Summary Report
1998 SPD Taped Interviews

Report prepared by
Jennifer Hess and Jennifer Rothgeb
Center for Survey Methods Research/SRD
September 25, 1998

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I. Introduction

The Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) was mandated by Congress to evaluate the impact of welfare reform on the well-being of families and children. The first administration of the survey instrument specifically designed for the SPD was implemented in the field between May and July 1998. The SPD instrument will continue to be used annually through 2002. It is important to determine if there are problems with the 1998 SPD instrument that require correction or revision prior its use again in 1999. It is also important to obtain some indication of data quality prior to releasing the data to the public. To truly determine the quality of data collected in the 1998 SPD a thorough quality assessment would be necessary. Due to scarcity of resources (staff, money, and time), the SPD Steering Committee determined that a quality assessment of the 1998 SPD was not possible. Instead, they decided that a very small-scale, limited effort be implemented to evaluate the 1998 SPD to determine primarily whether there were any major problems that previously went undetected.

The 1998 SPD evaluation contains three components: interviewing observation reports, Field Representative (FR) debriefings, and review of taped SPD interviews. Persons observing interviewing were asked to complete interviewing observation forms, noting any major problems with the instrument, question wording, or any significant respondent behaviors such as reluctance to provide information or misunderstanding words, concepts, or questions. Twenty-five interviewing observation forms were completed. The results will be presented in a separate document. A subset of FRs were debriefed in four areas: Seattle, Chicago, Dallas, and New York. Results of the debriefing are contained in a separate report. Additionally, the SPD evaluation included information noted from review of taped SPD interviews. Originally, it was expected that approximately 13 staff from the Population Division (POP), Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division (HHES), Demographic Surveys Division (DSD), and the Center for Survey Methods Research (CSMR/SRD), in addition to an unspecified number of staff from Field Division (FLD) (including Field Representatives) would participate in review of 2 taped SPD interviews each. Unfortunately, only 8 staff from POP, HHES and CSMR were available to participate in the review.[1] This document provides information only on the results of the review of SPD taped interviews.

II. Background on Methodology to Review Taped Interviews

Three Field Representatives (FRs) in each of the 12 Census Bureau Regional Offices (RO) were requested to tape three completed SPD interviews, resulting in a total of 108 taped interviews. FRs were instructed to return the tapes and a log sheet recording the case ID, FR code, and status of the taped interview (complete interview taped, partial interview taped, or refused to be taped). We did not receive log sheets from all FRs. In some cases, the FRs returned their tapes without

[1]Staff from POP included Ken Bryson, Loretta Bass, and Kurt Bauman. Staff from HHES included Stephanie Shipp, Lydia Scoon-Rogers, and Art Jones. David Rajnes coded two interviews but did not attend training.

the log sheet. In other cases, FRs returned neither the log nor the tapes. Table 1 below shows the tapes received from each RO. Information on partial interviews and refusals may be incomplete owing to the lack of log sheets from all FRs.

Regional Office	Number of completed interviews	Number of partial interviews	Number of refusals
Atlanta	9	0	0
Boston	3	0	0
Charlotte	9	0	0
Chicago	5	0	0
Dallas	7	1	2
Denver	9	1	1
Detroit	3	0	0
Kansas City	7	0	4
Los Angeles	9	0	0
New York	2	0	0
Philadelphia	7	0	0
Seattle	8	0	0
Total	78	2	7

We received 72 percent of the tapes we requested. Based on the log sheets we received, less than 10 percent of respondents refused to be taped.

Of the 78 taped completed interviews, we coded a sample of 20. The tapes we coded included 39 persons age 15 and over (3 of whom were ages 15-17), and 17 children under age 15.[2] Three of the twenty households received some form of government assistance.

Staff from the CSMR/SRD conducted a three-hour training session for staff from HHES and POP divisions regarding listening to the taped interviews. The training consisted of background information on standard coding of interviewer/respondent interactions, also called behavior coding; a description of the modified approach we were using to code the SPD tapes due to time and resource constraints; examples from taped SPD pretest interviews; and a short practice session coding an actual tape. Three staff from POP attended the training and four staff from HHES.[3] All participants, including two staff from CSMR, were requested to code two taped

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[2]The children's data for 2 of the tapes was lost because the FR forgot to turn the tape over during the interview.

