

*Problems of maintaining respondent rapport in surveys are exacerbated when respondents are asked to participate repeatedly over time or when several members of a family are interviewed. This article details the techniques used to maintain respondent rapport in a longitudinal study involving six interviews over eighteen years, which, after being expanded to include a second family member, still included 85% of the original respondents. The article describes techniques designed to assist and motivate the interviewers to do an effective job and those utilized to make the interviewing process pleasant and rewarding for the respondents.*

## Obtaining Respondent Cooperation in Family Panel Studies

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**E**mpirical research on family structure and relations increasingly has required data sets that follow families over time and interview several family members. However, such samples are particularly vulnerable to attrition because of the difficulties in maintaining contact and rapport with one or more family members over long time periods. Unfortunately, there is only limited published guidance for minimizing respondent attrition in longitudinal studies (Clarridge, Sheehy, and Hansen, 1977; Crider, Willetts, and Bealer, 1976; Freedman, Thornton, and Camburn, 1980). Most of the small set of successful longitudinal studies have had to acquire their expertise through trial and error with some attendant costs in response rates (Brinser, 1977).

This article documents the techniques developed for maintaining respondent cooperation in the Study of American Families—a longitudinal study that successfully interviewed a sample of mothers six times between 1962 and 1980, expanding

the sample during the last wave to include an interview with the family's 18-year-old child. Response rates were excellent throughout, with the 1980 survey successfully completing interviews with both mother and child in 85% of the original 1962 respondent families.

This study used a probability sample of first-, second-, and fourth-born children drawn from the 1961 birth records of the Detroit metropolitan area. The mothers were interviewed personally in 1962 right after the birth and by telephone in succeeding waves. In the 1980 study, a personal interview was conducted with the child born in 1961. The main focus of the original study concerned the social and economic correlates of fertility. This was broadened in the 1977 and 1980 surveys to include many other aspects of family interrelationships, with the last survey emphasizing the influence of parental families on the children's lives.

Maintaining high response rates in longitudinal studies requires: (a) that the respondents be located at each successive interview, and (b) that their willingness to cooperate be maintained. The procedures used in locating respondents in 1977—eleven years after the last previous contact, were detailed in an earlier article (Freedman et al., 1980). The present article concerns the problems of generating respondent cooperation of a sufficient magnitude so that they are willing to grant repeated interviews and to facilitate interviews with other members of their families.

#### *MOTIVATION AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION*

Researchers who seek to successfully collect longitudinal data must enlist the full cooperation of the respondents, who alone have the needed information, and of the interviewers, who provide the primary access to the respondents. For both respondents and interviewers, there can be some costs or barriers in the data collection process. Respondents must contribute a substantial time input, with some associated inconvenience, and

also may experience some psychological costs in discussing their personal attitudes and circumstances with strangers. Interviewers are subject to the risks of a multitude of possible awkward, embarrassing, or anxiety-producing interactions, including outright rejection by a disgruntled respondent.

Fortunately, there also are satisfactions and benefits from participating in a successful study that can provide the necessary motivation. There are satisfactions in being key and valued elements in a socially valued study. The interview experience itself can be satisfying; it can give respondents the opportunity to express their views to an interested listener, and interviewers have the opportunity to meet many different people and discuss their circumstances and opinions.

The success of any data collection endeavor may depend largely on the extent to which the researchers and their study design can maximize the satisfactions and minimize the barriers to participation for the interviewers and respondents. This is particularly true in long-term panel studies where respondents will base their future participation decisions on their remembrance of the quality of their past experiences. While the importance of making the survey experience satisfying for the respondents is often recognized, the necessity of a similar effort with respect to the interviewers is rarely understood, despite the fact that a successful interview may hinge on the interviewers transmitting their own positive outlook toward the study to the respondent.

