UNIT 1 PRIMARY DATA

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:
➢ know about the different primary methods used in anthropological research;
➢ learn how to use them according to the need of the study undertaken; and
➢ understand their relevance in anthropological study.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is a field science and fieldwork is the soul of the subject. In fieldwork, an anthropologist goes to the field and stays with the people whom he wants to study. He observes the phenomena under study and records them systematically. It is true that all phenomena are not visible. In these circumstances, an anthropologist takes help of other techniques of data collection such as interview, case study, schedule, questionnaire, etc. All techniques of data collection have some advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, an anthropologist takes help of more than one technique, when he or she goes to collect data from the field. Establishment of rapport, learning native language, maintaining field note book and use of key informants are also important components of fieldwork.

In this chapter we will discuss the nature, definition, types and process of the different kinds of primary ways through which data can be gathered while conducting fieldwork and examine their significance in anthropological research.
1.2 OBSERVATION – DIRECT AND INDIRECT, PARTICIPANT AND NON-PARTICIPANT

Observation is one of the earliest methods of data collection. It is largely employed by social anthropologists, with sociologists and other social scientists opting in larger numbers for survey and other techniques. Nevertheless, over a period of time observation has gradually gained importance outside anthropology and empirically in the social sciences. Today, observation is considered to be one of the fundamental critical techniques of social research.

Literally, observation means a method of data collection that employs vision as its main means of data collection. It is used as the only technique of data collection, or jointly with other techniques, like in intensive interviewing, and case studies. Observation is one of the major components of Participatory Research Appraisal (PRA). Observation is an indirect method of data collection since in most cases data is collected without the full knowledge of the respondents.

Observation is open to all observable social phenomena. However, there are some limitations. In the first place there are issues that do not lend themselves to an observational analysis, for example personal, sensitive issues or causes and consequences of social phenomena. Also, past or future events cannot be observed. Further, observation is limited by the fact that it is possible with observable phenomena.

There are several types of observation, some more popular than others. Although basically similar, they do differ from each other in the degree of the observer’s participation in the environment, or the setting in which it occurs and in the manner in which it is organised.

Participant observation as a technique of anthropological research is associated with Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) which has been incorporated into modern social-cultural anthropological fieldwork as a fundamental element. He not only spent a longer period among the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia, from 1914 to 1918 but he was also the first anthropologist to conduct fieldwork through native language. Being a participant observer and having knowledge in native language, he was successful in collecting vast information on social, religious, economic and political life of the Trobriand Islanders.

Naive and scientific observation

Naive observation refers to everyday, unstructured observation which people use when they interact with others in social phenomena. Observation becomes scientific when it is systematically planned and executed, when it is related to a certain goal and when it is subjected to tests and controls.

Participant and non-participant observation

In general, the degree of the observer’s involvement in observation varies from no participation at all to full participation. In the first case observers study the people from outside the group without becoming a part of the environment of the observed. In the second case, they actually become members of the group they are supposed to study. The first type of observation is known as non-participant observation; the other is participant observation. Malinowski’s
classic fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands is of immense significance in the establishment of anthropological fieldwork methods and particularly of the methodology of participant observation.

In participant observation, the observer observes from inside the group. For instance, Verrier Elwin used participant observation in studying the life of the tribal youth among the Muria of Basthar (1947). S. C. Roy who is regarded as ‘The Father of Indian Ethnography’, conducted fieldwork in tribal villages of Chota Nagpur and Orissa, and published ethnographic accounts on Munda (1912), Oraon (1915), Birhor (1925), Kharia (1937) and Bhuiyas (1935). There are several such studies in anthropological literature on tribal, rural and urban studies in India and abroad. By ‘becoming’ a member of these groups, one can study among other things their structure, process, problems and attitudes from the inside, and as experienced by the members of the groups.

A method is thought to be qualitative if it shows among other things, at least the following characteristics:

- A commitment to studying everyday life events, which are studied the way they are experienced and understood by the participants.
- A perception of reality as constructed through interaction and communication of the participants.
- Performance of the study in the natural environment of the participants without changing it in any way.
- Perception of reality in an interpretative manner.

Hence, participant observation is set to study social events under all these conditions, bringing data close to reality, the people living in it and the way they construct and experience it.

