

Social Distancing
Sampling:
Overcoming Barriers
for Strategic
Recruitment in a
Digital Age

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Introduction

- Social distancing– the term used during COVID-19, as a practice of increasing the space between individuals and decreasing the frequency of contact to reduce the risk of spreading a disease (CDC, 2020).
- COVID-19 presented research obstacles in terms of participant recruitment.
- To achieve pre-pandemic research requirements, we developed an innovative sampling technique that was “social” while supporting the physical social distancing guidelines.

Social Distancing Sampling (SDS)

- Collecting data from research participants despite physical and social barriers during times of quarantine.
- We replaced conventional methods (e.g., in-person interviews or pencil-and-paper surveys) with virtual strategies (e.g., survey invitation links, Facebook closed groups, texting).
- Online surveys can provide unique opportunities for research in the COVID-19 era (e.g., time-efficient, cost effective) (Hlatshwako et. al, 2020).



SDS
Methodology
Strategies



Use of trusted, reliable survey software (*e.g.*, Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey)

Recruitment through social media platforms (*e.g.*, Facebook closed groups)

Dissemination of survey link through social media, texting, smartphone apps, email

The online survey is concise and contains inclusive, trauma-informed wording instead of disempowering language (*e.g.*, participants instead of subjects)

For text, we tried to avoid anthropomorphic language like “the study will...”

Instead, we were conscious of promoting the human component of the research by speaking in 1st person. For example, “we are interested in learning about QOL while working from home”

Informed Consent is on first page prior to the online survey and is in plain language

Contains a clear purpose along with inclusion/exclusion criteria

The online survey invitation is concise, and transparent: salutation, please complete our survey, length of time, what is it for, link, thanks for participation

Global Participation

Use of a required
qualifier question:

This example is for
categorizing responses
from individuals in
different geographic
locations.

- Age is often used- Must be over 18 to participate

*** 1. In which country are you currently working from home?**

USA

UK

Other (please specify)

Final Thoughts

A final open-ended question can be included for individuals to share additional comments.

Respondents may want to share thoughts unrelated to the topic that may provide ideas for future research.

24. Please share any other thoughts about quality of life and working from home.

Follow-Up

Collecting email address provides opportunities to connect with participants in future.

25. Thank you for participating in the QOL Home Workplace Questionnaire. If you would like to participate in a future follow-up study on this topic, please enter your email below.

Email Address _____

Closed groups > Public groups

- Managed by admins who vet participants through a membership form
- Increases likelihood of participation and true responses

Identifying Facebook groups by category can yield higher numbers

- Groups by name: Fitness Lovers
- Groups by size: >15,000 members
- Groups by theme: Moms Home During the Pandemic
- Groups by purpose: Survey Exchange Groups

Sample Survey Invitation Text

Hi everyone! We are professors looking for participants from this group to take our online questionnaire about working from home. We hope you can participate. This questionnaire should take 5-7 minutes and is available at: www.surveymonkey.com/r/_____ Thank you so much!

Hi everyone! Here is my short academic survey about working from home: www.surveymonkey.com/r/_____
Thank you so much! I'll do yours in return just provide your link below in the comment section :)

Results of SDS Research

- Two large, novel qualitative studies
 - *Quality of Life While Working from Home* - 709 participants
 - *Physical Activity (PA) During COVID-19* - 519 participants
- Social distancing sampling presents unique barriers and advantages.



