

Focus groups:

- Focus groups (called focus group interviews) take place in a group setting.
- Focus groups are not recommended for studying sensitive topics that people will be reluctant to discuss in public.
- A key characteristic is the interaction between members of the group.
- Focus groups typically consist of 8-12 people (ideal 4-8), with a moderator (researcher) who focuses the discussion on relevant topics in a non-directive manner.
- The smaller the group, the less information we gather.
- On the other hand, having more than 10 people in the group make it crowded & difficult for all members to participate & interact.
- Multiple focus groups should be conducted in order to gather sufficient amount of data, opinion, & views on the study

• Focus group advantages:

- Convenience
- Time & expenses savings.
- Because the researcher (sometimes called facilitator or moderator) takes a less active role in guiding the discussion, less bias is introduced by the researcher than in individual interviews.

Factors to consider	Use group interviews when...	Use individual interviews when...
Group interaction	Interaction of respondents may stimulate a richer response or new and valuable insights	Group interaction is likely to be limited or non-productive
Group or peer pressure	Group or peer pressure will be valuable in challenging the thinking of respondents and illuminating conflicting opinions	Group or peer pressure would inhibit responses and cloud the meaning of results
Sensitivity of subject matter	Subject matter is not so sensitive that respondents will temper responses or withhold information	Subject matter is so sensitive that respondents would be unwilling to talk openly in a group
Extent of issues to be covered versus depth of individual responses	There is a need to cover a small number of issues on a topic on which most respondents can say all that is relevant in less than 10 minutes	There is need to cover a greater number of issues on a topic that requires a greater depth of response per individual
Requirement for interview guide	Enough is known to establish a meaningful topic guide	It may be necessary to develop the interview guide by altering it after a series of initial interviews
Logistics requirement	An acceptable number of target respondents can be assembled in one location	Respondents are dispersed or not easily assembled
Cost and training	Quick turnaround is critical, and funds are limited	Quick turnaround is not critical, and budget will permit higher cost
Availability of qualified staff to conduct the interview	Focus group facilitators are able to control and manage group discussions	Interviewers are supportive and skilled listeners

Source: Adapted from Frechtling, Sharp and Westat (43).

Sample on paper utilised interviews and focus groups:

- Surgeons' aims and pain assessment strategies when managing paediatric post-operative pain: A qualitative study (Interview study).
- "I couldn't even talk to the patient": barriers to communicating with cancer patients as perceived by nursing students (Focus group study).

Observation (observing in the field):

- Simply, Observation in qualitative research involves "going into the field"--describing and analysing what has been seen.
- Observation in qualitative research is one of the oldest and most fundamental research methods approaches.
- Traditionally, observation has been extensively used in the social sciences including psychology and medical settings.
- When using questionnaires and interviews sometimes a social desirability approach impacts on participants' responses, where they say what they think the researcher wants to hear rather than what they actually believe or do. This makes it hard to find out what is really happening in practice.
- Observation involves collecting data using one's senses, especially looking & listening in a systematic and meaningful way.
- Observation sometimes referred to as unobtrusive method.
 - o Unobtrusive measures allow for data collection & analysis to be completed without the researcher intruding in the research context.
 - o Their advantage is that they do not disturb the naturally occurring processes that are the

subject of the research. In particular, because the informants are not aware of the research that is going on, their behaviour and self-descriptions are not modified by the researcher's presence or activities.

o Other names for these techniques are 'non-reactive' or 'indirect' methods.

• The research setting for participant observation is the study informants' own daily environment rather than a setting assigned by researchers.

• Observation provides an enormous amount of data to be captured & analysed.

• One approach to helping with collection and analysis is to digitally record observations to allow for repeated viewing.

• Observation' is more than just recording of data from the environment.

• When we observe, we are active, not passive collectors of data like a tape recorder or video camera.

• Observation seeks to find out "what is going on here?"

• Data collected in observational studies can be qualitative, quantitative or both.

Why Use Observation to Collect Data?

• They provide researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities.

• Participant observation allows researchers to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events that informants may be unable or unwilling to share.

• Help researchers observe situations informants have described in interviews, thereby making them aware of distortions or inaccuracies in description provided by those informants.

• Makes it possible to collect different types of data. Being onsite over a period of time familiarizes the researcher to the community, thereby facilitating involvement in sensitive activities to which he/she generally would not be invited.

