Online Survey Research in the Work-Family Field: Basic Concepts and Definitions (2010)

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Basic Concepts & Definitions

Online survey programs allow researchers to customize a survey and place it on the Internet for participants to access. Individuals can create their own surveys and post them online, post existing surveys, or, if survey design is difficult, even purchase premade surveys and customize them to meet one’s individual needs. The option of online surveys is quickly becoming a popular means of collecting data in today’s research world. In fact, Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) suggest that the possibilities provided through Internet surveys are “too great to be ignored” (p. 833).

Many options are available for researchers wanting to explore this means of data collection. Therefore, this paper has multiple goals. The first is to discuss the relevance of online survey tools in work-family literature. Second is to discuss several of the survey options available, including features common to most programs, as well as to discuss some unique features of each. Lastly, this paper will outline some of the methodological concerns and disadvantages associated with online surveys in order to identify strategies to avoid potential pitfalls. This section will conclude with a discussion on the advantages of online survey tools.

Multiple web-based survey options were examined for this paper (Assess, Qualtrics, StudyResponse Survey Gizmo, Survey Gold, SurveyMonkey, ZipSurvey, and Zoomerang), but specific applications in these survey tools are subject to change. Researchers are encouraged to do their own comparison of different tools based on their specific needs.

Importance to Work and Family Studies

Much of the research in the work-family field focuses on gathering employee perceptions (e.g., satisfaction, perceived support, stress level). In many cases, this information is gathered using self-report surveys. Several examples of research using online surveys in the work-family area are discussed below,
and a complete list of the studies reviewed for this paper can be found in Table 1. This table includes additional information such as populations studied, research purpose, sample size, demographic breakdown, data collection methods used, and response rates.

Lambert, Marler, and Gueutal (2008) used an online survey tool as a means of data collection in order to determine the main reasons employees choose to use flexible work arrangements (FWAs). The authors surveyed 144 employees from two companies by sending out an email to over 200 employees asking for their participation. The email included a link to an online survey, which consisted of 43 items and measured six variables, not including demographics. Results revealed that seeing someone in an employee's workgroup using FWAs was the strongest predictor of employee use. Employees who had someone in their immediate workgroup using FWAs were 44 times more likely to use flex options themselves. Also, individuals who scored higher on the personal lifestyle scale, meaning they had more reasons to use FWAs (e.g., family commitments, transportation issues, going back to school), were more likely to engage in FWAs.

Another study examining FWA use in relation to work-family conflict (Shockley & Allen, in press) relied on online responses from 238 university faculty. Findings revealed that the need for separation between work and other life roles is negatively related to FWA use. People who prefer to or seek to integrate work and non-work roles are more likely to use FWAs. There was also support for an interaction effect. Individuals with a high need for work achievement and who had a high level of family responsibility were more likely to use FWAs to help balance work and family.

Drew & Murtagh (2005) examined female and male managers' experiences and attitudes toward work-family balance. Using an online survey, they collected data from 162 participants on career patterns, career progression, training opportunities, and their experience of and attitudes relating to work-family balance. The online surveys were used in conjunction with interviews and focus groups. Using these different methods, the results showed that the most significant barrier to achieving balance between work and family is the expectation of senior managers to work long hours, which reduces the opportunity for taking advantage of work-family programs like FWAs. Another finding revealed that women have a greater desire to use flexible options, but that both men and women believe that taking advantage of a flexible option as a manager could be detrimental to their careers.

The previous two studies both focused on work-family balance and FWAs, but online surveys are being used for other research related to work-family issues, such as understanding gender differences. For example, Moore (2006) conducted an online survey of over 2,000 girls and boys under the age of 18 and over 1,000 adults to assess traditional gender stereotypes, particularly stereotypes for girls and the expectations and pressures girls feel from family and peers. Two of the main findings of the study were
that many adult women feel pressure to be a perfect mother, wife, and employee, and that strong support systems predicted more successful balancing of work and family commitments. Another study related to gender differences used online surveys to assess the difference between males and females and their desire to achieve a senior management position (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007). A sample of 368 working professionals revealed that women are less likely to want a senior management position because they perceive a disconnect between their own personal characteristics and the characteristics needed to achieve a senior management position. Women also felt that there was a lack of opportunity to advance to senior management positions as compared to men.

Online surveys are also being used to collect data on mental and physical health. For example, Haar and Bardoel (2008) explored positive spillover (work to family, family to work) and its affect on psychological distress. They surveyed 420 employees in Australia and results showed that positive spillover, in either direction, reduced feelings of psychological distress. If the positive spillover was from work to family, there was also a decrease in turnover intentions. If the spillover was from family to work, respondents reported a higher level of family satisfaction.

