Combating Telephone Fatigue after Multiple Waves: Testing Prepaid Incentives and a Hard Copy Questionnaire in a Telephone Survey of Youth with Disabilities and Their Parents

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1. Purpose of the Paper
Describe an experiment to test the use of prepaid incentives and hard copy questionnaire in a longitudinal telephone survey of youth with disabilities and their parents.

2. Background of NLTS2 Study

3. Challenges Unique to NLTS2
Special population: Sampled youth reflect full range of federal special education disability categories including learning disabilities, speech and communication impairments, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, hearing, visual, orthopedic, or other health impairments, asthma, heart problems, multiple disabilities, and mental health problems.

4. Response Rate Building Measurement Implemented in Waves 2 through 4

5. Wave 6: Experiment: Use of Prepaid Token Incentive and Hard Copy Questionnaire for Parents

Methods
- Telephone interview of 6,098-10,096 youth (and their parents), fielded biannually
- Sampled in 2005 when youth were between 13 and 16 years old; at least the 7th grade, and receiving some type of special education services.

6. Literature Review
Researchers have long noted the decline in telephone survey response rates over the last decade or more, noting particularly challenging situations for longitudinal surveys. Researchers have focused on use of lead-in letters and incentives, but less so on the effect of offering a mail survey option to longitudinal telephone survey respondents. Key factors influencing response rate include:
- Length of interview
- Attitudes, with an average annual decline of almost ¾ of a percentage point, from about 72% to 60%. Since 1996, the authors found that the decline has been more or less linear, averaging 1.5 percentage points per year. Other two groups (i.e., monetary incentives) were offered for refusals, which resulted in a higher initial refusal conversion, but by the end of the interview, these differences had disappeared.
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7. Research Questions

- What is the impact of including a hard copy questionnaire, a prepaid token incentive and a reminder of full incentive (Group 3) vs. a prepaid token incentive and a reminder of full incentive (Group 2)?
- To what extent did the respondents differ from nonrespondents?
- To what extent did the different approaches reach different types of respondents?

8. Results and Discussion

Group 3 response rate was the highest:
- Parents who were provided the option of completing a mail survey along with a telephone and $5 (Group 3) filled out questionnaires more rapidly to the mailing than those who only received a letter (Group 1) or a letter with $5 (Group 2).
- Within 6 days of the mailing, 70% of parents in Group 3 had responded, compared with 40% in Group 1 and 38% in Group 2 (p < 0.05). Response rates for Group 3 were significantly higher.

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