[3]One HHES staff member who attended the training did not code any tapes. Another HHES staff who did not attend the training did code two tapes.

interviews each. The analysis consisted of listening to the interview and noting any problems that FRs or respondents had with question wording, sequencing, unclear concepts or terms, difficult to answer questions or series of questions, and other behaviors or indicators of how well a question is measuring the concept of interest. We also noted any instrument problems, such as incorrect skip patters, and training issues. (Note: The paper version of the SPD instrument dated 3/17/98 was the one used during review of the taped interviews.)

Below is a summary of problems noted from the tapes. The summary is divided into three sections: problematic question wording issues, instrument issues and training issues. In the last section there are a few miscellaneous comments.

III. Problematic Question Wording

Item 9. **The next few questions are about your work-related activities LAST YEAR, that is, from January to December 1997.**
Did you work at a job or business AT ANY TIME during 1997?

Problem: FRs are actively encouraging the use of the "retired" category for this item. FRs are likely doing this because it shortens the number of work-related questions asked.

Suggested revision: Delete "retired" from the response options in item 9 and include it only in item 10.

Item 19. **During 1997, which weeks did you do any work at all, even for only a few hours?"**

Problem: Many FRs are rewording this question to ask whether the respondent worked all year. In some cases the FRs are telling respondents that vacations time should be included. FRs are likely rewording the item because they don't have to ask several follow-up questions for year-round workers. Entering "all" weeks speeds up the interview.

Some FRs are incorrectly probing this question for persons who worked less than year-round by asking which months the person worked and then entering the entire month rather than probing for which weeks. This question is very difficult, if not impossible, for some respondents to answer, particularly those who worked only intermittently, and the best they can do is guess.

Suggested revision: Split this item into two questions or train FRs to ask question as worded and to use the calendar at the back of the flashcard booklet. Suggested question revision is provided below:

"Including paid vacation and paid sick leave, did you work during all 52 weeks in 1998?

(INCLUDE WEEKS DURING WHICH PERSON WORKED AT ALL, EVEN FOR ONLY A FEW HOURS)

<1> Yes (skip to)
<2> No (ask question shown below)

If less than 52:
SHOW CALENDAR IN FLASHCARD BOOKLET
"During 1997, which weeks did you do any work at all, even for only a few hours?"

(INCLUDE WEEKS DURING WHICH PERSON WORKED AT ALL, EVEN FOR ONLY A FEW HOURS)

Item CK39. **If item 29 eq 1 and week "52" marked in item 19 or item 21, go to 43a.**
If item 29 is more than 1, and week 52 marked in item 32 for this employer, go to 43a.
Otherwise ask 39.

Problem: This item checks to see whether the person worked (or took paid vacation or paid sick leave) the last week of the calendar year. If he/she did not, we presume that the person left the job and we ask items 39 (main reason left this job) and 40 (applied for unemployment benefits). This is not a good presumption. In some cases, persons may not work the last week of the year because their business may be closed (e.g. teachers, factory workers), but they still have a job to go back to when the new year starts. Taped interviews indicate that the question was also awkward for a retired person who did accounting on an as needed basis but did not work the last week of the year. He didn't consider himself as having "left" a job.

Suggested revision: For persons not reporting that they worked in week "52", ask a question (not yet developed) to determine if they considered themselves to still have a job in week 52. (Can't use the word "job" because some persons who have a casual arrangement for work may not consider themselves to "have a job." Contact CSMR to develop question wording if it is decided to include such a question.)

Item 318. **During which months in 1997 did you receive Social Security payments? (Also applies to 329A, 335, 339, 352, 365, 366, 380, 408, 413, 419, 424, 429, 435, 440, 481, 486, 491, 495, 501,)**

Problem: FRs are rewording question to ask if respondents received it for the entire year (e.g. "And you received it the entire year, then?")

Suggested revision: First ask if they received it all year and, if not, which months they received it. For example:
"Did you receive Social Security every month in 1997?"
If no, "During which months in 1997 did you receive Social Security?"

Note: HHES should review the list of income sources and determine if all questions asking for months the income was received can be changed to this format. We would not expect persons to receive some types of income every month, such as lump sums, and it may be better to just ask for months that income was received for those particular items rather than adopt the suggested revision above.

Item 446. **What is your best estimate of the AVERAGE AMOUNT that you and your (husband/wife) had in these jointly-held accounts during 1997?**

Problem: Question does not specify that it is asking about average amount held in interest-earning accounts only and one respondent thought question was asking about all jointly held accounts.

