

Experience Sampling Method and its Related Terms

Studying people in everyday life has several names. While many of them are used interchangeably, each has a slightly different nuance. Here's an overview, and the characteristics, of each of them.



EXPERIENCE SAMPLING METHODS

Subjective Experience

The term experience sampling method (ESM) was coined in the 1970's and is used in the narrowest sense.

Generally, it refers to capturing individuals self-reported experiences (thoughts, states, events) using a random sampling approach. Although ESM generally refers to gathering information from people within the context of daily life, it has been used to simply describe gathering subjective information over time, within the lab.



AMBULATORY ASSESSMENT

Physiological Monitoring

Ambulatory Assessment tends to be used by academic researchers who want to measure physical states (such as peoples' movement, heart rate, etc.) in the context of everyday life. A helpful resource is the Society of Ambulatory Assessment. This organization includes other methods for studying life in context, and has links to several helpful resources, including ESM/AA software and a bi-annual conference.



DAILY DIARY STUDIES

Ordinary Events

Probably the least "techy" of these names, this method refers to having participants write responses to questions throughout (or at the end of) the day in paper diaries. This method generally refers to surveys, or (obviously) daily descriptions of one's life. However, while daily diaries can refer to paper and pencil methods, they can also be recorded in electronic formats.



ECOLOGICAL MOMENTARY ASSESSMENT

Healthcare Related

Is incredibly similar to ESM, but has a few subtle differences. The behavioral medicine field was the origin of EMA so EMA tends to include physiological measurements, or asks questions relating to health, in addition to (or in lieu of) subjective measures. Since "E" in EMA is for "ecological," EMA generally happens in a person's "natural environment"



INTENSIVE LONGITUDINAL METHODS

Umbrella Term

This term originally referred to research methods that employed dense measurement methods. However, with the multitude of names to describe the method, this term was chosen to encompass all of them.

Bolger, N., & Laurenceau, J. P. (2013). Intensive longitudinal methods. An introduction to diary and experience sampling research. Guilford, New York.

Csikszentmihalyi, M., Reis, H. T., Schwarz, N., Hamaker, E., Wilhelm, P., Perrez, M., & Pawlik, K. (2012). Handbook of research methods for studying daily life (pp. 89-107). T. S. Conner, & M. R. Mehl (Eds.). New York, NY, USA:: Guilford Press.