

## I. Doing Sociology: What is Social Research?

A. Social Research: a systematic study of human behavior

1. Personal Bias should not influence research

## II. Why is Sociological Research Important in Our Everyday Lives?

A. Tradition: a handing down of statements, beliefs, and customs from generation to generation

B. Authority: a socially accepted source of information

C. It creates new knowledge that helps us understand social life

D. It exposes myths

E. It helps explain why people behave as they do

F. It influences social policies

G. It sharpens critical thinking skills that affect our everyday lives

## III. The Scientific Method

A. Concepts, Variables, and Hypotheses

1. concept: an abstract idea, mental image, or general notion that represents some aspect of our social life

2. Variable: a characteristic that can change in value or magnitude under different conditions

a. independent variable: characteristic that affects the dependent variable

b. dependent variable: the outcome

c. control variable: a characteristic that is unchanged during the research

3. hypothesis: a statement of the expected relationship between two or more variables

B. Reliability and Validity

1. Reliability: the consistency with which the same measure produces similar results time after time

2. Validity: the degree to which a measure is accurate and really measures what it claims to measure

C. Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

1. deductive reasoning begins with a theory, prediction, or general principle that is then tested through data collection (General → Specific)

2. inductive reasoning: begins with specific observations, followed by data collection, a conclusion about patterns or regularities, and the formulation of hypotheses that can lead to theory construction (Specific → General)

#### D. Sampling

1. Population: any well-defined group of people/things about which researchers want to know something
2. Sample: a group of people/things that are representative of the population
  - a. probability sample: each person/thing has an equal chance of being selected because the selection process is random
  - b. nonprobability sample: a sample for which there is little or no attempt to get a representative cross section of the population

#### E. The Research Process: The Basics

1. Choose a Topic to Study: can be general or specific; new or old
2. Summarize the Related Research: literature review; explains how the research extends the body of knowledge & improves lives
3. Formulate a hypothesis: ensure that the measures of variables are reliable & valid
4. Describe the Data Collection Method
5. Collect the Data
6. Present the Findings as clearly as possible
7. Analyze and explain Results: Why is this information important?

#### F. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

1. Qualitative: examines non-numerical material
2. Quantitative: focuses on numerical analysis

#### G. Correlation and Causation

1. Correlation: the strength of the relationship between variables
2. Causation: the relationship between cause & effect

### IV. Some Major Data Collection Methods

#### A. Surveys: the systematic collection of data using questionnaires or interviews

1. Advantages: inexpensive, simple to administer, anonymous, & have a fast turnaround
2. Disadvantages: low response rates, nonprobability sampling
  - a. social desirability bias: the tendency of respondents to give the answer they think they "should" give

#### B. Secondary Analysis of Existing Data: reexamining data previously collected by someone else

1. Advantages: convenient, inexpensive.

a. longitudinal: collected at two or more points in time

b. cross-sectional: collected at one point in time

2. Disadvantages: data may be unavailable, data could be outdated

C. Field Research: data is collected by systematically observing people in their natural surroundings; highly structured

1. Advantages: provides in-depth understanding, there is no influence on the subject, more flexible

2. Disadvantages: can be expensive & time consuming & even dangerous

D. Content Analysis: systematically examines some form of communication

1. Advantages: inexpensive & less time consuming than other methods, unobtrusive data can be analyzed over large time scales

2. Disadvantages: can be labor intensive, reflects social class bias

E. Experiments: carefully controlled artificial situation that allows researchers to manipulate variables and measure their effects

1. experimental group: participants are exposed to the independent variable

2. control group: participants are not exposed to the independent variable

3. Advantages: come the closest to suggesting cause-effect relationships, less expensive and time consuming than other methods, participants are readily available, replicating

4. Disadvantages: environments are so controlled that results cannot be compared to the "real" world, attrition among participants can cause inaccurate results, & they are not suitable for studying large groups

F. Evaluation Research: uses all of the aforementioned data collection methods to assess the effectiveness of social programs

1. Advantages: results can be valuable in showing discrepancies between the original objectives and the program's actual functioning

2. Disadvantages: Practitioners rarely welcome negative results for their program

## V. Ethics, Politics, and Sociological Research

### A. Ethical Research

1. Do no harm

2. Informed consent must be given

3. Confidentiality must be protected