Suggested revision: "What is your best estimate of the AVERAGE AMOUNT that you and your (husband/wife) had in jointly-held interest-earning accounts in 1997?"

Item 445-459 (interest-earning accounts/investments and dividend-earning investments).

Problem: The distinction between accounts that earn interest versus accounts that earn dividends in meaningless to many respondents and FRs. Some taped interviews indicated that the amounts reported in the first series of items on interest-earning accounts includes the amounts in dividend-earning investments. Respondents are also unclear whether the amount held in 401k plans or other retirement plans should be included when answering these questions.

Suggested revision: Revise items 246A and 246B as follows:

246A. At any time during 1997 did anyone in this household have money in any of the following types of interest-earning accounts:

A. Savings account	Yes	No
B. Interest-earning checking account	Yes	No
C. Money market fund	Yes	No
D. Bonds	Yes	No
E. Treasury notes	yes	No
F. Certificates of deposit	Yes	No

For each "yes" response, ask who had money in that type of account. Use the specific types of income identified here in the fills for the questions on the amount of income received in items 445-450. The same could be done for the fills to items 454-459 regarding mutual funds and stocks.

Item 445. **Earlier you told me that you had interest-earning accounts such as a (savings or interest-earning checking account, money market fund,) (bonds, treasury notes, certificates of deposit) or other investments that pay interest. Did you own any of these jointly with your (husband/wife)? (Also item 449)**

Problem: The fill isn't working properly. Both of the first two fills (savings or interest-earning checking account, money market fund, bonds, treasury notes, certificates of deposit) are being filled even if the person reported "yes" to the first list of items (savings, checking or money market) and "no" to the second list (bonds, treasury notes, CDs). Also the fill is very long.

Suggested revision: "Earlier you told me that you had interest-earning accounts. Did you own any of these jointly with your (husband/wife)?"

Item 511. **[I know that (you haven't/Name hasn't) received any income assistance, but (you/he/she) may have looked into getting such assistance.]**
[You reported (receiving/that Name received) some income assistance. The next questions are about whether (you/he/she) looked into getting any other government assistance.]

At any time during 1997, did (you/ Name) complete an application to receive any (other) government assistance because (you/he/she) had income that was too low?

Problem: Some FRs are not reading the introduction. Taped interviews indicate that for one respondent who did receive assistance, the FR noted the assistance the respondent had already reported previously in the interview before asking the question about other assistance.

Suggested revision: Modify question as follows for persons who do report receiving assistance: "You reported that (you/name) received (list types of assistance). At any time during 1997, did (you/ Name) complete an application to receive any OTHER government assistance because (you/he/she) had income that was too low?"

Also, can we use an income screener for this item? If a person was reported to have earned more than "X" dollars, could we skip them over this question?

Item 600. **The next questions I will be asking are designed to give estimates of the financial situation of households in the United States.**

Problem: Is this transition necessary? It leaves me wondering what all the questions that precede it were measuring.

Suggested revision: Delete transition.

Item 607. **The next few questions are about your property taxes, homeowners insurance and current mortgage payments on this home. It will be much easier to provide this information if you refer to your mortgage statement or mortgage payment coupons. I'd be glad to wait while you get those records.**

Do you have any mortgages on this property?

Problem: Many FRs are not reading the complete introduction. They read the first sentence and do not read the statements asking respondents to get their records. Also the request to get records should only be read if there is a mortgage on the home.

Suggested revision: Delete the introduction and request to get records from item 607. Move the introductory statement and request for records to items 609 and 611 after we've found out if the person has a mortgage and/or home equity loan. For persons who have mortgages, the introduction should be included at item 609. For persons without mortgages, the introduction should be included in 611. We recommend revising the introduction slightly to reflect that some homeowners have only home equity loans on their property and not mortgages.

[If 607 is "yes" and 608 is "yes" fill "mortgage and home equity loan" and "and loan." Otherwise fill "mortgage" and leave "and loan" blank.]

609. The next few questions are about your property taxes, homeowners insurance and current (mortgage/mortgage and home equity loan) payments on this home. It will be much easier to provide this information if you refer to your mortgage (and loan) statements. I'd be glad to wait while you get those records.

How much are your monthly mortgage payments (including any condo or association fees)?

[If 607 is "yes," do NOT fill "The next...get those records." If 607 is "no" and 608 is "yes," fill "The next...get those records." Also fill "taxes, homeowners" and fill "and current home equity loan payments." If both 607 and 608 are "no," fill "The next few questions are about your property taxes and homeowners insurance on this home." Leave other fills blank.]

