**Steps in Social Research**

A social research is a systematic procedure to seek explanation to unexplained social phenomena to clarify the doubtful and misconceived facts. A research is a scientific process to discover new facts and verify old facts in attempt to explain causal relationship of a phenomenon. Research is aimed at generating concepts, theories and reliable explanations.

A social research involves the following steps.

1. Selection of Research Problem
2. Review of Related Literature
3. Formulation of Research Objectives
4. Devising Hypotheses
5. Making the Research Design - *methodology*
6. Sampling procedure
7. Data Collection
8. Data Analysis and Interpretation
9. Hypotheses Testing
10. Deriving kndings, conclusion and suggestions
11. Report Writing

**Identification and Selection of Social Research Problem**

**What is a research problem?**

A research problem is the topic or title of the research. It is a phenomenon that a research intends to explore. A research problem in social sciences is:

A disturbing situation that needs to be solved – *a social problem*

A question that needs to be answered

A concept that the researcher wants to understand

A cause-effect relationship in social context that the researcher wants to explore

**IDENTIFICATION & SELECTION OF RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Identification of research problem refers to the sense of awareness of a prevalent social problem, a social phenomenon or a concept that is worth study – as it requires to be investigated to understand it. The researcher identifies such a research problem through his observation, knowledge, wisdom and skills.

Problem identification is an important part of a social inquiry. Most researchers may initially find it difficult to identify a researchable topic. The reason for this difficulty is not that there are limited researchable problems but this difficulty arises due to inability to locate the researchable problem. The other reason is to avoid duplication of earlier research studies and to come up with a new and unique topic.

The identification of research problem depends on researcher’s expertise and observation power. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, crime, environmental degradation, pollution, overpopulation, drug abuse, energy crisis, social unrest, ethnic and religious fragmentation, political problems, corruption, technological arenas, business issues, family problems and other issues prevalent in society are some researchable topics for social researchers. There are hundreds of researchable areas but the identification of researchable problems leads to the selection of best researchable topic.

The identification of the problem is based on the researcher’s knowledge and skills to grasp the issues, situations, and trends that need to be studied in a scientific manner. It is indeed an intuitive process to arrive at ideas for a research topic. Researchers may find certain areas for which no clear explanations exist or for which the existing explanations are suspicious. Hence, it may trigger a researcher drive to research those areas.

Similarly, researcher’s everyday experiences may bring across certain relationships between social variables which need to be elaborated further. The sources for identification of a research problem are as follows:

1. Subject area of the researcher
2. Knowledge of the current social trends *– issues and situations*
3. Knowledge of political and economic trends – *issues and situations*
4. On-going Programs and Initiatives – *evaluation of their effectiveness etc*
5. Deep observation – *careful study*
6. Cause-effect relationship of phenomena
7. Awareness of the social surrounding
8. Reading research articles in journals
9. Personal experience – *situations faced by the researcher*

With the help of the above, a researcher identifies a range of researchable topics. The next step is to select the best researchable topic out of the identified topics. A researcher must know what is a best researchable topic.

*The considerations for* ***selection of a research problem*** *are as follows:*

1. A unique topic to avoid duplication of studies
2. Researcher’s interest in the topic
3. Subject area and expertise of the researcher
4. Urgency to address the problem
5. Signikcance of the topic
6. Resource availability – *time and monetary resources.*
7. Availability of enough data on the data – *for initial theoretical understanding*
8. Applicability of the methodology in the specikc context
9. Ethical Considerations of the topic

# Selection of Research Problem

Research problem is simply the topic of the research. Selection of research problem involves selecting a broad area and then narrowing it down to a specific topic. For example, a research may select a broad area for his research such as **Domestic Violence**. He split this broad area into sub-areas to select one sub-area from them as a topic for his research. For instance, the broad area ‘Domestic Violence’ is split into following sub-areas:

Cause of Domestic Violence

Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Impacts of Domestic Violence on Children

Services available to victims of Domestic Violence Extent of Domestic Violence in a Society

One of the above sub-areas is selected as a research topic. The purpose of narrowing down the broad area in to sub-areas is to select a specific and manageable topic for the research.

# 2. Review of Related Literature

The next step is to study available literature on the topic – all the previously done work on the topic including research thesis, research papers, books, reports and publications. The purpose of reviewing the related literature is:

To understand various aspect of the topic – *required for conducting the research.*

To understand the nature of work done on the topic

To identify research gaps – *those areas which have not been explored by others*

To make a theoretical background for the study – *as it is added as a chapter to your final report.*

# Formulation of Research Objectives

Objectives are aims that you want to explore in the research. The simple way to make objectives is to first make questions that what do you want to explore about the topic and then convert these questions into objectives.

