

Identifying and Overcoming Barriers to Survey Participation for People with Disabilities

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Presented at the STATS:RRTC
State of the Science Conference

April 23, 2012

MATHEMATICA
Policy Research

Center for
STUDYING
DISABILITY POLICY



Overview

- **Some data collection methods can lead to the exclusion of people with disabilities and therefore**
 - Introduce bias into population estimates
 - Hinder sample members' rights to self-direction and self-expression
- **Purpose of presentation**
 - To discuss barriers to survey participation for people with disabilities
 - To offer suggestions for overcoming barriers and addressing methodological issues

Methodological Considerations

Survey Process	Methodological Considerations / Decisions
Sample design	Sampling frame (e.g., intentional exclusions of some populations) Eligibility determination/screening
Proxy decisions	Subjective approach: gatekeeper or interviewer judgment Objective approach: questionnaire screening assessment
Questionnaire design	Wording Format Context Translation 508 compliance
Data collection	Modes (e.g., in-person, mail, telephone, web-based) Adaptive data collection technologies Contact procedures Consent procedures
Interviewer training	Sensitivity trainings Training to overcome communication, stamina, and cognitive issues

Sampling Frames: Coverage Issues

- **Deliberate exclusion of nonhousehold units from sampling frames**
- **Compounding issue: dynamic nature of tenure in some types of housing**
- **Individuals with certain types of disabilities are often excluded from list frames**
- **Random digit-dialing (RDD) frames might under-represent people with disabilities**

Proxy Selection Methods

- **Self-response is desirable but not always practical**
- **Proxies facilitate inclusion of those who cannot self-respond**
- **Problem: methods for determining whether a proxy is necessary may not be valid or reliable**

Problems with Common Proxy Selection Methods

Proxy Selection Method	Problem
Gatekeeper or interviewer judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gatekeepers may underestimate the ability of the sample member to self-respond▪ Interviewers may not be well-trained; may misread cues during survey▪ Interviewers may not use the same standards
Formal assessments of sample member's ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Begins interview with a test; might encourage refusals▪ Not designed to assess sample member's ability to complete an interview; might produce false negatives▪ More stringent test for those with disabilities

Interviewer Training

- **People with disabilities might be excluded from surveys by interviewers who:**
 - **Are not sensitive to the issues faced by respondents who have a range of disabilities**
 - **Are not trained on how to overcome common barriers to interviewing people with disabilities, including communication, stamina, and cognitive challenges**

What Can We Do to Overcome These Barriers?

Sampling Frames: Coverage Issues

- Document and disclose sampling methods
- Review sampling methods to assess what is known about the inclusion of people living in group quarters
- Conduct more research on whether RDD surveys under-represent people with disabilities
- Create guidelines on how to develop sample designs to ensure the inclusion of the broadest range of people with disabilities

Proxy Selection Methods

- **Conduct more research on the use of assisted interviews to facilitate self-response**
- **Document proxy decisions during the survey process:**
 - **When a proxy was used**
 - **Why a proxy interview was conducted instead of a self-interview**
 - **Relationship of the proxy respondent to the sample member**
- **Conduct more evidence-based research on proxy selection methods**

Interviewers and Interviewer Training

- **Use people with disabilities as interviewers and pretesters**
- **Develop training guides and modules on:**
 - **Basic attitudinal receptivity**
 - **Development of rapport**
 - **Use of adaptive technologies**
 - **Proxy selection methods**

Overcoming Communication Barriers

- Use a normal tone of voice
- Use controls on headsets to amplify incoming and outgoing sounds (for telephone surveys)
- Do not pretend to understand a response; ask respondent to repeat or clarify
- Engage with respondents to learn speech patterns before beginning the interview

Overcoming Stamina Barriers

- **Watch for behaviors that suggest the respondent is fatigued**
- **Ask whether the respondent needs to complete the interview at another time**
- **Set appointments for times when the respondent is more alert**

Overcoming Cognitive Barriers

- **Learn nonbiased, nondirective probing methods**
- **Use active listening skills**
- **Remain patient during the interview**

Final Thoughts

- **Making surveys more accessible to people with disabilities requires a systematic approach that entails:**
 - Including people with disabilities in research design decisions
 - Using available resources to guide research
 - Making thoughtful and deliberate methodological decisions at each stage of the survey process
 - Documenting and disclosing survey methods
 - Conducting more methodological and experimental research on interviewing people with disabilities

For More Information

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- **Resource guide on surveying people with disabilities**
 - **<http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/edicollect/1255/>**

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