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Convenience Sampling

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Few terms or concepts in the study of research design are as self-explanatory as convenience sampling. Convenience sampling (sometimes called *accidental sampling*) is the selection of a sample of participants from a population based on how convenient and readily available that group of participants is. It is a type of nonprobability sampling that focuses on a sample that is easy to access and readily available. For example, if one were interested in knowing the attitudes of a group of 1st-year college students toward binge drinking, a convenience sample would be those students enrolled in an introductory biology class.

The advantages of convenience sampling are clear. Such samples are easy to obtain, and the cost of obtaining them is relatively low. The disadvantages of convenience sampling should be equally clear. Results from studies using convenience sampling are not very generalizable to other settings, given the narrow focus of the technique. For example, using those biology 101 students would not only limit the sample to 1st-year students in that class, but also to those students enrolled in biology and all their characteristics. However, in spite of any shortcomings, convenience sampling is still an effective tool to use in pilot settings, when instruments may still be under development and interventions are yet to be fully designed and approved.

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See also

Further Readings

Hultsch, D. F., MacDonald, S. W. S., Hunter, M. A., Maitland, S. B., & Dixon, R. A. Sampling and generalisability in developmental research: Comparison of random and convenience samples of older adults. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, (2002). vol. 26(4), pp. 345–359.

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