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**The 2008 SIPP Event History Calendar (EHC) Field Test:
Respondents' Reactions to the Interview**

Anna Chan

Statistical Research Division
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, D.C. 20233

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The 2008 SIPP Event History Calendar (EHC) Field Test: Respondents' Reactions to the Interview

Anna Y. Chan
Statistical Research Division
U.S. Census Bureau
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INTRODUCTION

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Event History Calendar (EHC) Field Test was conducted from late March to late May 2008 in two states - Illinois and Texas. The goal of the field test was to determine whether the use of EHC methods with a reference period of one year will yield quality data comparable to that of the traditional scripted and standardized questionnaire (with a 4 month reference period) currently used in the production SIPP survey.

SIPP is a nationally-representative panel survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey collects data on income, wealth, and poverty in the United States, the dynamics of program participation, and the effects of government programs. All current SIPP interviews are interviewer administered, conducted with a computer-assisted questionnaire; the first interview is administered in-person, subsequent interviews are generally conducted via telephone. See U.S. Census Bureau (2001) for a more complete description of the current SIPP program.

The sample size for the EHC field test was 1,945 addresses consisting of 1,097 continuing wave 11 cases and 848 wave-8-sample-cut cases from the 2004 SIPP panel. The unit response rate for the EHC field test was approximately 91% (1,627 completed interviews out of the 1,792 eligible cases.) The field test interviews were conducted in-person by 118 interviewers (57 from the Chicago and 61 from the Dallas Regional Office) using a paper and pencil instrument. The survey contained a subset of core contents from the production SIPP survey, including questions about school enrollment, labor force participation, general income, health insurance, and assets. For a more detailed description of the goals and design of the field test, see Fields and Moore (2007).

METHODS

To evaluate the quality of data collected by the EHC method, the data collected from the field test will be compared to production SIPP data collected for the calendar year 2007 and to federal and state administrative records of selected social welfare programs and other characteristics. As part of the evaluation of the SIPP EHC field test, opinions of respondents were sought on the new event history calendar method of data collection. At the end of the EHC interviews, field representatives were instructed to ask one respondent from each household to fill out a two-page self-administered paper questionnaire about their reactions to the interview. Field

representatives also filled out a different standardized questionnaire themselves for each household interview they completed or attempted. This report will present findings from the respondent debriefing. A total of 1,601 completed questionnaires were collected from 1,557 households. Forty of those households had two or more respondents who completed the questionnaires (see Table 1). Even though they were obtained outside of the intended procedures, we retained the 44 “extra” questionnaires in the analysis.

Table 1. Number of Households With Completed Respondent Questionnaires

Number of Household Members Completing Respondent Questionnaire	Number of Households	Total Number of Completed Questionnaires
1	1517	1517
2	36	72
3	4	12
Total	1557	1601

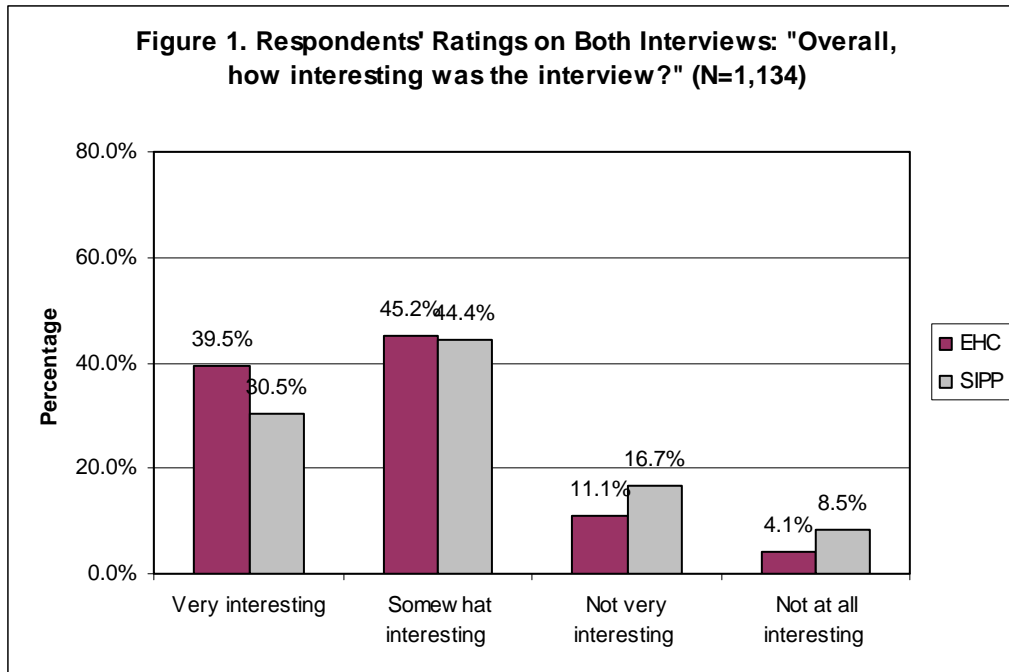
The following section summarizes responses to the respondent debriefing questionnaire. Specific question wordings and the complete response distributions for each item are shown in Appendices A and B respectively.