611. (The next few questions are about your property taxes(and/,) homeowners insurance (and current home equity loan payments) on this home. (It will be much easier to provide this information if you refer to your mortgage and loan statements. I'd be glad to wait while you get those records.))

How much are your total property taxes, including city, county and school taxes?

Item 611. **How much are your total property taxes, including city, county, and school taxes?**

Problem: One taped interview indicated that a respondent asked if this question was asking about the amount for a year? Question does not include reference period.

Suggested revision: "How much are your total property taxes per year on this home including city, county, and school taxes?"

Item 637. **Not counting routine use to get to and from work, is this vehicle used primarily for either business purposes or for the transportation of a disabled person?**

Problem: As with the pretest, this question is still being interpreted as a choice between "business purposes" and "transportation of a disabled person" by some respondents. Also, the phrase "Not counting routine use to get to and from work" is inappropriate for persons who don't work, such as in households of retired people. One respondent reported that the vehicle was used for business because they use it for shopping, etc. This respondent may have interpreted that it meant using the car to conduct ones own personal business.

Suggested revision: We need to discuss possible revisions to this question with HHES. Possible wording:

"Which of the following is this vehicle primarily used for: 1) business purposes, not counting routine use to and from work, 2) the transportation of a disabled person, or 3) personal use?"

<1> Business purposes
<2> Transportation of a disabled person
<3> Personal use

Item 923. **Is there a place that (name/you) go if (you/he/she) (are/is) sick or need advice about (your/his/her) health? (Also items 1219 and 1220.)**

Item 924. **To what kind of place did you usually go?**
READ RESPONSE CATEGORIES
<1> Clinic or health center
<2> Doctor's office (or HMO)
<3> Hospital emergency room
<4> Hospital outpatient department
<4> Some other place (specify)

Problem: This objective of these questions are not clear. In some cases, FRs probe with response options in item 924 when asking item 923, to give respondents a better understanding of what we're asking. Respondents are confused by the question as well. In some cases, they think we are asking about a place besides their regular doctor's office since that answer is too obvious so they think we must be asking about something else. The corresponding children's items (1219 and 1220) also are problematic. Some FRs are rewording the question to ask, for example, "Does (child) have his own pediatrician?" FRs also are rewording item 1220 to ask "doctor's office?"

Suggested revision: We need to know the objectives of these questions before we can recommend a revision. Also, the categories in item 924 (and 1220) are not mutually exclusive. A doctor's office can be located in a clinic or hospital. FRs inappropriately probe with "doctor's office" rather than one of the other two categories since this is the most common response.

Item 1000. **The next questions are about the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months, since (month) 1997, and whether you were able to afford the food you need.**

Which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months--(we have enough to eat and the kinds of food we want, we have enough to eat but not always the kinds of food we want, sometimes we don't have enough to eat, or often we don't have enough to eat?

Problem: FRs frequently do not read the response options included in the question. Given that the respondents are suppose to have a flashcard from which they select the response option, perhaps it is not necessary for the FRs to read the response options.

Suggested revision: Delete the date from the introduction ("since (date) 1997"). This will help to shorten a lengthy introduction. Revise question wording and include a "READ IF NECESSARY" statement before the response options:

<1000> FLASHCARD T

"Looking at Flashcard T, please tell me which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household in the last 12 months?"

READ IF NECESSARY

<1> We have enough to eat and the kinds of food we want
<2> We have enough to eat, but not always the kinds of food we want
<3> Sometimes we don't have enough to eat
<4> Often we don't have enough to eat

IV. Instrument Issues

Item 30. **(Think about the weeks that you worked last year.) (Counting all jobs,) How many hours did you USUALLY work per week in 1997?**

Problem: The first fill is not working properly. If the person worked all year (including paid vacation and paid sick leave), the first fill should be left blank.

Following item 40.
Problem: Instrument asked for name of the company a second time even though the information had already been recorded in item 29A.

Item 44A. **What was the address of (employer's name)?**
Problem: Need to check for possible instrument problem. One respondent who left a job before the end of 1997 was asked about unemployment benefits (item 40) but was not asked this item.

Item 63. **Next, I need to know about your CURRENT employment status.**

Did you do any work at all LAST WEEK, including work for pay or another type of compensation?

Problem: Wording of question is incorrect. It should be "...including work for pay or any other type of compensation?"

