

## **5 Interviewing interviewers: The SHARE interviewer survey**

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### **5.1 The importance of the interviewer**

Interviewers have a very important role in all interviewer-mediated surveys as they are the link between the researchers who developed and conducted a survey and the data which results from the survey. Tasks are manifold in face-to-face surveys like SHARE where interviewers visit respondents at their homes to conduct an interview. Interviewers have to establish contact with the sampled person, convince him or her to participate in the survey, administer the survey precisely, answer questions arising during the interview, maybe conduct specific measurements or tests and perhaps lay the foundation for successful future contacts in a panel survey (Groves and Couper, 1998; Schaeffer et al., 2010). As not all interviewers are performing equally well in these different tasks, interviewer effects of various kinds might result. Some interviewers are persistent in contacting target persons until they were successful, others are better in nudging target persons into cooperation or are more careful when entering the answers into the computer.

Although interviewers have such an important role within the process of conducting a survey, we know very little about them. A wide literature exists about identifying interviewer effects but relatively little is known about the mechanisms behind these effects. Questions such as “Which characteristics of the interviewers correlate with the effort in persuading respondents to participate in a survey?” are important but can only be answered when information about the interviewers is available. To fill that gap, SHARE launched an interviewer survey.

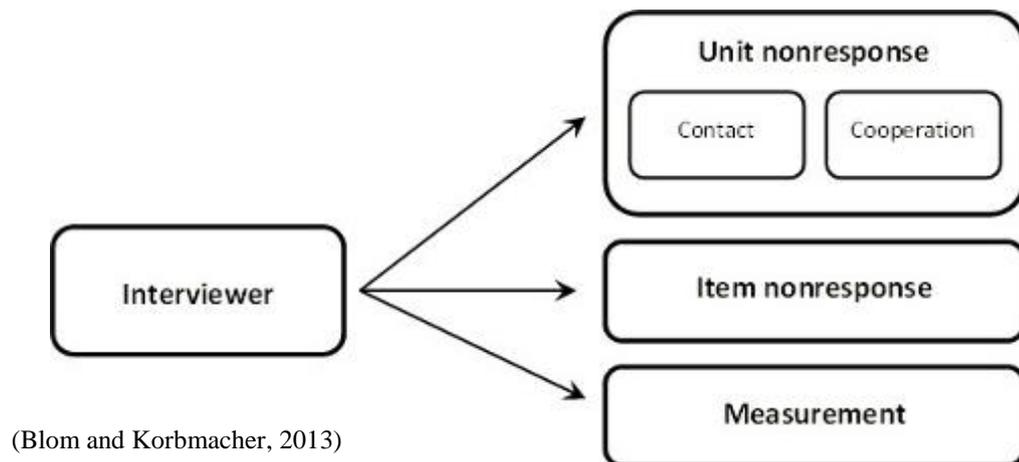
In this chapter, we describe efforts taken during Wave 5. The goal of this project was to make more information available by interviewing the SHARE interviewers prior to fieldwork. The information gathered in this separate survey could be linked to the SHARE survey data each interviewer conducted on his or her respondents.

### **5.2 Interviewer effects in surveys**

The term “interviewer effect” is used if survey outcomes of respondents who are interviewed by the same interviewer are more similar than those of respondents interviewed by different interviewers (Blom and Korbmacher, 2013). Interviewer effects can be found in different steps of a survey as Figure 5.1 shows. This figure gives an overview of the three main aspects of a survey which are prone to interviewer effects.

A large body of literature is available about interviewer effects on contact and cooperation rates (e.g. Groves and Couper, 1998; Campanelli and O’Muircheartaigh,

1999; Pickery and Loosveldt, 2002; Blohm et al., 2006; Durrant et al., 2010; Blom et al., 2011; Lipps and Pollien, 2011) evidencing that interviewers are differentially successful at recruiting survey participants, which determines the **unit response rates** (Blom and Korbmacher, 2013). Research has focused on interviewer attributes such as experience, interviewer skills or interviewer-respondent interaction as well as survey management characteristics like interviewer payment or interviewer burden (for an overview see Blom and Korbmacher, 2013).



**Figure 5.1: Types of interviewer effects in surveys**

Respondents' willingness to provide answers to certain question can also be affected by the interviewer (e.g. Singer et al, 1983, Pickery and Loosveldt, 2001). Especially sensitive questions (e.g. questions on income) are prone to **item nonresponse** as respondents are not willing to provide the information. The way interviewers handle such situations could influence the item nonresponse rate for each question.

