ONS social surveys response to Covid-19

United Kingdom

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Response to Covid-19: adapt our surveys

30 senior leaders gathered for a planning workshop on the 27th of February

Face to face interviewing was paused on 17th of March

Telephone interviewing started in April for most surveys

- Protect our members of staff, in particular the field force
- Protect the respondents
- Continue our operations whenever possible (or pause operations when no other options available; e.g. International Passenger Survey)
- Collect new data to inform the public on the impact of the virus on UK society
Response to Covid-19: lots of coordination required

- Review existing questionnaires
- Engage with our users
- Review sample sizes
- Assess the impact of changes on data quality and data processing
- Monitor response rates and develop strategies to improve it
- Review respondent-facing materials
- Review how to make contact with respondents
- Review incentives
- Make changes to the ONS website
  - Enable 700 face-to-face interviewers and 200 office-based telephone interviewers to work from home: roll-out of Skype
- Review of resources, in particular field force
- Develop training material for interviewers
Some of the key changes

**Phase 1**
- Development of a compliment slip and a chase letter

**Phase 2**
- Changes to standard advance letter
- Use of standard wording by interviewers for text and answerphone messages
- Use of tele-matching of cases to a list of telephone numbers

- Questionnaires shortened
- Questions using showcards were reworded
- New coronavirus questions developed
Strategies following low response rates

Survey on Living Conditions (SLC)
Response rates (%) at wave 1
Year 2020

- Development on an online portal, in which respondents enter their phone numbers
- Use of incentives
- Profile of social surveys raised through media presence and social medial campaign
- Knock and nudge trial (currently under way for the SLC and other surveys)
- Increase in sample sizes
Understanding the impact of changes

Potential response bias drivers:
- Interviewers haven’t been able to visit households to get respondents phone numbers
- Change of mode
- Covid situation and its impact on people

Early analysis of financial surveys (LCF, SLC, HAS) suggest:
- A change in the socio-demographic composition of respondents (age, marital status, employment status)
- A change in the household type and size

Calibration weights under review to adjust for response bias
March 2020: launch of an online longitudinal Labour Market survey

- Approximately 35,000 households a week are now being sampled (with a conditional incentive of £25 at wave 1 and £10 at subsequent waves)
- Response rates to online wave 1 is running at around a third of respondents
- A Covid-19 infection survey is being sub-sampled from wave 1 since April 2020: the purpose of the study is to monitor how many people in the population have or have already had Covid-19

Next steps: transforming surveys design

November 2019: first live mixed mode (online/phone) survey, the Opinions and Lifestyle survey (OPN).
This enabled the ONS to respond quickly to Covid-19 and collect important information on the impact of Covid-19 on UK society on a weekly basis.
More information is available on the ONS website at www.ons.gov.uk

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Thank you for your attention