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| **Learning Table 6: Sampling** | | | | | |
| With any research method sociologists must chose a sample of representative participants in order to produce data that can be generalised to the target population.  **Sampling Frame** – is a list of names of all those in the target population. Examples include the Electoral Register (names and addresses of all adults over the age of 18 in Britain who are registered to vote in elections. The Royal Mail Postcode Address File is the most complete sampling frame in the UK. | | | | | |
| **Random Sampling** | **Systematic Sampling** | **Stratified Sampling** | **Quota Sampling** | **Cluster Sampling** | **Snowball Sampling** |
| This refers to every individual in a target population has an equal chance of being selected. For example, a random sample can be performed by putting the names of your target population in a hat and picking them out at random. However it can result in a bias sample simply by chance. There may be too many people of one sex, age or social class. | This refers to when names are selected from the sampling frame at regular intervals until the size of the sample is reached. For example by selecting every 10th name in a sampling frame. This has much the same risk of being unrepresentative as random sampling. For example, every 10th name might be a white middle class person by chance. | This is achieved by subdividing the sampling frame into a number of smaller sampling frames drawn up on a particular basis such as social class, age, sex, ethnic group etc. The criteria used will depend on the topic being investigated. Individuals are then chosen at random from each subdivision. The researcher will ensure there is a reflective amount of each subgroup. For example, if you were to investigate doctors, 8% your sample would have to be made up of Asian doctors, since Asian people make up 8% of doctors in the UK. The final sample is likely to be more representative as it is reflective of the way in which the target population is made up. | In quota sampling, researchers are told to select people who fit into certain categories according to their proportion in the target population. (So many men and so many women over the age of 45). However this is not necessarily representative. For example, the quote might be filled by stopping people while shopping during the week, but this would exclude those who are at work. | This involves selecting a sample in various stages, each time electing a sample from a previous sample until the final sample of people is selected. For example, in a national survey of school students, you might first take a random sample of schools, then take a random sample of students in those sample schools. | This is used when a sampling frame is difficult to obtain or doesn’t exist. The researcher may identify one or two people with the characteristics and ask them to introduce them to other people willing to cooperate in the research. Then ask them to identify others. Laurie Taylor (1984) used this technique to identify criminals for their research.  Such samples are useful but are not representative. They rely on volunteers recommending other volunteers to the researcher and the sample is therefore self-selecting and this may create bias. |