RESEARCH PROBLEM & RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Lecture Format

- The meaning of research problem
- Criteria in choosing research problem
- Sources of research problem
- Techniques for focusing/developing a research problem
- Writing research proposal
  - Understanding requirements
  - Criteria for evaluating research question
  - Format of research proposal

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The Meaning of Research Problem

- The word 'Problem' is from Greek Word "... "proballein" which means "anything thrown forward" (Ekmekci, 1997, p. 10).
- Recall, 'RESEARCH': Re = *Again*; SEARCH = *Explore, Analyse in order to understand better*.
- Almost *every* statement/theory/understanding of ours is:
  1) Incomplete, in terms of explanation, description, exploration, analysis etc. or
  2) Paradoxical, or
  3) Illogical /Logically Fallacious, or
  4) Replete with competing explanations

Cont'd...

- Our knowledge of existing phenomena is always deficient in certain ways, i.e. Always problematic or questionable.
- Because none of us can ***know all*** or none can ever understand all and everything... There is always something 'Thrown Forward (i.e., problem)' to us.

So, A Research Problem …

- "… is the situation that causes the researcher to feel apprehensive, confused and ill at ease. It is the demarcation of a problem area within a certain context involving the WHO or WHAT, the WHERE, the WHEN and the WHY of the problem situation." (http://www.nmmu.ac.za/robert/resprobl.htm)

Also, a *Research Problem* is

- A research problem is a definite or clear expression [statement] about an area of concern, a condition to be improved upon, a difficulty to be eliminated, or a troubling question that exists in scholarly literature, in theory, or within existing practice that points to a need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation.
- (Source: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/introduction/researchproblem)

Criteria in choosing a research topic

1. **Should Arouse Interest**.
2. **Should confirm earlier theory/research or provide base for future research**
3. **Should be originally contributing.**
4. **Should be Philanthropic in purpose.**
5. **Should be considerably documented.**
6. **Should not be on a Heckneyed/overdone topic**.
7. **Researcher should have competence.**
8. **Should be practicable or feasible**.
9. **Should be an independent work.**
10. **Should be manageable** (Ekmekci, 1997: 13-14).

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Sources of research problem

From Printed Matter	Real World /Non-Material
1. Recent Dissertations/Theses 2. Professional Journals 3. Computer-based Databases & W*orld Wide Web (WWW)* 4. Text-books 5. Library Cards	1. Natural or Social environment/World. 2. Structure of Human Beings. 3. Behaviour of Human Beings. 4. Immediate Academic Environment. 5. Immediate Business Environment.

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Sources of research problem/issue

- **Intellectual puzzles and contradictions.**
- **The existing literature**.
- **Structures and functions**.
  - E.g., if you point to an organization, you can ask questions about the reasons why there are different types and the implications of the differences.
- **Opposition.**
  - the sensation of feeling that a certain explanation in notable piece of work (essay, newspaper article etc.) is misguided and of exploring the reasons for your opposition.
- **A social problem**.

Sources of research question/issue

- **'Gaps between official versions of reality and the facts on the ground'**.
- **The counter-intuitive.**
  - E.g., when common sense seems to fly in the face of social scientific truths.
  - 'Empirical examples that trigger amazement' (Marx 1997: 114) – e.g., deviant cases and atypical events.
- **New methods and theories**.
  - E.g., doing online/internet-based survey.
- **New social and technical developments and social trends**.
- **Personal experience.**
- **Sponsors and teachers.**
  - But do not expect your teachers to provide you with detailed research questions **(Marx, 1997: 113-14 cited in Bryman, 2012: 87)**

Ways/Methods of Limiting a Research topic/problem

METHOD 1 by Almack (1930: 48 cited in Ekmekci, 1997: 14):

- Analyse what is known (including historical record);
- Look for gaps or deficiencies in explanations;
- Look for contradictions in explanation or description;
- Follow tips, cues, inspiration received from reading, thinking, conferences, discussions etc.

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METHOD 2: Steps in Selecting Research Question (Bryman, 2012: 87)

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Steps in Selecting Research Question (Bryman, 2012: 87)

Research questions

What areas of risk are of greatest concern among people? Does concern about risk vary by age, gender, social class, and education? Do parents tend to worry about risk more than non-parents? What is the main source of people's knowledge about issues relating to risk (newspapers, television, family)? Do concerns about risk have an impact on how people conduct their daily lives and if so in what ways? Do worries about risk result in fatalism?

