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**QUESTIONS RELATING TO SOCIAL SUPPORT:
RESULTS FROM THE SLID JANUARY 1993 TEST**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the January 1993 field test, the SLID Labour interview included a series of questions (called the SUPPORT module) to measure the impact of unpaid caregiving and receipt of unpaid care on labour market participation. This module asked about care given to people who were disabled or ill, taking care of other people's children, and support received for one's own children.

This report examines the results of the January 1993 test of these questions and discusses whether these questions adequately met the objectives.

The report concludes that some of the impact of unpaid care giving on labour force participation can be better measured (with less respondent burden) when respondents are asked about their labour force participation, and that the questions tested should be replaced or the module should be dropped.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The SUPPORT module of the SLID Labour test consisted of a series of questions on giving and receiving of unpaid care, and sought to relate these activities to a person's ability to participate in the paid labour market. The questions, responses and flows can be seen in Appendix I.

This report will evaluate the SUPPORT module on several fronts. Did respondents find the questions "sensitive"? Did the questions flow well within the module? What was the quality of the collected data? Did respondents understand the questions?

The module included questions on three areas. Respondents were asked about care given to people because of age, disability or illness¹; taking care of other people's children; and support received for the care of their own children. If respondents provided or received any such support, the questionnaire asked further the number of hours involved and if giving or receiving this support influenced whether or not (or how much) they worked.

The sources for comparison are few, but the data were compared to similar questions in the General Social Survey (GSS) Cycle 7). The report also draws on comments made by interviewers and by SLID team members who observed interviewing in progress.

The SLID sample was selected from the whole province of Newfoundland and from seven CMAs in southern Ontario.

¹ The National Population Health Survey carries the same question as SLID on this matter.

2. QUESTION BY QUESTION FINDINGS

2.1 Screening Questions

In our sample (2278 people), only two people refused the questions 1 and 6 (giving help to the disabled or ill and other peoples' children). Two other people answered "don't know" to these two questions. It does not appear that these questions were too sensitive for respondents.

The three main questions (Q1, Q6 and Q11) resulted in the following frequency of "yes" answers.

Q1	183/2334	(7.8%) help the aged, disabled, or ill;
Q6	121/2334	(5.2%) help other people's children;
Q11	91/844	(10.8%) of those with children receive help for them;

For the first question, which dealt with helping the disabled, aged and people in crisis, SLID asked further who the help was provided to: a child or children, a spouse, another relative, a friend, etc.

168/183 (92%) listed one of those categories;

11/183 listed two;

2 respondents listed three;

2 respondents listed four.

Here is a breakdown of who the respondents helped. (Percentages add up to more than 100%, because the question was a "mark all that apply" and some people helped more than one person)

105/183 (57%) helped another relative;

34 (19%) helped a child;

29 (16%) helped a friend;

25 (14%) helped a spouse;

11 (6%) helped someone else.

Hours per week

The questions on hours per week (Q4, Q8, Q13) did not seem difficult for respondents to answer. Of a total of 395 people asked these questions, only five people (1.3%) answered "Don't Know". (4/183 for Q4, none for Q8, 1/91 for Q13). One person refused to answer Q8. Only two people used fractions of hours.

More than 10% of the respondents who said that they gave care (yes to Q1 and Q6), answered 84 hours per week or more (12 hours per day or more, 7 days per week). The highest numbers that could be reported in the GSS are 100 hours per month, and few people reported near to that. In SLID, just over half of caregivers cited 10 hours of care giving per week or less. Nearly 90% of GSS respondents reported a comparable figure (40 hours per month or less) in similar questions.

Months per year

A majority of people who gave or got help answered "all year" when asked in which months support was received or given:

118/183 (64.5%) for aged, disabled, or ill (Q3);

65/121 (53.7%) for other people's children (Q7);

54/91 (59.3%) for people's own children (Q12).

In total, 158 used the "specify months" option and most of them (80%) specified six months or less.

Proxy versus self respondent

Differences were detected between proxy and non-proxy responses. Incidence of care giving and receiving was greater among self-respondents than proxy respondents.

