

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL SCIENCES METHODS

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Training Course in Reproductive Health/
Sexual Health Research

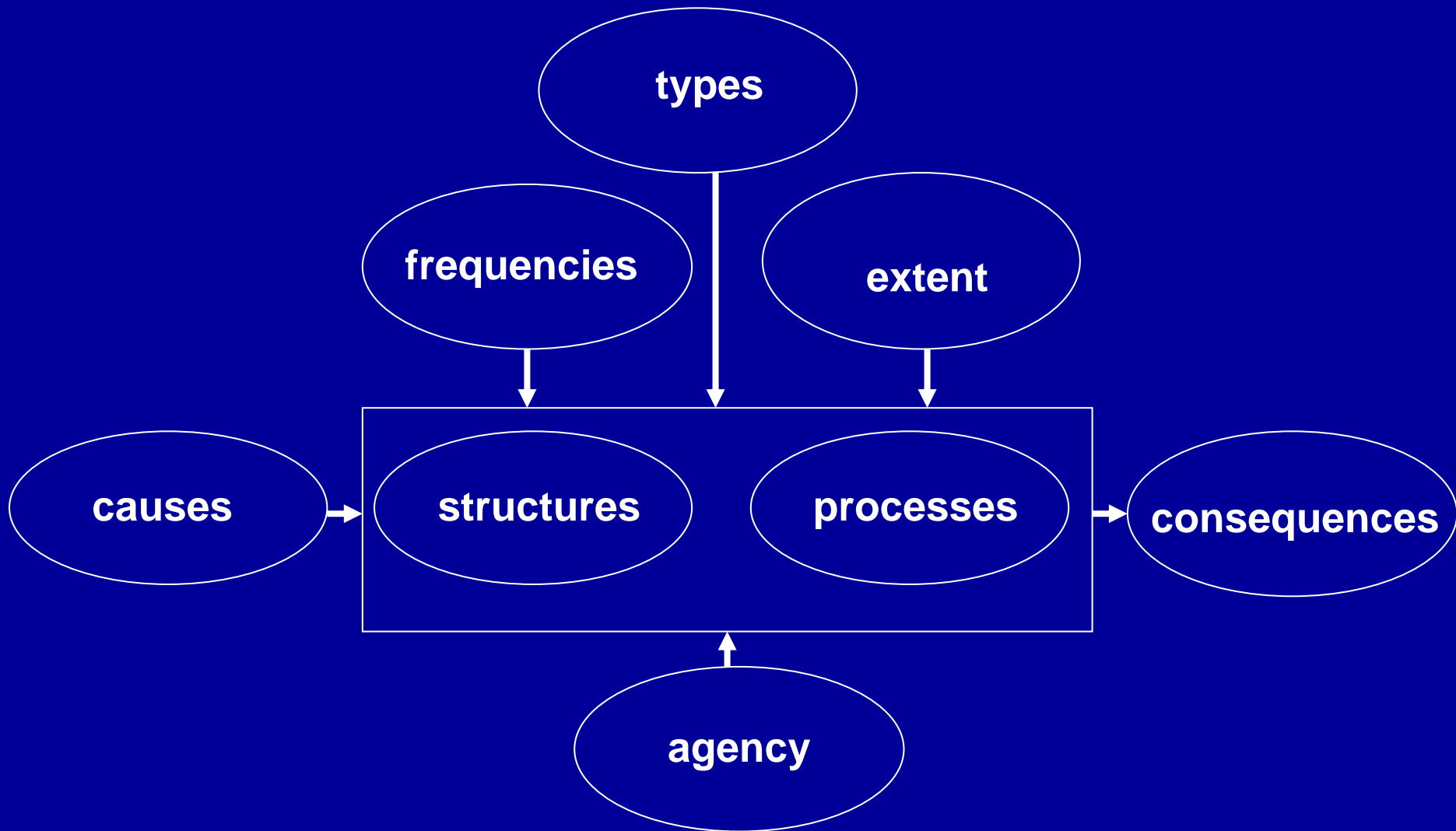
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Plan

- Social sciences methods
- The research process
- Quantitative versus qualitative research
- Overview of methods
 - Questionnaires
 - Interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Participant observation
 - Document analysis
- Importance of triangulation:
example of the AIDS prevention research

