

# THE 1990 CENSUS SHELTER AND STREET NIGHT ENUMERATION

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Shelter and Street Night enumeration, which was also known as S-Night, was a one night operation developed for the 1990 Census to include persons not covered by regular Census Bureau procedures for households or persons in group quarters. S-Night was conducted nationwide to improve coverage in selected locations where homeless persons tend to be found.

Census enumerators counted persons and collected data at preidentified locations on March 20, 1990 and the early morning hours of March 21, 1990 in two phases; the shelter phase and the street phase. The shelter phase covered enumeration of persons found in shelters, such as emergency shelters, shelters for abused women, shelters for runaway and neglected youth, low cost motels (costing \$12.00 or less), YMCAs and YWCAs preidentified by local areas as places where homeless persons stay, and subsidized units at motels and hotels. The shelter phase took place on March 20, 1990, from 6:00 p.m. until midnight. The street phase covered enumeration of persons found at selected street locations, abandoned buildings, commerce places such as bus depots and train stations, and other places where homeless persons may spend the night, such as all-night restaurants, parks, and vacant lots. Enumerators collected data at street locations and commerce places on March 21, 1990 from 2:00 a.m. until 4:00 a.m. Persons leaving from abandoned buildings were enumerated from 4:00 a.m. until 8:00 a.m. on March 21, 1990.

Enumerators who worked on S-Night were asked to complete a questionnaire to record their opinions about their training and various aspects of the S-Night operation.

Prior to S-Night, the Census Bureau worked closely with local officials, local service providers and some homeless persons to identify locations where homeless persons may spend the night. We contacted each governmental unit by certified letter requesting them to provide a list of such places.

This paper provides an overview of the number of persons counted at selected locations where homeless persons are found and the basic characteristics of those persons enumerated during the S-Night operation. The basic characteristics of the enumerators, as well as their opinions on the various aspects of the operation will be presented. Finally, this paper includes the level of participation by the local governments responding to the Census Bureau's request to identify places where homeless persons tend to stay at night.

## II. COVERAGE - NUMBER OF PERSONS ENUMERATED

The S-Night operation was not intended to be a census of the homeless and therefore the data in this paper do not represent a complete count of the homeless population.

### A. S-Night Locations

Table 1 provides the number of persons enumerated at "populated" sites by enumeration phase and type of location.

The number of sites does not include the sites at which no persons were found.

Table 1

**S-NIGHT COVERAGE**  
**Number of Sites and Persons Counted**  
**By Phase and Type of Location**

Phase	Type of Location	Number	Pct of Phase	Pct of SNight
<b>SITES</b>				
<b>SHELTER</b>	Shelters/ Hotels/Motels	6,664	78.8	44.0
	Shelters for Abused Women	1,009	11.9	6.7
	Shelters for Runaway & Neglected Youth	788	9.3	5.2
<b>STREET</b>	Street Locations	6,669	100.0	44.1
<b>PERSONS</b>				
<b>SHELTER</b>	Shelters/ Hotels/Motels	168,309	88.4	70.1
	Shelters for Abused Women	11,768	6.2	4.9
	Shelters for Runaway & Neglected Youth	10,329	5.4	4.3
	<b>STREET</b>	Street Locations	49,734	100.0

There were more persons and sites counted during the shelter phase of S-Night than the street phase. There were 168,309 persons counted at 6,664 emergency shelters, 11,768 persons counted at 1,009 shelters for abused women and 10,329 persons counted at 788 shelters for runaway and neglected youth.

Shelters, hotels, and motels accounted for 88.4 percent of the total persons enumerated during the shelter phase and 70.1 percent of the total persons enumerated during S-Night.

There were 49,734 persons counted at 6,669 sites during the street phase. These numbers represent 20.7 percent of the total persons enumerated and 44.1 percent of the total number of "populated" sites counted during S-Night.

