

Hard-to-Survey Populations

Surveys are used extensively in psychology, sociology, and business, as well as many other areas, but they are becoming increasingly difficult to conduct. Some segments of the population are hard to sample, some are hard to find, others are hard to persuade to participate in surveys, and still others are hard to interview.

This book offers the first systematic look at the populations and settings that make surveys hard to conduct and at the methods researchers use to meet these challenges. It covers a wide range of populations (immigrants, persons with intellectual difficulties, and political extremists) and settings (war zones, homeless shelters) that offer special problems or present unusual challenges for surveys. The team of international contributors also addresses sampling strategies including methods such as respondent-driven sampling and examines data collection strategies including advertising and other methods for engaging otherwise difficult populations.

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To our partners – KAREN TOURANGEAU, ALAN LOPEZ, LUELLEN DOTY,
MARY JANE WOLTER, AND MONA ALCAZAR

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>List of boxes</i>	xv
<i>List of contributors</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xxiii
 PART I INTRODUCTION	 1
 1 Defining hard-to-survey populations	 3
ROGER TOURANGEAU	
 2 Hard-to-survey populations in comparative perspective	 21
TOM W. SMITH	
 3 Measuring undercounts for hard-to-survey groups	 37
MARY H. MULRY	
 4 Counting and estimating hard-to-survey populations in the 2011 Census	 58
OWEN ABBOTT AND GARNETT COMPTON	
 5 A review of quality issues associated with studying hard-to-survey populations	 82
LARS LYBERG, MATHEW STANGE, JANET HARKNESS, PETER MOHLER, BETH-ELLEN PENNELL, AND LILLI JAPEC	
 PART II CONDUCTING SURVEYS IN DIFFICULT SETTINGS	 109
 6 Disaster research: surveying displaced populations	 111
BETH-ELLEN PENNELL, YASHWANT DESHMUKH, JENNIFER KELLEY, PATTY MAHER, JAMES WAGNER, AND DAN TOMLIN	

viii	Contents	
7	Conducting surveys in areas of armed conflict	134
	ZEINA N. MNEIMNEH, WILLIAM G. AXINN, DIRGHA GHIMIRE, KRISTEN L. CIBELLI, AND MOHAMMAD SALIH ALKAISY	
8	Interviewing in disaster-affected areas: lessons learned from post-Katrina surveys of New Orleans residents	157
	MOLLYANN BRODIE, CLAUDIA DEANE, ELIZABETH C. HAMEL, MELISSA HERRMANN, AND ERAN BEN-PORATH	
9	Reaching and enumerating homeless populations	180
	IRENE GLASSER, ERIC HIRSCH, AND ANNA CHAN	
10	“Where are <i>our</i> costumes?”: the All Ireland Traveller Health Study – our Geels 2007–2011	201
	CECILY C. KELLEHER AND BRIGID QUIRKE	
	PART III CONDUCTING SURVEYS WITH SPECIAL POPULATIONS	223
11	Representing the populations: what general social surveys can learn from surveys among specific groups	225
	INEKE STOOP	
12	Surveying cultural and linguistic minorities	245
	JANET HARKNESS, MATHEW STANGE, KRISTEN L. CIBELLI, PETER MOHLER, AND BETH-ELLEN PENNELL	
13	Challenges to surveying immigrants	270
	DOUGLAS S. MASSEY	
14	Ethnographic evaluations on coverage of hard-to-count minorities in US decennial censuses	293
	LAURIE SCHWEDE, RODNEY TERRY, AND JENNIFER HUNTER CHILDS	
15	Methodological and ethical issues arising in carrying out research with children and young people	316
	SINÉAD HANAFIN, ANNE MARIE BROOKS, GILLIAN ROCHE, AND BAIRBRE MEANEY	
16	Challenges in the first ever national survey of people with intellectual disabilities	347
	SALLY MALAM, ERIC EMERSON, AND IAN DAVIES	