This study assessed mental health, but Allen and Armstrong (2006) explored the link between work-family conflict and physical health. They used snowball sampling to collect survey responses from 246 people. They measured work-family conflict as well as overall physical health, diagnosed health problems, food choices, amount of physical activity, and body mass. The findings suggested that higher levels of work-family conflict result in less physical activity and eating foods higher in fat, which results in a greater body mass index, poorer overall health, and an increase in health disorders. One other study related to both mental and physical health was conducted by Scott and Judge (2006). They looked at insomnia, emotions, and job satisfaction. They used online surveys to collect daily responses from 45 people over a 3-week period to assess insomnia’s affect on feelings and work-related attitudes. Results revealed that fewer hours of sleep are related to increased feelings of hostility and fatigue. Results also indicated that insomnia is related to lower levels of job satisfaction and that women tend to be more affected by a bad night’s sleep than men.

The research discussed above provides evidence to support the belief that quality research on a variety of work and family topics can be collected using online resources, and that the results of these studies are being presented at and published in well-respected conferences and journals. Table 1 provides more details about the studies included.
Table 1

State of the Body of Knowledge

While providing a complete listing of every feature of each online survey tool is both impractical and redundant (because many of the tools have similar features), it is still important to know the features that are common to most online survey tools, as well as some unique features of each. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the common features available in each of the survey tools examined. The majority of the tools support multiple languages, which is a necessity for international research, as well as multiple question types (e.g., multiple choice, short answer). Some tools offer as many as 23 question types, allowing for more customization of the survey and more detail from the participants.

Online survey tools also include a feature known as skip logic, which allows the researcher to set parameters so that participants answer only those questions that apply to them. For example, if one is trying to determine what benefits employees are using, if any, then the survey might ask the question, “Do you use any benefits provided by your organization?” If the employee answers “yes,” then he or she receives more specific questions about the benefits being used. If the answer is “no,” if the skip technology has been activated, the respondent gets to skip the questions regarding specific benefits, which are not relevant to them.

Many of the online survey tools also have a randomization option that makes it possible to completely randomize the order of the questions, helping to eliminate some internal reliability issues associated with testing effects (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Some survey tools also have a broad range of predesigned survey templates to choose from. For example, Zoomerang offers customer and employee satisfaction surveys as well as market research surveys. Some even have ready-made questionnaires or other surveys that can be purchased. This option is less useful for academic researchers who are looking at specific employee perceptions (e.g., anticipated supervisory support), but it can be very useful for organizations trying to implement basic employee surveys or marketing research.

In order to collect responses, the programs allow the researcher to create a web link that can be attached or copied into an email and sent to all potential participants. Each software option acts as a web host for the survey, but some programs allow the researcher to deploy a survey to his or her own website (e.g., SurveyGold). Most programs also allow some type of response tracking, which makes it possible to follow how well the survey administration is progressing, as well as to monitor any potential problems that may occur as the responses are collected. For example, several tools allow the researcher to watch for and even block an individual trying to take the survey multiple times. Usually, these programs track IP addresses, which are unique to each computer. This feature can be useful if the researcher knows that
each potential participant has his or her own computer and therefore his or her own IP address. By blocking multiple response attempts from the same IP address, a researcher can keep one participant from skewing the data. Tracking IP addresses is not useful, however, if potential participants share computer terminals; in this case, one would expect to see repeat IP addresses and would not want to use the blocking feature. If the blocking feature cannot be used to minimize the likelihood of a respondent taking the survey more than once, then researchers can assign random passcodes to each potential respondent. Once the code has been entered, it becomes invalid, thus lowering the probability that someone could take the survey twice.

Once all the data have been collected, the survey programs provide a broad range of options for viewing and analyzing the raw data. Some allow results to be saved as PDF files, or for data to be downloaded into spreadsheet programs such as Excel or SPSS. This feature allows researchers to see individual responses and generate results at the individual level. Each online survey tool also provides a number of statistical and report options that can be generated quickly from the raw data. This option provides preliminary results and, in some cases, may be researchers need to get the answers they are seeking. Most of the software tools have, at a minimum, some rudimentary options to test the reliability and validity of the measure being used. Some provide more comprehensive statistical options, but one should be cautious of these options as they may not be as robust or as detailed as one may need to test hypotheses.

In short, the majority of the features that most individuals need in order to conduct online research can be found within every major online survey program. However, several of the programs have special options that may be important based on the purpose of the research and the information being collected. The following sections describe some of the unique features available that may help the researcher choose between the different online survey tools. Programs are discussed in alphabetic order.