More particularly, participant observation observes communication and interaction in an unstructured and natural manner, where the design is developed and modified while observation is carried out in a face-to-face relationship, and in an open and flexible way. Here observation is directed towards a social situation, which only later and after the study has been initiated is broken down into single elements.

In the case of non-participant observation, the observers are not a part of the environment they study. Their position is clearly defined and different from that of the people. In ideal terms, the observers are invisible, unnoticed and outside the group they observe.

Between participant and non-participant observation, there can be another form of observation. This is called quasi-participant observation. Quasi participant observation is one, where an observer tries to get involved in local daily life (everything from important ceremonies and rituals to ordinary things like meal preparation and consumption) and also carefully observes everything he/she can, about it. Through this the ethnographer or researcher seeks to gain what is called an “emic” perspective or the “native’s point of view” without imposing their conceptual frameworks. This emic worldview, which may be quite different from the “etic” or outsider’s perspective on local life, is a unique and critical part of anthropology.
Open and hidden observation

This distinction refers to the degree to which the identity of the researcher as an observer as well as the purpose of the study is known to the participants. While in the case of open observation the participants are well informed of the nature of the study and the identity of the researcher but in hidden observation they are not.

Direct and indirect observation

Direct observation studies the subject it intends to explain; for example, if the study intends to explain the patterns of conflict in marital dyads, and observation involves married couples, this is a direct observation. Indirect observation does not involve the observer directly, either because the informant refuses to take part in the study or a direct observation is not possible (e.g. the subject is deceased). Instead, researchers observe the physical traces of the phenomena under study, which have been left behind and make conclusions about the subject.

The researcher has to carry a field dairy and write the observations while collecting data by using observation as a research tool. The application of different types of observation depends on the nature of the event to be observed, the acceptance of people participating in that event and the skills of the observer.

The structure and process of observation depend on many factors, especially with regard to the underlying methodology. While in some cases observation is employed as participant observation, in other cases it might appear as non-participant observation. In case study research, for instance, both direct observation and participant observation can be employed, however, in both cases its process is quite clearly explained and outlined in the protocol.

In some cases (where the detailed step by step program of the event to be observed is known in advance, example: marriage ritual) observation is employed in a structured way, where everything must be followed to the last detail as prescribed; in other cases like dispute resolution, it is done only while employing other methods, for example while interviewing respondents.

The skills of the observer is often more significant in the context of observation than that of assistants working in the context of other forms of data collection; this is because observation, particularly participant observation relies very much on the attributes of the researcher for both amount and quality of information. Skills are more in demand here than in experiments or surveys. Particularly with regard to observation employed in the context of case studies, this is more crucial since the observer is often expected to carry out the study single handed.

The qualities of an observer will vary from case to case particularly with reference to the type of observation chosen. But intelligence and previous experience with observation, exact knowledge of the topic and (where appropriate) of the categories, flexibility and adaptability, ability to get along with others, to follow instructions to the smallest detail, to be unbiased and free from ideological constraints and to be honest and trustworthy are of paramount importance.

Pilot studies will certainly show the way. Nevertheless, concentration on the following points is a must for researchers:
• Thorough understanding of the research topic;
• Knowledge of the peculiarities of the population;
• Understanding of possible problem areas of the study;
• Familiarity with the categories (where appropriate) and their effective use;
• Introduction to ways of overcoming unexpected problems and conflicts;
• Ability to follow instructions accurately and adjust them without causing bias or distortion of the data;
• Adaptability and flexibility;
• Ability to observe several subjects and categories at the same time.

The nature of observation makes ethics a real issue since observers have the opportunity to interfere directly with the personal life of the subjects, and since in many cases observation takes place without the subjects being aware of it. This becomes even more serious when the subjects do not know the identity of the observer. However, in some cases ethics is not an important issue and should not hinder researchers from pursuing their research interests if they think that the investigation is carried out for a good purpose.

We will find that observation as a method of data collection is generally considered to have the following advantages over other methods.