RESULTS

1. How interesting were the EHC and the SIPP interviews?

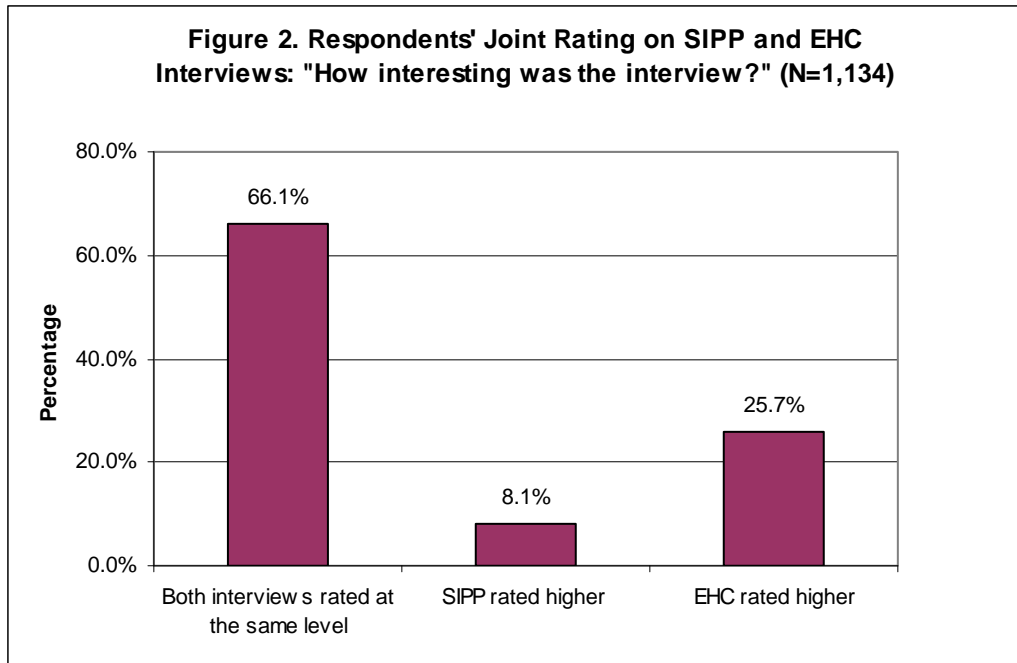
Respondents were asked to rate whether they found the EHC interview to be interesting. Almost 40% of all EHC respondents who answered this question (N=1,578) reported that they found the interview very interesting and another 46% found it somewhat interesting (see question 1 in Appendix A). Respondents who identified themselves as having been in the original SIPP interview a few months before the EHC field test were also asked to rate how interesting the SIPP interview was (see question 4 in Appendix A). Among the self-identified returning SIPP respondents who rated the SIPP interview (N=1,144), about 30% found that the SIPP interview was very interesting and another 45% reported that the SIPP was somewhat interesting.

Figure 1 shows the response distribution of the “interest” questions for returning SIPP respondents who rated both interviews (N=1,134). Overall, the majority of respondents rated both the EHC and the SIPP interview favorably – 85% and 75% of respondents rated the instrument as “very interesting” or “somewhat interesting” respectively.



We used a paired t-test analysis to examine whether the differences we observed between the two interviews' ratings were statistically significant. We restricted this analysis to EHC respondents who had also been interviewed in the SIPP and who provided a valid rating for both instruments (N=1,134.) Responses to the question "Overall, how interesting was the interview?" were coded into a binary variable where 1 denotes at least somewhat interesting and 0 denotes one of the "not interesting" responses. Respondents who had participated in both interviews rated the EHC instrument significantly more favorably. The percentage of the respondents who reported that the EHC interviews were at least somewhat interesting (85%) was significantly higher ($t=8.7$, $p<.0001$) than the percentage of respondents who reported that the SIPP was at least somewhat interesting (75%).

