



Designing Questions on Criminal Justice Involvement for Health Surveys

David Cantor

Westat

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Outline

- Measurement issues
 - Comprehension
 - Recall
- Design principals and some examples
- Response rate

Measurement: Good News/Bad News

- Bad News: There is additional error associated with asking on sensitive topics (see Yan presentation).
- Good News: It is possible to significantly reduce total error by carefully designing questions to minimize common sources of error (e.g., comprehension, recall).

Omissions - % of Crime Incidents Reported by Victims

	Percent
All crimes	74.1
Violent	62.6
Assault	48.1
Rape	66.7
Robbery	76.3
Property	86.2
Burglary	90.3
Larceny	81.0

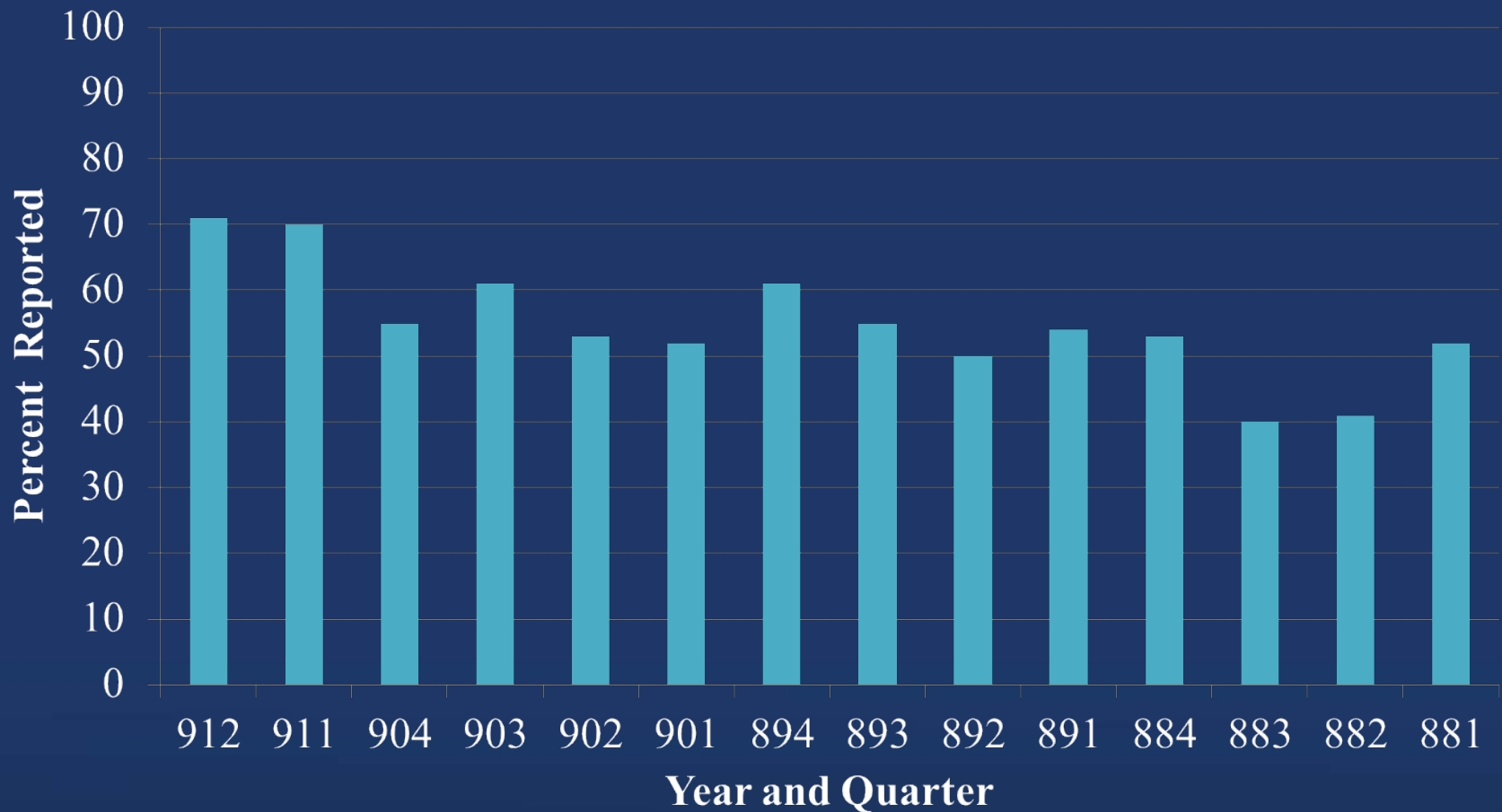
Source: Turner, A.G. (1981). "The San Jose Recall Study." pp. 22-27 in Lehnen, R.G. and W.G. Skogan, The National Crime Survey: Working Papers, NCJ-75374. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.

