

Executive Council, American Association for Public Opinion Research
February 13, 2009

On February 4, 2009, the American Association for Public Opinion Research issued a press release announcing that Dr. Gilbert Burnham, a faculty member at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, violated the Association's Code of Professional Ethics & Practices. The press release is available online (<http://www.aapor.org/aaporfindsgilbertburnhaminviolationofethicscode>). The Code is also available online (<http://www.aapor.org/aaporcodeofethics>). In response to several requests for more information about the investigation and the specific requests made to Dr. Burnham, the AAPOR Executive Council has approved the release of the following information related to the matter.

A complaint alleging an AAPOR Code violation was formally submitted and focused on Dr. Burnham's publication of results from a survey reported in the October 2006 issue of the journal *Lancet*. In accordance with the Schedule of Procedures for Dealing with Alleged AAPOR Code Violations (<http://www.aapor.org/scheduleofproceduresforcodeviolations>), the AAPOR Standards Chair and Associate Chair reviewed the complaint and then recommended that an Evaluation Committee be established to review the complaint, all available materials regarding the study, and Dr. Burnham's response. As part of the investigation, the AAPOR Standards Chair requested information from Dr. Burnham. The specific requests related to AAPOR's finding of violation of minimum disclosure were as follows:

1. The survey sponsor(s) and sources of funding for the survey.
2. A copy of the original questionnaire or survey script used in the 2006 survey, in all languages into which it was translated.
3. The consent statement or explanation of the survey purpose.
4. A full description of the sample selection process, including any written instructions or materials from interviewer training about sample selection procedures.
5. A summary of the disposition of all sample cases.
6. How were streets selected? How were the starting street, and the starting household, selected? Once the starting point was selected, how were interviewers instructed to proceed (e.g., when they came to an intersection)? How were houses and respondents chosen at housing units?
7. The survey description says that, "The interview team were given the responsibility and authority to change to an alternate location if they perceived the level of insecurity or risk to be unacceptable." In how many clusters did the team change location, and what were the reasons for the changes?

8. The survey description says that, “Empty houses or those that refused to participate were passed over until 40 households had been interviewed in all locations.” Were such cases included in the number of not-at-home and refusal cases counted in each cluster?

Dr. Burnham responded with the following information related to the detailed request:

- “This study was carried out using standard demographic and household survey methods.”
- “The methods we employed for this study were set out in the Lancet paper reporting our findings (Lancet, 2006;368:1421-28). The dataset from the study was released some time ago.”

Despite repeated requests from the AAPOR Standards Chair for the information detailed above, Dr. Burnham refused to provide any additional information. He did not indicate that the information was unavailable, nor did he suggest that disclosure of this information would risk revealing the identities of survey participants.

The Evaluation Committee concluded, and the AAPOR Executive Council concurred, that the AAPOR disclosure standards were violated. As noted by Richard A. Kulka in the AAPOR statement released on February 4, 2009, "When researchers draw important conclusions and make public statements and arguments based on survey research data, then subsequently refuse to answer even basic questions about how their research was conducted, this violates the fundamental standards of science, seriously undermines open public debate on critical issues, and undermines the credibility of all survey and public opinion research. These concerns have been at the foundation of AAPOR's standards and professional code throughout our history, and when these principles have clearly been violated, making the public aware of these violations is an integral part of our mission and values as a professional organization."