

Institute for
Fiscal Studies

Using scanner technology to collect expenditure data

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Consumer scanner data – a recap

- Market research organisation TNS, **Worldpanel** data
 - Representative GB panel of 15,000 – 25,000 active households
 - Ongoing recruitment sampling approach
- Data on food & grocery purchases (FMCG), Nov 2001–Nov 2007
 - Collected by in-home barcode scanner recording product details
 - Includes off-sales alcohol, some non-food, no tobacco or baby food
 - Purchases from all stores, including most non-barcoded items
 - Prices collected via till receipts sent to TNS (including special offers)
 - Supplemented by nutrition data (since 2006) and media data
- June 2006:
 - 2.32m recorded purchases (85% food, 13% non-food, 2% alcohol)
 - £3.39m total expenditure (76% food, 16% non-food, 8% alcohol)
 - 18,835 households, 3,485 stores, 84,481 individual products

Project overview and objectives

- Scanner technology offers considerable potential advantages
 - Panel data, extreme disaggregation, price and quantity data
- Questions over data quality / effect of scanner technology
- Key aims:
 - Assess the strengths and weaknesses of scanner data
 - Comparison to existing, well-understood data sources (EFS, BHPS)
 - How far are differences driven by collection method?
 - Representativeness: recruitment and retention (attrition)
 - Expenditures: accuracy of records, changes over time (fatigue)
 - Inform future research using scanner data
 - Make recommendations for data users
 - Raise awareness of data amongst research community

Demographic comparisons: cross section (2006)

- TNS deliberately over-record multi-person households
 - EFS 32.5% single adult households, TNS 22.5%
 - Differences largely eliminated using supplied household weights
- Fewer very young and very old households in scanner data
 - EFS 8.1% of households contain someone 80+, 3.8% in TNS
 - Weighting gives roughly 'correct' pattern of households aged 25-64
- Incomes substantially lower in TNS than EFS
 - EFS 13.2% have gross annual incomes above £60,000, TNS 5.3%
- Logit model for likelihood of being in EFS based on comparable demographics confirms these broad findings
 - Derive propensity score weight from model

Demographic transitions

- Household data collected at signup via telephone interview
 - In principle, updated every 9 months or so
 - Proper updating would allow analysis of expenditure response to demographic shocks (retirement, children, unemployment)
- Evidence that TNS data records transitions poorly
 - Compare transitions in TNS and British Household Panel Study