	<i>Contents</i>	<i>ix</i>
17 Conducting research on vulnerable and stigmatized populations		368
SANDRA H. BERRY AND PATRICK P. GUNN		
18 Surveying political extremists		379
TIMOTHY P. JOHNSON, ALLYSON L. HOLBROOK, AND KEITH ATTERBERRY		
PART IV SAMPLING STRATEGIES FOR THE HARD TO SURVEY		399
19 Probability sampling methods for hard-to-sample populations		401
GRAHAM KALTON		
20 Recent developments of sampling hard-to-survey populations: an assessment		424
SUNGHEE LEE, JAMES WAGNER, RICHARD VALLIANT, AND STEVE HEERINGA		
21 Indirect sampling for hard-to-reach populations		445
PIERRE LAVALLÉE		
22 Sampling the Māori population using proxy screening, the Electoral Roll, and disproportionate sampling in the New Zealand Health Survey		468
ROBERT GRAHAM CLARK AND ROBERT TEMPLETON		
23 Network-based methods for accessing hard-to-survey populations using standard surveys		485
TYLER H. MCCORMICK AND TIAN ZHENG		
24 Link-tracing and respondent-driven sampling		503
STEVE THOMPSON		
PART V DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES FOR THE HARD TO SURVEY		517
25 Use of paid media to encourage 2010 Census participation among the hard to count		519
W. DOUGLAS EVANS, A. RUPA DATTA, AND TING YAN		
26 The hard to reach among the poor in Europe: lessons from Eurostat’s EU-SILC survey in Belgium		541
IDES NICAISE AND INGRID SCHOCKAERT		

x	<i>Contents</i>	
27	Tailored and targeted designs for hard-to-survey populations MARIEKE HAAN AND YFKE ONGENA	555
28	Standardization and meaning in the survey of linguistically diversified populations: insights from the ethnographic observation of linguistic minorities in 2010 Census interviews YULING PAN AND STEPHEN LUBKEMANN	575
29	Mobilizing hard-to-survey populations to participate fully in censuses and surveys TIMOTHY P. OLSON, ARTURO VARGAS, AND JEROME D. WILLIAMS	599
30	Finding the hard to reach and keeping them engaged in research KIRSTEN BECKER, SANDRA H. BERRY, NATE ORR, AND JUDY PERLMAN	619
	<i>Index</i>	642

Figures

3.1 Historical estimates of percent net undercount in the US Census 1940 to 2010 based on estimates from demographic analysis	page 44
4.1 Relative confidence interval widths by census response rate and variability in response rates within a local authority	61
4.2 Comparison of 2001 and 2011 Census person response rates by local authorities	76
4.3 Distribution across local authorities of 95 percent confidence interval width for the 2001 and 2011 Censuses	77
4.4 2001 and 2011 Census response rates by five year by age and sex group	77
4.5 Difference between response rates in 2001 and 2011 Censuses by ethnic group	78
5.1 Survey life cycle steps	84
10.1 Map with list of the location of Primary Health Care Projects in each of the eight Traveller Health Units (which are co-terminous with the former Health Board boundaries)	207
10.2 Summary of design and substudies in the All Ireland Traveller Health Study	215
10.3 Certification ceremony for peer researchers	219
11.1 Representation of minority groups – three scenarios	226
11.2 ESS response rates in countries participating in rounds 1–5	239
13.1 Example of cards used in two-card estimation of undocumented migration from social surveys	278
16.1 Map of population by accommodation type	353
16.2 Example picture show card	361
16.3 Assessment procedure	362
21.1 Surveying a rare ethnic group	451
21.2 Surveying smokers	453
21.3 Surveying homeless people	454
21.4 Surveying smokers in the context of network sampling	456
21.5 Surveying a rare ethnic group using adaptive cluster sampling	458
22.1 Histogram of Māori meshblock densities	475
22.2 First page of NZ voting enrollment form	477
23.1 Standard error of the scale-up degree estimate plotted against the sum of the fractional subpopulation sizes	492
23.2 Mean number recalled as a function of subpopulation size for twelve names	493
23.3 Heatmaps of additional male and female names based on data from the Social Security Administration	496

xii	<i>List of figures</i>	
23.4	Total mean squared error across all elements of the mixing matrix and latent profile matrix	500
25.1	2010 CICPE conceptual model	527
29.1	Mail Self-Response by Race/Ethnicity during U.S. census 2000	607
30.1	Thinking about a tracking protocol: factors to consider	632

