

Title: “Case Study of the Use of Questionnaires in Research Ghanaian Small-Scale Industry”

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to review realist approaches to the use of the survey method, reflecting upon one exemplar of doctoral research in Ghana. First, the use of questionnaires as a snapshot of social change is examined in the context of open systems which realists claim exist in the social and natural worlds. It is argued that the use of a pilot stage, the existence of complex social objects, the importance of qualitative enquiry and reflection at the early stages of research are just as important in economics as in the other social sciences. The role of sampling (random and non-random) in realist research and the description/inference spectrum are discussed. The importance of non-universalism is stressed and a contrast with positivist and empiricist traditions is briefly reviewed. The case study in Ghana is introduced, and the difficulty of sampling when multiple units of analysis are relevant is reviewed. The problems with formulating a questionnaire suited to partially commercialised labour markets is discussed. Then I review competing algorithms for analysis of cross-sectional data. The main algorithms are backward and forward stepwise regression and the realist alternative is theory-guided decision-making. Retrodution during the stages of research is recommended so that theory is able to change and develop during the research. Three techniques are proposed for consideration: 1. reflection upon descriptive theory using interations of factor & regression analysis and the placing of sets of variables in blocks; 2. Fragility analysis, considered here to be a poor way to reach conclusions; 3. The creation of multi-level survey data. Thus the notion of stages of survey construction is critical to success with implementing a survey-method study based upon a complex realist ontology. The chapter concludes with a review of the critical realist arguments for a dialectic of description and involvement. Finally it is pointed out that a claim of fallibility resolves the perfectionist’s problem with causal modelling. Descriptive, theoretical, and practical implications of the study are summarised.