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Adapting face-to-face surveys in a pandemic: what did we do and what did we learn?

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Research

Talking Methods Seminar, 25th October 2022



Who are we?



ScotCen
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NatCen
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ScotCen Social Research

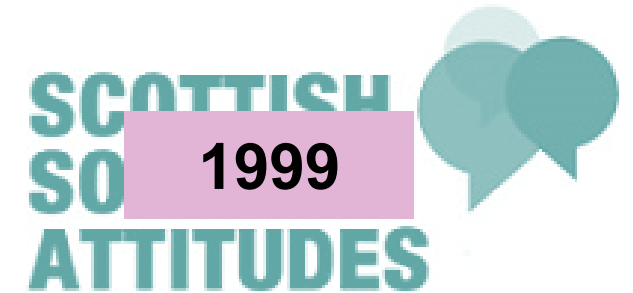
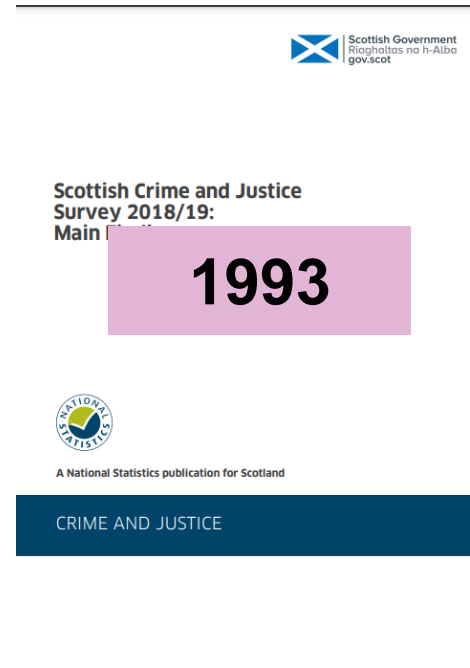
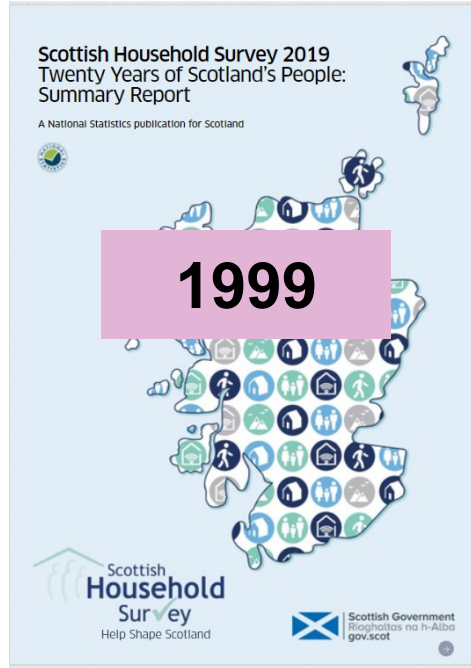
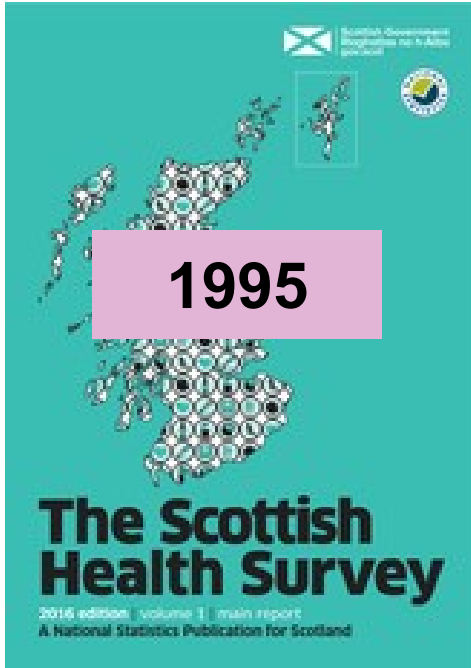
Who we are:

- Established in 2004 (though NatCen in Edinburgh from 1999)
- Based in Edinburgh
- Utilise all of NatCen's resources
- 19 members of staff

What we do:

- Quantitative projects include:
 - Large-scale F to F surveys
 - Web, telephone, postal and mixed mode surveys
 - Secondary analysis
- Qualitative projects
- Mixed methods studies
- Evaluations
- Methods training

Large-scale complex probability surveys in Scotland



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



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Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS)

Aiming to achieve c. 6000 interviews with adults aged 16+.