Item 199. **Which category represents the total combined income of all members of this household during 1997? This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, social security payments and any other money received by members of this household who are 15 years of age or older.**

Problem: The response options for this item are categorical ranges. The top level is $50,000 or more. If the household has already reported in the earnings questions that they made over $50,000, can this item be plugged and not asked?

Need to check skip patterns for persons who refuse this item. In one taped interview, the respondent refused this item and was not asked any of the questions on receipt of welfare in the income source section.

Item 208. **During 1997, did you receive any separate Social Security payments on behalf of the children? (Also item 214.)**

Problem: Need to check the universe for this item. Currently persons who report not receiving SS in item 206 are skipped over this item regardless of whether they have children under 23 in the household. Similar issue pertains to item 214 for SSI payments received on behalf of children.

Item 211B. **This is a list of benefits or income sources people sometimes receive. Please tell me if anyone in this household received benefits during 1997 from any of these sources.**

Problem: Neither this question, nor any of the welfare questions were asked of an elderly woman who lived alone, had no earnings last year, and refused to answer item 199 on household income. Need to check skips patterns.

Item 246A. **At any time during 1997, did you have money in any kind of savings account, interest-earning checking account or money market fund? (Also items 246B, 249A, 249B)**

Problem: As in the pretest, it is still unclear to respondents and FRs whether money in 401k plans, or other type of retirement plans, is suppose to be counted for these items.

Revision suggested: Include FR note on screen indicating whether 401k plans or money in other types of retirement plans should be included or excluded. If appropriate, the same note should be included on the corresponding screens collecting income amounts and in the section on eligibility and assets.

Item 258. **During 1997, did anyone in this household receive any alimony or maintenance payments?**

Problem: If no one in household has ever been divorced, we do not need to ask question.

Item 260. **Did anyone in this household receive any child support payments in 1997 including any money received directly from the other parent or through the welfare or child support agency?**

Problem: Is it possible to limit the universe for whom this question is asked? In households with only elderly persons, it is awkward to ask this question.

Item 262. **During 1997, did anyone in this household receive any financial assistance on a regular basis from friends or relatives not living in this household? Do not include loans.**

Problem: Question was not asked of several respondents. Problem may be in the documentation rather than the instrument if this item is supposed to be skipped for selected persons.

Item 269. **Last time we recorded that (name) received Social Security payments in 1996. Did (name) receive Social Security at any time during 1997?**

Problem: The screen did not include the name of the person who received Social Security. The FR read, "We have recorded that someone received Social Security payments in 1996. Do they still get that?" The FR then backs up to correct the previous Social Security screen in the income source section. Is this how the dependent interviewing is supposed to work? Shouldn't the instrument take the FR to the correct screen automatically?

Item 300. **I have recorded that (name) in 1997 received: (READ SOURCES) Is that correct?**

Problem: This screen contained incorrect information for one respondent. The screen listed the respondent as receiving Social Security, but the SS is her children's. It also listed SSI. The FR had earlier deleted the SSI at the dependent interviewing screen, but it came up again at this item.

Item 614. **What is the balance remaining on your home equity loan?**

Problem: Either instrument or items booklet is incorrect. Items booklet asks "What is the balance remaining on your home equity loan?" On the tape, FRs asked for monthly payments on home equity loan.

Item 645. **(Aside from mortgages,/Aside from car loans/Aside from mortgages or car loans) does anyone in this household have any (other) debts -- such as credit card charges, student loans, medical or legal bills, or loans from relatives?**

Problem: The fill for this question is not correct in the paper document or in the instrument. The fill as heard on the taped interview is "Aside from mortgages and home equity loans." This was the fill used even for persons who reported that they did **not** have a home equity loan. Fill needs to be corrected on both the paper document and the instrument.

Item 654. **During 1997, did (you/anyone in this household) provide any alimony to a former spouse?**

Problem: If no one in the household has been divorced, question does not need to be asked.

Suggested revision: Add check item before 654 to check whether anyone in the household has ever been divorced. If all persons age 15 or over are "never married" or have never been divorced, skip this question. (What about people who are currently separated? Could they be receiving alimony?)

Item 955B **What kind of plan were you covered by? (READ IF NECESSARY: CHAMPUS/CHAMPVA, Military Health, Indian Health Service, or some government provided plan, including (fill local name)?**

Problem: Instrument should be checked to see if precode <4> "other government-provided plan" is being displayed in instrument. In one case it seems like it did not appear and the FR entered a note that the children were cared for by a local government program. (Is display of this response option dependent on other information collected?)

