



SO5041 Unit 12: Surveys and Questionnaires

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SO5041 Unit 12

Surveys and Questionnaires

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:

5: Do you have a job?
(if yes, ask qn 6, else skip to qn 7)
6: What is your job?
7: ...

- 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

Example Questionnaire Extract

1: Sex: Male ₁ Female ₂

2: Age: 18 or under ₁
19 – 23 ₂
24 – 30 ₃
31 – 40 ₄
41 – 50 ₅
51 – 64 ₆
65 or more ₇

Office use only

_{q1}

_{q2}

Many options, tick one

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

Self-employed

1

Employed

2

Unemployed

3

Retired

4

Family care

6

Full time student, school

7

Long-term sick, disabled

8

Training scheme

9

Other

10

q3

If "Other" please specify: _____

Ordinal options (with a flaw)

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

Never ₁ (Skip to question 6)

More than 1 per day ₂

1 every day ₃

2–4 per week ₄

1 per week ₅

Less than 1 per week ₆

_{q4}

Picking zero or more from a list

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

Irish Times

a

q5a

Irish Independent

b

q5b

Irish Examiner

c

q5c

Limerick Leader

d

q5d

Sunday Independent

e

q5e

etc. etc.

f

q5f

Other

g

q5g

If "Other" please specify: _____

Attitude questions with Likert answers

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:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
A woman's place is in the home	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> q6a
Young children suffer if the mother works outside the home	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> q6b
Women are entitled to the same pay for the same work as men	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> q6c
When a wife works it is important for the husband to do his share of the housework	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> q6d

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

<http://teaching.sociology.ul.ie:3838/so4046/survey/>