Exhaustive or Exhausting Evidence on Respondent Fatigue in Long Surveys

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Living standards measurement surveys require sustained attention for several hours. We quantify survey fatigue by randomizing the order of questions in 2-3 hour-long in-person surveys. An additional hour of survey time increases the probability that a respondent skips a question by 10-64%. Because skips are more common, the total monetary value of aggregated categories such as assets or expenditures declines as the survey goes on, and this effect is sizeable for some categories: for example, an extra hour of survey time lowers food expenditures by 25%. We find similar effect sizes within phone surveys in which respondents were already familiar with questions, suggesting that cognitive burden may be a key driver of survey fatigue.

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