

Paper 3 questions

Interviewing, where a number of interviewers use the same structured questions, can involve problems of reliability.

(a) Explain the problem of a lack of reliability between different interviewers who are engaged in using the same structured questions during face-to-face interviews.

(4 marks)

(b) Discuss two ways in which you would resolve this problem so that interviewers achieve acceptable reliability in their performance. (6 marks)

a)

Reliability refers to whether a measure gives consistent results and replicability. However, it is not certain that different interviewers using the same structured interviews in face-to-face interviews will necessarily obtain reliable data because the interview situation is a social situation. An interview is designed to elicit particular types of information and interviewing is a skilled activity because of its interpersonal nature. People are e.g. good at reading non-verbal signs i.e. the small changes in behaviour that indicates how information is being received. These are often unconscious on the part of the interviewer, but they can have a profound effect on the way people respond. In a face-to-face situation, for example, most people like to be co-operative, and to avoid interpersonal conflict. So an unconscious indication from an interviewer that they disagree with what the person has said, or with a particular option in a question, can lead a respondent to change their answers to something that they feel is more socially acceptable. Another problem could be the interviewer effect and yet another could arise in situations where the interviewer and the interviewee cannot cooperate at all.

b)

Two ways of dealing with the problems outlined in a) could be training of the interviewers so that they use exactly the same techniques when interviewing in order to have a consistent approach to the respondents. Since this will influence also reliability of data it is encouraged that a test-retest measure of reliability could be used in the pilot study to ensure reliability of the interview as such so that the interview will give consistent results even if performed by different interviewers. Another way to deal with the problem of reliability is to make a pilot study so that the interviewers are prepared to what might happen during the interview session. If you want to have a representative sample of respondents you might need to find interviewers of e.g. different age, ethnicity and gender so that data collection is not disturbed by interpersonal variables.

Reliability may eventually be affected by transcription of the interview since an interview transcript can never be the mirror image of the interview. Different ways are used in transcription of an interview but a standardised way of transcription may assure reliability.

- (a) Explain, using an example, what is meant by participant observation (4 marks)
(b) Evaluate the use of participant observation as a research method. (6 marks)

- a) Participant observation means that the researcher becomes part of the target group. One famous study of participant research is the investigation of a cult by Festinger, Riecken and Shacter (1956). The researchers wanted to test Festinger's theory of 'cognitive dissonance' so they joined a cult to observe their reactions when the world did not end as they had predicted. The researchers had the opportunity to talk with the members during the process but it was somewhat difficult to take notes because they did not want to raise the suspicion of the cult members.
- b) Using participant observation generally decreases reactivity and increases ecological validity but one limitation is that the researcher may lose objectivity during the observation (observer bias) and there are ethical issues involved since the participants have not been asked in any way. On top of that, it can be dangerous if the target group finds out that you are studying them and you may even be involved in some criminal actions if you're studying a street gang e.g. Deception is always part of participant observation, because some information cannot be obtained without it so it could be argued that it is to some extent justified. However, it is essential that the researcher respect the individual's privacy and the rule of confidentiality.

- (a) Outline an example of a psychology related problem for which a large scale survey could be used as the research method (2 marks).
(b) Describe one sampling technique that could be applied to the example that you have chosen in section (a) (4 marks).
(c) Evaluate the use of a Likert scale that could be applied to the example that you have chosen in section (a) (4 marks)

- a) One example of a psychology related problem for which a large scale survey (i.e. more than 300 participants) could be used as a suitable research method is people's perceptions of the relationship between stress and alcohol use in relation to work stress.
- b) One sampling technique that could be applied in this survey could be a stratified sample, i.e. using a sampling procedure where the population is divided into subcategories and then members of these subcategories are selected in the proportion that they occur in the target population.
- c) A Likert scale could be developed with attitude statement questions related to a numerical scale so that the respondent's response can be expressed directly as a numerical value. This makes it possible to gather quantitative data and make statistical comparisons. One example of such a scale could be: How likely is it that you'll drink alcohol as a way of coping with work stress? And the scale could go from 1 to 5 with 1 indicating not likely and 5 very likely. The Likert scale is an efficient instrument in large scale surveys because it gives the opportunity to have large amounts of data collected and analysed. One problem with the Likert scale is that it might not always represent people's attitudes reliably so they may just answer whatever without it being their own attitude. If the Likert scale is not properly designed, it affects

reliability and validity of the survey, so it would be wise to conduct a pilot study before sending it to the participants.