

SURVEY FUTURES

SURVEY DATA COLLECTION
METHODS COLLABORATION

A framework for identifying and addressing the risks of exclusion from social surveys

Peter Lynn, University of Essex

16 March 2026, Survey Practice Workshop: Accessibility and inclusivity in self-completion surveys



Inclusivity (in a Social Survey Context)

Inclusive data: data that capture important dimensions of people's lives that should be taken into account in social policy

Inclusive data collection: using survey methods that are designed to be inclusive of the needs of all members of the population

Inclusive statistics: statistics that recognize and reflect the existence and relevance of all population subgroups whom social policy must serve

Source: "Handbook of Surveys on Individuals and Households", United Nations Statistics Division Studies in Methods Series F, United Nations, New York.

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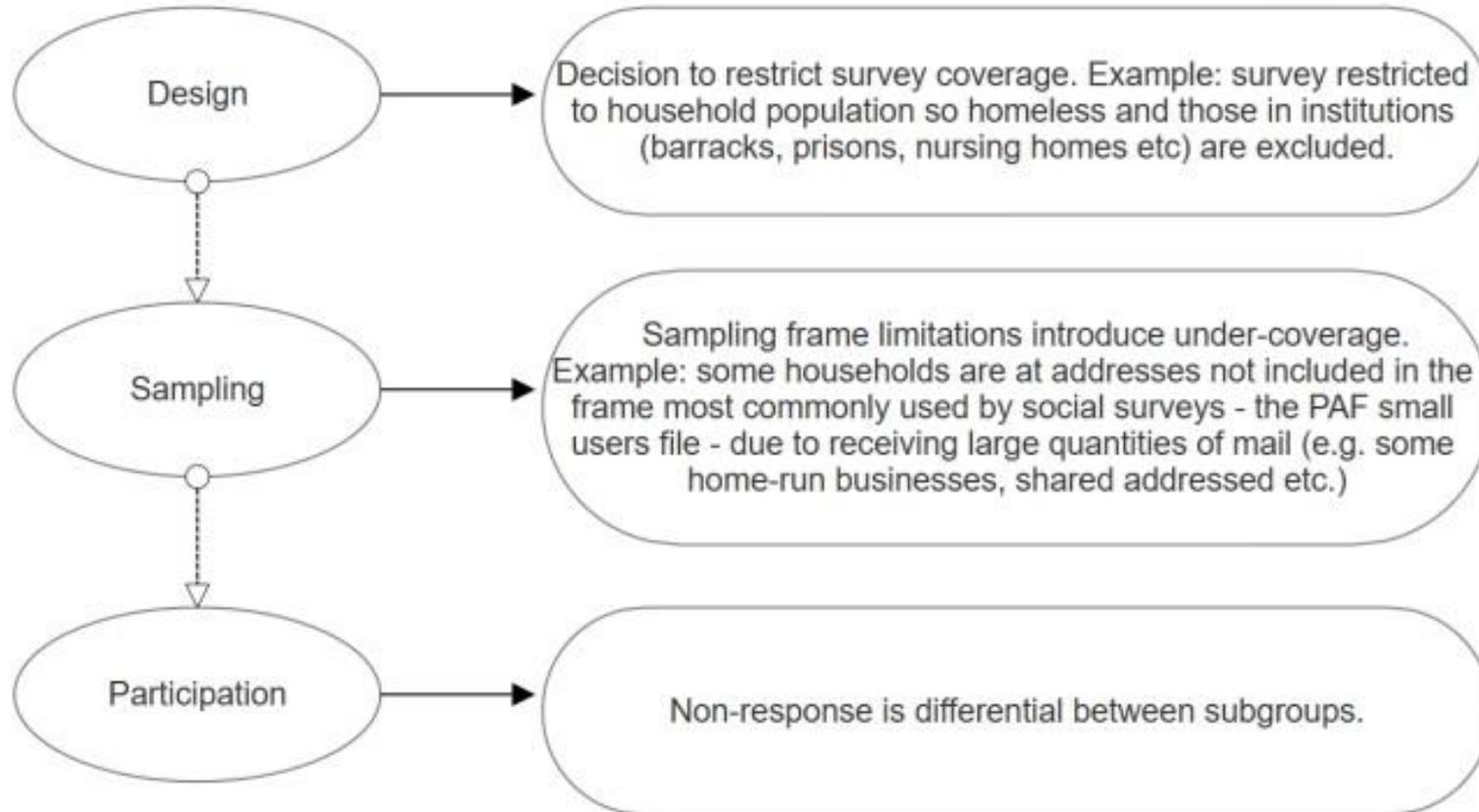
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Exclusion from Social Surveys

