

While many see family choices as purely individual, sociologists recognize the powerful influence of cultural, economic, and historical factors. Family formation—when and whether to have children, whom to marry or partner with, how to structure household relationships—is shaped by economics, social values, gender roles, religious beliefs, and social expectations. By asking your peers about their family aspirations, you’ll uncover patterns in how these social forces shape intimate personal decisions.

This exercise develops three essential sociological research skills:

1. Designing effective survey questions to collect meaningful data
2. Analyzing social patterns and comparing them to broader trends
3. Connecting individual attitudes and choices to larger sociological forces

Assignment Overview

In this research application, you will design and administer a survey to peers about their views and intentions regarding family formation. You’ll create survey questions using Microsoft Forms or Google Forms, collect responses, analyze the patterns in your data, and compare your findings to recent national reports on family attitudes. Through careful question design and systematic analysis, you’ll uncover how individual choices about family reflect broader social forces and historical changes shaping contemporary American families.

The specific requirements for what you need to do vary depending on what grade you would like to earn: Basic (75), Proficient (87), or Advanced (100). Students who come close but do not satisfactorily complete the requirements for a level will be allowed to revise and resubmit their application.

Before you begin: - Read [Millennials aren’t having kids. Here are the reasons why] - Read [Public Has Mixed Views on the Modern American Family]

Report Structure

Use the standard [research report template]. Below are the specific requirements for each section:

In your submission, clearly state which level you are attempting: “Basic,” “Proficient,” or “Advanced.” You must complete all components of that level to earn the grade.

Rubric: Assignment Components by Level

Introduction: Project Overview

All levels should: - Explain what changing family patterns are (cite the articles you read) - Present your research question: What specific aspect of family

formation are you studying? (e.g., timing of childbearing, attitudes toward non-traditional families, work-family balance expectations) - For Proficient/Advanced: State your hypothesis about what factors influence family attitudes - Connect to broader sociological issues: How do cultural, economic, or historical factors shape family decisions?

Methods: Analytical Approach

All levels should: - Describe your survey design process: How did you develop your questions? - List all survey questions (include exact wording) - Explain your sampling approach: How many people did you survey? How did you recruit them? - Identify demographic items you collected (age, gender, class, cultural background, etc.) - Explain your data collection procedures (online form, in-person, etc.) - Note any questions you replicated from the national surveys you read

All levels must include: - A screenshot of your survey (or the complete survey questions pasted in the appendix) so graders can see exactly what you asked - Confirmation that you protected respondent privacy: "Respondent data was anonymized (assigned numbers: Respondent 1, Respondent 2, etc.) rather than using names"

Findings: Trends and Significance

Basic (250 words minimum): - Report number of respondents - Summarize key results: For 3-4 main questions, show what percentage chose each response - Create one simple table or chart showing results - Note at least one interesting pattern - If possible, briefly compare to national survey data

Proficient (400 words minimum): - Report number of respondents and basic demographics (age range, gender distribution, etc.) - Create a detailed results table for all major survey questions showing: - Question | % Response 1 | % Response 2 | % Response 3 | Student Data vs. National Data (if available) - Include a figure or chart visualizing key findings - Compare your findings to national survey data: How similar or different are your peers? - Analyze any demographic patterns: Do responses vary by gender, age, or other factors? - Explain what these patterns reveal about contemporary family attitudes - Make clear connections to one or more course concepts (bold them, e.g., **family formation, cultural values, social change**)

Advanced (600 words minimum): - State your hypothesis clearly at the beginning of the findings - Report number of respondents, detailed demographics, and response rates - Create comprehensive results tables for all questions showing: - Question | Student Response Options with Percentages | National Data Comparison | Analysis - Include 2+ figures or charts visualizing patterns - Conduct demographic analysis: How do responses differ by gender, class, age, or cultural background? - Analyze whether your hypothesis was supported or refuted by the data - Identify unexpected findings and explore possible explanations - Discuss

qualitative themes: Were there surprising comments in open-ended responses?
- Connect findings to two or more course concepts (bold them, e.g., **social stratification**, **gender roles**, **institutional factors**, **social change**, **cohort effects**)

Conclusion: Sociological Synthesis

All levels should: - Reflect on what your survey revealed about family attitudes in contemporary society - Explain how individual choices about family are shaped by broader social forces - Discuss limitations: How representative was your sample? What questions did you not ask? What assumptions did you make?
- Consider: How might respondents' own family backgrounds have influenced their answers?

Advanced should add: - Propose specific recommendations for future research: What questions would you ask differently? Whom would you survey?

Appendix: Supplementary Information

All levels should include: - Complete survey instrument (screenshot or text of all questions) - Respondent data table (anonymized with numbers, showing responses to each question)

Proficient/Advanced should add: - Comparison table(s) showing student data vs. national survey data (if available) - Additional charts or visualizations - Any demographic breakdowns not included in main text

Potential Focus Areas

- **Delayed Family Formation** - Explore economic and educational factors influencing timing decisions
- **Alternative Family Structures** - Examine attitudes toward non-traditional family arrangements
- **Work-Family Balance** - Investigate expectations about combining careers and parenting
- **Generational Differences** - Compare attitudes across different age groups
- **Cultural Influences** - Analyze how cultural background shapes family expectations

Tips for Effective Survey Design

- **Keep It Focused** - Limit your survey to one specific aspect of family formation
- **Use Clear Language** - Avoid jargon and ambiguous terms

- **Include Demographic Items** - Gather key information to analyze subgroup differences
- **Test Your Survey** - Have a few friends take it and provide feedback before full distribution
- **Ethical Considerations** - Respect privacy and avoid overly personal questions