

Interview Method

Unit 4 (1)

- the different methods of data collection used in social research help us to gain accurate and scientific knowledge about the individuals and their society as far as possible.
- some of the important methods of data collection are observation, case study, content analysis, questionnaire, schedule and interview.
- among the first three i.e. observation,, case study and content analysis can be termed as qualitative methods in the sense that they provide information about the phenomenon in qualitative, descriptive and unstructured form.
- the interview method varies from being most highly qualitative method as in case of in-depth interview and non direct interview method to most quantitative methods based upon structured schedule.
- the lesser structured it is, the more qualitative would be the information and the more structured it is, the more quantitative would be the information.
- the observation method is mainly suited to the study of culture, institutional process or human behaviour.
- it cannot be used to gain information about a person's perception, belief, feelings, emotions, motivations, anticipations, future plans etc.

Meaning of Interview Method:

in simple words interview can be called as the process of talking in more purposive and more systematic manner than our day to day gossiping with each other.

Basic Objective of Interviewing:

interview has two basic objectives (a) discovery and, (b) measurement.

- discovery indicates gaining new knowledge, new consciousness or new enlightenment of certain unexplored qualitative aspects of the problem which is the primary objective of the interview.
- one can interview all the members of a group, or community or all the persons selected under sample or only some selected persons.
- in specific type of problems there is no need of interviewing all informants of the community or the units of the sample. Interviewing few experienced people may provide sufficient information e.g. a labour leader or an inspection can give sufficient information in relation to problems faced by both labourers and administrative personnel in running of a factory.
- interview method thus helps in identifying new variables and sharpening of conceptual clarity.

- interview gives something more than pure statistical descriptions achieved through mail surveys.
- while statistical studies and descriptions tells us as to what percentage of people from which class are in favour of a given topic.
- the interview method, on the other hand provides us with additional qualitative description of the people, how they feel and why they do so.
- It enhances the understanding of sociological nature of the facts.

Measurement:

- this is the second major objective of the interview.
- often in one project we find both the objectives, discovery and measurements. But as more emphasis is placed upon one objective the other one is subordinated.

usually the research work in which measurement is the predominating objective, scheduled interviews are used. But in several situations non scheduled interviews provide more valid measurements.

Advantage of Interview Method:

- there are some kind of information which are virtually impossible to be obtained by any other means e.g. person's past experiences, his anticipated future behaviour, etc. such information can be obtained only by asking for verbal report from persons concerned.
- a second advantage is the direction involved . As long as researcher is assured that the respondents do not distort their description of attitude and perception, the interview method is the most simple, direct and valid approach to use.
- the interviewers can modify the situation whenever necessary. He can clear up a mis-understanding about a question and keep the respondent on the track of providing only essential informations.

Types of Interview:

There are mainly two types of interviews

- (a) structured and (b) unstructured

the types of interview method to be used depends upon the nature of the problem being investigated and the type of the information wanted.

(A) Structured Interview:

- structured interview method is the one which is based upon structured set of questions and is, therefore, highly standardized in form or content.
- while unstructured interview method does not make use of any set of structured questions but only of semi-structured interview guide.

- in structured interview method information is collected by the interview/ investigator by directly asking the respondents on the basis of a schedule.
- it is not only the type of information sought, but also the specific questions to be asked, the language of the questions and their order is pre fixed.
- the interviewer does not have the freedom to ask extra questions. He can only, from time to time, make use of probe questions and thus encourage the respondents to answer the questions.
- here the interviewer's job is to see that the respondents answer to the questions systematically and clearly.
- the interviewer can clarify the questions to the respondents only by repeatedly reading out the questions or interpreting them in specified language.
- different types of questions are used in structured interview method, like the fixed alternative type in which not only the language of the question is structured but the answer is also structured either in the form of yes/no alternative answers or in the form of categorical answers, as given below: viz.

(i) Are you married: Yes/ No

- second type of questions used are the open ended questions in which the questions are written in specific language but the respondents are free to give answers in their own language, viz. (a) what advantage do you expect from our present government?
- the set of questions used in the structured interview method may be any of the above types or mixture of them. The type of questions used determine the structured ness of the interview method.
- structured interview method is used when data is to be collected from a large number of persons. It helps in systematic collection, comparison, organization and analysis of data within a limited time period.
- comparability is lost if questions are not asked in the same language and in the same order to all the respondents.
- it is always better to use open ended questions, unless impossible, because respondents, are likely to give answers more freely according to their real attitude. They are not indirectly compelled to place themselves in any one of the given categories.