Select research questions

What areas of risk are of greatest concern among people? Does concern about risk vary by age, gender, social class, and education? Do parents tend to worry about risk more than non-parents?

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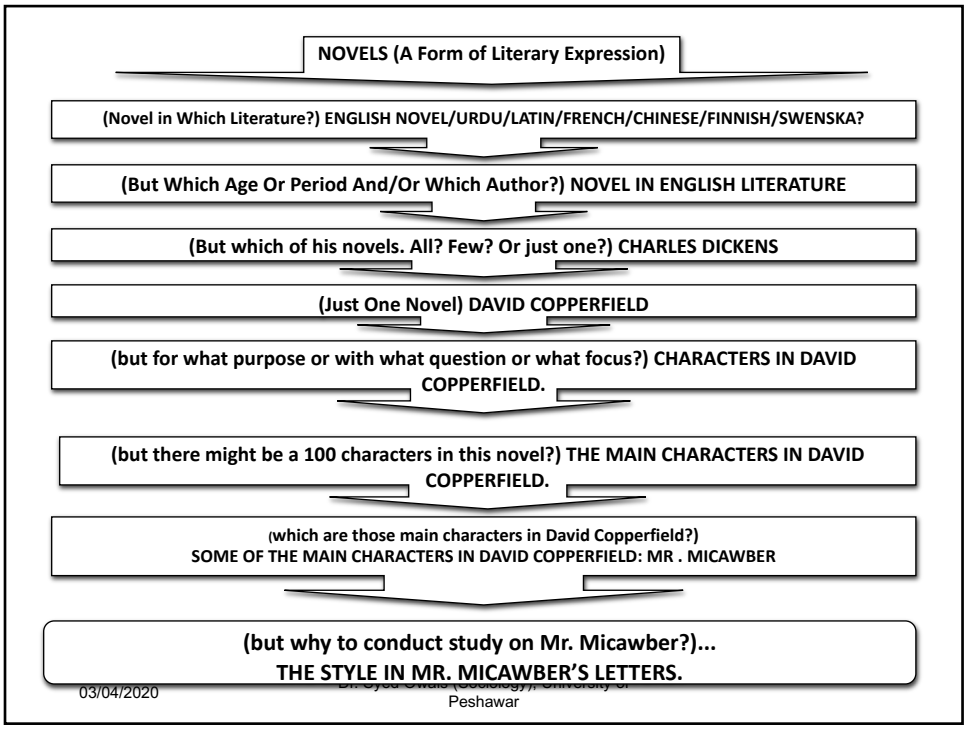

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Ways/Methods of Limiting a Research topic ... Cont'd

- **3rd strategy:**
- Brainstorming or "Free Association".
- **4th strategy:**
- Utilisation of Journalistic Technique "WH Questions":
  - "within the general topic, the focus could be shifted to the people involved **(who),** to the ideas and activities **(what),** to the places **(where),** to the time **(when),** or to the reasons **(why),** or the procedure itself **(how)**" (Ekmekci, 1997, p. 16).

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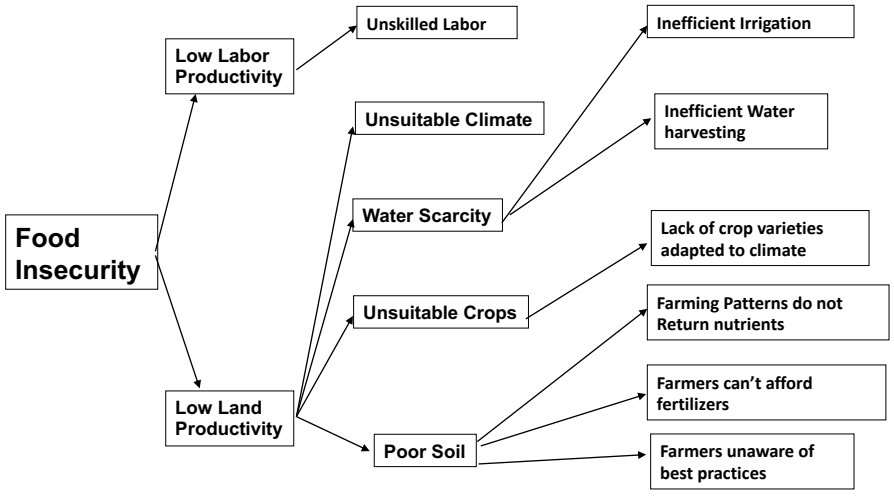
Problem Tree – Keep asking Why?