**Table 2**

**Assess (http://www.assess.biz)**

Assess can be used not only to collect survey data, but also to create online individually scored assessments that measure a person’s skills or other attributes. These assessments will score an individual based on a scheme created by the researcher, and they can be used for any number of purposes (e.g., training assessment, selection). For example, Assess has a template that can walk individuals through creating a 360 degree performance system for their organization. It also has the capability to print customized assessment reports for each individual participant. Assess even does gap
analysis, which can help a company compare its actual performance to its potential. As with surveys and exams, assessments can be modified and reused as often as needed.

As far as the author is aware, Assess is the only web-based tool that provides comprehensive personal/individual assessment, 360 degree assessment and complete survey capabilities. Assess also features a question bank option that allows one to input and save questions so they can be used as often as necessary. In addition, the company has premade tools one can purchase, such as a business skills assessment or a personal intelligence questionnaire.

Qualtrics (http://www.qualtrics.com)

Qualtrics has a feature called Enterprise Feedback Management that helps organizations share knowledge across departments. The tool helps different divisions within a company collect, manage, and integrate the information to best meet the needs of stakeholders. This unique feature is useful at the group and organizational level, but not at the individual level, which is where much of the work and family literature focuses. Even though this program may not be especially helpful to work and family researchers, the feature can be marketed to companies as a positive outcome of allowing the researcher to collect data. Organizations are almost always going to be more willing to open doors to research when they know there will be direct benefits to the company, and being able to help departments manage and share knowledge is a sizeable advantage.

StudyResponse (http://www.studyresponse.syr.edu)

StudyResponse, sponsored by the School of Information Studies at Syracuse University, is different from the online survey tools that many may be familiar with. The goal of the StudyResponse project is to connect social science researchers with willing online survey participants, and anyone who works for an accredited research institution can use it (Stanton & Weiss, 2002). The creators of StudyResponse explain that it “is likely to be useful for studies of phenomena that exhibit robust correlational relationships. [It] has also been used for qualitative data collections” (http://studyresponse.syr.edu/studyresponse/researcherFAQ.htm). One of the biggest advantages of using this tool, however, is that is has over 40,000 volunteer participants from around the world, so it is possible to create a customized sample with specific stratifications depending on what the researchers are trying to study. Anyone can go to the website and look at a demographic breakdown, including occupation, of the individuals currently participating. This could be very useful to work and family researchers who may struggle with getting a broad sample across certain demographics (e.g., gender). Another advantage is that researchers can collect their entire sample in a matter of a few days or weeks.
StudyResponse will send the survey link via email to the customized sample, providing absolute anonymity and confidentiality. The service does not provide any web design or survey hosting options, so regardless of whether one uses StudyResponse or not, researchers must still create their own web-based survey through another host (e.g., Qualtrics, Survey Gizmo). StudyResponse will also send reminder emails and provide the researcher with demographic information on the sample to allow for individual-level analysis, as well as group-level analysis, based on demographic differences or some other variable.

StudyResponse also provides several technical reports that outline how best to use the tool. These papers cite evidence regarding the quality of the data collected in order to help justify its use. The creators of StudyResponse, however, remind researchers that the likelihood of publishing any study relies on multiple variables (e.g., theory, methodological rigor) and not just the demographic breakdown. The website also has other features (e.g., a bibliography of published studies that have used StudyResponse) for researchers to make using this tool more efficient and effective. Researchers can also request that someone from the StudyResponse project conduct a seminar on their campus detailing how to make the most out of web-based surveys. StudyResponse does not guarantee a certain response rate, but it does provide tips on how to maximize response rate (e.g., shorter surveys, better incentives for participation).

While StudyResponse does not charge a monthly or yearly fee, each time researchers use the database to find participants, they must pay a licensing fee. The fee is used to pay incentives to participants and to cover administrative costs associated with maintaining the database. This fee depends on several factors: (1) the number of participants being paid; (2) the amount being paid (minimum $5); (3) how much the researcher wants to oversample (10%, 30%, or 50%), meaning sending out emails to more individuals than are actually needed in order to account for a less than 100% response rate; (4) whether or not the researcher creates his or her own sample or requests that the StudyResponse staff do it; (5) if the researcher wants to divide the sample into randomized subgroups in order to collect data under different conditions; and (6) if the researcher needs to collect data very quickly. If the latter case is true, the researcher can pay an extra fee to have his or her study receive priority service. StudyResponse usually processes studies on a first-come, first-serve basis, but this priority option can expedite the process.

