



Comparing Public Service Performance Internationally: How Can We Make Like-for-Like Comparisons of Survey Responses?



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Background

Increasingly comparison of public sector performance is based on service users' views and opinions. A common problem with using such data is that for any fixed level of performance, individuals are likely to vary in their ratings in a way that differs systematically across populations and population sub-groups—what seems acceptable to one group appears poor quality to another. This compromises the cross-country comparability of survey instruments.

[Mario] has been told that he has epilepsy and that he needs to take medication. The doctor has very briefly explained what the condition is. He is very busy and there is a queue of patients waiting to see him. Mario would like to know more about what he has, but feels that there is no time to ask questions. The doctor says goodbye to Mario, and Mario leaves the office.

Q1: How would you rate his experience of how clearly health care providers explained things to him?

Q2: How would you rate his experience of getting enough time to ask questions about his health problem or treatment?

Figure 1
Example of a vignette in the domain Clarity of Communication

One way to cut across the problem of non-comparability is to use a questionnaire that asks respondents in different countries for their assessment of the behaviour of the public service in a common hypothetical situation (e. g. how long a patient waited before being attended to). This so-called 'anchoring vignette' can be used to adjust individual reports of actual experiences with public services and hence provide more comparable rankings.

Aims

Using data from the World Health Survey we aimed to investigate the utility of anchoring vignettes to compare the performance of health system responsiveness across countries, to discover:

- ❖ The extent of differential reporting behaviour within and across countries and how this is related to socio-economic characteristics of individuals.
- ❖ Whether information derived from vignettes is useful to adjust for systematic differences in the reporting of health system responsiveness.
- ❖ How the application of anchoring vignettes can be extended to aid cross-country rankings of health system performance.

What We Did

- ❖ We interrogated data on health system responsiveness contained in the World Health Survey to explore the existence and level of reporting behaviour and how this relates to the income, education, age, gender and country of survey respondents.
- ❖ Using responses to the anchoring vignettes (example in Figure 1) we adjusted the country-specific data on health system responsiveness and compared the rankings of countries pre and post adjustment and assessed the resultant changes.

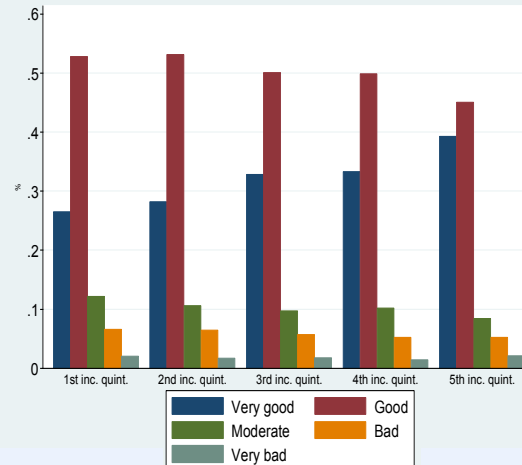


Figure 2
Systematic variability in the reporting of **responsiveness** by income quintile for a vignette in the domain of Clarity of Communication, Mexico

Findings

- ❖ We found evidence of systematic variations in reporting behaviour existing both within and across countries. Within countries reporting behaviour was associated with socio-economic position, notably income and education (Figure 2).
- ❖ Correcting for differential reporting behaviour across countries affected the ranking of countries according to the responsiveness of their respective health systems. For a selection of countries, Figure 3 compares the frequencies of reporting 'very good' responsiveness observed in the raw data with those obtained once country-specific reporting behaviour has been anchored to that observed in a baseline country (Mexico in the example).
- ❖ For cross-country analyses of public sector performance to produce comparative and meaningful information, adjustment for differences in systematic reporting behaviour should be undertaken.

Rank	A. Raw Frequencies	B. Anchored Frequencies
1	Austria (61.9%)	Finland (55.1%)
2	Denmark (61.0%)	Denmark (54.6%)
3	Sweden (55.8%)	Sweden (54.5%)
4	Czech Rep. (52.9%)	Belgium (42.9%)
5	UK (51.4%)	France (40.3%)
6	Greece (51.0%)	UK (39.9%)
7	Finland (49.3%)	Netherlands (38.8%)
8	Hungary (47.8%)	Uruguay (35.6%)
9	France (47.6%)	Czech Rep. (32.2%)
10	Ireland (45.7%)	Estonia (28.5%)

Figure 3
Ranking of reporting **very good responsiveness (% response)** A. based on raw frequencies and B. adjusted for country-level systematic reporting behaviour.

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