

Innovation and Excellence in Survey Research



For decades, the National Survey on Drug Use and Health has been integral to improving the lives of those struggling with substance abuse and mental illness. RTI International has conducted the survey since 1988, demonstrating a proven capability to provide expertise in substance abuse and mental health epidemiology.

Overview

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the federal government's primary source of national data on tobacco use, alcohol use, illicit drug use, nonmedical use of prescription drugs, and related mental health issues. The survey provides annual national-level, and state-level, and biennial substate-level drug use prevalence estimates. In addition, it addresses related topics such as substance dependence and abuse and the need for treatment. NSDUH provides information that policy makers, program planners, and researchers use to design programs and target resources for drug use treatment and prevention.

RTI's NSDUH staff are dedicated to superior client satisfaction and continually achieve an annual government evaluation rating averaging 95% or above.

RTI's responsibilities on NSDUH include sample selection and weighting, questionnaire development and testing, data collection, data processing, small area estimation, methodological investigations, preparation of public use data files, analysis, and reporting.

RTI's Approach

Using U.S. census data, RTI statisticians select areas in each state and the District of Columbia. Each year, approximately 600 staff members visit the selected areas to screen more than 150,000 households to determine their eligibility for the study and then conduct approximately 70,000 interviews. To compensate for seasonal effects, the sample is allocated approximately evenly across four calendar quarters each year. Interviews are conducted in English and Spanish. Interviewers use a handheld computer for eligibility screenings and a laptop to administer computer-assisted interviews. Daily, interviewers transmit data securely to RTI. Data are processed and subjected to a wide variety of statistical processes, including data consistency checks, imputation, weighting, and disclosure analysis.

Highlights and Innovations

RTI continues to manage this massive data collection effort successfully.

- Adaptive total design techniques are applied to identify and monitor metrics associated with data quality, cost, and productivity to ensure maximum survey quality. Specific steps to maximize quality are embedded in every stage of data collection and processing. For example, RTI designed an early data review process that analyzes frequencies, timing data, cross tabulations, “OTHER, Specify” responses, and data summaries to identify potentially problematic respondent questions early in the data collection period.
- Experienced interviewers and supervisors located throughout the nation resolve challenges that could otherwise dampen response rates, such as accommodating busy people, reassuring sample members fearful of strangers or of the government, overcoming language barriers, and obtaining access to dwelling units in limited-access locations such as locked buildings, gated communities, military bases, and colleges.
- Extensive logistical systems support these staff, including rapid materials resupply, technical support 7 days a week, and ongoing in-person and virtual interviewer training.
- RTI systems are flexible so we can respond quickly to special requests and implement numerous NSDUH pilot studies and field tests.
- Creative RTI staff from various disciplines work together to use technology proactively to meet client needs. Significant innovations include the following:
 - Interviewers use **iLearning**—a multimedia, independent learning application—to complete training courses and enhance convenience and cost savings.
 - A **comprehensive intranet website** streamlines editing, coding, problem resolution, variable definition, and data lookup for efficient data processing management that maximizes data quality.

- **A detailed web-based case management system** uses paradata to inform adaptive design techniques that enable timely and cost-effective management of fieldwork.
- State-of-the-art **small area estimation methods developed by RTI** produce high-quality state and substate drug use estimates quickly and affordably.
- **Equipment-tracking systems** maintain information on the users and locations of all computer equipment while quickly providing current details on equipment inventory, shipment requests, and problem logs to allow for timely problem resolution.

Results

NSDUH releases national findings to the public approximately 8 months after data collection ends each year. In addition to national reports on drug use and mental health, RTI produces state reports, substate reports, short reports, and journal articles that highlight key areas of interest. Topics include depression and alcohol use among teens and nonmedical use of prescription drugs among older persons. NSDUH reports are available online at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm>.

More Information

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