Interviewer Effects on Wave Nonresponse in Longitudinal Surveys

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It is widely recognized that interviewers play an important role in achieving contact and cooperation from sample members in face-to-face surveys. So far, however, much research on interviewer effects on nonresponse has been carried out for cross-sectional surveys. For longitudinal surveys, although some processes may be similar to those in cross-sectional surveys, a number of complicating factors exist, such as that response needs to be achieved across several waves and that interviewers may change over time.

The aim of this paper is to analyse interviewer effects on wave non-response in a longitudinal study. Here, the identification of the relative importance of interviewers across several waves plays an important role. The paper explores different types of interviewer characteristics which may explain part of the interviewer variation. A particular focus is on the influence of personality traits of interviewers on the nonresponse process. Cross-level interaction effects between sample members and interviewers will be explored, which may inform whether some sample members react favorably to certain interviewer characteristics.

The study uses data from the longitudinal Family and Children Study (FACS), which gathers data on the health and socio-economic status of households with children in the United Kingdom. The survey outcomes from waves 7 and 8 of the FACS have been linked to detailed information on interviewers from an interviewer survey, carried out by the UK National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in 2008. The analysis sample contains householders clustered within a cross-classification of wave 7 and wave 8 interviewers, as well as primary sampling units. To account for this clustering different specifications of multilevel logistic models, in particular cross-classified and multiple membership models, are explored. Some consideration is given to the estimation of interviewer and area effects. The results may be used to inform best practices regarding interviewer allocation and training with the aim of reducing non-response in longitudinal surveys.