

Recent Experiments with Respondent Incentives on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997

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Topics

- Introduction to NLSY97
 - One-time “bonus” to respondents who return to the study
 - Cash vs. In Kind
 - Other innovations
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Background

- NLSY97 is a national longitudinal study conducted every year by NORC at the University of Chicago, on behalf of the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Department of Labor. CHRR at Ohio State University programs the questionnaire and disseminates data and documentation to end users.
 - NLSY97 is a survey of approximately 9,000 individuals across the nation that gathers information about American youth as they make the transition from school to work and to independent households.
 - Interviews average about 60-70 minutes.
 - We just finished Round 11. Response rates continue to be over 80%.
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Base Incentives

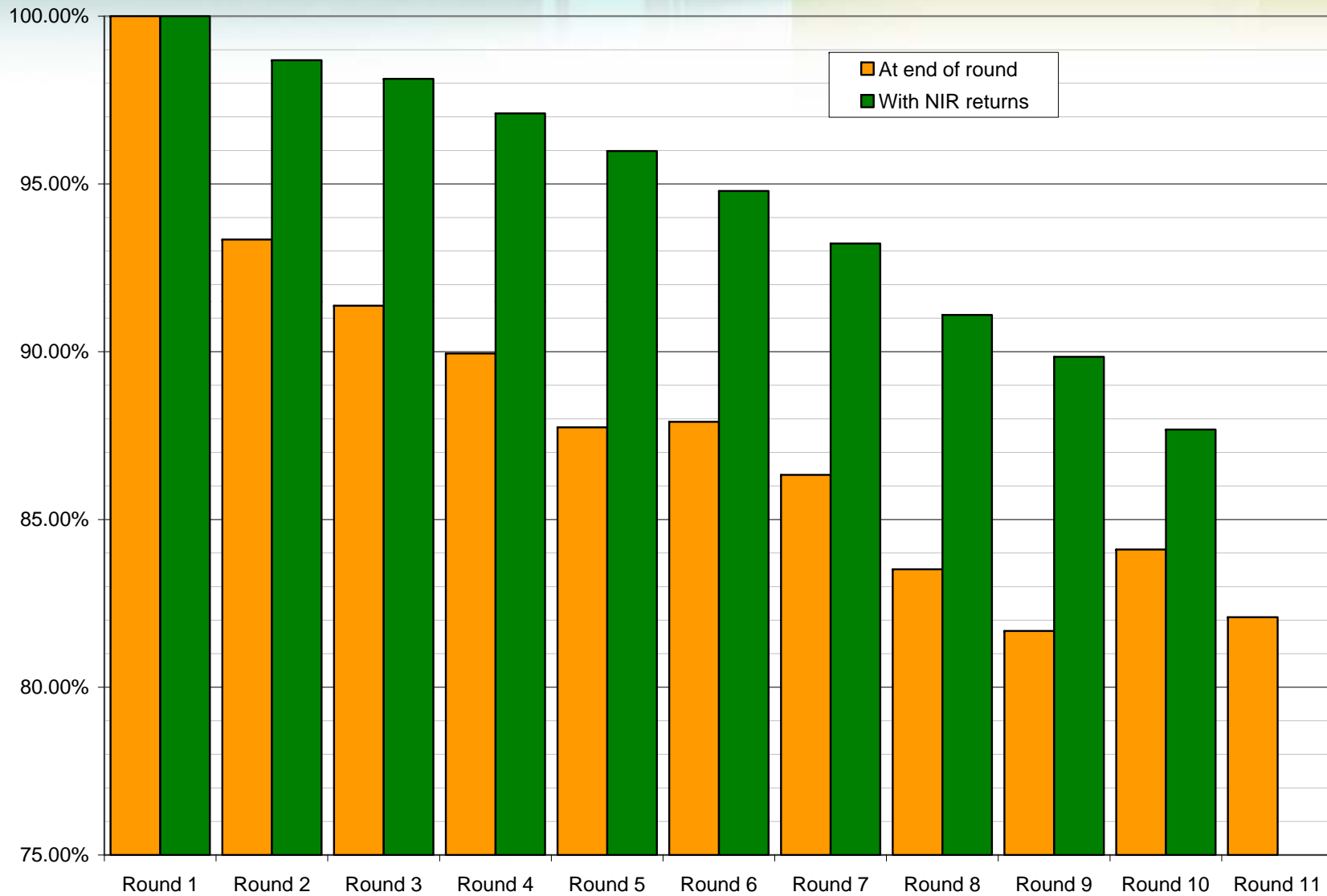
- Respondents have been offered incentives since the first round of the study
 - Base incentive:
 - \$10 for Rounds 1-5
 - \$20 for Rounds 6-9
 - \$30 for Rounds 10 – present
 - Respondents are offered a cash incentive at the end of in-person interviews
 - Those who complete by telephone receive either a check or a USPS money order by mail
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The Challenge

- Because NLSY97 is longitudinal, we need to be conservative about increasing incentives.
 - Respondents expect incentives to increase over time.
 - This has led to several experiments over the years as we seek to maximize the impact of incentive increases without threatening future budgets.
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One Time “Bonus” for Returning to the Study

Effect of Returns on Completion Rate



Bonus for returning to study

- Event histories in questionnaire mean that most data from missed rounds can be recovered
 - Bonus started as \$5 per consecutive missed round with \$15 maximum bonus
 - Since Round 9, offer has been \$10 per missed round with \$30 maximum
 - Receipts clearly state that this is a one time bonus
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What happens after the bonus?

