

THIRD EDITION

# APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

TOOL FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES



MONETTE • SULLIVAN • DeJONG

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TOOL FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES

THIRD EDITION

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TO MY MOTHER,  
*Thanks for everything.*  
TO NANCY,  
*Who accepted my fleeting presence.*  
TO SUSAN,  
*Across the miles.*

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# APPLIED SOCIAL RESEARCH

# Preface

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The social sciences and the human services have changed in important ways during the past twenty years and so has the environment in which they operate. Faced with the sobering realization that resources are limited, we as a society are being increasingly forced to make difficult choices over where and how to allocate these resources. As a consequence, more emphasis than ever is being placed on human service program accountability. Public and private programs are required to “prove” that they have beneficial outcomes and to document that they actually deliver the services that they say they deliver. At the same time, we are confronted with the severity of human suffering and the complexity of social problems. The pressing need for solutions to these issues, coupled with the call for the judicious use of available resources, has intensified the importance of social research to human service delivery. The call is for social research to respond to our need to devise and carry out human service programs that are not only effective but also make the best use of available resources. Social research provides the “proof” of beneficial outcomes or the documentation of service delivery that is increasingly demanded of the human services. Although debate continues about the extent to which the integration of research and human service practice has been achieved, the importance of working toward this goal has never been greater. There is more utilization of research in human service practice, and the social sciences are directing a growing portion of their efforts toward assessing programs and assisting practitioners with service delivery tasks. This third edition of *Applied Social Research* reflects these changes and the broadening in-

tegration of social research into human service policy making and service delivery.

We have retained the interdisciplinary cooperative effort of the earlier editions: some authors are more applied social researchers; others have more experience with human service practice. However, our own professional lives reflect one of the major themes of this book in that each of us, in one way or another, has had one foot planted in the research world and the other in the world of practice delivery. We conceive of social research and human service practice as allies bound by common goals of advancing knowledge and creating a better world, goals that neither can achieve alone. As is the case with allies in any human enterprise, disputes, tensions, and disagreements occur between research-as-science and human-service-as-practice. But in the fifteen years that we have worked on this book, we have been heartened by the many excellent examples of research and human service practice working together. In this third edition, we have incorporated recent research that shows the growing diversity of ways in which research is being applied to practice and the increasingly extensive linkages between research and practice. Our goal, as with earlier editions, is to prepare a book that is useful to those in human service departments who integrate research into the student's practice education as well as to social scientists who emphasize the applied dimension of social science methods.

The special theme of this book, then, is that many parallels and linkages exist between social research and human service practice. We outline these ideas in the first chapter and then carry this theme through the remainder of the

book. This text is primarily an introduction to social research as it relates to the human services. As such, we have presented all of the topics of scientific research important for such an introduction. But we have also offered a challenge. The challenge is for students to learn that social research has many parallels with human service practice. The challenge is also to recognize the ways in which the two can be linked—by incorporating research activities into practice settings and by shaping practice settings into research opportunities.

## FEATURES

We have retained a number of special features in this book that we feel help in developing an appreciation for social research and its importance to the human services.

**Research in Practice:** Each chapter includes boxed inserts titled “Research in Practice,” in which we discuss some special examples where research and practice have been linked. In this way, we emphasize the theme of the book and encourage students to consider the many ways in which this linkage can be achieved.

**Computers in Research:** Recognizing that computers have now become an integral part of both research and human service practice, we have included in many chapters boxed inserts that present some application of computers in research. These inserts require no previous experience with or knowledge of computers, and they are intended to inform students of the general capabilities of software rather than to train them to use particular types of software.

**Content on Women and Minorities:** We have given additional recognition to the need for human service workers to be knowledgeable of the special needs and problems of women and minorities. To this end, we have

addressed in most chapters some special considerations in research methods as they apply to these groups.

**Grant Proposals and Writing:** We have included a chapter on writing grant proposals and research reports. To be knowledgeable about research, students should understand how this process works because it is integral to the tasks of securing funding and communicating research findings.

**For Further Reading:** Each chapter includes a brief, annotated list of books that students will find useful for pursuing chapter topics in greater depth. An important consideration in choosing readings was that they further the overall theme of the book.

**Exercises for Class Discussion:** Each chapter ends with a set of exercises in which we present the student with some problem or setting in human service practice and ask questions that call for students to consider the parallels and linkages between research and practice. These exercises can be used as a context for class discussion, or they can serve as out-of-class assignments. Either way, students should find them challenging and stimulating.

**Appendix on Library Usage:** We have included an appendix in which we discuss how to use the library, focusing specifically on the special needs of students in the human services. Although many college students will be familiar with the library by the time they take a research course, some may find they have a weakness in this area that can be strengthened by studying the appendix. Even those familiar with the library will find some new and useful information about library resources relevant to the human services.

