Your notes

GCSE Sociology: revision notes

Research methods

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Types of data

- **Quantitative data** is numerical, such as statistics. **Qualitative data** is descriptive, such as people's words and feelings.
- Primary data is collected by the researcher; secondary data already exists, such as official statistics, documents and previous studies.

Methods

- Questionnaires: sets of questions, often with **closed questions** (fixed answers). Quick, cheap and good for large samples, but lack depth and may have low response rates.
- Structured interviews: set questions asked in the same order. **Unstructured interviews**: like a guided conversation, giving detailed **qualitative data** but taking more time.
- Observation: **participant observation** (the researcher joins the group) or non-participant (watching from outside); covert (secret) or overt (open). **Covert observation** avoids people changing their behaviour but raises ethical issues.
- Official statistics and documents: cheap and cover large numbers, but may not be accurate or may be socially constructed.
- Longitudinal studies follow the same people over time; case studies examine one group in depth.

Choosing a method

- Positivists prefer quantitative, scientific methods; interpretivists prefer qualitative methods that show meanings and experiences.
- Researchers also consider practical factors (time, cost, access) and ethics.

Key terms

Quantitative data	Numerical data.

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Qualitative data	Descriptive data about words and feelings.
Closed question	A question with fixed answers to choose from.
Unstructured interview	A flexible, conversation-like interview.
Participant observation	The researcher joining the group they study.
Covert observation	Observation where the group doesn't know they are being studied.
Longitudinal study	A study that follows the same people over time.
Positivism	An approach favouring scientific, quantitative methods.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is quantitative data?
2. What is a closed question?
3. What is participant observation?
4. What is covert observation?
5. What is an unstructured interview?
6. What is a longitudinal study?
7. Which approach favours quantitative, scientific methods?
8. What is secondary data?

Answers

1. Numerical data
2. A question with fixed answers to choose from
3. The researcher joining the group they study
4. Observation where the group doesn't know they are being studied
5. A flexible, conversation-like interview
6. A study that follows the same people over time
7. Positivism
8. Data that already exists

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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