UNIT 7: DATA COLLECTION ERRORS

1. NATURE OF FIELDWORK

Fieldwork encompasses all activities related to gathering data from respondents. It involves the selection, training, supervision, and evaluation of fieldworkers (interviewers, observers, or technicians) who execute the data collection in the field.

Fieldwork is the *execution* phase. It's when researchers leave the office and start talking to people. Since human interaction is involved, this stage is where most errors (like misinterpretation, bias, or outright cheating) can creep into the data, making strong management essential.

2. THE FIELD/DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

This is a systematic, five-step process designed to ensure that data is collected accurately and uniformly across all respondents.

2.1 Selection of Fieldworkers

The goal is to hire reliable and skilled individuals who can adhere to the research protocol.

- **Develop Job Specification for Project:** Determine the specific requirements (e.g., travel required, CAPI proficiency, language fluency).
- **Decide What Characteristics Fieldworkers Should Have:** Match personal traits to the job demands.
- **Recruit Appropriate Individuals:** Hire based on qualifications.

General Fieldworker Qualifications	Importance
Healthy	Must be able to sustain the physical demands of long hours and movement.
Outgoing, Communicative	Essential for establishing rapport and gaining respondent cooperation.
Pleasant Appearance	Helps in establishing initial trust and professionalism.
Educated, Experienced	Needed to understand complex questionnaires and record answers accurately.

2.2 Training of Fieldworkers

Training ensures every interviewer handles the questionnaire identically, which minimizes interviewer-related bias and standardizes the data.

Training Area	Focus	Simpler Explanation
Making Initial Contact	How to introduce the study, establish legitimacy, and secure respondent cooperation.	Teaching them how to avoid scaring people off and get them to agree to the interview quickly.
Asking Questions	Reading every question verbatim (exactly as written) and following skip patterns correctly.	Preventing the interviewer from paraphrasing or subtly changing the meaning of a question.
Probing	Techniques for motivating respondents to elaborate on incomplete or unclear answers without leading them (e.g., "Anything else?" or a brief pause).	How to get deeper, thoughtful answers without telling the respondent *what* to say.
Recording the Answers	Accurately and legibly recording responses, especially for open-ended questions.	Ensuring that what the respondent says is captured precisely, whether by handwriting or typing.
Terminating the Interview	Thanking the respondent professionally and handling any post-interview queries.	Finishing the interaction on a high note to maintain goodwill.

2.3 Supervision of Fieldworkers

Supervision ensures that the fieldworkers are following the procedures and prevents interviewer fraud.

- **Quality Control and Editing:** The supervisor checks completed questionnaires for **completeness, legibility, and internal consistency** (e.g., an answer in question 5 contradicts question 1). This is done *during* the fieldwork phase.
- **Sampling Control:** Ensuring interviewers strictly follow the predetermined sampling plan (e.g., only interviewing females aged 18−24 in a specified block). This prevents interviewers from taking shortcuts.
- **Central Office Control:** Monitoring the overall data collection progress, schedule, and cost metrics from a central location.

2.4 Validation of Fieldwork

Validation is a quality control procedure involving independent verification that the fieldworker actually conducted the interviews. This is specifically designed to combat **falsification** (interviewer fabricating entire interviews or parts of them). The manager calls or emails a small percentage (typically to 25%) of the people supposedly interviewed to ask verification questions: "Did someone from our company call you last Tuesday? What was

your age group? How long did the interview take?" If the answers don't match, the entire interview might be suspect.

2.5 Evaluation of Fieldworkers

Evaluation is the final review of fieldworker performance, used for compensation, retention, and feedback.

Evaluation Metric	What It Measures	Why It Matters
Cost and Time	Interviews completed per hour or total cost per interview.	Measures efficiency. Low cost per completed survey is desirable.
Response Rates	The percentage of successful interviews completed from the total valid contacts attempted.	Indicates the fieldworker's ability to persuade and secure cooperation.
Quality of Interviewing	Adherence to procedures (assessed via validation and observation).	High quality means consistent administration and low interviewer bias.
Quality of Data	The completeness and clarity of the questionnaires submitted.	Poor quality (e.g., many missing answers, inconsistent responses) suggests the interviewer was rushing or not using proper probing techniques.