Hard to reach, rare and/or hidden populations are often of particular interest to social science researchers, yet present obvious challenges to identify and engage in the research process. Such populations typically include individuals facing stigmatisation who are likely to be unwilling to identify themselves in public contexts. This workshop reviews the reasons why we may want to engage such populations in research and assesses the range of methods which have been employed to access them. This includes various chain referral methods, respondent driven sampling, privileged access interviews, engaged or activist research and applications of Internet research. Although some of these applications, such as snowball sampling, are now well established, others are only widely used in health research and are still at the experimental stage in the social sciences more broadly. The workshop will involve small group work to assess and apply these methods to a series of research contexts to identify the advantages and potential drawbacks of each. Research with hard to reach and hidden populations often generates particular ethical concerns which will also be considered in detail.

Learning Outcomes

Characterise and critically evaluate types of research questions that quantitative and qualitative methods are best able to address and articulate rationales for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Demonstrate an understanding of the principles behind a range of analytic techniques (including rationale, philosophical assumptions, assumptions about data type, and capacity to answer specific questions). This understanding should make it possible to understand a range of techniques beyond those typically employed in any single discipline.

Demonstrate an understanding of when it is appropriate to employ each type of analysis.

Demonstrate the ability to interpret accurately the output from the analysis, including articulation of any limitations on the interpretation.

Illustrate descriptions and evaluations of quantitative and qualitative methods with specific examples from published research.

Research on Hard to Reach Groups: Indicative Bibliography


