


Dwelling Form

Number of occupants on census night

2001 Census question

2 How many blue Individual Forms (Rārangi Pātai Takitahi) are being filled in, here in this dwelling? 

Background

Counting the number of occupants on census night is a statutory requirement under the Statistics Act 1975.

Both the 'number of occupants on census night' and 'name' items are used to balance the number of individual forms completed in a dwelling with the people listed on the dwelling form. This data must be of high quality to ensure balancing proceeds relatively smoothly. Collectors also use the number of occupants question to ensure all individual forms have been collected.

This question is a continuing problem as respondents often leave it blank, or do not return to complete it after filling in the household grid on the dwelling form, or when checking their responses before signing. In 2001 instructions for respondents about who in the dwelling fills in an individual form were separate from the question.

Development objectives/plan

The objectives identified for the 2006 development were to improve response rates and accommodate all respondents irrespective of whether they completed census forms online or on paper, by testing:

- a new embedded instruction box (placed between the question and write-in answer boxes) to help respondents answer correctly
- other form design changes aimed at encouraging respondents to check their answer to this question
- a new question format asking respondents to count both print and online individual forms when calculating an answer.

To meet these objectives a comprehensive programme of testing was conducted including cognitive testing, analysis of data from field tests and consultation with key stakeholders.

Cognitive testing

The cognitive testing programme was conducted between April 2003 and May 2005 with respondents of varied age, gender and ethnicity. Interviewers observed respondent form-filling behaviour and asked a series of follow-up questions.

The 'number of occupants on census night' question was redeveloped and tested during rounds two, three and four of the cognitive testing programme.

Cognitive testing results

Rounds two and three: June to December 2003 and March to July 2004

Results showed that overall, respondents appeared to understand the 'number of occupants on census night' question reasonably well. A clear majority noticed and understood the embedded instructions.

A substantial number of respondents saw and followed the new prompt added to the signing instructions, which asked them to check their answers before signing, beginning at question 2. Only a small number of respondents noticed the other new prompt at the bottom of page 2, but in one instance the respondent read it, returned to the number of occupants question and corrected their answer.

However these results need to be interpreted with caution because of the qualitative nature of cognitive testing.

Round four: November 2004 to May 2005

For round four of testing the question was amended by adding the words '(either on paper or on the Internet)'. This change was made to make it clear that respondents need to count all the individual forms completed, in the dwelling, irrespective of completion mode when answering this question.

The position of this question on the form was altered because other questions had been deleted and to make better use of space on the questionnaire. Moving the question's position (from Q2 to Q3) meant that it would not be the first question seen if respondents followed the prompt in the signing instructions at the end of the form.

As found in previous testing rounds, this question appeared to be reasonably well understood by most respondents, with a majority noticing the embedded instructions. Those who did not notice the instructions seemed to understand the question and answered correctly.

The concept 'count total forms' (where respondents need to count the individual forms filled in online and on paper) when calculating the total number of individual forms completed in the dwelling, appeared to be reasonably well understood by most respondents.

The prompt at the bottom of page 2 continued to work well for respondents who saw and followed it. The prompt added to the signing instructions also worked well, despite the position of the question changing.

Field test results

Field test: March 2003

An inspection of a number of March 2003 test dwelling forms showed that a large percentage of forms had the 'number of occupants' box filled in with a different coloured pen or handwriting, suggesting that it was completed at a different time to the rest of the form.

Field test: June 2004

There were no missing responses for the 'number of occupants on census night' question in the June test data; however, there were some mismatches between number of occupants and the household grid.

Dress rehearsal: 8 March 2005

Examination of the dwelling forms revealed that a clear majority showed an exact agreement between the number of occupants and the number of people listed in the household grid.

There were a small but significant number of dwellings where the number of occupants was missing, and a very small percentage where the recognition software did not recognise the responses given. This was subsequently fixed during processing.

'Number of occupants on census night' is a compulsory field online and forms cannot be submitted unless this question has been answered, so there were no item non-response issues.

Forms mailed back had notably more 'not stated' number of occupants than the forms picked up by collectors. Mail back and pick-up return modes did not differ significantly in 'unidentifiable' responses for the 'number of occupants on census night' question.

One of the most important findings was that mixed-mode dwellings (where some forms were completed on paper and some online) showed the poorest agreement between the number of occupants reported on the dwelling form and the number of individual forms returned. This analysis was of one type of mixed-mode dwelling only, that is, where a dwelling form was completed online and some individual forms were completed on paper. However, it should be noted that the number of mixed-mode dwellings in the dress rehearsal was very small, with the vast majority being single-mode households. This is also expected for the 2006 Census.

Changes made for the 2006 Census

3 How many blue Individual Forms (either on paper or on the Internet) are being filled in, here in this dwelling?

These people fill in a blue Individual Form, here in this dwelling:

- everyone, including babies, spending the night of 7 March here, and
- anyone who arrives on 8 March, who has not filled in a blue Individual Form anywhere else. This includes babies.

How many altogether?

For 2006 the 'number of occupants on census night' question has been amended so both paper and online individual forms completed in the dwelling are counted when answering. The instructions outlining who in the dwelling needs to fill in an individual form have been embedded and placed between the question and write-in answer boxes.

Future development

Analysing how mixed-mode households answer 'number of occupants on census night' in the 2006 Census will identify whether respondents had difficulties answering correctly.

It will be important to consider what impact offering a choice of completion mode at the individual level or the household-level may have for the 2011 development. A household level completion mode may eliminate the need to refer to both print and online forms in the 'number of occupants on census night' question.