• It helps the researcher to develop questions that make sense in the native language or are culturally relevant.

• It gives the researcher a better understanding of what is happening in the culture.

• Enables the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews.

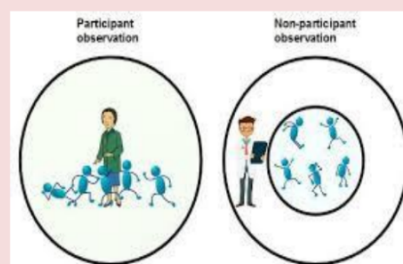

Two types of observations:

1) Non-participant observation. Researcher is not part of the activity taking place, but simply observes. May be identified as observer/researcher (Observers adopt a detached role).


2) Participant observation. Researcher takes part in community, organization, or activity. Researcher attempts to learn what it is like to be part of the community, organization, or participate in the activity (i.e. observer participates in the activities being observed).

Types of Observation

- Participant (interact with those you are observing; become a participant) vs. Non-participant (sit, watch, take notes with no interaction).
- Participant observations may alter events
- Non-participant observations may not gain complete understanding of event.



Observational Research



Non-participant Observation Participant Observation

Watching people in their natural environment

Participant observation:

- Marshall & Rossman (1989).
- “The **systematic description** of events, behaviors, & artifacts in the social setting chosen for study”.
- Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a **“written photograph”** of the situation under study.
- A process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing & participating in those activities.
- “The process of **learning through exposure to** or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting”.

Participant observation-Methodology:

- The researcher **assumes a role** in the setting or group being studied.
- Often the researcher actually **takes on the role** being studied:
- Becoming a firefighter.
- Enrolling in flight training school.
- Working in a mental hospital (or passing as a patient).

In both types of observation, the researcher attempts to learn about context in which behavior takes place. Context includes:

- Physical surroundings.
- **Other people** in the setting.
- The interactions among different people in the setting.
- Social, cultural, political, or economic context in which the behavior occurs & why it occurs.

Styles of observation:

1) **Unstructured observation** – describing what occurs. Researcher usually does not have a preconceived idea about what would occur.

The most common type.

Uses the researcher’s words for thick description of phenomena or events.

2) **Structured observation**. Starting with an operational definition of what you want to measure – and counting only the behavior or situation that “fits” the definition.

Uses a template to record tabulations of specific behaviours that can be measured and analysed statistically.

3) **Mix of both- unstructured and structured**.

Researchers record what they see, hear, smell, and taste using:

1) **Field notes**. Written record of what is observed, impressions, reactions, and hypotheses about what has happened.

2) **Photos** of people and setting may be added to analysis.

3) **Audio-tape & video-tape** are also used to document what researchers find.

An example of field note taken during triage nurse observation

7am Saturday. I followed Andrew as he moved through each clinical area on his way to triage. I asked about this behaviour. He explained, it's important to know the number of patients in each area and which beds are free. Arriving at triage, the night nurse was directing a patient to the waiting room. Andrew asked about the shift. Looking out into the waiting room, eight people sat on chairs. Some were watching the television, others rested with their eyes closed, of which two had draped around them hospital blankets. Andrew listened, mainly nodding, as the nurse discussed each patient: how long they had waited, why they came to the ED, if the Triage Nurse had done anything to speed up their care, and the rate that patients were seen. The Triage Nurses, turned back towards the computer and brought up a different screen that appeared labelled Patient Expect. Doctors entered the details and conditions of expected ED patient arrivals into this screen. Expected patients appeared listed on the computer screen. The information provided on this screen sometimes assisted Triage Nurses to determine their activities.

How Does One Conduct an Observation?

• Conducting observations involves a variety of activities & considerations for the researchers:

A- **Ethics.**

B- Establishing **rapport.**

C- Selecting **key informants.**

D- The **processes** for conducting observations.

E- Keeping **field notes.**

F- **Writing** up one's findings.

A) Ethics:

1) The researcher must take some of the field notes to reinforce that what the researcher is doing is collecting data for research purposes.

