

Data Collection Method Brief

Collecting Data from Children Ages 9-13

APPENDIX A: WRITTEN SURVEYS

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Excerpted From: *Summary Report: Collecting Data from Children Ages 9-13.*
<http://www.lpfch.org/informed/facts/etr.html>

Written Surveys

How have written surveys been used for collecting information from children?

Researchers and practitioners use written surveys (also referred to as paper-pencil surveys) to collect health information, conduct individual assessments and/or to measure program effects. Written surveys also are commonly used for program evaluation. Written surveys have been used with children as young as 5 years of age, but researchers agree that most children under 8 years of age face challenges in understanding abstract terms and tend to use the most extreme response options when filling out surveys.⁶

What are important considerations when using written surveys with children?

- ✓ Children under 11 years of age may need visual as well as verbal stimuli to make issues concrete.
- ✓ Investigators can use standard survey questions with children ages 11 years and older, but the questions must be modified to reflect children’s cognitive and language abilities, address issues of confidentiality of reporting certain behaviors, and ensure they are relevant to children’s main social and cultural context (e.g., home or school).
- ✓ Data quality depends on children’s age; the older children are the better they are at understanding language, and maintaining interest.^{1,2,7}
- ✓ Children’s attitudes towards written surveys are likely to be influenced by their classmates.
- ✓ Children are especially prone to “satisficing” (i.e., taking cognitive short cuts) when bored or under motivated. Maintaining attention and motivation during classroom administered surveys can be challenging.
- ✓ Individuals in charge of giving written surveys should be trained before collecting data on issues such as maintaining privacy and motivation.
- ✓ Some research shows that children who complete surveys at school report higher levels of some risk behaviors than those who complete surveys at home.⁹
- ✓ Written surveys are perceived to be among the least expensive methods of data collection, but they do require resources for data collection (e.g., multiple copies of survey), data entry and data cleaning.

What are the advantages of using this approach?

- Ease of use
- Data quality
- Cost

What the Research Says...

- ✓ Visual stimuli (e.g., illustrations of characters) can be used to increase motivation and interest in written surveys.^{2,3}
- ✓ Boys and girls are equally able to understand items on a survey.⁶
- ✓ The use of written surveys avoids potential interviewer influence and social desirability effects that might be present in individual interviews.⁹
- ✓ Classroom surveys are more cost-effective when compared with individual interviews.⁹

<p>What are the drawbacks of this approach?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptability • Flexibility • Data quality 	<p>What the Research Says...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This method has greater potential for low motivation and disinterest among children compared to more visually stimulating surveys such as computer-based or PDAs.^{2,3} ✓ Language mastery, reading comprehension, and cognitive and social development can affect children’s ability to complete written surveys.^{2,4,6,7} ✓ Written surveys do not easily allow for clarifying responses. For example, a response such as “I don’t know” could mean children are not interested, they do not have an opinion or that they do not understand the question.^{3,9} ✓ In-person interviews may be better for children than written surveys because they provide the ability to observe body language, establish rapport with children, answer questions, identify misunderstandings and provide encouragement to children.³
<p>References</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Borgers, N., & Hox, J. (2001). Item nonresponse in questionnaire research with children. <i>Journal of Official Statistics</i>, 17(2), 321-335 2. Borgers, N., Leeuw, E. D., & Hox, J. (2000). Children as respondents in survey research: Cognitive development and response quality. <i>Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique (BMS)</i>, 66, 60-75. 3. Holaday, B., & Turner-Henson, A. (1989). Response effects in surveys with school-age children. <i>Nursing Research</i>, 38(4), 248-250. 4. Jensen, S. A., Fabiano, G. A., Lopez-Williams, A., & Chacko, A. (2006). The reading grade level of common measures in child and adolescent clinical psychology. <i>Psychological Assessment</i>, 18(3), 346-352. 5. Marsh, H. W. (1986). Negative item bias in ratings scales for preadolescent children: A cognitive-developmental phenomenon. <i>Developmental Psychology</i>, 22(1), 37-49. 6. Rebok, G., Riley, A., Forrest, C., Starfield, B., Green, B., Robertson, J., et al. (2001). Elementary school-aged children's reports of their health: A cognitive interviewing study. <i>Quality of Life Research</i>, 10(1), 59-70. 7. Riley, A., Rebok, G., Forrest, C., Robertson, J., Green, B., & Starfield, B. (2001). Young Children's Reports of Their Health: A Cognitive Testing Study. Paper presented at the Seventh Conference on Health Survey Research Methods (2/01). 8. Stewart, J. L., Lynn, M. R., & Mishel, M. H. (2005). Evaluating content validity for children's self-report instruments using children as content experts. <i>Nursing Research</i>, 54(6), 414-418. 9. Vollebergh, W. A. M., van Dorsselaer, S., Monshouwer, K., Verdurmen, J., van der Ende, J., & Bogt, T. t. (2006). Mental health problems in early adolescents in the Netherlands: Differences between school and household surveys. <i>Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology</i>, 41(2), 156-163.