The General Social Survey

GSS

Experimenting with the Household Relationships Module in the General Social Survey

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SUMMARY

This report presents background and findings on the implementation of an experimental version of the Household Relationships module in the 2022 and 2024 GSS. We focus our evaluation on four key household relationship outcomes: HHTYPE1, FAMGEN, ADULTSINHH, and CHILDSINHH. Compared with the traditional Household Relationships module, the experimental module substantially improves time efficiency, especially for larger households, by reducing interview time compared to the traditional module. The distributions of household type and family generations from the experimental module closely replicate the traditional module. Adopting the experimental Household Relationships module in the 2026 GSS is expected to substantially reduce respondent burden and save valuable time during data collection without compromising descriptive measures of the household.

BACKGROUND

The General Social Survey (GSS) collects data on the respondent as well as data on other members of the household. Some information on the respondent's spouse or partner has traditionally been collected in the GSS replicating Core (e.g. SPOCC10, CORELIG), but information on other household members has historically come from the Household Enumeration Form (henceforth referred to as the HEF). Historically, the HEF was administered at the doorstep with a household informant, on a paper questionnaire, and accomplished one specific goal – the selection of the respondent from eligible household members. The HEF would roster the household, record relationships between individuals and the head of household, collect sex, age, and marital status for each member of the roster, and then select the respondent by age-ordering adults and identifying the relevant person according to a Kish grid[1] printed in the HEF. A scan of the HEF from 2000 can be seen here: https://gss.norc.org/content/dam/gss/get-documentation/pdf/quex/2000GSSHEF.pdf.[2] Although HEF information had been collected for many years, it was not initially included in public data releases. In 1992, the GSS expanded public access by incorporating HEF information and retroactively adding these data to the 1972-1991 rounds.[3] Over the past 50 years, the HEF data have been used as the standard for the number of people in the household, as well as their age ranges, which are part of the background variables required for the International Social Survey Program's (ISSP) modules, as well as vitally important for weights on the GSS.[4]

Creating the Household Enumeration and Household Relationships Modules

In 2019, during the development of the 2020 round of the GSS, staff made efforts to both digitize and simplify the HEF. The GSS interview had become longer and thus more burdensome over recent rounds, evident when looking at time-tracking variables such as ELAPSEDTIME. The HEF represented a further burden, unquantifiable, given its status as both a paper instrument and also one completed by an informant, not necessarily the respondent. The

[1] A Kish grid identifies the respondent based on the number of eligible persons in the household. For example, with 2 eligible people, Kish grids printed in HEFs would select the 1st person for 50% of cases, and the 2nd person for the other 50%. However, the size of the household is unknown prior to the completion of the HEF, so the grid would include entries for multiple household sizes, each indicating the eligible respondent. The GSS Kish grid typically contained four identifiers – 1 eligible respondent, 2, 3, and 4 or more eligible respondents.

[2] Please note that pages 4 and 5 are meant to be side by side and treated as a single sheet by interviewers.

[3] For more on this development, see GSS Methodological Report 73 (https://gss.norc.org/content/dam/gss/get-documentation/pdf/reports/methodological-reports/MR073.pdf).

[4] For more information regarding household rostering in other countries, see Appendix A.

team proposed splitting the HEF into two components: (1) Household Enumeration[5], which would occur prior to the interview, with the household informant; and (2) Household Relationships, which would be incorporated into the main interview as a kind of topical module, with the selected GSS respondent from the household. The goal was to simplify the HEF and make it less burdensome, while also maintaining the necessary information for respondent selection, as well as the style of a scientific selection process, which served to assure hesitant or concerned household informants that respondent selection followed a transparent scientific procedure.

In order to accomplish these goals, Household Enumeration was reduced considerably. It now asks only for a name or list of adults in the household (rather than all persons) and their approximate ages, denoted by decade. Exact ages, sex, marital status, and relationship to the household and their partner were removed from this new Household Enumeration section, a bulk of the questions asked across the rostering pages. Even these requirements take longer than one might naively expect — Household Enumeration disambiguates households with many adult members from group quarters, and confirms the eligibility of each adult prior to respondent selection. The survey instrument then selects a respondent using the Kish table. Therefore, Household Enumeration now provides three vital pieces of information: (1) respondent selection, (2) household eligibility, and (3) the number of adults in the household at the time of respondent selection needed for weighting. When implementing the digital Household Enumeration in 2021, GSS staff determined that we could not reliably pass information between the HEF instrument and the main interview questionnaire under field conditions and thus would need to roster the household a second time during the main interview if we wanted to obtain any information about household members. One other crucial change was made; with the removal of the relationships component of the HEF, Household Enumeration could now be centered on the informant, rather than asking about the head of household first.

