

# **The Role of Survey Methodology in the Reporting of Satisfaction**

## **An Investigation of Interview-Specific Effects in the SOEP**

Empirical research that uses subjective data on individual satisfaction levels relies heavily on the validity of the information reported by survey participants. However, situation-specific factors, such as the atmosphere in which the interview takes place, may cause considerable differences in satisfaction responses. While some researchers have, in fact, discussed the role of survey factors and acknowledged that these aspects account for a significant portion of the variance in satisfaction measured, by and large, this issue has been ignored by most in the scientific community. Hence, researchers tend to assume—in most cases more implicitly than explicitly—that there is no systematic bias in the data collected on well-being. If this were a case of random variation, sufficiently large samples would indeed allow these effects to get averaged out. However, a closer look at this methodological issue reveals an urgent need for intensive research in this field.

By analysing satisfaction responses in one of the largest panel studies available, the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), this study examines the role of interview-specific factors, such as the survey method used and the weekday on which the interview took place. The research objectives are to determine whether there are relevant differences in measured satisfaction levels, how these effects change depending on the specific satisfaction measure, and whether the consideration of interview-specific factors may even alter previously established conclusions regarding well-known and often-investigated determinants of individual satisfaction. Not only by presenting strong empirical evidence for the impact of survey factors on the measurement of satisfaction, but also by indicating potential bias problems, this study suggests that empirical research should consider interview-specific factors in order to avoid drawing inaccurate conclusions.

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