

Quick Study Guide

Topic: Research in Psychology - Methods

Related Course(s): Psych 1100, 2800, 3000, 3200

Psychological Research

(definition) Research is a systematic inquiry aimed at the discovery of new knowledge and is a central ingredient of the scientific method in psychology. It provides the key to understanding the degree to which hypotheses (and the theories) are accurate.

Types of Research

Descriptive Research: Descriptive research is designed to systematically investigate a person, group, or patterns of behavior. These methods include archival research, naturalistic observation, survey research, and case studies.

Archival Research: In archival research, *existing data*, such as census documents, college records, and newspaper articles, are examined to test a hypothesis.

Benefit(s): relatively inexpensive means of testing a hypothesis because someone else has already collected the basic data.

Drawback(s): The use of existing data has several drawbacks. The data may not be in a form that allows the researcher to test a hypothesis fully. The information could be incomplete, or it could have been collected haphazardly.

Naturalistic Observation: In naturalistic observation, the investigator *observes some naturally occurring behavior* and does not make a change in the situation.

Benefit(s): the advantage of naturalistic observation is obvious - we get a sample of what people do in their “natural habitat”

Drawback(s): the inability to control any of the factors of interest.

Survey Research: In survey research, a sample of people chosen to represent a larger group of interest (a population) is asked a series of questions about their behavior, thoughts, or attitudes.

Benefit(s): Survey methods have become so sophisticated that even with a very small sample researchers are able to infer with great accuracy how a larger group would respond.

Drawback(s): If the sample of people who are surveyed is not representative of the broader population of interest, the results of the survey will have little meaning. In addition, survey respondents may not want to admit to holding socially undesirable attitudes or to engaging in behaviors that they feel are somehow abnormal.

The Case Study: In contrast to a survey, in which many people are studied, a case study is an in-depth, intensive investigation of a single individual or a small group.

Benefit(s): detailed information, allows for comprehensive evaluation e.g. use of psychological testing

Drawback(s): The drawback to case studies is that, if the individuals examined are unique in certain ways, it is impossible to make valid generalizations to a larger population.

Correlational Research: Variables are behaviors, events, or other characteristics that can change, or vary, in some way. In correlational research, two sets of variables are examined to determine whether they are associated, or “correlated.”

Positive correlation: indicates that as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other variable will also increase.

Negative correlation: tells us that as the value of one variable increases, the value of the other decreases.