SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION METHODS COLLABORATION

Report 8: Knock-to-nudge methods for recruitment in self-administered surveys: Evidence review

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Survey Futures is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded initiative (grant ES/X014150/1) aimed at bringing about a step change in survey research to ensure that high quality social survey research can continue in the UK. The initiative brings together social survey researchers, methodologists, commissioners and other stakeholders from across academia, government, private and not-for-profit sectors. Activities include an extensive programme of research, a training and capacity-building (TCB) stream, and dissemination and promotion of good practice. The research programme aims to assess the quality implications of the most important design choices relevant to future UK surveys, with a focus on inclusivity and representativeness, while the TCB stream aims to provide understanding of capacity and skills needs in the survey sector (both interviewers and research professionals), to identify promising ways to improve both, and to take steps towards making those improvements. Survey Futures is directed by Professor Peter Lynn, University of Essex, and is a collaboration of twelve organisations, benefiting from additional support from the Office for National Statistics and the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. Further information can be found at www.surveyfutures.net.

Research Strand 4 of Survey Futures ("Methods for surveys without field interviewers"), led by Professor Olga Maslovskaya (University of Southampton), focuses on the challenges associated with self-completion general population surveys in both cross-sectional and longitudinal contexts. The strand explores ways to optimise design characteristics, with the aim of achieving more representative samples of the general population. The main challenges associated with self-completion general population surveys are associated with the absence of field interviewers to facilitate recruitment and retention of participants and, additionally in a UK context, the absence of a sampling frame of named individuals. Research Strand 4 has five sub-projects:

(1) Recruitment methods.

(2) Targeted survey procedures.

(3) Population subgroups.

(4) Knock-to-nudge

(5) Within-household selection methods.

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Contents

Executive summary

The knock-to-nudge (KtN) approach was first introduced in the UK during a relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions as a method to boost response rates. It involves face-to-face interviewers visiting sampled households to recruit participants for a subsequent non-face-to-face survey – conducted via telephone, video, or online. Although initially adopted as a temporary solution to pandemic-related constraints, KtN has continued to attract interest among survey researchers. This sustained attention stems from its potential advantages during a broader shift towards self-completion surveys.

This evidence review aims to formalise a definition of KtN, analyse its features and limitations, and review its use in UK household surveys. It also assesses the limited existing evidence and proposes methodologies for evaluating the approach's effectiveness and long-term role.

This review, based on UK surveys that implemented KtN during and after the pandemic, identifies a wide range of practices under the general KtN definition. These variations depend on factors such as the survey modes offered, the information exchanged at the doorstep, the data collected at the doorstep, and the criteria used to determine which addresses receive a KtN visit.

Initial research findings suggest that KtN can improve both survey participation rates and sample composition by engaging harder-to-survey groups – potentially affecting key survey estimates. However, these benefits must be balanced against potential drawbacks. Recruiting less-engaged participants may lead to lower data quality, such as increased item non-response. Furthermore, KtN adds costs to fully online or telephone-based surveys due to its reliance on field interviewers' visits to households.

The long-term viability of KtN will ultimately depend on clear evidence of its efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Robust experimental data will be essential for confidently evaluating its benefits and determining its future role in high-quality social surveys.

1 Introduction

Face-to-face interviewing has traditionally been considered the most desirable approach for high-quality survey data collection. It allows interviewers to improve contact and cooperation rates while controlling household and respondent selection, and to obtain more reliable information by building rapport and trust with respondents. However, declining response rates, increasing field costs of face-to-face interviewing, and the widespread availability of multiple communication channels, have contributed to the reduction of its predominant role in social and market research (Schober, 2018; Kunz *et al.*, 2024). The switch from face-to-face to mixed-mode surveys, including self-administered modes not requiring field interviewers, has been long encouraged (Dillman, 2020; Luijkx *et al.*, 2021; Wolf *et al.*, 2021), and the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for more innovative approaches in adapting to changing conditions and unforeseen events (Eurostat, 2020; Kastberg and Siegler, 2022).

Switching to online and mixed-mode designs for high-quality probability-based surveys entails significant challenges in terms of response rates, representativeness, and data quality. The survey mode itself might be an issue – a recent review of experimental survey data by Daikeler *et al.* (2020) reported that web-based surveys yield, on average, a 12 percentage points lower response rate compared with other survey modes (including email, post, telephone, and face-to-face), an effect that has not significantly changed over the last decade (Lozar Manfreda *et al.*, 2008).