[http://web.squ.edu.com/.../Research%20Problem%20Definition%20&%20Proposal%20Writing%20SA%20Prathapar.ppt]



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Writing a research Proposal on a (research) problem … of your choice

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Research Proposal: Definition

- A research proposal sets out the broad topic you would like to research **(substance)**, what the research would set out to achieve (aims and objectives), how you would go about researching it **(methodology)**, how you would undertake it within the time available (outline plan) and what the results might be in relation to knowledge and understanding in the subject **(potential outcomes)**. (http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEducation/ProspectiveStudents/PostgraduateResearch/MPhilPhD/TheResearchProposal/)

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Purpose of writing Research Proposal

- "The main purpose of a research proposal is to show that **the problem you propose to investigate is significant enough to warrant [justify] the investigation, the method you plan to use is suitable and feasible, and the results are likely to prove fruitful and will make an original contribution**. In short, what you are answering is ***'will it work?'"*** [http://www.uq.edu.au/student-services/phdwriting/phfaq01.html]

Understand Research requirements

- In academic taught/research studies, follow departmental guidelines, if any, e.g.,
  - Word/page count (to give you big/small topic/area to choose).
  - Font size, font style, line-spacing, indentation, pagination and other layout/format-related issues.
  - Referencing style (+ min/max number of references required)
  - Min/max time required to do research.
  - Specialities/area of interests of supervisors.
- Why (the above)?
  - Each research assignment (being a project!) is constrained by **TIME** & **RESOURCES!**
  - E.g., you might be interesting in **A NATIONAL SURVEY TO INVESTIGATE POSSIBLE & DESIREABLE REFORMS IN PRISON SYSTEM/JUDICIARY/ARMY/UNIVERSITIES etc.**
    - feasible for Masters/BS students with roughly 6 months at hand?

Understand research requirements

- If there are no or unclear guidelines, then consult an academic under whose supervision you'd like to do research!
  - AND, better yet…
- Write down your thoughts by answering the following three questions (in about 2 pages):
  - What do I *want/wish* to study (i.e., RQ)?
  - Why do I want/wish to study (i.e., significance/utility)?
  - How would I undertake it (i.e., methodology/strategy)?

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FROM RESEARCH PROBLEM TO WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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11 Questions to be address in R/Proposal (Bryman, 2012)

Your R/P should address:

1. What is your research topic (or, alternatively, research objectives)?
2. Why is your research topic (or why are those research objectives) important?
3. What is your research question(s)?
4. What does the literature have to say about your research topic/objectives and research question(s)?
5. How are you going to go about collecting data relevant to your research question(s)? In other words, what research methods are you intending to use?

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11 Questions to be address in R/Proposal (Bryman, 2012)

6. Why are the research methods/sources you have selected the appropriate ones for your research question(s)?
7. What resources will you need to conduct your research (for example, postage, travel costs, software) and how will those resources be funded?
8. What is your timetable for the different stages of the project?
9. What problems do you anticipate in doing the research (for example, access to organizations)?
10. What are the possible ethical problems associated with your research?
11. How will you analyse your data?

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Criteria for evaluating Research Questions

- They should be ***clear***, in the sense of being intelligible.
- They should be ***researchable***. i.e., neither ambitious nor abstract.
- They should have some ***connection(s) with established (1) theory and (2) research***.
- Your research questions should be ***linked*** to each other.
- They should at the very least hold out the prospect of being able to make an ***original contribution*** — however small—to the topic.
- The research questions should be ***neither too broad*** (to need huge sum of money or time) ***nor too narrow*** (so that you cannot make a reasonably significant contribution to your area of study).

Format of a research proposal (Creswell, 2003)

1 – Introduction
- 1.1 Statement of the Problem
- 1.2 Purpose of the Study
- 1.3 Theoretical Framework/Perspective
- 1.4 Research Questions or Hypothesis
- 1.4 Definition of Terms
- 1.5 Delimitations and Limitations

2 – Review of Literature

3 – Methods
- 3.1 Type of Research Design
- 3.2 Sample, Population, and Participants
- 3.3 Data Collection Instruments, variables and materials
- 3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

4 – Anticipated ethical issues in the study

5 – Preliminary studies or pilot tests

6 – Significance of the Study

7 – Appendixes: Instruments, timeline, and proposed budget

Format followed in Sociology@UoP (for BS/MA)