### B. The Fifty Largest Cities

Refer to Table 2, in the appendix, which shows the number of sites and persons counted on S-Night by type of location for the 50 largest cities. The number of sites includes only the "populated" sites. Table 2 provides the city population and the number of persons counted on S-Night per 10,000 persons of the city's total population by type of location.

TABLE 3

City Size	City Name	Shltrs/Hotels Motels	Street Locations	City Size	City Name	Shltrs/Hotels Motels	Street Locations
1	New York	22,709	10,447	14	San Francisco	3,986	1,566
2	Los Angeles	4,459	3,109	19	Washington, DC	4,419	131
3	Chicago	4,806	1,584	20	Boston	2,134	218
5	Philadelphia	3,366	1,069	21	Seattle	2,161	369
6	San Diego	2,750	2,101	36	Atlanta	2,332	60

Similar to the national trend, there were more persons counted during the shelter phase than during the street phase for each of the 50 largest cities. Ten of the 50 largest cities had more than 2,000 persons counted at emergency shelters, hotels and motels and six of the ten cities had more than 1,000 persons counted at street locations during S-Night. Refer to Table 3 above, which provides the names of the ten cities as well as the number of persons counted at two of the four S-night locations.

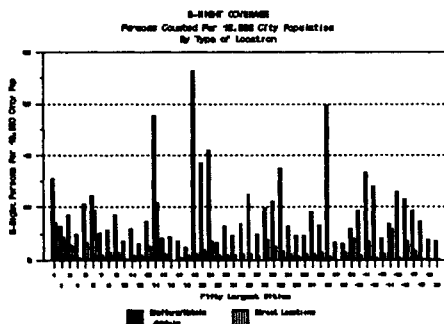
These ten cities accounted for 31.6 percent of the total population counted at emergency shelters, hotels and motels and 41.5 percent of the total population enumerated at street locations.

New York and Chicago had the highest number of persons counted at shelters, hotels and motels among the 50 largest cities. About 23,000 persons were enumerated at emergency shelters in New York City and about 4,800 persons were counted in Chicago. New York and Los Angeles had the highest number of persons counted at street locations. Over 10,000 persons were enumerated at street locations in New York City and over 3,000 persons were enumerated in Los Angeles.

New York City had the largest number of persons enumerated at all four S-Night locations among the 50 largest cities. There were 236 persons counted at abused women shelters and 674 persons enumerated at shelters for neglected youth in New York City.

Figure 1, below, compares the number of persons counted at shelters, hotels and motels to the number of persons counted at street locations for the 50 largest cities. The graph shows the number of S-Night persons counted per 10,000 persons of the city's total population. Refer to Table 2, in the appendix, for the city name and population size.

Figure 1



Although, New York City had the largest number of persons counted at each of the two locations among the 50 cities, it did not have the largest number of persons counted per 10,000 population. Washington, DC had the largest number of persons per 10,000 population counted at emergency shelters, hotels and motels and San Francisco had the largest number of persons per 10,000 population counted at street locations. In Washington, DC, the census counted about 73 persons per 10,000 population at emergency shelters, hotels and motels. In Atlanta, about 59 persons per 10,000 population were counted and in San Francisco, about 55 persons per 10,000 population were counted. About 22 persons per 10,000 population were counted at street locations in San Francisco.

II. CONTENT - BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PERSONS ENUMERATED

A. 1990 Individual Census Report

Enumerators interviewed respondents and recorded their responses on Individual Census Reports (ICRs). Enumerators were allowed to count a person by observation and complete the basic characteristic questions (e.g., sex, race and age) if the person was asleep or incoherent, or if the enumerator felt the situation to be unsafe to conduct an interview. Short form ICRs were used during both the shelter and street phases and long forms were used to collect more information for a sample of respondents at shelters. Both short and long forms contained questions concerning the basic demographic characteristics: sex, race, age, marital status and Spanish/Hispanic origin.

