

# A Level Sociology Knowledge Organiser

## Research methods

### Types of data

#### Primary data

Data collected first hand by the researcher (original data)

- ✓ Aware of issues with data
- ✓ Can target research question directly
- ✗ Time/cost may limit scale or sample (not representative)
- ✗ Ethical issues

#### Secondary data

Data which already exists and is used by the sociologist

- ✓ Saving time/cost could increase sample size
- ✓ Lack of ethical issues
- ✗ Data may not target researcher's question
- ✗ May be biased or invalid

#### Quantitative data

Data which is numerical and can be presented in graphs/tables

- ✓ Easy to compare between participants and analyse
- ✓ Sample size likely to be larger
- ✗ May lack meaning/depth/
- ✗ May not reveal unexpected information / insight

#### Qualitative data

Data which is non-numerical and is verbal or visual

- ✓ Easier to gain meaning / depth
- ✓ Can reveal unexpected information / insight
- ✗ Usually a smaller sample
- ✗ Difficult to compare responses between participants

### Experiments

#### Laboratory experiments

Artificial setting, high control over variables e.g. Milgram

- ✓ Can establish cause and effect
- ✓ Replicable to can test for reliability
- ✗ Hawthorne effect – may change behaviour
- ✗ May not apply to real life

#### Field experiments

Real life setting, IV is manipulated but variables not controlled e.g. Rosenthal and Jacobsen

- ✓ Likely to reflect real life behaviour
- ✓ Hawthorne effect less likely
- ✗ Difficult to establish cause and effect
- ✗ Difficult to replicate

### Sampling methods

#### Random

Equal chance of being selected e.g. names out of a hat

- ✓ Reduces researcher bias
- ✗ May not be fully representative

#### Opportunity

Selecting people available at time e.g. who is present in the shopping mall

- ✓ Easy to conduct
- ✗ Researcher bias
- ✗ May not be representative (too similar)

#### Volunteer

Participants self-select to take part e.g. respond to an advert

- ✓ Easy to conduct
- ✗ May not be representative – only a certain type of person

#### Stratified

Selecting participants from sub groups proportionate to the population

- ✓ Likely to be the most representative
- ✗ Time consuming
- ✗ Need a sampling frame

### Questionnaires

A type of social survey, respondents report their own thoughts/feelings/behaviours e.g. the population census

- ✓ Easy to distribute and complete – larger and more representative sample size
- ✓ Easy to compare responses between participants (quantitative data)
- ✓ Participants likely to be more honest as completing anonymously
- ✗ Social desirability bias – participants may not complete truthfully
- ✗ Participants may not understand questions – cannot clarify meaning
- ✗ Low response rate / biased sample
- ✗ Difficult to gain meaning/insight

### Interviews

#### Structured interview

Formal interview, set questions, researcher does not deviate

- ✓ Easy to compare responses between participants as all asked same question
- ✓ Less chance of interviewer bias as questions are pre-planned
- ✓ Easy to replicate to test for reliability
- ✗ Interviewer cannot deviate – may not find meaning/insight
- ✗ May not be suitable for some groups due to formality

#### Unstructured interview

Informal interview, no set questions, questions develop through interview

- ✓ Can find meaning/insight as interviewer can deviate
- ✓ May be suitable for some groups as can build rapport (leading to more honesty)
- ✗ Difficult to compare responses between participants (different questions)
- ✗ Chance of interviewer bias as questions are not pre-planned
- ✗ Difficult to replicate and test for reliability

### Observations

#### Overt

Participants are aware they are being observed

- ✓ More ethical – consent
- ✓ More practical and less dangerous
- ✓ Can probe for extra information
- ✗ Observer effect – participants may change behaviour

#### Covert

Participants not aware of observation

- ✓ Less chance of observer effect – true behaviour
- ✗ Unethical – lack of consent
- ✗ Less practical

#### Participant

The researcher is a participant in the group being observed

- ✓ Gain insight first hand into behaviour
- ✓ Can gain access to vulnerable groups
- ✗ Can be dangerous / impractical
- ✗ Possible bias/observer effect

#### Non-participant

The researcher is not a participant, watches from a distance

- ✓ Less chance of bias / affecting behaviour
- ✓ More practical
- ✗ May not gain insight / understanding

### Secondary sources

#### Official statistics

Statistics collected by the government, hard (birth rates), soft (levels of poverty)

- ✓ Usually collected on a large geographical scale – representative
- ✓ Collected at regular time intervals – track changes over time
- ✓ Easy to access – saves time/money
- ✗ May not gain meaning or insight
- ✗ May not be accurate e.g. dark figure of crime
- ✗ May not be available for all topics

#### Documents (qualitative)

- |                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Personal (e.g. diary) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Valid – can find meaning/insight</li> <li>✗ Difficult to gain access – need consent</li> <li>✗ Unlikely to be representative</li> </ul> |
| Public (prospectus)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Easy to access – ethical</li> <li>✗ May be biased</li> </ul>  |
| Historical            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ May be only source of information</li> <li>✗ May be biased/ untrustworthy</li> <li>✗ Difficult to access</li> </ul>                     |