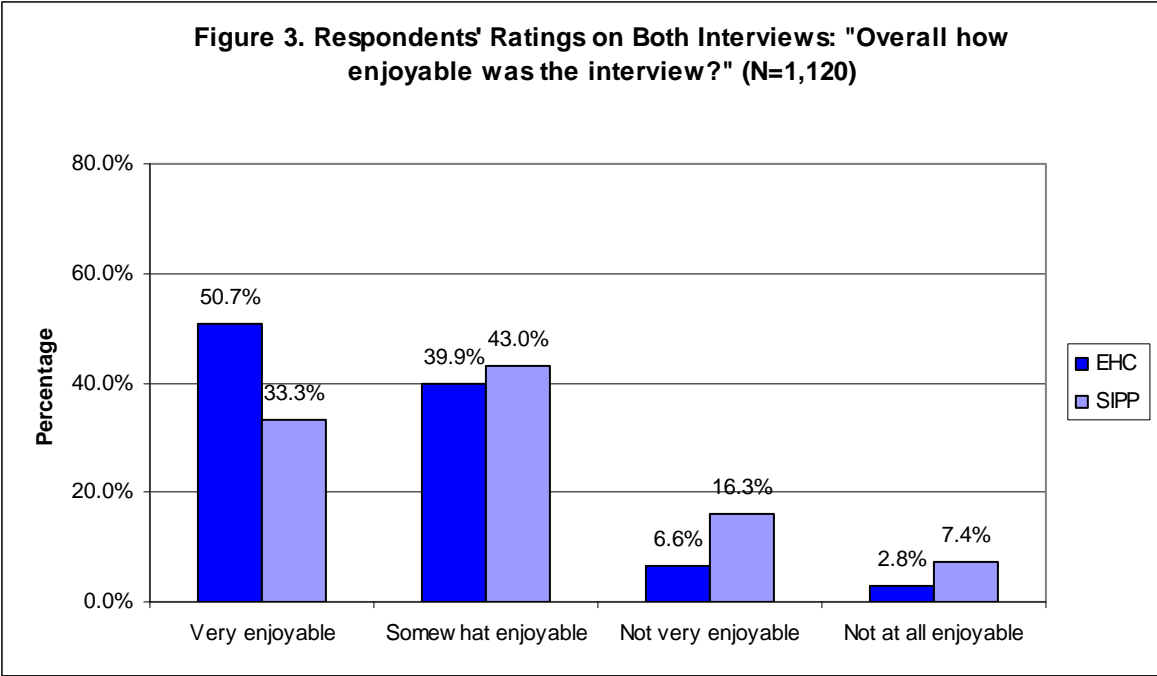
Figure 2 shows that about two-thirds of the respondents gave the same "interesting" ratings to both interviews. Among those who rated the two instruments differently, however, there were about three times as many who rated the EHC interview as more interesting than the SIPP, versus the reverse ($t=34.9$, $p<.0001$).



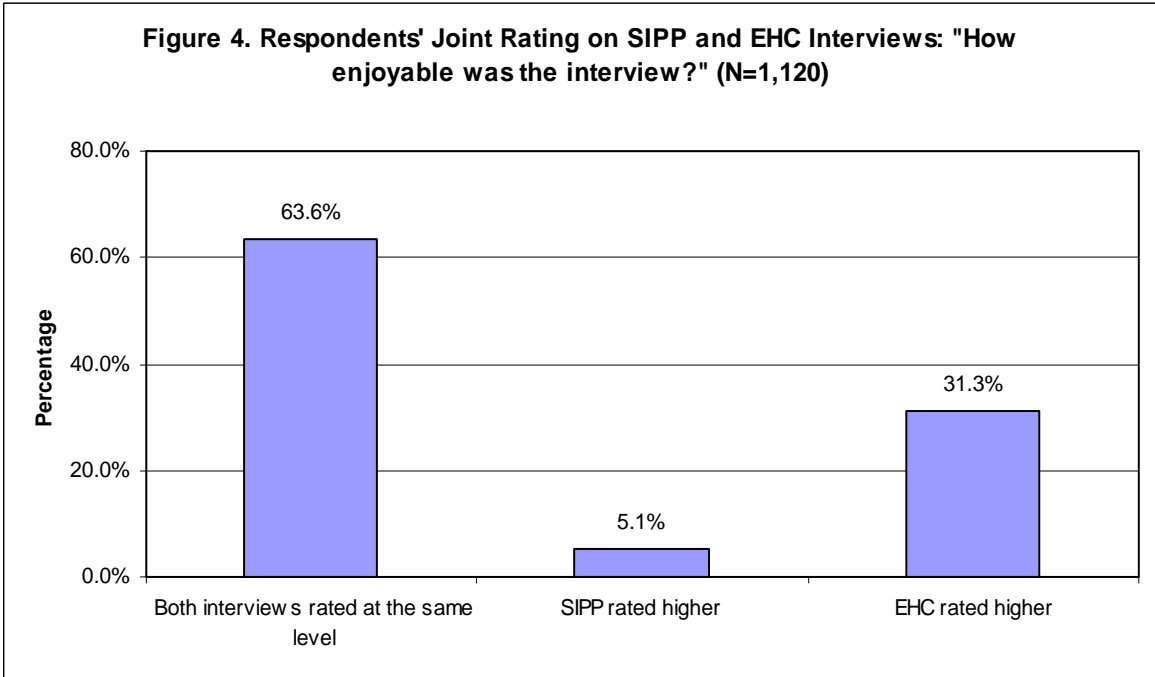
2. How enjoyable were the EHC and SIPP interviews?

