Worksheet: Thinking before doing

Defining your research project

1. What do you want to do?

What is your research topic/area?

Example: Fear of crime and the role of the media.

What are your research questions?

Example: Are we becoming more fearful of crime? Does reading tabloid newspapers increase fear of crime?

What are your hypotheses?

Example: Increasing media discussion of gang crime creates undue fear of crime, especially among those reading tabloid newspapers and living in urban areas.

2. Population and unit of analysis

To think about your population and units of analysis, consider the following questions:

- Do you want your research findings to apply to the population of a country? Is this the whole of the UK, or Wales, Scotland or another country?
- Or are you interested in a smaller sub-population (such as those in urban areas) or comparing individuals from more than one country?
- For units of analysis, who are you interested in? Individuals, households, or something else?
- Do you need a representative sample i.e. do you want to be able to make generalisations and inferences about a broader population?

Make a note of your units of analysis and population.

Example: Individuals in the UK.

Top tip

Sometimes we are interested in the experiences of a particular group; for example, whether those in high crime areas are more fearful of crime. But though our interest is one a particular group, to answer our research question we need to compare this group to another group. You therefore need data on both groups.

3. Key concepts

Having developed research questions and hypotheses, you can identify the main concepts in your research.

Example: ‘Fear of crime’, ‘Locality type’ and ‘Media consumption (reading tabloids)’.

Make a list of your key concepts.

Dependant and independent variables

It might also be useful to identify the dependent and independent variables.

Dependant variable: What you are trying to explain.

Example: ‘Fear of crime’.

Independent variables: The factors you think will help explain your dependent variable.

Example: ‘Age’ and ‘Location’.

Now that you have a list of the key concepts in your research, you have an idea of the information you’ll need within your data.