

The Utilization of Internet Surveys in Examining Sensitive Topics with MSM

Brian Kavanagh - PhD. Candidate – Brian.Kavanagh@open.ac.uk

Introduction

This research sets out to **explore if public sexual health interventions adequately reflect MSM's understandings of their risk of HIV infection.** With year on year increases in the number of new HIV infections among MSM since 2003 (Worrell, 2011), there is growing interest in how this trend can be reversed. Within this context, the role of masculinities, the prevalence of open relationships and the non-verbal manner which many MSM use to negotiate safer sex will be investigated in this research.

Internet Surveys & Sensitive Topics

Internet surveys are particularly suited to investigating sensitive topics, as they:

- allow respondents to answer questions without having to face an unfamiliar researcher.
- can capture hidden populations who are unlikely to participate in other research (Raymond et.al. 2010)
- allow respondents the freedom to give less socially desirable responses (Wang et.al. 2005).
- third-person vignette questions create distance between respondents and their responses.

Opportunities created by Technological Advances

Recent technological advances mean that online methods provide particular design techniques not available in traditional surveys. They provide researchers with:

- national coverage
- a snapshot of what is happening over a short period of time.
- Branching means that respondents only face questions relevant to them.
- Visuals can entice respondents and provide a robust basis for making comparisons.
- allow for open questions to be asked generating qualitative data.



Conclusions

Internet surveys provide numerous advantages to medical researchers wishing to research large numbers of respondents within a short timeframe. They have also proven valuable when researching hidden populations and allow respondents to break conventions by giving less socially desirable responses. Design techniques available mean that respondents can be enticed and kept interested in the survey, minimising non-completion. In addition, open questions in these surveys can generate data amenable to qualitative analysis, which has **the potential to bridge the distinction between qualitative and quantitative approaches.**



Please feel free to examine/try out the online survey schedule during the poster presentation session. Otherwise, please send questions or comments via email.

References

- Raymond, H. et. al. (2010) 'Comparing Internet-based and Venue-based Methods to Sample MSM in the San Francisco Bay Area', *AIDS & Behavior*, 14, 218-224.
- Wang, Y. et. al. (2005) 'Survey of Substance Use among High School Students in Taipei: Web-based Questionnaire vs. Pencil-based Questionnaire'. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 37(4): 289-295
- Worrell, S. (2011) Pan London HIV Prevention Programme Needs Assessment – Epidemiology Report. London: NHS.