When asked how “enjoyable” the interview was, about 41% of respondents (N=1,575) said they found the EHC interview “very enjoyable,” and almost half reported that it was “somewhat enjoyable” (see Question 2 in Appendix A). Respondents who self-identified as being in the original SIPP interview a few months before the EHC field test also rated how enjoyable the SIPP interview was (N=1,132). Of these, over 33% reported that they found the SIPP survey “very enjoyable,” and another 43% found it “somewhat enjoyable.”

Figure 3 shows the response distribution of the “enjoyment” question for returning SIPP respondents who rated both interviews (N=1,120). Overall, the majority of respondents rated both the EHC and the SIPP interview favorably – 91% and 76%, respectively, of the ratings were at least “somewhat enjoyable.” To assess whether the ratings differed significantly, responses to the question were coded into a binary variable where 1 refers to “very” or “somewhat” enjoyable and 0 refers to “not very” or “not at all” enjoyable. Results from a paired t-test analysis show that the percentage of respondents who reported that the EHC interview was at least somewhat enjoyable was significantly higher than the percentage of respondents who reported that the SIPP interview was at least somewhat enjoyable ($t=12.2, p<.0001$).

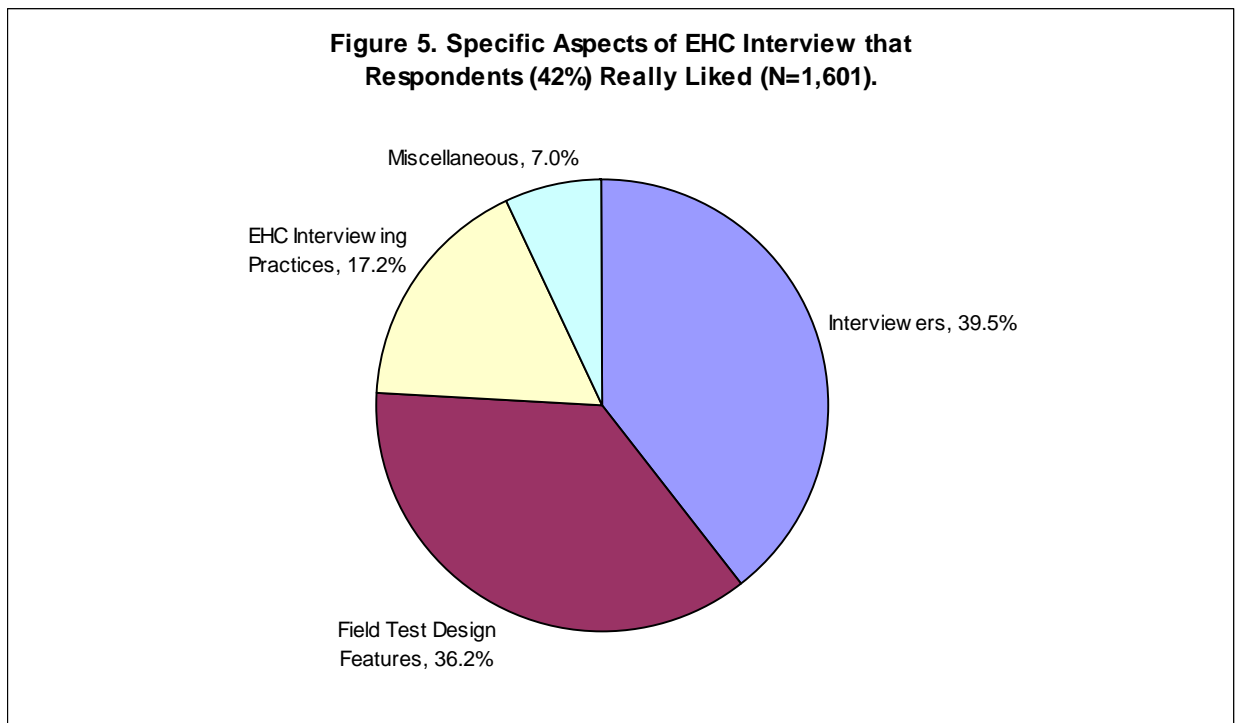


As with the “interesting” ratings, about two-thirds of the respondents gave the EHC and SIPP interviews the same ratings on the “how enjoyable” question (see Figure 4). Among the remaining respondents who rated the two instruments differently, about six times as many rated the EHC interview at a higher level of enjoyment, compared to the proportion who rated the SIPP at a higher level than the EHC ($t=50.1, p<.0001$).



3. Specific aspects of the EHC interview liked by respondents

Respondents were asked if there were any specific aspects of the EHC interview that they “really liked,” and, if so, to specify what they were. Over two-fifths of all respondents who completed a debriefing questionnaire (671/1601) reported that they liked certain aspects of the EHC interview. A total of 720 positive comments were provided by 633 of these respondents. Comments which were judged to represent similar thoughts were collapsed, as shown in Figure 5. In addition to a small “miscellaneous” category, the major EHC aspects that our respondents really liked were: (1) the interviewers; (2) EHC field test design features; and (3) EHC interviewing practices. These categories are described in more detail below.

