

Pilot experiment on household income

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In fall 2013, the CST conducted an experiment to test an alternative version of the ESS household income question. This alternative wording included a filter question where the respondent is asked to select whether they best know the household's weekly, monthly, or annual income, and depending on the answer to the filter question they are asked the income amount in their preferred format. Respondents who replied DK or refused to answer the income amount were then asked the main reason for their answer. These responses were recorded verbatim and can be found in Appendix A.

Unfortunately, there was a misunderstanding and those who said don't know to the filter question were not asked the income question, so a comparison of DK/refusal levels is now less informative than we hoped it would be. Nevertheless, here is a summary of the findings.

ESS question wording since Round 4

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Using this card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate. [Use the part of the card that you know best: weekly, monthly or annual income]

Question sequence in experiment for income question

Thinking about your household's total income after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources, which one do you know best: your household's weekly, monthly or annual income?

INTERVIEWER: use card [X/Y/Z] with list of [weekly/monthly/annual] salaries

CARD [X/Y/Z]. And using this card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total weekly income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate.

When looking at respondents who were asked the substantive question, the alternative wording led to significantly lower levels of response rates in both countries, with substantive responses being 9 percent points higher when the alternative wording is asked (see table 1).

In Great Britain, this difference seems to be due to a reduction in both the percentage of refusals and don't knows. In Portugal, however, the difference is due entirely to increased willingness to provide an income amount (see table 2).

Table 1. Effect of income wording on level of item nonresponse

		Substantive response	Item nonresponse
Total	Wording		
	Traditional	78.2%	21.8%
	Alternative	86.6%	13.4%
	Difference		8.4
	χ^2		9.84; <i>p</i> < .01
GB	Wording		
	Traditional	83.0%	17.0%
	Alternative	91.9%	8.1%
	Difference		8.9
	χ^2		7.22; <i>p</i> < .01
Portugal	Wording		
	Traditional	72.7%	27.3%
	Alternative	81.7%	18.3%
	Difference		9.0
	χ^2		4.59; <i>p</i> < .05

Table 2. Effect of income wording on item nonresponse by nonresponse component

		Substantive response	Refusal	Don't know
Total	Wording			
	Traditional	78.2%	13.0%	8.8%
	Alternative	86.6%	6.8%	6.6%
	Difference		6.2	2.2
	χ^2		<i>10.86; p < .01</i>	
GB	Wording			
	Traditional	83.0%	7.5%	9.4%
	Alternative	91.9%	4.1%	4.1%
	Difference		3.4	5.3
	χ^2		<i>7.34; p < .05</i>	
Portugal	Wording			
	Traditional	72.7%	19.3%	8.0%
	Alternative	81.7%	9.4%	8.9%
	Difference		9.9	-0.9
	χ^2		<i>8.04; p < .05</i>	

Table 3 presents a summary of the percent of respondents who mentioned different types of reasons. Full verbatim answers are available in Appendix A.

	Great Britain	Portugal
Refused – too personal	39.1%	40.8%
Refused – trust issues	4.7%	7.9%
DK – just DK	7.8%	5.3%
DK – changes in work/income/life	10.9%	13.2%
DK – DK income of everyone in HH	29.7%	25.0%
DK – other	7.8%	7.9%
n	64	76

Verbatim answer recorded by interviewer

- 1 In the middle of a new claim
- 2 Don't want to discuss that
- 3 Don't know husband's income
- 4 I just don't know
- 5 Paid fortnightly
- 6 Personal
- 7 Because I have sufficient for my needs
- 8 Because I work infrequent at times
- 9 I have no knowledge of what my parents earn
- 10 Do not want to tell the house income
- 11 Private
- 12 Self employed, often changes many times during the year
- 13 I'm not very good in maths
- 14 Don't know
- 15 My husband take care of all this
- 16 Don't want to tell its private
- 17 Don't want to tell
- 18 Doesn't think its anybody's business
- 19 Living in a childrens home.
- 20 I think that's my business
- 21 I refuse to disclose personal information
- 22 Because I am only 17
- 23 My daughter and her husband live with me. I don't know what her wages are
- 24 Household are not my family but I lodge with them
- 25 My husband doesn't give me that information
- 26 Husband knows
- 27 Lives with grandparents; no idea of their income
- 28 Personal
- 29 Don't know partners income
- 30 Depends on what the government decide
- 31 Don't know parents' income
- 32 I'm self employed and my parners on maternity leave recently so it varies
- 33 I live alone but under the supported living scheme so i dont know my total income
- 34 Because I am a private person
- 35 I just don't know
- 36 It's personal
- 37 All the money goes to my partner and I have nothing to do with it

