



National Survey of Divorced and Separated Parents

METHODOLOGY REPORT

Submitted to:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Federal, provincial and territorial governments have developed and maintained a constructive relationship through collaboration in the area of family justice for over 25 years through different initiatives to address the needs of families experiencing separation or divorce. The most recent federal family justice initiative is the Supporting Families Experiencing Separation and Divorce - five-year initiative, which began on April 1, 2009. A focus of the current strategy is to improve access to the family justice system and to encourage compliance with family obligations, including financial support and access.

To support policy development and the implementation of the new family justice initiative, the Research Unit of Family, Children and Youth (FCY) Section has identified a number of research priorities related to:

- Arrangements made for children post-separation/divorce and how they change over time;
- Financial arrangements for children and compliance with these arrangements;
- Parent conflict and adjustment to separation/divorce; and
- Use of family justice services.

The current survey builds on research conducted by FCY over the last 10 years discrete topic areas in the area of family law (for example, Survey of Family Courts, Court File Review Survey and several one-time survey consultations with legal professionals (e.g., lawyers, judges, and mediators). In addition, the Research Unit utilizes data bases maintained by Statistics Canada that include family justice information (for example, Civil Court Survey, Survey of Maintenance Enforcement Programs, General Social Survey – Cycle that focuses on Family, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth). Together, these sources provide multiple lines of evidence to understand perceptions, activities and trends in the area of family law.

The Survey of Separated and Divorced Parents addresses a gap in the current research: there is the lack of information collected directly from these parents. Of prime importance for the current assignment is addressing deficiencies recognized in previous primary research with separated and divorced parents (e.g., reliability and generalizability of the results due to problematic composition of the sample, under-representation of divorced fathers, insufficient sample size to permit analyses by key questions for sub-groups). Statistics Canada has, in the past, collected some information on these issues in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) and the General Social Survey – Family Cycle (GSS-Family). The NLSCY had included some limited information on custody arrangements for a period of time, but problems with the questions and with the data collection affected the ability to publish the data for

several cycles, and the limited nature of the questions has impeded ability to do longitudinal analysis of the data to really address the questions for which answers are needed.

The GSS is a cross-sectional phone survey with persons over the age of 15 years. Data is collected on different topics on an annual basis – with the family data collected every five years. The family cycle has in the past, included questions relating to custody and access as well as support (child and spousal). Cycle 20 data, collected in 2006 also included information on the use of family justice services. The next cycle to be collected in 2011 will have a greatly reduced section on custody/access and financial arrangements. In fact, with cuts and reductions in the survey content, there may be as little as 25% of the questions remaining. For the data that exists from past cycles, the information collected has been limited, for example, although there is some information on custody arrangements, there is no information on we how much the arrangements have changed from their original state and why, or how changes were made to these agreements (i.e., with the assistance of lawyers, mediators etc). Nor is it known how long - on average - orders are in place before changes are required, or whether changes are made informally to orders/agreements over time. In order to best serve the needs of families and help develop relevant policies in this area, there is a need to have additional information from families on their experiences with separation and divorce.

The objective of the current survey was to collect data from a regionally representative sample of male and female parents who had experienced a separation or divorce in the previous five years. These parents had to have had at least one child under the age of 18 at the time of the separation or divorce and were living in one of the 10 provinces.

2. METHODOLOGY

At EKOS Research we have created a telephone-based, national sample of roughly 55,000 Canadians. These individuals have been recruited into our online-telephone hybrid panel, which is used to collect survey data in nationally representative samples. Probit panellists have been selected randomly using a random-digit dial (RDD) landline-cell phone hybrid sample frame. Once selected, they are contacted and recruited by telephone and asked to complete a basic profile (i.e., base survey instrument) including a range of demographic information about themselves. They are also asked if they would prefer to complete surveys online or by telephone. All sample members are eligible to participate, including those with cell phones only, those with no Internet access and those who simply prefer to respond by telephone, rather than online. This panel represents a fully representative sample of Canadian (meaning that the incidence of a given target population within our panel very closely resembles the public at large) and margin of errors can be applied. Random samples can then be drawn from this pool and data collected in a more cost conscious and timely manner than would otherwise be possible in a traditional telephone survey.

