

Challenges Confronted while Executing Time Use Research On Nurses and Paramedics in Bahawalpur, Pakistan

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History	
Received: September 03,2025	<i>Aims: This paper aims to describe the challenges faced during data collection for time use study of nurses and paramedics, working in public sector hospitals of Bahawalpur District.</i>
Accepted: December 04,2025	<i>Methods: Data emerged from feedback of interviews and questionnaires filled by sample of 118 nurses and paramedics. Results: Obstacles faced included the following: reluctance in providing vacancy position, non-response during working hours due to tight, tough or emergency duty schedules, on other hand participants sometimes feel afraid to allow onto premises due to increasing crime rates in society, some respondents misinterpret their designation, marital status or age (especially female), totally adverse results. Conclusion: When planning surveys on time use the researcher should be prepared for these and other more serious conditions that may arise in fieldwork execution. This paper will also be helpful in understanding the problems faced by researchers in Asian context.</i>
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Introduction

Survey study goes through significant challenges that have important effects for both the method and its use in research. Survey participation is gradually declining and is likely to continue. The causes for such a deteriorating trend may be cultural or practical. Data collected through surveys is not only perilous to the social research practice, when executed properly, it also enhances the quality of a research (Rimando et al., 2015). To carryout survey based fieldwork, especially in developing and semi-urban or rural areas, is a challenging task (Rich, Nel, Burnhams, & Morojele, 2020). Fieldworkers play a critical role when conducting surveys as they need the necessary skills to successfully interact with participants and gain their trust and cooperation (Nel et al., 2017). Face to face dialogs establish a social contact between respondent and interviewer (Adida, Ferree, Posner, & Robinson, 2016). Qualitative researchers and fieldworkers who search for critical issues, may suffer from emotional misery (Jackson, Backett-Milburn, & Newall, 2013) which itself could be the result of disgrace faced by them during data collection practice. According to Oxford dictionary, “A problem is a situation or subject regarded as harmful or unwelcome and needing to be dealt with, whereas an issue is defined as an important matter or problem for discussion or debate. Surveys are usually subject to facing extraordinary trials from both social and technical changes (Couper, 2017). As to each problem there exists a solution and hence to deal with problems successfully in an adequate or calm manner is termed as “to cope with”.

Numerical information have always been valuable in a series of economic activities (Rubinfeld & Gal, 2017). This numerical information, termed as data, are depictions of observations, items or other units used as an indication of phenomena for research purpose (Borgman, 2016). The use of new and enhanced technologies for the collection, presentation, storage, mining, combining, and analysis of data has eased to utilize huge volumes of statistics to learn new information (Rubinfeld & Gal, 2017). In social research, data collection is the most essential phase as the correct implementation enhances the research quality (Rimando et al., 2015). And data collection methods are crucial because it depicts, how the collected evidences are used and what results it can produce are determined by the analytical approach and methodology, applied by the investigator. These are questionnaire, interviews, focus group, observations and *Textual or content analysis* (Paradis, O'Brien, Nimmon, Bandiera, & Martimianakis, 2016). Although, questionnaires can be an influential and a useful research method (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). In healthcare research, conducting interviews is most common mode of data collection where researcher seeks to understand participants and their experiences by their own views and words (Mitchell, 2015). Interviewers can have considerable effect on survey data. The presence of an interviewer can be a powerful means of collecting high-quality data (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016). It has been suggested that interviewer's cautious behavior is main factor for attracting respondent's attention which leads to successful research (Wilhelmy, Kleinmann, König, Melchers, & Truxillo, 2016). Interviewer/respondent interaction can produce 'interviewer effects' that shape the responses offered (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

Nurses not only provide collective care of all individuals, groups, families and communities but according to (Smolowitz et al., 2015), registered nurses also assess and document health status, provide health coaching, manage hospital transition and supervise the staff and quality improvement matters.

This paper indicates some of the barriers arising in Asian, especially in Pakistani, society, in conducting the time use survey on nurses and paramedical staff working in public sector hospitals. These indications would lead to the solution of these problems so the future researchers conducting research in developing countries may get an ease to these problems.

Study design and sample selection

A comparative study was made for the three districts of Bahawalpur division. For this purpose population of nurses and paramedics working in governmentally administered hospitals, either on district or tehsil level, was considered. A sample of size 364 was selected from 4004 population by adopting a Stratified and Systematic sampling technique using District as stratifying factor. Gender, Education, Age, Marital status, Religion, Pay Scale/ Grade and Geographical region were considered as study variables. The data from target population was collected using questionnaire, interviews as well as diary method. The diary was constructed by distributing 24 hours in 48 slots of 30 minutes each.

Data collection problems

The common hurdles with which the researcher had to encounter, some of acute nature, were as follows:

Language of questionnaire: In order to get information, a questionnaire was designed in English language. In case of direct contact the researcher explained it for to the respondent but the situation where the questionnaires were mailed, it seemed from the response that perhaps, respondents felt Troublesomeness with the language of questionnaire, in order to cope with this problem, almost three-fourth of the questionnaires were translated to Urdu language for the convenience of the respondents with lower education level.

Problems during developing questionnaire: As the present research also aims to explore the decline to this profession, especially nursing. So there was a dire need to ask some questions which usually seem awkward and are avoided to be answered in our society, specifically marital life related queries. So some questions were developed in such a manner which were not direct but to some extent compensate the purpose.

Getting vacancy position: For the purpose of data collection, having sampling frame is the first sign. In order to get the questionnaire filled, the complete vacancy position was needed so that by the use of systematic sampling technique the sampling units could be selected to comprise the sample size. Vacancy position is an official document, and official document is not exposed to public, so the researcher faced the difficulty in acquiring this, however a letter from the supervisor, bearing the request for cooperation eased the task.

Contact number issue: The contact number of the respondent is the personal information and is not shared generally, by the department. The interaction with selected respondent to get an appointment for interview was difficult without contact number. Again at this stage special request was made to make its availability possible.

Access to the target population: After having vacancy position, the next stage was to get access to sampling units as indicated in sampling frame. The approach to sampling units, present within main cities or towns was relatively easy as compared to the basic health units and rural health centers in remote areas.

The ways, questionnaires to be filled, can be categorized in two; first, the researcher personally approached the respondents and secondly, questionnaires were mailed to the address of BHU's and RHC's with request letter or in the monthly meeting of health and nutrition supervisors working in each BHU's and RHC's with the request to fill get it filled and in the next meeting to bring them along with, although they were to remind at least twice for that.

Non-Response: Non-response was observed due to following reasons.

In order to collect data the researcher had to adopt any of the three ways i.e.

- (i) To visit the respondents at their duty place
- (ii) To visit the respondents at their home
- (iii) Mailing questionnaire or hiring somebody to get filled the questionnaire

In all of three ways adopted, there occurred some type of hurdle on the form of non-response which are discussed one by one.

As per first case, mentioned above, the researcher herself approached the nurses and paramedics but because of emergency and busy schedules they showed reluctance to respond and sometimes a feeling of tedium is seen in their behavior. In order to get information the researcher sometimes had to visit the same person twice or thrice so they are ready to respond. This behavior was particularly from the female nursing staff, ward ayaa's/maid and sometimes from LHV's and LHW's. The reason seems to be their tough duty routine, stress from their officers, their family constraints and above all, overwork.

If researcher managed to approach their home, due to the reason they are too busy at their work place, majority of respondents took it as interference in their family time or rest schedules. Sometimes with the fear of crime, being looted, researchers are not allowed to come in or talk with and are refused behind the locked doors.

In case of mailed questionnaire, the nonresponse occurs with half-filled or incomplete information. This problem can be coped by filling some questionnaires more than need so that the incomplete may be discarded.

Misinterpretations & Disinformation: This problem commonly arises in the questionnaires which are filled through mailing process. In these questionnaires usually female respondents misinterpret the information. As

some lady health visitors LHV's, lady health workers LHW's mentioned their designation as nurse. Some misinterpreted their marital status, some divorced narrated them single.

The serious misinterpretation occurred when asked about their satisfaction with life. Almost all the female nurses and paramedics marked the option 'yes' but the reality is something depressing. Off the record facts illustrate that most of the female staff especially nurses, who have to perform the shifting duty hours, have to face brutal marital life which not only effects them alone but also their broods. This situation puts them to mental stress, which they deny to have, and then gradually effects their mental health. With the survey to keep their identity in veil, some admitted with deep sorrow that they are merely treated as earning machine.

Similarly, when asked about their job satisfaction the answer was 'yes' but again there is another side of the picture. Although it is said that nursing is a respectable profession, contrary to this verbal practice, some nurses explode the fact that today the situation is same as 20 years before.

Although by this profession we are serving the paining humanity but in return, injured by whom we heal. No respectable family adopts us happily as their family member.

All these disinformation were also a hurdle in approaching reality while collecting the data.

