

directly observing subject's behaviour, as opposed to a survey or an analysis of existing sources in which the researcher must rely on others' observations and reports.

(iii) Observational techniques allow the researcher "to observe the subject in a natural setting, and they provide for the study of the subject over a time rather than at one point, as a survey usually does".

(iv) Though there is the danger of an observer getting himself absorbed with the group under study, it has a peculiar strength of its own.

### Limitations

(i) One of the limitations of observation is that the data collected through observation cannot always be quantified.

(ii) Observation is essentially the study of occurrences at the time they occur. Hence it is very much limited by the duration of the event. Events do not wait for the conveniences of the observer.

(iii) Observation cannot always be effectively used to study the private and secret behaviour of the individuals. For example, observing the criminal behaviour of a so called "decent person", is not an easy task.

(iv) There is no guarantee that the observer studies the phenomenon in an impartial manner and without prejudice. Hence, there is scope for the danger of bias, especially hidden bias.

## 2. QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaires and interview schedules are very much used in gathering a variety of data. They have been used for the collection of personal preferences, social beliefs, attitudes, opinions, behaviour patterns, group practices, habits and other kinds of data. The increasing use of schedules and questionnaires is probably due to increased emphasis by social scientists on quantitative measurement of uniformly accumulated data.

// A questionnaire is a tool for data collection. It consists of a number of questions printed or typed in a definite order on a form or a set of forms. It is administered to a respondent either personally or through mail. The respondent answers the questions on his own without being aided. //

Questionnaires are now widely used collecting data, particularly when data are to be collected from a large number of people who are scattered over a wide area. They are used both as independent and separate method of collecting data. They are also used as an additional device to check data gathered through observation and personal interview.

### Definition of Questionnaire

"A questionnaire is a means of gathering information by having the respondents fill in answers to printed questions" — Wallace and Wallace.

"Fundamentally, the questionnaire is a set of stimuli to which literate people are exposed in order to observe their verbal behaviour under these stimuli" — Lundberg.

Goode and Hatt define questionnaire as a "device for securing answers to



questions using a form which the respondent fills in himself."

Questionnaire studies are systematic ways of asking questions under scientific controls. A questionnaire is a device in which the respondents fill in their responses in specified manner personally.

### QUESTIONNAIRE, SCHEDULE AND THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

The questionnaire is designed to collect data from large, diverse and widely scattered groups of people. The questionnaire is generally sent through the mail to the informants to be answered as specified in a covering letter and without further assistance from the sender. The schedule, on the other hand, is generally filled out by the researcher who can interpret questions when necessary.

**Questionnaire.** The word "Questionnaire" refers to a device for securing answers to questions by using a form which the respondent fills in himself.

**Schedule or Interview Schedule.** "Schedule" or "interview schedule" is the name usually applied to a set of questions which are asked and filled in by an interviewer in a face-to-face situation with another person. In its form and content, a schedule is similar to the questionnaire. Like the questionnaire, it can be structured and unstructured. As in questionnaire, here also the wording of the questions is the same for all the respondents.

The main difference between the questionnaire and schedule is that — the questionnaire is filled in by the respondent on his own, whereas the schedule is filled in by the interviewer.

#### Interview Guide

An 'interview guide' on the other hand, is a list of points or topics which the interviewer must cover during the interview. In this case, flexibility may be allowed as to the manner, order and language in which the interviewer asks the questions. The interview guides are also referred to "unstructured questionnaires." The interview guide permits the interviewer to ask a fresh question in order to make the previous answer more meaningful. It is normally used in exploratory research where researcher is required to get more detail and in-depth informations regarding particular case(s).

### TYPES OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaires can be classified into two broad types:

- (i) Structured Questionnaires, and
- (ii) Unstructured Questionnaires.

#### (i) Structured Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires are those which pose definite, concrete and prepared questions. It means the questions are prepared in advance and not constructed on the spot during the questioning period. Additional questions may be used only when need arises to clarify vague or inadequate replies by informants. This structured questionnaires may be of two broad types:

- (a) Closed-Ended or Selective Type Questionnaire, and
- (b) Open-Ended or Inventive Type Questionnaire.



