

It's Complicated: Within Household Proxy Reporting Across Languages and Household Types

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*Presentation for the 76th annual conference of the
American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR)
Virtual Conference: May 11-14, 2021*



Background

- In 2019, the Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM) at Census Bureau did cognitive testing of a household survey on the East Coast
 - English (n = 62)
 - Spanish (n = 14)
- Think-aloud method and retrospective probing
- Questionnaire required proxy reporting for others within the household
 - e.g. housing quality, income, sexual orientation/gender identity (SOGI)



During the Cognitive Interviews

- Some of the respondents = members of the same household
 - 3 pairs lived together (2 married couples and 1 roommate pair)
 - 1 English pair, 1 Spanish pair, and 1 mixed pair
- Compare and contrast responses given by pairs
- Within-household proxies, inconsistent reports of:
 - How many people lived in residence
 - Length of leases
 - Finances
- → Exploratory study
 - On evidence of uncertainty in within household proxy responses

Exploratory Study Plan

- Purpose: examine proxy reports for indications that the respondent had difficulties reporting attributes and behaviors of other household members
 - e.g. To the best of your knowledge, does [NAME] describe themselves as male, female, or transgender?
 - How easy or difficult was it to answer for the other people living with you?
- Data: interview summaries from the household survey cognitive testing
 - Income, public benefits, sexual orientation/gender identity (SOGI)
- Goal: contribute to more effective methods of respondent selection in household surveys that require proxy reporting

Exploratory Study Plan (Cont'd.)

- Excluded participants who lived alone
- Limited analysis to data from questions relying on proxy reporting
- Four coders used a three-variable coding scheme
 1. Respondent indicated no difficulties answering for others
 2. Respondent indicated difficulties answering for others
 3. Respondent did not answer for others [despite instructions to do so]
- Content analysis of probe responses



Exploratory Study Analysis Plan

- Analyze by language (little known about cross-lingual and cross-cultural proxy reporting)
 - English, Spanish
- Analyze by household type (Schwede 2017)
 - Non-complex household
 - 1-person living alone
 - Married couple
 - Married couple with adopted and biological children
 - Single parent with child
 - Complex household
 - All other types
- Variance by social distance (Bickart et al. 1990; Bickart et al. 2006; Holzberg et al. 2019; Pascale 2016)
 - How frequently household members talk and share experiences with each other
 - Accuracy and reliability of proxy reporting

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS		
	English	Spanish
Single-person	14	3
Complex	13	4
Non-Complex	13	7
Total	40	14



Results

- No major differences in observed between languages
 - Sample size
- Difficulty with Spanish speakers with SOGI but related to Spanish translations
- Proxy reporting by household type
 - Respondents in complex households seemed to report fewer difficulties when answering for other household members than respondents in non-complex households
 - With the exception of knowledge of public benefits
 - Contrary to our social distance predictions



Quality of Responses and Perceived Difficulties

- Non-complex household respondents:
 - Attempt to answer questions in more detail than respondents from complex households
 - Reported more difficulties answering questions
 - Example: "Well, and then, of course together with my husband, he makes more or less the same... It's very similar, the same. It's only a few dollars maybe more than me." – English speaker, non-complex household
- Complex household respondents:
 - Less qualifying of answers
 - Use of terms like "about" or "around"
 - Example: "It's [roommate's disability benefits] about \$800 a month." – English speaker, complex household
- Future research examining specificity of answers in proxy reporting



Topic Sensitivity for Proxy Responding

- Overall, respondents reported few concerns answering more sensitive questions about their household members
 - e.g. sex assigned at birth, disability status
- However, sometimes the respondents said they believed a question topic was sensitive
 - Regarding gender identity: “It’s an easy topic to talk about. People don't talk about it because they don't understand or they feel it’s bad to talk about it.” -- English speaker
- One incident where Spanish-speaking complex-household respondent did not want to reveal who lived with him
 - Sensitivity can be related to confidentiality concerns or fears about immigration status, rules about number of people on the lease, etc.



Knowledge of Terms and Concepts

- Inconsistencies within proxy reports on receipt of public benefits
 - One English-speaking respondent from a non-complex household initially said his wife did not receive any public benefits, but later reported his wife received social security and a pension
- Confusion about terms
 - One English-speaking respondent was confused about what SSI stood for and consequently reported his public benefits incorrectly
- Knowledge of terms and concepts impacts the quality of proxy reporting



Limitations

- Secondary data analysis
 - Probe types: many probes asked respondents whether they had difficulty answering for others
 - Summaries designed for other purposes: interviewers may not have recorded every instance of pause, laughter or discomfort, etc.
- Sampling
 - Respondents not chosen based on complex v. non-complex living situation
 - Only 3 pairs from same household included. More such pairs would have given us a measure of accuracy in responses



Future Within Household Proxy Research

- Respondent selection
 - Multiple individuals from the same household
 - Complex v. non-complex household residents
 - Spanish and English speakers
- Probe design
 - Examination of social distance
 - How often do people interact?
 - Do they share information about topics included in the survey?
- Analysis
 - Compare responses of co-residents: accuracy and reliability of proxy reports
- Summaries
 - record indicators of uncertainty: e.g. pauses, laughter



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Thank you!

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