• It provides information when other methods are not effective.
• It employs a relatively less complicated and less time consuming procedure of subject selection.
• It can offer data when respondents are unable and/or unwilling to cooperate or to offer information.
• It approaches reality to its natural structure and studies events as they evolve.
• It offers first hand information without relying on the reports of others.
• It allows the collection of wide range of information even when the information is thought to be, at the time of study, irrelevant. This is particularly true of participant observation.
• It is relatively inexpensive.

However observation also has some limitations, of which the ones listed below are the most significant.

• It cannot be employed when large groups or extensive events are studied.
• It cannot provide information about past, future or unpredictable events.
• It is inadequate when studying certain phenomena such as sexual behaviour, family violence, etc.
• It is exposed to the observer's bias, selective perception and selective memory.
• It offers no control measures regarding bias, attitudes and opinions of the observer.
Despite these limitations, observation one of the most popular methods of data collection, employed by researchers of both the quantitative and qualitative domains.

**Activity**

a) Choose an event/occasion/ritual/everyday affair to observe. Write what you observed in detail and tell us what kind of observation method did you use and why?

or

b) Is there any form of observation between participant and non-participant observation? If yes, name it and tell us when it is used.

### 1.3 INTERVIEW – STRUCTURED AND UNSTRUCTURED, KEY INFORMANTS, INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewing is a form of questioning characterised by the fact that it employs verbal questioning as its principal technique of data collection. Interviews are a common occurrence in everyday life, but as a tool of social research, or better as a method of data collection, interviewing is different. This is so with regard to its preparation, construction and execution, first because it is prepared and executed in a systematic way, second because it is controlled by the researcher to avoid bias and distortion and third due to the fact that it is related to a specific research question and a specific purpose.

Interviews are employed as methods of data collection in most research designs, regardless of the underlying methodology. Qualitative studies employ unstructured forms of interviewing, such as intensive interviewing and focused interviewing, while quantitative studies employ predominantly structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are employed in both qualitative and quantitative studies.

There are many types of interviews, each of which differs from the others in structure, purpose, role of the interviewer, number of respondents involved in each interview, and form and frequency of administration.

**Structured interviews**

They are based on a strict procedure and a highly structured interview guide, in which case it is no different from a questionnaire. The instrument allows no freedom to make adjustments to any of its elements, such as content, wording or order of the questions.

Such interview is based on a schedule, and strict adherence to the questions and the instructions is paramount. The interviewer is expected to act in a neutral manner, keeping the same tone of voice, offering the same impression to the respondents, using the same style, appearance, prompts, probes etc., and showing no initiative, spontaneity or personal interest in the research topic. The purpose of this is to reduce interviewer bias to a minimum and achieve the highest degree of uniformity in procedure.
Unstructured interviews

They have no strict procedures to follow as described above. There are no restrictions in the wording of the questions, the order of questions or the interview schedule. The interviewer acts freely in this context, on the basis of certain research points, formulating questions as and when required and employing neutral probing. The structure of these interviews is flexible and the restrictions minimal, being presented in most cases in the form of guides rather than rules.

Semi-structured interviews

They lay somewhere between structured and unstructured interviews. They contain elements of both, and while some are closer to structured interviews, others are closer to unstructured interviews. The degree to which interviews are structured depends on the research topic and purpose, resources, methodological standards and preferences and the type of information sought, which can be either quantitative or qualitative techniques.

The researchers i.e. the interviewers hold a central place in the research process. They have to follow the following tasks:

- Selecting and/or approaching the respondents
- Arranging the time, date, duration and conditions of interview.
- Performing the interview by following the instructions.
- Controlling the interview situation towards reducing or eliminating resistance, suspicion, prejudice and negative forces.
- Avoiding bias and working towards an objective.
- Recording the answers accurately.
- Establishing and monitoring positive relations.

Due to the significance of the interviewer in the research, investigators employ a very systematic process when selecting the interviewer. The criteria usually considered as significant are:

- Honesty, trustworthiness and self control.
- Intelligence, maturity and friendliness.
- Sociability and social acceptability.
- Carefulness, consciousness and ability to concentrate.
- Accuracy and dependability.
- Objectivity and lack of prejudice.
- Adaptability, independence and initiative.
- Verbal ability and ability to listen to others carefully.
- Interest in and familiarity with the research topic.
- Ability to work with others in a team of experts.
After selection, interviewers usually undergo training which depend on interviewers’ skills, experience and nature of the topic. The training generally includes the following features:

- Developing and practicing interviewing skills, mainly through observation, practice and criticism.
- Learning how to present oneself to the respondents, appropriate manners about the lifestyle of the subjects and about presentation and appearance.
- Learning essential techniques of persuasion necessary to convince uncooperative respondents for participation.
- Acquiring knowledge and skills related to obtaining relevant information and recording it accurately.
- Establishing standards of value neutrality, ethics, anonymity and confidentiality.