The Household Relationships module was meant to recreate the detailed household information present in the old HEF, including both individual characteristics of each household member, as well as the generated variables traditionally associated with the HEF, such as HHTYPE, FAMGEN, and the age-specific counts of household members such as ADULTS, TEENS, PRETEEN, and BABIES. To accomplish this, the Household Relationships module first rosters the household as of the interview, beginning with the head of household and their spouse or partner, if applicable. From there, the module collects age, sex, and marital status of each household member, as well as their relationship with both the head of household and the head of household's spouse or partner.

Implementation Challenges During the Pandemic-Era Transition

Ultimately, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed plans to include all of these changes in the 2020 round of the GSS. When the survey was delayed into late 2020 and early 2021, it was fielded entirely as a mail push-to-web survey, with no in-person interviewing component. Case selection was done via the last-birthday method, rather than attempting to roster the household, select a respondent from a Kish grid, and facilitate a transition between the informant and respondent on a web survey. However, the Household Relationships module was fully implemented in 2021. Unfortunately, the module did not handle the transition to web well without an interviewer. Respondents provided contradictory information (e.g., parents whose ages are less than the respondent's, missing people, zero people in household) and using raw text fills for names proved difficult if respondents misunderstood the question. For example, if a respondent described a household member as "my sister", they would later see a question asking, "How old is my sister?"

Historically, the HEF was among the easiest data to include in the GSS datafile, simply requiring transcription and some manual resolution of contradictory information (e.g., a HEF without a spouse, and a respondent with a spouse in the main interview could be corrected to provide the spouse on the HEF). The potential usefulness and

[5] This may be occasionally referred to as "Respondent Selection" in GSS codebooks.

low cost of release were the primary reasons that HEF data were retroactively added to the first two decades of GSS data. For the 2021 data, however, the Household Relationships module was one of the most resource-intensive sections to review and process, offering the most contradictory data with the least capacity for resolution, differing substantially from the consistency typically observed in GSS data processing. The absence of the Household Enumeration roster eliminated a potential source of truth for reconciliation. Documentation of Household Relationships was also difficult, as the module was primarily composed of a series of loops that proved to be impossible to export effectively from the standard survey program that the GSS used.[6] While the specs for how the modules should function were available, the outputs, which were traditionally all that the GSS released, provide limited visibility into the detailed logic of how Household Relationship responses were collected.

Redesigning Modules for GSS 2022

These cumulative changes led us to re-evaluate the functions of the HEF, and the designs of the Household Enumeration and Household Relationships sections from the pre-pandemic planning for the 2020 round of the GSS. The HEF, ultimately, had two essential functions – the identification of the respondent, and the count of the number of adults in the household. Everything else was secondary and had already been stripped out of the new Household Enumeration. Household Relationships, then, was whatever was remained that the GSS considered worth preserving. The HEF data beyond those two essential components had been made public because it was reliable and useful as a tool for disambiguation with other survey questions, and, perhaps most importantly, did not cost any time to collect, as it was collected outside of the time-keeping aspects of the survey that we used as a proxy for respondent burden. Over the course of one round due to changes in the study design, each of those useful characteristics had ceased. The data exhibited substantially more inconsistencies and contradictions than observed in prior implementations and they were no longer useful for disambiguation. Most importantly, they were now part of the observable burden of the interview for the respondent.

To address these various difficulties, the GSS made two changes beginning with the 2022 round of the study, the first round designed to be fielded across multiple modes (web self-complete, in-person interview or telephone interview). First, when Household Enumeration returned in 2022, the GSS would no longer consider any links between Household Enumeration and Household Relationships when it came to disambiguating data. The two components would no longer be used to cross-check each other, beginning in 2022. Each would be left to stand on its own, and the two sources would be maintained as distinct measurements and would not routinely be reconciled during processing, allowing researchers to evaluate each source independently. To that end, the GSS also committed to releasing duplicate versions of many variables that had previously only been present in one of the two modules, allowing data users to contrast the information from Enumeration (prior to the interview) and Relationships (within the interview). We also determined which of these variables would be utilized for weighting purposes; Enumeration contributes the relevant weighting variables, as chance of selection should reflect the number of adults in the household at time of selection (i.e., during Household Enumeration) rather than at time of interview (i.e. from Household Relationships). For more information on variable availability across Household Enumeration and Household Relationships, see Table 1.

