



What kind of question is good for evaluating awareness?

When initiating a program related to a new issue or problem in a county, extension educators often begin a program with what they call the awareness stage. In this stage of the program, extension educators use newsletters, newspaper, and the media to broadcast the causes and impact of the problem to the public or the target audience. The basis for an awareness stage of a program is the adoption—diffusion theory (Rogers, E.M., 1995; Seevers et al., 1997).

To evaluate how successful you have been as an extension educator in developing awareness of a problem or issue in a county, use a comparative question. Even though a comparative question is one of the most interesting questions to answer because of the range of stimuli brought into the question, it is also one of the most under used type of question.

TO CONSTRUCT A COMPARATIVE QUESTION:

1. Specify the problem or issue you will target, such as:
 - access to tobacco products by teens
2. Specify other problems people already know about in the county, such as:
 - automobile accidents at the intersection of X and Y roads
 - Johne's disease among cows
 - water pollution of Middle Creek from the pesticide atrazine

You could also use problems facing a particular target audience. For parents for example, use other problems with teens.

3. Insert the problem you are targeting in the question and the other problems below, using the same answer categories. For example:

Compared to the access that teens have to tobacco products in this county, how serious a problem is:

water pollution in Middle Creek from the pesticide atrazine?

- 1 MORE SERIOUS
- 2 JUST AS SERIOUS
- 3 LESS SERIOUS

automobile accidents at the intersection of X and Y roads?

- 1 MORE SERIOUS
- 2 JUST AS SERIOUS
- 3 LESS SERIOUS

Johne's disease in cows?

- 1 MORE SERIOUS
- 2 JUST AS SERIOUS
- 3 LESS SERIOUS



Use a comparative question before and after the awareness stage of the program. You can use it in an interview, telephone or newsletter survey, or focus group. In a focus group, you do not provide answer categories.

Before the awareness stage of the program, you are likely to see a large percentage of persons who find the other problems “**MORE SERIOUS**” than the new problem you are publicizing. Over time, if your awareness stage of the program is working, you should see an increase in the percentage of persons who choose “**JUST AS SERIOUS**” or “**MORE SERIOUS**” on the new problem, and perhaps a decrease in the percentage that choose “**MORE SERIOUS**” on the other problems.

Every question you construct has its limitations. Bias could surface if some major change occurs in the county relative to the other problems during the awareness stage of your program. However, to offset this bias, an array of problems is included in the comparative question.

For further reading, see:

Rogers, E.M., *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed., New York: The Free Press.

Seevers, B., Graham, D., Gamon, J. & Conklin, N. (1997). *Education through cooperative extension*. New York: Delmar Publishers.

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