

February 2, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR        The Record

From:                      Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group, Subgroup 2

Subject:                    Case characteristics for the study of reasons for nonresponse

## **Background**

The Interagency Household Survey Nonresponse Group (IHSNG) began meeting in 1998 and has reformed and met each year since. Its purpose is to investigate nonresponse in government surveys. The IHSNG includes representatives from the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, the Department of Justice, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, and the National Science Foundation. In 1999, the IHSNG identified and ranked various investigative tasks relating to nonresponse. Six subgroups were formed to work on the highest priority tasks during calendar year 2000. The second highest priority task was exploring the reasons for nonresponse. Subgroup 2, which led this investigation, included representatives from the Demographic Surveys Division and Field Division at the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National Center for Health Statistics.

According to the detailed task description, the goal of Subgroup 2 would be to recommend changes to the outcome codes used in current surveys, in order to “gather more detailed information on the reasons behind refusals, no one home, and other noninterview outcomes.”

The task description continues, “Currently, most instruments do not routinely capture enough systematic information to study this. We propose taking inventory of the information that is currently available (interfield communications or “intercomms,” interviewer notes, previous coding studies, etc.), and additionally designing a study that will capture more detail behind the reasons for noninterview. Based on the outcome of this study, we may recommend changes to the current categories of outcome codes used in current surveys.”

Changing and adding detail to the current outcome codes will require some work, so the benefits to doing so must be substantial. We believe they are.

- Once the changes are implemented, the regional office (RO) staff will have much needed detailed information on the nature of each contact for eligible cases, allowing them to perform analyses that can help determine where and how to put extra effort in converting reluctant respondents. For example, information on household contacts could be made available by field representative (FR) code, by the outcome code for the previous month in sample (for panel surveys), by type of contact (e.g., no one home, anti-government comments, too busy), etc.

This information could also be valuable when providing extra training to the FRs who need it, and can provide the FR with case history information that will be invaluable in tailoring the approach to the respondent.

- The detailed information will be included on the output file, and analysts can use it to research reasons for nonresponse, determining, for example, the most common case characteristics for cases that are interviews at one month in sample, and noninterviews at the next.
- In addition, the new recommended outcome codes will allow us to produce the core set of nonresponse measures recommended by the IHSNG.

## **Methodology**

In order to determine the level of detail currently available, group members

- inventoried outcome codes across the major surveys in the Demographic Surveys Division (DSD);
- using data from the CPS and SIPP surveys, examined a sampling of the INOTES for those surveys;
- reviewed two months' worth of intercomms for the CE Diary Survey, a paper survey with special problems, since the Diary is completed by the respondent, not the FR;
- reviewed and incorporated recommendations from a special report from SIPP research;
- and reviewed the recommendations for outcome codes from the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR).

## **Recommendations**

### *Interim outcome codes*

In order to get the desired amount of detail on nonresponse, we recommend obtaining *interim outcome codes* in addition to the final outcome codes now present on the output file for each survey. The interim outcome codes will be captured each time the case is opened; they will be similar to the final outcome codes now produced, with the exception that completed interview and Type B and Type C outcome codes will not be collected as interim outcome codes.

### *Case characteristics*

The recommendations include a plan to add *case characteristics* to all automated instruments, beginning with the Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) instruments. These case characteristics, far more detailed than the current outcome codes, will be a function of the outcome code.

The FR will select one or more case characteristics after assigning the outcome characteristic/code. These case characteristics will be mandatory for both interim and final outcome codes.

### *New outcome codes*

In addition, our group is recommending that each CAPI instrument be required to include new outcome codes for four new categories of nonresponse, based on our review of current outcome codes and the literature. The first three categories are recommended for all household surveys by the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). The recommended new categories are as follows:

- Language problems
- Health/mental problems—for example, respondent too sick to interview, respondent too confused to interview and no proxy available
- Access problems—gated community, buzzer entry, locked gate, etc.
- Technical problems—for example, with the instrument

These would all be Type A noninterview codes.

### *Ancillary variables*

Finally, our group is recommending a short list of ancillary variables to be completed by the FR after the interview is complete, but before transmittal, providing selected information about the household and respondent. Attachment 3 lists these variables.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 is the list of consolidated outcome codes for four major current Census Bureau surveys; it will be useful in reading Attachment 2. Attachment 2 provides the list of recommended case characteristics. For each case characteristic, the associated outcome code or codes is also listed. Note that case characteristics are a function of the selected outcome code (both interim and final outcome codes). For example, case characteristics related to refusals will not be displayed on the screen if the outcome code is the code for “no one home.” Similarly, case characteristics that apply only to interviews will not be displayed on the screen for a case with a noninterview outcome code. Attachment 3 lists the ancillary variables that will be used for research.

