Texas State University  
School of Criminal Justice  
Ph.D. Comprehensive Exam for Research Methods  
February 25, 2014  
12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

DIRECTIONS: Choose Option One or Option Two. 
Save two electronic copies of your answer (one with just your ID number assigned to you, 
the other with your ID number and name). Email both copies to Cybele 
Hinson ch56@txstate.edu. Print out and turn in a hard copy as well with both your ID number and name on it.

OPTION 1

After many decades of ‘get tough on crime’ legislative initiatives (like ‘Three Strikes You’re Out’), the state correctional authority is beginning to parole large numbers of inmates who have served very long prison sentences. Many of these inmates have likely aged out of violent criminal behavior and substance abuse. However, they are not likely to be successful finding suitable employment, re-establishing family connections and/or coping with the demands of the ‘free world’. There is some concern that they will not be successful during parole and may reenter the system through technical violations or new offenses – again in large numbers.

In order to mitigate this and reduce the potential demand this may place on the correctional system, the state has developed a special parole classification system and program called Intensive Reintegration for Long Term Offenders. The program has many features that are designed for this particular cohort of ex-offenders like vocational training, housing assistance, cognitive intervention therapy and small group intervention strategies.

You have been asked by the state correctional authority to develop an evaluation component for this new program. This requires you to develop the following:

- Criteria (type of inmate) for admission into the program
- A definition of recidivism
- A research question(s) or hypothesis(es)
- A dependent variable and its conceptual definition
- A list of appropriate independent variables and their conceptual definitions
- Strategies for insuring the validity and reliability of your measures
- A methodological plan for collecting the variables necessary to answer your research question(s)/hypothesis(es)
- A strategy for insuring the protection of human subjects
- A preliminary plan for analyzing the data (i.e., a statistical method)
Your response should contain a description of the evaluation component you design and include all of the items listed above.

OPTION 2
Van Craen \(^1\) conducted a study regarding community members’ trust in police based whether their race was in the “majority” or in the “minority.” The research questions are as follows (p. 1042):

1. Do the same factors determine their [majority and minority] levels of trust?
2. Are the effects parallel?
3. Furthermore the author tests the application of social capital theory to explaining levels of trust among the majority and the minority. “Social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (cited from Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Social capital theory suggests that social capital reinforces trust in police.

An excerpt regarding the methods is below:

The data that we use to answer these research questions were derived from the Flemish Integration Survey 2008, a standardized face-to-face survey designed by the Policy Research Centre on Equal Opportunities to monitor the social cultural distance between ethnic minority groups and the Flemish majority and the way they live together in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. . . The survey was conducted in three cities: Antwerp, Genk, and Ghent . . . The sample comprised a total of 1260 individuals (420 of Moroccan descent—a minority group, 420 Turkish descent—another minority group, and 420 Flemish descent—the majority). The sample was collected from several months of fieldwork. The interviews were conducted face-to-face.

The dependent variable, trust in police, was measured by directly asking respondents whether they trust the police very little, little, neither little nor much, much, or very much.

Questions

1. The authors relied upon a secondary data source for their data. Identify several strengths and weaknesses of using secondary data for this particular study. Be specific.
2. The authors relied upon a single question to measure/operationalize their dependent variable. What threat to internal validity does this lead to (name the threat, explain what it means, and explain how it applies to this study)? (Please note there are several threats this could be; just identify any one of them). Discuss how that threat could be minimized in a future study.
3. How does collecting information from the subjects in a face-to-face interview affect the methodology (positively and/or negatively)? Would an alternative method have provided better data (discuss how)?
4. Although only the research questions are identified, suggest at least two hypotheses that were likely proposed.

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5. The dependent variable is given above (trust in police); what level of measurement is this variable? Explain why it is that level of measurement. What descriptive statistics could you use to describe that variable?

6. Suppose you are going to replicate this study in the United States and assess level of trust in police by whites and non-whites. Identify a sampling strategy (other than simple random sample), and ensure it is feasible. Name the sampling method, explain it, and discuss why it is feasible and appropriate.