

Sampling techniques

Why sociologists sample?

- To save time
- To save money
- Geographical convenience
- Impractical to survey everybody in a target population

Random sampling – employing a technique to ensure that everyone in the target population has an equal chance of being selected.

Technique - description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Random: When every person in a target population has an equal chance of being selected in the sample. This achieved by picking names out of a hat, or through a computer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick and easy to carry out ▪ Ensures people all have an equal chance of being chosen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires an accurate, up to date and complete sampling frame ▪ Can be unrepresentative E.g. by chance the sample could be made of all females

Non Random sampling – employing a technique to structure or engineer the selection to meet specific or predetermined criteria.

Technique - description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Quota: Before the research is carried out the researcher is told how many respondents of a particular type are required. For example an interviewer may be required to administer a questionnaire to ten married males and ten married females between the ages of 20 and 30. Once one quota is filled no more results will be gathered from this group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows researcher to control the variables without having a sample frame – researcher knows how many people with particular characteristics to question. ▪ Quick and cheap method. For example if someone refuses to answer questions, simply ask someone else with same characteristics. Very important when speed is of the essence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not random as each person in the population does not have the same chance of being asked. ▪ Researcher may have to ask a few personal questions to ascertain whether the respondent matches the criteria. This may put people off.
<p>Stratified: Split the sample down into groups and select randomly from these groups. The groups that the researcher is choosing from must be the same proportion as in the target population studied, to protect representativeness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective as it allows the researcher to control the variables that are important to the research ▪ It can also increase precision and is therefore likely to improve representativeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is complex and time consuming to identify strata and sample various sub groups of the target population. ▪ Often it is not practical as the sampling frame does not contain the information required to split the population into the groups.
<p>Snowball: Involves using personal contacts to build up a sample group. 'Friend telling friend'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No sampling frame is needed ▪ Can allow access to sensitive and secretive groups. E.g. Drug users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly not representative as people who are included are part of a network of contacts ▪ May run out of pps making it difficult to generalise.
<p>Convenience/opportunity: Involves selecting who are conveniently available to the researcher.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quick, cheap and easy. ▪ No sampling frame is needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sample is not representative ▪ Sample is biased as choice of person relies on the judgement of the researcher

Sampling techniques dictionary

Target population	The large group of people about which sociologists wish to draw conclusions. E.g. single mothers, sixth form students
Sample	A sample is a small group of pps selected from the target population
Representative sample	How much the sample reflects the larger population. E.g. in terms of sex, age and class
Sample frame	A list of people from which a sample will be drawn. E.g. the electoral register