Most research decisions affect the motivations of both interviewers and respondents. Although the effect of any particular decision may be marginal, in total they can have a tremendous impact on the orientation of interviewers and respondents toward a study. Some decisions may concern basic design issues, involving tradeoffs between collecting a sufficient body of information for the research goals of the study and minimizing respondent attrition. Careful attention to potential respondent loss from the inception of a project can substantially improve response rates while minimizing the conflict between data needs and respondent attrition.

We stress that we have not systematically studied the process of decision making in implementing the research design of the Study of American Families nor can we provide proof of the effect of any particular decision on the response rate. Our intent, instead, is to review the decisions and processes of one successful study to identify techniques that could improve response rates in other studies. We also report on the interviewers' perceptions of what accounted for the study's excellent response rate. We consider first decisions and procedures directed primarily toward the respondents, noting indirect effects of these on the interviewing staff, and then we turn to interactions between the research staff and the interviewers.

*PROCEDURES DESIGNED PRIMARILY  
FOR RESPONDENTS*

*WRITTEN COMMUNICATION*

All communications with respondents were designed to emphasize the positive benefits for participation in the study. The letters introducing each new interview stressed the history, continuity, and significance of the study, telling the respondents that since they (or their mothers) had been interviewed previously, it was very important to talk with them again. The letter to the respondent also was designed to be as personal and friendly as possible, conveying an interest in them, their activities, plans, and opinions, while explaining the study as fully as possible to alleviate any fears or misgivings.

Correspondence with a large number of respondents inevitably involves a tradeoff between personalization and economy. The most economical procedure involves a mass produced form letter containing no personal identification and an envelope addressed with a computer produced sticker. Such a letter, though inexpensive, may be discarded unopened as "junk mail" Even when such a letter is opened and read, the mechanized format may not persuade the respondents that their cooperation is valued. In the 1977 survey we used a form letter upon which

the respondent's name, address, and a personalized salutation were typed; individually typed envelopes were also used. In the 1980 survey, with a sample doubled to include two respondents per family, the computer was used to produce, at moderate cost, individually typed letters and envelopes for each mother. The contents of the letter differentiated between mothers who had a son or daughter born in 1961.

This procedure could not be used for the sons and daughters, since neither their given names nor their addresses were known prior to the 1980 mothers' interviews. Instead, a form letter was produced upon which the interviewer subsequently wrote a personal salutation; the letter was mailed in a hand-addressed envelope. This hand-addressed letter was more personal than a mass-produced form letter.

Additional correspondence to the respondents also was individualized. For example, respondents who were reluctant to participate or who desired more information about the study were sent personal letters that addressed their individual concerns or desires. Where a number of respondents shared a particular concern, individualized personal letters addressing each particular problem were produced by the computer, maintaining our efforts to treat each respondent individually.

In an effort to strengthen the identification of the respondents with the study, the research staff developed a logo. The logo, together with the name of the study, was incorporated into the study's stationery—both letterhead and envelopes—as well as in the design of the survey instruments.

After each wave of interviews the respondents were sent a letter expressing the appreciation of the research staff for their participation in the study, together with a short report summarizing some of the interesting findings. Over the years, many of the respondents mentioned receiving the reports and expressed an interest in them. The 1980 study report was more comprehensive than previous ones since many of the respondents, during the 1980 interview, indicated they would appreciate receiving more information. The interest of the respondents in the findings provided an indication of the importance of such communica-

tions in strengthening the identification of the respondents with the study.

While the individualization of correspondence was designed primarily to promote respondent rapport, it also served to improve the motivation of the interviewers who perceived it as an effort by the research staff to ease the interviewing task. They felt that the reception from respondents was more likely to be positive in light of these efforts at treating each respondent individually. While the net impact on interviewers cannot be estimated, it was frequently cited by them as a worthy objective and seemed to enhance their morale.