B. S-Night Locations

ICRs from each of the four S-Night locations were data captured in the Hundred Percent Edited Detail File. If an item was left blank the data were imputed from similar characteristics reported for that geographic area. The percentages shown in Table 4, which follows on the next page, include imputed data. However, item nonresponse rates are also reported for each data item.

TABLE 4

S-NIGHT CONTENT -Person Characteristics by Type of Location										
CHARACTERISTICS		Shelters/Hotels /Motels		Shelters for Abused Women		Shelters for Runaway & Neglected Youth		Street Locations		90 Census* Total US Population
		NUMBER	PCT	NUMBER	PCT	NUMBER	PCT	NUMBER	PCT	PCT
Sex	Male	117,727	70.0	2,533	21.5	5,631	54.5	39,255	78.9	48.8
	Female	50,582	30.0	9,235	78.5	4,698	45.5	10,479	21.1	51.2
Item Nonresponse		6,528	3.9	798	6.8	211	2.0	3,541	7.1	1.2
Race	White	81,898	48.6	6,801	57.8	5,415	52.4	23,868	48.0	80.3
	Black	68,879	41.0	3,428	29.1	3,925	38.0	19,584	39.4	12.1
	Other	17,532	10.4	1,539	13.1	989	9.6	6,282	12.6	7.6
Item Nonresponse		16,001	9.5	532	4.5	454	4.4	7,814	15.7	2.1
Age	Under 18	28,770	17.1	5,615	47.7	8,505	82.4	2,422	4.9	NA
	18 - 34	63,337	37.6	4,194	35.6	1,606	15.5	25,107	50.5	NA
	35 - 49	48,350	28.7	1,556	13.2	128	1.2	14,852	29.9	NA
	50 - 64	21,209	12.6	348	3.0	71	0.7	5,639	11.3	NA
	65 & ovr	6,643	4.0	55	0.5	19	0.2	1,714	3.5	NA
Item Nonresponse		15,120	9.0	325	2.8	329	3.2	5,154	10.4	2.5
Mrtl Status	Married	19,701	11.7	1,101	9.4	265	2.6	9,728	19.6	NA
	Wid/Div/ Sep	54,567	32.4	3,049	25.9	163	1.6	14,624	29.4	NA
	Never Married	94,041	55.9	7,618	64.7	9,901	95.8	25,382	51.0	NA
Item Nonresponse		45,222	26.9	1,239	10.5	1,280	12.4	30,935	62.2	2.1
Hspn Origin	Not Hspn	141,911	84.3	9,998	85.0	9,093	88.0	33,071	66.5	91.0
	Hispanic	26,398	15.7	1,770	15.0	1,236	12.0	16,663	33.5	9.0
Item Nonresponse		52,817	31.4	1,588	13.5	1,799	17.4	26,656	53.6	10.0
<b>TOTAL PERSONS</b>		168,309		11,768		10,329		49,734		248,709,873

NA Not available in the same response categories as for the S-Night population.

\* Source: 1990 CPH-1-1, 1990 Census of Population and Housing-US

The final results on the sex question indicate:

- There were more males than females enumerated at each type of location, except at shelters for abused women. At shelters for abused women there were 21.5 percent males, which may be attributed to boys staying with their mothers at shelters.
- Street locations had the highest nonresponse rate for this category among the S-Night locations (7.1%).

The final results on the race question indicate:

- There were more whites than blacks counted at each type of location on S-Night. The percentage of blacks ranged from 29 percent to 41 percent.

- The percentage of blacks for the total US population was 12.1 percent.
- Less than 14 percent of persons counted at each type of location reported other than black or white. The highest percentage of "other races" were counted at shelters for abused women.

The final results on the age question indicate:

- The largest percentage of persons enumerated at emergency shelters, hotels and motels were between the ages of 18 and 34 years old.

- About 48 percent of persons enumerated at shelters for abused women were under 18 years old.
- About half of the persons enumerated on the street were between 18 and 34 years old.
- Four percent or less of the persons counted at each location were 65 years and over.
- Shelters, hotels and motels had a nonresponse rate of 9 percent. Street locations had the highest nonresponse rate for this category of 10.4 percent.

