

Online Classroom™

## **SOCIOLOGY SHORT CUTS 1**

# **DOING SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

## **Activities And Web Links**



**Social Surveys**

## 2. Social Surveys

**Activity 1: Concepts and Indicators**

Remind students that Kiel, the researcher in the programme, explained how he 'measured' students' socio-economic background or, in more everyday language, how wealthy their families were by using various indicators.

Explain that this activity will attempt to measure individual students' wealth and, in particular, how many are in 'relative poverty'.

*NB. If poverty is a sensitive topic for your class the same points can be made using other examples, such as student earnings (how many 'high earners' in each group?), or 'integration' (number of close family and friendship ties).*

Divide students into (at least) two groups based on some sort of division – such as areas of the town, gender etc. Nominate a researcher from each group. Give researchers very short questionnaires to administer to their group.

Make the definitions of poverty (or whatever topic you choose) and the indicators different for each group. For example, in one survey the 'poverty level' could be set at 'having less than £7.50 a week to spend on yourself', while for the other group it is set higher at say, 'having less than £15 a week'.

The researchers report back the findings.

Barring a freak result, there will almost certainly be more 'poverty' in the group with the higher, or highest, indicator.

- Ask students if they can think of some reasons for the differences, before (if necessary) drawing them back to the differing measuring tools.
- Ask students what they consider to be relative poverty. What criteria would they include? How do they justify their choice? For example, is not being able to afford a mobile phone a criterion of 'poverty'?

This exercise should help students understand that quantitative data aren't just 'out there' waiting to be collected, they have to be constructed by using concepts and indicators.

Sociologists can only measure *concepts* of things like poverty, socio-economic background or educational motivation; measuring something in sociology, therefore, involves making choices and the concepts and indicators selected will influence the data that is collected.

**Activity 2: Sampling**

This Activity involves students using different types of sampling.

Begin with some 'simple' questions to focus the students.

- What is a sample in research?
- Why do sociologists use samples?
- How many different types of sampling can you identify?

**A. Simple Random Sampling**

Group 1 takes the name of every student in your class from the register, writes them on separate pieces of paper and draws 25% of the names at random. Explain that this is a simple random sample.

How representative of your class was the sample Group 1 created (for example, does it accurately reflect the relative percentages of males and females in the class?).

**B. Systematic Sampling**

A second group, using your class register as a sampling frame, constructs a 25% sample by selecting every fourth name.

How similar / different is this sample from the simple random sample?

**C. Stratified Random Sampling**

A third group identifies a known characteristic of the group (for example, girls outnumbering boys by 2 to 1). They then construct a 25% stratified random sample with (from the example above) girls outnumbering boys by 2 to 1.

Compare the results from the stratified sample with those gained from the simple random and systematic samples. Which type of sample gave the most-representative outcome?

**D. Quota sampling**

Group 4 simply takes the names of the 25% of the class who are nearest to them. How does this sample compare with the other samples? For example, it's important to note here that any absent students cannot be selected. Students can also be asked why sociologists sometimes have to use samples that are not likely to be representative.

**Activity 3: Evaluation**

The video ends by asking 'if you were one of the students filling in Kiel's questionnaire, how much do you think it would really tell him about your social background and educational motivation?'

This activity is designed to explore this question further.

Give students a copy of Kiel's questions on Motivation (reproduced on next page) and ask them to fill it in as honestly as they can!

- Ask students to work out their own 'motivation score – giving themselves 5 for each strongly agree, 4 for each agree, 3 for each neutral and so on.
- Ask them if they think their score reflects how motivated they really are and, if not, why not.? If you're feeling brave you could also ask students if they were surprised by other students' scores.
- Ask 3 or 4 students who have ticked the same box to say what they actually meant by strongly agree, agree or whatever.
- Ask students if there were any questions where the answer they gave was not what they really meant.
- Ask students if there was anything they would have liked to have said about their educational motivation that the questionnaire did not give them the opportunity to say.
- Ask the students what they understood by a "good grade" a "top university" and "going out". Was the meaning of these phrases the same for each student and, if not, what does this tell us?

In our experience, students will invariably be able to give a range of different interpretations of the same item, some will be able to illustrate how an answer they gave was not what they actually meant and some will give examples of things they would have said but weren't asked.

In this way students can discover some of the limitations of questionnaire surveys for themselves. It is more likely that the ideas will then stay in their mind and improve exam performance.

**Supplementary Material****Social Surveys ppt**

**Attitudes to Education**

Look at the following statements and identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. (Please circle)

**1. I enjoy coming to school / college:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**2. I enjoy the academic work at college:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**3. Getting good grades at A-Level is really important to me:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**4. I want to go to a top university:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**5. Getting homework done is more important than going out:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**6. I would never take time off school / college unless I had to:**

Strongly agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly disagree

**Web Links****2. Social Surveys**

<http://www.ucel.ac.uk/rlos/questionnaire/Default.html>

Short presentation using text and Flash graphics to illustrate some basic points about questionnaires. Short activity and assessment questions are also included.

[http://student.bmj.com/back\\_issues/0601/education/187.html](http://student.bmj.com/back_issues/0601/education/187.html)

Notes explaining how to design a questionnaire.

<http://www.ergonomics4schools.com/lzone/questionnaires.htm>

Notes covering questionnaire use, design and problems.

[http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/cs6751\\_97\\_winter/Topics/quest-design/](http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/cs6751_97_winter/Topics/quest-design/)

Comprehensive Notes on a variety of aspects of questionnaire use and design.

[http://www.sociology.org.uk/v\\_home.htm](http://www.sociology.org.uk/v_home.htm)

Two videos (Methods section) covering questionnaires and research ethics.