#### *PERSONALIZATION OF THE INTERVIEW*

The opening statements of each of the mother's questionnaires were personalized so as to be relevant for a particular respondent, using information collected at previous interviews. For example, after a brief statement in which the interviewer introduced herself, noted her affiliation with the University of Michigan, and mentioned the introductory letter previously sent to the respondent, the first question might read as follows: "When we talked with you in the spring of 1977, there were (5) persons in your family: you, your husband (Alex), and your (3) children, (2) boys, and (1) girl. I would like to know about any changes that have taken place in your family since then." Right below, in a listing box, a computer-produced sticker was affixed that detailed the persons living in the household at the last interview, with the names of the husband and wife as well as the age and sex of each household member. The interviewer was instructed to insert the relevant data in the appropriate blanks prior to the interview so that her opening approach would include the correct date of the previous interview, the husband's name, and the exact composition of the family at the time of the previous interview. Thus, the interviewer could immediately establish that we had known the respondent before and now wanted to talk with her again. When a marital dissolution was discovered in the process of locating a respondent, the interviewer was careful to use the term "former" in referring to the ex-husband.

*STUDY CONTENT*

The subject content of a study undoubtedly is a factor in maintaining respondent cooperation. This study was fortunate in that throughout the six interviews with mothers, it focused on their own lives and families. They were asked questions such as past childbearing and plans for additional children, present work and work plans, present activities and aspirations for the future, and their attitudes about children, home, and work. The young adults in the 1980 study were questioned about concerns central to them: likes and dislikes; friends; and attitudes and plans concerning marriage, children, school, and work.

These were topics in which most of our respondents were inherently interested and knowledgeable. They were also topics that the respondents thought important and could discuss intelligently. They could easily tell us about their activities and plans, and many felt flattered that we were interested. Furthermore, the interviews were generally about the respondents *themselves* rather than dealing with less central concerns and issues. The subject matter also appeared to affect the motivation of the interviewees since they frequently commented about their interest in the study topics.

Some research topics that are important for scientific and policy purposes are not very appealing to respondents. However, if, as we believe, study content has an important influence on response rates over time, researchers must be aware that research on topics of less interest to respondents will have less chance of holding the respondents' attention over a number of years; respondents will be much more likely to view their experience as a burden rather than a pleasure. In these instances, the researcher should expend considerable effort to make the interview as interesting as possible so as to minimize respondent burden.

We benefited from one advantage of longitudinal studies in that over time, our respondents had become aware of the study's uniqueness. They sensed that there can be few, if any, studies that extend over an eighteen-year period and include two generations from the same family. The uniqueness of the study and the honor they felt in being involved was mentioned by several

respondents during the course of the interviews. This advantage probably can be capitalized on by most panel studies when they recontact respondents for additional interviews.

### *STUDY FLEXIBILITY*

While the researcher can design standardized interviewing procedures that will minimize the burden for most respondents, there usually are a substantial number of cases where these procedures are neither optimal nor desirable. In these cases, flexibility in meeting the needs of respondents may forestall refusals. One important advantage in having the research staff monitor the data collection is that they can detect such problems as they arise and act quickly to devise solutions. However, the decision to accept alternative ways of obtaining interviews from reluctant or hard-to-reach respondents is best made by the research directors. In earlier waves of the study, the research staff varied the interviewing procedures when it was necessary to maintain families in the sample who otherwise would have been lost. Personal interviews were substituted for those few respondents who did not have a phone, or who needed an interpreter to help them converse in English. Mail interviews were used for the few respondents who were both unavailable by telephone and outside the range of personal contact. This flexibility maintained the sample without an apparent loss in data quality.