(a) *Closed-Ended Questionnaire*. In closed-ended questionnaire, a number of alternative answers are provided at the end of each question and the task is, the informant has to choose one of them. His choice of giving his own answer is not permitted and hence it is a "closed-type".  
*Example: Where do you wish to live in? (1) City, (2) Suburb, (3) Village?*

(b) *Open-Ended Type or Inventive Type*. In this type, questions are not followed by any ready-made answers. The informant has to think of the answer himself and he is free to answer as he likes. The open-ended responses are free and spontaneous expressions on the part of the informant who is not limited in his replies to a particular question posed to him. This is also called "inventive type" for the respondent has to think of or invent the answer for himself. The respondent may be asked to write a descriptive essay and express his viewpoints, describe his relationships, attitudes, indicate his problems, and report on details and events without restrictions imposed as in the type of closed questions.

### (ii) Unstructured Questionnaires

Unstructured questionnaires, frequently referred to as "interview guides", also aim at precision and contain definite subject-matter areas. *Flexibility is its main advantage*. It is designed to obtain view-points, opinions, attitudes, and to show relationships and interconnections between data which might escape notice under more mechanical types of interrogation. The object is to give the respondent maximum opportunity to reveal how he had arrived at or developed his world of experience.

This form of questionnaire is used for intensive studies and in qualitative research methods, but generally for a limited number of selected cases. It has been applied to studies of family group cohesiveness, to studies of personal experiences, beliefs and attitudes.

## ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

### Advantages Questionnaire

- Questionnaire is relatively economical and inexpensive. It is possible to cover a large number of people scattered over a wide area.
- This method *saves time*. Instead of meeting people personally it is possible to approach them in a larger number through the mailed questionnaire. Analysis and interpretation can be done quickly.
- Questionnaire *ensures anonymity*. The respondent is free to express his views and opinions.
- Questionnaire is said to be more suitable for eliciting information regarding some personal and private affairs such as, marital relations, drug use patterns etc., because of the anonymity that it maintains.
- Questionnaire *does not put much pressure on the respondent's emotionality*. It provides sufficient leisure time to answer the questions in a relaxed mood.
- In questionnaire, the collected answers can be processed and analyzed in a simpler and a faster manner. Uniformity of answers helps the standardization of the recording procedure.

### Disadvantages and Limitations

- Questionnaire cannot be administered in the case of illiterate and uneducated persons.



- Questionnaire is not suitable when a spontaneous answer is very much required.
- There is no way of checking misinterpretations and unintelligible replies by the respondents.
- ✓ • Proportion of returns, especially of mailed questionnaire, can be very low, as low as 10%. This does not give a comprehensive picture of the situation.
- In spite of their advantage questionnaires lack the flexibility of interviews. Generally, they have lower response rates, since it is easier for the respondents not to respond. They permit the measurement of verbal behaviour only, without allowing the researcher to make observations. Furthermore, mailed questionnaires enable the respondent to skip questions.

### 3. INTERVIEW

Interview is one of the important methods of collecting data in social research. Literally, interview means mutual view of each other. It is called a conversation with a purpose. But it is not a simple conversation or verbal exchange. Its objective is to exchange ideas, elicit information regarding a wide area in which the interviewee may wish to recollect the past, interpret the present and advocate his future course of action or plan.

An interview is a means of gathering information in which one person asks another either in person directly, or indirectly. Interview, is an effective, informal verbal or non-verbal conversation, initiated for specific purposes and focused on certain planned content areas.

#### Definition of Interview

According to Young, as the very term implies, "interviewing is an interactional process".

According to Gopal, "The interview is conversation with a purpose and, therefore, is more than a mere oral exchange of information."

In general, it can be said that an interview is face-to-face verbal interchange in which one person, i.e., the interviewer, attempts to elicit some information or expressions of opinion from another person or persons regarding a particular issue.

#### TYPES OF INTERVIEW

There are different classifications of interview on the basis of different criteria. Interviews may be classified in various ways - according to their function (diagnostic, treatment, research, sample interviews), or according to the number of persons participating (group or individual interviews) or length of contact (short or long contact) or type of approach (directive or non-directive, structured or unstructured). Types of interviews are based chiefly on the respective roles assumed in them by interviewer and interviewee. The following types of interviews may be noted.