Random probability sample of c10,500 addresses selected from Postcode Address File (PAF)

1 randomly selected adult per household invited to take part

40-45 minute face-to-face CAPI interview including self-completion section

Response rate: c63%

Scottish Social Attitudes Survey (SSA)



Aiming to achieve c. 1000-1500 interviews with adults aged 16+.

Random probability sample of c3000 addresses selected from Postcode Address File (PAF)

1 randomly selected adult per household invited to take part

40-50 minute face-to-face CAPI interview including self-completion section

Response rate: c50%

Scottish Health Survey (SHeS)

Aiming to achieve c5000-
interviews with adults aged
16+ and c2000 interviews with
children

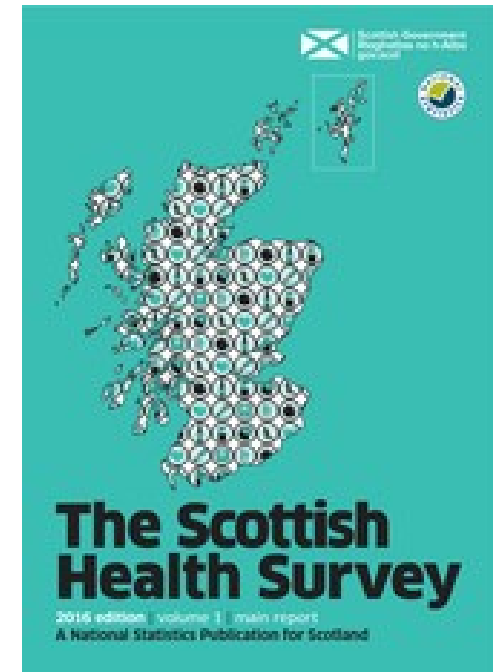
Random probability sample of
c11,700 addresses selected
from Postcode Address File
(PAF)

Up to 10 adults & 2
children per
household invited
to take part

45 minute face-to-face
CAPI interview and
multiple paper self-
completions

Interviewer administered
height & weight with full
sample, extra biomeasures
with 1/3 sample

Response rate: c60%



Growing Up in Scotland study (GUS)



Following a cohort of c5000 children born in 2004/05

Random probability sample selected from Child Benefit Records to form longitudinal cohort

Cohort member, main carer and partner of main carer invited to take part

c40 (parent)/c20 (CM) minute face-to-face CAPI interview each with self-completion elements. Partner had paper self-complete.

Interviewer administered height & weight measurements and cognitive assessments

Response rate: c80%

March 2020 – all F2F fieldwork paused

Two options:

Delay data collection

Continue data
collection using
different modes

Alternatives to face-to-face

Push-to-web

- PAF sample
- Invitation letter to complete web survey
- Options for follow-up modes or online-only

Push-to-telephone/video

- PAF sample
- Invitation letter requesting contact details
- Telephone (CATI)/video interview options

Web and/or telephone

- 'Named' sample
- Letter/email invitation to complete web survey
- CATI chasing/interviewing option

Push to telephone - summary

Scottish Health Survey, Scottish Social Attitudes Survey

Address-based sample (PAF)

Invitation letter – inviting contact to provide telephone details

Opt ins collated (multiple modes – telephone, email, online portal)

Remote interviews carried out by telephone

Response rates: c7-15% (compared with 50-60% F2F pre-pandemic)

