

Using innovative sampling methods to understand family demographic trends

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Trends in family demography in the United States and other industrialized nations such as declining and delayed marriage and childbearing have, until recently, been predominantly studied using large-

scale datasets identifying total population and subgroup trends over time, including differences by age, gender, racial/ethnic, and other characteristics. There is limited understanding of how individuals across different levels of social position, for example, make decisions around forming families. This lack of qualitative data has prevented researchers from completely understanding the factors driving these large-scale demographic trends.

To address this, CUNY SPH Associate Professor Diana Romero and DPH alum Dr. Amy Kwan developed a methodologic approach to sampling and field-based [data collection](#) for the Social Position and Family Formation (SPAFF) project, a large-scale in-depth interview study of factors influencing different aspects of [family](#) formation among heterosexual females and males in the context of individuals' social position. The study was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and published in the journal *PLOS One*.

The quantitatively-informed, purposive sampling approach the researchers employed went beyond common purposive sampling approaches for qualitative data collection that typically do not consider the underlying distribution of key population characteristics, Romero says.

"We hope that qualitative researchers will find the sampling technique we developed to recruit individuals in the NYC [metropolitan area](#) an advancement over purposive sampling that generally does not examine the underlying population, geographic or organizational units to attempt to achieve similar distributional patterns on key characteristics."

More information: Diana Romero et al. Methodologic approach to sampling and field-based data collection for a large-scale in-depth interview study: The Social Position and Family Formation (SPAFF) project, *PLOS ONE* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0210776](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210776)

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