Tables

3.1	Estimated 2006 Canadian Census percent net undercount, by sex and age	page 47
3.2	Estimated 2006 Canadian Census percent net undercount, by marital status and age for persons 15 years of age and over	47
3.3	Estimated 2010 US Census percent net undercount, by sex and age	50
3.4	Estimated 2010 US Census percent net undercount, by relationship in the household	50
3.5	Estimated 2010 US Census percent net undercount, by whether the area received a Spanish questionnaire and Hispanic ethnicity	51
3.6	Estimated 2011 Australia Census coverage error rates, by sex and age	51
3.7	Estimated 2011 Australia Census percent net undercount, by sex and marital status	52
4.1	Key population groups identified through evidence of size and nonresponse rate	66
4.2	Key population groups identified through anecdotal evidence	67
4.3	CCS interviewer workload size guidelines	72
4.4	Table of counts of individuals for dual system estimations	73
6.1	Characteristics of referenced events	113
6.2	Detailed recommendations	126
7.1	Dimensions of armed conflict situations	136
7.2	Summary of challenges encountered during active armed conflict survey research and recommendations for addressing them	137
10.1	Primary Health Care Projects (PHCPs): by Traveller Health Unit (THU) Regions	208
14.1	Percentage net undercount by race and origin	294
14.2	Observed sample persons with possible coverage error by type of error	299
14.3	Frequency of persons with possible coverage error by race/ethnic group	300
14.4	All sources of possible coverage error (multiple sources per person)	301
14.5	Sources of possible omissions (multiple sources per person)	302
14.6	Sources of possible overcounts/incorrect counts (multiple sources per person)	302
14.7	Sources of possible coverage error by race/ethnic site (multiple sources per person)	303
15.1	Response levels by study informant – <i>Growing up in Ireland</i> , 9-year-old cohort	327
16.1	Response rates and interviews by sample type	357
18.1	Types of domestic political extremist groups in the United States, 2012	382
18.2	Data collection modes, by type of sample frame used	390
22.1	Screener and survey classification of Māori status for adults in the core sample	471
22.2	Unweighted (weighted) underidentification rates (in percent) of proxy screener by type of household	472

xiv	<i>List of tables</i>	
22.3	Approximate relative efficiency (compared to equal probability sampling) of various designs meshblock selection probability proportional to $N_g \sqrt{\hat{\varphi}_g}$ where φ_g estimated using 2001 Census data at various levels of aggregation	476
22.4	Numerically optimized designs (all cost equivalent assuming 1 cost unit for each full interview and 0.3 for each household in sample)	482
25.1	2010 CICPE completed cases by race/ethnicity group	526
25.2	Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis of MR index	529
25.3	Mean and standard error of MR to census ads, by exposure	529
25.4	Predicting knowledge, attitude factor, and intent, using MR	530
25.5	Predicting knowledge scores using MR index by race/ethnicity	531
25.6	Predicting positive attitude factor using MR index by race/ethnicity	531
25.7	Predicting (Wave 2) intent to return census form using MR index	532
25.8	Predicting mail return using knowledge and attitudes	533
25.9	Predicting mail return using knowledge and attitudes by race/ethnicity	533
25.10	Predicting mail return using exposure	534
25.11	Predicting mail return using exposure by race/ethnicity group	535
25.12	Mean correct knowledge and positive attitude counts by race/ethnicity group	535
26.1	Overall attrition in EU-SILC Wave 2 (2005) by type of nonresponse	543
26.2	Selective attrition in Wave 2: results of the logistic regression analysis	544
26.3	Anticipated/achieved number of interviews, homeless people	550
26.4	Anticipated/achieved number of interviews, undocumented immigrants	551
27.1	Survey design features affecting response	558
28.1	Language teams and research sites	581
28.2	Effective meta-communicative conventions used by bilingual enumerators	584
29.1	US Census mail return rates since 1970	605
29.2	US Census over/undercount since 1990	606
30.1	Summary of strategies for locating respondents	621
30.2	Strategies used with certain hard-to-reach groups	624

