



Crafting social work research questions and hypotheses

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Overview

What makes a good research question?

What did you take away from the reading?

Review Key Terms and Ideas

Group Work

Takeaways



Writing a good research question

- What makes a good research questions?
- What stood out to you in the reading?
- How/did the reading change how you are thinking about your research question for class?



Writing a good research question

- It is written in the form of a question
- It is clearly written and has clear concepts
- It is not a yes/no
- It has more than one plausible answer
- It considers relationships among multiple variables
- It is specific and clear about the concepts it addresses
- It contains a target population

Ethical vs. Empirical Questions

- What is the difference between ethical and empirical questions?
 - When can this be a challenge?
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- Ethical questions- questions that ask about general moral opinions about a topic and cannot be answered through science
 - Empirical questions- questions that can be answered by observing experiences in the real world
 - **While social workers may study topics about which people have moral opinions, their job is to gather empirical data that guides action on behalf of clients.**

Quantitative Research Questions

- Types of quantitative questions: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory
 - Descriptive:
 - Easiest questions to think about
 - Not trying to relate to anything, but simply DESCRIBE
 - Can be very helpful in community scans, which helps assess and identify community needs
 - May contain a variable or multiple, but cannot be compared
 - Ex: “What is the average student debt load of MSW students?”
 - Explanatory:
 - Tries to build nomothetic (general scientific) causal relationships
 - Must contain an independent and dependent variable
 - Compares variables and seeks to find relationships
 - Ex: “What is the relationship between [independent variable] and [dependent variable] for [target population]?”
 - Exploratory:
 - Researcher is unsure of many aspects, so they ask a lot of “what” questions to explore factors or causes
 - Still exploring, so there may be no concrete outcomes or factors until after interacting with participants

Qualitative Research Questions


- Seek to explore or describe phenomena
- General and vaguely specific
 - Instead of asking how one concept causes another, we are asking about how people understand or feel about a concept.
- Often contain words like lived experience, personal experience, understanding, meaning, and stories.
- **Can change and evolve as the researcher conducts the study**
- Usually look for idiographic causal relationships
- May also contain only one variable, rather than asking about relationships between multiple variables.



Feasibility & Importance

When thinking about the feasibility of their research questions, researchers should consider their own identities and characteristics along with any potential constraints related to time and money.

Your research question should be important to you, social scientists, the target population, and funding sources.

- Research question should be important to the social world.
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Group Work!

- In your groups, create a research question and state whether it is quantitative or qualitative.
- What empirical questions would you ask?
 - Explain.
- Why is your research important and to whom and how will you make your research feasible?



Takeaways

That's all folks!



THANK YOU!

References

DeCarlo, M. (2018). Creating and refining a research question. In *Scientific inquiry in social work*. (1st ed., pp. 192–219). Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License.

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