

1999 HRS Mailout Experiment

Sample design

Participants in the mailout experiment were all part of the HRS panel of individuals. Several types of exclusions were made for the pool from which the sample was selected:

- 1) Those who known to be deceased in 1998;
- 2) Those for whom proxy interviews were done in 1998;
- 3) Those who were interviewed in Spanish in 1998;
- 4) Those who were not interviewed at all in 1998;
- 5) Any individual who was married or partnered with another panel member who was excluded by one of the above criteria was also excluded.

After making these exclusions, there were 15,633 individuals who were eligible for selection into the mail sample.

The eligible respondents were first stratified into two groups: 1) those who were not married or living with a partner in 1998; and 2) all others. Those in the first stratum were randomly assigned to a control group (i.e., no mail questionnaire) or to one of two treatment groups, which varied with respect to the size of the questionnaire: some were sent booklets that were 16 pages long, while others got 24-page booklets. The questions in the short version were a subset of those in the long version. Those in the second stratum were randomly assigned either to a control group or to one of four treatment cells in a two-by-two design, in which one variable was the length of the questionnaire (either 16 or 24 pages, as for the first stratum), and the second variable concerned the burden imposed on the household, with questionnaires sent either to both members of a couple, or to just one member of the couple.

Those in both strata were randomly sampled for the treatment groups at the same proportion: $3000/15633 = 1/5.211$. Those selected were randomly assigned to receive either the short or the long questionnaire, and those in the second stratum were randomly assigned as well to receive either one or two questionnaires per couple. Table 1 summarizes the number of individuals in each of the experimental and control groups.

Data collection procedures

The data collection procedure adhered to a standard protocol that has been developed by Dillman (1978, 2000) to maximize the response rate. In early October, a letter was mailed to each person selected announcing the study and saying that they would soon receive a questionnaire. A week later they received the actual questionnaire, along with a cover letter and a check for \$20. Then a week after that a postcard was mailed to each of them to thank those who had already mailed back their questionnaire, and reminding the others to do so. Three weeks later those who had not yet responded were mailed another letter and another copy of the questionnaire. And three weeks later, those who still had not responded received a final letter and a final copy of the questionnaire by Priority mail.

Response rate

The cooperation of the respondents with this request was quite high. Questionnaires were completed and returned by 2,454 of the original 2,998 selected panel members, for a response rate of 82 percent. Of the remaining sampled cases, there were 80 who were known to have died, or for whom the material mailed to them was returned as undeliverable (no tracking was done for this experiment). Excluding those 80 cases from the base, the response rate among those who, as far as was known at the time, actually received the questionnaire was 84 percent. As the interviewers carry out the field work for the year 2000 wave of interviews, they will learn about additional individuals who died before the experimental mailout, so the final response rate will be somewhat higher than 84 percent.

The number of returns, and the current estimate of the response rates, for each of the experimental groups are shown in Table 2.

Citations:

Dillman, Don A., 1978. **Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method.** NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Dillman, Don A., 2000. **Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method.** Second Edition. NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Table 1: Size of experimental and control groups

Stratum	Treatment	Number of individuals
Single respondent	Control (no questionnaire)	4,696
	Short questionnaire	561
	Long questionnaire	556
Coupled respondent	Control (neither R nor spouse got questionnaire)	7,939
	R and spouse both got short questionnaire	474
	R and spouse both got long questionnaire	466
	R only got short questionnaire	472
	R only got long questionnaire	469

Table 2: Response rates, by experimental treatment

Stratum	Treatment	Number of sampled individuals	Number deceased or no contact	Number of returns	Response rate, given received questionnaire
Single respondent	Short questionnaire	561	12	424	77.2%
	Long questionnaire	556	17	423	78.5%
Coupled respondent	R and spouse both got short questionnaire	474	13	410	88.9%
	R and spouse both got long questionnaire	466	12	392	86.3%
	R only got short questionnaire	472	8	410	88.4%
	R only got long questionnaire	469	18	395	87.8%
Total		2,998	80	2,454	84.1%