complete questionnaire. As the core module is developed to accommodate different survey modes, the appropriate questionnaire module will be included as an appendix to this statistical standard. The core module collects and outputs at level 1 of the partnership status classification – that is 'partnered' and 'non-partnered'.

For surveys that do not use the core module the question(s) may vary, but should conform to the requirements contained in this statistical standard.

**Note**

- **For interviewer-administered surveys:** When the respondent's spouse or partner (or the respondent themselves) is temporarily away at the time of the collection due to, for example, work or medical reasons, and the intention is to resume residing together, the respondent should be recorded as partnered (that is, married, or in a civil union, or in a de facto relationship), not as non-partnered.
- **For self-complete surveys:** It is unlikely this component can be operationalised to the degree of accuracy required to collect good quality data. For example the Census of Population and Dwellings is excluded because it is unlikely this component can be operationalised to enable it to be collected accurately in the living arrangements question, which is based on usual residents within a household. The living arrangements question is also used for other purposes, namely to aid in coding of complex families and households during census processing.

- Survey areas must clearly state in their output reports that a usual residence criteria applies to partnership status information so it is immediately apparent to data users. For example the core module above collects information about the relationships for all people who are usually resident in the surveyed household, including the respondent's spouse or partner. The Census of Population and Dwellings is a household-based collection and the usual residence criteria applies to their partnership status information (formerly social marital status), therefore a person who is partnered must also usually live in the same dwelling as their partner.

### Standard output

The partnership status classification master version is an input classification only. Survey-specific aggregated versions can be used for both input and output.

The core module collects and outputs at level 1 of the partnership status classification – that is 'partnered' and 'non-partnered'.

#### **Note: Guidelines for release of civil union data**

Due to the relatively small numbers of civil unions, the relatively small size of sample surveys, and the possible respondent misinterpretation of what a civil union is, there could be confidentiality and/or data quality concerns, such as the accuracy of civil union data. For example, the civil union figures from the 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings were significantly higher than was expected and are believed to be due to respondent misinterpretation regarding what a civil union is. For the social marital status variable in the 2006 Census 'civil union partners' were not output separately, but were included within the 'partnered, not further defined' category. Subject matter areas should contact Population Statistics and Statistical Methods for guidance on the release of civil union data.

The residual categories may be output separately or combined. Where a combination item of residuals is to be used in output, this item should be labelled 'Not Elsewhere Included' and should have a footnote indicating its composition.

The residual categories are defined in the glossary.

### Related classifications and standards

#### **New Zealand**

Partnership status in current relationship can be used to help code complex households and families for the following standards:

- family type
- household composition.

'Type of couple' is a related classification.

For further information about usual residence, refer to the 'usual residence' statistical standard.

#### **International**

Statistics New Zealand's statistical standard for partnership status in current relationship is not based on an international standard, although it is similar to United Nations' recommendations.

## Glossary

### Couple

Two people who are partnered only with each other. See partnered. There are three types of couples: opposite-sex, male and female.

### De facto relationship

Two people who usually reside together as a couple in a relationship in the nature of marriage or civil union and who are not married to, or in a civil union with, each other. Note that couples in de facto relationships where one partner is temporarily living elsewhere at the time of the data collection (due to, for example, work or medical reasons) and the intention is to resume residing together, are still considered to be in a de facto relationship.

### Dissolved (civil union)

People for whom a decree, order or any legislative enactment for dissolution or nullity of their civil union exists, or where a dissolution of a voidable civil union has taken place. People whose civil union has been dissolved are:

- legally able to enter another civil union or get married (if they are an opposite-sex couple)
- not currently in a civil union, married, or separated
- not currently widowed or the surviving partner of a civil union.

### Dissolved (marriage) (also known as divorced)

People for whom a decree, order or any legislative enactment for divorce or dissolution or nullity of marriage exists, or where a dissolution of a voidable marriage has taken place. People whose marriage has been dissolved are:

- legally able to marry again or enter a civil union
- not currently married, in a civil union, or separated
- not currently widowed or the surviving partner of a civil union.

### Legally registered relationships

- **Marriage**

A marriage is a legally registered relationship, which is entered into by two people of the opposite-sex who must have been married according to the laws and customs of the country in which they got married. A marriage also includes couples that have changed their relationship from a civil union to a marriage in New Zealand.

- **Civil union**

A civil union is a legally registered relationship, which is entered into by two people of the same or opposite-sex who must have entered into the civil union according to the laws and customs of the country in which they entered into the civil union. A civil union also includes opposite-sex couples that have changed their relationship from a marriage to a civil union in New Zealand.

### Never married and never in a civil union

A person who has never been in a legally registered relationship (marriage/civil union).

### Never partnered (vital statistics use only)

A person who has never been married and never in a civil union and never in a de facto relationship.

### Partner deceased (vital statistics use only)

Partnership status for a person whose spouse or partner (either civil union or de facto) has died.

### **Partnered**

A person with whom another person is:

- married to or in a civil union with, or
- in a de facto relationship with.

