

## Respondent Reactions to Reinterviews

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### Introduction

The use of reinterviews for quality control of interviewing is a standard practice with the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 1968) and other central statistical offices as well as a common practice for many quality survey organizations. The uses of reinterview data for other purposes, such as measuring response reliability, have also been attempted.

In reinterviews, survey respondents are asked to do something unique. Having already agreed to and done an interview, they are, without warning, recontacted and asked to answer the questions again. While we may reasonably assert that the public generally has some prior notion-- even if, sometimes, an inaccurate one-- of why surveys are conducted and what is done with the data, the reinterview procedure is not widely known. In the standard survey, most people have some idea of what is expected of them. This may well not be the case for reinterviews.

Despite the unusual nature of the reinterview, there has been little investigation of what respondents think about it. Respondent perceptions may well affect their willingness to cooperate and their response performance. Both response rates and data quality may be affected by these respondent perceptions. In this paper, we report some early findings from a study of reinterviews.

We have examined the reinterview process from two different perspectives: respondent perceptions of reinterviews and an analysis of reasons for differences between an initial interview and a reinterview.

In discussions with field interviewers and supervisors, both at the U.S. Bureau of the Census and elsewhere, and from monitoring CPS reinterviews, there was anecdotal evidence that some respondents do not understand the purpose of reinterviews. Based on these discussions with field staffs, we developed a short questionnaire about respondent perceptions of the reinterview process. In two independent pilot studies, after an actual reinterview, the perceptions questionnaire was administered. Although these pilot results are of

some interest in themselves, they are also intended to provide input into a similar study to be conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as part of the Current Population Survey Reinterview Program.

### The Illinois Pilot Study

The first pilot study was conducted at the University of Illinois Survey Research Laboratory, using a statewide RDD survey of individuals' recreation activities. Since this study dealt with individuals' uses of recreational facilities no proxy reporting was allowed. Both the initial interview and reinterview were conducted with the same respondent. Respondents were told in the introduction that the reinterview was a quality control procedure.

A sample of 45 reinterview cases was selected from the initial sample of about 700 cases. Of 31 individuals who were contacted, 23 cooperated on the reinterview and there were eight refusals, for a cooperation rate of 74 percent among those contacted. This moderate cooperation rate, among respondents who had earlier cooperated, shows that there is some resistance to reinterviewing. We hesitate, however, to generalize this finding since cooperation rates will depend on a variety of factors including the topic of the study, the skill of the interviewer and the respondent's mood and situation at the time of the reinterview contact.

The reinterview consisted of a subset of questions from the initial interview asking about participation in various outdoor recreation activities in the last twelve months. If respondents reported participating, they were asked to estimate how many days they participated and other details such as where. The reinterview proper ended with a series of demographic questions.

The perceptions questionnaire was then administered. Table 1 shows the specific questions asked and the response distribution.

A key finding was that answering these "post-reinterview" questions did not bother respondents once they agreed to the reinterview. No one refused to answer any of the questions and the number of "Don't Know" answers was minimal. This strongly

suggests that it is possible to get good responses to questions dealing with the reinterview process. One must remember, however, that these are the responses of the cooperators and do not reflect the views of those who refused to be reinterviewed.

It may be seen in Table 1 that more than half the respondents rejected the explanation given in the introduction and said the reinterview was unnecessary, whereas 30 percent thought the interview was necessary. About 40 percent of respondents indicated that they were bothered by the interview at all, and 30 percent thought that at least some people would be bothered.

Direct quotations from respondents were recorded. Table 2 summarizes these open-ended answers into categories for positive and negative answers. The reasons for the positive attitudes basically mirror the reasons given in the introduction. Some respondents infer that exactly the same answer is wanted which agrees with the results of Table 1.

The reasons for negative attitudes toward the reinterview can be grouped into five categories. The most important is that the reinterview is repetitive. The reinterview is also seen as unnecessary and time consuming (although it took an average of only about five minutes). Some respondents feel that interviewers should be simply trusted. (It is likely that these respondents enjoyed and were impressed with the initial interview.) Finally, a few respondents are concerned that it was hard for them to remember what they said the first time. This might suggest that these respondents saw the reinterview as checking up on them as well as the interviewer.