The **measurement** itself, for example the answer a respondent gives during the interview or the result of a test, can also be affected by the interviewer. This topic is very divers and interviewer effects vary for different questions and measurements (Schaeffer et al., 2010). Even the presence of an interviewer and interviewers' observable characteristics and their actions during the interview can influence the answers respondents provide in a survey (Groves et al., 2009).

### 5.3 The Wave 5 interviewer survey

The SHARE interviewer survey was implemented as a web survey and was based on the conceptual framework developed by Blom and Korbmacher (2013) which distinguishes four dimensions of interviewer characteristics as possible sources of interviewer effects: interviewer attitudes, interviewers' own behaviour, interviewers' experience, and interviewers' expectations. Besides basic demographics, questions were asked about interviewers' attitudes towards surveys in general, their expectations and

experiences towards some specific SHARE modules as well as some hypothetical questions of how they would behave as a SHARE respondent<sup>1</sup>.

The interviewer survey was coordinated centrally at MEA but all country teams had been invited to participate at the survey. The funding for programming the web survey was covered by the Charles Cannell Fund in Survey Methodology<sup>2</sup>, additional cost as for incentives or translations were covered by the country teams. In sum, six SHARE countries participated in the SHARE interviewer survey: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and Slovenia (SI). Of course, participation of the interviewers was voluntary and confidential, i.e. responses were not shared with their employers (the survey agencies). For the most of them, it was without any monetary compensation. Only Austria and Germany paid incentives to their interviewers. In Austria, all interviewers who completed the survey received a voucher in the amount of 20€ whereas all German interviewers got an (unconditional) incentive (10€ voucher) together with the invitation to participate in the survey.

Interviewers were invited to participate at the end of the national interviewer training sessions. The invitation letters were distributed randomly to interviewers and included the web-link to the survey as well as a unique login code. The interviewers were asked to answer the survey before the beginning of the Wave 5 fieldwork to ensure that their expectations were unaffected by first experiences from the field. To link the interviewer survey data with the SHARE survey data, interviewers were asked to provide their SHARE interviewer-ID at the very end of the interviewer survey.

The number of interviewers working in one country and the participation in the interviewer survey differed greatly between countries and will be described in the following. Table 5.1 gives an overview about the number of interviewers per country as well as the number of cases whose interviewer survey data could be linked successfully with the data they collected from SHARE respondents. In most countries, not all interviewers who participated at the training session also conducted SHARE interviews. For practical reasons, we only refer to interviewers who participated in the national training session **and** worked later as an SHARE interviewer. Column 2 of Table 5.1 refers to that number and summarizes how many interviewers per country worked for the fifth wave of SHARE. The third column reports the number of completed interviews with regard to the interviewer survey. For different reasons, e.g. item nonresponse or typos on the interviewer ID, not all interviews of the interviewer survey could be linked with SHARE data. Therefore, the fourth column reports the number of successfully linked cases. The last column is the ratio of successfully linked cases (column 4) and the number of interviewers (column 3), the so called “linkage rate”.

As Table 5.1 shows, this rate varied a lot between countries, ranging from nearly 83 percent in Germany to about 16 percent in Slovenia. Austria, Belgium and Spain were very close to each other with a linkage rate between 67 to 69 percent.

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<sup>1</sup>The generic questionnaire of Wave 5 can be found here:

[http://www.share-project.org/fileadmin/pdf\\_documentation/Interviewer\\_Survey/Questionnaire\\_w5.pdf](http://www.share-project.org/fileadmin/pdf_documentation/Interviewer_Survey/Questionnaire_w5.pdf)

