

# How Does One Conduct an Observation?

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

- Ethics.
- Establishing rapport.
- Selecting key informants.
- The processes for conducting observations.
- Keeping field notes.
- Writing up one's findings

## Ethics



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



• يجب على الباحث تدوين بعض الملاحظات الميدانية للتأكد من أن ما يقوم به الباحث هو جمع البيانات لأغراض البحث.

• 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.

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 versus 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

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

# Gaining Entry and Establishing Rapport


A key strategy in minimising the effect of the researcher's presence on behaviour is 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 occasion 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.
- Moving from a position of formal.
- Ignorant intruder to welcome.
- 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 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.

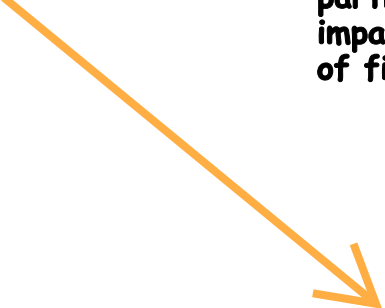
## Tips for collecting useful observation data

- 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 the conversation content.
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### Challenges of observation



- 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



- The dependability of the process on the observer understanding and judgment.
- The observer may miss a critical moment while notes have been taken, or being distracted by another factor in the setting