Steps of Structured Interview:

Construction of Schedule-Questionnaire:

- structured interview method starts with the development of a questionnaire schedule or check list.
- its construction involves the following steps:
 - (a) developing the conceptual model.

- (b) making various exploratory interviews to locate important areas of investigation related to a specific subject matter, and also to locate the relevant variables.
- (c) constructing more standardised and structured questions; testing them on small samples, revising them to meet the theoretical requirements and to make them sensible to the respondents so that they yield or elicit the relevant empirical data.

Establishing field relations:

- as the relationship between the researcher and the respondents is the key to effective observation and interviewing much depends upon the initial field contacts.
- although each field setting has its own peculiar characteristics to be taken into account, yet there are few common principles which might be used for entry into field.
- the following principles may be used as guideline for entry into the field.
- generally the interviewer may need to move from persons in the highest authority down to the actual participants in the field. He must not develop any affiliation or identification with any groups.
- contacting leaders and authorities first without any affiliation with them helps to establish good rapport with workers also.
- the field workers needs to have a plausible explanation of research that make sense to the people whose cooperation he seeks. The researcher should express that he has interest in understanding the people rather than in evaluating them.
- the field workers should try to present himself, his sponsors, and his study as honestly as possible. In other words, he needs to tell who is he and whom does he represents.
- the field worker should mention his task as being simply gathering of facts. This simple explanation makes people easily satisfied about the reason behind contacting the people and also give opportunity to others for becoming accustomed to researchers presence.
- the researcher needs to create an impression that the reason behind his being there is not only to collect data but also that he genuinely enjoys the informants company. He should not be too eager to collect crucial data, should avoid prolonged contact and ask direct questions only after he has been fully accepted.

Legitimize the Respondent:

- the interviewer needs to tell the respondent as how he was chosen. It is important that the respondent understands that he is a selected member of a sample and that he happens to be a particular person at a particular address.

Asking the Questions:

- the questionnaire /schedule used in interview is the basic tool that is based on the research objectives of the study.
- the purpose is to help the interviewer in establishing rapport, to standardize the interview and obtain accurate and complete information.
- the success of interview method depends to a great extent upon how the questionnaire/schedule is administered which means how the questions are asked.

Guiding Rules for Asking Questions:

- the questionnaire should be used informally. This means that the interview should be held in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.
- the interviewer should avoid creating the impression that the interview is a sort of cross-examination.
- the questions should be asked exactly as worded in the questionnaire. The interviewer should make no change in the phrasing of the questions. However, in a effort to be conversational, the interviewer may add a few words at the end of the question.
- the questions must be asked in the same order as they appear in the questionnaire.
- Clarify by repeating the questions, which are mis-understood, or mis-interpreted. Though questions are phrased in a manner that they are understood by the respondents from different background. However, occasionally, a respondent may mis-understand or mis-interpret what is asked. In such cases, the interviewer should repeat the questions, give time to the respondent to think over the answer.

Use of Transition Statement:

- such statement help in changing the scene by closing one topic and by opening another.
- these transaction statements aid the interviewer in making the interview appear conversational.
- these are used between the main topics of a questionnaire.

Keep Track of Changes Made in the Questionnaires:

- any changes made, knowingly or unknowingly, in the questionnaire, in its wording, phrasing, or order, during the interview, must be noted in the questionnaire. This is needed for accurate coding of questions.

Probing:

- Obtaining specific, complete responses which satisfy the question objectives are often difficult to achieve because the respondents might have difficulty in putting their thought into words, or may give answers which are unclear, inadequate, irrelevant, inconsistent and incomplete in form.

- the interviewer must deal with such factors and use procedures which encourage and clarify the thinking of the respondents.
- to solve these problems the interviewer should ask probe questions for which he must know the objective of each question.

Kind of Probes:

- there are different types of probe questions used.
- the simplest way of probing is to pause between two questions. Pausing encourages communication.
- repeating the questions
- repeating the respondents reply
- asking neutral questions or comments e.g. How do you mean? or Could you tell me more? etc.

Asking for Further Clarification:

- for this the investigator may ask "Could you tell me more"? This technique may make the respondent more cooperative.

