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| Positivists | Interpretivists |
| is the approach based on the natural sciences. Central is the idea of objectivity and science. This approach was favoured by earlier sociologists and tended to be “top down, tends to produce measurable quantitative data | is the approach which tries to see the world from the subjects perspective. Tends to be bottom up and qualitative  **Non-representative sampling –** where a valid study of the experiences of a group is more important than accuracy e.g. **studying prostitution** |
| Aim: to produce research that is systematic and logical. All those who take part are exposed to the same variables e.g. questions | Aim: to produce research which uncovers meaning and experiences. The world is socially constructed therefore it is important to uncover these meanings |
| Objectivity and value free:  Positivists do not want bias! So they want their research to be as objective as possible.  Value freedom: all sources of bias have been removed, e.g. the style of questions. This will hopefully lead to more reliable data | Verstehn, empathy and rapport  The aim of sociological research should be to get in the shoes of who they are researching. Building rapport between the participants and researcher is important as this will lead to valid data |
| Preferred methods:  Social surveys (questionnaires, structured interviews) secondary methods (official statistics) | Preferred methods:  Ethnographic methods (unstructured interviews, participant observations) within their natural environment. |



**Ethics**

The British Sociological Association argues that ethical issues are important. All sociological research should generally underpin the following;

1. Informed consent
2. Privacy and confidentiality
3. Protection from harm
4. Legality immorality

**Snowball**

Where each participant is asked to refer researcher on to someone of interest the the researcher. Highly biased but useful for investigating marginalised groups

**Volunteer sampling**

When you are asked to take part in research and no sampling frame is available- one of the weakest sampling techniques as they will more than likely have an agenda

**Opportunity sampling**

When researchers choose volunteers who are available at that time and fit the nature of the research

**Quota sampling**

Often used by market researchers  
Sampling based on proportions in UK population – e.g. age, sex, income, ethnicity  
Each pp would be chosen on the basis that they fulfil these e.g. if 1% of population is Asian and female 1% of those sampled will be like that.

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**Random sampling**

Where every possible participant has an equal chance of being chosen  
Three main types:  
**Systematic sampling** every nth on list  
**Stratified** – divided on known criteria but you have to know the % of characteristic in population  
**Cluster** e.g. geographic

**Representative sampling** – where attempts are made to accurately sample the target population to ensure representative and generalizable results

**Sampling**

**Triangluation** There is no perfect research method

Qualitative and quantitative methods both have weaknesses which tend to be the inverse of each other.

The use of mixed methods which is known as triangulation can overcome some of the weaknesses of a method

**Reflexivity:** interpretivists understand the potential of researcher bias and misinterpretation in their research. They believe that reflexivity overcomes this. This is where they are aware of how their decisions will impact on social behaviour of their subjects, so they will keep a journal or diary of the research process which they can critically reflect upon.

**How can we overcome researcher problems?**

Key analytical concepts:

Validity: does the research give a true picture of what is being studied? Especially important for **interpretivists** as they want to understand meanings and motives.

Consider;

1. Research design- is the design of the research poor?
2. Lies- can the participants lie or mislead researchers?
3. Changing behaviour- can they change their behaviour as a result of being studied
4. Misinterpretation- can the researcher misinterpret behaviour or words?

Reliability: the same or similar results should be produced if re-studied by other researchers important for **positivists**

Consider;

1. Can the research be undermined by the method- e.g. unstructured interviews/ participant observations- based on relationships and rapport- can another sociologist produce the same relationship?

Representativeness: consider the sample here; it is often impractical to include every member in a social group in research, so a researcher will take a sample.

Is the sample representative? Is it made up of those who mirror the larger population, consider CAGE. If the research is unrepresentative- can result in bias.

Generalisability: when a researcher uses a representative sample, they can generalise their findings to a wider population

Full generalisability cannot always be guaranteed