Survey Research


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Fink and Kosecoff have written an easily comprehensible book about the methods used for conducting surveys. They admit that their work is a compilation of the basics about surveys including some technical and "not-so-technical" material from a number of sources. Fink and Kosecoff state that their purpose is "to teach all those who need to conduct a survey, regardless of how skillful they are" (p. 11). As a result, the text is aimed for simplicity.

Several important topics to be considered in survey research are discussed. The chapter topics are arranged in the order one would consider them from initiating to completing a survey. A strength of this text
is that the authors present a cookbook approach to surveys. Even a beginning researcher could start at chapter one and move through chapter project.

The authors begin with a basic demonstration of what a survey is and when it should most appropriately be used. Fink and Kosecoff argue that the three primary reasons for conducting a survey are: (1) when a policy needs to be set or a program must be planned; (2) when you want to evaluate the effectiveness of programs; and (3) when you are a researcher and a survey may provide you with needed information. Within the discussion of each reason, the authors provide numerous examples to illustrate the kinds of situations where survey research is beneficial. From their analysis, it is clear that numerous forensic studies could be enhanced by using surveys.

In addition to when and why surveys are used, the authors specifically address how to develop a survey instrument. The types of questions and scales used with surveys are briefly but thoroughly presented. For example, the authors caution against the need to consider the content of the message, the definition of terms used, and the availability of the information sought. Fink and Kosecoff also discuss concerns about putting the survey together. Questionnaire format, ordering of questions, administration of the survey, and pilot testing the survey are all presented as practical concerns.

The weakest discussion within the text occurs regarding sampling and survey designs. Although the basics are introduced regarding probability and nonprobability sampling and cross-sectional, longitudinal, and comparison group survey designs, the information may, at times, be too brief. Fink and Kosecoff’s discussion offers an excellent overview but is perhaps not sufficient for the first time reader or survey conductor. For example, determining how large your sample should be is discussed from a statistical viewpoint with fewer examples used than in previous sections of the book. As a result, this discussion may be too briefly presented for the novice to be able to apply it. The authors, however, do supply a bibliography from which the novice could find sources which provide a broader discussion.

While the sampling and design sections are the hardest to understand, the authors do an excellent job presenting the final two considerations of survey research: analyzing data and presenting the results. Following in their basic approach, the authors succinctly present the typical statistical methods used in data analysis. Fink and Kosecoff also present several options for graphs and diagrams that will help
researchers more clearly present findings from their surveys. The examples used in this section are particularly helpful.

While Fink and Kosecoff have done an excellent job of identifying the key topics to be considered in designing and implementing surveys, the real strength of this book rests with the style in which it is written. In addition to providing succinct interpretations of the necessary material, the authors have supplied examples for virtually every concept introduced. Fink and Kosecoff also present a counter example which is not indicative of the concept being discussed. This technique is particularly helpful in sorting out the distinctions in various types of questions and scales used with surveys.