Recruitment is a key factor in ensuring meaningful response rates for all surveys but especially for cross-sectional probability-based surveys. In the UK, most high-quality cross-sectional surveys employ address-based sampling frames, which contain no information on household residents. Recruitment, therefore, involves sending advance letters to sampled addresses, inviting potential respondents to participate in home-based face-to-face interviews. However, restrictions enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic introduced significant methodological changes (Kastberg and Siegler, 2022). In the UK, data collection involving recruitment of new samples was generally paused during national lockdowns. However, several surveys quickly moved to a push-to-telephone or push-to-web mode for interviews. Initially, recruitment for these surveys remained mostly mail-based, while increasing incentives for respondents to provide their contact details to carry out the interview in an alternative mode. The reduction in response rates compared with the conventional approach (recruitment letters followed by face-to-face interviews) was substantial, ranging from 12 percentage points for both the Living Costs and Food Survey, Wealth and Assets Survey to 26 percentage points for the Labour Force Survey (Kastberg and Siegler, 2022), consistent with findings by Daikeler *et al.* (2020).

The *knock-to-nudge* (KtN) approach to establishing contact with a household was first introduced in the UK during a time when COVID-19 restrictions were slightly relaxed, as an alternative approach aimed to increase response rates under the COVID-19 restrictions. Knock-to-nudge can be broadly defined as a contact method in which face-to-face interviewers visit sampled households and ask respondents at the doorstep to participate in a non-face-to-face survey at a later date. An appointment is made for the survey, which is conducted later, usually by telephone, video interview or a combination of these modes, or respondents are asked to complete an online survey (Cornick *et al.*, 2022; Kunz *et al.*, 2024). KtN was originally designed as a solution adopted to subvert some very specific and pressing restrictions and was, therefore, abandoned by several surveys as soon as these restrictions were lifted. However, there has been an increased interest among survey methodologists

concerning the possible advantages of this approach to recruitment, especially during a broader shift towards self-completion surveys. This document attempts to formalise a definition of KtN, highlighting its main features and limitations, and briefly discusses its use in household probability-based surveys in the UK context, as well as the limited existing evidence about the method. Another objective is to discuss possible research methodologies to analyse the effectiveness of this new method of establishing contact with households, and its potential role in the future of social surveys.

2 Definition and characteristics

KtN has two essential features: it uses face-to-face interviewers (who *knock* on the door) and who persuade (*nudge*) sample members to take part in a non-face-to-face survey at a later date (most often, online or telephone) (Smith, 2020;2022; IEA, 2025).

This definition assumes that the purpose of the face-to-face contact is focused on *nudging* sample members to respond. This means that, although the interviewer can collect basic household or respondent information via observations (interviewer observations), contact details such as phone numbers, or other paradata – as recommended in Kunz *et al.* (2024) – no substantive data collection occurs during the KtN contact, with the main data collection conducted at a later time in alternative modes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, KtN was used to supplement recruitment efforts. The recruitment process typicallybegan with postal letters sent to sampled addresses, inviting respondents to take part in the survey. After some time had passed, an interviewer would visit all sampled addresses or non-responding households to encourage participation. Various KtN approaches exist to accommodate different survey designs and fieldwork strategies.

In surveys conducted primarily by telephone, initial letters invited respondents to contact the agency, either by calling a helpline or by entering their telephone number into a web portal to book an interview appointment. Some surveys also used tele-matching to link addresses to existing phone number lists.

During the pandemic, some surveys implemented KtN visits to *all sampled addresses* following the initial mailings. During these visits, field interviewers attempted to contact respondents, collect phone numbers, and schedule telephone interviews for later dates. If contact could not be made, a "called today" card was left at the address.

Other surveys, particularly those that continued using KtN after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, included a protocol in which all non-responding addresses were to be visited, focusing on those for which a telephone number could not be obtained or where previous contact attempts had failed. However, the full implementation of this protocol was limited by fieldwork constraints, resulting in not all non-responding households being visited in practice.