Round	Prior Round Returns	Retention Rate
Round 11	583	72%
Round 10	406	75%
Round 9	322	65%
Round 8	299	64%
Round 7	394	76%

Return rates range from ~23% (Round 11) to ~35% (Round 10) of all respondents who missed the prior round.

Cash vs. In Kind

Structure of Experiment

- The experiment began about 10 weeks into Round 10.
 - Pending cases were randomly assigned to one of three groups
 - Control
 - In Kind
 - Cash
 - These groups were also used for Round 11 incentives
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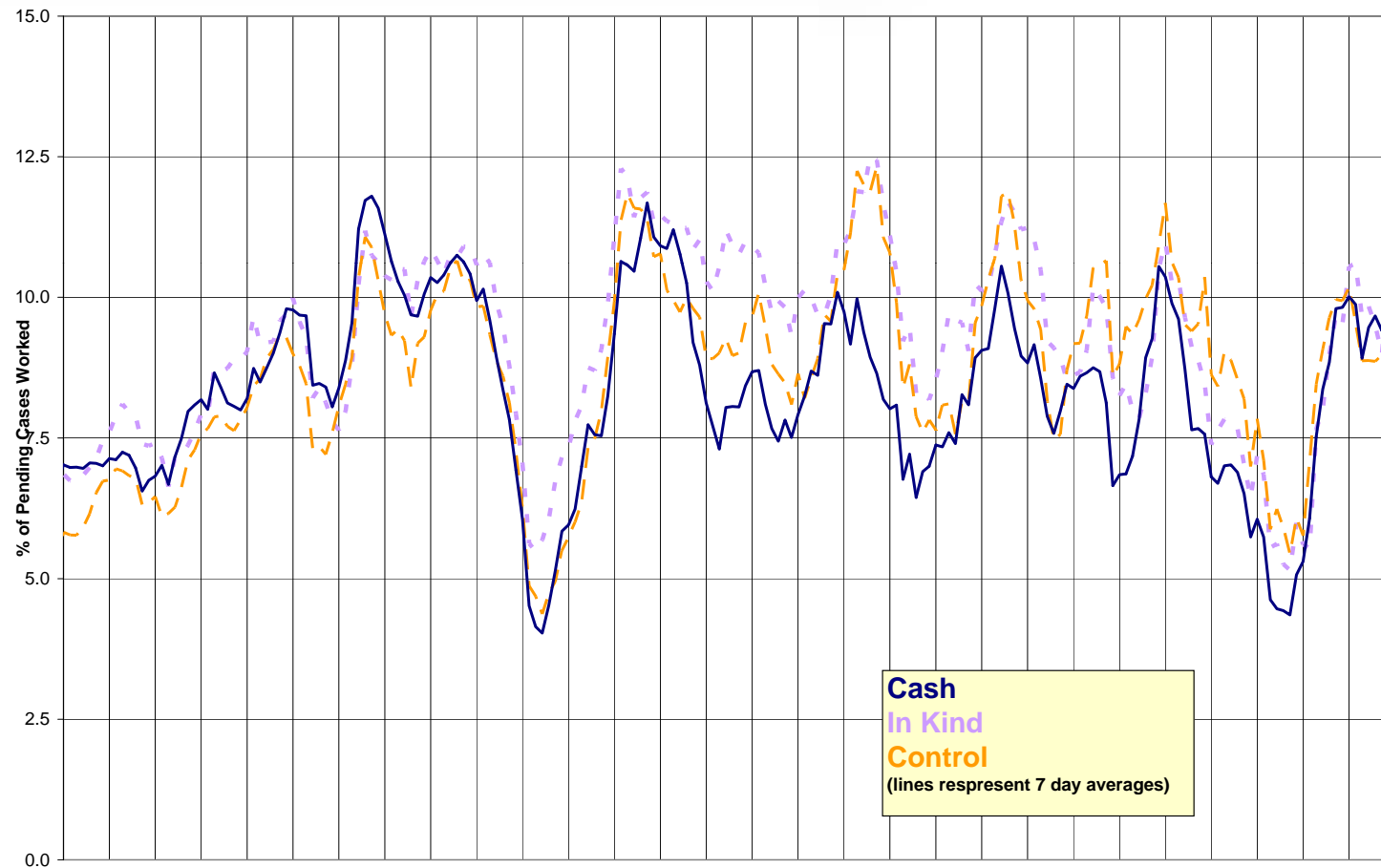
Guidelines for In Kind Incentives

- Interviewers were allowed to offer a wide range of incentives with just a few restrictions (no cash, no alcohol, no tobacco,...)
 - Maximum value was set at \$30 with actual amount set by interviewer.
 - Average value was \$20
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What was offered?

- Interviewers documented in kind offerings in the questionnaire
 - They offered food, plants, clothing, toys for pets, gift cards, and other items
 - The vast majority of respondents received a \$20 gift card to a national retail chain.
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Do interviewers favor one group?



Lessons learned

- Interviewers do not appear to favor one group over the others
 - In Kind offerings do not lead to administrative headaches
 - Interviewers are able to follow the rules
 - Respondents do not seem to mind receiving In Kind instead of cash
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Which is better? Cash or In Kind

- After nearly two rounds, respondents in cash and in kind groups have very similar completion rates
 - Both In Kind and Cash are better than nothing
 - In Kind allows interviewers to tailor incentives to respondents
 - In Kind offers more flexibility for increasing/decreasing incentives in the future
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Other Innovations

- Offer to expedite payment to help motivate FIs
 - Send all incentives by Fed Ex
 - Call respondents who have not cashed checks to make sure they received incentive.
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