

Conducting Observational Research

Research Methods in Health Promotion.
Crosby et al. Chapter 5 (p 107-128).

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Objectives

- To discuss multiple concerns relevant to the conception, design, and implementation of observational research in health promotion



Observational Research



“It’s the  of evidence in health promotion”

- To gain perspective before conducting a Randomized Control Trial
- To gain knowledge and understanding of a hypothesis

Susie's Grad Project

Observe the difference between fruit and vegetable consumption of school-age children when they serve themselves verses when they are served.



Where to Begin??

1. **Gaining Access to the Sample**
2. Effective Recruitment Strategies
3. Assessment
4. Avoid Attrition





I win
You lose

It's a deal!

I win
You win



I lose
You lose



I lose
You win

Sample

- Define study population

I liked the point where it was mentioned that it is preferable to identify a different population for the research rather than conducting a study that does not meet the requirements of the researcher. This statement gives an idea of how important it is to get access of the right population/sample for research.

--Megha

- Gain approval to conduct the study

The chapter briefly mentions how some IRBs permit data collection from non-volunteers, while other IRBs prohibit this. What are some reasons that the IRB will prohibit data collection from non-volunteers?

--Naho



Sample

- Make compromises that don't jeopardize the rigor and scope of the research





- Who is Suzie's Study Population?
 - School-age children
- How should she go about gaining approval to conduct the study?
 - School board/IRB
 - Principle
 - Teachers
 - Parents
 - Students



- What compromises should Suzie be willing to make?
 - Day/Time study takes place
 - Duration
 - Sample size????
- What compromises should Suzie not be willing to make?
 - Sample size
 - Observation methods
 - Service methods



“The point at which the required compromises jeopardize the ability of the research process to generate rigorous findings is the terminal end of the negotiation”

Where to Begin??

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- 2. Effective Recruitment Strategies**
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Recruitment

- *Effective Recruitment*
 - Offer reasonable incentives
 - Pay attention to **when** you are recruiting
 - Explain to match the needs of potential subjects
 - Active vs. Passive

Wouldn't passive recruitment present a lot of bias to a study, because the participants actively sought out the researchers or investigators and are obviously interested in the study? --Lauren



Recruitment

- *Systemic Recruitment*

- All potential volunteers treated the same way
- Keep accurate records

Selection Bias can be “...a result of participants non compliance or other. This really got me thinking about all the ways in which data can be affected” --Mary

Incentives can be a good motivator but I feel like researchers should pay extra attention during the recruitment.
--Amy





- What should her recruitment style be?
 - Active vs. Passive
- What ways can she ensure systematic recruitment methods?
 - Accurate record keeping
 - Assign a number to each school, according to service style

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- 3. Assessment**
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”Just as the sampling plan can be foiled by poor recruiting, an assessment method can be compromised by poor implementation”

Assessment

- *Avoiding Response Bias*
 - Don't tell participants what the hypothesis is



- Provide a nonjudgmental atmosphere

“The example of conducting research in a runaway youth population did get me thinking how important it is to tailor research to your target population. Many questions may be sensitive and this is definitely important to take into account. Also, do you think this would present many issues of honesty when researching vulnerable populations? Will they be possibly embarrassed to tell the truth? What do you think is the best way to design a survey with a sensitive subject and also the best way to interview these subjects?”

--Amanda

Assessment

- *Avoiding Undue Respondent Fatigue*

- Keep research interesting to volunteers

To avoid respondent fatigue, surveys for parents are designed to be fit into a one-page paper and surveys for children are color printed with figures and only half page long. In my own study, to ensure return rate, parent surveys will be distributed together with student homework file and incentives will provided if the students bring back the survey to school.

--Jenny



- Try to have answers for all questions



"A polite request to 'please consider providing responses to questions 76 through 89 on the last page' (for example) may be met with cooperation. This small task may make the difference between including and excluding the participant's data from the final analysis."

Assessment

- *Facilitating Accurate Recall*

- Use short recall periods

Q: Anyone have experience in collecting personal information or a diet recall from participants/clients? If so, did you run into any difficulties or notice any bias in their responses?

--Lauren

- Provide “probes” or key dates to help participants recall information

“I really liked the idea of using a large calendar and then asking the participant if they engaged in any special events on certain days or weekends to try and jog their memory of any activities they did, any foods they ate or drinks they consumed.” --Lauren





” The most challenging scenario occurs when the behavior under the study is low in salience and is relatively frequent.”



” The goal is to train research staff in the ‘art’ of conducting an assessment that will maximize the odds of accurate recall from the participants.”



- How can she avoid response bias?
- How can she create a nonjudgmental atmosphere?
 - Kids don't know they are being observed
 - Kids don't know why they are being observed
- Does she need to be concerned about response fatigue?

Where to Begin??

1. Gaining Access to the Sample
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4. **Avoid Attrition**





"In prospective observational studies, retention is so vital that complete failure of the study may easily occur if rate is low."

Avoid Attrition

- **Remain in contact with the study participants through phone or mail**

People can move, change phone numbers or no longer choose to participate.
--Amanda



Moreover, you should be caring and respectful to the needs of the participants, because the more satisfied participants you have, the lower attrition rate you get and eventually rigorous findings.
--Azzah



“The telephone is an essential tool for contact; therefore, gaining permission from the IRB to ask volunteers for a reliable phone number is clearly important in prospective studies.”

Avoid Attrition

- Show genuine interest in the person
- Be flexible to the needs of the participants





- Does Suzie need to be worried about attrition?
- Are there any variables that might affect the outcomes of this study?

Sweet Success

- Have a well designed study
- Plan ahead for many different obstacles that may come up during the observational period of the study
- Expect the unexpected and have a plan just in case!



Sweet Success



- Data analysis can be repeated over and over again, but planning and implementation steps occur at discrete points in time and cannot be “reversed.”



- The successful study will be one that is planned in great detail and implemented with fidelity.”