

Understanding and Addressing the Challenges of Survey Nonresponse*

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This paper provides a concise summary of the discussion on declining response rates and their implications for survey research, as explored in the Special Virtual Issue on Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Adjustments of the Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology. The analysis encompasses trends observed in U.S. face-to-face household surveys, national telephone surveys, and web survey response rates. The implications of declining response rates on the representativeness of survey estimates are discussed, emphasizing the need for weighted estimates to mitigate potential biases. Furthermore, the abstract highlights the broader implications of these trends beyond the United States, prompting considerations for the generalizability of findings to survey research in other countries. The document concludes by suggesting future research directions and the importance of adapting methodologies to address the evolving challenges in survey research.

1 Introduction

The Special Virtual Issue on Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Adjustments in the Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology sheds light on the persistent challenges posed by nonresponse in survey research. As the cornerstone of obtaining accurate survey estimates, the issue explores various aspects of nonresponse, ranging from declining response rates to innovative methodologies for remediation. This discussion focuses on the trends and implications of declining response rates, offering insights into the consequences for the survey research landscape.

*Code and data are available at: <https://github.com/siru1366/mini-eassy-5B.git>

2 The Decline in Response Rates: Trends and Implications

The downward trend in response rates across various modes of data collection poses significant challenges for survey researchers. The shift to web surveys, as evidenced by Daikeler, Bošnjak, and Lozar Manfreda (2020), accelerates the industry-wide decline in response rates. This trend necessitates a critical examination of the reliability and representativeness of survey estimates derived from datasets with lower response rates. As highlighted by Dutwin and Buskirk (2020), the use of weighted estimates becomes crucial in mitigating bias introduced by nonresponse. The implications of these trends extend beyond the United States, prompting questions about the generalizability of findings to survey research in other countries.

3 Addressing the Challenge: Future Directions

While the curated papers provide a comprehensive view of the challenges posed by declining response rates, they also open avenues for future research. The issues of whether these trends have continued beyond 2022, the impact of changing response rates on biases across various study designs, and the patterns observed in countries outside the U.S. remain crucial areas for exploration. The integration of adaptive data collection strategies, as suggested by Williams and Brick (2018), could be a promising approach to address the evolving landscape of nonresponse in surveys.

4 Shift to Web Surveys

Daikeler, Bošnjak, and Lozar Manfreda (2020) provide a meta-analysis of web survey response rates compared to other modes, revealing a consistent pattern of lower response rates in web surveys. The stabilization observed between 2012 and 2016 suggests that the industry-wide response rate decline is accelerated by the growing reliance on web surveys. This shift prompts a critical examination of the potential biases introduced by changing modes of data collection.

5 Conclusion

The Special Virtual Issue on Nonresponse Rates and Nonresponse Adjustments offers a valuable overview of the challenges faced by survey researchers in the context of declining response rates. By understanding these trends and their implications, researchers can adapt their methodologies to ensure the reliability and representativeness of survey estimates. The issue sets the stage for future investigations into the dynamics of nonresponse, calling for a continued exploration of innovative strategies to address the evolving challenges in survey research.

Reference

- Daikeler, Jessica, Michael Bošnjak, and Katja Lozar Manfreda. 2020. “Web Versus Other Survey Modes: An Updated and Extended Meta-Analysis Comparing Response Rates.” *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 8 (3): 513–39. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smz008>.
- Dutwin, David, and Trent D. Buskirk. 2020. “Telephone Sample Surveys: Dearly Beloved or Nearly Departed? Trends in Survey Errors in the Era of Declining Response Rates.” *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 9 (3): 353–80. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smz044>.
- Williams, David, and J. Michael Brick. 2018. “Trends in u.s. Face-to-Face Household Survey Nonresponse and Level of Effort.” *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 6 (2): 186–211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jssam/smx019>.