

Web survey in MCS and design of annual web-mailing

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Summary

Project overview

The main aim of this project was to build the evidence base regarding incorporating further use of web surveys in the CLS cohort studies. It had three main elements: a short web-boost survey within the MCS age 17 sweep in order to increase overall response to the study sweep, the design of an annual web-survey including an incentives experiment for future implementation in MCS, and scoping work on developing the technical capability for CLS to conduct web surveys in-house. All of this work was completed as planned, and we have additionally designed a small web-survey full feasibility test to be carried out on Next Steps as part of the between-sweep mailing in July/August 2019.

We outline the methods and findings for each of these elements separately below, and then summarise the next steps and recommendations arising from this work. Separate reports are provided for each of these three elements.

MCS Age 17 Web-boost survey

Methods

This element comprised of a web-boost survey designed to increase response rates in the MCS Age 17 survey. The main stage fieldwork for the survey finished in March 2019. We designed a web survey to collect data from cohort members who had not participated (N=2506). It was a short survey, approximately 15 minutes, and contained questions on a range of topics as well as collection of contact details, with the content taken from the cohort member questionnaires administered in the main survey. The web-boost survey was

implemented successfully in April and May 2019 by Ipsos MORI, the fieldwork contractor the Age 17 survey.

Findings

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, approximately 10% of the target sample for the web-boost. These additional cases increased the final response rate in the Age 17 Survey from 73.3% to 74.4%. These findings show that a web non-response follow-up was an effective way to increase response rates in MCS.

MCS design of annual web survey

Methods

This comprised of the design of an annual web-survey, including an incentives experiment for future implementation in MCS. The initial design work comprised planning the scope, broad content and timetable for the first annual web-survey in MCS, and designing a incentives experiment. It includes a brief literature review on the use of incentives, and was informed by findings of the two other elements of this work package, and a broader literature review on incentives conducted as part of work package 5 (survey methods).

Findings

We plan to conduct the web-survey in-house using Qualtrics software towards the end of 2019. It will consist of a 20-minute questionnaire, and all cohort members who were issued for the age 17 survey will be asked to complete it (excluding those who have since permanently withdrawn from the study), approximately 13,500 cohort members. It will incorporate an experiment around incentives, to understand how to maximise response to the survey through their use. We currently expect the incentive to be conditional on completion of the survey, and for the value of the incentive to be the equivalent of £10. At present, our preferred incentive design is to compare the effectiveness of an e-voucher incentive, a charity donation and the option of a choice between these options.

Our planning for this will continue to be developed over the coming months, and the design and planned timetable may change depending on scientific and feasibility considerations.

Feasibility review of conducting in-house web surveys

Methods

Following some brief initial scoping work, we decided that the optimal way to scope the feasibility of conducting in-house web-surveys was to trial this approach in one of our studies. Thus we have adapted the planned annual mailing for the Next Steps cohort due to go out in July 2019 in order to test this approach. The main aim of the survey is primarily to collect updated contact details from study members, but it also includes some other questionnaire items.

Findings

Findings so far indicate that it is feasible for CLS to conduct in-house web surveys, using Qualtrics software. We have successfully programmed a short (5-10 minute) survey for Next Steps, and plan to implement this in July/August 2019. This includes updating and collecting contact information, which is an important requirement. We have also established that this approach meets UCL requirements in relation to information security, another crucial

requirement. However, we have not yet actually carried out any data collection using Qualtrics, and though we don't anticipate any major problems, our experience of doing this will have a major impact on our assessment of its feasibility. Although Qualtrics does lack flexibility in some areas, we don't currently anticipate that this will be a major barrier to using this approach for short, relatively straightforward, online surveys between-sweeps.

Next steps and recommendations

The next steps for our work in this area will be to implement the Next Steps web –survey in summer 2019 and to continue to plan, develop and implement the MCS web-survey in winter 2019. The MCS web-survey will be longer than the Next Steps feasibility test and will incorporate incentives, so will provide a first full test of the design we would intend to rollout if successful. In order for us to carry this out in-house, it will require the development of operational capacity to incorporate incentives, likely administered electronically, and we will also investigate the feasibility of incorporating text-message reminders. Depending on the learning in these initial surveys, we will take a decision whether to carry out annual surveys for both MCS and Next Steps, in combination with annual mailing, in years when a major sweep is not taking place. As NCDS and BCS70 are both in the field with major sweeps in 2020, we don't anticipate carrying out a web-survey for these studies in the near future.