Recording and Editing the Interview:

- success of the study depends not only upon a good tested schedule or questionnaire, as well as a well trained and experienced interviewer but also upon to what extent the interviewer conveys the information to the study staff in a full and unbiased form.
- ideally, the best way to get full and accurate information is to use some sort of recording machines.

Rules for recording of Responses:

- a good written interview conveys several things at a time. It represents a picture of what the respondent has said and how he said it. For this some rules should be followed.
 - (a) responses should be recorded during the interview
 - (b) must use the respondent's own words
 - (c) respondents' answers should not be summarized or paraphrased e.g. Verbatim recording "Yes, indeed I certainly do think so", summarised recording - Yes.
 - (d) include every thing that pertains to question objectives.
 - (e) record all the probes made
 - (f) writing must be legible;

regardless of how good the actual interview may have been, it is worthless if the record of it cannot be read. Therefore, it is essential that all writings should be legible.

Problem of Non-response and its Types

- it is said that if we follow the rules we succeed in establishing rapport, in asking questions and in recording of answers and one is most likely to get reliable and vital data.
- however, there is another type of problem which might effect the success of any survey work.
- usually 80% to 90% of the selected units in the sample produce completed interviews. This leaves between 10 and 20 per cent of the addresses that result in a non-response of some kind.
- there are two types of non-response situation, non interview and non-sample . This can happen in case of both structured and unstructured interview methods.

The Non-interview:

- if the interviewer does not get an interview with the eligible respondent, it is a non interview.
- a non-interview may result from conditions beyond the interviewers control. i.e. the eligible interviewers may be too ill or un able to speak or not available at home etc.
- such interviewers affect the response rate because there is an eligible respondent who was not interviewed.

The Non-Sample:

- When the selected dwelling unit is found to be vacant or when in original address an eligible person, by study defination, does not live, or when an eligible respondent refuses to answer, it is known as a non sample, non response situation.
- one has to develop better means and ways to over come such situations.

Unstructured Interviews:

Purpose:

- unstructured interviews are mostly used in exploratory situations, such as:
 - (a) for providing background for defining a conceptual model and stating an objective in an exploratory study.
 - (b) for serving as basis for constructing a more highly structured questionnaire by showing the general framework within which respondent think, the kind of words they use and the types of incidents which have meaning for them.
 - (c) for explaining an ambiguous finding from an extensive study.

Nature:

- in this method the questions are not essentially pre-planned, structured or ordered.
- the investigators are given some broad topics upon which they have to collect information.
- the respondents are free to narrate their experiences and incidents of life.
- they can express their attitude or feelings towards a given event or narrate their personal experience in their own language.
- this sort of interview, is, therefore, known as narrative interview.
- in unstructured interview, the investigator must be able to handle lengthy conversation, should be able to collect information on highly personal matters.
- the investigator must also be able to analyze quickly what the respondent says, so that he can probe for further information.

Steps for Unstructured Interview:

- the unstructured interviews are used for more intensive study of individuals mental processes, like perception, attitudes and motivations than the structured interviews.
- advantage of unstructured interviews are many.
- it helps to measure the values and experienced that determine the individual's attitudes. This type of information one cannot get through standardized structured interview.
- all this makes unstructured interviews very difficult to conduct, since it can go to the maximum depth of any information and has the least standardization.
- even then there are certain steps which should be followed in conducting this type of interview and in recording information collected through it.
- these steps are essential to make it standardized.
- the processing of un structured interview should be divided into:

Selecting a Situation:

- One must select a place or an isolated condition under which interview can be nicely carried on.
- if it is to be conducted in the residence of the respondents, then it must be a completely private place.

Conducting the Interview:

- there are no clear cut rules for conducting an unstructured interview.
- it requires skill which may be acquired through practice. However some social scientists believe that the interviewer must follow the guidelines viz.

(a) Rapport:

- he must establish rapport through pleasant, receptive and patient behaviour.
- the respondent must feel that the researcher is interested in respondents information.

- the researcher must not interrupt with what respondent speaks rather should help him/her to overcome their personal inability of expression.

(b) Permissiveness:

the respondents must be assured that the researcher is deeply concerned with their thinking. They must be encouraged to express their own views however radical.

(d) Denial of Reciprocity:

- the researcher should not be involved in discussion and should not express his personal views in relation to the subject of investigation.
- the researcher should not let the respondent's know whether he himself approves or disapproves of what the respondents says.