Item 1003 **Now I'm going to read you several statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was OFTEN, SOMETIMES, or NEVER true for your household in the last 12 months.**

Problem: Check instrument to make sure income screener is working.

Item CK1006. Check instrument and paper document to determine if this check item is working properly and is documented correctly. In one interview, item 1000=1 and 1003-1005 =never, but questions 1007-1008 were asked.

Item 1301. **The next few questions are about child care arrangements you use for (name) on a regular basis. (By "regular," I mean at least once a week for a month or more.)**

Please tell me which of these, if any, you used for (name) on a regular basis BETWEEN JANUARY 1997 AND May, 1998.

Problem: The codes on the Flashcard (W) do not match the instrument precodes for the corresponding child care arrangements. Either the instrument or the flashcard needs to be revised. For example, the instrument has precode 12 for "child cares for himself" while the code on the flashcard for that arrangement is code 11.

Item 1311A. **Sometimes it is difficult to make arrangements to look after children all of the time, such as before or after school. Does (child) currently stay by (himself/herself) on a regular basis even for a small amount of time?**

Problem: There may be a skip pattern problem with this item. This question was not asked about a child who is 14 years old and is not in any regular kind of child care arrangement. Based on specs in CK1311, this item should have appeared. (Note that this may be related to the mismatch between the arrangement type precodes in 1301 and Flashcard W, but if that were the case, it should have created a bunch of other problems that we didn't hear on the tape.)

CK1400 **(Child Support Agreement)**
Item 1401A. **Why does (child) not have a father living outside this house?**

Problem: Instrument code for this check item should be reviewed. A case that was not correctly routed to item CK1422, mistakenly went to item 1400. The household roster showed that the biological father of the child lived in the household, but the respondent was asked item 1401A, shown above. (The father was line #4.) The problem may be in the demographic section with the question that asks who the child's father is. In one taped interview of a married couple with three kids, the computer asked who the father of Daniel, Nicholas and Mario was. Daniel is the father of Nicholas and Mario. The computer should not have prompted the FR to ask who Daniel's father was. Moreover, it did not ask who the father of the third child, Hannah, was. It turned out that Hannah is adopted, but we only found that out when Daniel (the adoptive father) was asked about her origin and happened to mention that he didn't know her origin because she is adopted. In another taped interview, the respondent indicated that three of the four children living in her household were adopted (in response to a question on one of the children's date of birth). However, the respondent was never directly asked whether the children were biological, adoptive or step children and the FR never verified this information as part of the material that is reviewed with the respondent before beginning the core interview.

V. Training Issues

Item 35. **Were you employed by government, by a private company, a non-profit organization, or were you self employed, or working in a family business or farm?**

Problem: FRs frequently reword this question based on information provided in item 29A (employer or company name) by verifying, for example, "And that's a private company?" or by not asking the item at all. In both cases, the respondents don't hear all the response options and, therefore, may misclassify the information.

Item 44A. **What was the address of (employer's name)?**

Problem: FRs are frequently rewording this question to ask, for example, "Do you know their address?" or asking respondent for just the street or town. This discourages respondents from providing complete information. Respondents often do not know work addresses, especially when reporting for other household members, and looking them up slows down the interview. We suggest encouraging FRs to ask the question as worded and allow respondents time to look up the information if they are willing to do this.

Item 49. **The next few questions are about your earnings last year.**

Since accuracy is important to this survey, it would be very helpful if you could refer to any income records you might have for the next series of questions. I would be happy to wait while you get them. Do you need a moment?

Problem: Some FRs discouraged respondents from getting records by adding statements at the end of this, such as, "or if you know the information we can go on." Perhaps FRs feel it is an imposition to get records or they think it will slow down the interview to allow the respondent time to get the records.

Item 63. **Next, I need to know about your CURRENT employment status.**

Did you do any work at all LAST WEEK, including work for pay or any other type of compensation?

Problem: FRs are rewording question to ask "Did you do any work last week?"

Item 199. **Which category represents the total combined income of all members of this household during 1997? This includes money from jobs, net income from business, farm or rent, pensions, dividends, interest, social security payments and any other money received by members of this household who are 15 years of age or older.**

Problem: FRs need to know what should be included when estimating income. One respondent asked whether child support should be included. The FR told her that it should not, which is incorrect. Another respondent asked if it should include gains on retirement. The FR said that it should not, which is correct.