**SurveyGizmo (http://www.surveygizmo.com)**

The basic features of an online survey that have been discussed previously also apply to SurveyGizmo. There are, however, several uncommon features. For example, survey piping allows the creator to copy entire pages of questions or even one question without having to enter the same question over and over again. The advantage of this application is that it can eliminate the redundancy and labor of manually reentering questions with comparable structures. Another unique option of SurveyGizmo is that the survey designer has complete control over the look and feel of the survey using HTML and CSS. While
many online survey tools allow researchers to customize their survey with different color and theme options, SurveyGizmo provides full access to survey design.

**SurveyMonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com)**

SurveyMonkey began in 1999 as a way for individuals to be able to collect survey information via the web quickly and easily. The company has excellent customer service and responds to questions quickly. They do not outsource their customer service to a third party, and their staff is knowledgeable and helpful. Several researchers have used this tool for their research (e.g., Lambert, Marler, & Gueutal, 2008) and have found it to be easy to use and simple to maintain. The survey software offers a variety of question formats that make customization uncomplicated. Similar to other survey tools, SurveyMonkey offers basic descriptive information but allows for data to be converted and saved to an Excel or SPSS file for more in-depth analysis.

**Zipsurvey (http://www.zipsurvey.com)**

ZipSurvey has two unique options that set it apart from other online survey programs. First, it is the only online survey tool examined here that has professional PhD-level consultants available to meet with customers one on one. Several of the subscriptions available for purchase include up to 16 hours of professional consultation. If this amount of time is not required, customers can pay by the hour. Like most of the programs discussed here, ZipSurvey has an online demonstration that guides individuals through the survey-building process. However, if customized training is needed, then they are willing to provide it; the options range from a 30-minute telephone session to a full-day on-site training.

Another distinctive feature of ZipSurvey is its WebSTATISTICA program. Created by StatSoft, WebSTATISTICA provides ZipSurvey customers with a web-based statistical package that can be accessed by any computer with Internet access. This makes collaboration between researchers in different geographic regions easier and more effective; instead of emailing a data file back and forth, researchers can simply log on to the secure website and access the data.

**Zoomerang (http://www.zoomerang.com)**

Zoomerang has features that allow its customers to set up MySpace and Facebook polls. While such polls would not represent the randomized samples that many researchers are looking for, they do have their uses. For example, if one were trying to create a new measure of employee benefits (specifically, trying to create an all-inclusive list of the benefits available to employees) then gathering information from
one or both of the most popular networking sites could help to create a representative list of the options organizations are offering.

Zoomerang also has a unique feature called Tag Clouds, which is designed specifically to assist in cataloging and categorizing responses to open-ended questions. The researcher identifies words or phrases and the associated Tag Clouds group open-ended responses into categories that allow for easier identification of emerging trends. This feature can be very useful for analyzing qualitative data. Zoomerang also offers online survey panels that connect researchers with an online sample of individuals who will complete the survey. It is similar to features contained in StudyResponse.

As can be seen from the above summary, even though the basic options are very similar across online survey programs, each one offers one or two unique features that may be of interest depending on the type of data being collected. Exploring each of these websites and other online survey options independently and investigating the features offered by each is the best way to ensure a good fit between the research being conducted and the survey program.

Implications for Practice and Research

Methodological Concerns

As with all methods of data collection, there are several concerns with online survey tools. Several are specifically related to the issue of self-report data in general. Any time one is collecting self-report data, concerns arise about the validity and reliability of the information collected (Bryman, 2001). Other concerns are related to sampling and demographic biases that may arise, and response rate issues.

Common-Method Bias. One of the most common concerns is that of single-source or mono-method bias. Single-source bias or common-method bias is one of the main sources of measurement error because it affects the validity of the conclusions one is able to make based on an analysis (Bagozzi & Yi, 1990). Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) discuss the issues surrounding common method bias, the types of bias, and how to control for them procedurally in the design of the study or statistically after the data have been collected. Online surveys make including some of the recommended procedural controls easier because the software includes features that, if selected, will control for or help to minimize the measurement error. A discussion of several of the procedural remedies specifically related to online surveys follows. For a complete discussion of all recommendations to minimize common-method bias, please refer to Podsakoff et al. (2003).

The first suggestion is to separate the criterion from the predictor temporally, proximally, psychologically, and methodologically. By doing this, response bias should be reduced because the “saliency of any
contextually provided retrieval cues” has been eliminated (Podsakoff et al., 2003, pp. 888). In other words, divide the survey into two pieces (the independent variables and the dependent variables) and administer them separately. This will help to minimize the effects of single-source bias because the potential for the respondents to use their past answers to influence their future responses has been reduced. This decreases the possibility that demand characteristics (i.e., that participants will attempt to discover the true nature or purpose of the research and that doing so will affect their responses (Orne, 1962)) and consistency motifs (that people want to seem reliable and logical in their responses (McGuire, 1966)) will affect the results.

