

Data Collection in a time of multiple crises: The social research response to COVID-19, bushfires, and drought



Overview

This online conference on Thursday the 21st of May, jointly convened by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods in the Research School of Social Sciences, and the Social Research Centre (an ANU-company), will bring together Australia's and the world's leading survey researchers, analysts and qualitative methodologists to discuss the potential ways forward for data collection during this most challenging time. The conference will focus on solutions and opportunities, building on practices already in place, and point the way forward to new and innovative practices.

Conference details

The conference will take place online on Thursday the 21st of May

Sessions will run from 9am to 5:30pm Australian Eastern Standard Time

Participation will be through a mix of keynote presentations, pre-recorded video presentations from experts in the field, and real-time Q-and-A sessions

Cost of participation is AUD\$10 per session, or AUD\$20 for all four sessions and an optional lunch-time training-workshop on online data collection. Registration will provide access to the event, the opportunity to ask questions of presenters, and an exclusive electronic conference pack.

Registration: <https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/data-collection-in-a-time-of-multiple-crises-tickets-103765242634>

Background and aims

The world, and Australia in particular, has experienced unprecedented health, economic, and environmental shocks. To varying degrees, almost every country is attempting to manage the Coronavirus pandemic, balancing the clear public health need to save lives and stop the spread of the virus, with the economic and social dislocation caused by physical distancing and isolation measures. On top of this, Australia experienced its most destructive summer ever of bushfires, caused by and adding to the costs of a multi-year drought spread across most of the country.

These crises have and will have untold effects on the lives of everyone in Australia and globally. Initial data from data collection carried out by the Social Research Centre for the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods the findings suggest large declines in employment and income, significant increases in social isolation and psychological distress, important changes in household structure, and significant uncertainty about the future. At the same time, we observe improvements in confidence in government and the public service, large increases in social trust, and significant observance of social distancing measures.

The ongoing documentation of these effects and demonstrating their causes is now and will be for some time the primary focus of social, policy and economic research in Australia and throughout the world. There has never been a greater need to collect high-quality social, economic and health data.

The capacity to collect data during this time though, is diminished by the very conditions that make the data so important. Face-to-face interviews create a real risk for the spread of COVID-19 and contradict the social distancing measures introduced by governments the world over. Government and research budgets are stretched as tax revenue dries up and expenditure is reallocated to health interventions, domestic violence support services, bushfire reconstruction, and the broader economic recovery. Furthermore, data collection companies and academic researchers are having to practice their own social distancing, making it challenging to collaborate using business and usual processes.

This raises the existential question of how the survey and qualitative research communities respond to these challenges in an era when face-to-face modes of data collection (for many years considered the gold standard) are no longer possible, and with traditional survey methods already under pressure due to declining response rates and increasing costs that preceded the multiple crises.

Speakers

- Professor Frauke Kreuter, University of Maryland and University of Mannheim
- Professor Michael Hiscox, Harvard University and Stanford University
- Professor Annette Jäckle, University of Essex
- Dr Gero Carletto, World Bank
- Matthew James, Deputy CEO, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Professor Matthew Gray, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods
- Diane Herz, CEO, Social Research Centre
- Professor Nicholas Biddle, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods
- Associate Professor Ben Edwards, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods