Interviewer Observation: are the observations what we want or what interviewers think we want?

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One of the information sources used to correct for nonresponse in a face-to-face survey is interviewer observations. In addition to easily obtaining complete data for respondents and non-respondents, an important advantage of this source of information is the possibility to tailor the questions to be related to survey variables of interest. Interviewers are often asked to indicate the type and condition of a house, condition of an area, among others. But often interviewers are also asked for guesses. In the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), as part of the interviewer observation questionnaire, interviewers are asked how likely it is that the address, a) has a car or van, and b) contains children under 10, including babies. Both of these variables are highly significant in a response propensity model. However, while the children question shows a logical relationship to response (addresses which are unlikely to have children or definitely have no children have lower probability to respond), the car question has an illogical relationship (addresses rated as definitely having a car or definitely having no car have higher probability to respond than those who are likely or unlikely to have a car or if the interviewer is unsure). The pattern for cars suggests that answers may be corrected after the interview once the interviewer knows the true answer. But this correction leads to systematic differences in the measures between respondents and nonrespondents, and therefore may be less useful for nonresponse bias adjustment. The paper describes an experiment, implemented as part of the UKHLS Innovation Panel wave 4, which has been designed to tackle this issue.