(d) Probing:

- the respondent should be guided towards giving a full and consistent report . **This needs probing. Some good ways of probing are.**
 - (a) that is very interesting can you tell me more?
 - (b) how did you figure that?
 - (c) can you think of anything else?
- if the respondent fails to give consistent answer then the researcher should repeat or summarize what the respondent has said. This helps the respondent to understand inconsistency or incompleteness of his answer and gives him a chance of amending or organising his answer.

Evaluating the Respondent:

- evaluation of the respondent should not be done on the basis of his appearance, home, language etc.
- inference should be drawn on the basis of information given by the respondent and on the basis of his emotional reactions towards the questions.

Recording the Interview:

- recording the respondents report verbatim as much as possible during the process of interview provides the most unbiased results.
- if the information has to be summarized before noting down the researcher has to be careful that he does not select just what he thinks as important and rejects what he thinks as unimportant.

Types of Unstructured Methods:

- the unstructured interviews includes (a) non direct interview, and (b) the focus interview / the clinical interview methods.
- these interviews techniques are more or less related and do not reasonable each other.
- there are similar in the sense that the respondents are free to choose the topics to be discussed and can discuss in their own way, they like.
- these interviews methods are called formative interview method because it enables the interviewer to develop his/her own understanding of the issues.

The Non-Directive Interview Method:

- in this method the respondent is allowed to select the topic of his own interest on which s/he likes to talk.
- s/he is fully free to express his opinion, attitude and feelings towards his selected topics in his own manner.
- the interviewer, acts as a silent receptor and simultaneously attempts to be non-committed and non-directive.
- this techniques of interview method has stemmed from Freud's Psychotherapy and its techniques.
- it is based on the fact that the **unconsciousness elements** of the human mind regulate the individual's belief, attitude and behaviour.

Limitations:

- the collection of material through this technique is very slow.
- through this method mostly small samples can be covered.
- the interviewer is supposed to keep himself away from any conversation and remark. He has to stop his temptation of displaying before the respondent his own superior knowledge or understanding of the situation, which may be very difficult on part of the interviewer.
- the success of this type of interview demands great knowledge, experience and skill on part of interviewer.

The Focused Interview

- the focused interview involves a particular area of interest based on the hypotheses developed by the researcher.
- the main function of the interviewer, in this method, is to focus attention of respondents upon a given area of experience.
- the interviewer measures the affect of the experience upon the respondents.
- the interviewer may use even specific set of questions but the manner of their asking and their timing, order etc is left on the interviewers decision.
- the investigator has freedom to ask any number of question to know reasons behind events. Similarly, the respondent also has the full freedom to express his ideas and knowledge on topics desired by the investigator in his own manner.
- at the first step of interview, the respondents are exposed to a particular situation or condition viz. made to see a film, hear a radio programme, read a book or magazine etc.
- through situational analysis of their reactions towards the presented condition, the researcher develops a set of hypotheses.
- both structured and unstructured interviews can be carried on a given number of persons, individually or collectively. Each has its own merits and demerits.

Interviewing Individually

- interviewing individual group members affords privacy and encourages all members to answer.
- respondents may be more frank if they know that others in the group will not hear what they have said.
- this removes the possibility of the effect of group sanctions.
- this may be the best way of obtaining responses from individuals who are in lower positions.

Collective Interviewing:

- interviewing members in group allows them to interact during the interview.
- this may be the best approach for revealing the nature of group dynamics, for gaining insight into the power structure of the group, the different roles played by the members etc.
- interviews of groups require considerable planning in advance. The interviewer has to make sure that all the members of the group will be available at proper time and in receptive frame of mind etc.

Advantage And Dis-advantage of unstructured Interview Method:

Advantage:

- the researcher can ease himself into the field at appropriate place and thereby avoid rebuff by blundering into delicate situations or subject matter.
- the interviewer can constantly modify his categories making them more suitable for the analysis of the problem he is studying.
- the interviewer can select the informants later on in such a way as to throw additional light on emerging hypothesis.
- the interviewer absorbs a lot of information that may appear irrelevant.
- difficulty to quantify variables are probably less distorted by unstructured observation and interviewing.

Dis-advantages:

- active participation by the interviewer in the data gathering process, at times, involves the greatest danger that interviewers characteristics will influence the responses.
- the direct interview approach lies on the assumption that the respondent is not only willing that will also provide reliable results.
- non-standardized way of data collection.

