

RECOMMENDATIONS ON OCCUPATIONAL MEASUREMENT FOR ESS

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MORE QUESTIONS

1. ESS would gain enormously in sociological relevance if a set of questions on first occupation (i.e. “the first job you had after leaving full time education for the first time”) is added. The relevance is:
 - Allows for direct analysis of the education/occupation (“from school to work”) link.
 - Allows for an elementary analysis of occupational careers.
 - Allows for the analysis of effects of life-time mobility on outcome variables, in particular political attitudes.
 - Allows for cohort comparisons, next to cross-national analysis.
 - Brings men and women on an equal level with respect to occupational analysis. Most women have had a first job, but many do not have a current job.

QUESTION FORMAT

2. The questions on mother’s and father’s occupation should refer to occupation “when you were 15 years of age or – if s/he did not work at the time – the last job they had before that”.
 - The change to the then/previous format is particularly important for mothers: while almost all fathers work when respondent was growing up, this is not true for mother – but mothers have had jobs before their children grow up and there is strong evidence that these jobs matter to current status outcomes.
 - If adopted, it is interesting to add a question asking when mother last worked / stopped working.
 - 15 years would be in line with “PISA” age: for all countries in PISA, age 15 is still compulsory and for comprehensive systems it is the final age of comprehensive education. The age reference would pertain to questions F50, F54, F56 and F60.
3. The current ESS showcard (card 60/62, question F54/F60) to measure father’s and mother’s occupation is no good. It has confusing titles, mixes up fundamental distinctions in occupational and class analysis (farm/manual/non-manual, skill levels) and can empirically be shown to be a weak instrument. A better and tested alternative is available: the showcard used in ISSP87, and also used in various ISSP sequels in the Netherlands. It is close to the first digit of ISCO88. I attach the format of this showcard and my presentation on its use for the ESS NC meeting.

4. Using a showcard to measure occupation next to a detailed question is a very powerful strategy to measure occupational status. This strategy is already in place for father's and mother's occupation and should be expanded for respondent's and partner's occupations (F23 and F40). This would allow for a full multiple measure status attainment model. (Note that ESS has already a multiple measurement format for education in place.)

DATA COLLECTION

5. Interviewers should be instructed to prompt for more information at unclear or crude answers to open questions. A recommended prompt is: "Use at least two words".
6. Interviewers should be instructed about occupation questions with some emphasis. In particular, they should understand the difference between an industry and an occupation.
7. At data entry, typists (in CATI: interviewers) should be instructed to type the information verbatim and only allow summary statements if the information cannot be stored in A100.

CODING

8. A new version of ISCO is coming up: ISCO08. It is in its final stages of revision at ILO and will be accepted (with possible minor revisions) by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2008. The logic of ISCO88 and ISCO08 are the same, with slight revisions at the major group level, however there are lots of changes at the detailed level, also of eminent sociological relevance (new categories for managers, different organization of farmer categories). Strictly speaking ISCO88 and ISCO08 are incompatible, but the downward compatibility (08 → 88) is clearly greater than the upward compatibility (88 → 08). It is recommended that ESS takes ISCO08 as its standard as soon as it is accepted by ILO, and uses the occasion to reshape and harmonize the occupational coding process in all countries.
9. The occupational coding process should be rigorously harmonized among all ESS participants. The following steps should be taken:
 - A. The ISCO08 should be translated into the local languages following the standard ESS translation rules.
 - B. A database should be maintained to collect all the occupation data ever coded for ESS in combination with its ISCO88 and ISCO08 codes. This database can be helpful to generate automatic coding using string matches.
 - C. Coders should be trained in the use of ISCO. The training should emphasize the logic of ISCO.
 - D. Coders should have access to the full (English language) ISCO manual and be competent in English.
 - E. A coding file should be created, containing IDNO, occupation string (A100), industry (if available, can be precoded), supervising status and self-employment.

- The coding file should not contain: education and self-assigned occupation code (showcard). Household relationships should be transparent in the file, but it is recommended that the file stacks the different occupations (father, mother, respondent, partner).in a 'long' format.
- F. Coders should be able to sort the file, by IDNO, OCCTXT, ISCO.
 - G. Two coders should code the file independently. A third and final code is created by an adjudicator.
 - H. The coding file, including the OCCTXT string and the three codes, should be archived at the ESS archive. The isco codes are transferred to the main files.

ARCHIVING

- 10. Keep the verbatim records of the occupations in a standard string format (A100) and make them accessible to researchers (in protected mode). This will make it possible (A) to check the quality of the coding, (B) the upgrade occupation coding to other coding systems, in particular the upcoming ISCO08 system.
- 11. At present, the strings of father's and mother's occupation collected for R1 and R2 are not coded, but available from the ESS website in CSV [comma separated format]. In practice, this information is very messy. It takes a competent data-analyst several days to retrieve the information and reformat it into something standard. (I have done this.) It is recommended that this information will be stored in spss files with a standard string length of A100. In the cases the isco coding has already been done, it should be added to these files with a standard variable name: such as ISCOF or ISCOF14 and ISCOM / ISCOM14 .
- 12. It is recommended that all stored information on father's and mother's occupation from the previous three ESS rounds be coded into isco88.
- 13. There is a potential privacy risk with storing occupational information in string format (like it is now for father's and mother's occupation). It is recommended that this information will be protected and made accessible to research only at specific request to the ESS secretariat.

Useful links:

ISCOCOM <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ier/isco/brit/intro.html>

ISCO08 <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/docs/draft08.pdf>

[http://home.fsw.vu.nl/HBG.Ganzeboom/Pdf/Ganzeboom_crude_\[Prague_2007\].pdf](http://home.fsw.vu.nl/HBG.Ganzeboom/Pdf/Ganzeboom_crude_[Prague_2007].pdf)