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Recap

Researching Crime and Justice

Workshop 11: Writing a Research Proposal

Jose Pina-Sánchez



Workshop Aims

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Recap

- To discuss the value of writing a research plan
- To consider how to structure a research plan/proposal
- To help preparing your third assignment and dissertation

Third Assignment

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Recap

- Write a research proposal in a criminological topic of your interest
- This is the structure recommended:
 - Introduction
 - Background to your research proposal (including a literature review)
 - Research questions
 - Research design and methods
 - Anticipated problems (ethical and others) and how they will be overcome
 - Suggested timetable
- Maximum of 3000 words, try not to use more than 800 in the introduction and background
- Focus on the research design and methods
- Deadline 23rd of May



Planning Research

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Recap

- Question: Why writing a research plan might be a good idea?



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Recap

- Question: Why writing a research plan might be a good idea?
 - To help us break down something complex into smaller, more manageable, stages/actions
 - To help us see how those stages are interrelated
 - e.g. availability of a sampling frame \Rightarrow sampling strategy \Rightarrow data collection method \Rightarrow data analysis method

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Recap

- Question: Why writing a research plan might be a good idea?
 - To help us break down something complex into smaller, more manageable, stages/actions
 - To help us see how those stages are interrelated
 - e.g. availability of a sampling frame \Rightarrow sampling strategy \Rightarrow data collection method \Rightarrow data analysis method
 - Research projects can be extended over long periods of time
 - Several issues can arise that we cannot control but should nonetheless anticipate
 - e.g. in a sampling strategy based on mail questionnaires you can hedge against unexpected low response rates by including a specific ID in each form
 - To prepare alternative courses of action

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Recap

- Question: Why writing a research plan might be a good idea?
 - To help us break down something complex into smaller, more manageable, stages/actions
 - To help us see how those stages are interrelated
 - e.g. availability of a sampling frame \Rightarrow sampling strategy \Rightarrow data collection method \Rightarrow data analysis method
 - Research projects can be extended over long periods of time
 - Several issues can arise that we cannot control but should nonetheless anticipate
 - e.g. in a sampling strategy based on mail questionnaires you can hedge against unexpected low response rates by including a specific ID in each form
 - To prepare alternative courses of action
 - To persuade donors/superiors of the viability and relevance of the project



Planning Research

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Recap

- Because every decision made at one point will affect subsequent stages you will not be able to improvise as you go along
- A good research plan needs to consider each of the stages to be carried out holistically
- Because Social Science research takes place in the real world a good research plan will identify alternative scenarios
- A good research project will always be preceded by a good research plan

What Makes a Good Research Plan

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Recap

- A good research plan should be able to convey effectively:
 - The goal of the project (answering the research question)
 - How to get there (methodology)
 - Potential contingencies (ethics, low response rates, etc.)



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Recap

- Often the structure of the research proposal is imposed by the funding body:
 - I gave you a PhD proposal funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)
 - And a grant proposal submitted to the ISRF (Independent Social Research Foundation)
- Find out what structure is required, if it is not specified you might want to consider the following



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Recap

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Literature Review
- 3 Methodology
- 4 Ethics
- 5 Impact
- 6 Timescale



Introduction

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Recap

- Question: What do you think should be covered here?



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Recap

- Question: What do you think should be covered here?
 - Context
 - Motivation
 - Research Questions



Introduction

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Recap

- Read and comment Johanna's introduction
 - Did she covered context, motivation, and research question?
 - Did she do a good job?



Literature Review

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Recap

- Question: Why do we do literature reviews?



Literature Review

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Recap

- Question: Why do we do literature reviews?
 - Identify what is the state of knowledge on one particular subject
 - Find out whether the research question has already been answered
 - Find gaps in the research areas to help you formulate your own research question



Literature Review

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Recap

- Question: What defines a good literature review?

Literature Review

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Recap

- Question: What defines a good literature review?
 - Identifies the key findings published in your subject of study
 - Weights them in relation to their relevance
 - But also in terms of their validity and reliability
 - i.e., it is a critical, and not just a descriptive, review of one topic



Relevance

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Recap

- Question: What elements of a research paper would you take into consideration to define its relevance?

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Recap

- Question: What elements of a research paper would you take into consideration to define its relevance?
 - Author and journal's prestige
 - Citations
 - Validity and reliability of findings
 - Are they generalisable, biased, based on unrealistic assumptions, etc.
 - How closely related findings are to your research question
E.g. in terms of time, location, formulation of the research question, etc.



