

## DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

# VOLUME 39, ARTICLE 14, PAGES 415–430 PUBLISHED 6 SEPTEMBER 2018

https://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol39/14/ DOI: 10.4054/DemRes.2018.39.14

Research Article

Interviewer effects on patterns of nonresponse: Evaluating the impact on the reasons for contraceptive nonuse in the Indonesia and the Philippines DHS

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# Interviewer effects on patterns of nonresponse: Evaluating the impact on the reasons for contraceptive nonuse in the Indonesia and the Philippines DHS

### Mark Amos<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

### BACKGROUND

Much social science research is reliant on generating data through questionnaires and interviews. Understanding the processes by which this data is generated is therefore vital for ensuring validity of scientific results. Interviewers, as a primary means of collecting responses, are one mode through which the generation of data can be affected.

#### METHODS

This paper uses the reason for contraceptive non-use module of the Indonesian DHS to examine the effect of differential effects of interviewers on response patterns. A cross-classified multilevel model is used to examine the effect of question order on the probability of providing a positive response.

#### RESULTS

The probability of providing a response declines across the module, an effect which is robust to the introduction of controls. We are able to partition the effect of this decline into respondent and interviewer effects by cross-classified residuals in the multilevel model. We find that although significant, the substantive effect of interviewers on the response profile is small and the majority of variation is accounted for by interviewee-level variation.

### CONCLUSIONS

While data collection via interviewers seems to be a reliable mechanism within the DHS, care should be taken to minimise respondent burden to ensure valid responses.

#### CONTRIBUTION

This submission confirms the high quality of DHS interviewing practices, while finding evidence of some systematic effects of data collection on responses.

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### 1. Introduction

Unmet need for contraception has fallen in Indonesia within the last two decades. From a value of 17% in the 1991 DHS, the most recent DHS estimates that 11% of Indonesian women have unmet need, with increasing demand for contraception, the percentage of demand met and the percentage of demand met by a modern method all contributing to this fall (Statistics Indonesia 2012). While this decline is impressive, in order to continue to reduce the number of women at risk of unwanted pregnancy – and in particular in the Indonesian context unmet need for limiting contraception – a thorough understanding of the reasons for contraceptive nonuse is required. While this has been extensively studied in general, the usefulness of existing literature going forward is limited by the fact that reason for nonuse at a population level shifts over time (Sedgh, Ashford, and Hussain 2016). Indeed, this is the situation that has arisen in the Philippines, which has seen increases in the rate of contraceptive utilisation until stalling increases at around 55% since 1995. Further, there is a continued and somewhat intractable use of traditional contraceptives in the Philippines (Marguez, Kabamalan, and Laguna 2017) with the continuity of factors predicting traditional contraceptive use seeming to point to subpopulations of women not currently reached by modern family planning or family planning programmes.

To fully understand processes of contraceptive nonuse, or the use of less effective contraceptive methods, high-quality data is required. Data quality in general has changed internationally (De Heer 1999). While DHS data quality has largely remained of a high quality (Lyons-Amos and Stones 2017), much evaluation has concentrated on demographic data such as age (Johnson et al. 2009; Pullum 2008; Robles and Goldman 1999) or basic health information (Channon, Padmadas, and McDonald 2011; Pullum 2008) with scant attention paid to more complicated data collection modules. Indeed, analysis that evaluates more complex data collection modules tends to find some major quality concerns (Strickler et al. 1997).

A number of respondent characteristics are known to systematically influence the quality of data collected, including the age of the respondent (Johnson et al. 2009) as well as method of recall (Channon, Padmadas, and McDonald 2011). These influences manifest in a number of ways, including refusal to participate in the survey process entirely (Durrant and Steele 2009) or item nonresponse (Singer, Frankel, and Glassman 1983). Additionally, interaction between the respondent and the questionnaire can substantially affect the nature of the responses gathered, with excessively long questionnaires tending to decrease the quality of responses toward the end of the interview through respondent fatigue (Groves et al. 2002). Whilst respondent burden can be reduced through the introduction of skips and filters, it should be noted that this

can introduce systematic biases into the responses elicited (Mathews et al. 2012; Beaujouan 2013).

