

What are the uses of both qualitative and quantitative research methods for the criminological understanding of patterns and trends of crime and victimisation?

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods help successfully provoke the required data for the criminological understanding of patterns and trends of crime and victimisation. Both methods have disadvantages and advantages linked with requiring the needed data, it can be argued that one method is more beneficial than the other due to the nature of this research yet it can also be argued that both research methods combined will be able to successfully provoke the required data drawing attention not only to cause and affect but also the numerical data which can help highlight the crime which is most significant in the contemporary UK.

Quantitative methods provoke numerical data which can be tabulated. It can take the form of questionnaires, surveys and structured interviews. Quantitative methods produce results which have to be transcribed and can take the form of unstructured interviews, case studies and covert and overt observations. Qualitative research methods provoke rich and multi dimensional data which is high in validity.

The nature of the question being examined is highly sensitive; therefore it would be proven to use quantitative methods which can take the form of an unstructured interview. These types of interviews help develop a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, therefore it is more like that the interviewee will devour more information that they may withhold in quantitative methods. Rapport will also be developed due to the fact that the interviewee has trust and confidence in the reporter, this mean that the validity of the results is likely to be higher. Qualitative methods are extremely useful in collecting data on sensitive topics, the nature of crime is a sensitive topic and quantitative methods may be seen as being de sensitive, whereas this method is not.

An added positive of using quantitative methods in order to understand patterns and trends of crime and victimisation is that it has little or no structure thus meaning the participant is free to talk about issues that may be ignored or over looked in other research methods. This is a positive factor as it allows the interviewer to attempt to find a cause or affect of the problem. As the interview is carried out face to face the interviewer will also be able to pick up on social cues that the participant is given out which can reinforce the point they are making or even go against what they are important. Flexibility is also important as if the responder feel distressed by any of the questions the interviewer can address this problem and attempt to make sure they do not come under any ethical harm. It is important also as it gives the interviewee a chance to lead the conversation and include answers that may have been over looked in other methods attempting to look at the patterns of crime and victimisation.

This type of research method enables the researcher to gain empathy. Therefore they can attempt to understand why or how this behaviour was displayed/carried out once again given validity to this experiment. Empathy is crucial for criminological understanding of patterns and trends of crime and victimisation as you need to understand how the participant felt and why they felt this way. It is also important for understanding why behaviour was carried out.

Qualitative methods are hugely flexible. The interview can follow up any interesting points the interviewee made, they can then probe further and will manage to develop their points and attempt to find a link. This would not be able to occur in quantitative methods as the structure would fail to allow flexibility.

Of course there are also problems with this method that need to be identified and addressed. This method is time consuming and costly. Due to the fact that it is flexible, participants may decide not to talk about certain areas regarding criminological understanding of crime and anti social behaviour in the contemporary society, therefore the issued may not be properly addressed meaning that the cause and affect is not identified having a direct affect of the validity of the results.

Another disadvantage of using this method is that due to the amount of time and the cost of this research method, the sample size is normally small. Therefore generalisations can not be made as

regards to gender, age and ethnicity as the sample size is unrepresentative. Added to this, this method is not reliable as it is unlikely that the same answers will be provoked if asked again. Therefore it lowers reliability and makes it difficult to generalise, quantify or get a representative sample.

It is not a systematic method. With no preset questions and relying on the skills of the interviewer the results are difficult to verify and reliability is inevitably lowered.

The interviewer's presence and the way questions are asked may affect results. This means it can lack objectivity. The interviewer may even offer their own opinions which may bias the results regarding criminological understanding of patterns and trends of crime and victimisation. The interviewer may be too close to the subject and alter their findings without realising. Thus having a direct effect on the results causing them to be unreliable and unrepresentative. Bias may also occur during the detailed analysis process.

Finally the experiment can be seen as unnatural; therefore the validity of the results must be questioned.

Qualitative data is a cheap reliable method which provokes representative results which can be generalised as regards to criminological understanding of patterns and trends of crime and anti social behaviour. The researcher already knows clearly in advance what trends and patterns they want to identify which makes it a quick method. Due to the fact that the method is cheap a larger sample can be used which makes it more representative and will help generalisations to be made regarding crime and anti social behaviour in the contemporary society. Quantitative data is more efficient, able to test hypotheses which are a positive factor.

A positive aspect of collecting data using quantitative methods is that results are easy to summarise and analyse as regards to understanding the trends and patterns of crime and victimisation. As the results are carried out in a structured way the interviewee the interview eliminates any potential bias from occurring due to the fact that the interviewer is literally following the structured questions the interviewee responded too. Personal bias can be avoided by researchers keeping a 'distance' from participating subjects and employing subjects unknown to them. This therefore means that the interviewer is eliminating or minimizing subjectivity of judgment which will have a direct effect on the reliability of the result regarding patterns of crime and victimisation making them more representative.

In criticism of quantitative data results can be limited as they provide numerical descriptions rather than detailed narrative and generally provide less elaborate accounts of human perception. Therefore although we are equipped with statistics it fails to explain why this behaviour existed regarding the understanding of trends and patterns of crime and victimisation. Added to this a questionnaire can be seen as callous when asking about trends and patterns of crime and victimisation as it is a sensitive topic that should be dealt with in a sensitive way. Added to this is the fact that the research is often carried out in an unnatural, artificial environment so that a level of control can be applied to the exercise. This level of control might not normally be in place in the real world yielding laboratory results as opposed to real world results. In addition answers will not necessarily reflect how people really feel about a subject and in some cases might just be the closest match. In conjunction with this the participant may have a different understanding of the question being asked as to what the researcher is asking. This will then have an effect on the results regarding trends and patterns of crime and victimisation.

Added to this is the type of people completing these questionnaires must be looked at. They are not representative to the rest of the society and therefore will have an effect on the generalisations that can be made. We must also consider how reliable these results are if the participant is unsure of the questions they are being asked regarding the trends and patterns of crime and victimisation.

To conclude I have discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of using both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to research the criminological understanding of patterns and trends regarding crime and victimisation. It seems that the above information has shown that when dealing with a sensitive subject such as the one presented the method that would be used to successfully collect this required data would be qualitative research methods due to the fact that it helps present an argument in which the interviewee had enough control to be able to talk freely about

their experiences with crime and victimisation which may have been previously overlooked when another method was used. This method also helps to build up rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee which may help with the validity of the results which is a positive factor. Added to this fact is the interviewee may give out more information to the researcher due to the fact that they are able to talk freely, although this is a longer process and more costly than other research methods on the whole it is a lot more effective. Another benefit of using this method is that crimes that may have previously been ignored in the official crime statistic come to light, given a more representative understanding of crime patterns and victimisation.

However we must not dismiss quantitative methods as these methods as these help us find the cause and effect and produce much needed numerical statistics which help to reinforce or dismiss peoples opinion of crime. It also a cheaper method which is highly reliable and can be replicated - surely a positive characteristic which can not be taken into account when using quantitative methods.

To conclude I feel that the best approach when attempting to look at the criminological understanding of trends and patterns o crime and victimisation. By using multiple methods you are able to collect multiple methods of data which helps to show the understanding of patterns and crime and victimisation.