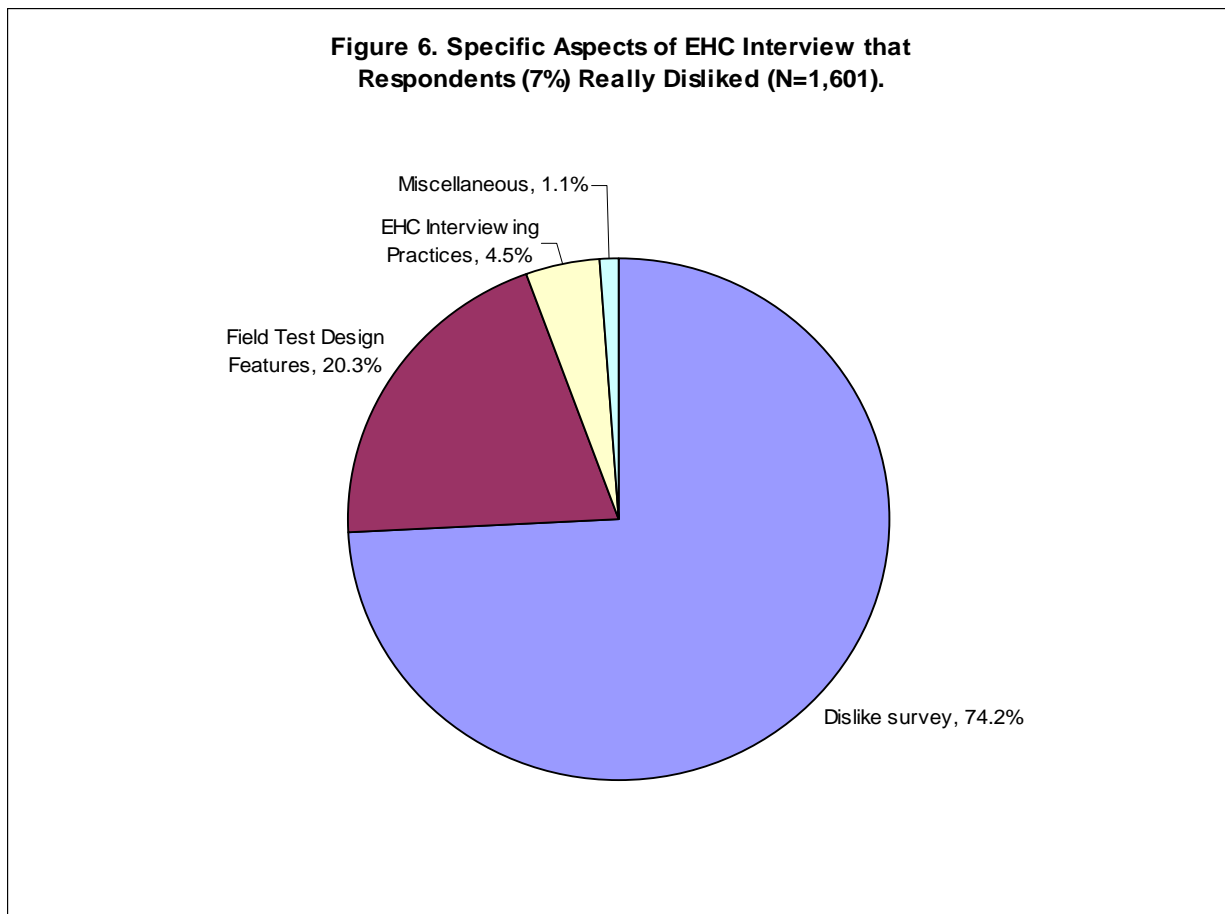


The most common positive aspect of the EHC interview mentioned by the respondents was the interviewer. Close to 40% of the comments were about how they enjoyed the interviewers or their company or their visits: the interviewers were “pleasant,” “helpful,” “accommodating,” “professional,” “friendly,” “polite,” “kind” and “interesting”. Others mentioned that they would not have participated in the survey (again) if it were not for the interviewer. Another 36% of the comments referred to the EHC field test design features. They thought that the EHC survey was briefer, shorter, quicker and smoother than the production SIPP interview. Some liked the \$40 debit card incentive; others thought that the interview was less personal and less invasive and liked the fact that it was an in-person interview. Seventeen percent of responses mentioned aspects of the EHC survey that are central features of EHC interviewing practices, such as the use of landmark events that helped respondents remember 2007 events, and the one year reference period which reduced the number of interviews from three per year to one. The

remaining 7% of responses were miscellaneous comments. For more detailed descriptions of each category, see Question 6A in Appendix A.

4. Specific aspects of the EHC interview disliked by respondents

Respondents were also asked to report on aspects of the EHC interview that they “really disliked.” Overall, only a very few respondents – about 7% – reported that they disliked certain aspects of the EHC interview. Respondents who reported they disliked some aspects of the interview were asked to specify what aspects of the EHC they didn’t like. A total of 89 written comments were collected from these 107 respondents (See Q7A in Appendix A.) The comments pertained mainly to three main categories: (1) generic survey participation issues; (2) the field test design features; and (3) EHC interviewing practices – see Figure 6.



