Developing Standard Questions for Surveys

QUEST 2009 - Norway

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Outline

- Project background
- Why standard questions?
- Variables identified for standardization
- Examples
- Process
- Testing
- Now what?
New Household Survey Strategy
Many social surveys collect common socio-demographic info
- Census
- GSS (General Social Survey)
- LFS (Labour Force Survey)
- CCHS (Canadian Community Health Survey)
- SHS (Survey of Household Spending)
- TSRC (Travel Survey of Residents of Canada)
Question Standardization Initiative

- Develop standardized questionnaire modules for key socio-demographic variables
  - Concepts & definitions
  - Wording of questions
  - Collection specifications, edits
  - Metadata: subject matter notes, interviewer & respondent instructions

- Multi-mode
  - Self-complete (paper, Internet)
  - Interviewer assisted (CAPI, CATI)
  - Proxy & non-proxy response
Why standardize questions?

- Possible advantages:
  - Cost savings
  - Timeliness
  - Comparability of results
  - Help with data collection – interviewer familiarity

- Possible problems:
  - Is it possible to standardize?
  - Will the same questions work the same way within different surveys?
  - Getting the approval and “buy-in”
Variables Identified for Standardization

- Age and sex
- Marital status
- Household composition & relationships
- Religion
- Language
- Fertility
- Education
- Income*
- Aboriginal status
- Immigration & citizenship
- Ethnic origin *
- Dwelling & household characteristics
- Health and activity limitations *
- Unpaid household activities
- Volunteering & civic participation *
- Labour market activities
- Mobility & migration *
- Place of residence 1 year ago*
Examples – Marital Status

- **Census**
  - MARITAL STATUS
    - Never legally married (single)
    - Legally married (and not separated)
    - Separated, but still legally married
    - Divorced
    - Widowed
  - Separate question for common law relationships

- **GSS & LFS**
  - What is your marital status? Are you:
    - ... married
    - ... living common-law
    - ... widowed
    - ... separated
    - ... divorced
    - ... single, never married

- **SHS**
  - What is your marital status? Is it:
    - ... married
    - ... common-law
    - ... never married (single)
    - ... other (separated, divorced or widowed)
Examples – Income

- **Census**
  - During the year ending December 31, 2005, did you receive any income from the sources listed below?
    - Paid Employment - $
    - Self-Employment - $
    - Income from gov’t - $
    - Other Income - $
    - Total Income - $

- **GSS**
  - What is your best estimate of your total personal income, before deductions, from all sources during the past 12 months?

- **LFS**
  - Including tips and commissions, what is your yearly wage or salary, before taxes and other deductions?

- **SHS**
  - What is your best estimate of your total income, before taxes and deductions, from all sources in 200X?

- **CCHS**
  - What is your best estimate of your total income, before taxes and deductions, from all sources during the past 12 months?
Examples – Language

- **Census**
  - What is the language you first learned at home in childhood and still understand?
    - English
    - French
    - Other, specify

- **CCHS**
  - What is the language that you first learned at home in childhood and can still understand?
    - ... English
    - ... French
    - ... Arabic
    - ... Chinese
    - ... Cree
    - ... several more categories

- **GSS**
  - What language did you first speak in childhood?
    - ... English
    - ... French
    - ... Italian
    - ... Chinese
    - ... German
    - ... several more categories
Examples – Immigration

- Census & LFS
  - Are you now or have you ever been a landed immigrant?
  - In what year did you first become a landed immigrant?

- SHS
  - Are you now or have you ever been a landed immigrant to Canada?
  - In what year did you first immigrate to Canada?

- GSS
  - Are you now or have you ever been a landed immigrant in Canada?
  - In what year did you get your landed immigrant status?

