Implementing Interventions Using Video Calls

Case Study: Informational Interventions in Colombia

Many projects collecting data had to move to remote survey modes due to COVID-19 health risks for staff and participants. This may make it impossible to exercise control over the data collection environment, which is particularly important to ensure that behavioral studies can accurately estimate the effect of the intervention. Video conference software is a promising alternative to face-to-face surveys in some contexts where the study population has access to computers, tablets, or smartphones.

IPA Colombia trialed protocols to conduct studies using video call software and self-administered forms. Successful practices include confirming computer operation and connectivity before launching and using breakout rooms and recorded explanations. These recommendations can be applied to any type of video interviewing.

Motivation

With in-person surveying, the enumerator has considerable control over the data collection environment. This is especially relevant for behavioral studies (conducted before or as part of the survey process) to ensure that the only variation that respondents observe is the intervention itself and therefore the impact can be estimated without bias. Intervention and survey protocols are a way to exercise control over the environment.

Some populations may have access to computers and consistent internet. In that case, video conferencing software and self-administered survey platforms can potentially be used to administer these types of assessments. IPA Colombia tested video interviewing coupled with an intervention occurring over video.

Suggested Protocols

The research team used a protocol involving two stages: a small set of preliminary work before launch to ensure that all potential respondents could take part and implementation protocols to preserve the intervention's integrity:

Connectivity checks Both participants and project staff must have good internet connections. Ensure that multiple project staff are available to lead the whole virtual session in case it's necessary after a connectivity disruption. Include clear directions for how to inform project staff if anyone is having internet or software problems.

Device checks Ensure that respondents' computers and devices are compatible with all software and websites used. If possible, conduct software pilots and hardware tests before launch to gather detailed feedback. For example, check that many different types of devices can access sites used for surveying, such as SurveyCTO.

When the intervention is implemented, the

Identity Verification and Protocol confirmation Upon entry, verify each participant. Highlight to participants that the survey and any activity must be completed using a computer and individual link provided to each participant.

Web Conference Platform Instructions Regardless of whether participants have experience with the web conferencing platform, ensure that someone explains the functionality of the software platform and participants' responsibilities.

Standardized study presentation During the sessions where participants are scheduled to take the survey, different information sessions can be delivered using recordings or breakout rooms. This ensures that the only difference in the study is the intervention and not any study descriptions or other explanations.

Incentives Information Provide tools and instructions for receiving incentives in a way that the project team can verify receipt of the incentive by each participant.