Childless couple aged
<35 at time t , Probability
of having child at $t+1$

- BHPS 12.1%
- TNS 6.2%

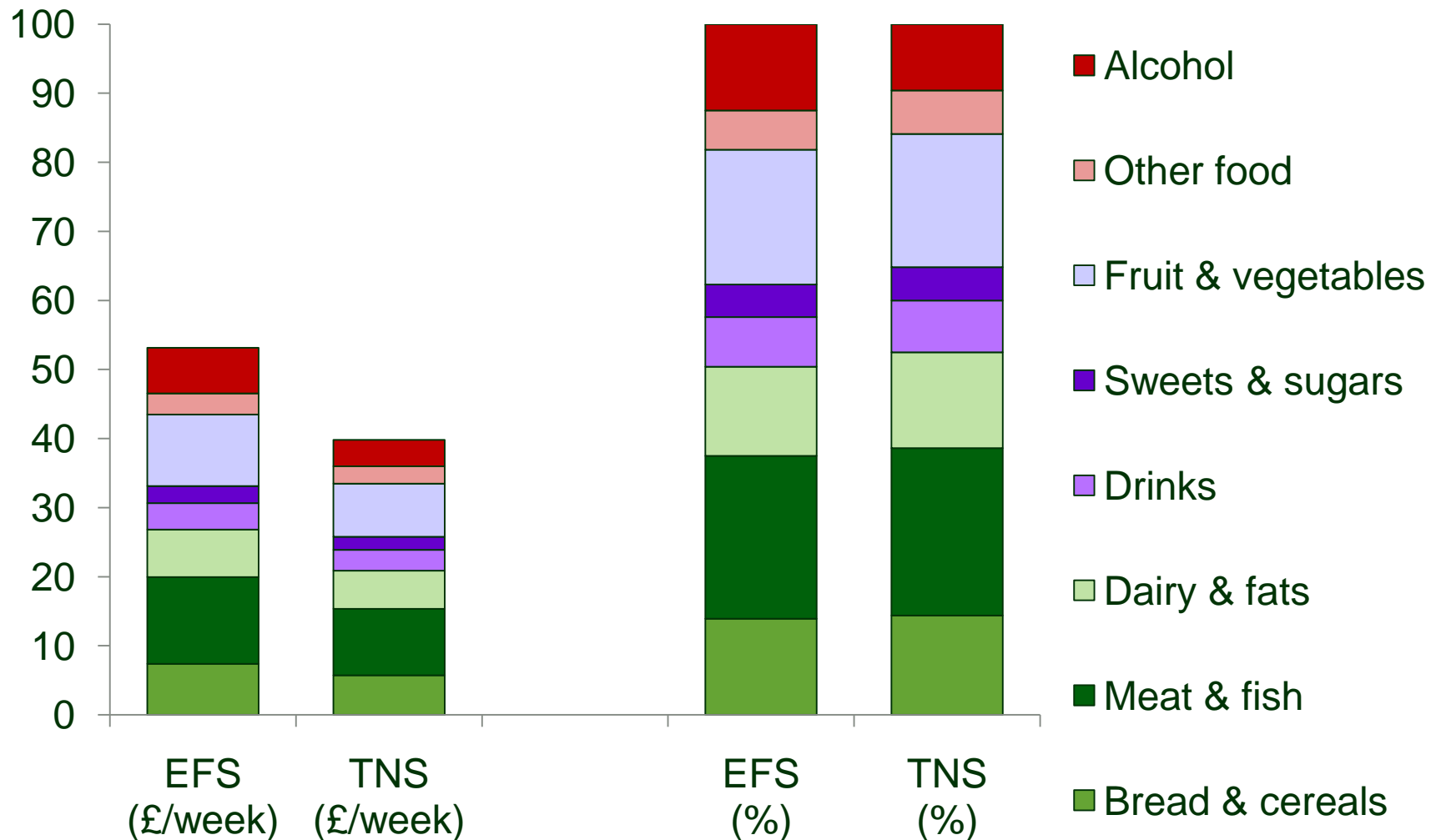
Aged 50+ employed at
time t , Probability of not
working at $t+1$

- BHPS 11.4%
- TNS 2.9%

Expenditure comparisons (2005)

- Mean weekly total food & alcohol TNS spending level 80% of EFS level
 - Modal spend similar, around £25 - £30 / week
 - TNS appears to record fewer high-spending households
- **Not** accounted for by demographic differences between surveys
 - Propensity weights reduce TNS spending to 75% of EFS levels
- But patterns of spending (budget shares) similar across surveys
 - ‘Under-recording’ similar across broad spending groups

Expenditure comparisons, TNS and EFS (2005)



