



# **Key terms**

Case study	A case study is where sociologists investigate in great detail a particular individual or group,
	as opposed to trying to gather a representative sample from the target population.
	Normally a case study will feature <i>methodological pluralism</i> (using a range of research
	methods to achieve <i>triangulation</i> ) and they are often <i>longitudinal studies</i> (the researcher
	regularly revisiting the case over a long period of time).
Census	The census is an official survey, conducted every 10 years, which is supposed to cover every
	household in the UK. Although the individual detail is kept confidential for a number of
	years, the data provides very useful statistics on a wide range of issues.
Closed questions	Closed questions are those with a limited number of possible responses, often "yes" or
	"no". Closed questions help to make data easier to analyse and to make it more reliable
Covert observation	Covert observation is where the researcher is "undercover"; the participants are unaware
	that they are being observed. Most famous examples of covert observation are also
	examples of participant observation, however, it would be possible to conduct a non-
	participant covert observation with CCTV, for example.
Ethical issues	Whether the research method required any deception and that participants had given their
	full informed consent to their contribution. It includes the issue of whether the research
	could cause any discomfort or harm, or indeed whether it includes any illegal activity
Ethnography	Ethnography is the study of a culture, a group or human behaviour. Although not
	synonymous with one single research method, it does feature the empirical recording of
	people's every-day behaviour and is therefore most associated with observations, and
	particularly participant observation, as ethnographic researchers want to achieve verstehen,
	to really understand how their subjects view and understand their behaviour and
	interactions
Gatekeeper	Anyone that could facilitate or block the researcher from carrying out their research.
Generalisable	Whether research conclusions are only applicable to the specific groups that have been
	studied, or whether they can be generalisable to the wider public.
Group interview	An interview with a group of people rather than a single interviewee.
Hawthorne effect	The alteration of behaviour by the subjects of a study due to their awareness of being
	observed.
Hypothesis	A hypothesis is a statement that is then tested through research. A hypothesis usually
	consists of what the researcher thinks to be the case, and the purpose of the research is to
	discover whether she/he was correct.
Informed consent	A major ethical consideration in research is whether the participants in the research have
	given their consent to be involved. It is also important that the participants understand
	what it is they have consented to be part of: it is checking this full understanding which
	makes it informed consent. This can normally be achieved by fully briefing research subjects
	before commencing the research, and informing them that they have the right to withdraw
	from the research at any time.
Interpretivism	Interpretivists argue that the study of human society must go beyond empirical and
	supposedly objective evidence to include subjective views, opinions, emotions, values: the
	things that can't be directly observed and counted.
Interviewer effect	The effect that the interviewer has on the interviewees answers e.g. the interviewee might
	give the responses they think are desired, rather than share their honest opinions or
	experiences.
Longitudinal	Longitudinal research refers to research that is done over a long period of time. For
research	example, interviewing participants at regular interviews through their childhood, in order to
	see development.
Methodological	Methodological pluralism refers to researchers using a range of methods in the same piece
pluralism	of research. This allows for <i>triangulation</i> where qualitative and quantitative data can be
	produced in order to maximise validity and reliability. This is often done in case studies.
	Examples include Paul Willis' "Learning to Labour"

