

2012 National Health Interview Survey Disability Questions Test Files

The 2012 Disability Questions Test files contain person-level data collected via a field test of six disability questions that were developed for use on the American Community Survey (ACS). These questions were a supplement on the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), beginning in October 2008. The field test was one component of a larger testing effort to develop and adopt a standard set of disability questions to be used with multiple surveys in multiple countries (http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/washington_group.htm). The ACS question set has also been included in the Current Population Survey (CPS), but there are differences in how the questions are administered. The initial NHIS supplement based on October 2008 to December 2009 data was conducted using a split-ballot format, with one-half of the NHIS families receiving the questions as they are administered on the ACS (questions asked at the person level) and the other one-half receiving the questions as they are administered on the CPS (questions asked at the family level). For more information on the 2008/2009 data file and associated documentation see: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/disabilityquestionstests20082009.htm>. For the Disability Questions Tests 2010 file, the split-ballot format was eliminated and only the questions asked at the person level were retained. These questions were asked of approximately half of participating families. The data file and associated documentation for the 2010 file can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/disabilityquestionstests2010.htm>. In 2011 and continuing for 2012, in addition to retaining person-level questions on the Family Core, the same six questions were added to the Sample Adult and Sample Child Cores. A split-ballot format was used: For one-half of the NHIS families, the six questions were asked for every person using the Family Core (section FDB). For the other one-half of NHIS families, the six questions were asked for sample adults (section ADB) and sample children (section CDB) using the Sample Adult and Sample Child Cores.

Background

The U. S. Census has a history of including questions about disability to satisfy a variety of stakeholder needs. The 2000 Census of Population and the 2000-2007 questionnaires of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey included six disability questions: a combined sensory (vision and hearing) question; separate mobility, self-care, and cognition questions; and two independent living questions (based on daily activities and working). Before each decennial census, other agencies and researchers join with the Census Bureau to develop survey questions most appropriate for their needs and to determine if existing questions need modification. The user community had expressed some dissatisfaction with the disability measures on the 2000 Census and 2000-2007 ACS. In response, the Census Bureau and other stakeholder agencies refined the disability questions to bring them into line with recent changes in the definition of disability and the conceptualization of the components of that definition. A work group was formed under the auspices of the Office of Management and Budget and led by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). That work group researched the theoretical approach to the definitions based on the latest national and international ideas about disability, analyzed available data to test their conceptualizations, identified and examined agency mandates for collecting disability data, discussed question content and wording, and sponsored cognitive testing of a new question set. The modified disability questions were subsequently tested in the ACS Content Test of 2006, along with other question additions and modifications (Brault et al., 2007).

The underlying concept behind the choice of questions was to identify the subpopulation that is at a greater risk than the general population of experiencing restrictions in social participation, for example, restrictions in employment, education, or civic life. The objective was thus to measure equalization of opportunities. Four basic domains of functioning (vision, hearing, mobility, and cognitive functioning) were identified that would define the largest component of the population of people with disabilities. These four domains could be used individually or combined in order to assess equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities. Also, two more domains were identified that could be used for monitoring independent living and the need for services: the ability to take care of oneself (self care, in particular, the ability to bathe and dress oneself), and the ability to move around the community (independent living, in particular, the ability to visit a doctor's office or go shopping). The new set included separate questions for vision and hearing, refined the mobility question, expanded the cognitive functioning question, continued the inclusion of a self-care question, and improved the question on independent living. The question about work, which had been included in earlier censuses, was not retained.

The 2006 ACS Content Test was a test of the modified questions, with the results of that testing used to inform the content for the 2008 ACS. The Content Test compared two sets of disability questions: the then current ACS set (called the "control questions"), and a set recommended by the work group (called the "test questions"). A formal evaluation of those two versions of the disability questions was completed and the results used to make the decision to adopt the modified questions for the 2008 ACS. See Brault et al. (2007) for a report on the 2006 Content Test.

Over the past decade, the Bureau of Labor Statistics had also been developing a set of disability questions for its Current Population Survey (CPS). Although that research initially resulted in a question set that was different from the ACS questions, it was decided starting in early 2008 to add a slightly modified version of the ACS disability question set to the CPS. The intention was to use the data to publish employment rates for people with disabilities.

Analysis, Merging with Health Data Files, and Weights

Analysis of the 2011-2012 test data will provide essential information about the nature of the questions and inform development of future improvements. Analysts, for example, can perform cross-survey comparisons of disability prevalence rates: NHIS person-by-person approach compared to the ACS. Results may provide insights into possible survey context effects on estimates of disability. The impact of proxy response can also be evaluated. Many NHIS analysts will want to produce estimates and perform comparisons within key subgroups such as age, sex, and race/ethnicity. This requires merging the Disability Questions Test files with one or more health data files. Information on combining multiple years of data and merging data files can be found in Appendix VI of the [2012 NHIS Survey Description document](#).

Separate weights that take into account the split-ballot design were generated for the Disability Questions Test files. The following weights provided with the Disability Questions Test files are designed to produce annual-level estimates calculated based on data included in the files.

Family Disability Questions Test: WTFA_FDB

Adult Disability Questions Test: WTFA_ADB
Child Disability Questions Test: WTFA_CDB
Reference

Brault, Matthew; Stern, Sharon; and Raglin, David (2007). Evaluation Report Covering Disability. 2006 American Community Survey Content Test Report P.4. U.S. Census Bureau. Available at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/AdvMeth/content_test/P4_Disability.pdf.