

How Does One Conduct an Observation?

- Conducting observations involves a variety of activities and considerations for the researchers:
 - **Ethics.**
 - **Establishing rapport.**
 - Selecting key informants.
 - **The processes for conducting observations.**
 - Keeping field notes.
 - Writing up one's findings.

(Kawulich, 2005)



Ethics

- The researcher must take some of the field notes to reinforce that what the researcher is doing is collecting data for research purposes.
- When the researcher meets community members for the first time, he/she should be sure to inform them of the purpose for being there, sharing sufficient information with them about the research topic. This means that one is constantly introducing oneself as a researcher.

(Kawulich, 2005)



Ethics (Continued)

- Another ethical responsibility is to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the final write-up and in field notes to prevent their identification.

(Kawulich, 2005)



Maintaining Ethics in Naturalistic Observation

Use only if no other research alternative possible

Avoid being discrete where not necessary

Include a thorough debriefing

Maintain confidentiality in the research report



Maintaining ethics in naturalistic observation

- **to not undertake this type of observation if another research method is possible** to investigate the same problem;
- **to take complete permissions** of those in the research environment, who are not a target of the research i.e. of concerned authorities such as school administrators or parents or community leaders, etc. in the least, and at least inform others who may be affected by the process of research;
- **to explain to the people observed, after observation** why it was necessary to carry out the research, why they could not be told about the observation, how their contribution is very valuable, and to patiently address their doubts and queries;
- **to assure the target observed that their confidentiality would be maintained** and to keep this promise. That is, the names or faces of the target or any information that could reveal their identity should not be known to anyone but the researcher(s). All the records of observation should be handled with utmost caution, and reports made without any identifications.



Types of Naturalistic Observation

Based on Researcher Participation:

Participant

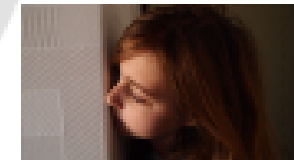


Non-Participant



Based on whether Researcher is known:

Covert



Overt



Overt versus covert observation

- Overt observation occurs when participants know they are being observed and are aware of the purpose of the study (Couchman & Dawson, 1996).
- Covert observation means that participants are either unaware of being observed or that the observer conceals the real reason for observing them (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).



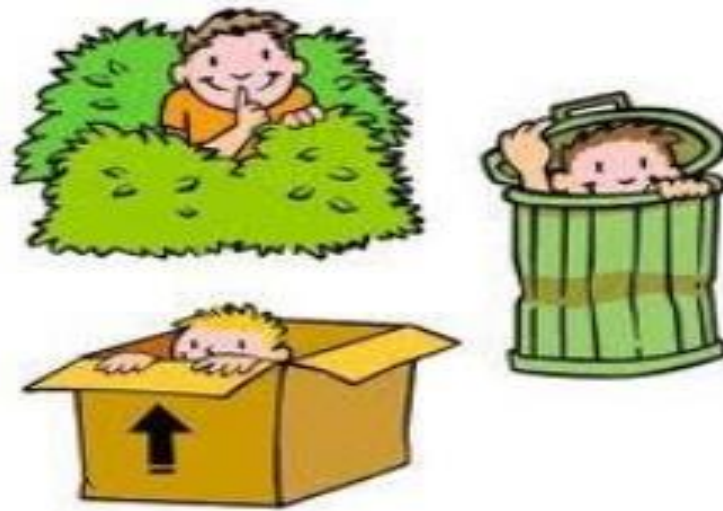
Overt Observation

- Means the observed group is aware of the presence of the researcher and that their behavior is being observed.



Covert Observation

- Means the participants are not aware of the presence of the researcher and they are that their behavior is being observed.



Types of observation

Overt versus covert

Overt

Ethnographer informs participants of their study and is transparent about research.

Covert

Ethnography does not inform participants of the study and must balance ethical issue of deception.



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Each method of observation has its advantages and disadvantages...

Research method	Advantage	Disadvantage
Participant observation	Observer can be a part of the process so can really see & experience what is going on	Can be dangerous for observer
Non-participant observation	Observer remains safe	Observer cannot get a feel for what is happening
Overt observation	Ethical	“observer effect” means respondents may act differently
Covert observation	Respondents act as they normally would	Unethical



All in all. Ethical issues that need considering when carrying out an observational study... Adopted from (Twycross & Shorten, 2016)

Ethical issues	Consideration
Covert versus overt data collection	Covert methods involve deception, with researchers pretending to be someone they are not. This type of observation is now considered unethical because it violates individuals' right to autonomy and their ability to decide whether they want to be observed. Nowadays participants are normally told what the purpose of the research is.
Gaining consent	<p>If collecting data in a hospital setting some researchers recommend gaining informed consent from all individuals present on the ward on a regular basis.</p> <p>Collecting data about a specific patient, informed consent should be obtained. For other people within the general area a simple explanation that you are collecting data for a study along with obtaining their verbal consent, may be adequate (REC: Research Ethics Committee will determine the approach).</p>
What will you do if you see poor practice?	Observation of practices that require improvement but are not dangerous or harmful (see below), without intervening, would not be considered unethical.
What will you do if you see dangerous practice?	The REC approving an observational study will expect a researcher to have identified the steps they will take if they observe dangerous practice. For example, the researcher may arrange to discuss any dangerous practice she observed with the ward manager. The ward manager would then take any necessary action.
Protecting participants anonymity	Anonymity can be maintained by referring to participants using identifying codes.