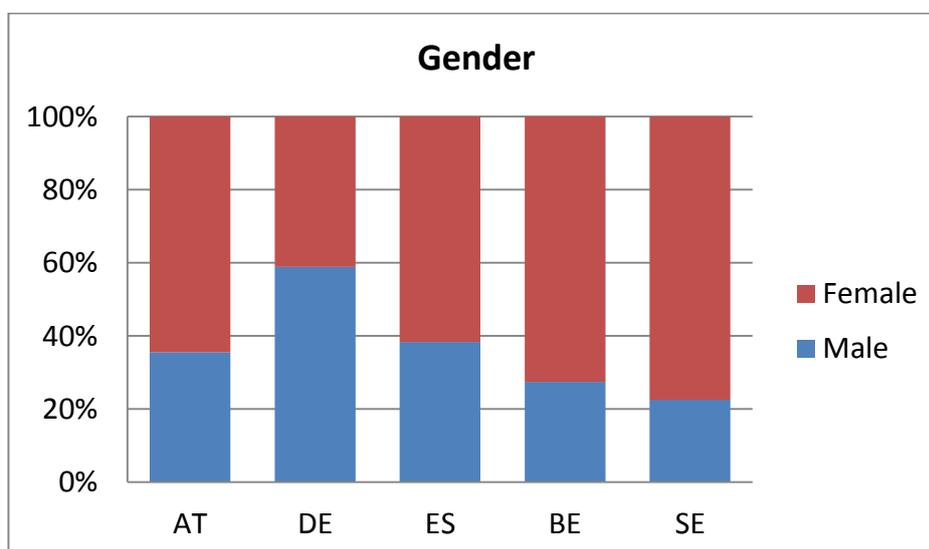
<sup>2</sup><http://home.isr.umich.edu/education/fellowships-awards/the-charles-cannell-fund-in-survey-methodology/>

**Table 5.1: Overview of interviewers and linkage rate by country**

Country	Interviewers in SHARE	Participation interviewer survey	Successfully linked	Linkage rate
AT	88	60	59	67%
DE	177	153	146	83%
BE <sup>3</sup>	137	104	94	69%
ES <sup>4</sup>	127	99	91	72%
SE	95	39	31	33%
SI	45 <sup>5</sup>	16	7	16%

#### 5.4 First results: Comparisons of characteristics of the interviewers within and between countries

Only if interviewers differ in certain characteristics, these characteristics can be used to explain interviewer effects. The following figures show that there is considerable variation in key variables between interviewers and also between countries. Slovenian interviewers are not considered in the following as the analysis would be based on seven interviews only. The first two figures show the variation in interviewers' gender and age.



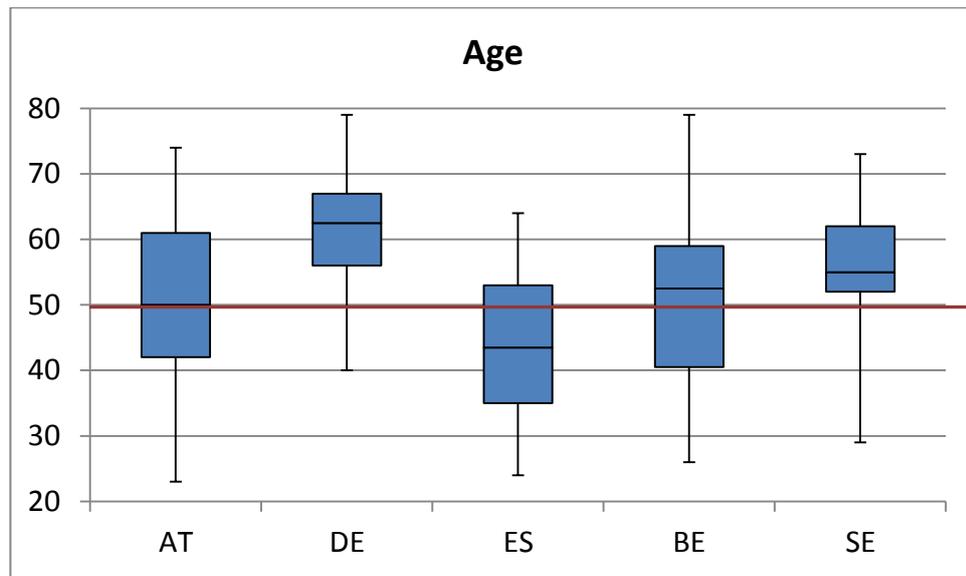
**Figure 5.2: Gender of the interviewers by country**

<sup>3</sup> Two different survey agencies are conducting interviews in Belgium (Flemish and French speaking); the results shown in this paper here combine both.

<sup>4</sup> Two different survey agencies are conducting interviews in Spain; results shown in this paper combine both.

<sup>5</sup> 7 interviewers had been trained on a separate training session and didn't receive the invitation.