In conducting the 1980 interviews there were several situations where flexibility proved essential for obtaining respondent cooperation. The first concerned the choice of the site for the adolescent interview. Because of warnings from colleagues experienced in adolescent studies that the parental home lacked sufficient privacy for interviewing adolescents, pretest adolescent interviews were conducted outside the parental home—in such places as libraries or YMCAs. However, it was discovered that many of the young people preferred the more convenient home interview site, and subsequent experiments revealed a considerable diversity among respondents as to their preferences for an interview site. In a substantial percentage of the cases, the



interviews were conducted in the parental home (or in the young person's dorm or apartment) with a minimum of inconvenience for the respondent and with no problems of interference from other people. However, there also were a considerable number of cases where the home situation did lack sufficient privacy and, in fact, a considerable number of respondents were unwilling to be interviewed at home, indicating that they preferred a more private location.

Instead of the research staff arbitrarily deciding what was private and what was not, respondents were allowed to choose the interviewing locus providing them optimal privacy. The interviewer pointed out the importance of having the interview in a quiet place where they would not be disturbed and then would accept the respondent's choice, being ready to suggest possible nonhome sites if necessary. As a result, in most cases the interviews were conducted at places both convenient and comfortable for the respondent.

In a few cases, home interviews were necessary even though the privacy provided was not optimal. The biases from the lack of privacy in such situations was minimized by our use of a self-administered questionnaire for the most controversial and sensitive questions. This procedure also appeared to improve interviewer and respondent rapport, since it avoided face-to-face discussion of sensitive issues.

Flexible procedures with regard to the mode of interview also were necessitated by the scattered nature of our sample, which precluded personal interviews with some of the young adults. A substantial number of them lived outside the range of the interviewing staff and the cost of sending trained interviewers to scattered sites proved prohibitive. Special provisions were made to conduct these interviews by telephone. All such respondents received a letter that indicated an interviewer would be contacting them by phone and that included a booklet containing the response categories for use in the interview. A select staff of interviewers was chosen and trained for these telephone interviews and marginal modifications were made in the format of the self-administered part of the questionnaire so it could be more easily done by telephone. No problems were encountered

with this improvised procedure, probably because the research staff, in constructing the questionnaires, had kept in mind the possibility that some interviews would be conducted on the phone, thereby avoiding later problems in administration.

Alternative modes of interview were also used to obtain interviews with respondents whose busy schedules made it difficult to arrange a personal interview. All the adolescent interviewers were trained in telephone interviewing techniques and were instructed to suggest a telephone interview when respondents seemed reluctant to establish personal interview appointments or repeatedly failed to keep appointments.

This procedure also was used to persuade unwilling respondents to participate. Persuasion letters were sent emphasizing the value of the respondents' input into the study and suggesting the interview be done by telephone so as not to encroach too much on their busy schedules. The telephone number of the study director was provided and the young person was invited to call collect if there were any questions. In a number of cases potential respondents called the study director personally while others agreed to telephone interviews when they were re-contacted.

A number of respondents could not be interviewed in person or by telephone because they were living outside the country or lacked the time or inclination to talk to an interviewer. These respondents were sent a questionnaire, together with a return envelope, appropriate postage, and a letter asking them to complete and return the questionnaire. To ensure comparability between the mail questionnaires and those obtained through the interviewers, a series of hand-written notes were incorporated into the standard questionnaire to clarify the instructions and to identify the appropriate filters for the question sequences.

A distribution of the frequency of the different interviewing locii and methods utilized in obtaining the information from the young adults is provided in Table 1. Nearly two-thirds of the interviews with the young adults were conducted in the respondent's home, while another 14% were personal interviews conducted outside the respondent's home. In addition, one-sixth of

**TABLE 1**  
**Location and Interviewing Method for the Young Adult Sample**

	Percent
Personal interview in respondents's home -- living with parents	53.9
Personal interview in respondents home -- not living with parents	11.9
Personal interview outside the home	14.0
Telephone interview	16.6
Mail interview	3.6
Total	100.0%
Number of Respondents	934

the interviews were conducted by telephone and another 4% through the mails. Thus, while the bulk of the interviews were obtained through straightforward personal interviews in the respondent's home, the achieved high response rate required the use of a number of additional strategies.