Literature Review

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Recap

- Read and comment Jose's Background section
 - Were the key studies mentioned?
 - Were they order by relevance?
 - Were their main limitations identified?



Methodology

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Recap

- This is the core of a research plan
- Question: What do you think should be covered here?



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Recap

- This is the core of a research plan
- Question: What do you think should be covered here?
 - Conceptual framework
 - Data
 - Analytical strategy



Methodology

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Recap

- This is the core of a research plan
- Question: What do you think should be covered here?
 - Conceptual framework
 - Data
 - Analytical strategy
- Defend your choices by discussing openly their advantages and limitations



Methodology: Conceptual Framework

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Recap

- What are the key concepts, variables, and/or hypotheses?
 - How do you operationalise/formulate each of the above
 - Ontological and epistemological considerations



Methodology: Data

- What data will you analyse?
 - Are you going to use any secondary data?
 - If not, which research tool will you use to collect your data?

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Methodology: Data

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Recap

- What data will you analyse?
 - Are you going to use any secondary data?
 - If not, which research tool will you use to collect your data?

Question: What data collection methods have we covered (or mentioned) in this course?

Methodology: Data

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Recap

- What data will you analyse?
 - Are you going to use any secondary data?
 - If not, which research tool will you use to collect your data?

Question: What data collection methods have we covered (or mentioned) in this course?

- Regardless of whether you use secondary or primary data explain the sampling design used

Question: What are the key elements that need to be covered when describing a sampling design?

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Recap

- What data will you analyse?
 - Are you going to use any secondary data?
 - If not, which research tool will you use to collect your data?

Question: What data collection methods have we covered (or mentioned) in this course?

- Regardless of whether you use secondary or primary data explain the sampling design used

Question: What are the key elements that need to be covered when describing a sampling design?

- Target population
- Sampling method
- Expected sample size
- Strategies to deal with non-response



Methodology: Analysis

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Recap

- How do you intend to analyse your data

Question: What could you cover here?



Methodology: Analysis

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Recap

- How do you intend to analyse your data

Question: What could you cover here?

- Statistics or models that you intend to estimate if using quantitative data
- Analytical frameworks if using qualitative data
- If you are going to use a particular software make sure that you mention it



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Recap

- Read and comment Jose's Methodology section
 - What important information is reported?
 - What is missing?



Ethics

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Recap

- Question: Do you remember the four main ethical concerns?



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Recap

- Question: Do you remember the four main ethical concerns?
 - Avoidance of harm
 - Informed consent
 - Absence of deception
 - Invasion of privacy



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Recap

- Question: Do you remember the four main ethical concerns?
 - Avoidance of harm
 - Informed consent
 - Absence of deception
 - Invasion of privacy
- Review each of them and identify potential dangers
- If you identify an element of your research especially problematic you should contact an ethics committee



Ethics

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Recap

- You will be asked to ensure certain procedures to minimise ethical problems, e.g.:
 - Use an encrypted hard drive to carry out the data analysis
 - Declare your identity when observing subjects of study

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Recap

- You will be asked to ensure certain procedures to minimise ethical problems, e.g.:
 - Use an encrypted hard drive to carry out the data analysis
 - Declare your identity when observing subjects of study
- If pushed you might need to justify your choices by convincing them about:
 - Your research is of the utmost importance, and
 - There is no alternative method capable of answering your research question



Impact

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Recap

- Who will benefit from your research and how
- Consider reach and intensity (i.e. width and depth)



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Recap

- Who will benefit from your research and how
- Consider reach and intensity (i.e. width and depth)
- Very important section in proposals for research grants not so crucial for PhD proposals
- For the latter academic impact is required, the former emphasises non-academic impact
- An increasingly common request the inclusion of “Pathways to Impact”



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Recap

- Read and comment Jose's Outcome section



Timescale

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Recap

- Identify each key stage
- Anticipate how long they will take
- Anticipate any problems that might arise
- Identify ways of dealing with them



Timescale

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Recap

- Read and comment Johanna's Timetable section

Recap

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Recap

- There is not a single best way to structure a research proposal
- Try to tailor it to the requirements/expectations of the funding body
- The structure that we have reviewed here could be used as a template
 - Introduction (research question)
 - Literature Review
 - Methodology
 - Ethics
 - Impact
 - Timescale