**Example：**

**Introduction**

The Community Services research proposal has a worthwhile aim but fails to fulfil this with its research question. I have recommended a more suitable explanatory research question and interview design.

# Background

You have identified an issue that is meaningful to our community. However, you have not used the introduction and background section to effectively communicate a clear and compelling argument supporting your proposed research.

You state that the perspective of welfare policies having negative consequences for young adults is supported by a significant amount of existing research. You need to discuss this research in your literature review section to communicate to your reader what is already known about this issue, and convince them of the value of your proposed research (Denscombe 2012).

You define your research aim as providing Council with better information on the impact of welfare policy on youth in this community. This will assist them in supporting vulnerable youth. This aim is likely to have benefits for the organisation and local community. Explaining how Council can use this information will strengthen your application. This aim suggests an qualitative explanatory research project (Maxwell & Mittapalli 2008). You will apply the perspectives established by the existing research you have referred to, to explain the impact of welfare policy on local young people.

Your research question asks how well community stakeholders understand the impact of welfare policies on youth in the community. This question doesn’t align with your aim of finding information on the impact of welfare policy on youth. It is questionable that information on community stakeholders’ understanding is of benefit to the organisation and local community, and a research project based on this question is unlikely to be approved.

Your proposed research question is not based on an analysis of the research surveyed during your literature review. You need to return to the research that led you to conclude that welfare policies having negative consequences for young adults. Consider what the existing research agrees on, doesn’t agree on, and what it hasn’t asked (Denscombe 2012). Based on this critique you can formulate a question that will build on existing knowledge and meet the aims of your research.

Based on the background provided, I recommend the explanatory research question: *‘What is the impact of welfare policy on young people in Local Government Area in 2018?’*

# Literature review

The purpose of a literature review is to show what is already known about the issue, and show how your proposed research will further the existing knowledge (Denscombe 2012 p7). What you have presented as a literature review is closer to a descriptive research project on media reporting of youth disadvantage. However, general media articles are not suitable references for the literature review of a social research project (Pepperell 2017). Even if these were appropriate sources, you have not used the content of the twelve artefacts you found to justify your original research question.

You state that your literature review was systematic but haven’t provided the parameters for your review. To convince the reader that your review was systematic you need to provide details of the search terms used, the databases used to conduct the review, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to determine if a source was relevant to your topic (Denscombe 2012).

You need to design a literature review that will provide a foundation for your proposed research. You should aim to identify between five and twenty key works for a research proposal of this nature (Denscombe 2012). Starting with the theme of *the impact of welfare policy on young people in our community*, you need to identify the key ideas, concepts and theories present in research done so far (Denscombe 2012). You have already begun to do this in your current introduction and background, with reference to existing research.

You will need to group these terms together to make a list of meaningful, searchable terms (Oliver 2012) that you can run through an online academic database, such as that of university library or Google Scholar.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Key concepts** | **Search terms** |
| Welfare policy | Welfare policy Australia |
| Young people (also: youth, young adults) | Welfare policy young people |
| Australia | Welfare policy disadvantage |
| [Local Government Area name] | Young people wellbeing |
| Wellbeing | Young people disadvantage |
| Disadvantage | Young people Australia |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Welfare policy wellbeing |
|  | Welfare policy disadvantage |
|  | Wellbeing [Local Government Area] |
|  | Disadvantage [Local Government Area] |

You can also find key works by seeking expert advice, looking at references in textbooks, following links to recommended articles, and exploring Google Scholar’s ‘cited by’ function.

After finding the key works you need to analyse and categorise the literature. This requires critically reading the research to summarise the key ideas, concepts and theories present. In your proposal you must draw conclusions about the current state of knowledge on the issue and use these to justify your research question (Denscombe 2012).

# Research design and data collection method

*Research sample and recruitment*

You have chosen the wrong human sources of information to achieve your research aim. Community stakeholders are unable to provide insight into the impact of welfare policy on the lives of local young adults. The human sources of this information are young adults living in our local government area.

Your plan for recruiting participants is to post flyers in the Council office. The most obvious issue with this plan is that your target participants do not routinely come into contact with Council office bulletin boards.

Another problem with your proposed recruitment process is requiring interested people to leave name, phone number and email address in a public place. This method of registering interest is inappropriate because it doesn’t provide adequate information privacy protections, and it looks unprofessional.

As the appropriate human source is young adults in receipt of welfare payments, an effective recruitment process is through Council’s Youth Work team, a youth services organisation or JobActive provider. Schelbe *et al* highlight the importance of building a relationship with a gatekeeper organisation where the target research population already gather and feel comfortable talking about their lives. As you will need the help of gatekeeper organisation to promote

participation to their clients and provide interview space, you need to clearly communicate the benefits of the research for the organisation’s goals (Schelbe *et al* 2015*)*.

Your community organisation partner will be crucial in identifying and recruiting participants who have relevant experience, are able to describe this experience adequately, and will not be harmed by being questioned about their experiences. You will need to consider what number of interviewees will provide a sufficient, representative sample of the population (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012).

*Research Design*

You have proposed running two focussed group interviews to collect data. You haven’t explained why you have chosen this method, or the reasoning behind running separate groups for subjects with different occupations.

Throughout your proposal you refer to the complete anonymity of participants. Anonymity refers to the researcher not knowing the identity of the respondent, while confidentiality refers to the researcher not disclosing the identity of the respondent (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012). Both anonymity and confidentiality are immediately undermined by placing participants in a focus group with 20-30 other high-profile community members. You state that promising complete anonymity will enable participants to speak freely about value-laden issues, in front of people they are likely to know. A focus group for participants drawn from a small population is likely to result in unreliable answers due to social desirability bias (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012), or participants simply not sharing their views to avoid conflict with their peers.

