



Introduction to Social Research Methods

Day 1

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National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia





About Us



50 years' experience of listening
to the public and making sure their
voice is heard



Not-for-profit, which means we're never
compromised by commercial or political
agendas



Setting the standard for social
research:
NatCen Learning trains others to do
robust research



Our Speakers



Dr Debbie Collins
Head of
Methodology and
Innovation Hub



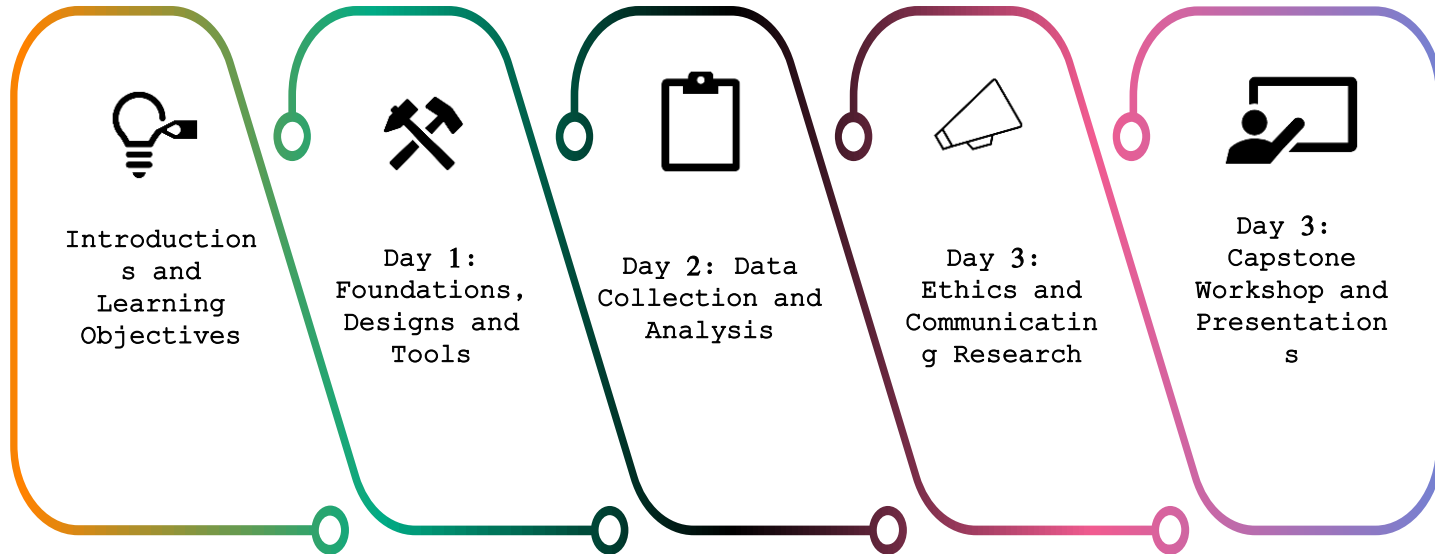
Dr Diane Abdallah
Research Director,
NatCen
International



Melanie Reixach-
Wong
Senior Researcher,
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Training Workshop Outline





Workshop Agenda

Session 1	Framing Research in the Saudi Context
Session 2	Research Design (Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed-Methods)
Session 3	Qualitative & Quantitative Data Collection
Session 4	Introduction to Analysis
Session 5	Ethics, Positionality, and Field Power
Session 6	Communicating Research
Session 7	Capstone Workshop
Session 8	Public Engagement with Research





Workshop Schedule

Day 1	
10.15 - 10.45	Session 1
10.45 - 11.00	Break
11.00 - 12.30	Session 2
12.30 - 13.30	Lunch
13.30 - 15.00	Session 2
15.00 - 15.15	Break
15.45 - 16.00	Wrap-up & Reflections

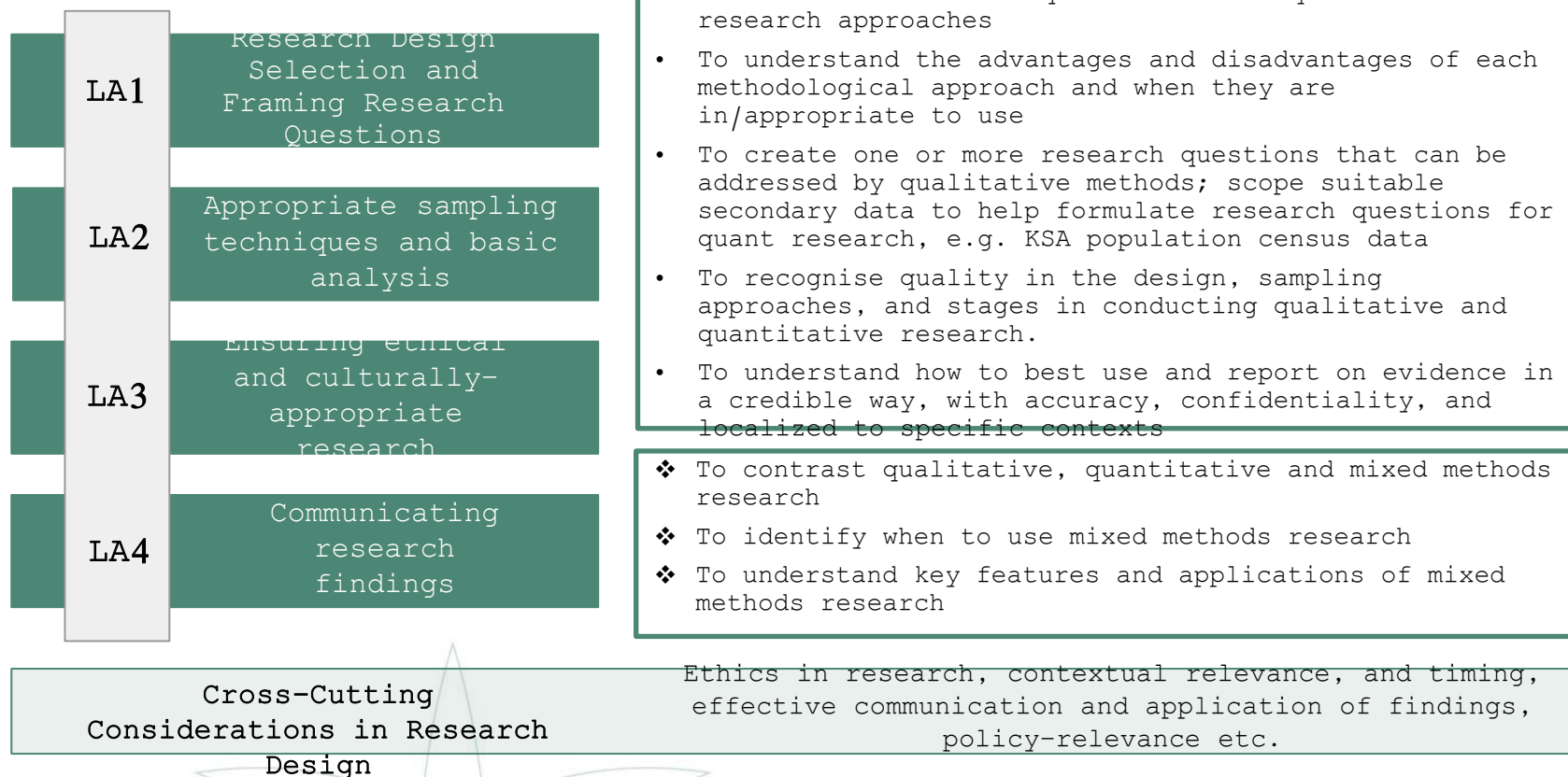
Day 2	
10.00 - 12.00	Session 3
12.00 - 12.45	Lunch
12.45 - 14.15	Session 4
14.15 - 14.30	Break
14.30 - 16.00	Session 4