Barriers to SDS



Working from home distractions

Mental health factors

Physical COVID-19 symptoms

Information overload

Digital divide – lack of access to technology



SDS Advantages

SDS Advantages

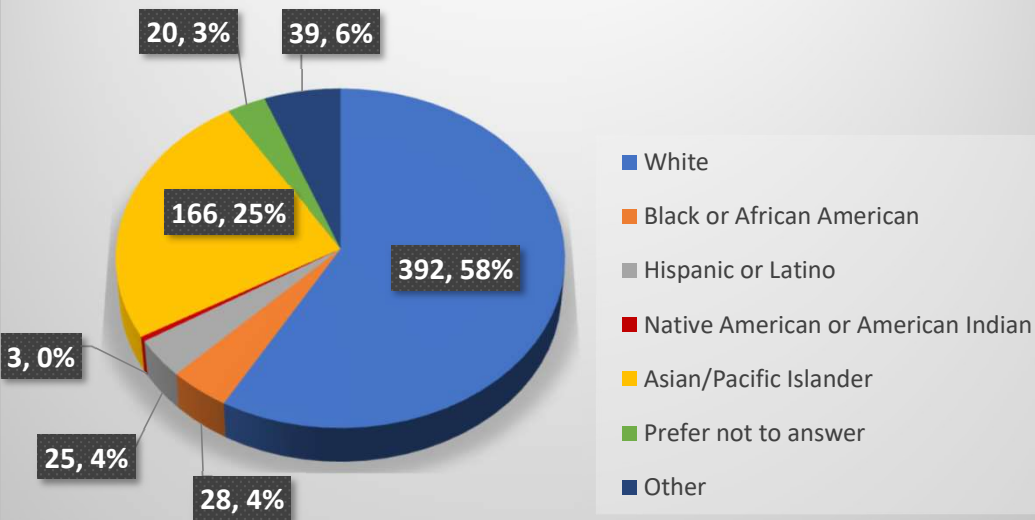
- Geographic and time constraints to participation were mitigated through completing surveys online
- Snowball sampling increased global participation
- Self-identified survey champions/ambassadors shared the link resulting in increased participation
- Increased engagement and unfiltered, honest responses from individuals who felt isolated and desired to connect about personal pandemic experiences

Participation According to Demographic

High Asian/Pacific Islander Population Numbers

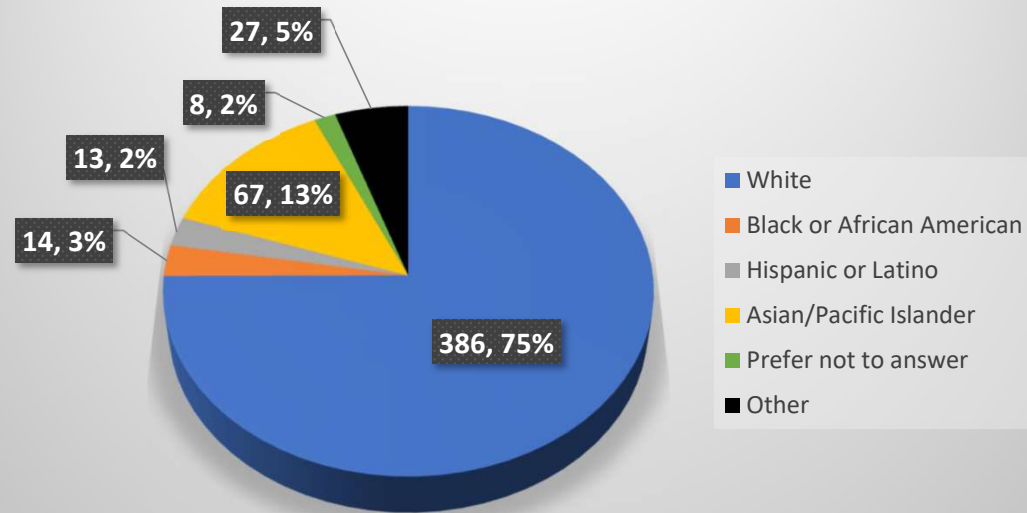
QOL Study

What is your race? (N=673 responses)



PA Study

What is your race? (N=515 responses)



Future Directions

- Interactive approach: Develop a social media platform/website/app to disseminate research findings to participants directly
 - Extends reach of research beyond academia to the general public.
 - Participants can be asked to provide reactions or impressions to provide more insight about finding.

Significance

Series of unknowns led to increased researcher creativity and innovation in research designs during COVID-19.



Recruitment during COVID-19 was challenging, yet fruitful, resulting in high participant numbers and meaningful responses from participants.



Research could result in additional interaction among participants through social media platforms including personal and professional networking. Thus, putting the “social” into online research during times of social distancing.



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