This brief shows the results of a systematic review of scientific literature published from 2003 to 2022 to understand when, where and how telephone surveys are conducted during infectious disease outbreaks.

**Introduction**

Telephone is very accessible, even in low-income countries.

Telephone surveys can reach people who are excluded from internet questionnaires.

Telephone surveys tend to have higher response rates than online surveys.

**Key findings**

- The countries where this method was often used are China (33%), United States (11%), France (6%), Italy (6%), Malaysia (6%) and Senegal (6%);

- In low- and middle-income countries, the use of telephone for data collection increased, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic;

- The target population is becoming more diverse.

**Approach**

A systematic review of the scientific literature was conducted (see here).

We found relevant articles in the databases and selected a total of 70 studies using this data collection method.

These studies were written in English and published between 2003 and 2022. The data used in these studies were collected during infectious disease outbreaks.
**Major challenges of telephone surveys**

Sampling can be complicated in certain countries where people share phone numbers. It is also possible that one person has several numbers.

In most studies, only 1 or 2 languages were spoken by interviewers.

For qualitative studies, telephone interviews tend to be long.

The most disadvantaged without access to telephone are excluded.

It is hard to characterize non-respondents.

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**Change in use of telephone surveys in high and low income countries* before and during COVID-19**

Before the COVID-19 crisis, telephone surveys are often performed in high-income countries.

During the pandemic, this method is a lot used in low-income countries.

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**Change in target population**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers use telephone surveys to gather data from more diverse groups of people.

This corresponds to the increased interest in health care systems and professionals during the pandemic.

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*High income countries include upper-middle income countries and high income countries; low income countries include lower-middle income countries and low income countries. See [here](#).
Conclusion

Telephone surveys are a useful tool to reach people who cannot be reached by online surveys.

The use of this data collection method has increased significantly, especially in low-income countries, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the target population for surveys is more diverse.

Recommendations for public health researchers

In addition to online surveys, consider using telephone surveys especially if the research concerns people and places whose technical and financial resources are limited.

Accommodate the local needs, such as multilingualism and (digital) literacy. Pay attention to specific contexts. While some people might share one phone or number, one person might have several phone numbers.

Include people who know the local context in the research team. Equip them with interview skills which will help them build rapport and trust with the informants.

The questionnaire of the telephone surveys should be kept short to avoid fatigue of interviewers and respondents.

References

The protocol of this study:

2 examples using this method:

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