

Millennium Cohort Study Age 17 web-boost survey

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Introduction

The main stage fieldwork of the Millennium Cohort Study Age 17 Survey finished in March 2019. This sweep was conducted primarily face-to-face and involved an interview, self-completion questionnaire and a cognitive assessment with cohort members. Interviewers also measured their height, weight and body fat percentage, and collect their consent for a range of administrative data linkages. After the visit, cohort members were asked to complete a web survey. Parents were also asked to fill in a short questionnaire about the cohort member during the visit, and invited to complete a web questionnaire. A wide range of best practice measures were employed during fieldwork to maximise response, including reissuing refusals and non-contacts.

Response rates, at 73.3%, were slightly lower than expected, driven in part by high levels of refusals. It was therefore decided to conduct a non-response follow-up by web to boost the overall response rates. The study considered it particularly important to engage cohort members at this stage in their lives, on the cusp of transition to adulthood. It was also deemed important to collect up to date contact details from them, to enable the study to continue to follow them in the future. Finally, it was considered an excellent way to re-engage the emigrant sample (N=132) in the study.

In order to achieve this, we designed a web survey to collect data from cohort members who had not participated in the main stage of the Age 17 Survey (N=2506).

Survey design

Content

The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete, and contained questions on a range of topics, including:

- Identity
- Attitudes
- Personality
- Health and wellbeing
- Relationships, sex and pregnancy
- Risky behaviours

Questions were chosen – from among the complete Age 17 cohort member questionnaire content - on the basis of their scientific and policy importance. Cohort members were also asked to provide up to date contact information, for the purpose of future contact from the study.

Programming

The survey was programmed by Ipsos MORI, the fieldwork provider for the Age 17 Survey. In order to maximise response, it was designed to be device-agnostic, and so was accessible via smartphones, tablets, laptops and PCs, and on a variety of operating systems.

Implementation

Fieldwork for the web-boost survey took place between April and May 2019. A soft-launch approach was implemented, whereby 500 cases were released in one batch in early April to test procedures and ensure complaints were not generated by this approach. Following the success of this pilot, the remaining cases were approached to participate in early May.

Cohort members were invited to take part in the survey via a letter sent directly to them. Two days later, they received an email invitation. Where only a postal address or an email address was known, only a letter or an email was sent, as applicable. A bespoke version of the letter and email was created for the emigrant sample.

Letters contained a URL that directed respondents to the web survey, as well as a unique ID, required to login and do the survey. Emails contained a unique link for the respondent to click on and access the questionnaire, without needing to enter an ID.

A study-branded badge was included with the invitation letter.

One week after the invitation letter was sent cohort members who had yet to complete the online questionnaire, and for whom we had a postal address, were sent a reminder postcard asking them to go online and fill in the survey. The postcard contained a link to the survey and a reminder of the unique ID, and was sent contained within an envelope.

The web-boost survey generated no complaints from cohort members.

Participants

Only cohort members, and not their parents, were eligible to complete the boost questionnaire. Those with the following outcomes from the Age 17 Survey were included:

- Untraced movers for whom we held an email address for the cohort member
- Non-contact cases, i.e. those whom an interviewer was unable to contact (N=604)
- All refusers, including office refusals (N=1,251)
- Cases where household interview and/or the parent interview were done, but the cohort member had not taken part (N=519)

Additionally, cohort members who we knew had emigrated and for whom we had either a reasonably complete address or an email address were invited to participate (N=132).

The following cases were not included:

- Permanent refusals

- Cases with an institutional address, for which there was no cohort member email address

A total of 2,506 cases were invited to take part in the web survey. These cases were split into three distinct types: 1) UK cohort members whose family had not completed the household interview (HH interview) at the Age 17 Survey, 2) UK cohort members who had not participated at the Age 17 Survey but whose family had completed the household interview, and 3) the emigrant sample, who were known to be living outside the UK.