#### *FINANCIAL REWARDS*

One obvious incentive for respondents is to pay them for their participation in the study. A number of longitudinal studies routinely offer a nominal financial incentive, but there is disagreement as to the value of any feasible financial payment as an incentive. Over the fifteen previous years of this study no financial payments had been made to the mothers. Since many researchers believe remuneration is particularly valuable for obtaining cooperation in youth studies, in our 1980 study each young adult was given \$5.00 as a way of expressing appreciation for their time.

The effect of these payments on respondent motivation is unclear. The interviewers were divided in their evaluations; while most agreed that the payment was appreciated, they differed sharply as to its importance relative to other factors in fostering

respondent cooperation. Unfortunately, there was no systematic way to evaluate that effect.

In addition to the high response rates achieved, there was some tangible evidence that the sum total of the various efforts detailed above were successful in making the interviews a pleasant experience for the respondents. Many of the mothers commented on how pleased they were to be interviewed again. They appeared to be flattered that we were interested in them, said they had enjoyed the reports, and seemed to feel that their efforts were appreciated. As one interviewer states, "Most of the respondents consider us old friends. Many were waiting for our call, wondering if they would ever hear from us again. We have shown in the past that we really care what they think." The comments of the children confirmed the enthusiasm felt by the mothers. One interviewer, in discussing the success of the interviews with the young adults, noted that, "the mothers had already been interviewed and almost all were enthusiastic about the study and transmitted this spirit of enthusiasm and cooperation to their son or daughter. For example, there was the oft-repeated remark, "My mother said that I would really enjoy the interview." It is our belief that the kind of enthusiasm transmitted from mothers to their children (along with our efforts to minimize the burdens of participation) produced the high response rates among the sons and daughters.

The positive orientation of the respondents was also a very important reward for the interviewers. Many of the interviewers echoed the sentiment that "the nicest part of the study for me was the respondents themselves—on the whole charming, courteous, and cooperative." These positive rewards received by the interviewers from respondents probably had a favorable influence on the morale of the interviewers and, in the final analysis, the success of the study.

#### *PROCEDURES DESIGNED PRIMARILY FOR INTERVIEWERS*

The interviewer's role is crucial to the success of a study because all the procedures and materials designed by the research

staff are transmitted through him or her to the respondents. Whether these procedures and materials prove successful depends to a large extent upon the motivation, morale, and skill of the interviewers. An interviewer with positive feelings toward the interview materials, the study staff, and the likely receptiveness of the respondents is more likely to demonstrate a positive, confident, and friendly attitude toward the respondents, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of respondent cooperation.

In most field surveys, a high level of interviewer morale is essential to the study's success, because although a substantial proportion of the respondents usually is available and cooperative, another large fraction proves difficult to find or has substantial reservations about participating. For example, in this survey, a considerable number of the respondents were not readily available for an interview; these included some who were in the army, on board a naval vessel, in the hospital with a serious illness, in jail, studying in foreign countries, had unlisted telephones, or could not be located at all. Even when a contact was readily made, obtaining an interview frequently proved difficult to obtain if respondents were too busy to participate or just reluctant to grant an interview. In these situations, interviewers must be diligent and flexible in persuading respondents to participate. They must persist even when they are rebuffed, reassure respondents who worry about confidentiality, and be willing to schedule interviews at inconvenient times and places. And of course, their job becomes more onerous as the remaining cases narrow down to those that are particularly difficult and yet necessary for achieving a high response rate.

Given the difficulty of the interviewing job, the research staff should make an important commitment to do everything possible to encourage the interviewers and ease their task. There are several things that the research staff can do to build interviewer morale and dedication. First, they should try, where possible, to integrate the interviewing staff fully into the research team by utilizing their survey skills and giving due recognition to their contribution. Second, they should make a concerted effort to imbue the interviewers with their own sense of the study's importance, by explaining the purposes of the study

fully and by attempting to communicate their own sense of enthusiasm about the study. Finally, they should expend every effort to make the interviewing experience pleasant and gratifying.

