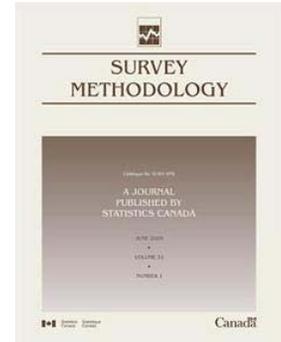


Article

Survey Methodology: The first 25 years

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Survey Methodology – The first 25 years

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This year the *Survey Methodology* journal, published by Statistics Canada, celebrates the silver anniversary of its remarkably successful existence that began in 1975. During these 25 years, the journal has developed into a dynamic and innovative leader in survey methodology. The future promises the same.

The first issue of the journal appeared in June 1975. Although the publication of the journal may have surprised many, the period 1960-75 provided a ripe background for it. In Statistics Canada methodological research flourished. Important and challenging ideas were developed worthy of presentation at international conferences. In this period of productive activities, *Quarterly Bulletin* and *Memoranda*, the forerunners of the journal, were established. These publications highlighted more significant developments, and were intended as a tool in staff training. Their circulation had been mostly internal, however, they soon found their way outside to various statistical organizations, universities and private research centres. The breadth of subject matter covered by the two series was enormous. They provided a springboard for a number of important papers on topics such as small area estimation, record linkage, edit and imputation, variations in response and others. As research and development work kept increasing, so too did a need and desire among statisticians at Statistics Canada to publish formal papers that could be subjected to a refereeing process. Thus, in 1975, the *Survey Methodology* journal was quietly but not prematurely born. At the beginning of its existence, the journal was for all intents and purposes an in-house publication guided and nurtured by one division.

Notwithstanding the journal's modest beginning, its first Editorial Board, consisting of Richard Platek (Chairman), M.P. Singh (Editor), and Paul Timmons, were not modest in their ambitions, as expressed in the editorial policy:

“The objective of the *Survey Methodology* journal is to provide a forum in a Canadian context for publication of articles on the practical applications of the many aspects of survey methodology. The *Survey Methodology* journal will publish articles dealing with all phases of methodological development in surveys, such as design problems in the context of practical constraints, data collection techniques and their effect on survey results, non-sampling errors, sampling systems development and applications, statistical analysis, interpretation, evaluation and

inter-relationships among all of these survey phases. The emphasis will be on the development strategy and evaluation of specific survey methodologies as applied to actual surveys. All papers will be refereed, however, the authors retain full responsibility for the contents of their papers and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Editorial Board or of the Department.”

(Statistics Canada 1975)

The foregoing makes it abundantly clear that the intent was to create a professional journal with a very specific and unique focus. Up to this point, there had not existed a forum for the illumination of general methodological issues arising during the course of putting a survey into the field. Most statistical journals were accepting articles dealing primarily with the mathematical aspects of sample design. The journal filled a long existing vacuum in the field of survey methodology. It provided an immediate benefit and challenge to survey methodologists. By publishing in the journal they had the opportunity to disseminate their work and ideas to a wider range of survey practitioners and theoreticians. In a number of countries, the journal, almost from the beginning, provided a base for teaching and training new statisticians. As S.S. Zarkovich, a prominent statistician from Yugoslavia put it:

“In this country, the situation is as follows. *Survey Methodology* was a highly regarded periodical by the young generation of statisticians in this country. It was a subject of conversation. A good part of production of our young generation was based on the ideas expressed in *Survey Methodology*.”
(Zarkovich 1985).

Initially, for a number of years, the journal relied exclusively on papers written by the staff in Statistics Canada. It was distributed, free of charge, within and outside Statistics Canada. The external recipients were: federal and provincial departments, university libraries, survey research centres, and statistical organizations abroad. This gracious policy had far reaching effects. The journal received a great deal of support from statisticians and statistical organizations in many countries. Statisticians began to enquire about submitting their papers and statistical organizations expressed interest in subscribing to the journal. In a relatively

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few years of its existence the journal won and secured for itself professional recognition and international stature as a technical journal with a unique focus on survey methodology. References to and abstracts from the papers published in the journal now appear in various statistical journals and publications. A brief article on the journal was featured in *Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences* (Singh 1988).