Day 3	
10.00 - 10.30	Session 7
10.30 - 10.45	Break
10.45 - 11.15	Session 5
11.15 - 12.15	Session 6 & 8
12.15 - 13.00	Lunch
13.00 - 15.30	Session 7 + Breaks





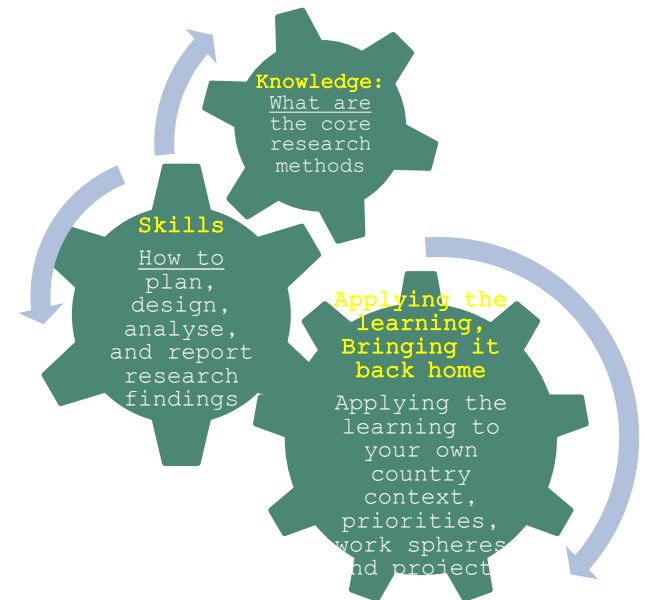
Learning Areas and Objectives





By the end of this training workshop, you will:

- ✓ Acquire a deeper understanding of the foundations of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research, and when they can be most useful .
- ✓ Be well-equipped with the knowledge and practical skills needed to plan key elements of a research project, choose the most suitable method, develop a robust design, and learn how different forms of data can be analysed and reported upon to wider audiences.
- ✓ Be exposed to real-life studies that have been conducted in the UK, the MENA region, and the GCC countries, and prepared to apply the learning to your own research interests and priorities in KSA.





Introductions

Fill out Menti-meter at www.menti.com with code 4301 5098 :

- How many years of experience do you have in the social sector? / كم سنة من الخبرة لديك في القطاع الاجتماعي؟
- Describe your experience in research (role and type of research) / صف خبرتك في البحث (الدور ونوع البحث).
- What do you hope to learn from this workshop over the next three days? / ما الذي تأمل أن تتعلمه من هذه الورشة خلال الأيام الثلاثة القادمة؟
- What research topic(s) / question(s) are you interested in? / ما هي موضوعات / أسئلة البحث التي تهتم بها؟

After 5 minutes, back to plenary and each person feeds back about the person they just met!



Module 1: Framing Research in the Saudi Context

Dr Diane Abdallah

Overview: Framing Research in the Saudi Context

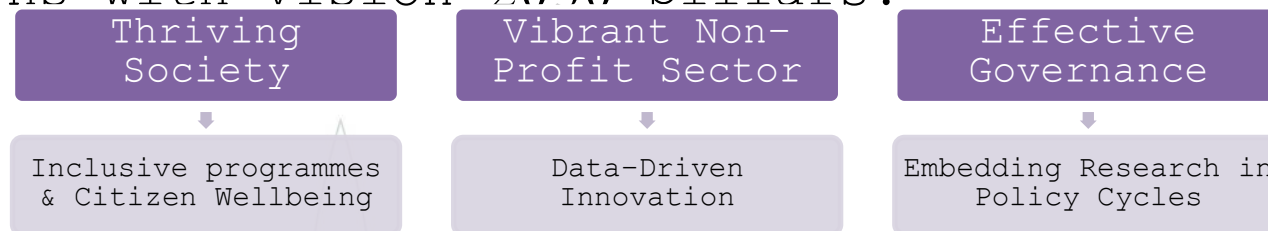
- The field of social and public policy research has recently witnessed an expansion in the Middle East and North Africa, strengthening social policy and governance.
- Saudi Arabia launched Vision 2030 to strive towards ‘a vibrant society’, ‘a thriving economy’ and ‘an ambitious nation’ guided by Islamic values and heritage.
- Vision 2030 stresses ‘providing effective social services’ and ‘reinvigorating social development’ across health, education and sustainability.
- Evidence-based social research is the foundation for developing a ‘strong social infrastructure’ underpinned by cultural contexts and traditions.
- It is critical that social research organizations are established by drawing on international best practice and tailoring it to the local context and culture.





