

Sampling - Teacher Notes

Sampling is a key issue when doing research.

The census, which takes place every ten years, includes the majority of people in the UK. However, most research is reliant on a sample of people. It would take too long and cost too much to include everyone who is relevant to a specific piece of research.

Sampling decisions

There are a number of sampling techniques available to researchers and the decision as to which to choose will depend on a number of factors.

Use the digital resource: **Sampling decisions**

Ask students to identify as many factors as possible which might affect the choice of sampling technique.

Suggestions:

- Positivists might be looking for a sample which is representative of the target population
- The group to be studied may be difficult to access
- Availability
- Convenience
- The timescale of the research may be restricted
- There may not be a sampling frame available
- The group that forms the target population to be studied may be very large – too large to research them all
- The extent to which the researcher wants to make generalisations about their findings to the target population

Sampling techniques

Sampling techniques may be random or non-random.

Use the digital resource: **Sampling techniques**

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Random techniques

From students' wider sociological knowledge, ask them to list the random sampling techniques they are familiar with.

Suggestions:

- Simple random sampling
- Systematic random sampling
- Stratified random sampling
- Cluster sampling
- Multi-stage random sampling

This is not a definitive list but covers the majority of random techniques.

Non-random techniques

From students' wider sociological knowledge, ask them to list the non-random sampling techniques they are familiar with.

Suggestions:

- Purposive sample
- Volunteer sampling
- Convenience sampling
- Snowball sampling

Have them decide where to place quota sampling before revealing the text below.

They are a way of trying to obtain a representative sample by selecting people in proportion to their numbers in the target population. However the selection of those chosen is not random. Once the quota from a subgroup has been filled, the researcher will continue to seek those who fulfil the criteria for another subgroup. For example if researching views of people regarding the health facilities in a particular postcode area, the number of males and the number of females in the area could be established. Therefore, once the right proportion of females had been spoken to, then the researcher would only be interested in males.

Students are asked to refer to research in the exam. Therefore it would be useful to keep an annotated list of research that they could apply to various questions in the exam.

These are two which could be used when discussing sampling. They are available as a handout.

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Carolyn Jackson – *Lads and ladettes in school: gender and a fear of failure*

Jackson's research was generated by data from two research projects.

The first was based on two secondary schools in the same area, in which all year nine pupils in each school were asked to complete a questionnaire.

25 boys from each school were then interviewed, chosen on the basis of their responses to the questions on the questionnaire.

The second was based on six schools, selected on the basis of their gender, class and ethnic mix. Once more, all Year 9 pupils received questionnaires.

Again, pupils were selected for interviews on the basis of their responses to the questions on the questionnaires. In one school the teachers chose the interview sample rather than Jackson.

Stephen Frosh, Ann Phoenix and Rob Pattman – *Young masculinities: understanding boys in contemporary society*

The original aim of the research as far as sampling was concerned was to carry out 38 focus group interviews with boys and some girls from twelve secondary schools in London. The second stage was to be interviews with 40 boys selected from those group interviews. The aim was to do a stratified sample by class and ethnicity. However, having conducted 45 focus group interviews they obtained 78 volunteers and they did not want to 'turn anyone away' so they continued the research with an increased sample size. They also included some girls in nine of the group interviews and consequently interviewed some girls at the individual interview stage.

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Sampling frame

Use the digital resource: **Sampling frame**

Students are asked to define what is meant by a sampling frame

Suggestion:

A sampling frame is a list of the people to be researched, a list of the target population.

They then have to consider what sampling frame could be used for the following.

1. Parents of children in a local primary school
2. Sixth form students in a school/college
3. People involved in the London riots of 2011
4. People working in a hospital
5. Members of a local football club
6. Households in a local area

If they cannot think of a sampling frame for any or all of the above, what could they do?

Suggested answers:

- School records of the children
- School/college register
- Difficult to obtain such a list
- List of employees working at the hospital from the payroll department
- All the members of the team
- Post-code address file

What issues may be involved in obtaining these lists?

Suggestions:

- ethics
- gatekeepers

Other issues of sampling frames?

Suggestions

- May be out of date

- May not include everyone – school registers would not include home educated children in an area
- May not indicate age, ethnicity or gender – for example the electoral roll
- Some groups will not have a sampling frame – homeless in an area
- May be confidential

Snowball sampling

Use the digital resource: **Snowball sampling**

Ask the students to read the following student answers in response to the question identified and rank them in order. In doing so they should consider:

1. Accuracy
2. The use of relevant key concepts
3. A balanced response between the advantage and the disadvantage
4. The extent to which concepts and evidence have been interpreted and applied.

Question

Identify one advantage and one disadvantage of snowball sampling

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1st response:

One advantage of using snowball sampling is that it is fairly easy to acquire a large sample without having to acquire it yourself, as you are asking participants to find others who are willing to take part in the study. This means that time and expense can be spent on other aspects of the study.

However, a disadvantage of snowball sampling is that it isn't very representative. This is because the people approached by the researcher/s would have only asked others who they would have known. Therefore, the participants are all likely to belong to the same strata and a number of individuals who might be useful will not have been considered.

2nd response

An advantage of snowball sampling is when the researcher has a contact who then introduces them to other people/contacts to take part in the research. It is a very efficient way of obtaining a sample in terms of accessibility and cost. The researcher has to put little effort into obtaining the sample because their contact is the one who introduces the researcher to the people in the sample. Therefore little effort is needed and the researcher has easy access to the participants. Furthermore, it's a cheaper method of sampling as the

researcher does not have to go out of their way to find participants which could be very costly.

One disadvantage of snowball sampling is that the sample is very unlikely to be representative of the target population. This is because the people in the sample are likely to be very similar. They would be likely to know each other and may even be friends and therefore have similar characteristics. This would mean that it would be very difficult to generalise and apply the findings to the rest of the population.

3rd response

Snowball sampling is a way researchers select their participants through people who know each other. It is a very quick and inexpensive method of obtaining a sample.

A disadvantage of snowball sampling would be that it isn't representative of the whole population. It is very likely that if a male participant is asked to refer a friend to the study, he will refer a male. This could affect the study as the researcher will only have one gender to study and won't be able to generalise the findings. Lastly, this method of sampling participants may alter the results. For example, they may tell their friends to give specific examples to the researcher. This will then result in low validity.

Then ask students to write their own response using the points below, extrapolated from the mark scheme. Talk to them about how they could improve their work.

Band 4 AO1

To access this band there should be:

Detailed knowledge and understanding of concepts and evidence relating to the question.

Band 4 AO2

To access this band there should be:

Accurate selection of appropriate concepts and evidence. They must be applied and interpreted to the context of the question.

This guide is provided as a printout for students:

In order to decide whether you have done what is required, underline the words in your response that indicate knowledge and understanding and those that indicate application and interpretation.

Knowledge and understanding

This is the extent to which a concept or term has been explained. That is, has one advantage and one disadvantage been described/defined (knowledge) and explained (understanding)?

Application and interpretation

Have you provided examples?

Using phrases such as:

This means that...

This is shown by....

will help you to gain higher band AO2 marks as they will lead you to finish the sentence with an example you have applied to snowball sampling.