In addition to respondent effects, interviewers can have a major impact on the quality of data collected. Interviewers systematically affect the rate at which survey respondents are both contacted and agree to participate in surveys (Durrant and Steele 2009), with systematic differences in interviewer success according to age, sex, interviewer's experience, pay grade, and years of experience and attitudes regarding the persuasion of reluctant respondents (Blom, De Leeuw, and Hox 2010; Durrant et al. 2010; Hox and De Leeuw 2002; Hansen 2006; Haunberger 2010). Interviewer characteristics tend to interact with those of their respondents when generating responses, with Durrant et al. (2010) finding that similarity between respondent and interviewer tends to improve survey response. Johnson et al. (2009) find this within the context of DHS data, with the sex of the interviewer and the presence of a translator having marked impact on the quality of data collected. Importantly, interviewers are subject to the same pressures as respondents, with the length of the interview assignment and the expectations of the interviewer playing a significant role in the quality of responses (Singer, Frankel, and Glassman 1983).

Whilst there has been a considerable literature devoted to evaluating DHS data quality (e.g., Johnson et al. 2009; Channon, Padmadas, and McDonald 2011; Pullum 2006), little work has been dedicated to describing the mechanism by which data quality is generated. Where interviewer characteristics have been taken into account (Johnson et al. 2009) by including characteristics of the interviewer on the nature of the response, this has largely dealt with only with issues in basic demographic data – such as age heaping. While an important demographic factor in their own right, these questions are concentrated at the start of the questionnaire and as such are less likely to suffer from data quality issues related to respondent or interviewer fatigue (Teclaw, Price, and Osatuke 2012). Moreover they are relatively simple to conceptualise and operationalise in comparison to later modules, such as the reason for nonuse (Morgan and Hagewen 2005). This paper therefore builds on existing evaluations of data quality in two major respects: first, by establishing the sources of variation between interviewers and respondents and identifying which of these has the larger relative effect, and second, by looking at a more complicated module sited relatively late within the DHS questionnaire – specifically the reason for contraceptive nonuse. The analysis relies on testing the significance of question order within the module: if neither respondent nor interviewers are affecting the responses gained, there should be no statistically significant effect of question order on the response pattern (net of controls). The significant effect of question order is taken to indicate either respondent (Groves et al. 2002) or interviewer (Singer, Frankel, and Glassman 1983) fatigue. Three research hypotheses are tested in performing this analysis. These research hypotheses are formulated under the assumption that there will be influences on response patterns from both respondents and interviewers: from this perspective rejection of the research hypotheses indicates higher quality collection of data, and support for these hypotheses indicates lower quality data collection:

Research Hypothesis I: Question order within the nonresponse module will affect the propensity to provide a positive response.

Research Hypothesis II: Interviewers will affect the propensity of obtaining a positive response within the nonresponse module.

Research Hypothesis III: Interviewer will affect the impact of question order on positive response differently: diligent interviewing teams will mediate the effect of question order whereas lackadaisical interviewing teams will accentuate it.

## 2. Data

Data for this analysis is drawn for the reason for contraceptive nonuse module from the 2012 Indonesian DHS and the 2013 Philippines DHS. DHS is a nationally representative household sample survey, which uses a cluster randomised sampling design. Primary Sampling Units (PSU) are selected based on national level data, with complete enumeration of households within the PSU to create a sampling frame to provide a list for secondary sampling. Within selected households all eligible women are interviewed.

The 2012 Indonesia DHS employed 119 interviewing teams to collect the data. Each team was comprised of eight interviewers: one male supervisor, one female field editor, four female interviewers, and two male interviewers, one for currently married men and one for never-married men. In Papua and West Papua, each team consisted of five interviewers: one male supervisor, one female field editor, two female interviewers, and one male interviewer for married men and never-married men. The 2013 Philippines DHS was conducted by 70 interviewing teams. Each team comprised a supervisor, field editor, and four female interviewers.

More than one interviewing team operated within each PSU, and each interviewing team operated within more than one PSU. A major advantage of this design is that interviewing teams are not nested within primary sampling units: this allows separation of the effect of interviewing teams from the area in which they are operating and is relatively rare in this type of analysis (Vassallo, Durrant, and Smith 2017; Campanelli and O'Muircheartaigh 1999; Schnell and Kreuter 2005). Geographic influences have been shown to affect both the effect of interviewers on the interview outcomes (Durrant and Steele 2009; Durrant et al. 2010; Vassallo, Durrant, and Smith 2017; Campanelli and O'Muircheartaigh 1999; Schnell and Kreuter 2005), but can potentially influence

the responses of individuals due to contextual effects such as the presence of a family planning clinic in the local area (which could inhibit access to contraception) as well as other local geographic effects, such as contraceptive networks (Lyons-Amos, Durrant, and Padmadas 2011; Behrman, Kohler, and Watkins 2002). The cross-classified design removes potential confounding of this nature and allows estimation of the relative size of the effect of interviewer, geographic and individual effects on the data generated.

