

UWSC

Reducing Non Response in Longitudinal Studies:

What Can We Do Instead of Increasing Monetary Incentives?

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Overview

- Background info on large longitudinal survey we are currently fielding at UWSC
- Discussion of why increasing monetary incentives was decided against
- Description of the effort to increase response rate without increasing monetary incentives
- Results of that effort and lessons learned



A National Study of Health & Well-Being

Midlife in the U.S.
A National Study of Health
and Well-being

Conducted for

The UW Institute on Aging
and
The National Institute on Aging

MIDUS Overview

The Harvard Survey of Health and Life Quality

- Done in 1995/1996
- Over 7,000 randomly selected Americans
- Ages 25 to 75



HSHLQ Respondents
(National RDD Sample)

MIDUS (Midlife in the US)

- Done in 2004/2005
- Same 7,000+ Americans
- Now ages 35 to 85



MIDUS Respondents
(List Sample)

MIDUS Overview

Harvard Survey of Life Quality Characteristics

- Multi-modal survey

- 30 minute phone survey
- 100 page mail survey

- HSHLQ respondents went on to be recruited for multiple follow up projects

- Diary survey
- Biomarker survey



MIDUS Sample

- 7000+ adults (ages 35-85)
- Includes 998 pairs of randomly selected twins
- Includes 900+ siblings of 500 selected main respondents

First Reason Not to Increase Monetary Incentives

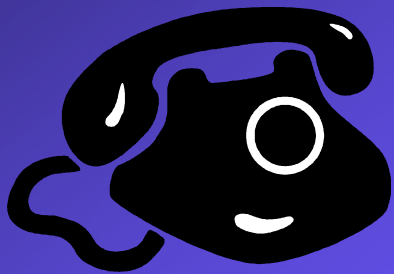
Sample Characteristics

- Over half of sample members are related to each other
- There are as many as 6 siblings in one family participating

Implication

- Sample members have a great deal of contact
- Sample members are likely to share information on incentives

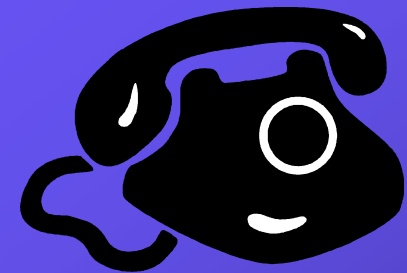
MIDUS Survey



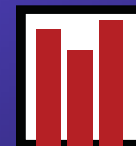
A 30-40 minute
telephone survey
(\$25 post incentive)



A 114 page mail survey
(\$10 pre incentive)
(\$25 post incentive)



An additional
telephone survey on
cognitive functioning
(no incentive)



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MIDUS Survey

Project 1

National Phone and Mail Surveys

MIDUS Survey

Project 1

National Phone and Mail Surveys

Project 2

Diary Survey and Collection of Saliva Samples

MIDUS Survey

Project 1

National Phone and Mail Surveys

Project 2

Diary Survey and Collection of Saliva Samples

Project 3

Cognitive Functioning Personal Interviews

MIDUS Survey

Project 1

National Phone and Mail Surveys

Project 2

Diary Survey and Collection of Saliva Samples

Project 3

Cognitive Functioning Personal Interviews

Project 4

Biomarker Medical Data Collection

MIDUS Survey

Project 1

National Phone and Mail Surveys

Project 2

Diary Survey and Collection of Saliva Samples

Project 3

Cognitive Functioning Personal Interviews

Project 4

Biomarker Medical Data Collection

Project 5

Neuroscience Data Collection

Second Reason Not to Increase Monetary Incentives

Survey Characteristics

- The multi-modal design calls for recruitment of sample for 3 different types of survey within a few months time
- Projects 2 through 5 recruit members from this sample for years to come

Implications

- Increased monetary incentives for initial recruitment into the survey may train respondents to wait for larger incentives at each subsequent attempt



What can we do instead of increasing the monetary incentives?



