Using Behavioural Science to Improve ONS’s Communication with Social Survey Respondents
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Abstract

ONS sends an ‘advance letter’ to each address selected to take part in one of its social surveys. We carried out a research project with the aim of using principles of behavioural science to improve this letter to increase the likelihood of participation in the survey. Following various stages of testing and review, including focus groups and cognitive interviewing, we developed a new letter and tested its effect in a split-sample field experiment. The letter aimed to be simpler, more appealing and to make clearer what the recipient is being asked to do. The results of the split-sample experiment will be presented.

ONS also developed an 'Influence' workshop for face-to-face interviewers on using behavioural science techniques to gain respondents' cooperation on the doorstep. The principles covered and feedback received will be discussed, as will the challenges of using these techniques indirectly (through interviewers' contact with respondents) rather than directly (through letters sent to respondents). Plans to make wider use of behavioural science principles in the development of respondent materials for the next UK census and for the introduction of online survey data collection will also be discussed.