The survey relied on a mix of self-administered (online) and interviewer administered methods to complete the cases. Roughly two-thirds of cases came from EKOS' online panel Probit, while another one in three cases were screened from the general public using an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) dialling system. These approaches were employed in an effort to collect a random sample in as cost effective a manner as possible given the very low incidence of finding the applicable target group within the population.

On first contact the nature of the survey exercise is explained in greater detail (as are our privacy policies) and demographic information is collected. The online/off-line status of the individual is also ascertained in order to determine the method of completing surveys (i.e., online, or by telephone). In addition to the RDD, telephone-based approach to the sampling, the fact that every member of the panel has a live telephone conversation with one of our recruiters to confirm their administrative data is very rare in Canada today. It is this extra step, however, that gives us absolute confidence in the administrative data we have on our panel, and our panel metrics. The hybrid nature of the panel ensures that members of the public are included in the sample regardless of whether they prefer contact by telephone or the internet.

With respect to the cases conducted using the Probit panel for the current study, of the 55,000-case panel, we invited 35,419 members between the ages of 18 and 60. Each panellist received up to four e-mails over the course of March and April inviting them (or reminding) them to participate. All members invited were asked to complete a 1-2 minute questionnaire screening them for eligibility into the survey sample. These questions asked:

- if they had experience a separation or divorce in a live-in relationship;
- if there were children involved who were a product of the relationship;

- if those children were under the age of 18 at the time of separation/divorce; and,
- if the separation or divorce took place in the past seven years.

In total, 16,291 or 46 percent of the invited panel responded to the survey. Of those who responded, we experienced a 4.7 percent rate of eligibility (see below). Given that we have invited 35,419 of the full 55,000 in the panel, this translates into a 3.0 percent incidence in the general public/panel overall.

Invited	35,419
Started	16,291 (47% success rate)
Separated/Divorced	2,396 (14.7%)
Kids involved	1,415 (59% or 8.9% overall)
Kids are right age	1,095 (77% or 6.7% overall)
Timeframe (7 years) is right	766 (70% or 4.7% overall)
Completed	705 (92% or 4.3% of total sample)

The initial intent had been to complete the survey entirely with Probit panel members. This was based on an initial assumption that roughly 10 percent of households would be within scope, according to the Justice Canada, who reviewed data from Statistics Canada's 2006 GSS Family Cycles which reported about 8-10 per cent of the 25,000 persons sampled indicated that they had experienced a separation or divorce in the last 5 years. Since the incidence ended up being only one-third of this rate at 4.3 percent, the 55,000 case panel was only sufficient to produce the 705 sample size. In order to increase the sample, the sampling process needed to be taken outside of the Probit panel to the wider public. The very low incidence, however, made it cost prohibitive to use the traditional method of interviewing to screen out 32 of 33 willing households to obtain a single response for the survey. To screen through the broader public in a cost effective manner, the decision was made to employ an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) computer dialling system to contact households and screen them through the study criteria. This works by dialling households and playing a pre-recorded message asking respondents to press a number on their telephone key pad to respond to the screening questions. Once determined that a household had responded correctly to the screening criteria, a message is played telling them that someone would be in touch with their household about the survey. The telephone numbers for those households that responded correctly are then given to a trained, bilingual team of interviewers who re-contacted the households and re-screened them. If the respondent met the study criteria, the interviewer conducted the interview over the telephone or, if requested, they were sent an e-mail with the link to the survey so that they could complete it on their own online.

