



Statistics Canada

www.statcan.gc.ca

Developing Standard Questions for Surveys

QUEST 2009 - Norway

Paul Kelly

Questionnaire Design Resource Centre



Outline

- Project background
- Why standard questions?
- Variables identified for standardization
- Examples
- Process
- Testing
- Now what?

Question Standardization Initiative

- 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 - \$

■ SHS

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

■ 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?

■ 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?



- For more information, please contact:

- Pour plus d'information, veuillez contacter :

Paul Kelly

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

613-951-6998

Paul.Kelly@statcan.gc.ca