Correlates of Locate Rates in the World Trade Center Health Registry

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1. Introduction

This research compares the differential locate rates between World Trade Center Health Registry (WTCHR) cases limited to one hour of tracing and those worked up to two hours. Furthermore, we test a hypothesis that cases requiring additional tracing in order to locate the subject differ in key demographic areas from those more easily located.

2. The World Trade Center Health Registry

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in partnership with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is developing a central, unified health registry of persons exposed to the World Trade Center (WTC) disaster of September 11, 2001. When completed, it will be the largest registry of its kind. Four eligible "sample types" that are tracked separately are 1) rescue, recovery, and clean-up workers at the WTC site, Staten Island, or on barges, 2) residents, 3) school staff and students, and 4) building occupants and passers-by.

3. How Are the Population Members Identified?

The first step in building the Registry is the identification of organizations that can provide contact lists for individuals who are eligible. Since May of 2003, RTI has sought the support of a number of sources, including businesses, schools, unions, construction and engineering firms, volunteer organizations, and government agencies. We have received approximately 200 lists of eligible individuals, including one list containing over 10,000 names. Furthermore, lists of eligible residents of lower Manhattan as of September 10, 2001, were purchased from a commercial vendor. More widely, we have conducted public health outreach to encourage eligible individuals to self-identify for the Registry using our website or toll-free number. To date, our efforts have resulted in a preregistrant database of over 80,000 names and over 32,000 completed interviews.

4. Tracing Protocol

Once names are obtained through the list building process, we attempt to identify any updated telephone numbers and/or addresses through batch and interactive tracing before an interviewer works a case.

1. **Batch Tracing.** Batch tracing provides relatively inexpensive systematic updates of locator information. For the WTCHR, we use the batch tracing vendors shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Batch Vendors

Vendor	Which Cases Get Sent?	What information do we get back?
National Change of Address (NCOA)	All cases obtained from list building	Updated address
Telematch	All cases returned from NCOA	Telephone number listed at address we provide
Transunion (Retrace)	Cases returned from Telematch that 1) have no telephone number, and 2) have no Social Security Number.	Social Security Number; sometimes address and telephone number.

2. **Interactive Tracing.** Tracing Specialists in RTI's Tracing Operations Unit (TOPS) are allowed to spend up to one hour per case to identify a telephone number and/or address for the subject. Cases assigned to them include those from batch tracing without a telephone number, and cases in which an interviewer has determined that a provided telephone number is not correct. Tracers generally will re-attempt existing telephone numbers, confirm the area code, access a wide variety of consumer and credit databases, and call likely family members or neighbors. To date, TOPS is achieving an 86% locate rate within the one-hour limitation.

5. Experimental Design

To determine if additional tracing time would be of value for the study, a sample of 500 previously unlocated cases was selected for one hour of further tracing. In early February 2004, the sample frame was constructed from all cases in the WTCHR preregistrant database that had been worked by TOPS since November 1, 2003, and which had been finalized in TOPS as not located – level of effort expired. A total of 863 cases met these criteria. Of these, 235 were excluded for one or both of the following reasons:

- The case had been identified as a duplicate of another case in the preregistrant database since the time it was originally traced;
- The tracer who worked the case originally had been terminated, promoted, or reassigned to another project. (To control for tracer effect, our experimental design called for the same tracer to work the case a second time who worked it originally.)

From the remaining 628 cases, all worker (N=231), school (N=1), and building occupant (N=18) cases were selected. 250 resident cases were sampled to bring the total number of selected cases to 500. During production on these cases, four sampled cases, one resident and three workers, were identified as duplicates of other cases in the preregistrant table and removed from production, resulting in 496 cases being worked as part of the experiment.

Tracers were instructed to spend up to one additional hour per case.

6. Results of Re-Tracing

The results of the additional tracing were encouraging, with 307, or 62%, of the 496 cases being coded as located. Table 2 shows the locate rates for the experimental sample broken out by sample type.