The results of the Illinois pilot certainly do not indicate any problem with asking respondents questions about the reinterview. Indeed, those respondents who have negative reactions to the reinterview are clearly willing to be able to voice these reactions.

Of the six questions asked in the study, two questions did not prove very useful in our analysis:

Did you think that I was calling because the person who interviewed you did something wrong?

Do you think you gave more thought to the questions the first time you were interviewed, more thought this time, or about the same?

Based on these results, we decided that only four questions should be asked in our second pilot study: Questions A, C, E and F in Table 1 along with the reasons why for the answers to Questions A, E and F.

### The Maryland Pilot Study

The survey used for the second pilot study was the Prince George's County Recycling study. The study was also an RDD survey using standard Waksberg-Mitofsky procedures. Prince George's County is a Maryland suburb of Washington D.C. The survey topic was household recycling practices; and the person selected was an adult household resident knowledgeable about those practices.

The reinterview questionnaire consisted of five substantive questions from the Recycling Survey, five demographic items, and the reinterview section introduction and a subset of four items (with open follow ups to three items) used in the Illinois Pilot. A few days after interviewing ended for the Recycling study, a sample of respondents was selected for the reinterview (converted refusers to the initial reinterview were excluded from the frame for the reinterview sample). The interviewing staff had worked on the Recycling survey, but were not allowed to reinterview any of their original respondents. There were 52 interviews completed, 5 refusals, and 9 noncontacts, and 3 other final dispositions. The cooperation rate was 91% for those respondents who were reached. Interviewing took place over 10 days; at its completion, an interviewer debriefing was held.

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution for each closed reinterview question. As in the Illinois pilot, slightly more than half the respondents thought that the reinterview was not necessary. And, about half the respondents tried to give the same answer as the first time. Respondents fairly evenly divided on whether other people would be bothered by being asked some of the same questions again, with more than 10% unsure. Almost 85% said that they, personally, were not bothered at all or only a little by being reinterviewed. Table 4 shows the frequency of reasons why respondents thought the reinterview was or was not necessary. Those respondents with positive attitudes about the need for the reinterview again mainly accepted the stated "quality control" rationale; while the majority of those who did not think it was necessary felt that it was an imposition on their time and did not see a reason to give the same answers again.

Tables 5 and 6 categorize the reasons why other people or the respondent would be bothered being asked some of the same questions again. Both these tables reinforce the concerns about giving up time to answer questions that have been answered before.

Crosstabulations of respondent sex by respondent attitudes about the reinterview were run. Although there were no statistically significant findings, women

consistently had a more positive attitude about the reinterview. On whether the reinterview was necessary, 32% of men said "yes" versus 43% of women. On whether they were personally bothered by the reinterview, 52% of men said "not at all" versus 75% of women.

An additional crosstabulation shows, not surprisingly, that respondents who felt the reinterview was necessary were much more likely [89% to 52%] to say the reinterview did not bother them at all. This difference was statistically significant [ $p < .01$ ].

Many of the results from the interviewer debriefing are subjective and anecdotal. Still, a few points from it are worth mention. First, there was some interviewer uneasiness about recontacting respondents to ask questions that the interviewers knew had already been answered. This feeling was exacerbated if an early refuser or reluctant respondent gave this as a reason for not wanting to do the reinterview. Second, some interviewers admitted that because of this feeling, they tended to stress to respondents that the reinterview would not take long. These interviewers also sometimes tried to pace the interview more rapidly than they otherwise would.

Before considering the implications of the findings for the reinterview process, we should note that the Recycling survey has some features of proxy reporting. While the selected knowledgeable respondent is not required to report about the activities of specific household members, the respondent is expected to include aspects of their behaviors in the report. These behaviors are likely to include some that were learned about indirectly, some that were observed, and some in which the respondent co-participated.

The Maryland pilot findings lend support to our expectations -- based on talking with Census interviewers, examining Reconciliation forms, and monitoring Census reinterviews-- of respondent reactions to the reinterview process. The findings are also mainly consistent with the Illinois pilot study. These two factors add to our confidence in the results, despite the relatively small sample sizes.

The two factors that may have the most effect on the quality of reinterview data are that the majority of respondents were not convinced that the reinterview was necessary and that many respondents tried simply to give the same answers as before. (The tendency of respondents to try to give the same answer as before means that the reinterview measure is not independent of the original measure.) Those who did think the reinterview necessary were much less likely to be bothered by it than others. Women seem to have more positive attitudes about the reinterview than

men.