Once the decision was made to augment the Probit sample by dialling the broader public with the IVR, another 421,000 households were added to the sample, screening for eligible respondents to the survey. Using the IVR screening process, households were asked two to five questions (see appendix for screening text) to determine eligibility and telephone numbers of households where someone indicated that they were in-scope were sent to the pool of interviewers who re-contacted the household and re-screened

respondents. All eligible cases (on-re-screening) were then asked to complete the survey on the telephone with the interviewer (or online, if requested).

We structured the IVR screener to break the screening criteria down into individual questions, each of which must be answered before moving to the next question, for as precise screening as possible with a view to increasing the efficiency of finding target respondents.

Of the 421,250 households dialled, up to three total calls (i.e. two call-backs plus the initial attempt) were made to try and reach a respondent. Following are the results of the calls by household:

Response Rate for IVR

Dialled	421,250		
Not in Service	97,780	23.2%	
Functional	323,470	76.8%	
No pick up (call-back, machine, etc)	112, 576	34.8%	
All Responses	210,894	65.2%	
Hung up-refused/timed out	208,753	98.9%	32.0%
Provided Responses	2141	01.1%	6.9%

Of the 2141 cases that were returned from the IVR dialling, and subsequently called by interviewers, 924 started the questionnaire. The results are as follows:

Started	924
Separated/Divorced	553 (60%)
Kids involved	525 (95% or 57% overall)
Kids are right age	382 (73% or 41% overall)
Timeframe (7 years) is right	358 (94% or 39% overall)
Completed	348 (97% or 38% of total sample)

The decision to extend the survey beyond the Probit panel into the broader (i.e., unrecruited) public meant that there would be a greater mix of cases being completed online and/or on the telephone (i.e., self-administered or interviewer administered). For this reason, as part of the analysis, there is attention paid to systematic differences in responses based on mode of completing the survey (see data base management section of this report).

The larger sample size would ensure that there are sufficient cases to be able to isolate results by region, gender, type of marriage (legal/common-law), separated/divorced, and also by other key variables (length of marriage, age of children, type of custody arrangement and so on). This sample size will yield a level of precision of as wide as +/-3.0 percent for the sample overall at a 95 percent confidence interval (i.e., 19 times out of 20).

2.1 INSTRUMENT REVIEW

One of the key challenges in the survey was to design a questionnaire that adequately addressed all of the questions (or as many as possible) within the constraints of a questionnaire that was not overly long or burdensome for parents to respond to. If the instrument is overly long, participation rates will suffer and the general validity of the results will be compromised. As it was, the average length of the interview was just under 25 minutes.

The questionnaire was designed by the Department of Justice, with input from EKOS Research on wording, categories, scaling of items and any other issues related to a smooth collection process and data quality (e.g., clarity and flow of questions, as well as appropriateness of categories/scales and other response sets). The instrument was also reviewed for skip logic and instructions to interviewers/respondents on completing specific items or sections of the questionnaire. Careful consideration was also given to the need for a survey instrument that would work appropriately in an interviewer-administered and self-administered context, as both methods were used extensively.

Throughout the questionnaire review process and programming of the questionnaire the following were also addressed:

- clear instructions about any references or frameworks to be used in answering questions;
- how questions would administered to respondents (e.g., prompted or unprompted categories that are either seen/read to respondents or not seen/read);
- definition of the available categories (particularly in more technical areas such as in this case type of family justice professionals used or type of custody arrangement) or scaled responses to include;
- specification of the actual number of allowable responses and whether specific responses could be selected in conjunction with other multiple responses or not;
- rules for making semi-closed options (e.g., “other – specify”) available;
- the format of responses that could be entered (e.g., number of digits possible, use of decimal point, use of dates);
- used of “Don’t Know”, as well as no-response options; and
- rotation or randomization of question batteries or blocks of questions, as well as the order in which categories or statements were read to respondents to minimize sequencing effects.