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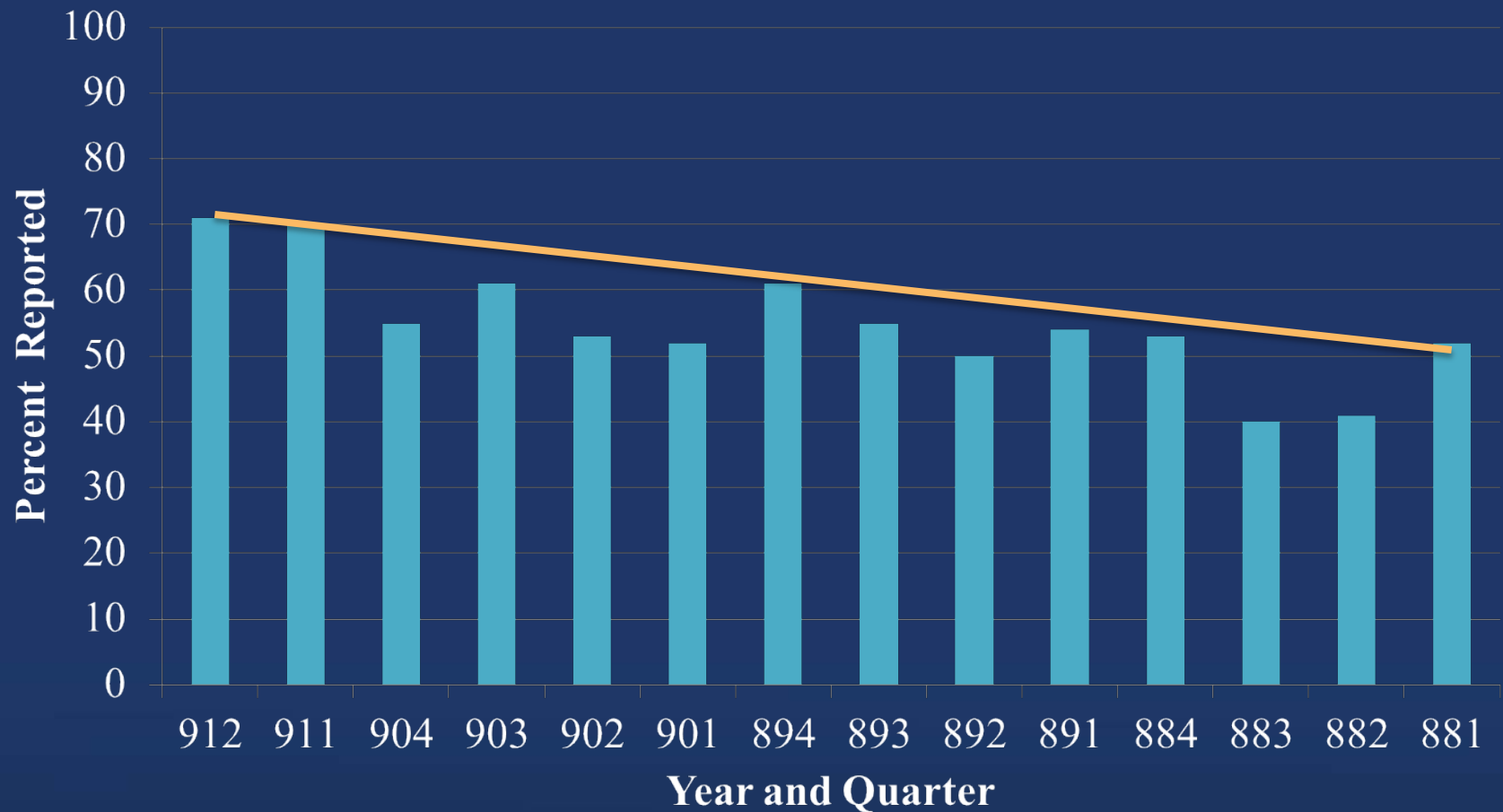
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Omissions - Percent of Positive Drug Tests Reported During Interview by Collection Quarter