Within the Indonesia DHS questionnaire, the module for contraceptive nonuse is relatively vulnerable to respondent and interviewer burden. The reasons for nonuse questions come in a list format, which requires the respondent to affirm whether any of twenty potential reasons for nonuse are relevant. Moreover, this comes at the end of the contraceptive use section of the DHS, which uses similar question structures and as such the respondent will be familiar with the list format. Respondent and interviewer fatigue then can potentially manifest in the form of a string of negative responses to questions proffered to speed the process of completing the module, or in item nonresponse (Groves et al. 2002).

The analytic sample for this paper comprises all women with reported unmet need who were not using a contraceptive at the time of survey. Only women with unmet need are considered for this analysis since by definition they will not be using a contraceptive, which allows identification of missing responses due to item nonresponse as opposed to nonresponse due to skip patterns within the questionnaire. The analytic sample for Indonesia comprises 2,956 women. Women within the selected sample are nested within both 1188 Primary Sampling Units (PSU) and 26 interviewing teams, although, as noted already, each PSU will be served by more than one primary sampling unit. This leads to a cross-classified nesting structure with an average of 37.4 observations within each PSU and 1709.1 observations per interviewing team. For the Philippines the analytic sample is 1,871 women nested in 669 PSU (50.2 observations per PSU) and 55 interviewing teams (610.2 women per interviewing team).

## 3. Method and model

The basic model for this analysis is a logistic regression where the probability of a positive response is denoted as a logit function of the question order within the reasons for nonresponse module. This model is presented in equation (1):

$$logit(Pr(positive \ response_{ij})) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 question \ or \ der_{ij}.$$
(1)

In equation (4), the response variable takes the form of an indicator variable, which takes the value 1 if the respondent proffers a positive response to the reasons for contraceptive nonuse and zero if not. The effect of question order is captured by the coefficient  $\beta_1$  which is a linear fixed effect. This operationalises the concept of declining data quality: respondent or interviewer fatigue can introduce a declining probability of responding positively to the reason for nonuse, which would introduce a significant and negative effect of question order.

The variation attributable to interviewer effects is captured by the addition of a random effect indexed by the interviewing team j, which allows for variation in the probability of a positive response according to interview team and is presented in equation (2).

$$logit(Pr(positive \ response_{ij})) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 question \ order_{ij} + u_{Interviewer,i}^{(2)}$$
(2)

This paper makes use of cross-classified multilevel models to separate interviewer effects from the effect of local geography on response patterns, mirroring the approach of Durrant and Steele (2009), O'Muircheartaigh and Campanelli (1998), Durrant et al. (2010), and Vassallo, Durrant, and Smith (2017). The cross classified multilevel model can be written in the form of equation (3) using the notation of Browne, Goldstein, and Rasbash (2001).

$$logit(Pr(positive \ response_{ij})) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 question \ order_{ij} + u_{Interviewer,j}^{(2)} + u_{PSU,j}^{(3)}$$

and

$$u_{Interviewer}^{(2)} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u(2)}^2), u_{PSU}^{(3)} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u(3)}^2).$$
(3)

The effect of the interviewer and local geography is captured by the two random effect coefficients  $u_{Interviewerj}^{(2)}$  and  $u_{PSUj}^{(3)}$  which partition variation in the response between interviewer and PSU clusters. In this case the responses to the individual questions are indexed by *i*, and the interviewing team and PSU are cross-classified at the *j* level. The PSU-level random effect also captures any potential effect due to the complex survey design. Both of these coefficients are assumed to be normally distributed with variance estimated at  $\sigma_{u(2)}^2$  and  $\sigma_{u(3)}^2$  respectively. This model is a variance partition model, and allows us to test the relative importance of interviewer effects in relation to all other sources of variation. Control variables can be added to this model – equation (4) – through the inclusion of the control vector  $\mathbf{z}_{ij}$ .

