# 7.12 Sampling Methods and Ethical Issues in Psychological Research: 30-minute Pack

AQA 7182 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

**Answer ALL questions.**

**1** Define stratified sampling as it would be used to ensure gender and age representation in a school-based psychology study.

**(Total for Question 1 is 2 marks)**

**2** Outline one strength of using random sampling when recruiting participants for a neighbourhood attitudes survey.

**(Total for Question 2 is 3 marks)**

**3** Explain one limitation of volunteer sampling for an online study into smartphone addiction.

**(Total for Question 3 is 3 marks)**

**4** A researcher selects every 7th name from a hospital outpatient appointment list to invite to a stress questionnaire. Identify the sampling method used in this healthcare study.

**(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)**


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**5** Explain how a researcher can use presumptive consent and debriefing to handle the ethical issue of deception in a short laboratory attention study involving mild deception about the study aim.

**(Total for Question 5 is 6 marks)**

**6** Discuss ethical issues in psychological research. Refer to the hypothetical study below in your answer.

Hypothetical study stimulus: A researcher plans to investigate whether listening to sad music for 20 minutes affects short-term mood in adults. Participants will be recruited via an online advert and will be told that the study is about 'music and attention' to avoid demand characteristics. After the listening task participants complete a mood questionnaire. Some participants may find the music upsetting. The researcher plans to debrief participants afterwards and will allow participants to withdraw their data at the debriefing stage.

**(Total for Question 6 is 12 marks)**


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# Mark scheme · 7.12 Sampling Methods and Ethical Issues in Psychological Research: 30-minute Pack

## Question 1

| | |
|---|---|
| dividing the target population into subgroups or strata based on a characteristic such as gender or age, oe | **B1** |
| then selecting participants from each stratum in proportion to their presence in the population oe | **B1** |

**Answer: Dividing the population into strata such as gender or age, then selecting participants from each stratum in proportion to their numbers so the sample mirrors the population on those characteristics.**

## Question 2

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies a strength: reduces sampling bias and increases representativeness oe | **M1** |
| explains why this matters: a representative sample improves generalisability of the findings to the target population oe | **A1** |
| gives an example or consequence, e.g. avoids overrepresenting one neighbourhood group which would skew results oe | **A1** |

**Answer: Random sampling reduces sampling bias and tends to produce a more representative sample, which improves the generalisability of the survey findings; for example it prevents one demographic group from being overrepresented and skewing results.**

## Question 3

| | |
|---|---|
| identifies limitation: volunteer samples are prone to self-selection bias oe | **M1** |
| explains consequence: the sample may overrepresent people with strong interest or concern about smartphone use, so results may not generalise to the wider population oe | **A1** |
| could mention effect on validity or that estimates of prevalence may be biased oe | **A1** |

**Answer: Volunteer sampling is prone to self-selection bias because people who respond to an online advert may be unusually interested or concerned about smartphone use, so findings may overestimate levels of problematic use and not generalise to the whole population.**

## Question 4

| | |
|---|---|
| systematic sampling cao | **B1** |
| selecting every nth name from an ordered list is the defining feature oe | **B1** |

**Answer: Systematic sampling, because the researcher selects every 7th name from an ordered list.**

## Question 5

| | |
|---|---|
| defines presumptive consent or describes its use, e.g. asking a separate sample whether they would agree to the deception beforehand oe | **M1** |
| explains how presumptive consent helps reduce ethical concern, e.g. it indicates whether people like those being tested would find the deception acceptable, so risks are anticipated and reduced oe | **A1** |
| states what a debrief involves, e.g. fully explaining the true aim and reasons for deception after participation and checking participant wellbeing oe | **M1** |
| explains how debriefing addresses harm, e.g. it restores informed consent post hoc, corrects any misconceptions and offers support or withdrawal of data if participants object oe | **A1** |
| identifies an additional safeguard such as offering the right to withdraw data after debrief or providing contact details for counselling oe | **M1** |
| explains why this matters, e.g. it gives participants control and helps meet BPS ethical requirements for respect and protection from harm oe | **A1** |

**Answer: Presumptive consent can be obtained by asking a similar but separate group whether they would agree to the mild deception, helping the researcher judge acceptability and reduce risk. After the study the researcher debriefs participants by fully explaining the true aim and the reason for the deception, checking wellbeing, and offering the right to withdraw their data or signpost support. These procedures restore informed consent post hoc, reduce harm, and align with BPS principles of respect and protection.**

## Question 6

| | |
|---|---|
| **Level 4** Detailed, accurate knowledge of ethical principles and relevant BPS guidance is shown. The answer applies these principles effectively to the stimulus and evaluates the proposed procedures thoroughly. Strengths and limitations of the researcher's approach are discussed with clear justification and alternative solutions are offered. The response is well organised and uses appropriate psychological terminology. | **10-12** |
| **Level 3** Good knowledge of ethical principles is evident with mostly accurate application to the stimulus. Evaluation is present and shows awareness of strengths and weaknesses in the researcher plan. Some relevant suggestions for improvement may be offered. The answer is mostly clear and structured. | **7-9** |
| **Level 2** Basic knowledge of ethical issues is shown and some attempt is made to apply them to the scenario. Evaluation is limited or descriptive rather than analytical. Some valid but underdeveloped points are made about how to handle the issues. | **4-6** |
| **Level 1** Very limited knowledge or understanding of ethical issues. Application to the stimulus is minimal or absent. The answer is brief and lacks structure. | **1-3** |
| **Level 0** No creditworthy material. | **0** |


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**Indicative content:**

- AO1: Key ethical principles include informed consent, protection from harm, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and avoidance or justification of deception. BPS Code requires that deception is only used if no alternative exists and that participants are debriefed promptly.
- AO1: Informed consent should be obtained in advance where possible and must include sufficient information about procedures, foreseeable risks and the right to withdraw. For online recruitment this may include an information sheet and tick-box consent before participation.
- AO3: Application to stimulus, informed consent is compromised by the cover story 'music and attention'. The researcher should justify the deception and use measures such as presumptive consent, careful information that omits only the minimal necessary details, and full debriefing afterwards.
- AO3: Protection from harm is a central concern because some participants may become upset by sad music. The researcher should conduct a risk assessment, screen out vulnerable participants, provide warnings in the advert, allow participants to stop the task at any time, and provide support contacts in the debrief.
- AO3: Right to withdraw is partly addressed because participants can withdraw data at debrief, but best practice is to allow withdrawal during the study and to make the right to withdraw explicit in pre-study information and consent materials.
- AO3: Confidentiality must be maintained for online data. The researcher should explain how data are stored, who can access them, and how anonymity will be protected. If support referrals are offered, this may require limited breaking of anonymity with participant consent.
- AO3: Debriefing must fully explain the deception, rationale and findings, check participant wellbeing and offer the opportunity to withdraw data. Debriefing also offers an ethical benefit, educational value and can restore trust.
- AO3: Evaluate trade offs: deception may be necessary to avoid demand characteristics, but it increases ethical burden. Measures such as presumptive consent, clear pre-warnings, voluntary stopping, and thorough debrief mitigate risks but may not eliminate them. The researcher must weigh scientific gain against potential harm.
- AO3: Suggestions for improvement include pilot testing the procedure for harm, including screening questions to exclude those with recent bereavement or clinical depression, providing immediate online wellbeing resources, offering follow-up contact if needed, and seeking ethics committee approval.


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