The following common steps can be identified in all forms of interviewing:

**Seeking the respondents**

When meeting the prospective respondents the interviewer must introduce himself/herself, explain the intention of the visit and purpose of the research, disclose the sponsor, ensure anonymity and confidentiality, explain details of research and arrange a place, date and time for the interview.

**Asking and recording the questions**

The interview guidelines should be observed accurately. Asking questions depends of course on the type of interviewing. Recording should take place as given in the instructions. Some respondents may interpret taking notes as a breach of promise, or get confused. In other cases, taking notes is perceived positively, since some people think that the interviewer who records notes takes their views very seriously. Some ways to overcome such difficulties include writing down key words only, and completing the notes at the end of the interview. The most successful way is the use of tape recorders with the permission of the subjects.

**Field supervision and checks**

Data collection is the most significant part of the research, and its administration should not be left entirely up to the interviewer. Supervision and checks are important in helping to avoid incomplete answers and interviews, refusals to answer certain questions or even to take part in the interview, too much or too little probing and inadequate recording of the data. Checks for bias, honesty, politeness, objectivity, ethics and interviewer-respondent relationships should also be made.

**Completion of the interview**

The friendly relationship between the interviewer and the respondent should end with some care, smoothly and in a friendly atmosphere after the questions have been answered and after completion checks have been made.

Interviewing is the most commonly used instrument for data collection in social research. We can note the advantages below:
• Flexibility— adjusted to meet many diverse situations.
• High response rate— attracts a relatively high response rate.
• Easy administration— no need to read and handle complex documents.
• Opportunity to observe non-verbal behaviour.
• Less patience and motivation to complete are needed than are required.
• Control over the environment— control the conditions under which the questions are answered.
• Capacity for correcting misunderstandings by respondents.
• Control over the order of the questions.
• Opportunity to record spontaneous answers.
• Control over the identity of the respondent.
• Completeness of the interview guaranteed.
• Control over the time, date and place of the interview.
• More complex questions can be used to elicit information.
• Greater permissible length is more possible in interviewing than other methods.

Despite its advantages, we see that interviewing is limited by a number of factors. They may be:
• Interviews are costlier and time consuming than other methods.
• Interviews are affected by the factor 'interviewer' and the possible bias associated with it.
• Interviewing is more inconvenient than other methods.
• It offers less anonymity than other methods.
• It is less effective than other methods when sensitive issues are discussed.

Apart from these limitations, interviewing is affected by factors common to other techniques of data collection, for example deliberate misrepresentation of facts, genuine mistakes, unwillingness or inability to other information and similar problems. In such cases, however, it is easier to detect problems when interviewing than when using other methods.

They are capable of providing past and present information in detailed form. They have good memory and gives information even analytically. The method of sampling does not arise in selection of key informants. They can be selected purposively based on the nature of data to be collected.

**Interview guide**

Interview schedule and interview guide are almost similar and they act as the guide points in interview. It guides the researcher in conducting interview and avoids deviations from the data to be collected.
1.4 SCHEDULE

Schedules and questionnaires are beneficial as supplementary devices in observation, in interviews, and in evaluating personal behaviour and social situations. They also aid in standardising and objectifying observations and interviews, and finally they are useful devices for isolating one element at a time and thus intensifying observation of it.

There is a vast variety of schedules and they can be classified in various ways.

**Observation schedule/guide**

The observation schedule offers the opportunity for uniform classification in recording the activities and social situations of persons or groups being observed.

One observer or several may be employed to secure uniformly systematic data in an observation study.

An observation schedule usually serves several purposes simultaneously:

- It is a specific “memory tickler”
- It is an objective recording of data.
- It is a standardising device.
- It aids to delimit the scope of the study.
- It aims to concentrate on the circumscribed elements essential to the analysis.

