

The Importance of Survey Methods and Quantitative Surveys in Producing Fit-for-Purpose Public Statistics

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Abstract

High-quality public statistics are essential for societal development, providing vital information for decision-making, the planning and evaluation of public policies, and the exercise of citizenship. While survey methods may be overlooked as a source of scientific development and innovation, quantitative surveys are essential for producing fit-for-purpose public statistics. The talk will address the ongoing debate about the need for quantitative surveys in the context of a continually evolving information society. To inform this debate, two recent Brazilian surveys on specific social and economic issues will be presented.

One survey aimed to collect data on the effects of a tragic dam collapse on labour, income, and subsistence among affected populations in 45 Brazilian cities. The collapse constitutes Brazil's worst environmental tragedy caused by a technological disaster of the mining industry, in which 43 million m³ of iron ore tailings caused environmental damage, polluting 668km of watercourses. The survey design features innovative methods for collecting labour history information. Additionally, the sample included households from both affected and non-affected areas to enable impact assessment and evaluation of socioeconomic damage.

(<https://projetoriadoce.fgv.br/pesquisa-domiciliar-participativa>)

The other is a household survey designed to inform public policy in a single town and to provide local area statistics. The city is a pioneer in Brazil in conducting a large-scale municipal sample survey to complement information from the 2022 Demographic Census and other official databases. In addition to standard sociodemographic data and labour market status, it collects information on essential quality-of-life topics, including urban mobility, food security, social support, health, sports and leisure, culture, and ICT use. The survey, which interviewed nearly 13,900 households, is part of the city's information and management system that supports the planning and evaluation of local public policies and programs.

(<https://observa.niteroi.rj.gov.br/niteroi-que-somos/>)

When evaluating both situations, would it be possible to collect the necessary data without conducting a survey? The importance of household surveys is acknowledged when the data gathered is useful for decision-making and appropriate for the intended purpose. In both instances, the objectives, design, and scope of the surveys align with the required data needs.