Push to telephone – issues to consider

- Questionnaire –
 - Telephone usually shorter than F2F (although indications are that this approach can work with similar length to F2F)
 - Question wordings for telephone
 - Managing show cards
 - Dealing with self-completion
- Multiple respondents, increased time/burden
- Implications for non-questionnaire data collection, e.g. no biomeasures
- Very low opt-in rates

Push to telephone developments on SHeS

- Introduction of 'knock to nudge'
 - Doorstep contact to encourage sample to provide contact details for remote (telephone) interview
 - Safe protocols for socially-distanced doorstep contact
 - Single-use show cards
 - Led to significant increase in response rates
- Self-completions administered as web surveys, with paper as back up
 - Benefits of web over paper – data quality, data processing, environment
 - Paper alternative for those with no web access or who preferred
- BUT, still no reliable means of collecting most biomeasures remotely (though some are now feasible on certain projects, e.g. saliva)

Web and/or CATI - summary

Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, Growing Up in Scotland

Named sample (e.g. follow-up to previous survey, longitudinal sample)

Letter/email invitation to complete web survey and/or notify of telephone survey

Telephone 'chase' to complete web survey or interview

Response rates: c40-75%

Web/CATI on SCJS

- CATI only - 'Scottish Victimization Telephone Survey' (SVTS)
- Follow-up of 'recontact sample' recruited on previous face-to-face surveys
 - 6800 issued with 2654 achieved (39% response rate)
- Shorter questionnaire and interview – only 17 minutes on average
 - Reduced content
 - No self-completions
 - Specific questions on COVID-related experience
- Shorter fieldwork period – 6 weeks (compared with 12 months)
- Data not comparable to previous years
- SCJS subsequently restarted as K2N with web self-completions and paper back up

Web/CATI on GUS

Element	Face-to-face administration	Remote administration
Household qre and parent/carer interview	CAPI in-home	Telephone
Parent/carer self-completion	CASI in-home	Web
Young person interview	CAPI in-home	Telephone
Young Person self-completion	CASI in-home	Web
Young person height and weight	In-home	Not included
Young person cognitive assessments	In-home	Not included
Partner questionnaire	Paper	Paper

Web and/or CATI – issues to consider

- SVTS – limited sample, only feasible to run as a one-off exercise (without adopting a panel design)
- Telephone interviews still required showcards
- Lower response to web elements – and to remote approach generally:
 - GUS F2F response – 80%;
 - Any CATI or web response – 68%;
 - Completed web questionnaire – 47% young people, 50% parent/carer
- No measurement or assessment data

What did we learn?

