

SO5041 Unit 14: Surveys and Questionnaires

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SO5041 Unit 14

Surveys and Questionnaires

- The main way of collecting survey data is by means of questionnaires and structured interviews
- There are several important issues relating to the design and implementation of questionnaire-based surveys
- Reading:
 - Bryman Chs 9 and 10
 - DA de Vaus, *Surveys in Social Research*, chapter 6 ("Constructing Questionnaires")



Questionnaires

- The questionnaire is the backbone the script for the interview
- Two main types
 - · In structured interviewing it is sometimes referred to as the interview schedule
 - · Questionnaires filled out by the respondent him/herself are referred

to as self-completion questionnaires

• The practical purpose of a questionnaire survey is to get standard info from a large number of people relatively cheaply and reliably



Purpose of questionnaire

- Must minimise of ambiguity in the meaning of the recorded answers need to be clear and precise
- Also minimise non-response
 - · Item non-response: refusal to answer or "don't know" to specific questions
 - · Respondent refusal: flat refusal to participate
- Hence good design is important:
 - · Clarity of questions and structure
 - · No unnecessary burden on the respondent



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Questionnaire Design

Questionnaire Design

- · There are two aspects to questionnaire design
 - · The overall structure of the document
 - · The individual questions



Composing questions

- · Questions must be clear and unambiguous
 - Express the questions in clear and simple language
 - Don't use leading questions (Avoid "Isn't it the case that X is a good idea?"; prefer "Do you think X is a good idea or a bad idea?")
 - Ask a single thing at a time (Avoid "Do you have a job, and if so how much do you earn?")



Composing questions: direct information

- Avoid hypothetical questions: often don't give useful information (e.g., "If you had a grant how much more money would you spend on drink?")
- If you need to ask for information about others, restrict it to factual information ("What is your partner's job?", but not "What does your partner think about X?")



Composing questions: easy to answer

- · Make the questions easy to answer:
 - provide a set of options (perhaps on a prompt card)
 - with amounts (time, money etc.) provide options help to precision (e.g., times per week, ranges)



Document structure

- · The document must be structured simply and logically
 - · Group questions in a way that will seem reasonable to the respondent
 - Use clear routing:

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5: Do you have a job?(if yes, ask qn 6, else skip to qn 7)6: What is your job?7: ...
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• Reserve sensitive questions (e.g., income, drug use) to the end of the questionnaire: less likely to scare off respondents there



Question structure

- · The structure of questions is also important
- Each question must have its answer space: a tick-box, a space for writing, a set of categories
- Closed questions are preferred: a fixed set of options makes it easier to answer and to analyse
- Always allow the category "Other" with closed questions, with space to write ("If other, please specify:")



Types of closed question

- · Closed responses can take several forms:
 - · One only: "Tick the category that best describes your job"
 - · One or more: "Tick all of the following reasons that are relevant"
 - Ranking: "Rank the importance for you of each of the following reasons (1, 2, 3 etc.)"



Likert scales

- Measurement of attitudes often uses "Likert" scales:
 - · a set of statements relevant to the attitude being measured
 - with options indicating agreement:
 - Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Agree
 - · Strongly agree



Practical organisation

- The practical organisation of the questionnaire must take question structure into account: easy to answer and easy to process
- Processing involves several steps
 - · Recording the information as it is being collected
 - · Checking it is consistent and the right questions are answered
 - · Coding it onto a computer
 - Checking it is consistent once on computer
 - Adding variable and value labels to help the computer data set to make sense



Design principles

- The design of the questionnaire should keep the first three of these in mind
 - It should be easy to record the information
 - It should be easy to read the recorded information to see that it makes sense, to see that the correct routing has been followed
 - The layout of the questionnaire should anticipate the structure of the computer data set



Example Questionnaire Extract

1: Sex: Male Female 2: Age: 18 or under 19 - 2324 - 3031 - 4041 - 5051 - 6465 or more

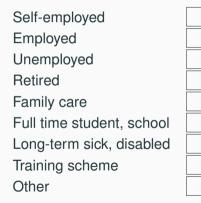
Office use only





Many options, tick one

3: Which of the following options best describes your current situation? (show card):



If "Other" please specify:



Ordinal options (with a flaw)

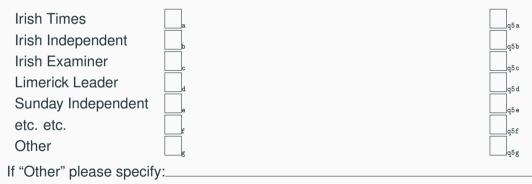
4: How often do you read newspapers? Tick the category that is closest:

NeverMore than 1 per day1 every day2-4 per week1 per weekLess than 1 per week

 $_{1}$ (Skip to question 6)

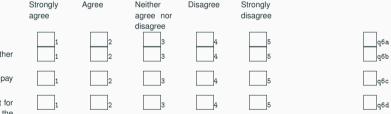


5: Which of the following newspapers do you read? (show card) Tick each one that applies:





6: People have different views about women's role in society. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following things people might say, using the categories provided:



A woman's place is in the home

Young children suffer if the mother works outside the home

Women are entitled to the same pay for the same work as men

When a wife works it is important for the husband to do his share of the housework



Pilot your questionnaire

- · It is very important that a questionnaire work well once in the field
- · Test it beforehand,
 - on friends/colleagues
 - on a "pilot" subsample drawn from the reference population
- Are the questions comprehensible?
- Are the categories in closed questions adequate? Do they cover everything? Make the right distinctions? No very unlikely ones? Will they make sense to the respondent?



Piloting

- Is the structure okay? Not too complicated or illogical?
- Is there anything likely to confuse the respondent or interviewer?
- Exactly how long will it take? If too long, shorten it now!
- Piloting will also allow you to create closed categories for questions, using real-world feedback rather than your imagination



Example survey

https://teaching.sociology.ul.ie/apps/so4046/survey/

