Reasons for Late Response and Nonresponse in Surveys of Government Agencies

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Establishment Response Rates

- Annual Survey of Public Employment and Payroll (n=50 state governments and about 90,000 local governments)

- Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Private Sector Establishments
- 2015 Occupational Information Network (O*NET)

- Schools and Staffing Survey (SSAS) 2011-12
Risks Due to Late Response/Nonresponse

- Higher data collection costs
- Longer data collection period
- Lower data quality
- Staff turn-over
- Biased estimates
Research Goals

- Identify reasons for late response/nonresponse among probation and law enforcement agencies
- Assess differences by agency size and other characteristics
- Define tailored strategies to encourage survey participation
Methods – Focal Studies

- **Annual Probation Survey (APS)**
  - Census of 456 agencies nationwide
    - 42 provide state-level data
    - 13 provide data for multiple agencies
    - 401 provide data for a single agency
  - Burden between 30-90 minutes
  - Annual confirmation of agency head contact information for survey pre-notification
  - Web survey, with telephone follow-up
  - 5-month data collection period
  - 92% response rate
Methods – Focal Studies

- Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) Core Survey
  - Sample of 3,500 state and local law enforcement agencies
    - 50 state agencies
    - 2,640 local police departments
    - 810 sheriff’s offices
  - Burden of 3 hours
  - Online search for agency head contact information for survey pre-notification
  - Web survey, with telephone follow-up
  - 7-month data collection period
  - 80% response rate (2016)

![Graph showing response rate by agency type and size (FTE) for 2013 and 2016]
Methods – Reasons for Late Response/Nonresponse

- Codes based on experiential/anecdotal evidence
  - Perception that limited resources (e.g., budget and staff), benefits, and role of federal government in state/local issues might impact cooperation
  - Tested on 2016 LEMAS Body-worn Camera Supplement Survey
    - Verbatim reasons
      - Double-coded into 21 categories, with adjudication
    - Refined for APS and LEMAS-Core
Methods – Reasons for Late Response/Nonresponse

- Final code list
  - COMPLETE — Claims that survey has been submitted
  - DUE DATE — Cannot respond by due date
  - LIMITED TIME/RESOURCES — Not related to due date
  - APPLICABILITY — Thinks survey does not apply to agency
  - NO INTEREST – Uninterested in survey topic/goals
  - NO BENEFIT – No benefit to agency from participation/survey
  - VOLUNTARY – Participation is not mandated by law
  - SURVEY FATIGUE — Agency receives too many survey requests
  - LACK OF DATA (IN PERIOD) — Data are not available during survey period
  - LACK OF DATA (EVER) — Data do not exist or are not maintained
  - INACCESSIBLE DATA – Data exist, but are not easily accessible
  - POOR QUALITY DATA – Data exist, but are of questionable/poor quality
  - CONFIDENTIALITY – Data cannot be shared outside of agency/authority
  - FEDERAL ROLE – Federal government should not be involved in local issues/operations
  - JURISDICTION RULE – Jurisdiction does not participate in research
  - OTHER
  - REFUSED TO GIVE REASON FOR DELAY/REFUSAL
Findings – Overview

- **Late respondents**
  - APS: 165 cases; 129 contacts gave reasons
  - LEMAS: 679 cases; 339 contacts gave reasons (240 “did not receive”)

- **Nonrespondents**
  - APS: 38 cases; 29 contacts gave reasons
  - LEMAS: 572 cases; 310 contacts gave reasons (223 “did not receive”)

- **Five reasons were not cited by late respondent or nonrespondent contacts on either study**
  - APPLICABILITY — Thinks survey does not apply to agency
  - NO BENEFIT — No benefit to agency from participation/survey
  - CONFIDENTIALITY — Data cannot be shared outside of agency/authority
  - FEDERAL ROLE — Federal government should not be involved in local issues/operations
  - JURISDICTION RULE — Jurisdiction does not participate in research
Findings – Late Respondents
Findings – APS Late Respondents, by Agency Size
Findings – LEMAS Late Respondents, by Agency Size
Findings – APS Nonrespondents, by Agency Size

![Graph showing APS Nonrespondents by Agency Size]

- **VOLUNTARY**
- **OTHER**
- **NO INTEREST**
- **LIMITED TIME/RESOURCES**
- **LACK OF DATA (EVER)**
- **INACCESSIBLE DATA**
- **DUE DATE**

% Contacts Mentioning Reason

Agency Size:
- All
- Q1
- Q2
- Q3
- Q4
Findings – LEMAS Nonrespondents, by Agency Size
Findings – LEMAS - Did Not Receive Survey Request, by Agency Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUARTILE 1</th>
<th>QUARTILE 2</th>
<th>QUARTILE 3</th>
<th>QUARTILE 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent, Did Not Receive: 8.1%</td>
<td>Respondent, Did Not Receive: 8.2%</td>
<td>Respondent, Did Not Receive: 8.0%</td>
<td>Respondent, Did Not Receive: 3.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Respondent, Did Not Receive: 10.1%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Did Not Receive: 5.6%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Did Not Receive: 5.3%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Did Not Receive: 4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Respondent, Received: 20.8%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Received: 12.7%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Received: 10.6%</td>
<td>Non-Respondent, Received: 11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent, Received: 61.1%</td>
<td>Respondent, Received: 73.5%</td>
<td>Respondent, Received: 76.1%</td>
<td>Respondent, Received: 81.0%</td>
</tr>
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APS and LEMAS demonstrated differential response rates by agency size

- Many experiential/anecdotal reasons for nonresponse are not borne out by evidence (e.g., no benefit, confidentiality, federal role)

- Reasons for late response and nonresponse vary by agency size
  - Large agency late respondents often report data availability
  - Small agency late respondents often report staff resource limitations
  - Frame address quality did not influence response, even though LEMAS agencies (especially small agencies) often reported not receiving survey materials
Lessons

- Test data availability when defining survey content
- Communication should stress flexibility/support for due dates and mode of data submission
- Confirm receipt of survey materials early
Limitations

- Data are from only two specific kinds of government agencies
- Data on reasons restricted to those contacted
- Analysis to-date only related to agency size
- Solutions are undefined/untested
  - Restricted survey content
  - Tailored survey correspondence/communication
  - Interviewer procedures/materials
Next Steps

▪ Identify/analyze additional characteristics

▪ Develop tailored communications strategies

▪ Conduct randomized tests

▪ Investigate with other establishment/agency populations
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Information on RTI data collection on criminal justice projects: