Instrument Critique:

Breast Feeding Initiative Questionnaire

Elizabeth Scott Wells

CEP 937

Spring 2004
The MSUE Breast Feeding Initiative (BFI) is a collaborative effort with the Woman, Infant and Children (WIC) program. WIC is a food and nutrition program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture, through the Michigan Department of Community Health. WIC helps to prevent malnutrition in low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women or women with babies, infants and children under five years of age by providing supplemental food, education and counseling.

The Breast Feeding Initiative seeks to train peer counselors who have experiences with breastfeeding to serve as a support person for mothers at risk for low nutrition. Counselors are available for answering questions, encouraging mothers and referring mothers to additional resources. Peer counselors wear pagers so that they are accessible during critical times in breastfeeding. Their overall goals are to encourage women to initiate breastfeeding, empower mothers to solve breastfeeding problems, support and encourage breastfeeding mothers and keep those mothers breastfeeding longer.

To examine the effectiveness of the peer counselor program of the Breast Feeding Initiative, survey research must be done. This paper analyzes a propose instrument for gathering data on the effectiveness of the peer counselors and other factors in the success of breast feeding by participants in the program.

Instrument

The instrument is a self administered mailed questionnaire for WIC mothers who participated in the Breast Feeding Initiative. It is five pages long and includes a cover with the Breast Feeding Initiative logo, a one page informed consent page with a place for the participant to sign and date it, and three pages of questions. The instrument has a
total of forty questions which include demographic data, closed ended questions, 
opinion/satisfaction questions with Lickert type scale answer choices and two open ended 
questions. Approximately one half of the questions are related to the respondents 
satisfaction with the BFI program and the other half are related to other variables such as 
additional support the respondent has for breast feeding, number of contacts with the peer 
counselor, location of contacts, and respondent demographics.

Major constructs underlying the questions on the instrument are that the level of 
satisfaction with the Breast Feeding Initiative and the respondent’s peer counselor, have 
an impact on the success of the respondent’s breast feeding experience and length of 
breastfeeding of their most recent baby. Additional variables being operationalized for a 
casual/comparative relationship are how often they met with their counselor, where they 
met, what kinds of help they needed, who else supported them, if they set a goal for 
breast feeding and met that goal, how early they enrolled in the program and why they 
enrolled in the program as well as demographics such as number of pregnancies, age, 
work status, marital status, race and living arrangements.

It is not clear from the information provided if this questionnaire would be 
reduced and placed in a booklet form, would be its current size and double sided or 
would be single sided with a staple in the upper left hand corner. Respondents are 
instructed to answer questions on each of the pages (capitalization used for emphasis) and 
return the questionnaire in an envelope (which has been provided) within one week. 
Respondents are told they will be given a gift certificate/coupon as a thank you after they 
return the questionnaire.
The instrument is printed with colored (red) directions on the top of the first and third pages of questions. The directions are in 14 point font. The text of the questionnaire is in Ariel font and questions (which are numbered) are in 12 point with answers in 10 point. Many questions use a “circle the answer or all that apply” format and some use a “check all that apply” format with and short space/line for the respondent to check. Answers are arranged horizontally and in many cases lists are double or triple banked. The Likert type scale questions are arranged in one long table with both horizontal and vertical lines to create boxes (of varying sizes) for the respondent to check. Response categories for these 21 questions are “very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied and not applicable”.

The instrument has a Flesch-Kincaid 9.4 grade reading level and a 50.2 Flesch Reading ease score.

Evaluation

For purposes of evaluation, the instrument is divided into; cover, consent form and introduction, instrument items and response format and administrative procedures.

Cover

Since the cover of the questionnaire is likely to be examined by the respondent before any other part of it, it is an opportunity to motivate the respondent. Evidence exists that the front cover can influence response rates and since the first thing the respondent will see is the front cover it is important that the cover be immediately identifiable and serve to separate the instrument from other mailings that the respondent may receive. Any title should be short, simple and aimed at the respondent. It should clearly represent
what the survey is about. The cover of this instrument has the name of the survey “Breastfeeding Program Satisfaction Questionnaire”, a logo of the BFI, instructions, a thank you and the season and year (Spring 2004). Art work or a logo that represents the program or contents of the questionnaire is most appropriate especially if it has a high recognition factor. This may serve to not only get the respondents attention long enough to get her to open the instrument but it also lends credibility to the instrument since it is from a (hopefully) trusted and legitimate source. Covers should include the name of the sponsoring organization and an address to return the survey too (in case the return envelope should be lost) but this cover does not include that. The rear cover should include a thank you, sufficient white space to allow for comments and question about the survey and no questions that may discourage the respondent from filling out the questionnaire such as personal and demographic ones. The last page (outside over) of the instrument as currently presented has a large table with 21 questions, as well as two open ended questions with a small amount of white space for responding. Respondents often look at the back or end of the survey before deciding if they should answer it so a simple question, opportunity to add information and white space along with a thank you from the researcher is a preferred back page.

Consent Form

Michigan State Universities internal review board (IRB) is called University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). All research must pass strict regulations and go through a review before the researcher can begin collecting data. In most cases a signed consent form such as the one for this survey is required. However, for mailed surveys UCRIHS does not require a signed consent form as long as an
introductory letter with the correct information is included with the instrument. The
introductory letter must include a statement which is written in easy to understand
language and which tells the respondent that they consent by completing and returning
the questionnaire. (UCIRHS 2004)

“If the investigator chooses to incorporate the elements of consent in a cover letter or face sheet to a written
to the consent
statement must include: "You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this
questionnaire." Or “You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by beginning this phone interview."

Another important task of an introductory letter is to tell the respondent about any
incentive being offered for completing the questionnaire. Research shows that a token of appreciation mailed with the questionnaire can increase response rate by % (Dillman
2000) and is more effective than any promise of an incentive to be mailed after the
instrument is returned. This is attributed to social exchange theory whereby the
researcher must show trust and ( ) good faith. The proposed cover letter
describes a coupon/gift certificate of appreciation that will be mailed to the respondent
after they return the questionnaire. This goes against extensive research on the use of
incentives in mailed surveys.
References

http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/applications/Consent_Process.doc