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Work Package: 8 - A coding module for socio-economic survey questions

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The four year project (2015-19) is a collaboration between the three leading European Research Infrastructures in the social sciences – the European Social Survey (ESS ERIC), the Survey for Health Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE ERIC) and the Consortium of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA AS) – and organisations representing the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), European Values Study (EVS) and the WageIndicator Survey.

Work focuses on three key areas: Addressing key challenges for cross-national data collection, breaking down barriers between social science infrastructures and embracing the future of the social sciences.

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1. Introduction

Social networks are the collection of personal ties that individuals variously maintain and from which they gain a range of benefits, supports and services. Given the significance of the social network construct for both science and policy, SHARE is developing a unique module for the measurement of social networks that can serve as a model for other surveys. The SHARE Social Network Module (SN) is based principally on the approach that was employed in the National Social life, Health and Aging Project, in the United States, in 2005-2006 (Cornwell et al., 2009). The module applies a name generating mechanism in which respondents identify the people who are important to them and then add information on each person named (via "name interpreter questions"). It also allows the tracing of changes in respondents' social networks over time and is programmed to avoid respondents having to duplicate information provided. This deliverable describes the basic structure of the name generator, as it is developing, and its mode of operation.

2. The Social Network (SN) Module

The evolving SN module in SHARE is delivered as part of the main SHARE interview, using a computer assisted personal interview (CAPI). It is administered early in the interview, when respondents are most alert. The module starts with the interviewer asking the respondent to name the people with whom he or she most often discussed important things over the last 12 months (Figure 1). The respondent is permitted to provide a list of up to six names. Following that, the respondent is invited to mention one additional person who is important to him or her "for some other reason" (Figure 2). Additional information is then asked about each of the individuals listed in the network roster, who will be referred to as "social network members" in this report. The name interpreters include role relation categories, gender, residential proximity, frequency of contact, emotional closeness, the year of birth of each person named, their occupational status and their partner status (examples in Figure 3, 4). Finally respondents are asked to rank their overall satisfaction with their social network on a single global measure that ranges from 0-10 (Figure 5).

In order to save interview time, some name interpreter questions are skipped on certain categories of social network members. Specifically, skipping occurs if the same information is available from questions asked elsewhere in the interview. In such cases, the relevant information is linked during the data processing stage. Thus, respondents are not asked about the gender, residential proximity, partner status, occupational status and year of birth of any of their children who were named in the SN inventory, as the same information is solicited in the survey's Children (CH) module. Similarly, respondents are not asked about the year of birth, occupational status and partner status of their spouse, if the spouse was named in the SN name generator, as that information is available from other modules or from the spouse's interview. Moreover, spouses who lived with the respondent and are named in the inventory are automatically assumed to live in the same residence (residential proximity) and to have daily contact (contact frequency). In a similar vein, respondents are not asked about the residential proximity, contact frequency and year of birth of parents who are named in the name generator, as that information is available from the Demographics (DN) module.

Please give me the first name of the person with whom you MOST OFTEN discuss things that are important to you:

IWER:
 if R cannot name any network member, type 991

Enter a text

SN_SN002a_
SN_SN002_   John

Figure 1: Naming the first social network member (CAPI screenshot)

Is there anyone (else) who is very important to you for some other reason?

○ 1. Yes
◉ 5. No

SN_SN003a_   5   a5
SN_SN003_
SN_SN002a_
SN_SN002_

Figure 2: Question about an additional important person (CAPI screenshot)

Figure 3: SN role relational categories (CAPI screenshot)

Figure 4: Contact frequency with social network members (CAPI screenshot)

Figure 5: Rating the overall satisfaction with the network (CAPI screenshot)

A recent test of the SN module in SHARE enquired about linkage between persons named at that time and persons named in a previous test of the module. Following the identification of the current roster (i.e. the list of persons named), respondents were shown a list of their previously mentioned social network members on the computer screen, by name and role relationship (Figure 7). The bottom of the screen displayed a list with the names of the roster that was just reported. Respondents were asked to indicate next to each of the people just named the number they were assigned in the earlier test of the roster (which is shown at the middle section of the same screen). Following the identification of the person's prior number, he or she was automatically deleted from the list, leaving only the newly added names.

