

Evaluation

A Systematic Approach

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Chapter 2: Social Problems and Assessing the Need for a Program

The Role of Evaluators in Diagnosing Social Conditions and Service Needs

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- A **needs assessment** is used to systematically describe and diagnose social needs.
- The **target population** for a program may be individuals, groups, geographic areas, or physical units.

The Role of Evaluators in Diagnosing Social Conditions and Service Needs

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Evaluators make significant contributions by applying their repertoire of research techniques to systematically describe the problematic social conditions.

The Role of Evaluators in Diagnosing Social Conditions and Service Needs

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- The three phases of needs assessment
 - Phase 1: Preassessment
 - Phase 2: Assessment
 - Phase 3: Postassessment

Defining the Problem to Be Addressed

- Social problems are not objective phenomena.
- They are social constructions.
- Example: poverty

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

(1 of 7)

- Must assess the scope and extent of that problem
- Difficult to develop valid estimates of density and distribution
- Example: child abuse

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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- Probability sampling
 - **Probability sample**
 - **Sampling frame**

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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EXHIBIT 2-C

PROBABILITY SAMPLING DESIGNS

Probability Sampling Design	Definition	Salient Characteristics
Simple random sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members of the study population have as equal chance of selection in the sample. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simple to conduct. Requires a complete list of the study population.
Systematic sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members of the target population have a known, nonzero chance of selection in the sample. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires an interval (i) at which sample units are selected ($i = N/n$) and random start between 1 and i. Can be used in situations in which a complete list of the target population is not available but partial lists (or actual members of the target population) can be accessed at different sites.
Cluster sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All units of the target population are members of one and only one cluster. All clusters have an equal chance of selection into the sample Data are collected on all units in the randomly selected clusters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often used when members of the target population are in naturally occurring groups, such as teachers in schools or case workers in county social service offices. Reduces precision compared with a simple random sample of the same size (amount of reduction depends on how much of the variation of the variable of interest is between clusters; more within-cluster variation improves precision).

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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Stratified random sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All units of the target population are placed into one and only one stratum.• A known, nonzero sample of units is selected from each stratum.• The probability of selection within strata can be equal or unequal depending on study goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often useful when smaller subpopulations that are proportionately larger in some strata are of particular interest for the evaluation (e.g., underrepresented groups).• Improves precision compared with a simple random sample of the same size (amount of improvement depends on the correlation between strata assignment variable and variable of interest).
Multistage sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Similar to cluster samples in that all members of the target population are members of a cluster.• Clusters are sampled at the first stage, and then units are selected in the second stage for two-stage samples.• Multiple clustering such as individuals within census tracts within counties can be combined.• Clusters can be stratified before sampling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often useful in large, multipurpose probability samples drawn at the international, national, or state or provincial level.• Requires sampling expertise to compute sampling weights if the probability of selection for final units is unequal and to calculate standard errors for hypothesis testing.

Source: Adapted from Henry (1990).

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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- Using Existing Data Sources to Develop Estimates
 - Examples: administrative data, surveys and censuses.
- Regularly occurring measure is a **social indicator**

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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- Estimating Problem Parameters through Social Research
 - Agency Records
 - Surveys and Censuses
 - Key Informant Surveys

Specifying the Extent of the Problem

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- Forecasting Needs
 - Can estimate the magnitude of a social problem in the future
 - Forecasting of future trends can be risky

Defining and Identifying the Targets of Interventions

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- What Is a Target?
 - Target population for a social program usually consists of individuals.
 - May also be:
 - groups (families, work teams, organizations)
 - geographically and politically related areas (such as communities)
 - physical units (houses, road systems, factories).

Defining and Identifying the Targets of Interventions

(2 of 2)

- Specifying Targets
 - Target Boundaries
 - Varying Perspectives on Specification of the Target Population

Describing Target Populations

(1 of 3)

- Risk, Need, and Demand
 - Population at risk
 - Population in need

Describing Target Populations

(2 of 3)

- Incidence and Prevalence
 - **Incidence:** Number of new instances of a particular problem in a specified area or context during a specified time.
 - **Prevalence:** Total number of existing cases in that area at a specified time.

Describing Target Populations

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- Rates
 - **Rate**: the occurrence or existence of a particular condition expressed as a proportion of units in the relevant population (e.g., deaths per 1,000 adults).
 - Especially appropriate for comparing problem conditions across areas or groups.

Describing the Nature of Service Needs

(1 of 4)

- Also important to develop descriptive information about the specific character of the need within the population.
- Qualitative Methods for Describing Needs.
 - Useful for obtaining detailed, textured knowledge of the specific needs in question.
 - Can range from interviews of a few persons to elaborate and detailed ethnographic research.

Describing the Nature of Service Needs

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- Qualitative Methods for Describing Needs.
 - Focus groups.
 - Snowball sampling.

Describing the Nature of Service Needs

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- 6 steps for conducting a needs assessment focus group
 1. Determine if a focus group is appropriate for the data needed
 2. Select individuals for the focus group interview
 3. Handle logistics and arrangements

Describing the Nature of Service Needs

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- 6 steps for conducting a needs assessment focus group
 4. Prepare questions
 5. Conduct focus group
 6. Analyze and report findings