Development of the Experimental Household Relationships Module

Second, the GSS developed a new, experimental Household Relationships module. The aim was not to recreate the full web of relationships present in the traditional Household Relationships module, which proved too

[6] This particular problem was not apparent until the 2022 round of the GSS — the 2021 survey export was difficult to read for other reasons, but did contain accurate question text and fills for each question in Household Relationships. This is because the 2021 GSS was programmed in a different environment than other years of the GSS, which led to its own negative consequences.

burdensome and difficult to administer to web-based respondents. Instead, we wanted a version of Household Relationships that would allow us to collect accurate counts of household members by age category, as required by ISSP policy, and generate secondary, household-level composition variables that could be used as part of historical trends to examine household composition. We identified four target household-level variables that the experimental design needed to be able to capture. The first, HHTYPE1, summarized the web of relationships in the household, identifying households with married or cohabitating couples, children, relatives, and non-family households. Traditionally, HHTYPE1 was a recode from HHTYPE, which summarizes the household relationships in a list of 74 distinct codes and extended back to 1975. The second, FAMGEN, identified the number of generations within the household. FAMGEN is derived from the identities captured within the roster relationships (e.g., noting the presence of a relationship tagged "grandparent" or "grandchild"), and extends back to 1975. The third and fourth variables, ADULTSINHH and CHILDSINHH, summarize two fundamental units of every household by broad age classifications.[7] These variables would serve to evaluate how effectively the experimental Household Relationships module replicated the same variables derived from the web of relationships in the traditional module.

We also determined that timing of the Household Relationships module would be a component of its success. With the move into the main interview, Household Relationships represented a substantial new burden on GSS respondents. Generally speaking, the GSS interview has been getting longer over the course of the last 15 years, with face-to-face interviews taking upwards of 2 hours in 2018, despite the generally agreed upon target of a 90-minute in-person interview. The 2022 and 2024 rounds of the GSS would be the first attempts to assess the traditional Household Relationships timing, as well as that of the experimental module. The simplification of the module, hopefully, would lead to shorter completion times, and thus less burden on respondents, allowing them to more easily and accurately complete the rest of the substantive portions of the GSS interview.

To accomplish this, the design of the experimental Household Relationships module was fundamentally changed relative to the traditional module. After speaking to field staff, the GSS team determined that the head-of-household framing for the Household Relationships module was the most difficult element for respondents to understand. Observing errors from the 2021 implementation confirmed this fact. As a result, we made the decision to re-center the module around the respondent, as that would lead to fewer errors and difficulty comprehending the purpose of the module. This mirrors the decision made for the Household Enumeration module, which unwound the head-of-household framing in the design for the 2020 GSS. First, the module would collect detailed counts of household members by age category, confirming totals as it progressed, and determining accurate counts of adults, children under 5, children 5-12, and children 13-17, as well as total number of people in the household. Second, the module would try to capture a snapshot of the web of relationships *as centered around the respondent,* identifying if *they* were a parent, a child, a sibling, etc. to anyone within the household. There was a risk at the loss of some complexity, especially if the respondent was unrelated to other household members, who had complex relationships with each other, but the tradeoff was necessary to simplify the module.

The downside of this change is that the type of household encoded in HHTYPE1 would depend heavily on who was selected as the respondent. The majority of respondents belong to 1- and 2-adult households (between 70 and 75%, since 2004), which we expected would not shift substantially. However, 3+ adult households can depend on whether the householder or their spouse is selected, as compared to any other adult. An adult child of the householder, living at home, can be identified as the child if the householder or their spouse answers. However, if the adult child answers, they can only indicate that there is at least one parent in the household, but not how many, as the relationships capture the parent/child dynamic only once. Picking up the missing piece of information the relationship between their adult parents, would require reframing the questions away from the respondent.

[7] Our analysis does not examine the differences between Household Enumeration and Household Relationships, and so focuses on the comparison between ADULTSINHH and ADULTS_EXP, not ADULTSINHH and ADULTS. See Table 1 for more details.

This experimental Household Relationships module was placed on Form Y and administered to approximately 50% of respondents in both 2022 and 2024. As with the Household Enumeration/Household Relationships split, the module necessarily replicates several existing GSS variables, as is detailed in Table 1. Variables in **bold** existed in the GSS prior to 2021 and were derived from the old HEF. They have been situated appropriately with their module as of 2022.

The purpose of this report is to explore the effectiveness of the Traditional and Experimental Household Relationships modules fielded in the 2022 and 2024 rounds of the GSS. Based on these findings, we make a recommendation for the future of the GSS.