**Instructor’s Manual:** A manual of test items and suggested lecture and class discussion topics is available from your local Harcourt representative or by contacting the Sociology

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## NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

Events have been unfolding rapidly in the social sciences and human services. Some of these changes are substantive—new research findings replacing earlier results and changing how we view such things as strategies to control domestic violence and sex stereotyping in children's books and textbooks. Other changes are methodological, such as a growing emphasis on qualitative research in the human services and new computer software that is revolutionizing the research process. These developments warrant a new edition of this book in order to ensure that both faculty and students have available the most current materials and information on the research process. Although this third edition retains the same organization and special features of the second edition, it has been thoroughly updated to reflect the most recent developments in the research field. For example, two Research in Practice inserts have been completely replaced by new material that should serve the student much better; five of the Research in Practices were thoroughly revised, while the others were judged still very useful with, at best, minor editing. Among the Computers in Research inserts, three completely new ones have been prepared, with four others substantially revised and the remaining five deemed still appropriate.

Beyond these inserts, the text itself has been significantly edited or new material prepared where developments warrant it. To give just a few examples of the kinds of things that we thought deserved to be added in this third edition:

- information on Certificates of Confidentiality and the importance of their use in research on sensitive subjects (Chapter 3)
- new material on the types and extent of fraud and misconduct in research and how to protect against it (Chapter 3)
- current developments regarding the impact of political issues on research decisions on sensitive topics such as AIDS (Chapter 4)
- more attention given to the value of qualitative methods in human service research (Chapters 4 and 9)
- current sources of scales for measurement in the human services (Chapters 4 and 13)
- updated research on the use of available data to document stereotyping of minority populations (Chapter 8)
- new research with more sophisticated research designs to show effective interventions with woman batterers (Chapter 10)
- new computer software and CD-ROM technology in many areas, including sampling, available data, and the use of the library.

These illustrations are a sampling of the kinds of additions or changes that we believe necessary to bring the student the most current introduction to social research in the human service field.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This preface represents the end of a journey that has spanned a number of years. It affords us an opportunity to look back and reflect on the help we have received. A special note of gratitude must go to the many students who have passed through our courses over the years. Although they probably did not realize it at the time, they helped shape our own thoughts and skills as much as we tried to shape theirs. This book is much improved because they insisted on challenging our ideas.

Many people at Northern Michigan University contributed to our ability to complete this project. Richard D. Wright and Kenneth W. Kelley made available to us whatever resources they had at their disposal. Other

colleagues—they know who they are—created an atmosphere that made this project not only possible but also highly rewarding. Two university librarians, Roberta Henderson and John Berens, also provided invaluable assistance.

For their many helpful suggestions and comments we also wish to thank the following reviewers: Bruce A. Thyer, The University of Georgia; James A. Rosenthal, University of Oklahoma; Monica A. Seff, University of Texas at Arlington.

We have had the pleasure of working with a number of talented editors at Harcourt. The most recent is Chris Klein, who assisted us in shaping this third edition through his very helpful suggestions and criticisms and his knowledge of both the behavioral sciences and the human services.

Many people deserve thanks for their assistance, but, of course, we take final respon-

sibility for whatever weaknesses this book contains—and rightly so, because we decided which advice to accept and which to ignore. But then, we should also take responsibility for whatever insight or passion we generate in the students who read this book. We hope at least a few of you come away from it with a new view of research and practice.

Finally, we have dedicated this book to those crucial people the readers will never see—the relatives, friends, companions, and lovers who put up with the fact that we have had a “mistress” these past few years in the form of a keyboard and monitor. They understood, with great patience, that the absences and the working weekends were unavoidable and important to us. To all of these people, we now put the question, “Are you free this weekend?”

DRM  
TJS  
CRDeJ



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# 1

## RESEARCH IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

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### **Research in the Human Services**

Goals of Research

Applications of Research

Special Issues: Research on Minorities and Women

### **Parallels Between Research and Practice**

Steps in Conducting Research

Steps in Practice Intervention

### **The Plan of the Book**

Main Points

Important Terms for Review

For Further Reading

Exercises for Class Discussion

This book is about the use of research in human services. The term **human services** refers to those professions with the primary goal of enhancing the relationship between people and societal institutions so that people may maximize their potential and alleviate distress. Among the human service professionals can be found social workers, psychologists, counselors, probation officers, and day-care providers. Others who are not normally considered human service professionals, such as teachers and nurses, contribute to the delivery of human services as a part of their respective tasks. For all of these groups, research is becoming increasingly essential to their delivery of human services. To illustrate how central research can be, consider the following actual case:

Two months after giving birth to a baby boy, a young mother kills her infant son and disposes of the body by dumping it in the trash. Through a routine visit by a public health nurse, the tragedy is discovered. In the course of the investigation, it is learned that the mother had made threatening remarks about the child while still in the hospital. The local community is outraged. Why was the mother allowed to leave the hospital with the child? Why was there no police intervention? Where was the local community mental health agency? The various human service agencies of the community are called on to do something to make sure that similar events will not happen again.

