

Designing Questionnaires for Elderly Populations

Instructor

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Office Hours

By arrangement.

Time & Location

To be announced

Course Description

Given the changing age stratification in many countries, more and more information on the psychosocial and economic situation of older people is in great demand. However, human cognitive functioning changes across the lifespan and this has implications for the way we ask questions and conduct surveys among the elderly. This course reviews what changes with age (e.g., sensory functioning, speed of processing, memory functioning, etc.), and how this can be taken into account in designing better questionnaires (mail, telephone, and personal interviews) for the elderly. The course involves lectures, exercises, and discussions. Frequent in-class exercises will cover the basics of the major stages of questionnaire design. Also, participants can receive thorough feedback on sample questionnaires that they bring. The homework assignments are intended to offer practical experience by developing questions and critiquing existing questionnaires.

Important Information

Participants are encouraged to submit questions or questionnaire examples to the instructor before the course begins!

Grading

Course grades are based on assignments and participation in class discussions. The assignments serve to provide an opportunity to practice writing and critiquing questions that can be understood and answered by older people. Grading is based on two assignments and class participation, with each contributing 1/3. In evaluating class assignments, it will be considered how well you apply relevant concepts and findings discussed in the readings and in class to specific question problems and how well you present your solutions. Each assignment will be graded using letter grades. You will also receive a letter grade for your overall class participation. Your final grade will be the average of these three grades.

Required Book

Schwarz, N., Park, D., Knäuper, B., & Sudman, S. (Eds.) (1998). *Cognition, aging, and self-reports*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Selected Readings

In addition to the book there will be two additional readings. They will be handed out in class.

Suggested Books

This is a list of books that is invaluable to a professional designer of questionnaires. They are on reserve in the library.

Biemer, P. B., Groves, R. M., Lyberg, L. E., Mathiowetz, N. A., & Sudman, S. (Eds.). (1991). *Measurement errors in surveys*. New York: Wiley.

Converse, J. M. & Presser, S. (1986). *Survey questions: Handcrafting the standardized questionnaire*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Fowler, F. J. (1995). *Improving survey questions: Design and evaluation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Groves, R. M., Biemer, P. P., Lyberg, L. E., Massey, J. T., Nicholls, W. L. II, & Waksberg, J. (Eds.) (1988). *Telephone survey methodology*. New York: Wiley.

Schuman, H., & Presser, S. (1981). *Questions and answers in attitude surveys*. New York: Academic Press. New 1996 copyright by Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Schwarz, N., & Sudman, S. (Eds.). (1994). *Autobiographical memory and the validity of retrospective reports*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Schwarz, N. & Sudman, S. (Eds.) (1996). *Answering questions: Methodology for determining cognitive and communicative processes in survey research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sudman, S., & Bradburn, N. M. (1982). *Asking questions: A practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sudman, S., Bradburn, N. M., & Schwarz, N. (1996). *Thinking about answers: The application of cognitive processes to survey methodology*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Tanur, J. M. (Ed.) (1992). *Questions about questions*. New York: Russell Sage.

Papers Related to Aging and Self Reports

Bärbel Knäuper

Cognition, Self-Reports, and Aging

- Knäuper, B., & Wittchen, H.-U. (1994). Diagnosing major depression in the elderly: Evidence for response bias in standardized diagnostic interviews? *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 28 (2), 147-164.
- Knäuper, B., & Wittchen, H.-U. (1996). Heuristics used by older respondents to answer standardized mental health questions. In R. Warnecke (Ed.), *Health survey research methods* (pp. 75-78). Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Knäuper, B., Belli, R. F., Hill, D. H., & Herzog, A. R. (1997). Question difficulty and respondents' cognitive ability: The impact on data quality. *Journal of Official Statistics*, 13 (2), 181-199.
- Schwarz, N., Park, D., Knäuper, B., & Sudman, S. (1998). *Cognition, aging, and self-reports*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Schwarz, N., & Knäuper, B. (1999). Cognitive aging and accuracy of self-report. In D. Park, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Cognitive aging: A primer* (pp. 233-252). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Schwarz, N., Park, D. C., & Knäuper, B. (1999). Aging, cognition, and context effects: How differential context effects invite misleading conclusions about cohort differences. In Statistics Sweden (Ed.), *Official statistics in a changing world* (pp. 125-132). Stockholm: Statistics Sweden.

Attitude Measurement and Aging

- Knäuper, B. (1998). Age differences in question and response order effects. In N. Schwarz, D. Park, B. Knäuper, & S. Sudman (Eds.), *Cognition, aging, and self-reports* (pp. 341-363). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.
- Knäuper, B. (1999). The impact of age and education on response order effects in attitude measurement. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 63, 347-370.

Autobiographical Memory

- Knäuper, B., Cannell, C. F., Schwarz, N., Bruce, M. L., & Kessler, R. C. (1999). Improving accuracy of major depression age-of-onset reports in the US National Comorbidity Survey. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 8, 39-48.
- Schuman, H., Akiyama, H., & Knäuper, B. (1998). Collective memories of Germans and Japanese about the past half century. *Memory*, 6, 427-457.

Health and Aging

- Knäuper, B., & Schwarzer, R. (1999). Gesundheit über die Lebensspanne [Health across the life span]. In R. Oerter, C. von Hagen, G. Röper & G. Noam (Hrsg.), *Klinische Entwicklungspsychologie. Ein Lehrbuch* (S. 711-727). Weinheim: Psychologie Verlags Union.

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Course Schedule

Mon 7/24 1. The Basics

- Introduction, organizational Issues
- Overview of cognitive and communicative tasks involved in answering questions
- Overview of relevant findings from the cognitive aging literature
- Implications for participation in surveys (survey nonresponse problem)
- Implications for choosing the appropriate mode of administration

Required readings: Chapter 2 & 3 (*From ch. 3 you do not need to read all details, but try to understand the major mechanisms of cognitive aging.*)

Additional readings: Chapter 1

Tues 7/25 2. Age, Language, and Communication

- Age-related changes in language comprehension
- Age-related changes in language production
- Age-related changes in communication
- Implications for participation in surveys
- Implications for data quality
- Implications for writing questions
- Implications for interviewer training

Required readings: Chapters 10

Additional readings: Chapters 11,12, 15, 16

Assignment #1 handed out.

Wed 7/26 3. Age and Memory

- Age-related changes in working memory capacity
- Age-related changes in autobiographical memory
- Implications for data quality
- Implications for asking questions about behavior and events

Required readings: Chapter 5 & 13

Additional readings: Chapters 8

Assignment #1 due.

Assignment #2 handed out.

Thu 7/27 **4. Age and Judgment**

- Response scales
- Social desirability
- Implications for data quality
- Implications for assessing attitudes and sensitive issues

- Required readings:
1. Chapter 17
 2. Belli, R. F., Herzog, A. R., & Van Hoewyk, J. (1999). Scale simplification of expectations for survival: Implications for quality of response. *Journal of Official Statistics*. (will be handed out in class)

Assignment #2 due.

Fri 7/28 **5. Questionnaire Formatting and Pretest Methods**

- Required readings: Jenkins, C. R. & Dillman, D. A. (1997). Towards a theory of self-administered questionnaire design. In L. Lyberg, P. Biemer, M. Collins, E. de Leeuw, C. Dippo, N. Schwarz, & D. Trewin (Eds.), *Survey measurement and process quality* (pp. 165-196). New York: Wiley. (will be handed out in class)