Over the first 10 years the journal was steadily and successfully evolving but the process was gradual. The year 1984 saw the result of many important decisions that had the potential to change the character of the journal significantly. First of all the journal became an official Statistics Canada publication and with this came several concomitant developments. Commensurate with Statistics Canada's policy for its publications, the journal acquired a price tag, and officially became a bilingual publication (Wilk 1982). The general appearance, printing, and format were improved. The production process became smoother and more efficient to ensure timeliness and quality of the final product. With respect to editorial policy and the scope of the journal, it was realized that a broader base in its content, its contributors and its readership would enhance its value and effectiveness. On the other hand, there was some concern that its main objectives, as expressed in the initial Editorial Policy, not be lost in the process. Finally, a decision was made to broaden the journal's scope, expanding the Editorial Board to new areas, accepting and inviting papers from outside. The international community responded to the invitation by submitting many papers to the journal. This trend continues to this day.

Another important decision was the establishment of a separate Management Board. The Management Board, with the help of a Production Manager would coordinate various phases of the journal's production to keep pace with its professional responsibilities. The journal's pricing, relationship with other journals, and production issues are frequently on the agenda of the Management Board.

Concurrently with all the new decisions, discussions were held and distribution agreements were reached with the International Association of Survey Statisticians, the Statistical Society of Canada, and the American Statistical Association, and more recently with the American Association for Public Opinion Research. The members of these associations were given the opportunity to subscribe to the journal at various special rates.

All of these developments resulted in a different perception of the journal, both internally and externally. Externally, the journal entered the international arena. Internally, important changes took place in its Editorial Policy, which emphasized that "The Survey Methodology journal will publish articles dealing with various aspects of statistical development relevant to a statistical agency" (Statistics Canada 1984).

While keeping abreast of new requirements and needs, the journal continues to extend its scope to cover a full range

of methodological questions arising in surveys. In its steady growth, the journal introduced, in 1988, a preface called "In this Issue" (Statistics Canada 1988). Furthermore, from time to time, the journal has been carrying special sections dedicated to topics of particular interest. Examples of topics that were covered in such special sections include census coverage errors, data analysis, establishment survey methods, and longitudinal surveys and analysis. Notices of conferences and seminars on surveys also appear in the journal.

To reflect the increasing number and depth of topics published in the journal and to keep pace with its professional commitments, the journal's Editorial Board was enlarged and another new Management Board was established.

The very essence of any journal is its sensitivity to changing times and expectations. The management of the journal has been, therefore, conducting market research studies in order to evaluate customers' reaction to the journal. Although the outcome of some recent investigations show that some readers feel that their needs for practical applications are not fully met, most regard the journal as a high quality journal and are satisfied with its content.

In recent years the journal has become very popular among academics, with many seeking to publish their articles in it. A view has been expressed that, if this is not controlled, the journal may lose its general and educational appeal to some readers in many countries. While it is proper and healthy to recognize and publish theoretical papers, it is equally important to ensure that this will not become a dominant trend.

At present, the variety of topics published in the journal is very impressive. Based on the classification by topics provided by the *Index to Survey Methodology* volumes 1 to 24, out of 420 articles, 31% dealt with estimation, 20% with sampling design and survey development, and 12% with non-sampling errors. The other articles dealt with analytical methods, data collection, quality assurance, edit and imputation, confidentiality and a few with general topics. It should, perhaps, be encouraged that papers on questionnaire design and non-response, the weakest links in survey design, be more frequently published in the journal.

For the past several years, the journal has been extremely ably guided by Gordon Brackstone, Chairman of the Management Board, M.P. Singh, an excellent Editor since the beginning, and Frank Mayda as Production Manager. The Editor is assisted by Associate Editors, who come from universities, government agencies, and private sectors around the world, ensuring a desirable mix of theoretical and practical interests. The large number of subscribers from many countries (70) gives a clear testimony to the journal's broad appeal and importance. Statistics Canada should be proud of its journal. The journal is not only effective publicity for the organization, but is also a leading methodological publication in the world.

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