



Understanding Health Research

A tool for making sense of health studies

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Asking the right questions

Researchers asking people questions as part of interview research, survey research or other types of research need to think carefully about the questions they ask and how good the data they produce will be.

Here are three examples of how poorly-chosen questions can harm the quality of research:

Closed questions:

- Survey questionnaires usually ask several closed questions.
- Closed questions require the person completing the questionnaire (the respondent) to select their answer from a pre-defined list
- If researchers do not choose the possible answers to closed questions carefully, they can prevent respondents from saying what they really think, and can lead them to select an answer that they do not entirely agree with.

Leading questions:

- The way a question is worded can influence how participants answer. For example, here are two very different ways of asking the same question:
 - *What do you think of the government's targets for daily fruit and vegetable consumption?*
 - *Are you doubtful that the government's targets for daily fruit and vegetable consumption can be achieved?*
- Because the way questions are asked can influence participants, researchers have to be careful in how they word their questions
- If you are reading survey or interview research, check to see whether the researchers included a copy of the questions they asked, and think about whether those questions might have led participants towards certain answers

Revealing the researcher's opinions:

- It is important that researchers keep their own opinions out of their research as much as possible
- Researchers risk revealing their opinions in the way they phrase their questions, particularly in qualitative interviews with a more conversational style
- Participants sometimes give answers that they think the researcher would like to hear

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit



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