IAB-Colloquium
zur Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung

The Quality and Utility of Interviewer Estimates of Household Characteristics in the U.S. National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG)

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Effective methods for repairing nonresponse error are of primary interest to the field of survey methodology, given declining response rates in household surveys of nearly all formats. Post-survey methods for repairing nonresponse error rely on the presence of auxiliary variables for both respondents and non-respondents, and much methodological work has shown that the best auxiliary variables for repairing nonresponse errors are related to both the survey variables of interest and response propensity. Unfortunately, auxiliary variables having these optimal properties are rare in survey research practice. In the first 10 quarters of Cycle 7 of the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG, June 2006 to December 2008), female interviewers performing household screening operations were asked to record their best guesses as to whether there were children under the age of 15 in a selected household (35,258 guesses by 96 interviewers, prior to a screening interview), and whether the selected respondent was in a sexually active relationship with a member of the opposite sex (13,495 guesses by 94 interviewers, after the completed screening interview). Given that "correct" values on these two indicators can be derived from completed household listings and responses to the main NSFG interview, this study sought to examine the amount of error in the two interviewer estimates, and the associations of the interviewer estimates with both key NSFG variables and the propensity to respond to the main NSFG interview, given a completed screening interview. Several significant associations were found, suggesting that these interviewer estimates may be useful for repairing nonresponse errors. However, a small simulation study shows that the level of estimation error in the NSFG may have a negative impact on potential reductions in nonresponse error. The study also discusses estimation techniques used by highly accurate interviewers, the potential effectiveness of a practical strategy for increasing observation accuracy that will be tested in Wave 5 of the PASS, and future research in this area aimed at improving the quality of the interviewer estimates.

Dienstag, 2. November
11:00 Uhr

Sitzungssaal 126a