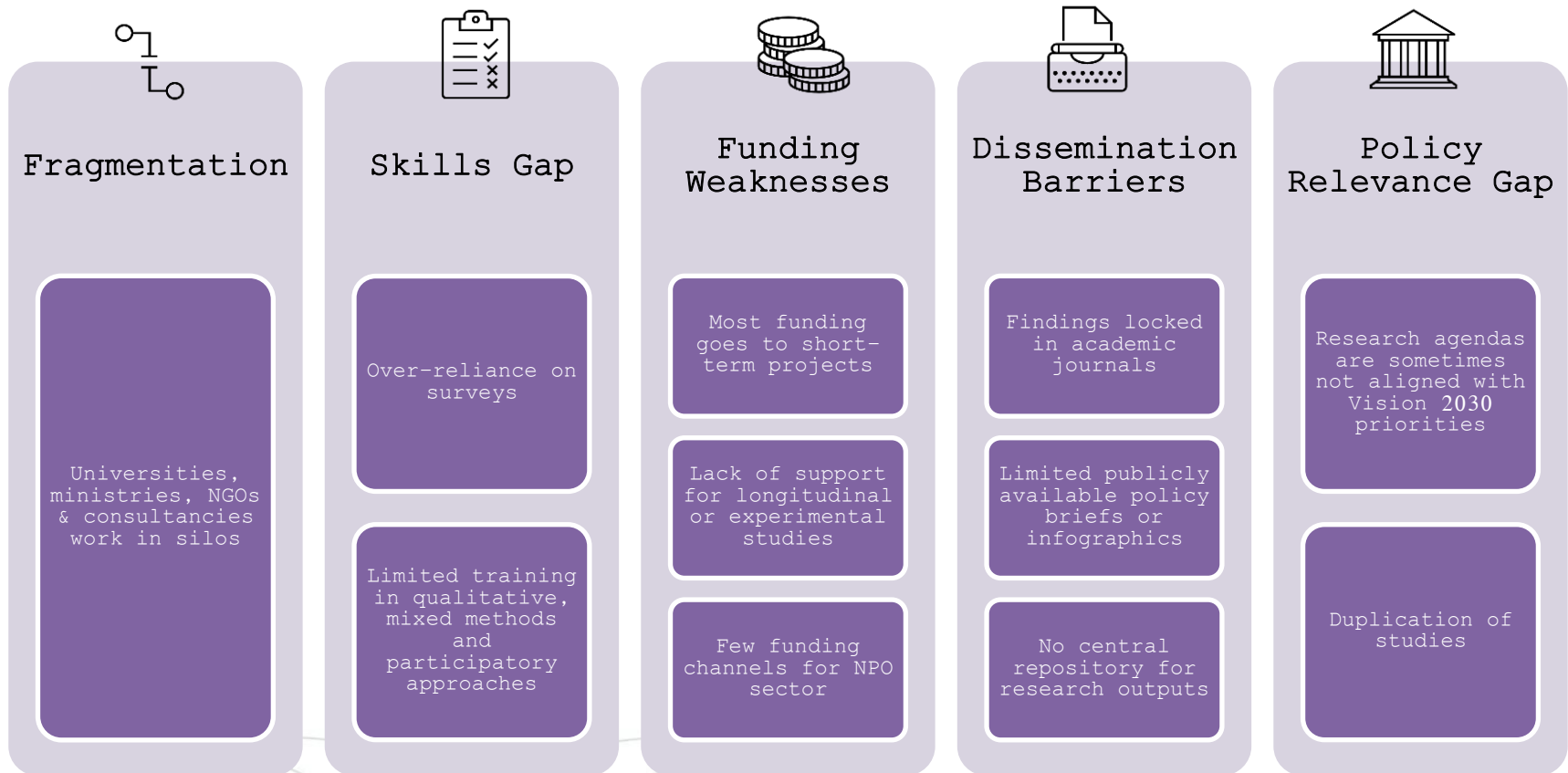
Why Social Research Matters in KSA

- Rapid transformation under Vision 2030 requires evidence-based policymaking.
- Research helps understand social dynamics: youth aspirations, women's participation, family cohesion, mental health.
- Aligns with Vision 2030 pillars:





Current Gaps in the Research Landscape in KSA





Localising and Innovating Research Methods

- Adapt global best practices:
 - Social Return on Investment (SROI) to evaluate NPO programmes
 - Participatory evaluation to involve communities directly
 - Longitudinal studies to assess long-term reform impacts
- Dual-Track Model:
 - Rapid Insight Research can result in policy briefs, visual dashboard
BUT
 - Strategic Depth Research can result in systemic studies, evaluation frameworks
- Innovative approaches:
 - DELVI (Deliberative & Visual Inquiry) - participatory, visual mapping of community needs
 - Mixed-methods - combining survey data, qualitative, and digital tools (mobile diaries, time-use mapping)
 - Translational methods - framing outputs for decision-makers, not just academia.



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Break and Prayer

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Module 2: Research Design (Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed Methods)

Lead: Dr Debbie Collins

Discussants: Dr Diane Abdallah, Melanie Reixach-Wong





2.1 | Research purpose

Why do we carry out research?





Reasons we might do research

-  Identify experiences, ideas, needs, aspirations, contexts
-  Map trends and patterns, identify links and relationships
-  Evaluate service delivery, outcomes/ impacts, and effectiveness
-  Improve existing services and provision
-  Demonstrate accountability to stakeholders e.g. funders, service users, the public
-  Innovate and develop new dialogues/projects/services based on evidence
-  Meet needs, build stakeholder or community relationships
-  Design campaigns, fundraising or promotional materials/activities



Applied social research

- Focused on real-world social issues
- Solutions-orientated
- Evidence informs decision-making and drives actions

Under Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has prioritised **increasing women's participation in the workforce**. Applied social research has been critical in identifying real-world barriers such as access to childcare, workplace policies, and safe transport. Studies have provided **evidence** showing how these barriers limit women's employment. This research has directly informed **policy reforms**, including expanding childcare support, introducing flexible work arrangements, and investing in female-friendly public transport.

- **Real-world issue** → low female labour force participation.
- **Solutions-oriented** → reforms targeting childcare, transport, workplace practices.
- **Evidence-driven action** → policies designed using social research findings.

Research plan



Begin with clear and defined research goals and research questions



Design your research to align with your research goals and questions



Keep focused on your research goals and research questions as the project progresses



Identify ethical & safeguarding concerns early and put plans in place to manage these



Agree budgets and timelines, and monitor progress



2.2 | Research Questions

Designing research questions for
qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods
research





What are Research Questions and Why do They Matter?

Research questions are the guiding inquiries that shape what a study investigates.

- **Purpose:**
 - Clarify the focus of the study.
 - Define the scope (what will and won't be studied).
 - Guide the choice of methods and data collection.
 - Ensure alignment with policy or community needs.
- **Good research questions are:**
 - Clear and specific.
 - Answerable with data (empirical).
 - Relevant to theory, practice, or policy.

Learning what's out there already

Literature/research/policy reviews
can be informal & exploratory - or
more focused



Help map area and prevent reinventing the wheel, wasting resources.

Refine the focus of your study and identify gaps in knowledge.

Establish the need for primary research or the focus for secondary analysis.

Questions to ask when using existing data:

- Are the original and new context compatible?
- Are the methods and questions valid?
- Are the results out of date/ out of context?



