

# 02

## WHAT ARE RESEARCH METHODS? 30



the scientific procedures that sociologists use to conduct research and develop knowledge about a particular topic

## HOW DO SOCIOLOGISTS USE RESEARCH METHODS? 41



through analysis of quantitative data using cross-sectional studies, comparative studies, longitudinal studies, surveys, and experiments; through analysis of qualitative data using participant observation, case studies, and ethnographies

## HOW IS RESEARCH INVOLVED IN SOCIAL POLICY AND COMMUNITY LEARNING? 43



through analysis of statistics and by conducting needs assessments

## get the topic: WHAT ARE RESEARCH METHODS?

Objectivity 30	Quantitative and Qualitative Methods 41	Social Policy and Statistics 43
Variables 30	Triangulation 42	Community Learning—Needs Assessments 43
Cause and Correlation 32	Research Methods and the Three Paradigms 42	
Scientific Method: What Are the Six Steps of Social Research? 32		

## Key Terms

**research methods** are the scientific procedures that sociologists use to conduct research and develop knowledge about a particular topic. 30

**objectivity** is the ability to conduct research without allowing personal biases or prejudices to influence you. 31

**independent variables** are variables that are deliberately manipulated in an experiment. 31

**dependent variables** are the response to the manipulated variable. 31

**control variables** are variables that are kept constant to accurately test the impact of an independent variable. 31

**causal relationship** is a relationship in which one condition leads to a certain consequence. 32

**causation** is the relationship between cause and effect. 32

**correlation** is an indication that one factor might be a cause for another factor. 32

**positive correlation** includes two variables that move in a parallel direction. 32

**negative correlation** occurs when variables move in opposite directions. 32

**spurious correlation** occurs when two variables appear to be related, but actually have a different cause. 32

**social research** is investigation conducted by social scientists. 32

**literature review** is a study of relevant academic articles and information. 32

**theory** is a comprehensive and systematic explanation of events that lead to testable predictions. 32

**hypothesis** involves a suggestion about how variables relate. 32

**concepts** are abstract ideas that are impossible to measure. 32

**operationalizing** is turning abstract ideas into something measurable. 32

**research design** refers to the process used to find information. 33

**reliable** means able to be trusted. 33

**validity** assures that you're actually measuring the thing you set out to measure in the first place. 33

**comparative studies** use data from different sources in order to evaluate them against each other. 33

**cross-sectional studies** look at one event at a single point in time. 33

**longitudinal studies** include data from observations over time using a cohort. 33

**cohort** is a specific group of people used in a study. 33

**survey** is an investigation of the opinions or experience of a group of people by asking them questions. 35

**populations** are target groups from which researchers want to get information. 35

**parsimony** is extreme unwillingness to use resources. 35

**sample** is a subset of a population. 35

**generalization** is the extent that what is learned from a sample can be applied to the population from which the sample is taken. 35

**random sample** is a group of subjects arbitrarily chosen from a defined population. 35

**oversampling** is the process of taking a bigger sample if the group you wish to study makes up a small percentage of the whole population. 35

**sample of convenience** is a nonrandom sample available to the researcher. 35

**selection effects** are the likelihood that a nonrepresentative sample of the population may lead to inaccurate results. 35

**Hawthorne effect** occurs when people behave differently because they know they are part of an experiment. 36

**field research** is research conducted in a natural setting. 36

**participant observation** is a type of field research in which the researcher poses as a person who is normally in the environment. 37

**case studies** are investigations of one person or event in detail. 37

**ethnography** is a research method that aims to understand the social perspective and cultural values of a particular group by participating with or getting to know their activities in detail. 37

**secondary data** are data that others have already collected and published. 37

(continued)

**secondary data analysis** is the process of using and analyzing data that others have collected. 37

**central tendency** is the numbers in the middle of an array of numbers. 38

**mean** is an average. 38

**median** refers to the midpoint in a distribution of numbers. 38

**mode** refers to the most common value in a distribution of numbers. 38

**ethics** is a system of values or principles that guide one's behavior. 40

**quantitative data** refer to data based on numbers. 41

**qualitative data** include words, pictures, photos, or any other type of information that comes to the researcher in a non-numeric form. 41

**content analysis** is a type of research in which the sociologist looks for common words or

themes in newspapers, books, or structured interviews. 41

**triangulation** is the process of using multiple approaches to study a phenomenon. 42

**needs assessment** is an analysis that studies the needs of a specific group and presents the results in a written statement. 42

## Sample Test Questions

These multiple-choice questions are similar to those found in the test bank that accompanies this textbook.

1. "Children who participate in organized sports are less likely to suffer from obesity later in life." This statement is an example of a
  - a. causal relationship.
  - b. positive correlation.
  - c. negative correlation.
  - d. spurious correlation.
2. Which of the following research steps requires developing a logical research design?
  - a. Collecting data
  - b. Analyzing results
  - c. Deciding on a topic
  - d. Developing a hypothesis
3. What kind of study tells you what other researchers think about a particular topic?
  - a. Literature review
  - b. Longitudinal study
  - c. Comparative study
  - d. Cross-sectional study
4. The ethical principle that refers to staying within one's area of expertise is
  - a. integrity.
  - b. social responsibility.
  - c. professional competence.
  - d. professional and scientific responsibility.
5. Which measure of central tendency is not affected by extreme high or low scores?
  - a. Mean
  - b. Mode
  - c. Average
  - d. Median
3. Suppose you were conducting a study of how people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds felt about a particular political candidate. How might you collect quantitative data for this study? How might you collect qualitative data?
4. How could the Hawthorne effect influence the results of a study on office productivity?
5. Provide an example of a theory. Next, explain how you would use that theory to form a hypothesis.

### WHERE TO START YOUR RESEARCH PAPER

For more information on all countries, including maps and profiles, go to <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

To find United Nations data on children, go to <http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index.html>

To find more information on national and international population projections and reports as well as inequality and poverty numbers, go to <http://www.census.gov>

To learn more about the World Values Survey (which includes data from surveys of 66 countries), go to <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/>

To find religious data on the Web, go to <http://www.adherents.com/>

For comparison data on education, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/>

For more information on the world population report, data, and trends, go to <http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm>

To find summary data on topics related to population growth, go to <http://www.prb.org/>

To find information on health indicators, international comparisons or health care systems, and health-related data, go to <http://www3.who.int/whosis/menu.cfm>

To find international data and analysis of poverty and wealth throughout the world, go to <http://www.worldbank.org/>

### ESSAY

1. How could you argue that Humphreys' study of the tearoom trade violated ethical standards of sociological study?
2. What caveats should you keep in mind when reading statistical evidence?

ANSWERS: 1. c; 2. a; 3. a; 4. c; 5. d

Remember to check [www.thethinkspot.com](http://www.thethinkspot.com) for additional information, downloadable flashcards, and other helpful resources.