1. Introduction & Background
2. Literature Review
3. Research Question(s)/Objective(s)
4. Methodology
   1. Universe
   2. Sample Size & Sampling Strategy
5. Tools of data:
   1. E.g., questionnaire, interviews, FGDs, Documents, Observations etc. with reasons/rationale for selection.
6. Ethical considerations
7. Bibliography/References

Explanation of Steps in Research Proposal

WRITING INTRODUCTION IN A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Use ***"Deficiency Model"*** to start introduction, which consists of:

- ❑ The Research Problem;
- ❑ Studies that have addressed the problem;
- ❑ Deficiencies in the Studies;
- ❑ The Importance of the Study for an audience, and
- ❑ The purpose statement

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I. *The Research Problem* in the Study

(Creswell, 2003: 79)

- Start with one or more paragraphs.
- In the very first sentence, present information in such a way that it catches a reader's (research supervisor's/funder's) interest.
  - Often called **hooking sentence!**
- After the First Sentence, identify a ***distinct research problem*** that needs to be addressed.
- The following questions are important for creating a *narrative hook* (i.e. Hooking a reader, obliging her/him to read further) about your research problem:

✓ *What effect could this sentence have?*

✓ *Would it entice the reader to read on?*

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I. *The Research Problem* in the Study (Cont'd)

- Beyond the first sentence, you need to identify clearly to the reader the issue or research problem that leads to a need for the study (i.e. your proposed study).
  - *Remember "a research problem is the issue that exists in the literature, in theory, or in practice that leads to the need for the study" (Creswell, 2003: 80).*
- Your idea about *your* research problem (i.e. your proposed research) would get clear if you ask:
- "What is the need for this study?" or "what problem influenced the need to undertake the study?" (Creswell, 2003: 80).

Guidelines for writing opening paragraphs of a proposal (Creswell, 2003: 80-81)

- **Write a stimulating opening sentence.**
- **Refrain from using Quotations.**
- **Don't use idiomatic expressions or trite (i.e. Heckneyed, common, worn, commonplace) phrases** (e.g. Every year ½ million children die of malnutrition in Pakistan)
- **Clearly identify the research problem** (i.e. Dilemma, issue) leading to the study (i.e. Proposed study of yours). ask yourself: "is there a specific sentence (or sentences) in which I convey the research problem?"
- **Indicate why the problem is important by citing references.**
- **Make sure that the research Problem is framed (i.e. Written) in a manner consistent with the ***approach to research*** in the study.**

Review Studies Addressing the Problem (Creswell, 2003, p. 81)

- The purpose of reviewing studies that have addressed the problem is to justify the importance of the study and to create distinctions between **past studies** and a **proposed study**.
- This component can also be called "'setting the research problem within the ongoing dialogue in the literature" (quotes in original).
- New studies need to add to the literature or to extend or retest what others have examined.

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Points to ponder while reviewing literature for an introduction to the research problem.

- Refer to the literature by summarizing groups of studies not individual studies. The intent should be to establish broad areas of research at this juncture in the study.
- To de-emphasize single studies, place the in-text references at the end of a paragraph or at the end of the summary point about several studies.
- Review research studies that used a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approach.
- Find recent literature to summarise (such as that published in the last 10 years) unless an older study exists that has been widely cited by others.

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How to find deficiencies in past literature.

- "The nature of deficiencies in past scholarly literature varies." (Creswell, 2003, p. 82-83)
- "The literature may be deficient because the authors have not studied specific variables." (Creswell, 2003, p. 83) "They may not have explored the topic with a particular group, sample, or population." Creswell, 2003, p. 83)
- "The literature may need to be replicated or repeated to see if the same findings hold given new samples or people or new site for study." (Creswell, 2003, p. 83)
- "If other authors have also mentioned these deficiencies – typically in the "suggestions for future research" sections at the end of research studies – then this section can include references to these studies as further justification for the proposed study."" (Creswell, 2003, p.83).
- "beyond mentioning the deficiencies, proposal writers need to tell how their planned study will remedy or address these deficiencies. For example, because past studies have overlooked an important variable, a study will include it and analyse its effects. Because a past studies have overlooked the examination of Native Americans as a cultural group, a study will include them as the participants in the project." (Creswell, 2003, p. 83).

References

- Bryman, A. (Ed.) (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (Ed.) (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ekmekci, F. O. (1997). *Research Manual for Social Sciences* (Vol. 1). Istanbul: Surat Basim Yayin Reklamcilik Egitim Araclan Sanayii Ve Ticaret A.S.