- CCHS
  - Were you born a Canadian citizen?
  - In what year did you first come to Canada to live?
Examples – Dwelling Type

- **GSS**
  - In what type of dwelling are you now living? Is it a:
    - ... single detached house
    - ... semi-detached or double
    - ... garden home, townhouse or row house
    - ... duplex (one above the other)
    - ... low-rise apartment (less than 5 stories)
    - ... high-rise apartment (5 or more stories)
    - ... mobile home or trailer
    - ... other - specify

- **LFS & CCHS**
  - What type of dwelling do you live in? Is it a:
    - ... single detached house
    - ... double
    - ... row or terrace
    - ... duplex
    - ... low-rise apartment (fewer than 5 stories) or flat
    - ... high-rise apartment (5 stories or more)
    - ... institution
    - ... hotel, rooming/lodging house, camp
    - ... mobile home
    - ... other - specify
Examples – Dwelling Type con’t

- **SHS**
  - What type of dwelling do you live in:
    - … single detached
    - … semi-detached (double)
    - … townhouse (row or terrace)
    - … duplex
    - … low-rise apartment of fewer than 5 stories or a flat
    - … high-rise apartment of 5 or more stories
    - … hotel, rooming or lodging house or camp
    - … mobile home
    - … other movable dwelling, for example a recreational vehicle, van
    - … other - specify
Examples – Health and Activity Limitations

- **Census & GSS**
  - Do you have difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning or doing any similar activities?
    - Yes, sometimes
    - Yes, often
    - No
  - Does a physical or mental condition or health problem reduce the amount or kind of activity you can do:
    - At home?
      - Yes, sometimes
      - Yes, often
      - No
    - At work or school?
    - In other activities, for example transportation or leisure?

- **CCHS (& SHS)**
  - Do you have any difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning or doing any similar activities?
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Never
  - Does a long-term physical condition or mental condition or health problem reduce the amount or kind of activity you can do:
    - At home?
      - Sometimes
      - Often
      - Never
    - At school?
    - At work?
    - In other activities for example transportation or leisure?
Process to Arrive at Standard Questions

- Evaluation of existing questionnaires & outputs
- Expert consultation, international standards
- Design of questions
- Evaluation & testing of questions
- Approvals
- Specification development
- Implementation
- Maintenance
Testing and Evaluating the Standard Question Modules

- **Interviewer debriefings**
  - 5 focus groups with experienced interviewers in 4 regional data collection centres
  - Comments & recommendations on suggested standard questions

- **Cognitive interviewing**
  - 3 phases (iterative)
  - Urban & rural
  - Self complete & interviewer administered
  - Mix of ages, gender, income, education, religion, immigrants, complex family type, dwelling type
Testing and Evaluating the Standard Question Modules

- **Phase I**
  - February / March 2007
  - 66 interviews in 6 locations

- **Phase II**
  - May / June 2007
  - 34 interviews in 4 locations

- **Phase II**
  - October 2007
  - 48 interviews in 4 locations
Results of Question Testing - Examples of findings

- French not always asking the same as English
  - Marital Status question
    - common-law = union libre or conjoint
  - Dwelling Type question
    - Dwelling = logement or domicile
Results of Question Testing
- Examples of findings

- Landed Immigrant Status question
  - Needs to flow with other questions
    - country of birth & year of landing
  - Definition in the question
    - “…have you been granted the right to live in Canada permanently…”
  - Permanent Resident vs. Landed Immigrant
Results of Question Testing
- Examples of findings

- Income question
  - Include a transition statement explaining the purpose of income type questions
  - Standard should not include breakdown of all income types – level of detail depends on content of survey

- Health and Activity Limitations question
  - Not possible to standardize – context sensitive
    - Health survey
    - Census – post censal survey
Where are we know?

- Testing & retesting completed
- Most variables “approved”
- Development of specifications
- Implementation
  - Use in new surveys
  - Transition for existing surveys
    - Census 2011
    - SHS & TSRC redesign
Discussion

- What are other organizations doing?

- Any thoughts on the advantages / disadvantages of the standard question approach?
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