**Document schedules**

These are used for recording data obtained from documents, case histories, and other materials. The document schedule should not be considered a tally sheet. A separate schedule should be used to list the pertinent points from each case record.

**Institutional survey or evaluation schedules**

These are used to visualise the problems faced by or inherent in a given type of institution. The length of such schedules depends upon the aspects of the given situation under investigation.

**Interview schedule**

These are used in collection of data through interviews. They help the investigator in maintaining objectivity in collection of data and avoid deviations during interview. They are used in most of the social science research studies as the investigator gets the benefits of observation, interview and schedule.

**Structure and preparation**

The structure and preparation of schedule and questionnaire are almost same. Both contain close and open ended questions. However, the schedule contains questions and blank tables unlike the questionnaire that mostly contains questions only. Both the tools need pre-testing for standardisation.
1.5 QUESTIONNAIRE

Surveys are also a known method of data collection in anthropology. The information is gathered through oral or written questioning. Oral questioning is known as interviewing, written questioning is accomplished through questionnaires. The central elements of questionnaires consist of their nature, structure, content, design and construction, their strengths and weaknesses and the forms in which they are employed. The main characteristic of this method is that data are offered by the respondents, with limited interference on the part of research personnel. The issues such as questionnaire format, type of questions, content of questions and the response format are as relevant to interviewing as they are to questionnaires.

The advantages which most researchers and writers consider as significant are listed below:

- Questionnaires are less expensive than other methods.
- They produce quick results.
- Questionnaires can be completed at the respondent’s convenience.
- They offer greater assurance of anonymity.
- They offer less opportunity for bias or errors caused by the presence or attitudes of the interviewer.
- Questionnaires are a stable, consistent and uniform measure, without variation.
- They offer a considered and objective view on the issue, since respondents can consult their files and since many subjects prefer to write rather than talk about certain issues.
- The use of questionnaires promises a wider coverage, since researchers can approach respondents more easily than other methods.
- They are not affected by problems of ‘no-contacts’.

The limitations that we find here are:

- They do not allow probing, prompting and clarification of questions.
- They do not offer opportunities for motivating the respondent to participate in the survey or to answer the questions.
- The identity of the respondent and the conditions under which the questionnaire are answered are not known. Researchers are not sure whether the right person has answered the questions.
- It is not possible to check whether the question order was followed.
- Questionnaires do not provide an opportunity to collect additional information while they are being completed.
- Due to lack of supervision, partial response is quite possible.

Regardless of whether the questionnaire is administered personally or by mail, it has to be constructed according to certain standards and principles. In the
first place, it has to include three main elements, each having a certain purpose: the cover letter, the instructions and the main body.

The main aims of the cover letter are to introduce the respondents to the research topic and research team, to neutralise any doubt or mistrust respondents might have about the study, to motivate them to participate in the study and answer the questions, and to assure them of anonymity and confidentiality. The following are the minimum number of points to be included in the cover letter. The cover letter has been recognised as one of the factors that influence the response rate.

- The main objectives and social significance of the study;
- The reasons why the respondent should answer the questionnaire;
- Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality;
- Requirements for completion such as maximum time, conditions etc.,
- Issues related to ethics.

Instructions regarding how to state their answer or preference, will be given on the questionnaire or on a separate sheet. The instructions usually remind the respondents that they should not try to please the researcher, that there are no right or wrong answers and that all questions should be attempted, and instruct them about what to do with the completed questionnaire, for example that it should be returned to the project director in the self addressed and stamped envelope by a certain date. Inadequate instructions are one of the major sources of non-responses and should be avoided.

The main body of the questionnaire includes the questions that are to be answered. In order to be effective it must be worked out carefully with regard to content, structure, wording, flow, format and so on.

Questionnaire construction is a very demanding task which requires not only methodological competence but also extensive experience with research in general and questioning techniques in particular. The questions should be clear, easy to read and attractive to the respondent. The questions have to be listed in a logical order, allowing for transition and flow, and avoiding distortions and problems. The questionnaire format is chosen to suit the nature of the survey, the type of respondents, length of questionnaire, nature of administering the questionnaire, and the findings of a pilot study.