Table 1. Guide to the Respondent Selection, Traditional and Experimental Household Composition Modules

Concept	Household Enumeration	Traditional Household Relationships	Experimental Household Relationships
Availability	All cases	Form X only	Form Y only
People in household	HOMPOPH	**HOMPOP**	HOMPOP_EXP
Adults in household	**ADULTS**	ADULTSINHH	ADULTS_EXP
Children in household		CHILDSINHH	CHILDS_EXP
Age 0-6		**BABIES**	BABIES_EXP
Age 7-12		**PRETEEN**	PRETEEN_EXP
Age 13-17		**TEENS**	TEENS_EXP
Presence of children			KIDSUND18
Informant and respondent identity within roster	RESPNUMH, HEFINFO1[1]	**RESPNUM**	
Person-level characteristics	**AGEHEF1-14, AWAY1-14, WHERE1-14**	**OLD1-14, GENDER1-14, MAR1-14**	
Relationships between people		**RELATE1-14, RELSP1-14, RELHH1-14, RELHHD1-14, RPLACE, RVISITOR, VISITORS**	LNGRLTNSHP, RSBLNG18, RCHILD18, RPRNT18, RBIOPRNT18, RADPTPRNT18, RSTPPRNT18, RGPRNT18, RFMLY18, RNTRLTD18, RRLTU18, RNRLTU18, RGPRNTU18, RBIOPRNT, RADPTPRNT, RSTPPRNT, PRNT
Family Generation		**FAMGEN**	FAMGEN_EXP
Household Type		**HHTYPE, HHTYPE1**	HHTYPE1_EXP

Note: Variables in **bold** existed in the GSS prior to 2021 and were derived from the old HEF. Some variables are impacted by recent disclosure review and limitation changes; see Appendix B. For more details regarding these changes, see the GSS 1972-2024 Codebook.

COMPARISON BETWEEN HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIP MODULES

Key Household Relationship Outcomes

Our first points of comparison are our four selected outcome variables: HHTYPE1, FAMGEN, ADULTSINHH, and CHILDSINHH. These four variables summarize much of the information captured by Household Relationships, by capturing a snapshot of the basic relationship between household members, their relative ages, and the number of adults and children in the household. ADULTSINHH is useful for weighting purposes, and CHILDSINHH is closely related to background data requirements for the ISSP, which requires counts of children by age group in the household. The experimental Household Relationships module was designed to generate these four variables with the respondent-centered orientation that the module requires. We did not expect the respondent-centered modules to exactly reproduce the distribution of the traditional Household Relationships construction, due to the simplification of the web of relationships.

HHTYPE1

While the two approaches show similar distributions for HHTYPE1 in 2022 and 2024 (see Table 2), they are by no means identical. Compared to the traditional module, the experimental module finds fewer married couples

Table 2. HHTYPE1 distribution by GSS year, weighted percentages

HHTYPE1	2022		2024	
	Traditional	Experimental	Traditional	Experimental
Married couple, no children	32.9%	26.6%	29.4%	28.5%
Single parent	2.9%	4.9%	3.6%	3.2%
Other family, no children	5.8%	11.7%	6.5%	10.5%
Single adult	20.1%	18.7%	20.7%	18.1%
Cohabitating couple, no children	4.8%	5.7%	5.5%	5.7%
Non-family, no children	2.5%	2.3%	1.6%	2.5%
Unsure, no children	0.8%	1.0%	1.2%	1.8%
Married couple with children	21.2%	19.2%	23.8%	18.1%
Other family with children	2.7%	4.5%	2.8%	6.1%
Cohabitating couple with children	2.3%	4.4%	2.3%	3.8%
Non-family with children	0.5%	0.1%	0.7%	0.1%
Unsure with children	3.4%	0.7%	1.8%	1.7%
Chi-Square (p-value)	$\chi^2(11)=48.64$ ($p<.0001$)		$\chi^2(11)=37.93$ ($p<.0001$)	

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)
Note: Weighted percentages are weighted using WTSSNRPS. Rao-Scott chi-square test for weighted analyses.

without children, more "other family" relationships without children, fewer married couples with children, and more cohabitating couples with children. These differences are significant in both years, and persist after weighting.

To better understand these differences, we examined the differences by the number of adults in the household. While the differences in 1 adult and 2 adult households are minimal, we see sizable differences in the 3+ adult households (see Table 3). In 2022, the percent of "Married couple, no children" household drops from 42.5 percent in the traditional module to 24.6 percent in the experimental module, a nearly 18 percentage point shift. Subsequently, the percent of "Other family, no children" households rises from 8.2 percent to 27.2 percent, an increase of 19 percentage points. Similar patterns occur in the corresponding households with children. The pattern is also replicated in 2024.

