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Household Rosters for Phone Surveys

Case Study: RECOVER Phone Survey, IPA Colombia

In a phone survey, asking individuals to give data on other members of their household is a useful way to collect data on larger numbers of people or on specific populations (such as married women or students) but it requires listing household members in a roster to determine who is being described. It is uncommon to include household rosters in phone surveys because respondents typically are not willing to spend as much time on the phone as they are in face-to-face interviews. In a recent project, IPA Colombia found that household rosters can be conducted in a short amount of time: an average of less than 3.5 minutes for households that averaged 4.1 members. This provided an opportunity to target questions to and/or about specific household members in order to create a richer, more comprehensive dataset.

Background

The project was part of Research for Effective COVID-19 Response (RECOVER), a set of surveys coordinated across ten countries to help policymakers understand the response to the pandemic. Coordinating the surveys provided an opportunity for the Research Methods Initiative, a collaboration between IPA and Northwestern University's Global Poverty Research Lab (GPRL), to standardize protocols and auxiliary data (survey metadata and paradata), and to embed experiments and gather other methodological insights.

During the second round of data collection of the RECOVER survey in Colombia, the team added a household roster to target key questions to specific household members. The team needed to minimize time spent on the roster to allow enough time for the substantive questions (see text box). Refining household roster protocols for computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) can lead to improvements or even innovations in:

- Asking questions to individual household conditional on responses (e.g. about income, education, etc.)
- Targeting and/or random selection of household respondents for interventions
- Richer datasets than a traditional phone survey typically generates

Household Roster

The SurveyCTO survey form for this round of data collection included a new household roster module that asked the minimum amount of data to target questions on income, employment, business ownership, work hours, and educational attainment. To do so, it included the following questions:

- Name, age, and gender identity of household members
- Household role for the household head and spouse

The new roster module took an average of less than 3.5 minutes with an average household size of 4.1 members, a short amount of time for the data it yielded.

However, qualitative feedback on the shortened module revealed that it still felt repetitive to respondents. It tried to distinguish between work performed for a respondent-owned business, for a non-owned business, and as unpaid labor during the pandemic. Further research is needed to determine if there is a tradeoff between obtaining this information and increased sample retention.

Example Targeted Survey Items

The household roster made it possible to ask these questions:

- During February 2020, did *[household member]* work for someone else for pay?
- Before the National Quarantine, was *[household member]* involved in university, school or daycare?
- On average over the past 7 days, other than educational/h school and leisure activities which of the following activities did *[household member]* spend the most time on?

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IPA's phone survey methods case studies are part of a series on best practices on implementing surveys using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) and other remote survey modes. These case studies are made possible with the generous support from and collaboration with Northwestern University's Global Poverty Research Lab (GPRL).

Case Study: Household Rosters for Phone Surveys in Colombia

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