$$logit(Pr(positive \ response_i)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 question \ order_{ij} + \boldsymbol{\beta}' \boldsymbol{z}_{ij} + u_{Interviewer,j}^{(2)} + u_{PSU,j}^{(3)}$$
(4)

and

$$u_{Interviewer}^{(2)} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u(2)}^2), u_{PSU}^{(3)} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u(3)}^2).$$

This model can be extended in the form of equation (5) to account for variation in the effect of question order by interviewing team.

$$logit(pr(positive \ response_{ij})) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 question \ order_{ij} + u_{Interviewer,j}^{(2)} + u_{PSU,j}^{(3)} + u_{Interviewer,j}^{(4)} question \ order$$

and

$$\begin{bmatrix} u^{(2)} \\ u^{(4)} \end{bmatrix} \sim N(0, \Omega_u) \text{ with } \Omega_u \sim \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_{u(2)}^2 \\ \sigma_{u(2), u(4)} & \sigma_{u(4)}^2 \end{bmatrix} \text{ and } u^{(3)}_{PSU} \sim N(0, \sigma_{u(3)}^2).$$
(5)

This model is defined similarly to equation (4), save for the addition of the random coefficient  $u^{(4)}$  which allows the effect of the question order to vary depending on the interviewing team. The distribution of the interviewer random effects is now multivariate normal according to the variance-covariance matrix  $\Omega_u$ , with the random intercept captured by the variance  $\sigma_{u(2)}^2$  and the random slope by  $\sigma_{u(4)}^2$  which have covariance  $\sigma_{u(2),u(4)}$ .

The modelling strategy builds successive models to test the research aims and research hypotheses. The modelling procedure is conducted for each data set under analysis: results are presented for Indonesia and the Philippines in turn. Model I is a simple logit model which simply tests whether the effect of question order on the probability of a positive response is statistically significant. This allows us to test the validity of research hypothesis I.

Random effects are then introduced into the model to test whether there is a significant impact of area and interviewer-levels effects. Ideally, fixed-effect controls would be introduced before the random effects, however, this leads to nonconvergent solutions. This analysis therefore follows the recommendations of Browne (2017) and establishes a working random component of the model first, before adding fixed-effect

controls. Model II therefore comprises a random intercept model with the random part reflecting variation at the interviewer level. Model III extends this by introducing a cross-classification with random intercepts for both interviewer and primary sampling unit, which should remove any confounding between area level characteristics and interviewer characteristics (Vassallo, Durrant, and Smith 2017). This model allows us to test research hypothesis II.

Model IV introduces fixed part controls for age, education, marital status, and wealth. This establishes whether both the effects of question order, and the clustering by both PSU and interview team are robust to woman-level determinants of contraceptive nonuse. Finally, Model V introduces a random slope for question order by interviewing team. This allows us to test research hypothesis III by allowing the effect of question order to depend on the interviewing team collecting data.

Model I is estimated using regression function in Stata 13.0 for Windows. All multilevel modelling is conducted in MLwiN 2.36 for Windows (Charlton et al. 2017) via the runmlwin function in Stata (Leckie and Charlton 2013). For model II to model IV, models are estimated via MCMC using 10000 samples with a 2000 sample burn in with initial values taken from models estimated using second order penalised quasi-likelihood. This follows the recommendation of Browne (2017) which advises the re-estimation of binary response models using MCMC since iterative (such as IGLS or RIGLS) estimation is likely to create downward bias variance estimates. Model V was also estimated using MCMC with 10000 samples and a 2000 sample burn in, but initial values were taken from a bespoke input matrix since second-order PQL gave nonpositive definite starting values.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1 Indonesia

Results of the modelling procedure are presented in Table 1. In initial data exploration it was found that a linear trend for the effect of question order provided the best fitting model, with terms for question order squared and cubed providing no improvement in model fit based on likelihood ratio tests.

