



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations

>> FAO Statistics Division

Collecting data with remote surveys

Practical steps learned by collecting Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) data during the COVID-19 pandemic



From face-to-face to telephone surveys

- The **ideal approach** of using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) to measure the prevalence of food insecurity is by implementing it within a **face-to-face well-established, ongoing, government-administered survey**, with the advantage of being more granular (representative at sub-national level), less costly and less time-consuming than creating an ad-hoc survey.
- The global COVID-19 crisis and the lockdown measures in place in many countries made **impossible to implement face-to-face surveys**, forcing institutions to find alternative ways for data collection.
- Despite the many options available nowadays (web-based, apps, social media, interactive voice response (IVR) surveys, short message service (SMS) surveys, etc.), **computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) have proven to be the most common alternative**.
- CATI is also the solution that has been adopted to collect FIES data remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic with the objective of collecting nationally representative data.

Objectives of a telephone survey

- As in any other survey, a telephone survey has the main objective of **producing valid and reliable conclusions about the targeted population** on the basis of the answers of sampled respondents. To accomplish this task, telephone surveys should:
 - first correctly **select participants** from the target population; and
 - second **obtain a valid information** regarding the variable of interest.
- In CATI, these two aspects may be **particularly challenging** vis-à-vis face-to-face surveys
- Special strategies should be adopted to avoid **strong biases** in the results

Challenges and possible strategies to control for biases in telephone surveys

Selecting participants

Telephone coverage

- **Assess mobile subscription, penetration and coverage, and identify isolated areas** (e.g. conflict environments).

Response, participation rate and self-selection bias

- Establish **sample quotas** using the main socio-demographic available variables
- Attempt to overcome within household differences in ownership by asking to **speak to a randomly chosen adult**

Challenges and possible strategies to control for biases in telephone surveys

Selecting participants...continued

Sampling

- Whenever available, use phone numbers from an **existing baseline** (possibly face-to-face) **survey** that had a representative frame and a high response rate. If not possible, use **Random Digit Dialing (RDD)** or other procedures to form random samples. As a last resource, use **stratified phone numbers** made available from telephone service providers or administrative registers
- Compare **socio-demographic characteristics** collected in the survey with the available information from a recently conducted survey

Challenges and possible strategies to control for biases in telephone surveys

Selecting participants...continued

Sampling

- **Compute design and post-stratification sampling weights.** Design weights are computed to adjust for possible underrepresented populations. Adjustments are typically done whenever possible by gender, education, age, household size and area of residence (urban/rural)

Challenges and possible strategies to control for biases in telephone surveys

Obtain valid information

Privacy, confidentiality and sensitivity of the questions

- Make clear at the beginning of the questionnaire that the collected information will be used only for **research purposes** and disseminated only as aggregated statistics

Respondent burden and incentives

- Design a **short questionnaire** possibly not exceeding 15 minutes
- Provide a telephone **credit recharge incentive** when the call is completed

Language/dialect/cultural/sex/religion respondent-enumerator matching

- Establish clear rules and mechanisms with the service provider to guarantee a **social and linguistic matching** between respondents and enumerators

Challenges and possible strategies to control for biases in telephone surveys

Obtain valid information...continued

Reporting bias

- **Train enumerators** on the purpose of the survey and the intended meaning of the questions.
- During (and after) data collection, run weekly **data quality checks** with the available information. Data quality checks by enumerator and sub-population groups are run to spot possible issues in the data collection process. These include:
 - Internal consistency checks: for example, **unexpected response patterns by enumerator**
 - External consistency checks: for example, **alignment of the distribution by education or wealth to the official statistics in the country**

Operationalize the telephone survey

Select the service provider

- Prepare and launch an expression of interest to assess the market
- Prepare and launch the tender for short or long term agreements
- Select the service provider
- Alternatively, already existing Long Term Agreement (LTA) between an UN agency and the service provider can be used to contract the company (within the terms defined by the LTA)

Prepare the data collection

- Define the workplan
- Develop the questionnaire, translate it and script it
- Train enumerators
- Define the sample design and the interview protocol to be followed by the service provider
- Test the questionnaire

Operationalize the telephone survey

Collect the data

- Define a data quality check protocol
- Collect the data
- Implement on a regular (weekly) bases the data quality check protocol

Close the agreement

- Clean the final dataset
- Possibly in collaboration with the service provider, develop design and post stratification sampling weights
- Perform the last data quality check and verify that all the established (geographic/social/linguistic etc.) quotas have been attended
- Close the agreement



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Thank you very much!