Special Mailing to Improve Phone Survey Response Rate

MIDUS Stress Ball Mailing Included:

- A stress ball with the MIDUS logo
- A letter requesting the respondent's participation
- A brochure including results from Time 1 data collection
- A color flyer advertising the most recent publication regarding the Time 1 data, including quotes from reviewers about the uniqueness of the survey
- All packaged in a U.S. Priority Mail Box



Special Mailing to Improve Phone Survey Response Rate



Eligibility to Receive a Stress Ball Mailing

Groups that were sent a stress ball mailing included:

(1) Second Refusals

- Non hostile refusals
- Received a previous refusal letter and brochure



Eligibility to Receive a Stress Ball Mailing

Groups that were sent a stress ball mailing included:

(2) Cases that were “Dead Ended” in tracing

- No good number could be found
- Previous mailings to respondent were not returned, indicating a good address

Eligibility to Receive a Stress Ball Mailing

Groups that were sent a stress ball mailing included:

(3) Cases with large numbers of call attempts

- Cases with no contact at all and 20+ call attempts
- Cases with some contact and 40+ call attempts

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Eligibility to Receive a Stress Ball Mailing

Number of call attempts on 1394 cases
sent stress ball mailing

- Average number of call attempts
= 28
- Range of number of call attempts
= 1 through 91
- 30% of the cases had
40 or more call attempts



Results of Stress Ball Mailing

Breakdown of 1394 Cases Sent Stress Balls by Type of Sample

Status Before Mailing	Packets Mailed	Completed Phone Surveys
Second Refusals	542	84 (15%)
Large Number of Call Attempts	602	200 (33%)
Tracing Dead Ends	250	44 (18%)
Total	1394	328 (24%)

Mailed out between November, 2004 and February, 2005

Note: 16 cases were found to be deceased

MIDUS Response Rates Before Special Mailing

Type of Sample	Main Phone Survey	Mail Survey	Cognitive Survey
Random Digit Dial	.57	.74	.75
Twin	.68	.76	.79
Sibling	.67	.80	.79
Total Sample	64%	76%	78%

MIDUS Response Rates After Special Mailing

Type of Sample	Main Phone Survey	Mail Survey	Cognitive Survey
Random Digit Dial	.65	.78	.88
Twin	.74	.77	.88
Sibling	.77	.84	.90
Total Sample	72%	80%	88%

Benefits of Special Mailing

- Improved response rate by roughly 5 percentage points
- Not a single respondent complaint regarding differential incentives
- No evidence that respondents were trained to hold out for a better incentive (response rates for mail and cognitive surveys remained constant with those who did not receive the mailing)



Drawbacks of Special Mailing

Cost

- Each mail packet cost about \$7.00 including postage, materials and labor

Time

- Time required to amend human subjects protocol, order and produce materials, send them out, and wait for response was substantial

Effort

- Required a large amount of staff time to create and order materials, and to prep and send mailing



Mailing of First 900 Packages



9 Staff Members Required to Prepare and Send Mailing



We were fortunate that the Post Office agreed to come pick them up!

Lessons Learned from Special Mailing

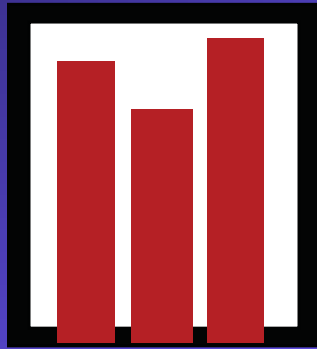
Using other methods besides increasing the size of the monetary incentive can be effective, and will be considered in the future when it fits with the project



Lessons Learned from Special Mailing

- Build efforts such as this into original protocols
- Attempt special efforts earlier in the field period
- Try to tease out what the most convincing part of the special mailing was
 - Stress Ball
 - Letters or brochures
 - Receiving the info in a priority mail box





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Thank You!