

# Research methods survey, naturalistic observation, case study

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## Research Methods – Survey, Naturalistic Observation, Case Study

Research works towards fulfilling three main purposes – description, explanation and validation of new knowledge. The descriptive research method involves gathering data that describes events and then organize, tabulate, depict, and describe the data collection (Knupfer & McLella, 2009). It aims at answering the dilemma, ‘ what is’. An example of a descriptive research question would be – “ Do teachers hold a favourable attitude towards counselling cells in schools?” In this paper we look at three basic types of descriptive research methods:

### 1. Survey

A survey method is used when responses to the research subject are sought from a wide sample. Here participants answer questions administered to them either through written questionnaires, personal interviews or telephonic interviews. The reliability and validity of a survey is measured against question construction, lucidity and comprehension of questions. This method of research is very useful when a widespread or state-wide needs assessment is required, for example, The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses the survey method to study public and private education systems. While this method may allow us to get the opinion of a larger population the subjects who respond need not be representatives of the same population. Even if response rates are guaranteed it puts immense pressure on human and financial resources involved in the research. Also, this method cannot illustrate or suggest causal relationships it can only interpret the data collected (Jackson, 2009)

### 2. Naturalistic Observation

The naturalistic observation method involves covertly or overtly watching subjects' behaviours in their natural environment, without intervention, sometimes over a prolonged period of time (Fournier, 2010) This method is mostly used by people studying behavioural sciences as it increases ecological validity, like for example, to study child development researchers observe a class through a one-way mirror. Jane Goodall's work among the chimpanzees is another perfect example of this method. Though this method allows the researcher to excellent observations it still becomes difficult to comprehend certain behaviours when so many variables are involved. While some researchers may argue that this method guarantees least manipulation of subjects but subjects can act in a certain way to conform with the researcher's expectation.

### 3. Case Study

This method involves an in-depth study of an individual or group of individuals. Each part of the subject's life and history are analyzed to find method and determinants of behaviour, with the hope that learning gained from studying one case can be applied to others. Sigmund Freud's theory on psychoanalysis was developed through the use of this method. This method gives us a detailed profile of the subject but carries the burden of expectancy effects. Case study method also carries with it the risk of getting atypical individuals as subjects which may lead to detracting from validity and poor generalizations.

#### References:

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