Table 3. HHTYPE1 distribution by number of adults in the household, weighted percentages

	2022						2024					
	1 adult		2 adults		3+ adults		1 adult		2 adults		3+ adults	
HHTYPE1	Trad	Exp	Trad	Exp	Trad	Exp	Trad	Exp	Trad	Exp	Trad	Exp
Married couple, no children	-	-	43.0%	39.6%	42.5%	24.6%	-	-	40.6%	44.6%	35.0%	25.7%
Single parent	10.9%	20.7%	0.1%	-	-	-	14.7%	15.0%	0.1%	-	-	-
Other family, no children	-	-	7.2%	9.2%	8.2%	27.2%	-	-	10.0%	8.2%	5.5%	21.1%
Single adult	89.1%	79.3%	-	-	-	-	85.3%	85.0%	-	-	-	-
Cohabitating couple, no children	-	-	9.6%	6.9%	-	9.1%	-	-	10.7%	8.7%	-	4.1%
Non-family, no children	-	-	3.1%	1.0%	3.3%	6.7%	-	-	2.2%	2.3%	2.2%	4.7%
Unsure, no children	-	-	0.2%	1.1%	2.3%	0.4%	-	-	-	0.5%	5.1%	2.7%
Married couple with children	-	-	26.3%	31.1%	29.8%	15.7%	-	-	27.5%	26.5%	40.1%	19.3%
Other family with children	-	-	4.3%	2.5%	2.2%	12.5%	-	-	4.0%	3.9%	3.1%	13.7%
Cohabitating couple w/ children	-	-	4.6%	7.0%	-	3.8%	-	-	4.5%	4.3%	-	5.8%
Non-family with children	-	-	0.6%	0.2%	0.8%	-	-	-	0.3%	0.1%	2.1%	0.3%
Unsure with children	-	-	1.1%	1.4%	10.9%	-	-	-	0.2%	0.9%	6.8%	2.5%

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)
Note: "Trad" = Traditional module. "Exp" = Experimental module. Weighted percentages are weighted using WTSSNRPS.

This phenomenon can be illustrated with the following example. In the respondent-focused module (i.e., experimental), if the respondent was an unmarried adult child of a married couple, the household would be classified as "Other family, no children" because the respondent is not married but living with "other family." In the head-of-household framing of the traditional module, the respondent's father (most likely to be the head of household) would be the key household member, and given he is married and has no children age 0-17, the household would be classified as "Married couple, no children."

FAMGEN

Similar to HHTYPE1, FAMGEN is not identically distributed between the two versions of the module (see Table 4). The experimental module finds fewer households with parents and children under 18, and more households with parents and children over 18. However, FAMGEN_EXP, in the experimental formulation, is sensitive to where the respondent sits within the household, while FAMGEN, in the traditional formulation, is not. As a result, an interviewed respondent who is living with their adult parents would be coded as "Two generations, children" in FAMGEN, reflecting the status of the child relative to the head of household. In the same scenario in the experimental module, FAMGEN_EXP could be coded as "Two generations, parents" if an adult child is interviewed and "Two generations, children" if one of the parents is interviewed. As one of the goals of the GSS is to provide useful context around respondent opinions, this sensitivity improves the usefulness of the overall FAMGEN construct, as it now more accurately reflects the respondent's perception of the generations within their household.

Through review of the open-ended text associated with the traditional Household Relationships module, we identified areas of conflict. While the Background section detailed some of the ways in which the traditional Household Relationships can fail (e.g., bad use of text fills and respondent confusion), it has become clear that additional problems arise from blended families. For example, the web of relationships lacks the ability to describe the relationship between an unmarried partner and the family of their partner (e.g., what do you call a "stepchild" or a "parent-in-law" when you are not married to your partner?). Meanwhile, the experimental module can address this confusion by identifying that there are a) unmarried partners in the household, b) children in the household, and/or c) other adults in the household, allowing for a FAMGEN_EXP code of "cohabiting partners, with children."

Table 4. FAMGEN distribution by GSS year, weighted percentages

	2022		2024	
FAMGEN	Traditional	Experimental	Traditional	Experimental
One generation	55.6%	53.4%	55.2%	53.1%
Two generations, children	36.5%	33.2%	37.7%	32.4%
Two generations, parents	3.5%	10.8%	3.0%	9.0%
Two generations, grandchild(ren)	1.1%	0.6%	1.0%	1.0%
Three generations or more	3.3%	2.0%	3.0%	4.5%
Chi-Square (p-value)	$\chi^2(4)=33.77$ *(p<.0001)*		$\chi^2(4)=26.96$ *(p<.0001)*	

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)
Note: Weighted percentages are weighted using WTSSNRPS. Rao-Scott chi-square test for weighted analyses.

ADULTSINHH

For ADULTSINHH, there are notable differences in our results between 2022 and 2024 (see Table 5). The comparison between the traditional and experimental modules in 2022 shows no significant differences in the number of adults in the household with or without weighting. However, for 2024, the experimental module has statistically more 3+ adult households than the traditional module.

