

Steps in Social Research

Scientific research involves a systematic process that focuses on being objective and gathering information for analysis so that the researcher can get the answer of the question or solution of the problem. The scientific research process is a multiple-step process where the steps are interlinked with the other steps in the process. If changes are made in one step of the process, the researcher reviews all the other steps to ensure that the changes are reflected throughout the process. Although, there is no ideal structure, social researchers and professionals need to understand and follow steps of the research process.

Identification of the Problem

The first step in the social research process is to identify a problem or develop a research question. The research problem may be something the agency or researcher identifies as a problem and some knowledge or information that is needed by the agency or researcher. If there is no clear problem formulation, the purpose and methods are meaningless. Of the various research steps listed, this one is probably the most important. For example, a social work researcher finds number of children working in auto workshops and wants to conduct research on this issue.

Review of the Literature

Knowledge of the relevant literature is essential because it provides background, suggests approaches, indicates what has already been covered and what has not, and from redoing what has already been done. It is a way of using other people's observations. After identification of the problem, the researcher must learn more about the topic under investigation. To do this, the researcher must review the literature related to the research problem. This step provides foundational knowledge about the problem area. The review of

literature also educates the researcher about what studies have been conducted in the past, how these studies were conducted, and the conclusions in the problem area. In the child labour study, the review of literature enables the researcher to discover statistics related to the child labour at national and international level. The literature could include, library books, articles, newspaper news, diaries, internet data and recordings.

More Clarification of the Problem

Many times the initial problem identified in the first step of the process is too large or broad in scope. In step three of the process, the social researcher clarifies the problem and narrows the scope of the study. This can only be done after the literature has been reviewed. The knowledge gained through the review of literature guides the researcher in clarifying and narrowing the research project. In the example, the social researcher has identified child labour as the problem and the purpose of the study. This topic is very broad and could be studied in different ways. It is not possible to investigate every aspect of child labour at once. Therefore, the problem and purpose of the study must be more clearly defined. The researcher has decided to know the major causes behind child labour in auto workshops in Bahawalpur. This purpose is more narrowly focused and researchable than the original problem.

Formulation of Hypothesis

After finalization of research topic, social researcher develops hypothesis. A hypothesis is a tentative statement about the relationship between two or more variables. A hypothesis is a specific, testable prediction about what you expect to happen in your study. Suppose social researcher's hypothesis is: "Low income or poverty compels people to send their children in auto workshops in Bahawalpur." Remember, a hypothesis does not have to be correct. While

the hypothesis predicts what the researchers expect to see, the goal of research is to determine whether this guess is right or wrong. There could be a possibility of researches without any hypothesis.

Research Design

After topic finalization and hypothesis formulation, it is necessary to choose a suitable research design. Research design is very important to conduct any social research. It is a detailed outline of how an investigation will take place. A research design will include what will be research method (case study research, survey research, experimental research), what will be the population of the study (sampling), how data is to be collected, what instruments will be employed (questionnaire, interview schedule), how the instruments will be used and ways for analysing data. The research design is developed very carefully because it is the crux (root) of the research process.

Data Collection

Once the research design is completed, the actual study begins with the collection of data. The collection of data is a critical step in providing the information needed to answer the research question. Every study includes the collection of some type of data to answer the research question. Data can be collected in the form of words on a survey, with a questionnaire, through observations, or from the literature. In the child labour study, the social researcher will be collecting data on the defined variables: age of children, economic conditions, working hours, education level of children, etc. The researcher collects these data and once the data are collected on the variables, the researcher is ready to move to the final step of the process, which is the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The social researcher finally has data to analyse so that the research question can be answered. In the research design, the researcher specified how the data will be analysed. The researcher is now analysing the data according to the design. The results of this analysis are then reviewed and summarized in a manner directly related to the research questions. The collected data could be analysed manually or through the use of computers. For example data analysis is done through SPSS. After this step has been taken, your hypothesis can then be confirmed, rejected, or modified.

Conclusions and Report Writing

After having data analysed, social researcher prepares a report. Conclusions and recommendations are the crux of the research. Recommendations are made based on the conclusions arrived by the social researcher. The effectiveness of entire research work depends on the written form of report being submitted. The written report is the main communication between the researcher and the reader. Therefore, it is very critical that the report is in simple language with clarity and be effective.

Social Research Process at a Glance

Identification of the Problem



Review of the Literature



More Clarification of the Problem



Formulation of Hypothesis



Research Design

Research methods (Case study method, survey research, experimental research etc.)

Population, Sampling process

Data Collection Tool (Questionnaire, Interview Schedule etc.)

Data Collection Procedure



Data Collection



Data Analysis



Conclusions and Report Writing