Research question evaluation framework

Feasible	• Is it going to be possible to obtain the data needed to answer the research question(s)? • Can the question be answered in the time and for the money available?
Useful	• The research will be useful for commissioning body
New	• Confirms, refutes or extends previous findings
Ethical	• Answering the research question is possible within the existing ethical framework
Relevant	• To the research objective in question





EXERCISE A: Writing research questions

In small groups: draft a research question and review it.

Is it clear?

Is it practical?

Revise your research question and write it down. You will present your recommendations.





Methodological approaches and the types of research questions they are well-suited to

Quantitative

- Seeks to measure prevalence, model or predict things, understand the strength of relationships between variables. Good for **how many**, **how much** questions.

Qualitative

- Explores meanings, perceptions, and understanding complex phenomena. Good for **how** and **why** questions.

Mixed Methods

- Provides both quantitative and qualitative data – breadth and depth. Good for **how many** and **why** questions.





Examples of research questions

Quantitative	What is the relationship between women's educational attainment and workforce participation in Jeddah?
Qualitative	How do young Saudi women describe their experiences of balancing societal expectations with career goals?
Mixed Methods	How do graduates' personal experiences help explain the statistical patterns of employment delays?"





Mixed Methods Research Questions

- **Purpose:** To integrate quantitative and qualitative insights for a more holistic understanding.
- **Approaches:**
 - Sequential: One method builds on the other.
 - Concurrent: Both methods used at the same time.
- **Types of mixed-methods questions:**
 - Complementary: "To what extent do survey findings align with interview insights?"
 - Expansion: "What are the measurable trends, and how are they explained by lived experiences?"
- **Example:**
 - Quantitative: "What percentage of university graduates face delays in finding employment?"
 - Qualitative: "What challenges do graduates describe when seeking their first job?"
 - Mixed question: "How do graduates' personal experiences help explain the statistical patterns of employment delays?"





EXERCISE B: Deciding on the methodological approach

In the same small groups, decide which methodological approach – quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods you will recommend to answer your research question.

Now, consider an alternate methodological approach that would also answer your research question. Write down this additional phrasing of your research question.





2.3 | Which data collection methods should I use?

An overview of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods



Do I need to collect new data
to answer my research
questions?



What type of data do you need?

Naturally occurring data

- Exists independently of the research
- Relies on researcher's interpretation of what is seen/read

- Social media posts
- Policy documents
- Paradata
- Case files, records

Researcher-Generated data

- Created through interaction between researcher and participant
- Participant articulates their own meaning

- Depth interviews
- Administrative data
- Pairs, triads
- Biographical interviews
- Group discussions





New or existing data?

Using existing data may involve:

Analysing existing data e.g. administrative data, someone else's survey data

Benefits:

Less resource intensive

Disadvantages:

Data may not be complete

Data may not be sufficiently focused

Regulations may restrict data

Generating new data might involve:

Conducting a survey, carrying out focus groups or collecting specific monitoring data

Benefits:

Data is focused on your specific research questions

Disadvantages:

Can be costly, time consuming and place a burden on participants

Naturally occurring data

- What to observe, and how (in person, online)?
- What sources to select?
- Ethical considerations – informed consent



Documentary analysis



Provides important substantive content

- ❖ factual information (e.g. staffing policies)
- ❖ processes, systems (e.g. roles and responsibilities)



Reveal frameworks

- ❖ decisions, intentions
- ❖ language, discourses, assumptions, cultural factors



Provide a historical perspective



Map implementation processes and decision making
(e.g. minutes)

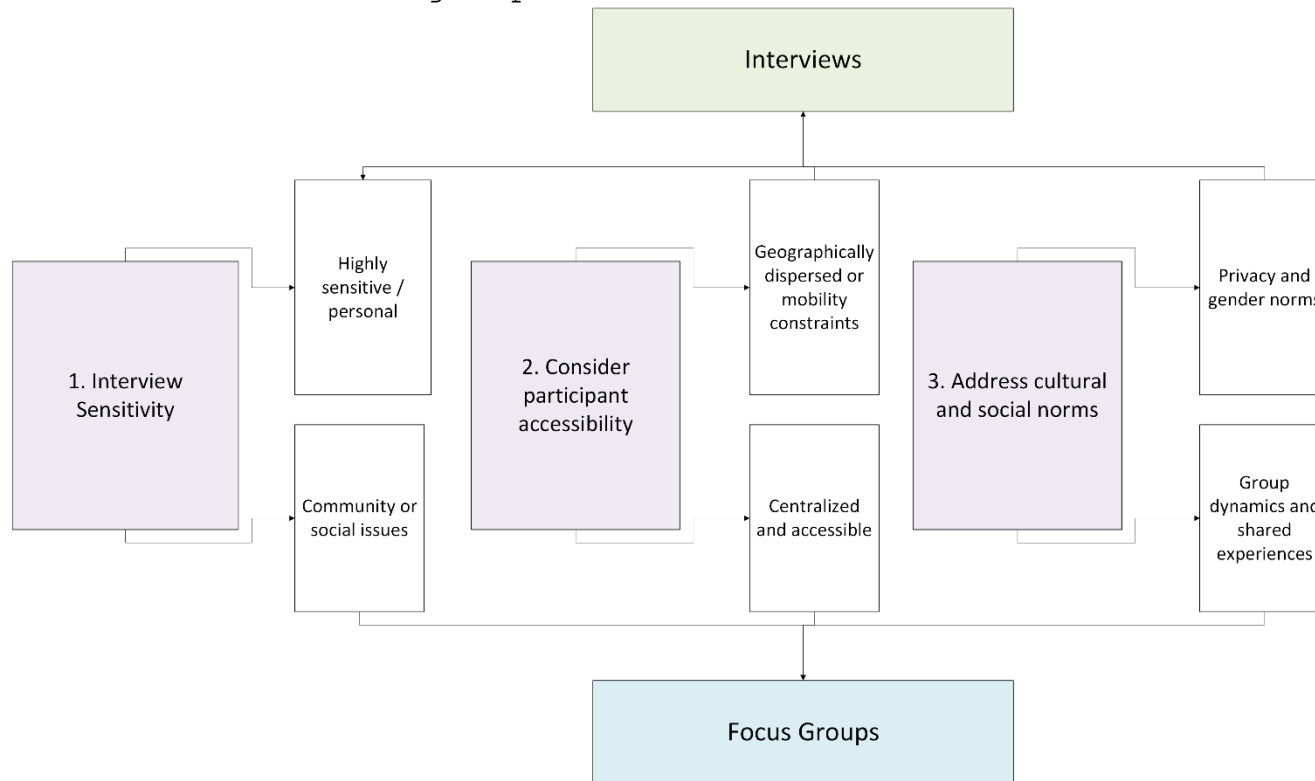


Which qualitative data
collection method should I use?