Boxes

11.1 Western and non-Western minorities in the Netherlands	<i>page</i> 228
11.2 ECRI/INED questionnaire (Simon, 2007, p. 20) variables on ethnic or national origin	234

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Preface

Between rising costs and falling response rates, surveys certainly seem to have their problems these days. Yet, it also seems that surveys have never been more popular as a research tool than they are now. Every year, more and more federal surveys are done (Presser & McCulloch, 2012) and the rate of growth has, we suspect, been even faster for academic and commercial surveys. And it also seems to us that surveys are being done with an ever-wider array of groups and in an ever-wider range of settings than ever before. Groups that may once have been deemed impossible to survey – groups like the homeless, prostitutes, war refugees, victims of natural disaster, and persons with serious physical or mental disabilities – are now the target populations for surveys – maybe not routine surveys, but surveys nonetheless. This volume tries to capture the experiences and lessons learned that have accumulated over the years in doing surveys with such hard-to-survey populations. We hope that presenting some of the best of the recent work here will spur the development of methods for surveying these groups, moving the field beyond stories about individual experiences and toward a more systematic understanding of the problems and solutions.

The book is divided into five parts. The chapters in the first section, edited by Roger Tourangeau, develop an overall conceptual framework for surveys of challenging populations, examine such populations across nations, recount efforts to reduce and measure these difficulties in national censuses, and describe quality control and quality assurance issues for such surveys. The next two parts look at settings and populations that make surveys hard to do. Part II, edited by Brad Edwards, examines surveys done after disasters, in war zones, and with homeless and itinerant populations. Part III, edited by Timothy Johnson, looks at a range of hard-to-survey populations, including difficult groups in European surveys, linguistic minorities, immigrants and other hard-to-count groups in the US, children and young people, persons with intellectual disabilities, vulnerable and stigmatized groups, and political extremists. Part IV, edited by Kirk Wolter, looks at the issues in sampling hard-to-survey populations. This part includes chapters on traditional methods for sampling rare populations, more recent techniques for such populations, indirect sampling, methods for finding special populations from existing lists or census data, network methods, and link-tracing and respondent-driven sampling. The final part of the book, edited by Nancy Bates and Brad Edwards, looks at the tactics researchers have used to carry out surveys of hard-to-survey groups, including media campaigns, methods for reaching and retaining the poor

in surveys in the EU, tailoring the survey to the population, ethnographic studies of interviewer–respondent interactions in surveys with language minority groups, mobilizing members of a hard-to-survey population to participate, and finding members of such populations.

Planning for this volume was closely coordinated with the International Conference on Methods for Surveying and Enumerating Hard-to-Reach Populations (H2R), held in New Orleans from October 31 to November 3, 2012 (www.amstat.org/meetings/h2r/2012). New Orleans was chosen as the site in part to signal our support for the city's rebirth after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. (The difficulty of surveying New Orleans residents after Katrina is a major focus of Chapters 6 and 9 in this book.) Seeds for both the book and the conference were planted in 2008 at the US Census Bureau, as it prepared for the 2010 Decennial Census, and the conference was timed to coincide with early release of research with hard-to-survey populations in that census. Invited papers presented at the H2R conference were candidates for book chapters in this volume.