*Integrating the interviewing staff more fully into the research team.* Involving the interviewers in the design and administration of the fieldwork enhances their understanding of the purposes and importance of the study and should increase their morale. In addition, the practical know-how of experienced interviewers can make an important contribution to the success of the field operation. For example, experienced interviewers usually have an intuitive grasp of what makes a questionnaire work and about which questions can arouse anxiety or resentment in respondents or prove difficult and embarrassing for the interviewers. They also know what kinds of field procedures will maximize the ease and efficiency of the interviewing process.

In this study a core group of experienced interviewers, several of whom had worked on earlier waves, participated actively in the pretesting and development of both the questionnaire and the field procedures. Their opinions and suggestions were solicited and many of their ideas were adopted. Their input and advice were particularly important in deciding several key issues: where to conduct the interviews, how to ensure the confidentiality of the most sensitive parts of the interview, procedures for making and monitoring interviewing assignments, the tone and content of the correspondence with respondents, questionnaire format and flow, and the wording of individual questions. While it is impossible to adopt all the interviewers' suggestions, the willingness of the research staff to expend the time and effort to consider them seriously can markedly improve interviewer morale.

The use of interviewers for specialized field assignments also integrates them more fully into the research team. In this study one of the experienced interviewers acted as coordinator of the interviewing process—assigning interviews with each young adult after the mothers' interview was completed and reassigning

interviews when necessary. This coordinator, together with the research directors and interviewer supervisor, kept careful check on the completion rates and interviewing performance of the new interviewers, so that remedial action could be taken where indicated. Two of the experienced interviewers used their special skills to handle delicate situations—those involving deaths in the family, divorce, or children not living with their parents. Another specialized in locating respondents and in persuading reluctant respondents to participate.

The core group of experienced interviewers also handled the crucial job of recruiting and training a fairly large number of new interviewers. They took charge of such training jobs as explaining the questionnaire in detail, outlining the techniques essential for good interviewing, and organizing practice sessions where the new recruits obtained experience in administering the interviews. During these sessions, the trainers could draw on their prior experience to point out tactics that had proved successful in earlier waves.

*Communicating the purposes and importance of the research.*

The research staff had many opportunities to communicate the purposes of the study to the core group of experienced interviewers. As part of the pretesting process, many discussions ensued about the purposes and intent of particular questions and their relationship to the underlying aims of the study. In the training sessions for the new interviewers, every opportunity was taken to explain the purposes of the study and the relevance of the various sections of the questionnaire for the study's aims.

As an additional communication aid, two orientation conferences were held for the entire interviewing staff—one prior to starting the interviews with the mothers and the other before the young adult interviews. These conferences allowed all the interviewers to interact with the study staff, to catch the staff's enthusiasm and interest in the study, and to ask questions about the study purposes and procedures. The conferences gave the experienced interviewers an opportunity to point out how well the interviewing had gone on previous waves and on the pretest

and to assure the new recruits that the study was fun, the questionnaire was easy to administer, and the respondents pleasant. One could almost see the anxieties and uncertainties associated with a new study disappear as the "old-timers" shared their enthusiasm for the study.

*Facilitating the interviewing task.* One of the most effective things a research staff can do to facilitate the interviewing task is to design a questionnaire that is couched in simple language, maintains an easy flow, avoids embarrassing or awkward questions, and is easy to administer. Pretests should be made to identify problems in form format and wording and any revisions also should be tested, if at all possible, before completing the final draft.

Another technique for facilitating the interviewing process involves the identification of potential problem cases from earlier waves of the study. In the 1977 survey, when the interviewing materials were prepared by hand, the research staff read all the previous interviews and noted any special circumstances or idiosyncrasies about the respondent on the new cover sheet. In the 1980 study a special effort was made to identify certain types of problem areas, those where previous interviews had revealed family problems such as deaths, serious illnesses, or the institutionalization of family members. These warning signals were greatly appreciated by the interviewers since it allowed them to avoid embarrassing and awkward situations.