A third approach, more commonly adopted after the pandemic, involved targeting and visiting only a *pre-selected subset of non-responding addresses*, identified by the agency based on predefined criteria.

It is important to note that in all three approaches, some addresses may not have been visited due to fieldwork constraints, limited interviewer availability, or cost considerations.

These KtN methods can also be adapted for primarily online surveys. In this case, KtN visits focus on encouraging online participation by providing survey links and instructions.

In both telephone and online survey contexts, interviewers are not limited to nudging; they may also be instructed to collect paradata (e.g., counting dwelling units or households) and to carry out respondent selection, if required (Smith, 2022).

This typology of KtN methods should not be viewed as fixed or exhaustive, as various implementations and combinations can be developed. For example, the approaches outlined here may be applied for other data collection modes, such as video-interviewing or postal surveys, as the proposed definition excludes only face-to-face surveys. Similarly, KtN could be used to nudge respondents toward more than one data collection mode within a single survey.

3 Implementation

3.1 UK KtN Survey Landscape

A preliminary list of UK surveys that used KtN during the COVID-19 pandemic was compiled by reviewing data sources listed in the UK Data Service (2024) and supplemented with information provided by survey agencies in reponse to the Survey Futures project data request. The full list of surveys reviewed can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 includes 24 surveys whose Technical Reports include a reference of KtN being used at least during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine of these surveys were administered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), eight by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), three by the National Centre for Social Research or the Scottish National Centre for Social Research (NatCen/ScotCen), two by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), and one by IPSOS. As far as we are aware, thirteen of the surveys in Table 1 stopped using KtN after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted ("C" in the "period" column in Table 1), with only three (the National Survey for Wales, the Transformed Labour Force Survey, and the National Readership Survey, commissioned by the Publishers Audience Measurement Company, and known asPAMCo survey) continuing it as part of their data collection methodology beyond the pandemic ("C+P" in Table 1) in Great Britain. The eight NISRA surveys continued using KtN beyond July 2022, when face-to-face interviewing was partially re-introduced. Although in-person interviewing at home has continued increasing over time, telephone interviewing is still offered as an option for the NISRA surveys.

Fifteen of these surveys (including all those conducted in Northern Ireland) used a protocol that involved implementing KtN for all selected households. Other surveys using this approach during their COVID-19 implementations, when they temporarily shifed to telephone administration, included the English Housing Survey (EHS), the Scottish Health Survey (SHes), the Health Survey for England (HSE), the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS), and the National Travel Survey (NTS). Some of these surveys involve completing more than a single interview– for example, the health-related surveys may include a nurse visit to conduct health checks, while the National Travel Survey requires participants to fill a one-week travel diary. All surveys in this group have returned to home-based face-to-face interviewing following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another nine surveys used KtN specifically to contact non-responding addresses. This group includes the three surveys that continued to use KtN after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted: the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the National Survey for Wales (NSW), and PAMCo survey.

In most cases, KtN was used as a method to obtain a telephone number or to encourage web response, without collecting substantive data. In some surveys, including both health surveys (HSE and SHeS), the EHS, the NTS, as well as the NSW and PAMCo, KtN interviewers collect paradata related to the number of dwellings and households at each address, in addition to identifying ineligible addresses. For the EHS, KtN interviewers also conduct an assessment of the exterior of the dwelling, supplemented by factual information about the dwelling's interior, collected at the doorstep.

Interviewers in the NTS were instructed to leave specific materials with participating households to facilitate the telephone interview. These materials included showcards and charts designed to assist respondents in providing the required information. Both the NTS and the health surveys aim to interview all household members aged 16 and over. During KtN visits, interviewers were also tasked with identifying all eligible respondents.

The National Survey for Wales, the UK World Values Survey, and PAMCo employ a protocol that requires interviewers to perform a respondent selection process alongside the collection of basic information about the address.).

The case of PAMCo is interesting as it uses an "online first" methodology, where KtN visits are implemented for non-responding households to encourage questionnaire completion. During the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person interviewers encouraged completion either online or on paper, with the option to provide participants a tablet to complete the interview. While KtN has continued to be used since 2020, face-to-face interviews were introduced as the preferred response option in 2022, with online or paper self-completion offered only if participants declined a face-to-face interview. This makes PAMCo a mixed-mode survey that incorporates KtN as part of a more complex non-response follow-up strategy, which includes the option of face-to-face interviews. Nonetheless, self-completion modes account for over 80% of total responses.

