Collaborating with Survey Centers to Conduct Survey Research

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research Web Series on Survey Methods

Michael Davern, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President and Director, Public Health Research
NORC at the University of Chicago
Should you Conduct a Survey?

• Surveys are hard to do well and expensive so always ask yourself….  
  • Is there existing survey data that I can use to answer my research question?  
  • Is your research question appropriate for the survey research?  
  • Do I have an appropriate level of funding?  
• After you have reached a conclusion or would like to discuss these issues with someone then.  
  • You should seek out experienced survey professionals often found in survey centers
Good places to find existing survey microdata and documentation:

- ICPSR at the University of Michigan
  - [http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/)
- IPUMS at the University of Minnesota
- NBER
  - [http://www.nber.org/data/](http://www.nber.org/data/)

Survey centers can help you find and analyze these data sources.
Is your question appropriate for survey research?

• Is my research question appropriate for survey methodology? Some work others do not…
  • Examples:
    – What proportion of the population visited a dentist in the past year?
    – Why did a person not visit the dentist in the past year?
    – How does behavior influence likelihood of a cavity, crown, root canal or dental emergency?
    – What proportion of the population is in need of dental services?
    – What proportion of the population has a cavity and does not know it?
    – What proportion of the population has gum disease?
    – What proportion is at risk of experiencing serious pain due to an unmet dental need in the next year?
Do I have the Appropriate Level of Funding?

- To do a survey well is more expensive than most people think
  - A minimum of $50,000 is generally needed and cost only goes up from there
- Consult a survey center about costs of various components you are thinking of
  - I have seen survey costs range anywhere from $20 per completed survey to $2000 per completed survey
    - From web/mail intercept surveys on the low end to a survey combined with biomarker collection on the high end
- Researchers are often tempted to get surveys done cheaply by using graduate students and/or their own time
  - I would resist this as the quality of the work is often not reproducible nor up to scientific standards with appropriate documentation
We can ask people about things they are likely to know

Which of the following will people be able to provide a valid answer?

- Do you have dental insurance coverage?
- What is your premium?
- What is your deductible?
- How much did your last dental visit cost?
- What did you pay out of pocket for your last dental visit?
- During the past year were you told you had a cavity or needed a crown or root canal?

Survey centers can also help you set up processes to link respondents to other sources of information (e.g., results from a clinical exam, x-ray, digital image, or claims data)

Survey centers can also collect biomarkers (DNA, weight, blood (draws or spots), blood pressure, urine, etc.)
Why Engage a Survey Center?

• Surveys may look simple but…
  • Survey centers engage potential sources of error and know how to minimize them and their potential impact on scientific inference
  • We know how to create appropriate survey documentation and methodology reports which are essential reference materials when writing up results for scientific audiences
  • We know how to look for and analyze existing sources of survey data
  • We can foresee the problems you will have and provide you appropriate counsel to make informed decisions
  • We have established processes and protocols in place that have been scientifically tested and improved over 80 years of scientific survey research
When and How to Engage with a Survey Center?

• Contact a survey researcher as soon as you can if you are thinking of conducting a survey
  • If you are applying for a grant or asking for funding make sure to get a realistic cost estimate before submitting

• How to get pricing from a survey vendor:
  • Meet with them to discuss a ballpark figure and cost tradeoffs
  • Informally request pricing from select vendors
  • Formal RFP process
Different Types of Survey Centers:

- Those based in Universities
  - Academic Association of Survey Research Organizations
    - http://www.aasro.org/
- Those that do federal government contracting (e.g., NORC)
- Those that predominately do market research (Gallup)
- Some mix both market research with federal and state government work
- AAPOR Blue book is a good place to start to look for one
  - http://www.aapor.org/source/bluebooksearch/index.cfm
What Survey Centers can do for you

- Design Sample
- IRB/OMB issues
- Instrument development
- Mode(s) selection (in person, telephone, cell phone, web, mail)
- Develop operational procedures
  - Dialing landline and cell phones
  - Mixing survey modes (e.g., web and mail)
  - Collecting paradata ((number of phone calls to a number, amount of time to complete a phone interview, number of surveys mailed out to a home, etc.)

National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: Collaborating with Survey Centers
What Survey Centers can do for you (cont.)

• Best design for the research question
• Interviewer training
• Interview respondents
• Prepare data
  • Edit inconsistent data, and impute missing data
  • Develop coding schemes for open-ended responses
• Conduct disclosure limitation editing and review the data for threats to confidentiality
What Survey Centers can do for you (cont.)

• Link data to other sources of data
  • Claims, x-rays, digital images, enrollment data, environmental sources of data
• Prepare methodology reports
• Collect biomarkers (and set up labs to process the specimens)
  • Including appropriate metadata and documentation following the data documentation initiative (DDI)
• Conduct analysis
  • Including appropriately handling the analysis of complex survey data
• Evaluate the quality of the data
• Investigate anomalies
• Write up results, reports and papers
Conclusion

- We are here to help and we look forward to assisting you both collect and analyze survey data.
- Survey research centers are service related organizations that are the business of helping you conduct your research.
- If you have a research question for which you would like to conduct a survey,
  - there is not existing survey data that can be used to answer your question,
  - and you have potential sources of funding we look forward to working with you.
- If you are just not sure most survey centers are happy to spend time with you to develop your ideas.
- Thanks and we look forward to hearing from you soon.
Contact Information

Michael Davern PhD
Senior Vice President, Director of Public Health Research
NORC at the University of Chicago
55 East Monroe Street, 30th Floor, Chicago IL 60603
Davern-Michael@norc.org