

Producing official statistics via voluntary surveys – the National Household Survey in Canada

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Statistics Canada conducts over 350 surveys a year. Of all social or household type surveys, only one is conducted on a mandatory basis, the Labour Force Survey. By their very nature, voluntary surveys will achieve lower rates of response and are exposed to higher risks of bias. For the 2011 Census of Population program, the detailed form was for the first time collected on a voluntary basis as the National Household Survey. The survey content was basically the same as that of previous Census detailed forms and covered various socio-demographic topics that are of high importance to a wide variety of stakeholders in Canada. Given that one of the key characteristics of the survey is to produce data for small regions and for subgroups of the population, collecting it on a voluntary basis introduced several challenges. Statistics Canada, based on its extensive experience with voluntary surveys, developed a number of processes and approaches to ensure the highest data quality possible. This paper will describe what these measures were for data collection, data processing and estimation. It will also provide a brief description of the quality assurance framework underlying the release strategy of the 2011 survey.

Key words – Voluntary surveys, data quality, household surveys, response bias