Non -paricipant observation	A non-participant observation is one where the researcher chooses not to play any part in
	what is being observed.
Official statistics	Official statistics are a major source of <i>secondary data</i> . The term refers to any set of data
	collected by the government or other official body, for example official crime statistics,
Onen muestiene	unemployment figures, demographic statistics collected from the <i>census</i> , etc.
Open questions	Open questions do not limit the possible answers that the responder can give, producing qualitative data, which is generally considered to be higher in validity.
Operationalise	Operationalization defines a fuzzy concept so as to make it clearly distinguishable,
	measurable, and understandable by empirical observation.
Opportunity	Opportunity sampling is where a researcher selects participants based on their availability.
sampling	One example would be standing on the street asking passers by to join the research.
Overt observation	Overt observation is where those being observed are aware of the fact. The researcher may
	still participate in the activity being observed (overt participant observation) or might play
	no part and simply observe (overt non-participant observation).
Participant	Where the researcher does not just observe, but interacts with the subjects and plays a part
observation	in their everyday life (therefore making this ethnography).
Personal	A useful source for some sociological inquiry is personal documents such as letters and
documents	diaries. Interpretivists particularly like these as they give an insight into what individuals
	were thinking (verstehen).
Pilot study	A pilot study is effectively a trial run of a research method, usually with a very small sample,
	in order to ensure that the method will work as intended.
Practical Issues	Practical issues relate to time, money and logistics. Sometimes the best method for
	researching a particular topic, theoretically, has to be rejected because it would cost a great
	deal of money to conduct, it would be very difficult to carry out, or because it would take a
	very long time to get results
Primary data	Primary data, in sociology, refers to data that has been generated by the researcher
	themselves. For example, they may have conducted a <i>questionnaire</i> or a series of
	interviews, or they might have carried out an observation or experiment.
Positivism	Positivist sociologists believe that it is possible to establish objective facts through scientific
	research methods and the thorough collection and analysis of empirical evidence.
	Interpretivists and post-modernists believe that this misunderstands the nature of society
Durage compline	and human behaviour.
Purpose sampling	Some research requires a sample that is not broadly representative of society but instead meets the purpose of the sample. For example, if you were researching domestic violence, a
	representative sample of broader society is likely to include many people who can tell you
	very little about the topic you are researching
Quantitative data	Quantitative data is numerical and is therefore useful for mathematical/statistical analysis
Quantitutive data	and to be presented graphically. This is in contrast with <i>qualitative</i> data which is non-
	numerical and normally exists in the form of text.
Questionnaire	A questionnaire, or social survey, is a popular research method that consists of a list of
<b>4</b>	questions.
Reliability	Refers to the extent to which, were the same study to be repeated, it would produce the
•	same results. For this to be the case, samples need to be representative, questions or
	processes need to be uniform and data would generally need to be quantitative
Response rate	The response rate is normally applied to <i>questionnaires</i> or <i>surveys</i> and is the percentage of
	people in the sample who actually respond.
Representative	Representativeness simply means the extent to which a sample mirrors a researcher's
	target population and reflects its characteristics.
Rapport	Rapport refers to the ease of a relationship between people and, in the case of sociological
	research, between a researcher and their subjects.
Random sampling	Is when a researcher randomly selects participants for research from a list, out of a hat or
	randomly-generated choice by computer. Each member of the target population has an
	equal chance of being in the sample

