Survey research and the quality of survey data among ethnic minorities

Joost Kappelhof
Overview

- Introduction
- On the use of the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic minorities*
- Applying the TSE framework when surveying ethnic minorities
  - The representation of ethnic minorities in surveys.
  - Measurement issues when surveying ethnic minorities
- Surveying ethnic minorities: quality in a broader perspective
- Conclusions
Introduction

- Great need for data on ethnic minorities
  - Some information is available in administrative records, but surveys remain necessary

- But, ethnic minorities are difficult to survey...
  - Often underrepresented in GSS
  - Measurement issues

- Applying the TSE framework to map difficulties
  - Not a full account, but focus is on which difficulties are often amplified
  - Not everything applies for every ethnic group: they are diverse

- Data quality: not only accuracy concerns
On the use of the terms ethnicity and ethnic minorities

- Ethnicity is often used as an explanatory variable.

- 3 problems concerning the terms *ethnicity* and *ethnic minorities*
  - Lack of consensus of what an ethnic group is. Concept of ethnicity is subjective, multifaceted and changing.
  - Measuring the concept of ethnicity. “ethnic” indicators only partly cover the concept and have an unique component.
    - Three classification strands: state-centered model; mosaic model and post-migration multicultural model
    - Different indicators and classifications traditions affect comparability of results.
  - Sensitivity of ethnicity data (in particular ethnic minorities (def))
    - Stereotypes and Racism
On the representation of ethnic minorities in surveys

- Sampling, coverage and coverage-related issue that seem to occur more often among ethnic minorities leading to underrepresentation

- Both in general population surveys comprising ethnic minorities and surveys specifically targeting ethnic minorities.
  - Choice of sampling frame (e.g., national register)
  - Mode-dependent sampling frame (e.g., telephone based)
  - Slow registration or lack of timely updates to the sampling frame (e.g., mobility)
  - Mismatch living conditions and target population definition (e.g., collective)
  - Multiple families living at the same address in a address based sample
On the representation of ethnic minorities in surveys 2

- **Specific coverage issues for surveys targeting ethnic minorities**
  - Lack of direct or usable ethnic identifier in the frame. Indirect identifiers may be available, but lead to exclusion (e.g., c.o.b. excludes descendants)

- **Factors affecting nonresponse among ethnic minorities to a greater degree**
  - Societal environmental attributes (e.g., do not feel recognized by the mainstream society, have different views as to what are important research topics, lower level of trust, a negative perception of the ethnic group by the mainstream society, etc.)
  - Local level environmental attributes in case of interviewer assisted mode (e.g., highly urban areas and big city dwellers)
On the representation of ethnic minorities in surveys (3)

- Nonresponse factors ctd...
  - Socio-demographic attributes of the sampled person (nonresponse correlates: e.g., on average younger, lower socio-economic positions, single parents, non standard working hours, lower educational level)
  - Survey design features/choices (implicit assumptions about the survey process, such as standard working hours, language, length and time of fieldwork period, mode choice)
  - Interviewer (interaction) in case of interviewer assisted mode (e.g., at home patterns, cultural etiquette)

- Post survey adjustment issues (e.g., using a broad ethnicity variable in the weight adjustment and subsequently reporting about subcategories)
Measurement issues when surveying ethnic minorities

- Typical measurement issues within ethnic minority research
  - Ethnicity of interviewer is more an in-group/out-group effect, but mostly gets attention in ethnic minority research
  - Language! (poor understanding and also translation)
  - Family member interpreters, proxy interviews
  - Differences in the interpretation of concepts
  - Specific answering strategies
  - Interview setting: presence of others (not only with ethnic groups, but seems to surface more often)
Measurement issues when surveying ethnic minorities 2

- Response enhancing measures: trade-off

- Focus on measures targeted to reduce nonresponse due to linguistic problems, illiteracy and cultural differences

- Downside: reducing ‘not able’ nonresponse with these measures might increase measurement variability

- When does one outweigh the other? Unclear, but some guidelines
  - The general population or targeting minorities specifically?
  - Need to report on a subgroup level?
  - More structural or more attitudinal topics?
  - Can I take precautions to minimise the potential measurement effect? (e.g., beforehand or afterwards)
Quality in surveys among ethnic minorities in a broader perspective: comparability

- Often survey results obtained from ethnic minorities are compared to other groups, periods or the general population
- Cross-cultural or cross-national survey research: focus is on what can complicate or invalidate the *comparability* of cross-cultural or cross-national collected data → useful lessons to be learned!

What can compromise the comparability?

- Representation: differences of survey realities between ethnic groups that are beyond the survey designers’ control (e.g., differences in coverage issues, nonresponse bias, lack of suitable sampling frame)
- Measurement: three types of measurement bias:
  - Construct
  - Item
  - Method: incomparability of samples, administration bias and instrument bias
Quality in surveys among ethnic minorities in a broader perspective: timeliness and costs concerns

- Timeliness
  - Society is constantly changing, so ‘late’ data loses relevance
  - Target population can place restrictions on timeliness (e.g., the representation and/or measurement using bilingual interviewers instead of short fieldwork period or CAWI)
  - Also relevant when it comes to sequential mixed mode

- Costs considerations
  - Response enhancing measures costs (e.g., translating, recruiting and training, motivating bilingual interviewers)
  - Employing a combination of cheaper modes can lead to a distorted image of the actual costs of the survey (e.g., mixed mode and questionnaire design, monitoring, extended fieldwork period, less information, ftf less effective in terms of return, additional analysis time)
Conclusions

- When it comes to surveying ethnic minorities it is even more important,

  • To highlight the relation between survey design (choices) and how they may affect the measurement and representation of ethnic minority groups because it can offer insight into how accurate a particular survey is or will be in rendering a picture of these groups.
  • To take other quality dimensions (and cost) explicitly into account in the design stage (depending on the goal of the survey or the research question)
  • To take factors into account that affect other relevant quality dimensions in trying to assess how well suited the data are to inform on a research question (fit for purpose?)