- (i) The Non-Directive interview.
- (ii) The Directive Interview.
- (iii) The Focused Interview.
- (iv) The Repeated Interview,
- (v) The Depth Interview.



### (i) The Non-Directive Interview or Unstructured Interview

This type of interview is also known as *uncontrolled or unguided or unstructured interview*. In this kind of interview, interviewer does not follow a system or list of predetermined questions, interviewees are encouraged to relate their concrete experiences with no or little direction from interviewer, to provide their own definitions of their social situations, report their own foci of attention, reveal their attitudes and opinions as they see fit.

The unstructured interview is much more flexible and "open-ended". The researcher puts more general questions to the respondents, allows them to answer freely, and follows up on their comments. This approach allows the researcher to get insights that a structural interview may ignore.

### (ii) The Directive Interview or Structured Interview

This interview uses a highly standardized technique and a set of predetermined questions. It is especially useful for administrative and market research of various types.

In a structured interview the researcher has a checklist of questions and puts them to the respondents in exactly the same form and exactly the same order. The respondent is asked to choose between several predetermined answers such as "Yes/no/don't know", or "very likely/likely/unlikely/very unlikely". This type of interview is very inflexible.

### (iii) The Focused Interview

In this type of interview the interviewee is given considerable freedom to express his definition of a situation that is presented to him. *Therefore, focused interview is considered as semi-standardized.*

The focused interview is based on the assumptions that through it, *it is possible to secure precise details of personal reactions, specific emotions, definite mental associations provoked by a certain stimulus and the like.* The focused interview is not being used as widely as its merits deserve probably because it requires extreme care in preparation and exceptionally sophisticated handling by skillful interviewers.

### (iv) The Repeated Interview

This type of interview is *particularly useful in attempts to trace the specific developments of social or psychological process* (that is, the progressive actions, factors or attitudes which determine a given behaviour pattern or social situation).

### (v) The Depth Interview

This kind of interview *aims to elicit unconscious as well as other types of material relating especially to personality dynamics and motivations.* It is generally a lengthy procedure designed to encourage free expression of information charged with emotions. It may be used along with special devices such as free association and projective techniques. When used carefully by an interviewer having specialized training the depth interview can reveal important aspects of psycho-social relations which are otherwise not readily available. Unless the researcher has specialized training, it is better not to attempt depth interviewing.



## ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF INTERVIEW

### Advantages

- Through interview it is possible to secure relatively dependable information about issues, peoples and events.
- Interview may help us to obtain in-depth knowledge of social issues.
- It is possible to secure information about the past, present and also about future course or plans in somewhat a detailed manner.
- The active and intelligent role of the interviewer can add to the high rate of response.
- The interview method can be used to obtain information from almost all types of persons.

### Disadvantages and Limitations

- Many disadvantages of this method arise due to the incapability of the interviewer.
- Prejudices or bias developed knowingly or unknowingly by the interviewer may completely mislead the outcome of interview.
- The interviewer may fail to select a "right" person (due to defective sampling procedure) to obtain information.
- Possibilities of the interviewer and the interviewee having diverging, often antagonistic, views and outlook cannot be overlooked. This situation may create confusion in the course of the interview or it may spoil its outcome.
- Interviewing is a difficult skill and it needs an intense and time-consuming training.
- Interview by itself is incomplete and needs to be supplemented with other methods such as observation.
- There is no guarantee that the interviewee gives his honest opinions on the issues referred to him. Hence his information may mislead the outcome of the interview.
- One major danger with interview is that when people are asked to report on their own behaviour they may tend merely to mention the formal rules of social behaviour, rather than recount exactly how they actually behave.

## 4. THE SOCIAL SURVEYS

The social survey technique seems to be very popular in sociology. In fact, the man in the street particularly associates the social survey with sociologists. This he does, probably because, this he thinks to be the only available technique that sociologists have for collecting information. The social survey is certainly a very important way of assembling data, but it is by no means the only way.

### Meaning and Definition

**Duncan Mitchell's** "Dictionary of Sociology" defines social survey this way : "The social survey is a systematic collection of facts about people living in a specific geographic, cultural, or administrative area".

**Bogardus.** "A social survey is the collection of data concerning the living and working conditions, broadly speaking, of the people, in a given community".



