

Do interviewers' reading behaviors influence survey outcomes?

EVIDENCE FROM A CROSS-NATIONAL SETTING

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MOTIVATION

- Standardized interviewing is the gold standard in face-to-face
- Non-standardized interviewer behavior is considered to be a major threat to having comparable data.
- “Uniform wording of questions asked is perhaps the most fundamental and universally supported principle of standardized interviewing” (Groves et al. 2009)
- Payment by interview incentivizes shortening behavior (principal-agent problem)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

1. Do interviewers change their reading behavior over the survey's field period? How?

Hypothesis: Decrease in reading times across all countries

2. Does it matter for survey outcomes?

Hypothesis: Shorter reading times should influence survey outcomes depending on the amount of informational content of a specific question

METHODOLOGY

Data:

- SHARE Wave 5, 15 countries + audit trail data (durations for all items in the questionnaire)
- Analysis sample: 1 582 interviewers with number of interviews between 2 and 258 (N=62 563 respondents)

Approach:

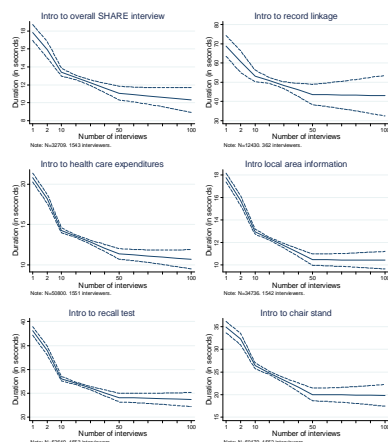
- We selected 6 interviewer-only items (introduction texts), where we expect an influence on survey outcomes (see Table 1)
- Linear fixed-effects regressions
- Semi-parametric functional form for number of interviews (splines)

RESULT I: SHORTENING BEHAVIOR

- Reading durations decrease over an interviewer's fieldwork
- We ascribe reduction in 2nd spline to learning behavior

Controls:

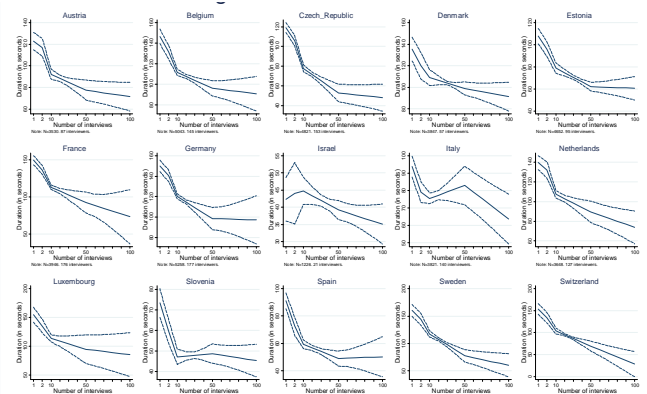
- Time trend: days in field
- Respondent: gender, age, education, work status, income, HH-size, urban area, subjective health, limitations, grip strength, activities, willingness to respond
- Sample composition: number and pattern of participations, interview version, 2nd interview in HH, late in field, number of interviews at a specific day



Data: SHARE Wave 5. Fixed-effects regressions with spline knots at 2, 10 and 50 interviews. Controlled for days in field, respondent characteristics and sample composition; weighted by total number of interviews.

Figure 1: Reading durations over number of interviews (all countries)

RESULT II: CROSS-NATIONAL TRENDS



Data: SHARE Wave 5. Fixed-effects regressions with spline knots at 2, 10 and 50 interviews. Controlled for days in field, respondent characteristics and sample composition; weighted by total number of interviews.

Figure 2: Cumulated reading durations by country

- Country-specific models show same declining pattern
- No significant learning behavior in Israel and Italy

RESULT III: IMPACT ON SURVEY OUTCOMES

Type	Reading-out duration (Introduction to ...)	Survey Outcome	Effect of avg. change in reading time (sec)
Confidentiality	overall SHARE interview	Refusal to income [0;1]	-.000
	record linkage	Consent given [0;1]	-.047**
Definition	health care	Payed out of pocket [0;1]	-.006*
	local area	Feeling part [0; 1]	.000
		Cleanliness [0; 1]	.005
		Help available [0; 1]	-.005
Explanation		Vandalism or crime [0; 1]	.008*
	recall test	Amount of words [0; 10]	-.017*
	chair stand	Compliance with test [0;1]	-.023***

Note: Each line represents own linear fixed-effects model on survey outcome with reading-out duration of intro text as explanatory variable and days in field, respondents characteristics, and sample composition as controls. + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Table 1: Intro-specific regressions on survey outcomes

- Reading matters especially for within-survey requests
- Less for subjective evaluations

IMPLICATIONS

- Questionnaire design: visual help for interviewers by improving screen design
- Training: stress and explain within-survey requests
- Monitoring: include (interview) durations
- Management: limit workload per interviewer

References:

Groves, R. M., Fowler Jr, F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2009). Survey Methodology. Second Edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