Verbatim answer recorded by interviewer

38 Wife does money
39 Self employed
40 Don't bother about that
41 Son of household doesn't know
42 That's the wife's job
43 You might be trying to get something out of me you might have ulterior motives
44 Personal
45 Personal
46 That's personal information
47 Not sure what it is. Mum deals with that
48 Personal
49 Personal
50 Don't know about such matters
51 Privacy
52 Privacy
53 I think it is private
54 I don't think its your business

55 Dont jnow parents income
56 Invasive
57 Private
58 Because I am obstinate
59 I know my salary but am not sure of the amount i get in benefit
60 I have no idea at all
61 Private matter
62 Too young
63 I would have to go and look it up
64 It is information I don't give out to anybody
65 The income is variable from month to month. Works by commission.
66 Does not feel confortable answering this question. It is personal informat
67 It is not an appropriate question. It is to personal.
68 These kinf of questions should not be done.
69 Doesn't know the income values. It is not her business to know.
70 It is a personal matter.
71 Doesn't know the income of each one of the house members
72 Is a minor. Doesn't know the family incomes
73 We are a lot of people, some of us working, I never did the math, I only what my wife earns
74 Prefers not to tell
75 Prefers not to tell

Verbatim answer recorded by interviewer

- 76 This is an information that doesn't want to share.
- 77 Prefers not to tell
- 78 Prefers not to tell
- 79 Prefers not to tell
- 80 Prefers not to tell
- 81 Doesn't know the parents incomes
- 82 I don't know the incomes of the other members of the family
- 83 Doesn't know how much the son earns. The husband is the one that knows these kind of things
- 84 Doesn't know the income of each one of the house members
- 85 Doens't need to say that kind of information
- 86 Doesn't know how much the daughter earns
- 87 They don't have to know my income. My income doesn't affect my opinions.
- 88 Then you will come back and ask things about our lifes.
- 89 Doens't know
- 90 Não sabe o valor exacto porque a esposa trabalha à hora, é incerto.
- 91 Doesn't know the income of each one of the house members
- 92 Doesn't want to share the values
- 93 Doesn't have a fixed income and no one has anything to do with it.
- 94 Doesn't know the income of each one of the house members
- 95 Doesn't know the parents incomes
- 96 Doesn't know how much the daughter and the somn-in-law earn
- 97 Depsnds on the number of hours of work, it is allways different.
- 98 Doesn' want to reveal this information. It is not important for the s
- 99 It depends a lot because I am self-employed
- 100 Prefers not to tell
- 101 Prefers not to tell
- 102 Prefers not to tell
- 103 It is confidential information.
- 104 I think that our income is something personal and that we shouldn
- 105 By a matter of principle I do not answer
- 106 I am self-employed, the income is variable
- 107 Doesn't want to say the value
- 108 It is a personal matter.
- 109 It is a personal matter.
- 110 Doesn't know the parents incomes
- 111 I do not like to give this kind of information
- 112 Not sure of the value
- 113 Doesn't want to share this kind of information
- 114 I really don't know

Verbatim answer recorded by interviewer	
115	Doesn't need to know
116	I don't receive anything
117	Doesn't like to tell this information. It is no one's business.
118	It is something that I am not interested.
119	Doesn't have any interest in knowing this.
120	To know how much I earn I will have to check in the bank, how much have entered in the account.
121	Doesn't understand the relevance of this question for the study and pre: to tell
122	I can only tell the retirement values, I can't give you any other values besides the ones I receive from my retirement
123	Doesn't want to say. No one has anything to do with that.
124	Doesn't know the parents income
125	Doesn't know how much the husband earns, it is not a fixed value
126	Doesn't know. The mother owns a store and she doesn't know I much she earns
127	These are personal things. Doesn't want to say.
128	Doesn't know the parents incomes
129	I prefer not to share. It is a personal matter.
130	Doesn't know. Doesn't have fixed incomes. Can be a lot or low. It is variable.
131	<u>Doens't</u> know
132	This information is personal
133	Believes that shouldn't reveal this information.
134	Doesn't know the income of each one of the house members
135	It is no one's business.
136	Doesn't want to talk about it
137	It is personal. It is no one's business
138	Doesn't have any income. Her daughter helps.
139	I can't say a value. We are both <u>sel</u> -employed and it is very uncertain.
140	Depends on the month.