Table 5. ADULTSINHH distribution by GSS year, weighted percentages

ADULTSINHH	2022		2024	
	Traditional	Experimental	Traditional	Experimental
1 adult	22.5%	24.0%	24.1%	21.5%
2 adults	50.7%	49.1%	51.0%	46.1%
3 adults	16.2%	16.4%	16.4%	18.7%
4 adults	8.3%	7.5%	7.3%	9.1%
5 adults	2.1%	1.8%	1.1%	4.1%
6 or more adults	0.3%	1.2%	0.1%	0.5%
Chi-Square (p-value)	*$\chi^2(5)=4.34$ (p=.50)*		*$\chi^2(5)=22.69$ (p<.001)*	

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)
Note: Weighted percentages are weighted using WTSSNRPS. Rao-Scott chi-square test for weighted analyses.

CHILDSINHH

We again see differences in our results between 2022 and 2024 for CHILDSINHH, but in reverse (see Table 6). For 2022, the experimental module reported significantly fewer households with children than the traditional module. While the experimental module in 2024 similarly had fewer households with children, this difference is not statistically significant between the two modules.

Table 6. CHILDSINHH distribution by GSS year, weighted percentages

CHILDSINHH	2022		2024	
	Traditional	Experimental	Traditional	Experimental
0 children	72.9%	66.1%	69.4%	67.1%
1 child	9.2%	14.0%	13.5%	13.7%
2 children	11.7%	11.0%	9.7%	10.3%
3 children	4.8%	5.9%	4.1%	6.0%
4 children	0.6%	1.5%	2.5%	1.7%
5 children	0.1%	0.8%	0.6%	0.9%
6 or more children	0.6%	0.8%	0.3%	0.3%
Chi-Square (p-value)	*$\chi^2(6)=18.80$ (p<.01)*		*$\chi^2(6)=5.42$ (p=.49)*	

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)
Note: Weighted percentages are weighted using WTSSNRPS. Rao-Scott chi-square test for weighted analyses.

Module Timing

The timing of completing Household Relationships is a key metric for evaluating the performance of the experimental Household Relationships formulation and was judged by the research team to outweigh the performance of the variables discussed above, given that Household Relationships was now being tracked as part of the overall interview time and burden. The GSS consistently uses completion timing[8] as a proxy for respondent burden, as longer modules lead to longer interviews with more fatigue and potential for both increased error and respondent dissatisfaction. Tables 7 and 8 detail the results of module timing for the traditional and experimental Household Relationship modules, respectively, over the 2022 and 2024 rounds of the study. Table 9 compares the completion time between the two approaches.

Based on these timing results, the experimental Household Relationships module achieved substantial reductions in completion time, taking less than half as much time as the traditional module, with the time savings remaining

Table 7. Median Traditional Household Relationships Timing in Seconds, 2022 & 2024

	All cases	FTF only	Web only	No breakoff	FTF only – no breakoff	Web only – no breakoff
All cases	140	149	134	139	149	133
HOMPOP						
1	84	88	75	84	88	75
2	140	154	127.5	140	154	127
3	197	224	177.5	197	224	177
4	240	277.5	211.5	239	277.5	208
5	306	354	260	301	354	258.5
6	309	390.5	287	307.5	390.5	283
7	405.5	459.5	369.5	405.5	459.5	369.5
8+	474	502	432	474	502	432

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)

Table 8. Median Experimental Household Relationships Timing in Seconds, 2022 & 2024

	All cases	FTF only	Web only	No breakoff	FTF only – no breakoff	Web only – no breakoff
All cases	70	70	67	63	67	59
HOMPOP						
1	39	38	37	37	37	32
2	55	58	51	52.5	58	48
3	103	108	85	98	107	77
4	118	131.5	102	112	131	94
5	130.5	144.5	104	128	144.5	99.5
6	172	216	139	170	184	134.5
7	166.5	182.5	148	153	182.5	136
8+	159	168	105	147	165	101

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)

[8] Completion times for these modules are measured using the variables ELAPSEDTIMEB (traditional module timing) and ELAPSEDTIMEBB (experimental module timing), available in the GSS 2022 and 2024 Paradata files, available at https://gss.norc.org/get-the-data/sas.html.

Table 9. Experimental Module Timing as a Percent of Traditional Module Timing, 2022 & 2024

	All cases	FTF only	Web only	No breakoff	FTF only – no breakoff	Web only – no breakoff
All cases	50%	47%	50%	45%	45%	44%
HOMPOP						
1	46%	43%	49%	44%	42%	43%
2	39%	38%	40%	38%	38%	38%
3	52%	48%	48%	50%	48%	44%
4	49%	47%	48%	47%	47%	45%
5	43%	41%	40%	43%	41%	38%
6	56%	55%	48%	55%	47%	48%
7	41%	40%	40%	38%	40%	37%
8+	34%	33%	24%	31%	33%	23%

Source: General Social Survey, 2022, 2024 (1972-2024 Release 3)

constant as the number of persons in the household increases. Implementing the experimental module for all cases would reduce the median survey length by over one minute compared to the traditional module. In the case of larger households, which are necessarily more onerous to roster, would reduce completion time by two to three minutes. As is historically the case with timing analysis, these results are not weighted, and are instead broken down by mode of survey completion.