In some respects, administering the independent and dependent variables separately is easier using online survey tools. In a typical paper-and-pencil survey, the researcher would have to make two separate surveys, copy them, and distribute them, possibly by mail. This takes considerable time, effort, and cost on the part of the researcher. With online surveys, there is no copying, no time spent stuffing envelopes, and no postal cost; the researcher simply creates two surveys (one with the independent variables and one with the dependent variables) and emails them to potential participants at the designated time interval. However, separating the online survey into two parts creates its own set of problems. The primary problem is that there needs to be a way for the researcher to connect the two parts of the survey from the same respondent. This can be accomplished by having participants create a unique code, either one of their own choosing or one that is assigned based on a series of questions placed at the beginning or end of the survey (e.g., asking for the first two initials of the participant’s mother’s maiden name, the first two letters of their first name, and the two digits representing the day of their birth). This will create an individual code that will allow researchers to connect the two pieces of the survey once data collection is complete.

Another method for controlling mono-method bias discussed by Podsakoff et al. (2003) that directly relates to online surveys is to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to the respondents in order to reduce evaluation apprehension. By assuring respondents that their answers will remain confidential and will be used only for research purposes, participants will have a greater propensity to answer honestly and will be less likely to respond in a socially desirable manner. The majority of the online survey tools allow the researcher to send an email to possible participants asking them to go to a secure website, operated by a third party (not their employer), to complete the survey.

Podsakoff et al. (2003) also recommend counterbalancing the order of the items in order to reduce priming effects. In many cases, complete randomization of surveys is impractical due to the nature of the questions being asked. For example, one must ask whether or not an individual uses a benefit before asking them if they are satisfied with it. Also, complete randomization means that many different versions of the survey must be created by the researcher. This would take exhaustive time and effort. However,
when it is possible to randomize the order in which participants receive the questions, it should be done. This will help to reduce any order effects that may occur. Many of the online survey tools will randomize the questions automatically if the researcher selects the appropriate option.

Demographic Biases. Another concern to be cognizant of in online survey research is demographic bias. Some demographic groups may be at a disadvantage when it comes to online surveys because of their limited access to the Internet. Samples collected through the Internet have reported a higher proportion of older, married males that have longer job tenures than samples collected through other means. The studies included here follow this trend except for the higher proportion of males. The majority of the research discussed here has a higher percentage of women than men. This is probably due to the fact that women are more likely to use programs designed to help them better balance work and family, as women are usually the primary caregivers in a family (Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness, 1999).

There are several ways researchers have attempted to correct for demographic biases. Drew & Murtagh (2005), in order to make sure that they had a demographically balanced sample, surveyed all of the women managers (N = 133) at the organization they were studying and randomly selected an equal number of male managers, while Michel and Clark (2009) as well as Judge, Ilies, and Scott (2006) used StudyResponse to ensure they were getting a representative sample.

Online surveys may also be better for collecting data about traditionally white-collar professions where the majority of workers have email accounts and computers with high-speed connections and are generally more technologically savvy. If one’s research focuses more on blue-collar workers, then attempting an online survey may not be the best option. Also, online surveys pose some problems if one wants to look at the general population instead of the population at a specific company. Obtaining a truly random sample of email addresses from the general public is very difficult. In this situation, the best option is probably a convenience sample or snowball sampling and several studies examined for this paper utilized this option (see Table 1). Using StudyResponse is also a good option.

Response Rates. Another disadvantage of online surveys is that, in some cases, it is hard to determine accurate response rates. One way this may occur is if the researcher does not actually send out the recruitment email. For example, if the email is coming from someone within the organization being studied, then it is possible that the researcher will have no information about how many people were originally contacted to participate. Also, if a snowball sample is used, then it may be difficult to determine how many people actually received the link to the survey. Therefore, in both cases it would be difficult to calculate a final response rate.

Another potential problem that could lower the response rate might be email address mortality. In other
words, if the recruitment email is being sent out to a distribution list, it may be hard to control or determine how many of those email addresses are still accurate, how many of the individuals actually check their account, or how many of the emails were considered to be spam because the computer did not recognize the sender address. All of these issues can possibly affect the number of individuals that actually received and read the email. Without knowing the response rate, it is hard to determine if the sample collected is valid and reliable (Baruch, 1999).