If a person that was previously named was not mentioned again in the more recent test of the SN module, he or she was given the value of 96. Respondents were then asked the reason for not naming that person again. The response options were:

1.   I forgot, should have been included

2.   I moved

3.   Named person moved

4.   Named person died

5.   I became ill or had a health problem

6.   Named person became ill or had a health problem

7.   Respondent does not recognize the named person

8.   We are no longer close

9.   Wrong, WAS mentioned this time

96.   Other reason (specify – open ended question).

Figure 7: Linking social network members ACROSS administrations of the SN module over time (CAPI screenshot)

3. SN Linkage with Financial and Social Support

Unique in the emerging SHARE SN module, persons named in the roster were also linked with information in the modules that queried financial transfers (FT) and social support (SP). The data in question identify who it was that was involved in the exchange of financial and social support with the respondent (that is, who was the giver or receiver of money and/ or time transfers). This allows the investigator to distinguish between support exchanges with members of the social network (i.e. those named in the SN name generator) and support exchanges with other persons (i.e., people who were not named in the SN inventory).

Following each question about the identity of a person with whom the respondent exchanged support, respondents were asked whether the person indicated was the same as the one with the same role relationship who was mentioned in the SN roster (Figure 8). Respondents were routed to receive this question only if the person with whom they indicated having an exchange of support had the same role relationship as a person nominated in their SN roster. If it was a child who was cited as the recipient or provider of support, the respondents were asked to identify the child from the list of their children that was shown in the FT/SP module. If that same child was cited as a social network member, respondents were not asked to identify that child from the SN roster. The identified child will be linked with the corresponding social network member in the SHARE generated variables module as the recipient/receiver of support.
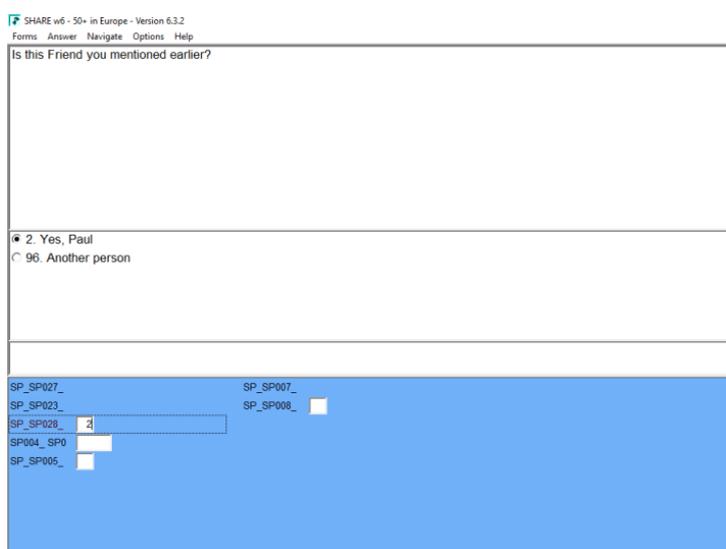

Figure 8: SP / FT linkage to social network members (CAPI screenshot)

4. Conclusion and Next Steps

The name generator has been found thus far to work as intended. Initial examination of the data from the respective administrations of the SN module in Waves 4 and/or 6 in 20 countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) indicates that the tool is working as designed and that it produces the

requisite data on the interpersonal environment of the survey respondents.Thus, for example, we are able to compute such key variables as network size (i.e., the number of persons named), measures of average frequency of contact and emotional closeness, as well as a range of indices that reflect the network's composition, e.g., the proportion of family members, friends and others. The name generator also allows identification of changes in the network, e.g. the number of initially named persons who are no longer cited at a later administration, the extent of new persons cited as confidants, and so on.

The next steps in the work of this work package include the critical examination of the data that are available from the administrations of the name generator toward the derivation of meaningful measures for subsequent application in empirical analyses. We will look specifically at the possibility for the construction of composite measures of social connectedness, such as typologies of network types, thus differentiating the key interpersonal environments in which people are embedded, and social network scales that reflect a summary score of connectedness.

Reference

Cornwell, B., Schumm, L. P., Laumann, E. O., & Graber, J. (2009). Social networks in the NSHAP Study: Rationale, measurement, and preliminary findings. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *64*, I47al of doi:10.1093/geronb/gbp042