

case study: The holistic analysis of a single person, group, or event by one or more research methods.

cluster sampling: A probability sampling design in which the population is broken down into natural groupings or areas, called clusters, and a random sample of clusters is drawn.

confidence interval: A range (interval) within which a population value is estimated to lie at a specific level of confidence.

convenience sampling: The selection of cases that are conveniently available.

coverage error: The error that occurs when the sampling frame does not match the target population.

disproportionate stratified sampling: A sampling procedure in which strata are sampled disproportionately to population composition.

multistage cluster sampling: A sampling design in which sampling occurs at two or more steps or stages.

nonprobability sampling: Methods of case selection other than random selection.

nonresponse error: In survey sampling, the error that occurs when nonrespondents (sampled individuals who do not respond or cannot be contacted) differ systematically from respondents. Also called *nonresponse bias*.

normal curve: A bell-shaped distribution of data that characterizes many variables and statistics, such as the sampling distribution of a proportion or mean. Also called *normal distribution*.

population: The total membership of a defined class of people, objects, or events.

probability: The likelihood that something will occur, which may vary from 0 to 100 percent.

probability distribution: A distribution of the probabilities for a variable, which indicates the likelihood that each category or value of the variable will occur.

probability proportionate to size sampling: The selection of cases in cluster sampling so that the probability of selection is proportionate to the size of (i.e., the number of cases in) the cluster.

probability sampling: Sampling based on a process of random selection that gives each case in the population an equal or known chance of being included in the sample.

proportionate stratified sampling: A sampling procedure in which strata are sampled proportionately to population composition.

purposive sampling: Sampling that involves the careful and informed selection of typical cases or of cases that represent relevant dimensions of the population. Also called *judgmental sampling*.

random selection: A selection process that gives each element in a population a known and independent chance of being selected.

sample: A subset of cases selected from a population.

sampling distribution: A theoretical distribution of sample results for all possible samples of a given size.

sampling error: The difference between an actual population value (e.g., a percentage) and the population value estimated from a sample.

sampling frame: An operational definition of the population that provides the basis for drawing a sample; ordinarily consists of a list of cases.

sampling with replacement: A sampling procedure whereby once a case is selected, it is returned to the sampling frame, so that it may be selected again.

sampling without replacement: A sampling procedure whereby once a case is selected, it is NOT returned to the sampling frame, so that it cannot be selected again.

saturation: In purposive and theoretical sampling, the point at which new data cease to yield new information or theoretical insights.

simple random sample: A probability sampling design in which every case and every possible combination of cases has an equal chance of being included in the sample.

snowball sampling: A sampling procedure that uses a process of chain referral, whereby each contact is asked to identify additional members of the target population, who are asked to name others, and so on.

standard error: A statistical measure of the “average” sampling error for a particular sampling distribution, which indicates how much sample results will vary from sample to sample.

stratified random sample: A probability sampling design in which the population is divided into strata (or variable categories) and independent random samples are drawn from each stratum.

target population: The population to which the researcher would like to generalize his or her results.

theoretical sampling: A sampling process used in qualitative research in which observations are selected in order to develop aspects of an emerging theory.

weighting: A procedure that corrects for the unequal probability of selecting one or more segments (e.g., strata) of the population.