The final results on the marital status question indicate:

- The majority of persons at each type of location were never married. About half of the persons counted at street locations were married, widowed, divorced or separated.
- The item nonresponse rate for the marital status category was relatively high for each type of location. Street locations had the highest rate among the S-Night locations (62.2%).

The final results to the Spanish/Hispanic origin question indicate:

- Similar to the national profile, the majority of persons enumerated at each type of location were not of Hispanic origin. The percentage of persons who were of Hispanic origin ranged from 12 percent to about 34 percent.
- The percentage of persons who were of Hispanic origin for the total US population was nine percent.
- Among the S-Night locations, the largest percentage of persons who were of Hispanic origin was counted at street locations (33.5%).

The higher enumeration rates for blacks and persons of Hispanic origin indicate that the coverage improvement resulting from S-Night contributed to reducing the differential undercount.

Street locations had the highest nonresponse rate for each category among the S-Night locations. Enumerators were allowed to count a person by observation without doing an interview. Persons may have been covered up or otherwise disguised so that enumerators were unable to determine any of the basic characteristics such as sex, race, or age.

The marital status and the Spanish/Hispanic origin categories had the highest nonresponse rates in each type of location among the five basic characteristic questions. This may be attributed to the fact that enumerators were not required to complete these items for persons counted by observation.

#### IV. ENUMERATOR DEBRIEFING QUESTIONNAIRE

Enumerators who worked on S-Night were asked to complete an enumerator questionnaire (Form D-1014). The questionnaire was designed to provide basic demographic characteristics of the enumerators and information concerning how enumerators heard about the S-Night job, the quality of the enumerator training and job aids, any problems encountered on S-Night and recommendations for improving the S-Night operation.

##### A. Response Rates

There were 18,569 enumerator debriefing questionnaires completed by enumerators in the district offices (DOs). There were a total of 22,644 enumerators who worked on S-Night, which results in a response rate of 82 percent on the debriefing questionnaire.

##### B. Basic Characteristics of S-Night Enumerators

Overall, there were more males (57.5%) than females (42.0%) who worked S-Night. The Detroit Regional Census Center (RCC) was the only one to have more female enumerators than males. In all other RCCs, the ratio of males to females ranged from about 1.0 to 1.6. About 32 percent of the enumerators were 50 years old or older. Most enumerators (56.3%) were between the ages of 20 and 44. In all RCCs, enumerators worked in teams of two or three.

##### C. Homeless Network Involvement

Approximately 60 percent of the enumerators heard about the S-Night job through a census recruiter (25.1%), a newspaper advertisement (21.6%) or by working on other census operations (13.2%). Less than three percent of the enumerators, nationwide, heard about the job through the homeless network. In ten DOs, however, the percentage of enumerators who heard about the job through the homeless network was between 20 and 40 percent. Other sources of information concerning S-Night employment came from unemployment offices, employment agencies, churches, and other Census enumerators.

Overall, 32.6 percent of the responses indicated that S-Night enumerators had been involved with the "homeless community", that is, worked or lived in a shelter, lived on the street, or provided or received services for the homeless. This may be a result of efforts by the Census Bureau local DOs encouraging homeless persons and persons familiar with the homeless to apply for work as census enumerators. Data from the eight assessment DOs indicate that almost 75 percent of the enumerators in the Central Los Angeles, California DO had been involved with the homeless community. (Since multiple responses could be provided for this question by those who were involved with the "homeless community", the percent distribution reflects total responses marked on each answer.) About 13 percent of the enumerators had at some time provided services for the homeless. This response had a higher percentage than any other response that showed involvement in the homeless community, nationally and for each RCC.

##### D. Workload and Assignments

Shelters, hotels and motels represented about 43 percent of enumerators' workload and street locations represented about 57 percent. The Boston, Detroit and Kansas City RCCs were the only ones to have a greater proportion of shelter locations than street locations, based on the responses to the questionnaire. The Atlanta RCC had the highest percentage of street location responses among the RCCs (about 75%).