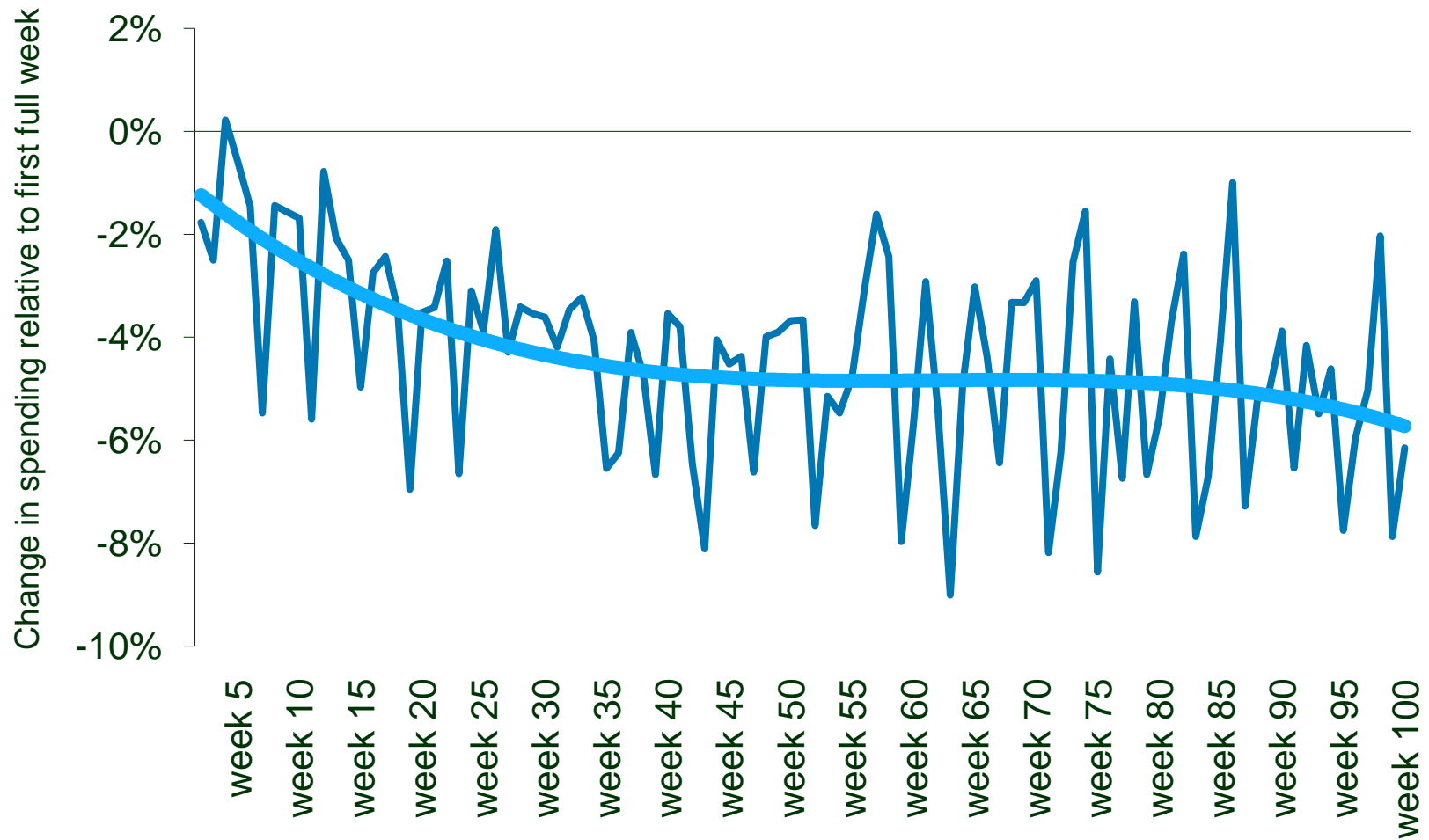
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 - Though relatively low alcohol spend in TNS
 - More detailed comparison: low spend on top-up items, non-barcoded items
- Variation in shortfall across demographic groups
 - Relatively higher spending for younger, single, childless households
 - Also for poorer, inactive/unemployed
 - Effects of time on ability to record?

Fatigue: changing spending within household

- Households tire of participating, stop reporting all spending
 - Problem potentially worse for some goods, trips, households
- Evidence of strong decline in recorded spending even in two week, one-off survey
 - Ahmed et al, 2006: Canadian Food Expenditure diary (FoodEx)
 - Spending 9% lower in week 2 than week 1
- Better or worse in consumer scanner data?
 - Participation potentially indefinite
 - Easier to scan barcodes than to keep a written diary
- Use household fixed-effects model to estimate within-household spending changes relative to first full week of participation