Another case of interest is the World Values Survey. In Great Britain, this was a mixed-mode survey, with 47% of participants responding via face-to-face interviews, 48% via self-completion (either online or on paper), and 5% via video interviewing. For Northern Ireland, 60% of participants responded face-to-face and 40% via self-completion. Similar to PAMCo survey, interviewers were encouraged to conduct the interview face-to-face either on the spot, or in a safer outside space, with self-completion offered only as a secondary option.

Finally, the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) represents a unique case in our review, employing a "targeted" KtN strategy. This approach involves conducting visits only to a subset of non-responding households located in under-represented areas with a lower propensity to respond. Compared to visiting all non-responding households, this targeted strategy reduces fieldwork costs. Preliminary results indicate that targeting-based KtN scheduling, combined with constant monitoring and improvements in field operations, can lead to a higher effectiveness of KtN, and increased survey representativeness (Siemiatkowska and Gilliland, 2025).

Table 1. UK surveys that have carried out KtN strategies

Survey name	Data collection organisation/Sponsor	KtN dates	Period*	Main mode	Who is nudged?	Information exchange
Continuous Household Survey (Northern Ireland)	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
COVID Social Mobility and Opportunities Study (COSMO)	Centre for Longitudinal Studies	February 2022 only	C	Online	All non-responding addresses	Encouraging completion
English Housing Survey (EHS)	ONS/Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities	July 2020-March 2021	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number, Paradata
Family Resources Survey (FRS)	ONS/Department for Work and Pensions	November 2020-December 2021	C	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number
Family Resources Survey (Northern Ireland)	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Growing up in Scotland (GIS)	ScotCen/Scottish Government	2021 only	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Health Survey for England (HSE)	ONS/National Health Service	April 2021-March 2022	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Booking interview, Paradata, Respondent selection
Labour Force Survey (LFS)	ONS/Department of Finance and Personnel	April 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number
Labour Force Survey (Northern Ireland)	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF)	ONS/ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	October 2020 to 2022	C	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number
Living Costs and Food Survey (Northern Ireland)	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
National Survey for Wales (NSW)	ONS/Welsh Government	January 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number, Paradata, Respondent selection
National Travel Survey (NTS)	NatCen/Department for Transport	April 2021 to March 2022	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Booking interview, Paradata
Next Steps Age 32	Centre for Longitudinal Studies	April 2022 to July 2023	C	Telephone	All non-responding addresses	Obtaining phone number
Northern Ireland Health Survey	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Publishers Audience Measurement Company (PAMCo)	Ipsos/PAMCo	September 2020 onwards	C+P	Online, Paper, and Face-to-face interviewing	All non-responding addresses	Encouraging completion, Respondent selection, Paradata, Face-to-face interview

Survey name	Data collection organisation/Sponsor	KtN dates	Period*	Main mode	Who is nudged?	Information exchange
Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SJCS)	ScotCen/Scottish Government	November 2021 to April 2022	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Scottish Health Survey (SHeS)	ONS/National Health Service Scotland	October 2021 to December 2021	C	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number, Paradata, Respondent selection
Survey on Living Conditions (SLC)	ONS	October 2020 to March 2021	C	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number
Survey on Living Conditions (Northern Ireland)	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)	ONS/Department of Finance and Personnel	April 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone/ Online	Subset of non-responding addresses	Obtaining phone number
Travel Survey for Northern Ireland	NISRA	July 2021 onwards	C+P	Telephone	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number
Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS)	ONS	July 2020 to September 2022	C	Telephone	Addresses for which a phone number could not be obtained	Obtaining phone number
World Values Survey (WVS)	The World Values Survey Organisation/King's College London	March to September 2022	C	Integral (knock-to-telephone, knock-to-web, or face-to-face)	All sampled addresses	Obtaining phone number, Encouraging completion, Respondent selection, Paradata

Notes: Surveys indicated with "C" stopped using KtN after the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Surveys indicated with "C+P" have continued KtN as part of their data collection methodology until the present.