It was to be expected that respondents would, in the main, not report being bothered by the reinterview themselves, since, after all, they did cooperate. Still, over ten percent were bothered "definitely or a lot." One difference between the Maryland findings and the Illinois Pilot was that a higher proportion of Maryland respondents felt that other people would be bothered by the reinterview. We have no explanation for this other than that it might reflect true regional differences.

What do our pilot results suggest for future research? First, we are eager to see if the findings are replicated with larger samples and in the Census interview setting. Sponsorship is one factor that may affect respondent perceptions of the importance of the reinterview, and perhaps affect their willingness to expend effort. While we would expect results in the same direction as in these pilot studies, the magnitudes may well differ.

Second, field experiments in which self and proxy reinterviews are compared, and in which alternative introductions are used would be certainly be useful. We should be able to design alternative introductions that seek to affect both the perceptions of the value of the reinterview and respondent tendencies simply to try to give the same answer as before. (This latter factor, of course, applies only when the same respondent is interviewed both times.)

Finally, there are some anecdotal indications that investigating interviewer behavior may be worthwhile. As a first step, one might build in some additional monitoring to assess interviewer pacing of the reinterview, willingness to probe, and strategies used in dealing with reluctant respondents. This might possibly be combined with a questionnaire to assess interviewer attitudes toward the reinterview.

#### Reasons for Differences Between Interview and Reinterview

In the second phase of our research, we investigated reasons for differences between an initial interview and a reinterview. As part of the CPS reinterview process, the Census Bureau collects information (on Form CPS-241) giving respondent and field representative reasons why the original and the reinterview information differ. We examined and coded 200 such forms in which such differences occurred. Note that each form could contain information about multiple household members, and that differences might occur for more than one household member.

Initially, the reasons were coded simply to determine who was responsible for the difference. Four possible sources of error were coded:

1. The interviewer,
2. The same respondents reporting about themselves,
3. The same respondent reporting about others, or
4. Different respondents.

Table 7 gives the percentage of error by source and the error rate based on all interviews. It may be seen that the single largest cause of differences is changing the respondent between the initial interview and the reinterview. The interviewer is one of the least important causes of differences. This is simply another confirmation that there is more to be learned from the reinterview process about response reliability than about interviewer errors.

One interesting and somewhat surprising finding from Table 7 is that respondents are more likely to change an answer in the reinterview about themselves than about another household member. This is simply, however, another confirmation of a finding of O'Muircheartaigh (1991) that proxy responses are more reliable than self-responses. It is important, however, to determine whether this greater reliability of proxy reporting reflects better memory by proxies, which seems unlikely, or actually reflects that proxy reporters are depending more on a stereotyped memory of the usual behavior of other household members. In this latter case, data would be more reliable, but less valid, since actual changes from typical employment behavior would be under-reported.

One way of beginning to explore this latter explanation is to examine those cases where the data were self-reported during an interview and proxy reported in the reinterview, or vice versa. Table 8 shows the reasons for differences between self and proxy reports for these cases.

It may be seen that there are three major reasons given for the differences. Lack of knowledge and forgetting or confusion are the second and third most important reasons, but the single most important reason is the proxy's use of a stereotyped response while the self-report indicates that something was different that week.

#### Summary

In this section, we have seen how the reconciliation of differences between the initial interview and the reinterview can lead to a better understanding of the overall accuracy of responses. The finding that proxy reporters are more reliable than self respondents seems surprising, but it may be explained by the fact that proxy reporting is based on more general information about the respondent. This is confirmed by examining reasons for differences

between self and proxy reports in the reinterview.

The results in this section are based only on differences between the initial interview and reinterview and, thus, provide no information if the same erroneous response is given in both the initial interview and the reinterview. It is possible, however, to ask questions on the reinterview that can shed light even on these kinds of errors. Such questions would ask respondents to talk about how they came up with their answers and how confident they are about their answers for selected items of the questionnaire.

Not surprisingly, these early results suggest that the attitudes of both respondents and interviewers may affect the quality of data from reinterviews. The pilot surveys and analysis of reconciliation forms have provided a number of specific reasons for these effects. This information should prove valuable in designing experiments to investigate further the reinterview process.

