

Understanding Non-response and Reducing Non-response Bias

Aims

This study addresses the nature of the non-response process on social surveys and how this relates to bias in survey estimates. Specifically, the study examines aspects of the survey process that have the potential to be manipulated by survey researchers in ways that may lead to improved response rates and reduced non-response bias. In this way, the objective is to identify improvements to survey methods. A range of data sources are used, some of which are unique and have yet to be applied to non-response research. Several novel contributions of this project are evident. The study consists of five sub-projects:

1. Developing a structured framework of factors affecting non-response bias;
2. Cross-national replication of non-response research;
3. Interrogating call data to better understand links between field processes and non-response bias;
4. The relationship between manipulable survey design features and non-response bias;
5. Reducing attrition on longitudinal surveys.

Progress to Date

Tasks completed to date have mainly concerned design and data collection.

We have developed a theoretical framework of how interviewer characteristics might affect both contact propensities and co-operation propensities within the Groves & Couper framework. We have developed a self-completion questionnaire to measure these characteristics and have administered it to *NatCen* interviewers, achieving a response rate of 81% (1,198 responding interviewers). The data from the interviewer survey has been edited and keyed and a descriptive report of the data produced. The framework and analysis objectives were presented at the *International Workshop on Household Survey Response* in September 2008 and useful feedback obtained.

We have obtained call record data from the first three rounds of the *European Social Survey*. We have cleaned the data from 19 countries from round one and have additionally obtained and linked sampling frame data from one country. We have carried out descriptive analysis and preliminary modelling of contact propensity. We are exploring decomposition methods for between-country comparisons and some preliminary results were presented at a seminar at ISER. We have reviewed the literature on the use of call record data and have written an overview paper: an early version was published as an ISER working paper in February 2008 and a later version presented at the 3MC conference in Berlin in June 2008.

We have designed and implemented a factorial experiment with three design features on the BHPS, the aim of which is to assess affects on attrition. The experimental features are the use of address confirmation or change of address cards, the associated use of incentives for returning the cards, and the use of tailored survey reports for sample members. We developed three alternative survey reports, one aimed at young people, one aimed at busy professionals, and one standard report not tailored towards any particular sub-group. The experimental mailings took place in June 2008. Wave 18 field work, which will provide the outcomes of interest, is currently taking place.