

Editorial

Survey Research Methods during the COVID-19 Crisis

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Good things take time—this saying is certainly a firm part of the scientific belief system. Scientists prefer valid and reliable evidence to rapid results, and they are therefore open to running additional checks to rule out yet another artifact hypothesis, and patiently bear the challenges of lengthy reviewing processes. It is our implicit understanding that all this serves well in the joint effort of scientists to approximate the truth, at least in the long run.

In these rapidly changing times, our belief system is challenged.

The COVID-19 crisis created an enormous demand for *rapid* research results—and rightly so. Policymakers have every reason to demand scientific evidence to make informed decisions. What else should they be asking for? Journalists also have every reason to demand scientific evidence in order to efficiently evaluate and report on policymakers' decisions. And last but not least, everyday people also have every reason to insist that the harsh restrictions of their personal freedoms are at least this: evidence based.

In the current situation the demand for scientific evidence is targeted predominantly at medical and epidemiological research—again with good reasons, since we are confronted with a pandemic disease. However, it is our firm conviction that survey research can and should contribute to scientific discovery in the realm of the COVID-19 crisis. Most obviously, because epidemiologists use survey research methods to estimate SARS-CoV-2 prevalence and incidence. But there are other reasons, as well. The various non-pharmacological interventions (NPIs) such as stay-home or shelter-in-place orders, rules for social distancing etc. that restrict people's everyday lives not only affect their behavior, but also their attitudes and values. The way people react to the NPIs affect the NPI's probability of success, and their effects on the economy and society as a whole. There are an enormous number of research questions currently being

addressed with the help of survey data, and the answers to those questions do not just have purely academic relevance. Indeed, a lot of survey research is focused on public policy, and does not always fit comfortably in the world of academic literature.

Against this background, Survey Research Methods (SRM) presents a special issue on survey research during the COVID-19 crisis. The issue is special in various respects. First of all, it was published fast, or even very fast, by SRM standards. Recognizing the demand for speed, SRM put less than two months between the call for papers and the publication of this issue. It therefore changed its standard reviewing process and suspended the possibility for a revise and resubmit for papers that could make it into the issue with more rounds of revisions.

Secondly, all the articles are considered to be contributions to ongoing debates instead of decisive research papers. In order to highlight this characteristic, the articles are published together with commentaries by peers, and sometimes with responses by the authors of the main article.

Thirdly, this issue contains more articles than a standard issue. We selected 23 papers from almost 40 submissions to give the reader a broad sense of the valuable contributions of survey researchers to our knowledge about the COVID-19 crisis.

The issue collects four types of papers:

1. Commentaries about ongoing research using surveys or related methods.
2. Proposals of designs to study Coronavirus-related questions using survey research.
3. New research initiatives related to the pandemic that have already started.
4. Descriptions of the adaptation of ongoing surveys (*Understanding Society*, PSID, SHARE, etc.) to the lockdown policies.

The four topics are targeted at different, yet partly overlapping, audiences. The commentaries section is targeted to

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a broader audience including the general public. A good example of the papers included in this section is Klingwort and Schnell's critique on studying SARS-CoV-2 prevalence with tracking apps. In doing so, they dismantle popular myths about the chances of digital epidemiology, and is thus highly relevant for ongoing political debates in many countries.

The design proposals are meant as inspiration to social scientists and epidemiologists who are planning to study Coronavirus related research questions. The articles discuss various methodological approaches to such questions. To give just one example: Frasier et al. propose a probability-based mail survey with at-home, self-administered testing as a feasible method to safely estimate SARS-CoV-2 antibody prevalence. Readers who want to follow this discerning design are well advised to also read the commentary and reply.

The research initiatives section is particularly interesting for all researchers who want to study the societal or economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The articles there introduce new data collection initiatives—such as the fascinating world-wide COVID-19 probability based daily survey of Facebook users (Kreuter et al.)—or specific research designs for specific research questions—such as Lillard's design to estimate the effects of the NPIs.

Finally, the last section of the special issue documents the adaptations that larger ongoing data collection projects have had to made to continue their projects. This important section is targeted to an expert audience and thus of particular interest to the SRM's standard readership. For such readers it suffices to list the names of the projects which have contributed articles: SHARE, pairfam and FReDA-CGS, the labor market surveys of IAB, *Understanding Society*, PSID, and ReGES.

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