Interview Privacy and Social Desirability Effects in Cross-Cultural Survey Research: The World Mental Health Survey Experience

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. World Mental Health Surveys
3. Results (high, middle, and low income countries)
   a) Rates of interview privacy
   b) Rates of respondents with high social desirability scores
   c) Prevalence of outcomes
   d) Effect of interview privacy on
      • Suicidal Behavior
      • Partner Physical Violence
      • Relationship Ratings
4. Conclusion and Recommendations
Introduction

• A common survey practice is to instruct interviewers to conduct their interviews in private.

• However, between 37%-57% of the interviews are conducted in less than complete privacy in the US (Gfroerer, 1985; Pollner and Adams, 1997; Silver et al., 1986; Smith, 1997).

• Most frequent type of third party present is spouse followed by children (Silver et al., 1986; Smith, 1997).

• The main concern of non-private interview settings is the deliberate misreport of information; especially for sensitive questions.
Introduction

• Previous literature on effect of third party presence on reporting sensitive information is mixed:
  – No significant effect: Anderson and Silver, 1987; Bradburn and Sudman, 1979; Silver et al, 1986; Smith, 1997

• None of the previously published studies:
  – Investigated characteristics of respondents that might make them more or less sensitive to third party presence
  – Investigated multiple types of third party: parent, spouse, children, youth, and other adult
  – Studied this phenomena in variety of cultures: party presence may be a welcome feature of everyday life in some socio-cultural contexts but exceptional or intrusive in others
Current analyses focus on 16 countries that collected interviewer observation data on: interview privacy and relationship (of third party) to respondent and respondent’s social desirability score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample Size*</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample Size*</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sample Size*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Income</td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Income</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low Income</td>
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<td>Belgium</td>
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<td>United States</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Part II sample
Interview Privacy Across WMH Surveys

Presence of Third Party During Interview

- High Income
- Middle Income
- Low Income

- No Third Party
- <=Quarter of Interview
- >=Half of Interview
- All the Interview

Relationship of Third Party to R

- Parent
- Partner
- Child
- Youth
- Other Adult

Percent of Interviews

High Income  Middle income  Low income
Interview Privacy Across WMH Surveys

Presence of Third Party During Interview

Percent Respondents with High Social Desirability Score
### Prevalence of Outcomes

#### Weighted Prevalence of Suicidal Behavior, Relationship Ratings, and Partner Physical Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>High Income Countries</th>
<th>Middle Income Countries</th>
<th>Low Income Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suicidal Behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>13.361 (0.542)</td>
<td>7.857 (0.293)</td>
<td>7.149 (0.353)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>4.278 (0.273)</td>
<td>2.911 (0.137)</td>
<td>2.700 (0.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt</td>
<td>4.034 (0.200)</td>
<td>2.521 (0.143)</td>
<td>1.879 (0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partner Physical Violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Victim of Violence</td>
<td>11.319 (0.933)</td>
<td>13.983 (0.592)</td>
<td>9.933 (0.657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator of Violence</td>
<td>13.149 (0.746)</td>
<td>14.224 (0.630)</td>
<td>13.517 (0.865)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Relationship Ratings</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital Relationship</td>
<td>7.262 (0.677)</td>
<td>17.522 (0.800)</td>
<td>10.291 (0.668)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Relationship</td>
<td>6.616 (0.444)</td>
<td>4.722 (0.292)</td>
<td>4.942 (0.465)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A couple of countries within strata did not measure certain outcomes and were excluded from the analysis.

s.e. = standard error
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Suicidal Thoughts

Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicidal Thoughts: High Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicidal Thoughts: Middle Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicidal Thoughts: Low Income
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Suicidal Plan
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Suicidal Attempt

**Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicide**

**Attempt: High Income**

**Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicide**

**Attempt: Middle Income**

**Effect of Interview Privacy on Reporting Suicide**

**Attempt: Low Income**
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Being a Victim of Physical Violence by Partner

Effect of Interview Privacy on Victim of Violence: High Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Victim of Violence: Middle Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Victim of Violence: Low Income
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Being a Perpetrator of Physical Violence by Partner

Effect of Interview Privacy on Perpetrator of Violence: High Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Perpetrator of Violence: Middle Income

Effect of Interview Privacy on Perpetrator of Violence: Low Income
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Reporting Good Rating of Marital Relationship

Effect of Interview Privacy on Marital Rating:
- **High Income**
- **Low Income**
- **Middle Income**
Effect of Interview Privacy and Social Desirability on Reporting Good Rating of Relationship w Children
Conclusion

- None private interviews are more common in low and middle income countries

- About 1 in 5 respondents interviewed in low income countries scored high on scale measuring social desirability

- Effects of third party presence on disclosure of sensitive information vary by cultures and by type of question
Conclusion

• Personal sensitive outcomes:
  – *Low income countries*: Lower reporting in presence of any third party and effect heightened among respondents with high social desirability scores
  – *Middle income countries*: Lower reporting only among respondents with high social desirability scores (i.e. interaction effects)
  – *High income countries*: No such effects; but presence of parents reduced reporting
  – *Low, middle, and high income countries*: Higher reporting in the presence of child, youth, and other adults

• Interpersonal outcomes:
  – *Low income countries*: Lower reporting in the presence of concerned member (either main or interaction effect depending if factual or attitudinal)
  – *Middle income countries*: Lower reporting in the presence of concerned member only among respondents with high social desirability scores
  – *High income countries*: No such effects, but presence of parents increase reporting of partner violence
Conclusion

• Lack of misreporting due to presence of third party in high income countries could be attributed to:
  – Lower taboos associated with outcomes such as suicide and physical violence
  – Lower social desirability concerns exhibited by respondents

• Differences in effects of interview privacy in middle and low income countries could possibly explain the lower/higher prevalence of outcomes
Recommendation

• Interview privacy needs to addressed more seriously in light of its possible effect and the protection of human subjects and informed consent procedures

• Observations on interview privacy measures need to be revised to measure
  – Specific timing of presence (During which instrument sections?)
  – Dynamics of third party presence (Is the third party within hearing range, did they participate in the interview, etc....)
  – Motivation behind third party (Did the respondent request their presence? Did they impose themselves?)
  – Better refinement of relationship of third party to respondent (e.g. Who is the other adult? Did they seem to be close to R)
Reccomendation

• Respondents characteristics that mediate effect of interview privacy need to be collected and analyzed

• Interviewers need to be better trained on how to request privacy

• Effect of interview privacy need to be investigated using more private modes (such as A-CASI)

• Use of validation data is needed to accurately study misreporting
Thank you!
Tourangeau and Yan (2007) literature review:
- Spouse presence does not have significant overall impact on responses
- Parental presence seems to reduce socially undesirable responses
- Children presence does not seem to affect responses (however based only on two studies)

Tourangeau and Yan review article draws our attention to:
- The small number of articles investigating the effect of third party presence on misreporting
- The need to investigate other types of relationship to respondent and its effect on reporting including children, adolescents and others

Most importantly, the effect of third party presence could be influenced by cultural factors due to variations in the norms and patterns of social relations, and the level of economic and social development