3.2 Experiences in other contexts

Only a handful of methods similar to KtN have been implemented outside the UK. Cleary (2023) analysed Round 10 of the European Social Survey (ESS) in Poland, where a KtN strategy was used to encourage questionnaire self-completion, either online or on paper. In this case, the strategy only considered visits to non-responding households.

Three other national household social surveys that share some – but not all – the attributes of KtN are also analysed by Cleary (2023). These are:

- The **recruitment survey for the AmeriSpeak Panel**, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US population. Here, field interviewers make face-to-face visits to non-responding addresses to personalise recruitment and encourage panel enrolment. Unlike the UK-based KtN strategies, interviewers administer the recruitment questionnaire in-person "where possible", encouraging sample members to register online or via telephone if there is no other option.
- The **Ervaren Discriminatie 2018 (ED18) survey**, a survey focused on experiences of discrimination in the Netherlands. Here all responses were collected via self-completion, with non-responding households receiving one of two possible concurrent follow-up interventions: phone contacts or in-person visits. Household allocation to each group was non-random – in-person visits appear to be focused on

more “difficult” non-responding cases. There was also an additional postal contact phase after fieldworker recruitment phase. This makes a fair assessment on the effectiveness of each individual approach rather difficult.

- **Round 10 of the European Social Survey – Israel**. As postal service is unreliable in Israel, the first phase of postal contact does not exist there and interviewers were employed to make contact from the outset. After initial contact, there were three reminders for non-respondents: the first and third could be made either in person or by phone, while the second was always face-to-face and included the supply of a paper questionnaire.

There is also some limited evidence of KtN practices used for probability-based surveys of a smaller scale. As these experiences are limited to population sub-groups or specific geographic areas, it is not possible to generalise their results. However, their analysis still presents some of the benefits of the proposed approach. The smaller-scale surveys using approaches similar to KtN for recruitment are:

- The **University of Michigan survey of student sexual misconduct,** reported in Cleary (2023), focused on a population of university students. It was designed as a web-based survey in two stages. The first stage used pre-notification letters and email reminders. The second stage was a follow-up phase, where a random selection of non-responding students from phase 1 was contacted by in-person interviewers who encouraged them to complete their questionnaire. The specialised target population makes it difficult to compare this survey with large-scale household surveys.
- A **stated choice survey of housing, neighbourhood, and travel preferences in New Zealand**, reported in Dodge and Chapman (2018), compared respondent recruitment via email – using email contacts obtained from a list maintained by the Wellington City council – with door-to-door recruitment offering two options: computer-assisted in-person completion in the presence of the interviewer or online self-completion. Although it used a probability-based sampling frame, the survey was limited to a very specific area in the City of Wellington.
- A **longitudinal cohort study in North Carolina, USA**, reported by Karasik (2022), used a probability-based sampling design to investigate COVID infections in Chatham County. The first phase of recruitment included invitations via post or email, with door-to-door home visits attempted for a subset of non-respondents. As this stage proved effective in improving response rates and recruiting harder-to-reach populations, the door-to-door recruitment was expanded in this study.
- **Immigrant German Election Study II**. An experiment was conducted as part of a probability-based telephone panel in Duisburg, Germany, which ran both before and after the 2021 federal election (Elis et al., 2023). The recruitment phase, which occurred during a partial COVID-19 lockdown, used postal invitations. In this experiment, individuals pre-classified as being of Turkish origin or from specified former USSR countries, and who had not responded to the initial postal invitation within three weeks, were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The experimental group received a visit from an interviewer who provided a survey package containing a paper questionnaire for self-administration along with a €5 incentive. The control group received only a postal reminder. The paper mode was offered as an alternative to telephone interviews, for the ethnic minority groups only. The results show that the interviewer visit increased the proportion of individuals who responded to the survey

(either by telephone or by returning the questionnaire) by approximately 21 percentage points in both immigrant-origin groups.

3.3 Effectiveness Indicators: Response Rates and Sample Composition

As the surveys analysed employed different methodological strategies, a detailed comparison is not possible without disaggregated data on non-respondents. However, a preliminary indication of the effectiveness of KtN strategies can be obtained from the aggregate response rates reported in some survey documentation.