<u>Question</u>	<u>Proxy pop.</u>	<u>Non-proxy pop.</u>
Q1 (disabled, ill)	6.4%	9.9%
Q6 (other people's children)	3.3%	7.6%
Q11 (help for your children)	7.5%	14.2%

Effect on labour force participation

Frequencies of people who reported that the amount of support provided/received affected their labour market participation indicate that, of the three areas, support received for caring for respondents' own children seems to have the largest impact on labour market participation.

<u>Frequency</u>	<u>% affected, by category</u>
30/183	(16.4%) caring for aged, disabled, and ill (Q5);
6/121	(5.0%) for other people's children (Q9);
30/74	(40.5%) of those receiving help for their children (Q14);
42/711	(5.9%) of those who did not receive help (Q15).

2.2 Caring for the disabled and ill: SLID and GSS comparison

Question D10b in Cycle 7 of the GSS reads: "Did you provide personal care to someone who was disabled or ill?". This question is somewhat more restrictive than the one in SLID, because it involves only *personal care* and only talks about the *disabled and ill* and not about the rest (i.e., people having trouble taking care of themselves because of ageing, or for any other reason). For a Canada-wide

sample of people asked about the first six months of 1992, GSS found 13.2% who had provided some personal care to someone who was disabled or ill. The GSS estimate should be a lower bound. The fact that it is larger than our 7.8% is surprising. Indeed, because the SLID question covered broader ground and given the confusion that interviewers mentioned with respondents including young children as "people who had trouble taking care of themselves because of age", we would expect the incidence of care to be higher in SLID than in GSS.

In SLID, those who gave care to the disabled, ill or aged reported an average of 35 hours per week, or 25 hours per week if we exclude those who said they provided support for 24 hours per day, all week. In the GSS, people reported an average of 18 hours per month (around 4 per week), which is considerably less. Interviewers mentioned that some SLID respondents included care given to people who could not take care of themselves because of **young** age. This might explain some of the discrepancy.

Table 1 summarises the SLID results as to hours of support reported in Q4.

Table 1: Support provided to the disabled, ill or ageing (SLID data)	
HOURS PER WEEK	% OF CARE-GIVERS
0 to 10	46.4
11 to 20	17.9
21 to 80	20.1
84 and more	15.6

Note: Nobody reported figures between 81 and 83 hours.

From the results of the GSS, we would not expect that this kind of unpaid help would have any impact on most care providers' labour force participation. Indeed,

two thirds of those who helped spent ten hours or less in a month (two hours per week) doing so, while only 5.6% spent more than 60 hours per month (2 hours per day). Also, taking into account that few people actually provide this kind of help, one finds that five percent of care providers, or 0.6% of respondents, are liable to be affected in their labour force participation.

In SLID, 16.4% of respondents who provided care to the disabled, ill or ageing said that they were affected in their labour force participation. These people reported many more hours than the average for care providers in this category. Indeed, for care providers, the average amount of support given was 35 hours per week, but respondents who were affected in their labour force participation reported an average of 81 hours per week.

2.3 Caring for other peoples' children: SLID and GSS comparison

In the case of caring for other people's children, the GSS question is quite comparable to ours. In fact, the SLID question is the more restrictive here, because it says "exclude any care giving mentioned earlier" whereas in GSS, the question of care giving to another person's child comes before the personal care question. Like SLID, the GSS restricts another person's children to children out of the respondent's household. The GSS finds that 25.5% of those surveyed had "looked after another person's child", while in SLID, the figure was 5.2%, again much lower than the GSS. Again the confusion of the first question may explain some of this discrepancy, because question Q6 states "exclude care giving mentioned earlier" and those respondents that had included other people's young children in Q1 would have excluded them here.

In SLID, those who said they cared for other people's children reported an average of 18 hours of support per week, or 17 if we remove those who said 24 hours per

day, all week. GSS respondents reported an average of 15 hours per month (less than 4 per week).

Table 2 summarises the SLID results as to hours of support reported in Q8.

Table 2: Support provided for someone else's children (SLID data)	
HOURS PER WEEK	% OF CARE-GIVERS
0 to 10	63.3
11 to 20	13.3
21 to 80	20.0
84 and more	3.3

Note: Nobody reported figures between 81 and 83 hours.

