



Is shorter better? Lessons from India's 2011/12 Household Consumption and Expenditure Survey experiment with two recall periods.

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The length of the recall period (RP) is one of the most important parameters in a Household Consumption and Expenditure Survey (HCES), and is recognized to be a common source of HCES measurement error (Smith et al., 2014). It is striking, therefore, that there is no commonly agreed upon ideal or optimal RP, and that there have been few studies conducted to inform setting the length of the RP. A recent review of 100 HCES (Smith et al., 2014) found enormous variety in RPs; varying from one day (in the case of a daily diary) to 360 days, with a mode of 7 days.

India's National Survey Sample questionnaire in round 68 used two distinct interview schedules with different RPs and conducted the two survey using each interview schedule in an independent sample. Schedule Type 1 using what until that time was the standard 30 day recall period for all 219 food items was retained, and the new Schedule Type 2 introduced the use of a 7 day recall period for 87 of the items, while retaining the 30 day period for the other 132 items. The items for which the 7 day recall was introduced were generally thought to be purchased with greater frequency, and were thought to be under-reported due to recall error. While the differences have been noted in aggregate measures of food consumption, to our knowledge there has been no analysis of differences in the consumption estimates of individual food items.

The presentation compares 7 and 30 day recall responses, analyzing differences in the precision (relative standard error) of the estimates of 87 foods and 9 food groups. It also decomposes consumption expenditures into unconditional means quantities, the number and percentage of households consuming some of the item in question and the conditional mean quantities (conditional upon households consuming some of the item) to analyze their differences by food group, food characteristics and recall periods and discusses the survey design implications of the findings and makes suggestions for next steps.

Keywords: Recall period, household surveys, food consumption, measurement error