

Gemini Project: Redesigning the Consumer Expenditure Surveys

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Developing and Testing an Online Diary Survey:
Memorial Seminar for Jennifer Edgar

Joint WSS/DC-AAPOR Statistical Seminar

April 28, 2021

Outline

- Consumer Expenditure Surveys
- Gemini Project
- Jennifer's Role in the Gemini Project
- 9 Lessons from Jennifer



CE Survey Overview

- CE data consist of estimates derived from two separate surveys:
 - ▶ The **Interview Survey** is designed to collect data on large and recurring expenditures that consumers can be expected to recall for a period of 3 months or so, such as rent and utilities (approximately 5,500 interviews/quarter)
 - ▶ The **Diary Survey** is designed to collect data on small, frequently purchased items, including most food and clothing (approximately 3,000 diaries/quarter)
- Together, data from the two surveys cover the complete range of consumers' expenditures



CE Survey Overview

- CE data are collected for BLS by the U.S. Census Bureau, from consumer units (CUs), in other words people living at one address who share living expenses (in most cases, CUs are the same as households)
- The sample frame is a national probability sample of households designed to be representative of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population
- Respondents report dollar amounts for all non-investment purchases; business expenses and reimbursements are excluded
- Response rates for the 2019 surveys were 54 percent for the Interview Survey and 56 percent for the Diary Survey



Why Redesign (... and what does High's have to do with it?)



Gemini Project Overview

Gemini Project “...aims to redesign the Consumer Expenditure (CE) survey to improve data quality through **a verifiable reduction in measurement error**—particularly error caused by underreporting.”

2013 CNSTAT recommendations addressed three key factors believed to affect the survey’s ability to collect high quality data:

- (1) measurement error
- (2) environmental changes related to new technology and consumption behaviors
- (3) need for greater flexibility in data collection strategies



Current CE Design



- 4 waves of personal interviews
- 3 month recall
- Large or recurring expenditures

- 2 one-week household paper diaries
- Contemporaneous recall
- Small, frequently purchased items



**Consumer Expenditure Survey
Estimates**

CE Survey Redesign

- Phased implementation of the redesign plan to maintain effective design elements and implement them directly into CE's Interview and Diary surveys.
 - ▶ **Online diary:** implement in 2022 (pending results of the LSF)
 - ▶ **Streamlined questionnaire:** phased implementation starting in 2023
 - ▶ **Records focus & incentive (\$20):** to be included in records path
- Postpone single sample design pending changed requirements and/or additional funding and further testing

Streamlined questionnaire features

- Reduce the level of detail
 - ▶ Aggregate to the extent possible
- Records focus
 - ▶ Facilitate the use of records, including a records path for certain groups of questions
- Question order/sections to improve flow of questions
 - ▶ Some changes to the section order, and within section organization



Streamlined questionnaire features

- The streamlined questionnaire with a records focus will not be field tested, but is undergoing cognitive testing and expert review before being put into production in a phased implementation starting in 2023
- Major sections with few or no changes will be released in the first phase in 2023 along with the revised processing system for those sections.
- Sections with more extensive changes will be released in subsequent years



Exploring future enhancements

- Leveraging new technologies: such as receipt scanning and geolocation
- Self-administered interviews: allow respondents to complete the survey themselves without an interviewer visit or phone call (i.e., pandemic proofing the survey)
- Single sample design: on hold, pending research and new requirements
- Adaptive design: measure/monitor indicators of progress to tailor field procedures and data collection efforts
- Gold standard interviews: use a research sample to obtain the highest quality data for benchmarking



Jennifer's Role in the Gemini Project



Jennifer's Role in the Gemini Project

- 2010 – Redesign of the CE Surveys (Survey Redesign Panel)
- 2011 – Redesigning the CE Survey (SRMS Newsletter)
- 2012 – Preliminary Redesign Proposal (Internal Report)
- 2013 – CNSTAT Report Evaluation (Internal Memo)
- 2013 – The Gemini Project to Redesign the CE Surveys (CE Symposium)
- 2013 – CE Survey Redesign Research Highlights (Monthly Labor Review)
- 2014 – Gemini Content Team: Final Report (Internal Report)
- 2015 – Records Interview Feasibility Study Report (Internal Report)
- 2016 – Proof of Concept Test Field Results (Internal Report)



9 Lessons from Jennifer

1. Be present
2. Be reasonable
3. Be a peacemaker and bridge builder
4. Find a lane
5. Make it make sense
6. Vet everyone
7. Connect with people
8. Care about the work, and the people
9. Tell people the hard truth, with a friendly smile



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