The size of the questionnaire depends on factors such as the research objective, the type of respondents, the methods of analysis and availability of resources. One should include as many questions as necessary and as few as possible.

Questions contained in a questionnaire vary with respect to a number of criteria, especially those relating to their relevance to the research topic, their approach and structure, content and wording, and with regard to the type of response they require. The questions can be classified as: i) primary questions, ii) secondary questions, iii) tertiary questions, iv) padding questions, v) probing questions, vi) direct and indirect questions, vii) suggestive questions, viii) filter and contingency questions and ix) fixed alternative and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions have many advantages and several limitations. Pre-coded
questions have the advantage of being easy to administer, to code and to answer. They also have several limitations, particularly restricting the freedom of the respondents.

The content of the questions is obviously the most important element of the construction of a questionnaire. The researcher has to consider the following points while preparing a questionnaire.

- Every question must be relevant to one or more aspects of the study.
- Ambiguous, non-specific and hypothetical questions are to be avoided.
- Leading, double-barreled and presuming questions should not be employed.
- Embarrassing, personal or threatening questions should be avoided.
- Vague words and academic jargon should not be used.
- The language of the respondent should be employed.
- Easy flow and logical progression in the questionnaire should be assured.
- Each question should ask what it is supposed to ask.

The success of the questionnaire in general and the response rate in particular depend to a large extent on the following factors:

- The questionnaire must have a professional appearance and should give the impression of a document that deserves respect and invokes feelings of responsibility.
- The questionnaire should be presented in a way that encourages the respondent to complete and return it.
- Print and colour of paper and ink must correspond with the preferences of the respondents.
- The questionnaire should be presented as a complete document with an inviting and reassuring introductory cover letter and a concluding note containing instructions regarding the return of the questionnaire.
- Sufficient instructions and probes should be provided where necessary.
- Pre-coded questions should offer adequate response categories.
- All questions should be checked for possible bias and ethical adequacy.

Questionnaires are constructed in a very sophisticated and systematic manner. The process of construction goes through a number of interrelated steps such as: i) preparation, ii) constructing the first draft, iii) self-critique regarding relevance, symmetry, clarity, simplicity and other things, iv) external scrutiny, v) re-examination and revision, vi) pre-test or pilot study, vii) revision, viii) second pre-test and ix) formulation of the final draft.

Questionnaire construction is not only employed in the area of mail questionnaires, it is also employed by researchers using interviews. Here the communication between the researcher and the respondents is closer and more intense than it is in mail questionnaire.
1.6 RAPID APPRAISAL TECHNIQUES – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD)

This method was introduced by Kurt Lewin in 1936 in the USA, in the context of small group experiments, and later in other areas of research, including market research and opinion research in the USA and other countries. The respondents are brought together in an ‘artificial’ environment created for the purpose, and are examined according to some methodological criteria. Focus groups can be subjected to ‘treatment’ in a controlled way, converting them to a kind of quasi-experimental method. Consequently, knowledge of experiments, their nature, strengths and weaknesses can help us to use focus groups more constructively.

Focus groups are employed extensively among many social researchers, with the range of social scientists using focus groups steadily increasing. They are used as a preliminary study leading to quantitative research, as a self-contained and principal method of research, as a supplementary source, or as a part of a multi-method study. In any case, focus groups involve persons specially selected owing to their particular interest, expertise or position in the community in an attempt to collect information on a number of issues, as well as to brainstorm a variety of solutions, and ultimately facilitate group discussion as a tool of data collection and possibly policy construction.

Focus groups are used as a form of (quantitative and qualitative) data collection that employs discussion in a non-standardised form and observation as its sources. It is primarily a way of gaining information in a short period of time about the breadth or variation of opinions, and of establishing a mechanism of opinion formation.

The basic assumption that underlies this method is that a group environment will, through mutual stimulation, encourage discussion related to topical issues, increase the motivation to address social issues; enable the discussion leader to lead the discussion towards focal points and topical issues through encouragement or discouragement or manipulation of the environment; and allow significant points of view to be presented in a real, emotional and summated form as spontaneous expressions (in other words, reducing the opportunity for a controlled presentation of personal views).