Social sciences methods

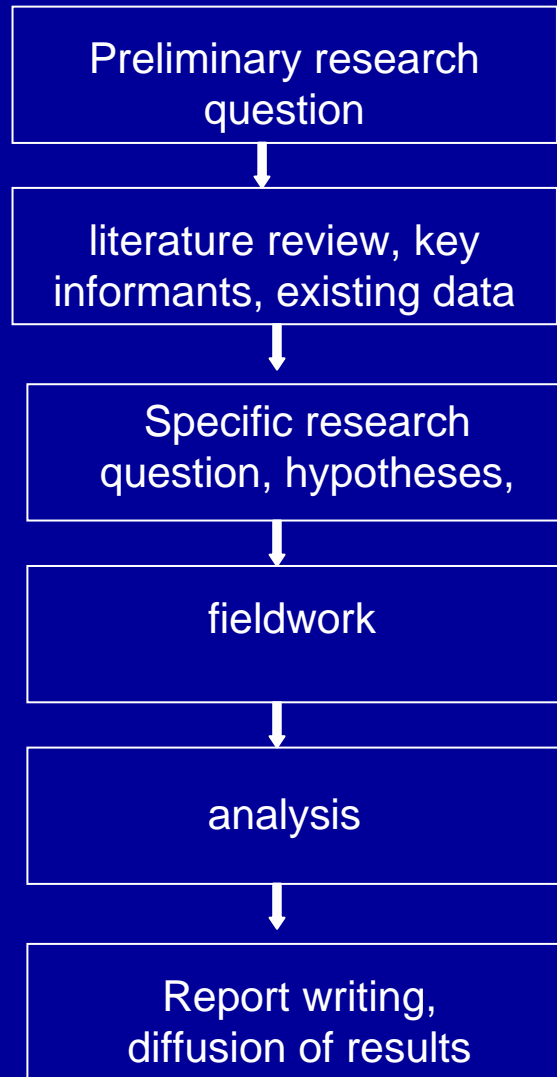
- Types of research
 - Fundamental research
 - Applied research
- Social sciences research
 - Social reality, immersion of researcher
 - Abstract notions
- Objectives of research
 - Descriptive
 - Explicative



Lofland J, Lofland L H (1995) *Analyzing social settings. A guide to qualitative observation and analysis*, Belmont, Wadsworth, p. 124.

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Process of research



Reduction of the scope

- What is the period under study?
- What is the geographic context under study?
- General description or specific social categories ?
- What is the unit of analysis ?
- On which aspects/dimensions will the project be focused on ?

Quantitative versus qualitative methods

- Quantitative

Focus on numbers, statistical analysis

- Questionnaires
- Secondary analysis of collected data

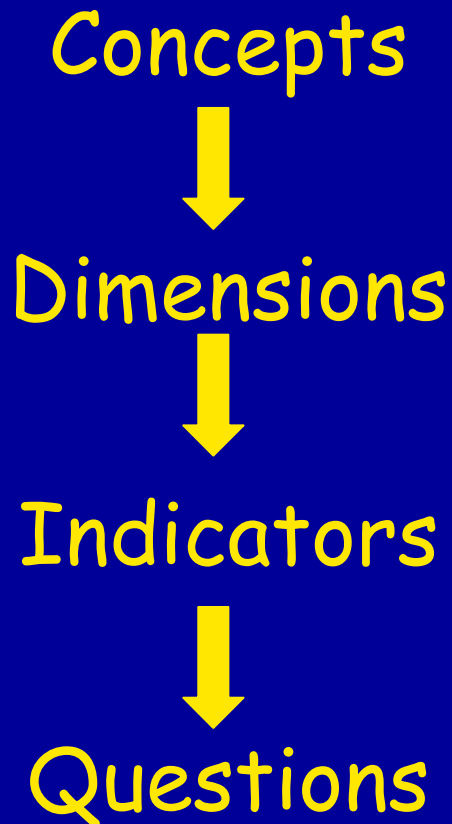
- Qualitative

Focus on words, processes, subjective definitions

- Qualitative interviews
- Focus groups
- Participants observation

Questionnaire survey

Operationalisation process



Questionnaire survey

- Types of questions
 - Socio-demographic questions, personal data (age, sex, education, religion, ...)
 - Behaviours, practices
 - Knowledge, cognition
 - Attitudes, opinions, values, representations

Questionnaire survey

- Format of questions
 - Closed questions
 - Open-ended questions
 - Semi-open questions
 - Vignettes, scenarii

Questionnaire survey

- Formulation of questions
 - Short questions (max 20 words)
 - Clear and precise questions
 - Appropriate vocabulary
 - Neutral formulation
 - 1 question only per question !

