

# INTERVIEWING

FOCUS: STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SURVEY

COVER:

- WHY AN INTERVIEW APPROACH ?
- INTERVIEW PROCESS
  - DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS
  - PRACTICAL (?)
  - SOURCES OF ERROR
- OTHER ASPECTS OF INTERVIEWER ROLE
  - CONTACTING
  - PERSUADING } POTENTIAL RESPONDENTS
- MEANS OF IMPROVING INTERVIEW SURVEYS

3 PERSPECTIVES TO BE CATERED FOR :

1. RESEARCHER - INTERVIEWER
2. RECRUITING + MANAGING A FIELD FORCE
3. COMMISSIONING FIELDWORK.

(2)

# WHY INTERVIEWING?

## A Collecting information

- Complex questions and questionnaires
- Dealing with complex definitions (eg 'room', 'travel')
- Long questionnaires
- Observation data (eg ethnicity)
- Taking physical measurements (eg traffic noise, house measts., health measts.)
- Open questions
- Sensitive topics
- Preserving order and context
- Reducing item non-response

3

## B. Other Reasons

- Sampling
  - eg quota sampling and other screening
  - eg sampling within already sampled units
- Improving response rates: esp. persuading people to take part
- Ensuring correct person answers and avoiding problems of conferring
- Obtaining information about non-response.

④

3.

## REASONS WHY NOT TO INTERVIEW

- COST
- TIME (eg. if doing self)
- SOURCE OF ERROR

## STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

VERY RULE - BOUND

NOT A CONVERSATION

VERY 'ARTIFICIAL' SITUATION

(6)

## QUANTITATIVE SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Underpinned by commitment to the logic of probability theory and to the experimental method with emphasis on producing standardised controlled sets of measures for sample members

Data-collection methods are driven by the emphasis on the statistical analysis of data which is concerned with aggregate pictures and with analysis by variable across cases.

### 3 CHARACTERISTICS OF DATA NECESSARY FOR 'SCIENTIFIC' SURVEY ANALYSIS:

- CLASSIFICATION } (AN ANSWER AND ONLY ONE ANSWER TO EACH QUESTION FROM EVERY RESPONDENT)
- COMPLETENESS }
- COMPARABILITY (OBTAINED IN REACTION TO A STANDARD STIMULUS)

### GALTON (1970) THEORY + METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

LONDON: ALLEN + UNWIN.

8

IN THE SURVEY INTERVIEW THESE THREE REQUIREMENTS ARE MET :-

1. BY CAREFUL SCRIPTING OF QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED. AIMING FOR QUESTIONS WHICH CAN BE UNDERSTOOD UNAMBIGUOUSLY AND ANSWERED (WILLINGLY) BY THE TARGET POPULATION
2. BY CAREFUL TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION TO INTERVIEWERS TO ENSURE THAT A 'STANDARD' STIMULUS IS PRESENTED



9

## 'RULES' OF INTERVIEWING

1. READ QUESTIONS AS WORDED
2. FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS AND SIGN-POSTING
3. MAINTAIN AN 'UNINVOLVED' STANCE
4. TO DEAL IN STANDARDISED WAYS WITH RESPONDENT QUERIES AND DIFFICULTIES (IE COPING WITH 'BREAKDOWNS' IN THE IDEALISED QUESTION/ANSWER PROCESS)  
eg Giving repeat readings of questions respondents don't understand
5. RECORD ANSWERS ACCURATELY, INCLUDING VERBATIM RECORDING OF ANSWERS TO OPEN QUESTIONS
6. TO APPLY DEFINITIONS IN STANDARDISED WAYS

## TYPES OF ERROR

### SYSTEMATIC ERROR / BIAS

Due to the method employed  
 eg. Presence of interviewers  
 causes underreporting of  
 proscribed behaviour

### RANDOM ERROR (CANCEL OUT OVERALL BUT ADD 'FUZZINESS')

Due to characteristics of a  
 specific operation eg.  
 interviewers, questions

2 TYPES:

UNCORRELATED A.E. - independent errors

CORRELATED A.E. - errors not independent eg.  
 interviewer variance,

## SOURCES OF ERROR IN INTERVIEWS

1. INTERACTION BETWEEN INTERVIEWER AND RESPONDENT
2. INTERVIEWER SKILL ACQUIRED MAINLY THROUGH TRAINING
3. 'MEASURING INSTRUMENT' -  
QUESTIONNAIRE

# SOURCES OF ERROR

## 1. INTERVIEWER RESPONDENT INTERACTION

- Presence of an interviewer
- Interviewer characteristics (socio-demographic) - affecting respondents
- Interviewer opinions about survey subject
- Interviewer expectations of response
- Interviewer behaviour esp. non task-oriented behaviour.

