

A Note on Response Rates in the How Couples Meet and Stay Together Survey

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This note is adapted from Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012).

The HCMST survey is an Internet survey, implemented by Knowledge Networks (KN). Unlike most Internet surveys whose participants are composed of a self-selected or opt-in sample of volunteers, the KN panel participants were initially recruited into the panel through a nationally representative random digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey, so the KN sample is nationally representative. Respondents with Internet access at home used their own computer to answer the surveys. Respondents who did not have Internet access at home were offered Internet access and a WebTV in exchange for participating regularly in surveys. The quality of data derived from representative Internet surveys such as the KN panel has been shown to equal or exceed the quality of data derived from the previous industry standard RDD surveys (Fricker et al. 2005; Baker et al. 2010 p.743; Chang and Krosnick 2009).

Seventy one percent of KN panelists contacted for the HCMST main survey in 2009 consented to participate. The 71% response rate is the response rate for people who were already in the KN panel. KN panelists were subject to several stages of recruitment, which themselves had response rates which, when accounted for, lower the overall response rate sharply. Including the initial RDD phone contact and agreement to join the panel (participation rate 32.6%), and the respondents' completion of the initial demographic survey (56.8% completion), the composite overall response rate is a much lower $.326 \times .568 \times .71 = 13\%$ (Callegaro and DiSogra 2008). The

very substantial issue of attrition bias can be controlled, however, because KN gathered information from subjects at each survey stage (Couper 2000).

The response rates for the follow-up surveys are easier to calculate, because only partnered subjects who completed the first wave were eligible to participate in wave 2, and only subjects who remained partnered (or whose partnership status was unknown) after wave 2 were eligible to participate in wave 3, and so on. Among the 3,009 partnered respondents who participated in HCMST wave I, 2,520 or 84.5% completed the first follow-up survey one year later, $2520/2981=84.5\%$, excluding 28 subjects whose wave 1 answers made them ineligible for follow-up, mainly because they indicated that their partner was already deceased at wave 1, and excluding 4 subjects who provided multiple names rather than single partner names at wave 1. See variables `w2_deceased`, `w2_multiname`, and `w2_f1complete`.

After subtracting cases who reported break-up or partner mortality at wave 2, the wave 3 survey target population was 2,689, and 1,960 responses were received, for a wave 3 response rate of $1960/2689=72.9\%$. See variables `w3_xqualified` and `w3_complete`.

References:

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