

CHAPTER-2

TOPIC SELECTION

Obsan Rorisa (BSc, MPH/RH)

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Adama, Ethiopia

TOPIC SELECTION

After completing this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Describe the principles underlying whether a problem situation is researchable.
2. List the criteria for selecting a research topic.
3. Identify and select your own topic (health problem) for research based on certain guidelines.

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- ❖ The development of a health project goes through a number of stages.
- ❖ Formulation of the proposal is the major task in the process of developing a research project.
- ❖ Note that the development of a research proposal is often a cyclical process.
- ❖ The process is not always linear. It is a usual practice to go up and down on the developed proposal and make the necessary revisions.

"Well begun is half done" -

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Problem identification

- If the answer to the research question is obvious, we are dealing with a management problem that may be solved without further research
- A number of research questions could be presented that may be posed at the various levels of the health system

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◆ Whether a problem requires research depends on *three conditions*:

I) There should be a perceived difference or *discrepancy between what it is and what it should be*;

II) The reason(s) for this difference should be *unclear*

(so that it makes sense to develop a research question); and

III) There should *be more than one possible and plausible* answer to the question (or

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Example1:

- ❖ **Problem situation:** In district “ A “ a report showed that in the first month there were 500 children under one year old who started immunization, but at the end of the year it was found out that there were only 25 children who completed their vaccination.
- ❖ **Discrepancy:** All the 500 children at district “A “should have completed their vaccination but only 5% out of those who started vaccination have completed.

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- ❖ **Problem(research) question:** why only 5% of the children completed their vaccination?
- ❖ **Definite answer:** Out of the 1 hospital, 2 health centers and 10 health stations found in district “A” only 2 health stations were functioning, the rest were closed due to insecurity in the area.
- In the example above, assuming that all the given facts are true, there is no need of undertaking a research, since definite answer is obtained to the problem situation

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Example 2:

- ❖ **Problem situation:** In district “B” (population 150,000) there are 2 health centers, 1 hospital and 15 health posts and all of them function smoothly. However, at the end of the year it was found that the EPI coverage was only 25%.
- ❖ **Discrepancy:** Although district “B” had 100% availability of health services and at least 80% of the children should have had full vaccinations the EPI coverage was only 25% as seen above.

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- ❖ **Problem question:** What factors influence the low EPI coverage in district “B”?
- ❖ **Possible answers:**
 - Mothers might have problems for not attending in the EPI sessions.
 - The MCH, EPI, OPD, etc... programmes might not have been integrated; hence children might have missed opportunities in getting immunization.
 - The follow up of defaulting children might not be effective and other reasons.
- ***Thus, the above problem situation is researchable.***

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Criteria for prioritizing research problems

- ◆ Each problem that is proposed for research has to be judged according to certain guidelines or criteria.
- ◆ There may be several ideas to choose from. Before deciding on a research topic, each proposed topic must be compared with all other options.
- ◆ Selection and analysis of the problem should involve those who are responsible for the health status of the community (health services managers, health care workers, and community

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Helpful guidelines/criteria for selection

a) Criteria for selecting a research topic

- *Relevance*
- *Avoidance of duplication*
- *Feasibility*
- *Political acceptability/government concern*
- *Applicability of results & recommendations*
- *Urgency of data needed/timeliness*
- *Ethical acceptability*



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1. **Relevance:**

The topic you choose should be a priority problem:

- How large or widespread is the problem?
- Who is affected?
- How severe is the problem?

2. **Avoidance of duplication:** Investigate whether the topic has been well researched before.

- If the topic has been researched, the results should be reviewed to explore whether major questions that need further investigation remain unanswered.

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- 3. Feasibility:** Consider the complexity of the problem and the resources you will require to carry out the study.
- Consider first the personnel, time, equipment and money that are locally available.
 - In situations where the local resources necessary to carry out the project are not sufficient, you might consider sources available at the national level.

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4. Political acceptability:

- ❖ It is advisable to research a topic that has the interest and support of the authorities.
- ❖ It will facilitate the smooth conduct of the research and increases the chance that the results of the study will be implemented.

5. Applicability of results and recommendations

- Is it likely that recommendations of the study will be applied?
- It depends not only on the blessing of the authorities but also on availability of **resources** for implementing recommendations.

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6. Urgency of results needed

- How urgently are the results needed for making a decision?
- Which research should be done first and which can be done late?

7. Ethical acceptability

- Always consider the possibility that we may inflict harm on others while carrying out research.
- Therefore, it will be useful to review the proposed study.

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b) Scales for rating research topics

1. Relevance

1 = Not relevant

2 = Relevant

3 = very relevant

2. Avoidance of duplication

1 = Sufficient information already available

2 = Some information available but major issues not covered

3 = No sound information available on which to base problem-solving

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3. Feasibility

- 1 = Study not feasible considering available resources
- 2 = Study feasible considering available resources
- 3 = Study very feasible considering available resources

4. Political acceptability

- 1 = Topic not acceptable
- 2 = Topic somewhat acceptable
- 3 = Topic fully acceptable

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5. Applicability

1 = No chance of recommendations being implemented

2 = Some chance of recommendations being implemented

3 = Good chance of recommendations being implemented

6. Urgency/timeliness

1 = Information not urgently needed

2 = Information could be used but a delay of some months would be acceptable

3 = Data very urgently needed for decision-

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7. Ethical acceptability

1 = Major ethical problems

2 = Minor ethical problems

3 = No ethical problems

N.B. The above rating should be based on the existing data and not on mere assumptions.

***THANK YOU,
ALL!***