

Short research proposal on fear of crime



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In this short research proposal, I will critically analyse and justify the reasons why I have chosen to use in depth interviews compared to other qualitative methods in order to research fear of crime among young men aged between 18-25 in inner London. My primary objective is to find out to what extent do young men aged 18-25 living in inner London fear crime.

Altogether there are three main types of qualitative data; they are in depth interviews, focus groups and ethnography (Bryman, 2004). However, before I justify the reasons why I have chosen to use in depth interviews compared to focus groups and ethnography I will first give a brief definition of fear of crime among young men. In order to carry out a short research proposal, it is important that I have background knowledge on my research topic.

On the whole, there are many different types of interviews however in my research I will be conducting in depth interviews with thirty young males aged between 18-25. I have chosen in depth interviews to conduct my research as this will provide me with rich data, it will also enable the participants to express their feelings and experiences on fear of crime (Bryman, 2004). There are two different types of in depth interviews they are known as semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

In my research, I will be carrying out semi-structured interviews whereby I will have a set of questions to ask the participants. In Semi structured interviews the questions are usually open ended hence this will enable me to gather rich, detailed information about the experiences and attitudes towards fear of crime among young men (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

On the other hand, although unstructured interviews are a great way to build rapport with the respondent there is a slight possibility that the participants may go off on tangents, and hence this will be more time consuming (Seale, 2004). In relation to my research topic, by carrying out a semi-structured interviews young men will feel more comfortable to talk about their experiences.

I will now discuss and justify the reasons why I have decided to select in depth interviews compared to focus groups and ethnography to carry out my research. According to May, in depth interview is a great way to understand the attitudes and feelings of an individual on a specific topic (May, 2001). In depth interviews will enable me to explore in more detail the fear of crime among young men in inner London (Seale, 2004). Hence, compared to focus groups and ethnography, in depth interviews will allow me to have a better understanding of the individual's views, experiences, opinions and feelings towards fear of crime among young men (Seale, 2004).

Another advantage of in depth interviews is that it allows flexibility; interviews can be adjusted to cater the needs of different types of people (Sarantakos, 2005). Furthermore, another advantage is that researchers can ask questions on the spot, probe the participants as well as change the order of questions if needed (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Another advantage is that during my study, I will have full control of the environment, under which questions are answered (Sarantakos, 2005). In depth interviews will also enable me to clarify any questions which are not understood by the participants (Sarantakos, 2005).

Another advantage of in-depth interviews is that I will gain high response rate, with rich, detailed information about the fear of crime among young men. Hence, with in depth interviews it is much easier to discuss sensitive issue compared to when interviewing a group (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

Despite these advantages, there are many limitations to in depth interview.

With in depth interviews participants may not always be as honest about their fear of crime; hence this will lack reliability (Miller and Brewer, 2003).

Another limitation of in depth interview is that it is very time consuming compared to other data collection methods (Seale, 2004). From gaining access to individuals, to conducting the interviews and then analyzing the data will take a huge amount of time (Miller and Brewer, 2003). This is one of the reasons why I will be conducting my research on only thirty individuals.

Furthermore, according to May, the researcher's physical characteristics such as age, class, race, gender and ethnicity may have an effect on the interviewee's responses (May, 2001). This is another limitation as interviews may be affected due to the physical characteristics of the researcher (Sarantakos, 2005). For example, if a female researcher was conducting the study on fear of crime among young men many participants may not be as honest about their attitudes and experiences of fear of crime due to the researcher being a female. Another issue of in depth interview is that people tend to prefer to write about sensitive topics, such as fear of crime rather than discussing the issue in an interview (Sarantakos, 2005).

As the study will only be conducted on thirty individuals, another concern is that once the information is gained and analysed, it will be difficult to

generalize fear of crime among young men who live in inner London (Sarantakos, 2005).

I will now define, discuss and analyse the advantages and limitations of ethnography and why I decided not to use ethnography for my research topic. Ethnography allows researchers to understand the social meanings and activities of people they are conducting research on (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Furthermore, ethnography studies will allow the researcher to observe the participants for a longer period of time (Bryman, 2004).

By spending time with the participants, listening and engaging in conversations and getting to know them individually on a daily basis it will help and allow the researcher to have a better understanding of the participants he or she is studying (Bryman, 2004).

However, in relation to my research topic my aim objective is to find out the feelings and emotions of fear of crime among young men. With participant observation it will be difficult for me to understand the experiences of fear of crime among young men as the participants may not be able to express their experiences when conducting a participant observation study. Furthermore, when an individual is aware that they are being observed they may behave differently, hence this will lack validity (Bryman, 2004).

There are two types of ethnography roles when gaining access to participants, they are known as overt and covert roles. Covert role is whereby an individual discloses the fact that they are a researcher observing the participants for a particular reason. On the other hand, the ethnographer who takes the overt role informs the participants that they are researches

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(Bryman, 2004). On the whole, covert roles may provide the researcher with more information which is highly valid due to the fact that the participants are not aware that they are being observed. However, by carrying out covert roles you will be breaking the ethical guidelines such as informed consent and deception (Bryman, 2004).

I will now define, discuss and analyse the advantages and limitations of using a focus group. Focus groups are when a small group of people are brought together for an interview that share similar experiences and have particular interest. Focus groups have become a very popular method used by many researchers since the 1980's. Focus groups allow participants to ask questions, have discussions and arguments (Bryman, 2004). It also allows participants to justify and articulate their ideas with one another in a group context (Seale, 2004).