Item 236A. **Does anyone in this household have a physical, mental, or other health condition that prevents him or her from working? (Also item 236C and 238.)**

Item 236C. **Does anyone in this household have a physical, mental or other health condition that limits the kind or amount of work he or she can do?**

Item 238. **Did anyone in this household ever retire or permanently leave a job for health reasons?**

Problem: The objectives of these three questions are not clear to FRs or respondents. Respondents often pose questions to the FRs and expect the FRs to tell them whether that qualifies. For example, one person asked if "old age" counted. Another said that someone in the household has "Attention Deficit Disorder." A third said that he was fired from a job because he couldn't do the work. The FR asked if the reason he couldn't do the work was health related. The respondent answered, "Yeah, I just hurt all the time." If these three questions are used to find out if anyone in the household is eligible for disability income, it may be better just to ask everyone the question on disability income and drop these three screeners. If the questions are retained, FRs need better training on the objectives of these questions.

Item 302. **Now I am going to ask you how much you received from each of these during 1997 and which months you received it.**

Problem: The respondent indicated that she didn't think the government had any right to know how much she made at item 199 (household income question). The FR asked the income source questions, but when he got to this series, he entered "refused" for everything without reading the question. Is this proper procedure? It is possible that the respondent would have answered the months she received a particular source of income even if she wouldn't answer the amount.

Item 445-459 (interest-earning accounts/investments and dividend-earning investments).

Problem: The difference between interest-earnings accounts and dividend earning accounts needs to be addressed in training and the manual. FRs also need to be better trained on how to handle 401k and other retirement money in interest-earnings and dividend earning accounts. What are the criteria for including or excluding money in retirement accounts? Are they supposed to be included in the questions on net worth (i.e. average amount held in accounts)? Are they to be included when asking about interest earned on the accounts or dividends earned on the accounts if the person is not drawing off the account at this time?

Item 618C. **How much (do you/does this household) usually pay for electricity per month?**
How much for gas or other types of heating fuel per month?
How much does this household pay for basic telephone service per month?

Problem: A few respondents reported that they pay their electricity and gas bills together. FRs need to be trained how to handle this situation. Since these questions are designed to estimate total utility expenditures, if it is easier for respondents to report a single figure for electricity and gas together, is that acceptable to analysts? Can FRs be instructed to report just a single dollar amount that includes both gas and electricity in the electricity item for these respondents?

Some respondents had difficulty answering the questions on average utility bills because their bills vary so much and they have trouble averaging them. Some respondents reported amounts for last month. In other cases, the FR and respondents tried to estimate separate amounts for winter and summer months and then average the two.

One respondent asked if the cost should include cell phone. The FR told her to the she thought it would include all phones.

Suggested revision: Provide additional training to FRs on what an average is and how to probe respondents for average amounts. Provide FRs information in training and the manual regarding how to record utilities that are paid jointly such as gas and electricity. Define what should be included as "basic telephone service" in the manual and cover the concept during training if it is not already covered.

Item 631. Does anyone in this household own a car, van, or truck? Do not include leased vehicles, recreational vehicles, or motorcycles?

Problem: One respondent asked whether a motor home is considered a "recreational vehicle."

Suggested revision: Define a "recreational vehicle" in the manual and cover this concept in training if it is not already covered.

Item 701. At any time between September 1997 and May 1998 (were you/was name) enrolled in school, either full or part time?

Problem: One respondent took a correspondence course. Initially the FR recorded "yes" to this question. Later the answer was changed to "no" based on input from other household member who decided that being enrolled in a correspondence course does not count as being enrolled in school.

Suggested revision: Define what types of schooling should be included in the manual and cover this concept in training if it is not already covered.

Item 950 This is a list of different types of health insurance coverage. I'd like to know if anyone in this household was covered by the following types of health insurance at ANYTIME from January through December 1997.

Problem: Some FRs do not read all the possible insurance options. Perhaps training can be enhanced to provide FRs with additional information as to why it's important that they ask about all types of insurance and that households can be covered by more than one type of insurance. (Note that this item may be changed in 1999, so the problem noted above may be a moot point.)

Item 957A. Who was covered by an employer or union provided plan?