From the GSS results, one would expect that this kind of unpaid help would have limited impact on most providers' labour force participation. Indeed, the GSS found that over 60% of help providers spent 10 hours or less in a month (roughly two hours per week) doing so, while 5.3% spent more than 60 hours per month (2 hours per day). This last figure is close to the 5% who reported that caring for other people's children affected their labour force participation in SLID. If the proportion of respondents who gave care is multiplied by the proportion of help-providers who are affected in their labour force participation, one can estimate that caring for other people's children is liable to affect labour force participation of about 1.4% of the total number of respondents.

The average number of hours of support given by those who cared for other people's children was 17, but those who said that providing support affected their labour force participation reported an average of 51 hours.

2.4 Help received for taking care of one's own children

Two thirds of those who got help taking care of their children received less than ten hours per week while less than five percent mentioned receiving 12 hours per day or more.

Those empowered to work by the amount of support they got for their own children received, on average, 22 hours of support, compared to an average of 8 hours for all respondents who received such support.

2.5 Looking after one's own children

The GSS asked another question on the subject of how unpaid care giving affects one's labour force participation. That is: "Last week, how many hours did you spend looking after children who live in your household?" This question was not tested in SLID. Of the total number of respondents, 29.8% spent some time looking after children in their household (compared to 25.5% who looked after other people's children and 13.2% who provided personal care for the disabled or ill).

Further, the number of hours spent taking care of one's own children is much higher than that given for care of people outside the household. We assumed that only those who spent two or more hours per day providing care for the disabled (5.6%) or looking after other people's children (5.3%) would be affected in their labour force participation. The proportion of those who spend more than two hours per day looking after children in their households is 88.7%! The numbers are still significant as we go up in the number of hours. 43.3% spend more than 40 hours per week (6 hours per day) and 23.5% spent more than 60 hours per week (8.5 per day). Indeed, even if we adopt a criterion that is six times more strict,

(that only those spending more than 12 hours per day looking after their children would be affected in their labour force participation) the proportion of respondents whose labour force participation is liable to be affected by providing care is significantly greater than in the other two cases (3.8%, compared to 1.4% for the disabled and 0.6% for other people's children).

3. COMMENTS FROM THE INTERVIEWERS AND OBSERVERS

Members of the SLID team observed the first few days of interviewing in Toronto and St. John's. Also, interviewers were asked to complete a debriefing questionnaire after the test. The following section summarises their comments.

- ! The concepts in this module seemed very fuzzy and overlapping. The introduction was too long and not understood. In the first question, it would be helpful to separate children from everyone else who was getting help.

- ! Interviewers would like some rewording of questions, for example "exclude paid help" in the introduction seemed too terse. Also, it wasn't clear whether young children would be included as needing care because of "AGE", whereas the word was meant to ensure that the question measured elder care.

- ! The answers to Q2 "Who did you provide help too?" include "child". It was unclear to interviewers, if this should include respondents' own children. Interviewers commented that everyone spends time providing help to their own young children. The second question (Q6) seemed to duplicate what people had answered about children in Q1, and again raised the question about whether to report care given to their own children.

- ! The age cutoff for the questions dealing with support received for respondents' own children was 18. Interviewers thought this was too high. It was also suggested that respondents over 65 and under 18 should be skipped around this question.

- ! Respondents did not like to say how many hours they helped others who needed help and could not understand why we asked. They didn't like to call it "unpaid help" and did not want anyone to think that they would have wanted to work rather than help those in need.

- ! A number of people were confused by these questions and interviewers had to explain them many times for people to understand. Some also had to paraphrase the questions.

- ! The first question referred to help given both inside and outside of the household. The second concerned only other people's children, which would be most often out of the household. Finally, the third question asked about help received from outside of the household. This created some confusion.

4. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The questions that seek to identify "In which months" "How many hour per month?" are problematic, because some help may be of a regular nature while some happens in specific months. The first question, for example, refers to both "help in a crisis situation" and "help given to those who are unable to care for themselves due to a disability". In addition, SLID, does not ask whether the hours changed by month, but just the average hours per week in the months where help was provided, which may vary through the year.

Fractions of hours can safely be dropped when we ask "How many hours per week?"