Questionnaire survey

- Structure of questionnaire
 - Sections, order is important
 - Coherence, logical flow
 - Provide instructions (1 or several answers are possible, skip/filters,...)
 - Socio-demographic data at the end
 - Difficult/sensitive questions: not at the beginning
 - Limit length of questionnaire

Questionnaire survey

- Pre-test / pilot survey
- Passation modes
 - Face to face
 - Postal survey
 - Self-administered
 - Telephone survey
- Interviewers training

Questionnaire survey

- Population versus sample
- Representativity
- Sampling issues
 - Random sample
 - Non-random sample
- Non-respondents

	Variable	
	Low	High
Women 20-29 years old		
Women 30-39 years old		
Women 40-49 years old		
Men 20-29 years old		
Men 30-39 years old		
Men 40-49 years old		

Questionnaire survey

- Analysis of data
 - Univariate analysis: frequencies
 - Bivariate analysis: crosstabulations
 - Multivariate analysis: regressions, typologies, ...
- Focus on « WHY ? »
 - But difficulties with causality (correlations)
- Several softwares: epi-info, spss, sas, ...

Qualitative interviews

- Several uses
 - Main method
 - Explore and prepare a questionnaire survey
 - Supplement a questionnaire survey or participant observation, analysis of documents, ...

Qualitative interviews

- Focus on :
 - subjective representations, discourses
 - processus, mechanisms
- Focus on « HOW ? »

Qualitative interviews

- Research definition, hypotheses
- Interview grid
 - Weak structure: one main topic and possible dimensions (discovery approach)
 - Structured grid: list of topics, hierarchical order

Qualitative interviews

- Sampling
 - Categories / groups (age, sex, social class, urban-rural, experience of a specific event,...): allow for comparisons
 - Size: smaller than for questionnaire survey
 - Criteria
 - Diversification versus redundancy
 - Time, resources

Qualitative interviews

Access to interviewees

- Direct access: existing files, list, door-to-door
- Indirect access: thru a third party
- Snow-balling

Qualitative interviews

- Interviewing situation
 - Environment (timing, private or public space, work or home environment)
 - Communication: information on the research project, on selection of interviewees)
 - Recording and confidentiality
 - Role of interviewer

Qualitative interviews

- Analysis
 - Transcription of recording
 - Interview analysis (processes)
 - Thematic analysis (analysis grid, coding of texts)
 - Dimensions
 - typologies
 - Specific software (atlas-ti, nudist,...)

Focus groups

- Origins: media studies, marketing
- More interviewees
- Easier access to individual discourses
- Gain of time and resources

Focus groups

- Natural group or artificial group?
- Social homogeneity of participants
- 5 to 10 participants
- 3 to ... ? groups

Focus groups

- Environment
- Duration: 1 to 2 hours
- Important role of moderator
- Recording
- Short questionnaire for personal data
- Transcription
- Analysis

Participant observation

- Overt observation
- Covert observation

- Public/open spaces
- Private/closed spaces

Participant observation

- Types of data:
 - Setting: place, characteristics of space, decor,
 - People: who, positions of people, ...
 - Actions: what is happening?
 - Discourse: what is being said?

Participant observation

- Observation log
 - Data
 - Who
 - What
 - Where
 - Why
 - How
 - interpretations

« You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room »

« Frequently »

« How often? »

« Well, some hundreds of times »

« Then how many are there »

« How many? I don't know »

« Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed »

(In Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. A Scandal in Bohemia")

Research respondents

- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Incentives to respondents?

Triangulation: aids prevention research

1980's: risks of an aids epidemic?

- few data on sexual behaviours
- sensitive research topic
- Difficulties for funding, political barriers

Triangulation: aids prevention research

1. Quantitative surveys by the late 1980's
 - Theoretical approach: individual focus, education, rational actor

Data collected on:

- Age at first sexual intercourse
- Sexual behaviours (risk behaviours, condom use, behaviour change)
- Number of partners
- Impact of prevention: knowledge, behaviour change

" ... men and women count differently. That is to say they do not define their partners in the same way: women would tend to consider only partners that really mattered to them and therefore they would under-estimate the total number of their partners; whereas men would consider that reporting a large number of partners prove their virility and therefore they would tend to over-estimate the number of their partners and/or include partners that they only kissed or fondled "
(Léridon et al. In Hubert et al. 1998)

Triangulation: aids prevention research

2. Relational approach: qualitative interviews (1990's)

- Theoretical approach : values, interactions, gender dimension

Data collected on

- Men and women expectations, values
- Power relationships
- Communication between partners

Conclusions

- A choice of methods
- Importance of research design, research as a process
- Organize work: stages, schedule (ie according to time and resources)