Your plan to subject business owners to a semi-public verbal test of their understanding of welfare policy is likely to lead to participants feeling frustrated, embarrassed, and/or negative towards the researcher.

Designing a localised welfare system is a waste of participant and researcher time, and isn’t aligned with your research aims or question. Council has no power to implement a local welfare system, so the data has no value. Asking participants to undertake such an arduous and useless task is an unethical use of their time.

When you return to defining your research question you need to consider what kind of question it is, what kind of data will contribute to the question, where this data is located, and the most suitable research design for collecting this data. Young people in receipt of welfare benefits may have low literacy levels that would affect their ability to complete a written survey. They may have less sense of civic duty towards answering survey questions honestly, or inclination to participate in social research (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012). For these reasons, conducting interviews with selected subjects will more a more successful research design than a sample survey.

As the suggested research question is explanatory, your interview protocol should be designed to explain a causal link between welfare policy and disadvantage. You should plan two or three different interview protocols, to be used in response to the interviewee’s candour (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012).

Conducting interviews with young people will enable the interviewer to tease out complex issues and clarify meanings (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012). As probing sensitive issues with a young person requires specific professional skills (Schelbe *et al* 2015*)*, you should consider recruiting a youth worker to conduct the interviews, perhaps while you observe and take notes.

Revisit your consideration of costs and resources. Numerous elements were required in your initial research design, including the costs of video recording and transcribing. The costs present in the recommended research design include researcher and specialist interviewer time, participant compensation, facility hire costs, and use of recording equipment.

*Data collection method*

You plan to video record the focus groups, which is another breach of the promised anonymity. You haven’t explained your reasons for choosing video recording as your data collection method, although there are some obvious advantages when capturing the responses of a large group.

While you are considering how best to collect data, you should invest time in finding out if this data already exists. In your current proposal you refer to obtaining case studies of local young people from Council’s Youth Work team. If the team has already collected case studies through interviews with local youth, then the most efficient and ethical research design is to analyse this documentary data using the perspectives identified in your literature review. This is ethical as young people would not be subjected to questioning about sensitive issues that they have already discussed with their youth worker (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffle 2012). As your proposed design refers to drawing on the experiences of the Council teams, this implies using the youth workers’ perspectives of the impact. My recommendations are based on the understanding that case studies based on interviews with local young people do not already exist.

You need to consider how your data capture method will impact on your subject’s comfort and candour. Being videoed while describing sensitive issues can feel threatening (Denscombe 2010) and negatively effect the subject’s trust in their confidentiality. Consider the less intrusive combination of note-taking and audio recording for data collection.

You have referred to transcribing the video recordings and undertaking statistical analysis on the transcripts. Searching for statistical significance in qualitative data is meaningless in terms of your research aims and question. The idea of playing video recordings at staff meetings is yet another breach of anonymity and confidentiality.

I recommend analysing the audio transcripts and notes from your interviews to generate causal narratives that “elucidate the processes at work” (Maxwell & Mittapalli 2008). Content should be analysed according to the established ideas, concepts and theories identified in your literature review. Plan to use these theories to explain the meaning of your data in its spatiotemporal context. The result will be meaningful research that meets your aims.

# Ethics

You have identified some ethical issues involved in your research design, but have not taken steps to adequately resolve them.

You state that your strategy for managing physical risk is to “exclude anyone… with unusual mobility needs.” Excluding a participant based on a disability irrelevant to their ability to contribute to your study is discriminatory (Australian Human Rights Commission 2018). The ethical response is to source and budget for an accessible interview venue.

You have planned to remind participants of their right to leave at any time during the focus group if they feel uncomfortable. While it is important to inform participants of their rights, you haven’t considered the impact on a participant to stand up in front of their peers and walk out of the focus group.

In the recommended interview design you need to consider the psychological impact on the interviewee and also the interviewers. The impact on the interviewee can be lessened by using a specialist interviewer, preferably a youth worker. You need to provide access to debriefing for the interviewees and interviewers, due to the sensitive and possibly confrontational content of the interviews.

The social risk you have identified for your research design is very real, and the strategy you have proposed is inadequate. Neither anonymity or confidentiality can be promised when putting up to thirty peers in a room together. In the recommended interview design, you can provide confidentiality by assigning each interviewee a code rather than recording their name on documents. It’s likely that their name, and those of friends and family, will be spoken during the interviews. You will need to either delete these from your audio recordings or from your transcripts.

An interviewee may disclose information that would have legal consequences if publicly known. You need to establish a protocol for responding to reported risk and in what situations the participants’ need to be protected from harm overrides their right to confidentiality. The interviewer must clearly communicate this protocol to the subject before starting the interview (Schelbe *et al*

2015). In some circumstances the interviewer may decide to remind the interviewee during the interview.

Schelbe *et al* discuss the issues involved in compensating youth for research participation, as for a disadvantaged young person even a small financial compensation can coerce them into doing something they would otherwise object to. To reduce the element of coercion they recommend providing any promised compensation when the young person arrives for the research, and remind them of their power to leave at any stage (Schelbe *et al* 2015).

A final consideration of the ethics of interviewing young people is their capacity to give informed consent. They may also have a “developmental gap in experience and confidence necessary to assert self-interest in an unfamiliar research situation” (Schelbe *et al* 2015 p514). When working with young people the researcher needs to slow down the consent process, read information aloud, and repeatedly check for questions. Throughout the interview the interviewer needs to be attuned to non-verbal cues that the interviewee is uncomfortable, as they may not have the confidence to object to a line of questioning (Schelbe *et al* 2015).

# References

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