First, in Table 2 ("between-instances comparison"), we list surveys whose technical reports do not provide a breakdown of response rates by data collection phases within a single data collection period. For these surveys, we compare the overall response rate from the last survey instance (year) *before* KtN was introduced to the overall response rate after KtN implementation. For surveys in England, this comparison covers 2020 (pre-KtN) and 2021 (KtN). For surveys in Northern Ireland, the comparison spans 2020-21 (pre-KtN) to 2021-22 (KtN).
Next, Table 3 ("within-instance comparison") lists surveys for which it is possible to compare response rates resulting from non-interviewer recruitment methods (such as post, email, or telephone), to the overall response rates after KtN was employed in the non-response follow-up stage.

In both cases, a rough estimate of the contribution of KtN to response rates can be calculated as the difference between these two response rate figures.

As previously noted, these surveys cannot be directly compared due to substantial differences in scale, objectives, topics, recruitment methods and modes, and interviewing modes. Nevertheless, Table 2 provides a general indication that KtN strategies are associated with increases in response rates ranging from 2.4 percentage points (LCF) to 17.6 percentage points (PAMCo). For the UK surveys reported by Kastberg and Siegler (2022), the improvements in response rates range between 2.4 and 10.7 percentage points.

These aggregate figures should be interpreted with caution. For example, the relatively low increase in response rates for the Living Costs and Food survey may be influenced by the substantially higher respondent incentives (£50 conditional), which could have a greater effect than the recruitment mode itself. Conversely, the comparatively high response rate observed in PAMCo was achieved not only through KtN strategies but also by allowing in-person interviewing for a proportion of the sample.

Nonetheless, all surveys reported in Table 2 report generally improved sample representativeness, with more pronounced efects for certain specific socio-demographic indicators. This suggests that the primary benefit of KtN strategies may lie in reducing non-response bias.

Table 2. General indicators of effectiveness for surveys using KtN strategies – Between-instances comparison

Survey	Period	Response rates		Effects on sample representativeness	Source
		Without KtN	With KtN		
Continuous Household Survey (Northern Ireland)	2020-2022	16.0	41.0	Generally improved	Technical report[1]
Health Survey for Northern Ireland	2020-2022	18.3	47.3	Generally improved	Technical report[2]
Labour Force Survey (LFS), Wave 1	2020-2021	28.7	39.4	Generally improved, although less marked than other ONS surveys.	Kastberg and Siegler (2022)
Living Cost and Food Survey (LCF)	2020-2021	29.8	32.2	Generally improved	Kastberg and Siegler (2022)
Survey on Living Conditions (SLC), Wave 1	2020-2021	27.5	34.2	Generally improved	Kastberg and Siegler (2022)
Travel Survey for Northern Ireland	2020–2022	25.1	33.4	Generally improved	Technical report[3]
Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS)	2020-2021	25.5	30.6	Generally improved, particularly socioeconomic status.	Kastberg and Siegler (2022)

Table 3. General indicators of effectiveness for surveys using KtN strategies – Within-instance comparison

Survey	Period	Response rates		Effects on sample representativeness	Source
		Without KtN	With KtN		
Ervaren Discriminatie 2018 (ED18)	2018	18.6	24.0	Information not provided.	Cleary (2023)
European Social Survey Round 10: Poland	2020	31	37	Improved, particularly size of settlement.	Cleary (2023)
Publishers Audience Measurement Company (PAMCo)	2021	18.9	36.5	Improved, particularly socioeconomic status and home ownership	Cleary (2023)
Recruitment survey for the AmeriSpeak Panel	2014-2017	27.9.	33.7	Generally improved.	Cleary (2023)
Stated choice survey of housing, neighbourhood, and travel preferences in New Zealand	N/D	29.9	38.4	Generally improved.	Dodge and Chapman (2018)
University of Michigan survey of student sexual misconduct	2018	54	67	Generally improved.	Cleary (2023)
Immigrant German Election Study II (Turkish group)	2021	12.4	33.0	Improved, as ethnic minority groups are more represented.	Elis et al (2023)
Immigrant German Election Study II (former USSR group)	2021	17.2	38.6	Improved, as ethnic minority groups are more represented.	Elis et al (2023)

[1] Available at: https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/find-your-survey/continuous-household-survey
[2] Available at: https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/find-your-survey/health-survey-northern-ireland
[3] Available at: https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/find-your-survey/travel-survey-northern-ireland