Sample	A sample is a smaller group of people who will be studied, taken from a broader target
	population. This is because it would usually be impossible to get data about the wider
	group.
Sampling frame	A sampling frame is a list of everyone in the target population from which a sample is
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	drawn. Examples of this would be the electoral roll or a telephone directory.
Secondary data	Secondary data refers to data that is already available to the sociologist as opposed to
Secondary data	primary data which they produce themselves.
Semi-structured	A semi-structured interview is one where the interviewer does have a list of questions they
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interviews	intend to ask, but they are happy to ask supplementary questions if required or to leave out
0 1 11 11	questions if deemed necessary.
Snowball sampling	A snowball sample works a little like a chain letter. For example, if you were distributing a
	questionnaire, you could pass it to your own contacts who could then pass it on to theirs
	and so on (the sample "snowballing" as a result).
Stratified sampling	the sampling frame is divided up into various social groups (e.g. by age, social class, gender,
	ethnicity, etc.) and then random sampling is used for each group to ensure the final sample
	reflects the population in terms of the representation of said groups
Structured	A structured interview is one where the interviewer sticks rigidly to a pre-written set of
interview	questions. It is effectively an individually-administered questionnaire and could have open
	or closed questions or a mixture of both.
Systematic	Systematic sampling is when a researcher selects every nth person on the sampling frame
sampling	to be part of the sample. The nth number is selected by dividing the target population size
P 0	(the number in the sampling frame) by the desired sample size.
Target population	The target population is everybody the sociologist would desire to be able to <i>generalise</i>
raiget population	their findings to. In other words, if a researcher was hoping to reach conclusions about the
	whole population of the UK, then that would be their target population.
Theoretical	Sociologists' theoretical perspective is likely to have a significant impact on their choice of
meoretical	research methods. For example, <i>positivist</i> sociologists will choose methods that produce
	quantitative data, as they consider these to be more scientific. These include questionnaires
	and official statistics. Interpretivists will choose to use methods that produce qualitative
Transactions	data, such as interviews or observations.
Triangulation	Using a range of research methods in combination – so that they can triangulate the truth
	from a combination of both reliable and valid research.
Unstructured	An unstructured interview is one without any pre-planned questions. Instead the
interviews	interviewer might have some headings to guide a free-flowing discussion where interesting
	but unexpected responses can be followed fully.
Validity	Valid research reveals a true picture. Data that is high in validity tends to be qualitative and
	is often described as "rich". It seeks to provide the researcher with verstehen - a deep, true
	understanding of their research object.
Verstehen	Verstehen is the German for "to understand" but has come to mean a particular form of
	deep, emphatic understanding. Introduced to sociology by Max Weber, the term refers to
	seeing the world as others see it, to the sort of rich valid data that might be acquired
	through participant observations or extensive unstructured interviews.
Volunteer sampling	A volunteer sample is one where participants choose to join the research. The participants
. 0	can opt to join the research by replying to adverts placed by the researcher about the topic
	and methods being used.

### Sociological Research Methods Knowledge Organiser Strip

In this section of the course, we assess the methods Sociologists use to research and understand society. A key part of sociologist's work involves carrying out research in order to collect data (information) to provide them with evidence to help explain the social world & to contribute to our knowledge of modern society. Research findings also provide important information for policy makers, government & local authorities.

#### Contents:

- 1. The Research Process
- 2. Primary-Secondary Methods
- Quantitative-Qualitative
- Evaluating Research
- Sampling Methods
- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- 8. Observations
- 9. Longitudinal Studies
- 10. Ethnography
- 11. Official Statistics
- Content Analysis
- Practical, Ethical and Theoretical Issues
- 14. Social Policy

### NOTE – Methods is embedded throughout

 Use this to supplement your revision, not replace it.



#### 1. The Research Process:

The research process in sociology involved several steps or stages. In broad terms, these are:

Aim - An aim is something that the researcher wants to investigate or find out. It can be a general or specific idea, but this is the purpose of the research.

**Hypothesis** - This is an idea which a researcher guesses might be true, but has not yet been tested against the evidence.

Review Existing Literature - Before you carry out research you need to look at what has been researched in the area before.

Plan a Research Method - Once you have established what you are trying to find out, you choose which research method you will use.

Sampling - A sample is made up of your research participant (people you are studying). It is a smaller representative obup drawn from the population you wanto study.

Pilot Study- This is a small-scale practice of your research This is carried out before the main body of research to check for initial patterns, issues with questions, practical problems etc.

Carry out Research - Here you need to look at your initial research plan and adjust it based on the findings of your pilot study. Then you carry out your research on your sample.

Gather Results - Depending on the research method chosen, the way you gather your results will vary.

Analysis - This is the part where you try to make sociological statements from your findings. Here you link what you have found with ideas in society.

Evaluation - Before you publish your work it is important you evaluate what you have done. You consider the strengths of your research and the method you use. However, you also consider the weaknesses.

**Publish** - The researcher now decides how to publish the results. This can be in many forms: book, magazine, T.V show etc

# Primary-Secondary – 3.Quantitative-Qualitative

Another influence on a researcher's choice of method is the type of data they want to gather. Data is the information collected by sociologists when they research society and it can be divided into the following types:

Primary data: This is information that researchers have gathered themselves.

