

What a neighbourhood survey can tell us

Mira Bell / 2023

Notes by Sofia Marino / 2026-04-22

Fictional teaching text

Question

How far can results from a volunteer survey be generalised?

Survey question

The fictional chapter examines a survey about opening hours at a shared reading room. Responses were collected at the room entrance over two weekdays.

The survey produced 64 responses. Most respondents were already regular visitors, so the sample describes current weekday users more directly than the whole neighbourhood.

Interpretation

A preference for later closing times was common among respondents. The author warns that people unable to visit during current hours were unlikely to be present to answer.

The result supports a trial of later opening, but it does not estimate neighbourhood-wide demand without additional sampling.

A better follow-up

The proposed follow-up includes an evening session, a weekend session and invitations distributed outside the reading room. Each response records whether the person currently uses the room.

The analysis should show both the number of responses and the share supporting each option. Small groups should not be described with percentages alone.

Limitations

- Responses were voluntary.
- No information was collected about people who declined.

Discussion

- Which residents are least likely to appear in the original sample?
- How would you report a result based on only five responses?