Unfortunately, the use of computer-prepared study materials precluded the opportunity to identify other kinds of problem issues from previous interviews. One potential advantage of panel surveys is that the identification of problem cases could be incorporated into the survey design, something we plan to do in future waves. This can be done by having such respondent problems recorded by the interviewers and coded into the data set, where they can be identified easily in preparing for the next round of interviews.

One useful technique for building morale among new interviewers is the scheduling of their first interviews with cooperative respondents since a pleasant initial experience fosters a positive



and enthusiastic approach toward succeeding interviews. To achieve this, the staff must be able to identify reluctant or uncooperative respondents from earlier waves, so that these cases can be assigned toward the end of the interviewing period. The importance of an early success was confirmed by the reaction of one new interviewer who was devastated by a refusal on the first call and required substantial reassurance before being willing to continue. Fortunately, this experience was an exception; in most cases the positive expectations of the interviewers were reinforced by an early favorable experience. On future waves of the study, we plan to utilize information about the level of the respondents' cooperation to schedule the first interviews with predictably cooperative and pleasant respondents. This can be arranged in panel studies by coding the pleasantness of previous interviews into the data file. Of course, there are instances where other goals, such as the necessity of completing the interviews within a short period, might place a premium on assigning difficult cases first so as to ensure completion of the interviews within the study's field schedule. However, such a decision should be made only after serious consideration is given to its possible adverse effect on interviewer morale.

We believe that a high level of interviewer morale was achieved in this study, which, in turn, was a crucial element in the maintenance of high response rates. Some corroboration for this is evidenced from the comments made by some interviewers in response to our questions about what they thought accounted for the high response rate of this study.

I do believe one of the reasons for the high response rate of the study is the fact that interviewers do so enjoy working on the study. That is so important in getting people to do a good job. During training the interviewers were so enthused about the questionnaire and the interviewing situation that I feel this enthusiasm was transmitted to the respondents, and they in turn were eager to do their parts.

When an interviewer is as interested in a study as we were in this one, no way are we going to miss talking to that person who doesn't want to talk to us.

The enthusiasm of the interviewers was undoubtedly a factor in the success of the study.

I truly felt that I was contributing to important research and that my feelings about the study were carried over to the respondents.

The way you have successful interviews is to keep the interviewers happy.

### *THE PRIMARY ROLE OF THE RESEARCH STAFF*

In the final analysis, the research staff must assume the primary responsibility for maintaining response rates. Their job is to establish study procedures such that participation in the study constitutes a positive experience for both respondents and interviewers. To do this, the research directors must be aware of the possible barriers to survey participation for respondents and interviewers and work to minimize these barriers and to maximize the rewards of survey participation.

The involvement of the research director should extend to participation in the daily activities of the study. The research staff must be prepared to reassign interviews, send out personalized letters answering the respondents' questions, and to look through files for information that will help the interviewers locate respondents or encourage respondent participation. In short, there are so many ways that respondents can be lost to a panel study that research staffs must be willing to exhaust all methods and approaches before accepting the loss of a respondent. Without this commitment over time, the attrition will become too great.

In this study, the research directors checked daily with the field staff, communicated regularly with the interviewer supervisor, and personally evaluated the steps to be taken for each reluctant or negative respondent. Thus, the research staff could quickly identify situations creating undue barriers for either respondents or interviewers and attempt to remove them. At the same time, their daily involvement and commitment to obtaining

the maximum number of completed interviews was a continual reinforcement for the interviewing staff that their efforts were important and appreciated. In our opinion, there is no substitute for the daily supervision of the research staff in the achievement of a quality data set. Only in this way can the research staff fully communicate the importance of obtaining respondent cooperation and provide the rewards for successful completion of difficult cases.

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