DISCUSSION

For the past several years, since the transition away from a primarily in-person, CAPI interview, the GSS has encountered clear issues with collecting household relationships. Some of the issues were easily implemented across multiple modes, such as breaking respondent selection from household relationships, and duplicating variables to identify which information comes from which component. However, others, such as the difficulty of the Household Relationships module, meant to perfectly replicate the in-person HEF, proved harder to implement in a web survey. Given the newly increased burden associated with collecting this data, we established a new experimental version of the Household Relationships module. The question remains, even with multiple versions of the Household Relationships module – is there still any utility to the collection of these household rosters and characteristics? The household relationship variables have seen relatively limited usage in the GSS Data Explorer and have appeared occasionally in readily identifiable published literature. We would like to demonstrate the utility of FAMGEN and HHTYPE1 as moderating variables, showing that household composition has influences on attitudes and behaviors, but are not yet aware of any research addressing these topics utilizing GSS data.

Historically, the household roster variables were part of the GSS public datafile not because they were identified by the GSS Board as having particular sociological interest in a vacuum, but because they were collected as part of the HEF, which made them convenient, potentially disambiguating, and straightforward to release publicly. With the revisions to the HEF and its decomposition into Household Enumeration and Household Relationships in 2020, and the loss in data quality subsequently observed in 2021, these variables became more complex to process and interpret, while also exposing the full burden of collecting these measures in the form of survey timing. Clearly, the potential for these roster variables should be preserved, but the form of the variables themselves no longer seemed necessary, especially given the burdensome collection and cleaning process.

With all of this in mind, we find that the experimental Household Relationships module has proven to be a useful alternative approach to the traditional module, approximating the historical estimates based on the household roster, but at a significant time savings and reduction in respondent burden. Furthermore, the experimental Household Relationships module has proven easier to clean and process, allowing for more timely GSS data releases. Adopting the experimental formulation of Household Relationships has the potential to shift estimates for FAMGEN, HHTYPE1, ADULTSINHH, and CHILDSINHH, given the limited evidence of widespread use of these variables, these shifts are less impactful than the time savings. Data from 2022 and 2024 can also be used to bridge these four variables, allowing researchers to correct for the deviation from historical estimates and methods. As such, the 2026 GSS will adopt the experimental form of the Household Relationships module. Future rounds of the GSS will likely modify the experimental form of the Household Relationships module further, tracking the distribution of HHTYPE1 among 3+ adult households as a metric for success. This model has been implemented with other GSS changes stemming from the shift to multi-mode data collection, most notably Religion, as discussed in GSS Methodological Report 145, and volunteered variables, as discussed in GSS Methodological Report 141.

The GSS team will continue to assess ways to accurately generate household composition. This was recently explored in GSS Methodological Report 150 for HHYTPE1 using open-ended responses and coding responses using large language models. As mentioned earlier, developing and testing an additional survey item for the experimental module to disentangle parent and adult child relationships within a household, as well as other items to resolve disruptions in trends for 3+ adult households, will be a high priority for future rounds of the GSS.

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APPENDIX A: HOUSEHOLD ROSTERS IN OTHER MAJOR SURVEYS

The GSS is far from the only major survey that requests information on each household member. However, it is unusual among its peers for the process by which it came to release household information, the convenient path to releasing HEF data, and then the turn away from convenience. In advance of proposing the experimental Household Relationships module, the GSS team looked at other major household surveys from federal and international sources, to identify the ways in which our peer studies collect and publish household roster information. Table A1 details the kinds of information and methods of collection for household rosters across several other notable American and international surveys. Sometimes, these studies collect information only about the respondent or informant, rather than all household members, and this is likewise noted in the table. "Method" aims to disambiguate the sequence of the rostering — does it ask for all content on a single characteristic at a time (e.g., age of each household member, then sex, then marital status), or on a single person at a time (e.g., age, sex and marital status of the householder, then the householder's spouse, etc.)

Table A1. Household Rosters in Major Surveys

	GSS Trad	GSS Exp	ACS	ALLBUS	ANES	AU GSS	BSA	ESS
Household roster	X		X	X		X		X
Age	X		X	X	R only	X	R only	X
Sex	X		X	X	R only	X	R only	X
HH Head relationship	X		X			X		Oldest R only
HH Spouse relationship	X							
R relationship		X		X				
Marital status	X		R only	X	R only	X	R only	R only
Count of persons	X	X	X	X		X		X
Count of adults	X	X			X	X	X	
Count of children		X			X		X	
Method	Characteristic*	Characteristic	Person	Person	n/a	Characteristic	n/a	Person

Note: "Trad" refers to the traditional Household Relationships module and "Exp" refers to the Experimental Household Relationships module. ACS = American Community Survey. ALLBUS = German General Social Survey. ANES = American National Election Studies. AU GSS = Australian General Social Survey. BSA = British Social Attitudes survey. ESS = European Social Survey.