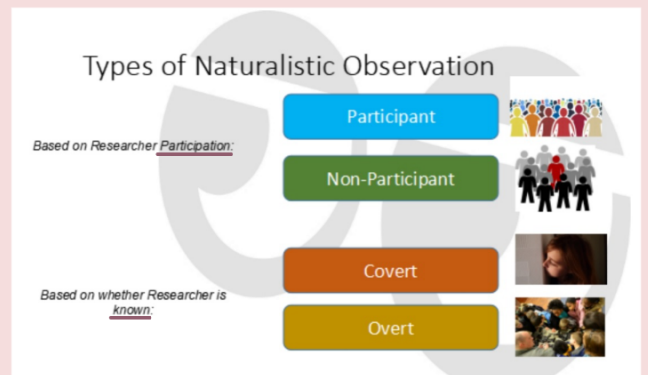
2) When the researcher meets community members for the first time, he/she should be sure to inform them of the purpose for being there, sharing sufficient information with them about the research topic.

This means that one is constantly introducing oneself as a researcher.

3) Another ethical responsibility is to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the final write-up and in field notes to prevent their identification.

Maintaining ethics in naturalistic observation

- to **not undertake this type of observation if another research method is possible** to investigate the same problem;
- to **take complete permissions** of those in the research environment, who are not a target of the research i.e. of concerned authorities such as school administrators or parents or community leaders, etc. in the least, and at least inform others who may be affected by the process of research;
- to **explain to the people observed, after observation** why it was necessary to carry out the research, why they could not be told about the observation, how their contribution is very valuable, and to patiently address their doubts and queries;
- to **assure the target observed that their confidentiality would be maintained** and to keep this promise. That is, the names or faces of the target or any information that could reveal their identity should not be known to anyone but the researcher(s). All the records of observation should be handled with utmost caution, and reports made without any identifications.



Overt v.s. covert observation:

• **Overt observation:** occurs when participants know they are being observed and are aware of the purpose of the study.

• **Covert observation:** means that participants are either unaware of being observed or that the observer conceals the real reason for observing them.

Overt Observation

- Means the observed group is **aware** of the presence of the researcher and that their behavior is being **observed**.



Covert Observation

- Means the participants are **not aware** of the presence of the researcher and they are that their behavior is being **observed**.

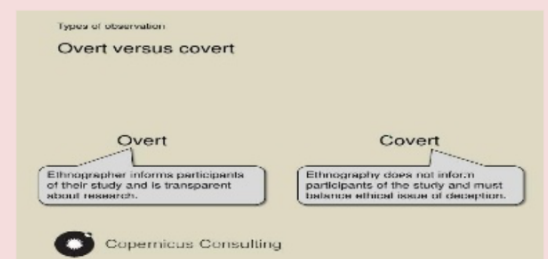


Types of observation

Overt versus covert

Overt
Ethnographer informs participants of their study and is transparent about research.

Covert
Ethnography does not inform participants of the study and must balance ethical issues of deception.



All in all. Ethical issues that need considering when carrying out an observational study... Adopted from (Twycross & Shorten, 2016)

Ethical Issues	Consideration
Covert versus overt data collection	Covert methods involve deception, with researchers pretending to be someone they are not. This type of observation is now considered unethical because it violates individuals' right to autonomy and their ability to decide whether they want to be observed. Nowadays participants are normally told what the purpose of the research is.
Gaining consent	If collecting data in a hospital setting some researchers recommend gaining informed consent from all individuals present on the ward on a regular basis. Collecting data about a specific patient, informed consent should be obtained. For other people within the general area a simple explanation that you are collecting data for a study along with obtaining their verbal consent, may be adequate (REC: Research Ethics Committee will determine the approach).
What will you do if you see poor practice?	Observation of practices that require improvement but are not dangerous or harmful (see below), without intervening, would not be considered unethical.
What will you do if you see dangerous practice?	The REC approving an observational study will expect a researcher to have identified the steps they will take if they observe dangerous practice. For example, the researcher may arrange to discuss any dangerous practice she observed with the ward manager. The ward manager would then take any necessary action.
Protecting participants anonymity	Anonymity can be maintained by referring to participants using identifying codes.

Each method of observation has its advantages and disadvantages...