E.g. questionnaires, interviews, observations.

Secondary data: This is information that has been collected by somebody else & then used by the researcher. E.g. official statistics, historical documents & diaries.

#### Quantitative-Qualitative

When a researcher collects data it can also be divided into quantitative data and qualitative data.

Quantitative data is numerical, often presented as numbers shown in statistics, in graphs, bar charts, etc.

**Qualitative data** is in-depth material, usually descriptive and presented in a written form.

#### Positivism-Interpretivism

Positivism is based on the idea that the only way to obtain knowledge about the world is through scientific methods. Positivist sociologists focus on behaviour that can be observed and measured rather than on people's feelings or emotions. They prefer quantitative research methods such as large-scale surveys & prefer to describe society in statistical terms.

Interpretivist - sociologists argue that the subject matter of sociology – people – is completely different from that of the natural sciences. People do not behave like objects or animals. Interpretivist sociologists prefer qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation that collect rich, detailed accounts rather than statistics.



### 4. Evaluating Research

Whenever Sociologists conduct or look at research they evaluate it. They want to look at the advantages and disadvantages of the research and data.

Sociologists do this by assessing the:

- Reliability
- Validity
- Generalisability
- Representativeness
- Ethics



Reliability - means the research should be able to be repeated in a different time and place and similar results will be gained.

Validity - is concerned with whether the research has uncovered truth about social life.

Generalisability - If the research can be generalised (applied) to all people who are similar to the sample, it is considered generalisable.

Representativeness - How much does a study or a sample represent the wider population.

Ethics – What is right or wrong in Sociological Research:

Confidentiality is the need for researchers not to publish the personal details of respondents without their consent

Anonymity is the right of individuals participating in research to not be required to provide their name or personal details or, if they do give this information, it will not appear in any reports arising from the research

Participants should always give their informed consent to the research being conducted so that no deception occurs.

Protection from harm is the belief that nobody should be put in a position where they could come to any emotional or physical harm. People should never be made to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or threatened & they should have the right to withdraw from the research at any point.

### 5. Sampling Methods

When you do research, it would be difficult or impossible to ask questions to everybody in the group you are studying as it would take too long and be too expensive. For example, if you are studying whether 'girls do more work around the house than boys', you cannot ask every boy and girl so you only ask a sample of the group.

Sampling Frame: this is the list of people from which you take your sample, e.g. school registers

Sampling Methods include:

Probability Sampling – Anyone in the population can be selected using a sampling frame

Simple-Random Sampling - To be truly random, everyone in the Population being studied must stand an equal chance of being selected.

Systematic Random Sampling - This is when you have a system for choosing your sample, such as picking every 5th name on the school registers. It can be quick to organise, but it is not representative as you may end up with more of one type of person than another.

Stratified Random Sampling - This sample is divided up into groups to accurately represent the people being studied, e.g. you might have 50% boys and 50% girls, 20% ethnic minority. You could also divide the group by age and by where they live.

Non-Probability Sampling – Samples that are selected on purpose by the researcher. This is used when a sampling frame is unavailable

Snowball Sampling – This is where a member of your sampling group introduces you to another participant and helps you recruit further participants.

Quota Sampling - Often used in market research, this is when respondents are selected because they represent certain groups in the total population (e.g. due to their age, gender, marital status, etc.).

**Purposive Sampling -** This is selecting a sample according to a known characteristic (being a headteacher or being homeless)



#### Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a list of written questions which are completed by a large number of people called respondents. They are normally handed out or posted out for people to self complete, but occasionally the questions are read out to respondents instead. There are two main types of questions that can be used in a questionnaire and most questionnaires will include examples of both.

- Closed questions are often fixed choice and involve tick box answers. The respondent might be presented
- Open questions gather more in-depth answers from respondents using words such as 'why'.