“Everyone counts and is counted and no-one is left behind”

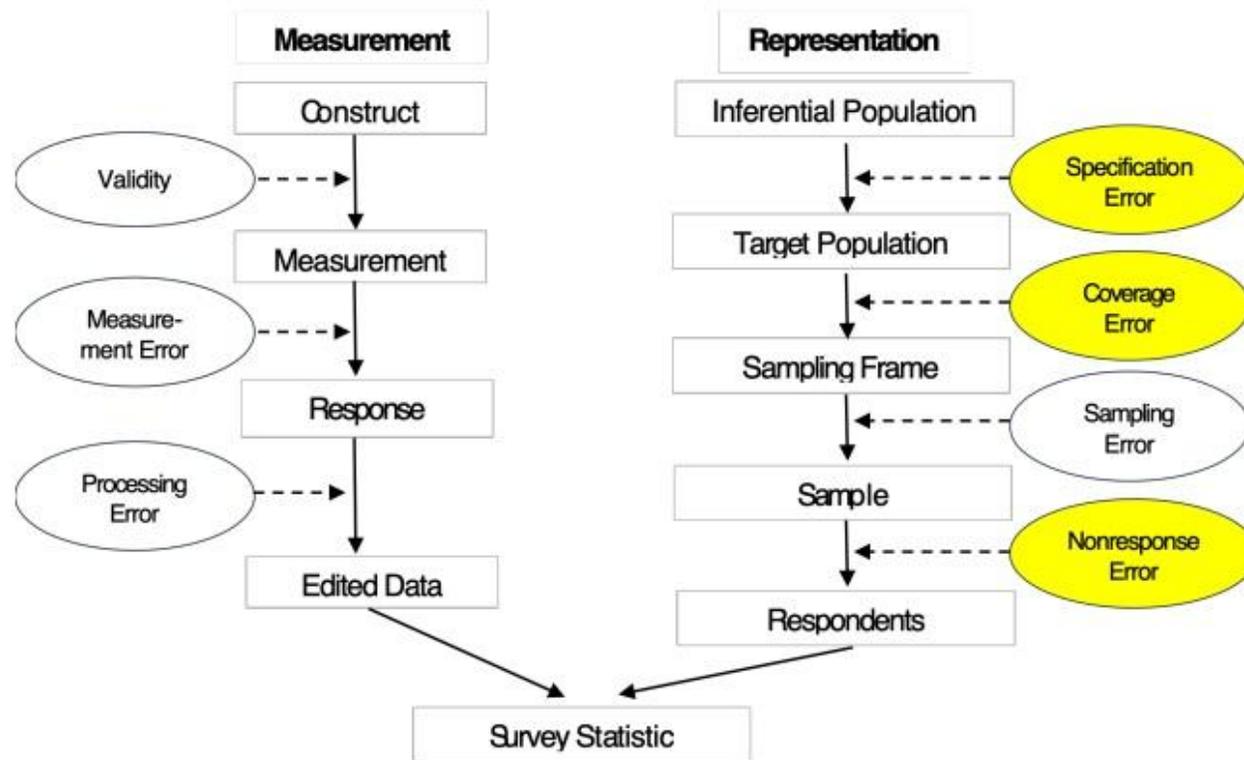
United Kingdom (UK) Statistics Authority (2020) Statistics for the public good. Strategy document. London, UK: UK Statistics Authority, p. 28. Available at: <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/aboutthe-authority/strategy-and-business-plan/statistics-for-the-public-good/>

Reasons for exclusion from surveys



Source: Lynn, P. (2025) 'Why are some people missing from UK surveys.' *Radical Statistics*, 137: 8-23.
<https://www.radstats.org.uk/no137/Lynn137.pdf>