The option of specifying months is needed. We cannot just assume that all respondents help "all year", especially because the first question asks about crisis situations. Our results indicate that just under half of our respondents used this option.

We should keep the "mark all that apply" for question Q2 (Who did you provide help too?). Some people did help more than one person, and it is helpful to see who people are giving support to (for example, for studies of the "sandwich" generation, caught supporting their children and their parents...)

The first question should be changed from "... unable to care for themselves because of age..." to "... because of ageing..." Some interviewers weren't clear if that included helping someone's own children because of young age, whereas what we really want to measure is elder care; i.e., helping people who had difficulty taking care of themselves because of old age, or ageing.

Seniors: should they be included?

If the objective of the module is to measure the impact of unpaid care giving and receiving on labour market participation, it should be restricted to those 69 and less. SLID already skips many of the labour questions for people over 69.

Further, our only question for care-receiving deals with "help received taking care of your children") irrelevant to most senior citizens. (In our sample, only 3% of people 65 and over had children under 18).

On the other hand, care giving and receiving by seniors will become increasingly interesting as their proportion in the Canadian population grows. If this were deemed a worthwhile endeavour for SLID, then the questions should be made relevant to those over 65 and should include questions like "Do you receive any unpaid help?" with examples similar to those of the GSS (personal care, doing groceries, transportation, filling out forms, housework).

How long do parents care for children?

Another area of concern is that the age of 18 may be too high as a screening criterion for the third question ("Do you get help for your own children). We cannot really evaluate this since we do not know the age of respondents' children. (We only know the age of those that are in the household.) The people over 65 give us an indication of this. Of the 10 with children under 18, none said that they received help for them and none would have needed any for a greater labour force participation. How would results for this question change if the age cutoff was lowered and what should that cutoff be?

Caring for one's own children revisited

The GSS data points unequivocally to the impact of child care on paid work. It is so obvious, some say, that we do not need to measure it: everybody would answer "Well of course" to "Do you spend time taking care of your children?" However, two solutions to what seems to be here an objection of response burden warrant further discussion.

One is to start right away with a question like the one in GSS "How much time do you spend looking after your children?", after having screened for the presence of children in the household. We may want to consider adding the word "actively" to

the question on looking after one's own children as a way of getting around the criticism that many may answer 24 hours per day.

Another option is to ask those who are not working or who are working part-time what their reasons are for this choice. The LFS plans to include among choices for these questions "caring for own children", "caring for other family members", and "other personal or family responsibilities". This will not measure hours spent, but adds little respondent burden. It has the potential for measuring elder-care as well, though not identifying it. This approach has a shortcoming, though. Those who are not working, or who are working part-time do not include all of those who are affected in their labour force participation, leaving out respondents who work full-time, but keep a job with less responsibility than they would take if they did not care for children.

The second option would leave us with a reduced SUPPORT module to measure incidence of support given for other people's children and support received for their own. Weighing the low impact on labour force participation one can expect of these matters against the respondent burden needed for the task begs the suggestion of abandoning the SUPPORT module or replacing it with questions of a different nature, that of measuring unpaid work within the household and how this affects labour force participation.

APPENDIX 1

**QUESTIONS IN THE SUPPORT MODULE
FOR THE JANUARY 1993 SLID FIELD TEST**

SUPPORT-BEGINA: THE NEXT FEW QUESTIONS ARE ABOUT TIME SPENT TAKING CARE OF A SPOUSE, CHILDREN, ANOTHER RELATIVE, A FRIEND OR SOMEONE ELSE. EXCLUDE PAID HELP.

GO TO SUPPORT-Q1

SUPPORT-Q1: IN 1992, DID [respondent] PROVIDE ANY UNPAID HELP TO ANYONE WHO HAD TROUBLE TAKING CARE OF HIM/HERSELF BECAUSE OF AGE, A DISABILITY, A PHYSICAL OR MENTAL ILLNESS, OR FOR ANY OTHER REASON?

YES - GO TO SUPPORT-Q2

NO/DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q6

SUPPORT-Q2: WHO DID [respondent] PROVIDE HELP TO? WAS IT . . .