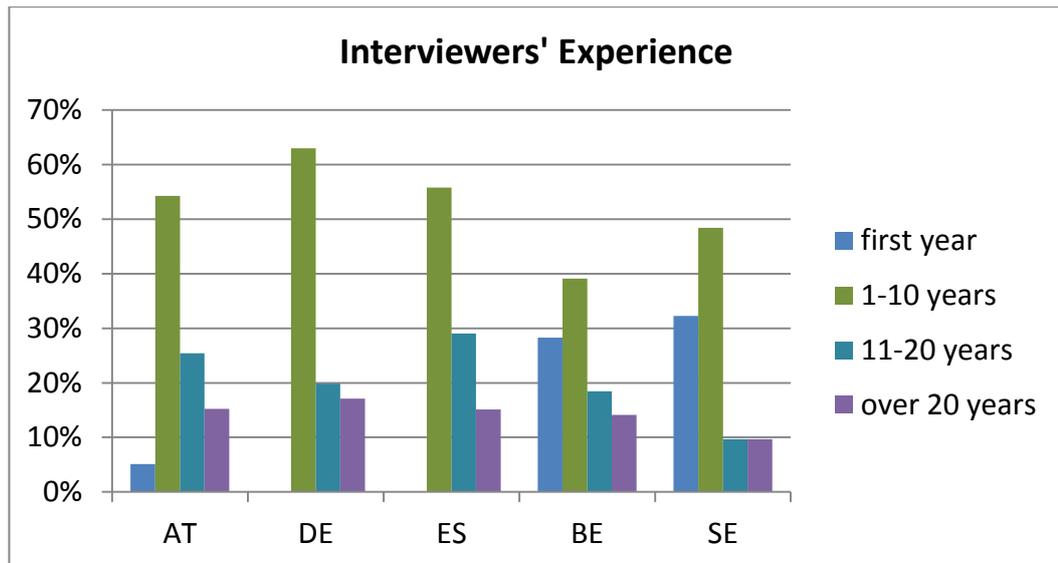
In all countries, except in Germany, the majority of interviewers were female ranging from 77 percent in Sweden to 64 percent in Austria. Only in Germany, male interviewers dominate with 59 percent. Even more obvious were the differences in interviewers' age. Figure 5.3 shows the distribution of interviewers' age using box-plots. The horizontal line within the box refers to the median age in each country. The red line in the graph marks the age 50 (the age at which people get age-eligible for SHARE). The SHARE guidelines suggested selecting interviewers which were in the same age span as their respondents. The German and Swedish survey agency seemed to follow these suggestions best. These interviewers were older than those of other countries and with a smaller variation.



**Figure 5.3: Age of the interviewers by country**

Previous research has shown that interviewers' experience is an important determinant of interviewer effects (e.g. Korbmacher, 2014; Durrant et al. 2010). When considering the average number of years interviewers worked in their job, the countries didn't differ by much. The average varied between 8 and 11 years. Nevertheless, a more detailed examination of the interviewers' experience showed that the distributions of the interviewers' experience varied more than the mean alone would be able to tell. Figure 5.4 displays the job experience of the interviewers broken down into four categories<sup>6</sup>.

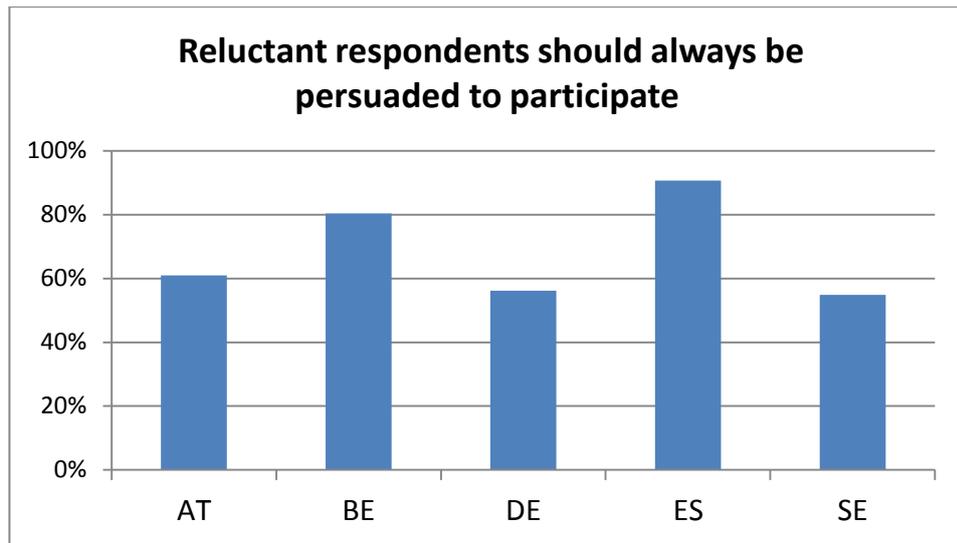
<sup>6</sup> Based on question v1: „In what year did you first start working as an interviewer?“ it has to be kept in mind that the timespan must not indicate continuous tenure as interviewer.



