Session 5 – Timely Topics and Survey Measurement RAPPORTEUR NOTES

This session featured 5 presentations that focused on various aspects of survey measurement, including differences elicited by proxy response, differences in within-respondent responses between similar sets of questions, and issues with using scale measures. The talks largely focused on different aspects of measurement but there was some overlap as well. After the presentations and discussant response there were questions for all speakers but most focused largely on the issues related to proxy responses and within-respondent differences to two sets of questions on disability.

Conceptualizing Disability: An Evaluation of Differences Between the American Community Survey and Washington Group Short Set Questions. This presentation initially generated questions and discussion about the potential impact on the discrepancies in results due to self-report versus answers by a proxy respondent. In the NHIS, a designated family member or proxy answers all questions for the family and this may be a different person than the Sample Adult who generally provides self-reported answers. However, the presented analysis accounted for this by limiting the sample to respondents who served as both the Sample Adult and Family respondent which indicates that proxy responses were not responsible for the differences shown. There were also some questions regarding the "speeding" patterns of the interviewer which generated discussion about the role of the interviewer and how their behaviors may be driving the quality of the data. More analysis of this issue is needed, including examination of the paradata in more detail. It was also suggested that differences in responses to the second set of questions at the end of the questionnaire may reflect respondent acquiescence or burden versus speeding. Observations or recordings of the interviewers could be helpful to determine if fatigue by respondent or interviewer is happening.

There was also some discussion around whether the results seen might be due to participants dropping off in between the disability question sets and whether those respondents may have been sicker compared to those who answered both sets of questions. However, since the analysis was limited to respondents who answered both sets of questions, that could not be examined. It was noted that while people did drop off between questions characteristics were consistent between the subsample of adults who answered both questions and all adults in the survey. Lastly, there was a suggestion to examine the conversational norms literature to see if respondents may be comparing questions between the two data sets in an attempt to determine whether the second set of questions was trying to elicit a different response from the first set. If questions are asked one way then asked a different way later, often respondents may think that later questions are trying to ask something different and then will provide a different answer.

Examining Proxy Response Bias in a Large-Scale Survey of People with Disabilities. There was much interest in the findings regarding differences between proxy and non-proxy responses. When proxies report higher limitations, this could be that the group needs a proxy because they have higher limitations and this may be a confounding effect. However, the current analysis did separate proxy and self-responders, as well as cognitive versus non-cognitive disabilities, but only looked at primary disability and not secondary disability. Comparisons were the done within the stratified groups. We know there may be other factors that contribute to how a proxy may answer differently than self-respondents. It was suggested that maybe instead of dealing with differences by proxy use at the back end of analyses via weighting techniques, etc., that instead there could be ways to improve the impact of proxy response in the front end of surveys, or maybe proxies should be avoided altogether. However, the general discussion recognized that it is unreasonable and infeasible to do away with proxy respondents in health surveys but it could be worth spending more time on evaluating how people become proxies to determine if there are differences introduced by the way people become proxies that should be accounted for in analyses. There could be other ways to deal with proxies statistically, including adding a term for a proxy in models. Otherwise, there is not much you can do unless you are going to change the measures. Should some questions be changed to avoid issues with proxy responses? It was noted that some questions have to be included in surveys by the client but that the interviewer may have some impact in the way the questions are framed or presented to respondents. It was also noted that pain behaved differently than the other outcomes. It was posited that pain is something you cannot observe as well as other types of disability. How do you measure pain properly by having someone observe it? This might be an example of a question or measure that should be not be answered by proxy. There could also be interviewer effects with proxy respondents, so should we consider not asking certain questions of proxy respondents, or do we ask questions in a different way when we are asking it of a proxy?

Other suggestions for evaluating the potential bias introduced by use of a proxy included considering a scoring system to adjust for possible bias. Use of dyads, as was done in the presented analysis, may also be useful to determine if there is variation in the measures that come close to agreement, as may the use of mode-invariant questions. Lastly, in cases where the parent is acting as proxy for the child, the possibility of bias from influence of having the child in the same room where the parent is answering the questions was raised. It was hypothesized that the difference shown in the analysis between cognitive and noncognitive disabilities may be due to the child overhearing what the parent is saying. Some surveys isolate the respondent to avoid any potential influence, so this may be an avenue for future research on the potential for bias by proxy respondents in other surveys.

Threats to Examining Subjective Well-Being Disparities: Measurement Comparability in the Face of Acquiescence Response Style. There was a question regarding use of a neutral point in a scale. Although balance of the scale was addressed in the analysis, use of a neutral point on the scale was not evaluated and a 5-point scale was used. This could introduce another source of measurement error. Currently the literature seems to advocate for not using the 6-point scale although it was noted that removing a neutral value from a scale does not seem to affect which side of the scale respondents would lean towards.

Other Discussion. It was noted that the definitions used in the Census business surveys seemed long which raised the question of what motivates the respondents to read through these long definitions. How can you be sure respondents are reading them? If surveys are mandatory surveys, it could help to encourage respondents to read through the full definitions. Although most of the Census surveys are mandatory it was recognized that it is difficult to provide definitions when it comes to some issues. With emerging changes in the field, respondents can need clarification and have difficulty with understanding questions. One strategy is to provide examples, but the list of examples can become long. While it may be infeasible to provide an exhaustive list of health insurance there is some opinion that if you cannot provide all options to respondents then none should be shown as to avoid limiting the respondent to certain choices and possibly skewing results.

Some definitions change rapidly as well, and by the time a survey is fielded a definition used during survey development may no longer be relevant. A similar issue was raised regarding the opioid presentation. Opioids are currently a hot topic, attracting much policy attention. A long lead time for survey development may also result in less relevance for results by the time they are published depending on how policy changes over time.