# How to do and report survey studies robustly: a helpful mnemonic SURVEY

**Tume, LN and Latour, J**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>How to do and report survey studies robustly: a helpful mnemonic SURVEY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authors</strong></td>
<td>Tume, LN and Latour, J</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>URL</strong></td>
<td>This version is available at: <a href="http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/60332/">http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/60332/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Published Date</strong></td>
<td>2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

USIR is a digital collection of the research output of the University of Salford. Where copyright permits, full text material held in the repository is made freely available online and can be read, downloaded and copied for non-commercial private study or research purposes. Please check the manuscript for any further copyright restrictions.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: usir@salford.ac.uk.
How to do and report survey studies robustly: A helpful mnemonic SURVEY

Jos M. Latour RN, PhD, Professor in Clinical Nursing1 | Lyvonne N. Tume RN, PhD, Reader (Associate professor) in Child Health2

1Faculty of Health, School of Nursing and Midwifery, University of Plymouth, Plymouth
2School of Health and Society, University of Salford, Manchester, UK

Surveys are one of the most used research designs. The results of survey studies can add context around a topic, quantify the extent of an issue or suggest future research questions1,2. However, if done poorly, with little rigour, they offer little insight, can be misleading and simply burden research participants unnecessarily.2 On top of that, poorly performed survey studies provide less rigorous and often biased results, the conclusions of which can be questioned. These studies can be considered research waste3 and should not be supported.

Surveys are popular amongst health care professionals. In this journal alone, many submitted research papers use a survey design. Unfortunately, many of these submitted manuscripts face a desk rejection or are rejected by the reviewers with the overall argument that the design, methods and reporting of the survey study was inadequate.

It is important to be clear in the wording. A survey is the research design of the study, and a questionnaire is the instrument used to conduct the survey study and to collect data. Survey studies are most commonly cross-sectional, conducted at one point in time, but can be done longitudinally, where surveys are administered over a period of time.1,4

In this editorial, we have developed a simple mnemonic—SURVEY—to guide and remind clinicians and researchers about the key issues to consider when undertaking and reporting surveys studies.

1 | S: SURVEYS USE AN INSTRUMENT

The instrument is a questionnaire and should always be included as an electronic supplementary file in any submitted manuscript. This is important as it allows the reviewers to see and assess the questionnaire and relate this back to the overall reporting of the methods and results of the study. If the manuscript is accepted and published, it allows the readers to use your questionnaire and replicate the study in a similar or different context (obviously after seeking permission from the corresponding author).

2 | U: USEFUL AND JUSTIFIED DATA ANALYSIS

The proposed analysis of your survey study must be clearly reported, along with the type of data. If inferential statistics are being used, the rationale for this, the statistical test used, and the level of significance need to be reported. Inferential data analysis may be appropriate to compare different groups or different levels of education or experience, and you must justify in the methods whether parametric or non-parametric tests were used. However, in some survey studies, this is not appropriate or feasible. In this case, descriptive statistics (percentages) or distribution, such as mean and SD or median and interquartile range, must be reported anyway.5

3 | R: REPORT RESPONSE RATES

It is essential to report the response rates in a survey study whenever possible, both the exact figures and the percentage. The exceptions might be if the denominator is unknown; for example, the questionnaire was distributed via social media. If response rates are known, the target response rate should ideally be >70% of your sample.6 Anything less risks introducing a large bias and may indicate a poor questionnaire or inadequate reminders. Anything less than 50% will be almost impossible to draw conclusions upon.
Unless you are using a questionnaire that has been validated in your specific population, you need to establish, at the very minimum, face and content validity of the instrument. This is achieved by pilot testing the questionnaire in a small sample of your intended (or very similar) survey population to ensure the questions are clear and are asking what you think you are asking. This process needs to be reported in the methods section of your manuscript for clarity, such as how many people it was piloted on, and whether were any changes made in the questionnaire before it was used in the main study. If a translation of the questionnaire from or to another language has been done, the accepted process of translation, cultural adaptation, and validation must be reported including the steps of both forward and back translation and testing.

While developing a new questionnaire after reviewing the literature on a topic, you may consider sending the draft survey to an expert panel for their assessment of the readability, content and feasibility. Ideally, these would be a small group of experts in the field, not necessarily at your local institution, and must include experts who belong to the intended respondents of the questionnaire. This process should be undertaken before piloting and can further add to the face validity of the questionnaire.

In summary, surveys can be a useful research method, but they need to be undertaken with the same rigour that is applied to other clinical research studies. It can be said that surveys are the most widely abused form of research because of their perceived ease of undertaking. It is important to recognize the significant limitations of survey designs and to acknowledge these in the limitations and ensure that your conclusions are justified and not “over claimed.” Finally, we hope this proposed new mnemonic “SURVEY” will help guide potential authors to maximize their chances that their survey study will be accepted for publication.

REFERENCES


How to cite this article: Latour JM, Tume LN. How to do and report survey studies robustly: A helpful mnemonic SURVEY. Nurs Crit Care. 2021;1–2. https://doi.org/10.1111/nicc.12669