Which qualitative method should I use?

The following framework can serve as a decision-making guide about whether to use interviews or focus groups.





Subject matter and choice of data collection method

Interviews

Detailed personal accounts

Understanding **complex** issues such as motivations and impacts.

Exploring private/
sensitive issues

Focus groups

For generating data shaped by group interaction

Highlighting and exploring **diversity**

Where subject is **conceptual/** abstract e.g. 'fairness'

Creative thinking - ideas and solutions





EXERCISE C: Deciding on data collection methods

In your groups, decide which **qualitative data collection methods and modes** you will recommend to answer your research question. Justify your recommendation. You will present your recommendations.





Which quantitative data
collection method should I use?





Generating quantitative data

Surveys

Census

Questionnaires

Diaries

Other measurements



What are surveys and why do we undertake them?

‘the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions’

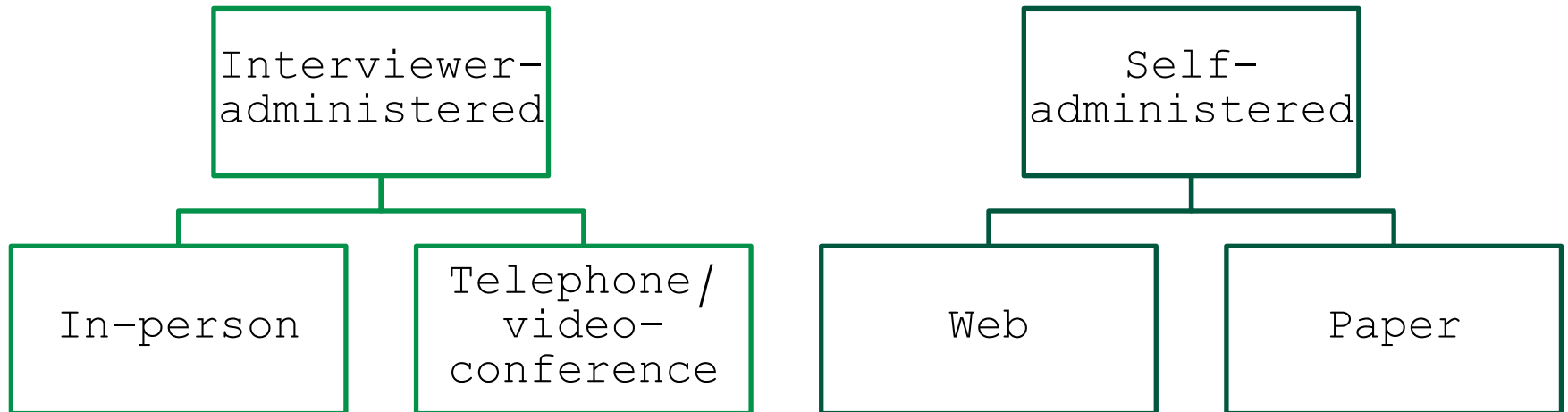
Check & Schutt (2012), Research Methods in Education. Sage. p. 160

‘a systematic method for gathering information from (a sample of) entities for the purpose of constructing quantitative descriptors (statistics) of the attributes of the larger population of which the entities are members.’

