

# Reconstructing event histories in standardized survey research:

Cognitive mechanisms and  
aided recall techniques

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The quality of retrospective reports in survey research is often compromised by the respondent's inability to recall personal events accurately. As retrospective data collection is an integral part of social surveys, these inaccuracies are of great concern to researchers. In order to reduce reporting error caused by memory problems, various aided recall techniques have been developed. This dissertation focuses on calendar instruments, such as the Event History Calendar, which combine the use of temporal landmarks and visual response feedback. So far, a limited number of methodological studies have examined the effects of those methods. In order to add to the body of research, the dissertation addresses the question whether cognitive processes differ between interviews with calendar instruments and interviews with regular retrospective questionnaires. Furthermore, it discusses the results of a methodological experiment that was aimed at examining the differential effects of temporal landmarks and visual response feedback on data quality in a web-based retrospective life course survey. Based on the findings of that experiment, recommendations are made for the optimal design of standardized calendar recall aids in self-completed life course surveys.

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