Response rates

A total of 253 cohort members either fully or partially completed the web survey, which equates to a response rate of 10.1%. Table 1 details the outcomes of the survey split by the three sample types. Table 2 shows the outcomes of the survey split by sweep of last participation.

Given that the target sample for this survey were those who had either refused at the Age 17 Survey (including many who had refused both initially and at the re-issue stage of fieldwork), or had been uncontactable, combined with the fact the survey was not incentivised, a response rate of 10.1% is very encouraging.

Overall, response to the Age 17 Survey was boosted by 1.1% by the web survey, taking the final response rate to 74.4%.

Table 1: Survey outcomes by sample type

Outcome	UK only sample – without HH interview	UK only sample – with HH interview	Emigrant sample	All sample
Fully productive	165	33	39	237
<i>Non-contact at main stage</i>	54	n/a	n/a	
<i>Refusal at main stage</i>	106	n/a	n/a	
<i>Untraced mover at main stage</i>	5	n/a	n/a	
<i>HH interview only at main stage</i>	n/a	33	n/a	
Partially productive	12	1	3	16
<i>Non-contact at main stage</i>	4	n/a	n/a	
<i>Refusal at main stage</i>	8	n/a	n/a	
<i>Untraced mover at main stage</i>	0	n/a	n/a	
<i>HH interview only at main stage</i>	n/a	1	n/a	
Survey started	7	2	2	11
<i>Non-contact at main stage</i>	3	n/a	n/a	
<i>Refusal at main stage</i>	3	n/a	n/a	
<i>Untraced mover at main stage</i>	1	n/a	n/a	
<i>HH interview only at main stage</i>	n/a	2	n/a	
Unproductive (not started)	1671	483	88	2242
<i>Non-contact at main stage</i>	496	n/a	n/a	
<i>Refusal at main stage</i>	1134	n/a	n/a	
<i>Untraced mover at main stage</i>	41	n/a	n/a	
<i>HH interview only at main stage</i>	n/a	483	n/a	
Total issued sample	1855	519	132	2,506

Table 2: Survey outcomes by last sweep participated in

Outcome	UK only sample – without HH interview	UK only sample – with HH interview	Emigrant sample	All sample
Fully productive	165	33	39	237
<i>Last participated at Sweep 1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 4</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 5</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 6</i>	<i>108</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Partially productive	12	1	3	16
<i>Last participated at Sweep 1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 2</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 4</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Survey started	7	2	2	11
<i>Last participated at Sweep 1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 4</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 5</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
Unproductive (not started)	1671	483	88	2242
<i>Last participated at Sweep 1</i>	<i>35</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 2</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>n/a</i>	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 3</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>n/a</i>	

<i>Last participated at Sweep 4</i>	<i>154</i>	<i>29</i>	n/a	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 5</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>89</i>	n/a	
<i>Last participated at Sweep 6</i>	<i>919</i>	<i>340</i>	n/a	
Total issued sample	1855	519	132	2,506

Table 2 shows that whilst the majority of respondents to the web survey had last participated in MCS at either sweep 5 or 6 (age 11 or 14), 17 cohort members who had not participated since they were seven or younger fully completed the web survey.

Conclusions

An additional 253 cohort members took part via the web-boost survey who had not taken part in the main stage of the Age 17 Survey. The majority (64%) of web respondents had declined to participate in the interview at home, but a considerable proportion of them (33%) had not been contactable by interviewers at the main survey.

This shows that a web non-response follow-up was an effective way to increase response rates in the Age 17 Survey of the Millennium Cohort Study, taking the final response rate from 73.3% to 74.4%. It indicates that for some cohort members taking part online may be a preferred method compared with an interviewer visit – evidenced by the fact that some cohort members who had not taken part in the study in many years participated in the web survey. It also shows that whilst some cohort members move home and do not notify the study, or are simply not contactable at their home address, online contact offers a valuable way of keeping in touch with them.