Fatigue results

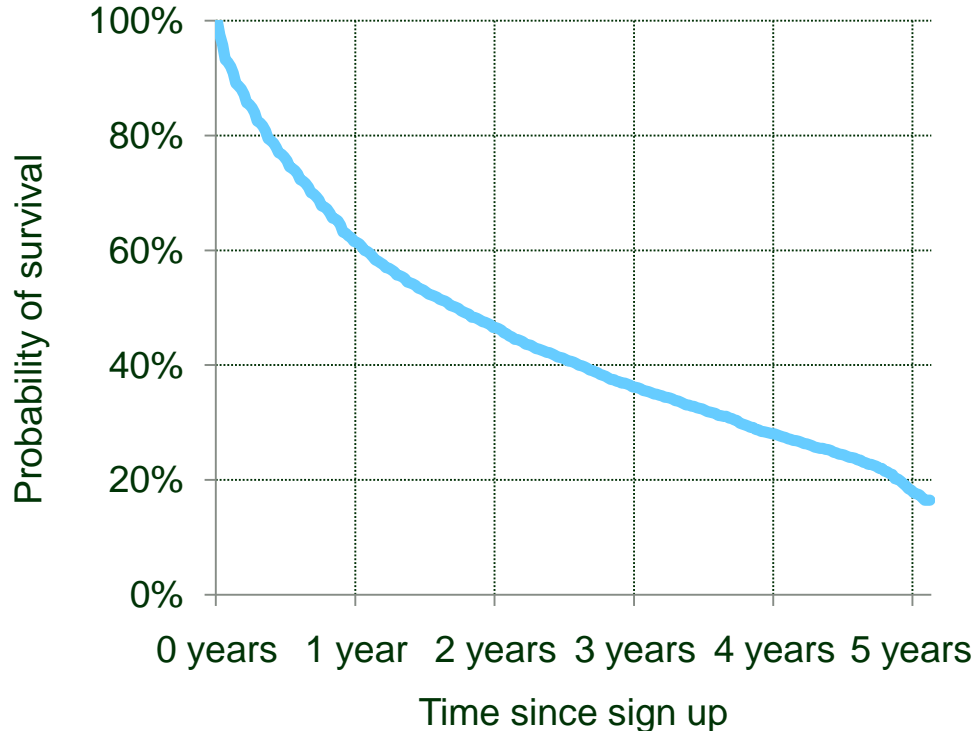


Fatigue results

- Spending around 5% lower on average after 6 months
- Variation across goods and households
 - Households with children: higher early fatigue
 - Childless households: no early fatigue, then more sustained decline
 - Pensioner households: no evidence of fatigue
 - Greater for alcohol, sweets & chocolates, smaller for fish, fruit
- Patterns consistent with Canadian diary evidence
- Does not explain spending gap with EFS
 - Spending gap 25% for full sample, 16% for 'unfatigued' new starters
- Ultimate outcome of fatigue may be attrition from survey

Attrition

- Sample of households that we observe *begin* participating
- Estimate non-parametric survival function:



- 7% drop out within 4 weeks
- 39% drop out within 1 year
- 54% drop out within 2 years
- 18% survive for 5 years or more
- Average duration is 48 weeks where we observe both start and end

Attrition

- TNS: probability of new household being observed 1 year later 63%
- BHPS: 86% of wave 1 sample gave full interview in wave 2
- Hard to make direct comparison but TNS attrition rate not bad ...
- TNS attrition varies with observable household characteristics
- Results of semiparametric duration model show:

Significantly higher risk of attrition

Households aged under 30
Households with any children
Missing employment status (compliance?)
Lone parents
Household without a car

Significantly lower risk of attrition

Households aged over 30
Single adult households
Childless households
Having new scanner technology

Conclusions

- Scanner data offers considerable advantages for research
- Understanding the implications of data collection method vital
 - Sample composition differences at least partly driven by known reporting issues (e.g. multiple adult households)
 - Demographics and fatigue do not explain expenditure differences
 - Top-up shopping, barcoding, time to scan have effects on spending
 - On average, attrition and fatigue not major problems
- Demographic representativeness depends on sample selection
 - Sample of “new starters” will look very different to full sample
- Useful to integrate market research and social science expertise
 - Variables like income, education, employment status not critical for marketing and not always collected or updated