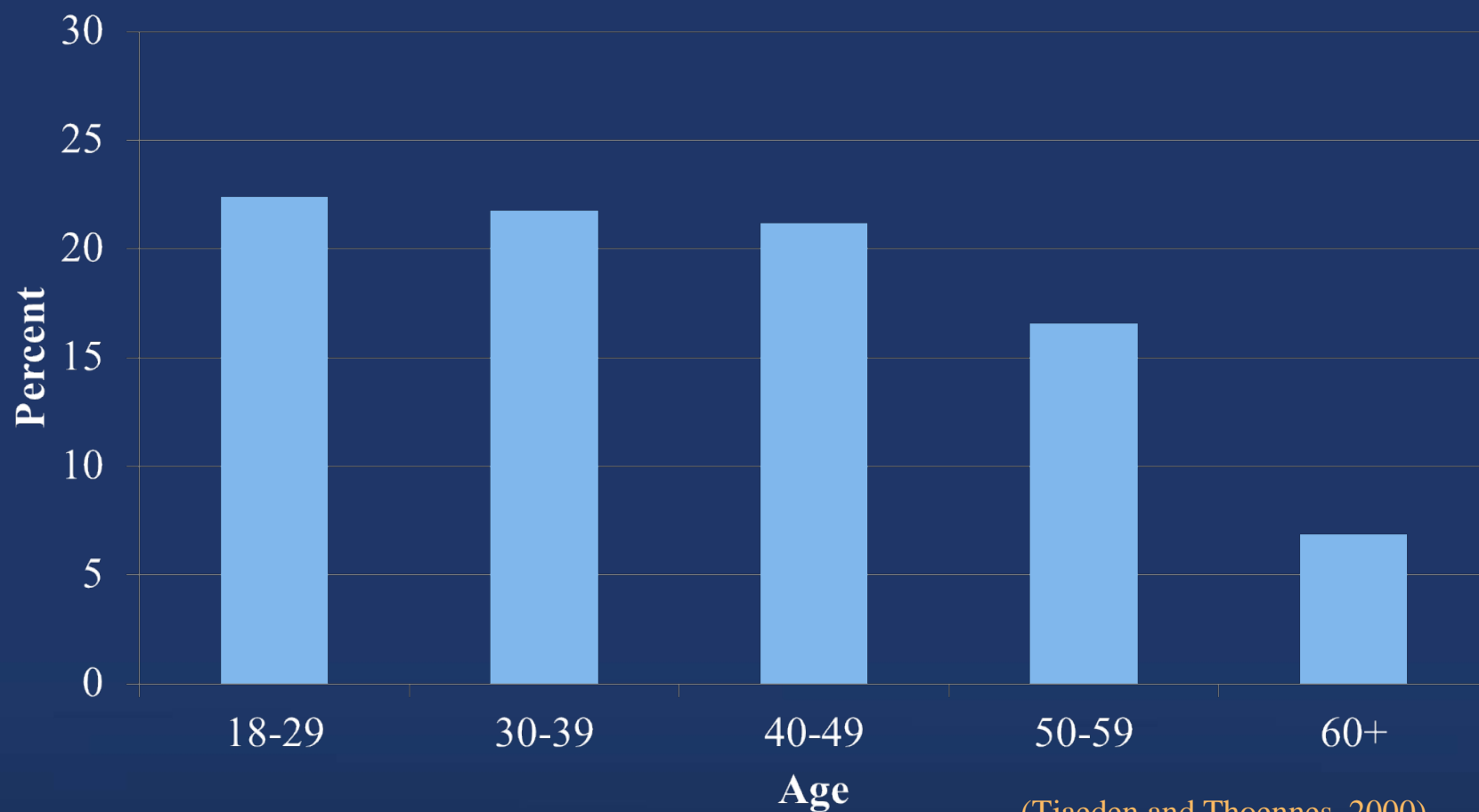
Cantor, et al, (1996)

Omissions - Percent of Positive Drug Tests Reported During Interview by Collection Quarter



Cantor, et al, (1996)

Comprehension and Telescoping: Lifetime Prevalence of Rape Among US Women by Age



Design advice from Sudman and Bradburn (1982)

- Make questions as specific as possible
- Use words that virtually all respondents will understand
- Lengthen the questions by adding memory cues to improve recall

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These are guidelines which, in practice, can be compromised for particular applications

What are the essential informational needs?