Close to three-quarters of the “disliked” aspects of the EHC interview related to respondents’ general dislike of participating in a survey, rather than any specific dislike of the EHC interview in particular. Respondents disliked providing private information; disliked the SIPP survey; found the survey inconvenient and too long; and thought that the questions were redundant. Another one-fifth of the comments pertained to the design of the field test, as opposed, again, to the EHC experience specifically. For example, respondents were expired sample cases from the

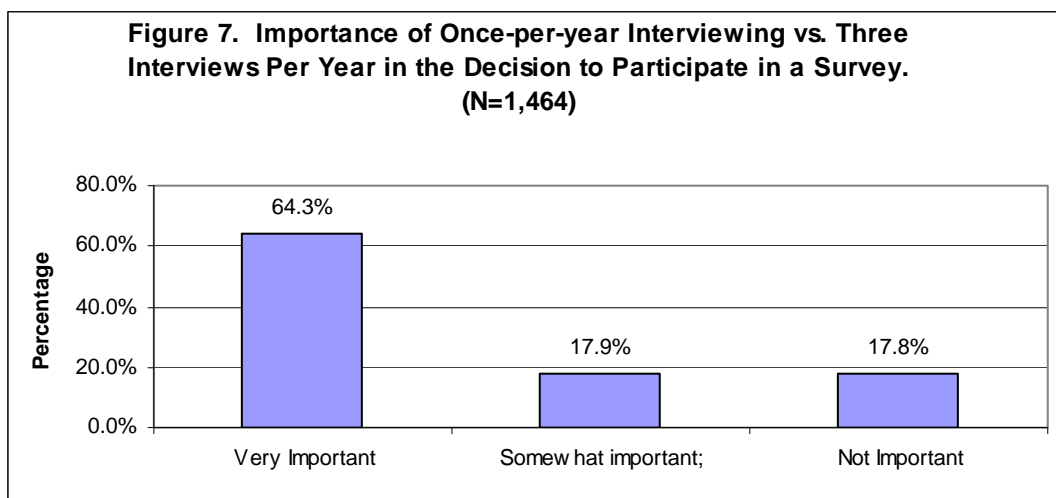
2004 SIPP panel and had been interviewed up to three times per year over the four-year time period, and thus many expressed dismay at having to endure yet another interview. (This sentiment was also clearly reflected in the Field Representatives Questionnaire.) A few disliked the in-person interview mode; others disliked the debit card and preferred a cash incentive. Only a very small percentage (less than 5%) of the negative comments pertained to the specifics of EHC interviewing practices: three respondents disliked providing information about the landmark events, and one respondent did not like the one-year reference period.

5. EHC as a reminder

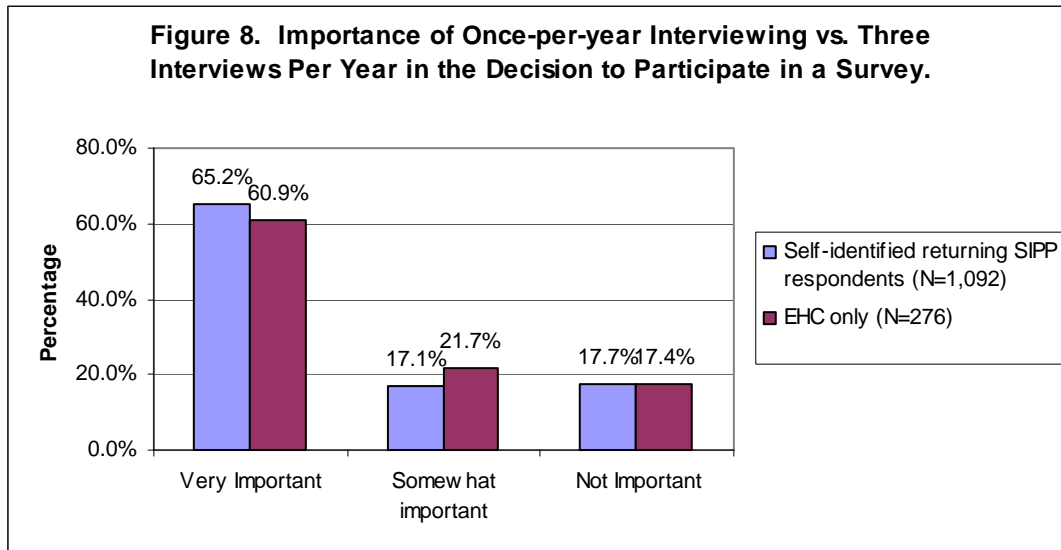
One of the major advantages of the Event History Calendar method is that when respondents have difficulty recalling events, the interview is supposed to provide a reminder about other events that might have been going on at about the same time, to help trigger respondents' memory about events and timing of such events during the reference period. Only about one in five respondents reported that they had trouble during the interview recalling when some event occurred in 2007 (see Question 3). But among these respondents, a large majority (85%) reported that the EHC interviews did provide assistance in recalling these events (see Question 3a), and almost all (9 out of 10) found the assistance useful (see Question 3b).