Groves et al (2004) Survey Methodology. Wiley Interscience



Modes of data collection





Issues to consider when deciding on mode

Sampling

Availability of contact information

Spatial dispersion/density of target population

Characteristics of target population

Literacy levels

Cognitive, communication, language ability

Access/ competence in use of equipment needed to participate

Data

Data analysis planning, appropriateness of methods

Features of data collection

Nature of data wanting to collect

Complexity

Content e.g. types of Qs, sensitivity, consent, bio-samples

Data quality

Quality of answers

Extent of control over response environment

Other factors

Cost

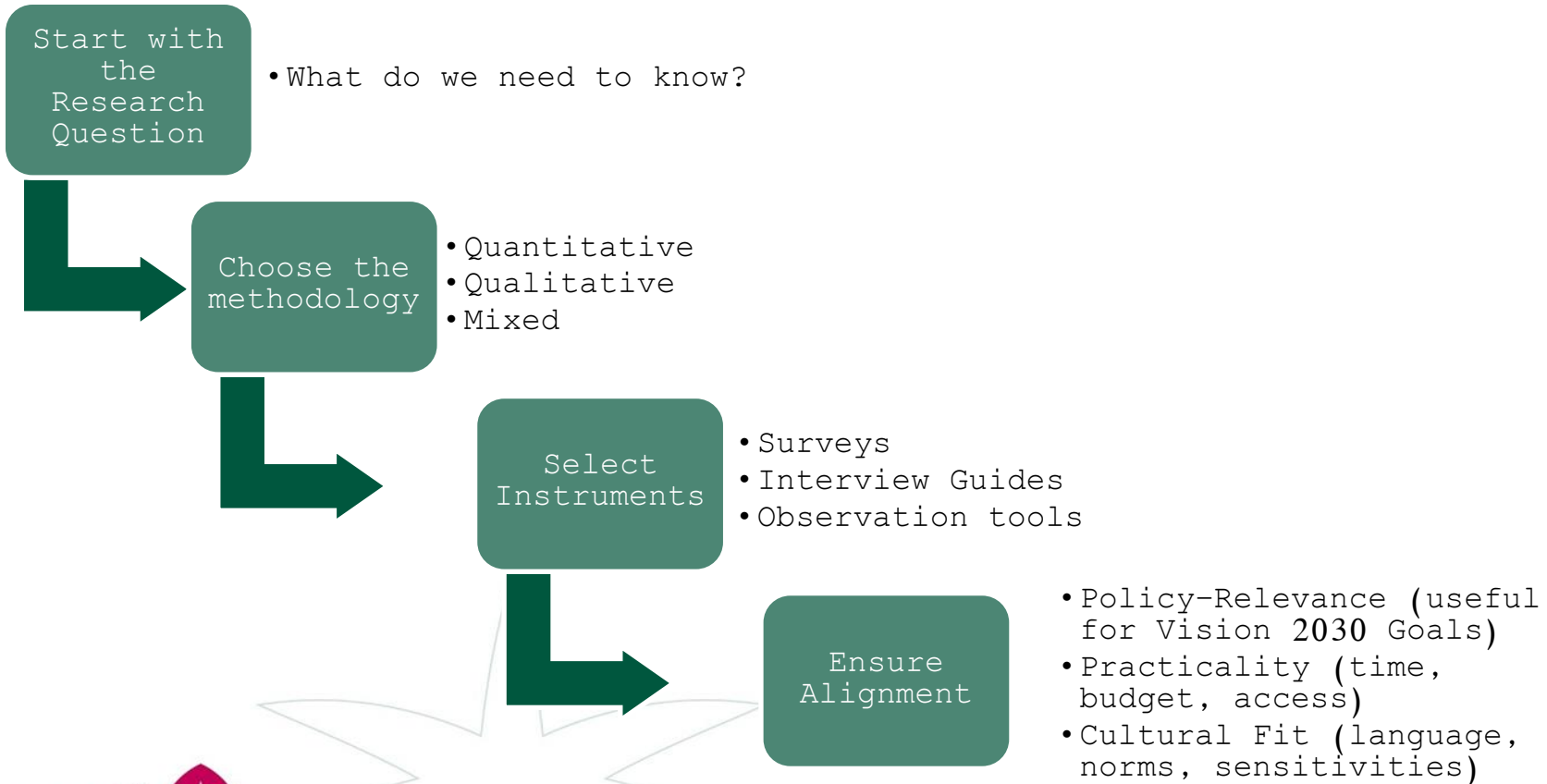
Time

Comparability e.g. over time, with other sources





Summary: Matching Design, Methods & Instruments



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EXERCISE D: Deciding on data collection methods

In your groups, decide which **quantitative data collection methods and modes** you will recommend to answer your research question. Justify your recommendation. You will present your recommendations.

2.5 | Sampling and recruitment

Determining the sample and population to
collect data from



Sampling considerations

	Research questions	Analytical Requirements	Sampling methods
Qualitative	• In-depth exploration	• Diversity in experiences, contexts	• Purposive • Convenience • Snowball
Quantitative	• Measurement accuracy	• Statistical representation of population	• Random probability • Quota





Consideration 1: Your Study Population

- Key questions:
 - Who are the population of interest?
 - Should any subsets of the population of interest be excluded?
 - Do any specific subgroups need to be included?





Consideration 2: How will you identify your target population?

Existing sample frames

administrative
lists - e.g.
benefit records;
electoral register
survey

Generated sample frames

- household screen
- working through gatekeepers

Considerations

- comprehensive and inclusive?
- selectivity and bias?
- cost and feasibility?





Consideration 3: How will you select them?

Informed by...

- Aims of the study
- Relevant literature
- Hypotheses / ideas to explore

Sampling criteria...

- Geography
- Demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender)
- Views, experiences, behavior

Resourcing and prioritisation

- How many interviews and with whom
- Budget





Quantitative Sampling



Aim of sampling for quantitative research

Sampling involves the **systematic selection** of units from the target population

The sample **represents** the target population of interest and the data collected from the sample are statistical **estimates**

The goal is to generate a survey sample from which **accurate** estimates for the population can be estimated

- Sample size should be adequate to obtain **precise** estimates
- Sample size should be large enough to support any required sub-group analysis

(Target) Population

- The **universe** of all units of interest to the study

Need to define:

- **Sampling unit**

- e.g. people, households, schools, businesses, etc.

- **The criteria for inclusion**

- people e.g. all adults; adult males aged 16-34 resident in Riyadh
- households: all households in KSA containing at least one child under 6 years old
- schools: all state-funded primary schools in KSA



Issues to consider when designing a sampling approach

What is the population of interest?

What type of data do you want to collect and what will it be used for?

- Robust population level estimates? Random probability
- Focus on specific hard-to-reach group? Non-random

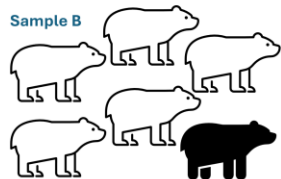
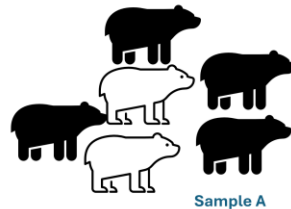
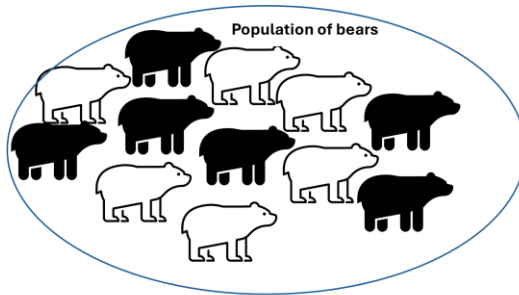
How will we access the population?

- Does an existing sample frame exist?
- What are its strengths and weaknesses? How good is the coverage?
What contact details does it contain?
- How easy will it be to construct a sample frame?



What sampling frames could you use?

Variance (precision)



The results of sample surveys are not completely precise, but suffer from (random) sampling variability

- Sample estimates are always associated with a measure of uncertainty
- Uncertainty is measured by the confidence interval around the survey estimate



Bias (accuracy)

- **Bias** is very different from random variation
- An **unbiased** method will produce results which vary randomly from sample to sample, but will on average correctly reflect the population
- A **biased** method, will systematically misrepresent the population, no matter how large the sample
- Biased estimates are **misleading and inaccurate**





Variance and bias (summary)

VARIANCE	BIAS
Under different replications of same design, estimate varies randomly centred on correct value	Under different replications of same design, bias is constant; estimate is not centred on correct value.
Can be measured from within the survey	Can only be measured with information external to the survey
Can be reduced by drawing a large sample	The effect is fixed regardless of how big the sample is

Does **not** affect means and totals

Means and totals **will be affected**





Types of survey sample designs





Comparison of probability and non-probability sampling methods

Random probability sampling (RPS)	Non-random probability sampling (NRPS)
Need a list (sampling frame) of all units included in the target population	Don't need a list of all units in the target population
Every unit has a chance of selection	Selection is based on criteria and availability
Chance of selection for every unit is known	Chance of selection of units is unknown
Once selected, units cannot be replaced	Once selected, units can be replaced
Types of RPS include: • Simple random probability sample • Stratified sample • Clustered sample • Multi-stage sample	Types of NRPS include: • Convenience/ grab/ opportunity/ river sampling • Quota sampling • Random location sampling • Snowballing
Used when need high precision estimates	Used for experiments and when RPS is impractical

A RPS sample is only as good as the sample frame

- Sampling frames are a list of all members of a population from which a sample is drawn.
- Three things are essential to judging the value of a sample frame:
 1. **Coverage**
 - It should ideally include a list of all members of a defined population
 2. **Accuracy**
 - It should contain up-to-date information and no member should be listed more than once
 3. **Representativeness**
 - It should contain all information needed to satisfy sample requirements



EXERCISE E: Quantitative Sample Design

In your groups, propose a **sampling design** that will be appropriate for your quantitative research question. You will present your design. In coming up with your design:

Define the target population

How will you identify the target population?