* The paper HEF was nominally organized by characteristic (i.e. all names, then all sexes, then all ages) but due to the layout, it's feasible for a respondent to simply provide answers by person (i.e. person 1's age, sex, relationships, person 2's age, sex, relationships), because the paper layout allows for switching if necessary. No such flexibility exists in the web mode and is one of the major downsides of the web mode.

From this table, the GSS employs a somewhat more detailed household roster design than many peer surveys. First, it is the only major survey to ask about both the head of household and the spouse. As mentioned earlier, this second set of relationships can be useful for disambiguation if either the head of household or spouse has an ambiguous relationship with another household member, but a clearer one with the other person in the dyad. However, given that the other major studies seem to accept this lack of detail and subsequent ambiguity, the GSS may not need to preserve it. Secondly, the GSS is one of only two surveys (the other being the Australian GSS) which collects a full household roster and orients it by characteristic of each household member, rather than by person. For the GSS, this is an artifact of the HEF design and does not need to be preserved for the future. Both of

these outliers suggest that the GSS should rethink its roster, as the areas which cause the most difficulty for data cleaning (e.g., confusion about which household member the respondent is answering questions about, difficulty properly identifying head of household and their partner) are unique to the GSS, rather than being general frustrations with collecting household information across most surveys.

APPENDIX B: IMPACTS OF DISCLOSURE REVIEW AND LIMITATION

Advances in computing combined with more publicly available information on Americans has led to increased risk for GSS respondent identification. As such, the GSS team made a variety of changes to the 2024 GSS, limiting or restricting more disclosive variables which severely impacted the Household Enumeration and Household Relationship sections. Most variables were either coarsened or restricted, though historical variables were preserved. Table B1 describes the publicly released variables from these sections and how they were impacted.

Table B1. Disclosure Limitation Changes to Household Enumeration and Household Relationship Variables

Module	Variable Name	Variables Available	Important Notes
Household Enumeration	ADULTS	1972-2018, 2022-2024	
	AGEHEF1-14	2022	Not released in 2024
	AWAY1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	HEFINFO1	2022	Not released in 2024
	HOMPOPH	2022	Not released in 2024
	RESPNUMH	2022	Not released in 2024
	WHERE1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
Traditional Household Relationships	ADULTSINHH	2021-2024	
	BABIES	1972-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	BABIES_7222	1972-2022	Not released in 2024
	CHILDSINHH	2021-2024	Coarsened to seven categories
	CHILDSINHH_2122	2021-2022	Not released in 2024
	FAMGEN	1975-2024	Coarsened to five categories
	FAMGEN_7522	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	GENDER1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	HHTYPE	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	HHTYPE1	1975-2024	
	HOMPOP	1972-2024	Coarsened to 14 categories
	HOMPOP_7222	1972-2022	Not released in 2024
	MAR1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	OLD1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	PRETEEN	1972-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	PRETEEN_7222	1972-2022	
	RELATE1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	RELHH1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	RELHHD1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	RELSP1-14	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	RESPNUM	1975-2022	Not released in 2024
	RPLACE	1975-2024	
	RVISITOR	1975-2024	
	TEENS	1972-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	TEENS_7222	1972-2022	
	VISITORS	1975-2024	

Module	Variable Name	Variables Available	Important Notes
Experimental Household Relationships	ADULTS_EXP	2022-2024	
	BABIES_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	BABIES_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024
	CHILDS_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to seven categories
	CHILDS_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024
	FAMGEN_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to five categories
	FAMGEN_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024
	HHTYPE1_EXP	2022-2024	
	HOMPOP_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to 14 categories
	HOMPOP_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024
	KIDSUND18	2022-2024	
	LNGRLTNSHP	2022	Not released in 2024
	PRETEEN_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	PRETEEN_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024
	PRNT	2022-2024	
	RADPTPRNT	2022	Not released in 2024
	RADPTPRNT18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RBIOPRNT	2022	Not released in 2024
	RBIOPRNT18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RCHILD18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RFMLY18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RGPRNT18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RGPRNTU18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RNRLTU18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RNTRLTD18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RPRNT18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RRLTU18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RSBLNG18	2022	Not released in 2024
	RSTPPRNT	2022	Not released in 2024
	RSTPPRNT18	2022	Not released in 2024
	TEENS_EXP	2022-2024	Coarsened to three categories
	TEENS_EXP_22	2022	Not released in 2024