Table 2. Experimental Group: Locate Rates by Sample Type

Sample Type	Traced	Located	Locate Rate
Worker	228	143	62.7%
Resident	249	156	62.7%
School	1	0	0%
Building Occupant	18	8	44.4%
Total	496	307	61.9%

However, among those located, there was a higher proportion of cases coded as "unconfirmed locate" or located with only an address (*i.e.*, no telephone number) than we have seen with cases being traced for the first time, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Type of Locate by Level of Effort

	Cases Worked One Hour Only		Cases Not Located in One Hour, Worked an Additional Hour	
	N	%	N	%
Located w/phone – confirmed*	12,472	71.9%	95	30.9%
Located w/out phone – confirmed*	2,633	15.2%	86	28.0%
Located w/phone – unconfirmed**	900	5.2%	40	13.0%
Located w/out phone – unconfirmed**	1,334	7.7%	86	28.0%
Total	17,339	100%	307	100%

*A confirmed locate indicates that the tracer spoke with someone to confirm that the telephone number or address of the subject identified is correct, or that a preponderance of evidence from database sources indicates a confirmed location.

**An unconfirmed locate indicates that the tracer has identified a telephone number and/or address through multiple sources, but has been unable to verify the information with a person.

7. The Impact of Tracing on the Composition of the World Trade Center Health Registry

To assess the impact of tracing on the composition of the Registry to date, we examined the distributions of key demographic factors for cases that received no interactive tracing and for cases that received one hour of interactive tracing.

Figure 1. Race

African-Americans are more likely to require interactive tracing.

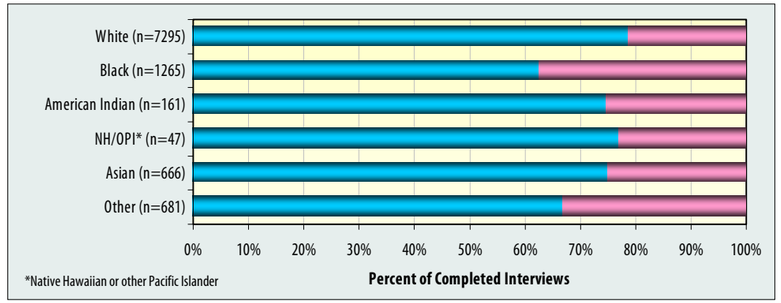


Figure 2. Marital Status

Unmarried cohabitants and separated people are more likely to require interactive tracing.

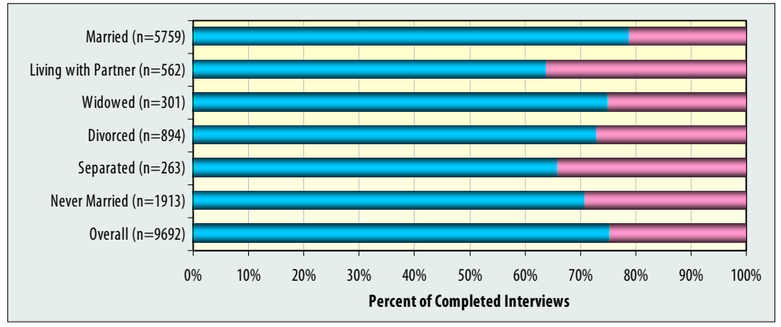
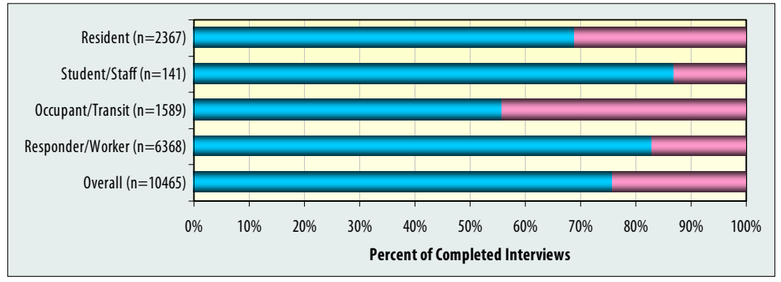


Figure 3. Sample Type

Building occupants and passers by, as well as residents, are more likely to require interactive tracing.



8. Conclusions

- Retracing results in more cases located, but at a lower overall quality of locate data.
- Although it is too early to examine the effects of the additional second hour of tracing on the composition of the registry (since so few retraced cases have been fielded), the initial hour of interactive tracing is effective in bringing more African-Americans, unmarried domestic partners, separated people, building occupants below Canal Street, and residents below Chambers Street into the Registry.
- Studies involving racially diverse populations, highly mobile populations, and urban populations are likely to benefit from the use of Interactive tracing methods.