Characteristics of the Good Interviewer:

- Whether it is a structured or an unstructured interview method, the interviewer plays an important role.
- the more unstructured is the interview the more complex is the process of the interviewing and the greater role played by the interviewer.

- the success of interview depends, to a great extent, upon the interviewer.
- therefore, it is essential for the students of research methodology to know about the essential characteristics of a good interviewer.
- it is said that interviewers are not born but made. All interviewers may possess some skill or interviewing originally, but it is a quality that is achieved and improved through experience and training.
- the criterions which can have direct bearing on maximizing the flow of information between respondent and interviewer can be stated as:
(a) over characteristics, (b) basic personality traits (c) attitude and (d) knowledge.

The Overt Characteristics of Interviewer:

- under this group we can include sex, age, ethnicity, social class, manner of dress and speech as important characteristics.
- they create an immediate impression and help to determine whether or not the respondent will agree to be interviewed.

Basic Personality Traits:

- an excellent interviewer need not conform to the popular image of pleasing personality.
- a very attractive personality may be in the beginning helpful in establishing rapport but not essentially in having good communication with the respondent and in keeping the respondent interested in answering.
- the three basic personality traits that are important and do help or hinder in interview are (a) flexibility (b) intelligence, and (c) emotional security.
- Flexibility allows the interviewer to assume an active or passive role effectively according to the need of the situation.
- an intelligent as interviewer can easily elicit information, evaluate it in terms of interview objectives and make probing for the purpose of clarity and competence.
- the feeling of emotional insecurity often have detrimental manifestations in the interview. The interviewer may display compulsive urge to dominate and challenge remarks unnecessarily, may fail to observe the respondents emotional needs, may communicate his own insecurity to the respondents for achieving cooperation etc.
- the best way to overcome the personal limitations is to make him master in some of the basic interviewing techniques, tactics and skills.

Attitude of the Interviewer:

- attitudes are influenced by several factors like race, religion, occupation and political affiliation.
- some positive or negative attitudes of the interviewer may influence the quality of interview.
- training of interviewers helps to over come displaying of such attitudes.

Special Knowledge of Interviewer:

- special knowledge. refers to specialized information or skill needed by the interviewer to gain access to the situation where the respondent can be interviewed, gain respect of the respondents etc.
- both subjective and objective qualities of an interviewer influence the usefulness of the interviewer and in achieving the scientific objectives of interview method.
- subjective qualities are the inquisitiveness of mind or capability of orienting themselves quickly to the newly emerging problems etc.

Variety of Interview Approaches:

The other two interview approaches are (a) the panel study, and (b) the community self survey.

The Panel Study:

- In the typical panel study the same group of individuals known as the panel, is interviewed at regular intervals on two or more occasions over a specified period of time.
- panel study is very similar to the case study method. The prime intent is in developing history of shifting of attitudes or behaviour of individuals . He wants to know which member of the panel change, in which direction and how much, so that he can identify possible causal factors.
- panel study may cover a sample drawn from a large population or even a entire group.
- what would be the size of the panel, how much the panel members are to be selected, how may times the panel members are to be interviewed etc. are the matters that the researcher should determine.
- panel study is clearly superior to a cross sectional survey or even a series of cross sectional surveys for studying the change.

Advantage of Panel Study:

- groups to be involved is usually smaller then in case of typical individual interview study. This helps in saving time and cost involved in covering a large number of persons.
- it provides an exceptional opportunities for the study of the causes and the effects of change.
- with the panel technique it is possible to identify those who themselves changed or experienced the change is the community.

Dis-advantage of Panel Study:

- Repeated visit to some respondents can be a source of change itself. The respondent become sensitive to the interviewer interest and prepares himself for his return.
- Real changes in the panel cannot be distinguished from sample bias. Differentials in answers from one interview to other might have been because of respondents misunderstandings of questions or because of change in his mood and not because of relevant variables.
- Long term studies make it costly.
- panel member may become sensitive to repeated interviewing. This usually happens if the study is a long term one.

Community Self Survey:

- in this approach it is not an outside agent who enters homes of the community themselves to obtain information, but the members of the same community themselves becomes involved in obtaining the information.
- although an outsider may serve as a catalyst and a consultant it is person within the community itself who develop the questionnaire.

the major purpose of this sort of action research is to motivate the community members to bring about the desirable social changes.