Total Survey Error Components with sources of exclusion highlighted



Note: Adapted from Groves & Lyberg (2010)

Source: Lynn, P. (2025) 'Why are some people missing from UK surveys.' *Radical Statistics*, 137: 8-23.
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Exclusion from Selected Survey Samples

By design:

- Non-household population (for most general population surveys):
Homeless, in prison, barracks, nursing homes, other communal establishments

Not by design:

- Sampling frame deficiencies

Exclusion (under-representation) in Responding Survey Samples

Non-response:

- Failure to locate or make contact
- Unwilling to participate
- Unable to participate

Failure to Locate / Contact

Incorrect contact details on frame

- e.g. People who change address / email address / phone number more frequently

Insufficient / inappropriate effort

- e.g. Postal mailings: some people will not receive or will not open the mailings

Face-to-face: people who spend less time at home

Unable to Participate

Self-completion surveys

- Literacy; sight; motor control; language
- Web surveys: technical; access; comfort

Interviewer-administered

- Unable to communicate verbally (mute, spoken language)

Unwilling to Participate

- Many reasons
 - Concerns re privacy, data usage, legitimacy, ...
 - Less specific unwillingness to give time and information;
 - Situational: busy, bad/low mood, etc.
- But not independent of survey design
 - Unwillingness is more likely if survey...
 - ... seems irrelevant, difficult, intrusive,
 - ... is poorly explained / motivated / introduced

Which groups are at risk of exclusion / under-representation

- Those with less stable lives (frequently move, change phone numbers, spend time outside of household population, ...)
- Those who are less able to fill questionnaires (low literacy, poor internet skills, various disabilities, ...)
- Those with very busy lives

Disproportionately: the needy, the vulnerable, the socially (and digitally) excluded – but also those with the very highest incomes

What Should be Done?

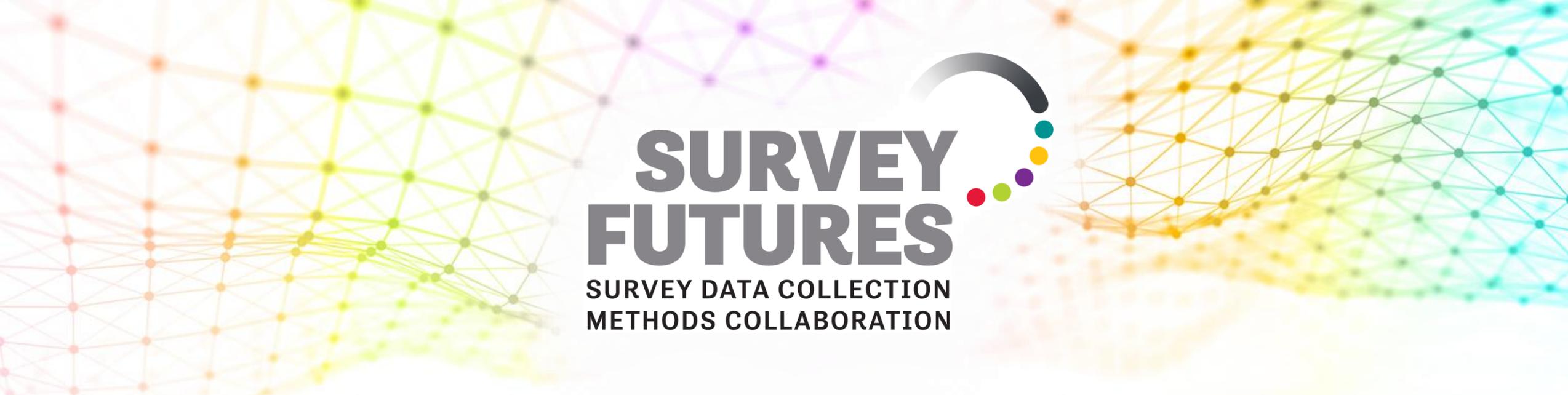
Many things *could* be done:

- Better survey design
- Better options for modes/ methods of response
- Translation / interpretation in more languages
- Extension to non-household population; etc.

But *first* need assessment of effect of omissions on:

- Survey estimates
- Statistics knowledge base
- And costs / feasibility

And moral / ethical / rights considerations?



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