6. Importance of the number of interviews per year

Respondents were asked whether the number of times they were interviewed in a year (once per year versus three times per year) would affect their decision to participate in a survey. Not surprisingly, about 64% of respondents reported that the number of interviews per year is a very important criterion: they would be more likely to participate in the survey if there were only one interview versus three interviews per year (See Q8). Another 18% of respondents said that the number of interviews per year is somewhat important, while the remaining 18% reported that the number of interviews per year was not important to them – see Figure 7.



Among the self-identified returning SIPP respondents who responded to this question, a slightly higher percentage reported that once-per-year interviewing is very important compared to the other respondents (65.2 vs 60.9%) – see Figure 8. This difference, however, is counter balanced by an almost mirror-image difference in “somewhat important” reports. As a result, the percentage of respondents who reported that the number of interviews was not important to them was about the same regardless of their previous SIPP experience.



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the EHC respondents’ debriefing reports, the new instrument was, overall, well received. Few respondents disliked the new EHC methods. Among respondents who had participated in both SIPP and EHC interviews, a majority of them rated both instruments favorably, but when the ratings of the two surveys differed, respondents were much more likely to give an edge to the EHC experience on both the “interesting” and “enjoyable” scales.

The novelty effect of the EHC interview may explain why some respondents preferred it to the SIPP interview. Also, it is important to note that the prototype EHC instrument contained only a small subset of the SIPP content (Moore 2008), and skipped many dollar amount questions entirely, making the new interview more appealing, less tedious, and less intrusive. In addition, although almost half the respondents provided positive comments on certain aspects of the EHC interview, only one out of six positive comments was about the EHC design features. On the other hand, a disadvantage of the EHC interview is that the EHC field representatives were less familiar with the new EHC instrument and may not have conducted the EHC interview as smoothly as the standard SIPP interview, which may have dampened enthusiasm for the new interview. For these and other reasons, any significant differences between the ratings should be interpreted with care.

As intended, the majority of respondents who had difficulty remembering the details of important events, and who reported having received the sort of assistance that EHC methods are supposed to provide, found that assistance helpful in reminding them when the events occurred. In general, respondents enjoyed our field representatives, who played an important role in our high survey completion rate. Respondents liked the new event history calendar methods, and found the new instrument easier to respond to. Additionally, the EHC worked well in reminding respondents about events, and many respondents welcomed the change of reference period. Over 80% of the respondents preferred to have fewer interviews per year and expressed a higher inclination to participate in the SIPP interview if it was only once per year instead of three times per year.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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FR Code: _____
 Case ID: _____
 Person Line #: _____

OMB #: 0607-0725
 Expiration Date: 08/31/2010
 Form Name: SIPP-EHC2008RQ

Please take a minute to give us your...

Reactions to the Interview

1. Overall, how **interesting** was the interview?
 - Very interesting
 - Somewhat interesting
 - Not very interesting
 - Not at all interesting
 - Don't know

2. Overall, how **enjoyable** was the interview?
 - Very enjoyable
 - Somewhat enjoyable
 - Not very enjoyable
 - Not at all enjoyable
 - Don't know

3. It's hard, sometimes, to remember when things happened. During the interview, did you have any trouble recalling when during 2007 some event occurred?
 - Yes → please answer 3a
 - No → skip to 4
 - Don't know / don't remember → skip to 4
 - 3a. When a person can't quite remember a date, this interview is supposed to help, by offering a reminder about other things that might have been going on at about the same time. Did the interview ever give you a reminder like that?
 - Yes → please answer 3b
 - No → skip to 4
 - Don't know / don't remember → skip to 4

 - 3b. Was that helpful to you? Did that sort of reminder help you remember when during 2007 some event occurred?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know / don't remember

Over, please...

4. IF YOU WERE IN THE “SIPP” SURVEY SEVERAL MONTHS AGO:
Overall, how **interesting** was the SIPP interview?
- Very interesting
 - Somewhat interesting
 - Not very interesting
 - Not at all interesting
 - Don't know / don't remember
 - I WAS NOT IN THE “SIPP” SURVEY
5. IF YOU WERE IN THE “SIPP” SURVEY SEVERAL MONTHS AGO:
Overall, how **enjoyable** was the SIPP interview?
- Very enjoyable
 - Somewhat enjoyable
 - Not very enjoyable
 - Not at all enjoyable
 - Don't know / don't remember
 - I WAS NOT IN THE “SIPP” SURVEY
6. Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really **liked**?
- Yes → Please explain:

 - No
 - Don't know / don't remember
7. Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really **disliked**?
- Yes → Please explain:

 - No
 - Don't know / don't remember
8. The “SIPP” interview covered 4 months, so people had to be interviewed 3 times to give information for a whole year. Today's interview covered a whole year in one interview. 3 interviews a year vs. 1 interview a year — If you were deciding whether to be in a survey, how important would that difference be?
- Very important; I would be MUCH more likely to say “yes” to a survey with only 1 interview every year
 - Somewhat important; I would be a little more likely to say “yes” to a survey with only 1 interview every year
 - Not important; 1 or 3 interviews every year doesn't matter to me
 - Don't know

Thank you!

