
**ESSi-NA2 Quality Enhancement Meeting IV:
Rotating Module “Work, Family and Well-Being:
The Implications of Economic Recession”**

Held at Mannheim, 15 – 16 July 2009



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Outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Meeting IV on Rotating Module “Work, Family and Well-Being: The Implications of Economic Recession”

Introduction

The 4th Quality Enhancement Meeting was held at GESIS in Mannheim on 15-16 July 2009. The purpose of this expert conference was to review the conceptual underpinning and the draft template of the repeat module to be designed for Round 5: „Work, Family and Well-Being: The Implication of the Recession”. This QEM constitutes a novelty – and a test for the use of QEMs in the future – in two ways:

- First, the subject was not a problem of survey methodology, but the substantive discussion of a questionnaire module. Given the variety of issues taped by the module, the experts came from quite different fields of research.
- Second, for the first time the members of a questionnaire design team could discuss their module with experts coming from the field of interest. This opens the possibility for increasing the general usage of the modules for the scientific communities because concepts and measurements can be discussed and improved.

In both respects, this Quality Enhancement Meeting was successful. ESS representatives, QDT members as well as the invited experts expressed their satisfaction with the proceeding and the outcome of the conference. By way of recommendation, a list of issues to be considered and discussed among QDT and CCT was produced. In the following, the course of business as well as the outcome in term of recommendations will be presented.

Agenda

DAY I (15.7.09) Chair: Michael Braun

Rotating Modules and Questionnaire Development in the ESS: What we do and why we do it
(Rory Fitzgerald & Eric Harrison)

Work, Family and Well-Being: Overview and plans for the 2010 questionnaire
(Michael Tåhlin, Martina Dieckhoff, Nadia Steiber)

Job insecurity, its measurement and what we might get from the next ESS on this topic
(Brendan Burchell)

Worklife Balance - Experiences analyzing ESS 2004
(Karin Halldén)

DAY II (16.10.09) Chair: Eric Harrison

Family work: conceptual and measurement issues
(Haya Stier)

Subjective Well-Being in the ESS
(Justina Fischer)

What researchers who have used the ISSP might enjoy (and miss) in the ESS module
(Michael Braun)

Recommendations

The meeting started with introducing the participants into the procedures and practices of the ESS. Rory Fitzgerald and Eric Harrison gave an introduction into the specific proceeding of questionnaire design project in the ESS. The representatives of the Questionnaire Design Team presented their plans for the rotating module. Subsequently the experts invited gave insights in their fields of research and formulated demands for a rotating module.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN QDT AND CCT

In the following, the presentations of the participants are summarised very briefly and the recommendations drawn from the presentations and the ensuing discussions are presented in list of bullets.

1. Work, Family and Well-Being: Overview and plans for the 2010 questionnaire (Michael Tåhlin, Martina Dieckhoff, Nadia Steiber)

As members of the Questionnaire module Design Team, Michael Tåhlin presented the module, its conceptual underpinning and the draft template. He stated that the main research interest consists of investigating the implications of the economic recession and explaining the consequences for the domains of work, family and well-being. Subsequently, he outlined which items are to be repeated from the former module in Round 2, which are to be dropped and which new items are to be included in the Round 5 module. There was by and large agreement of which items to be repeated and which items to be dropped. Longer discussions arose with regard to some of the new items presented with a tentative wording. Several issues could not be answered, but were formulated as questions to be considered in the further design process.

Labour market trajectories:

- Ideally, the description of change is complemented by an evaluation (reason, voluntariness).
- Make descriptive items should be more balanced and less recession-specific (taking into account repetitions in the future): “Compared to three years ago, do you now work in a more/equally/less interesting job?”
- How can items be formulated unequivocally? Especially the formulation “had to work shorter hours” seems to be ambivalent. Make sure to capture temporary layoff or temporary shorter hours.
- It is desirable to ask the labour market trajectories also for the other household members: “you or someone in your household”. A household grid (“laundry list”) may help to keep costs low.

Household effects of transition:

- Are the respondents able to give a true account of the development of the household income that is unaffected by the media coverage of decreasing purchasing power? Do respondents have problems to admit a drop in household income (bias)?
- Make sure to capture structural changes in the household that may be induced by the recession: layoff of (young less educated) men while labour participation of women rises could lead to changes in main income positions.

Retirement plans:

- How can voluntary and involuntary early retirement be distinguished?
Are the effects due to recession or to demographic change?
How to integrate the question with the age filter into the questionnaire?

Working time preferences for partner:

- What should be the focus of this question: respondent’s or partner’s preferences? In the former case: what factors influence the respondent’s preferences of partner’s working hours: domestic work, welfare, partner’s happiness, partnership?

