

Non-Experimental Research

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will discuss methods to conduct and utilize non-experimental research. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Experimental vs. Non-Experimental Research
2. Types of Non-Experimental Research
 - a. Naturalistic Observation
 - b. Clinical Method
 - c. Case Study
 - d. Correlational Study
 - e. Survey Method

1. Experimental vs. Non-Experimental Research

While experimental research is probably the most commonly known form of scientific research, it's important to know that while experimental research best explains causation, or cause and effect relationships, because it can show relationships more specifically, there are some challenges with it.

Often, human behavior is very complex, and the experiment itself might affect the results. Or, the different things that are being studied are too specific to the setting or situation, or too difficult to replicate on their own.

This is when psychology uses a series of non-experimental methods of research to try to explain the wide range of human thoughts and behaviors. These non-experimental forms of research are not less legitimate than experimental research, they're just different ways of approaching all of the different problems in order to reach a fuller understanding of them.

2. Types of Non-Experimental Research

In today's lesson, we will explore five types of non-experimental research.

2a. Naturalistic Observation

The first of these methods is the **naturalistic observation** method of research, which consists of watching someone or something within its natural setting. You gather information about it and come to conclusions. This is helpful in psychological phenomena, because they can often be very specific to the situations in which they take place, so it is difficult to take them out of context and understand them within an experimental or lab setting.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, altruistic behavior--or someone being nice or kind to others--is hard to replicate in a lab. It's difficult to come up with a situation where a person feels like they should authentically be nice to others within a lab. Therefore, it's helpful to be able to see it occurring organically outside in the world itself.

Naturalistic observation is probably the most common of the non-experimental methods of research. It is used often in psychology due to the nature of psychological concepts.



TERM TO KNOW

Naturalistic Observation

Watching someone or something in its natural setting to gather information about the mind and behavior

2b. Clinical Method

The second type is the **clinical method**, where information gathered from psychological patients is used to come to conclusions about their mental states and behaviors. Under the clinical method, we can study things that are more uncommon and that defy experimentation.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, schizophrenia is a mental disorder with a prevalence of about 0.3% to 0.7% of the population; a very small amount of people have schizophrenia. Therefore, in order to study it, it's better to go to a setting where people with schizophrenia are more inclined to come and to gather information from those settings. At the same time, researchers are able to help people with those problems.



TERM TO KNOW

Clinical Method

Using information gathered from psychology patients to come to conclusions about mental states and behaviors

2c. Case Study

The third type of non-experimental research is a **case study**, which is an intensive in-depth study of a single person or small group of people. This is particularly useful when depth is more important to your research versus breadth, or gathering a large amount of information.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, if you wanted to study a group of children and the factors that lead to later success in life, you could conduct a case study over a long period of time and gather a great deal of information.



HINT

Note, though, when conducting case studies, that it is important to not generalize the information. Because

case studies focus on a small group of people, you don't want to say it's necessarily completely true for all people in all situations.



TERM TO KNOW

Case Study

In-depth research focusing on all aspects of a single person or small group

2d. Correlational Study

Somewhat related to a case study is the correlational study, which is a study that gathers information that compares two or more different variables.

In this instance, we can use existing data from other sources, and often from other fields of study, to explore those concepts. This is essentially research that examines information on a scale of breadth versus depth, and involves gathering a lot of information. This is helpful because it does incorporate other areas of research, not just psychology.



EXAMPLE For example, you might look at crime rates within a city and see how they're related to feelings of stress within people that live within those cities.

2e. Survey Method

Lastly, the **survey method** involves the use of written or verbal questionnaires to ask psychological questions. This is another way to gather a large amount of information, relatively easily, about many different types of people--again, breadth versus depth of information.



EXAMPLE For example, if you want to ask people about their shopping habits, personality traits, or feelings about different types of things within the world, you might use a survey--like a presidential poll to gauge current public sentiment about the president.

Surveys, as mentioned, are quite helpful because they're relatively easy to do, so they are used fairly often. However, it is important to understand that they provide a relatively broad and simple understanding of issues, depending on how long the questionnaires are and how valid they are for whatever subject they're talking about.



TERM TO KNOW

Survey Method

Use of written or verbal questionnaires to answer psychological questions



SUMMARY

Today we learned about the different non-experimental methods that are used within psychological research. **Non-experimental research** is sometimes used instead of the more commonly known **experimental research** because of the complexity of human behavior, and in cases where the things being studied are too specific to the setting or situation, or too difficult to replicate on their own.

We explored five different **types of non-experimental research**: **naturalistic observation**, the **clinical method**, **case study**, **correlational study**, and the **survey method**. Each type varies in the setting in which it is conducted, as well the focus on gathering breadth vs. depth of information.

Good luck!

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR ERICK TAGGART.



TERMS TO KNOW

Case Study

In-depth research focusing on all aspects of a single person or small group

Clinical Method

Using information gathered from psychology patients to come to conclusions about mental states and behaviors

Naturalistic Observation

Watching someone or something in its natural setting to gather information about the mind and behavior

Survey Method

Use of written or verbal questionnaires to answer psychological questions