Most enumerators (65.5% overall) had assignments in areas that were well known to them. This was especially true for the New York, Philadelphia and Chicago RCCs where over 70 percent of the responding enumerators did work in an area well known to them.

Less than 10 percent of the enumerators experienced problems finding their assigned S-Night places. This does not mean that the enumerators did not find their assigned sites. Unfortunately, the questionnaire was not designed to enable us to determine the percentage of enumerators who felt they eventually succeeded in locating their assigned area. Ten percent of the enumerators who wrote in a response to the question on what problems made their job difficult, stated they experienced difficulty finding their assigned location.

## E. Training and Job Aids

Virtually all enumerators, about 97 percent, felt that the training prepared them adequately or very well for the job and that the job aid was useful. The job aid was a booklet of consolidated procedures, to be used as a quick reference guide for possible situations that might be encountered during S-Night enumeration.

## F. Job Difficulties

About 71 percent indicated there were special situations that made their job difficult. When an enumerator marked "Yes" to this question, he/she was asked to specify the problem in a later question (Question 14).

Of the enumerators answering yes to this question, 39 percent recorded a write-in response in Question 14. Some of the problems they encountered were:

- Difficulty in finding their location.
- The contact persons at shelter locations were uncooperative.
- Respondents were uncooperative.
- Their assignment area presented potentially dangerous or threatening situations.
- The training was unclear and lacked essential information.

## G. Opinions on How to Improve the S-Night Operation

There were over 9,000 responses given to the question on what could be done to improve the S-Night operation. Some of the responses suggested:

- Improving coordination and organization of the operation.
- Changing the hours of enumeration.
- Quality of training and supplies should be improved.
- The information on shelters and street locations should be checked more thoroughly.
- There should be more involvement by local officials.
- Public awareness of the operation should be increased.

## V. GOVERNMENTAL UNIT PARTICIPATION

In support of S-Night, the Census Bureau sent letters to 39,233 functioning governmental units requesting they identify all street and shelter locations where homeless persons tend to stay at night. Participation of these 39,000 plus governmental units was vital since there are no national lists available for sites such as abandoned buildings, open public locations, shelters in church basements, street and other non-shelter locations where homeless persons are likely to be found.

As of March 1, 1990, Field Division reported that 14,208 (36.2%) of the 39,233 governmental units responded to the Census Bureau's request concerning locations where homeless persons tend to stay at night. Most governmental units

responded either by mail or telephone. The remaining participating governmental units had information provided for them by one or more nearby governmental units, agencies or advocacy groups concerned with the homeless.

Governmental units include counties, as well as jurisdictions such as cities, townships, boroughs, etc. within those counties. If a particular township did not respond to the Census Bureau's request, the county containing that township may have responded with information for that township. In addition, the Bureau received responses directly from advocacy groups and governmental agencies of cities and towns within a county. These advocacy groups and governmental agencies may have also included site information for other nearby governmental units.

While only a third of the local governmental units participated, the population residing in these governmental units represents about two-thirds of the 1990 U.S. population. This higher rate reflects both the extent of overlapping physical boundaries among the governmental units and the higher rate of participation in S-Night by governmental units with larger populations.

In fact, all but 25 (5%) of the 503 cities with population 50,000 or more responded to the Bureau's request. In the cities with population 50,000 or more that did not respond, the Census Bureau's district office employees, working with knowledgeable local people, prepared lists of shelters and street locations to visit on S-Night.

Further work is currently underway to determine governmental unit participation by population size and type of governmental unit (i.e. county, place, minor civil division, etc.)

After reviewing the actual response letters received from the participating governmental units and the Regional Census Centers' Master Control Logs, about 70 percent reported "no homeless sites". The majority (88.8%) of units reporting "no homeless sites" had populations under 10,000.

## REFERENCES

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