4 Assessment and future research

KtN could play a key role in the transition towards mixed-mode designs and more cost-effective approaches to social surveys. However, due to its limited application in survey practice up until now, the effectiveness of KtN has not yet been thoroughly analysed. To address this gap and assess its impact, data from surveys that have used KtN as a recruitment method should be examined across five main dimensions: survey participation, sample composition, data quality, substantive variables, and survey costs. Based on the limited evidence available, we would expect the following hypotheses associated with the KtN (compared to surveys that do not use it) to hold:

1) Improved survey participation, as follow-ups with non-responding households inherently increase survey response rates.
2) Improved sample composition, since direct contact with an interviewer may facilitate engagement with groups that typically have lower response propensities.
3) A potential decline in data quality, including increased item non-response and straightlining, as participants recruited via KtN may be more reluctant to participate and, once engaged, may be more likely to exhibit negative response behaviours such as speeding through the questionnaire or providing lower quality responses.
4) Differences in survey estimates, as KtN is more likely to recruit reluctant and/or less engaged participants. The direction and magnitude of these differences will depend on the specific survey topic.
5) Increased data collection costs compared with online or telephone surveys, as field interviewers constitute a significant proportion of fieldwork expenses and KtN may lead to additional follow-ups and interviewer calls. However, these costs could still be lower than those of full face-to-face interviews, since KtN limits the interviewer's role to encouraging participation through brief interactions with potential respondents.

As the evidence in the literature remains limited, Survey Futures is currently analysing three survey datasets to address these research questions:

- The Publishers Audience Measurement Company (PAMCo) survey, which started using KtN in September 2020 to encourage response from non-responding households.
- The National Survey for Wales (NSW), a telephone survey which used KtN as a targeted (?) non-response follow-up strategy in their 2021-22 data collection.
- The Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), another mainly telephone survey, which includes KtN as a targeted non-response follow-up strategy since 2021.

Preliminary findings from these analyses support our first four hypothesis: KtN appears to be effective in improving response rates and enhancing sample composition. However, it is also associated with slightly higher levels of item non-response and straightlining, as well as some variations in substantive variable estimates.

Experience during the pandemic demonstrated that, while telephone and online modes are generally more cost-effective than face-to-face administration, they tend to yield lower response rates - even when KtN is used for recruitment. Compensating for these lower response rates may require issuing a larger sample or increasing the value of incentives, both of which raise overall fieldwork costs.

Whether KtN remains an effective strategy for recruiting participants to online self-administered surveys will ultimately depend on whether these increased costs are offset by its net benefits, taking into account both the positive and negative aspects of its implementation.

Robust experimental data are needed to confidently evaluate all the five hypotheses outlined above.

5 Summary and recommendations

Although originally conceived as a recruitment method to overcome restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, KtN has been retained by several high-quality UK social surveys, primarily as a follow-up strategy for non-response in self-administered and telephone-administered surveys. By design, KtN is effective at increasing response rates. Initial research also indicates that it can improve sample composition by reaching population segments often under-represented in the initial recruitment phase, potentially leading to more accurate and reliable estimates. However, these benefits must be balanced against the potential for increased fieldwork costs and the risk of reduced data quality.

The long-term viability of KtN will depend on its cost-effectiveness. A range of KtN strategies are currently in use, differing in survey mode and the targeting of addresses - whether KtN is applied to all sampled members, all non-respondents, or only a targeted subset of non-respondents.

- Our evidence review suggests that issuing KtN to *all* sample members is likely to be most efficient when one or more of the following conditions are met:the survey requires within-household respondent selection;
- the survey involves multiple instruments for data collection(e.g. nurse visits or travel diaries);
- the survey requires interviewer-collected observations (e.g. dwelling inspections or household counts).

Conversely, for surveys that use only one questionnaire and do not require within-household selection (e.g., those targeting “any adult” or “all adults”), implementing KtN only for non-responding addresses may be sufficient. In such a case, KtN interviewers function as part of a non-response follow-up or refusal conversion strategy. Fieldwork costs can be reduced further by limiting visits to a targeted subset of non-responding households, as illustrated by the current approach used in the TLFS (Siemiatkowska and Gilliland, 2025).

However, there is currently no evidence comparing the effectiveness of these three distinct KtN strategies - in terms of response rates, sample composition, or data quality. This gap highlights the need for further research to inform future implementations and evaluate the comparative value of each approach.

