

# International surveys: motives and methodologies

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## **Abstract**

The context of the discussion is the increasing incidence of international surveys, of which one is the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Project, which began in 2002. The ITC country surveys are longitudinal, and their aim is to evaluate the effects of policy measures being introduced in various countries under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The challenges of organization, data collection and analysis in international surveys are reviewed and illustrated. Analysis is an increasingly important part of the motivation for large scale cross-cultural surveys. The fundamental challenge for analysis is to discern the real response (or lack of response) to policy change, separating it from the effects of data collection mode, differential non-response, external events, time-in-sample, culture, and language. Two problems relevant to statistical analysis are discussed. The first problem is the question of when and how to analyze pooled data from several countries, in order to strengthen conclusions which might be generally valid. While in some cases this seems to be straightforward, there are differing opinions on the extent to which pooling is possible and reasonable. It is suggested that for formal comparisons, random effects models are of conceptual use. The second problem is to find models of measurement across cultures and data collection modes which will enable calibration of continuous, binary and ordinal responses, and produce comparisons from which extraneous effects have been removed. It is noted that hierarchical models provide a natural way of relaxing requirements of model invariance across groups.

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