

October 28, 1987

Dr. Seymour Sudman
Chairman, AAPOR Standards Committee
Survey Research Laboratory
1005 W. Nevada Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Dear Dr. Sudman:

The American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) recently conducted and publicly released a survey of airline passengers' opinions on in-flight smoking (press release and clippings attached). We believe that this survey fails to meet AAPOR's "standards for minimal disclosure." We strongly urge you to review the methodology of this survey and the circumstances of its public release for violations of your code of professional ethics and practices.

The AARC press release specifies the sample size and type of interviewing used, but omits the following components necessary for minimum disclosure:

- Question prefaces, wording and sequencing -- Section III, article 2.
- Sample selection procedure -- Section III, article 4.
- Interviewer method, location and dates of data collection -- Section III, article 8.

Pursuant to Section II, article A under your code of professional ethics and practices, it is appropriate for the AARC either to release the data required for standard minimal disclosure, or to release a statement to the public media, legislative body, regulatory agency and other appropriate groups concerning the questionable aspects of the survey's methodology.

TIOK 0017598

Dr. Seymour Sudman
October 28, 1987
Page Two

Polling procedures such as those used by AARC must not go uncensured by the survey research community. Adherence to the AAPOR code of ethical conduct is vital to ensure the validity of public opinion polling and to maintain public confidence in the polling field. It is an unfortunate fact that when professional codes of conduct are disregarded by a few, all those in the public opinion research community suffer.

In addition, this issue must be viewed in a larger context -- that of the use of research results as a basis for public policy decisions. The results of the AARC survey were included in the public hearing record of the House Subcommittee on Aviation in its deliberations on legislation to ban smoking on airlines. I am sure you will agree that questionable or invalid polling results should not be used to formulate public policy.

It behooves the AAPOR, as the organization representing those who believe in accurate, scientific poll measurement, to take a stand on this issue. Action by the AAPOR -- such as a letter to the AARC delineating disclosure standards -- could help to prevent other organizations from disseminating poll results which do not meet ethical standards. A similar statement, submitted to the congressional hearing record, would be an excellent counterbalance to the AARC's submission of its "polling results."

I would appreciate hearing from you regarding the prospect of a statement by AAPOR on this issue. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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