There are three main types of questionnaires:

- Online
- Surveys
- Postal

The advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires are:

#### Advantages Disadvantages Questionnaires Low response can be more rates can distort the data accessible for respondents; its Pre-coded easier to find questions can be time for an online biased interview than Questionnaires face to face provide little interview opportunity for the researcher to Responses to questionnaires gauge the can generally be truthfulness relatively easy to Questionnaires quantify generally limit the Questionnaires possible are generally responses that a most costrespondent can effective to give administer



#### 7. Interviews

These interviews are unstructured and therefore each one is unique. The researcher has an idea of the topic they want to discuss but they do not have set questions to follow. They allow the interview to flow. This produces qualitative data.

A semi- structured interview is a mix of the two. The research has a guide of questions but allows the participant to speak freely.

#### Advantages of Structured Interviews

- Questions are standardised so they can be compared.
- They can be easily replicated to check for reliability.
- Interviewers are trained and familiar with the interview schedule so they can help the respondents with any misunderstandings.

#### Disadvantages of Structured Interviews

- The interviewer might make some people feel uncomfortable about telling the truth.
- The interviewer can also influence answers by their body language.
- The age, gender and ethnicity of the interviewer can also influence the respondent's answer. This is called the interviewer bias.

#### Advantages of Unstructured Interviews

- They are much more flexible so any misunderstandings can be discussed.
- Researchers can explore how interviewees understand their own experiences and behaviour so they can collect detailed data

#### Disadvantages of Unstructured Interviews

- In depth interviews are time consuming and expensive.
- It requires the researcher to have skills in order to encourage the participant to open up.
- The interviewer could ask leading questions and influence the responses of the participants.



#### 8. Observations

This can be done overtly or covertly. Overt means that the researcher explains his aims and intentions to the group they are observing. Covert means that that the researcher is working under cover.

In a participant observation the researcher joins in with the group.

#### Advantages of Participant Observation

- It allows the observer to study the group in their everyday setting.
- Studies tend to take place over a period of time so the researcher can build a bond with the participants.
- By participating in activities the researcher can see things from the group's perspective and develop a deeper understanding.

#### Disadvantages of Participant Observation

- It may be difficult for the researcher to gain entry to the group and for the group to trust them.
- Taking notes and recording activities as they happen can be challenging especially if the research is covert.
- The research is time consuming and therefore expensive.
- The observer effect the presence of the observer can cause the group to act differently.

In non-participant observation the researcher sits back from the group and observes without joining in.

#### Advantages of Non-participant Observation

- Researchers are less likely to get drawn into the group's activities.
- They can remain objective as they are less likely to let their opinions be influenced by the group.

#### Disadvantages of Non-participant Observation

- It is more difficult to see the world through the eyes of group members if they do not participate in their activities.
- The observer effect may change the behaviour of the participants as they are aware of being watched.

### 9.Longitudinal Studies

Longitudinal studies follow a group of people over time. Changes in people's social attitudes and experiences can be examined. However, they are expensive to conduct and there are practical problems in retaining the original sample.

#### Advantages of Longitudinal Studies

 Longitudinal studies allow researchers to examine social changes over time. Changes in individuals' daily lives, experiences, behaviour, values and opinions can be identified

#### Disadvantages of Longitudinal

- The time scale involved means that longitudinal studies are relatively expensive and time-consuming
- Involvement in a longitudinal study may affect the behaviour of the participants they might behave differently from the way they would have behaved if they had not been involved in the study.
- There are problems in maintaining contact with the original sample over time: people leave home, move house, move abroad or otherwise disappear for periods of time
- People may change their minds and decide to withdraw from the study.

### 10. Ethnography

Ethnography is the observation & description of group of people & their way of life

#### Advantages of Ethnographies

- Based on the direct observation of social behaviour which provides a valid, wellrounded picture of the social behaviour under study
- Type of qualitative research providing detailed in-depth data

#### Disadvantages of Ethnographies

- There are ethical problems, particularly with regard to the privacy of informants who can reveal their intimate details.
- The observer effect when people are aware they are under study, they may change their behaviour
- Ethnographic research tends to be expensive & time consuming

#### Official Statistics

Statistics are a form of secondary data. This means that they are pre-existing as they have been collected by somebody else. Statistics are presented in the form of quantitative data such as birth rates or crime rates. Official statistics are compiled by government departments and agencies.