Employment and job commitment:

- Specify that people want to “continue *paid* work”.
- Use separate items to ask for general employment commitment and commitment to present job.

Continuing training:

- Ask for the type of training.

2. Job insecurity, its measurement and what we might get from the next ESS on this topic (Brendan Burchell)

Brendan Burchell outlined in his presentation different ways job insecurity can be measured and is measured in different surveys (BHPS, ISSP, EWCS). He distinguishes cognitive from affective approaches, satisfaction and multiple-item measures. He suggests preferring cognitive (“how likely is it”) over affective (“how much do you worry”) formulations. The current ESS version of the question (R3 E52 “How likely would you say that you will become unemployed in the next 12 months?”) is well phrased not only because of the cognitive perspective, but also for the formulation “become unemployed.

- He proposes to ask additional questions to those who answer positively and inquire for the predicted length of the period of unemployment, the predicted loss of weekly household income, the probability of a geographical move, other consequences (like early retirement). CCT members considered including these additional items into the supplementary questionnaire for a test.

3. Worklife-Balance – Experiences analyzing ESS 2004 (Karin Halldén)

Karin Halldén presented analyses women’s access to higher positions, the quality of part-time work and work-life balance and reported her experience using the 2004 module. Her recommendations referred to a number of items missing for analysing the data according to theoretical approaches.

Word-Family Balance:

- Ask for child care for all children, not only the youngest.
- Ask also for parental leave of men.

Work-Life Balance:

- Capture the outsourcing of domestic services.
- Individualize the contribution
- Flexibility to do private things at work (cp. ISSP)
- Include social capital in addition to work and family as life domains

Quality of part-time work:

- Include a question on self-identification as part-time or full-time

Women’s access to higher positions:

- Keep the item of sex of the supervisor (e.g. due to the effects on wages). It is an important measure of gender disadvantage.
- Ask for On-the-Job Training (OJT): length, type, financing

4. Family work: Conceptual and measurement issues (Haya Stier)

Haya Stier outlined the relevance of family work and the measurement of time allocation measures. Based on a comparison with ISSP measures, she criticised the measures used in the ESS in various respects and recommended their revision. She also proposed to capture additional aspects of family work neglected until now, but this may be realised in a different context where family work is at the centre of interest.

Time use measures:

- Ask all respondents for the time spent on housework, at least the single parents
- Useful: separate items for work days and weekend
- Improve the measurement of total time allocated and individual share (problem: respondents need to add up total times first and then calculate shares). Stier recommends an improved version of the ISSP items.
- Improve the categories because they are not suitable for analysis! Consider MTMM on different measures of time use.
- Improve the measure of time spent on child care, e.g.
“How much time are you responsible for child care while the partner is working?”
“How much time do you spend with one of your children while the partner is not present?”

Desirable additional measures of family work:

- Differentiated measures of child care (routines vs. interaction)
- Care of elderly persons
- Family maintenance activities

5. Subjective Well-Being in the ESS (Justina Fischer)

Justina Fischer elaborated on the use of well-being measures in political economy. She considered the central questions for measuring the dependent variable – life satisfaction and happiness – well designed in the ESS. Especially the fact that both items are measured on an 11-point scale makes them very suitable for analysis.

- A measure of financial satisfaction should be added (the specific reference point – personal income or household income – depends on the research interest).

6. What researchers who have used the ISSP might enjoy (and miss) in the ESS module (Michael Braun)

Michael Braun told about his experiences using ISSP and ESS data for similar analysis. He enumerates a list of strong points of the ESS (combination of work and family in the same module; format of item on work hour preferences; measurement of task discretion) but also points to lacking or unfortunate measures. His recommendations suggest improving some mistakes done in Round 2.

- Ideally, items on values and characteristics for work, family and income should be matched
- Add job satisfaction
- Add marital happiness or family satisfaction
- Add satisfaction with personal income

- Reconsider the proceeding in the household income questions in the core (total income and individual share): first, respondent sum up total income and then have to calculate their shares. (Similar problem as with time spent on housework, see above.)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CCT

Throughout the meeting, some recommendations arose that address the CCT specifically:

- ESS should provide a question database to facilitate reference to previously used items. A simple spreadsheet with the English question wording and the question number of the respective rounds (plus differentiation between core and module by font style) would be sufficient.
- The participants pointed to the problem that the number of cases is often too low for in-depth analysis (e.g. in the field of job market research). Since an over-sampling of the module does not seem feasible, the number of cases should be reduced as little as possible by filters and other selection processes.
- Consider testing scales and formulations in the supplementary questionnaire.