This is expected to occur when (1) addressing, describing or explaining an issue introduced by the leader or a member of the group; (2) comparing different points of view, evaluating views and discussion outcomes, and judging relevant arguments; or (3) making discussion or drawing conclusions presenting alternative points of view, trying to achieve or suggesting a possible consensus.

The FGDs can serve several purposes and the following are thought by many researchers to be the most significant:
- As a pre-research method it can help to prepare the main study by providing sufficient information about the study object, about operationalisation by defining indicators and about preventing possible errors.

- As a post research method it can explain trends and variances, reasons and causes, through the views of the respondents.

- As a main study it offers information about group processes, spontaneous feelings, reasons and explanations of attitudes and behaviour as adequately as any other method.

- In one form it can bring about changes in the group and its members as a result of the direction and intensity of the discussion.

- In another form, group discussion allows access to valuable information about group processes, attitude changes and manipulation, attitudes and opinions of group members, the group or the public, the effectiveness of certain methods and so on.

There are four major steps in it: being strange, orientation, adjustment, intimacy, conformity and fading out of the discussion.

**Choice of respondents**

Choice of respondents is accomplished through a random procedure, systematic or cluster sampling, or other ways that can be justified by the object of the study, nature of the respondents or the underlying methodology. Question of interest here may be related to the structure of the group, that is, whether it should consist of similar or different people, age and gender of the respondents and so on.

The size of the group must be large enough to provide a basis for a reasonable discussion but not too large to become uncontrollable. The group size should be between 5 and 12 but no larger than 20. A size around 10 seems to be ideal.

The group composition depends on methodological factors. The members of the group must be talkative, knowledgeable of and interested in the research topic.

**Introduction of goal-directed discussion**

After a group is selected for investigation, a goal-directed discussion is introduced by the group leader. This is accomplished through the introduction of a ‘discussion generating question’ supplied by the researcher. The group leader will intervene as required, directing the discussion to the research goals and keeping its course interesting and balanced. The way in which discussion will be introduced, organised and controlled is summarized in an interview guide which is given to group leaders.

Discussions are led on the basis of instructions. In physical terms, the environment in which the discussion will take place should be conducive to encouraging debate. Rooms must be arranged so that all respondents can see each other and communicate with all participants freely.

**Controlling the discussion**

The discussion will be controlled by the leader as required by the situation. Discussions that are slow to start will be helped to gain momentum through
additional questions, probes and other appropriate means; non-talkers will be encouraged to participate and those who dominate the discussion will be controlled. Motivation, encouragement, stimulation and control will bring about a balanced environment that is conducive to group discussion.

**Recording the data**

The type of information to be collected depends on the research question and purpose of the study. If the data is collected in a qualitative context, interpretation in a reductive or explicative form will be most appropriate. In other cases, hermeneutic method might be chosen.

A leader – often referred to as the facilitator – occupies a central position in the context of group discussion. The quality of data collection using FGD depends on the skills of the facilitator. Consequently, leaders are expected to have the following qualities:

- Theoretical and methodological knowledge of the research topic and general intellectual capacity.
- Experience with group work as well as the ability to control the discussion effectively by encouraging involvement, controlling dominating participants and keeping the discussion moving in the right direction.
- Leadership qualities.
- The ability to develop a warm atmosphere among the members of the group.

There are many ways of recording data produced in group discussions. Electronic recording is common, but demonstrates several shortcomings, for example it can cause some distortions (members might feel intimidated or not wish to talk when their statements are recorded), especially when used at the beginning of the discussion, since it might distract the respondents and lead to selective participation in the discussion. Electronically recorded data also require additional time for analysis and evaluation and this is a very time consuming exercise.

Writing down the discussion manually is the good old way of recording such data, but this is still not without problems. Perhaps having two leaders, with both of them taking notes in turn or one recording the data and the other leading the discussion, may be the ideal solution. Another issue is the content of the recording.

Group environments do encourage people to express views and to evaluate situations, especially when ‘encouraged’ or ‘manipulated’ by the leaders. Nevertheless, this advantage may cause several problems, such as those listed below:

- Group conditions might force people to hide their real opinions, especially as their views can have effects on their personal life or professional career.
- There are problems with recording the data.
- Domination of the discussion by some persons might affect the direction and outcome of the discussion.
- Some members may not participate in the discussion.
A trend of the group to please the leader might occur, for many reasons.