There are many advantages to having focus groups, by conducting a focus group it will allow individuals to probe one another and challenge each other for holding certain views (Bryman, 2004). Another advantage of using a focus group is that large amount of data can be produced in a short amount of time, however a limitation to this is that it will be difficult for the researcher to record and analyse data from the focus group (Bryman, 2004).

Focus groups allow participants to share stories, experiences and thoughts together; hence this provides rich, quality data for the researcher to analyse (Bryman, 2004). Another advantage of a focus group is that it is less time consuming compared to in depth interviews, you can easily get six

to ten people's views and opinions all at the same time rather than interviewing all ten of them (Seale, 2004).

Focus groups also allow the participants to listen to other people's views who have a similar position to them in the community (Sarantakos, 2005).

According to Bryman, focus groups are regarded as 'more naturalistic compared to interviews in the sense that focus groups reflect the processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life' (Bryman, 2004, 348).

During the focus group the researcher acts as a facilitator observing the discussion and encouraging participants to contribute (Sarantakos, 2005).

Depending on the topic being discussed, focus groups can sometimes encourage the individual to open up and hence take part in the discussion.

However, in other situations in-depth interviews are preferred; it all depends on the research topic (Seale, 2004).

According to Wilkinson who reviewed more than 200 studies based on focus groups, she found that many researchers fail to analyse and take into account the interaction between the group members (Bryman, 2004).

Another critic of a focus group is that some individuals may not express their fear of crime among other young men. By being in a group individuals may not express their true opinions (Sarantakos, 2005). Individuals may feel more comfortable to express their concerns of fear of crime in a one to one interview (Bryman, 2004).

In focus groups, individuals may be influenced to follow the group norm and may not open as much compared to in depth interviews (Bryman, 2004).

According to Barbour and Kitzinger, focus groups will enable 'researchers to
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examine people's different perspective as they operate within a social network, (Barbour and Kitzinger in Seale, 2004, 181).

Furthermore, focus groups may allow the researcher to explore issues which are not easily seen during participant observation (Seale, 2004). However, another concern of using a focus group is that some individuals may dominate the discussion and hence others may not be given the chance to explore their attitudes and feelings towards fear of crime, (Sarantakos, 2005).

I will now discuss what sampling method I will use in order to carry out my research. In relation to my research topic and design I will use the purposive sampling method in order to carry out my study. Purposive sampling is when participants are selected due to them having a relation to the subject topic. Purposive sampling is whereby researchers use their expert judgment to find participants who are relevant to their study (Singleton and Straits, 1999).

Purposive sampling is a very popular sampling method used by many researchers when conducting qualitative research (Seale, 2004). In relation to my research topic, purposive sampling is the best sampling method to use; it fits in very well with the aims of my research. However, according to Singleton and Straits, a limitation to purposive sampling is that 'making an informed selection of cases requires considerable knowledge of the population before the sample is drawn' (Singleton and Straits, 1999, 159).

I will now discuss how I will gain access to my participants. I will gain access to my participants through contacting local organizations who work with youths. I will also gain access by visiting two universities in inner London; I

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will visit the student union and ask for potential students who are willing to take part in my study.

Before the interviews are carried out, I will ensure that I am fully prepared and organised, in order for me to do this I will make a check list of all the things I need to do before the interview and also after the interview.

In my research, I will also audio record all the interviews; this will enable me to have a better one to one conversation with my respondents. However, an issue may be that that some respondents may refuse for their voice to be recorded. If this occurs, I will explain to the participants that the interview is only being audio recorded for my use only and that the recording will not be shared with any third party (Bryman, 2004).

For the interview to be successful it is vital that the interviewee has an understanding of the subject topic (May, 2001). Before I start my interview, I will define the term fear of crime to my participants in order for them to have a better understanding of the subject topic. Before the interview process, I will make it clear to my participants what is expected of them, by doing this my participants will feel more comfortable and hence more relaxed for the interview to begin (May, 2001).

It is important for all researchers to take into consideration ethical issues before conducting any research. The British Sociological Association has set out ethical guidelines for researchers to follow; breaking the guidelines may result in penalties. There are many ethical issues which need to be considered before carrying out a study; however the three main ethical

issues are whether there is harm to participants, lack of informed consent, and whether deception is involved (Bryman, 2004).

In relation to my study on fear of crime among young men I will ensure that all my participants are fully informed about the study. Before I conduct my research all participants involved will be asked to read and sign the consent forms, all participants will also have the right to withdraw from the study at any given time (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, in regards to participant harm according to Diener and Crandall, participant harm can be physical harm or personal harm (Diener and Crandall, in Bryman, 2004). I will ensure that in my study none of my participants are physically or emotionally harmed.

Finally, in regards to deception, I will ensure that all my participants are fully aware of the study and that the results of the interviews will not be shared with anyone else without their consent. Deception usually occurs when the researcher provides false statements to their participants about the study (Bryman, 2004).

In conclusion, in depth interview is the best data collection method for me to research the fear of crime among men aged 18-25 living in inner London. Despite its limitations, in relation to my research topic, in depth interview would be the best method to use as it will enable me to understand the attitudes and experiences of fear of crime among young men compared to focus groups and ethnography.