

a) Please give details of the research on which you are reporting

Title: Sexual attitudes and lifestyles

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Date of publication/completion: 1994

Publisher or source:

b) Outline of the Research design (210-300 words)

You should state the objective of your chosen piece of research, and use this section to outline how the researcher/s carried out their research. You should describe the aims of the research and the research methods that were used. (You may wish to consider sample size, access to sample, ethics etc.)

Johnson et al aimed to research sexual behaviour due to the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s. Before this study, the study of sexual behaviour was much neglected due to attitudes towards it. The Conservative government declined to finance the survey due its belief that personal business should be 'kept behind closed doors'. People working in the fields of fertility, sexual health and education were hindered in their work by the shortage of data. Luckily the 'Wellcome Trust' funded the research.

With the emergence of the AIDS epidemic, up-to-date research was required. This study was the largest and most comprehensive survey of sexual behaviour ever conducted. The information was collected from over 19,000 randomly selected British representatives selected through the Post office postcode address file. To gain access to the sample, times were arranged for meeting at their homes. Before this research, how the disease spread was unknown and the number of victims was thought to be 1 in 3.

This research was a descriptive and detailed study of sexual attitudes and lifestyles of the British public aged 16 to 59. The objective was to find out the link between sexual behaviour and AIDS. Two research methods were used to carry out their study. They employed structured interviews, which took place in the interviewee's home and a self-completion questionnaire booklet to fill in, e.g.

- Have you ever had any kind of sexual experience or sexual contact with a male?
- This was then sent to London anonymously to be put on computers for statistical analysis. The interviewer had training and was issued standardised instructions.

The invasion of personal information brings up the ethical issue intrusion. This was justified by the fact that public health services desperately needed this information to save lives. The ethical issue that the survey was time – consuming was overcome as individuals showed public willingness. Informed consent was attained by the 80% response rate of the selected sample.

Age was considered because legal complications could occur if under 16's were involved. Researchers assumed that over 59's would be less likely to talk about and be involved in sexual practices, and more likely to take the Margaret Thatcher viewpoint of keeping personal business personal. (365 words)

c) Reasons for selection of research design (250-300 words)

Use this section to outline why the researcher/s chose the methodology outlined above. You should explain why the methodology was thought suitable for achieving the kind of data required by the researcher/s

The decisions about the methods of data collection were centred on the nature, breadth and complexity of the information required. The information needed, about sexual behaviour from the subjects, was sensitive and of a personal nature. This meant that the respondents would need to be convinced of the necessity of the information before they would commit themselves fully. A 1-2-1 interview was chosen as it allowed interviewers to explain the research fully and reassure the interviewee. This would be harder to achieve when using a postal survey or over the phone.

The planned length of an interview being just under an hour for a quarter of the sample and 40-45 minutes for the remainder of the sample would be more acceptable for face-to-face interviews rather than postal or telephone surveys. The information needed was of a large amount and therefore a personal interviewing technique was chosen. This was because people would not generally give personal information over the phone to someone they are not familiar with. The data needed to be collected was complex and therefore there was a need for careful definitions of the questions so they were understood. This was also more suited to face - to - face interviews.

Another problem with using a telephone technique would have been that the interviewer would have had little control over whether the interview was being conducted in comfort or if other household members were present. A high proportion of the British public were without telephones, particularly younger people, at the time of research. This is another reason why using a telephone survey wouldn't have been best suited as a means of data collection.

An early pilot survey was carried out before the actual study. A postal survey was attempted but the response rate was very poor. On balance, the use of personal interview techniques seemed to be best suited to the social context of the study and finding the specific objectives. (320 words)

d) Evaluation of there research findings (350-400 words)

*You should use this section to outline briefly the main findings of the study, making reference to a limited sample of the research data to illustrate particular points. (The sample may be attached to the report as an appendix and may take the form of a graph, table, text quotations etc. It will **not** be counted in the word count)*

*You should also identify parts of the research that appear to have worked well and those that have not. You will need to show that you are aware of ways in which the methods selected have affected the quality of the data collected and produced, using the concepts of **reliability, validity, representative ness and/or generalisa bility**.*

One of the main things that the survey has found is that there has been a considerable drop in the age of first sexual intercourse. The changes seem to coincide with a period in which the traditional constraints on early sexual activity— social disapproval of sex before marriage and the fear of pregnancy have gradually lifted. From the research those that have early sexual intercourse were still associated with the lower classes but these effects are weakening. Those that have sex at an early age are more likely to have more sexual partners in their life and were more likely to have had other partners outside of marriage, thus making the chances of contracting a STD higher than those of 1 partner.

The attempts to obtain quantitative data on sexual behaviour relied on self-reports, as the objective verification of such intimate is virtually impossible. This has a lot to do with the fact that males' would be more likely to exaggerate the truth and to boost their egos, women on the other hand would be more likely to be reluctant to tell the truth because it promotes socially disapproving attitudes.

Some of the questions that were asked were not only socially disapproved but also legally, this was a problem that the researchers had to be careful about. The researchers couldn't include people under the age of 16 as they would have been under the legal age for sex; the main problem with this was that although the legal age for sex was 16, people under that age were still having sex. 1 in 3 women aged between 16 and 24 had had sex under the age of 16. This shows that a high proportion of those sexually active people were not included in the survey. Also the survey didn't include those over the age of 59. The main reason was that the researchers only wanted to include the sexually active, but with things like Viagra the age could be much higher.

One of the main objectives at the start of the research before any data could be extracted from the research was to obtain a 65% response rate, they achieved this and the response rate was over 80%, this showed a public willingness.

The survey was to assist the workers in sexual health and education. As the government refused to fund the survey, the Wellcome Trust came to the rescue and funded the research. The Wellcome Trust specialised in treatment of those with STD. This concerned some ethical issues, as although the general public would obviously benefit from the research, the Wellcome Trust would also benefit hugely as they gained millions of pounds from the research at the cost of those with STD's.

One criticism of the study was that it explored people's personal lives and their sexual lifestyles. That was one of the main reasons the piece of research lacked government funding. Also it didn't involve the whole of the sexually active persons in Britain. This is not really a fault of the survey as its aims were to explore people's sexual lifestyles and habits; it was also to the gain of the population in the long run as it has given more awareness of STD's.

The study contains valid findings and it fulfils its aim to give insight into people's sexual activity and has helped to provide sound data on links with sexual behaviour and STD's. It has helped those that work in sexual health, sex education and those that work in fertility, without this piece of research many lives would have been lost due to the lack of data and awareness in the field of sexual activity and its link to the world-wide epidemics of AIDS and HIV.