Parameter	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Fixed part parameters					
Question order	-0.15**	-0.014**	-0.015**	-0.014**	-0.009
	(-0.020.006)	(-0.0230.007)	(-0.0230.007)	(-0.0230.007)	(-0.057 - 0.049)
Respondent over 30				-0.054	-0.059
				(-0.163 - 0.536)	(-0.163 - 0.0429)
Secondary or higher				0.036	0.040
education				(-0.0680.149)	(-0.063 - 0.147)
Currently married				-0.139	-0.126
				(-0.388 -0.106)	(-0.378 - 0.186)
Rich or richest wealth quintile				-0.085	-0.084
				(-0.196 - 0.024)	(-0.184 - 0.023)
Constant	-3.08	-3.09	-3.09	-2.87	-2.96
Random part parameters					
Variance (PSU)			0.002	0.001	0.002
			(0.001 - 0.006)	(0.000 -	(0.000 -
				0.003)	0.005)
Variance (Interviewer)		0.0025	0.002	0.002	0.130
		(0.000 - 0.010)	(0.000 - 0.007)	(0.000 - 0.009)	(0.052 - 0.284)
Variance (Question order)					0.028
					(0.016 - 0.049)
Covariance (Interviewer,					-0.009
question order)					(-0.042 - 0.143)

#### Table 1: Estimated models from multilevel cross-classified regression for probability of positive response for Indonesia

Notes: Model II–V based on 10000 MCMC sample with 2000 sample burning. Starting values from 2<sup>nd</sup> order penalised quasilikelihood estimates for models II–IV, and from bespoke input matrix for model V. Figure in (parentheses) indicate 95% credible intervals.

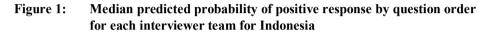
\*\* denotes p<0.01, \* denotes p<0.05, based on overlap of credible intervals of null value.

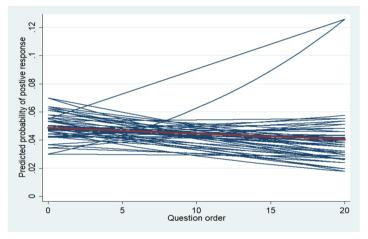
Model I finds a significant effect of question order on the probability of providing a positive response to a reason for nonuse (p<0.01). This effect is negative, indicating the probability of providing a positive response declines with increasing order. This is consistent with research hypothesis I: there is an effect of question order on the responses and the data generated.

Model II includes a random intercept at the interviewer level, while model III extends this model to include a random intercept at the PSU level. In both cases, the fixed effect for question order is statistically significant and relatively unaffected in magnitude compared to model I. Interviewer-level effects are significant and robust to the introduction of PSU-level random effects, indicating an interviewer influence on the responses generated. That said, the substantive size of these effects is trivial. Using a latent variable approximation with the woman-level variance set to  $\frac{\pi^2}{3}$ , the estimated variance partition coefficient for the interviewer-level effects is less than 1%. Similar results are obtained with the introduction of woman-level fixed-effect controls: the fixed effect for question order remain significant and negative, and the random effects for the interviewer effect remain significant but small.

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Model V includes a random slope to account for differential effects of interviewers on the effect of question order. This random coefficient, again, is significant but relatively small in magnitude. This is reflected in the predicted probabilities of a positive response presented in Figure 1. Each blue line denotes the slope for one interviewer team, with the population average presented in red. Overall, there is little deviation from the population line, with most interview teams clustering around the overall downward trend. There are only two major outliers, both of whom show relatively rapid increases in the probability of positive responses with increasing question order.





#### 4.2 The Philippines

Table 2 presents the estimated models for the Philippines. Model I finds a statistically significant effect for question order on the response probability, although it is smaller in magnitude than the comparable model using Indonesian data. The significant effect of the question order is maintained after including variation for both interviewer team (model II) and PSU (model III). Again, the degree of variation attributable to these higher-order clusters is exceptionally small in terms of substantive effect – the percentage attributable to interviewer-level variation is in the region of 0.07%. The effect of question order is also robust to the introduction of control variables: model IV

retains a significant effect of question order on the probability of a positive response even after the introduction of other fixed effects.