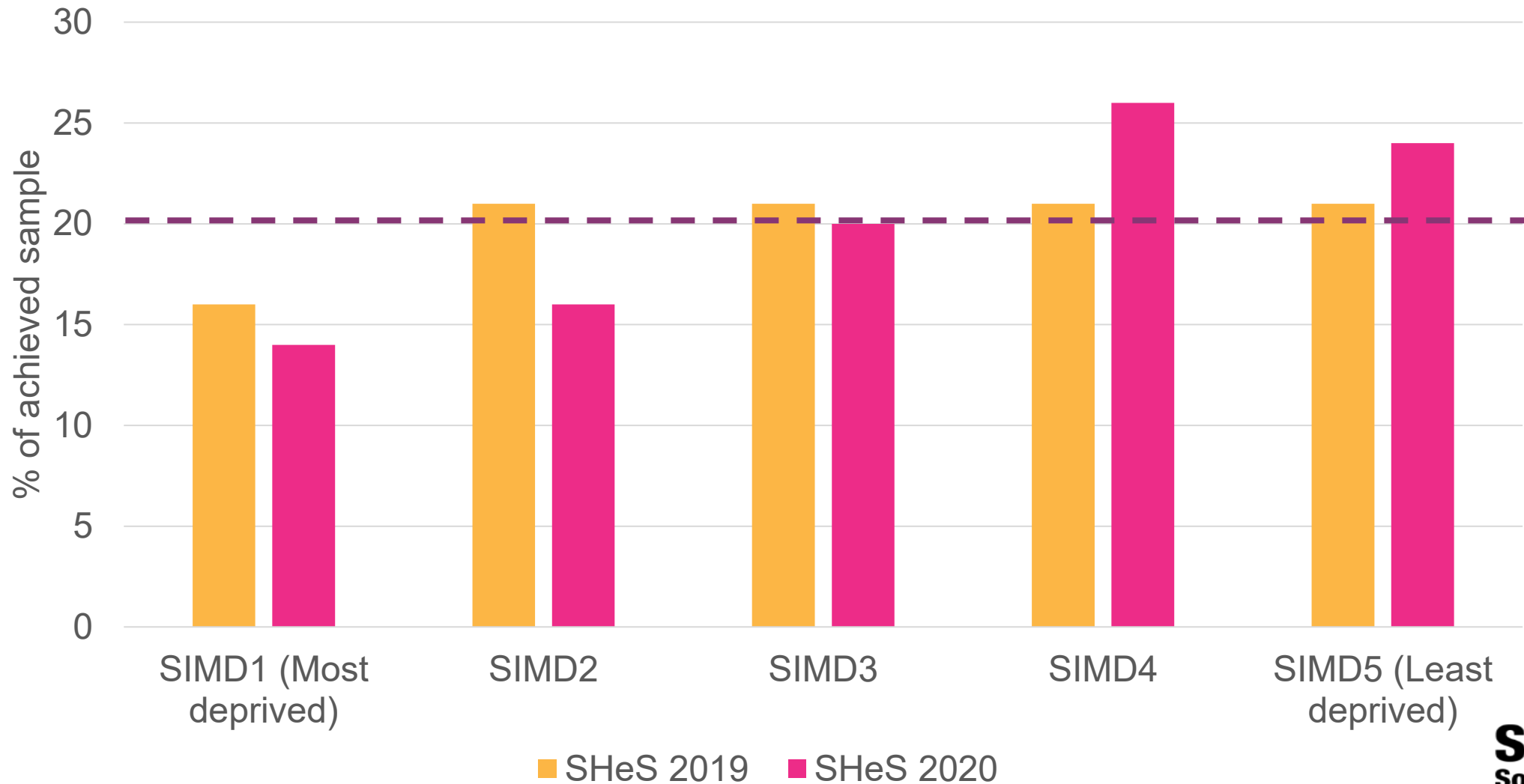
- It's feasible to replicate much F2F data collection using wholly remote survey approaches
 - Allowed important data to be collected during a unique period. Across SHeS, SCJS and SHS data was collected from c7400 individuals in second half of 2020 alone.
- Random probability sample designs can be maintained
- Negative impacts on data quality and robustness of estimates
 - Lower response rates
 - Shortened questionnaires and other 'gaps' in the data (e.g. no measurement data)
 - Break in time series due to concerns about data quality and robustness of estimates – e.g. sample bias, mode effects

Is low response necessarily problematic?

- No – if the sample is representative on key indicators and there is no significant bias

Example survey sample	Face to face	Push to telephone
Issued sample size	1670	10000
Response rate	60%	10%
Achieved sample size	1000	1000
Age distribution		
16-24	11%	10%
25-44	25%	24%
45-64	38%	36%
65+	26%	30%

Response rates by SIMD, SHeS 2019 and 2020



The future

- This experience has reinforced the advantages of F2F interviewing:
 - Higher response rates & lower sample bias
 - Allows lengthy, detailed questionnaires
 - Avoids the risk of mode effects that come with mixed mode
 - Allows collection of objective measurements

BUT

- Has also demonstrated the feasibility of alternative data collection approaches in many applications
 - Hybrid (and more resilient) models are in place and likely to continue
 - More scope for follow-up surveys and panels
 - Some surveys have permanently moved away from F2F and others may follow
 - Further thinking needed on maximising response and reducing/dealing with sample bias

Thank you

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For more information, visit our website:

www.scotcen.org.uk

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