

TOP TEN LIST

TEN BEST WAYS TO DO BAD HEALTH SURVEY RESEARCH

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R.S. Kirby, March 1999

Top Ten List: Ten Best Ways to Do Bad Health Survey Research

Number 10

Ask the most confidential questions first.

Chances are, you'll never get to the end of the survey. Be certain to ask detailed questions about income and assets right up front, followed by incarceration history, drug use and spousal abuse. Get the bank, saving account and incident report numbers so you can check the accuracy of the responses.

Number 9

Send the survey by FAX with the wrong reply number. Equivalent methods include:

- a) sending surveys by mail with the wrong return address
- b) the more modern method of sending an email notification that respondents should log on to a WebPages for which you provide a non-existent URL.

Number 8

Always call during mealtimes, preferably during the dinner hour.

Mealtime calling ineffective? Call very early in the mornings or late in the evening. If no one answers or you get the answering machine, call again several times. Of course, if your sampling design requires that you make diligent attempts to reach each randomly selected respondent, call backs are a definite no-no when no one answers. Just try another number.

Number 7

When using multiple choice questions, don't choose mutually exclusive answers.

Do limit your list of question answers to 10 alternatives; repeat each in monotone voice as you work through a series of nearly identical questions.

Do make respondents choose between extreme alternatives, none of which makes any sense in the real world.

Do use forced responses which (a) overlap and (b) fail to cover all possibilities.

Number 6

Never pre-test, it will only louse up what you want to show. If you feel you must, ask other experts for their opinions on your survey instrument but fail to field test it with the intended survey participants.

Number 5

Frame questions using terms associated with political perspectives, cultural groups, or other "loaded" terms.

Surveys should provide respondents with the opportunity to express their own opinions, in their own terms and frames of reference. For example, when surveying a sample of families drawn from a CSHCN database, ask "Does anyone at your residence have a disability?" If the respondent is an older child with fragile X syndrome he may answer "no." Similar questions will yield useful information from members of the deaf community, families who home birth, and other subgroups.

Number 4

Make sure that your sub-samples are small enough so that the information you find about them is unreliable or non-existent. This can be accomplished by hasty decision making concerning the sample frame. Never over-sample sub-populations or geographical units; you can always create estimates from the handful of cases who actually complete the survey.

Number 3

Don't fret over which data collection methodology to use.

The choice between in-person, phone, mail and Internet survey strategies is not really complex. Internet surveys would work best, because it can be so quick and easy and everyone in your reference population has Internet access these days. If you do choose to do a phone survey, don't bother with CATI technology. Just find some well-intentioned volunteers - they should be able to conduct a survey without much, if any, training. After all, you just talk to people in a survey, don't you?

Number 2

Never assess how the information you gather is likely to be used—until after you have compiled it.

This will ensure that you will have to do another survey soon, but probably while working for a different agency.

Number 1

No one has ever thought to do a study exactly like yours.

Since this is true, there's no point in looking at results published elsewhere (national data sets, studies done in other states, research literature). Even if someone has done similar research, it's not relevant to your state or program.