
Jamie Griffin
Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan
Email: jlgriff@umich.edu

Hanan Hashem
University of Texas at Austin
Email: hmhashem@utexas.edu

September, 2017

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank Vicki Freedman and Katherine McGonagle for comments on earlier versions of this manuscript, Alyssa Buthman for transcription of the audio files, and Minako Edgar, Shonda Kruger-Ndiaye, and Mohammed Mushtaq for coordinating access to the restricted data. This work was supported by the Charles Cannell Fund in Survey Methodology of the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and by the National Science Foundation under award number SES 1157698.

Jamie Griffin
University of Michigan
426 Thompson Street
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
Email: jlgriff@umich.edu

Hanan Hashem
University of Texas at Austin
1912 Speedway STE 504
Austin, TX 78712-1289
Email: hmhashem@utexas.edu

Abstract. The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) uses an interviewer-administered computerized event history calendar (EHC) to collect information about respondents’ past-two-year residence(s) and employment. Research has demonstrated that the calendar method generated better quality reports than conventional interviewing and that improved reports were associated with characteristics of the interviewer-respondent interaction unique to the calendar method. Yet, whether and how interviewers use the EHC to help respondents resolve uncertainty about the timing of life changes is unknown. We coded the interviewer-respondent interaction in a random sample of 103 respondents from the 2013 PSID’s main study, all of which experienced a residential change or employment-related event since the 2011 interview. One-third of respondents expressed uncertainty about the timing of changes in residence or employer and the majority of respondents expressed uncertainty about the timing of periods away from work. Interviewers generally accepted uncertain responses or requested less precise timing information and rarely used the unique features of the EHC to help respondents resolve uncertainty. Our findings suggest that the collection of less precise timing information would likely reduce respondent burden. Future research should experimentally examine whether and which features of the calendar method help resolve respondent uncertainty.

Key words: Calendar method, verbal behavior coding