

Letter to Editor



Survey Fatigue in Questionnaire Based Research: The Issues and Solutions

Mansour Ghafourifard^{ID}

Department of Medical Surgical Nursing, Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

Received: December 15, 2023 Accepted: December 21, 2023 ePublished: January 14, 2024

*Corresponding Author: Mansour Ghafourifard, Email: m.ghafori@yahoo.com**Dear Editor,**

Collecting self-reported data through questionnaires and surveys has long been the most commonly used tool in healthcare research. These studies provide important information concerning a population's feelings, experiences, habits, health, and opinions.¹ Obtaining correct and accurate data from survey respondents has long been a challenge for researchers.² Today, there are many studies that use questionnaires as a main tool for collecting data from patients, health care professionals, and other groups. However, people become overwhelmed by the number of surveys and questionnaires they encounter in daily life, and they thus become fatigued.^{1,3} This type of fatigue is called survey fatigue or respondent fatigue, a phenomenon where individuals become tired and uninterested in answering the questions of surveys, lose their motivation to complete surveys, provide less thoughtful answers to questions, or prematurely terminate participation as a result.^{4,5} Another form of respondent fatigue can be visible as a respondent skips the questions, leaves text response fields blank, selects the default answers to the questions, or the same option is selected in a series of multiple-choice questions.⁴

There are many factors contributing to the survey fatigue. Researchers should recognize that long surveys with extensive follow-up questions, targeting the incorrect participants, poor survey design, asking repetitive questions, providing more open-ended questions, and participating in too many surveys (called over-surveying) could lead to survey fatigue.^{4,5}

Survey fatigue is considered a main limitation of questionnaire-based designs which results in careless responses, suboptimal responses, and decreased survey responsiveness. Moreover, it can damage the results of rigorously designed studies by providing inaccurate answers and causing substandard responses to the questions.⁶ Finally, these undesirable behaviors can lead

to unwanted bias in findings and impact the quality of data gathered.⁴ Moreover, it could lead to survey attrition which will cause a lack of survey responses and lead to a waste of resources.⁷

There are four types of survey fatigue: (1) Over surveying: This type is the common form of survey fatigue. It occurs when we continually ask the participants to engage in the filling of the questionnaires. (2) Question fatigue: Question fatigue occurs when the researcher asks the same questions in diverse ways. This type of survey fatigue occurs in poorly designed questionnaires and leads to frustrating participants, survey drop-outs, and incompletions. (3) Long surveys: Long surveys make the participants feel tired and they do not like to continue filling the questionnaires. As a result, it can lead to poorly gathered data and a higher rate of non-completion. (4) Disingenuous surveys: This is a dangerous type of survey fatigue. It occurs when our participants think that their responses will not affect an outcome. They feel tired of being asked to participate in disingenuous engagement.

Since questions are the most commonly used tools in the studies conducted in the health care area, the following solutions could help to minimize survey fatigue:

- Using long questionnaires is not recommended in a study. Since the time that respondents spend filling out the questionnaires is very important, using tools with short and relevant questions encourages the individuals to fill out the questionnaires.

- When there is a short form of a questionnaire, the short form of questionnaires should be used.
- The researchers should provide the results of the research to the participants and give feedback to them.
- A short introduction on the aim of the study could increase the response rate of the study. Explaining

the importance of the participants' perception could encourage them to participate in survey studies.

- The researchers could offer an incentive to the participants. Providing an incentive could increase the response rate by 10-15 %. A simple acknowledgment and saying thanks for survey taking times could also encourage the participants to fill out the survey.
- It is recommended to study a small number of variables in one study.
- Offering incentives upon survey completion could encourage greater engagement by participants.
- Over-surveying the participants and asking them to participate in many studies with questionnaire could discourage them to engage in the surveys.
- An estimated time for questionnaire completion should be provided to the participants.
- The aim of the study should be explained to the participants. When asking to fill out a survey request, be sure to give a concise reason why you're asking to fill out the questionnaire.
- The validity and reliability of the questionnaire should be checked before conducting a research.
- The participants should be targeted and selected based on the aim of the study. Incorrect targeting defeats the entire purpose of a survey because the survey questions may not align with the participant's experience.

Competing Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data are available for all.

Ethical Issues

Not applicable.

Funding

Not applicable.

References

1. Karlberg C. The Survey Fatigue Challenge: Understanding Young People's Motivation to Participate in Survey Research Studies [thesis]. Lund University; 2015.
2. Backor K, Golde S, Nie N. Estimating survey fatigue in time use study. In: International Association for Time Use Research Conference. Washington, DC: Citeseer 2007.
3. Jeong D, Aggarwal S, Robinson J, Kumar N, Spearot A, Park DS. Exhaustive or exhausting? Evidence on respondent fatigue in long surveys. *J Dev Econ.* 2023; 161: 102992. doi: [10.1016/j.jdeveco.2022.102992](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2022.102992)
4. Le A, Han BH, Palamar JJ. When national drug surveys "take too long": an examination of who is at risk for survey fatigue. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2021; 225: 108769. doi: [10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108769](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108769)
5. O'Reilly-Shah VN. Factors influencing healthcare provider respondent fatigue answering a globally administered in-app survey. *PeerJ.* 2017; 5: e3785. doi: [10.7717/peerj.3785](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.3785)
6. Brown RF, St John A, Hu Y, Sandhu G. Differential electronic survey response: does survey fatigue affect everyone equally? *J Surg Res.* 2024; 294: 191-7. doi: [10.1016/j.jss.2023.09.072](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2023.09.072)
7. Hochheimer CJ, Sabo RT, Krist AH, Day T, Cyrus J, Woolf SH. Methods for evaluating respondent attrition in web-based surveys. *J Med Internet Res.* 2016; 18(11): e301. doi: [10.2196/jmir.6342](https://doi.org/10.2196/jmir.6342)