Kittleson (1995) suggests that response rates for web-based surveys will be between 25% and 30% if no reminder email is sent, but that responses will be almost double that if a follow-up email is sent. The author does note, however, that the relationship between response rates and follow-up emails is not linear. Individuals do reach a tolerance level and, in fact, too many follow-up emails may actually lower the response rates. Cook et al. (2000) suggest that using personalized correspondence may also help increase the response rate of web-based surveys. They also discuss that the results of their meta-analysis did not reveal any evidence to support the supposition that survey length affects response rates.

One last issue related to online survey response rates is the complete lack of control over who responds to the survey. Is it the person who was actually sent the survey the one who responds? Or is it someone else? However, this question applies to any survey collection in which the researcher does not see the participant respond firsthand. Related to this is the concern of over-repeated or malevolent responses. Tracking repeated responses can be difficult, but there are some techniques (discussed earlier) that can be employed to minimize this.

**Advantages of Online Surveys**

Much of the research conducted today in the work-family area is done using surveys in organizations. With the unstable economy experienced in 2009 and the rapid changes taking place in the business world, organizations need to maintain flexibility and efficiency in order to be able to adapt. Because of this, researchers have to become more creative in how they collect data because organizations will be less likely to allow data collection inside their company if they believe it may hurt employee productivity or efficiency. Online survey tools provide a way for important information to be collected more efficiently than using traditional pencil-and-paper surveys. Several of the reasons why online survey tools can be more efficient and effective are discussed below.

Ease of Use. While the task of creating an online survey may be daunting to some, many of the programs available provide tutorials that teach users how to use the software. SurveyMonkey, for example, provides video tutorials on how to set up and manage an account, design a survey, and send out emails to potential participants. Once the survey has been set up, inviting participants to complete it is as simple
as sending out an email invitation that includes a link to the survey. Many of the programs also have automatic follow-up features that remind researchers to send follow-up emails to potential participants at specified intervals. For example, the researcher can set up the program to send out an automatic follow-up at 1-week or 2-week intervals until the survey closes.

Cost. Internet surveys can be cheaper to administer than paper surveys, even though all of the software programs charge a fee (e.g., monthly, yearly), because there are no copying and/or postage fees involved (as there would be when mailing paper surveys to potential participants). Some of the software tools even offer a free option depending on how many questions are asked and/or how many people are being surveyed. For example, both SurveyMonkey and SurveyGizmo have a free option, although the capabilities provided under that option are extremely limited. The cost for service varies greatly depending on the survey tool chosen and the type of membership selected. For example, SurveyGizmo has several monthly fee options, all of which provide additional services. Many of the survey programs also have the option of a yearly membership, which tends to be a lower cost over a 12-month period than if paid on a monthly basis. However, much of the research conducted in the work-family field can be completed at the lower end of the price range. In some cases, colleges and universities may already have a membership to one of the survey tools; therefore, if researchers are affiliated with an academic institution, they may be able to conduct research at no personal cost. Also, some survey tools provide discounts to academic and nonprofit institutions (e.g., SurveyGizmo, SurveyGold, ZipSurvey), which can significantly reduce cost.

Going Green. Many organizations are moving toward initiatives that are considered environmentally friendly, and a report by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Initiatives suggests that these “going green” initiatives will continue to grow (Ramey, 2009). Online surveys definitely fit this “green” agenda and can be used as a selling point when trying to convince companies to allow the research to occur. With traditional paper surveys, a large amount of paper is used to make copies, and then more paper may be used in the form of envelopes and stamps needed to mail the surveys. Then, even more envelopes and stamps are used for the participants to mail the surveys back. This causes unnecessary waste and expense on the part of the researcher. In contrast, with online surveys, there is virtually no paper involved. The amount of storage space required is greatly reduced as well. Instead of storing hundreds, if not thousands of paper copies, online surveys require very little storage space. Also, sharing information with colleagues is much easier and requires only attaching the data to an email or, in some cases, sending them a login ID and password that allows online access to the project.

Interactive Materials. One of the primary advantages of using web-based surveys is that they are more interactive than paper-and-pencil surveys. The researcher can set up the survey to be tailored to each respondent. For example, skip logic, discussed earlier, allows the researcher to set hidden directions
within the survey so that respondents are asked only the questions that pertain to them. This makes the survey more efficient because individuals answer only questions that pertain to them and do not have to waste time answering “Does not apply.” The Internet also offers a wealth of interactive media options for survey delivery (e.g., video presentations, wikis), allowing researchers to make their surveys more engaging. In some cases, researchers can embed a video or podcast in the survey that can be used to demonstrate a new product or service the organization wants to offer. The participants can answer questions providing valuable feedback about their perceptions of the product or service.

