2.9 Case Studies and Longitudinal Studies as Research Methods: 30-minute Pack

AQA 8192 · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions. For questions worth 4 marks or more write your answers in full sentences. Spend about 30 minutes on this paper.

1 Using your knowledge of research methods, explain two ways researchers can try to reduce the problem of sample attrition in a long-term longitudinal study.

(Total for Question 1 is 4 marks)

2 Discuss how far sociologists would agree that longitudinal studies are worth the high cost and effort involved in following the same people for many years.

(Total for Question 2 is 12 marks)

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3 Define what sociologists mean by a 'longitudinal study' when investigating a cohort of people over time.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

4 Identify one practical advantage of longitudinal studies compared with cross-sectional surveys when studying life-course changes.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

5 Explain two weaknesses of longitudinal studies as a method when sociologists follow the same cohort for many years.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Outline one ethical issue that can arise in a long-term longitudinal study working with the same family over thirty years.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

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Mark scheme · 2.9 Case Studies and Longitudinal Studies as Research Methods: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

identifies a method to reduce attrition, e.g. maintaining regular contact and updated addresses with participants	**B1**
development, e.g. this keeps participants engaged and makes follow up easier	**B1**
identifies a second measure, e.g. offering incentives or compensations for continued participation	**B1**
development, e.g. incentives can improve retention but must be balanced against ethical concerns about undue inducement	**B1**

Answer: Researchers can reduce attrition by maintaining regular contact and updated addresses to keep participants engaged and make follow up easier, and by offering incentives or compensation to improve retention, while taking care with ethical limits to avoid undue inducement.

Question 2

Level 1 Simple or partial arguments. Limited use of sociological ideas. Little or no balance. Conclusion, if present, is unsupported or is a brief assertion.	**1-3**
Level 2 Developed arguments using sociological perspectives or studies. Some balance, with at least one strength and one weakness considered. Some evidence of evaluation but with limited depth or support for the judgement.	**4-7**
Level 3 Well developed, balanced discussion drawing on sociological perspectives and examples. Clear evaluation of strengths such as ability to track change and suggest causal links, and weaknesses such as cost, attrition and ethical issues. A supported conclusion that reaches a justified judgement on whether the benefits outweigh the costs.	**8-12**

Indicative content:

- Arguments that longitudinal studies are worth the cost: they can track the same individuals and so identify sequences and potential causal relationships, for example linking early education experiences to later employment outcomes, which cross-sectional studies cannot do as effectively
- They reveal life course patterns and long term social change, providing rich data for policy evaluation and theory development, and can combine quantitative and qualitative methods for depth and representativeness
- Arguments that they may not be worth the cost: longitudinal studies are expensive and time consuming, require long term funding and researcher continuity, and face sample attrition which may bias results
- Ethical challenges arise from long contact with participants, such as maintaining consent and privacy across decades, and attrition reduction methods like incentives raise ethical trade offs
- Different sociological perspectives may value longitudinal research differently: interactionists may prize qualitative longitudinal insight into identity formation, functionalists or policy-oriented sociologists may value longitudinal evidence for social policy, while some practical or critical perspectives may prefer faster, cheaper methods where time or resources are limited
- Conclusion could weigh the high value of unique longitudinal insights against practical and ethical limits, concluding that longitudinal studies are often worth the cost for questions about change over time, but not always appropriate for all research questions

Question 3

identifies that a longitudinal study follows the same group of respondents and re-studies them at intervals over an extended period (oe)	**B1**
development, e.g. allows researchers to track change over time in the same people	**B1**

Answer: A longitudinal study follows the same group of respondents and re-studies them at intervals over an extended period, allowing researchers to track change over time in the same people.

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Question 4

identifies an advantage, e.g. they allow direct observation of change in the same individuals rather than inferring change from different age groups **B1**

brief development, e.g. this makes it easier to link cause and effect over time for the same people **B1**

Answer: Longitudinal studies allow direct observation of change in the same individuals rather than inferring change from different age groups, making it easier to link cause and effect over time.

Question 5

identifies a weakness, e.g. high cost and time required to run long term studies **B1**

development, e.g. funding and researcher continuity can be difficult to maintain over many years **B1**

identifies a second weakness, e.g. sample attrition where participants drop out over time **B1**

development, e.g. attrition can bias the results if those who remain are systematically different from those who left **B1**

Answer: Longitudinal studies are costly and time consuming to run, making funding and consistent research teams hard to maintain, and they risk sample attrition, where participants drop out over time, which can bias results if those who remain differ systematically from those who left.

Question 6

identifies an ethical issue, e.g. maintaining informed consent as participants age and family circumstances change **B1**

development, e.g. researchers must regularly reconfirm consent and deal with changing capacity or changing relationships **B1**

Answer: An ethical issue is maintaining informed consent over time as participants age and family circumstances change; researchers must regularly reconfirm consent and consider changing capacity and relationships.

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