Gaining Entry and Establishing Rapport

- A key strategy in minimising the effect of the researcher's presence on behaviour is to establish rapport before starting data collection (Twycross & Shorten, 2016).
- To assist in gaining permission from the community to conduct the study, the researcher may bring letters of introduction or other information that will ease entry, such as information about one's affiliation, funding sources, and planned length of time in the field. One may need to meet with the community leaders. For example, when one wishes to conduct research in a school, permission must be granted by the school principal and, possibly, by the district school superintendent.
- ❑ For example, if the study involves observing nurses, a first step might be to attend team meetings or ward handover on several occasions as a way of getting to know the potential participants and building a relationship with them.
- "Hanging out" is the process through which the researcher gains trust and establishes rapport with participants.
- Hanging out involves meeting and conversing with people to develop relationships over an extended period of time.
- Three stages to the hanging out process.
 - Moving from a position of formal.
 - Ignorant intruder to welcome.
 - Knowledgeable intimate.



(Kawulich, 2005)



1. Moving from a position of formal

- The researcher is a stranger who is learning the social rules and language, making herself/himself known to the community, so they will begin to teach her/him how to behave appropriately in that culture.



2. Ignorant intruder to welcome.

- Researcher begins to merge with the crowd and stand out less as an intruder.
- “Acquaintance” stage.
- The language becomes more familiar to the researcher, but he/she still may not be fluent in its use.

(Kawulich, 2005)

3. Knowledgeable intimate.

- The "intimate" stage.
- The researcher has established relationships with participants to the extent that he/she no longer has to think about what he/she says.
- It sometimes involves the researcher's working with and participating in everyday activities beside participants in their daily lives.

Tips for collecting useful observation data

- Become familiar with the setting before beginning to collect data.
- keep the observations short at first to keep from becoming overwhelmed.
- Be honest, but not too technical or detailed, in explaining to participants what he/she is doing.
- Pay attention, shifting from a "wide" to a "narrow" angle perspective, focusing on a single person, activity, interaction, then returning to a view of the overall situation;
- Look for key words in conversations to trigger later recollection of the conversation content.

Each observation should provide you with answers regarding.....

- Who do you observe?
- What do you observe?
- Where does the observation take place?
- When does it take place?
- How does it happen?
- Why does it happen as it happens?

(Moser & Korstjens, 2018)



An example of a research design using observation

Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How do members of operating teams interact and communicate?2. What contributes to the communication climates in different operating theatres?3. Do interprofessional values exist in theatre teams. If so, how do they impact on the behaviour and interactions of operating theatre team members?
Research Site	Operating theatres in general, vascular and orthopaedic surgery; compare one metropolitan and one regional hospital site.
Participants	surgeons, registrars, nursing staff Team leaders, theatre technicians, patients
Other key personnel	Director of clinical services; director of medical services; theatre manager; patient admissions manager; admissions staff; team leaders of each theatre
Methods of data collection	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Observations (approximately 40 hours in theatre across the two sites);2. Field memo's3. Informal conversations with staff in the theatre and/or theatre suite (e.g. Change rooms, staff room, corridors etc)4. Conduct semi-structured interviews to follow up and clarify findings from observations (include questions about medical jargon, differences in procedure amongst team leaders etc)
Data analysis	Coding of observation notes; field notes (which includes details of informal conversations with staff; analytic memos; recording of personal experiences, context); thematic analysis



Challenges of observation

- Methodologically, the act of being observed may change the behaviour of the participant (often referred to as the 'Hawthorne effect'), impacting on the value of findings (Barrett & Twycross, 2018)
- However, most researchers report a process of habituation taking place where, after a relatively short period of time, those being observed revert to their normal behaviour.
- As participants grow accustomed to the observer's presence, their behaviour will more closely resemble normal, everyday behaviour (Briggs, Askham, Norman, & Redfern, 2003).
- The dependability of the process on the observer understanding and judgment.
- The observer may miss a critical moment while notes have been taking, or being distracted by another factor in the setting (Oun & Bach, 2014).



Samples on participant observation papers (further reading)

- Participant Observation BY DL Jorgensen.
- Using participant observation in pediatric health care settings: ethical challenges and solutions.
- Do physicians clean their hands? Insights from a covert observational study.
- Tensions in ethnographic observation: overt or covert?
- Some strategies to address the challenges of collecting observational data in a busy clinical environment.



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THANK YOU

