



# Introduction and How To Use This Book

You have probably been attracted to psychology for the same reason as the rest of us: because you are interested in understanding people or behaviour or both. Many of us find the subject matter of psychology intriguing, and these days it is a popular course to study at university. It can be a bit of a surprise to discover that studying psychology also means studying research and statistics. Sometimes it is hard to see the reason for this in the early days. It can feel like an unnecessary imposition, no matter how hard tutors try to persuade you otherwise. With time, the link between psychology and research becomes clearer, but at first it can seem inexplicable!

There are three main types of research that we can use in psychology. We can watch what people do – observation. We can see if we can manipulate events to change individual responses – experiments. Or we can ask people – survey methods. I confess that there is no real consensus about exactly what constitutes survey methods; some researchers would restrict the use of the term to large-scale questionnaire studies, while others use it in its broadest sense, meaning any type of research that involves asking people questions. To complicate matters further, some people, usually not psychologists, use the term ‘survey’ for an observational study. This text has used this term in the broadest sense to incorporate all interrogative research strategies, thereby including all research that is neither observation nor experimentation.

The main purpose of this book is to introduce the reader to the principles and terminology of research in a way that makes them easy to understand. It is also to illustrate how research methods contribute to the building of our chosen discipline and why they are important. The chapters are based around the subject matter of psychology, and are intended to make the most of your natural curiosity about and enthusiasm for the subject to help you through some of the complexities of research techniques.

There are three sections to this book. Each of the following chapters (2–19) tells the story of one particular piece of research. These chapters draw on studies from

different types of research in diverse areas of psychology. The first of these tackles the issue of ethics in research. Often, ethics tends to be a bit of an afterthought, when it should be the foundation of all research, hence its primary position in this text. There are then seven chapters on experimentation, the first three describing single experimental designs; later chapters tackle the more complex ones. The next five chapters are about different observational techniques, followed by four on survey methods. The penultimate chapter is an example of cross-cultural research providing an illustration of how different research methods can be successfully combined. Chapter 20 is an overview of the preceding narratives comparing the methodologies and techniques employed.

*If you want to know how a particular study design works*, then reading the relevant chapter will show you the pros and cons of that design. Each chapter begins with a familiar topic and considers why it might be worth investigating, leading into the chosen study for that chapter. The study is then briefly outlined: what was done and what was found. Then three questions about the study are reviewed: How safe is the conclusion? How effective is the design? and How appropriate is the research method? These are questions that are useful to bear in mind when reading about any research study. The last question allows us to consider how other research methods might be used to explore the same issue.

Although there are cross-references between the chapters, this is simply to enable the reader to follow things up should they wish. Each chapter is self-contained and does not require the reader to read them in sequence. The only chapter where this is not the case is the final chapter, which draws on the material of the preceding narratives.

*If you want to know about some of the general issues* you encounter in research, Key Topics (p. 246) describes and summarises some fundamental issues underlying research (including how to write reports and referencing) which require more detailed explanation than is appropriate in the preceding sections.

*If you want to find about particular research terminology* there is a Glossary on page 275. This is an alphabetical ready reference, and can be used either to check the meanings of terms given in the narrative chapters in **bold** or, alternatively, as a general dictionary of research. Research terminology can seem confusing to the beginner – and to the experienced researcher for that matter! There are different terms for the same phenomena, and there are very similar terms for very different phenomena. It can be really difficult to follow. The terms in the glossary are cross-referenced to increase the chances of the reader being able to find, recognise and then decode any research terms they encounter in their reading elsewhere.

Much of this book concerns quantitative methods, although qualitative methods are included. The reason for this imbalance is not that quantitative methods are superior or more important. The trouble is that they seem more off-putting. To do qualitative research properly, skills and experience are needed just as much as they are for quantitative methods. Yet newcomers to research are rarely frightened by qualitative methods. The main aim of this book is to help the reader to get to grips with, or perhaps refresh their understanding of, quantitative methods.

Lastly, I should explain the choice of studies discussed here. Apart from those cited in Chapter 2, these are not classic studies in psychology. It is unlikely that you will have encountered them before. The studies I have chosen are all from the twenty-first century and all highlight the diversity of the subject matter within the discipline; they illustrate its intriguing variety. They were chosen from a large number of possible studies, many of which could easily have been substituted here, and would have illustrated the principles of research as effectively as those chosen. The studies described here are indicative of the wide range of research conducted in psychology, and I hope that they represent some of the features that first drew you to the study of psychology.