Problem: FRs sometimes just confirm that everyone was covered. In some cases this presented a problem. For example, in one case it seemed like the 20 year old son was covered under his own policy, but that information was never collected and the FR had him listed only under the father's policy. In another case both parents have separate policies that cover the entire family. FR indicated that the instrument only allowed one policy to be shown on the screen. (It seems like this would have been more of a problem for 957B (who is policyholder) than for item 957A.)

Items 1116-1119 (School enrollment items.)

Problem: Some FRs did not read the reference period when asking the question. In some cases the reading of the question implied "ever". Perhaps additional training can be given to FRs on importance of reference periods and implications on data results, if correct reference periods are not provided to respondents.

Items 1124-1126 (Enrichment activities)

Problem: Several FRs did not read the reference period. Several FRs did not read the questions as worded, which changed the meaning of the question. For example, some FRs asked item 1125 as "did she take any lessons **on weekends** such as music, dance, or language?" while other FRs asked "did she take any lessons **after school** like music, dance or language.? We recommend additional training on the importance of reading questions as worded, perhaps with examples provided of how not reading questions as worded has the potential to change the meaning of the question and the resulting data obtained.

Items 1201-1207 (Functional Limitation Series)

Problem: Several FRs did not read questions as worded in this particular series. The first time through the series, FRs are reading questions as worded for the most part, but in some cases they will leave off phrases like "such as a full bag of groceries" (item 908) or "about 3 city blocks" (item 910). As they cycle through the series for additional people in the household, FRs are shortening and are sometimes turning the disability questions into statements: "No trouble seeing," "No trouble hearing," etc. In one case, the FR asked "Are there any of the medical situations that I just mentioned?" and filled all the disability questions based on the answer to this inappropriate probe. FRs also frequently don't read the introduction to item 914. It was obvious in many cases that the FR sensed that this series was burdensome and somewhat unnecessary and that they just wanted to hurry through it. We would like to note that the reason the timer data for this series is so short is because of the shortcut approaches FRs are taking. If FRs were to read all the questions as worded for each respondent, the series would have taken longer.

Suggested revision:

Minimally, FRs should be retrained on the importance of this series of questions and the prevalence of functional limitations to reduce the perception that this series is unnecessary and doesn't apply to most people.

CSMR noted the same concerns in our SPD Pretest Evaluation Report (pp. 34-37). At that time, we suggested asking this series of questions on a household level, instead of a person level, in order to reduce the burden. After further review, we realized that the household level questions would work fine for the adults but not so well for the children, since the children's questions are asked of the designated parent and households with subfamilies may have more than one designated parent. CSMR then suggested using a topic-based approach (in an e-mail from J. Hess to S. Shipp dated July 15, 1998). This approach would ask the full item for the first person and then a shorter follow up for subsequent people in the household, and would work for both the adult and children's disability questions. An example is shown below:

"Have you ever been told by a health professional that Suzy has a developmental or learning disability?"

<1> Yes
<2> No

"What about Joey?"
<1> Yes
<2> No

"What about Mary?"
<1> Yes
<2> No

This approach would eliminate having to read the full question for all persons. Moreover, we could easily include only those children for whom the respondent is the designated parent. If resources are available to program the instrument, we think that thought should be given to revising the disability series to reduce both interviewer and respondent burden.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

1. In many interviews it seems that FRs are shortcutting wherever possible. Some FRs are not reading questions as worded particularly the second time through a series. Some FRs lead respondents to choose answers that will shorten the interview, such as "retired" in items 9 and 10 and "52 weeks" in item 19 so that they won't have to ask follow-up questions that can slow down the interview. FRs also suggest responses to respondents for open ended questions before the respondent has had a chance to try to answer the question. They also reword questions to make them sound like statements such as "Jamie doesn't get any disability income" rather than asking the question as worded.

2. In the income source section, FRs often do not read full question. They abbreviate by reading just the source of the payment "Any retirement income?" "Any Social Security?" What is lost by this approach is the reference period and that the questions are being asked about all household members, not just the respondent. Moreover, this approach speeds up the interview considerably and may give the impression that we are not so concerned with data quality since we aren't really giving the respondent much time to think about their answers. If analysts are concerned about data quality resulting from not reading questions as worded, they should recommend focusing attention on this issue during training and provide examples of how questions could be misinterpreted when they are not asked as worded.

3. One respondent's husband had died in December 1997. All the questions in the income source section of the questionnaire were asked about the respondent only. The fill used was "you" rather than "anyone in the household." All income that the husband may have earned during the previous year was not collected. Is this the correct procedure?

Distribution list:

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