Ian Robertson, "Surveys are frequently used in sociological research, either simply for the purpose of gathering facts (such as the political opinions of college students,) or for finding out about the relationship between facts (such as how sex, parental opinions, or social class, influence students' political views)"

E.W. Burgess, "A social survey of a community is the scientific study of its conditions and needs for the purpose of presenting a constructive program of social advancement."

Social surveys are usually for dealing with many related aspects of a social problem. They provide the data for administration, rather than for the illustrative or descriptive material. They are generally quantitative and the history of the social survey is intimately bound up with the development of statistics.

#### Some Main Types of Social Surveys

Depending upon the purpose and the nature of study, social surveys assume different forms, some form of social surveys are as follows: (i) *Official, semi-official or private surveys*, (ii) *wide-spread or limited surveys*, (iii) *census survey or sample surveys*, (iv) *general or specialized survey*, (vii) *regional or adhoc surveys*, etc.

### 5. OTHER TECHNIQUES OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

The following are the methods usually employed in various researches of social sciences:

(i) **The Statistical Method:** It shows quantitative relationship among the variables and sociological phenomena are measured mathematically. The statistical rules are applied on measurement of social relations.

(ii) **The Case-Study Method:** It is the study of a small number of cases and then interpreting them. The method is employed in studying a condition of group, community, institution or individual. In this method, we study events individually and then by generalization derive a common result.

(iii) **The Historical Method:** Growth and continuity in social processes is traced out through the method and the antecedents of our contemporary life are found by studying the events, processes and institutions of past civilization. It is related to the study of past historical record. It is usually used in the study of social change.

(iv) **The Experimental Method:** All sciences use experiments. The experimental method provides a reliable way of studying the relationship between two variables under carefully controlled conditions. Experiments can be conducted either in the laboratory or in the field. It means the experiment method is of two types : (a) *Laboratory experiments*, and (b) *Field experiments*.

(a) **Laboratory Experiments.** In a laboratory experiment the people and any necessary materials are brought into an artificial experiment that can be carefully regulated by a researcher. In laboratory experiments with people, people are recruited, assembled, and sometimes even paid for engaging in the experiment. This type of experiment is more appropriate when the researcher wants to control the situation in minute detail.

(b) **Field Experiment.** The field experiment takes research out to people instead of bringing people to the research laboratory. It takes place outside the laboratory under somewhat less artificial conditions, say in a prison, hospital, college, or factory. The field experiment is more



suitable when the researcher wants to minimize the possibility that people will change their typical behavior in the artificial laboratory experiment.

### The Ways of Experimental Method

The concept of any experiment is very simple. The researcher has to hold all variables constant, except one, has to vary it and see what happens. In a typical experiment, an independent variable is introduced into a carefully designed situation and its influence on a dependent variable is recorded. This can be illustrated with the help of an example.

The researcher therefore, has to control the situation in such a way that other possible influences can be discounted. The standard method of doing this would be to *divide the Muslim students into two groups whose members are similar in all relevant aspects*. Both groups are then tested on their communal attitudes, but only one group called the experimental group, is exposed to classroom integration. The other groups called, *the control group*, is not subjected to this variable, but its experience is the same in all other respects. Finally, both groups are again tested on their communal attitudes, and any difference between the groups is assumed to be the result of the independent Variable.

(v) Content Analysis: According to Neuman:

"It is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of the text".

The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any other message that can be communicated. The text is anything written, visual, or spoken that serves as a medium for communication. It includes books, newspaper or magazine article, advertisements, speeches, official documents, films or videotapes, musical lyrics, photographs, articles of clothing or work of art. Content analysis is basically a non-reactive kind of research.



### SHORT QUESTIONS EXERCISES

1. Define social research in the light of different sociologists.
2. Briefly explain purposes of research.
3. Differentiate between quantitative and qualitative research.
4. What are the uses of research in your views?
5. Briefly explain salient features of a good research.
6. List out seven step research process.
7. What do you mean by observation?
8. Differentiate between participant & non-participant observation.
9. Distinguish controlled and non-controlled forms of observation.
10. Differentiate between questionnaire and interview schedule.
11. Compare and contrast between structured and unstructured types of questionnaires.
12. Define interview and list out its types.