What size of sample will be needed and why?

What would you recommend?

In thinking about your design, think about how you can minimise bias.

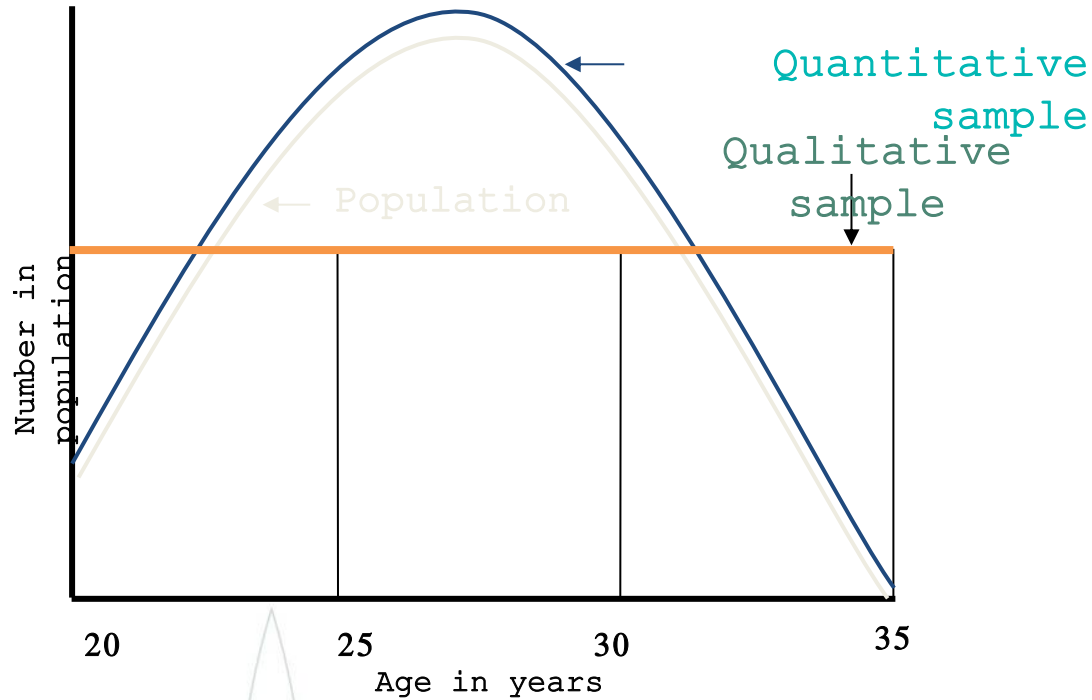




Qualitative Sampling



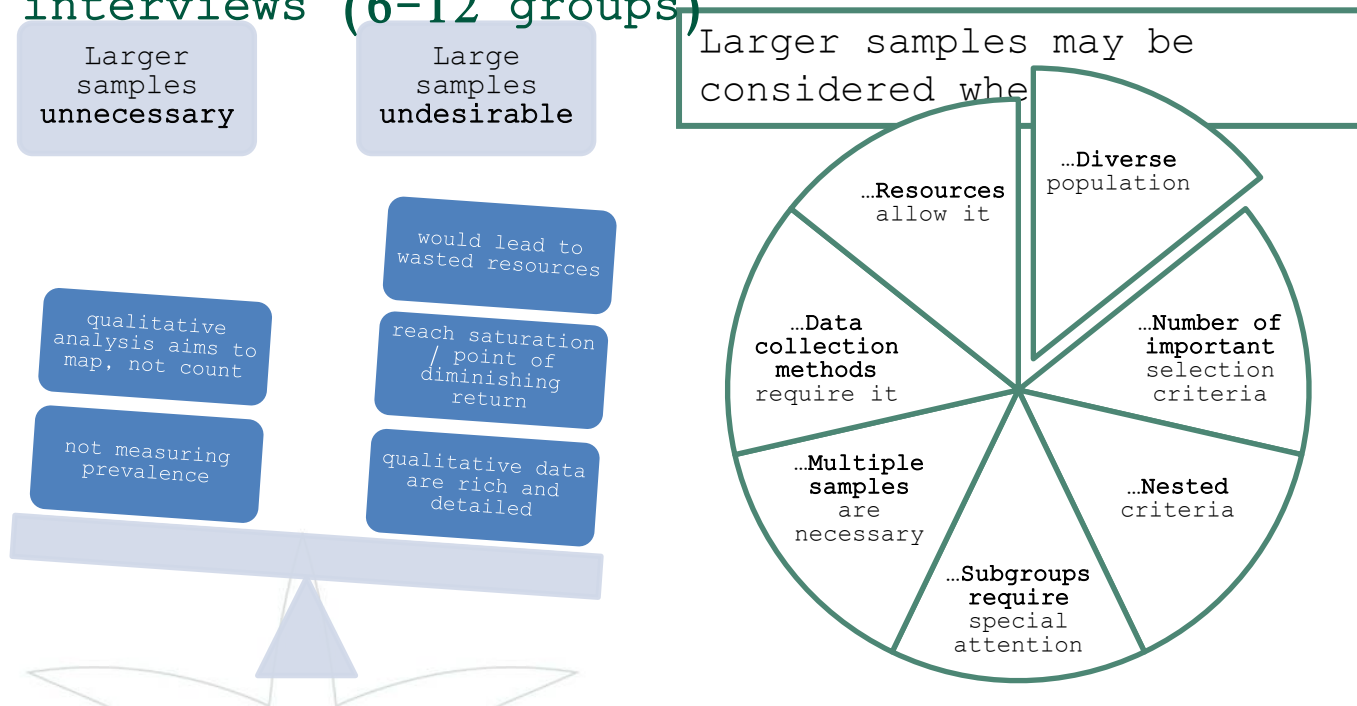
A visual comparison





Typically, how big should my sample be?