**For example,** you select ‘**Impact of Domestic Violence on Children**’ as your research topic. You can raise the following question about this topic.

What is the impact of DV on the emotional development of a child? How DV affects the child’s academic performance?

What are the effects of DV on child physical health? How DV influences the social behavior of children?

Now, convert the above question into objective by using action-oriented words (e.g. *to explore, to investigate, to know etc)* as follows:

To understand the impact of DV on the emotional development of a child. To examine the influence of DV on the child’s academic performance.

To know various effects of DV on child’s physical health. To explore the impact of DV on the child’s social behavior.

 **Devising Hypotheses**

A hypothesis is a testable assumption showing a relationship among certain variables. It can be a false or true statement. It is put to test in the research to check its authenticity. Hypothesis is a logical relationship and is relevant to the theme of the research. It becomes a base for the research. It specifies the focus of the research. It makes it easier for the researcher to carry on the research to generate productive findings.

The examples of hypothesis are as follows:

Higher the illiteracy in a society, higher will be the poverty. Higher the poverty in a society, higher will be the crime rate.

Higher the illiteracy in a society, higher would be the discrimination against women.

# Making Research Design

The research design is a plan for a research. It outlines the methods and procedures used in the research. It tells how the researcher wants to conduct the research. It includes the following:

**Which methodology will be used**? - *e.g. quantitative or qualitative method*

**Which tool of data collection will be used? -** *e.g. questionnaire, interview, or observation*

**Who will be the respondents and how many respondents?**

**How will be the collected data analyzed? -** *e.g. software, manual, graphs, tables etc.*

**Which test will be used to verify hypothesis or other facts? –** *e.g. chi-square test etc*

A research may also mention other considerations of research in the research design such as description of the geographical area of research, ethical considerations and variables of the study. Research design keeps the researcher on tract during the research.

 **Sampling Procedure**

Sampling means to select a part of population for study. It is difficult for a researcher to study all the population of an area due to limited resources *– time, money and energy.* Hence, a part of the population is selected for research study. The number of total respondents for a sample is known as sample-size. The sample size can vary depending upon your study.

Sampling procedure means how to select respondents from population to make a sample which is true representative of the entire population. There are various sample procedures such *as random sampling, stratified sampling, purposive sampling, probability sampling, non-probability sampling and so on*. The sampling procedure and sample sized is always mentioned in the research design.

 **Data Collection**

Data collection is an important phase of the research. The data is collected for deriving findings, results and theories. There are two types of data: primary data and secondary data.

**Primary data:** It is the data which is collected for the first time by the researcher from respondents. The research has to visit the respondents and collect data from them using his selected tool of data collection*, e.g. a questionnaire, interview or observation etc.* It requires a lot of fieldwork activity.

**Secondary data:** It is the data which has already been collected by others and is available in the form of books, reports, papers, websites, magazine, encyclopedias and so on. Such a data is called secondary data.

# Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data is properly analyzed to generate findings. Data analysis involves data editing, data coding, data classification, measurement and interpretation. **Data editing** means to check the collected data for errors or missing information and correct it accordingly. **Data coding** means to scale the variables in the data so that they can be measured. Various scaling methods may be used, *such as nominal scale, ordinal scale or interval scale.*

The data is classified on the basis of relevancy and is presented in the forms of **tables, graphs, charts, diagram or texts** so that it can be easily analysed by the researcher. The data may also be statistically measured with the help assigned scales. The researcher analyse the data to extract the important findings from the data.

 **Hypothesis Testing**

The hypothesis of the research is tested in the light of analysed data. For example, the hypothesis ‘Higher the poverty in a society, higher will be the crime rate’. The relationship of poverty and crime rate in the analysed data will either verify or reject this hypothesis. Similarly, the researcher may use some test to test the hypothesis such as chi-square test.

# Deriving findings, conclusion and suggestions

Data analysis generates findings of the study. The research has to derive conclusion and suggestions on the basis of the finding the study. The conclusion is usually a summary of the findings which include only the most significant findings. The research has to devise some suggestions or recommendations, in the light of findings, to the audience of the research report – *e.g. to government, to the community, to a specific section of society.*

 **Report Writing**

After conducting a research, all the details of the research *(e.g. basic concepts, literature studied, methodology, findings, suggestions etc)* are compiled into a **research report**. The purpose of writing the research report is to record your work as well as to present your work in written form to the audience. The widely accepted format for writing a research report is as follows:

1. **PRELIMINARY PAGES**
   * Title Page
   * Abstract
   * Table of contents
2. **MAIN BODY**

**Chapter 1** - Introduction **Chapter 2** – Literature Review **Chapter 3** – Research Design

**Chapter 4** – Data Analysis and Interpretation

**Chapter 5** – Findings and Suggestions

1. **CLOSING PAGES**
   * Bibliography / References