Problems faced, being female researcher

I had to go through some specific problems, some of which were as under:

1. When getting vacancy position, instead of having supervisor's letter from the department authorities found it an additional work load to their daily responsibilities. Sometimes I was asked to come after office time so I had to ask some of my brother or cousin to collect that from the concerned officer or to accompany me so that I may collect that. This is due to the reason our religion, Islam, guides females not to have one to one meeting with male other than your blood relations.
2. Personal security during fieldwork is rarely been discussed. working alone in certain geographical areas has often led researcher to feel frightened and uncomfortable (Demery & Pipkin, 2020). The researcher had to face some difficulty during interview or filling questionnaire personally. A relatively serious situation was faced when visiting/approaching respondents residing/performing out of my native district, even within my native district some THQ's/BHU's were enough faraway so that it was impossible for me to visit such places alone, so some male member from my family had to accompany me
As it is well known fact that nurses have to perform a very hectic jobs so despite of have appointment, I had to wait for hours so that they get some break or spare time to respond me. And this waiting is quite unbearable when the temperature is 45° or above.
3. When talking about waiting time, sometimes it so happened that a single interview took 2-3 days as it was interpreted by respondent's boss. Sometime by an urgent/emergency call, sometimes by the friend/colleague of respondent, sometimes by electricity load shedding problem, especially in summer.

Problems faced being an employed researcher

In order to enhance my professional competency I decided to do PhD. Doing PhD is itself a fulltime job, so it was extremely difficult, but not impossible for me to run both side by side. After fulfilling my job's obligations sometimes I got so exhausted that was unable to proceed research work.

My job was also a hurdle during data collection process as after my duty hours when I approached to the medical/paramedical staff, they were also in a hurry to windup their daily chores and to rush up to their homes. During these circumstances sometimes my plea was accepted or sometimes it was postponed to next day.

Data collection and COVID-19

Data was to be collected in three phase. In 1st phase it was started to be collected in 2016. Then 2nd phase data was collected in 2018 and in 3rd phase, the data was to be collected in 2020. First two were normal periods but in 2020, due to the breakup of epidemic (COVID-19), from March 2020 till August 2020, complete lockdown in Pakistan, it was difficult to approach the respondents, and if managed to approach then they were hesitant to interact visitors, when no locomotion was possible and hence there was no choice except to "STAY HOME". This was the time when mailed questionnaires were not thought to be entertained due to business of health workers both at their work place as well as at their homes as they were the front line force during pandemic.

Limitations

Despite the significance of this study, it does have some limitations that should be kept in mind. While various defies arose during the execution of data collection, some of the challenges faced by the researcher does have direct impact on the validity, consistency and reliability of the research. These include (i) timing of interview (ii) length of questionnaire (iii) gender of participant (iv) misunderstandings about job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

It was understood that participants will fill the diary according to their average daily time use but when most of them interviewed during officetime they thought it to be filled stressing their office routine, when interviewed at home, their main stress was on household responsibilities, when interviewed at weekends, they tried to fill it according to their weekend business so before filling the diary, often there was a need to explain them how to fill and what to fill.

Questionnaire should be of moderate length. Here for the present study it was a bit lengthy which if managed properly, would surely be better. The gender of participants also accounts a lot. Male respondent's behavior was more inclined to cooperate as compared to female.

Many studies reveal that self-employment places a positive effect on job satisfaction but nothing could be said, with surety, about life satisfaction of such self-employed persons.(Binder & Coad, 2016). Here in the present study job satisfaction as well as life satisfaction both were intangible terms for the respondents, some took it financial satisfaction. Consequently, this often had to be explained by the data collector what actually a satisfied life means to?

Recommendations

Firstly, for the researchers scheduling the research on nurses and paramedical staff, extensive planning is necessary, to avoid potential problems as outlined in the paper. Prior to the study researchers should endow time in identifying types of location where the population is settled and make arrangements for how to reach remote areas.

Second, circumstantial factors should always be taken into account when planning and executing research. The safety of fieldworkers/ researchers especially, female in our society, always be of a principal importance. It is also favorable if the fieldworkers have prior knowledge of the community where the research will be carried out(Fry, 2013).

Third, a thorough training of data collector/fieldworker is very important as interviewer are thought to be negotiated endeavors of both researchers and respondents (Oltmann, 2016). It is also better to hire experienced persons who have enough knowledge of how to deal with sensitive question like personal life/ marital life.

Finally, researchers can get subsidy by systematically documenting and integrating their knowledge, observations and experiences into their future fieldwork.

Conclusion

The present study inputs to the literature on problems faced during the collection and execution of data concerning the nurses and paramedics, working in public sector hospitals in Pakistan. Some of these challenges are common around the globe while many of these are specifically attached to developing countries and Pakistani society. Further work is needed to systematically identify and measure the nature of these problems so that its impact can be minimized.

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