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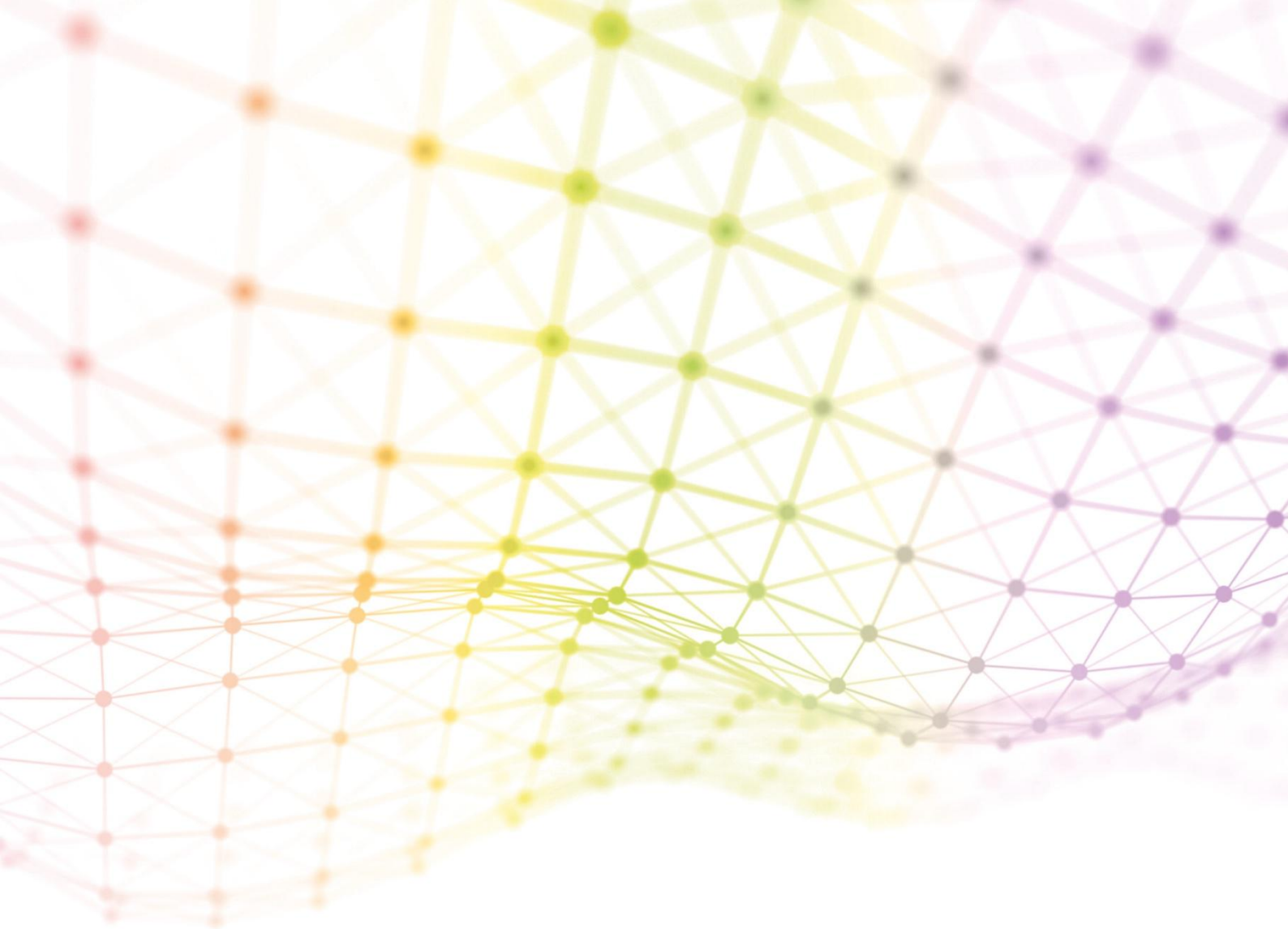

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University of Southampton

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

NCRM National Centre for Research Methods

Office for National Statistics

UCL

Warwick The University of Warwick

Manchester 1824 The University of Manchester

City University of London Est 1894

National Centre for Social Research

LSE The London School of Economics and Political Science

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