Consideration was given in the development of the screening sequence of questions and introduction to the following:

- inform respondents that the study is being carried out by the Department of Justice/Government of Canada;
- inform the participants of the reasons why the survey is being conducted;
- inform respondents that participation in the survey is voluntary, that no administrative decision will be taken concerning that individual, and their refusal to participate will not in any way lead to an unfavourable decision concerning that individual;
- inform them of their rights under the current privacy legislation;
- inform them of the length of the survey; and
- provide contact information where they can verify the legitimacy of the survey (which will be registered with the National Survey Registration System), or find out more about the nature and purpose of the survey (either through EKOS or DoJ).

Once the survey questionnaire was reviewed and finalized, it was programmed into Ekos' system for data collection purposes and then several internally and also by client representatives, who tested it extensively online.

The English questionnaire was then translated and the French version superimposed over the English programming to ensure that the same questionnaire flow, categories and program logic were upheld in both languages. A detailed review of the French was undertaken internally and by DoJ.

2.2 SURVEY PRETEST

The questionnaire was thoroughly tested (in English and then in French) with 50 separated or divorced parents (i.e., 50 completed interviews, that were then added to the final database for analysis, as significant changes were not made as a result of the test). Some of the test cases were completed online and others were completed over the telephone. Some of the online cases were subsequently contacted (about 15) for a ten minute de-brief on the survey instrument. This cognitive testing of the survey addressed concepts in the questionnaire, the overall nature of the survey and sensitivity of the topic, as well as views about the length and flow. It also provided useful feedback about small changes to the survey instrument.

The objective was to test the survey questionnaire (French and English) in terms of the length of time required for the interviews, as well as to ensure the sequencing and clarity of the questions, and that wording and flow were appropriate (in the telephone survey context specifically). Quality and comprehensiveness of the data returned were closely scrutinized. Pretesting was also done to examine the incidence of finding in-scope cases in the panel and to establish response rates.

All data from the pretest were carefully reviewed for data quality and submitted to the client for review. All audio recordings from the test cases conducted by telephone were also reviewed internally and submitted to the client. The Project Manager then made a list of the suggested changes implied by the test results, which were reviewed and approved by DoJ and subsequently implemented in both languages. Final revised questionnaires were submitted to DoJ prior to starting the survey.

a) *Probit* Field Methodology

The survey was administered using the bilingual questionnaire, installed on a secure web-server controlled by EKOS. The email invitation included a description and purpose of the survey (in both languages) along with a link to the survey website. When respondents clicked on the survey link, they were taken to a website containing the survey instrument. Once inside the survey, the respondent had the choice of completing the questionnaire in French or English (and were able to change the survey language between French and English at any time). The survey database was mounted using a Personalized Identification Number (PIN), so only individuals with a PIN had access to the survey (the PIN was included in the email invitation). The PIN also allowed respondents to exit and re-enter the survey at any time to complete or change information before the questionnaire was completed/submitted. Once the questionnaire was submitted, however, that case was locked and could not be re-accessed, except through the survey administrator.

The questionnaire included a brief introduction to the study and rationale for the research. Panellists were told that the study was collecting fact-based, profiling information about the nature of their separation or divorce. They were informed of the purpose of the survey and how the information helps the Government of Canada. The voluntary and confidential nature of the survey was also emphasized. Instructions for completing the survey were clearly laid out about how to move through the questionnaire.

Both the email invitation and the survey instructions included an email address that respondents could use in the event that they had questions about the study or completing the questionnaire. Also, a 1-800 hotline was in place, staffed by experienced, bilingual field staff.

Sampled panellists who were flagged as telephone cases were contacted by telephone for a telephone interview. Full call-back procedures were in place for the telephone sample (i.e., up to ten call backs, if needed, on a rotational schedule across days, evenings and weekends).

2.3 DATA BASE MANAGEMENT AND WEIGHTING

In the context of web-based online/telephone surveys, the data base is created in real time as the survey unfolds. Answer consistency checks and skips (simple and complex) are programmed directly into the questionnaire so that questions cannot be asked when they are not required and they cannot be left unanswered when they require an entry. Data editing is thus relegated to a minor check of “non applicable”

code attribution in cases where backwards skips occurred during an interview. With some restrictions, even this can be carried out automatically by the CallWeb software. Verbatim responses to open end survey items such as industry and occupation will be merged into the survey data file along with spaces allocated for closed ended coding.

