Doing Quantitative Observations

Decide on an aim
What is the general question you wish to answer? What trends in behaviour do you expect to observe?

This should be derived from a theory of some kind

Decide on variables
Which specific types of behaviour are you interested in (e.g. aggression)?

These need to be specific behaviours that can be clearly observed

Decide on categories of behaviour
Exactly which behaviours are you going to look for and count (e.g. hitting, kicking, verbal insults)?

Formulate a hypothesis
What specific prediction can you make about what you will observe?

This should be an exact statement of the expected results

Draw up a coding sheet
Create a form or grid on which behaviour can be recorded easily (e.g. by ticking boxes).

Reformulate behaviour categories

Check inter-observer reliability
Several different observers use the behaviour categories/coding sheet to classify the same sample material. Do they all agree?

no

This helps to ensure objectivity

Select a setting
Where will you carry out the observation?

You need to consider how PPs behaviour might be affected

Laboratory
A pre-prepared environment that you set up and control.

Field
The participants' own natural environment.

Decide the observer's status

Overt
The participants are aware that they are being observed.

Covert
The participants are unaware that they are being observed.

Choose a sampling method

Event sampling is usually easier

Event sampling
Specific behaviours are recorded every time they occur.

Time sampling
The behaviour of each participant is recorded at fixed intervals.

Decide how data will be collected

Video is convenient but not always practical

Live
Participants' behaviour is recorded by the observers at the scene

Video
Participants' behaviour is recorded on video and analysed later

It's easier to miss things in a live observation

Collect data
Run the observation.

Analyse data
Use statistics to make sense of the data you have obtained.

Graphs and charts are useful here

Accept or reject hypothesis
Decide whether your data are in line with the prediction you made in your hypothesis.

Now you need to evaluate your methodology to see whether you can trust your results

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