Table 2:	Estimated models from multilevel cross-classified regression for		
	probability of positive response for the Philippines		

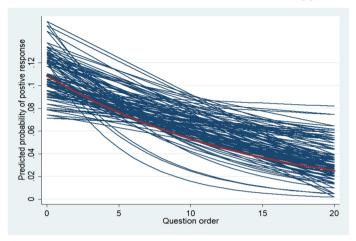
Parameter	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Fixed part parameters					
Question order	-0.059**	-0.059**	-0.059**	-0.059**	-0.077**
	(-0.067 - 0.052)	(-0.0670.052)	(-0.0670.051)	(-0.0670.052)	(-0.1090.046)
Respondent over 30				0.062	0.071
				(-0.040 - 0.169)	(-0.041 - 0.177)
Secondary or higher education				-0.084	-0.091
				(-0.193 - 0.028)	(-0.202 - 0.010)
Currently married				-0.010	-0.018
				(-0.117 - 0.094)	(-0.121 - 0.086)
Rich or richest wealth quintile				-0.027	-0.035
				(-0.125 - 0.072)	(-0.138 - 0.060)
Constant	-2.17	-2.17	-2.17	-2.13	-2.10
Random part parameters					
Variance (PSU)			0.002	0.001	0.001
			(0.001-0.003)	(0.000 - 0.004)	(0.000 – 0.003)
Variance (Interviewer)		0.001	0.001	0.001	0.108
		(0.000 - 0.004)	(0.000 - 0.005)	(0.000 - 0.005)	(0.055 – 0.190)
Variance (Question order)					0.015
					(0.010 - 0.023)
Covariance (Interviewer,					-0.011
question order)					(-0.027 - 0.001)

Notes: Model II–V based on 10000 MCMC sample with 2000 sample burning. Starting values from  $2^{nd}$  order penalised quasi-likelihood estimates for models II–IV, and from bespoke input matrix for model V. Figure in (parentheses) indicate 95% credible intervals.

\*\* denotes p<0.01, \* denotes p<0.05, based on overlap of credible intervals of null value.

Model V introduces a random slope to account for variation in the trajectory of positive response probabilities. As with previous models, the estimated coefficient is negative, indicating a downward trajectory consistent with fatigue and this effect is significant. Figure 2 presents the estimated median predicted probabilities, and the downward sloping probability of a positive response for the population line is clear. Consistent with Indonesia, there is some degree of variation according to interviewer team. However, in this instance, there are three outlying interview teams evident, and these tend to decrease the probability of a positive response more rapidly than other teams.

Figure 2: Median predicted probability of positive response by question order for each interviewer team for the Philippines



### 5. Conclusions and discussion

This paper evaluates the effect of interviewers on the responses obtained from the reasons for contraceptive nonuse module of the most recent Indonesia DHS (2012) and the Philippines DHS (2013). Three major research hypotheses were tested, first, that the probability of obtaining a positive response declines with question order, due either to respondent burden or interviewer induced question skipping. Second, the extent to which interviewers compared to respondents influence the pattern of positive responses. Thirdly, we tested whether there was a significant effect of interviewers on the effect of question order.

By and large the analysis refuted the second and third research hypotheses. Although we obtain a consistent estimate that there is some variability due to interviewers, the estimated value is so small as to be practically trivial: less than 1% of variability in the response patterns can be attributed to interviewer-level effects in the analyses for both Indonesia and the Philippines. This is in general a positive finding. DHS data quality seems to be robust and the generation of data is generally uninfluenced by the teams collecting it. In Indonesia the only two major outlying interview teams demonstrated increases in the probability of obtaining a positive response with increasing question order: contrary to the expected effect where interview teams responsible for declines in data quality. This should give confidence in the

quality of data available from DHS surveys. That said, the Filipino data produced estimates of outlying teams of interviewers associated with more rapid drops in the probability of a positive response. Whilst this is a relatively small fraction of the interviewing staff, care should be taken to ensure comparable quality across interviewing teams and validation of data quality post hoc. In particular efforts should be made to identify.

That said, a note of caution should be sounded. The declining probability of obtaining a positive response across question order supports the first research hypothesis and is robust to individual level controls, interviewer- and area-level effects in both study settings. The persistent significance of this effect – even net of other determinants of contraceptive nonuse – and the small effect of both area- and interviewer-level effects suggests a degree of respondent burden. This is consistent with other authors, who have noted the effect of DHS questionnaire design on response schedule – Mathews et al. (2012), in particular finding that the DHS is vulnerable to framing effects and that question order can have systematic effects on responses collected. As noted previously, the module evaluated in this paper comes toward the end of a relatively lengthy module with a number of questions in a list format which increases the potential for respondent fatigue. Care should be taken to ensure that the requirements of the DHS interview on the respondent are not too onerous, and that a desire for data quantity does not compromise data quality.

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