The conference was organized by a committee chaired by two of the editors of this book, Nancy Bates and Brad Edwards. In developing plans for the conference and the book, Bates drew heavily on the prior experience of her colleague, Jennifer Rothgeb. Bates also received early encouragement and advice from Lars Lyberg. We gratefully acknowledge their help and support. Besides the other three editors (Johnson, Tourangeau, and Wolter), the organizing committee included Siobhan Carey from the Office of National Statistics in the UK; Linda Jacobsen from the Population Reference Bureau in the US; Frauke Kreuter from the Joint Program in Survey Methodology at the University of Maryland and the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) in Germany; Pierre Lavallée from Statistics Canada; Mary Mulry from the US Census Bureau, USA; and Gordon Willis from the National Institutes of Health in the US. The organizing committee was crucial to the success of the conference and the success of this book.

And, by any measure, the H2R conference was a big success. Despite Hurricane Sandy, the major storm that hit the northeast coast of the US the day before meetings began, stranding many travelers, more than 300 researchers made it to Louisiana for sessions that included three short courses (given by Reg Baker, Peter Mohler, and Matthias Schonlau), 144 papers, 18 posters, and a plenary, for a total of 166 presentations. Presenters came from more than twenty countries on five continents (and some islands) and included some students and other researchers from less developed parts of the globe who received travel scholarships. To circumvent Sandy, some authors presented papers remotely, with technical video support in New Orleans. The plenary session showcased the authors of Chapter 10 in this volume, describing a landmark study of Irish Travellers conducted in two countries and illustrating virtually every aspect of difficulties in (and strategies for) surveying the hard to survey. The Irish Travellers Health Survey used innovative methods to identify and systematically study a population that was highly mobile or nomadic, with low literacy rates, a unique language and isolated culture, and subject to high levels of stigmatization. The survey design was created with a high level of participation from the study population, and the data collectors were all members of the group. Innovative

methods were developed to allow interviewers with low literacy levels to conduct computer-assisted interviews.

There was a session in memory of Janet Harkness, who died in late May of 2012 and who co-authored several conference papers and two of the chapters in this book. We mourn the passing of this distinguished survey researcher. Apart from the papers published in this book, additional papers from the conference will be published in upcoming special issues of the *Journal of Official Statistics* and *Survey Practice*.

The conference would never have happened without the support it received from a number of organizations – the American Association for Public Opinion Research; the Survey Research Methods, Social Statistics, and Government Statistics Sections of the American Statistical Association (ASA); the National Science Foundation; the Institute for Employment Research in Germany; and the World Association for Public Opinion Research. Beyond these key sponsors, there were three other levels of support: contributors (who gave funds but who did not assume any financial risk), partners (who contributed in-kind support), and additional sponsorships (for specific activities or events). Contributors included GfK, the International Association of Survey Statisticians, the National Agricultural Statistical Service, NORC at the University of Chicago, the Office of National Statistics in the UK, the Population Association of America, the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, the US Bureau of the Census, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Westat. Partnering with H2R were Statistics Without Borders and the US Census Bureau's five Race and Ethnic Advisory Committees (African-American; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; Asian, Hispanic; and American Indian and Alaska Native). The additional sponsors were Abt SRBI, American Institutes for Research, Headway Workforce Solutions, Mathematica Policy Research, NORC at the University of Chicago, RAND Corporation, and RTI International. We gratefully acknowledge these supporters, without which neither the conference nor the book would have come about.

The ASA also provided an institutional home for the conference and the ASA meetings department helped immensely in putting the conference together. Our special thanks go to Naomi Friedman, Donna Arrington, Joyce Narine, Kathleen Wert, Kathryn Wright, and others at ASA for their hard work on the conference. In addition, we thank Margo Kline for her help in getting the authors to sign their contracts and copyright forms and to Margo Tercy, Jerri Brown, Ben Engelbach, Alex McIntosh, and Phyllica Sookhar for their help in getting the files ready for the publisher. Finally, Patty Kelley did the index, with assistance from Cat Tourangeau and Margo Tercy. We are very grateful for their excellent work on this difficult chore.

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