Civil unions and de facto relationships include both same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples.

### **Permanently ended de facto (vital statistics use only)**

A de facto relationship that has permanently ended and the de facto couple no longer usually reside together.

### **Separated (marriage or civil union)**

To be separated, a person must be permanently living apart from his or her spouse or civil union partner, with or without a legal separation order or agreement. To be permanently living apart, a person must not usually reside with their spouse or civil union partner.

### **Spouse**

A spouse is the husband or wife in a legally registered marriage. For the purposes of these definitions 'spouse' does not apply to civil unions and de facto relationships.

### **Surviving civil union partnered**

The status of a person who has not entered into a new civil union or marriage, following the death of his or her civil union partner.

### **Usual residence**

Usual residence is the address of the dwelling where a person considers himself or herself to usually reside, except in the specific cases listed in the guidelines. It is recommended that these guidelines be followed in the cases where usual residence is not self-defined.

1. Dependent children who board at another residence to attend primary or secondary school, and return to their parent's(s') or guardian's(s') home for the holidays, usually reside at the address of their parent(s) or guardian(s). Tertiary students usually reside at the address where they live while studying. If they give up their usual residence in the holidays (eg terminate the lease on a flat or give up their hostel room) and return to their parent/caregivers' home during the holidays their usual residence over that period would be their parent/caregivers' home.
2. Children in shared care usually reside at the place where they spend more nights, or if they spend equal amounts of time at each residence, they usually reside at the place where they are at the time of the survey.
3. People who are in rest homes, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, usually reside where they consider themselves to live, and this may include the institution.
4. A person whose home is on any ship, boat or vessel permanently located in any harbour shall be deemed to usually reside at the wharf or landing place (or main wharf or landing place) of the harbour.
5. A person from another country who has lived in New Zealand the past twelve months, or has the intention of living in New Zealand for twelve months or more, usually resides at his or her address in New Zealand (as in external migration).
6. People of no fixed abode have no usual residence. However, for enumeration purposes, a meshblock of usual residence is assigned to people of no fixed abode based on their location on the date of data collection. They are still recorded as having 'no fixed abode'.
7. People who spend equal amounts of time residing at different addresses, and can not decide which address is their usual residence, usually reside at the address they were surveyed at, assuming that they are not a visitor.
8. If none of the above guidelines apply, the person usually resides at the address he or she was surveyed at.

### **Usual residence operational issues**

The definition of usual residence is based on the assumption that each respondent has only one usual residence. The majority of people do not have difficulty in providing one address. Instructions should be provided on which address to give for individuals who have more than one usual residence. For example, see bullet points. If you are an overseas resident and will be staying in New Zealand for less than 12 months, give your address in your home country. Otherwise, give your New Zealand address.

If you are a New Zealand resident, follow these guidelines to give the right address.

- If you are a primary or secondary school student at boarding school, give your home address.
- If you are a tertiary student, give the address where you live during the semester.
- If you live in more than one dwelling, give the address of the one you most consider to be your home. If you spend equal amounts of time at different addresses, give only one of those addresses.
- Children in shared care should give the address where they spend most nights. If children spend equal amounts of time at different addresses, give the address of where they are staying tonight.

For further information about usual residence, refer to the 'usual residence' statistical standard.

### **Widowed**

The status of a person who has not entered into a new marriage or civil union following the death of his or her spouse.

### **Residual categories**

Residual categories are used as operational codes only when capturing and/or coding particular types of responses. The mode of the survey will determine which residual categories are required.

#### ***Don't know***

Use of this category is discretionary. The use of a category capturing don't know responses is most applicable to household surveys where 'don't know' may be a legitimate response to certain questions.

#### ***Refused to answer***

This category is only used when it is known that the respondent has purposefully chosen not to respond to the question. Use of this residual category in processing is optional. Its use is most applicable in face-to-face or telephone interviews, but may be used in self-completed questionnaires if the respondent has clearly indicated they refuse or object to answering the question.

#### ***Response unidentifiable***

This category is used when there is a response given, but:

- the response is illegible, or
- it is unclear what the meaning or intent of the response is – this most commonly occurs when the response being classified contains insufficient detail, is ambiguous or is vague, or
- the response is contradictory, for example, both the yes and no tick boxes have been ticked, or
- the response is clear and seemingly within the scope of the classification, but cannot be coded because no suitable option (particularly other residual category options such as 'not elsewhere classified' or 'not further defined') exists in the classification or code file.

### **Response outside scope**

This category is used for responses that are positively identified (that is, the meaning and the intent are clear) but which clearly fall outside the scope of the classification / topic as defined in the standard.

### **Not stated**

This category is only used where a respondent has not given any response to the question asked, that is, it is solely for non-response. It is always presented as 'not stated' in classifications.

### **Not captured (vital statistics use only)**

The variable is not collated in the reference period, or the variable is collated in a different format in reference period. (For example, the variable may have been collated using a different classification.)

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