

Chapter 3

The Problem of Nonresponse

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Many books about survey sampling tell you how the precision of survey estimates depend on the sample design. However, this assumes that data are obtained for every unit in the selected sample. This is rarely the case; most surveys experience some nonresponse. This can affect the survey estimates. This chapter aims to explain how and why nonresponse occurs, why it is important, and what can be done to minimize any undesirable consequences, either by reducing nonresponse at the data collection stage or by statistical adjustment at the analysis stage. Guidance is also included on the calculation and presentation of response rates.

GLOSSARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

Adjustment. A term applied to a number of post fieldwork procedures, such as weighting and imputation, that can be used to reduce nonresponse error.

Noncontact. Failure to communicate with a selected sample unit and to inform the unit of their selection for the survey.

Nonresponse. Failure to obtain useable survey data from an eligible selected sample unit.

Nonresponse error. The difference between a survey estimate and the equivalent estimate that would have been obtained if all selected units had responded.

Refusal. A decision by a selected sample unit not to respond to the survey.