#### References

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**TABLE 1: ATTITUDES TOWARD REINTERVIEW**

(Illinois Pilot)

**A. Do you think the reinterview was necessary?**

Attitude	Percent
Yes	30.4
No	56.5
Don't know	13.1

**B. Do you think that I am calling because the person who interviewed you did something wrong?**

Attitude	Percent
Yes	00.0
No	91.3
Don't Know	8.7

**C. Did you try to remember what you said the first time and give the same answer again?**

Attitude	Percent
Yes	34.8
No	65.2

**D. Do you think you gave more thought to the questions the first time you were interviewed, more thought this time, or about the same?**

Attitude	Percent
More the first time	21.7
More on the reinterview	13.1
About the same both times	65.2

**E. Do you think that most people, some people, or only a few people would be bothered about being asked some of the same questions again?**

Attitude	Percent
Most	17.4
Some	13.0
A few	60.9
Don't know	8.7

**F. Were you bothered about being asked to answer some of the same questions again?**

Attitude	Percent
Yes/Definitely/A lot	13.0
Somewhat/A little/A bit	26.1
No/Not at all/Not really	60.9
(n)	(23)

**TABLE 2: REASONS FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS REINTERVIEWS**

(Illinois Pilot)

Reasons	Percent*
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**Positive Attitudes**

Need to check on interviewer	54.5
Compare/get the same answer	27.2
Get the work done right	18.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>99.9</b>
n (Total Responses)	(11)

**Negative Attitudes**

Repetitive/once is enough	36.4
Time consuming	27.3
Unnecessary	13.6
Should trust interviewer	13.6
Hard to remember what was said the first time	9.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
n (Total responses)	(22)

\* Percentages based on total responses within positive and negative attitudes.

**TABLE 3: ATTITUDES TOWARD REINTERVIEW**

(Maryland Pilot)

**R1: Do you think the reinterview was necessary**

	N	Percent
No	29	55.8
Yes	18	34.6
Don't know	5	9.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**R2: Did you try to remember what you said the first time and give the same answer again?**

	N	Percent
No	23	44.2
Yes	28	53.8
Don't know	1	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**R3: Do you think that most people, some people, or only a few people would be bothered about being asked the same questions again?**

	N	Percent
Most	11	21.2
Some	19	36.5
A few	15	28.8
Don't know	7	13.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**R4: Were you bothered about being asked to answer some of the same questions again?**

	N	Percent
Not at all	34	65.4
Definitely a lot	7	13.5
Somewhat, a little	10	19.2
Don't know	1	1.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**TABLE 4: REASONS FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS REINTERVIEW**

(Maryland Pilot)

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<u>Positive Attitudes</u>		
Need to check on interviewers	7	63.6
Need to compare/confirm info	2	18.2
Other	2	18.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<u>Negative Attitudes</u>		
Already answered/gave same answers as before	13	44.8
Do not have the time	7	24.1
Interviewers did a good job the first time	4	13.8
Not necessary for respondent	2	6.9
Don't know	3	10.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>99.9</b>

**TABLE 5: WHY DO YOU THINK MOST/SOME PEOPLE WOULD BE BOTHERED ABOUT BEING ASKED THE SAME QUESTIONS AGAIN?**

(Maryland Pilot)

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
They have already done it	8	26.7
They do not have the time	9	30.0
People get too many calls	3	10.0
People feel irritated (mistrusted, checked upon)	2	6.7
Don't know	5	16.6
Other	3	10.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**TABLE 6: WHY WERE YOU VERY/SOMEWHAT BOTHERED ABOUT BEING ASKED THE SAME QUESTIONS AGAIN?**

(Maryland Pilot)

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Get a lot of calls	3	20.0
Do not have the time	6	40.0
Have already done it	3	20.0
Do not want to be bothered again	3	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**TABLE 7: SOURCES OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CPS INTERVIEW AND REINTERVIEW**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Different respondent	173	30.7
Same respondent		
Self-report	146	25.9
Proxy report	117	20.8
Interviewer error	<u>127</u>	<u>22.6</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>563</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**TABLE 8: REASON FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF AND PROXY REPORTS IN CPS INTERVIEW AND REINTERVIEW**

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Stereotyping	40	38.8
Lack of knowledge	34	33.0
Forgetting, confusion	<u>29</u>	<u>28.2</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.0</b>