Do something. But what? The human service professionals charged with taking action can first of all turn to research studies on the nature of child abuse and the effectiveness of child abuse programs in other communities. Second, they can use research to ascertain just how much abuse actually occurs in their community. The community response may be different if this event is an isolated one. In addition,

research can help identify factors that can predict which families are most at risk for some sort of family violence and assess the consequences of abuse in child development. Finally, once a plan is put into operation with the support of community funds, research can be conducted to assess whether the program is working properly.

Thus, numerous links exist between research and human service practice. Because research provides the means for understanding the problems with which professionals work and the means for evaluating change, practitioners in the human services are certain to encounter the need to understand, apply, and in some cases, conduct research in carrying out the goals of their professions (Reinherz, Grob, and Berkman, 1983; O'Hare, 1991). Some would go further and argue that the link between research and practice is even more intimate, namely, that there can be—and should be—a fruitful merger of the two. In fact, the notion that scientific research and human service practice are totally distinct enterprises is gradually disappearing (Barlow, Hayes, and Nelson, 1984; Ivanoff et al., 1987). Two reasons explain this.

First, strong parallels are now recognized between the conduct of research and the conduct of practice, and practitioners can benefit by incorporating into practice some of the techniques used in research. Both research and practice, for example, are based on observation, but the observations of practitioners are often unstructured and intuitive. Thus, practitioners can benefit from some of the techniques, discussed in Chapters 7 and 9, that researchers use to make structured observations. A second reason for the changing views of research and practice is the realization that practice intervention, properly conducted, can provide scientifically valid knowledge about human behavior and the effectiveness of intervention. Practitioners, for example, can scientifically assess the effectiveness of their interventions if those interventions are organized



in a manner known by researchers as “single-subject design,” which parallels the scientific experiment. We discuss single-subject designs in Chapter 11. Some illustrations of how the tasks of research have been incorporated into the very definition of the human services are provided in Research in Practice 1.1.

The purpose of this book is to introduce students in the human services to social research logic, methods, and design. We do this by emphasizing the parallels and linkages between research and practice. Because research and practice are intertwined, human service professionals need training in the techniques of social research as much as they need to know about group processes or theories of personality. In some situations, human service providers will *consume social research* as they apply the findings of research to practice intervention. Therefore, they need to understand the logic of research and be able to assess research procedures critically to decide whether and in what fashion research findings can be introduced into practice. In other situations, human service workers may *conduct social research* as a part of their overall intervention strategy, so they need to know how to design and carry out scientifically valid research projects.

In this chapter, we discuss the goals of research in the human services and then illustrate five areas of human service activities in which research can make a contribution. Next, we draw some of the parallels between the steps in social research and the steps in the intervention process. Finally, we provide an overview of the plan of the book, including previews of later chapters.

## RESEARCH IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

### Goals of Research

The word “research” is applied to many activities: the student who browses in the library

for a few hours; the social worker who, while visiting clients about other issues, makes a mental note of some of their social characteristics; the parole officer who routinely inquires, as a part of an intake interview, about a parolee’s family life. All these people might claim to be doing “research.” Yet the term, as it is commonly used in the social and behavioral sciences, has a considerably more precise meaning according to which none of these activities would be considered scientific research. This is not to say that these activities are unimportant. They may have a variety of uses. However, social research has very specific goals that can be achieved only through utilizing the proper procedures.

**Social research is the systematic examination (or reexamination) of empirical data, collected by someone firsthand, concerning the social or psychological forces operating in a situation.** Three major elements characterize this definition. First, social research is *systematic*. That is, all aspects of the research process are carefully planned in advance, and nothing is done in a casual or haphazard fashion. The systematic nature of research is at the core of the scientific method, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. Second, social research involves the collection of *empirical data*, that is, information or facts about the world based on sensory experiences. As such, it should not be confused with philosophizing or speculating, which lack the empirical base of research. Third, social research studies *social and psychological factors* that affect human behavior. Biological, physiological, nutritional, or other such factors would be a part of social research only to the extent that they affect, or are affected by, social and psychological factors.

Research in the human services generally focuses on one or more of the following goals: description, prediction, explanation, or evaluation. **Descriptive research has as its goal description, or the attempt to discover facts or describe reality.** Descriptive research, for example, might deal with such questions as: What