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DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES # I-3

MEMORANDUM FOR	Michael J. Longini Chief, Decennial Systems and Contracts Management Office
Attention:	Edwin B. Wagner, Jr. Deputy Chief, Decennial Systems and Contracts Management Office
From:	Howard Hogan Chief, Decennial Statistical Studies Division
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Subject:	Observation of Coverage Edit Follow-up Operation

I. INTRODUCTION

The coverage edit follow-up (CEFU) operation is used to improve within household coverage and improve data quality in two ways. First, it is used to collect person data for all persons beyond the first six in large households. Second, it resolves count discrepancies between the reported household population count and the actual number of data defined persons recorded on the census form. Prior to collecting person data, a series of probe questions are asked for all CEFU cases. These probes are designed to allow the respondent to add or delete names from what was reported on their census form in order to ensure the actual household composition is consistent with census residence rules.

This memorandum documents my observation of the CEFU operation in Margate, Florida on May 30, 2000.

II. OBSERVATIONS

I observed the CEFU operation at the PRC Telephone Call Center in Margate, Florida. I watched as agents made telephone calls and the Quality Assurance Representatives (QARs) monitored the agents. The interviews that I observed were for the English short form only.

The first agent I observed was very professional. The first respondent was very upset and stated that she had completed the interview just five days earlier and asked to speak to the supervisor. The agent put her on hold and summoned the supervisor. The supervisor apologized for the duplication, asked the respondent to complete the interview, and assured her that she would not be called again. The respondent reluctantly agreed. Once the agent took her off of hold she said, "Why can't you people at the Census Bureau understand that yes, I did give birth to six children." and hung up on him. At that point the agent scheduled her for a call back.

The second respondent for the first agent completed the entire interview. I noticed that the screen froze up and had to be soft booted after every couple of questions. The agents are not allowed to have "dead air" so while waiting for the computer to reboot the agent would either repeat the respondents answer, ask the next question (based on memory), or apologize and put the respondent on hold. I asked the agent if this were a usual occurrence and he said yes. I looked around at the other work stations and the agents were experiencing the same problem.

The third call for this agent was to a business. The secretary for the respondent gave the agent the home telephone number. The agent ended the call and scheduled a call back.

During the fourth call, the computer froze almost after each question. The agent read the interview script verbatim. The purpose of this interview was to collect person data on the two persons listed on the roster. The respondent was very patient during the interview. The duration of the call was 12 minutes.

The next agent I observed was just as competent as the previous. During the first call, the respondent stated that she was in a hurry because of an appointment but agreed to complete the interview. Again the computer froze after each question during the entire interview. Despite the fact that the respondent was very patient during the interview, she repeatedly stated that she would be late for her appointment .

The second call for the second agent lasted 21 minutes. The agent was very apologetic when the computer froze up and the respondent was very patient.

The third call for this agent was to an exasperated respondent who answered each probe question by saying, "Nobody else lives here." The agent was very professional and explained that she must ask each question verbatim. The respondent completed the interview.

Attempts were made to contact respondents other than those I have just described. In between the calls I described there were hangups, refusals, and interviews that had to be rescheduled due to language barriers.

Next I asked to observe a QAR. The QARs monitor the agent during the interview, complete a weighted assessment form, and give immediate feedback to the agent on the performance of the interview.

There was a separate room for the QARs to monitor the agents. While the agents know that a QAR may listen in on any call they do not know exactly which call will be monitored. The QARs listened in on the agents call without their knowledge. The QARs graded the agents on presentation skills and call management skills such as telephone etiquette, proper enunciation, whether they read the script verbatim, and their ability to handle respondent's objections to participate.

The QARs I observed did a great job. They graded the agents fairly and gave immediate feedback to the agents once the form was completed.

At one point in the afternoon the entire Operating System Software (OSS) program shut down completely for a short period of time. I was told that this was probably due to a severe lightning storm.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The agents I observed were very professional. They were polite, they followed the interview script verbatim, and they were very apologetic to the respondent during computer malfunctions.

The agent supervisors also were competent with their duties. They actively listened to the agents and they were able to assist the agents when necessary.

The QARs were just as competent. They gave a fair assessment of the agents performance and gave feedback to the agent in a very timely manner.

The manager informed me that the computer began freezing up when the Spanish version was loaded.

There was a severe lightning storm in the afternoon which could have contributed to the problems with the OSS.

While the agents were very professional and apologetic about the computer freezing up, it is very inefficient to expect respondents to wait extended periods of time for the computer to reboot and does not convey a professional image of the Bureau.

Attachment

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