Interviewer marks all that apply

A SPOUSE

A CHILD

ANOTHER RELATIVE

A FRIEND

SOMEONE ELSE

GO TO SUPPORT-Q3

SUPPORT-Q3: IN WHAT MONTHS DID [respondent] PROVIDE THIS HELP?

All months in 1992 - GO TO SUPPORT-Q4

Some of the months - specify - GO TO SUPPORT-Q3A

DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q5

SUPPORT-Q3A: **IN WHAT MONTHS DID [RESPONDENT] PROVIDE THIS HELP?**

Specify months. Interviewer marks months - GO TO SUPPORT-Q4

SUPPORT-Q4: **IN THESE MONTHS, ABOUT HOW MANY HOURS OF UNPAID HELP DID [respondent] PROVIDE PER WEEK?**

Interviewer enters amount - GO TO SUPPORT-Q5

SUPPORT-Q5: **DO YOU THINK THAT THIS UNPAID HELP LIMITED THE AMOUNT OF PAID WORK [respondent] COULD HAVE DONE?**

YES/NO/DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q6

SUPPORT-Q6: **IN 1992, DID [respondent] SPEND ANY TIME LOOKING AFTER ANOTHER PERSON'S CHILD? EXCLUDE PAID CARE OR UNPAID CARE GIVING MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY.**

YES - GO TO SUPPORT-Q7

NO/DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q10

SUPPORT-Q7: **IN WHAT MONTHS DID [respondent] PROVIDE THIS CHILD CARE?**

All months in 1992 - GO TO SUPPORT-Q8

Some of the months -specify - GO TO SUPPORT-Q7A

DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q9

SUPPORT-Q7A: **IN WHAT MONTHS DID [RESPONDENT] PROVIDE THIS CHILD CARE?**

Specify months.

Interviewer marks months - GO TO SUPPORT-Q8

SUPPORT-Q8: **IN THESE MONTHS, ABOUT HOW MANY HOURS OF UNPAID CHILD CARE DID [respondent] PROVIDE PER WEEK?**

Interviewer enters amount - GO TO SUPPORT-Q9

SUPPORT-Q9: **DO YOU THINK THAT PROVIDING THIS UNPAID HELP LIMITED THE AMOUNT OF PAID WORK [respondent] COULD HAVE DONE?**

YES/NO/DK/R - GO TO SUPPORT-Q10

SUPPORT-Q10: **DOES [respondent] HAVE ANY CHILDREN UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE?**

YES - GO TO SUPPORT-Q11

NO/DK/R - GO TO END-INTRO

SUPPORT-Q11: **IN 1992, DID [respondent] RECEIVE ANY UNPAID HELP TAKING CARE OF HIS/HER CHILD(REN) FROM A FRIEND OR A RELATIVE? (EXCLUDE HELP RECEIVED FROM THE OTHER PARENT)**

YES - GO TO SUPPORT-Q12

NO - GO TO SUPPORT-Q15

DK/R - GO TO END-INTRO

SUPPORT-Q12: **IN WHAT MONTHS DID [respondent] RECEIVE THIS HELP?**

All months in 1992 - GO TO SUPPORT-Q13

Some of the months - specify - GO TO SUPPORT-Q12A

DK/R - GO TO END-INTRO

SUPPORT-Q12A: **IN WHAT MONTHS DID [RESPONDENT] RECEIVE THIS HELP?**

Specify months.

Interviewer marks months - GO TO SUPPORT-Q13

SUPPORT-Q13: **IN THESE MONTHS, ABOUT HOW MANY HOURS OF UNPAID HELP DID [respondent] RECEIVE PER WEEK?**

Interviewer enters amount

If worked in 1992 - GO TO SUPPORT-Q14

If didn't work in 1992 - GO TO END-INTRO

SUPPORT-Q14: **DO YOU THINK THAT THIS HELP INCREASED THE AMOUNT OF PAID WORK [respondent] COULD DO?**

YES/NO/DK/R - GO TO END-INTRO

SUPPORT-Q15: **DO YOU THINK THAT THIS LACK OF HELP LIMITED THE AMOUNT OF PAID WORK [respondent] COULD DO?**

YES/NO/DK/R - GO TO END-INTRO