

Research Methods knowledge Organiser

Postal / Email Questionnaires:

- ✓ Quick
- ✓ Easy to send to lots of people (representative & reliable).
- x Response rate is about 10%
- x Might not understand the questions (less valid).

Structured/ Semi-structured Interviews:

- ✓ All participants are asked the same questions (reliable)
- ✓ Can explain what questions mean (valid);
- ✓ Ability to explain answers further in a semi-structured interview (valid).
- x Interviewer bias

Informal (Unstructured) Interviews:

- ✓ Participants can talk about what is important to them (valid)
- ✓ The researcher can ask the participant what their answers mean (valid).
- x Every interview is different, hard to compare the results of all the interviews (less reliable)

Group interviews

- ✓ Access a wide range of views and experiences
- ✓ Participants may feel more at ease.
- ✓ Save time and money
- x Some may dominate discussion/everyone might not be heard
- x Cannot assure confidentiality

Participant observation

- ✓ Watch how participants behave (valid)
- ✓ Can see the world from participants' point of view (valid).
- x If participants know they are being observed, then they will not act naturally
- x The researcher might have to get involved in criminal behaviour (unethical)
- x If participants do not know they are being observed, then they can not give their permission (consent – unethical).

Official Statistics

- ✓ The data is usually based on the whole population (representative).
- ✓ May be the only source of data
- ✓ Can investigate trends over time
- x Cannot check the validity
- x Could be politically biased

Qualitative Data: data presented in words or visual form e.g. diary, photographs, mass media



Quantitative Data: data presented in numerical form presented in graphs, pie charts or tables of statistics e.g. official statistics



- ✓ Reliable
- ✓ Relevant
- ✓ Scientific
- ✓ Preferred by Positivists
- x Costly
- x Time consuming
- x Sampling needs to be generalisable

- ✓ Large Scale
- ✓ Cheap
- ✓ Quick
- ✓ Only way to study historical issues
- ✓ Preferred by Interpretivists
- x Reliability could be questioned
- x Interpretation issues

Primary Research
(data collected first hand.)



Secondary Research
(data from previously published sources.)

- Interviews
- Surveys
- Experiments
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Case Studies
- Observations

- Census
- Website
- Journals
- Media
- Books
- Official statistics
- Primary data
- ANYTHING

Validity: Data is valid if it gives a true picture of social reality

Reliability: Data is seen as reliable if other researchers using the same methods get the same results.

Representativeness: Sociologists want the sample they are studying to represent a large group of people

Generalisation: Assuming the results are valid, reliable and representative you should be able to generalise your findings



Ethics: Research must be carried out in a morally acceptable way

Closed (or fixed-choice) questions

- ✓ Easy to process and present
- x Doesn't allow for the respondent to expand on their answer

Open-ended questions

- ✓ Able to give a more detailed answer
- x Difficult to convert into statistics
- x More time consuming to process



A representative sample: typical of the wider population

An unrepresentative sample: difficult to generalise. Some Groups are overrepresented

Sampling Methods

Probability (or random) sampling

Non-probability sampling

Simple random sampling	Systematic random sampling	Stratified random sampling	Snowball sampling	Quota sampling	Purposive sampling
Use a computer to generate a random sample, everyone has as much chance as the other.	The researcher uses a system to pick the participants (eg. every 10th name on the register).	This involves picking people from different groups within the population	The researcher selects one person, then asks them to put them in touch with other people, etc.	Each interviewer has an exact number of people from categories that they need e.g. females, teenagers.	The sample is collected according to a known characteristic e.g. a teacher.