

Important Cautions for Interpreting Crosstabs:

The crosstab function of the SHARP Web Tool is an amazing tool for looking at the SHARP data in new and important ways. It provides users with the ability to explore relationships between SHARP variables in a way that was not possible before. However, there are important limitations regarding the interpretation of the crosstab output that should be considered.

- 1) Most importantly, do not make assumptions about cause and effect. The crosstab tables allow you to examine the relationship between two specified variables. While it may be tempting to interpret the data as having a cause and effect relationship (e.g., Question 2 causes Question 1), the crosstab data DO NOT imply causality. The crosstab tool provides the opportunity to examine relationships in the data, but it is important NOT to make assertions from the data that are not warranted. When you find relationships between two variables, some possibilities for that relationship include:
 - a) Question 2 causes Question 1 (there is a cause and effect relationship)
 - b) Question 1 causes Question 2 (cause and effect is reversed)
 - c) Some other variable causes both Question 1 and Question 2
 - d) There is no true relationship between Question 1 and Question 2 (the relationship is an artifact of the survey – see next bullet point)

- 2) Running crosstabs is a form of data “mining.” There is a large number of items on each SHARP Survey, and sometimes relationships between items can exist by chance (not because of a true relationship between the variables). It is always good to do some reality checks when you find relationships in the data. For example:
 - a) Does the relationship hold up over time (not just for one year of the survey)?
 - b) Does the relationship seem to be systematic (e.g., is there a linear relationship or is it sporadic)?
 - c) Is there a theoretical foundation that plausibly connects the variables?