Student Involvement

As many instructors in an academic setting will attest to, it is important to get students involved in research. In fact, many academic institutions provide funding for research involving students. Using online survey tools is a great way to get students involved in research in more ways than performing the typical routine work (i.e., data entry). Working with online survey tools can also increase students’ professional skills. They can learn how to use the survey tool and even create the survey online and set up the web link for potential participants. Once the data collection has begun, students can monitor the responses and report to faculty on the progress. In traditional paper survey collection, students tended to be the ones spending hours entering data into the computer; with online survey tools, the time spent entering data is virtually eliminated.

Conclusion

In the past 20 years, technology, particularly the Internet, has dramatically changed the way researchers contact survey participants and gather information. The use of online surveys is not new, but the broad range of options available to individuals can make the decision about which program to use a daunting task. The information provided here is designed to inform prospective users about some of the features and costs and advantages and disadvantages of various online survey tools. Aoki and Elasmar (2000) point out that web-based surveys still have limitations, but that they also have many advantages over traditional forms of data collection.

References


**Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies**

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. ([More about the Matrix...](#)).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

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<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
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<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
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<td>Community Antecedents</td>
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<td>Community Covariates</td>
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<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains*
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.
It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.

**Process**

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

   Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

   Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

   The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-
**Assumptions**

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:

1. **Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves.** Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word "family" to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. **It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, care giver care taker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal.** Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

**Outcomes**

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

**Limitations**

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.
Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:

1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

Work-Family Experiences: The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

Antecedents: Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
• Community Antecedents
• Societal Antecedents

Covariates: The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see Column C in Table 1).

• Individual Covariates
• Family Covariates
• Workplace Covariates
• Community Covariates
• Societal Covariates

Decisions and Responses: The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

• Individual Decision and Responses
• Family Decisions and Responses
• Workplace Decisions and Responses
• Community Decisions and Responses
• Public Sector Decisions and Responses

Outcomes & Impacts: The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

• Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
• Outcomes & Impacts on Families
• Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
• Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
• Outcomes & Impacts on Society