- Type of contact (Police contact vs.. Convictions vs. CJ supervision)?
- Timing (recent vs. lifetime)?
- Number of times (over what time period; specificity)?
- Length of time (Total vs. by spell vs.. longest)?
- Type of crime (how specific)?

Criminal Justice terms - Supervision

- “Since age 18 have you ever been under any form of criminal justice supervision, including on probation, in jail or in prison?” (SCJE)
- “Have you ever spent time in a jail, prison or juvenile detention center?” (NSFG)
- “...have you been sentenced to spend time in a corrections institution, like a jail, prison or a youth institution like a juvenile hall or reform school or training school or to perform community service?” (NLSY 97)

Criminal Justice terms– Contact with the Criminal Justice System

- “Have you ever been arrested or taken into custody by the police?”
(Add Health)
- “Not counting minor traffic violations, have you ever been arrested and booked for breaking the law? Being "booked" means that you were taken into custody and processed by the police or by someone connected with the courts, even if you were released” (NSDUH)
- “Have you ever been arrested by the police or taken into custody for an illegal or delinquent offense (do not include arrests for minor traffic violations)?” (NLSY 97)

Comprehension and Recall are improved when simplifying items and using examples

- Break up complex items to help respondent understand what you are asking.
 - Respondent can hear and attend to the specific terms
 - Compromise between questionnaire space and simplification
- Use of examples makes the memory search more specific to the targeted behavior or situation (Biderman, et al., 1985; Tourangeau et al., 2015)
- Disadvantages of examples:
 - Might focus too much on the examples
 - Need more real estate. Can make questions more complex

Example Questions: Adult Involvement

Since you were 18, have you been arrested for breaking the law? Please don't count minor traffic violations.

Since you were 18, have you been convicted of a crime? Please don't count minor traffic violations.

Since you were 18, have you been locked up for at least 30 days to punish you for breaking the law?

Example Questions: Adult Involvement

Since you were 18, have you been arrested for breaking the law? Please don't count minor traffic violations.

Since you were 18, have you been convicted of a crime? Please don't count minor traffic violations.

Since you were 18, have you been locked up for at least 30 days to punish you for breaking the law?

Can follow-up with the type of offense

Example: With specific offense

- Since you were 18, have you been arrested for any of the following (y/n to each):
 - Stealing something
 - Breaking into a home or a building
 - Assaulting someone with a weapon
 - Injuring someone with a weapon or your hands
 - Injuring someone with a motor vehicle
 - Drunk driving
 - Tricking a person into giving you money
 - Using someone else's identity to obtain money
 - For anything else?

Timing: What is easiest to remember?

- Specific calendar periods are difficult to remember
 - Memories are typically not stored with particular dates in mind
 - Memory traces of dates decay very quickly
- Past 12 months – expect some external telescoping
- Consider anchoring to specific events
 - Most recent time it happened
 - Age first occurred

Frequency and Duration

- Frequency: Counts vs. Rates
 - For general population, counting seems most practical
 - Open end vs. response scale
- Duration
 - Total time: Requires some calculation and estimation.
 - Longest time
 - Most recent time

Pre-testing will provide empirical information on what works

- Cognitive interviews can be very informative on comprehension and recall issues
 - Need to make sure to recruit respondents with a variety of experiences
 - Should administer questions in the mode to be used for administration (self vs.. interviewer)
- Pre-tests in field setting is also important
 - Debrief respondents after taking the survey
 - Collect data (from debriefing) on the types of experiences that were reported on the survey

Impact on Response Rates

- Based on experience (i.e. no systematic data), I would not expect inclusion of a few questions would have a big effect on the response rate
 - Surveys that ask much more sensitive questions have relatively high response rates (NSDUH; NCVS; NSFG)
 - Respondents tend to not answer truthfully, rather than refuse to answer at all
 - Need to make sure interviewers are comfortable with the question
- Possible exceptions
 - It is explicitly called out during the informed consent statement
 - Parents review the survey for a minors