



Research Methods knowledge organiser



Positivist Methods

Laboratory experiments

P ✓ Attractive to funding bodies due to their scientific nature & researchers can easily conduct the experiment as respondents come to them, so they don't have to travel

P X Often small scale, time consuming & cannot be used to study the past

E ✓ If informed consent is given, no deception is involved

E X Many experiments often conceal the real aims of the research, therefore informed consent is not always given.

T ✓ Highly reliable as variables are easily controlled, produces quantitative data & is a very detached & objective method

T X Lacks validity due to 'Hawthorne Effect' & due to them being small scale they are often not representative

Examples include: *Zimbardo's Prison Experiment & Milgram's study of Obedience*



Questionnaires

P ✓ Quick & cheap to carry out, can be sent to respondents in a variety of ways e.g. post, email phone call. They also gather large quantities of data at once which is easy to interpret.

P X May have a low response rate, people may not be honest when completing them & questions can be inflexible

E ✓ Informed consent given & no one is put at risk (researcher/respondent)

E X May ask sensitive/intrusive questions

T ✓ Highly reliable & representative

T X Not very high in validity & representativeness may be undermined by low response rates

Examples include: *the Census & surveys*



Closed questions =
'Yes or 'No'

Open questions =
participants can speak freely

Structured Interviews

P ✓ Relatively quick as questions are fixed, quick & cheap to administer, results are easily quantified

P X Employing & training interviewers is costly & inflexible as it makes it impossible for the interviewer to ask further questions

E ✓ Informed consent given & no one is put at risk (researcher/respondent)

E X Sensitive questions may be asked which can cause 'psychological harm'

T ✓ Highly reliable due to fixed questions & larger scale than unstructured therefore, more representative

T X Lacking validity due to fixed questions **Examples include: Police & Job Interviews**



Official Statistics

P ✓ Free source, statistics allow comparisons between groups & show patterns over time

P X data may not be available on the topics wished to be studied

E ✓ Public documents means consent is already given for the data to be looked at

E X the collection of statistics may have harmful effects e.g. crime

T ✓ very representative

T X Validity is questionable—'soft' statistics are less valid

Examples include: *Official Crime statistics for England & Wales*



Quantitative Data

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

P= Practical

- Cost
- Time
- Access
- Funding
- Opportunity

E= Ethical

- Informed Consent
- Vulnerable Groups
- Effect on Researcher
- Effect on the Participants
- Confidentiality

T= Theoretical

- Validity
- Reliability
- Representativeness
- Objectivity

Qualitative Data

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

Primary Data

Data that has been generated by the researcher

Secondary Data

information that already exists, collected by other people or organisations for a different purpose

Interpretivist Methods

Field experiments

P ✓ Larger scale research than lab experiments

P X Less control over variables & lack of research opportunity

E ✓ Possibly less hierarchical than lab experiments

E X Deception & lack of informed consent.

T ✓ Less artificial & high in validity

T X Lower reliability in comparison to lab experiments

Examples include: *Rosenthal and Jacobson - Pygmalion in the Classroom*



Overt: Where those being observed are aware of the fact

Covert: Where those being observed are unaware of the fact e.g. undercover police officer

Observations

P ✓ Relatively cheap to carry out

P X Time consuming

E ✓ Allows the researcher to be sympathetic towards certain issues or topics

E X People are under the false impression that the researcher is a part of their group (participant obs)

T ✓ Highly valid

T X Lacks reliability & risks of researcher 'going native'

Examples include: *Chelsea Head hunters—gang leader for a day*



Participant: The researcher may participate in the activity being observed

Non-participant: Where the researcher simply observes

Unstructured Interviews

P ✓ Easy to carry out as it is just like a conversation & cheap

P X Time consuming

E ✓ Good for sensitive topics & less hierarchical than structured interviews

E X In depth answers makes there more potential to harm respondent if confidentiality is harmed

T ✓ Highly valid as interviewer builds a rapport with interviewee & researcher can adapt questions based on the responses they're getting

T X Typically low in reliability & not very representative

Examples include: *Dobash & Dobash - Violence Against Wives*



Documents

P ✓ Free/cheap source of large amounts of data & saves time for sociologists

P X May be hard to access, extraction of data may be time consuming & may not answer the sociologists' questions

E ✓ Public documents means consent is already given

E X issues regarding consent for personal documents

T ✓ High in validity as it provides qualitative data that gives us an insight into the author's meanings/view.

T X Can be difficult to draw generalisations from & are often unrepresentative

Examples include: *Anne Frank's Diary*

