

ESRC SDMI project 'Mixed Modes and Measurement Error'

Summary and progress report

23 October 2008

Aims

This study is concerned with the use of different modes of survey data collection. There is a real need for practical advice to inform decisions about when to mix modes and how, since survey designers are making these decisions in an ad hoc manner, driven by considerations of costs and response rates, but often ignoring the potential impact on data comparability. Some aspects of mixed modes are well researched, but others have not been examined. What is needed is a theoretical framework, based on existing and new complementary findings, about the causes and consequences of mixing modes.

The objectives of this study are:

- a) To develop a framework to assess the susceptibility of different types of survey questions to various mode effects;
- b) To identify gaps in the evidence base and to formulate hypotheses to address these gaps;
- c) To test these hypotheses using existing datasets where possible and by collecting new data where none exist currently; and
- d) To develop a set of principles for designing questions that would improve portability across modes.

Progress so far

This study consists of three sub-projects:

- (1) a review of the literature and development of a theoretical framework,
- (2) quantitative analysis of existing datasets and new experimental data, and
- (3) qualitative research using cognitive interviewing to identify causes of mode effects.

We have identified over 700 papers from literature searches and we are in the process of screening papers for inclusion and summarising relevant papers. Papers are being classified according to the mode comparison (i.e. interviewer presence, aural/visual question delivery, aural/visual response list, oral/written recording of response), the question item (i.e. question type, question format, task difficulty, sensitivity of question), and the results (i.e. hypotheses, indicators and statistical methods, conclusion). The evidence is being synthesised according to a theoretical model that specifies the causes, nature and magnitude of differential measurement error.

For sub-projects (2) and (3) we have been focussing on areas that we have identified as needing further research. We are currently in the process of formulating hypotheses and identifying question types that can be used to test these hypotheses.

The first phase of data collection started in July 2008. This first phase involved two rounds of NatCen's Omnibus Survey (all CAPI) which included a module of twenty questions which will be repeated in the second phase of data collection. The second phase of data collection will commence late January 2009 and involves the collection of experimental data (treatments=CAPI, CATI and web) from random sub-samples selected from NatCen's Omnibus Survey and the British Household Panel Survey (wave 18). In addition to the module of twenty questions included in the Omnibus questionnaire, the questionnaire for the experiments will include additional 30-40 questions.

Conference presentations:

Nicolaas, G. (2008) 'Mixed Modes and Measurement Error', invited paper in a session on Survey Methods, NCRM Research Methods Festival, Oxford, July 2008.

Hope, S and Nicolaas, G. (2008) 'Mixed Modes and Measurement Error: Study Design and Literature Review', paper presented at the 7th International Conference on Logic and Methodology in Sociology, Naples, September 2008.