## PRESENCE OF AN INTERVIEWER

e.g. SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS

## SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Example of effects:

Schuman + Converse 1971

Interviews with blacks on militant protest + hostility toward whites gave more radical responses to black interviewers. (which was the direction of error?)

IN GENERAL:

- Is little evidence of socio-demographic effects (age, sex, social class) [Refs: Dijkstra + Van der Zouwen (1983)]

MAIN STABLE EXCEPTION:

- Effects of race ~~is~~ where topic is salient.

## INTERVIEWER OPINIONS

Example: Rice (1929) found on a survey of causes of destitution, that 2 different interviewers elicited quite different responses depending on their own views. (social and economic factors v. alcohol abuse)

But General finding in studies conducted subsequently is that where interviewer training is adequate and questionnaires well-designed, there is little evidence of important opinion effects (eg Hyman et al 1954)

16

## ROLE EXPECTATIONS

HYMAN ET AL (1954)

% OF HUSBANDS WHO SAID  
THEY BOUGHT HOUSE  
FURNISHINGS

FEMALE INTERVIEWERS WHOSE  
HUSBANDS BOUGHT FURNISHINGS 60

FEMALE INTERVIEWERS WHOSE  
HUSBANDS DON'T BUY  
FURNISHINGS 45

% OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS  
WHO SAID THEY HAD CAR  
REPAIRED

FEMALE INTERVIEWERS WHO  
HAD CAR REPAIRED 46

FEMALE INTERVIEWERS WHO  
DIDN'T HAVE CAR REPAIRED 38



## INTERVIEWER EXPECTATIONS

### 3 KINDS IDENTIFIED BY HYMAN ET AL (1954)

#### 1. ROLE EXPECTATIONS

- Expect certain kinds of responses from certain 'role-types' eg 'housewives'. (eg Hyman et al (1954))

#### 2. ATTITUDE-STRUCTURE EXPECTATIONS

- Interviewers expect respondents' views to be internally consistent eg Smith + Hyman (1950) - coding an ambiguous item

#### 3. PROBABILITY EXPECTATIONS

- Interviewers expect certain responses because of beliefs about sentiments prevailing in the population (eg Wyatt and Campbell (1948))
- matching of predictions and distributions

## OPINION AND EXPECTATION EFFECTS MOST LIKELY WHEN:

- There are problems in administering questions
- Where interviewers have to exert judgement
- Where interviewers have strong expectations

#### 4. INTERVIEWER BEHAVIOUR

- CONCERN LIES WITH BEHAVIOUR RATHER THAN EFFECTS OF STABLE, ENDURING CHARACTERISTICS AND PREDISPOSITIONS INTERVIEWERS BRING TO THE INTERVIEWING SITUATION.
- EMPHASIS IS ON EFFECTS OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF INTERVIEWER BEHAVIOUR ON SURVEY OUTCOMES.
- BOTH 'SCRIPTED' OR 'PROGRAMMED' BEHAVIOUR AND UNSCRIPTED BEHAVIOUR.

## BEHAVIOUR EFFECTS

Eg In 'naturalistic' experiment, Cannell et al (1971) found a large amount of interviewer behaviour was 'feedback'.

Led to experiments using 'scripted' positive and negative feedback to encourage respondents on questions involving effort (recall)

Found improved reporting of events (hospitalisations)

Other experiments with instructions for respondents also improved reporting of events.

## INTERVIEWER SKILLS AS A SOURCE OF ERROR

- Main problems lie with training
- Training content may be inadequate
- and/or training methods.
- Some problems identified at SCPR :-
  - Inadequate probing of open-ended questions
  - Leading / misleading probing
  - Tendency to make evaluative comments
  - Difficulty in coping with respondent digressions
  - General difficulties in handling problems expressed by ~~various~~ respondents
- Other potential problem areas :-
  - Reading questions as written
  - Following skips and instructions
  - Accurate coding and verbatim recording
  - Cheating

## MEASURING INSTRUMENT / QUESTIONNAIRE AS A SOURCE OF ERROR

QUESTIONNAIRES OFTEN CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR RESPONDENTS AND/OR INTERVIEWERS.