APPENDIX B –Response Distributions

Question 1

Overall, how interesting was the interview?	Frequency	Percentage
Very interesting	621	39.4
Somewhat interesting	719	45.6
Not very interesting	174	11.0
Not at all interesting	64	4.0
Total	1578	100

Question 2

Overall, how enjoyable was the interview?	Frequency	Percentage
Very enjoyable	654	41.5
Somewhat enjoyable	778	49.4
Not very enjoyable	100	6.3
Not at all enjoyable	43	2.7
Total	1575	100

Question 3

It's hard, sometimes, to remember when things happened. During the interview, did you have any trouble recalling when during 2007 some event occurred?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	338	21.8
No	1211	78.2
Total	1549	100

Question 3a

When a person can't quite remember a date, this interview is supposed to help, by offering a reminder about other things that might have been going on at about the same time. Did the interview ever give you a reminder like that?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	278	85.3
No	48	14.7
Total	326	100

Question 3b

Was that helpful to you? Did that sort of reminder help you remember when during 2007 some event occurred?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	247	92.5
No	20	7.5
Total	267	100

Question 4

IF YOU WERE IN THE "SIPP" SURVEY SEVERAL MONTHS AGO: Overall, how interesting was the SIPP interview?	Frequency	Percentage
Very interesting	348	30.4
Somewhat interesting	507	44.3
Not very interesting	190	15.2
Not at all interesting	99	7.9
Total	1144	100

Question 5

IF YOU WERE IN THE "SIPP" SURVEY SEVERAL MONTHS AGO: Overall, how enjoyable was the SIPP interview?	Frequency	Percentage
Very enjoyable	376	33.2
Somewhat enjoyable	488	43.1
Not very enjoyable	183	16.2
Not at all enjoyable	85	7.5
Total:	1132	100

Question 6

Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really liked ?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	671	45.6
No	699	53.4
Total	1470	100

Question 6a

Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really liked? PLEASE EXPLAIN.	Frequency	Percentage
1. Interviewers (39.5%)		
• The interviewer/company/conversation/meet people/visit by FR	285	39.5
2. Field Test Design Features (36.2%)		
• That EHC is briefer or shorter, went faster, quicker & less time burden	192	26.6
• \$40 incentive	49	6.8
• EHC survey was less personal and less invasive	13	1.8
• In-person interview	7	1.0
3. EHC Interviewing Practices (17.2%)		
• Survey is easy, simple/to the point	41	5.7
• All aspects of the survey of the interview	39	5.4
• Landmark events and/ or help remember events and things in 2007	29	4.0
• Reference period (once per year instead of three interviews per year)	15	2.1
4. Miscellaneous (7.0%)		
• Government cares/understand SIPP or what the government is doing	12	1.7
• Participation in survey - learn new things	11	1.5
• Interview was conducted at respondents' convenience	11	1.5
• Certain sections or questions of the survey	5	0.7
• Benefits for doing the survey	4	0.6
• No difference/none/okay	4	0.6
• Survey is finally over	3	0.4
Total	720	100

Question 7

Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really disliked ?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	107	6.7
No	1428	89.2
Don't know / don't remember/blanks	56	4.1
Total	1601	100

Question 7a

Were there any specific aspects of today's interview that you really disliked ? PLEASE EXPLAIN.	Frequency	Percentage
1) SIPP		
• Dislike providing private/personal information (demographics, income, assets etc)	28	31.5
• Did not like the Survey/Questions(redundant) /certain section (health insurance)	22	24.7
• Inconvenience/felt bothered/time consuming/survey too long	16	18.0
2) Field Test Design Features		
• Being selected or in-sample again	13	
• Prefers different interview mode (Mail/telephone/CAI)	3	3.4
• Debit card-prefer cash	2	2.3
3) EHC Interviewing Practices		
• Landmark events	3	3.4
• Reference period	1	1.1
4) Other	1	1.1
Total	89	100

Question 8

The "SIPP" interview covered 4 months, so people had to be interviewed 3 times to give information for a whole year. Today's interview covered whole year in one interview. 3 interviews a year vs. 1 interview a year — If you were deciding whether to be in a survey, how important would that difference be?	Frequency	Percentage
Very Important	942	64.3
Somewhat important; I would be a little more likely to say "yes"	262	17.9
Not important; 1 or 3 interviews every year doesn't matter to me	260	17.8
Total	1464	100