## **Remaining Issues**

The screen design for these variables has not been examined. For example, how many case characteristics can or should fit onto a single screen? Will FRs tend to choose only those case characteristics displayed on the initial screen (if more than one screenful of characteristics is associated with a given outcome code)?

- We worked exclusively with CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) outcome codes and case characteristics. The work should be extended to CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing). Good candidates are the Point of Purchase Survey (TPOPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS).
- Similarly, we worked with demographic surveys conducted within the federal government, and especially those surveys conducted by the Census Bureau. We need to look at other government (non-Census) and non-government surveys as well.
- Training on these case characteristics will need to be developed before they can be used, even in a test instrument

## **Next Steps**

These recommendations incorporate suggestions from people working in several different areas, including CAPI experts in the Census Bureau's Field Division and Technologies Management Office; subject matter specialists in the Demographic Surveys Division (DSD); and data users/researchers at the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Center for Health Statistics. We now would like to solicit comments from a wider audience. We would like to begin with subject matter branch chiefs in the DSD.

There should be a review by cognitive specialists to ensure that these case characteristics can be used effectively in production work. We strongly urge that experienced FRs be included in the group that performs the review.

Assuming that the reviewed, possibly modified list proves acceptable to the review panel, we should develop criteria for their acceptance, and design a test to measure their effectiveness in meeting those criteria. The test should incorporate the case characteristics in an ongoing survey. All, or almost all, of DSD's surveys are undergoing conversion to a BLAISE-based instrument in the next few years, and we believe that this represents an opportunity to enhance and improve the information available on survey nonresponse.

Attachments (3)

Updated May 24, 2000

OUTCOME CODES USED	CPS	HIS	SIPP	CE
200 new case, not started*	X	X	X	X
201 completed interview	X	X	X	X
202 accessed instrument, insuf. Partial*	X	X	X	X
203 sufficient partial-no more follow up	X	X	X	X
204 sufficient partial-follow up*	X	X	X	X
205 sufficient partial-sup. follow up	X			
206 Partial-one or more persons incomplete (no callback items)			X	
207 Completed partial interview with type Zs-no follow up possible			X	
213 language problem		X	X	
214 unable to locate				
215 insufficient partial		X		X
216 no one home	X	X	X	X
217 temporarily absent	X	X	X	X
218 refusal	X	X	X	
219 other-occupied	X	X	X	X
220 temporarily absent, follow up possible		X		
223 occupied entirely by Armed Forces members		X		
224 occupied by persons under 14				X
225 occupied by URE	X	X		X

226 vacant regular	X	X		X
227 vacant-storage of hh furniture	X			
228 unfit, to be demolished	X	X		X
229 under construction	X	X		X
230 converted to temp. business/storage	X	X		
231 unoccupied tent/trailer site	X	X		X
232 permit granted-construction not started	X	X		X
233 other	X	X		X
234 entire household institutionalized			X	
235 vacant seasonal		X		
236 occupied - screened out by hh		X		
240 demolished	X	X		X
241 house/trailer moved	X	X		X
242 outside segment	X	X		
243 converted to permanent business/storage	X	X		X
244 merged	X	X		X
245 condemned	X	X		X
246 built after April 1, 1990		X		X
247 unused serial # on listing sheet	X	X		X
248 other	X	X	X	X
249 sample adjustment			X	
250 entire household deceased			X	
251 entire hh moved out of country			X	

252 entire hh on active duty in AF			X	X
253 entire hh on active duty in AF- discovered in HH roster			X	
254 entire hh age 14 or under			X	
255 no wave 1 (original sample) person remaining in hh			X	
260 moved, address unknown			X	
261 moved, within U.S. but outside of SIPP limits			X	
262 merged with another SIPP hh			X	
263 mover, further work needed to obtain new address			X	
270 mover, no longer located in FR's assignment area (parent unit)			X	
271 mover, new address located in same FR's area			X	
280 mover, no longer located in FR's assignment area (reassign to different FR/RO)			X	
321 refused, Hostile respondent				X
322 refused, time related excuses				X
323 language problems				X
324 refused, other - specify				X
331 vacant for sale				X
332 vacant other - specify				X
341 type c - CU moved				X
342 type c - cu merged with another CE CU within same address				X

\* not final outcome codes



Type of Problems	Recommended Case Characteristic	Outcome Code For Which Case Characteristic is Displayed
Phone Problems	Answering machine–respondent did not respond to messages	All Type A noninterviews
	FR believes HH has caller ID (i.e., knows someone is home, but does not answer telephone)	All Type A noninterviews
	Number currently disconnected	All Type A noninterviews
	Number to be disconnected	ALL Type A and interview codes
	No phone available	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Cannot get phone number from any sources	ALL Type A and interview codes
	No answer to repeated calls	ALL Type A noninterviews
	HH requests personal visit only	All Type A noninterviews and interviews
	Phone number in instrument is incorrect	ALL Type A and interview codes
	HH requests phone call only	ALL Type A and interview codes
Other contact problems	HH does not answer door, even though there is evidence someone is home	216, 218
	HH seldom, never home	216
	Access problems–buzzer entry, gated community, locked gate, etc.	NEW Type A CODE