Usually small - rule of thumb is **<50 interviews (6-12 groups)**





Qualitative sampling methods

Purposive

- Theory/ data drive
- Quotas set by researcher to ensure diversity

Snowball or respondent-driven

- Initial quotas set
- Participants' networks are used to recruit additional participants



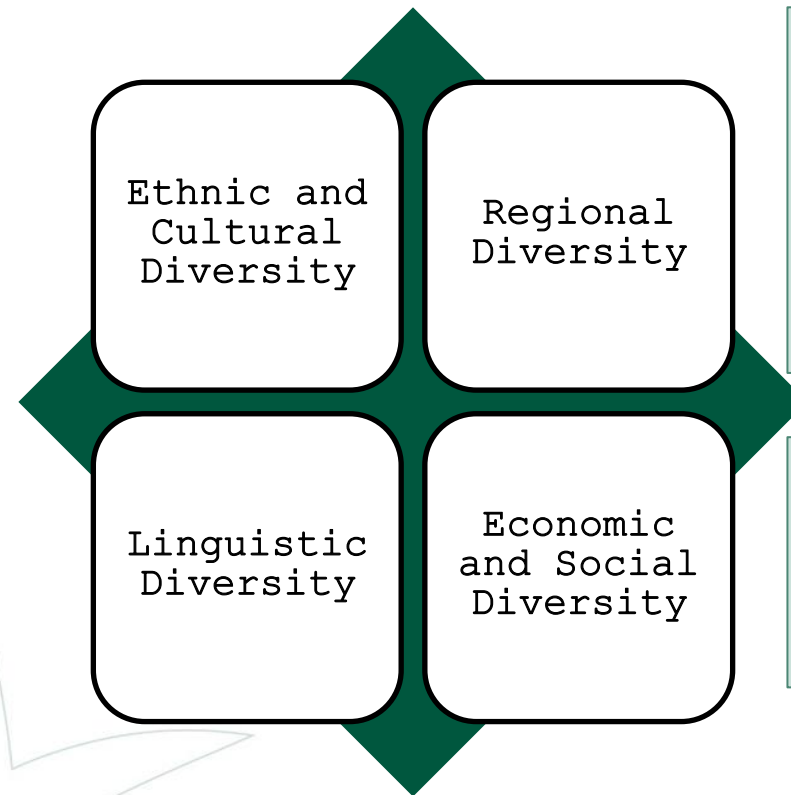


The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a Case Study





Taking into account the diversity in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



- **Arab Population:** Predominantly Arab with deep-rooted Arab traditions and Islam.
- **Tribal Groups:** Key tribes like Qahtanis and Adnanis influence social structure.
- **Non-Arab Groups:** Afro-Saudis: Descendants of African migrants; Asian Communities: Large populations from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh) and Southeast Asia (Philippines, Indonesia); Western Expats: Professionals from Europe, North America, etc.

- **Religious Diversity:** Mainly Sunni Muslim with Shia communities in the Eastern regions.

- **Arabic Dialects:** Various regional dialects; Classical Arabic used in formal settings.

- **Other Languages:** Urdu, Hindi, Tagalog, and English spoken among expatriates.

- **Hejaz:** Western region with Mecca and Medina; rich multicultural influences.
- **Najd:** Central region with Bedouin heritage; home to Riyadh.
- **Eastern Province:** Oil-rich, with Shia communities and trade history.
- **Asir:** Southwestern region with unique cultural heritage.

- **Northern and Southern Regions:** Distinct local

- **Economic Stratification:** Differences between affluent urban centres and rural areas; varied socio-economic classes.

- **Urban vs. Rural:** Distinct lifestyles and cultures between cities (e.g., Riyadh, Jeddah) and rural regions.





Recommendations for sampling in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

1. Ensure Inclusive Sampling

- **Regional Representation:** urban and rural participants
- **Ethnic & Tribal Diversity:** Arabs, Afro-Saudis, expatriates, and various tribal groups.
- **Socioeconomic Stratification:** representation from different economic and occupational backgrounds
- **Gender Balance:** both men and women, consider cultural norms and gender-segregated data.
- **Age Range:** diverse age groups, from youth to elderly

Follow Stratified Sampling

- **Identify key strata** based on the research objectives. E.g. by region, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and age.
- **Within Strata:** Use purposive sampling within each stratum to ensure that specific characteristics relevant to the research question are represented

Language and Communication Considerations

- **Multilingual Approach:** use preferred languages or dialects, bilingual facilitators.
- **Language Sensitivity:** Be mindful of language nuances and non-verbal communication styles.





EXERCISE F: Qualitative Sampling Design

In your groups, propose a sampling design that will be appropriate for your qualitative research question. You will present your design. In coming up with your design:

- Define the target population
- How will you identify the target population?
- What size of sample will be needed and





[to fill in]

WORKSHOP: RESEARCH TOOL DESIGN



Case study

In a study by Alyaemni et al. (2013) exploring Saudi Arabian women's perceptions of how gendered social structures affect their health, researchers sought to understand these influences relative to men's health. Certain research methods were conducted with 66 married women in Riyadh. Participants were purposively sampled for maximum variation, considering different factors.

The purpose of the study is to offer insights into the gendered health experiences of Saudi women, highlighting the interplay between social structures and health from their perspectives.

The sample frame for the study was the five geographical health sector regions of Riyadh city (middle, western, southern, northern, and eastern sectors).

Research Questions

1. How do gendered social structures in Saudi Arabia impact women's health?
2. What are the key barriers to healthcare access for women in Saudi Arabia?
3. How do Saudi women perceive the influence of gender roles on their physical and mental health?
4. What strategies do Saudi women use to navigate and negotiate their health needs within the constraints of their social environment?
5. What are the potential areas for social change that could improve health outcomes for Saudi women?

ase study

Task 1: You now need to decide how to collect your data. What qualitative methods would you use? Why?

Task 2: You need to decide what you think the key criteria, should be for selecting people to participate and how you would decide if the women should participate in Interviews vs. Focus Group Discussion?

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Reflection and Discussion





Reflection & Discussion

What connections can you make between research design and your own research roles (past, present, aspirational / future)?





Arrangements for Capstone

Capstone Assignment: Activity combining learnings from all three days to prepare and present a research project in a group

- 10-minute presentation on Day 3 per group
- 5-minute question and feedback session

Formation of 5-6 groups: Consider topic area and methodological interest



Task: Urban Mobility in Riyadh

Research Question: How do transportation infrastructure changes affect urban mobility in Riyadh?

Answer to Task

Quantitative Component: Analyze •
traffic flow data and public
transportation usage statistics
before and after infrastructure
changes.

Qualitative Component: Conduct •
interviews with Riyadh residents
about their experiences with new
transportation options.

Integration: Correlate changes in •
traffic data with resident
feedback to assess the impact of



Task : Renewable Energy Adoption in Saudi Arabia

Research Question: What are the
barriers and motivators for
adopting renewable energy in
Saudi Arabia?



Answer to Task

Quantitative Component: Survey •
households and businesses on
their adoption of renewable
energy technologies.

Qualitative Component: Conduct •
interviews with key stakeholders,
including energy experts and
policy makers.

Integration: Compare survey data •
on adoption rates with interview
insights to identify key factors
influencing renewable energy
adoption.