While the survey was being completed, the data base for use in the analysis was constructed. This entails thoroughly documenting the data files for the survey data, including providing sensible variable labels and exhaustive and accurate sets of value labels. Command files to create the survey system files include detailed statements specifying relationships between variables, and determining the proper non-response codes (i.e., “not applicable” or “missing” value codes).

A coding scheme was developed for any variables with open or semi-open ended items. The coding scheme was also reviewed by the project manager and client for additional codes, which were subsequently added. The coding took place over the course of the last stages of data collection and early stages of data base management process.

As part of the data management process we reviewed the sample comparing the portions of the sample online versus telephone for mode effects and also explored the differences between the two sources of sample (*Probit* and IVR screened sample in the general public). There were relatively few differences between the *Probit* and IVR generated samples. There were on the other hand some systematic differences between the cases collected online and those collected by telephone. These differences typically related to more responses provided or more varied responses provided by online respondents, and telephone respondents proving more positive responses than online respondents. For example, interviewed respondents were more apt to say communications had improved in a range of areas, they also more often described frequent contact with the other parent. They were also less apt to describe difficulties experiences over the living arrangements and to say that they were satisfied with living arrangements and less apt to cite a range of reasons for dissatisfaction; more often describing the current relationship with the other parent as friendly. They also reported fewer changes to the primary living arrangement of the child.

Complete documentation was submitted to the client regarding data file including variable names, variable location in the data file, their fully labelled question and response categories, skip logic, and any additional commentary related to the variables. All codes used for closed, semi-open and open variables are also listed.

A series of detailed data tables were also produced indicating “top line” results, as well as complete cross-tabulations involving several “banners” of descriptive variables (such as gender, parent age, socio-economic status, province, number and age of children, type of union and type of custody arrangement, etc.). These tables array up to 30 columns of multiple breakdowns on a single page, with assorted continuous and categorical descriptive statistics, and tests of statistical significance for each sub-table. The tables were reviewed by the client and adjusted as necessary to meet informational needs.

The following is a detailed schedule of the major steps taken in the data collection process from questionnaire review and programming to the final steps of data base management.

Schedule of Events for Survey Collection

Start of project	Feb 10
Questionnaire revised and programmed	Feb 11 to 25
First iteration of testing	Feb 26 (2,500 invited – English)
Briefing on outcome and results of testing	March 2-3
First Frequencies Sent to client	March 1
Revisions to questionnaire, debriefing and re-testing	March 1-3
Reminder to Online test cases	March 3
Phone testing	March 4-5 (750 cases English)
Updated briefing on outcome and results of testing	March 4-5, 8
First invitation to Probit sample 1	March 9 (5,000 cases English)
Frequencies sent to client	March 9
Briefing on outcome of first wave of sample	March 10-11
First invitation to Probit sample 2	March 12 (15,000 cases English)
Meeting to discuss results and difficulties	March 15
First invitation to Probit sample 3	March 15 (8,000 cases French)
Screening calls to General Public	March 12 (14,000 cases English Canada)
Reminder to Probit sample 1&2	March 16 (20,000 cases English)
Telephone calls to Probit sample	March 16 (1500 English)
Progress Memos on results to date	March 17, 23, 31, April 15, April 30
Frequencies sent to client	March 17, 22, April 7, 13
Final round of invitations to Probit	April 15
Final dialling through to IVR	April 30
Final calling by interviewers to IVR generated sample	May 10
Coding of open ends	April May
Data base management (labelling, cleaning, computed variables, etc.)	April May
Delivery of preliminary tables and methods report	June 15
Delivery of final Data set, tables and methods report	July 15