

Problems experienced by sociologists when choosing a research method

Tutor

University

Date

Identify and explain problems sociologists may experience when choosing a research method?

Introduction

In this essay I am going to list down the problems that sociologists may have to face when they are doing research. These problems include Hawthorne effect, practical factors, wrong choice of research methods and ethical factors. In this paper, I have described these problems in detail with the help of examples.

Main Body

Sociologists have always been studying human societies. They do this by carrying out numerous researches. These researches are sometimes detailed, systematic, or scientific in nature. Some research work calls for interpretive framework where the researcher carries out ethnographic studies.

Sociologist can experience research-based problems at every step of the research process. Thereby, they are required to plan their research work wisely before starting their studies. One of the problem that sociologist may experience can be in the form of Hawthorne effect. This is where people behave differently when they get to know that are being observed. Sociologists usually try to study human behavior in societal settings where they want to observe their natural response to things. When a person gets to know that he is being observed then he will alter his actions (Cohen et al., 2013).

For example, the sociologists want to observe how waiters and managers behave in a coffee shop. The researcher wants to have a detailed idea about the staff's behavior with customers, their reactions and at what specific time does their efficiency level reaches the highest point. However, the problem for the sociologist will occur when the staff of coffee shop will

come to know that they are being observed. Some may resort to their natural behavior, others will behave differently and some will become more efficient as a result of observation. This particular problem makes the results of sociologists study quite unnatural.

In this case, the solution to this problem will be to make the researcher invisible. This way the researcher will be able to get the data that he wants with naturalistic behaviours. But, this has its own limit. The researcher cannot always stay invisible. For instance, if he/she is studying prison behaviours or early education; he may have to show his presence.

Another problem that sociologist can face is related to practical research factors. Practical methods to carry research should be considered when sociologists conduct their research. One of the problems that can generate in practical research method is funding. If sociologists lack sufficient funds to support his research work, then it will place a limit on the scale of research. Moreover, he won't be able to conduct research on a large scale and will fail to gain a significant amount of information (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

Funding is a financial means that a sociologist can get for his idea and research work. Lack of funding will create a problem because funding acts like a fuel for successful completion of the project. Without the fuel, the project's goals and objectives will not be attained as they should be.

For instance, the topic of the sociologist calls for detailed research methods. The sociologist will have to conduct surveys and face-to-face discussions with their research participants. In order to successfully initiate their research thesis, the researcher will need financial support. If he lacks funding and financial muscle to carry out the project, then his

planning for the project will fail. As a result, it is imperative, that the researcher should plan and market his idea in a way that he is able to get funding for his project (Acker et al., 1983).

Practical factors also include developing a level of trust with research participants. Since, the nature of sociological research is getting insights from the lives of the people and society, a significant amount of trust must be present between the researcher and participant. This will reduce the problem for sociologists. These problems can in the form of failing to get insights from their research sample, not getting sufficient details to support their project paper or unsuccessful in getting the data altogether (Cribari-Assali, 2016).

Another problem that the sociologist will have to face is related to their choice of research methods. Sociologist's research tactics must be well planned. Their plan should involve consistent know-how of the research topic, how it should be conducted and what will be their research sample. Failing to choose from a right research method will result in the wastage of time, energy and money. Sociologists must know whether they are doing qualitative research or quantitative research or both. They should make sure if they are planning to conduct only qualitative research then they should use research methods such as interviews and questionnaires. These approaches will help them to get an in-depth details about their interviewees or research sample (Thompson, 2016).

Distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative research is utmost important for the researcher. If the research fails to understand this fine line then he will not be able to reap the results from his research. He should also be clear of what is entailed in qualitative and quantitative research methods.

For example, the researcher wants to collect quantitative data for his project. Without much know-how of the research methodology he creates questionnaires and gets the results in detailed way. This wasted their efforts as they did not get the data that was needed in the first place.

In addition, ethical factors, if not considered by the researcher can also create problem. British Sociologist Association (BSA) has created strict guidelines to treat research participants fairly. If a sociologist is unable to follow the instruction of BSA and continues his unethical techniques then he will be dismissed from BSA register (Aragona and Zindato, 2016).

For example, D.L Rosenham's study in 1973. The researcher continued to carry out unethical activities despite the fact he knew about BSA regulations. Rosenham was later dismissed from his university when he asked his 'normal' participants to get in psychiatric labs. He misled his participants by telling them that they are unwell and they are hearing voices in the background. His lack of ethical consideration for his research sample proved to be quite dangerous for the participants.

Conclusion

Sociologists should consider multiple factors when they are planning their research work. Lack of detailed planning may inhibit their efforts, time and investments and create problems for them. These problems can be in the form of Hawthorne effect, ethical dilemmas, practical factors and failing to select the right research method for their project.

The researcher should keep in mind that when people come to know that they are getting observed, they tend to behave differently. This is a problem because it will change the results of the study as the results will not show naturalistic behaviour of the participants. The second

problem is related to lack of sufficient funding and trust. Lack of enough finance can hamper the success rate of the project in question. In addition, when particular personal insights from the participants are taken, researcher's level of trust with the sample should be very high so that there is an easy flow of information.

Another problem can be the wrong choice of research method. If the project calls for qualitative analysis and the researcher conduct quantitative analysis, then the outcome of the project will be completely different. As well as, the sociologists will again have to invest his time and finances to collect data from relevant research method. Last problem for sociologist is related to ethical dilemmas. If the researcher try to mislead his participants, do not take their informed consent and failed to keep their data private then they will be dismissed from the BSA register.

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