### Theoretical considerations when conducting research

#### Positivism:
Positivist approaches prefer more scientific reasoning when conducting research and prefer using methods that are large scale such as questionnaires, that can be generalised to the population as a whole. They prefer causal relationships that predict human behaviour. Their methods tend to be higher in reliability but often lack validity. Methods used include: Structured interviews, experiments (field and lab) and statistics.

#### Interpretivism:
Interpretivists look to achieve understanding of the human condition in their research. They look for insight (verstehen) into the lives of those they are studying. As a result their research tends to be smaller scale as it is usually more time-consuming and difficult to quantify. Methods used include: Personal and Historical Documents, Observations, unstructured interviews.

#### Quantitative Data:
Data presented in numerical form which is relatively easy to compare and quantify into tables and graphs. Large scale data like this is useful for governments to have an overview of problems, but can lead to misrepresentations, such as ethnic rates of offending. Statistics, coded questionnaires, some non-participant observations and structured interviews most likely to have this data.

#### Qualitative Data:
This data is more contextual and requires more skill to interpret and find meanings. It shows a broader range of meanings and focuses more of the individual's interpretation of events than outsiders. It is used for smaller groups and individuals and less likely to be applied to social policy. Methods include: unstructured interviews, case studies, participant observations and reviewing historical and personal documents.

#### Reliability and Validity:
Reliability in sociology refers to the ability for the research to be carried out again and similar results achieved. This is more likely to be a feature of positivists using quantitative data. Validity on the other hand is whether the research is measuring what it is supposed to measure. Is it a true picture of our understanding. Preferred by interpretivists, most likely to be found in qualitative data. Both can be improved through triangulation or methodological pluralism, merging two or more methods together to get a final result.