Theoretical Foundations: The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<td>Family Covariates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
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<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
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<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
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<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Domains F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Population Studied</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Demographic Breakdowna</td>
<td>Research Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen &amp; Armstrong 2006</td>
<td>Education, consumer goods, healthcare, manufacturing</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>Female 78%, Caucasian 93.4%, married 91.4%, at least one child 75.6%, average age 38.61 Female 78.4%, Caucasian 90.4%, married 84.4%, At least one child 100%, Average age 37</td>
<td>Further understand the link between work-family conflict and physical health. Examine the relationship between work-family conflict and the frequency of family dinners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen et al. 2008</td>
<td>Working parents</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>Female 78.4%, Caucasian 90.4%, married 84.4%, At least one child 100%, Average age 37</td>
<td>Examine the relationship between work-family conflict and the frequency of family dinners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allis &amp; O'Driscoll 2008</td>
<td>Government employees</td>
<td>938</td>
<td>Female 54%, at least one child 72%, average age 43</td>
<td>Understand if spillover from non-work to work affects well-being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong-Stassen 2008</td>
<td>Construction, education, finance, healthcare, manufacturing, high tech</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>Female 57.42%, married 68.60%, average age 58.5</td>
<td>To explore whether or not organizations provide HR programs/policies targeted at older workers. To determine if an individual’s family identity salience and gender moderate the affects of work-family conflict on job satisfaction and job distress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagger et al. 2008</td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>Female 32%, married 75%, at least one child 40.5%</td>
<td>To determine if an individual’s family identity salience and gender moderate the affects of work-family conflict on job satisfaction and job distress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyar et al. 2008</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>Female 66%, Caucasian 85%, married 78.5%, Average age 42.7</td>
<td>Explore how demands of work and demands of family affect work-family conflict. To examine if work-life balance explains additional variance in work-related and family-related outcomes above and beyond work-family conflict and work-family enrichment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlson et al. 2009</td>
<td>Professional, technical, service</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>Female 56%, Caucasian 86%, married 66%, at least one child 51%, average age 46,</td>
<td>To examine competing theories to explain why work-life policies affect organizational attachment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casper &amp; Harris 2008</td>
<td>Multiple industries</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>Female 61.6%, Caucasian 64.4%, married 51.6%, at least one child 17.9%</td>
<td>To examine competing theories to explain why work-life policies affect organizational attachment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Population studied</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Demographic Breakdown*</td>
<td>Research Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casper et al. 2007</td>
<td>University students</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>Female 64%, Caucasian 60%, married 0%, at least one child 0%, average age 25</td>
<td>To explore work-life issues of single employees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cragg et al. 2005</td>
<td>Undergraduate and graduate students</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>Female 100%, married 71%, at least one child 48%</td>
<td>Understand what types of support are most important for women in distance learning programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew &amp; Murtagh 2005</td>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Female 41.9%, married 75.8%, at least one child 67%, average age 44.5</td>
<td>Explore the managers’ experiences with and attitudes toward work-life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haar &amp; Bardoel 2008</td>
<td>Public and private sector</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>Female 66%, married 78.5%, at least one child 66%, average age 44.5</td>
<td>Explore the employee outcomes associated with positive spillover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill et al. 2003</td>
<td>High tech</td>
<td>6,133</td>
<td>Female 54.4%</td>
<td>Understand how perceived flexibility of work time and location affect work-life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill et al. 2001</td>
<td>High tech</td>
<td>6,451</td>
<td>Female 32%, married 78%, at least one child 59%</td>
<td>Understand how perceived flexibility of work time and location affect work-life balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambert et al. 2008</td>
<td>Healthcare industry</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>Female 75.6%, Caucasian 88.9%, married 70.1%</td>
<td>To determine why people use flexible work arrangements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litzky &amp; Greenhaus 2007</td>
<td>Finance, manufacturing, pharmaceutical</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>Female 44%, Caucasian 86%, married 75%, at least one child 53%, average age 38</td>
<td>Examine gender differences in aspirations to achieve senior management positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore 2006</td>
<td>School-age children and adults in multiple industries</td>
<td>Over 3,000</td>
<td>Not provided for both populations</td>
<td>Assess gender stereotypes of girls and the pressures they feel. Explore psychological processes that mediate the relationship between managerial behaviors on job-related attitudes and strain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooney et al. 2009</td>
<td>Human services</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>Female 82%</td>
<td>Explore the relationship between insomnia, emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott &amp; Judge 2006</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female 70%, average age 34.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and job satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Population studied</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Demographic Breakdown*</th>
<th>Research Purpose</th>
<th>Data Collection Methods</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shockley &amp; Allen 2007</td>
<td>Multiple industries</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>Female 100%, Caucasian 91.3%, at least one child 100%, average age 36.6</td>
<td>To examine different types of flex work in relation to work-family conflict.</td>
<td>Online survey only</td>
<td>Part of larger study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shockley &amp; Allen in press</td>
<td>University faculty</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>Female 57%, married 81%, at least one child 79%</td>
<td>To examine the relationship between individual differences and FWA use. Further explore the extent of couple agreement on ratings of work-family conflict and the outcomes associated with agreement.</td>
<td>Online survey only</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streich et al. 2008</td>
<td>Multiple industries</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>Female 50%, Caucasian 78%, married 100%, average age 36</td>
<td>Examine how layoff survivors' increased workload affect work-life balance and job and life satisfaction.</td>
<td>Online survey only</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virick et al. 2007</td>
<td>High tech</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>Female 32.9%, Caucasian 87.6%, married 65.8%, average age 40.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Online survey only</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Married includes individuals who were married, in a domestic partnership, or in a long-term relationship.

* This number is estimated because the survey was distributed to over 3,000, but the researchers did not know how many of those people actually had email access.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Assess</th>
<th>Survey Gold</th>
<th>Survey Gizmo</th>
<th>Survey Monkey</th>
<th>Qualtrics</th>
<th>Zip Survey</th>
<th>Zoomerang</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nonprofit discount</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Multiple languages</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple question types</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports qualitative data through open-ended questions</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Skip logic</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Randomize question order</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Survey templates</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>Survey distribution</td>
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<td>Weblink, send email, social network sites</td>
<td>Weblink, email, pop-ups</td>
<td>Weblink, email</td>
<td>Weblink</td>
<td>Weblink, social network sites, online survey panel</td>
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<td>Statistics capabilities</td>
<td>Graphs, descriptives</td>
<td>Graphs, cross-tabs, descriptives, weighting</td>
<td>Graphs, crosstabs, descriptives</td>
<td>Graphs, crosstabs</td>
<td>Graphs, cross-tabs, descriptive, combine data from multiple surveys</td>
<td>Graphs, crosstabs, descriptive, WebSTATISTICA</td>
<td>Graphs, descriptives, confidence intervals</td>
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<td>Download to spreadsheet</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*StudyResponse is not included because it is used only to connect researchers with online survey respondents.