Research method	Advantage	Disadvantage
Participant observation	Observer can be a part of the process so can really see & experience what is going on	Can be dangerous for observer
Non-participant observation	Observer remains safe	Observer cannot get a feel for what is happening
Overt observation	Ethical	'observer effect' means respondents may act differently
Covert observation	Respondents act as they normally would	Unethical

B) Gaining Entry & Establishing Rapport:

- A key strategy in minimising the effect of the researcher's presence on behaviours to establish rapport before starting data collection.
- To assist in gaining permission from the community to conduct the study, the researcher may bring letters of introduction or other information that will ease entry, such as information about one's affiliation, funding sources, and planned length of time in the field.
- One may need to meet with the community leaders. For example, when one wishes to conduct research in a school, permission must be granted by the school principal and, possibly, by the district school superintendent.
- For example, if the study involves observing nurses, a first step might be to attend team meetings or ward handover on several occasions as a way of getting to know the potential participants and building a relationship with them.
- "**Hanging out**" is the process through which the researcher gains trust and establishes rapport with participants.
- Hanging out involves meeting and conversing with people to develop relationships over an extended period of time.
- Three stages to the hanging out process:
 1. **Moving** from a position of formal.
 2. **Ignorant** intruder to welcome.
 3. **Knowledgeable** intimate.
- 1. Moving from a position of formal:
 - The researcher is a stranger who is learning the social rules and language, making herself/himself known to the community, so they will begin to teach her/him how to behave appropriately in that culture.
- 2. Ignorant intruder to welcome:
 - Researcher begins to merge with the crowd and stand out less as an intruder.
 - "**Acquaintance**" stage.
 - The language becomes more familiar to the researcher, but he/she still may not be fluent in its use.
- 3. Knowledgeable intimate:
 - The "intimate" stage.
 - The researcher has established relationships with participants to the extent that he/she no longer has to think about what he/she says.

- It sometimes involves the researcher's working with and participating in everyday activities beside participants in their daily lives.

Tips for collecting useful observation data:

- Become familiar with the setting before beginning to collect data.
- keep the observations short at first to keep from becoming overwhelmed.
- Be honest, but not too technical or detailed, in explaining to participants what he/she is doing.
- Pay attention, shifting from a "wide" to a "narrow" angle perspective, focusing on a single person, activity, interaction, then returning to a view of the overall situation;
- Look for key words in conversations to trigger later recollection of conversations' content.

An example of a research design using observation

Research Questions	1. How do members of operating teams interact and communicate? 2. What contributes to the communication climates in different operating theatres? 3. Do interprofessional values exist in theatre teams. If so, how do they impact on the behaviour and interactions of operating theatre team members?
Research Site	Operating theatres in general, vascular and orthopaedic surgery; compare one metropolitan and one regional hospital site.
Participants	surgeons, registrars, nursing staff Team leaders, theatre technicians, patients
Other key personnel	Director of clinical services; director of medical services; theatre manager; patient admissions manager; admissions staff; team leaders of each theatre
Methods of data collection	1. Observations (approximately 40 hours in theatre across the two sites); 2. Field memo's 3. Informal conversations with staff in the theatre and/or theatre suite (e.g. Change rooms, staff room, corridors etc) 4. Conduct semi-structured interviews to follow up and clarify findings from observations (include questions about medical jargon, differences in procedure amongst team leaders etc)
Data analysis	Coding of observation notes; field notes (which includes details of informal conversations with staff; analytic memos; recording of personal experiences, context); thematic analysis

Each observation should provide you with answers regarding:

- Who do you observe?
- What do you observe?
- Where does the observation take place?
- When does it take place?
- How does it happen?
- Why does it happen as it happens?

Challenges of observation:

- 1) Methodologically, the act of being observed may change the behaviour of the participant (often *referred to as the 'Hawthorne effect'*), impacting on the value of findings.
 - ❑ However, most researchers report a process of habituation taking place where, after a relatively short period of time, those being observed revert to their normal behaviour.
 - ❑ As participants grow accustomed to the observer's presence, their behaviour will more closely resemble normal, everyday behaviour.
- 2) The dependability of the process on the observer understanding and judgment.
- 3) The observer may miss a critical moment while notes have been taking, or being distracted by another factor in the setting.

Samples on participant observation papers (further reading):

- Participant Observation BY DL Jorgensen.
- Using participant observation in pediatric health care settings: ethical challenges and solutions.
- Do physicians clean their hands? Insights from a covert observational study.
- Tensions in ethnographic observation: overt or covert?
- Some strategies to address the challenges of collecting observational data in a busy clinical environment.