Sources include The Office for National Statistics and The Department of Education.

#### Advantages of Official Statistics

- They save time and money because they have already been collected.
- They are based on large samples.
- They may only provide limited information.
- They allow for comparisons between data and information on trends.
- They can be used as part of a mixed methods study

#### Disadvantages of Official Statistics

- They can tell us numbers but not meanings.
   For example we can know how many divorces are occurring each year but we do not know why.
- Sociologists cannot check the validity of official statistics.

### 12.Content Analysis

A content analysis studies the content of the media. It can measure and analyse the messages produced by the media.

#### Advantages of Content Analysis

- Cheap method: You only need access to the media to be able to carry out a content analysis e.g. access to TV or newspapers
- It's a reliable research method: If you use a content analysis grid to measure the output of the media, then it is easy for other researchers to repeat your content analysis and test your results.

#### Disadvantages of Content Analysis

- It lacks validity: If the content analysis is just quantitative data it will lack detail and depth of information. E.g. It can show that the media is violent and sexist, but it cannot explain why the media is violent or sexist.
- It is too subjective: This means the results are based on the opinions of the person doing the content analysis; they decide if something they see is violent and sexist.

### 13. PET

Practical issues are also something Sociologists need to consider. Sociologists need to assess how practical it is for them to complete research.

Key practical issues include:

- •Time is the research project too timeconsuming?
- Access can the researcher gain access? For example, researching a gang – can the researcher gain access to a gang?
- Cost How much will the research cost? Extended participant observation would cost a significant amount.

Key ethical issues in Sociological research are:

- Protecting participants from harm (emotional, psychological etc)
- Informed consent the participant should know they are being studied and the purpose of the research
- •Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality the participants identity must be protected, and all personal information should be kept confidential.

Key Theoretical issues in Sociological research are:

- Validity
- Reliability
- Representativeness

## 14. Social Policy

Social policies are plans and actions that governments and local authorities put into place to address a specific social problem.

Many Sociologists carry out research into the effectiveness of social policies. For example, welfare policies. Do they help relieve poverty, stop crime and help the elderly?

Sociologists, thus have a key role in social policy design and evaluation. In key areas of crime, education and welfare



# **Research methods**

Research Methods are **embedded** throughout the entire two-year course. AQA are focus on the skill of **application**. This means, it is not enough to know about research methods, you will need to apply them to the topics you are studying e.g., families, **education**, **Crime and social stratification** 

Here are some example questions.

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0 7	Identify and explain <b>one</b> disadvantage of using structured interviews to investigate conjugal role relationships.  [4 marks]
Educat	ion Topic  Identify one ethical issue you would need to consider when investigating attitudes towards arranged marriage and explain how you would deal with this issue in your investigation.
	[4 marks]

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Percentage	e of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A*–C, England,
1990–2014	: by gender
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	70 Males
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[2 marks]

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Anne Campbell studied the role of girls in street gangs in New York in the 1970s and 1980s. Up to this point, research only focused on male gangs.

To understand female members more clearly, Campbell selected three gangs. She spent six months with each gang, focusing on a particular girl in each gang. She used a range of methods, such as unstructured interviews and overt observation.

Campbell found that the girls in the gangs did not have a different set of norms and values to the rest of society. In fact, they had the same goals in life as most other women – financial security, freedom, stable relationships and a family, meaning that they were not so different from women in wider society.

Source: Girl Delinquents (1981)

0 5 From Item A, examine one strength of the research.

[2 marks]

0 7 Identify and explain <b>one</b> disadvantage of using group interviews to research the experience of prisoners.	
	[4 marks]