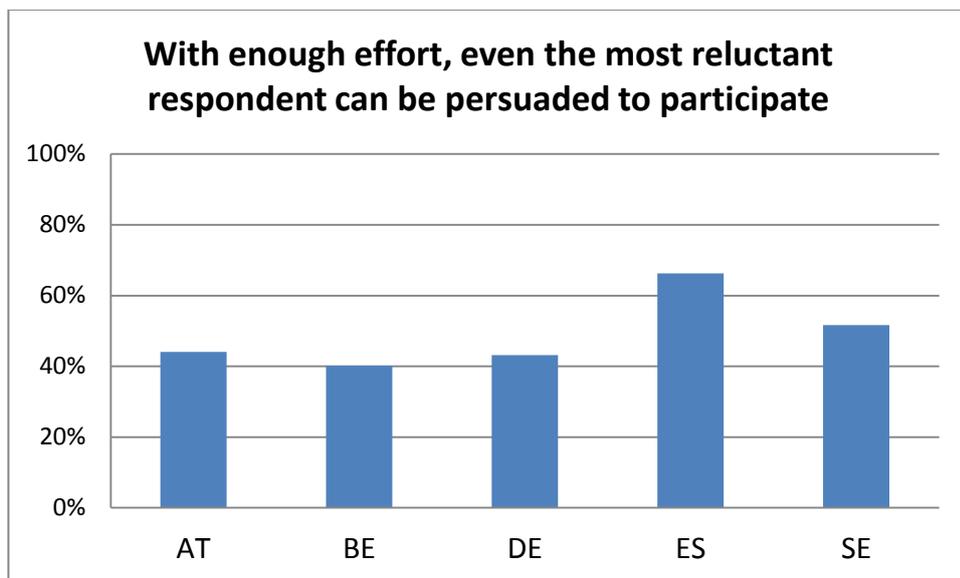
**Figure 5.4: Experience of the interviewers by country**

The most obvious dissimilarities could be found with regard to interviewers with less than one year of experience. In Germany and Spain, none of the interviewers worked in their job for less than one year whereas Belgium and Sweden showed a considerable amount of interviewers with less than one year of job experience.

The last two figures refer to the interviewers' attitudes towards reluctant respondents. In the questionnaire we gave a list of eight statements on how interviewers could engage with reluctant respondents. The two statements we selected here refer to a normative belief about whether or not reluctant respondents should be persuaded to participate and to self-efficacy, i.e. whether or not the participation of reluctant respondents was under the control of the interviewer. Response options were "strongly agree", "somewhat agree", "somewhat disagree" or "strongly disagree". We combined the first two answers into *agree*. The share of interviewers who agreed to the statement that "*Reluctant respondents should always be persuaded to participate*" and "*With enough effort, even the most reluctant respondent can be persuaded to participate*" is illustrated in Figure 5.5 and 5.6, respectively.



**Figure 5.5: Percentage of agreement towards reluctant respondents by country**



**Figure 5.6: Percentage of agreement towards reluctant respondents by country**

A comparison of the two statements shows that agreement was higher for the first statement compared to the second across all countries. So the majority of all interviewers confirmed that it is important to persuade reluctant respondents, but only in Spain and Sweden the majority of interviewers also assumed that it was matter of interviewers' effort.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Interviewers are an important actor within the process of conducting a survey. They have a high potential to influence different survey outcomes. The descriptive analysis of aspects prone to interviewer effects is an important first step. Understanding the mechanisms behind these effects is the logical next step. Our interviewer survey carries high potential for analyzing and understanding the effect of the interviewer within the Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe. The descriptive comparison of interviewer characteristics shows that there is variation between interviewers within one country and also between countries. This is an important prerequisite to identify characteristics of the interviewers which can explain interviewer effects. At the time of writing, the data of the interviewer survey is slated for release together with the first release of the Wave 5 SHARE data in March 2015. Information on how to get access to the data will be made available on the SHARE homepage: <http://www.share-project.org/methodological-research/interviewer-survey.html>

We plan to extend this project to additional waves of SHARE as well as to additional SHARE countries. The survey will be implemented in SHARE's sixth wave in up to 11 countries. To increase the response rates, incentives will be paid to all interviewers who will complete the survey. As some countries will participate for the second time, with the beginning of Wave 6, the interviewer survey also starts its longitudinal dimension.

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