SOME REASONS:

- ILL DEFINED CONCEPTS
- UNFAMILIAR IDEAS / WORDS
- COMPLEX QUESTIONS
- QUESTIONNAIRES TOO LONG
- DULL / BORING QUESTIONS
- TOO SENSITIVE
- DIFFICULT LAY-OUTS

ETC..

It is not uncommon for researchers to blame interviewers and/or their training on problems arising in the administration of questionnaires. But ~~with~~ no system of rules and no amount of training is adequate when the tasks set for interviewers are unrealistic.

# OTHER ASPECTS OF INTERVIEWER'S ROLE

## LOCATING SAMPLE MEMBERS AND OBTAINING CO-OPERATION

- Crucial to good response rates
- 2 distinct sets of tasks:
  - those to do with making contact
  - those to do with persuasion



## MAKING CONTACT : THE MAIN TASKS

(assignment of addresses, interviewer to use selection procedure to identify respondent at address using selection procedure)

- Locate address
  - map reading
  - enquiries
  - sorting out incomplete address information
  - route planning
- make contact
  - repeated call backs
  - Planning call backs
- Administer selection procedure on contact
  - technical + persuasive skills
- Contact selected person
  - more call backs
  - Dealing with gate-keepers

SOME BASIC SKILLS

Persistence

Planning and organisation

Resourcefulness

Technical skills.

## PERSUADING - SOME BASIC SKILLS

- KNOWING WHEN TO 'BACK OFF'
- ADDRESSING RELUCTANCE DIRECTLY

## CONTACTING AND PERSUADING - CONFLICT OF SKILLS?

- INTERVIEWERS WHO GET LOW NON-CONTACT RATES TEND TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE WHO GET LOW REFUSAL RATES

## RESPONSE TO INTERVIEW SURVEYS

1. TENDS TO BE BETTER THAN FOR COMPARABLE TELEPHONE OR POSTAL SURVEYS
2. TREND TOWARDS LOWER RESPONSE RATES (HIGHER REFUSALS AND NON-CONTACTS) ESPECIALLY IN INNER CITIES

## STATEMENT OF RESPONSE

### ADDRESSES

- Issued
- Found to be out of scope:-
  - vacant/derelict
  - business / industrial premises only
  - demolished
  - institution
  - other reasons
- Assumed out of scope:-
  - not traced
- Total out of scope
- Total in scope

SELECTED PERSONS

- Total assumed to be in scope
- Interviewed
- Not interviewed

Reasons for non-response

- Refusal (total)
  - Selected person refused
  - Refusal on behalf of selected person by someone else in household
  - Complete refusal of information
  - Broke appointment and could not be re-contacted
- Non-contact (total)
  - No contact with anyone at address
  - Selected person not contacted
  - Selected person away/in hospital
- Other reasons for no interview (total)
  - Selected person senile/incapacitated
  - Selected person ill (at home)
  - Interview not completed
  - Selected person could not speak adequate English
  - Other reasons

# IMPROVING INTERVIEW SURVEYS

## - Selection of interviewers

- Background factors
- Attitudinal factors

} unlikely to be important

### - Ability to carry out tasks:

- Discipline, flexibility, intelligence
- Eyesight and hearing
- Confidence and warmth of personality
- Physical fitness + energy
- legible writing
- car and telephone

## - Training of interviewers

- Task oriented
- Socio-emotional

} involving:

- study (definitions etc)
  - classwork (technical) <sub>thes</sub>
  - role-playing (scenario and interviewing)
  - field practice (putting it all together)
- often 1/3 drop out at this stage.

Personal project briefings supply project specific training and can be crucial.

## Questionnaire design

- Length
- Order
- Question structure (richm sheets)
- Wording of questions
- clarity of instructions
- etc.

## Quality control

- Ensures standards are maintained and that corner-cutting (+ even cheating) are minimised.
- Relies on interviewers knowing their work will be checked and on feedback being given to interviewers.
  - Supervision on a regular basis to appraise, teach and support interviewers.
  - Back checks calls to productive and unproductive sampled addresses
  - Early work checks (first 2-6 scripts)
  - Progress chasing
  - Monitoring response rates and reissuing

Minimise assignment sizes (30)