Survey Research

CADS MODULE 1 – SOCIAL JUSTICE 4330

Introduction

- **Survey:** ask people questions for research purposes
  - Most frequently used mode of observation in social science research
- **Respondent:** individual completing the survey

Topics Appropriate to Survey Research 1

- <u>Counting crime</u> – asking people about victimization counters problems of data collected by police

- <u>Self-reports</u> – dominant method for studying the etiology of crime

    - Frequency/type of crimes committed

    - Prevalence (how many people commit crimes) committed by a broader population

Topics Appropriate to Survey Research 2

- <u>Perceptions and attitudes</u> – to learn how people feel about crime and CJ policy

- <u>Targeted victim surveys</u> – used to evaluate policy innovations & program success

- <u>Other evaluation uses</u> – e.g., measuring community attitudes, citizen responses, etc.

Example: Survey Use

- The Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey collects data from 50,000 youths in schools. Beginning in 1975, the MTF survey produces information on youths' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Data collected from the survey has been used in numerous scholarly publications and is also used in the White House Strategy on Drug Abuse to monitor youths' drug usage (http://monitoringthefuture.org/purpose.html).

Guidelines for Asking Questions

- **Open-ended questions:** respondent is asked to provide his or her own answer

- **Closed-ended questions:** respondent selects an answer from a list

  - Choices should be *exhaustive* and *mutually exclusive*

  - **Questionnaire:** a collection of questions

    - May contain statements as questions

- Questions and Statements – Likert scale

Additional Guidelines

► <u>Make items clear</u> – avoid ambiguous questions; do not ask "double-barreled" questions

► <u>Short items are best</u> – respondents like to read and answer a question quickly

► <u>Avoid negative items</u> – leads to misinterpretation

► <u>Avoid biased items and terms</u> – do not ask questions that encourage a certain answer

- **Bias:** any property of a question that encourages respondents to answer in a particular way

Designing Self-Report Items

- ▶ Social desirability can be problematic
- ▶ Adhere to ethical standards of confidentiality and anonymity
- ▶ Be sensitive to respondent embarrassment
  - ▶ Disclaimers can be used to help
- ▶ Interview frequently to reduce memory issues
  - ▶ Crime calendars

Questionnaire Construction

- <u>General questionnaire format</u> – critical, must be laid out properly

- <u>Contingency questions</u> – relevant only to some respondents – answered only based on their previous response

- <u>Matrix questions</u> – same set of answer categories used by multiple questions

Ordering Questions in a Questionnaire

- Ordering may affect the answers given
- Estimate the effect of question order
- Perhaps devise more than one version
- Begin with most interesting questions
- End with duller, demographic data
  - This is opposite for in-person interview surveys

Self-Administered Questionnaires

- Can be home-delivered
    - Researcher delivers questionnaire to home of sample respondent, explains the study, and then comes back later

- Mailed (sent and returned) survey is most common
    - Researchers must reduce the trouble it takes to return a questionnaire

Computer-Based Self-Administration

- Cheap and easy

- Can create attractive questionnaires

- Face issues with representativeness, low response rates, respondents have to have a computer and Internet access

- Can pair with mailed warning letter or give the option of electronically completing the survey or completing hard copy

In-Person Interview Surveys

► **Interview survey:** researchers send interviewers to ask questions orally and record respondents' answers

► Typically achieve higher response rates than mail surveys (80-85% is considered good)

► Demeanor and appearance of interviewer should be appropriate; interviewer should be familiar with questionnaire and ask questions precisely

► Interviewer can probe for additional information; probe

► When more than one interviewer administers, efforts must be coordinated and controlled

► Practice interviewing

Computer-Assisted Interviews

- Reported success in enhancing confidentiality

- Reported higher rates of self-reporting
  - **Computer-assisted interviewing (CAI):** interviewers read questions from screens and then type in answers from respondents
  - Computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI): respondent keys in answers, which are scrambled so that interviewer cannot access them

Telephone Surveys

- Random-Digit Dialing
  - Eliminates unlisted number problem
  - Often results in business, pay phones, fax lines
- Saves money and time, provides safety to interviewers, more convenient
- May be interpreted as bogus sales calls; ease of hang-up

Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)

► A set of computerized tools that aid   telephone interviewers and supervisors by automating various data collection tasks

► Easier, faster, more accurate but more expensive

► Formats responses into a data file as they are keyed in

► Can automate contingency questions and skip sequences

Comparison of the Three Methods

- Self-administered questionnaires are generally cheaper, better for sensitive issues than interview surveys

- Cost and speed are inversely related

- Using mail – local and national surveys are same cost

- Interviews – more appropriate when respondent literacy may be a problem, produce fewer incompletes, achieve higher completion rates

- Validity low in survey research; reliability high

- Surveys are also inflexible, superficial in coverage