

Research aims and hypotheses

The starting point of a piece of research usually begins with a general idea or something you would like to find out more about (an aim). In formulating the research, these ideas will then become more focused (a hypothesis). (Many active researchers in sociology are probably always thinking up new ideas for potential research...they may even dream about research!)

For example, one day you might find yourself entering a supermarket and getting shoved out of the way by a group of antisocial youths. You may start to think 'I wonder if young people are more deviant than older people?' and this is the beginning of your research.

You already have the overall aim of your research, which is to find out whether young people are more deviant than older people. From here you would begin to hypothesise about your research. This means, like research in the natural sciences, you will make a prediction about what you think you will find.



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Read the statements below and try to decide which are aims and which are hypotheses:

- a. Black people are more likely to get stopped and searched by the police than white people.
- b. Do working-class children achieve less in school than middle-class children?
- c. Girls do better than boys in school.
- d. Positive expectations lead to improved performance.
- e. Do the working class experience different life chances?
- f. Parents raise boys and girls differently.
- g. Is there a lack of female role models in the media?
- h. Women receive more lenient punishments for crime than men.

In your own words explain the difference between aims and hypotheses.

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What is the danger of beginning research with a very precise hypothesis?
