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| **Strengths and Limitations of Common Information-Gathering Methods** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **METHOD** | **DESCRIPTION** | **STRENGTHS** | **LIMITATIONS** |
| **Systematic Observation** |  |  |  |
| *Naturalistic observation* | Observation of behavior in natural contexts. | Reflects participants’ everyday behaviors. | Cannot control conditions under which participants are observed. |
| Structured observation | Observational of behavior in a laboratory, where conditions are the same for all participants. | Grants each participant an equal opportunity to display the behavior of interest. Permits study of behaviors rarely seen in everyday life. | May not yield observations typical of participants’ behavior in everyday life. |
| **Self-Reports** |  |  |  |
| *Clinical interview* | Flexible interviewing procedure in which the investigator obtains a complete account of the participant’s thoughts. | Comes as close as possible to the way participants think in everyday life. Great breadth and depth of information can be obtained in a short time. | May not result in accurate reporting of information. Flexible procedure makes comparing individuals’ responses difficult. |
| *Structured interview, questionnaires, and tests* | Self-report instruments in which each participant is asked the same questions in the same way. | Permits comparisons of participants’ responses and efficient data collection. Researchers can specify answer alternatives that participants might not think of in an open-ended interview. | Does not yield the same depth of information as a clinical interview. Responses are still subject to inaccurate reporting. |
| **Clinical, or Case Study, Method** | A full picture of a single individual’s psychological functioning, obtained by combining interviews, observations, and sometimes rest scores. | Provides rich, descriptive insights into processes of development. | May be biased by researchers’ theoretical preferences. Findings cannot be applied to individuals other than the participant. |
| **Ethnography** | Participant observation of a culture or distinct social group. By making extensive field notes, the researcher tries to capture the culture’s unique values and social processes. | Provides a more complete and accurate description than can be derived from a single observational visit, interview, or questionnaire. | May be biased by researcher’s values and theoretical preferences. Findings cannot be applied to individuals and settings other than the ones studied. |

**Reference**

Berk, L. E. (2007). *Infants, Children, and Adolescents*. (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon. ISBN: 9780205511389.