Type of Problems	Recommended Case Characteristic	Outcome Code For Which Case Characteristic is Displayed
	Unable to reach–unsafe area	219
	Not attempted	219
No one available to interview	On vacation, away from home	217
No one available to interview	At vacation home/second home (may require adding a question to instrument to determine if there is a second residence)	217
Reluctant respondent	Refusal–Respondent hostile or threatens FR	218
	Refusal–Respondent hangs up/slams door on FR	218
	Refusal–Passive (puts off FR indefinitely)	218
	Difficult interview/respondent angry or reluctant to participate	all interview codes
	Respondent only willing to provide basic info (e.g., will not answer supplement, will only answer labor force questions)	all interview codes
	Asked too many personal questions last time	218, all interview codes
	Gave that information last time	218, all interview codes
	Too many interviews	218, all interview codes
	Interview takes too much time	218, all interview codes
	Tired of telemarketers	218, all interview codes

Type of Problems	Recommended Case Characteristic	Outcome Code For Which Case Characteristic is Displayed
	Too busy	218, all interview codes
	Police advise not to give out information	218, all interview codes
	Other HH members tell respondent not to participate	218, all interview codes
	Survey is voluntary	218, all interview codes
	Anti-government comments	218, all interview codes
	Negative comments about other surveys	218, all interview codes
	Privacy concerns	218, all interview codes
	Complaints about supplements	218, all interview codes
	Respondent says survey content does not apply (e.g., "I am retired, so questions about unemployment don't apply to me")	218, all interview codes
	Refusal—respondent says not interested/doesn't want to be bothered	218
	Respondent says planning to quit, don't come back again	all interview codes
	Confirmed refusal	218
	Congressional refusal	218

<b>Type of Problems</b>	<b>Recommended Case Characteristic</b>	<b>Outcome Code For Which Case Characteristic is Displayed</b>
Respondent situation	Health problems	NEW Type A CODE, all interview codes
	Death in family	219, all interview codes
	Any apparent conflict within household	
	Respondent is confused/mental problem	NEW Type A CODE, all interview codes
	Language problems	213, all interview codes
	Diary/survey requirements too difficult for respondent	219, all interview codes
	Diary/survey information completed for wrong dates	219
Technical problems	Instrument problems	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Address incorrect	214, all interview codes
Other information/situations	Wanted a lot of information about the survey	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Respondent does not understand the survey	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Different respondent from last wave	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Received respondent letter	ALL Type A and interview codes

Type of Problems	Recommended Case Characteristic	Outcome Code For Which Case Characteristic is Displayed
	Did not receive respondent letter	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Respondent gave best time to call	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Talk only to {specific HH member}	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Scheduling difficulties	ALL Type A and interview codes
	Case dropped–transferred to second FR too late to contact	219
	Case interrupted and never completed	215
	Placed Diary/survey, but HH moved	219
	Placed Diary/survey, respondent did not complete	219, 218
	Placed Diary/survey, no one home at pickup	219, 216
Positive comments	Nice–very cooperative	All interview codes
	Requests same FR as last time	All interview codes
	No problems	All interview codes

ATTACHMENT 3  
**Ancillary Variables**

1. Time pressure (asked for interviews only)  
  
Did there appear to be any time pressure on the main respondent?  
  
Response categories: Time pressure  
No time pressure
2. Number of Contacts (asked for interviews and Type A noninterviews)  
  
How many attempts did you make to contact this household? (asked for all interviews and noninterviews; could be programmed into the instrument)  
  
Response: Open-ended
3. Signs that children were present (asked for Type A noninterviews only)  
  
Were there signs that children were present?  
  
Response categories: Yes  
No
4. Respondent information (asked for Refusals only)  
  
Response categories: [Apparent] race of respondent  
[Apparent] gender of respondent  
[Apparent] age of respondent
5. FR reassigned? (asked about current month-in-sample for all interviews and noninterviews; could be programmed into the instrument)  
  
Response categories: Yes  
No

ATTACHMENT 3  
**Ancillary Variables**

6. Letters sent—mark all that apply (asked for interviews and Type A noninterviews; could be marked in RO)

Response categories: Advance letter  
No One Home Letter  
Refusal Letter  
“Better Understanding” Letter  
Access Letter (to attempt to gain access to limited access building)  
No letter sent