Coding of Survey Research Data

RTI's coding staff includes expert coders with extensive experience in coding a wide variety of survey data. Coders are experienced in working with several media, including on-line coding, automated coding using computerized data dictionaries that electronically match survey responses to dictionary entries, and coding from hardcopy documents. Stringent quality control (QC) procedures are enforced to ensure that low error rates are consistently maintained for all coded data. Our standard QC approach for on-line coding includes the comparison of independent coding by two coders, with adjudication of discrepant codes by a coding supervisor. This ensures that the resultant data are of the highest quality and accuracy.

Innovative use of selected principles of Total Quality Management has resulted in significantly reduced error rates for coding, improved production rates, and reduced costs. RTI researchers documented their model for Continuous Quality Improvement, which evolved from a year-long investigation involving industry and occupation coding, in a 1994 volume of the *Journal of Official Statistics*.1

Selected coding capabilities include:

- **Industry and Occupation:** Certified coding staff routinely code more than 100,000 industries and occupations each year. Currently, codes for U.S. surveys are assigned using the Census Bureau's 1990 coding index. For surveys based in other countries, we use the coding system prescribed by that country.

- **Medical:** Coding is performed using the *International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, Clinical Modification* (ICD-9-CM) or the *International Classification of Diseases for Oncology* (ICD-O).

- **Geographic:** We code geographical locations using the *Federal Information Processing Standards Index* or the *U.S. General Services Administration Worldwide Geographic Location Index*.

- **Military:** Coding is performed using the *Department of Defense Occupational Conversion Manual*.

- **Dietary:** We assign codes based on the coding index prepared by the *U.S. Department of Agriculture*.

- **Open-ended Survey Responses:** We assign codes based on project-specific coding manuals developed from pretest or pilot study data or from a review of early main study data.

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