Success of the method relies very much on the qualities of the leader and the composition of the group.

There may be difficulties with keeping the discussion on track.

The findings may not be representative.

It is used as a form of exploration rather than as an independent and autonomous study.

1.7 CASE STUDY

Case study research involves studying individual cases, often in their natural environment, and for a long period of time. It employs a number of methods of data collection and analysis. Case study analysis is a type of research that is different from other forms of investigation and demonstrates the following distinguishing characteristics:

- It studies whole units in their totality and not aspects or variables of the units.
- It employs several methods primarily to avoid or prevent errors and distortions.
- It often studies a single unit: one unit is one study.
- It perceives the respondent as an expert not just as a source of data.
- It studies a typical case.

Today, case studies are considered to be valid forms of inquiry in the context of descriptive as well as evaluative and causal studies, particularly when the research context is too complex for survey studies or experimental strategies, and when the researcher is interested in the structure, process and outcomes of a single unit.

**Case studies in quantitative and qualitative research**

Case studies are employed indiscriminately in both quantitative and qualitative research, although to a different extent and for different reasons. Case-studies are also employed for the purpose of exploration, and for the following reasons:

- To gain more information about the structure, process and complexity of the research object when relevant information is not available or sufficient;
- To facilitate conceptualisation;
- To assist in formulating hypothesis;
- To guide the process of operationalisation of the variables;
- To illustrate, explain and offer more detailed quantitative findings;
- To test the feasibility of the quantitative study.

In all cases it is obvious that case studies are not used as an autonomous research project but as a supplement to other studies.
The case-study protocol

The protocol contains the main steps of the research process, offering details about the decisions that need to be made and the techniques that must be employed in the context of the study.

i) An overview of the case-study project is to know what it is all about, the case(s) to be investigated, special characteristics of the research unit(s), the aim of the study, expected outcomes and so on.

ii) The field procedures involved in case study method are choosing the case(s) to be studied, the ways of gaining access to the research unit(s) including key organisations and informers, the resources required in the field for the completion of the study, communication patterns while in the field, an outline of data collection activities to be considered at the various stages of the study, and in general planning for unexpected events that might crop up during the study.

iii) There are case-study questions which mainly act as reminders of the issues that need to be addressed in the study.

iv) A guide for preparing the report which tells us about the elements it must contain, its style, format and the audience it might address.

1.8 SUMMARY

Thus this unit can be seen as highly informative as it discusses the following concerns. Anthropological data can be collected through fieldwork, using observation, interview, questionnaire, schedule, case study and other tools and techniques. The selection of tools and techniques depends on the objectives of the study, the population to be studied, advantages and disadvantages of the available research tools, time and financial budget of the study. Observation gives more valid data but it is costly, time consuming and not possible in all social situations. Mailed questionnaire can be covered more extensively but response and the quality of data depends on several factors. Interview is more advantageous than questionnaire and schedule, as interview can be flexible in getting data. Nevertheless interview is also costly and time consuming when compared to the use of questionnaire and schedule.

Case study is an intensive study of a particular unit and the unit may be an individual or a group or a social phenomena. It provides only qualitative data. Case study data strengthens the quantitative data. It is also a costly and time consuming method. Rapid Appraisal techniques are a combination of different tools and techniques and they save time, man power and finances. FGD is a costly and time consuming method. But it provides more valid data and it is more appropriate in development and market research.

References


**Suggested Reading**


**Sample Questions**

1) What is participant observation? How it is useful in anthropological research?
Data Collection Techniques

2) Describe the advantages and disadvantages of observation.

3) What is interview? State the differences between structured and unstructured interviews.

4) Discuss the similarities and differences between interview and questionnaire.

5) State the advantages and disadvantages of interview and questionnaire.

6) What are the precautions to be taken in the application of mailed questionnaire.

7) What is interview schedule? State the advantages and disadvantages of interview schedule.

8) What is case study? How it is useful in anthropological research?

9) Discuss the use of Rapid Appraisal techniques in anthropological techniques.